

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE SOLDIER'S WIFE.

It is now many years since the first battalion of the 17th regiment of foot, under orders to embark for India,—that far distant land, where so many of our brave countrymen have fallen victims to the climate, and where so few have slept in what soldiers call the “bed of glory,”—where assembled in the barrack-yard of Chatham, to be inspected previously to their passing on board the transport which lay moored in the Downs.

It was scarcely daybreak when the merry drum and fife were heard over all parts of the town, and the soldiers were seen sallying forth from their quarters, to join the ranks, with their bright fire-locks on their shoulders, and the knapsacks and canteens fastened to their backs by belts as white as snow. Each soldier was accompanied by some friend or acquaintance, or by some individual with a dearer title to his regard than either; and there was a strange and sometimes a whimsical mingling of weeping and laughing among the assembled groups.

The second battalion was to remain in England; and the greater portion of the division were present to bid farewell to their old companions in arms.—But among the husbands and wives, uncertainty, as to their destiny, prevailed; for the lots were yet to be drawn—the lots that were to decide which of the women should accompany the regiment, and which should remain behind. Ten of each company were to be taken, and the chance was to be the only arbiter. Without noticing what passed elsewhere, I confined my attention to that company which was commanded by my friend Captain Loder, a brave and excellent officer, who, I am sure, has no more than myself forgotten the scene to which I refer.

The women had gathered round the flag-sergeant, who held the lots in his cap—ten of them marked “*To go*”—and all the others containing the fatal words “*To remain*.” It was a moment of dreadful suspense; and never have I seen the extreme of anxiety so powerfully depicted in the countenance of human beings as in the features of each of the soldiers’ wives who composed that group. One advanced and drew her ticket; it was against her, and she retreated sobbing. Another; she succeeded, and, giving a loud huzza, ran off to the distant ranks to embrace her husband. A third came forward with hesitating step; tears were already chasing each other down her cheeks, and there was an unnatural paleness on her interesting and youthful countenance. She put her small hand into the sergeant’s cap, and I saw, by the rise and fall of her bosom, even more than her looks revealed. She unrolled the paper, looked upon it, and, with a deep groan, fell back, and fainted. So intense was the anxiety of every person present, that she remained unnoticed until all the tickets had been drawn, and the greater number of the women had left the spot. I then looked round, and beheld her supported by her husband, who was kneeling upon the ground, gazing upon her face, and drying her fast-falling tears with his coarse handkerchief, and now and then pressing it to his own manly cheek.

Captain Loder advanced towards them. “I am sorry, Henry Jenkins,” said he, “that fate has been against you: but bear up, and be stout-hearted.”

“I am so, captain,” said the soldier, as he looked up, and passed his rough hand across his face; “but ’tis a hard thing to part from a wife, and she so soon to be a mother.”

“Oh, captain,” sobbed the young woman, “as you are both a husband and a