

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE PENINSULA

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Recollections of the Peninsula by Moyle Sherer

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MOYLE SHERER

**RECOLLECTIONS
OF THE PENINSULA**

RECOLLECTIONS
OF
THE PENINSULA.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
SKETCHES OF INDIA.

SECOND EDITION.

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1824.

PREFACE.

THE following pages have occupied and amused the leisure of my winter evenings, in a dull uninteresting garrison on home service.

I relate what I saw, thought, and felt, as a man, a traveller, and a soldier, during five interesting years.

The style of a soldier can need no apology; it is beneath the notice of a scholar and the critic. We pass our lives in conversing with mankind; they in conversing with books. We only observe and draw hasty conclusions; they observe, compare, and study. Ours is a life of action; theirs of repose. We write to amuse; they to instruct.

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HE, to whom the interest of foreign scenes, the animation of the daily march, and the careless gaiety of camps are familiar, may be expected to languish in the solitude of a barrack-room, and to feel restless at a life of dull and wearisome inaction. Accustomed to the array of thousands, he turns with indifference from the parade of a regiment; nor can the ordinary duties of a quiet garrison be supposed to satisfy him, who has served with armies in the field. The life of a soldier abroad is one of foreign travel, as well as of active employment; and it combines, therefore, rational enjoyment with honorable service. The campaigns of the British army, in Spain, had peculiarly that character; for we moved over large tracts of country, and our operations were not, as is often the case in war, confined to marches and countermarches in particular districts.

The British soldiers, who landed on the banks of the Tagus, visited, in succession, those of the Douro, the Ebro, and the Bidassoa; were encamped under the walls of Madrid, and bivouacked on the Pyrenean mountains. In those scenes, and on that service, many of us experienced feelings of contentment, joy, and pride, for the return of which we may look, perhaps, in vain. At the distance of time at which I write, all that was disagreeable in campaigning is forgotten; while that which delighted, is, especially in my present frame of mind, very fondly remembered.

The unpretending volume I offer is not copious; but the few anecdotes I relate are true, the military sketches are faithful, and my descriptions of towns and scenery are, with all their imperfections, at least my own. For the reflections, opinions, and warm (perhaps romantic) expressions of feeling I have scattered through these pages, they are such as naturally arose to me, both as a soldier and a man.

It was in the last week of June, 1809, that I embarked at Portsmouth, to follow and join my regiment, which had already sailed for Portugal. On the tenth morning after my departure from England, the vessel which bore me was passing under the rock of Lisbon, impelled by a favourable breeze, and she in a very few hours dropped her anchor in the harbour of Lisbon, nearly abreast of Belem Castle, and about a mile from the shore. Few

scenes can compare with that which feasts the eye of a traveller, who, from the deck of a vessel in the Tagus, first gazes on Lisbon, rising proudly and beautifully above him. The northern bank of the river, on which this capital is built, makes a handsome and sweeping curve throughout the whole extent of the city, which, including its suburbs, covers several hills, rising more or less abruptly from that quarter where its quays, squares, and some of its most regular streets are conveniently disposed. The number of palaces, convents, and churches, which crown this amphitheatre of buildings; the dazzling whiteness of the houses; the light appearance of the windows and balconies; the tasteful arrangement of plants, flowers, and shrubs on their roofs and terraces; the golden orange-groves which adorn the suburbs; and the stately specimens of Indian or American botany, which are, here and there, scattered through the scene, produce an effect which may be felt, and which may be conceived, but which cannot be described.

Boats from the shore soon crowded round our vessel, and I leaned over her side to look, for the first time, at natives of Portugal. The dark-brown complexion, bare and muscular throat, expressive eye, and white teeth, together with the general vivacity of their deportment, strike an Englishman, at first, very forcibly: their costume, too, is quite new to him, and, I think, very picturesque. Short petticoat-trowsers of white linen, a red sash, and

their legs and arms free and naked, mark very strongly the difference between the boatmen of the Tagus and the Thames.

The British troops at Lisbon were at this time all encamped in the Prince's Park, a large enclosure above the suburb of Belem, carefully preserved. In an old ruined house, the only building in or near the encampment, the mess of my regiment still held its social sittings; and here, round a rudely constructed table of casks and planks, seated on portmanteaus, stones, or knapsacks, we enjoyed our evening far more than we had often done at a board better provided, and in the most commodious mess-room. The conversation no longer ran in the same dull, unvarying strain, on scenes of expensive folly and fatiguing amusement; the dignity of our profession, which will naturally in such scenes glide from the view, again rose before us, arrayed in its best and brightest colours. New prospects and eager hopes gave an animation and interest to the discourse, which, seasoned as it was by some excellent wine, made time fly swiftly, and it was midnight before I entered my tent. Here a couch of heath, freshly gathered, with my knapsack for a pillow, and a blanket for a covering, invited me to repose; but I was far too happy to sleep.

The night was hot: I opened the door of my tent, raised all the walls, and throwing myself on my bed of heather, I indulged in waking dreams. We can only command the services of sleep when