

Austerlitz Battle

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I love battlefields. Silent monuments of the battles of past ages, they are turning-points of history where men were ready to die so that their cause might prevail. Men will not usually die for trifles. They will often die for their religion, where their highest and deepest convictions are at stake. In fact whenever men are ready to die for a cause which does not seem to be religious, that cause can often prove upon examination to have been, in effect, their real religion. What is life? Battles tell!

So when several months ago I found myself purely by accident within a half-hour car-ride of the battlefield of Austerlitz, I had myself as soon as possible taken out there. Austerlitz, in the now Czech Republic about 70 miles north of Vienna, is where on the wintry Sunday morning of December 2, 1805, Napoleon achieved one of his greatest military victories by crushing with his Revolutionary French army the numerically superior joint Austrian-Russian army of the Third Coalition mounted against him. After the battle, featured towards the beginning of Tolstoy's famous novel "War and Peace," Russian survivors limped back to Russia, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire both lost much territory and was forced to pay a large war indemnity. French Revolutionary presence and influence made a major advance on the map of Europe. To this day a Paris railway station carries the name of Austerlitz (like Waterloo in London).

How did Napoleon achieve such a victory? Mainly, as one learns on site, by the "Lion's Leap." Soon after battle was joined, he struck hard at the weakened center of the Coalition line, broke it in two and overwhelmed the strong but now surrounded enemy left wing. Had the "lion" struck at the center because he guessed or knew that the enemy were weak there? The history books probably say it was his military genius. On the

battlefield one learns that the "lion" was tipped off . . .

Engraved in the bronze presentation mounted for visitors on the hillock from which Napoleon commanded the opening of the battle is the fact that on the night before, he received a visit from someone who revealed to him the Austrian General Weyrother's plan to mass the Allies' attack against the French right wing to cut off their retreat to Vienna. This concentration to the south is what weakened the Austrian-Russian center. In effect, one could say that the visitor provided Napoleon with his victory. Who was he?

A French spy? An Austrian traitor? Very possibly neither and both. In other words, a Freemason working for the triumph of the liberal Revolution over the still Christian empires of Austro-Hungary and Russia. In nearby Austerlitz Castle, which gave the battle its name, an exhibit for tourists shows portraits of the generals who took part in the battle. On the side of the Coalition, they are all older men, aristocrats, looking serious and responsible. On the French side they are all younger men, few if any aristocrats, with a wild gleam in their eyes. Truly, a new world taking over . . . And the Christian world

today? –

Kyrie eleison.