

**A WASTED
CRIME: A NOVEL**

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A Wasted Crime: A Novel by David Christie Murray

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DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY

**A WASTED
CRIME: A NOVEL**

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A WASTED CRIME

A Novel

BY 2

DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY

AUTHOR OF

"FIRST PERSON SINGULAR" "TIME'S REVENGE" ETC.



NEW YORK

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By DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY.

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A WASTED CRIME

CHAPTER I

HOGGETT'S GREEN may have been green once upon a time; but if ever that was so, it was more years back than the oldest inhabitant could remember. For many and many a year now the whole landscape has been overrun by the black armies of labor, the entrails of the earth have been rifled in the search for coal and iron, and the surface is covered with huge mounds of refuse. Weedy pools of old rain-water fester in the dingy hollows between the artificial hills. Here and there a slimy canal—the surface of which is iridescent with floating oil and tar—divides the country, and slow barges, laden with coal and pig-iron, are drawn along by lazy horses, driven by picturesque rascals, whose speech is a mingling of many rustic dialects.

Hoggett's Green may once again be green, one of these days, for the underground resources of the country are almost exhausted. The district, which

twenty years ago was populous and prosperous, is now more than half-deserted. Evidences of old abandoned enterprise lie scattered everywhere. There are yawning caverns from which clay has been dug; there are open coal-mines, surrounded by rickety and rotting fences, huge balks of timber, and half-dismantled edifices of brick; and hundreds of huge rusting cog-wheels, which once made part of a working colliery plant, might be found within the limits of a square mile.

Nature does her best to reassert herself in this mournful district, but there is still enough of smoke left to cloud the sky on the brightest midsummer day, and the poisonous exhalations of a chemical factory wither all vegetation within reach of their deadly influence. The roads are miry and ill-kept, the scattered living-places are mean and ruinous, and, in short, it would be very difficult to find in all broad England a less desirable place to live in.

On the edge of this desolate province, just where the country begins to smile again, there is a long straggling street, with a police-station, a dozen public-houses, and a chapel in it. This street is always spoken of by the people of Hoggett's Green as "the town." The parish is a very large one, and the outlying Hoggett's Greeners look on a visit to the town as an affair of enterprise and excitement. The street is always filled on a Saturday night with men in black

broadcloth and women in shawls of many colors, who carry great marketing-baskets on their arms, and wear flowers unknown to nature in their bonnets. The male section of society in Hoggett's Green is content, from Monday morning until Saturday afternoon, with the complexion of a Christy's minstrel; but on Saturday evenings they wash, and dress themselves in black, shining raiment, false collars, and silk hats. If times are good, they get solidly and respectably fuddled at the various public-houses, while their wives spend the market-money and get through the gossip of the week.

It was a Saturday night in the beginning of autumn, and the one street of the town was thronged. At one end of it, it was particularly brilliant and noisy, for there were set up a number of stalls, all illuminated by flaring naphtha lamps. There was a show of some sort in a canvas booth, and the populace was noisily invited to enter it by the blare of an ill-blown key-bugle and the banging of a big drum. A little farther on was a merry-go-round, which was worked by steam. Hidden somewhere away in the centre of this contrivance was an instrument of hideous discord, a barrel-organ of abnormal power, the strains of which were audible a mile away. A thin rain had fallen all day, and was still falling. The ruts and puddles in the roadway shone bright yellow in the glare of the lamps, and the people,

heedless of the weather, lounged and jostled hither and thither in a distracting confusion of noises.

That night a young gentleman, travelling on foot from Quarrymoor to Beacon Hargate, had lost his way in the rain and darkness, and had been guided across the waste of black country by the flaring lights and the rude noises of merriment. The scene was new to him, and he stood to watch it for a minute or two, with a half-smiling interest, though his face expressed a good-humored silent protest against the fanfaronade of the steam-driven barrel-organ. He was not at first aware that he was exciting so general a regard, but by-and-by he discovered that almost everybody in his neighborhood was staring at him, more or less furtively. A gentleman was not a common spectacle in the town street of Hoggett's Green on Saturday nights, and the stranger unmistakably belonged to a type altogether different from the rough-cast specimens of humanity by whom he was just then surrounded. He was not openly insulted, but certain free-and-easy comments on his dress, his mustache, and his eye-glass reached his ears. There was certainly no intention to give offence, but there was, just as certainly, no anxiety to avoid it, or care if it were taken. He took the comments with a perfect good-humor, and lounged on through the mud until he came to a halt at the front of a green-grocer's shop. Here a giant of a fellow—

bareheaded and in his shirt-sleeves—was weighing out potatoes from a big tray-table, which took up half the width of the footway. The stranger, pausing near at hand to look at something which for the moment attracted his attention, was half deafened by the salesman's voice.

"Roll up this way, for the mealy 'uns! 'Ere y' are! Balls of flour—balls of flour! 'Taters—'taters! Three farthings a pound."

The young gentleman turned to look at him.

"Give your orders!" cried the salesman, addressing him personally.

The young man smiled, but made no answer. A customer came up and was served. He stood there still watching the transaction, though it had, of course, no interest for him, and purposing to ask his way when it was over. The potato salesman seemed to take umbrage at his regard.

"Yo' seem to have made up your mind to know me again, young man," he said, with more display of anger than the occasion seemed to warrant.

"I beg your pardon. I was only waiting to ask my way. Can you put me on the road to Beacon Hargate?"

"Can I put thee on the road to B'acon Hargit?" the man answered, with a clumsy imitation of the young man's accent. It was simply the accent of a gentleman, and in no way exaggerated or odd to an ac-