



The Battle-Ground (Classics Civil War Fiction)

Ellen Glasgow

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The Battle-Ground, Ellen Glasgow's fourth novel, was her first bestseller, with more than 21,000 copies sold in just two weeks. The novel committed her to a project almost unparalleled in American literary history: a novelistic meditation on the South from the decade before the Confederacy to the middle of the 20th century. *The Battle-Ground* speaks of a South before and during the Civil War in its struggles to become part of a nation still in the making. The overthrow of the aristocratic tradition, the transfer of hereditary power to a rural underclass, the continued disenfranchisement of African Americans, and the evolving status of women--these topics, which came to bind the more than a dozen volumes of Glasgow's self-styled "social history," initially coalesced in *The Battle-Ground*.

The Battle-Ground conspicuously departs from the tradition of Southern romances popularized by Thomas Nelson Page, and contemporary reviewers praised the book for its historical accuracy. Glasgow, an ardent Anglophile, bragged that military officers in Great Britain studied its descriptions of battle. With her, realism had not only crossed the Atlantic, it had "crossed the Potomac."

But Glasgow never sensationalizes the Civil War, whose bloodiest scenes she flanks with domestic officers, the sharing of rations, the warmth of camp, and reminders of home. Her vision of the war centers less on its corruption or barbarity than on its occasions for small decencies and their power of humanization. Glasgow cannot separate the war from its greater social implications--it is a place, as her title suggests, that tests the soul of a nation as well as individual men and women. The importance of *The Battle-Ground* in Southern literary history cannot be overemphasized, for Glasgow's reimagining of the Civil War had a profound impact on the next generation of Southern writers, including Allen Tate, Stark Young, and Margaret Mitchell.

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