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ROBERT F. MURRAY (AUTHOR OF THE SCARLET GOWN): HIS POEMS; WITH A MEMOIR

Andrew Lang

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Содержание

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R. F. MURRAY – 1863-1893

Much is written about success and failure in the career of literature, about the reasons which enable one man to reach the front, and another to earn his livelihood, while a third, in appearance as likely as either of them, fails and, perhaps, faints by the way. Mr. R. F. Murray, the author of *The Scarlet Gown*, was among those who do not attain success, in spite of qualities which seem destined to ensure it, and who fall out of the ranks. To him, indeed, success and the rewards of this world, money, and praise, did by no means seem things to be snatched at. To him success meant earning by his pen the very modest sum which sufficed for his wants, and the leisure necessary for serious essays in poetry. Fate denied him even this, in spite of his charming natural endowment of humour, of tenderness, of delight in good letters, and in nature. He died young; he was one of those whose talent matures slowly, and he died before he came into the full

possession of his intellectual kingdom. He had the ambition to excel, αίεν αριστευειν, as the Homeric motto of his University runs, and he was on the way to excellence when his health broke down. He lingered for two years and passed away.

It is a familiar story, the story of lettered youth; of an ambition, or rather of an ideal; of poverty; of struggles in the 'dusty and stony ways'; of intellectual task-work; of a true love consoling the last months of weakness and pain. The tale is not repeated here because it is novel, nor even because in its hero we have to regret an 'inheritor of unfulfilled renown.' It is not the genius so much as the character of this St. Andrews student which has won the sympathy of his biographer, and may win, he hopes, the sympathy of others. In Mr. Murray I feel that I have lost that rare thing, a friend; a friend whom the chances of life threw in my way, and withdrew again ere we had time and opportunity for perfect recognition. Those who read his Letters and Remains may also feel this emotion of sympathy and regret.

He was young in years, and younger in heart, a lover of youth; and youth, if it could learn and could be warned, might win a lesson from his life. Many of us have trod in his path, and, by some kindness of fate, have found from it a sunnier exit into longer days and more fortunate conditions. Others have followed this well-beaten road to the same early and quiet end as his.

The life and the letters of Murray remind one strongly of Thomas Davidson's, as published in that admirable and touching biography, *A Scottish Probationer*. It was my own chance to

be almost in touch with both these gentle, tuneful, and kindly humorists. Davidson was a Borderer, born on the skirts of 'stormy Ruberslaw,' in the country of James Thomson, of Leyden, of the old Ballad minstrels. The son of a Scottish peasant line of the old sort, honourable, refined, devout, he was educated in Edinburgh for the ministry of the United Presbyterian Church. Some beautiful verses of his appeared in the *St. Andrews University Magazine* about 1863, at the time when I first 'saw myself in print' in the same periodical. Davidson's poem delighted me: another of his, 'Ariadne in Naxos,' appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine* about the same time. Mr. Thackeray, who was then editor, no doubt remembered Pen's prize poem on the same subject. I did not succeed in learning anything about the author, did not know that he lived within a drive of my own home. When next I heard of him, it was in his biography. As a 'Probationer,' or unplaced minister, he, somehow, was not successful. A humorist, a poet, a delightful companion, he never became 'a placed minister.' It was the old story of an imprudence, a journey made in damp clothes, of consumption, of the end of his earthly life and love. His letters to his betrothed, his poems, his career, constantly remind one of Murray's, who must often have joined in singing Davidson's song, so popular with St. Andrews students, *The Banks of the Yang-tse-kiang*. Love of the Border, love of Murray's 'dear St. Andrews Bay,' love of letters, make one akin to both of these friends who were lost before their friendship was won. Why

did not Murray succeed to the measure of his most modest desire? If we examine the records of literary success, we find it won, in the highest fields, by what, for want of a better word, we call genius; in the lower paths, by an energy which can take pleasure in all and every exercise of pen and ink, and can communicate its pleasure to others. Now for Murray one does not venture, in face of his still not wholly developed talent, and of his checked career, to claim genius. He was not a Keats, a Burns, a Shelley: he was not, if one may choose modern examples, a Kipling or a Stevenson. On the other hand, his was a high ideal; he believed, with André Chénier, that he had 'something there,' something worthy of reverence and of careful training within him. Consequently, as we shall see, the drudgery of the pressman was excessively repulsive to him. He could take no delight in making the best of it. We learn that Mr. Kipling's early tales were written as part of hard daily journalistic work in India; written in torrid newspaper offices, to fill columns. Yet they were written with the delight of the artist, and are masterpieces in their *genre*. Murray could not make the best of ordinary pen-work in this manner. Again, he was incapable of 'transactions,' of compromises; most honourably incapable of earning his bread by agreeing, or seeming to agree with opinions which were not his. He could not endure (here I think he was wrong) to have his pieces of light and mirthful verse touched in any way by an editor. Even where no opinions were concerned, even where an editor has (to my mind) a perfect right

to alter anonymous contributions, Murray declined to be edited. I ventured to remonstrate with him, to say *non est tanti*, but I spoke too late, or spoke in vain. He carried independence too far, or carried it into the wrong field, for a piece of humorous verse, say in *Punch*, is not an original masterpiece and immaculate work of art, but more or less of a joint-stock product between the editor, the author, and the public. Macaulay, and Carlyle, and Sir Walter Scott suffered editors gladly or with indifference, and who are we that we should complain? This extreme sensitiveness would always have stood in Murray's way.

Once more, Murray's interest in letters was much more energetic than his zeal in the ordinary industry of a student. As a general rule, men of original literary bent are not exemplary students at college. 'The common curricoolum,' as the Scottish laird called academic studies generally, rather repels them. Macaulay took no honours at Cambridge; mathematics defied him. Scott was 'the Greek dunce,' at Edinburgh. Thackeray, Shelley, Gibbon, did not cover themselves with college laurels; they read what pleased them, they did not read 'for the schools.' In short, this behaviour at college is the rule among men who are to be distinguished in literature, not the exception. The honours attained at Oxford by Mr. Swinburne, whose Greek verses are no less poetical than his English poetry, were inconspicuous. At St. Andrews, Murray read only 'for human pleasure,' like Scott, Thackeray, Shelley, and the rest, at Edinburgh, Oxford, and Cambridge. In this matter, I think, he made an error, and

one which affected his whole career. He was not a man of private fortune, like some of those whom we have mentioned. He had not a business ready for him to step into. He had to force his own way in life, had to make himself 'self-supporting.' This was all the more essential to a man of his honourable independence of character, a man who not only would not ask a favour, but who actually shrunk back from such chances as were offered to him, if these chances seemed to be connected with the least discernible shadow of an obligation. At St. Andrews, had he chosen to work hard in certain branches of study, he might probably have gained an exhibition, gone to Oxford or elsewhere, and, by winning a fellowship, secured the leisure which was necessary for the development of his powers. I confess to believing in strenuous work at the classics, as offering, apart from all material reward, the best and most solid basis, especially where there is no exuberant original genius, for the career of a man of letters. The mental discipline is invaluable, the training in accuracy is invaluable, and invaluable is the life led in the society of the greatest minds, the noblest poets, the most faultless artists of the world. To descend to ordinary truths, scholarship is, at lowest, an honourable *gagne-pain*. But Murray, like the majority of students endowed with literary originality, did not share these rather old-fashioned ideas. The clever Scottish student is apt to work only too hard, and, perhaps, is frequently in danger of exhausting his powers before they are mature, and of injuring his health before it is confirmed. His ambitions, to lookers-on, may seem narrow

and school-boyish, as if he were merely emulous, and eager for a high place in his 'class,' as lectures are called in Scotland. This was Murray's own view, and he certainly avoided the dangers of academic over-work. He read abundantly, but, as Fitzgerald says, he read 'for human pleasure.' He never was a Greek scholar, he disliked Philosophy, as presented to him in class-work; the gods had made him poetical, not metaphysical.

There was one other cause of his lack of even such slender commercial success in letters as was really necessary to a man who liked 'plain living and high thinking.' He fell early in love with a city, with a place – he lost his heart to St. Andrews. Here, at all events, his critic can sympathise with him. His 'dear St. Andrews Bay,' beautiful alike in winter mists and in the crystal days of still winter sunshine; the quiet brown streets brightened by the scarlet gowns; the long limitless sands; the dark blue distant hills, and far-off snowy peaks of the Grampians; the majestic melancholy towers, monuments of old religion overthrown; the deep dusky porch of the college chapel, with Kennedy's arms in wrought iron on the oaken door; the solid houses with their crow steps and gables, all the forlorn memories of civil and religious feud, of inhabitants saintly, royal, heroic, endeared St. Andrews to Murray. He could not say, like our other poet to Oxford, 'Farewell, dear city of youth and dream!' His whole nature needed the air, 'like wine.' He found, as he remarks, 'health and happiness in the German Ocean,' swimming out beyond the 'lake' where the witches were dipped; walking to the

grey little coast-towns, with their wealth of historic documents, their ancient kirks and graves; dreaming in the vernal woods of Mount Melville or Strathtyrum; rambling (without a fishing-rod) in the charmed 'dens' of the Kenley burn, a place like Tempe in miniature: these things were Murray's usual enjoyments, and they became his indispensable needs. His peculiarly shy and, as it were, silvan nature, made it physically impossible for him to live in crowded streets and push his way through throngs of indifferent men. He could not live even in Edinburgh; he made the effort, and his health, at no time strong, seems never to have recovered from the effects of a few months spent under a roof in a large town. He hurried back to St. Andrews: her fascination was too powerful. Hence it is that, dying with his work scarcely begun, he will always be best remembered as the poet of *The Scarlet Gown*, the Calverley or J. K. S. of Kilrymont; endowed with their humour, their skill in parody, their love of youth, but (if I am not prejudiced) with more than the tenderness and natural magic of these regretted writers. Not to be able to endure crowds and towns, (a matter of physical health and constitution, as well as of temperament) was, of course, fatal to an ordinary success in journalism. On the other hand, Murray's name is inseparably connected with the life of youth in the little old college, in the University of the Admirable Crichton and Claverhouse, of the great Montrose and of Ferguson, – the harmless Villon of Scotland, – the University of almost all the famous Covenanters, and of all the valiant poet-Cavaliers.

Murray has sung of the life and pleasures of its students, of examinations and *Gaudeamuses* – supper parties – he has sung of the sands, the links, the sea, the towers, and his name and fame are for ever blended with the air of his city of youth and dream. It is not a wide name or a great fame, but it is what he would have desired, and we trust that it may be long-lived and enduring. We are not to wax elegiac, and adopt a tearful tone over one so gallant and so uncomplaining. He failed, but he was undefeated.

In the following sketch of Murray's life and work use is made of his letters, chiefly of letters to his mother. They always illustrate his own ideas and attempts; frequently they throw the light of an impartial and critical mind on the distinguished people whom Murray observed from without. It is worth remarking that among many remarks on persons, I have found not one of a censorious, cynical, envious, or unfriendly nature. Youth is often captious and keenly critical; partly because youth generally has an ideal, partly, perhaps chiefly, from mere intellectual high spirits and sense of the incongruous; occasionally the motive is jealousy or spite. Murray's sense of fun was keen, his ideal was lofty; of envy, of an injured sense of being neglected, he does not show one trace. To make fun of their masters and pastors, tutors, professors, is the general and not necessarily unkind tendency of pupils. Murray rarely mentions any of the professors in St. Andrews except in terms of praise, which is often enthusiastic. Now, as he was by no means a prize student, or pattern young man for a story-book, this generosity is a high proof of an

admirable nature. If he chances to speak to his mother about a bore, and he did not suffer bores gladly, he not only does not name the person, but gives no hint by which he might be identified. He had much to embitter him, for he had a keen consciousness of 'the something within him,' of the powers which never found full expression; and he saw others advancing and prospering while he seemed to be standing still, or losing ground in all ways. But no word of bitterness ever escapes him in the correspondence which I have seen. In one case he has to speak of a disagreeable and disappointing interview with a man from whom he had been led to expect sympathy and encouragement. He told me about this affair in conversation; 'There were tears in my eyes as I turned from the house,' he said, and he was not effusive. In a letter to Mrs. Murray he describes this unlucky interview, – a discouragement caused by a manner which was strange to Murray, rather than by real unkindness, – and he describes it with a delicacy, with a reserve, with a toleration, beyond all praise. These are traits of a character which was greater and more rare than his literary talent: a character quite developed, while his talent was only beginning to unfold itself, and to justify his belief in his powers.

Robert Murray was the eldest child of John and Emmeline Murray: the father a Scot, the mother of American birth. He was born at Roxbury, in Massachusetts, on December 26th, 1863. It may be fancy, but, in his shy reserve, his almost *farouche* independence, one seems to recognise the Scot; while in his cast

of literary talent, in his natural 'culture,' we observe the son of a refined American lady. To his mother he could always write about the books which were interesting him, with full reliance on her sympathy, though indeed, he does not often say very much about literature.

Till 1869 he lived in various parts of New England, his father being a Unitarian minister. 'He was a remarkably cheerful and affectionate child, and seldom seemed to find anything to trouble him.' In 1869 his father carried him to England, Mrs. Murray and a child remaining in America. For more than a year the boy lived with kinsfolk near Kelso, the beautiful old town on the Tweed where Scott passed some of his childish days. In 1871 the family were reunited at York, where he was fond of attending the services in the Cathedral. Mr. Murray then took charge of the small Unitarian chapel of Blackfriars, at Canterbury. Thus Murray's early youth was passed in the mingled influences of Unitarianism at home, and of Cathedral services at York, and in the church where Becket suffered martyrdom. A not unnatural result was a somewhat eclectic and unconstrained religion. He thought but little of the differences of creed, believing that all good men held, in essentials, much the same faith. His view of essentials was generous, as he admitted. He occasionally spoke of himself as 'sceptical,' that is, in contrast with those whose faith was more definite, more dogmatic, more securely based on 'articles.' To illustrate Murray's religious attitude, at least as it was in 1887, one may quote from a letter of that year (April 17).

'There was a University sermon, and I thought I would go and hear it. So I donned my old cap and gown and felt quite proud of them. The preacher was Bishop Wordsworth. He goes in for the union of the Presbyterian and Episcopalian Churches, and is glad to preach in a Presbyterian Church, as he did this morning. How the aforesaid Union is to be brought about, I'm sure I don't know, for I am pretty certain that the Episcopalians won't give up their bishops, and the Presbyterians won't have them on any account. However, that's neither here nor there – at least it does not affect the fact that Wordsworth is a first-rate man, and a fine preacher. I dare say you know he is a nephew or grand-nephew of the Poet. He is a most venerable old man, and worth looking at, merely for his exterior. He is so feeble with age that he can with difficulty climb the three short steps that lead into the pulpit; but, once in the pulpit, it is another thing. There is no feebleness when he begins to preach. He is one of the last voices of the old orthodox school, and I wish there were hundreds like him. If ever a man believed in his message, Wordsworth does. And though I cannot follow him in his veneration for the Thirty-nine Articles, the way in which he does makes me half wish I could… It was full of wisdom and the beauty of holiness, which even I, poor sceptic and outcast, could recognise and appreciate. After all, he didn't get it from the Articles, but from his own human heart, which, he told us, was deceitful and desperately wicked.

'Confound it, how stupid we all are! Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Unitarians, Agnostics; the whole lot of us. We all believe the same things, to a great extent; but we must

keep wrangling about the data from which we infer these beliefs.. I believe a great deal that he does, but I certainly don't act up to my belief as he does to his.'

The belief 'up to' which Murray lived was, if it may be judged by its fruits, that of a Christian man. But, in this age, we do find the most exemplary Christian conduct in some who have discarded dogma and resigned hope. Probably Murray would not the less have regarded these persons as Christians. If we must make a choice, it is better to have love and charity without belief, than belief of the most intense kind, accompanied by such love and charity as John Knox bore to all who differed from him about a mass or a chasuble, a priest or a presbyter. This letter, illustrative of the effect of cathedral services on a young Unitarian, is taken out of its proper chronological place.

From Canterbury Mr. Murray went to Ilminster in Somerset. Here Robert attended the Grammar School; in 1879 he went to the Grammar School of Crewkerne. In 1881 he entered at the University of St. Andrews, with a scholarship won as an external student of Manchester New College. This he resigned not long after, as he had abandoned the idea of becoming a Unitarian minister.

No longer a schoolboy, he was now a *Bejant* (*bec jaune*?), to use the old Scotch term for 'freshman.' He liked the picturesque word, and opposed the introduction of 'freshman.' Indeed he liked all things old, and, as a senior man, was a supporter of ancient customs and of *esprit de corps* in college. He fell in

love for life with that old and grey enchantress, the city of St. Margaret, of Cardinal Beaton, of Knox and Andrew Melville, of Archbishop Sharp, and Samuel Rutherford. The nature of life and education in a Scottish university is now, probably, better understood in England than it used to be. Of the Scottish universities, St. Andrews varies least, though it varies much, from Oxford and Cambridge. Unlike the others, Aberdeen, Glasgow, and Edinburgh, the United College of St. Leonard and St. Salvator is not lost in a large town. The College and the Divinity Hall of St. Mary's are a survival from the Middle Ages. The University itself arose from a voluntary association of the learned in 1410. Privileges were conferred on this association by Bishop Wardlaw in 1411. It was intended as a bulwark against Lollard ideas. In 1413 the Antipope Benedict XIII., to whom Scotland then adhered, granted six bulls of confirmation to the new University. Not till 1430 did Bishop Wardlaw give a building in South Street, the Pædagogium. St. Salvator's College was founded by Bishop Kennedy (1440-1466): it was confirmed by Pius II. in 1458. Kennedy endowed his foundation richly with plate (a silver mace is still extant) and with gorgeous furniture and cloth of gold. St. Leonard's was founded by Prior Hepburn in 1512. Of St. Salvator's the ancient chapel still remains, and is in use. St. Leonard's was merged with St. Salvator's in the last century: its chapel is now roofless, some of the old buildings remain, much modernised, but on the south side fronting the gardens they are still picturesque. Both Colleges

were, originally, places of residence for the students, as at Oxford and Cambridge, and the discipline, especially at St. Leonard's, was rather monastic. The Reformation caused violent changes; all through these troubled ages the new doctrines, and then the violent Presbyterian pretensions to clerical influence in politics, and the Covenant and the Restoration and Revolution, kept busy the dwellers in what should have been 'quiet collegiate cloisters.' St. Leonard's was more extreme, on Knox's side, than St. Salvator's, but was also more devoted to King James in 1715. From St. Andrews Simon Lovat went to lead his abominable old father's clan, on the Prince Regent's side, in 1745. Golf and archery, since the Reformation at least, were the chief recreations of the students, and the archery medals bear all the noblest names of the North, including those of Argyll and the great Marquis of Montrose. Early in the present century the old ruinous college buildings of St. Salvator's ceased to be habitable, except by a ghost! There is another spectre of a noisy sort in St. Leonard's. The new buildings are mere sets of class-rooms, the students live where they please, generally in lodgings, which they modestly call *bunks*. There is a hall for dinners in common; it is part of the buildings of the Union, a new hall added to an ancient house.

It was thus to a university with ancient associations, with a *religio loci*, and with more united and harmonious student-life than is customary in Scotland, that Murray came in 1881. How clearly his biographer remembers coming to the same place, twenty years earlier! how vivid is his memory of quaint streets,

grey towers, and the North Sea breaking in heavy rollers on the little pier!

Though, like a descendant of Archbishop Sharp, and a winner of the archery medal, I boast myself *Sancti Leonardi alumnus addictissimus*, I am unable to give a description, at first hand, of student life in St. Andrews. In my time, a small set of 'men' lived together in what was then St. Leonard's Hall. The buildings that remain on the site of Prior Hepburn's foundation, or some of them, were turned into a hall, where we lived together, not scattered in *bunks*. The existence was mainly like that of pupils of a private tutor; seven-eighths of private tutor to one-eighth of a college in the English universities. We attended the lectures in the University, we distinguished ourselves no more than Murray would have approved of, and many of us have remained united by friendship through half a lifetime.

It was a pleasant existence, and the perfume of buds and flowers in the old gardens, hard by those where John Knox sat and talked with James Melville and our other predecessors at St. Leonard's, is fragrant in our memories. It was pleasant, but St. Leonard's Hall has ceased to be, and the life there was not the life of the free and hardy bunk-dwellers. Whoso pined for such dissipated pleasures as the chill and dark streets of St. Andrews offer to the gay and rousing blade, was not encouraged. We were very strictly 'gated,' though the whole society once got out of window, and, by way of protest, made a moonlight march into the country. We attended 'gaudeamuses' and *solatia* – University

suppers – but little; indeed, he who writes does not remember any such diversions of boys who beat the floor, and break the glass. To plant the standard of cricket in the remoter gardens of our country, in a region devastated by golf, was our ambition, and here we had no assistance at all from the University. It was chiefly at lecture, at football on the links, and in the debating societies that we met our fellow-students; like the celebrated starling, 'we could not get out,' except to permitted dinners and evening parties. Consequently one could only sketch student life with a hand faltering and untrained. It was very different with Murray and his friends. They were their own masters, could sit up to all hours, smoking, talking, and, I dare say, drinking. As I gather from his letters, Murray drank nothing stronger than water. There was a certain kind of humour in drink, he said, but he thought it was chiefly obvious to the sober spectator. As the sober spectator, he sang of violent delights which have violent ends. He may best be left to illustrate student life for himself. The 'waster' of whom he chants is the slang name borne by the local fast man.

THE WASTER SINGING AT MIDNIGHT. AFTER LONGFELLOW

Loud he sang the song Ta Phershon
For his personal diversion,
Sang the chorus U-pi-dee,
Sang about the Barley Bree.

In that hour when all is quiet
Sang he songs of noise and riot,
In a voice so loud and queer
That I wakened up to hear.

Songs that distantly resembled
Those one hears from men assembled
In the old Cross Keys Hotel,
Only sung not half so well.

For the time of this ecstatic
Amateur was most erratic,
And he only hit the key
Once in every melody.

If “he wot prigs wot isn’t his’n

Ven he's cotched is sent to prison,"
He who murders sleep might well
Adorn a solitary cell.

But, if no obliging peeler
Will arrest this midnight squealer,
My own peculiar arm of might
Must undertake the job to-night.

The following fragment is but doubtfully autobiographical. 'The swift four-wheeler' seldom devastates the streets where, of old, the Archbishop's jackmen sliced Presbyterian professors with the claymore, as James Melville tells us: —

TO NUMBER 27x

Beloved Peeler! friend and guide
  And guard of many a midnight reeler,
None worthier, though the world is wide,
    Beloved Peeler.

Thou from before the swift four-wheeler
  Didst pluck me, and didst thrust aside
A strongly built provision-dealer
Who menaced me with blows, and cried

  'Come on! come on!' O Paian, Healer,
Then but for thee I must have died,
    Beloved Peeler!

The following presentiment, though he was no 'waster,' may very well have been his own. He was only half Scotch, and not at all metaphysical: —

THE WASTER'S PRESENTIMENT

I shall be spun. There is a voice within
  Which tells me plainly I am all undone;
For though I toil not, neither do I spin,
    I shall be spun.

April approaches. I have not begun
  Schwegler or Mackintosh, nor will begin
Those lucid works till April 21.
So my degree I do not hope to win,

  For not by ways like mine degrees are won;
And though, to please my uncle, I go in,
    I shall be spun.

Here we must quote, from *The Scarlet Gown*, one of his most tender pieces of affectionate praise bestowed on his favourite city: —

A DECEMBER DAY

Blue, blue is the sea to-day,
  Warmly the light
Sleeps on St. Andrews Bay —
  Blue, fringed with white.

That's no December sky!
  Surely 'tis June
Holds now her state on high,
  Queen of the noon.

Only the tree-tops bare
  Crowning the hill,
Clear-cut in perfect air,
  Warn us that still

Winter, the aged chief,
  Mighty in power,
Exiles the tender leaf,
  Exiles the flower.

Is there a heart to-day,
  A heart that grieves
For flowers that fade away,
  For fallen leaves?

Oh, not in leaves or flowers
  Endures the charm
That clothes those naked towers
  With love-light warm.

O dear St. Andrews Bay,
  Winter or Spring
Gives not nor takes away
  Memories that cling

All round thy girdling reefs,
  That walk thy shore,
Memories of joys and griefs
  Ours evermore.

'I have *not* worked for my classes this session,' he writes (1884), 'and shall not take any places.' The five or six most distinguished pupils used, at least in my time, to receive prize-books decorated with the University's arms. These prize-men, no doubt, held the 'places' alluded to by Murray. If *he* was idle, 'I speak of him but brotherly,' having never held any 'place' but that of second to Mr. Wallace, now Professor of Moral Philosophy at Oxford, in the Greek Class (Mr. Sellar's). Why was one so idle, in Latin (Mr. Shairp), in Morals (Mr. Ferrier), in Logic (Mr. Veitch)? but Logic was unintelligible.

'I must confess,' remarks Murray, in a similar spirit of pensive regret, 'that I have not had any ambition to distinguish myself

either in Knight's (Moral Philosophy) or in Butler's.' [1]

Murray then speaks with some acrimony about earnest students, whose motive, he thinks, is a small ambition. But surely a man may be fond of metaphysics for the sweet sake of Queen Entelechy, and, moreover, these students looked forward to days in which real work would bear fruit.

'You must grind up the opinions of Plato, Aristotle, and a lot of other men, concerning things about which they knew nothing, and we know nothing, taking these opinions at second or third hand, and never looking into the works of these men; for to a man who wants to take a place, there is no time for anything of that sort.'

Why not? The philosophers ought to be read in their own language, as they are now read. The remarks on the most fairy of philosophers – Plato; on the greatest of all minds, that of Aristotle, are boyish. Again 'I speak but brotherly,' remembering an old St. Leonard's essay in which Virgil was called 'the furtive Mantuan,' and another, devoted to ridicule of Euripides. But Plato and Aristotle we never blasphemed.

Murray adds that he thinks, next year, of taking the highest Greek Class, and English Literature. In the latter, under Mr. Baynes, he took the first place, which he mentions casually to Mrs. Murray about a year after date: —

'A sweet life and an idle

[1] Mr. Butler lectures on Physics, or, as it is called in Scotland, Natural Philosophy.

He lives from year to year,
Unknowing bit or bridle,
There are no Proctors here.'

In Greek, despite his enthusiastic admiration of the professor, Mr. Campbell, he did not much enjoy himself: —

'Thrice happy are those
Who ne'er heard of Greek Prose —
Or Greek Poetry either, as far as that goes;
For Liddell and Scott
Shall cumber them not,
Nor Sargent nor Sidgwick shall break their repose.

But I, late at night,
By the very bad light
Of very bad gas, must painfully write
Some stuff that a Greek
With his delicate cheek
Would smile at as 'barbarous' – faith, he well might.

* * * * *

So away with Greek Prose,
The source of my woes!
(This metre's too tough, I must draw to a close.)

May Sargent be drowned
In the ocean profound,
And Sidgwick be food for the carrion crows!'

Greek prose is a stubborn thing, and the biographer remembers being told that his was 'the best, with the worst mistakes'; also frequently by Mr. Sellar, that it was 'bald.' But Greek prose is splendid practice, and no less good practice is Greek and Latin verse. These exercises, so much sneered at, are the Dwellers on the Threshold of the life of letters. They are haunting forms of fear, but they have to be wrestled with, like the Angel (to change the figure), till they bless you, and make words become, in your hands, like the clay of the modeller. Could we write Greek like Mr. Jebb, we would never write anything else.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.