



THE WAR
ON THE
PENINSULA

VOL. I



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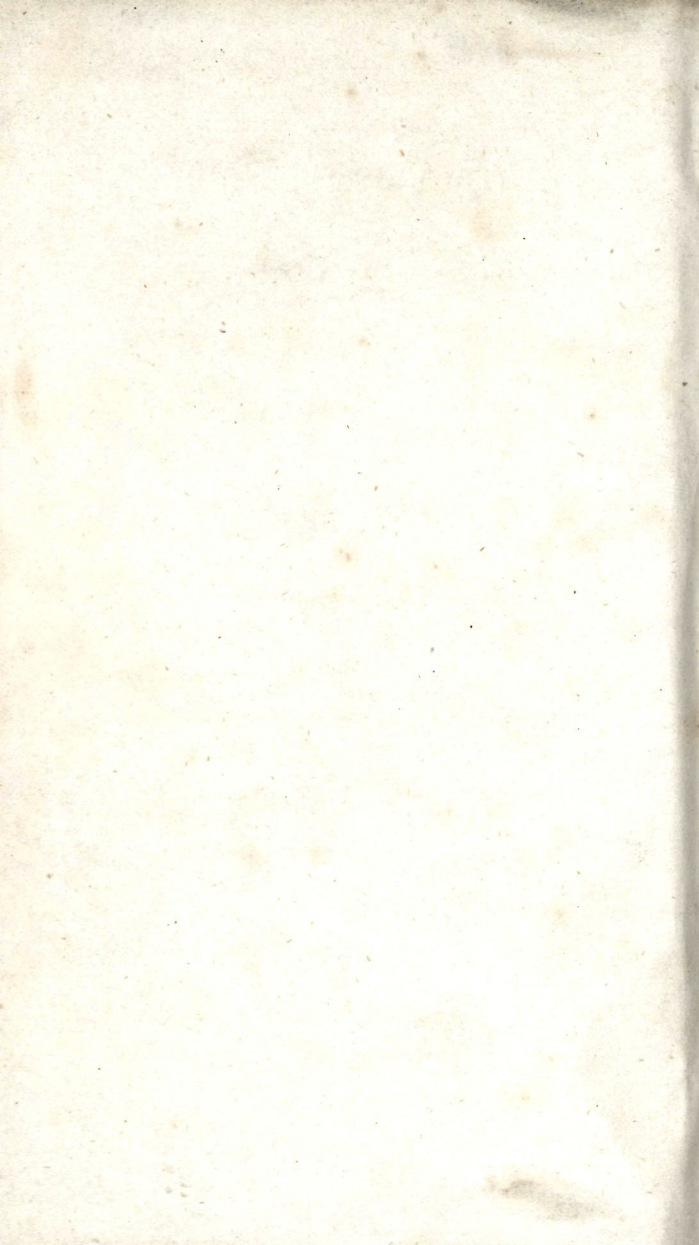
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COLLECTIONS



RECOLLECTIONS

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By A SOLDIER

GLASGOW,

W. & A. GIBSON, 10, N. BRIDGE STREET,
PRINTERS AND BOOKSELLERS,
1850.

I WILL A ROUND UNVARNISHED TALE DELIVER—
OF MOVING ACCIDENTS BY FLOOD AND FIELD,
OF HAIR-BREADTH 'SCAPES IN THE IMMINENT DEADLY BREACH,
AND WITH IT ALL MY TRAVEL'S HISTORY.

Shakespeare.

RECOLLECTIONS
OF
AN EVENTFUL LIFE

CHIEFLY
PASSED IN THE ARMY.

By A SOLDIER.

SECOND EDITION.

GLASGOW:
W. R. M'PHUN, TRONGATE.
LONDON, KNIGHT & LACEY.
EDINBURGH, EDWARD WEST & CO.

1825.

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1855



*John Wood Down Esq
1/2 Calif*

TO HER,

WHO, BY PRECEPT AND EXAMPLE,

FIRST

LED HIM TO THAT CULTIVATION OF MIND,

WHICH HAS

PROVED AN INEXHAUSTABLE SOURCE OF PLEASURE,

EVEN

IN THE MIDST OF PRIVATION AND SUFFERING;

TO

His Mother

AS A

TRIBUTE OF RESPECT AND AFFECTION

THIS VOLUME IS INSCRIBED,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

TO HER

WHO, BY PRESENT AND FUTURE

FIRST

LED HIM TO THAT CULTIVATION OF MIND

WHICH HAS

PRODUCED AN INSTANTANEOUS EFFECT OF GREATLY

IN THE COURSE OF INVENTION AND REFINEMENT

TO

THE

AS A

THE TRIBUTE OF RESPECT AND GRATITUDE

AND THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED

BY

THE AUTHOR

A

Letter to the Editor.

———— BARRACKS,
23d June, 1823.

MY DEAR M————.

ENCLOSED with this letter, I have sent you the rude sketch of my life, which I promised to forward, when I last saw you. It has been written by snatches, now and then, when I could find opportunity; and I have been induced to finish it more hastily than I at first intended, in consequence of expecting to leave Britain, once more, for a foreign station: whence it is doubtful whether I may ever return.

In drawing it up, I have studied to give a plain relation of facts, as they

fell under my observation, unbiassed by any regard to rank or wealth; and, if in pourtraying character, I have sometimes made an unlovely picture, the fault was in the original. I have also aimed more at giving a delineation of the feelings, manners and customs of those around me, than a description of the positions of the army, in a general engagement, or details of its movements, which from the local situation I held, I could only learn through the medium of others.

As I have written wholly from recollection, it can scarcely be expected that I could remember names of places and dates very correctly; but this will be of little consequence, as the public are already in possession of them through other sources. For the main point, namely, the truth of

the narrative, I can confidently appeal to all who served with me.

In the observations I have risked, it has been my wish to preserve that independence of spirit which I have always cherished, under every difficulty, and will continue to cherish to the last moment of my existence.

With regard to the publication of my work, I leave it wholly in your option either to publish it or not as circumstances may guide you.

I am little acquainted with the taste of the literary world; but I am much afraid that my humble production will scarcely pass the fiery ordeal of criticism, unaccustomed as I have been, to write with only a partial knowledge of grammar, and none of the rules of composition. However, I have so much faith to put in the public taste, that I believe the

work will rise or fall according to its intrinsic merit; and either way I will have no good reason to complain.

Even though it should fail, I will not consider my labour lost; for many an hour I have whiled away in writing it, which might otherwise have passed over me heavily enough. The pleasures of memory, I think, in many cases, are even superior to those of hope—particularly when we have awakened from life's young dream, and, from our experience of the past, have learned to distrust the future.

In writing this sketch, "I seem to have lived my childhood o'er again," and again gone through all the interesting adventures of my life, without the fatigue, hardships and hunger, which too often accompanied them.

I have dwelt with "pleasing fond regret," on the remembrance of

scenes of pure and simple pleasure, which have passed away, never to return, and mourned the loss of friends whose steady affection formed the solace of my life. You remember some of them; for they were yours as well as mine.

But amongst all, there is a regret nearly allied to a feeling of despair which swallows up every other. I allude to the manner in which I sacrificed every prospect by inlisting. What might I not have been had I not taken the fatal step, that cut me off from that society which would have been congenial to my mind!

“ But 'tis vain, all words are idle,
 Words from me are vainer still,
 But the thoughts we cannot bridle,
 Force their way against the will.”

I would wish you to call on my
 mother, and * * * * *
 * * * * *

I will write to you soon again, perhaps, to bid you a long farewell.

Meantime, believe me to be, as ever, your sincere friend.

JAMES

ADVERTISEMENT.

IN laying the following narrative before the Public, I may perhaps have consulted my own feelings more than the public taste; but, in justice to myself, I must state that previous to the manuscript being sent to press, it was shown to several gentlemen of literary merit; and, it is in consequence of their report, that I have been induced to publish it.

With the exception of a very few verbal alterations, no change has been made on the original manuscript;

but, in consequence of the Author not being present to correct the press, some errors may have escaped notice: for which I must beg the indulgence of the public.

Circumstances, which will be evident to the reader, preclude me from saying anything of the author, more than that I served in the same regiment with him, during the Peninsular war; and I can vouch for the truth of all that he has related, so far as the army is concerned. I can state also, that since he first entered the service, his conduct has been in every respect exemplary.

H. M.

RECOLLECTIONS.

CHAPTER I.

THE AUTHOR'S PARENTAGE—EDUCATION—EFFECTS OF ROMANCE READING—AIRY CASTLES—JOURNEY TO ARCADIA—DISAPPOINTMENT.

I WAS born in Glasgow: my father held a situation in a mercantile house, that enabled him to keep his family respectable; my mother had been married before, and had children by her first husband; but I was the only surviving child by my father. I was therefore his particular care, and no expense would have been spared on my education, had I been wise enough to appreciate the value of it; but, unfortunately for me, that was not the case. I had early learned to read; but novels, romances and fairy tales were

my favourite books, and soon superseded all other kinds of reading. By this means, my ideas of life were warped from reality, and the world I had pictured in my imagination was very unlike the one in which I lived. The sober realities of life became tiresome and tasteless. Still panting after something unattainable, I became displeased with my situation in life, and neglected my education—not because I disliked it: on the contrary, I was fond of learning, and used to form very feasible plans of study, wherein I omitted nothing that was necessary to form the accomplished gentleman. I could pleasingly skim over the whole course in my mind, and contemplate my future fame and wealth as the result; but when it came to detail, and I considered how many years of arduous study would be required to complete it, I was too impatient to put it into practice. I had acquired too great a facility at raising castles in the air, and embellishing them with my fancy, to submit to the drudgery of building on a more stable foundation. Thus, straining at shadows, I lost substantial good.

Amongst other books which fell into my hands, when very young, was Robinson Crusoe. It was a great favourite; and, at that time, I believe, I would have suffered shipwreck willingly, to be cast on an island like his. An island to one's self! I thought what a happiness! I have sat and dreamed for hours together, on what I would do in such a situation. I have often played truant from school, to wander into the fields, and read my favourite books; and, when I was not reading, my mind was perfectly bewildered with the romantic notions I had formed. Often have I travelled eagerly to the summit of some neighbouring hill, where the clouds seemed to mark the limits of the world I lived in, my mind filled with an indescribable expectation that I would there meet with something that would realize my wild ideas, some enchanted scene or other; and when I reached its summit, and found those expectations disappointed, still the next similar place had the same attraction. The sky, with the ever-varying figures of the clouds, was an inexhaustible field for my imagination to work in;



and the sea, particularly those views of it where the land could not be seen from the shore, raised indescribable feelings in my breast. The vessels leaving the coast, I thought, must contain happy souls; for they were going far away, and all my fancied happy worlds were there. Oh, thought I, if I could once pass that blue line that separates the ocean and the sky! —then would I be happy; for that seems to me the only barrier between me and happiness.

I was often beat for being absent from school, and urged to tell what was my reason for playing the truant. The reason I felt, but could not describe; and, the same fault recurring again and again, I was at last set down as incorrigible. What most surprised my friends, was that I never had any companions in my rambles; but a companion would have spoiled all my visions. Never did I enjoy such pure unmixed delight, as in those excursions; but it was transient. Every day's experience served to destroy some part of my enchanted structure; and now time and a more intimate knowledge of

the world have swept away the fabric, and left "not a wreck behind." Still memory hovers fondly over the spot where it once stood, with a feeling of regret, that those happy days are gone forever.

"So ill exchanged for riper times,
To feel the follies and the crimes,
Of others or my own."

In some old romances which I had read, the life of a shepherd had been described in such glowing colours, that I became quite enamoured of it, and would not give my parents rest until they procured such a situation for me. It was in vain that they assured me I would find every thing different in that life from what I imagined. I could not believe it. They made some agreement with a farmer, from whom they got their milk and butter, to take me out with him to his farm, that I might learn the truth by experience. I set off with him on his butter-milk cart, my mind filled with the most extravagant anticipations of my new employment. I arrived at the farmer's house at night; and next morning I was called up at four o'clock, to my new avocation.

An old man was sent out with me, to show me my charge. I was left by him on a bleak hill, with four-score of sheep, and told that my breakfast and dinner would be brought out to me. I sat down to contemplate the scene before me. It was desolate enough, nothing but bog-land extending for miles on each side of me. There were no sylvan groves; for there was not a tree on the farm—no shepherds piping in the dale; for the shepherds there had neither pipe nor crook. I tried to transform the female servant, that was in my master's house, into a shepherdess, but it would not do. It was a horrible caricature: she was a strong masculine-looking Highland girl, anything but lovely or romantic. Surely, thought I, there must be some mistake here. I never spent such a lonely tiresome day. My flock seemed to think they had got a fool to deal with; for they run in every direction but the right one. It is true, I had a dog; but he did not understand my language. We had not been long enough acquainted; and, by the time night came, I was pretty well convinced

that the life of a shepherd was not what I had imagined it. Day after day passed, without realizing any of my expectations. My feet got sore running through the rough heather; and I returned to my parents about a month after, completely cured of that folly. One would think that this disappointment would have rendered me more cautious in forming opinions from the same source—but no! I was as bad as ever, unless in my ideas of a shepherd's life. Indeed, it was always my misfortune to pay dearly for my experience, and to profit little by that of others.

CHAPTER II.

A COMPANION—LOTTERY TICKET—EXPECTATIONS
—DISAPPOINTMENT—RESOLVES ON GOING TO
SEA—GREENOCK—LOOKING OUT FOR A BIRTH
—RECEPTION—PRESS-GANG AGENT—AN OLD
ACQUAINTANCE—HIS DESCRIPTION—BOUND
APPRENTICE TO A SHIP-OWNER—FITTING OUT
—PARTING WITH HIS FATHER—COMMENCES
SEAMANSHIP—PRACTISING.

I FOUND few boys of my own age, that entered into my notions. One indeed there was equally extravagant, and we were scarcely ever separate. Tired of living under the control of our parents, we determined to make a bold push at independence. We mustered as much money as bought the sixteenth of a lottery ticket. In the interval between buying and drawing—how we did dream! It never entered our minds that we would get less than the share of a prize of £30,000; and of course

the disposal of the cash was the constant theme of our conversation. At last the wished-for day arrived, on which we were to receive intelligence of the fate of our ticket. We did not go to inquire concerning it until night. With hearts fluttering with apprehension, we went to the shop where we had bought it. I would not go in: I sent in my companion. I durst scarcely look after him. To such an intense pitch of interest was my mind wrought up, that the criminal on his trial for some capital crime could not wait with more dreadful anxiety for the verdict of the jury, than I did for my companion to come out. He did come, but I was afraid to look him in the face, lest I should read disappointment in it. I waited for him to speak; but his tongue refused its office. I at last ventured to look in his face, and there I read the truth. Had he spoken and told me it was a blank, I might have doubted him, and thought he only joked me; but I could never doubt the expression of despair which I saw there depicted. Not a word was exchanged: we walked on in stupified vexation. After wandering

about for some time unconscious of where we were going, he at last burst into tears. I could have very willingly joined him; but I suspected that something else preyed on his mind. On asking him what distressed him so much, he said that part of the money with which he had purchased his share of the lottery ticket was the balance of an account, due by a person to his father, which he had received without his knowledge. He had depended on the receipt of his prize, to pay it with interest; but now those hopes were blasted: he could never face home—his countenance would betray him, and his father was very severe.

He said he was determined to go to Greenock, and engage with some merchant vessel bound to Surinam, in the West Indies. He had an uncle a planter there, and of course when he arrived there was no danger of him. His uncle would procure his discharge from the ship, and the result would be that he would become a gentleman. I listened eagerly to this. We had often expatiated on the pleasure of seeing foreign countries; and I resolved