RECOLLECTIONS

OF

AN EVENTFUL LIFE,

CHIEFLY

PASSED IN THE ARMY.

BY A SOLDIER.

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1824.
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.
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, unbiased by any regard to rank or wealth; and, if in portraying 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
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 inexhaustable 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 everything 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 bogland 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 ran 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 XIII.

JOIN THE REGIMENT IN CAMP—RECEPTION—PARTY ADDRESSED BY THE COMMANDING OFFICER—DUTY OF THE TROOPS—GENERAL STEWART—DONALD AND HIS COFFEE—BRITISH FORCE IN CADIZ—GO INTO HOSPITAL—VISIT FROM A TOWNSMAN—HIS SYSTEM OF RECRUITING—OBSERVATIONS ON THE SPANISH CHARACTER.

The day following, we marched to join the regiment at Isla Camp. Our comrades turned out to receive us; and our hearts thrilled with exultation at the encomiums passed on our bravery. The poor fellows flew with alacrity to procure wine to treat us; amongst the rest, my comrade Dennis was not backward. He and I had been separated when I went to the fort, and he was now overjoyed to see me. He seized my hand, and shook it so long, and squeezed it so heartily, that I was ready to cry out with the pain; but
it was in the warmth of his heart that he did this; and, as such, I valued it. "Death and ounds, James," exclaimed he, "is it yourself that's in it; troth, I thought I'd never see you more, for, when I saw the shot and shell flying about ye like hailstones, I said to myself 'poor comrade it's all over with you:' but, thank God, here you are safe and sound." "Scarce-
ly," said I. "What's the matter, my dear fellow; are you wounded?" "Slightly," said I; "but that is not the worst of it, I have all my kit on my back." "Och, if that's all, never fear, my honey—you'll never want while Dennis has a shirt in his knapsack, or a cross in his pocket." And his were not empty professions: my heart glows with grateful feeling to this moment at the remembrance of his disintersted kindness—in my chequered jour-
ney through life, I met few friends of his description.

After supplying me with things to change myself, he procured a canteen of wine; and, being joined by more of our comrades, who were willing to show their good will, and who had come equally well
provided, we sat down in the tent, and I soon forgot all that I had suffered.

When the wine warmed my head, I entered into a detail of our proceedings during the time we were in the fort, with a feeling of pride and exultation—"fought all the battles o'er again, and thrice I slew the slain." My comrades, ranged around, greedily devoured the relation; and their exclamations and remarks served to heighten my enthusiasm. I can smile now at the warmth of my feeling, and the high ideas I had then of a warrior's fame. Yet, I must say, that there is a feeling connected with military enterprise, which will scarcely fail to carry all before it, particularly in men of any imagination. Military glory or fame, calmly considered, certainly appears a mere bauble, a delusive ignis fatuus: but, show me the man, of any soul, who could take this view of it in the midst of battle; there the imagination soars unconfined beyond every trammel, and gets into the region of sublimity and enthusiasm.

Next day, we were called out. The regiment formed square, and the remains of our party was marched into it. We
were then addressed by our commanding officer in terms of the highest eulogy, and held out to the regiment as a pattern. The sergeant, who had so gloriously distinguished himself by staving the wine cask, was particularly addressed, and told that he would not be lost sight of. We were then dismissed; but, with the exception of this sergeant, I do not remember any of us who were thought of after the speech. For my own part, I know that I found difficulty enough in getting the sum of two pounds eight shillings— in lieu of all that I had lost!! The commandant, however, was soon raised to the rank of major, and not long after to that of lieutenant-colonel.

The regiments of the brigade in camp were busily employed at this time working at the batteries, which were building on the island, for which they received ninepence per day, in addition to their pay. They had also extra rations, such as coffee and sugar for breakfast, and a pint of porter daily; but the labour was very hard, and the exposure to the sun brought on sickness amongst them.

Still we had little reason to complain;
for we were under the command of a general who did not think it below him to look into the men's rights and interest, and anticipate their wants. It was not an uncommon thing, in a very wet morning, to find him up at our camp, ordering an extra ration of rum to be served out to the brigade. There were also double tents provided for us; as, in consequence of the heavy rains, the single ones were found insufficient; and on every occasion he paid the most indefatigable attention to our comfort. In him was found a rare combination of the rigid disciplinarian and the soldier's friend. He discharged his own duty faithfully and well; and he expected every one under him to do the same, and would admit of no excuse for the non-performance of it from either officer or soldier. To those who served under his command, in that place, it will be unnecessary to say that the officer to whom I allude was, Lieutenant-General William Stewart. His name will be associated in their minds with the character of a gallant and able general, and a steady friend to the soldier.
We generally turned out for the working party, at five o'clock in the morning; and our breakfast, which was coffee with bread, was always ready at that hour. I remember, the first time we had it, each man came forward with his mess-tin for his allowance, which was measured out by the cook. We had a Highlandman in the company, who had enlisted raw from his native hills, and who, I believe, had never seen any thing of the kind before. When he came for his allowance of the coffee, which was now nearly done, the cook was skimming it off the top very carefully, to avoid stirring up the grounds. Donald, who thought this a scheme to keep all the good part to himself, exclaimed, "Tam your plood! will you'll no gie some o' the sik as well as the sin?" Oh, certainly," said the cook (who was a bit of a wag); and, stirring the grounds well up, he gave him a double proportion. Donald came in, chuckling with satisfaction at having detected the knavery of the cook, saying, "If she'll socht to to sheat a highlandman, she'll be far mistook." And, seeing the rest of his com-
rades breaking bread in their coffee, he did the same; by this time the eye of every one in the tent was on him, scarcely able to refrain from laughing. Donald began to sup it with his spoon; but, after taking two or three spoonfuls, grinding the coffee grounds between his teeth, and making wry faces, he threw the tin, contents and all, out of the tent door, exclaiming, "Tam their coffee! you might as well chow heather, and drink pog water as that teevil's stuff. Gi'e Donal a cog o' brochan before ony o' your tea or coffees either."

The French had once or twice made a powerful attack on our picquets, but were repulsed with loss; and the skirmishing at our outposts, and firing from the batteries, were now carried on almost without intermission. We expected them to make an attack on us with their whole force; and scarcely a night passed without being turned out, in consequence of movements making on their side; notice of which was communicated to the troops by different coloured rockets, thrown up at our outposts.
At this time we had a strong force of British here. Besides artillery and engineers, we had a battalion of guards and nine or ten regiments of the line. There was also a strong fleet of British vessels in the bay: at one time we had three first-rate men-of-war, viz. the Caledonia, Hibernia, and Ville de Paris, besides seventy-four gun ships, frigates, and a great number of smaller vessels and gun boats; batteries were built on every commanding situation: one of which we used to call the Friars' battery, having been built by these gentry, and certainly among the best deeds they had done in that part of the country. It was on a very commanding situation, extending completely across the isthmus at its narrowest part, with a wide trench, which could be filled with water from the sea on either side.

At this time the wound on my leg, which I had paid little attention to, became so ill that I was obliged to go into the hospital; and I, in a great measure, lost sight of what was going on amongst the troops. I had now nothing to relieve the monotony of an hospital life, unless a
visit from Dennis now and then, when he could gain time from working or duty; and one visit from a sergeant (a townsman), who joined the regiment at that time, and had brought a letter from my parents. He had been long on the recruiting service, and was considered a first-rate hand at it. After some inquiries respecting my friends and native place, I happened to remark how successful he had been in getting recruits, and expressed my surprise that he should have been so much more so than others who had been on the same service. He replied, "No wonder at it—no wonder at all. I knew Glasgow well. It was my own place—knew the minds of the young fellows better than they did themselves—for I had been a weaver myself, and a lazy one too. I knew how I used to feel. In winter it was too cold, and in summer too warm to work. When it was good trade, I could not resist the temptation of drinking and going idle two or three days in the week; and, when it was bad, I had no time to work for trying to find out the cause, and setting the government
to rights. The truth is, you could scarcely ever catch a weaver contented. They are always complaining. Therefore, you would never have much trouble enticing them to enlist, if you knew how to go about it, or much in going after them; for whenever they got lazy, they came up, and lounged about the Cross. You could not manage them however the same as a bumpkin. They were too knowing for that. The best way was to make up to the individual you had in your eye, and, after bidding him the time of the day, ask him what sort of web he had in. You might be sure it was a bad one; for when a weaver turns lazy his web is always bad; ask him how a clever handsome-looking fellow like him could waste his time hanging see-saw between heaven and hell, in a damp unwholesome shop, no better than one of the dripping vaults in St. Mungo's church, when he could breathe the pure air of heaven, and have little or nothing to do, if he enlisted for a soldier; that the weaving was going to ruin, and he had better get into some birth, or he might soon be starved. This was, generally,
enough for a weaver; but the ploughboys had to be hooked in a different way. When you got into conversation with them, tell how many recruits had been made sergeants—when they enlisted—how many were now officers. If you saw an officer pass while you were speaking, no matter whether you knew him or not, tell him that he was only a recruit a year ago; but now he's so proud he won't speak to you; but you hope he won't be so when he gets a commission. If this won't do, don't give up chase—keep to him—tell him that in the place where your gallant honourable regiment is lying, every thing may be had almost for nothing—that the pigs and fowls are lying in the streets ready roasted, with knives and forks in them, for the soldiers to eat, whenever they please. As you find him have stomach, strengthen the dose, and he must be overcome at last. But you must then proceed quickly to work, before his high notions evaporate. You must keep him drinking—don't let him go to the door, without one of your party with him, until he is passed the doctor and attested.
"But," said I, "you would not find every one so easily duped." "To be sure," said he; "some of your sentimental chaps might despise all this; but they were the easiest caught after all. You had only to get into heroics, and spout a great deal about glory, honour, laurels, drums, trumpets, applauding world, deathless fame, immortality, and all that, and you had him as safe as a mouse in a trap.

"But, if all these methods failed, and the fellow remained obstinately determined against parting with liberty, the next resource was to pretend you had been joking him, that you had no wish to inlist any man against his will, that you had advised many a one not to inlist. Ask him in to take a friendly glass, ply him briskly, send one of your party out to put on plain clothes, let another of your men bring him in as a young man wishing to inlist, set him down next to the man you have in your eye. After allowing them some conversation, put the question to them, if they were talking about inlisting. 'Yes, I'll inlist,' would be the reply of your man, 'if this young
man will go also.' Perhaps he might; but, if not, your last resource was to get him drunk, and then slip a shilling in his pocket, get him home to your billet, and next morning, swear he enlisted, bring all your party to prove it, get him persuaded to pass the doctor, as it will save the smart should he be rejected. If he passes, you must try every means in your power to get him to drink, blow him up with a fine story, get him inveigled to the magistrate in some shape or other, and get him attested; but by no means let him out of your hands."

"At this rate," said I, "men are taken into the service by as unfair means as they are pressed on board a man-of-war. Were you not afraid of complaints being made to your officers; and did the magistrates not scruple to attest men who were drunk?"

"Not at all, man," was the reply. "It was war times. The officers knew it all—encouraged it all—called us clever fellows—they would not be fit for recruiting if they didn't. As for the magistrates, we knew who to go to on these
occasions. You know, it was all for the good of the service."

"But had you no honour or conscience of your own?" said I. "Honour or conscience!" said he, laughing. "Pretty words in the mouth of a private soldier. You must do your duty, you know. A good soldier does what he is ordered, right or wrong." "But I am afraid," said I, "that you did more than you were ordered." "Perhaps we were not ordered to do all that we did; but we were blackguarded if we didn't get men, and that was the same thing; and what's the use of a man if he can't take a hint?"*

"You must have made a good deal of money in this way." "Money," said he, "no no. Did you ever hear of men making money in the recruiting service? They must have come from the north if they did. No, our money didn't do much good—it all went in raking and drinking. 'It melted awa' like snaw aff a dyke,' as the old women at home would

* I do not know whether the sergeant exaggerated or not; but, in justice to the service, I must remark that such stratagems are neither authorised nor resorted to at present.
say, and we left Glasgow with bad kits, and worse constitutions.” “Well,” said I, “you may be glad you have left it, for more reasons than one; and I hope you will never return to it.” The conversation was dropped, and he soon left me; but I could not help thinking how many poor fellows were thus inveigled into a profession they did not like, and rendered miserable the remainder of their lives.

While here I was near losing my life in a very simple manner. There was a garden behind the hospital, which had formerly been a gentleman's house, kept by a Spanish gardener, who raised vegetables for the Isla market. In it there was a cistern, from which the water ran when required to water the garden; and this was supplied by a contrivance very unlike anything I have seen in Britain, although common enough on the Continent. It was raised from a deep well, by means of pitchers attached to the circumference of a large wheel, which, revolving by the power of a horse and gin, were successively filled and emptied into the cistern.