AN ARTIST'S STORY OF THE WAR.

BY EDWIN FORBES,

SPECIAL ARTIST with the Armies in the field:
Author of "LIFE STUDIES OF THE GREAT ARMY;"
CENTENNIAL MEDAL—HIGHEST ART AWARD;
MEMBER OF THE FRENCH ETCHING CLUB,
ETC., ETC.
When the Civil War broke out, one of the most brilliant and famous editors of New York said, “This war will absorb public attention and be the ruin of the newspapers.” On the contrary, it was the making of the newspapers. The correspondents in the capital and in the field leaped to their opportunity, and suddenly developed elements of quickness, sagacity and comprehension that were potent factors of public education in all that the war was. Among those who won fame in that daring pursuit of information was a young artist whose graphic sketches and pictures in the very midst of the varied scenes of camp, march, hospital, bivouac and battlefield, made their reality familiar to the home public through the illustrated papers of the day, and whose accumulated material gave him in later years the means of vividly recalling those exciting times in a series of forty large etchings, published as “Life Studies of the Great Army.”

It was no small honor to Edwin Forbes, when the International Art Commission at our Centennial Exposition of 1876 gave to him the highest award in their power, privately expressing their wonder that one man should have been able to produce such a splendid array of artistic plates; and this was followed by unsought honorary memberships of the foreign Etching Clubs.

That is perhaps of even more interest to us in these present days, is the strong and uniform witness of men to whom every phase of army life in that war was familiar, that Forbes' pictures are in very truth “life studies,” and reproduce with startling realism the almost forgotten minutenie of the scenes they portray—the beauty, the fun, the tragedy and comedy, the brightness and dullness, the gayety and the toil, the infinite variety of picturesque fact in all arms of the service. The series of large etchings, of course, are on the United States War Office walls, but they are only a small part of his interesting material.
IX.

A NIGHT MARCH.

While it is always preferable for a great army to advance on an enemy by the light of day, there have been some most wonderful marches made in the dead of night. Many Union soldiers can recall to mind the varied scenes of adventure when they tramped in darkness through unknown country, occupied by the enemy in such strong force, and so well fortified at every available point, that it seemed like an impossibility to make an attack that would result in anything but defeat.

None had more interest for me than a march I made in 1863 with the Army of the Potomac under command of Gen. Hooker, when it left the winter camp on the north fork of the Rappahannock, opposite the town of Fredericksburg. This town was then occupied by the Confederate army commanded by Gen. R. E. Lee; and upon orders from Washington active preparations were made to turn their position and drive them out of their fortified lines.

The whole Union army, except three corps under Gen. Sedgwick, marched up the north fork of the Rappahannock and, crossing on pontoons at Kelly's Ford, moved rapidly to Ely Ford on the Rapidan. Fording this stream (about four feet deep) the troops advanced quickly and took Chancellorsville, thus placing themselves on the enemy's rear and flank. Holding this menacing position, Gen. Hooker gave orders to fortify a strong line in the dense woods surrounding Chancellorsville, where he awaited the enemy's attack. Meanwhile, Sedgwick's command had made a strong feint below Fredericksburg by crossing the river on pontoons and displaying a large force in front of the Confederate entrenched lines, on the hills in rear of the town. Two corps were then detached from Sedgwick's force and marched in the direction of the United States Ford to form a junction with our main body under Gen. Hooker. Heavy skirmishing and some fighting had already taken place, which suggested a determination on the part of the enemy to retain possession of their stronghold.

I accompanied the detached column along the north fork of the Rappahannock late in the afternoon, and approached the ford, at which point on the river two pontoon-bridges had been thrown across. As we marched along, we could hear artillery and musketry fire from the opposite side of the river, but did not suppose the contest would be intense before we could reach the field. Just before dusk, however, a tremendous volume of sound came from the woods where the two armies confronted each other. It commenced with crackling musketry fire, as if advancing skirmish lines had become engaged, and soon swelled into a continuous roar which made the ground tremble with its power. Now and then could be heard a separate cannon shot, as if but few guns had secured favorable position. As the musketry fire became louder, we knew that the Union lines were being forced back, and clouds of dust and smoke rolled up from the woods where the two gallant armies were struggling for victory.

Our pace was quickened, and troops hurried forward in route-step to succor the hard-pressed Union lines. From the high bank on our side of the river we could get a view of the field of conflict, on our approach to the ford. Looking over the stream we saw a densely wooded country stretching for miles toward the south and west. In the open fields of the foreground were ammunition and supply trains, reserve artillery, extra pontoons, — in fact,
all the impedimenta of a great army. It was a thrilling scene as it lay bathed in the warm
glow of a May sunset. Clouds of smoke rolled up from the woods, which in many places
had taken fire, and as we stopped to gaze for a moment we might conclude, were it not for
the noise, that the sight before us was the conflagration of a great city.

We descended the hill to the river, and crossing on the pontoons, were soon on our
way towards the front. We passed through the wagon-camps on a flat near the river, and
ascending a gentle slope were soon in the dense woods beyond. Darkness had now fallen, and the
din of the conflict increased, though we concluded that the enemy's advance had been checked,
as the reports of firing came no nearer. Sounds rose and fell as the opposing forces changed
position, coming clearly and distinctly from a wooded ridge but with muffled tone from the
valleys. Suddenly there came a burst of artillery, and a tremendous roar continued for one
hour. Then word was received that the enemy's advance had been checked.

Suddenly we met straggling parties of demoralized troops hurrying towards the rear,
and found on inquiry that the Eleventh Corps, holding the right flank of our army, had been
surprised and put to rout by Stonewall Jackson, who had been making one of his famous
forced marches for the purpose. These men were panic-stricken, rushing about at random
with no directness of movement, their only thought being to get away from the bullets. Guards
were thrown out on both sides of the road to put an end to the disgraceful confusion, and
when the way was cleared we pushed forward toward the firing.

I shall never forget the scene at this point, at nine o'clock. Fires were blazing on
every side, which, with the pine trees that had been ignited, so lit up the road that objects
were as discernible as in the day; and surging through it all was a mass of earnest,
determined men who were intent only on reaching the line of battle where they could be of
service to their struggling comrades. Marching hurriedly forward, they soon came to a road
leading from Ely's Ford to Chancellorsville, and deploying to right and left the lines were
very shortly in such a position that the damage done by Jackson's masterly surprise was
almost made good, although a last desperate attempt was made at eleven o'clock to take pos-
session of a plateau surrounding the Chancellorsville House.

The incidents on the road during the remainder of the night were full of absorbing
interest, for troops were continuously pushed forward. The moon looked placidly down as
the column of men, broken here and there by batteries of artillery and ammunition-wagons,
hurried toward the front, and through the woods on all sides could be seen large bodies of
men in reserve, grouped around camp-fires, preparing coffee and other much needed food.
Thousands were wrapped in gray blankets, sleeping peacefully, dreaming perhaps of a far-off
home, while only a mile away the roar of the musketry rose and fell in continuous sound.

Soon after midnight there was a cessation of battle-tumult; but the rumbling trains
and weary troops steadily made their way through the smoky wood until the sun lit up the
eastern horizon.

Thus the great night march was ended, and the last of twenty thousand men who had
marched bravely during the night came straggling by. Their eyes were so heavy that they
could scarce keep them open, but so high were they in spirit that a passer-by would think
they were marching to a scene of pleasure instead of perhaps to a field of death.
THROUGH THE WOODS AT NIGHT.
X.

CHRISTMAS AT THE FRONT.

“PEACE ON EARTH, good-will toward men” could not ring out its grateful cadence in the scenes of conflict through which our army was passing; nor even during the ordinary camp rests, when most of the soldiers, if they had anything in the nature of a special banquet in honor of the ancient festival of good cheer, had to get it by special foraging in the enemy’s country. Yet, although there were no home-greetings, tender memories of Christmas tide filled the hearts of the soldiers and took them back in thought to where little ones sang in anthem the story of old. Remote from scenes most dear and happy in the consciousness of a country’s defense, our brave men brushed away a tear and sought to enjoy the holiday as best they might.

I was just feeling a sense of my own loneliness one Christmas day when an officer of the Signal Corps invited me to take dinner with some friends of his on the picket-line. It was quite early in the morning when we mounted our horses and started from camp. After riding some miles, we came in sight of the picket-reserves; then rode on and found that the main picket-line extended across a valley through which flowed a creek. Nearing a point of crossing, we passed a picket-post on a sand-bar in the middle of the stream, and halted a while to admire the beautiful surroundings. The hut, which was prettily fashioned of pine boughs, sheltered three or four sleeping men, while the cook was getting a frugal dinner ready on the camp-fire in front. Near-by, the officers’ mess was being prepared, and we were cordially invited to partake of “chicken fricassee, camp-style.” The odor of the cooking was appetizing, and our long ride had given us an appetite, but as we were expected elsewhere, we were obliged to decline and soon took leave of the hospitable officers.

We rode down the line and found the post, commanded by my comrade’s friend, on an old farm road. The men were camped in the farm garden, where they had thrown up a shelter of boards against the fence as a protection from the cold wind. We dismounted in the barn-yard, and entrusted our horses to an old negro servant who promised them a feed of corn. We were most cordially received, and the dinner was soon placed before us on a table improvised from the cover of an oat-bin.

We found that living on the outer picket-line was much better than in the main army camp, and were surprised at the real luxuries placed before us, most of which had been obtained from the farmers at very small cost. The bill of fare consisted of rabbit-stew, fricassee chicken, griddle-cakes with honey, and excellent coffee. To this we did full justice, and, with the addition of a little “commissary,” had a more enjoyable feast than we had eaten in months. The rough fellows often detailed as cooks, and especially the “darkeys,” who attached themselves to the various commands as camp-followers and servants of all kinds, developed much culinary talent at times, and the clearness of the coffee and toothsome nature of their simple dishes would put to shame many a professional cook. It is fair to allow, however, that perhaps the admirable hunger-sauce of outdoor life had something to do with these savory concoctions.

After an hour or two of social chat over our pipes, we rode further down the line and stopped at various points to talk with friends who were on duty. None seemed to have fared
as sumptuously as ourselves; most of the men were cooking salt pork, though one party had 
secured a turkey from a neighboring farmer and looked lovingly towards it as it roasted before 
the glowing camp-fire. Some of the men were fortunate enough to have received boxes from 
home, and their faces grew bright as they lifted out roast turkey, chickens, bread, cake and 
pies that kindly hands had prepared. An occasional bottle of “old rye,” secreted in a turkey 
or loaf of bread, would give rise to much fun and expected enjoyment. The provost guard, 
however, seldom overlooked a bottle, and confiscated any contraband liquor; and his long 
experience had bred in him a sort of special sense for any such little infractions of the rule, 
which was inflexible even for Christmas, and if got the better of at all had to be by a skillful 
and imperceptible breaking.

But little more of interest came in our way on the agreeable trip I have mentioned, 
and we returned to camp much brightened by the scenes which so pleasantly broke the 
monotony of soldier life on that Christmas day at the front.
A CHRISTMAS DINNER.
EEF ON THE HOOF was the soldiers' name for the fresh beef furnished them, and the herds of cattle from which it came were no inconsiderable portion of the army's supplies. The Commissary Department usually furnished a certain number of steers to each moving column, and it was a pleasant sight to watch the droves with their escorts as they traveled along the road. A stalwart white ox, with eyes too gentle to suggest slaughter, would sometimes be in lead, and around his neck would be hung blankets, a cartridge-box and other accoutrements of the guard. Often a soldier would sit astride the animal in lead and guide him with a long pole, while the rest of the herd would be kept in order by a series of vigorous shouts.

When a herd reached camp at night-fall, it would be driven into an adjacent field, where it was carefully guarded during the night and where it could rest and feed till the column moved again.

Sometimes fresh beef rations would be issued to the men while in the midst of battle. I recall to mind an instance where during an engagement I was watching an army butcher slaughter an ox, when a sudden charge was made by the Rebs which quickly caused a scattering of both spectators and men engaged in the work. The herd of cattle stampeded and dashed back through the ammunition trains and lines of troops, causing a great panic for a time.

Cattle were collected by foraging parties whenever practicable, and during Sherman's "March to the Sea," immense numbers were secured in the rich country through which he traveled. During the war a supply depot for cattle was established at Washington, just outside the city limits. Great numbers of cattle were sent thither from different localities, and drafts were made from the great herd and sent to the different armies in the field. Sometimes they would be captured by the enemy's cavalry, and many a drove of well-fed oxen intended for Uncle Sam's boys would go to sustain the strength of the "fighting Johnnies," who were always blessed with vigorous appetites.
They were not peculiar in that, however, and I have already noted the importance to all army operations of the "commissary of subsistence." One can well believe what is said of the ancient Romans, that their success in war was not altogether the result of their indomitable courage and splendid discipline, but that these were sustained by the fact that they paid more attention than any other nation of their times to the organized and efficient serving of the commissariat of their army. If it is true that man must eat to live, it is indisputable that man must eat to march and fight.

I once saw a herd of beautiful cattle being driven through the streets of Baltimore. The leader, a handsome red ox, was mounted by a Zouave who sat astride with his Springfield musket across his knee. "A picture of war and peace!" I thought:—the dashing Zouave with bronzed skin, strong, characteristic face and gaudy uniform; and the patient beast, whose eyes wondered mildly at the sights of a great city.
THE MOVING COLUMN.

HE most interesting war-sight to an observer is a great army on the march. I learned one morning that the whole army had been ordered to move forward, so I mounted my mare Kitty and rode out to see the great column pass by.

The first object that came in sight in the distance was a division of cavalry, the advance guard, which presented a splendid appearance. The horses had evidently had hard service, but looked tough and business-like. Neither had the soldiers a superfluous pound of flesh upon them, but both officers and men looked bronzed and hardy, and, like the horses, appeared able to endure continued hardship. Flags and guidons were flying and sabres clattering, and men were chatting and laughing. In rear of the cavalry several batteries of horse-artillery rumbled along. The powder-and-smoke-blackened muzzle gave evidence of recent service, as did the limbers and caissons covered with mud and dust; blankets and other traps were fastened to the latter, and here and there a bag of oats or bundle of hay for the horses.

Just behind, the headquarters flag appeared to view, and I knew that the commanding general, Grant, was approaching. I had not seen him in some time, so awaited his coming with pleasure. He sat his horse with easy grace, his right hand resting upon his thigh. He wore a slouch hat ornamented with a cord, a double-breasted military coat carelessly thrown open, and a vest which had lost two buttons. He was, as usual, without belt or sword, and had the inevitable cigar in his mouth, unlighted. Anxieties and responsibilities had left telling traces, for the general was much thinner than when he left winter camp a few months previous; but the resolute face, which time proved so true an index of character, remained the same. After Gen. Grant came the headquarters staff, followed by a cavalry escort.

Then came the infantry, and as they surged along I was struck with surprise at the youthful appearance of the troops. Many of the enlisted men were hardly more than boys; but notwithstanding their few years they looked strong and muscular, their blankets and knapsacks slung over one shoulder and canteens clattering a refrain to their steps. Their bright faces bespoke the best of cheer, and a ringing laugh echoed along one part of the column when some witty fellow had made an amusing remark.

The staff officers rode backward and forward with anxious oversight, while the company officers made effort to hold the men to their gait. The general color of the troops’ clothing, originally blue, was a greenish yellow; the sun and rain having faded the uniforms, and the yellow dust of marching settled thickly in the fabric. A Zouave regiment soon appeared, and the gay uniforms of the officers and troops gave new brightness to the moving column, although their flowing, baggy trousers were mostly tattered. One Zouave who wore an old white “stove-pipe” hat was the subject of much merriment; he had evidently lost his fez in the last encounter, and in the bereavement had donned some old farmer’s ancient head-gear. Quite a number were barefooted, and gingerly picked their way over stony places, and the poor fellows were laughed at by inconsiderate comrades when a misstep caused them to wince with pain.

After I had viewed thus for hours the varied elements of the army on the march, a
The moving column.

low, rumbling sound broke upon my ear, and sharp glances and quickened footsteps told of the men’s realization that their front was already engaged with the enemy. The column was now shifted to one side of the road, and a couple of batteries dashed along, the speed of the horses increased by the slash of whips and cries of drivers. The gunners ran frantically by the side of their pieces or clung excitedly to the ammunition boxes. The column was soon doubled up, the rear division taking to the fields beside the road. Fences across their course seemed to disappear at a touch, and corn and wheat fields were swarmed over as if by a legion of locusts. Ambulances were scattered through the column to pick up the sick, and the pale faces that glanced out from some of them told how severe a strain the march had been in many instances. Several times I saw men fall out of the ranks too foot-sore to proceed a single step further, and after receiving the captain’s admonition to return to duty as soon as possible, would retreat to the shelter of a fence-corner and fall into the sleep of sheer exhaustion, oblivious to the clatter and noise.

The sun was scorching, and the dust suffocating as it drifted to leeward and settled a foot deep over grass and weeds, and lay like heaps of winter snow on the fence rails. A grateful though brief respite was given to the troops, and as the column halted, the men dropped down in the dust by the road-side to snatch a moment’s rest. Orders to “fall in” were soon given, and the weary column was again under way. Ammunition wagons were hurried forward, and the negro drivers lashed their animals and yelled as if to hasten the speed at every jump. The baggage-trains were turned off the road and parked in the fields to await the outcome of the struggle. One unusual picture presented itself: two infantrymen languidly mounted on an old gray horse; one was wounded and the other sick, if a pale, sad face was any criterion. A drummer-boy was acting the Good Samaritan by carefully leading the horse and conveying the suffering soldiers to a place of refuge. Meanwhile, the infantry still surged along, officers urging their men to increased speed. When the chief part of the column had passed, stragglers that always follow an army and foot-sore men tramped on, wagons guarded by infantry, reserve artillery, army forges and pontoon-trains, followed in irregular line. Occasional groups of men limped by, different ones being supported by a hay-fork or a crutch made of a forked stick. The road now became littered with blankets and knapsacks flung away by the troops when they could no longer endure their weight in the weary march. Some parts of the road were blue with overcoats cast away, no doubt without a thought of the protecting warmth they would lend at night-fall.

Interspersed through the column were negro servants of officers, many of them very grotesque. They were all proud of their new-found freedom, and stepped gleefully chattering along as if to the “Happy Land, far, far away.” Some of them had confiscated old mules and horses, over which they had slung kettles and camp utensils in ridiculous fashion, and seated astride some of the animals an unknown future with their scene of this wonderful panorama, and the resident whites ventured out from their up the too-plentiful cloth- is no great loss without

The

SOME CRITICAL OPINIONS.

LTHOUGH the proof of the pudding is the eating, and the best way for a man to be satisfied of the truthfulness and beauty of these war-stories told to the eye is to see them, yet we all like to know what the best judges of fact and art think about such things. So highly are Forbes' sketches rated as historical data that a bill has been introduced into Congress to purchase his collection of pencilings for the Government archives of the War Department. Here are given a few brief expressions, which are to the point, concerning the "Studies."

President GRANT;
Writing to Mr. Forbes about the "Life Studies," took pains to express his "appreciation of this valuable work of art."

GRANT.

General SHERMAN.
* * * "I considered them most valuable; so much so, that I had already instructed my A. D. C., Colonel Audenried, to purchase the first set of proofs now on exhibition at the Centennial in Philadelphia, which set I design for the decoration of my new office in the War Department, when finished. I am sure that these pictures will recall to the survivors the memory of many scenes which are fading in the past."

SHERMAN.

General SHERIDAN.
* * * "A capital reminder of the days when we were in the field against the enemies of the Republic. I take great pleasure in testifying to their artistic excellence and accuracy."

SHERIDAN.

HORACE BINNEY SARGENT,
Commander Dept. of Mass., Grand Army of the Republic.
* * * "Very life-like and interesting. They vividly and in a most spirited manner recall the old scenes. For the halls of Grand Army Posts I can conceive of no more delightful decoration."

SARGENT.

Rev. EDWARD EVERETT HALE, D.D.
South Cong'l Church, Boston.
* * * "They have remarkable interest, both as works of art and as a memorial of the experience of thousands of our friends which we cannot afford to forget."

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* * * "A work creditable in the highest degree to American art, and a worthy commemoration of the great episode in American life which it so vividly illustrates. As etchings, simply, the collection will be sought for by amateurs of art, and not a few of the pictures will find a worthy place framed and hung beside the best examples of modern art."

TRANSCRIPT.

The CENTURY MAGAZINE.
* * * "The portfolio of etchings is one of the most authentic and valuable series of illustrations of the war. The etchings are well known to collectors and others."

CENTURY.

The ARMY AND NAVY JOURNAL.
* * * "They present the most perfect idea of the army of the American Rebellion that has yet been given to the public."

JOURNAL.

The NEW YORK HERALD.
* * * "The subjects of these works have an appearance of nature, which is so seldom seen except in the sketches of artists, and Mr. Forbes' experience as an army artist correspondent for one of the New York illustrated papers gave him unusual opportunities for obtaining material for the work."

HERALD.

The CHRISTIAN UNION.
"No such series has ever been completed with a degree of skill sufficient to command the general attention of artists and connoisseurs. * * * "And these are no fancy sketches. As "field artist," Mr. Forbes followed the fortunes of the Union armies during their hardest and most important campaigns, and filled his sketch book with memoranda and finished drawings which now afford him an inexhaustible mine from which to make up a truthful record of the private soldier as he lived in camp or trench, in the bivouac or on the march, on foot or on horseback, in rain, sun, summer or winter."

UNION.

Mr. THOMAS OLDHAM BARLOW.
Hon. Secretary London Etching Club.
* * * "The etchings were very much admired by the members, and I am instructed to convey to you their best thanks. I have the pleasure to communicate to you that Mr. Redgrave, R. A., proposed you as a Foreign Honorary Member of the London Etching Club. Mr. Millais, R. A., seconded the proposition, and you were unanimously elected."

BARLOW.

COPY OF CENTENNIAL AWARD.
The undersigned having examined the product herein described "Life Studies of the Great Army," respectfully recommend the same to the United States Centennial Commission for award, for the following reasons, viz.: For Excellent Studies from Nature and Life, Firmness in Tone and Spirited Execution.

[Signed by the Ten Group Judges.]
Number Four of the "ARMY LIFE SERIES"

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