

The Sergeant's Strategem. The disastrous campaign of 1814 was drawing to a close. The allied forces covered France like a cloud of locusts, and the wild Cossack, who had marched from the banks of the Borysthenes, was soon to attack his cousin's third in the waters of the Seine. Napoleon winning desperate victories against terrific odds. But the sun of Austerlitz was doomed to rise and total eclipse. The Russians had gained possession of the city of Troyes, and with their walls they lay encamped in overwhelming numbers. The troops of the French emperor, too few and feeble to contend against such crushing odds, had disbanded. Yet the remnant of an heroic band, lying aside their uniforms, still lurked about the city, sleeping and feeding where they could, the holder of them seeking every opportunity to pick quarrels with the Russians and engage them in duels, glutting that hate in single combat which they could not slake upon the field of battle.

dressed as citizens with swords and pistols concealed under their blouses. There was a great consumption of brandy among the Cossacks, and the waiters who supplied their calls looked anxious and flurried. They evidently expected trouble, nor were their forebodings deceptive. The curtains were run up and the piece commenced. When Bressant, the offending actor, appeared, there were murmurs among the Russians, but these were drowned in the applauding shouts of the French spectators, and one or two bouquets were thrown at his feet. The play however, was allowed to go on till the finale was sung, and when the orchestra played the symphony for this piece the audience sat perfectly motionless and still. It was till the full that proceeds the hurricane. Bressant advanced fearfully to the foot-lights and commenced the obnoxious verse. Then arose a storm and howl of groans and hisses, mingled with applause.

Col. Ostrogoff, a gigantic Russian, rose in his place, and addressed the actor. "French dog!" said he "apologize for the insult you have offered us." "Never!" replied the actor. "I will apologize to no living man for doing my duty." "Quick as a flash, the Russian drew a pistol from his belt and fired it full in the face of Bressant, who fell without a groan.

"Revenge!" shouted Bonville, throwing off his blouse and disclosing his artillery uniform, "up, Frenchmen! and draw with the Cossacks!" A terrible struggle ensued. Pistols and knives were freely used. Frenchmen and Cossacks grappled. The tables were overturned—the lights were put out—the most dire confusion prevailed. The combatants fought their way out into the street and there continued the deadly encounter. But it was not of long duration; the firing and cries brought down a reinforcement from the Russian Camp. A troop of Cossacks dashed into the mêlée, and dispersed the feeble band of Frenchmen, killing some of them, while Captain Bonville, the ring-leader, remained a prisoner in the hands of Ostrogoff.

The next day was an eventful one for Troyes. Intelligence was brought into camp by scouts that Napoleon was approaching. As the day wore on, heavy firing was heard gradually drawing near the town. It was reported by fugitives that the French had utterly routed their opponents, and were moving on at a rapid rate, flushed with victory, to the relief of Troyes.

All was confusion in the Russian camp. A brief period of illness, consumed in unbridled debauchery, had demoralized and weakened the Cossack force, and the officers calculated with concern the chances of a conflict. Still the prisoner Bonville was not overlooked in the midst of this crisis. During the forenoon he was examined before a military tribunal, a mere form extorted by his rank, and sentenced to be shot. At the very moment he listened to his sentence, with unmoved countenance, the rattle of musketry was heard near at hand, as the French skirmishers drove in the enemy's pickets.

"You hear that!" said Bonville, with a smile, to the Russian commander. "I shall die, but I shall be avenged." "Take him away, Colonel Ostrogoff," said the Russian General. "Take a file of men with you and execute the sentence." Ostrogoff saluted and withdrew with an escort. In spite of his protestations, Bonville's arms were tightly bound behind him.

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