

LIPPINCOTT'S MONTHLY MAGAZINE.

MARCH, 1890.

TWO SOLDIERS.

I.

THE rain was plashing dismally on the grimy window-sill and over the awning of the shops below. The street-cars went jingling by with a dripping load of outside passengers on both platforms. Wagons and drays, cabs and closed carriages, that rattled or rumbled along the ordinarily busy thoroughfare, looked as though they had been dipped in the river before being turned loose on the street, and their Jehus, a bedraggled lot, must needs have had something amphibious in their composition, else they could not have borne up against the deluge that had been soaking the city for two days past. The policeman, waddling aimlessly about at the opposite corner, enveloped in rubber cap and overcoat, cast occasional wistful glances into the bar-room across the way, wherein the gas was burning in deference to the general gloom that overhung the neighborhood, and such pedestrians as had to be abroad hurried along under their umbrellas as though they half expected to have to swim before they could reach their destination. The dense cloud of sooty smoke that had overhung the metropolis for weeks past, and that wind from any direction could never entirely dissipate, for the simple reason that smoke-stacks by the score shot up in the outskirts on every side, now seemed to be hurled upon the roofs and walls, the windows and the pavement, in a black, pasty, carboniferous deposit, and every object out of doors that one could touch would leave its inky response upon the hand. A more depressing "spell of weather" had not been known for a year, and every living being in sight seemed saturated with the general gloom,—every living being except one: Captain Fred Lane, of the Eleventh Cavalry, was sitting at the dingy window of his office in the recruiting rendezvous on Sycamore Street and actually whistling softly to himself in supreme contentment.