

DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY "RECOLLECTIONS"

Snippets from childhood memories of West Bromwich

"I cannot recall a time when there was not a police barracks in my native High Street. Its inmates were all "bobbies" or "peelers".

"I rambled alone, as children will, along the High Street on a lovely summer day, each sight, and scent, and sound of which comes to me at this moment with a curious distinctness, and I had turned at the corner, had wandered along New Street, which by that time was old-fashioned enough to seem aged, even to my eyes; had diverged into Walsall Street, which was then the shortest way to the real country, and on to the Ten Score; past the Pearl Well, where Cromwell's troops once stopped to drink; through Church Vale, and on to Perry Bar, and even past the Horns of Queslett, beyond which lay a plain road to Sutton Coldfield...."

"I have begun many a child's ramble by a walk down Bromford Lane to look in at half-naked figures sweating and toiling at the puddling furnaces."

"Whilst I was yet a very little fellow, a certain big-boned, well-fleshed, waddling wench from the local workhouse became a unit in my mother's household. Her chief occupation seemed to be to instruct my brothers and sisters and myself in various and many methods of being terrified.there was in our near neighbourhood, for example, a person known as the Dudley Devil.from the time that foolish, fat scullion came into the household service, we were all impressed with a dreadful sense of this gentleman's potentialities for evil; and darkened rooms and passages about the house into which we had hitherto ventured without any hint of fear, were suddenly and horribly alive with this man's presence. I know that he haunted every place of darkness. He positively peopled the back kitchen to which we went for coals. He haunted a little larder on the left and stood on each of the three steps which led down to its red brick floor....That fat, foolish scullion slept in the same room as my brother and myself. My brother was seven at this time and I was five, and we got to know afterwards that the sprawling wench grew hungry in the night-time, and went downstairs to filch heels of loaves and cheese, or anything our rather spare household economy left open to her petty larcenies. And in order that these small depredations should be hidden, she used to play the ghost upon us and I suppose it to be a literal fact that many and many a time when she stole back to our room, and found us awake and quaking, she must have driven us into a clean swoon of terror by the very simple expedient of drawing up the hinder part of her nightdress, and making a ghostly head-dress of it about her face. That I fainted many a time out of sheer horror at this apparition, I am quite certain."

"At the age of twelve I was taken from school and set to work in my father's printing office. There must have been a serious fall in the family fortunes about this time, for a year earlier I had been removed from the respectable little private seminary I had hitherto attended and transferred to a school of the roughest sort, where the pupils paid threepence a week apiece to the schoolmaster and we used to give off the result of our lessons in platoons.I was secretly very unhappy at this time."