

Tales and Sketches.

THE SOLDIER'S PLEDGE.

"I do not drink," the colonel said
Upon the festal morning;
There was a toss of beauteous head,
And bright eyes full of scorning.
"As woman's eyes this wine is fair,
I know 'twould make us merry;
But I will pledge in water clear,
And not in golden sherry."

"Why, colonel, why?" the bride spoke up,
Sir Edwin's fairest daughter;
"Why do you scorn the honored cup,
And pledge me in cold water?
Upon your words there hangs a tale
And we to it would listen;
Methinks I see your cheeks grow pale,
Your eyes with tear-drops glisten."

"Oh, bonnie bride, the tears I shed
Above this glass of water,
Are for the best and bravest dead
That e'er rode down to slaughter.
'Twas long ago when on the bank
Of Irigally's river,
We met the Russian's rank to rank,
A sword or spear to shiver.

"The night before in Powell's tent
The officers were drinking,
A ceaseless round the goblet went—
A shameless round, I'm thinking.
The morning found us flushed with wine,
With hands and brain unsteady;
But when the Russians formed their line
Of battle, we were ready.

"I reeled, but still upon my steed
I sat and gave the orders
That formed the gallant ranks I'd led
From England's historic borders;
I curse the day I saw them mowed
Down in the fire infernal,
For braver troopers never rode
Behind a drunken colonel!

"This order came to us: 'Advance,
And hold the Ridge of Bannan!
Beyond it shone the foeman's lance
Above one hundred canon.
We gained the ridge and there drew rein,
But only for a minute,
The demon Drink had fired my brain—
The flames of hell seemed in it!

"I shouted, 'Charge!' and thro' the smoke
We left the Ridge of Bannan,
And faced the lurid flames that broke
From all those Russian cannon.
We sabred here, we sabred there,
Despite death's horrid rattle;
We left our comrades everywhere
Upon the field of battle!

"How each man like a tiger fought
'Tis told to-day in story;
The foe's success was dearly bought,
And dearer still our glory.
Six hundred gallants rode with me
Upon the deadly cannon;
But only ninety lived to see
Once more the Ridge of Bannan!

"With wounded heart, by time unhealed,
That fell morn in October,
I galloped from the fatal field,
By murder rendered sober.
Behind me lay upon the field,
By murruring Irigally,
Four hundred men who'd ne'er again
At blast of bugle rally.

"Against our arms the battle went,
Defeat succeeded slaughter,
And all because in Powell's tent
We did not pledge in water.
The sword I drew that fatal day
Is rusted now, and broken,
'Tis well! for it must ever be
Of crime a horrid token.

"Now this is why my eyes with tears
To-day are overflowing;
Above my comrades twenty years
The grasses have been growing.
Come, fill each cup, and say with me—
(Still be your childish prattle!)
The day is lost, as it should be,
When brandy leads the battle.

"I'd drink to all whose bones are white
Beside the distant river;
Their gallant blades to-day are bright,
And will be bright forever!
In water let us pledge the braves
Who questioned not, but followed—
Who peaceful sleep in soldiers' graves
By Cossack lances hallow'd."

"Fill up!" cried out the bonnie lass,
Sir Edwin's fairest daughter,
"Pour out your wine, and fill each glass
With clear and sparkling water!
We drink to them who will no more
At blast of bugle rally—
The gallant ghosts that guard the shore
Of whispering Irigally!"

It was no woman's foolish whim
As tearful eyes attested,
They filled their glasses to the brim,
And drank as she requested.
He bowed his head—the soldier gray
Who led his men to slaughter;
And those beside him heard him say:
"Since then I pledge in water."

—Selected.

ONLY ONE SCENE.

BY EARNEST GILMORE.

It was a dreary, miserable morning; a heavy fog hung over the wretched street; the rain had fallen continually through the night, and still drizzled in a forlorn way. Pedestrians jostled along, occasionally hitting one another with their wet umbrellas and sloshing the mud right and left over the dirty pavement.

Crossing a filthy street, where the thick, black mud entered the soles of her sodden shoes and clung with tenacity about her thin ankles, was a young girl of thirteen or thereabouts. She breast the driving wind and swerved not from a straight course ahead, although her weapons against the elements were only a ragged dress and thin, faded shawl of many colors. Tied about her untidy mass of hair was an old hood, while upon her feet an old one-sided shoe, unlaced, and torn at the toe, did duty for one, while the other walked bravely on in a man's discarded boot, hard and unwieldy though it was. She seemed utterly indifferent to the rain. And why should she be otherwise? For when one is thoroughly wet and worn a few drops more or less either of water or trouble make no difference. She hurried around the corner, and a shiver passed through her frame with the cutting blast of wind. She shuffled on as fast as possible, considering her soaked feet, held her poor, wet garment closer to her as if for protection, and soon turned up a dark court, opened a creaking door in a rickety tenement-house, and entered. How cold and dark and damp! although just what she expected. A deep sigh escaped her. The "bundle of rags" (called father) on the straw in the corner did not move, and she softly opened the door into another smaller one and looked in. All was hushed and still. On a low couch of straw, covered with a thin, patched army blanket, lay a little girl of seven, pale and faded, but, though the clammy sweat stood upon the fair brow, one could not but say, how lovely! Yes; though a drunkard's forsaken child, Lena Croft's pinched features were classically beautiful. Amy knelt down by her side, took the little thin hand in her own, and, poor child, although she did not intend to awaken