



Durrington

The Battle Of Amesbury

Tuesday Night

The last gun has been fired, and the autumn manoeuvres of 1872 have come to an end, with the exception of the pageant of the march past.

The battle was begun at about 9 o'clock, the Prince of Wales and the headquarters staff having left Salisbury before eight, but the respective positions could not be easily overlooked, for the ground of which Stonehenge may be considered the centre, was not so favourable for viewing as the Valley of the Wile, or that of the Avon. The Druid's Head was evidently considered by spectators the key of the positions, and round about the Druid's head accordingly, there was what looked like an improvised fair of horses and carriages. The trees by which the hostelry is pleasantly shaded are probably the oldest part of the estate, for the building is entirely of modern structure, and is used partly as a training stable and partly as an inn. When the Prince of Wales arrived to partake of lunch, and the group of foreign officers came afterwards trotting up from another direction, while half the officers on the various headquarters had already been drawn thither as the only spot for miles round where such a thing as beer was to be had, the scene was a good deal more picturesque than the movements of the troops. And yet there would have been far less interest in the scene but for the presence of the troops, for at one time the Druid's Head seemed a critical position, and Northerners who had lingered for a drink hurried away as though there was a real danger of being sent into captivity when a cry of "approaching foe" was raised. That both parties, not only at this but at other points, got mixed up, is, saying nothing new; but looked at from a purely civilian view, the confusion seemed to be greater than usual. Luckily the weather was exceedingly pleasant—plenty of light, little sunshine, and no rain, gave the spectators a sensation of languid interest that could be but little affected by the chances of war. The attempt of gentlemen to explain the tactics of each General, and the course of the battle; and the conscientious endeavours of the ladies to understand what was incomprehensible, would furnish an exceedingly entertaining dialogue. The great centre of attraction during the day certainly was Box-hill. It was the only height that rose from the surrounding country with abrupt boldness, and the struggle for its possession was witnessed with great interest. Later on, the opposite heights became crowded with infantry from the copsewood; the artillery sent forth its clouds of smoke, the 22nd and 27th Regiments crept up the hill and round the summit toward, the village to Woodford below, where for about half an hour the fight seemed to be fierce and wavering. But even then it was difficult to determine who was who; for the bodies of cavalry that had moved with the Northerners in the most amicable manner appeared to the uninitiated spectator to be firing towards all points of the horizon. There is, however, an end to all things, and at twelve o'clock or thereabouts there was peace over the land, and the troops drew together and formed into column, preparatory to their march for camp. The scene in Woodford shortly afterwards reminded one very much of Pont-á-Mousson just before the battle. Being on one of the principal roads to Salisbury the stream of spectators, who discovered that they might hurry home for dinner, naturally flowed through its one street. At the same time cavalry, infantry, and control trains came pouring in from different sides. A hopeless block was the inevitable result, in which the efforts of half-a-dozen Gendarmes would have been appreciated by

all. The great cavalry camp which has been formed near *Vespasian's Camp*, and on its west front is a sight to see.

The manoeuvres are over, and "sides" therefore no longer exist. The entire cavalry are now together, and as the seemingly endless stream of riders advanced, crossed the undulating fields, all movement, life, and colour, there was something to satisfy even those who had seen nothing else, although the day has been practically wasted, considering that the Duke of Cambridge and the majority of umpires have stoutly refused to decide either way.

Immediately on the close of the battle, which was soon after 12 o'clock, the two rival armies became one. With bands playing and colours flying, battalion after battalion, regiment after regiment, and battery after battery, debouched from the fighting ground to the various downs and roads leading to Amesbury. Some 30,000 men and 20,000 horses are now in fields and parks about Durrington. Such a show as this army made in marching through Amesbury has rarely been seen in any English town or village. The whole country round came in to see it, and there was scarce standing room out of doors, and none inside any of the inns, as the columns, during full two hours, passed through to the beautiful encampments in which, favoured by bright sunshine and a genial atmosphere, the troops will clean and brush up for the grand march-past on Thursday.

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