

## THE FORD.

(TRANSLATED FOR THE OWL.)



It was after the battle of Grooechwilber. The French, twenty hours in advance of their enemy, were receding towards Châlons, with the intention of taking the offensive by way of Montmedy. The main body of the re-creating army had already crossed the Meuse, and all along the river, one after another, the bridges had been broken down, cutting off the possibility of pursuit.

Their stratagem, meant to delay the Germans, must at the same time prove fatal to those of the French soldiers who, owing to their wounded and weakened condition, straggled behind, and on reaching the bank, stood dismayed at the sight of the broad, swift-flowing current before them.

Night came on. By the stream, silent shades wandered about. An excited and motly crowd halted in front of a destroyed bridge, whereof there was left nothing more than an arch which stood erect in the middle of the river.

As time passed by, the shades grew more numerous, the several groups more compact. Horsemen and footmen, soldiers of every grade, waifs of the battle-field, called out to one another, made feverish inquiries, sounded the depth of the water with long poles, swore and vociferated in accents of despair, then suddenly ceased, resigning themselves to their fate, but bitterly regretting that they had not met death in the light of day, while bravely fighting with the enemy.

A fire was at once kindled, and towards its cheering flame the wounded crept eagerly, soon forming a vast circle around the heap of burning ferns.

Suddenly, the oppressive silence was broken by a loud voice that cried: "Down the river eight leagues hence, is a bridge, that of *La Fourche*; perhaps it has not been destroyed. Let us go and see!"

The speaker was a lieutenant in the infantry. As he stood before the fire, he consulted an unfolded map, and with his finger soon indicated a point; there was

the bridge of *La Fourche*. After a few words exchanged between him and his brother officers, all exclaimed: 'Tis true! Forward!

Every man sprang to his feet. Thereupon a groan was heard. It came from the wounded, the poor wounded, who shivering, bleeding, delighted to bask in the invigorating warmth of the fire, and who incapable of walking, dreaded to be left behind.

"Who commands here?" one asked.

The officers looked questioningly at each other, and all raising their kepi, silently saluted him who had just said these words. He was a tall dragoon officer, and now looked taller and more imposing still, draped as he was in his black mantle that reached down to his knees. He was the only officer of high rank in their midst.

"Thanks, gentlemen," he said. "Well then, let all of the cavalry that are not incapacitated, give their horses to the wounded. Let the fire be put out, and forward!"

In order to set an example to the rest, though there was blood on his forehead, the dragoon placed on his own horse a young soldier, who groaned from the pain caused by a wound in his thigh. Then taking the horse by the bridle, this newly appointed commander of a routed army quietly led on that column of phantoms marching through the night.

The progress was slow, as there were not horses enough for all the wounded. Mounting by turns, with dizzy head and weary foot, they went, now dragged along, now carried, moaning with pain and full of fear as they proceeded.

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Along the way their number increased, for as they passed by, other soldiers rose, emerged from the thickets where they had lain hid, and joined their ranks. Like the companions of the Cid, they had set out three hundred strong, and were three thousand when they arrived.

A march of eight hours is a trifle for able-bodied men as they leave the camp: