

A Spy of France

by Joseph Alexander Altsheler, 1862-1919

Published: 1896

in »The Cosmopolitan, A Monthly Magazine«, Volume 21

Re-published: 2016

Richard M. Woodward

*** **

Illustrations

I am your prisoner.
On the Bridge of Avignon.
Heavy with liquor.
An earlier struggle.

*** **

I felt much sorrow for the Frenchman and thought it a great pity that one so young, so gallant, and so gay should die a shameful death, but I saw no chance for him. The defeat at Ticonderoga was still fresh in the minds of our leaders and the memory of it festered like a sore. The knowledge that their own ignorance and rashness had caused a sacrifice so heavy and so useless did not dispose them to mellowness of temper. When the officers first came over to teach us how to beat the French, they showed much choler at the best of times, caviling at this and carping at that, and saying everything we had done was contrary to the rules of European tactics, and could end in nothing but disaster. We did not accept these rebuffs in a spirit that was wholly meek, although I for one was not lacking in respect for the old country and its great deeds. But they had their way, and when they looked upon the stricken field of Ticonderoga, and heard that Montcalm was victor, everywhere they knew their way was a grievous mistake. Such reflections, as I am sure our leaders must have had, and the strictures upon their errors which I more than suspect were contained in the despatches of the prime minister and the king, made them even more curt and sour than they had been in the period of their insolence, when they thought all the wisdom and knowledge of the times was gathered under their own skulls. This was perfectly plain to the men and to the petty officers, Britons and Colonials alike, and we felt sure that it would be fatal to the hopes of the Frenchman if he presumed that any doubts would be resolved in his favor.

Although the Colonel's manner must have warned him that he was standing upon the edge of an open grave, it did not detract a whit from the jaunty humor of the Frenchman. He might have been strutting it at some grand ball, so far as his appearance went. He twirled his mustache, looked around gaily, and hummed:

*Hier, sur le pont d'Avignon,
J'ai oui chanter la belle,
Lon, la, J'ai oui chanter la belle,
Elle chantait d'un ton si doux
Comme une demoiselle,
Lon, la, Comme une demoiselle.*

The last line lingered upon his lips, as if he were forgetful of our presence. But in a moment he turned his eyes upon us again, and said, mixing his French and his English in a queer manner, though he spoke the latter almost without accent:

Illustration:

I am your prisoner.

„Ah, *Messieurs les Anglais et les Americains*, it seems that I am your prisoner! This is an honor which I did not expect to achieve so soon! *Mais, fortune de guerre!* Who can say that I am not the gainer by it when it has brought me into so close an acquaintance with such brave men, such accomplished soldiers! Truly chance is a kind goddess, for sometimes she brings to us what all our best efforts have failed to win.“

The Colonel's face, always red and inflamed, flushed a deeper hue than ever, and for a moment there was a gurgle in his throat as if he wished to say something and could not. Talbot, the Englishman, whom I liked very much and who had become my messmate, whispered to me:

„How can a man whose life may turn upon a word speak to the Colonel like that? Either he must be very brave or very foolish, and when I knew him I did not think he was the latter.“

I made no reply, for I was intent on watching the Frenchman. I fancied that he was not lacking in the true appreciation of his position, but he took the matter like one who feared nothing. Since we have conquered the possessions of the French on this continent, there are many who decry the men of that race, but I know better, for I am one of those who had to face them, and my comrades will bear me out in the assertion that they are as heroic, as daring, and as tenacious as any people that ever existed. I had become acquainted already with these qualities of our enemies, and the one who stood so fearlessly before us invited all my sympathy.

Presently the Colonel found his voice, and snarled out, with what I thought an indecent show of passion:

„We are thankful for the pleasure you express in making a closer acquaintance with us; but it is very painful to feel that the acquaintance may be terminated so abruptly as the circumstances seem to require. We would wish nothing better than to have as our permanent guest one of the trusted officers of the *Marquis de Montcalm*. But the laws of war, we fear, forbid it.“

Having said this, the Colonel looked around at us, in order that he might see stamped upon our faces the proper admiration of his pomposity.

„The *Marquis de Montcalm*,“ said the Frenchman with a graceful bow, „is a complete gentleman as well as a great soldier, *un brav soldat, et un parfait gentilhomme*. He knows how to repay the hospitality which may be accorded to his officers and friends, and it will be his labor and delight to return it.“

The Colonel's inflamed face took on a purple hue again. Some of the strong wine that he had been drinking must have flown to his head or surely he would not have been so remiss in courtesy to the officer and gentleman who was in his power. „Let us stop this play upon words,“ he said in his most choleric manner. „Zounds, man, am I to stand here and let you insult me forever? One would think that I am the prisoner and you the captor! You know, *Monsieur St. Cyr*, if that is your name, you were taken within our lines.“

„Ah, *c'est vrai, Monsieur le Colonel*,“ said the Frenchman; „that is, I have it on the word of Monsieur le Colonel, and an English officer is too much of a gentleman to tell that which is not the truth. It is as Monsieur le Colonel says. I was taken within the English lines. But alas! how was I to know? I am traveling with a message, a very important message for *Monsieur le Marquis de Montcalm*. I am traveling in great haste. I meet a party of English soldiers. They capture me and tell me I am within their lines. But I did not see. How could I know it?“

It was true that our sentinels had been remiss, and Talbot whispered to me that if there had been any chance for mercy before, it was gone now. But from the very first I had thought St. Cyr was doomed, and I admired his easy manner. Certainly no man could face his fate more lightly or more gracefully.

There was an awkward pause, that is, it was awkward for us. St. Cyr was not at all disconcerted. He hummed his gay little song, cocked his hat a trifle on one side, and sat down on a fallen log. He looked around at us as if waiting to hear what we might say. Then for the first time his eyes fell upon Talbot who had been standing behind me, whether to escape observation I know not.

When he saw Talbot a flash of happy surprise came over his face. He sprang forward and seized the young Englishman by both hands and exclaimed in the warmest tones:

„Ah, *mon cher Talbot*, *c'est vous*, the friend whom I knew in the gay Paris before our sovereigns had a trifling disagreement and sent us here to fight their battles. And now I am a prisoner in the hands of your commander. *Mais, fortune de guerre!* But this chance besides winning for me the pleasure of an acquaintance with *Monseieur le Colonel*, your accomplished commander, has enabled me to meet an old and remembered friend again. Truly, I could not call it a bad fortune, after all.“

„I am very sorry, indeed, to see you here in this position,“ said Talbot, who is always a man of blunt speech. „I would rather see any other Frenchman than you here under the circumstances.“

„Say not so, *mon cher Talbot*,“ replied St. Cyr without any abatement of his gaiety. „This meeting will be a pleasant incident in a soldier's life to remember. Some day when your sovereign and mine have ended their quarrel we will recall it over a bottle of red wine in the gay Paris.“

Talbot smiled sadly, but said nothing. The Colonel had glowered at us during the recognition and the conversation that followed.

„So,“ he said, „it seems that you have met a friend, one who can vouch for your name and position. I am sorry for that, since it renders our task the more disagreeable.“

„I beg *Monsieur le Colonel* not to trouble himself on my account,“ said St. Cyr.

„I fear I must,“ said the Colonel, thrusting out his inflamed and lowering face. „Since you have greeted your friend, let us return to the matter which we had in hand.“

„If I can serve in anything so accomplished and courteous an officer as *Monsieur le Colonel*,“ said St. Cyr, „he is at liberty to command me. I put myself at his service.“

He made a polite bow, reseated himself upon the log, and looked smilingly at the Colonel. I turned my gaze from the Frenchman to watch our commander, who had always seemed to me a very irascible and pompous man, all epaulets and sounding words. And when he was in wine his temper, naturally bad, became intolerable. The Frenchman's manner rasped him, and had it not been for our presence he might have so far forgotten himself as to strike his prisoner. He glowered at the Frenchman a while, contracting his beetle brows over his bloodshot eyes.

„I said just now that you were taken within our lines, *Monsieur St. Cyr*. You were alone, and you could have been there but for one purpose. In war there is only one name for men who do that. Do you know, *Monsieur St. Cyr*, what I take you to be?“

He thrust his face still nearer to St. Cyr's and its purple hue deepened. I fancy that a man about to have a stroke of apoplexy must have looked as our Colonel

did. But the Frenchman did not flinch. He looked straight into the Colonel's eyes and said with his gay smile:

„I have no doubt, *mon cher Colonel*, that you mean I am a spy. You would accuse me of prowling about your camp in search of information to take to *Monsieur le Marquis de Montcalm*, the number of soldiers you have, their readiness for battle, and other such trifles. Am I not right, *mon cher Colonel*?“

„Your surmise is correct,“ said the Colonel, and I thought there was a trace of satisfaction in his tone; „and as you are a soldier, I presume you know the usual punishment for spies?“

„*Vraiment, Monsieur le Colonel, certainement,*“ said St. Cyr with his blithe little laugh. „I hope you do not think me so dull as not to know that. We either shoot or hang them. If time presses and the necessary materials are not convenient, we introduce them to the future with the assistance of a bullet. But if there is no hurry, and it is convenient otherwise, we induce them to leave this world at the end of a rope. Poor fellows! It is a somewhat violent interruption of their careers, but the necessities of war demand it. I have no doubt that since the king, my master, and the king, your master, had the misfortune to disagree, more than one unlucky lad has been compelled to end his campaign in the middle of it through this same sad necessity of war. *Mais, fortune de guerre, Monsieur le Colonel, fortune de guerre!*“

He looked around at us all with his quick, light smile, waved his hand at his friend Talbot, and again hummed:

*Hier, sur le pont d'Avignon,
J'ai oui chanter la belle,
Lon, la, J'ai oui chanter la belle,
Elle chantait d'un ton si doux
Comme une demoiselle,
Lon, la, Comme une demoiselle.*

„You like to see brave men, Talbot,“ I whispered to my friend. „Then look well at your friend *Monsieur St. Cyr*. I doubt whether in all our campaigns you will meet a man who will carry a lighter heart at a time when those of most men would be heaviest.“

„He is a Frenchman,“ he replied, simply. Then he added: „I would much rather have met him on the field of battle than here.“

The Frenchman again was the one to renew the conversation. Our camp lay in an opening in the woods. Repeated disasters had not taught our leaders anything, and in that dense wilderness a large army might have come within a mile of us without our knowing of its presence. But the place was a noble and inspiring sight: the trees, majestic in their height and girth, stretched away in long rows as I have seen them planted in parks in the old country; their dense foliage, tangled and interwoven, made a vast green canopy upon which the rays of the sun dissipated themselves, failing to reach the earth below. Beneath, the grass grew long and soft. The clear waters of a brook trickled over some stones. A western wind sighed softly among the trees. All nature seemed to invite to peace and rest.

St. Cyr sniffed the air as if some odorous breath came on the west wind. His eyes sparkled, he waved his hand at the green forest, and said:

„Ah, gentlemen, *la belle France* herself, the pearl of countries, has no finer sylvan scene than this to show. We behold nature here in her most attractive mood. Ah, it is a thousand pities that our poets, those greatest of Frenchmen, Moliere, Racine, and Corneille, could not have walked in these woods as we have walked in them; could not have heard the voice of nature as we hear it now! Ah, what great poems have not been written because the great poets have not been amid such surroundings as these! It is a fine thing to be a great poet, is it not, messieurs, perhaps a finer thing than to be a great soldier?“

„I should not think you would be caring much for poetry just now,“ said the Colonel, choking and muttering as if he were compelled to drag his voice up from infinite depths.

„And why not, *mon cher Colonel?*“ exclaimed St. Cyr. „You are too hard upon the company. You do yourself and your officers here an injustice. I am sure that such gallant men have the true love of nature and beauty that becomes the brave. In such company, with such support, I would be a clod indeed if I did not try to elevate myself to the same height.“

„I think,“ said our Colonel, „that the conversation has wandered again from the matter in hand. It is perhaps rude to disturb the poetic thoughts of *Monsieur St. Cyr*, but I am a soldier and not a poet.“

„I would not have thought it,“ said St. Cyr with an apologetic bow.

The purple spots came again in the Colonel's face. He had been one of those who were foremost in advising the rash attack at Ticonderoga, and much had been said about his want of ability.

„Nor have I been trained in any of the schools to chatter,“ resumed the Colonel. „We know that the French, our enemies, are skilled in such light and elegant matters as these, and can fence mightily with words. But I am only a soldier, and if the bluntness of my speech seems rude, overlook it.“

„*Certainement! Certainement!*“ said St. Cyr. „Nothing that *Monsieur le Colonel* might say could give me offense.“

The Colonel looked disconcerted again, but he shrugged his shoulders and resumed:

„We were talking a little while ago about spies. *Monsieur St. Cyr* was so kind as to inform us what a spy is, and the punishment that is accorded to him when he falls into the hands of his enemies. He told with great readiness what I took *Monsieur St. Cyr* to be. It is with regret then that I must tell him—“

„Now, *mon cher Colonel* is about to give himself pain,“ broke in St. Cyr. „He thinks he must say words which sound harsh to me. I will spare him that annoyance. I will put those words into his mouth myself. He would say that I, Gabriel St. Cyr, am a spy, and that he is going to put me to death, *n'est ce pas, mon cher Colonel?*“

„You have said it. It is so,“ replied the Colonel, and again I thought I noticed the gleam of satisfaction in his eyes. More than ever I despised him.

„It is many pities that *Monsieur le Colonel* should take me for a spy,“ said St. Cyr, who was by far the cheeriest of the party, „but he seems to have his belief settled. I fear I should annoy the good Colonel if I were to undertake to persuade

him to the contrary. So I, being a Frenchman, and knowing the worth of courtesy, will not ruffle the brave Colonel's feelings. No, I will let him have his way. The brave English officers must have their way. *Mais n'importe*. Yet surely the *Marquis de Montcalm* will be sad when he hears what has become of his friend and officer."

"It does not matter what your Montcalm will think of it," brutally blurted the Colonel. "At least, where you are going you will never know what his thoughts may be."

"The Colonel is a very wise man if he knows that," smiled St. Cyr. "It is a great achievement to solve all the mysteries of the future which have been perplexing the philosophers so long."

"I shall not play with words any longer," said the Colonel. "I tell you, *Monsieur St. Cyr*, to prepare to meet your fate in the morning."

"And I shall have a whole night in which to make my preparations!" cried St. Cyr. "Ah, *mon cher Colonel*, you are indeed very kind, and I, a poor soldier of France, about to penetrate the secrets of the future, thank you! It is more than I had expected."

He had arisen to make another of his graceful bows, and when he had reseated himself upon the log he sang his scrap of song again. The Colonel heard him through, though with a heavy frown on his face. Then he sent away all but Talbot and me. When they had gone he drew near to St. Cyr and said in a voice which he meant to be insinuating, but which was very repellent:

"Now, *Monsieur St. Cyr*, you look like a brave man. You are certainly a young man, and doubtless life is dear to you. At least you do not wish to die the death of a spy. Perhaps there is a chance of preventing it. That chance depends upon you, and I have sent those people away that you might not be embarrassed. You spoke of having an important message for Montcalm. Perhaps if the information contained in that message were told to somebody, somebody else might have no restriction put upon his future movements. Zounds, man, do I make myself plain!"

There was no doubt about his bluntness.

"I would strike a man who made such a proposition to me," whispered Talbot, "if I were shot the next minute for it."

But if any change came over St. Cyr's countenance, it passed so quickly I could not see it. His face was smiling when he replied:

"*Mon cher Colonel* is true to his description of himself. He does not speak in riddles; nor will I. In this matter I will take the advice of the Colonel who is a gallant gentleman as well as a skilled soldier. I will leave the matter in his hands. Suppose he should be in my place and I in his, and I were to make this same proposition to him, what would he do? I will do whatever *mon cher Colonel* says he would do. He has only to speak."

The Colonel's inflamed eyes wandered around to us; but Talbot's face was as impassive as stone, and I tried to discharge all expression from mine, also. He could get no assistance from us; he growled out a curse, and said:

"I will not answer your question, *Monsieur St. Cyr*; the difficulty is yours, not mine."

"Then," said St. Cyr, "I cannot do better than to imitate *Monsieur le Colonel* in this as well as other respects. He that says nothing will have nothing to deny. I,

too, decline to say anything, and I wish it to be understood that I am following the wise precedent set for me by *Monsieur le Colonel*."

The Colonel's wrath now had almost entire mastery of him. He looked furiously at the Frenchman, and presently he jerked out:

"Well, I thought I would give you a chance. You do not wish to take it, so it seems. You have played another game and you have lost."

"The Colonel speaks with words of wisdom," said St. Cyr.

"If you should change your mind in the night," resumed the Colonel, taking no notice of the interruption, "I would not deny you another opportunity to save your life; also, I would not be inferior in politeness to one of our enemies. You shall have good company to-night. Your guards shall be your friend Lieutenant Talbot and his friend, Lieutenant Wharton, of the New York regiment."

"But," protested Talbot with a heightened color, "we are officers. Surely you cannot mean to assign us to such duty."

"You will obey your orders," said the Colonel in a voice thick with anger; "and besides," he added, turning to St. Cyr, and making a clumsy imitation of the latter's bow, "it is for the sake of *Monsieur St. Cyr* who has shown himself to be such a perfect French gentleman. It is well that on his last night he should have the company of those who can appreciate his spirit and wit."

"You do me too much honor," returned St. Cyr. "You could not do me more unless you granted to me the company of *Monsieur le Colonel* himself."

The Colonel made no articulate reply, but presently he designated a tent near the edge of the glade in which St. Cyr was to spend his last night. We were to sit guard with him. Talbot swore between his teeth, but said nothing aloud. Indeed, it was not wise to do so. It would merely have provoked some new explosion of wrath, some new indignity. I relished the matter as little as Talbot did, but I saw very readily that it was better for us to keep silent.

The Colonel followed us to the tent, and when we had gone in, he said with a grotesque imitation of St. Cyr's lightness and courtesy:

"I trust, *Monsieur St. Cyr*, you will fare well here. This is not like a parlor in gay Paris, but it is the best we have to offer in this wilderness. I recommend you to these young gentlemen, and bid you good-night."

"Pay no heed to him, St. Cyr," said Talbot, when the Colonel had passed out of earshot. "I am ashamed to call him a countryman of mine. All I can say in excuse is that he is a boor by nature, and the wine-cup has made him worse."

"Do not apologize, *mon cher Talbot*," replied St. Cyr. "Indeed, France could wish that England had many more like *Monsieur le Colonel*:

*Hier, sur le pont d'Avignon,
J'ai oui chanter la belle,
Lon, la, J'ai oui chanter la belle,
Elle chantait d'un ton si doux
Comme une demoiselle,
Lon, la, Comme une demoiselle.*

Illustration:

On the Bridge of Avignon.

„Ah, that was yesterday, messieurs! *Mais demain!* She will sing on the bridge of Avignon, and who will be there to hear her? Ah, messieurs, I feel no sorrow for myself. I am a soldier and a gentleman. But I would not have tears for my fate to dim the soft eyes of any one in la belle France! *Mais, fortune de guerre, messieurs, fortune de guerre!*“

Neither Talbot nor I could make reply. Ought not all of us to know by this time that a brave and gay exterior may conceal a soft and tender heart?

„Forget it, *messieurs*, I pray you; forget it!“ he exclaimed. „Let it not be said that an officer of France, one who has heard Montcalm’s approving words, gave way to weakness when about to face death. It was but for a moment. It has passed, and now I am ready to meet anything, even your gallant Colonel.“

I liked him all the better for the dash of feeling he had shown, and Talbot, always a man of few words, as I have said before, pressed his hands silently.

There was nothing in the tent but a bearskin, and St. Cyr reclined upon it with careless grace.

„I would not deprive you, *messieurs*,“ he said, „of any slender comfort my quarters may afford, but I presume your duties will compel you to keep guard at the door of the tent, and I would not willingly tempt you into any neglect of those duties. You wish to win glory, promotion, *n’est ce pas?* Ah, *messieurs*, so long as the Marquis de Montcalm leads the armies of France on this continent there will be many opportunities for the brave.“

I did not feel like talking. To tell the truth, my spirits were very heavy. It is no light task to keep a death-watch, to sit guard over the last hours of one whom you like and admire, and to watch with all your faculties lest he seize some chance for life. It is a position to which even now I cannot look back without a quiver of the nerves. Talbot’s face showed no emotion. Indeed, its expression rarely changed, no matter what the provocation might be. But I felt sure he was deeply moved.

St. Cyr relapsed by and by into silence, and his face became thoughtful and a trifle sad. I suppose he was thinking of „la belle“ on the bridge of Avignon, of whom he had sung so gaily. Talbot and I stood by the door in heavy silence. The bustle and confusion of the camp went on for a while, then died down as night approached. An orderly brought food. St. Cyr’s appetite was much better than ours.

„Ah, the good Colonel is very kind,“ he said. „He sees that a soldier of France whom the fortune of war has thrown into his hands does not go hungry. The good Colonel will get his reward.“

When he had eaten, he politely asked us to excuse him, and reclined once more on the bearskin.

The dusk came and then the night, and after a time the camp noises ceased, save a confused murmur like the hum of many bees. Lights glimmered, but all around the encircling rim of the forest rose like a dark and mighty wall. Our peculiar position made the night seem oppressive. In the tent the air felt hot and choking. I stepped outside and stood beside the door while Talbot watched.

Hours must have passed. The moon came out and shed its silver rays over glade and forest. The wind rose and sighed mournfully through the trees. Near the wall of the forest I could see the sentinels, their figures dim and shadowy, and

occasionally the breeze brought to me the echo of footsteps, as they tramped up and down. Presently I started as the lonely hoot of an owl far off in the forest came to my ears. I looked into the tent, but Talbot stood, stiff and upright, by the door. St. Cyr still lay on the bearskin with his face turned away. He may have been asleep.

The Colonel's tent was not far off, and the sounds which came from it soon indicated that some revelry was in progress there. I should not have been surprised at this, for it was no new thing, but the occasion did not seem to invite to merriment.

The sounds grew louder. I heard the clink of glasses, and two thick, coarse voices took up the chorus of a drinking-song. I knew it well. That one was the Colonel's. The accompanying voice belonged to one of our Colonial majors, who had joined us at Albany, a heavy, lumpy man, fully as pompous and heavy as the Colonel himself. This major had been the Colonel's companion in debauchery, much to the annoyance of the other Colonial officers. We were all of us anxious to make a good appearance before our English friends who had seen so much service in the great wars of Europe.

I hoped that St. Cyr could not hear it, but I feared that he did, although nothing was said.

As the song ceased, it was followed by guttural laughter. This gave way in its turn to the rattling of dice, perfectly audible in the stillness of the camp. Now and then came loud oaths, and my indignation increased. How could we ever deserve to win with such men as these to lead us? I wondered at the lowness and cruelty of the mind which could sit thus, while the man whose life it had reduced to the term of a few hours lay within hearing. I was roused from these melancholy musings by a cheerful voice in the tent.

„Ah,“ said St. Cyr, „*notre cher Colonel* looks upon the merry side of life. I have heard that the English were heavy and solemn, but it is not so, at least in the case of the good Colonel.“

He was sitting up on the bearskin, and he had recognized the Colonel's voice; perhaps he had recognized it long before.

In the moonlight I could see Talbot's face flush when St. Cyr spoke. It was the first time he had shown emotion.

„Do not think, St. Cyr,“ he said, „that all our colonels are like the one in the tent over there.“

„Not at all! Not at all, *mon cher Lieutenant*,“ returned St. Cyr in his lively fashion, „for if they were it would bring no glory to Frenchmen to serve against you. I shall expect you, *mon ami*, to be another sort of colonel.“

He said no more about the matter, but closed his eyes and appeared to be asleep.

Talbot and I retained our stations. The night dragged heavily, and the noise of the carouse in the Colonel's tent continued. Evidently they intended to make an all-night affair of it. I would have shut out the sounds, but there was no way to do it. I tried to distract my attention by watching the dim figures of the sentinels as they trod their beats. Then I studied the wall of the forest and tried to imagine that I could see the skirmishers of the enemy lurking in its shade. But invariably my

mind wandered back to the tent. When an orderly came out and returned with several bottles, I felt that the thing would not end before daybreak.

It must have been well beyond midnight when the flap of the Colonel's tent was thrust aside and his heavy figure lurched out. He swung about for a while like a schooner rocking among the high waves. Either he did not know which way he intended to go or was unable to carry out his intentions. After some minutes of this uneasy staggering he came in my direction, stepping very high and bringing down his feet very hard.

When the Colonel drew near I saw that he was in a state of sodden intoxication; his face was swollen and was a mottled red and purple; his eyes were inflamed, and when he spoke to me his voice was so thick as to be scarce articulate.

„Ah, it ish you, ish it, Lieutenant?“ he hiccoughed, „and how ish ze prisoner, ze d—d French spy?“

Conquering my repugnance as best I could, I answered in a tone becoming a subaltern when he addresses his superior, that I believed St. Cyr was asleep.

„Asleep! Asleep!“ growled the Colonel, swinging from side to side. „Sorry to dishturb his slumbers, but will get plenty of rest soon. Must wake spy. Give him one more chance to save his life.“

Summoning up all his drunken dignity the Colonel tried to stand erect. He drew around him his military cloak which some one had thrown over his shoulders when he came out of his tent, and sought to look haughty. The attempt was distressing.

„Colonel,“ said Talbot, „I think it is useless for you to talk about the matter to *Monsieur St. Cyr*. He will never do what you have proposed. He is asleep now, and this is his last night on earth, Colonel.“

„Don't care!“ exclaimed the Colonel angrily. „Don't interfere with your shuperior. Put you under arrest.“

I think Talbot would have protested still, but St. Cyr himself came to the door and exclaimed:

„Ah, it is *mon cher Colonel* again, and in a happier frame of mind than when I saw him last. The Colonel does not allow his duties as a soldier to suppress his inclinations as a man. May I welcome you to my somewhat narrow quarters, Colonel?“

„Yesh,“ said the Colonel thickly, „wantsh to talk to you again. Have proposition to make. Confidential! Won't embarrass you with other listeners.“

Then in no very polite way he ordered Talbot and me to withdraw out of earshot. I felt like demurring, for I knew that the Colonel, rid of our presence, would be likely to say grossly insulting things to St. Cyr. But Talbot pulled me by the arm.

„Let him have his way,“ he said. „It is not worth while to protest. I think from what we have heard, *Monsieur St. Cyr* is quite able to make a fitting reply to any questions.“

We walked a short distance away and sat down on a little hillock to wait until the close of the interview. I could indistinctly hear the voices of St. Cyr and the Colonel. Occasionally there was an oath, which I knew, without any reference to the tones of the voice, was the Colonel's. I wished to listen, not with any desire to overhear what they might say, but I feared the Colonel in his drunkenness might strike St. Cyr, in which case there would be a call for our interference.

But Talbot, contrary to the whole nature of the man, was talkative. I suppose his indignation had loosened his tongue at last. He criticized the approaches to our camp and the ease with which an enemy could creep upon us; then he made a heavy joke or two, and laughed rather noisily. These interruptions distracted my attention. When Talbot presently relapsed into silence and appeared to be listening, I strained my ears but could hear nothing. I became alarmed for St. Cyr. The Colonel in his wrath might have felled the prisoner with a blow from a pistol butt that would leave him insensible. A drunken man can strike very hard sometimes, and the Colonel was not incapable of such a deed.

„I think we had better return,“ I said, „and take the Colonel away.“

„Oh, no,“ said Talbot, putting his hand on my arm, „we have only to obey. Let us remain here; be patient. The Colonel will be out presently.“

I waited in much aggravation of spirit, and more than once might have started for the tent had not Talbot kept his restraining hand on my arm.

„Be patient, Wharton! Be patient!“ he said, and then began to comment again on the camp, until I replied coldly. At that moment the Colonel slouched out of the tent. I did not think for a moment that he had had any success with St. Cyr. The biting words the Frenchman would be sure to use had evidently aroused in him some sense of shame, for he hung his head as he came out, and his cloak was pulled up, muffling his face in part. He staggered and nearly fell, but revived himself, and instead of coming in our direction went away from us.

„He is so heavy with liquor he does not know the way to his own tent. We must lead him there, Talbot,“ said I.

„Let him alone,“ replied Talbot coolly. „If he wanders around the camp and disgraces himself, so much the better for everybody. Then we may get rid of him and all his like.“

Illustration:

Heavy with liquor.

I could not answer this argument, and I thought the best thing to do was to watch the Colonel. He lurched from right to left and from left to right, but always came back to the general direction in which he was going. He came presently to some billets which had been piled up for firewood.

„I'll lay you a shilling he falls over them,“ I said to Talbot.

„I'll take the wager,“ he replied.

The Colonel paused before the billets, and swung to and fro like a ship uncertain of her course. But at last he veered to the right, and passing the obstruction safely, went on.

I took out a shilling and handed it to Talbot. He received it and put it in his pocket. Neither of us said a word. Two or three men about the camp saw the Colonel, but they said nothing to him. They knew him too well to do that. A tent by and by shut him from our view, and we did not see him again.

We sat for some time on the hillock. Talbot was silent and thoughtful. All his desire to talk seemed to have left him.

„As the Colonel has gone,“ I said at length, „I think we had better resume our guard over the prisoner.“

„Very well,“ said Talbot, „I suppose we are responsible for him.“

We walked slowly back to the tent. I looked in. St. Cyr was lying against the far side; his figure seemed to be distorted, and his military coat was drawn up around his face. His breathing was thick and broken; it was more like gasping. I was struck with alarm. It flashed upon me instantly that St. Cyr, in some manner, had committed suicide. He would not die the death of a spy, and had sought that way out of it.

I entered the tent hastily and turned him on his back. The coat remained over his face, and I saw that it was knotted there with strips of cloth. Calling Talbot to my aid, we jerked the coat off and disclosed a mottled red and purple face, and inflamed and projecting eyeballs. It was the Colonel!

Illustration:

An earlier struggle.

When we released him he led a furious search in the camp and the surrounding woods, but we found nothing, though once in the forest I thought I heard an echo:

*Hier, sur le pont d'Avignon,
J'ai oui chanter la belle,
Lon, la ...*

