

David Christie Murray



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DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY.*

There was a time when Christie Murray was a very popular novelist, and when not a few of us were looking confidently to his writing the novel that should lift him into something more than popularity ; but he never wrote it. He seemed to have all the gifts of the born story-teller ; he had a true feeling for dramatic effect, a broad sympathy with humanity, could touch you to tears or laughter, and mould his characters so that they lived ; he had the mind and the heart and the great ambition, but he missed greatness, and the novels he wrote during his last seven or eight years have done his reputation more harm than good. Personally, I count among my happier memories one of the day when a novel of his first came into my hands. It was "Joseph's Coat," and I was so taken with it that in the next few months I had bought or borrowed "A Life's Atonement," "Aunt Rachel" (the finest thing, I suppose, that he ever did in fiction), "Rainbow Gold," "Val Strange" ; and I have never re-read them in maturer years for something of the same fear he had, as he tells you in these "Recollections," about reading again a certain story that gave him "one superb moment" when he was young :

"That moment came with the reading of a story, entitled 'The Mandan's Revenge ; or the Riccaree War Spear,' which came from the pen of Mr. Percy B. St. John, and may still be found in some far-away number of *Chambers's Journal*. I have never gone back to that story. I have never had the courage to go back. It would be something like a crime to dissipate the halo of romance and splendour which lives about it, as I know most certainly I should do if I read it over again. I daresay Mr. St. John was an estimable person in his day ; but he could not have written one such story as that my memory so dimly, yet splendidly recalls without having made himself immortal."

Murray was born in Staffordshire, in 1847 ; his father was a printer and stationer, and at the age of twelve he left school and started work in his father's printing office. When he was nearly eighteen he came to London to follow the same trade, and a disappointment in love drove him to enlist. An old great-aunt presently bought him out of

* "Recollections." By David Christie Murray. 10s. 6d. net. (John Long.)



1062 Mr. David Christie Murray. 66.604.2