EARLY REMINISCENCES By C. O. Murray
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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Murray_(lexicographer)
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The village of Denholm has a striking peculiarity among its neighbours of the south of Scotland as it shows unmistakable signs of having been an early example of 'town planning' centuries before the term became an ultra-modern catchword. It stands on a level shelf of boulder clay at the foot of rocky Ruberslaw. Near the ford of the Teviot is probably the oldest part, where it carries the only street name it possesses - the 'Cannongate'. This points to there having been there a rural settlement of Clergy connected with the not so far off Abbey of Jedburgh. The Spittal Farm nearby, tradition says, retained its name from a like connection.

The chief part of the village, however, is of rectangular form and encloses the Green, the houses built close together, town-fashion, all with little gardens behind, systematic, but not unpicturesque from diversity of roofs and height. They are built on land feud (leased) on long term, from the Lords of the Manor, the Douglasses of Cavers, who still own a large estate thereabout. This branch of the old Douglas line have their ancestral home a mile or two from Denholm; an ancient Border castellated tower is built up and hidden in the present modern mansion. This branch of the old warlike sept, of direct descent (relics of Chevy Chase are preserved in their archives), seem after the Union to have turned definitely to the arts and ways of peace, and to the 'development' of their estate. At two of the corners of the Denholm quadrangle used to stand two stout old Manorial buildings (the Eastgate and Westgate Halls). One still stands with walls five or six feet thick as its chief reminder of troublesome times, if we do not include the Douglas arms rudely engraved over a Mantelpiece.

Both halls were probably built for scions of the Douglas family, and the village house-lots were leased in straight streets around the Green. The idea was orderly and neat, but the Green so closely built about, became soon, we fear, anything but an ornament. The cottages each had a right to a piece of it opposite the door where the cottager heaped his lumber and stack of 'turves' which for centuries were his mainstay for firing. There is no peat near Denholm and firewood must have become scarce after the irresponsible use of it for centuries. The short bent grass up on Ruberslaw sinks its wiry roots deep into the soil. It is peat in course of growth,and the turves cut from it when dry make a tolerable firing. It was all they had - situated as they were far from any coal fields, with only pack horses as a means of transport over the wretched pre-macadam roads, The centre of the Green was occupied with undrained puddles, rather than ponds, where flocks of geese and ducks enjoyed themselves. Pigstyes also were plentiful, and were no addition to the salubrity of the village.

About a hundred years ago such conditions began to be noticed unfavourably. The passengers by the mail coaches that now ran through the main street, worse than that of the neighbouring villages with more accessible back yards, themselves took to calling it 'dirty Denholm', and it was not to be borne. The Lord of the Manor stepped in at length with a

proposal. The was now a metalled roadway into the Lothian Coalfields and wheeled vehicles no longer needed to choose the bed of the river in preference to the rutted bridle path. All the farmers had the light Scotch cart by then, and when the harvest work was over, could and did ‘go to the coals in the morning’, as to old broadsheet hath it, doing the 40 miles or so there and back, with each cart a ton of coal. The men liked the adventure,and it was all found money that they had from the sale. Turves became less used and firewood more plentiful. So a bargain was struck with their overlord by the vassals,to give up their ancient right of turf-cutting on the Law, and to clear the Green.

What they got in exchange was a quaint set of acquirements: an addition to the gardens where the pig could be kept unseen;the Green was neatly walled round; a library, of a respectable size for those days; and, lastly, the instruments for a small brass band. No doubt both parties were well satisfied. Unhappily the Feuars were the sole negotiators , and the library was their property, and by no means public to all. What became of the band we do not know, but a battered trombone or clarinet could be seen, badly preserved, 50 years ago, that was said to be a vestige of it. It could not have been a great success.

Denholm, however, had sloughed off its bad sobriquet of ‘dirty’, and rested for a bit. It was not till years after, no doubt at a Cholera scare, that a cobbled pavement was laid down, and decent drainage took the place of open gutters.

Denholm had no doubt been a weaver village in its day as a means of subsistence to many who were not quarrymen or worked at farmwork. Villages entirely of weavers houses abounded at that time. Many of them leave no trace behind to mark the spots, but Denholm was more lucky. The neighbouring Hawick had taken to manufacturing, and its framework knitting was widely in demand. The hand frames could be set up in any room, or assembled in a cheap building, the whizz of the stocking frame was a familiar sound, and the stocking cairt went weekly to Hawick with the knitted goods and brought back the yarn. It is reported that the craft first began in Denholm, but the capital and business enterprise and the water-power gave Hawick the pull very soon.

It was in the Denholm of this period that the subject of this memoir first saw light. His father had been a journeyman tailor (the term had still its own meaning). He had spent a year or two moving about in England at his work; he used to tell of being present and having seen the death of Huskisson, killed by the first railway train at the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester line. He had journeyed home to his native Hawick, and found his trade overstocked there. He took a holiday at Denholm, and a chatting friend said: ‘Why not try Denholm, rather than carry out your intention of starting for England again?’ He decided dubiously to do so, met the young person that was afterwards the devoted wife, and mother of his family, and speedily got married and settled down. Denholm must have had hopes of material progress at the time. The old corn mill had capital water-power, and it was long hoped that it would be wanted as a woollen manufactory, hopes never realised, fortunately for lovers of the quiet picturesque. Houses were scarce in the place, and James Murray was born in a room of the Crown Inn, part of which was let off to them as their home. Trade must have been bad at this, the principal Inn in the place, possibly from the multiplication of drinking shops - there were five or six in the short length of the main street that was also the through route, as it is still. The Crown had a handsome sign with a golden crown, and the stagecoaches stopped regularly at its door, but a lettered sign proclaimed also that it was

Draper, Grocer, wine and spirit merchant. The couple occupied several houses in the village; in one of them their fourth son was born, ………..'s 'Back House', with a pleasant outlook over the gardens. The second son died in infancy, and at long last came a 'lassie' to help her mother and afterward to nurture her lovingly in old age.

Great was the rejoicing when the railway was pushed forward from Edinburgh to Hawick, but it did no good to Denholm as it did not touch it. On the contrary it ruined the quarries which employed many men. The cartage to the rail was long, and many quarries were close to the line.

The Denholm of this time was a cheery interesting place. Coaches night and morning passed through, stopping at the Crown, and sometimes a brad-wheeled tilted waggon, and often dog-carts at Hawick Fair time panted past, with the callous driver and the trappings of state or small show, both drawn by the two stout dogs. They were later abolished by law in this country. Denholm was too big to be a nest of gossip,too often malevolent - the fate of many small country villages. There was plenty of character too. There was Andrew, the village natural and ready wit withal. One of his curious traits was identical with Dr Johnson's; he would touch a particular post, or tread on a particular stone every time he passed it. He was so loyal that he always took off his cap when he passed the gilt crown of the Inn. Once he was observed coming from the well with two pails of water. The obsession came strong upon him; what was he to do? He was equal to the occasion. He set down a pail, took off his cap, put it in his mouth, picked up the pail, and marched gravely past the house, then he put on his cap again. Every notable had a nickname, most of which were unavoidably accepted, as their true names were hardly known, just as the proud families of Italy accepted theirs. Some were perhaps proud of them; there was the Marquis, and there was Cawto (Cato, the censor), and many more, less complimentary.

The Parish Schoolmaster, of course, had his; he was over six feet, and was 'lang legs'. But it is ungracious to speak other than tenderly of this domestic hero - he died the death of one. His elderly wife had nerves, a disease not sympathised with much by the wives of the village, and had trying fancies. At all hours of the evening, and in any weather, she wanted to drive out, and at midnight, at times, one would meet the Maister walking soberly by his donkey cart, leading the donkey, with the good lady inside well muffled up in shawls. He caught a chill one winter night, and died of pneumonia.

Then there was the village Doctor, that would swim his horse across the river when a spate made the ford more dangerous, and the deed of mercy called him.

There was also the Minister, who in his old mackintosh was always found on the roads of the extensive parish, holding meetings in distant cottages in addition to his doomy long sermons on Sunday - rest his heroic soul! But enough of village memories; this is not a kailyard romance.

No, it was not a bad place to be born in, Denholm, in the late thirties of the last century. If taste did not turn to mankind as your proper study, there was nature all around in its most varied and fascinating form, and then so accessible. Its leaf embowered glens and valleys where the primrose and the spotted orchid and the wood anemone bloomed early, and where Wordworth's little celandine starred the turf. The haughs by the riverside - a paradise

for the youthful botanist - and a little farther off, the mighty crags of basalt that long ago eruptions had forced up to light, some on the summit of the hills and laws, some near the river level. The bosky and romantic Dean was always open, as happily it is still.

Alas, many of the cherished outlets (as old White of Selborne called his rambling paths) are fenced off by unclimbable fences now. Minto Crags are inexorably barred, even to special petitioners. One who got in somehow tells that the walks are overgrown with weeds and obstructed by lusty branches, so that even the owner could not use them. This was a favourite study ground for James Murray with his eager hankering after geology and his love for ferns and flowers and insects. It were long and lamentable to tell of by-roads round the ancient mansion that had been used by the public for many generations, now shut off by gates and fences by descendants of the generous forbears, that made them and left them free and open.

All according to law, perhaps, but what a law! And what are the powerful proletariat of the land about that can combine and exact what wages almost they like. Do they care only for the meat that perisheth and their rough amusements while the treasures of mother nature are being filched from them on all hands - for similar encroachments are happening everywhere in the country. The pity of it that Denholm, left in a backwater of traffic, without its quarries and its manufacturers, is an inviting spot for the quiet summer visitor. It largely lives upon him, they say, now. How much more would it have attracted him, had it remained as in these old times, and much to the profit of the place.

Were we to try and make comparison between the wage earnings of these days and those of to-day, modified even by costs of commodities, the results might sound startling, but it would be a bootless job. The problem is too intricate as to what really is a living wage, living, that is in health and average human happiness. One immediate result would be that some soft-hearted thinker, totting up his own expenditure (would not cry shame on that, but say: 'what a sordid squalid table is this! Could such things be, and no one to blame? The system, the Government, the capitalist, the only answer is; they were not! And they would have been indignant had you told them so. The poor were those who accepted doles from the Parish.

For all similar reasons, we simply have not the courage to tell how small the dwellings were, how few the rooms. In these days of prescribed numbers of rooms, each house to have a bathroom and so on, whether it be wanted for its proper use or not, of allowance of air space, in short of conditions without which no human life should be allowed to live! We mean only to reply that the Murray family of six, living much as the majority of the villagers in these material conditions, grew up to healthy manhood and womanhood. Two are alive now, in vigorous old age.

Of course much depended on family management, cleanliness and thrift, and all honour is due to the mother of a family that so pulled through. The mother of this one was a model of all that could be done. And done it was, with many an ache and weary hour too, for she was often ailing, yet lived to be 84. And it is doubtful if either she or any of the family ever pitied themselves, so the modern soft-hearted one need not worry himself. The mother was often heard to say that she thanked God she was spared to nurse her husband herself and administer with her own loving hands to all the pitiful necessities of prolonged helplessness during his last illness.

The father of the family was a man of much character and worth. His own education had been much neglected (of course he will know the 3 ‘r’s like every Scot since John Knox) and he had a great desire to give more to his sons than he had received. He was a silent man most of the time, and must have had long thoughts. It was pathetic to hear him in his last illness in delirium addressing himself as second person, telling himself he should never have been a tailor. So he had (never told) ambitions. He would probably have made an excellent Lawyer; he had great power of weighing and looking at a proposition all round, and he dearly loved a calm discussion, not an argument, and if that eventuated, he never got hot or testy. His sons remembered the long sederunts and prolonged debates that would ensue when some trusted crony dropped in and kept all the youngsters awake. They would, next day, play at, and imitate the hesitating stutter of one of the debaters, but the subject matter eludes the memory. Later on, he would argue gently on politics and the like with the boys, and they found out his mettle. He took the side of the North in the American Civil War: one son was all for the chivalrous South - the under-dog anyway. Indeed, the North was the unpopular side then, but the old man kept his opinion.

He never complained of a poor man’s burdens and difficulties, but often spoke with thankfulness of the many avenues to success in life that ‘now existed’ compared with his young days.

After the family moved to Hawick to be near the three lads, the father became a member of the Town Council, elected then by the burgesses and their sons belonging to the old Trade Guilds - the old ‘self elected’ Council, as it is called - also the ‘self effacing’ Council, for it voted it’s own demise, and Thomas Murray strongly supported the vote in favour of a more democratically elected body, losing his seat.

He was not, it must be admitted, a good businessman. The mother would sometimes lose her patience, though living, as they did, in close affection, and rate him soundly for making bad debts, and letting people owe him money that were better off than themselves, she avowed. But the father sat and dry smoked, and said and did nothing. The Saxon and the Gael, perhaps, had not a judicious mixture in his temperament. He had not enough of the huckstering push of the former, and too much of the mysticism and other-worldliness often pertaining to the Celt. He was a very religious man, careful of all observances, but not given to goody talk. Sunday, of course, was well kept, and chapel attendance a thing of course. Both father and mother were dissenters; but blinds were not drawn down by anybody in Denholm on Sabbath day, as they have been shown in recent comedies - exaggeration, surely. He had much comfort from his pipe, and small sympathy from his better half therein. She would twit him tartly (and draw a sheepish smile from him, beaming through the reek) that he had promised to give it up when she consented to marry him - perhaps he did, but began again. It is a tribute to the influence of their mother that none of the three boys followed their father’s bad example speedily; only one of them became a confirmed smoker, but not till after he was 40. James never smoked. It is a curious comment on the influence of fashion on the use of the weed, by the way, that while thus fighting against its use at home, the mother had a next-door neighbour, a dear and bosom friend and guardian angel in all trouble, an old lady - lady, if ever was one - that sat in her chimney nook when at home with a very black clay often in her mouth, a thorough smoker. Yet the fashion had so gone out,

even in this remote village, for women to smoke that it is questionable if there were another left in the place.

In a manner of much more importance than indulgence in tobacco, there has been a complete volte-face since then, in the theory and practice of bringing up children. The modern mode is summarised by the phrases:'Give the children a good time; they will never be young again; let them always remember a happy youth in the future' - beautiful sentiments, of course, but what of the future. Was the poet quite wrong when he said: 'a sorrow's crown of sorrow Is remembering happier things.' Needless to say that the Murrays were reared under the older regime. It is scoffed at as 'early Victorian' to-day, but is vastly older than that. It was founded on a constant thought for the future of the child. Toys were not heaped upon them till boredom and satiety intervened, sweetmeats till they were in no sense a treat. Even the natural and parental instinct of devotion to progeny was subjected to reason. We laud that now as a special gift from heaven to fathers and especially to mothers, but, after all, the animals beat us in it, do they not? Then as to manners, they have not been cynically summed up as 'behave yourselves afore folk'. Well, if that was sometimes enjoined, was it not in essence the same as 'Be given to hospitality'? Ask any visitor to-day in a house full of children.

Perhaps the father observed old maxims a little over carefully. One can remember no lovey-dovey cuddling from him. The mother made up for any shortcoming, but always with due restraint; yet she was deeply loved by all the bunch to the end of her honoured days. Can the mother who has spoiled a child by overindulgence from foolish fondness say as much? Alas, very seldom.

Both parents, especially the mother, knew that they belonged to forbears of old descent - descent in each sense of the term, and looked hopefully to the boys to turn the awkward corner of their fortunes and make progress the other way. They deserved the village sobriquet of an 'uppish family'. Amid their anxiety for their immortal well being, they did not forget to inspire them with an ardent desire to 'get on'. Fortunately they both lived long enough to see their hopes being fulfilled, though in the case of their eldest, many of his honours came, alas, too late.

James from early years had a unique position in the little house. His mother would lament sometimes half in earnest that her oldest was not a lassie, but the fault was hers. Of need for household help, she never would ask from the boys any help outside the queer scots code of what a man's and woman's work, and would scorn a mother when she entered one day and found a male child helping to wash the dishes while the mother looked on. James, much the oldest, was ever helpful to his brothers, who believed in him from the fiestas one worth looking up to. His influence was always good, teaching worthy objects of interest and indomitable perseverance in their pursuit - alas, his lessons were not always learned. The younger ones loved him certainly, but regarded him with a kind of awe. Now it was rocks and stones and the mysteries of strata and formations with long nebbed names, jaw breaking - that Geology is full of - anon it was the flowers of the field, and the insects, and James's wonderful memory hugged and remembered all the Latin names so easily. Then there was all the mystery of the Linnaean system and the Natural system to rack young brains.

He got a loan somehow of a globe of the starry heavens, probably from Robert Moodie, and had all the constellations off by heart in no time. Wherever he got the books it is hard to think, but he must have imbibed a good deal from his early age. The writer remembers being waked out of his first sleep and carried to the stair top (by a proud mother, doubtless) to witness the rising of the sirius , the dog star, which James had prophesied that the cycle of the sphere would make visible over the dark young planting on the hill that week, and there it was!

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It has been asked how a boy like James Murray with no advantage of influence in a somewhat remote village became the scholar he became. To himself apparently he could find no mystery about it. When quite a young man, he delivered a lecturette on one occasion, entitled 'Perseverance is Genius' . He said nothing directly about himself unfortunately, but adduced many instances of cases similar to his, where by sheer perseverance (he claimed) all the drawbacks had been overcome and the highest positions had been attained. He was not entirely convincing. Those who felt that they were not geniuses argued, logically enough, that they also knew that they had not the gift of power or great perseverance, and the puzzle was only put a step back.

James had great strength of will, great sense of duty, great power of concentration, splendid memory, and untiring mental energy. These may or may not be the components of genius; they may all be cultivated by use, but surely all are innate gifts - but we get into deep waters of psychology. Power of concentration alone has been acclaimed by some who love simplicity to be genius itself.

There was no free education in those days; though fees were low, they were paid. Denholm Parochial School was the first school he attended, after a little while at a Dame's school ar Cavers. Old Scott was a patient and industrious teacher to the extent of his attainments which included higher mathematics and Latin. He was great in Geography and had cleverly drawn many large school maps himself for the use of his rustic scholars. He had a quaint but most efficient way of teaching from them; the boys taught themselves. After the ten minutes 'leave', the older boys ranked up before a map, judiciously hung near the door to be as remote as possible. Close by on a shelf was a heap of long hazel wands which the class appropriated. One boy took the leadership and called out the name of a town, cape or island, and it was pointed out, by sometimes the pupils in order, but the most efficient way was to make a competition of it, and to try who could first jab his pointer at it. It was bad for the stout maps, but it taught geography. Maps were also drawn, but that was a more lengthy method of acquirement. It was a poorly appointed schoolroom, the ceiling only some eight foot high; Scott with his long legs, mounted on a school form, could rool up the map and affix it to the side of a cross beam of the ceiling. His dwelling house was over the school, a vile expedient for necessary fresh air to the scholars.

About that time, the neighbouring village of Minto got a new master who had a reputation for more modern methods than Scott, and the schoolroom was more salutious. So the Denholm master soon lost most of his promising pupils. It must have been cruel for him, but he was never heard to complain, and indeed remained the friend of, and lent his books to, his old pupils.He probably learned too that some of his teaching was derided by the younger man.

He was emphatically of an older school in his teaching of English. For ‘it is a man’ we were taught to read ‘Eet ees ay maan’, which, neither Scots nor English, was supposed to be in his time the latter. Hamilton knew better than that, and all had to be derisively unlearned when the change to Minto was made. The joke of it was that the new pronunciation was not vastly nearer standard English of the south than the other. Hamilton too had acquired somehow the English pronunciation of Latin (which was never prevalent in Scotland) and insisted on it. Scott taught the old and european form, which now is adopted even in England. So a Denholm boy like James had to learn and unlearn twice!

Mr Hamilton, however, was an able and inspiring master for a country school. He could teach French and Greek as well as Latin, was a clever draughtsman, and musical, taught us in walks the names of the wild flowers and a little geology and astronomy. He was keen too on Chemistry with apparatus supplied by himself, no doubt. At special seances outside regular school hours, he would put us under laughing gas, and make other effective experiments - to the pupils great delight.

James learned a great deal at Minto school, and had hints of much more that he worked out for himself. The Schoolmaster of that period had the great advantage of not being compelled, as he was afterwards, to drag along every boy however dull or not prone to school learning to pass certain standards. He could, and often did, concentrate on the boys of ‘parts’, as the old term was.

There were no secondary schools then, no Carnegie fund, and no bursaries for colleges or universities in these country schools. Nothing for nothing was the order of the day. Happily about the time he left school the firm of John Cassell brought out as a cheap serial their Popular Educator. This was absolutely devoured by our student, surely from cover to cover. He bound up the parts himself into a creditable volume, which when last seen showed signs of exhaustive usage. One who knew him well in later years thought him inhandy with his hands. That must have been the result of intense concentration on the herculean task of the dictionary. When young, he taught his brothers bookbinding as well as himself, and several examples endure today. One of them who afterwards became an artist traces his earliest inspiration towards art to his older brother, who was then a capital draughtsman.

They came across, or borrowed, an old book - now - upon the Elgin Marbles, with a wealth of outline illustrations of the Parthenaic Frieze admirably done. James found some cheap writing paper, nearly transparent, and had been making tracings of the figures from pure admiration; his young brother was attracted, and had his young soul inspired by intense appreciation of the nude human form, and many a tracing he made from that old book. Tracing has been much criticised in draughtsmanship, but he is convinced that there is a useful province for it in early years, inspiring love for form.

A writer at the time of James’s death, professing to give an account of his early life, says he had the run of the library at Minto House, the seat of the Earl of Minto. That is a total mistake. Probably he was thinking of the great man, also born in Denholm, whose monument adorns the Green - Leyden, the poet, linguist and orientalist. The Lord Minto of his day is signalised as being the patron of Leyden when in India. James Murray had no such luck. He had the run of no library at all, not even the Feuars’ village library mentioned. They exacted a stiff fee from even boys who were not the sons of Feuars. True, some of the

books came as short loans into the house - Scott's poems, Leydens, and those of the Ettrick Shepherd, and the Border Minstrelsy, etc, and were eagerly read. A small collection of books, all supposed to be religious, had been given by the Douglases into the charge of the Minister, and were free of the family. There was not a novel between them. Indeed, novels were deprecated at home, though not forbidden, and the younger ones devoured them eagerly when they got the chance. James never wasted time on romances; he rather boasted when about the age of sixteen that he had only read one in his life, and that was the Pilgrim's Progress. It was, perhaps, an unsafe boast to make - one never knows - as a copy of Borrows Bible in Spain had a honoured place on these religious shelves at the Minister's, and the jargon of Borrow's gipsies was spouted often with spirit by the budding linguist.

It was about this time, at the age of 12 or 13, that he got hold of D'Aubigny's History of the Reformation in French, and spent many evenings reading from it by the light of a littler oil lamp with a cistern about the size of an orange, no chimney, and a foot-stalk that fitted into a candlestick, or perhaps it was the new fangled naphtha lamp of evil odour, made by a country tinsmith, that preceded the paraffin lamp, which came later. He read volubly, translating as he went right through D'Aubigny, to his intelligently interested parents and younger brothers, who, I daresay, only remembered the purple patches describing the valour of the unhappy Vaudois, who defended the Pass of the Pra triumphantly against their persecutors. It was a favourite game with us to defend the Pass of the Pra for long after in the roomy garret that was our playground when not filled with firewood. Like Leyden before him, at family worship he would follow the lesson with a French or German Bible, and read his verse in translation.

His chief help got from outside must have come from a retired parish minister, the Rev James Duncan, who lived in Denholm and was very kind to him and encouraged him in his aspirations. His influence and instruction extended over a wide field, including Botany, Entomology (in which he was keen) and Geology, as well, no doubt, as Hebrew. Mrs Selby, the wife of the Minto Estate factor, a german scholar, devoted much time to the raw lad, and helped him with German pronunciation, and perhaps also with Italian, but where he got any help in Hindu and Hindustani, Sanskrit and Arabic or Hungarian is not, I fear, known. He had gone to Hawick by then, and had access to more books, but there was surely no one there to help with pronunciation. Yet this narrator remembers well on one of his weekends visits home, hearing the most alarming sounds from his brothers bedroom, so he opened the door and asked 'was he ill?' his brother, still in bed (with a book), replied that he was merely practising Arabic vowels. On another occasion, it was Hottentot clucks that he pensively burst out with, to the alarm of his listeners. Probably, he was only going by instructions from the book as to how to hold tongue and lips and make a certain sound, or think of one word and say another.

No, he never had any lordly patronage. It was well he died, though, before he found on a visit to his homeland any desolate spot, full of natures grandeur and adorned with natures beauty, where he had quested and studied as a boy, now bolted and barred and watched to prevent his entry. What would the outspoken, fearless Leyden have said, had he found Minto Rocks shut to him, patron or no patron!

The schooling was broken into on one occasion for six months. There was a sudden and severe visitation of cholera which reached the village; the school vacation was prolonged,

and there was naturally much fear of it in young and old. His father sent James to the farmer of Spittal Tower, an old friend, partly fortified by an inherited maxim that it was good to send a boy for a little while to the friend i.e. to strangers. It would make him value home more when he returned. He was to be employed to herd the 'kye'- the milk cows and calves. At that time fences were far from being universal, and the job was easy and pleasant. Many boys in rural Scotland had a turn at it in their youth. It was almost held as classical, as the shepherd boy was in the story. The writer visited him often on Ruberslaw, and greatly envied his good times among the rugged and heathery glades and was introduced to the cows which his brother held in close and loving intimacy. There was one especially of Jersey breed that showed much affection. It all remains in the memory as quite idyllic. Coming blithely down the Loaning after with a young companion, a accent of burning met their nostrils and stilled their mirth as they came in view of an expiring fire by the wayside; it was the part consumed bed and blankets of a cholera patient; a gruesome sight that they hurried quickly past. There was no intention of learning farming in this hiring out to herd the 'kye' for a season. He returned to school again, leaving it at about the customary age then of, say, 14.

There were many anxious discussions of a suitable future for James. Schoolmastering was certainly thought of, and college training and its expense too, no doubt, but not regarded as the chief objection. His father was a sturdy dissenter, a deacon in the little chapel, and at that time there was a conscience test. To get a mastership one had to be a member of the Established Church. To be a member of any church merely for form or for worldly profit was utterly repugnant to their consciences. Many careers at that time were marred by that conscience test. It was abolished soon after, but the writer knows of one. He was an M.A. of Aberdeen, of excellent character but would not submit to that test. He tried to get an Assistantship in England, but failed, and turned to law in Scotland in a very inferior position.

It was about this time that a place in a Chemists shop in Melrose was offered. Probably it was hoped that his quickness in study might lead on to his being a doctor, if times grew better, and so forth, to attend college, and get a degree. Leyden, it is told, got his after six months intensive study. And many cases were happening in Edinburgh and Glasgow, where chemists lads, and those in other trades too, were able to attend college, and in time, not so brief, to get their degrees.

Anyhow, James went to Melrose, but did not stay long - not from any incapacity whatever - not sufficient time for study was talked of, and other incompatibilities between master and boy that need not be raked up. It was then that his father put him to help in his business. There were mixed reasons. He always had apprentices, but with children growing up there was no room for one. Then he had an ancestral proverb to lean on; it was; 'Can do's easy carried'. He greatly believed in that proverb. It was quoted to all of us, and all learned to sew. It will be observed that it conveyed no intention of any permanent purpose, but an argument for a by-trade such as St Paul had and found it timely, though in education, he had sat at the feet of Gamaliel. James never was meant to be for life a tailor, nor did he fail at his craft. His parents had more ambition for him than that.

During these waiting years, at harvest time and haymaking, he assisted at farm work at friendly farmers - Ashybank and Whitrigs comes to memory - but all the time he was studying hard and growing to healthy manhood. At last through an advertisement in a

newspaper he heard that an assistant Master was wanted at Hawick Grammar School. He applied, and obtained it. His age was then seventeen and a half. It does not appear that any test was applied to a mere assistant.

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When James was at Hawick he used to walk down to Denholm at the weekend and spent the Saturday and Sunday at home. One lovely June day his younger brothers inveigled him out to bathe in the Teviot. They were great bathers and were both learning to swim; to their great pride they could each do several strokes - six or eight they averred - and each boasted of his prowess. It was a rare place for bathing, the Teviot, and there were many suitable pools of safe depth, but there some under taboo as dangerous. Among these were the Hutch pools. A Hutch was a breakwater of masonry, pushed out into the current to deflect the stream from gnawing away the bank, a trick the rapid little river was fond of. It was a boundary between different proprietors, and, no doubt, there were added inducement to protect a special pool. Anyway, hutches were common, and below every one was a deep pool, deep enough to drown a man.

There was a wide-spread legend abroad that these pools were whirlpools, and would suck you down - and indeed there had been fatal results on record. To an intelligent boy who had read of Coriverechan and the dreaded Maelstrom that could suck down a ship in full sail and so forth, the word whirlpool had an awful significance, so we obeyed the dictum of our elders and avoided them. There, however, came to the school a lad brought up where there were no such pools, or bogie tales about them, but was a strong swimmer. He looked at one of the pools of evil fame, threw a cork in and found it took many minutes to float round with the eddy on the slack water of a june day, collared his courage, perhaps, and went to the point of the hutch, sprang in and swam about all over the pool and laughed at our tale of suction and our credulity so loudly that I think we were a little sorry that he came out scathless. But when we thought it over, we concluded that we had indeed been hoaxed by these elders simply to save themselves the unpleasantness of dealing with our remains, minimising the risk at least by tabooing some of our most convenient bathing pools. Needless to say, the bogy was henceforth exorcised, and nothing less than a hutch-pool would suit the boy of spirit. That day, without stating our destination at home, of course, we made for Christopher Hutch, called after a victim, perhaps, a pleasant walk of a mile downstream. James could not swim, but he had encountered in his varied studies much information on the respective specific gravities of water and the human body. They were nearly the same, and a float of small dimensions, hung about the body, was quite sufficient to let you keep the head above water and float and practise swimming strokes. The book said that many riverside plants make excellent floats, and as we wended our way we gathered the thick cellular leaves of the wild iris which were said to be just the thing. We knotted up all the string we could muster, made two bundles, and with some spare string over, none too much, we had no fear of disaster in all our thoughts. Albeit a paragraph had gone round the newspapers of a sad death from drowning of a promising youth, a student home from college, in a neighbouring stream. He had gone to bathe with another youth in quite a small, but deep, pool, and was drowned, his friend powerless to help him. The papers said how sad it was that a few feet of rope or a paling rail thrown to him might have saved him. The younger boaster had been revolving that fact in his mind and wondering what length the united four bathers would have totalled, and felt sure that he could have saved the drowning friend. Today, however, it was

not in his thoughts. They quickly undressed, the young swimmers practising their strokes discreetly in shallow water. James, confident in his floats which he had done his best to knot about his armpits, went in off the point of the hutch, and was soon in deep water. All was going merrilly, when suddenly he disappeared near the centre of the pool; there was only a bubbling and agitation of the water. As is usual in most sudden happenings, the first instinct is to think some game is on foot (all had faith in those faithless floats), but when a human hand and wrist emerged from the gurgling water, and made a most gruesome gasp at nothing, a gasp that one who saw it aghast never forgot, he knew that his brother was drowning. The second brother, one of the boasters as to strokes, at once renounced his pretensions and begged his younger brother to try to help. That youth, perhaps, felt he too had been overstating his powers, and anyway knew luckily they were quite insufficient. He said nothing, but the idea of the braces flashed into his mind, and he wheeled about and struggled for the bank. Already that had been reached by a schoolfellow, one of the party, who was standing shivering with horror, keeping his own nerve, he rushed to the piles of clothes, but it may well be doubted if he could have undone a dozen buttons or more in good time. Most fortunately he saw at once on his brother's heap a long length of stout black silk; it was his new Sunday tie, which, by a freak of fashion, was enormous for a necktie. Punch said of that fashion of tie at that time;

'The bow must extend from shoulder to shoulder.
If it be a little longer, it will make you look the bolder.'

It must have been five feet long, at least. He snatched it up and ran back in haste. As he turned, he saw that his brother had got a hold of James's hand, but was being dragged in, slipping deeper and deeper, and was calling for help. That was soon given, and that preposterous bit of silk and buckram pulled them out, hand in hand. The floats had slipped down to his haunches in deep water; that is the danger of the contrivance - Reader, please note.

It was a close thing. A few seconds lost, and both brothers would have been in a treacherous deep pool, and probably drowned - and the Oxford Dictionary postponed perhaps for a generation, and this book not written, alack!

It is well due to that brother, who left alone to the job that he mistructes (for he thought, mark you, the other had bolted in terror), yet faced it like a man, waded in up to all his depth, and caught hold of that grasping hand. He knew well to the common saying 'the grip of a drowning man is death'. That cautious saying is not far out. The present writer has been at the bottom of seven feet of water with the arm of a drowning man around his neck, and a madman's legs trying to get around him, though a fair swimmer by that time. But he was not averse to help coming from terra firma by a long pole held out from the bank.

The precious long tie was dried in the sun and wind, while the victim of the mischance soon recovered his breath; he had swallowed no water fortunately; and the party, sadder but wiser, wended their way home, registering a solemn oath not to tell the mother, and they never did.

Just a word about pools scooped out by eddies, like these hutch pools. There is no suction in the water, aty any rate when not in flood, to trouble a swimmer, but if a cork floats around,

however quietly, the pebbles are rolling around at the bottom, and grinding out a conical cavity in time, even in solid rock. At the same time, they are grinding themselves perfectly round and as small and slippery as the balls in ball-bearings. The danger lies with them, and once the wader gets on the steep slope of the pit, it is facile descensus, and no grip for the feet to struggle out.

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Charles Oliver Murray (1842 – 11 December 1923) was a Scottish artist and printmaker.

Born in the village of Denholm in Roxburghshire in 1842, Murray trained at the Trustees' Academy in Edinburgh and moved to London by 1872. He was elected a Fellow of the Society of Painter-Etchers on 7 May 1881. He had his work published widely in both *The Portfolio* and *The Art Journal* from the 1870s onwards, and frequently exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1872 onwards.

Murray died in London on 11 December 1923.