

CHARLOTTE BRONTË

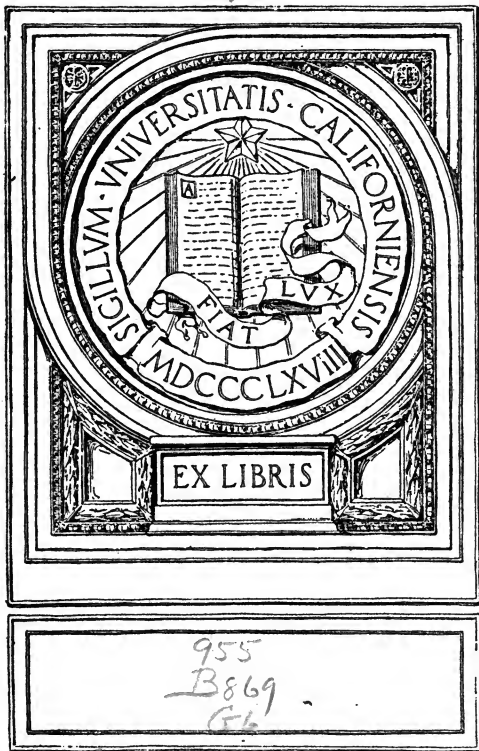
THE WOMAN

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MAUDE GOLDRING







CHARLOTTE BRONTË

THE WOMAN

*By the same Writer*

THE COUNTRY OF THE YOUNG

LONELY ENGLAND

THE WONDER YEAR

THE DOWNSMAN

ETC.

# CHARLOTTE BRONTË

## THE WOMAN

### *A Study*

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## TO CHARLOTTE BRONTË

*Written at Haworth*

THESE hills assert imperious sovereignty.  
Lay by (they say), O human soul, lay by  
The claim to live by spirit travail sore.  
Yield and have peace. Our old fierce strength is such  
If thou art strong, art righteous overmuch,  
Lo, Death, the wild storm rider, beats thy door.

But thou, a sister spirit by thy side,  
Hast weighed and hearkened, anguished, and denied  
Menace of hectoring critic, tyrant fell.  
Bent but enduring, lone by lonely stone  
Thou mad'st the virtue of the moors thine own  
For twofold epic, lived and written as well.

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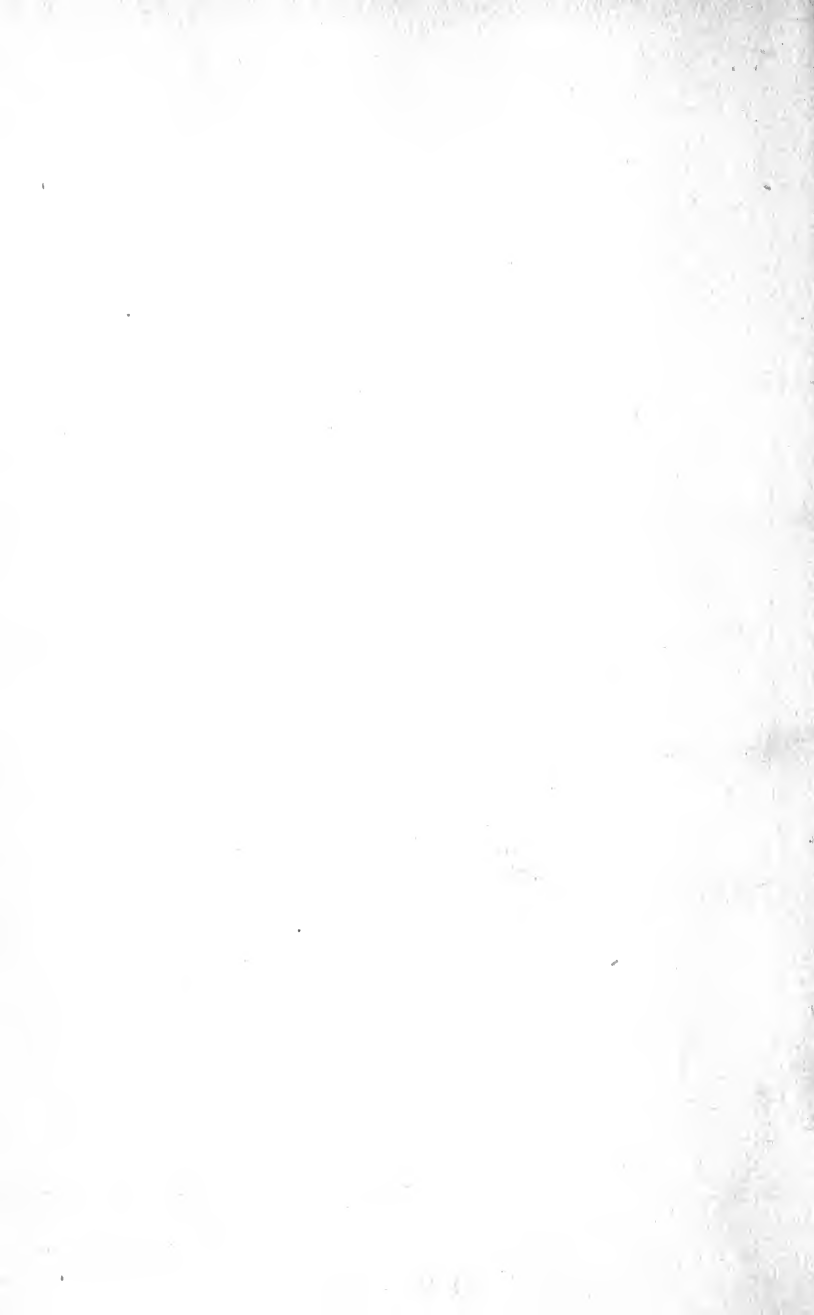
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# CHARLOTTE BRONTË

## THE WOMAN

### CHAPTER I

#### PREPARATION

CHARLOTTE BRONTË in one of her letters says that she wishes she had lived in the great times of the European War. In connection with this we may remember that the hero of her childhood was the victor of Waterloo. There seems therefore some element of fitness in making a study of her life at this time, when a war has broken out, the combatants in which are driven on by Titan forces, angels of darkness or of light such as Charlotte and Emily loved to image to themselves among their native moors. Charlotte was of a spirit to understand to the full that stubborn endurance in the trenches which has been the glory of our time; and not less the intensity, the exaltation of the hand-to-hand wrestle with death, whether in the air, or on the earth, or in the waters beneath. Careful students of the Brontë legend, and they are many, know well in her letters the oft-repeated note of waiting—that steadfast bearing through tedium, disappointment, narrowness of outlook, straitness of circumstance, multiplied small torment of anxieties, which is so seldom seen as the heroic life until it is all over, too late for praise to be its antidote, or for the

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consciousness of greatness to send a light through its gloom.

Here is an extract from a letter written to Ellen Nussey when Charlotte was in her last situation as governess. The Taylors had written to her from Brussels, and it is almost a premonition of what life awaited her there.

“I hardly know what swells to my throat as I read her (Mary Taylor’s) letter: such a vehement impatience of restraint and steady work; such a strong wish for wings, wings such as wealth can furnish; such an earnest thirst to see, to know, to learn; something internal seemed to expand bodily for a minute. I was tantalised by the consciousness of faculties unexercised—then all collapsed and I despaired. . . . These rebellious and absurd emotions were only momentary; I quelled them in five minutes. . . .

. . . “I begin to suspect I am writing to you in a strain which will make you think I am unhappy. This is far from being the case; on the contrary, I know my place is a favourable one, for a governess. What dismays and haunts me sometimes is a conviction that I have no natural knack for my vocation. If teaching only were requisite, it would be smooth and easy; but it is the living in other people’s houses—the estrangement from one’s real character—the adoption of a cold, rigid, apathetic exterior that is painful. . . .

“P.S.—I am well in health; don’t fancy I am not; but I have one aching feeling at my heart. (I must allude to it though I had resolved not to). It is about Anne; she has so much to endure, far far more than I ever had. When my thoughts turn to her they always see her as a patient, persecuted

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stranger. I know what concealed susceptibility is in her nature, when her feelings are wounded. I wish I could be with her to administer a little balm. She is more lonely, less gifted with the power of making friends even than I am. Drop the subject."

Many pages could not give the Charlotte of the pre-Brussels days as that letter gives her. Suffering, despondent, yet grappling with her moods and getting herself in hand in five minutes. Self-distrustful, full of a sense of duty, determined to do her best. A little harsh in phrase—generous and devoted towards her sisters, fearful lest sympathy should weaken her, yet unable to resist the hunger for self-expression. It is trench fighting in that conflict within the soul, and there is no discharge in that war.

This is the revelation of the letters; but in her novels we see the result of profound emotion upon this slowly disciplined character. The sullen heat that has intensified so slowly breaks out then into a fiery glow, which only the finest-tempered blade could bear. Liberty, the breath in Charlotte's nostrils through days of submission and waiting, incites her now in this new time to a freedom, in wide spaces, and to such untried paths as only strong spirits dare. In proof of this take any of the immortal passages in her books—the love scene with Rochester, for instance, when she declares her love after the nightingales had been singing, his own still unspoken; or this about friendship, in a later passage, when she is earning her bread as a village schoolmistress, under the protection of St. John Rivvers.

"Again the surprised expression crossed his face. He had not imagined that a woman would dare to speak so to a man. For me, I felt at home in this sort of discourse. I could never rest in communication

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with strong, discreet and refined minds, whether male or female, till I had passed the outworks of conventional reserve, and crossed the threshold of confidence, and won a place at their very hearth stone."

After the interminable hours of restricted opportunity, there came to Charlotte Brontë, as to the soldier in the trenches, the hour to dare and to do; and, using the pen for sword, she wrought her epic.

There is some fascination in working out a parallel between the struggles and difficulties of Charlotte's life, as seen on the spiritual plane, and that of Joan of Arc, who at the present day, in this hour of her nation's stress, has reached to the fulness of honour in the hearts of a grateful people.

The comparison is not perhaps as inept as it may at first appear. For the life of the peasant girl of Domrémy was not a more striking example of the triumph of personality over circumstance than was that of the daughter of the moorland parsonage. Time and surroundings differed by much, temperament perhaps by still more: for the Maid saw visions and walked with a pillar of fire by night, while Charlotte Brontë moved upwards on a road that demanded equally steadfast climbing, with a pillar of cloud to guide her through the unromantic day: yet the two women had much in common. Both felt themselves marked out for a peculiar vocation, the Maid in a sudden flash of vision, Charlotte gradually, as the sense of her own powers, and of her unlikeness to the ordinary folk around her grew upon her. Both had a certain austere courage, as far as possible removed from mere audacity. Both trusted to the innermost Guide, rejecting the safe counsel of public opinion. Both



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had their moments in which to taste man's honour and renown. Both knew the gloom of earth's deepest valley, the vale of humiliation and the land of the shadow of death. Both accomplished a deliverance which they did not live to see, the Maid for the land of France, Charlotte for the mass of women whom her brave life and strong thought inspired to nobility, while the force and justice of her ideas proved powerful solvents of the enslaving conventions of her time. The paradox of Charlotte Brontë's life lies in this: that it was essentially a dynamic life, while to her it appeared as almost insufferably narrow and lacking in outlet. James Hinton, a mystic thinker of our own day, has admirably expressed the secret of the decrees ruling Charlotte's fate which it was so hard for her to discover. To use Hinton's terms, the storing up of force is "nutrition," and the baffling of our aspirations, the postponement of our hopes are the nutrition upon which function, that is, the liberating of stored up force, depends. The redemption of the world comes through bearing and being, not by doing. It was owing to precisely those hindrances, those almost impenetrable clouds, those tyrannous cares and narrowing claims that Charlotte gained her power. By rousing all her will and energy to fight such obstacles, she did what others dreamed of doing, and left behind her a new road open for weaker spirits. For there is many a woman conscious of ability that might move the world to better things who lacks the stimulus of opposition, or the trained capacity for endurance; and so the ability remains potential, and its force is lost among domestic cares like a river among sands. Household duties, that recur with an unyielding claim, act like a brake upon her best energies. Trammled by narrowing circumstance and an empty purse, she is

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sorrowfully conscious that her mind has not the wings of its youth. The glory and the dream which for an instant, it may be, she caught sight of, have to be relinquished to the next generation. For herself endurance, resignation, useful work that keeps things going merely, and seems altogether undynamic, opportunities of a love that is possibly meagre and, after the first glow, almost certainly unromantic—such must be the compromise she effects with her aspiration. Life has bested her; she has gone under; she is one of the mass.

Charlotte Brontë unquestionably experienced in full measure this sense of a mind at issue with its environment, but she was lacking in that common submission which after a longer or a shorter struggle consents to be crushed. In her earliest novel, *The Professor*, she states this attitude of mind clearly. "I would have courage to live out every throe of anguish that Fate assigned me," her heroine says, "and principle to contend for justice and liberty to the last." An eloquent illustration of that plain text is afforded by the *Life* by Mrs. Gaskell, an epic of truth which equals even the intensity of Charlotte's novels, themselves also epics of truth, because under cover of fiction so uniquely autobiographical. Charlotte's circumstances were tough. Victory was not going to be easily wrested from them. The strong angels of love and death, of despondency, humiliation, ill-health, solitude, disappointment had all to be met, and faced. Some of these dogged her way to the last. Yet by force of personality she conquered her circumstances; and by so doing she became, according to an eternal law, one of the heroes and pioneers of the race.

It is probable that the interest felt for the Brontës is still far from having reached its height. So much

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intensity is not stored up for one short lifetime, but becomes a sort of powder magazine for the generations following. Many people are ignorant of the clear and courageous thinking done by Charlotte and her circle, and expressed by her in passages which are passed over at a first reading because of the absorption of the story ; but when the novels come to be more widely read and re-read we shall realise our great debt to Charlotte as the pioneer of the woman who lives with her mind as well as her heart, and who has grasped the necessity of learning to think. The duty of looking at life without blinkers, and of cultivating a mental honesty with as much enthusiasm as some other more popular virtues, will then come home to thousands of women whose lives move now nearer to slave levels. Charlotte Brontë affects us primarily as being herself free ; she did not set out consciously to be a liberator, though out of the fulness of her heart she wrote of freedom. She is one of the women whose acquaintance is infinitely worth making, and it is easy to make it in her own books, and in her letters. We see her in these as she actually was, with odd little early Victorian mannerisms, sometimes stiff in phrase, very often sententious, and yet so human with it all, so constantly expressing the very moods we suffer under, so valiantly sustaining the very attacks which under much milder conditions beat us down, that it seems the most natural thing in the world to be writing many books about her, some of them not very illuminating it may be, but all of them bearing witness in one way or another that here was one of the finer spirits of humanity. The lonely woman of the moorland parsonage, isolated from intellectual companionship, has many friends now. We think of her, with Emily and Anne, in a world outside time, enjoying again the stimulating com-

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panionship of her fiery, brusque, chivalrous-hearted "Master"; but we think of her also as a comrade among her comrades the women of to-day, who are mute where she could find utterance for her soul, but who nevertheless begin as never before to share the aspirations which animated her, and to live out on the wide levels where she stands.

Patrick Brontë had given to his children the heritage of a keen mind. Though poor, he retained the wholesome pride and self-respect of the educated man. From youth his children were free of good society—that of books. It is a characteristic of a fine mind to feel at home with great people even in the midst of entire self-abasement before them. Smaller minds shrink away from high company. They frankly prefer something more homely. Their associates must not expect too much of them, nor set standards which are hopelessly high. They say in effect: Life is a compromise. Let me read my romance comfortably in a novel which represents people as ordinary as myself receiving the devotion of rich and handsome husbands, or winning beautiful maidens, as the case may be; but in real life I will mix with people who, like myself, are more thankful for comfort than romance. When any one, who once had the fire of youth, descends to this level, calling it resignation, or the inexorability of circumstances, or what-not, the Cause of Humanity has once again been given away. The Brontë girls were not likely to join that self-excusing throng; it was left for poor Branwell to make occasionally the best of that worst of bad jobs, failure of spirit. The friends the girls made in the schoolroom out of books or newspapers were of an exalted order. Charlotte may be said to have achieved a certain intimacy with the Duke of

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Wellington. Similarly, the fact that she wrote to Southey, and felt so intense an admiration for Thackeray, implies that she had dwelt with their thought, understood what they were really at, to use a colloquialism, and was at heart aware that by these efforts to understand them she was herself worthy of their acquaintance.

The cost of keeping such company, and of cultivating the society of that elusive master in the house, one's own soul, was of course paid for by an almost complete isolation from ordinary people.

Charlotte and Emily and Anne could not have survived quite without friends, but their circle was small, and even Ellen Nussey, true and unfailing as she was, was hardly felt to be an intellectual companion. Charlotte in one of her later letters says that she finds her companionship at all times satisfactory, but owing to her character rather than her mind. With the ordinary folk at the neighbouring houses and with the poor there was very little intercourse. It was too difficult. In earlier years there undoubtedly was a certain repellent hardness in the Brontë sisters which contributed to their isolation. This sprang out of the sense of gifts which set them apart, and of higher standards and superior powers of mind. Later, perhaps from the time in Brussels when Charlotte found her place more accurately, this was lessened in her case. Then, too, they were shy and, one conjectures, decidedly stiff in their bearing when they thought their friends silly or vulgar. They were rather precise in phrase, at least Charlotte was, and Emily was most uncomfortably silent; their clothes were simple, and their neatness could not save them from the reproach of being dowdy; they were known to be poor. Every circumstance combined to isolate them, and to give them that training

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in the deserts which means either greatness or ruin. It was well for them that the necessities of life obliged their constant attention to household tasks, for the domesticities are very humanising when they are not allowed to be tyrannous over the mind. In Mrs. Gaskell's pages or in their own letters we see them with the old servant Tabby, stitching, cooking, or tidying up the house, preparing for a visit from Ellen Nussey, occupied with some ailment of "Papa." Charlotte would be often busily writing letters which are full of tiny details, because write she must, and there was so little "news" in their life. In these the great doings in the schoolroom at night when they "made out" together were not related.

The Brontës' existence on this actual earth as opposed to the thought world of which they were also free was, until the great move to Brussels, a sum of very small and prosaic things. The country, however, in which the scene was laid was never prosaic. Every one knows now the parsonage divided by its garden from the gloomy churchyard half paved with long flat tombstones, the solitary moors wind-kissed in summer, terrible with storm-blasts in winter, where grey stone mill houses and cottages stand by the water; and the heights where grey sheep roam among bilberry and heather and crags, and loose stone walls divide the high pastures, where tumbling becks come singing in the sunshine over the rocks to join the streams in the valley. It is a country where Nature at times seems stronger than man, and they are a rough and hardy race that pursue their business in these valleys.

It is not my purpose to go over again in detail ground which is well known to every casual Brontë student, but the main outline of Charlotte's life up to early womanhood may here be briefly summarised.

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Mrs. Brontë, a gentle and refined, but delicate woman, died the year following her husband's removal to Haworth as incumbent of the parish, leaving five little girls and one boy. Three years later the two elder girls, Maria and Elizabeth, left the care of their father and aunt for the harsh circumstances of the school for clergymen's daughters at Cowan Bridge. In the May and June of the following year both little girls succumbed to consumption, or speaking more accurately, to the ruthless grind of a machine upon sensitive spirits, coupled with a lack of proper nutriment and care which was admirably ordained for the elimination of the unfit. Charlotte and Emily went to the same school a little later in the year, 1824, in which the elder pair entered it. Charlotte, a child of stronger spirit and of stronger frame, has left us in the early pages of *Jane Eyre* an imperishable picture of the martyrdom of her sisters. She left the school when she was nine, so that we must not look in her descriptions for the sober judgment of an older observer. There must have been a shameful neglect of the children's real interests which the excellent head mistress was powerless to overcome, since it originated with the clergyman whom Charlotte gibbeted as Mr. Brocklehurst, the founder and patron; but of intentional unkindness, of course, there was none. There is indeed a tragedy in this desire for active benevolence in the unimaginative mind of a man who might better have left household details to those qualified by experience and motherly qualities to decide upon them. Perhaps his wife was not such an one. We may be thankful that the head mistress made light in a dark place for the suffering little girls.

After the fever which ended Charlotte's and Emily's stay at Cowan Bridge, came a period of happiness

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and intellectual activity at home, with their aunt, Miss Branwell, as teacher of lessons, Tabby as instructor of household arts, and with freedom of spirit in which to give play to mental activities unconnected with lessons. These years were perhaps in some ways the most fruitful of Charlotte's youth. In them the habit of writing stories was formed, and joy in the creative gift first tasted; in them love of home and of the moors around was planted deep. Ideas of duty and truth-telling and—more rare—*truth-thinking* in the sense of facing out conclusions wherever they might lead, were established. The rut was formed which should keep Charlotte and Emily from mingling too freely with their fellows, which would have caused a weakening of the power that had to force itself an outlet through art; and the deep convictions were imbibed which stood both women in good stead when they faced death and desolation—and in Charlotte's case the stress of passion, in years to come.

This period of training lasted for six years, and then came Charlotte's entrance to the school at Roe Head, which gave her as her best possession the friendship of Ellen Nussey, true and staunch until the earth had fallen upon Charlotte's grave. It is to her chiefly that we owe Mrs. Gaskell's biography, for it was she who was so anxious that justice should be done to the memory of her friend, and it was she who treasured by far the larger portion of the correspondence which has made our own generation the admiring intimates of the Haworth circle.

The Taylor sisters were also met and appreciated at this school, to which Charlotte returned as teacher in 1835. Miss Woolner's influence upon Charlotte during the period that she worked under this motherly and able woman should not be underestimated. She performed the great task of all



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school mistresses in imprinting upon the minds of her pupils an indelible picture of what a gentlewoman should be, beyond reproach in conduct, sensitive, kindly and just, keen in educational matters, but full of human interests, and ready to follow the fortunes of her children with interest, whatever their lot in after life. An important letter of Charlotte's breathes admirably the sane and wholesome spirit which Miss Woolner had encouraged in a pupil who already, as a child, had possessed considerable strength of character and a practical spirit of self-discipline. It was written after the experiences in Brussels, but breathes no word of them—those Charlotte kept to pour out to her secret page. Neither does it utter the sadness or despondency which sometimes reached the faithful Ellen's ear. She says: "I have already got to the point of considering that there is no more respectable character upon this earth than an unmarried woman who makes her own way through life quietly and perseveringly, without the support of husband or mother, who having attained the age of forty-five or upwards retains in her possession a well-regulated mind, a disposition to enjoy simple pleasures, fortitude to support inevitable pains, sympathy with the sufferings of others, and willingness to relieve wants as far as her means extend."

This letter, which reflects, we may be sure, Miss Woolner's own teaching, and by no means Charlotte's deepest experiences, was written when Charlotte was in her thirtieth year. It has the sententious ring of many of her utterances, but subdued by the strong common sense and vigour of mind which it breathes. We have to remember that the writer of it was considerably nearer the days of the Old Maid than we are now. There were not then, as there are to-day, a multitude of women who were enjoying the

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dignity due to lives lived in complete fulfilment of this programme ; but that there were even then a number of unmarried women, probably most of them of the governess class, who could claim the well-regulated mind as well as the sense of a useful, happy existence, though no husband had part or lot in it, is plain from the example of Miss Woolner herself. It is, I think, also clear that the fiery and artistic side of Charlotte's nature had been strongly repressed by the atmosphere of Miss Woolner's school. Genius requires other food. Passion stirs sometimes uneasily amid the well-regulated heart-beats of such excellent, though unimaginative, women. It was well that Charlotte should go out to see the world.

The letters about this time make as light-hearted reading as any that the sisters penned. Charlotte, of course, has her fits of despondency, her musings upon religion, sometimes in morbid vein, but there is a good deal of jesting about curates and suitors to lighten the troubles. Henry Nussey's proposal to her, which she had the good sense to reject, conscious of her developing intellectual powers, came in 1839. In the same year she went as governess to a family in Harrogate. The children were spoilt, the lady of the house was vulgar. Charlotte was neither happy nor well, and was thankful to get home again after a few months' stay. A proposal of marriage from an Irish curate followed, after an evening of gaiety, and upon the briefest of acquaintances. It was possibly not meant to be taken seriously, but Charlotte, who was never without the desire to please, nor without regret at her own plainness of feature, must have appreciated the compliment. In the meanwhile writing is going forward in the old schoolroom. A double life has developed. The sensible pupil of Miss Woolner, so keen to live an industrious and respectable life, here

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with her sisters is poet and feeling woman. This second and higher existence to which Charlotte returned after her governancing, had been going on for some years now. Charlotte's moving letter to Southey is dated 1837, but we learn from Mrs. Gaskell that the project of publishing a united volume of verse had been mooted a year earlier. Charlotte writes :

“ SIR,—I most earnestly entreat you to read and pass your judgment upon what I have sent you, because from the day of my birth to this, the nineteenth year of my life, I have lived among secluded hills, where I could neither know what I was or what I could do. I read for the same reason that I ate or drank, because it was a real craving of nature. I wrote on the same principle as I spoke, out of the impulses and feelings of the mind, nor could I help it, for what came out came out, and there was an end of it.”

Later in the letter she says that it is not poetry alone that she proposes, but “sensible and scientific prose, bold and vigorous efforts in my walk in life, would give a further title to the notice of the world . . . what I send you is the prefatory scene of a much longer subject in which I have striven to develop strong passions and weak principles struggling with a high imagination and acute feelings, until as youth hardens towards age, evil deeds and short enjoyments end in mental misery and bodily ruin. . . .” Charlotte's Victorian sense of what is respectable is here, of course, very strong. Branwell is possibly in mind, though the letters published by Mr. Shorter prove that she was on very friendly and confiding terms with him as late as her stay in Brussels, and his debased period had not yet set in ; but the letter is

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perhaps chiefly interesting for the impression of vigour it conveys which is so characteristic of Charlotte. Never was a woman less bound by the everyday duties, or the humdrum fetters of financial needs, or of indifferent health. Her whole heart, her whole will, is to *live*. She throws herself outwards. Strong passions appeal to her because she is half conscious herself of something untamed beating beneath the decorum of her manner, and the moral precepts which form a manner to her mind. Strong passions unsubdued and leading to ruin form her first theme. The story of a woman's heart emancipated from convention, while obeying its own law and true to its highest instincts, a woman whose will is to cross the stormy ocean to a new haven, rather than to lie for ever within the narrow horizons of port, is to be the prophetic picture which shall constitute her life's work, and be her gift to the women of the coming day.

Charlotte's second governess-ship, also uncongenial—she calls it “dreary solitary work”—took place in 1841. She returned home in July to look after Anne, whose health was causing anxiety, and the plan of keeping school at the parsonage, and so preserving the home life that all three sisters valued so intensely, was then eagerly discussed. Its result was Charlotte's determination to improve her qualifications by going abroad to finish her education. She was twenty-three years of age, and now of formed character, with her imagination quickened and developed by her literary work, but with her heart untouched, and as yet occupied in its innermost chambers by the dear figures of the home circle alone. As woman and genius she had yet to experience emotions and trials which should shake her to the heart's core, bring her face to face with her

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very soul, and put her in touch with the throbbing heart of humanity, until her love of "respectability" should be a far different thing from that which she had acquired passively from her environment. The word indeed, one suspects, she kept always for such friends as Miss Woolner. To her own soul, in which was growing a hatred of crystallised respectability which we call convention, she must have spoken of moral right and wrong, that inner law which God ordains, and man's heart embraces or rejects in a profound solitude where no other human being can intrude.

## CHAPTER II

### THE COMING OF LOVE

MUCH has been written, and will no doubt continue to be written, concerning Charlotte's relations with the Hégers in Brussels. The outward facts are simple, and are to be found both in the novels and the letters, though considerably worked up in the former for purposes of art ; but it is to *Villette* that we must chiefly look for the inner history of this time. In the earliest of her books, *The Professor*, Charlotte relates under the guise of fiction some of her own experiences in that strange foreign world, together with her vigorous insular condemnation of the religion and habits of her new associates ; we know by comparing the letters that this is so. But in *The Professor* Charlotte is still very reserved. Her experiences were still recent ; some of them she could hardly yet bear to recall. She had not fitted everything in together and pondered deeply upon the story of her heart ; therefore, although that book is extraordinarily interesting to a student of Charlotte Brontë, it is not nearly so revealing as the book which she wrote last, and which gives us in the form of a compelling story surely the most remarkable piece of autobiography that ever was written. Try as she might to alter and to conceal, there is no reasonable doubt that Lucy Snowe represents Charlotte Brontë, and M. Paul

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Emanuel M. Héger, while Madame is to the life the able manager of that well-conducted establishment, a past mistress in the art of espionage, usually most successful in the business of estimating and managing those with whom she had to deal. Charlotte, as was perhaps not surprising considering that she was a genius and therefore *sui generis*, upset the calculations of Madame Héger, and so, little by little, that lady's appreciation of the English girl turned to dislike. It is small wonder that when at last she came to read Charlotte's ruthless picture of herself, dislike seems to have been exchanged for actual hatred. Madame Héger that time had caught a fish altogether too large for her net.

Before setting out upon this adventure of life in a foreign educational establishment, Charlotte's mind had been much occupied with practical problems. The idea of a school at the parsonage originated with her, and the Brussels scheme, which was carried out when she was twenty-five, had its root entirely in the need to improve her qualifications before issuing a prospectus for this undertaking. But a study of the letters in Mrs. Gaskell's *Life* and in Mr. Clement Shorter's collection proves that during these years, as was natural at that age, Charlotte had been thinking a good deal upon the subject of love and marriage, and not only of love in its ordered, but also in its more irregular and passionate aspect. She had written to a friend in 1840 the following words upon the subject :

"I think if you can respect a person before marriage moderate love at least will come after ; and as to intense passion, I am convinced that that is no desirable feeling. In the first place, it seldom or never meets with a requital ; and in the second

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place, if it did, the feeling would be only temporary. . . . Certainly this would be the case on the man's side ; and on the woman's—God help her if she is left to love passionately and alone."

It is interesting to compare with this letter what Mr. A. C. Benson has to say of Charlotte in a singularly illuminating address delivered in Dewsbury in January, 1915, on the occasion of the twenty-first annual meeting of the Brontë Society. He said :

"Two writers of the nineteenth century, Robert Browning and Charlotte Brontë, did a very definite and wonderful thing. They above all others emphasised the true worth of human passion, the relation of man and woman ; but whereas many other writers presented this sort of passion as an emotion which, at supreme moments, could blaze up into a tremendous conflagration of experience and joy, Browning and Charlotte Brontë showed that it could be a permanent, continuous, dominating emotion which . . . could glow as purely and sacredly hour by hour and year by year as it did in its first fine rapture and abandonment."

If that is indeed true of Charlotte Brontë, as I think no one acquainted with *Jane Eyre* could doubt for an instant, then something of supreme importance must have happened to the sombre-minded young woman who in 1840 wrote the letter we have just quoted. At the same time we feel instinctively that there is more than a mere lack of natural optimism in these lines, there is an indistinct prevision of coming sorrow, a sorrow which has a peculiar pathos when it falls to the woman's lot—"God help her if she is left to love passionately and alone." Apart from



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that ending sentence, the paragraph almost irritates us by its air of finality. This clear-eyed and decisive girl of twenty-three is, we feel, unconsciously inviting Fate to put her to the test by making her a victim and not merely an observer of love. The opinion of men that the letter suggests is not high. The Browning romance has not yet made a glory in a public place among the commonplaces of marriage followed by a settling down and a growing indifference, which no doubt will be easily observed phenomena as long as the world lasts.

In a book recently published, *The Life and Letters of a Macaroni*, we have incidentally preserved for us an admirable story of two Yorkshire lovers who met as boy and girl not a great while before Charlotte's day, and loved each other romantically and without abatement until death. Charlotte's nature, which by no means inclined her to looking at the brighter side, would not allow her to be influenced by such cases as these in stating her generalisations. An exception herself in the circle of society to which she belongs, she is mournfully conscious that exceptions are rare to meet; and she forgot that important truth, that races and classes of men must always be judged by their best. There were many waters to pass through before the richness of her nature and the fairness and force of her judgment could have free play unhampered by prejudice, pessimism, or convention. In the meanwhile she was going to leave her native heath for the first time. She and Emily set out in the February of 1842 under the escort of their father for the Pension Héger in Brussels.

There is little doubt that there was in Charlotte's soul from very early days a capacity for contempt and a sense of superiority in which probably Emily joined; they seem to have made little attempt to

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break free from these prejudices. Arriving in this frame of mind, Charlotte, one feels, may have been unduly severe in her judgments upon her companions. As we read that unpleasant picture in *The Professor*, in which nothing is spared, neither the dulness of brain, the desire for flirtation, nor even the lack of sufficient washing which shocked her very British sense in some of her fellow-pupils, we feel that really there must have been something more to be said for one or two than she manages to say. It will be remembered that the good and hard-working girl of the collection is destined for the convent, and therefore, Charlotte says, has neither will nor judgment of her own.

All lovers of *Villette* are as familiar with the Parisian mistress and Madame herself, both cold and calculating, as with people they have themselves met. One person remained of the little society of school for Charlotte to study and to write about, this one a man.

That small, eagle-eyed, Spanish-faced professor, fiery to the point of absurdity, brilliantly clever, furiously alive, unrestingly interested in human character and development, and at heart tender and reverential and good—how brilliantly he holds the stage in which all other characters have been thrown into the shade for his benefit! Is he a member of that church which was in Charlotte's eyes so debased? It is no matter, he is excused. Does he know of Madame's espionage? Her pettiness serves but to reveal his greatness of soul, though indeed he had his own little tricks of opening desks and such-like. Amazing story, which can keep us for chapter after chapter breathless and absorbed in the doings and sayings of a little schoolmistress holding her own in a place made hard by petty tyranny, poverty, and difference of race and creed; and in an erratic, un-

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tidy professor, whose deep concern is in the doings of his girls! Strange destiny of Charlotte, thus finding the stimulus and guidance she had craved from a mind keen in analysis and capable of eager interest in literature; strange destiny, in writing themes and correcting exercises, to stumble head-long into one of the great passions of the age.

The first year passed off quietly. Charlotte and Emily kept together and mixed as little as possible with their companions. The Taylors and Wheelwrights were in Brussels, and the Brontë sisters received invitations and enjoyed their outings, though Emily's extreme shyness must have been a bar to much social intercourse for either of them. The death of Miss Branwell in October caused their sudden return home before the school year was finished; but upon the news that they could not return to Brussels as they had originally intended for a second year, M. Héger wrote to Mr. Brontë the charming letter of praise of his daughters, printed by Mrs. Gaskell, in which he declares that he looks upon them as members of his own family. This served to turn the balance in favour of Charlotte's return to enjoy the great advantage of further training, and the study of German which she thought necessary to her teaching scheme. Thus, after a happy Christmas at home, brightened by visits paid to, and from, Ellen Nussey, Charlotte's most vital year of life opened with the January of 1843. The return to Brussels began with an adventure well known to readers of *Villette* and the *Letters*. Charlotte was late arriving in London, and rather than seek out by herself the coffee-house where she had stayed with her father and Emily, she drove down alone in the dark to the dock, and after some difficulty succeeding in finding a boatman to convey

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herself and her luggage out over the dark waters to the packet, which she boarded to the surprise of the stewardess. The incident illustrates admirably both Charlotte's strong sense of convention at this time, and also her capacity for going through with things that were difficult or disagreeable. The experience made a vivid impression upon her, and she wrote of it more than once. The sight of St. Paul's looming above the houses, and of London seen in the grey of the morning from the boat, remained till the end of her life among the unfading pictures in her mind.

In the Rue d'Isabelle she was now on a different footing, being raised to the status of teacher with the munificent salary of £16 a year, out of which she had to pay for her German lessons. For part of the time M. Héger and his brother-in-law were her pupils in English, and thus she herself prepared him to read *Villette*. Point by point we find the experiences of this year returning to Charlotte's mind almost as vividly as when she lived through them, when she sits down to write her last story. Lucy Snowe's determination to manage the girls herself, in spite of her humble position, by sheer force of character without any assistance from the principal was undoubtedly the same as Charlotte's own. We know from her letters that the walks in l'Allée défendue during term time, and also the rambles during holidays in the city and far into the country, were Charlotte's way of easing the pains of solitude before they were her heroine's. The garden that plays so large a part in the love story was the green spot symbolising a fertile oasis in Charlotte's own arid life. The pert and lively *bonne* Rosine, the half-witted *crétin*, her sole companion during that terrible vacation—these and many other characters making

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excellent copy, she developed from life. One of the most thrilling incidents in *Villette*, Lucy Snowe's confession to a priest of the Roman Catholic Church, also had its original in Charlotte's own experiences in Brussels. Mr. Clement Shorter has given the letter in his collection of letters to which constant reference is made here, now published by Messrs. Dent in the Wayfarers' Library under the title of *The Brontës and their Circle*. Charlotte writes to Emily under date September 2, 1843:

“... I should inevitably fall into the gulf of low spirits if I stayed always by myself here without a human being to speak to, so I go out and traverse the Boulevards and streets of Bruxelles sometimes for hours together. Yesterday I went on a pilgrimage to the cemetery (readers of *The Professor* will remember the meeting of the two lovers there), and far beyond it on to a hill where there was nothing but fields as far as the horizon. When I came back it was evening, but I had such a repugnance to return to the house, which contained nothing that I cared for, I still kept threading the streets in the neighbourhood of the Rue d'Isabelle and avoiding it. I found myself opposite to Ste. Gudule, and the bell whose voice you know began to toll for evening Salut. I went in quite alone (which procedure you will say is not like me), wandered about the aisle where a few old women were saying their prayers till Vespers begun. I stayed till they were over. Still I could not leave the church or force myself to go home—to school, I mean. An odd whim came into my head. In a solitary part of the cathedral six or seven people still remained kneeling by the confessionals. In two confessionals I saw a priest. I felt as if I did not care what I did provided that it was not absolutely

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wrong, and that it served to vary my life and yield a moment's interest. I took a fancy to turn myself into a Catholic and go and make a real confession to see what it was like. Knowing me as you do you will think this odd, but when people are by themselves they have singular fancies. A penitent was occupied in confessing. . . . After I had watched two or three penitents go and return I approached at last and knelt down in a niche which was just vacated. I had to kneel there ten minutes waiting, for on the other side was another penitent invisible to me. At last that one went away, and a little wooden door inside the grating opened and I saw the priest leaning his ear towards me. I was obliged to begin, and yet I did not know a word of the formula with which they always commence their confessions. It was a funny position. I felt precisely as I did when alone on the Thames at midnight. I commenced with saying I was a foreigner and had been brought up a Protestant. The priest asked if I was a Protestant then. I somehow could not tell a lie, and said 'Yes.' He replied that in that case I could not '*jourir du bonheur de la confesse*'; but I was determined to confess, and at last he said he would allow me because it might be the first step towards returning to the true Church. I actually did confess—a true confession. When I had done he told me his address, and said that every morning I was to go to the Rue du Parc—to his house—and he would reason with me and try to convince me of the error and enormity of being a Protestant. I promised faithfully to go. Of course, however, the adventure stops there, and I hope I shall never see the priest again. . . ."

This letter is one of the most interesting that Charlotte ever wrote, for several reasons. First of

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all it admirably illustrates the fundamental strength and sanity of her mind. It was written in that terrible time during which the horrors of loneliness, of dread of the future, of ill health and inability to sleep, coupled with an agony of mind which she kept out of her letters, make any sensitive reader of *Villette* shiver with a lively sympathy. Here is a passage in which, with the greater freedom that distance in time and the veil of fiction gives, Charlotte looks back to those September days :

“ While wandering in solitude (for the *crétin* had now been fetched away) I would sometimes picture the present probable position of others of my acquaintance. There was Madame Beck at a cheerful watering place with her children, her mother (Charlotte no doubt inserted in her own mind ‘her husband’) and a whole troop of friends who had sought the same cheerful relaxation. Zélie St Pierre was at Paris with her relatives ; the other teachers were at their homes . . . I too felt those autumn suns and saw those harvest moons, and I almost wished to be covered in with earth and turf deep out of their sight and influence, for I could not live in their light, nor make them comrades, nor yield them affection. . . . By True Love was Ginevra followed ; never could she be alone. . . .”

There follows after this cry of a woman’s heart for love, the description of her fearful dream when in her state of nervous fever in the empty dormitory she dreams that the well-loved dead met her elsewhere with alienated looks. Then follows in the novel the account of the confession. Charlotte commits to her friendly paper some particulars under the protection of the fictitious Lucy Snowe which are omitted from

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the calm account she sent to her sister and dearest friend.

“I said I was perishing for a word of advice or an accent of comfort. I had been living for some weeks quite alone; I had been ill; I had a pressure of affliction on my mind of which it could hardly any longer endure the weight.”

“‘Was it a sin, a crime?’ he inquired, somewhat startled.

“I reassured him on this point, and as well as I could I showed him the mere outline of my experience.”

She repeats the very kind and thoughtful words of the priest that followed as to the impossibility of the world to satisfy natures such as hers; the reminder that after the bread and water of affliction which are their portion here recompense will come hereafter. He ends with the advice to her to join his church, and the assurance that he did not wish to lose sight of her, which Charlotte thought not too private to relate to Emily. She adds in *Villette* to her remark that she went near him no more, two lines which show how much sorrow had enriched her nature in later years, for they are noticeably lacking in her letter to Emily:

“He was kind when I needed kindness; he did me good. May Heaven bless him.”

I think that all thoughtful readers will agree that there is more in these passages than meets the eye. We recall Charlotte's vehement hatred of everything Catholic; her stringent criticism upon the effect of the confessional upon the character of her class mates. What then had happened that there should have



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awakened in her own heart that very impulse, old as man, to meet which the system of the private confessional arose ?

It was evidently something which she could not write of to Emily. Loneliness, dreadful as it is, was hardly sufficient to account for the mental agonies of that vacation so vividly described, or to have aroused the heartfelt emotion of that longing for love, when only the moon was near for companionship. What sort of a love was this that Charlotte so hungered for ? No hysterical person she, to write that calm letter, so apparently open, so careful in its self-concealment. And why did she suffer even in a dream the peculiar agony of thinking that her nearest and dearest turned from her in another world, having loved her so well in this ? What could they have learned in the clearer light of eternity that they would not guess at while here below ? Was there indeed some secret that Charlotte, the calm, proud, independent Charlotte, must at all costs pour into some human ear, like any weak deluded child of the church she despised ?

There is a letter to Ellen Nussey later, in which, referring to this second stay in Brussels, Charlotte says :

“ I went to Brussels after my aunt’s death against my conscience, prompted by what seemed then an irresistible impulse. I was punished for my selfish folly by a total withdrawal for more than two years of happiness and peace of mind.”

Ellen Nussey would doubtless read this as one of Charlotte’s fits of morbid self-reproach on the score of leaving her father and sister. She had not seen the letters to M. Héger written during those two years which caused so great a stir

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upon their publication in *The Times* in 1913. With the further facts before us, I take this to mean that on looking back Charlotte saw clearly the nature of the impulse which had drawn her back to the Rue d'Isabelle, but it is unlikely that at the time she was more than half aware of what was hidden in the depths of her heart. It was not all at once, more especially while Emily was still beside her, that she would feel how much the clear brain of the man who had discovered her to herself meant in her life; and then she had to learn further that his personality, his presence, were more even than the magic stimulus of his mind. It is only after the second return that jealousy seems to have entered Madame Héger's mind. Before that she had undoubtedly liked and admired Charlotte, and had added much pleasure to the English girl's lonely existence by her appreciation and kindness.

Yet what an extraordinary note of bitterness there is in all that Charlotte writes about Madame Héger. In *The Professor* she makes the woman who represents her employer not only underhand, but in a measure coldly sensual. Charlotte, I think, in her revolt from the evil attributed to her—whose temptations she had with such passion flung behind her back—believes that only out of an evil heart could such suspicions have become possible. The Madame Beck of *Villette* is also without a redeeming trait, unless a certain interested justice and kindness can be so called; but these qualities are made subordinate in that calculating character to the vice of insincerity which all readers loathe with Charlotte herself. It is astonishing how the two characters of Madame Beck and M. Paul Emanuel are contrasted. He too has his little tricks for finding out things, his un-English ways, but in him they are only lovable; and this too

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by her intensity and by her art Charlotte makes us feel with her. The unlovableness of the woman, the lovableness of the man, are revealed on almost every page.

Here, for instance, is her character of Madame, after a paragraph of laboured praise for her "good sense," her "sound opinions," her care for the physical well-being of the girls.

"Interest was the master key of Madame's nature, the mainspring of her motives, the alpha and omega of her life. I have seen her feelings appealed to, and I have smiled in half pity, half scorn at the appellants. None ever gained her ear through that channel or swayed her purpose by that means. On the contrary, to attempt to touch her heart was the surest way to arouse her antipathies, and to make of her a secret foe. It proved to her that she had no heart to be touched; it reminded her where she was impotent and dead. . . . In philanthropic schemes for the benefit of society at large she took a cheerful part; no private sorrow touched her. . . . Not the agony in Gethsemane, not the death on Calvary, could have wrung from her eyes one tear.

"I say again, Madame was a very great and a very capable woman. . . ."

Assuredly Charlotte Brontë strove to be just to the living woman she had before her mind as she wrote these pages; but is there anywhere in literature an exposure of one woman by another so direct, so balanced, so crushing as this? Consciously or unconsciously the little English governess revenged herself to the full upon the estimable presiding genius of the Pension Héger, who had first taken her up, and then smeared her very soul with dirty fingers with the meanness of

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suspicious Charlotte could not have formed, to herself, and with the soil of half lies.

But M. Paul Emanuel—there was if anything an excess of heart about him. He was always having to conceal and control (and so deliciously ineffectual he is about it!); his absurd delight in kindness, his interest in the souls and in the material circumstances of his girls. This interest is sometimes curiosity—and yet, no; one protests it never is, since it springs so plainly from that well of good-will which made him the secret benefactor of an ugly and ungrateful old woman, the faithful lover of the dead who had been far below his ideal of her. Here is one of the earlier pictures of M. Paul.

“No sooner was the play over, and well over, than the choleric and arbitrary M. Paul underwent a metamorphosis. His hour of managerial responsibility past, he at once laid aside his magisterial austerity; in a moment he stood among us, vivacious, kind, and social, shook hands with us all round, thanked us separately, and announced his determination that each of us should in turn be his partner in the coming ball.”

And then we see him with sufficient force of character (had M. Héger that?—in view of later events it seems doubtful) to overpower even the wishes of Madame herself. “He, this school autocrat, gathered all and sundry reins into the hollow of his one hand; he irefully rejected every colleague; he would not have help. Madame herself, who evidently rather wished to undertake the examination in geography—her favourite study which she taught well—was forced to succumb.”

He has another virtue besides forcefulness, which

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appeals to those of us who love Lucy Snowe (or Charlotte Brontë) almost as much as it did to herself—he discovers what is hidden beneath that subdued exterior by his own intuition. When others “think that a pale, colourless shadow has gone by” he has become aware that fire has shot into her glance, “not mere light, but flame.” And M. Héger deserves all praise for his perceptiveness if indeed he too discovered the capacity in Charlotte for spiritual passion—flame. If he did—and to the writer at least M. Héger, the passive recipient of some of the most moving letters ever penned, remains an enigma—but if he did, then it was through profound affinities, and those differences that best bring understanding and make perfect unions possible,

For you must love her ere to you  
She will seem worthy of your love,

was most certainly true of the little English governess in the Rue Isabelle.

Here is another scene which is so lifelike that in view of the close correspondence Charlotte's letters prove to so many incidents in the novel, it is hard not to take it as a transcript from life :

“It was time to soothe him a little if possible (the girls had not been speaking clearly, and M. Paul, angry, declared that it was all Lucy Snowe's fault).

“‘Mais, Monsieur,’ said I, ‘I would not insult you for the world. I remember too well that you once said we should be friends.’

“I did not intend my voice to falter, but it did—more I think through the agitation of late delight than in any spasm of present fear.”

The passage is too long to quote in full. One

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feels in reading it how often Charlotte herself had longed for a word more than was spoken—longed naturally and innocently for the little more that means so much. In this case Lucy wept, and M. Paul produced a handkerchief. That was all. But later, when in the warmth of heart induced by receiving a letter from Dr. John, she makes a ball of the handkerchief, “the game was stopped by another hand than mine—a hand emerging from a paletot sleeve and stretched over my shoulder. It caught the extemporised plaything and bore it away with these sullen words, ‘Je vois bien que vous vous moquez de moi, et de mes effects’” (how Charlotte, to the end, loved French phrases, and loved to recall the very words her “Master” had used).

“Really that little man was dreadful.” But jealousy is akin to love, or rather a morbid symptom of it. Did he not feel just something of the for ever unsayable? Did he not?

Here is a last extract. It is from the summer excursion which celebrated M. Paul’s birthday in May, a day hot as June. The party had gone out into the country to breakfast.

“With what a pleasant countenance he stood on the farm kitchen hearth looking on! He was a man whom it made happy to see others happy. He liked to have movement, animation, abundance, enjoyment, around him. . . . At the worst it was only his nerves that were irritable, not his temper that was radically bad. Soothe, comprehend, comfort him, and he was a lamb; he would not harm a fly. Only to the very stupid, perverse, unsympathising, was he in the slightest degree dangerous.”

There is Charlotte, always clear-minded, always in

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command of her analytical powers; but if this passage is contrasted with the one about Madame the world of difference of outlook will be at once apparent. Here the very weaknesses are referred to almost caressingly. They were lovable in her eyes. So thoroughly did she know the man of whom she wrote, and the way to soothe him, that her trust rings as to the impossibility of a misunderstanding between them. *Villette* was written long after Charlotte was in Brussels. If she was, as she certainly was, angry and sore at first, yet by this time she had utterly and fully excused and forgiven.

“Mindful always of his religion, he made the youngest of the party say a little prayer before we began breakfast, crossing himself as devoutly as a woman. I had never seen him pray before, or make that pious sign. He did it so simply, with such childlike faith I could not help smiling pleurably as I watched. His eyes met my smile. He just stretched out his kind hand, saying, ‘*Donnez-moi la main!* I see we worship the same God in the same spirit though by different rites.’

“Most of M. Emanuel’s brother professors were emancipated free-thinkers, infidels, atheists, and many of them men whose lives would not bear scrutiny. He was more like a knight of old—religious in his way, and of spotless fame. Innocent childhood, beautiful youth, were safe at his side. He had vivid passions, keen feelings, but his pure honour and his artless piety were the strong charm that kept the lions couchant.”

—A wonderful passage, in which Charlotte uttered the very heart of her admiration. We feel as we read that he fulfilled all her high ideals of what

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a man should be. He was the perfect knight that every woman knows of in her heart, but he combined with that the unique charm of the individual destined to be perfectly understood by one alone. We feel as we read that it is some French saint that is being described, having the attractive sensibility of his race added to his virtue. How, in view of this passage, Miss May Sinclair can believe that M. Héger gave his wife any real ground for jealousy, even if slight, it is difficult for me to see. For if ever Charlotte drew from the life, and we know past any dispute that she constantly did so, she seems here to be dwelling upon a well-loved character, recalling the highest human influence, Emily not excluded, that her life had known.

Mrs. Gaskell found Charlotte "gentle," but she did not like Emily. The portrait in the Brontë Museum at Haworth, supposed to be a variant of the Richmond one, shows Charlotte gentle, with a certain appealing charm. Whatever she was, the Miss Brontë who first crossed the sea to the Pension Héger, and who described in *The Professor* her fellow-students with pen dipped in scorn, was not gentle. The Protestant Englishwoman seeing only ill in an alien church was not gentle. But the friend of M. Paul Emanuel, who understood so perfectly how to soothe and comfort him, has suffered a sea change already at heart, and its results are seen in such a passage as this, written long after, when death and sorrow had wrought their fruitful work; until at last that charming Charlotte who was not just, merely, but generous, self-forgetful, passionately loyal where one man was concerned, came to have this quality of gentleness as a characteristic visible to all.

Was Charlotte true to the promise of Lucy Snowe,



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in answer to that sudden announcement of the coming separation?

“‘Petite sœur,’ said he, ‘how long could you remember me if we were separated?’

“‘That, Monsieur, I can never tell, because I do not know how long it will be before I shall cease to remember everything earthly.’”

*Villette* is the proof of how Charlotte kept her promise. Whatever of love and devotion her marriage to Mr. Nicoll's represented, it did not represent a dimming of that bright image of the Master of her youth, that is plain. Did the Professor remember? It would seem that he forgot. But then he kept those letters. And in any case I do not believe that Charlotte ever heard him say just those wistful tender words, nor call her “petite sœur.” And yet—I hope she did.

An interesting point to notice is the way in which M. Paul is forced into the part of hero of *Villette* against Charlotte's deliberate intention, which was to make Mr. Smith the hero under the guise of Dr. John. Truth was part of Charlotte's very nature. She could not make a heroine who, with whatever surface differences, represented herself, absorbed in Dr. John, while the one unforgettable figure was painted in as a minor personage. It could not be. And so the story follows the path of real life. The interest at first centres in the strange life, in Madame and her astounding espionage, in Ginevra and her shallow disappointing character, in the mistresses, in Dr. John, and other outside friends. And then presently, one hardly knows how, just as no doubt Charlotte hardly knew how, the book has a new source of vitality; the preparatory part is over, the real hero has appeared, from henceforward until the end to hold the stage. Gradually the friendship

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between the oddly assorted pair deepens. The man's warm true heart wins trust, while his oddities capture her attention, and his intellectual gifts charm and stimulate the splendid powers of the heroine's own mind.

We see Madame grow more watchful, interfering with more than one pleasant *tête-à-tête*, insisting more and more upon the differences of religion which separate the English girl from themselves; and so at last we come to the utter withdrawal of companionship, with the opening of that unspeakable vacation, and to Charlotte's realisation of the truth. Of what truth? Surely of this—that no man could ever again give her so perfect a sense of companionship, of mutual understanding, as M. Héger had done. That whatever might be her future, no other man could waken her soul and her heart, for that is done once in a lifetime, and it had fallen to the husband of Madame Héger to do it. It is a truth of utmost importance, short only of the awakening to a knowledge of God, in every individual human life. For all of us, parent, friend, or lover plays the part of supreme human influence, yet less as the loving than as the loved. It was an innocent awakening in Charlotte, a discovery pure in proportion to the purity of the heart that made it, and yet it was something, Charlotte seems to have felt, that Emily might not understand, might even shrink from, for Emily had never loved like this. And he was more to her even than Emily—the letters to Brussels written after her home-coming make that plain; and that Emily must never know. As early as April Charlotte had written to her sister, in answer to some remark of hers:

“So the future *époux* of Mdlle. Brontë is on the Continent. These people are wiser than I am.

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They could not believe that I have crossed the sea merely to return as teacher to M. Héger's! I must forsooth have some remote hope of entrapping a husband somehow or somewhere. If these charitable people knew the total seclusion of the life I lead, and that I never exchange a word with any other man than M. Héger, and seldom indeed with him, they would perhaps cease to suppose any such chimerical and groundless motive had influenced my proceedings."

It is possible that Emily wondered why, if Charlotte had really no thoughts beyond her studies, she should have been so bitter about it all; but with the key in our hands we need not wonder. Charlotte had not then faced her own heart, but she was aware already of something of which she must let no hint escape even to Emily. How carefully she writes. What an absence of that note of intensity and passion which makes of the novel in which she let herself go, so wonderful a human document. Charlotte was on dangerous ground, and as we should expect, she walked warily. But the slow months saw her under the flail of the strongest of the powers that rule in human life, and the confession in Ste. Gudule marks the high-water mark alike of struggle and self-realisation.

The sense of being unattractive, and of being, as it were, missed—her qualities undiscovered because of her plainness, which Charlotte several times indirectly expresses—give way after this time to a nobler, sweeter outlook upon the world. Into her starved and barren life there has come one fitted both by affinities and by opposites to satisfy her need of love, though divided from her by the strongest bar which exists on earth. Charlotte's

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education during the first year at the Pensionnat Héger, and the consequent development of her full womanhood, had brought her to the point when she was ready to give herself to that love she had generalised about, but whose power upon herself had been as yet untried. When she arrived in Brussels her heart beneath its rigid and possibly frigid manner was warm, but it was empty. The passionate side of her nature after Emily left, away from the religious influences of home, and the curb of staid friends such as Miss Woolner, inevitably stirred her now to a sense of the possibilities which life holds for those who can love to the uttermost. To such an awakening, fraught with danger even to a more shallow nature, and doubly so to one of Charlotte's intensity, was added the trial of long hours of solitary brooding after the constant intercourse with a mind that keenly appreciated the unusual quality of her own, and with a heart full of natural goodness expressed by a manner increasingly full of kindness to herself. M. Héger's mind was undoubtedly of a brilliant order, clear and eminently stimulating. His personality was refreshing and unusual. His character, if we are to apply to him all that Charlotte says of M. Paul Emanuel, was full of delicate traits of generosity and a chivalrous goodness. His faults were surface ones, and were just those which in any other Charlotte would have despised. She in her primness needed contact with such a vehement irritable nature. In her tendency to self-righteousness, she needed the touch of passion to save her from becoming a clear-sighted but acid old maid. She must love, if her gifts of mind and character were to become available for the help of her fellow-creatures ; nay more, we might almost say that she must sin, or at the least stand upon the brink

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of sinning ; she must realise, appalled, that the strong, well-ordered soul of Charlotte Brontë belonged indeed to our common humanity, and could be driven near the edge of a precipice to which many of those she despised would not even be tempted to approach, before she could hope to be a guide and a pioneer towards true freedom of spirit for the yet unborn. In the account she has herself given of that hour of spiritual stress, we watch with awe and emotion Charlotte the woman undergo as best she might, with only the help of her God, the agony of realising a love that could never be fulfilled on earth. If Charlotte had not possessed a secret which she hardly dared breathe to herself, much less to her friends, she might have occupied her mind during those dreary summer days with study, or by writing poetry or prose ; some few verses she did write, if those given in *The Professor* belong, as seems natural to suppose, to the period in her own life to which the story corresponds ; but Love is jealous, and not even Art may dispute its dominion when the day of its triumph has dawned.

Charlotte's soul was cast into the furnace, seven times heated for one destined to greatness. In a world far more easily outraged in its moral sense than is our own, she could not expect even those who loved her best to believe that, though love may, and must have its way in the heart, yet that a righteous will and the instinct of prayer may carry its possessor safe through the reign of terror and of ecstasy. It is idle to speculate upon what would have happened had the tragedy been complicated by any disposition to infidelity upon the part of M. Héger. The simplest reading of the matter is that he liked and esteemed Charlotte, but did not experience any warmer emotion. When her letters from home betrayed her, he took the most sensible if not the

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most generous course, and deliberately starved a passion which must be convinced of its hopelessness. It is no doubt in regard to his letters that Charlotte writes so bitterly, when she says in *Villette* that the letters Lucy received from Dr. John were so eagerly read and seemed such treasures at first; but after, when silence grew so long and so cruel and she re-read her treasures, it was to find only kindness in them where she at first read a real affection. Yet brotherly affection, had she received it, would have satisfied Charlotte's heart as little as the apparent forgetfulness of her Master. Lucy Snowe, in *Villette*, observes that she would not mind M. Paul Emanuel calling her his sister, so long as he did not ask her to be a sister also to his wife. Mr. Shorter very rightly observes that there are many kinds of love; but the love of a man for a woman and of a woman for a man is a thing apart. It cannot be mistaken for something quite different from itself; and these words of Charlotte's just quoted contain the note of that love which can take nothing less than complete possession if it is to be satisfied. It gives all for all. In Charlotte's case it was given where her higher nature forbade her to wish, much less to act so as to attract, a response. It had to be first felt to the very heart's core, and then wrestled with with tears of blood, and finally subdued.

In all this, Charlotte's native sense of right and the strict atmosphere in which she had been brought up served as armour. Pride also, and the sense of the hopelessness of any return came to her aid. No one who reads *Villette* with attention can fail to see that throughout there is a sense of aloofness. The force that rules the destinies of mankind draws two parallel lines nearer, but they never even seem to meet. It was impossible for Charlotte to make

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M. Paul Emanuel marry Lucy Snowe, for there was no happy ending to that story. The love-making of *The Professor*, similarly, seems in its warmest moments to have about it an air of detachment. Charlotte simply cannot forget that this part of her story is untrue. As we get near to what should be the *dénouement*, the sense of impassable obstacles, of oppression and sorrow and heart-break, deepens. It is just this atmosphere of passion restrained, of the heart's desire refused in secret for no lower motive than the sake of right, that gives to the tale the sense of a clean, re-invigorating moorland air sweeping through places where the cobwebs of petty intrigue and material-minded and shallow attachments have prevailed.

Breathless we watch Charlotte's love deepened and purified, until at last she can write in her novel of that farewell interview which we know from her letters cost her a pain she felt her friends could not understand. "I loved him well—too well not to smite out of his path even jealousy herself when she would have obstructed a kind farewell." Charlotte had lived and had loved—readers of *Villette* will remember that the quotation occurs. She had been in a place of darkness and in the deep, and using the very words of the psalms, she had trusted to God that He would deliver her. Her self-righteousness had been burnt out of her; her respectability was laid aside. She knew herself of kin to the other women; she knew that but for the grace of God she might have been as frail as they. But in the furnace of temptation and fiery loss she learnt that love is in its nature eternal, selfless, pure; and henceforth all her life goes to a nobler music. To endeavour out of loyalty to Charlotte to say that she never felt any real love for M. Héger at all, but only guessed at it

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by her artist intuitions, is to wish for Joan of Arc that she had never entered the battle. The measure of this woman's passion, suffering, and ultimate victory is to be found in the life that lay ahead, with its terrible tests, and in those three great books in which at length she poured out her soul. The reality of her passion stands revealed in the higher levels to which she attained after this Brussels experience which changed her from girl to woman; but it is also written for us in letters from a lonely parsonage before whose heart-hunger the most indifferent and careless must stand touched and awed.

"Otherwise I should write a book, and I should dedicate it to my literature master—to the only master I ever had, to you. . . .

"I have not begged you to write to me soon as I fear to importune you—but you are too kind to forget that I wish it all the same—yes, I wish it greatly. Enough; after all, do as you wish, Monsieur. If then I received a letter, and I thought you had written it out of pity, I should feel deeply wounded. . . .

"Day and night I find neither rest nor peace. If I sleep I am disturbed by tormenting dreams in which I see you always severe, always grave, always incensed against me.

"Forgive me, Monsieur, if I adopt the course of writing to you again. How can I endure life if I make no effort to ease its sufferings? I know that you will be irritated when you read this letter. You will say once more that I am hysterical—that I have black thoughts, etc. So be it, Monsieur; I do not seek to justify myself. I submit to every sort of reproach. All I know is that I cannot, that I will not resign myself to lose wholly the friendship of my Master. I would rather suffer the greatest physical pain than



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always have my heart lacerated by smarting regrets. If my Master withdraws his friendship from me entirely I shall be altogether without hope ; if he gives me a little—just a little—I shall be satisfied, happy ; I shall have a reason for living on, for working. Monsieur, the poor have not need of much to sustain them—they ask only for the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table. But if they are refused the crumbs they die of hunger. Nor do I either need much affection from those I love. I should not know what to do with a friendship entire and complete—I am not used to it. But you showed me of yore a little interest when I was your pupil in Brussels, and I hold on to the maintenance of that little interest—I hold on to it as I would hold on to life.”

And again, in the famous postscript in English to the next letter :

“ Truly I find it difficult to be cheerful so long as I think I shall never see you more. . . .

“ I have never heard French spoken but once since I left Brussels—and then it sounded like music in my ears—every word was most precious to me because it reminded me of you ; I love French for your sake with all my heart and soul.

“ Farewell, my dear Master ; may God protect you with special care and crown you with peculiar blessings.”

That Charlotte was sensitive as to what might be said by anyone (Madame, for instance) reading this letter, other than the person to whom it is addressed is abundantly clear, not only from what we know of her, but from the sentence above in which she speaks of some people—“cold and common sense, reading it and saying ‘she is talking nonsense.’” This makes the

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more remarkable what she did say—words welling up from the heart which could and would find some way out, just as water, though carefully repressed, will find a way out if it is anyhow possible. When we remember, along with these wonderful letters, that the term ‘my dear Master’ is the tenderest her heroines can use to their lovers, both in *The Professor* and in *Jane Eyre*; that two of her books were laid as to scene at the Pensionnat Héger, with a difference of nationalities in the lovers; that in *Shirley*, where the scene is wholly Yorkshire, the young men are half French; and that in *Jane Eyre*, Rochester has been much in Paris, we may see, I think, how inevitable it seemed to Charlotte Brontë, in the earlier part of her life at all events, that a great passion, that is to say her own great passion (for no novelist can so far escape from his or her own personality) required that there should be French blood on one side; and we need not shirk the conclusion that in the fiery little Professor, husband of Madame Héger, who first opened her cramped mind and revealed her truly to herself, the lonely Englishwoman, strong alike in principle and in genius, recognised her mate. There is a single passage in which Charlotte seems to speak as though she could feel that the future life must bring to true lovers what this life often forbids. In that thought, let us trust, she found her comfort. For her, as for the poet Christina Rossetti, also unhappy in love,

Much may be to suffer, much to do  
Before this life be past,

but Charlotte gradually won to serenity over her tragedy not only of unfulfilled but of unrequited love. Passion is no crime. The crime begins when passion takes the reins and drives on, careless of the hurt

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involved to innocent sufferers bound up in the same bundle of life with the lovers. All things can be explained except a proud and a pure heart, and that too, Charlotte was to prove, can be revealed by genius in its own time and in its own way. But to the circle around the sufferer the bare word must be its own justification, the character long known and tried its own sufficient testimony. "I love," Charlotte cried in effect from her lonely home to the man across the sea, with whose image she dwelt in a secret world of the heart ; but to none other, not even to Emily, we think, did she risk the misunderstanding and pain that the relief to herself of speaking that word might give. She was content to tell the world in her books, and to go from dark to dark, out to the light that lies beyond the grave at last, in silence and in hope.

## CHAPTER III

### LONELINESS AND FAME

THERE are multitudes of people who go through life without any sort of understanding of what loneliness means. Sometimes they confuse it with solitude, for which in a full and busy life they long, and they wonder how any can complain of so great a boon. But while solitude is an essential to all natures that would come to full development, loneliness is, or seems to those who really experience its pangs, a kind of sentient death, the more agonising and horrible because it is not the body, but the soul, the heart, the finer powers of the mind that seem to be withering and decaying from a lack of all the vital elements. Someone has pointed out that solitude either makes great, or destroys. Even this is not quite true of loneliness, for there are victims who suffer it without apparently entering into the fruits of their suffering, hungry folk who do seem slowly to perish for want of companionship, as their bodies might perish for want of bread. It is such cases, whether they really are or only seem to be, that lend point to the terror in the sufferer's own mind. Shall I at last become even as they? Out of this wilderness with no water there is one way of escape, and one alone, upwards towards that Omnipresent Spirit Who dwells in the clear air and in the hearts of men.

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The two elder of the Brontë sisters, and perhaps Anne when away from home, knew much of the horrors of loneliness, even before Charlotte was left to be tested almost beyond human endurance, after the grave had closed upon the last beloved sister ; but from the beginning Charlotte experienced it the most acutely. Emily perhaps never felt it when she was at Haworth. She lived with Anne in a world peopled with all sorts of romantic and secret beings. And as she grew older she found and rested in that all-satisfying Presence into which she was gathered up upon the lonely moor. Up there, among the living things whom she passionately loved, nesting birds, or birds soaring high above her, creeping things, the bilberry and the heather, and the stream that trickled among its roots to slide out into the open among the grey crags in the gorge—she did not lack sympathy and high intercourse, she did not hunger for limited human minds. Enough for her that at home there were some to love. Up here where time was not, the Absolute above and around, and Mother Earth beneath her were all-sufficing.

It is one of the strangest touches in Miss Sinclair's brilliant book on the Brontë sisters that she seems always to be trying to make of Charlotte a sort of lesser Emily. It is difficult indeed to agree to this conception. It is not to dispute Emily's greatness, nor to miss the attraction of her virgin inaccessible heart, to say that she lacked humanity. If the greatest of these is love, then Charlotte's reaching out from her reserve and her prejudices and disappointments in her neighbours, towards her kind, shows a richer nature even than Emily's sure touch upon reality, her intuitive perception of the Infinite. At the present moment it is the fashion to place Emily above her sister, but the fame of the author of *Wuthering*

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*Heights* must always rest upon other grounds than that of Charlotte. Truth and sincerity Charlotte had as few other writers. These are not qualities we should especially distinguish in Emily, perhaps because only she could tell how true to the wild moors her drawing was. But there is in Charlotte's work evidence of a gentle heart, and in the end the higher revelation of the Divine is to be found in the eye that pierces to the soul of goodness in things evil and observingly distils it out; and that lovingly dwells upon what is pure and lovely and of good report. Charlotte's nature was the richest in its humanity. She had developed a sort of motherhood towards the younger sisters, but before that, she had experienced the passionate desire to champion the weak and the good oppressed by wicked men, as typified by her sister Maria, whose sufferings she related in *Jane Eyre*. And so it came about that as she had more need of her fellows, she suffered more than the others in the isolation of Haworth, and from the vulgarity and meanness of mind of some of their few neighbours. Ellen Nussey and the Taylors were especially Charlotte's friends. Emily had Charlotte, Anne, the animals and the moors. She wanted no other, and could not expand when other possibilities opened. Brussels, which to Charlotte spelled living in a new sense, meant pining like a caged bird to Emily. Certainly Charlotte was no lesser Emily, but a temperament differing widely, and differing most in this, that it had in it a wider though certainly not a more intense capacity for love. It is wonderful, it is terrible to see Emily dying before the eyes of the devoted sister, and refusing from that loving hand the simplest services, the smallest easing; but it is more terrible even than wonderful that in face of death Emily should not have experienced the desire

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to know "what peace there is in giving," what graciousness there may be in receiving from another whose heart aches to bless. But Charlotte was from the beginning fundamentally different. She poured out her love upon her father, and it was to her he always looked; upon her friends, whom she suffers to say all kinds of things to her, to give her advice even upon matters of the soul, where one simply cannot conceive that Emily would ever have tolerated the very faintest intrusion. She is humble to morbidity upon the state of her inner life. Above all, she early developed that trust in a Personal God which Anne shared with her, as apart from the calm reliance upon the Absolute of Emily, which to Miss Sinclair's eyes makes her strong and admirable where Charlotte and Anne, with their more definitely Christian tone, are merely weak and ordinary. It is all a question, no doubt, of the point of view. Certainly Charlotte had this humility which belongs to the Christian ethic, and it brings her nearer to ordinary folk. Moreover, as a plain fact, it served her better, for it held her up through black hours when the bitterness of death itself was outpassed. In that letter which is surely one of the finest pieces of literature in the language, written on the day that Emily died, after a moment in which bitterness and despair seem to hover by her pen, Charlotte writes: "She died in a time of promise. We saw her taken from life at its prime." Then she goes on, not in the outburst we almost seem to expect, questioning whether there be a good God or no:

"It is God's will, and the place where she is gone is better than that she has left. God has sustained me, in a way that I marvel at, through such agony as I had not conceived . . . Try to come. I never so much needed the consolation of a friend's presence."

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This appeal was to that most faithful friend, who was afterwards to stand beside her while Anne slipped away out of life. If Charlotte's Christianity had a Calvinistic touch, it was yet that only type which is recognised as the real thing by all men of good will. In spite of herself she had been forced to acknowledge that a "verrai parfait gentil knight" could come out of the despised Roman Church; and I think from the time of her great unhappy love, and of the removal of Emily's strong influence which tended to separation and perhaps to a certain attitude of scorn which they seem to have shared in early years, Charlotte moves on rapidly in that Way in which loving the brother is set before even the conscientious performance of duty, or the acceptance of suffering, which had played so large a part in the more disciplinary period of her life.

"As ever in my great Taskmaster's eye" was indeed as much the motto of the daughter of the Yorkshire parsonage as it was of the great Puritan; and at the end an outcast girl wept passionately for a friend and sister removed, and a blind girl begged to be led across the moor to hear spoken over Charlotte the promise of the resurrection from the dead. It is the miracle of the change of attitude as between the hard, clear-cut, contemptuous judgments, and the lyric passage quoted in the last chapter about the man she loved. Faith Charlotte had from the beginning, and love; but the love was quickened a thousand-fold and the faith intensified by an experience which made her know all men of kin. The kind wife of good Mr. Nicolls might have helped an erring girl, but we may feel that the woman who had once knelt in her despair at the confessional of an alien church had kept a secret of touch upon the sacred, shrinking human soul which belonged not



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to Mrs. Nicolls, and which had in it the very spirit of Him Who said to a woman—"Her sins which are many are forgiven her, for she loved much."

Charlotte had gone to Brussels with the lines of her character already formed. She was a girl disciplined, generous, upright; but also, as we have seen, narrow in vision, crude in judgment, and virgin in heart. She returned a woman upon whose soul and imagination there had been played such music as only one power can evoke in human life. The blossoms that open on the moors have a sweetness and vigour all their own; and Charlotte's heart-cries have this very sweetness and vigour in them. Her love's wild splendour, clear from first to last, belongs to the solitudes, set amid such storm-wrack as is known upon the moors, with death and sorrow and pain and glory, surrounded by the great silences, and winning out of them healing, energy, fruition, and at the last peace.

She had struggled as only the strong know how; she had renounced as only the pure can. Was she then to have nothing? Not even those crumbs claimed and awarded in the Gospel story? Her very sense of justice seems to cry out in these letters to M. Héger during the year after her return. Surely she may have what she may. The end cannot be utter loss. Friendship—yes, friendship may be retained across the dividing sea. "Why cannot I have just as much friendship for you as you for me, neither more nor less?" she wrote to him. Charlotte is still inexperienced enough to suppose that Madame, who was always persistent, implacable, unsleeping when her suspicions had been aroused, would suffer friendship to continue between her husband and the now hated English teacher. Life, we may easily imagine, would not have been

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worth living for M. Héger had he tried Charlotte's plan.

His own attitude baffles all conjecture. He had been kind to Charlotte, that is certain. She had brought out his gentlest side, for we see its reaction upon herself. There had been an understanding between them, not as to their relation to one another, certainly never that, but as to their sympathies. He admired, he did not patronise. He could allow that there might be good in Charlotte's religion, though she saw none in his. He was certain that they both served the same God. The mystery perhaps will remain forever unsolved. Was it a sensitive conscience that made him deaf to Charlotte's cries? Did his duty to his wife, his too great consciousness of the sympathy between himself and the ardent mind and heart he had awakened, make him refuse for them both the pleasure of a correspondence that would have brightened the desolation at Haworth with such morning beams? Or was it after all discretion, that ugly virtue, that withheld him? Playing for safety; fear of consequences, the evil consequences not of a friendship between a man and woman of honour, which could not have produced real evil, but the consequences of Madame's suspicions, of jealous chatter, of perpetual friction? In any case he was wise; probably he was right. Perhaps he saved Charlotte worse pain and trouble in the end. But I like to think that something truly great was in the soul of the man whom Charlotte Brontë delighted to honour with the uttermost of her genius; and that, in the phrase of the French she loved, to know all was to forgive all at last.

Charlotte's healing at this time came from three sources, all life-giving—the love of her sisters, the joy of work, and contact with Nature. When *The*

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*Professor* was finished, there was *Jane Eyre*—handled with a large freedom which must have brought the keenest joy to its creator, after the self-imposed placidity of the first attempt. Any writer knows the impossibility of handling indirectly for purposes of fiction an event of moving interest in his own life. *The Professor* is surely tame, primarily because Charlotte fears self-betrayal; but the reading of *Wuthering Heights*, that tale of flame and dew, of heather and stone, no doubt, as Miss Sinclair brilliantly suggests, had its effect upon her, and helped to set her genius free. What delightful hours of work in company, of comparison and hope! And then there was the joy of seeing their poems in print, the work of the Bells before the public eye; it is a secondary matter to any poet whether there are large sales or not, as it is secondary to any parents whether their child is popular and in request. *They* want it. *They* appreciate it. It has lived. And after absence, after the heat and aridity of a long summer vacation in Brussels, it would be almost solace enough for Charlotte at moments, when hope was dying down in the long June days, to lie among the heather and bilberry, perhaps up there by the waterfall associated with her name, looking down upon the little stone footbridge over the beck in the ghyll below, and feeling part of all life, for ever and ever. In summer, indeed, there are few lovelier spots, with the sky clear blue above the fell, and the deep green of the sycamore trees showing against the dark stone line of houses in Stanbury village clinging to its ridge on the right; with the snipe and the peewits winging by, and the mountain sheep grey as the half-buried crags cropping peacefully where they can find pasture. An ideal place in which to meditate upon gains and losses; to learn to wait for the Day; to

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let go bitterness. A place solitary and secret for all its apparent open-heartedness, just as the human soul, for all self-utterance, and for all reverend inquiry of those who love and admire, must remain solitary and secret still. But a place where God seems near in the silence and the brooding heat. Not the God of jarring sects, with their buzzing of urgent disagreements, but the God Who is Nature's soul, and the pitiful Christ Who prayed on the hilltops and moved among the wild flowers, a Shepherd of the souls of men. Man should be worthy of an epic among the moors; and there *Wuthering Heights*, supreme achievement, sprang alive. From that source *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* gathered their intensity, their truth, their keenness of vision. The Spirit upon the moors made it possible for Charlotte to introduce the epic touch into a tale of a boarding-school, inspired Emily's poetry, and taught them both to love life well, and to look at death closely, till they could see beyond its shadow—terrible as that shadow was. For no dweller among the moors could forget in summer the winter that was past, and that was to come. Then the gulleys, filled with colour and scent now, would be death-traps deep in snow for any who erred from the stone-laid path. The wind would cry with tales of human sorrows; loneliness and desolation would make pathless and unfamiliar all the loved places on the mist-wrapped hills. The stones in the churchyard, now shut out by trees which had not been planted in the Brontës' time, would force themselves again upon the imagination; and the straitness of the way to freedom would make that freedom itself that they tasted so fully in their heritage in summer-time, seem far off. It would not be true to suppress that note of weariness and deadness to hope which is Charlotte's reaction from passion. A well-

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known letter written about this time contains the passage :

“I have fewer illusions ; what I wish for now is active exertion, a stake in life. Haworth seems such a quiet lonely spot, buried away from the world. I no longer regard myself as young.”

And again, with a bitter memory of wounding tongues.

“Ten years ago I should have laughed at your account of the blunder you made in mistaking the bachelor doctor for a married man. Now . . . I know that if women wish to escape the stigma of husband-seeking they must act and look like marble or clay. . . . Never mind. Well-meaning women have their own consciences to comfort them after all.” She adds the excellent advice : “ Do not condemn yourself to live only by halves, because if you showed too much animation some pragmatical thing in breeches might take it into his pate to imagine that you designed to dedicate your life to his inanity. I feel rather fierce and want stroking down.”

If people still supposed Charlotte had had marriage in view in going to Brussels, and said so, we can imagine that any such impertinences would sting now as never before.

In January of 1845, the year after her return, when Charlotte was very depressed and unwell, she paid that visit to the Taylors at Gomersall during which she felt so out of things. Mary Taylor described it after Charlotte's death.

“She told me she thought that there must be some possibility for some people of having a life of more variety and more communion with human kind, but she saw none for her. I told her very warmly

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that she ought not to stay at home . . . such a dark shadow came over her face when I said : ' Think of what you'll be five years hence,' that I stopped and said, ' Don't cry, Charlotte.' She did not cry, but went on walking up and down the room, and said in a little while, ' But I intend to stay, Polly.' ”

Mary Taylor does not strike us as an intuitive person. She was excellent, bracing, downright, and it is not surprising that she could not come to Charlotte's help, and supply her own lack of belief in her star with a forecast of what actually did happen. For in five years' time, Charlotte was in London paying her first visit to Thackeray, tasting the first sweets of fame—alas, alone. The promise of a dawn was what she needed to throw some ray upon the inky waters, but Mary could only give the watchman's answer, " The night cometh "—" and also the morning " was withheld from Charlotte's ears.

In April we learn from letters in Mrs. Gaskell's collection that Charlotte dreaded blindness for herself as well as for her father. As the days lengthened, new shadows rose, lest the sisters should have too much happiness in love and air and dreams. Branwell was home, disgraced and ill, and the house must hold him and them. Yet all this time Charlotte is struggling against memory and heart-hunger. In the latest of the letters now in the British Museum from which I have quoted above a sentence about friendship, writing on November 18, 1845, she says :

“ The summer and autumn seemed very long to me . . . I tell you frankly that I have tried meanwhile to forget you, for the remembrance of a person whom one thinks never to see again, and whom, nevertheless, one greatly esteems, frets the mind too much ; and

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when one has suffered that kind of anxiety for a year or two one is ready to do anything to recover one's peace. I have done everything; I have sought occupation, I have denied myself absolutely the pleasure of speaking about you, even to Emily; but I have not been able to overcome either my regrets or my impatience."

Here is Charlotte after nine months of that self-repression, in which she had been trained for so long, revealing her soul, unknowing. I do not think any one yet has dwelt upon the achievement of personality involved in her recovery from the abyss into which her life and all her hopes had been cast by M. Héger's refusal of letters. There are passages describing her feelings when letters came and afterwards ceased to come to Lucy Snowe from Dr. John which it is difficult not to associate with M. Héger, "Dr. John, you pained me afterwards. Forgiven be every ill, freely forgiven, for the sake of that one dear remembered good"—this is the letter which was "kind."

It was a long fight; and it is as arresting, and more inspiring because more human, than Emily's wrestle with death. Charlotte emerged from it, not an embittered old maid broken in health, narrowed in sympathies, but rather strengthened to endure the further suffering of watching Emily die refusing human help, of mothering Anne along that same sad road.

It is not my purpose to dwell upon the almost intolerable days of distress that began with Branwell's dying, and were lengthened to the climax of tragedy when Emily laid aside that comb still treasured at the Haworth Museum, and without any special word for the devoted sister, went out and on into im-

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mortality. The gate, never opened but for funerals, made way for her body to be carried through from the garden to the church vault, where Charlotte's should in due time be laid. Anne's gentle, long-drawn-out dying is almost as well-known, and the final scene at Scarborough, where Charlotte and Ellen Nussey watched her go, and would not disturb the landlady at her dinner. Charlotte returned home not to desolation utter and complete, but to a desolation which was caused by having no sharer of her fame. Perhaps it is fancy, but she always seems to me from this time on to be at once more gentle and more prim, walled up behind her new identity of successful author, spending too much of her time inditing admirable epistles to My dear Sir (Mr. Williams) about books or his daughters, and to that little man, Mr. James Taylor, who was a "decorous reliable personage," according to her own account, and therefore not suited to our fiery-hearted Miss Prim. The most interesting letters at this time are reminiscent,—Charlotte is dull when discussing current literature. For instance, the one given by Mrs. Gaskell, dated May 22, 1850.

"For my part I am free to walk on the moors ; but when I go out there alone, everything reminds me of the times when others were with me, and then the moors seem a wilderness, featureless, solitary, saddening. My sister Emily had a particular love for them, and there is not a knoll of heather, not a branch of fern, not a young bilberry leaf, not a fluttering lark or linnet, but reminds me of her. The distant prospects were Anne's delight, and when I look round she is in the blue tints, the pale mists, the waves and shadows of the horizon. In the hill-country silence their poetry comes by lines and



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stanzas into my mind. Once I loved it, now I dare not read it. . . .”

It is a wonderful phrase that of Charlotte's, “In the hill-country silence.” And she, so lonely there, comes now more than any of the three to the minds of many friends.

The friendship of the Kay Shuttleworths was a feature of Charlotte's life at this time. They brought to her many intellectual interests and acquaintances, and introduced her two friends, Mrs. Gaskell and Miss Martineau. Nothing illustrates better the generosity and increasing gentleness, as well as that old loyalty in Charlotte's character, than her attitude to Miss Martineau. The summer at Bowness when she had first met her at the Kay Shuttleworths had been a happy time, and Charlotte's liking for Miss Martineau was strongly rooted. The book expressing her atheism, though it gave Charlotte her first shock, did not change her attitude of admiration for the writer. Mrs. Gaskell observes that the contemptuous tone used towards this book by the critics “made her (Charlotte) more indignant than almost any circumstance during my acquaintance with her.” Charlotte's own letters bear this out. When Miss Martineau unexpectedly fell foul of *Villette*, Charlotte had only shortly before refused to break off friendship with her for her unbelief—a grievous offence at that time. Her letter is utterly beautiful :—

“I believe if you were in my place and knew Miss Martineau as I do—if you had shared with me the proofs of her genuine kindness, and had seen how secretly she suffers from abandonment—you would be the last to give her up; you would separate the sinner from the sin, and feel as if the right lay rather in quietly adhering to her in her strait, while that

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adherence is unfashionable and unpopular, than in turning on her your back when the world sets the example." Charlotte has well learned at last that it is not the profession of a dogma, or a fashion of worship that makes the Christian. Mrs. Gaskell speaks of their "short and sorrowful" misunderstanding, and calls them "faithful friends."

She tells us also how sensitive Charlotte was to the last as to any suggestion of impropriety or immorality in *Jane Eyre*. She who knew her own heart cannot have over-estimated the value of outside opinion; yet it does seem as if this sensitiveness may in part have sprung from a hidden cause, the unforgotten secret in her heart, so long buried, so rigidly guarded. She who had been strong to forbear speaking even to Emily of her Master, who had kept the secret of the novels from her most intimate friend, had, we are sure, kept this other secret, the secret of those letters M. Héger had preserved but not answered, secure from all approach. Something wrong—so harmful to others, so painful to herself, so unjust, so untrue, might when suggested on more than one side lead to a prying where prying must be intolerable to any living woman. Charlotte must indeed have felt at times as though she had said so much that any moment the hounds might be baying upon the track of her most innocent, most unhappy love.

The friendship with Mrs. Gaskell, and Charlotte's ever-deepening appreciation of the delicacy of her mind, of the nobility of her character, were assuredly one of the greatest joys of her life at this time. Mrs. Gaskell's enthusiastic account of her visit to Haworth is one of the happiest pictures that her book contains.

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“All the small table arrangements had the same dainty simplicity about them. Then we rested, and talked over the clear bright fire.” That clear bright fire, so typical of Charlotte’s spirit and of Emily’s—though Emily’s is rather a fire out of doors—is worth a thousandfold ; and tells us as perhaps nothing else could all the sensitive understanding, all the appreciation and love that Mrs. Gaskell offered to Charlotte before she took up the pen on her behalf. Sister authors, sister women, they understood one another. “Whereupon I said I disliked Lucy Snowe, and we discussed M. Paul Emanuel,” says Mrs. Gaskell, and is silent. Did she remember some flash in Charlotte’s eye, some note in her voice which made her feel it impossible ever to tell whether Charlotte had supposed him her masterpiece, or whether she didn’t ; whether from M. Paul Emanuel the conversation had turned for a word or two, just a word or two, after the long silence—with death so near—upon “*mon Maître*” at the Pension Héger. We do not know. Only this we know, that after Mrs. Gaskell had gone to her room about ten she heard Charlotte come down and walk up and down for an hour or so. On that visit, too, it was they had that conversation about some people being born to sorrow and some to happiness. This was Charlotte’s theory—Mrs. Gaskell was for believing in the law of compensation. But Charlotte would have it that some must just cultivate patience and resignation “and try to moderate their expectations.” “She was trying to school herself against ever anticipating any pleasure ; it was better to be brave and submit patiently.” At this time her father was still set against the marriage with Mr. Nicolls. Was her marriage the pleasure Charlotte must school herself against anticipating ? Possibly it was ; yet one remembers that she had had her mind absorbed

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lately with *Villette*, and that she had been talking to her friend about Lucy Snowe and M. Paul Emanuel. Perhaps, after all, the desire to have a mystery cleared, and to hear again, to see again the unforgotten and still living dead, and also to see her sisters was even more urgent for Charlotte to school herself against. We do not and shall not know. But we do know that she was well acquainted with the character of Mr. Nicolls, that she trusted him and found restfulness and content in his warm true affection, and that she was very happy as his wife—and we rejoice to know it. For Charlotte's was not a nature ever to be satisfied without love. She enjoyed being author, she enjoyed her books, she enjoyed her letter-writing, she enjoyed her friendships; but from first to last she thought of herself as one born to sorrow, as one who must wait to know "in time" the good reason of it all. And it is as a woman, generous, much-enduring, passionate-hearted that the moors keep her image. Married, yet sister to Emily the wild and shy in deepest bond; married, yet keeping a memory of love as different from the slow and pleasant waters of ordinary marriage as the moor top is from the town. One man awakened her soul, and revealed her to herself, with her passion and her power. Another man sustained her in fame, comforted her in loneliness, strengthened her in death. To both she owed much, but when we think of that love which Cathy Earnshaw and Jane Eyre experienced, we know that Charlotte Brontë owed most to the man who left her to fulfil her own premonitory prayer—"God help the woman who is left to love passionately and alone!"

And since this is not a biographical study, but an attempt to understand a woman's story which in its simplest outline consists of preparation, a love

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affair, and its forthtelling, I make no excuse for returning last of all to that major episode which, as we have seen, Charlotte dwelt upon so much near the close of her life, before her marriage to Mr. Nicolls.

The final word upon Charlotte's love story, apart from *Villette*, shall come from herself.

It is to be found in the collection of poems by the three sisters and by Branwell, which Mr. A. C. Benson has edited. The book was not in my hands when the earlier chapters of this were written, and the significance of these verses seemed therefore the more striking. They are not dated, and are numbered 9 and 12 in the collection of Charlotte's poems. Charlotte, no doubt, hid them most carefully from human eyes during her lifetime. But if she had felt she could never suffer them to see the light I think she would have destroyed them. It is certain that she, with every writer, had moments when she longed to confide to the great unknown public secrets which weighed upon her mind, but were too intimate to be shared with those whom she met every day. No. 9 seems from internal evidence to belong to some time after she had ceased to write letters to M. Héger, before she had begun *Jane Eyre*. Perhaps it was written as a counterbalance to the calmness of *The Professor*. Love for the moment is overmastered by a bitterness of spirit which is the aftermath of the humility, entreaty, patience and heart hunger that her unanswered letters had revealed. Neither bitterness nor reproach were Charlotte's final attitude. She was too great for that. Even now, in this moment of disillusionment, the sorrowful woman can turn away quickly from earth to heaven, from the man's timidity to her own bold avowal of what perhaps hitherto she had hardly dared to call by

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its true name. Most of Charlotte's poems are uninteresting enough, even when there is deep feeling behind them, as a glance at the poem called "Presentiment" will illustrate.

As poetry it fails to reach us, though Charlotte almost died with Emily. But No. 9 has an even deeper passion behind it, and for once it has given to Charlotte an utterance equivalent to that which she has in prose. There appear to have been few, if any, comments upon it at present, but I cannot but think that it will come later to be recognised as a fine and vital confession that the winds are God's ministers blowing as well through the spaces of human consciousness as over the tree-tops of earth.

I quote four verses, but the whole should be studied.

He saw my heart's woe, discovered my soul's anguish,  
How in fever, in thirst, in atrophy it pined,  
Knew he could heal, yet looked and let it languish,  
To its moans spirit-deaf, to its pangs spirit-blind.

He was mute as is the grave, he stood stirless as a tower,  
At last I looked up and saw I prayed to stone ;  
I asked help of that which to help had no power,  
I sought love where love was utterly unknown.

In dark remorse I rose. I rose in darker shame.  
Self-condemned I withdrew to an exile from my kind.  
A solitude I sought, where mortals never came,  
Hoping in its wilds forgetfulness to find.

He (God) gave our hearts to love, He will not love despise,  
Even if the gift be lost, as mine was long ago.  
He will forgive the fault, will bid the offender rise,  
Wash out with dews of bliss the fiery brand of woe.

The opening verse here is an exact and accurate summary of Charlotte's condition of mind as revealed

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in those of her letters which deal with the period following the return from Brussels. No. 12 may have been written in Brussels, in the terrible vacation. It is called "Frances," the name of the heroine of *The Professor*, who wrote verses, and it refers clearly to the garden, the "alcove in that shade screening a rustic seat and stand." This must refer to l'Allée défendue.

Unloved I love ; unwept I weep,  
For me the universe is dumb,  
Stone deaf, and blank and wholly blind ;  
Life I must bound, existence sum  
In the strait limits of one mind.

That is a wonderful verse. Perhaps the lover's longing for the fusion of two *minds* has never been more vividly expressed.

It is noticeable that in spite of the circumstances and in spite of the times she lived in, with their confusion between morality and convention worse than that which prevails to-day, Charlotte refuses to call her love evil. Rather she names it boldly as love only when she brings it out in the face of high Heaven, before angels and men. She speaks as one who has fulfilled a great spiritual adventure, whose soul has been already purged in the furnace of fire. For her, from this time on, there could be no shirking the issue. Love, the subject of a thousand investigations since her day by varying types of mind, had by Charlotte at length been seen in its true sphere. She saw it, as the saints and the poets have seen it, among the eternities, and she declared, as great hearts have done before her, that lovers could only be judged by their peers. She had proved that it introduces to a new plane, and she knew that its law is the paradox of *Ama et fac quod vis*, just because the high liberty of love cannot by its very nature be

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licence. The vulgar find marriage to lie in circumstance. Charlotte uses all her genius to declare that marriages are first made on a plane above circumstances, and that therefore in certain cases, such as that in which Charlotte found herself, circumstances are beside the point, having no more worth than mere obstacles to prove the strength of love. When the question reaches the lower levels of morality and behaviour, then she neither faltered nor paused. Madame Héger she certainly thought of as no true mate to the man she loved ; but though she seems ready to accept friendship with love veiled and waiting behind it, Charlotte had no notion at all of inviting disloyalty to Madame Héger. The planes were different. Possibly she was unaware of the difficulties of translating such theories into fact, but the essential rightness of her position for the higher type of humanity can scarcely be questioned. In *Jane Eyre* Charlotte emphasises the situation for literary effect. The wife of Rochester is not merely no helpmeet for him, she is not even his wife in anything but name. She is, in fact, no longer human, but she still lives. The higher type of humanity as portrayed in *Jane Eyre* has then but one way of honour, and she fled at heroic cost. Charlotte, I think, always looked upon her own sudden departure from Brussels, however well covered by good excuses, as partly in the nature of a flight from temptation. It would have been interesting to see what she would have made of the same situation varied by a partner uncongenial but not base. But this Charlotte could not handle. She tried, I think, to make M. Paul's dead love someone who might have drawn more even with Lucy Snowe. But she could not picture her Master except with someone spiritually much inferior standing in that relation to him. Her strength de-



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parted directly she ventured far from her personal experiences, and she seems to have given up the attempt.

It is pleasant to picture Emily thrusting her manuscript into Charlotte's hand. Did she know or did she guess the extent of Charlotte's experiences? We know that Charlotte had laid it upon herself not to talk of M. Héger to Emily. Emily's powers as a seer were not small, but we cannot tell if she loved Charlotte well enough to be a diviner here. Be that as it may, Charlotte's emotions must indeed have been intense as she found her own ideas, so carefully withheld from the tame pages of *The Professor*, glowing in *Wuthering Heights*, with an elemental poetry that not even she herself could equal. We may picture her either listening with hidden face while Emily read, as their custom seems to have been; or reading the love passages alone on the moor or in the empty study, to the beat of her heart-throbs. Surely Emily had been writing for her!

"Whatever our souls are made of," says Cathy Earnshaw of Heathcliff, "his and mine are the same, and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire." . . .

"Who is to separate us, pray? Not so long as I live, Ellen, for no mortal creature . . . I cannot express it, but surely you and everybody have a notion that there is, or should be an existence of yours beyond you. What were the use of my creation if I were entirely contained here? My great miseries in this world are Heathcliff's miseries . . . my great thought in living is himself . . . Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff."

In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte said practically the same

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thing with only less vividness, through the lips of a woman possibly less in psychic perception, but far greater in mentality, and in the moral force which comes through self-rule.

When the gods arrive  
The half gods go.

That, crystallised in Emerson's phrase, is the message of both sisters. Get back to the primal simplicities, the great elemental things before you can know if you are strong or weak, true or false. Leave the twilight for morning sunshine over the pathless hills. Leave the town for a solitude where you must overcome, since you can no longer flee from, your own thought. Mrs. Grundy, creature of an hour, is the upholder of the ever-new wrong, the enslaver of the weak, the thief of life. But in every age there are Pioneers who lead the way back to true morality and true religion, upon which time makes no change, in spite of what some loudly tell us. It is these who wrestle with the half gods, and by suffering overcome on behalf of the weak and the fearful, on behalf of those whose dreams are not of Eden, nor their labours to restore Jerusalem. The captives of convention stand in the airless dark calling upon the half gods to slay the impious who contest their sovereignty; but outside, the Pioneers—and among that band you may discern the faces of these two sisters—stand wounded but beautiful, under the storms and the sunlight of heaven, calling the prisoners back to life.

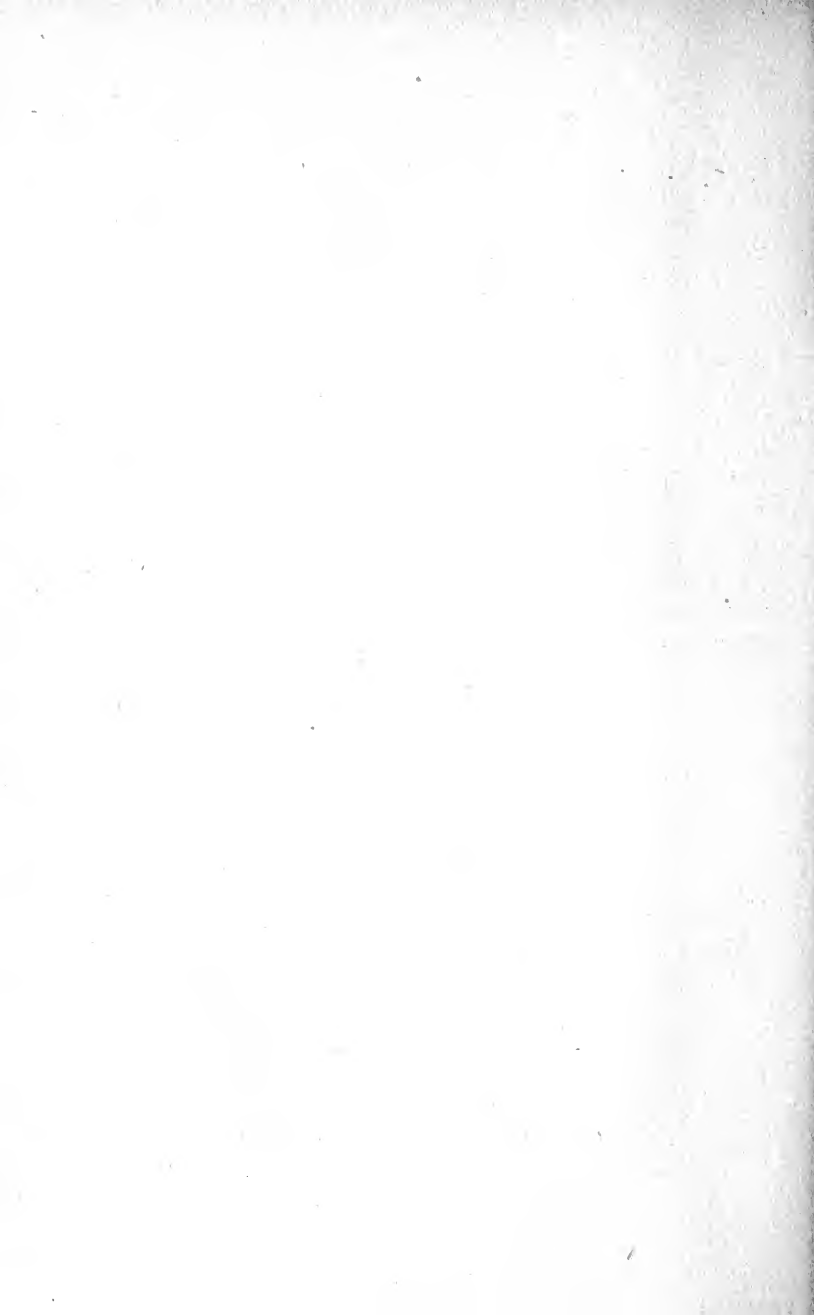
One question we may ask, to close. Charlotte could and did pour burning scorn upon those who peeped and pryed into the secrets of her heart. What measure would she mete now to those who seek to disentangle the threads of this tale of the lonely

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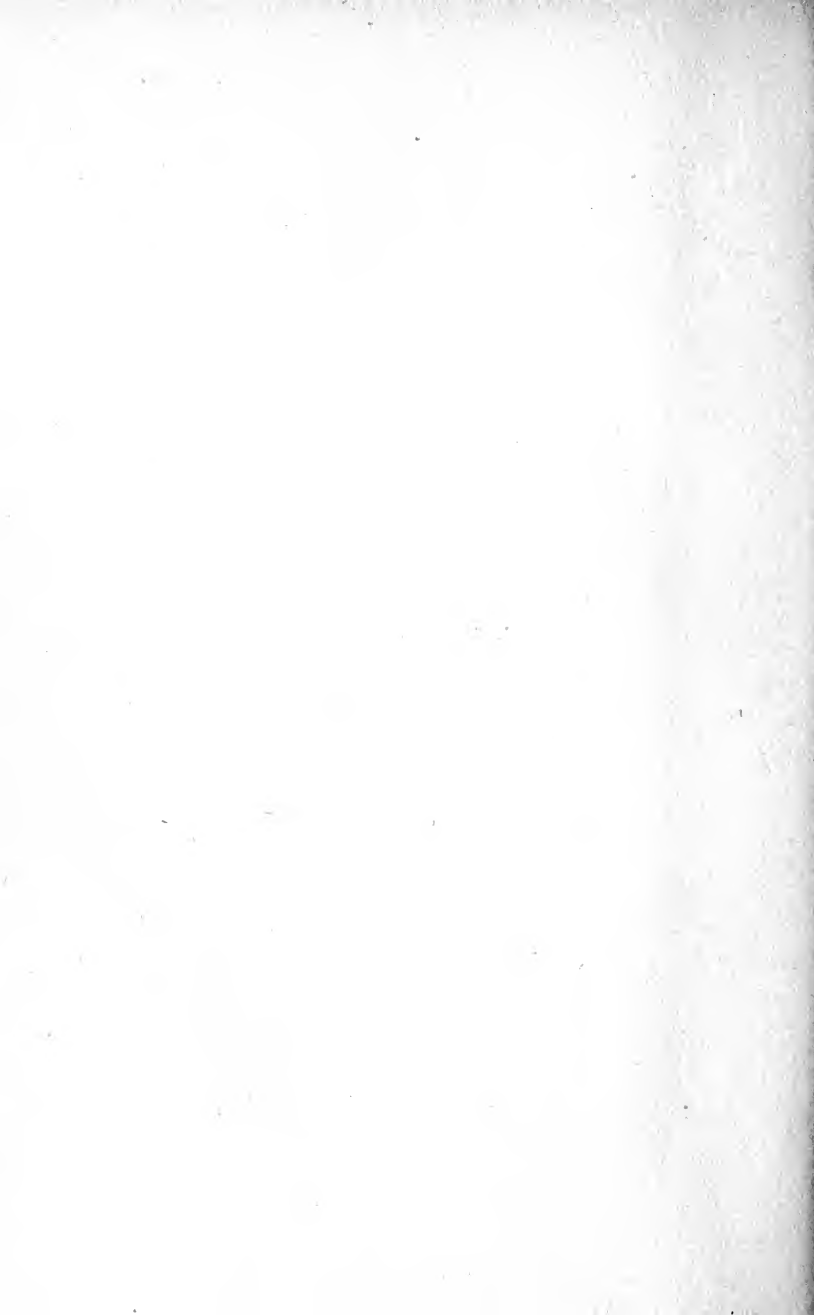
indomitable heroine, which she has and has not told us herself?

I have already referred to the portrait in the Brontë Museum. In that I find my answer. For there is something so living in the expression that I cannot but think we have there the real Charlotte. Loss and attainment have softened her, but left an appeal half-shy, half-young in her eyes. The smile that grows as you watch seems to have in it more than its humanity. It seems to suggest to the many friends who come to see her there, that after her lonely days, Charlotte is glad to receive good after sorrow from so many men and women of good will.

None knew better than Charlotte, in the end, that the genius and the sufferings of man or woman are not for themselves alone, and it is therefore with all reverence but in all confidence that I lay this little essay beneath her portrait.



## APPENDIX



## APPENDIX

### SOME UNPUBLISHED BRONTË MSS.

THE verses given beneath were written by Charlotte when she was sixteen, just after she had returned to Haworth from Roe Head School. Her occupations at the time she herself describes in a letter to Ellen Nussey as "instructing her sisters, drawing, and walking on the moors." Charlotte preserved all her life a vivid pleasure at receiving new books, and the measure of her capacity for appreciating the treasures of other minds is revealed in this joy. These verses are full of it. Bewick's book on birds meant days of happiness in the parsonage. The references to Charlotte's days of childhood—expressed in the form natural to sixteen who feels already so grown up, are interesting as showing that she had bright memories as the dominant ones, and the usual blessed faculty of remembering best the happiest things. The verses do credit to her by their smoothness, and occasionally a line or a phrase gives promise of the command of language which was to come to her later.

The verses have never before been printed in a book, and are included here by kind permission of Mr. Hall, bookseller at Haworth, who copied them from the original manuscript.

## APPENDIX

LINES ON THE CELEBRATED BEWICK, WRITTEN BY CHARLOTTE BRONTË IN HER SIXTEENTH YEAR, JUST AFTER LEAVING ROE HEAD SCHOOL.

The cloud of recent death is past away,  
But yet a shadow lingers o'er his tomb  
To tell that the pale standard of decay  
Is reared triumphant o'er life's sullied bloom.

But now the eye undimmed by tears may gaze  
On the fair lines his gifted pencil drew,  
The tongue unfalt'ring speak its meed of praise  
When we behold those scenes to Nature true—

True to the common Nature that we see  
In England's sunny fields, her hills and vales,  
On the wild bosom of her storm-dark sea  
Still heaving to the wind that o'er it wails.

How many winged inhabitants of air,  
How many plume-clad floaters of the deep,  
The mighty artist drew in forms as fair  
As those that now the skies and waters sweep,

From the great eagle, with his lightning eye,  
His tyrant glance, his talons dyed in blood,  
To the sweet breather-forth of melody,  
The gentle merry minstrel of the wood.

Each in his attitude of native grace  
Looks on the gazer life-like, free and bold,  
And if the rocks be his abiding place  
Far off appears the winged marauder's hold.

But if the little builder rears his nest  
In the still shadow of green tranquil trees,  
And singing sweetly 'mid the silent blest  
Sits a meet emblem of untroubled peace,

“A change comes o'er the spirit of our dream”—  
Woods wave around in crested majesty,  
We almost feel the joyous sunshine's beam  
And hear the breath of the sweet south go by.



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Our childhood's days return again in thought,  
We wander in a land of love and light,  
And mingled memories, joy—and sorrow—fraught  
Gush on our hearts with overwhelming might.

Sweet flowers seem gleaming 'mid the tangled grass  
Sparkling with spray drops from the rushing rill,  
And as these fleeting visions fade and pass  
Perchance some pensive tears our eyes may fill.

These soon are wiped away, again we turn  
With fresh delight to the enchanted page  
Where pictured thoughts that breathe and speak and burn  
Still please alike our youth and riper age.

There rises some lone rock all wet with surge  
And dashing billows glimmering in the light  
Of a wan moon, whose silent rays emerge  
From clouds that veil their lustre, cold and bright.

And there 'mongst reeds upon a river's side  
A wild bird sits, and brooding o'er her nest  
Still guards the priceless gems, her joy and pride,  
Now ripening neath her hope-enlivened breast.

We turn the page, before the expectant eye  
A traveller stands lone on some desert heath,  
The glorious sun is passing from the sky  
While fall his farewell rays on all beneath.

O'er the far hills a purple veil seems flung,  
Dim herald of the coming shades of night,  
E'en now Diana's lamp aloft is hung,  
Drinking full radiance from the fount of light.

O, when the solemn wind of midnight sighs,  
Where will the lonely traveller lay his head?  
Beneath the tester of the star-bright skies  
On the wild moor he'll find a dreary bed.

Now we behold a marble Naiad placed  
Beside a fountain on her sculptured throne,  
Her bending form with simplest beauty graced,  
Her white robes gathered in a snowy zone.

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She from a polished vase pours forth a stream  
Of sparkling water to the waves below  
Which roll in light and music, while the gleam  
Of sunshine flings through shade a golden glow.

A hundred fairer scenes these leaves reveal,  
But there are tongues that injure while they praise ;  
I cannot speak the rapture that I feel  
When on the work of such a mind I gaze.

Then farewell, Bewick, genius' favoured son,  
Death's sleep is on thee, all thy woes are past,  
From earth departed, life and labour done,  
Eternal peace and rest are thine at last.

C. BRONTË.

*November 27th, 1832.*

The author has also had the pleasure of going through the letters sent to the trustees by applicants for the living of Haworth at the time of Mr. Brontë's appointment, through the kindness of Mr. Charles Bairstow, of the Manor House, Stanbury, who is connected with the Taylor family. These Taylors must not be confused with the Taylors at Gomersall, who were also friends of the Brontë girls, and who are better known. The little note of Charlotte's given below was written to Mrs. Taylor at Stanbury, the mother of Mary Anne and Elizabeth. It owes its preservation, doubtless, to the recipe for chilblains on the back! It is a thin scrap of paper, brown with age, in C.'s fine hand.

DEAR MRS. TAYLOR,—I have asked Mr. and Mrs. Rand and Mrs. Bacon to take tea with us on Friday afternoon—and should be glad if you and Miss Taylor would come and meet them. Have the

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goodness to send word by Martha if Friday will be a convenient day for you. Yours truly,

C. BRONTË.

*Wednesday morning.*

### *Chilblanes*

Salve Spermaceti  
And Sweete Oile  
as a cure for Chilblanes.

The difficulty of combining pure disinterestedness with strong effort to obtain the living on the part of the worthy clerics makes this bundle of old letters one of the most entertaining possible. One is sure that his preaching will be sufficient to make him the chosen candidate; another, presumably less golden-tongued in his own estimation, expresses the opinion that preaching is of little account in a clergyman's work. A certain Mr. Tunnicliffe writes a most beautiful copper-plate hand, with masterly flourishes, on behalf of his cousin Parkin who was classical teacher at the Free School at Bradford, and had intended to be a missionary to Canada, since he felt the confinement of the school. One wonders if the Brontës at Thornton had heard of this good man, and if he could have had anything to do with St. John Rivvers in *Jane Eyre*. Then there is a letter from as far away as Alfriston, Sussex. The writer, a friend of the late incumbent, has heard from him that the same view of divine things as he held is likely to be acceptable. Another writes as follows:—

“Since my return I have thought much of Haworth. I may say it has been on my mind

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both sleeping and waking. It has been the subject of my conversation ; it has been the theme of my prayers . . . ." (We cannot follow the reverend gentleman through all his metaphors which were not all of a "polite nature.") He goes on : "I am assured that if I come to Haworth I shall be brought by a way that I know not, and led in paths that I have not known."

Mr. Blyth of Long Preston is unaccountably brief. He announces that he is coming on the Saturday, to take the Sunday duty which was required of all the candidates ; and that as two sermons have not been mentioned, he will only be prepared with one.

The most prolific writer of letters and sender of testimonials is a certain Mr. Thomas Blackley of Rotherham. In one letter he says : "By some means it was known, or rather conjectured, for what I went from home, and *of course* numerous regrets on the occasion." In another he "longs" for a letter from his friendly trustee as to the progress of "our" plans ; and he never fails to send kind regards to "your dear son." It is surprising that such persistent effort, backed so well at Haworth, failed. One shares the mortification of Mr. Blackley, the more for those numerous regrets ; but no doubt his congregation rejoiced.

Another gentleman sends no less than two dozen sermons, with the remark that the recipient is to use his own judgment in lending them to the trustees in general or to particular friends ; but in no case are they to be copied. He expresses the hope that while they will convince his friend that he preaches his own sentiments in his own language, he will peruse them with forbearance, and receive them in the spirit of Christian candour and affection.

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Mr. Brontë, in the course of a mercilessly prosy letter, contrives to refer both to Providence and propriety. He informed Mr. Taylor that he was educated at Cambridge, "that first of Universities," and that he was "a good deal conversant with the affairs of mankind." He had been something of a gay dog for a curate, as we know, with his Irish temperament, and perhaps this hint might have won upon the trustees in thinking of the future sermons they would have to listen to (George and John Taylor of Stanbury were prominent among them) to decide for Mr. Brontë, and, though they knew it not, for conferring imperishable lustre upon Haworth. As a matter of fact, however, the choice of Mr. Brontë appears to have been a compromise with the Vicar of Bradford. The decision must have been difficult, when, according to the modest self-laudations of each, the preaching possibilities were so scintillating from some dozen other good men who had the welfare of Haworth at their heart, and who were all ready to be led there by ways that they knew not.

The following is a quotation from Mr. Brontë's sermon at Haworth, to improve the occasion of the movement of a bog beyond Stanbury. He alone, it seems, attributed it to an earthquake, and he seems to have stuck to his own explanation.

The quotation is taken from *A History of Stanbury*, by Mr. Joseph Craven.

### THE CROW HILL FLOOD

"On Tuesday, September 2, 1824, an extraordinary eruption of the bog at Crow Hill took place. The water ran thick under Tonden Bridge beyond Stanbury."

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Mr. Brontë improved the occasion in his sermon on Sunday, from which the following extract is taken :

“I would avail myself of the advantages now offered for moral and religious improvements by the late earthquake and extraordinary disruption which lately took place about four miles from this very church in which we are assembled. You all know that at about 6 o'clock in the afternoon two portions of the moors in the neighbourhood sunk several yards during a heavy storm of thunder and lightning and rain, and there issued forth a mighty volume of mud and water, which spread alarm and astonishment and danger along its course of many miles. As the day was exceedingly fine I had sent my little children, who were indisposed, accompanied by the servants, to take an airing on the common, and as they stayed rather longer than I expected I went to an upper chamber to look for their return. The heavens over the moors were blackening fast; I heard the muttering of distant thunder, and saw the frequent flash of the lightning, though ten minutes before there was scarcely a breath of air stirring; the gale freshened rapidly and carried along with it clouds of dust and stubble, and by this time some large drops of rain clearly announced an approaching heavy shower. My little family had escaped to a place of shelter, but I did not know it. The house was perfectly still. Under these circumstances I heard a deep distant explosion, and I perceived a gentle tremor in the chamber.”

Mr. Brontë perhaps never wrote better. It is a fine passage, and would not have disgraced *Jane Eyre*. Maria and Elizabeth had a few weeks before been sent to Cowan Bridge School, so the children were Charlotte, Branwell, Emily, and Anne.

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Mr. Brontë also wrote a long piece in rhyming couplets called "The Phenomenon of the Extraordinary Disruption of a Bog," by the Rev. P. Brontë, A.B. It begins :

The glowing East in lovely hues was drest  
And twilight grey had sunk beneath the West ;  
Star after star had vanished from the sight,  
Quench'd in the beams of morning's kindling light.  
The genial sun his blazing orb uprear'd ;  
And fast emerging, his vast orb appear'd  
In all its glory ! Clouds and vapours flew,  
All was gold and deep ethereal blue ;  
The cackling moorcock o'er the common flew ;  
The milkmaid blithe sung o'er her glowing pail,  
The lowing cattle gamboll'd through the vale ;

and so on, working up in Miltonic vein to all about Adam and Eve.

One deadly tree in Eden only grows ;  
Now every heart its tree of knowledge shews.  
Ten thousand fallen Eves allurements try ;  
Ten thousand Adams daily eat and die.

After about forty lines of this, we get on to the disruption.

Yet signs there were to philosophic eyes,  
Prognostications sure that storms should rise  
Ere day's dark close. Late in the previous night  
The reeling stars shot down with slanting light  
Or said, or seemed to say to all, "Beware !"

The sprightly lark ascending, hailed the morn,  
The linnæus caroll'd in the dewy thorn ;  
The blackbird's whistle echoed in the wood,  
The sportive fishes darted through the flood ;

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The scudding hare brushed off the twinkling dew

Now kawing rooks on rapid pinions move,  
For their loved home, the safe sequestered grove.  
Far inland scream the frightened seagulls loud,  
High the blue heron sails along the cloud.

This reveals either a strong love of Nature, or a study of Bewick ; in any case, it serves to reveal the undoubted literary ability of the father of the Brontës.

The little children gone with the servants through the stone stiles and moorland fields that separate the Haworth parsonage from the open moor is as clear a picture as we can ask. Disruption of a bitterer kind was to separate each from each, and finally sweep those four little children away, leaving an old father in chambers grown very still.

Finally, through the kindness of Mr. Bairstow, I am able to give two letters from Mr. Brontë which are of interest, and which have never yet seen the light.

HAWORTH,

*October 4th, 1843.*

DEAR SIR,—When you see John Crabtree, you will oblige me by desiring Him to pay the debt which he owes. Since you and Mrs. Greenwood call'd on me, on a particular occasion, I have been particularly, and more than ever guarded. Yet notwithstanding all I have done, even to the injury of my health, they keep propagating false reports—I mean to single out one or two of these slanderers, and to prosecute them, as the Law directs. I have lately been using a lotion for my eyes, which are very weak, and they have ascribed the smell of that, to a smell of a more exceptionable character. These things are hard, but



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perhaps under Providence, I may live to overcome them all. With all our kindest regards to you and your Family, I remain, Dear Sir,

Yours, very truly,

P. BRONTË.

HAWORTH,

*February 29th, 1844.*

MY DEAR SIR,—I doubt not you have heard of Mr. Enoch Thomas's *very severe* and great affliction, one of the greatest that can fall to our human nature. In consequence of this, I requested him to come up here, this morning, and when he came, I gave him the most consolatory advice within my power. But what can console a man under his circumstances? I am aware that you have kindly sent for him, and given him good advice, but I wish you to have a tea-party, soon, and to invite him among the number of the guests; his mind which is in a very disordered state, should be diverted as much as possible from his present way of thinking. He is a good well-meaning and honest man, and in many respects unfit for his present arduous situation. Yet still his friends ought to do for him all that lies within their power. I have understood that your son and heir has met with an accident. For this I am very sorry and as soon as the snow goes away, I shall do myself the pleasure of seeing how you all are. As my eyes are very weak, I cannot very well go out whilst the snow is on the ground. With my kind respects to you, Miss Parrot, and your Family,

I remain, My Dear Sir,

Yours Most Respectfully and truly,

P. BRONTË.

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The slanders to which he refers are that he was in the habit of drinking too much, a tale which Mrs. Gaskell had heard, and hints at.

Mr. Brontë's naïve belief in a tea-party as a cure for "the greatest affliction that can befall our human nature" is very delightful, and sets him in a kindly light. This letter should stand beside his own account of his watch for the children, if we would get at the fresh and feeling nature of the man under those formalities of speech and thought and behaviour which a divine of the period wore as inevitably and more continuously than his linen bands.

I have seen Stanbury Manor, a pleasant stone house on the high street, with a great barn where the Brontë children may well have spent many happy hours when taking tea with the Taylors. This barn now houses the remains of the old three-decker from which Patrick Brontë improved the occasion, and exhorted the faithful at Haworth.

Inside the house there are many things with which Charlotte was familiar. Especially, a beautiful print of the Duke of Wellington, which hangs over the chimney-piece in the drawing-room. There is a plant which belonged to her, and a horse-hair rocking-chair in which she often sat. And upstairs, most interesting of all, in one of the bedrooms is some fine oak panelling which does not belong in its present situation, but was probably once part of a shut-in bed. I cannot help thinking that this it is that Emily had in mind when she wrote of that haunted bed at Wuthering Heights which had the books scrawled over with Cathy's name, the bed on which Heathcliff died, and at which a ghost came crying in the night to the affrighted Lockwood to open the casement and let her in.

In conclusion, I should like to express my in-

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debtedness (1) to Mr. and Mrs. Bairstow for their kindness in giving information about the Taylors of Stanbury, and for the opportunity they afforded to study the unpublished letters from which I have quoted above ; (2) to Mr. Clement Shorter for allowing me to quote from his book, *The Brontës and Their Circle* ; and (3) to the Rev. W. T. Elliott, for his great help in reading the proofs and deleting some of the errors of this book.

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