

**John Murray**  
**of Badbea, and Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia**

**A Memorial with Tributes**

Edited by  
**Iain Murray**

**"Preface"**

Two years ago when John Murray and I were discussing the publication of his *Collected Works*, I suggested that a biographical Introduction should be prepared and printed in the first volume. To this he replied: "Regarding biographical data, I think I should have to supply a good deal of the information . . . If I supplied a skeleton, perhaps you yourself could write the biographical account." Thereafter he and I continued our usual correspondence respecting the publishing work of the Banner of Truth Trust, in which he was so influential as a trustee, but we did not carry that particular proposal any further. The first volume of his *Collected Works* was not ready for printing, I entertained no doubts over his continuing fitness, and consequently I felt no urge to proceed with speed.

Sadly, therefore, nothing in these pages was provided by our late friend, whose health deteriorated so rapidly in the first months of this year. After his death on May 8th, I initially thought that I would not be able to put together more than a few pages of biographical information in a memorial issue of the Banner of Truth magazine; but the help and inspiration which was immediately given to me by Dr. Paul Woolley of Westminster Seminary and by Dr. David Freeman provided the framework for something rather larger. For the filling in of this framework I am greatly indebted to Mrs. John Murray, who welcomed me again at Badbea after her husband's death. Such access as I have had to original documents and letters I owe almost entirely to Mrs. Murray, and without her assistance this record would have been much reduced in value.

Many contributors have given willing help, and I would like to thank all whose names occur in the following pages. In addition, I am indebted to the Rev. Alex. N. MacLeod of Willowdale, Ontario; to Professor Murray's nephew, the Rev. Alexander Murray of Applecross, and to Mr. D. M. Campbell of Bonar Bridge, both of whom supplied information on John Murray's childhood; to Mrs. Janet MacPherson of Dornoch; and to several other friends who have supplied details which could scarcely have been recovered without their assistance. I appreciate also the help of Mr. John J. Mitchell, the Editor of *The Presbyterian Guardian*, who has kindly provided some of the photographs. He has also allowed me to use material from articles first published in the *Guardian*.

The biographical material which I have thus put together to mark the occasion of John Murray's death has many limitations and deficiencies. It is by no means a biography. There were limitations of space and, as this is intended for the double August-September issue of the Banner of Truth Magazine, only limited time for preparation. Much has been left unsaid and perhaps a few things are said which some, on reflection, would consider better excluded. There was not time for contributors to read the whole manuscript prior to publication, and they bear no responsibility for statements other than their own.

It is hoped that a more permanent biography may be produced and that comment or criticism on this present publication will assist towards that end. In particular, some readers may be able to loan correspondence by John Murray which in part or in the whole could be of value for biographical purposes.

Without question the most important and abiding memorial of John Murray will be his own writings. As already mentioned, it is intended that a considerable number of these should be brought together and published as his *Collected Works*. . . .

Great has been the loss of the church militant in the home-going of this servant of Christ. Surely his passing calls us to greater resolution and faithfulness! To his widow and beloved children, Logan and Anne-Margaret, all will wish to join with the contributors to these pages in expressing deepest sympathy. The children are too young to know the full extent of their loss but, with their mother, they belong by covenant promise to "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort," and He has said, "Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children."

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July 10, 1975.

## Chapter One

### "The Youngest Son of Badbea, 1898-1924"

In the remote parish of Creich, South Sutherlandshire, in the Highlands of Scotland, Alexander Murray passed away in 1942 at the age of ninety years. Before that day came, he had taken care to secure from his minister a solemn promise that no obituary of him would be published in his Church's magazine. "He would rather get a slap than flattery," men had said of him in his lifetime. His son, in whose memory these pages are now written, breathed the same spirit. He spoke little and seldom of himself. When, nine years ago, a leading American publisher asked him to supply information on his life to be included in a major publication to which he was contributing, his response was characteristic:

John Murray: Professor of Systematic Theology  
M.A. Glasgow, 1923; Th.B., Th.M. Princeton Theological Seminary, 1927.

These brief words -- together with the titles of his books which he added -- were, in his judgment, sufficient. In part, we may attribute this reticence of father and son to the native reserve of the Highland Gael. Surely no race of men ever disapproved more strongly than they of any broadcasting of personal affairs to the world at large! But in this matter it was the gospel itself and not temperament which exerted the greatest influence. One of John Murray's earliest sermons, which he had to hand in as classwork for Senior Homiletics during his preparation for the ministry in the 1920's, was on the words of John the Baptist recorded in John 3:29: "He that has the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom which stands and hears him rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. This my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase but I must decrease." After an Introduction, setting the words in their context, the ministerial student divided his text as follows:

1. John knew Christ's supreme and exclusive position in the Kingdom of God.
2. He knew his own subordinate place in the Kingdom of God.
3. John knew the only method of development, "He must increase but I must decrease."

Upon this last statement in the text he said:

We are not to think of these words as spoken in Stoical, disappointed submission but as the expression of a heart full of holy joy that the goal on which he had set his heart had now been actually achieved. His popularity, his increase at the expense of the honour of Christ would have been his deepest sorrow. We may discover in this the pain of indignation and contempt for the very suggestion of his usurping the place that belonged to Christ alone . . . The desire for self-supremacy is an expression of the sin which above all others seeks to undermine the very purpose of the gospel and the gospel ministry, which is the restoration of the Kingdom of God and the rule and supremacy of God alone in all sphere and departments of life. May God grant that we follow in the footsteps of John and imitate his self-effacement, self-abasement, self-renunciation, self-forgetfulness! "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world."

It was the strength of this holy ambition that led John Murray, and the community of Christians amongst whom he was first nurtured in Christ, to deplore the thought of making a name for themselves before men. As he was to write in later years, "Humility, contrition, lowliness of mind are of the essence of godliness." And again, in lecturing once on John Calvin, he warned his hearers, "At all times we must remember that men, however great their stature, are still only men characterized by infirmity, earthen vessels into which God has put treasure, and our servants for Jesus' sake." He would have regarded it as a serious disservice to the cause of the gospel if a record of his life failed to impress the reader with the truth that praise for any talent or grace belongs to God alone.

John Murray was born at Badbea,<sup>1</sup> his parents' home, on October 14th, 1898. For beauty the location can scarcely be excelled by anything in Scotland. The house, or croft, with its surrounding farmland, stands just a few hundred yards above the edge of Migdale loch, facing southwards and with rising ground giving the homestead shelter from north winds. Migdale, with its few other crofts similar to Badbea, is surrounded by hills 500 to 700 feet in height, the arable ground nearest the loch merging soon into moorland with clumps of trees -- larch, mountain ash, Scotch fir and birch.

Hidden from view behind the hills on the southern side of Loch Migdale are the waters of the Dornoch Firth, but rising above these nearer hills are the distant peaks of the mountains of Easter Ross in majestic panorama. There are thus simultaneously presented to the eye vistas both near and far, with a richness of colour capable of all manner of variation depending upon the season or the weather.

Gospel light appears to have been brought to the district after the 16th-Century Reformation by a certain Donald Logan who was appointed to the parish of Creich as "a reader in Gaelic," but it was not until the 18th Century that the gospel began to take powerful hold upon the scattered population, especially under the ministry of the Rev. George Rainy (1771 to 1810). When Rainy died, more than a hundred men in the parish "could openly testify to a personal work of grace and give a reason for the hope that was in them." The strength of this work, and the deep root it took in many households, may be judged by the fact that from 1810 to 1843 the Lord's people in Creich maintained their assemblies without a minister; for when a Moderate minister was intruded into the parish in 1811, the congregation left him to himself and met in barns or on the shore of Loch Migdale under the shelter of the great rock near Badbea. With the Disruption of the Church of Scotland in 1843, the people at once united with the newly-formed Free church of Scotland and called Gustavus Aird to be their minister. There were 280 signatures to the call.

The health of the work prior to 1843 depended upon four elders who were the sole guides and leaders of the people. To their number eight more were added in 1844. These were men eminent for their spiritual gifts, and they spread light and warmth throughout the whole parish. The story is told how one of them, Havie Munro, as a young man under spiritual concern, found himself walking to a monthly fellowship meeting behind Hugh Mackenzie, an older Christian whose godliness filled him with awe. Not wishing to pass Mackenzie, Munro slackened his pace only to find another such man coming up behind him. "I felt," he said afterwards, "as between two fires from Heaven." In old age the same Munro confessed to a friend that sometimes, when favoured with much of the Divine presence, he had erred in praying, "Cum air ais do lamh" ("Stay thine

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1 Badbea (Gaelic, "A clump of birch") was originally the name of an area upon which several crofts stood, but in the course of time the name became identified with the Murrays' dwelling. The present house dates from 1906.

hand"), for he felt he should have prayed for increased strength to "take in" what was given him. Another of these devout elders, Hugh Mann, who was very deaf in later years, was so eager not to miss the Word that he would mount the pulpit steps and stand close to the minister!

Men of this type long adorned the parish of Creich, and Dr. Aird "often confessed to a sense of utter want of fitness to preside over such a session." It is no small testimony to the high esteem in which the church held John Murray's father, that he was ordained to the eldership at the early age of twenty-seven. Born in 1853, Alexander Murray could remember as an old man how, when an infant, a relative taught him the prayer as she put him to bed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." He recalled also, as a youth, being able to count no less than eight prayer-meetings being held on a Saturday evening in an area of some three square miles around Badbea. After his marriage to Catherine Logan (probably a descendant of Donald Logan), his own home was to become one of the most frequent resorts for Christians meeting for fellowship and prayer. Christ himself was often there as in Bethany of old, and the hospitality afforded to all who came was known throughout the North.

John was the youngest of the family, being preceded by five brothers and two sisters. In the early 1890's far-reaching changes, some of which were beneficial, had come to the parish. Throughout much of the century the crofters of Sutherland had often endured much hardship and even deprivation at the hands of the proprietors upon whose land they lived as tenants. The Creich parish fell within Skibo, an estate containing around 20,000 acres, only some 6,000 of which were arable ground. Tenant crofters had often to live as best they could off largely infertile soil and at the same time pay exorbitant rents to grasping proprietors. It was, as Dr. Aird protested in 1884, "a first-class manufactory for producing paupers." In a statement before a Royal Commission, Aird pointed out that the rents collected from the Skibo estate had risen from £700 to £800 in 1793 to £4813 in 1884, compelling the emigration of large numbers from his parish, "upwards of 266 to Australia and 100 to America, besides a large number to the large centres of population in the south."

In May, 1898, however, as Catherine Murray was carrying her sixth son, the prospects brightened. Towards the end of that month Alexander had to go down to Bonar Bridge -- the nearest village -- to join with other tenants to welcome the new proprietor of Skibo Castle and estate. It was Andrew Carnegie, with his wife Louise, returning to his native country after making millions from the companies which in the following year he formed into the Carnegie Steel Company of the United States. His tenants, who presented him with an address of welcome, cared nothing for his political faith and his "gospel of wealth," but his ability to provide work was a much-needed benefaction. At Skibo Castle, where the Stars and Stripes now hung alongside the Union Jack, £50,000 was at once spent on building a new wing, and soon Carnegie wanted old roads remade and new ones built to provide access to lochs and moors for shooting and fishing. In the latter operation "Sandy" Murray played a considerable part. He became a contractor employed by Carnegie to organize and lead squads of men on the road work, and so efficient was he at levelling ground that he was popularly known as "Sandy Level"! For such work he was well qualified both by physical strength and moral integrity. It was common knowledge that when Sandy Murray received payment for work done, he kept not a penny more for himself than what he gave to each of his men.

Far off though it was from the great debates and controversies which were then agitating the Free Church in the South, the tremors of those events were being felt with growing dismay in Suther-

land before the 1890's. There was growing alienation between the weakening evangelicalism in the South and the old orthodoxy which remained widespread in the North. When heresy charges, well sustained by evidence, were brought against certain Free Church theologians, only to be dismissed, the likelihood of a further disruption grew imminent. When the old worthies of Creich heard Alexander Whyte of Edinburgh preach at a communion season in the parish, they did not like certain new notes which they detected. In 1893 a crisis was precipitated by the withdrawal of two Highland ministers, the Revs. D. Macfarlane and D. Macdonald, who sought to maintain the gospel in its purity by the formation of the Free Presbyterian Church. The godly were divided. Some of the best of the people in the North joined the new Church, but others, including Dr. Aird, remained, judging that no constitutional change had been made in the old Free Church sufficient to justify separation. As for Alexander Murray, in 1895 -- despite his love to his minister -- he decided that he could remain in his session no longer. When, after more than fifty years' ministry Aird preached his last sermon in Creich in November, 1896, Alexander Murray was already worshipping in the newly-formed Free Presbyterian Church. The Creich Free Church, handsomely rebuilt in 1881, was the only man-made landmark of any size visible from Badbea, and it was with aching hearts that the Murrays could no longer view it as their spiritual home.

John, the new baby in Badbea, was baptized at the communion season in the Spring of 1899 by the Rev. Neil Cameron, the Free Presbyterian minister of Glasgow.

The accommodation at Badbea was stretched to the limits when the last member of the family was born. Until he was six, "Johnnie" Murray -- also to be known locally as "Johnnie Level" -- shared a bed with his two sisters, Johan and Christina; but at that age he determined to sleep henceforth with his older brothers! He was a quiet child, yet not incapable of mischief. On one occasion when his brothers were going out to burn stubble after the harvest, they left Johnnie with a few matches. These he managed to apply to a stack of oats beside the house. But when the stack took fire he retired from the scene, and as others raised the alarm he was found sitting quietly indoors! Like most children he soon learned that the telling of a lie was a possible way to escape punishment. For a time he was tempted to practice that art, but in later years he remembered how, about the age of seven, in the very midst of a team race at school, he vowed as he ran from one point to another that he would tell lies no more.

Not only upon the Sabbath, when the family walked towards Bonar Bridge to join the forty or fifty who met in the Free Presbyterian Church, but every day of the week John was surrounded by Christian influence. At Badbea the day commenced and closed with prayer and praise. It should be specially mentioned that no portion of Scripture had more pervasive influence upon the family religion of that period than the Psalter. Those inspired songs were found suitable for all circumstances. Dr. Aird once told the story how some years earlier, when eighteen poor families were ruthlessly evicted from their homes by the proprietor of the land, they took what shelter they could in a graveyard and began their family worship together that sad day with the singing of Psalm 145 from verse fifteen:

The eyes of all things wait on Thee,  
The Giver of all good;  
And Thou, in time convenient,  
Bestowest on them their food.  
Thine hand Thou open'st liberally,  
And of Thy bounty gives

Enough to satisfy the need  
Of everything that lives.

But if John Murray saw parental godliness in acts of worship, he saw it no less in all the daily practical labours in which his father engaged. Piety and hard work went hand-in-hand. "The people are very industrious," Aird reported to the Royal Commission in 1884, "and so far as I remember, I do not know a lazy man in my congregation." This was sure result of that God-consciousness which lies at the center of true spirituality. The Christians of Creich, amongst whom the head of Badbea's household was a leader, were as mindful of their relationship to God when farming land or making roads as they were in church. All daily toil must be undertaken for the glory of God. Though their numbers were growing thin in comparison with former times, there were still many men and women in Sutherland at the beginning of this century who exemplified the Pauline injunction: "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ."

The Free Presbyterian minister of Bonar Bridge in those days was the Rev. Ewen MacQueen, who, when he visited Badbea, had the habit of putting his hand on John's head and saying a few words to him affectionately about spiritual things. It was not known to Mr. MacQueen at the time, but in later years John Murray spoke of those occasions as being accompanied by the first stirrings of spiritual emotion which he could recall. In other Free Presbyterian ministers, and particularly in John Cameron of Tomatin and in John MacDonald of Gairloch, he also witnessed practical godliness of a high order. When no minister could be present on the Sabbath, his father would preach. These were by no means the only times when his father urged upon his son the glory of the Saviour's grace. John remembered, for example, a day when he travelled with his father over the fifteen miles of the County road between Bonar Bridge and the Mound near Golspie in Sutherland, which Alexander Murray was under contract to maintain. Though they covered the considerable distance by horse and cart, Sandy Murray was throughout imparting spiritual counsel to his son. With reference to his father on that occasion, John Murray once told his nephew that "he did not witness a greater intensity of spiritual exercise of soul in any other person, and his very body moved in sympathy with the inner man."

John Murray's school days were passed first at the local Bonar Bridge School and then at the Dornoch Academy, where brighter pupils went about the age of twelve to study for the Higher Certificate necessary for University entrance. The Academy, being some fourteen miles from Badbea, was reached after a cycle ride early on Monday mornings, and lodgings in Dornoch were occupied until late Friday afternoon. He proved an excellent scholar, and in his eighteenth year the Academy, which found it very difficult to engage suitable staff, used him for a time as a tutor.

Such was the youth's first experience of absence from home. His second was of a far darker nature. The effects of the First World War on the Scottish Highlands were almost as devastating as if it had been fought on that soil. When the conflict began in 1914, the long-famous Highland regiments at once claimed the cream of the manhood of the North; but very few who were recruited at the beginning of the conflict ever returned to their homes. Of John's brothers, William went to the Navy, Donald went to France with the Seaforth Highlanders, and Thomas to the Dardanelles with the Camerons. Both brothers in the army were killed in action. John's call-up for military service was dated April 18th, 1917, when he was enlisted in the Royal Highlanders (Black Watch) at Nairn. On official papers he is described as Private Murray, 5/22863; "Height, 5ft.

6 1/2 in; Complexion, Fresh; Eyes, Brown; Hair, Black." Among his new possessions that day was a pocket-sized paperback, *The Story of the Black Watch*, being an account of the regiment's "heroic failures, splendid successes, and undying glories."

In France, however, The Black Watch, along with all the allied infantry, were fighting a campaign which permitted no such exploits as had been performed in earlier days. In the face of shells and machine guns they were constantly decimated, and consequently new recruits were kept at home for only the minimum period necessary for training. It seems likely that John Murray was sent across the English Channel before the end of 1917.

Appallingly uncongenial as the trenches were for humanity in general, they were yet more distressing to a Christian. The sight of men dosed well with rum in preparation for battle, and the hardened paganism of the ungodly in the presence of death, promoted feelings distressing in the extreme. John Murray was not known to identify his conversion with any single date or experience in his youth, unlike his own father who was brought suddenly from intense conviction of sin to peace in believing. It is probable that he was only gradually aware of the presence of true spiritual life within. Conversion for some, as he used to say, is like the gentle dawn of day in northern latitudes, when there is no exact moment observable which separates the night from the day. What is clear is that during his days in The Black Watch spiritual realities were his main concern, and whenever there was any opportunity for relaxation he would draw aside from his comrades and find some corner where he might read his Bible and pray.

As the Great War came to its climax in 1918, strain and sorrow cast their long shadows in the once sunlit rooms of the old home beside Migdale. Long intervals passed between news of victories or reverses at the Front and confirmation that the youngest son was still alive. As Alexander Murray continued in prayer, there was one sentence of Scripture which repeatedly comforted him. He recalled how, when John was baptized in the peaceful Spring of 1899, not only were God's covenant promises his confidence, but certain words in Psalm 92 had spoken to him so forcefully that he believed their fulfilment would be seen in the infant carried in his arms. The words were: "Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age . . ." John, he was persuaded, would return from the War.

It appears that when the last German offensive began in July, 1918, John was posted as missing. Then this was corrected by the news that he had been wounded in action and removed from the battle front to hospital. The facts appear to be that day after day, during the last great German drive, John's regiment would stand and fight, lose many of its men, and be forced into rapid retreat. When evening came, those who survived would be asleep from exhaustion almost before they could lie down on the ground. After three days of battle, all along the front line the enemy offensive was stopped and the Allied advance (the final turning point in the War) began. In later years John spoke of the new exhilaration at seeing the kilted Scots moving forward, taking position after position. But his participation in the success was short-lived. While leading a section of men as a lance corporal, dirt thrown up by a bursting shell temporarily blinded him as he was in the act of firing his rifle. He could still see with his left eye, but the sight of the right eye was gone, destroyed by a piece of shrapnel, as it was discovered when he was ordered to the rear. From base hospital he was removed to England where he convalesced in London. This was his first visit to the English capital. On December 10th, 1918, he was discharged "being no longer physically fit for war service," and in due course received the customary scroll inscribed, "Served with honour and was disabled in the Great War." A small pension was subsequently paid.

The glass eye which John Murray wore so closely resembled the original that even those who knew him well tended to forget that his sight was limited to one eye. It was a considerable handicap for one whose next ten years were to be given to almost unremitting study. He entered the University of Glasgow in the autumn of 1919 and, in the hope that less strain would be placed on his eyesight, his Arts course in Logic, Moral Philosophy, Instit. Education, Mathematics, Latin and English literature was extended over four years instead of three. The M.A. degree was conferred upon him on June 20th, 1923. At one time it seems his inclinations were divided. He felt a pull to both mathematics and theology and knew that his future career could not contain both. By the time he graduated in 1923 his mind was decisively made up, captured by that conviction which he considered an essential part of the call to the Christian ministry, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel!" He was by this time a communicant member of the Free Presbyterian Church and had preached his first sermon in Stratherick, Inverness-shire in 1922 upon the words, "His name shall be called Wonderful." On August 16th, 1923, the Kirk session of the Bonar Bridge congregation examined him as a candidate for the ministry and recommended him to the Northern Presbytery of the Church, which met the following day and approved the recommendation.

Accordingly John Murray commenced the three-year period of theological study required by his Church. Comparatively small in numbers, the denomination did not maintain a college, preferring instead the time-honoured procedure of placing their students for the ministry under the supervision of a minister who would undertake to tutor them while also occupying a pastoral charge. Donald Beaton, minister in Wick, Caithness, had long and ably undertaken this role; and it was therefore to Wick that John Murray went, along with five other theological students, in the autumn of 1923. Robert Sinclair, a fellow student of that period, remembers John as possessing his father's self-composure, as notable for his kindness, and as a student and a preacher of more than common ability. The latter fact soon impressed Mr. Beaton, and he formed the conviction that the best interests of the Church would be served if Murray's training could be more advanced in certain departments than was possible in Wick. The result was that the Synod of the Free Presbyterian Church, meeting in May 1924, heard the unusual suggestion from their theological tutor, "that Mr. John Murray, M.A., be permitted to proceed to Princeton with a view of taking up the study of certain subjects to equip him as a theological tutor of the Church." The Synodical Report records that "the suggestion was received with the heartiest approval." So in the summer of 1924 John Murray took his first trans-Atlantic voyage from Glasgow to New York. No one anticipated that it was to lead, not to two, but to forty years in the United States!

"Preface" and "Chapter 1" from Iain Murray, *John Murray: of Badbea, and Westminster Seminary*, Philadelphia (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975).