

**BLACKWOOD'S  
STANDARD NOVELS.  
THE SUBALTERN**

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Blackwood's Standard Novels. The Subaltern by George Robert Gleig

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**GEORGE ROBERT GLEIG**

**BLACKWOOD'S  
STANDARD NOVELS.  
THE SUBALTERN**



TO HIS GRACE,

ARTHUR, DUKE OF WELLINGTON.

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MY LORD DUKE,

I TRUST that I shall not be deemed guilty of an act of unpardonable presumption, if I venture to dedicate to your Grace a little volume, of the merits of which you have been pleased to speak in terms far more flattering than they deserve.

The Subaltern's story is a plain relation of so much of a soldier's active career as was passed in the army under your Grace's command. The narrator's rank and position were not such as to afford him an insight into the plans of those campaigns in which it was his fortune to take an humble part; neither has he made any attempt to describe events to which he was not an eye-witness, or to offer opinions upon subjects concerning which he neither is nor was a competent judge. But it is a matter of high gratification to him to be aware, that his sketches have received the sanction of

your Grace's approval; and that you have pronounced them to be correct pictures of the scenes which they seek to represent.

It is scarcely necessary to add, that the space of time spent where your Grace won glory for yourself, and incalculable benefits for the whole of Europe, was the happiest in his life; and that it adds not a little to the satisfaction arising from a glance back into the stirring scenes which marked it, that he is enabled, thus publicly, to subscribe himself, with sincere admiration and respect,

MY LORD DUKE,

Your Grace's most obedient servant,  
and follower in a few bloody fields,

THE SUBALTERN.

MARCH 1845.

BLACKWOOD'S  
STANDARD NOVELS

THE SUBALTERN

Gleig

## PREFACE TO THE FIFTH EDITION.

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THE history of the little volume, which has been received with so much favour by the public, and of which a new edition is now offered to such as may still find in it matter wherewith to fill up a vacant hour, is told in few words.

Though a mere boy, barely seventeen years of age, when I embarked for the seat of war in the summer of 1813, I was so fortunate as to have formed a close friendship with a man of more matured years and experience than myself,—Charles Grey, the younger of Morwick, in Northumberland, the captain of the company to which I was attached, and as good a soldier, in the best sense of that term, as the British Army has ever produced. To him I was indebted for many useful customs; and among others, for the habit of noting down, at the close of every day, brief notices of the most memorable of the events that might have distinguished it while passing. A small blank-paper volume—a little memorandum-book—with a pencil attached, was his constant companion and mine; and, regularly as the night closed in, we drew them from our bosoms, and often, by the light of our bivouac fire, registered in a couple of lines the materials of much thought in after years. The characters thus loosely sketched, we filled in with ink on the first con-



venient opportunity; and so contrived, amid the bustle and excitement of a campaign, each to keep his journal with a degree of accuracy which cannot always be predicated of the diaries of men better furnished with all the appliances of authorship.

I can hardly tell how it came to pass that these records of a young soldier's life during the progress of the war, both in the Peninsula and America, were not lost. No care whatever was taken of them by me after my return home; indeed I gave them, unless my memory be at fault, to my sister, and for some years never thought of inquiring whether they were in existence. But an occasional paper or two contributed to "Blackwood's Magazine," descriptive of detached adventures in the Peninsula, having been well received, it was suggested to me—I think by the late Mr Blackwood himself—that a personal narrative of my military service, in a connected form, would be popular. I took up the idea, and worked it out with all my heart; for it would be sheer affectation to deny even now, when time has wrought its accustomed changes on me, and a long dedication of my best energies to different pursuits has greatly modified my tastes, that the years which were spent amid the toils and dangers of active warfare, are those on which I continue to look back as the happiest in my life. And if this be the case now, it is hardly necessary to acknowledge, that the feeling was stronger in the year 1825, when the first page of "The Subaltern" was written. Nor must the moralist blame me for this, without inquiring farther. They who write and speak of war as of a succession of horrors, and nothing else, know not what they are describing. Under the admirable discipline of the great man, who happily sur-

vives to receive, wherever he goes, the reverence of his fellow-countrymen, the British camp was a community better regulated by far than any town or city in the world, where one half the amount of human beings congregate. There was little crime, no violence—I had well nigh said, no vice anywhere. By stragglers from the rear, offences might be committed; and the absence, from the hospitals, of religious instruction and comfort, was sorely felt. But the Duke of Wellington was not to blame for this; indeed, his public despatches prove, that he made many, though fruitless efforts, to remedy the latter evil. On the other hand, the lives and properties of the peaceable inhabitants were as secure, wherever his influence extended, as if their country had been under the management of the most efficient civil government; and if, during the progress of active operations, houses and gardens suffered, the loss thereby sustained was made good to the owners by bills upon the English treasury. Hence, though it might be very shocking to witness the death, by violence, of our fellow-creatures, and sadder still, when the fray was over, to contemplate the wrecks which it had left behind, the day of battle, be it remembered, was not of constant recurrence; while the intervals that came between one and the other of these crowning operations of the campaign, were, wherever the Duke of Wellington commanded, fruitful in enjoyment. We had the full spring-time of youth about us then. We, the Duke's devoted followers, had neither care for the past, nor anxiety in regard to the future. Our constitutions, hardened by much exposure to the open air, kept us above the reach of sickness, or else failed us quite. And as I, for one, never knew what sickness was, except when wounds—

and these not very severe—induced it, my memory does not bring back, at this moment, one hour, or half hour, of all that were spent in Spain and the south of France, of which I would erase the record, were it granted me so to do, or scruple to live it over again. There are darker griefs in civil life, than warfare such as that of which I now speak occasions. For, even in reference to the highest of all concerns, I am not sure whether, to a well-constituted mind, the tented field be not as apt a school of piety and true devotion, as the crowded capital, or even the quiet village.

Of the manner in which the work was begun and carried on, it is hardly worth while to make mention. It appeared originally as a series of papers in "Blackwood's Magazine," and obtained, I have reason to believe, as large a share of public favour as ever was bestowed upon a narrative of the kind. For this, both I and my publisher were grateful; and the latter having proposed to me to collect the papers and bring them out as a separate volume, I acceded at once to the project. And now it was that the measure of my pride as an author was filled up, on hearing, from more than one quarter, that the little book had attracted the attention, and received the approval, of the Duke of Wellington. I was recommended also to solicit his Grace's permission to dedicate the volume to him, and I did so. And though, in conformity with a rule which he had been obliged to lay down for himself, the Duke declined to give a formal assent to the proposal, he very kindly explained his reasons for refusing, and left me at liberty, if I chose, to do in the matter according to my own humour. I therefore dedicated the Work to his Grace; and do not find reason to alter more than