

## THE BATTLE OF PODOLL.

"From Lieutenant Hozer's work, "The Seven Weeks' War," published by Macmillan & Co."

It was about eight o'clock, and the dusk of the evening was rapidly closing in when the Jagers first felt their enemy. On the right-hand side of the road, about half a mile before the bridge, stands the first house of the village. It is a large square farmhouse, with windows without glass, but with heavy gratings. The Austrians had occupied it in force, but their outlying pickets, as they retired before the advancing Prussians, formed line across the road beside it. As soon as the Jagers came within sight the garrison of the farmhouse and the formed-up pickets opened a bitter fire upon them. From the grated windows and from the line of soldiers in the road there came one rapid volley, which told severely on the Prussian riflemen, but these went quickly to work, and had fired three times before the Austrians, armed only with muzzle-loading rifles, were able to reply. Then the noise of musketry rose high, occasionally swelling into a heavy roar, but sometimes falling off so that the ear could distinguish the separate reports. But this did not last. Von Hagen, commanding the 2nd battalion of the 31st, which was following the Jagers, on the first sound of the firing had put his troops into double quick time, and was soon up to reinforce the riflemen. It was now nearly dark, and the flashes of the rifles, the reports of the shots, and the shouts of the combatants were almost the only indications of the positions of the troops; yet it could be seen that the rapid fire of the needle-gun was telling on the Austrian line in the road, and the advancing cheers of the Prussians showing that they were gaining ground. Then while the exchange of shots was still proceeding rapidly between the window gratings of the farm-house and the Prussian firing parties, who had extended into a corn-field on the right of the highway, there was a sudden pause in the firing on the road, for the Jagers, supported by the 31st, had made a dash, and were bearing the Austrians back beyond the farm-house to where the cottages of the village closed on each side of the road, and where the defenders had hastily thrown some hewn-down willow trees as a barricade across the way.

Then the tumult of the fight increased. Darkness had completely closed in, and the moon had not yet risen; the Prussians pressed up to the barricade, the Austrians stoutly stood their ground behind it, and, three paces distant, assailants and defenders poured their fire into each other's breasts. Little could be seen, though the flashes of the discharges cast a fitful light over the surging masses; but in the pauses of the firing the voices of the officers were heard encouraging their men, and half-stifled shrieks or gurgling cries told that the bullets were truly aimed. This was too severe to endure. The Prussians, firing much more quickly, and in the narrow street, where neither sides could show their whole strength, not feeling the inferiority of numbers, succeeded in tearing away the barricade, and slowly pressed their adversaries back along the village street. Yet the Austrians fought bravely, and their plans for the defence of the houses had been skilfully though hastily made; from every window muskets flashed out fire, and sent bullets into the thick ranks of the advancing

Prussians, while on each balcony behind a barricade Jagers crouched to take their deadly aim; but in the street the soldiers, huddled together and encumbered with clumsy ramrods, were unable to load with ease, and could return no adequate fire to that of the Prussians, while these, from the advantages of a better arm, poured their quick volleys into an almost defenceless crowd.

As the battle in the street was pushed inch by inch towards the Iser, the Austrians in every house which the foremost ranks of the Prussians passed were cut off from their retreat, and were sooner or later made prisoners, for the houses of the village do not join to each other, but are detached by spaces of a few yards, and there is no communication from one house to the other except by the open street. The whole Prussian force was now up, and extending between the houses which the first combatants had passed by cut off the escape of their garrison, and exchanged shots with the defenders.

With shrieks and shouts, amid the crashing of broken windows, the heavy sounds of falling beams, and the perpetual rattle of the fire arms, the battle was heavily pressed down the narrow street, and about half-past eleven the moon came up clear and full to show the Austrian rearmost ranks turning viciously to bar the Prussians from the bridge. The moonlight, reflected in the stream, told the assailants that they were near the object of their labour, and showed the Austrians that now or never the enemy must be hurled back. Both sides threw out skirmishers along the river bank, and the moon gave them light to direct their aim across the stream; while on the first plank of the bridge the Austrians turned to bay, and the Prussians pausing some short paces from them, the combatants gazed at each other for a few moments. Then they began a fiercer fight than ever. The discharges were more frequent, and in the narrower way the bullets told with more severe effect. Her Von Drygalski, leading the Fusillier Battalion of the 31st, a lieutenant colonel of only two days' standing, went down with two bullets in his forehead, and a captain at his side was shot in both legs; many men fell, and the grey horse of a Prussian field officer, with a ball in his heart, fell heavily against the wall, kicking amid the ranks; but he was soon quieted forever, and at that moment men regarded but little such wounds as could be inflicted by an iron shoe hoof, even in the agonies of death. The Austrians stood gallantly, and made an attempt to set fire to the bridge; but the difference of their armament again told upon them here, and it is said that, galled by their hard fortune, they charged with the bayonet; but that the Prussians also took kindly to the steel, and this charge caused no change in the fortune of the fight; certain it is that the defenders were ultimately obliged to retire across the bridge.

While this combat was proceeding slowly along the street, another fight was carried on upon the railway almost with an equal progress, and with an almost similar result. A party of the Austrians fell back from the point where shots were first exchanged, and where the railways crosses the road, along the line. They were pushed by some Prussian detachments, but neither sides were hero in strong force, and the principal fighting was done upon the road; but here, too, the needle-gun showed its advantage over the old-fashioned weapons of the Austrians, for the latter fell in the proportion of six to one Prussian. The railway bridge was not broken, but the lines were

torn up by the retiring troops, and the line was not passed by trains. The Prussians pushed over both bridges after the retiring Austrians; the latter threw a strong detachment in a large unfinished house which stood by the *chaussee*, about a quarter of a mile beyond the bridge, and again made a stand, but not of long duration; they had lost many killed, wounded and prisoners; many of their officers were dead or taken; but they stood till they could gather in all the stragglers who had escaped from the houses of the village, and, harrassed by the pursuing Prussians, drew off sullenly by the main road to Munchengratz. Thus terminated a contest which, fought upon both sides with the greatest vigour and determination, yet resulted in a clear victory for the Prussians; for, when the last dropping shots ceased, about four o'clock in the morning, there were no Austrian soldiers within three miles of Podoll Bridge except the wounded and the taken. There was no artillery engaged on either side; it was purely an infantry action, and the Prussians derived in it great advantage from the superiority of their arms over that of their opponents, not only in the rapidity, but in the direction of their fire, for a man with an arm on the nipple of which he has to place a cap, naturally raises the muzzle in the air, and in the hurry and excitement of action often forgets to lower it, and only sends his bullet over the heads of the opposite ranks, while the soldier armed with a breech-loading musket keeps his muzzle down, and if in haste he fires it off without raising the butt to his shoulder his shot still takes effect, though often low, and a proof of this is that very many of the Austrian prisoners were wounded in the legs.

The road to Podoll was next morning crowded with hospital wagons and ambulance cars, bringing in the wounded; every cottage in the way was converted into a temporary hospital, and the little village of Sweirzin was entirely filled with stricken men. The sick-bearers, one of the most useful corps which any army possesses, were at work from the very beginning of the action. As the combatants passed on these noble-minded men, regardless of the bullets and careless of personal danger, removed with equal hand both friend and enemy who were fit writhing on the road, and carried them carefully to the rear, where the medical officers made no distinction in the care for both Austrian and Prussian. Not only was it those whose special duty is the care of the wounded who alone were doing their best to ease the sufferings of those who had suffered in the combat; soldiers not on duty might be seen carrying water for prisoners of both sides alike, affording any comfort which it was in their power to give to those who overnight had been firing against their own hearts! Nor is this wonderful; for after the flash of the battle was over, and the din of the musketry had died away, the men of the Prussian army could not forget that one common language linked them to their adversaries, and that, after all, it was probably German blood which, flowing from an Austrian breast, trickled over the white livery of the House of Hapsburg.

WORKING PARTIES.—A number of men from different regiments in garrison are now employed under the Military Store Department, and in connection with the Royal Artillery at St. Helen's Island, in furbishing up and re-storing guns and material on the Island. The men are placed under canvas while so employed, and receive working pay