



Francis Leyland

The Brontë Family

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with special reference to Patri

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T H E B R

**WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
PATRICK BRANWELL BRONTË**

VOL. I.

BY

FRANCIS A. LEYLAND.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

**LONDON:
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PREFACE.

It has long seemed to me that the history of the Brontë family is incomplete, and, in some senses, not well understood. Those who have written upon it—as I shall have occasion to point out in these pages—have had certain objects in view, which have, perhaps necessarily, led them to give undue weight to special points and to overlook others. Thus it happens that, though there are in the hands of the public several able works on the Brontës, there are many circumstances relating to them that are yet in comparative obscurity. Especially has injustice been done to one member of the family—Patrick Branwell Brontë—whose life has several times been treated by those who have had some other object in view; and, through a misunderstanding of the character of the brother, the sisters, Anne in particular, have been put, in some respects, in a false light also. This circumstance, coupled with the fact that I am in possession of much new information, and am able to print here a considerable quantity of unknown poetry from Branwell's hand, has induced me to

write this work. Those of his poems which are included in these volumes are placed in dealing with the periods of his life in which they were written, for I felt that, however great might be the advantages of putting them together in a complete form, much more would be lost both to the interest of the poems and the life of their author in doing so. Branwell's poems, more, perhaps, than those of any other writer, are so clearly expressive of his feelings at the time of their writing, that a correct view of his character is only to be obtained by looking upon them as parts of his life-history, which indeed they are. And, moreover, when we consider the circumstances under which any of these were written, our understanding and appreciation of the subject must necessarily be much fuller and truer. It has not escaped the attention of writers on the Brontë story that Branwell had an important influence on his sisters; and, though I maintain it to have been essentially different from what others allege, it would not be possible to do justice either to him or to them without saying a good deal about his character.

I have felt it right, in these pages, to some extent also, to re-consider the character of the Rev. Patrick Brontë, which has, along with that of his son, suffered unfair treatment in the biographies of his daughters. I have likewise entered upon some account of the local circumstances of art and literature which surrounded the Brontës, an element in their history which has hitherto been unknown, but is especially necessary to a right understanding of the life and work of Branwell Brontë and his sisters. These circumstances, and the altered view I have taken of the tone of the lives of Mr. Brontë and his son, have obliged me to deal more fully than would otherwise have been necessary with the early years of the Brontës, but I venture to hope that this may be atoned for by the new light I have thus been enabled to throw on some important points. There are published here, for the first time, a series of letters which Branwell Brontë addressed to an intimate friend, J. B. Leyland, sculptor, who died in 1851, and it is with these that a fresh insight is obtained into an interesting period of Branwell's life.

I am largely indebted in some parts of my work,

especially those which deal with the lives of the sisters, to Mrs. Gaskell's fascinating 'Life of Charlotte Brontë'; and it is a source of sincere regret to me that I am compelled to differ from that writer on many points. I am likewise indebted in parts to Mr. T. Wemyss Reid's admirable 'Charlotte Brontë: a Monograph,' a work which has corrected several errors and misconceptions into which Mrs. Gaskell had fallen. The reader will perceive that I am obliged in several places to combat the theories and question the statements of Miss A. Mary F. Robinson in her 'Emily Brontë,' a book which, nevertheless, so far as its special subject is concerned, is a worthy contribution to the history of the Brontës.

I have also found of much use, in writing this work, an article entitled 'Branwell Brontë,' which Mr. George Searle Phillips—'January Searle'—published in the 'Mirror' in 1872. The chapter in Mr. Francis H. Grundy's 'Pictures of the Past' on Branwell Brontë, has likewise been of the greatest service to me. Both these gentlemen were Branwell's personal friends, and to them I gladly acknowledge my indebtedness.

Among many other sources of information respecting the Brontës, of which I have availed myself in writing these pages, I may mention *Hours at Home*, 'Unpublished Letters of Charlotte Brontë'; *Scribner*, 'Reminiscences of Charlotte Brontë'; the *Athenæum*, 'Notices and Letters,' by Mr. A. C. Swinburne, and 'One of the Survivors of the Brontë-Branwell Family.' To this lady I must also express my obligation for her very kind letter to me.

In the preparation of my work I have been greatly assisted by the information, and encouraged by the sympathy, of several who had personal knowledge of Patrick Branwell Brontë, and who have supported the view I have taken of his life and character, and also who had like knowledge of the other members of the Brontë family. Among these, I have to express my sincere thanks to Mr. H. Merrall and to Mr. William Wood, who were early acquaintances of Branwell; also to Mr. William Dearden. To Mr. J. H. Thompson and Mrs. Thornton I am greatly indebted for information respecting Branwell's sojourn in Bradford. I have likewise derived much

information from the family of the Browns, now all deceased, except Mrs. Brown, to whom I have to express my obligation. I have also gained much reliable information from Nancy Garrs, now Mrs. Wainwright, the nurse of the Brontës, and to her I must especially express my thanks. To these, I must not omit to add my deep and sincere thanks to those who will not permit me to mention them by name, for the unwearied assistance, counsel, and literary judgment which they have as cheerfully, as they have ably, rendered.

F. A. L.

Oakwood, Skircoat, Halifax,
October, 1885.

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THE BRONTË FAMILY.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE BRONTËS.

Brontë Genius—Patrick Brontë—His Birthplace—His early Endeavours—Ordained—Presented to Hartshead—High Town—His Courtship and Marriage—Removes to Thornton—His House—Thornton Chapel—Mrs. Brontë's failing Health—Mr. Brontë Accepts the Living of Haworth—Rudeness of the Inhabitants—Local Fights between Haworth and Heptonstall—Description of Haworth—Mrs. Brontë dies.

Not many stories of literary success have

attracted so much interest, and are in themselves so curious and enthralling, as that of the Brontë sisters. The question has often been asked how it came about that these children, who were brought up in distant solitude, and cut off, in a manner, from intellectual life, who had but a partial opportunity of studying mankind, and scarcely any knowledge of the ways of the outside world, were enabled, with searching hands, to dissect the finest meshes of the passions, to hold up in the clearest light the springs of human action, and to depict, with nervous power, the most masculine and forcible aspects of character. The solution has been sought in the initiatory strength and inherent mental disposition of the sisters, framed and moulded by the weird and rugged surroundings of their youth, and tinged with lurid light and vivid feeling by the misfortunes and sins of their unhappy brother. To illustrate these several points, the biographers of Charlotte and Emily Brontë have explained, as the matter admitted of explanation, the intellectual beginnings and capability of the sisters, have painted in sombre colours the story of their friendless childhood, and

lastly, with no lack of honest condemnation, have told us as much as they knew of the sad history of Patrick Branwell Brontë, their brother. It is a curious fact that this brother, who was looked upon by his family as its brightest ornament and hope, should be named in these days only in connection with his sisters, and then but with apology, condemnation, or reproach. In the course of this work, in which Branwell Brontë will be traced from his parentage to his death, we shall find the explanation of this circumstance; but we shall find, also, that, despite his failings and his sins, his intellectual gifts, as they are testified by his literary promise and his remains, entitle him to a high place as a worthy member of that extraordinary family. It will be seen, moreover, that his influence upon Charlotte, Emily, and Anne was not what has been generally supposed, and that other circumstances, besides their own domestic troubles, inspired them to write their masterpieces.

The father of these gifted authors, Patrick Brontë, whose life and personal characteristics well deserve study, was a native of the county Down.

He was born on St. Patrick's Day, 1777; and, after an infancy passed at the house of his father, Hugh Brontë, or Brunty, at Ahaderg—one of the ten children who made a noisy throng in the home of his parents—he opened, at the age of sixteen, a village school at Drumgooland, in the same county. In this occupation he continued after he had attained his majority, and was never a tutor, as Mrs. Gaskell supposes; but, being ambitious of a clerical life, through the assistance of his patron, Mr. Tighe, incumbent of Drumgooland and Drumballyroony, in the county of Down, he was admitted to St. John's College, Cambridge, on the 1st of October in the year 1802, when he had attained his twenty-fifth year. At Cambridge we may infer that he led an active life. It is known that he joined a volunteer corps raised to be in readiness for the French invasion, threatened at the time. After a four years' sojourn at his college, having graduated as a bachelor of arts, in the year 1806, he was ordained, and appointed to a curacy in Essex, where he is said not to have stayed long.

The perpetual curacy of Hartshead, in the West-

Riding of Yorkshire, having become vacant, Mr. Brontë received the appointment, on the presentation of the vicar of Dewsbury.

The church of St. Peter, at Hartshead—which has extensive remains of Norman work, and has recently been restored—is situated on an eminence about a mile from the actual hamlet of that name; and, with its broad, low, and massive tower, and its grim old yew-tree, forms a conspicuous object for miles around, commanding on all sides extensive and magnificent views of the valleys of Calder and Colne, with their wooded slopes, and pleasant farms, and the busy villages nestling in the hollows. At the foot of the hill, the deep and sombre woods of Kirklees hide the almost indistinguishable remains of the convent, founded by Raynerus Flandrensis, in the reign of Henry II., for nuns of the order of Cîteaux.

There are interesting circumstances and evidences concerning Kirklees, its Roman entrenchments being very distinct within the park which overlooks the Calder at this point. The priory, too, has its curious history of the events which

attended the cloistered life of Elizabeth de Stainton, one of the prioresses, whose monumental memorial alone remains of all that marked the graves of the religious of that house; and there are stories relating to Robin Hood. Here still exists the chamber in which tradition says the 'noble outlaw' died, and also the grave, at a cross-bow shot from it, where long generations of men have averred his dust reposes. The district of Kirklees had an interest for Charlotte Brontë, and she has celebrated it in 'Shirley,' under the name of Nunnely, with its old church, its forest, its monastic ruins, and 'its man of title—its baronet.' It was to the house of the latter—kind gentleman though he was—that Louis Moore could not go, where he 'would much sooner have made an appointment with the ghost of the Earl of Huntingdon to meet him, and a shadowy ring of his merry men, under the canopy of the thickest, blackest, oldest oak in Nunnely Forest ... would rather have appointed tryst with a phantom abbess, or mist-pale nun, among the wet and weedy relics of that ruined sanctuary of theirs, mouldering in the core of the wood.'

Mr. Brontë entered upon his ministrations at Hartshead in the year 1811; and there are entries in the churchwarden's book of Easter-dues paid to him up to 1815. It is curious to note that, in this early mention of Mr. Brontë, the name is spelled 'Brunty' and 'Bronty.'

Hartshead being destitute of a glebe house, and no suitable residence existing either at this place or at the neighbouring village of Clifton at the time, Mr. Brontë took up his residence at High Town, in a roomy and pleasant house at the top of Clough Lane, near Liversedge in the parish of Birstall, and about a mile from the place of his cure. The house, which commands beautiful views, is entered by a passage of the ordinary width, on the left of which is the drawing-room, having cross-beams ornamented with plaster mouldings, as when first finished. On the right of the passage is the dining-room. The breakfast-room and kitchen are behind them. The house is three stories in height, and stands back about two yards from the road, which points direct to the now populous towns of Liversedge and Cleckheaton, both places of considerable

antiquity, whose inhabitants, employed in various manufacturies, were increasing in Mr. Brontë's time.

Finding himself now in possession of a competent income and a goodly residence, he felt relieved from those anxieties which, in all probability, had attended his early struggles; and, resting awhile in his ambition, he turned in peace and contentment to poetical meditation. His first book was called 'Cottage Poems,' on the title-page of which he describes himself as the 'Reverend Patrick Brontë, B.A., minister of Hartshead-cum-Clifton.' This book was published at Halifax in the year 1811. The following are a few of its subjects: 'The Happy Cottagers,' 'The Rainbow,' 'Winter Nights' Meditations,' 'Verses sent to a Lady on her Birthday,' 'The Cottage Maid,' and 'The Spider and the Fly.' Mr. Brontë thus speaks of himself and his work: 'When relieved from clerical avocations he was occupied in writing the "Cottage Poems;" from morning till noon, and from noon till night, his employment was full of indescribable pleasure, such as he could wish to taste as long as life lasts. His hours glided

pleasantly and almost imperceptibly by, and when night drew on, and he retired to rest, ere his eyes closed in sleep with sweet calmness and serenity of mind, he often reflected that, though the delicate palate of criticism might be disgusted, the business of the day in the prosecution of his humble task was well-pleasing in the sight of God, and by His blessing might be rendered useful to some poor soul who cared little about critical niceties.' Throughout he professes to be indifferent to hostile criticism.

It is pleasant to find that Mr. Brontë, although settled in competence in a picturesque part of England, was not forgetful of his parents or of the land of his birth. So long as his mother lived he sent her twenty pounds a year; and, though we have no record of the occasion, we may safely infer that he found opportunity to visit Ireland again. He maintained his connection with the district of his early life; and, in after-years, he appointed a relative of Mr. Tighe to be his own curate. One of his 'Cottage Poems' is entitled 'The Irish Cabin,' a verse or two from which may here be given:—

'Should poverty, modest and clean,
E'er please when presented to view,
Should cabin on brown heath or green,
Disclose aught engaging to you;
Should Erin's wild harp soothe the ear,
When touched by such fingers as mine,
Then kindly attentive draw near,
And candidly ponder each line.'

He describes a winter-scene on the mountains of Morne—a high range of hills in the north of Ireland—and thus alludes to his hospitable reception in the clean and industrious cabin of his verses:—

'Escaped from the pitiless storm,
I entered the humble retreat;
Compact was the building, and warm,
In furniture simple and neat.
And now, gentle reader, approve
The ardour that glowed in each breast,
As kindly our cottagers strove
To cherish and welcome their guest.'

It is unnecessary to give in this place further extracts from this book; suffice it to say that, in all probability, Mr. Brontë lived to see the day when he was pained and surprised that he had ever committed it to the press.

Although the poems of Mr. Brontë are inspired by the love of a peaceful and contented life, free from excitement and care, yet in times of trouble and emergency, such as those of the Luddite riots which occurred during the period of his ministration at Hartshead, he showed again the active and resolute spirit which had prompted and sustained the efforts of his early ambition; and his ardour in helping to suppress the turbulent spirit of the neighbourhood would have made him very unpopular with the disaffected people, had they not learned to respect the upright and unfailing rectitude of his conduct. In the energetic character of Mr. Brontë's life in these early times, in his persistent ambition, and in the literary pursuits which clearly were dear to him, we may trace those factors of working power and literary aspiration and taste which made up the characteristic intellectual force of his children.

Mrs. Gaskell, in her 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' has given some of the particulars of the Reverend Mr. Brontë's courtship and marriage, in which she appears to have taken a lively interest.

Mr. Brontë met his future wife, (Miss Maria Branwell—of whose character I shall speak in the next chapter—the third daughter of Mr. T. Branwell of Penzance, deceased) for the first time about the summer of 1812, when she was on a visit to her uncle, the Rev. John Fennel, a Methodist minister and head-master of the Wesleyan Academy at Woodhouse Grove, near Bradford, but who became later a clergyman of the Establishment, and was made incumbent of Cross-stone, in the parish of Halifax. This meeting was soon followed by an engagement, and, says Mrs. Gaskell, there were plans for happy picnic-parties to Kirkstall Abbey in the glowing September days, when 'Uncle, Aunt, and Cousin Jane'—the last engaged to a Mr. Morgan, another clergyman—were of the party.

In the account which Mr. Brontë gives of the aim and scope of the work from which I have made

an extract, and the state of his mind while engaged upon it, we have a retrospect of the inner life of the father of the Brontës, during his sojourn at Hartshead as perpetual curate, prior to his marriage with Miss Branwell. In this period of his life, he seems to have been perfectly happy, no cloud or anticipation of future sorrow having obscured or diminished the fulness of his peace. The marriage was celebrated on the 29th of December, 1812, at Guiseley, near Bradford, by the Rev. W. Morgan, minister of Bierley, the gentleman engaged to 'Cousin Jane.' It is a very curious circumstance that on the same day, and at the same place, Mr. Brontë performed the marriage ceremony between his wife's cousin, Miss Jane Fennel, only daughter of the Mr. Fennel alluded to above, and the Rev. W. Morgan, who had just been, as described, the officiating clergyman at his own wedding.

Mr. Fennel would naturally have performed the ceremony for his niece and Mr. Brontë, had it not fallen to his lot to give the lady away.

When Mr. Brontë found himself settled in married

life at Hartshead, and with the probability of a young family rising around him, he felt pleasure in the contemplation of the future. Mrs. Brontë, ever gentle and affectionate in her household ways, comforted and encouraged him in his literary pursuits, and, by her acute observation and accurate judgment, directed and aided his own. It was at this time that Mr. Brontë wrote a book, entitled 'The Rural Ministry,' which was published at Halifax, in 1813. The work consisted of a miscellany of descriptive poems, with the following titles: 'The Sabbath Bells,' 'Kirkstall Abbey,' 'Extempore Verses,' 'Lines to a Lady on her Birthday,' 'An Elegy,' 'Reflections by Moonlight,' 'Winter,' 'Rural Happiness,' 'The Distress and Relief,' 'The Christian's Farewell,' 'The Harper of Erin.' It cannot be doubted that, in consequence of his two publications while he was at Hartshead, Mr. Brontë became known in the surrounding districts as an aspiring man, and one of literary culture and ability.

Mr. Brontë had taken his bride to his house at High Town, and it was there that his daughters Maria and Elizabeth were born. Maria was

baptized on April the 23rd, 1814, and is entered in the register as the 'daughter of Patrick Brontë and Maria his wife.' The Rev. Mr. Morgan was the officiating minister. There is no such entry there relating to Elizabeth, for she was baptized at Thornton with the other children.

Mr. Brontë, after having been nearly five years minister of Hartshead-cum-Clifton, resigned the benefice, and accepted, from the vicar of Bradford, the incumbency of Thornton, a perpetual curacy in that parish. This, probably, on the suggestion of Mr. Morgan, who was then incumbent of Christ's Church at Bradford.

Thornton is beautifully situated on the northern slope of a valley. Green and fertile pastures spread over the adjacent hills, and wooded dells with shady walks beautify and enrich the district. 'The neighbourhood,' says Mrs. Gaskell, 'is desolate and wild; great tracts of bleak land, enclosed by stone dykes, sweeping up Clayton Heights.' This disagreeable picture of the place, painted by the biographer of Charlotte, is scarcely justified by the actual appearance of the district.

The soil is naturally fertile, and the inhabitants are notable for industry and enterprise. Hence no barren land, within the wide range of hill and vale, is now seen obtruding on the cultivated sweep.

The town is somewhat regularly built. In the main street is situated the house where Mr. Brontë took up his abode during his stay at Thornton. The hall door was reached by several steps. There was a dining-room on one side of the hall, and a drawing-room on the other. Over the passage to the front was a dressing-room, at the window of which the neighbours often saw Mr. Brontë at his toilet. Above the door of the house, on a stone slab, there are still visible the letters:

A.

J. S.

1802

These are the initials of John and Sarah Ashworth, former inhabitants of Thornton; and this residence remained as the parsonage until another was built below, nearer to the chapel, by the successor of Mr. Brontë.

The chapel of Thornton is a narrow, contracted, and unsightly building. The north side is lighted by two rows of square cottage windows—on the south side, five late perpendicular pointed windows permit the sun to relieve the gloom of the interior.

The diminutive communion-table is lighted by a four-mullioned window, above which, externally, in the wall, appears the date 1620. The interior is blocked, on the ground floor, with high-backed, unpainted deal pews. Two galleries hide the windows almost from view, and cast a gloom over the interior of the edifice. The area under the pews, and in the aisles, is paved with gravestones, and a fetid, musty smell floats through the damp and mouldering interior. In this chapel, Mr. Brontë preached and ministered, and from the pulpit, placed high above the curate and clerk, whence he delivered his sermons, he could see his wife and children in a pew just below him.

The new incumbent of Thornton seems to have taken active interest in his chapel; for in the western screen, which divides a kind of lobby

from the nave, is painted, on a wooden tablet, an inscription recording that in the year 1818 this chapel was 'Repaired and Beautified,' the Rev. Patrick Brontë, B.A., being then minister.

While at Thornton Mr. Brontë steadily pursued his literary avocations, one of his books being a small volume entitled, 'The Cottage in the Wood, or the Art of becoming Rich and Happy.' This is an account of a pious family, consisting of an aged couple and a virtuous child, whose appearance and education qualify her for a higher position in the world than that of a cottager's daughter. Accident brings to their door a young man in a state of almost helpless drunkenness, whose habits are the most profligate and dissolute, as the sequel discloses; and the object of the book is to show the dire consequences of continued intemperance. The story is told in prose, but Mr. Brontë gives a poetical version of one event in the narrative. It is entitled, 'The Nightly Revel,' and possesses a dignity of its own. The following extract shows considerable improvement, in diction and verse, upon the style of his small volume published at Halifax, in 1811. For this

reason it is well worth reproducing.

'Around the table polish'd goblets shine,
Fill'd with brown ale, or crown'd with ruddy
wine;
Each quaffs his glass, and, thirsty, calls for
more,
Till maddening mirth, and song, and wild
uproar,
And idly fierce dispute, and brutal fight
Break the soft slumbers of the peaceful night.

'Without, within, above, beneath, around,
Ungodly jests and deep-mouthed oaths
resound;
Pale Reason, trembling, leaves her reeling
throne,
Truth, Honour, Virtue, Justice, all are flown;
The sly, dark-glancing harlot's fatal breath
Allures to sin and sorrow, shame and death.
The gaming-table, too, that fatal snare,
Beset with fiercest passions fell is there;
Remorse, despair, revenge, and deadly hate,
With dark design, in bitter durance wait,

Till Scarlet Murder waves his bloody hand,
Gives in sepulchral tone the dread command;
Then forth they rush, and from the secret
sheath
Draw the keen blade and do the work of
death.'

Mr. Brontë also, in 1818, before his appointment to Haworth, published his 'Maid of Killarney.' He had not been long at Thornton, where he went about the year 1815, when a considerable increase in his family added to his parental responsibilities.

On his acceptance of the living, he probably enjoyed a larger stipend than at Hartshead, but the demands of a young family, perhaps, on the whole, made him a poorer man. There Charlotte Brontë was born in April, 1816; Patrick Branwell Brontë in 1817; Emily Jane Brontë in 1818; and Anne Brontë probably just before Mr. Brontë's removal to Haworth, which was on February 25th, 1820, as we are told by Mrs. Gaskell.

Of the life of the Brontës at Thornton we know

little. But there were causes of anxiety pressing on Mr. Brontë at the time. The state of his wife's health was a real sorrow, and although he derived solace from his literary pursuits and the society of his clerical friends, his spirits were damped by the contemplation of the season of bereavement and affliction that assuredly threatened him at no distant date.

With six young children, who might soon become motherless, Mr. Brontë's future was dark and discouraging, and he entertained the idea of resigning, at no distant day, the then place of his cure. Here, living within a reasonable distance of Bradford, he had an opportunity of moving in a larger circle of friends than at Hartshead, and it was here that his children received their earliest impressions of local life and character. Old inhabitants of Thornton remembered them playing in the space opposite their father's residence, in the village street, and had often seen them carried, or their parents lead them by the hand, in the lanes of the neighbourhood. They were children only when they left Thornton; yet, on many grounds, the inhabitants of that village may feel privileged

that it was the birthplace of the authors of 'Jane Eyre,' 'Wuthering Heights,' and 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.'

Shortly an opportunity presented itself to Mr. Brontë for leaving Thornton, a vacancy having taken place at Haworth through the death of the curate, Mr. Charnock. The situation of this chapelry was blessed with a more bracing air, and the curate had a somewhat better stipend than Thornton allowed, and so Mr. Brontë accepted the presentation from the patron. We are informed, however, that, on visiting the place of his intended ministrations, he was told that while to him personally the parishioners had no objection, yet, as the nominee of the vicar of Bradford, he would not be received. He had no idea that the inhabitants had a veto in the appointment.

On Mr. Brontë declaring that, if he had not the good-will of the inhabitants, his ministrations would be useless, the place was presented to Mr. Redhead by the patron, and the village seems to have become the scene of extraordinary

proceedings. It appears that, after the Reformation, the presentation to the curacy of Haworth, which had been from time immemorial vested in the vicar of Bradford, had become subject to the control of the freeholders, and of certain trustees who held possession of the principal funds from which the stipend of the curate proceeded, which they could withhold, by virtue of an authority they appear to have been empowered with. In effect, they could at any time disallow or render void an appointment, if disagreeable to themselves, by keeping back the stipend. Mr. Brontë, writing later of Mr. Redhead, says of this: 'My predecessor took the living with the consent of the vicar of Bradford and certain trustees, in consequence of which he was so opposed that, after only three weeks' possession, he was compelled to resign.' What this opposition and its immediate effects were, we learn from the pages of Mrs. Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' and they may be mentioned here as illustrative of the pre-eminent resolution and force of character which ever distinguish the inhabitants of the West-Riding and the dwellers

on these rough-hewn and storm-beaten elevations.

During the long illness which preceded the death of Mr. Charnock, incumbent of Haworth, his assistant curate, Mr. Redhead, had supplied his place; who, on Mr. Brontë's withdrawal, was presented, as is stated above, to the vacant living by the patron, and he seems to have been determined to hold the chapelry, *vi et armis*, in defiance of the inhabitants. But the freeholders, conceiving they had been deprived of their long established prerogative, or an attempt was being made to interfere with it, protested against Mr. Redhead's appointment. On the first occasion of this gentleman's preaching in the church, it was crowded not by worshippers, but by a multitude of people bent on mischief. These resolved the service should not proceed, or that it should be rendered inaudible. To secure this object they had put on the heavy wooden clogs they daily wore, except on Sundays, and, while the surpliced minister was reading the opening service, the stamping and clattering of the clogs drowned his voice, and the people left the church, making all

the noise and uproar that was in their power, which was by no means feeble. The following Sunday witnessed proceedings still more disgraceful. We are told that at the commencement of the service, a man rode up the nave of the church on an ass, with his face to the tail, and with a number of old hats piled on his head. On urging his beast forward, the screams of delight, the roars of laughter, and the shouts of the approving conspirators completely drowned the clergyman's voice; and he left the chapel, but not yet discomfited.

Mr. Redhead, on the third Sunday, resolved to make a strenuous and final effort to keep the ecclesiastical citadel of which he had been formally put in possession. For this purpose he brought with him a body of cavalry, composed of a number of sympathising gentlemen, with their horses; and the curate, thus accompanied by his supporters, ascended the village street and put up at the 'Bull.' But the enemy had been on the alert: the people were exasperated, and followed the new-comers to the church, accompanied by a chimney-sweep who had, not long before,

finished his labours at some adjacent chimneys, and whom they had made half drunk. Him they placed right before the reading-desk, which Mr. Redhead had already reached, and the drunken, black-faced sweep nodded assent to the measured utterances of the minister. 'At last,' it is said, 'either prompted by some mischief-maker, or from some tipsy impulse, he clambered up the pulpit stairs, and attempted to embrace Mr. Redhead. Then the fun grew fast and furious. Some of the more riotous pushed the soot-covered chimney-sweeper against Mr. Redhead, as he tried to escape. They threw both him and his tormentor down on the ground in the churchyard where the soot-bag had been emptied, and though, at last, Mr. Redhead escaped into the "Black Bull," the doors of which were immediately barred, the people raged without, threatening to stone him and his friends.'

[\[1\]](#) They escaped from the place, and Mr. Redhead, completely vanquished, retired from the curacy of Haworth.

Mr. Brontë, who had made a favourable impression on the inhabitants, was now accepted

by them, and the natural kindness of his disposition and the urbanity of his manners, secured peace and contentment in the village.

His responsibilities as a pastor were not light, though the new scene of his labours, in moral condition, was, perhaps, no worse than the generality of similar villages in the north of England. The special chroniclers of Haworth speak of the population of the barren mountains west of York as 'rude and arrogant, after the manner of their wild country.' This is the testimony of James Rither, a Yorkshire esquire. The celebrated Oliver Haywood, preaching at the house of Jonas Foster, at Haworth, on June 13th, 1672, broke out into lamentations about the immorality, corruption, and profanity of the place. Mr. Grimshaw, in the last century, while curate there, had a conviction that the majority of the people were going to hell with their eyes open! Mrs. Gaskell informs us that at Haworth, 'drinking without the head being affected was considered a manly accomplishment.' A remarkable instance of the loss of reverence and the increase of profanity, in those days, is found in the

observance of Palm Sunday at Heptonstall, a neighbouring village, and at Haworth itself this feast was pre-eminently distinguished in ancient times by the out-door processions of people going from the church and returning to it, bearing palm branches and singing the psalms and hymns appointed for the special festival.

It is known, indeed, that this feast was attended by the inhabitants of the surrounding hills and valleys in those times; and, at the period of which I speak, the attendance of the people was not diminished, but increased, though they came for another object. It is a singular fact that local feuds, if we may call them such, were kept up between the villages of the West Riding. And thus challenges were given alternately by Haworth to Heptonstall, and by Heptonstall to Haworth, for struggles between the champions of the respective villages, to be fought out on Palm Sunday. The inhabitants of these places, therefore, met to pound and pummel each other without any civil or religious cause to give bitterness to the fray: greed of triumph and brutal indifference to injuries inflicted characterized these hostile meetings. On

such occasions, at Heptonstall, amidst great drunkenness and rioting, there were 'stand-up' fights from the church-gates to the 'Buttress,' a steep part of the road, near the bridge which crosses the river at the foot of Heptonstall Bank—nearly a mile in extent. On one of these feasts, a Haworth belligerent, unwilling to return home, although night was drawing on, and looking extremely dissatisfied, when asked by his wife what ailed him, answered, 'Aw 'annot fawhten wí onny body yet, an' aw'll nut gooa whom till aw dun summat.' His affectionate spouse replied, 'Then gooa, an' get fawhten' an' ha' done wí it, for we mun gooa.' The West-Riding police, on their institution, put an end to these disgraceful proceedings.

Haworth, the new place of Mr. Brontë's incumbency, which has been well and very fully described by many writers, is situated on the western confines of the parish of Bradford, and stands on a somewhat lofty eminence. It is, however, protected in great measure from the western storms by still higher ground, which consists of irreclaimable moors and morasses.

The church in which he, for the remainder of his life, performed his religious services, and in which his more gifted children repose, after their brief but memorable lives, was of ancient date. A chantry was founded there at the beginning of the reign of Edward III., where a priest celebrated daily for the repose of the soul of Adam de Battley, and for the souls of his ancestors, and for all the faithful departed. The church, which is dedicated to the glory of God, in honour of St. Michael the archangel, has been recently, to a great extent, re-edified. The old structure retained traces of one still older, of the early English style. Invested as it was with the evidences of the periods of taste good and bad through which it had passed, and with the associations which attach to old and familiar internal arrangements, it was endeared to the inhabitants. Of such associations the present church—though an architectural gain upon its predecessor—is necessarily destitute, and the world-wide interest with which the former structure was invested through the genius of the Brontës has been almost destroyed by the substitution of an edifice in

which they never prayed, and which they never saw; though their remains repose, it is true, under its pavement, as is indicated by memorial tablets.

During the existence of the old church, Haworth was visited by continuous streams of people; but, on its removal, little was left to attract pilgrims from afar, and there was a manifest diminution of visitors to the village.

In the recent alterations, the parsonage also, in which the children of the Rev. Patrick Brontë lived and won for themselves enduring fame in the path of literature, has undergone considerable changes. It has been found necessary to add a new wing to the house, in order to obtain larger accommodation, and, to beautify the parsonage still further, the old cottage panes, through which light fell on precious and invaluable pages of elaborate manuscript, as they passed through delicate and gifted hands, have given way to plate-glass squares. Altogether the house, both inside and out, presents a very different appearance from that which it did in the time of the Brontës.

The chapelry at Haworth, when Mr. Brontë accepted the perpetual curacy, was much more populous and important than that of Thornton. The stipend of £170 per annum, with a fair residence attached, and a sum of £27 13s. for maintenance, made the change a desirable one on pecuniary grounds; and, with Mrs. Brontë's annuity of £50 a year, anxiety on this head was no doubt allayed.

The population of the district was about four thousand seven hundred, and, in the first ten years of Mr. Brontë's incumbency, increased by nearly twelve hundred souls. The chapelry included within its bounds the townships or hamlets of Stanbury and Near and Far Oxenhope, with the extensive moors and scattered houses stretching to the borders of Lancashire. The curacy of Stanbury, a place one mile west of Haworth, with £100 per annum, was in the gift of Mr. Brontë; and there was also the interest on £600, with a house, for the maintenance of a free school at that place, and a sum of £90 per annum for a like purpose at Haworth. In the year 1849, while Mr. Brontë was still incumbent, the chapelry of

Haworth was divided, a church having been erected at Oxenhope at a cost of £1,500, the curacy there being valued at £150 per annum.

Among the considerations which had weight with Mr. Brontë in his determination to accept the curacy of Haworth was, in all probability, the delicate state of his wife's health, and the not over-robust constitutions of his children. He knew, that though from the smoke-laden atmosphere of the busy centres of West-Riding industry, Keighley and Haworth were not wholly exempt, yet the winds which prevailed from the west and the south-west for a great part of the year, and swept over the moorlands from whose heights the Irish Channel itself was visible, would, by their purity, give that invigoration of which his family stood in need. It is quite possible, indeed, that by Mr. Brontë's removal to Haworth, which gave an almost illimitable range of wild, heathery hills for his children to wander over, an extension of their short lives may have been attained. Mrs. Brontë, however, derived little or no benefit from the change. She had suffered for some time under a fatal malady—an internal cancer—of which,

about eighteen months after her arrival at Haworth, she died.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. BRONTË.

The Mother of the Brontës—Her Character and Personal Appearance—Her Literary Taste—Penzance, her Native Place—Description of Penzance—The Branwell Family—Personal Traits of Maria Branwell—Her Virtues—Her Letters to Mr. Brontë—Her Domestic Experiences.

The mother of the Brontës—whose death, in September, 1821, deprived her children of the affectionate and tender care which, for the short period of her married life, she had bestowed upon them—would, had she been spared, have moulded their characters by her own meek, gentle, and maternal virtues. Mrs. Brontë is said

to have been small in person, but of graceful and kindly manners; not beautiful, yet comely and lady-like, and gifted with great discrimination, judgment, and modesty. Mrs. Gaskell says she 'was very elegant, and always dressed with a quiet simplicity of taste which accorded well with her general character, and of which some details call to mind the style of dress preferred by her daughter for her favourite heroines.' Mrs. Brontë was also gifted with literary ability and taste. She had written an essay entitled, 'The Advantages of Poverty in Religious Concerns,' with a view to publication in some periodical; and her letters were characterized by elegance and ease. Her relations in Penzance spoke of her as 'their favourite aunt, and one to whom they, as well as the family, looked up as a person of talent and great amiability of disposition;' and again, as 'possessing more than ordinary talents, which she inherited from her father.'

Mrs. Brontë, as has been said, was a native of Penzance, a corporate town in the county of Cornwall, and also a sea-port. Penzance is situated in the hundred of Penwith, and is the most

westerly town in England. The climate is distinguished by great mildness and salubrity, and the land is remarkable for its fertility, and the beauty of its meads and pastures. Its maritime situation, however, had, in former times, exposed it to the descents of foreign invaders, the last of which appears to have been that of the Spaniards in the year 1595. The account given of this event is that the invaders, being masters of Bretagne, sent four vessels manned with a force sufficient to occupy the Cornish coast. They landed near Mousehole—a well-known place on the western side of Mount's Bay—and entered the town, which they set on fire, the inhabitants fleeing before them. At a later date the town became very pleasant, and many of the houses were large and respectable, while the streets were well paved. Generally the people enjoyed long lives, and some attained the patriarchal age: one of these—Dolly Pentreath, who died in her one hundred and second year, and who had made the 'Mousehole' her residence—was known as the last who spoke Cornish. On account of the gentleness of the climate, many suffering from

pulmonary complaints took up their residence there.

Penzance was a town surrounded by places of great interest to the historian and the antiquary, which are fully described by Borlase and others. The trades carried on at the place were of considerable extent in tin and the pilchard fishery, as well as in copper, earthenware, clay, and in other objects of manufacture and merchandise. In one of the local industries, Mr. Thomas Branwell was engaged. He had married a lady named Carne, and they had four daughters and one son. Maria was their third daughter. The families of Mr. and Mrs. Branwell were well connected, and moved in the best society in Penzance. They were Wesleyan Methodist in religion, and the children were brought up in that persuasion. Mr. Branwell relieved the cares of business by the delights and consolations of music, in the performance of which he is said to have had considerable ability. He and his wife lived to see their children grown up; and died, Mr. Branwell in 1808, and his wife in 1809.

Maria Branwell visited her uncle, Mr. Fennel, at the beginning of the summer of 1812, as is stated above, and, for the first time, saw Mr. Brontë. A feeling of mutual admiration sprang up between them, and something like the beginning of an engagement took place. When she returned home, a correspondence opened between the two, and Mr. Brontë preserved the letters. These have been referred to by the biographer of his daughter, and we learn that the communications of Miss Branwell were characterized by singular modesty, thoughtfulness, and piety. She was surprised to find herself so suddenly engaged, but she accepted with modest candour the proffer of Mr. Brontë's affection. The future was determined by mutual acquiescence. On Miss Branwell, nature had bestowed no great personal attractions, yet, as has been said, she was comely, and lady-like in her manners; and her innate grace drew irresistibly to her the esteem of all her acquaintances. Little is known respecting her beyond the personal traits already mentioned; and as to the circumstances and events of her life, unmarried or married, which was one of an

extremely even and uneventful kind, little or nothing can be recorded beyond the ordinary routine of domestic duties well and affectionately performed, and of obligations in her sphere religiously observed. Blameless in her conduct, loving in her charge, and patient in the sufferings she was called upon to endure, she was a pattern of those excellencies which are the adornments of domestic life, and make the hearth happy and contented. It cannot be doubted that she ordered her household with judgment, and expended her husband's income with frugality and to the best advantage.

Mrs. Gaskell was enabled to give an extract from one of her letters written to Mr. Brontë before her marriage, which displays in an excellent manner her calm sensibility and understanding. She says: 'For some years I have been perfectly my own mistress, subject to no control whatever; so far from it that my sisters, who are many years older than myself, and even my dear mother, used to consult me on every occasion of importance, and scarcely ever doubted the propriety of my opinions and actions; perhaps you will be ready to

accuse me of vanity in mentioning this, but you must consider that I do not boast of it. I have many times felt it a disadvantage, and although, I thank God, it has never led me into error, yet, in circumstances of uncertainty and doubt, I have deeply felt the want of a guide and instructor.' [\[2\]](#)

The usual preparations, which Mrs. Gaskell has particularized, were made for the wedding; but during the arrangements a disaster happened, to which the following letter to Mr. Brontë refers:—

'I suppose you never expected to be much richer for me, but I am sorry to inform you that I am still poorer than I thought myself. I mentioned having sent for my books, clothes, &c. On Saturday evening, about the time when you were writing the description of your imaginary shipwreck, I was reading and feeling the effects of a real one, having then received a letter from my sister, giving me an account of the vessel in which she had sent my box being stranded on the coast of Devonshire, in consequence of which the box was dashed

to pieces with the violence of the sea, and all my little property, with the exception of a few articles, being swallowed up in the mighty deep. If this should not prove the prelude to something worse, I shall think little of it, as it is the first disastrous circumstance which has occurred since I left home.' [\[3\]](#)

The wedding took place at Guiseley, on December 29th, 1812, as is stated in the previous chapter.

CHAPTER III.

THE REV. PATRICK BRONTË.

Character of the Rev. P. Brontë—Charges against Him—Serious Allegations of Biographers—Injustice of the Charges—Mr. Brontë's indignant Denial of the Imputations—Testimony of Nancy Garrs—Mrs. Brontë and

the Silk-Dress Episode—Mr. Brontë, the
Supposed Prototype of Mr. Helstone—The
Pistol-shots Theory—Mr. Brontë on Science
Knowledge—Miss Branwell.

The character of the Rev. Patrick Brontë, who was responsible, after the death of his wife, for the education of his children, if we may believe the accounts given of it by those who have admired their genius, had many deplorable peculiarities. It would be difficult, indeed, to find anywhere the record of such passionate outbreaks, such unreasoning prejudices, and such unbending will as are revealed in the stories which are told of him. But we shall see presently that most of these charges have no foundation in fact, while others are, probably, the result of total misconception.

Mrs. Gaskell gives an account of these peculiarities. On one occasion, she tells us, after the children had been out on the wet moors, the nurse had rummaged out certain coloured boots given to them by the Rev. Mr. Morgan, who had been sponsor for Maria at Hartshead, and had

arranged them before the fire. Mr. Brontë observing this, and thinking the bright colours might foster pride, heaped the boots upon the coals, and filled the house with a very strong odour of burnt leather. 'Long before this,' she says, 'some one had given Mrs. Brontë a silk gown she kept it treasured up in her drawers. One day, however, while in the kitchen, she remembered that she had left the key in the drawer, and, hearing Mr. Brontë upstairs, she augured some ill to her dress, and, running up in haste, she found it cut into shreds.... He did not speak when he was annoyed or displeased, but worked off his volcanic wrath by firing pistols out of the back-door in rapid succession.... Now and then his anger took a different form, but still was speechless. Once he got the hearth-rug, and, stuffing it up the grate, deliberately set it on fire, and remained in the room in spite of the stench until it had smouldered and shrivelled away into uselessness. Another time he took some chairs, and sawed away at the backs till they were reduced to the condition of stools.'

[4]

Mr. Wemyss Reid, who implicitly adopts the

'pistol shots' and 'pretty dress' stories, while paying a high tribute to Mr. Brontë's rectitude, and to his just pride in the celebrity of his daughters, says of him, 'He appears to have been a strange compound of good and evil. That he was not without some good is acknowledged by all who knew him. He had kindly feelings towards most people.... But throughout his whole life there was but one person with whom he had any real sympathy, and that person was himself.' He was 'passionate, self-willed, vain, habitually cold and distant in his demeanour towards those of his own household.' His wife 'lived in habitual dread of her lordly master.... It would be a mistake to suppose that violence was one of the weapons to which Mr. Brontë habitually resorted ... his general policy was to secure his end by craft rather than by force.' [\[5\]](#)

Miss Robinson, without hesitation, repeats the censures on Mr. Brontë published by Mrs. Gaskell and Mr. Reid, asking, 'Who dare say if that marriage was happy? Mrs. Gaskell, writing in the life and for the eyes of Mr. Brontë, speaks of his unwearied care, his devotion in the night-

nursing. But, before that fatal illness was declared, she lets fall many a hint of the young wife's loneliness ... of her patient suffering, of his violent temper.' [\[6\]](#)

It will thus be seen that the disposition of Mr. Brontë must have been a sad one indeed, if all these statements are true; and marvellous that, with 'such a father,' the young and sterling faculties of the 'six small children' should have been so admirably directed and trained that, of the four who lived to later years, three at least occupy an exalted and prominent position among women of letters in the present century. And it would be still more strange that these children were especially distinguished for the gentleness of their dispositions, and the refinement of their ideas. It may be hoped that the readers of this volume, with their additional knowledge of the affectionate, but often wayward, Branwell, will sympathize with the sentiment which Monsieur Héger expressed in his letter to Mr. Brontë, that, *en jugeant un père de famille par ses enfants on ne risque pas de se tromper*. For we can scarcely doubt that the characteristics of the

children, which I have named, were due, in fact, in great measure, to Mr. Brontë's affectionate supervision and education of them. He had graduated at St. John's College, Cambridge, as we have seen; and the culture and tone of the university were brought under the roof of his house, where his children—more especially Branwell—were subjected to its influence. Moreover, whatever may be thought of Mr. Brontë's intellectual gifts, or of the talent he displayed in his poems and prose writings, we may be sure that he possessed, in a marked degree, a deep sympathy with a higher mental training, and with the truth and simplicity of a pastoral life.

After the allegations against Mr. Brontë had appeared in the first edition of the life of his daughter Charlotte, he never ceased to deny the scandalous reflections upon his character in that work. 'They were,' he said to me, 'wholly untrue.' He stated that he had 'fulfilled every duty of a husband and a father with all the kindness, solicitude, and affection which could be required of him.' And Mrs. Brontë herself had said, as

quoted by Mrs. Gaskell, 'Ought I not to be thankful that he never gave me an angry word?' thus openly declaring that, whatever might have been the peculiarities of Mr. Brontë's temper, his wife, at least, never suffered the consequences. The children also ever looked up to their father with reverence, gratitude, and devotion.

In a conversation I had with Mr. Brontë on the 8th of July, 1857, he spoke of the unjustifiable reflections upon himself which had been made public, and he said, 'I did not know that I had an enemy in the world, much less one who would traduce me before my death, till Mrs. Gaskell's "Life of Charlotte" appeared. Every thing in that book which relates to my conduct to my family is either false or distorted. I never did commit such acts as are there ascribed to me.' At a later interview Mr. Brontë explained that by the word 'enemies,' he implied, 'false informants and hostile critics.' He believed that Mrs. Gaskell had listened to village scandal, and had sought information from some discarded servant.

Let us then examine the source of these

allegations. Mrs. Gaskell tells us that her informant was 'a good old woman,' who had been Mrs. Brontë's nurse in her illness. Now it is known that, whatever good qualities this person may be supposed to have had, her conscientiousness and rectitude, at least, were not of the first order, and she was detected in proceedings which caused Mr. Brontë to dismiss her at once. With the double effect of explaining her dismissal and injuring Mr. Brontë, this person gave an account of his temper and conduct, embellished with the stories which I have quoted from the first edition of the 'Life of Charlotte,' to a minister of the place; and it was in this way that Mrs. Gaskell became acquainted with her and them. Nancy Garrs, a faithful young woman who had been in Mr. Brontë's service at Thornton, who continued with the family after the removal to Haworth, and who still survives—a widow, Mrs. Wainwright—at an advanced age, a well-known inhabitant of Bradford, informs me that the 'silk dress' which Mr. Brontë is said to have torn to shreds was a print dress, not new, and that Mr. Brontë, disliking its enormous sleeves, one day, finding the

opportunity, cut them off. The whole thing was a joke, which Mrs. Brontë at once guessed at, and, going upstairs, she brought the dress down, saying to Nancy, 'Look what he has done; that falls to your share.' Nancy declares the other stories to be wholly unfounded. She speaks of Mr. Brontë as a 'most affectionate husband; there never was a more affectionate father, never a kinder master;' and 'he was not of a violent temper at all; quite the reverse.'

This view of these slanderous stories is fortunately also confirmed out of the mouth of Charlotte Brontë. In the fourth chapter of 'Shirley,' speaking of Mr. Helstone—whose character, though not absolutely founded on that of her father, is yet unquestionably influenced by her knowledge of his disposition, and of some incidents in which he had been concerned,—she says that on the death of his wife, 'his dry-eyed and sober mourning scandalized an old housekeeper, and likewise a female attendant who had waited upon Mrs. Helstone in her sickness ... they gossiped together over the corpse, related anecdotes with embellishments of her lingering decline, and its real

or supposed cause; in short, they worked each other up to some indignation against the austere little man, who sat examining papers in an adjoining room, unconscious of what opprobrium he was the object. Mrs. Helstone was hardly under the sod when rumours began to be rife in the neighbourhood that she had died of a broken heart; these magnified quickly into reports of hard usage, and, finally, details of harsh treatment on the part of her husband: reports grossly untrue, but not less eagerly received on that account.' It will thus be seen that the character of Mr. Helstone becomes in part a defence of Mr. Brontë. On the occasion above referred to, Mr. Brontë went on to say that, 'while duly acknowledging the obligations he felt himself under to Mrs. Gaskell for her admirable memoir of his daughter, he could not but regard her uncalled-for allusions to himself, and the failings of his son Branwell, as the excrescences of a work otherwise ably carried out.' He appeared, on this occasion, to be consoled by the thought that, owing to the remonstrances he had made, the objectionable passages would be expunged from

the subsequent editions of the work, and that he would ultimately be set right with the public. He concluded with these words:—'I have long been an abstraction to the world, and it is not consoling now to be thus dragged before the public; to be represented as an unkind husband, and charged with acts which I never committed.'

The story of the pistol-shots admits of ready explanation. It is known that Mr. Brontë, like Helstone, had a strange fascination in military affairs, and he seems to have had almost the spirit of Uncle Toby. He lived, too, in the troublous times of the Luddites, and had kept pistols, for defence as Mr. Helstone did. That gentleman, it will be remembered, had two pairs suspended over the mantel-piece of his study, in cloth cases, kept loaded. As I have reason to know, Mr. Brontë, having been accustomed to the use of fire-arms, retained the possession of them for safety in the night; but, fearing they might become dangerous, occasionally discharged them in the day-time.

Mr. Brontë's remonstrances and denials, and his

refutation of the scandals attributed to him, had their effect; and the charges complained of were entirely omitted in the edition of the 'Life of Charlotte,' published in the year 1860. Mr. Brontë was in his eighty-fourth year when this tardy act of bare justice was done to him. It may be added that the people of Haworth, when they saw in print Mrs. Gaskell's exaggerated and erroneous statements, loudly expressed their disapprobation. Mr. Wood, late churchwarden of Haworth, also denied the stories of the cutting up of Mrs. Brontë's dress, and the other charges just referred to.

The truth about Mr. Brontë appears to be this: that though, like Mr. Helstone—many of the *traits* of whose character were derived from that of the incumbent of Haworth—he might have missed his vocation, like him he was 'not diabolical at all,' and that, like him, also, 'he was a conscientious, hard-headed, hard-handed, brave, stern, implacable, faithful little man: a man almost without sympathy, ungentle, prejudiced, and rigid: but a man true to principle—honourable, sagacious, and sincere.' Possibly we should not

be wholly mistaken in saying that, like the parson in 'Shirley,' Nature never intended him 'to make a very good husband, especially to a quiet wife.' He lacked the fine sympathy and delicate perception that would have enabled him to make his family entirely happy; and when brooding over his politics, his pamphlets, and his sermons, like Mr. Helstone, he probably locked 'his liveliness in his book-case and study-desk.' Yet Mr. Helstone is neither brutal nor insane, 'neither tyrannical nor hypocritical,' but 'simply a man who is rather liberal than good-natured, rather brilliant than genial, rather scrupulously equitable than truly just—if you can understand such superfine distinctions?'

It would not have been necessary, in this work, to defend at such length the character of the Rev. Patrick Brontë, had it not happened, unfortunately, that recent works, which have treated admirably of the writings of his daughters, have also acquiesced in, and to a great extent reiterated, the serious charges made against him. Moreover, it can never be a useless thing to retrieve a character which has been thoughtlessly

taken away. This defence has now been made, and it may be hoped that the 'six motherless children' had a more amiable and affectionate father than is generally supposed, and that he paid careful and anxious attention to their bringing-up and to their education. Indeed, of this there need be no doubt. The death of his wife had placed them in his hands, he being their only support on earth, and it surely is not too much to say that he knew his duty, and did it well, as the lives of his children prove, on the ground of natural affection, and, perhaps, of higher motives also.

The following extract from a letter written by Mr. Brontë a few years later, in reference to scientific knowledge, is sufficiently characteristic. He says: 'In this age of innovation and scepticism, it is the incumbent duty of every man of an enlarged and pious mind to promote, to the utmost extent of his abilities, every movement in the variegated, complex system of human affairs, which may have either a direct, indirect, or collateral tendency to purify and expand the naturally polluted and circumscribed mind of fallen nature, and to raise it to that elevation which the Scriptures require, as

well as the best interests of humanity.'

Upon the death of his wife, Mr. Brontë felt the need of some one to superintend the affairs of his household, and assist him in this important charge of the bringing-up of his children; and so, towards the end of the year 1822, an elder sister of the deceased lady, Miss Elizabeth Branwell of Penzance, came to reside with him. She is represented to have been, in personal appearance, of low and slight proportions; prim and starched in her attire, which was, when prepared for the reception of visitors, invariably of silk; and she wore, according to the fashion of the time, a frontal of auburn curls, gracefully overshadowing her forehead. She took occasionally, through habit, a pinch from her gold snuff-box, which she had always at hand. When she had taken up her residence at bleak, wild, and barren Haworth, she is said to have sighed for the flower-decked meads of sunny Penzance, her native place. Miss Branwell's affectionate regard for her dead sister's children caused her to take deep interest in everything relating to them, their health, the comfort and cleanliness of their home,

and the sedulous culture of their minds. In the management of Mr. Brontë's household she was materially assisted by the faithful and trustworthy Tabby, who, in 1825, was added to the family as a domestic servant. By a long and faithful service of some thirty years in the Brontë family, Tabby gained the respect and confidence of the household. She had been born and nurtured in the chapelry of Haworth, at a time when mills and machinery were not, when railways had not made the inhabitants of the hills and valleys familiar with the cities and towns of England; and, moreover, before the ancient dialect, so interesting philologically to the readers of King Alfred's translations of Orosius and Bede, and the like, came to be considered rude, vulgar, and barbarous. Tabby used the dialect rightly, without any attempt to improve on the language of her childhood and of her fathers; and she was original and truthful in this, as in all her ways. It was from Tabby, principally, that the youthful Brontës gained the familiarity with the Yorkshire Doric, which they afterwards reproduced with such accuracy in 'Shirley,' 'Wuthering Heights,' and

others of their writings.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GIRLHOOD OF THE BRONTË SISTERS.

Girlhood—Gravity of Character—Charlotte's Description of the Elf-land of Childhood—The Still and Solemn Moors of Haworth influence their Writings—The Present of Toys—The Plays which they Acted—Mr. Brontë on a Supposed Earthquake—The Evidence of his Care for his Children—Grammar School at Haworth—His Children under the Tuition of the Master—The Character of the School—Cowan Bridge School—Charlotte's View of Mr. Carus Wilson's Management—Deaths of Maria and Elizabeth.

The childhood of the Brontës in the parsonage of

Haworth has been pictured to us as a very strange one indeed. We have seen them deprived in their early youth of that maternal care which they required so much, and left in the hands of a father unfamiliar with such a charge, who was filled with Spartan ideas of discipline, and with theories of education above and beyond the capacity of childhood. There was probably little room in the house of Mr. Brontë for gaiety and amusement, very little tolerance for pretty dress, or home beauty, and small comprehension of childish needs. Rigid formality, silent chambers, staid attire, frugal fare, and secluded lives fell to the lot of these thoughtful and gifted children. It was no wonder that they grew up 'grave and silent beyond their years;' that, when infantine relaxation failed them, they betook themselves to reading newspapers, and debating the merits of Hannibal and Cæsar, of Buonaparte and Wellington; or that, when they were deprived of the company of the village children by the '*Quis ego et quis tu?*' which was forced too early upon them, they fled for silent companionship with the moors. Yet this childhood, stern and grim though it was, where

we look in vain for the beautiful simplicity and sunny gladness which should ever distinguish the features of youth, had a beauty and a joy of its own; and it had a merit also. Charlotte Brontë herself has left us one of the most beautiful pictures which can be found in English literature of the pleasures of childhood, that elf-land which is passed before the shores of Reality have arisen in front; when they stand afar off, so blue, soft, and gentle that we long to reach them; when we 'catch glimpses of silver lines, and imagine the roll of living waters,' heedless of 'many a wilderness, and often of the flood of Death, or some stream of sorrow as cold and almost as black as Death' that must be crossed ere true bliss can be tasted. So the Brontës, trooping abroad on the moors, revelling in the freedom of Nature, while their faculties expanded to the noblest ends, lived also in the heroic world of childhood, 'its inhabitants half-divine or semi-demon; its scenes dream-scenes; darker woods and stranger hills; brighter skies, more dangerous waters; sweeter flowers, more tempting fruits; wider plains; drearier deserts; sunnier fields than are found in Nature.'

Can we doubt that the Brontë children, endowed, as the world was afterwards to know, with keener perceptions, more exalted sympathies, and nobler gifts than other children, enjoyed these things more than others could? And the merit of their childhood was this: that it impressed them in the strongest form with the influence of locality, with the boundless expanse of the moors, and with the weird and rugged character of the people amongst whom they lived, and whom they afterwards drew so well. Such influences as these are a quality more or less traceable in the works of every author, but they are very apparent in the productions of the Brontës. These writers could not have produced 'Jane Eyre,' 'Shirley,' and 'Wuthering Heights' without them, any more than Goldsmith could have written his 'Vicar of Wakefield' if his early years had not been passed in the pleasant village of Lissey. The moors, clothed with purple heather and golden gorse in billowy waves, were certainly all in all to Emily Brontë; and she and her sisters, and the youthful Branwell with his ready admiration and brilliant fancy, escorted by Tabby, enjoyed to the full the

free atmosphere of the heights around Haworth. The rushing sound of their own waterfall, and the shrill cries of the grouse, which flew up as they came along, were to them friendly voices of the opening life of Nature whose potent influence inspired them so well.

Of other companionship in their early years they had hardly any; and being unable to associate much with children of their own age and condition, or to play with their young and immediate neighbours in childish games, Mr. Brontë's son and daughters grew up amongst their elders with heads older than their years, and spoke with a knowledge that might have sprung from actual experience of men and manners. They were, in fact, 'old-fashioned children.' Their extraordinary cleverness was soon observed, and the servants were always on their guard lest any of their remarks might be repeated by the children. Notwithstanding this, the little Brontës were children still, and took pleasure in the things of childhood. Up-grown men will not whip a top on the causeways, nor trundle a hoop through the streets, nor play at 'hide-and-seek' at dusk as of

yore; but the Brontë children in their youthful days did all these things, and they entered at times with ardour, despite their precocious gravity, into the simple joys and amusements of childhood, as is testified by the eager delight with which they regarded the presents of the toys they received.

The earliest notice we have of Branwell Brontë is that Charlotte remembered having seen her mother playing with him during one golden sunset in the parlour of the parsonage at Haworth. Later, we are informed that Mr. Brontë brought from Leeds on one occasion a box of wooden soldiers for him. The children were in bed, but the 'next morning,' says Charlotte, in one of her juvenile manuscripts, 'Branwell came to our door with a box of soldiers. Emily and I jumped out of bed, and I snatched up one and exclaimed, "This is the Duke of Wellington! This shall be the duke!" When I had said this, Emily likewise took up one and said it should be hers; when Anne came down she said one should be hers. Mine was the prettiest of the whole, and the tallest, and the most perfect in every part. Emily's was a grave-looking fellow, and we called him "Gravey." Anne's was a

queer little thing much like herself, and we called him "Waiting-boy." Branwell chose his, and called him "Buonaparte." So Charlotte relates these glad incidents of their childhood with pleasure, and places on record the joy they inspired.

Mr. Brontë says, 'When mere children, as soon as they could read and write, Charlotte and her brother and sisters used to invent and act little plays of their own, in which the Duke of Wellington, my daughter Charlotte's hero, was sure to come off conqueror; when a dispute would not infrequently arise amongst them regarding the comparative merits of Buonaparte, Hannibal, and Cæsar.'

In acting their early plays, they performed them with childish glee, and did not fail at times to 'tear a passion to tatters.' They observed that Tabby did not approve of such extraordinary proceedings; but on one occasion, with increased energy of action and voice, they so wrought on her fears that she retreated to her nephew's house, and, as soon as she could regain her breath, she exclaimed, 'William! yah mun gooa up

to Mr. Brontë's, for aw'm sure yon childer's all gooin mad, and aw darn't stop 'ith hause ony longer wì 'em; an' aw'll stay here woll yah come back!' When the nephew reached the parsonage, 'the childer set up a great crack o' laughin',' at the wonderful joke they had perpetrated on faithful Tabby.

Mr. Brontë—like other parents and friends of precocious and gifted children, who, in after-life have become celebrated in religion, art, poetry, literature, politics, or war, and who have given out in childhood tokens of brilliant and sterling gifts which have been recorded in their biographies—saw in his own children evidences of that mental power, fervid imagination, and superior faculty of language and expression, which were developed in them in after-years. He often fancied that great powers lay in his children, and it cannot be doubted that he sometimes looked forward to and hoped for a brilliant future for his offspring. It was this hope that cheered him, and he gave to Mrs. Gaskell, for publication, all the evidences of genius in his son and daughters, as children, which he could remember. But, from the information he

imparted to that writer, we can scarcely gather, I fear, sufficient to justify the inference he drew, or appears to have drawn, for the particulars given border too much on the trivial and unimportant. Perhaps Mr. Brontë failed to remember the special evidences he had observed of what he intended to convey at the actual moment of communication. Be this as it may, no doubt remained on his mind that genius was apparent in his children above and apart from their eager reading of magazines and newspapers, nor that other schemes and objects occupied their thoughts than the interests and contentions of the political parties of the hour.

'When my children were very young,' says Mr. Brontë,—'when, as far as I can remember, the oldest was about ten years of age, and the youngest about four,—thinking that they knew more than I had yet discovered, in order to make them speak with less timidity, I deemed that, if they were put under a sort of cover, I might gain my end; and, happening to have a mask in the house, I told them all to stand and speak boldly from under cover of the mask. I began with the

youngest (Anne, afterwards Acton Bell), and asked what a child like her most wanted; she answered, "Age and experience." I asked the next (Emily, afterwards Ellis Bell) what I had best do with her brother Branwell, who was sometimes a naughty boy; she answered, "Reason with him, and, when he won't listen to reason, whip him." I asked Branwell what was the best way of knowing the difference between the intellects of man and woman; he answered, "By considering the difference between them as to their bodies." In answer to a question as to which were the two best books, Charlotte said that 'the Bible,' and after it the 'Book of Nature,' were the best. Mr. Brontë then asked the next daughter, 'What is the best mode of education for a woman;' she answered, 'That which would make her rule her house well.' He then asked the eldest, Maria, 'What is the best mode of spending time;' she answered, 'By laying it out in preparation for a happy eternity.' He says he may not have given the exact words, but they were nearly so, and they had made a lasting impression on his memory. [\[7\]](#)

But the intellectual pabulum of Mr. Brontë's children, for some time, consisted, for the most part, as we are told, of magazines and newspapers. As these took the place of toy-books and fairy tales, their young minds were attracted by such moral subjects and entertaining stories as were treated of in the serials of the day; and their attention was also largely engaged in the political questions which were then debated in the Houses of Parliament. Imbibing from their father their religious and political views and opinions, they became strong partizans and supporters of the leading Conservatives in the House of Lords and the House of Commons. They had often heard conversations between their father and aunt on these subjects; they listened with interested attention, and obtained information as to the outer world and its pursuits. By their surroundings their minds were soon raised above the thoughts, desires, and interests of childhood in general; and, under the circumstances, though it may seem odd, it is not extraordinary that wooden soldiers should thus be made, by these talented children, to represent the two great opposing warriors of the

present age.

In addition to the general bringing-up of his children at home, and the formal tasks which Mr. Brontë set them, magazines and other publications were thrown about, and Maria, being the eldest, was wont to read the newspapers when she was less than nine years old, and reported matters of home and foreign interest, as well as those relating to the public characters and current affairs of the day, to her young brother and sisters. Indeed, so earnest was her relevancy on such occasions in these unchildish and grave questions, that she could talk upon them with discriminating intelligence to her father, whose interest in his children thus grew, as their faculties expanded. The young Brontës, though still in childhood's years, were soon no longer children in intellect: they touched, in fact, the 'Shores of Reality' at an earlier age than most children; and, though interested sometimes, perhaps momentarily, in trivial matters, they seem to have turned almost everything to literary account. Even Branwell's toys, which they all received so gleefully, gave rise to the 'Young Men's Play.'

Mr. Brontë, though interested deeply in the gradual development of the mental gifts of his children, did not fail, after his wife's death, to promote and protect their health, and he availed himself of the means which the chapelry of Haworth afforded. For this object he encouraged recreation on the moors at suitable times, and subjected the young members of his family to the pure and exhilarating breeze that, redolent of heather, breathed over them from the sea, during the summer and autumnal months.

On Tuesday, September the 2nd, 1824, a severe thunderstorm, and an almost unprecedented downfall of rain which resembled, in volume, a waterspout, caused the irruption of an immense bog, at Crow Hill, an elevation, between Keighley and Colne, and about one thousand feet above the sea-level. The mud, mingled with stones, many of large size, rolled down a precipitous and rugged clough that descended from it. Reaching the hamlet of Pondens, the torrent expanded and overspread the corn-fields adjoining to the depth of several feet, with many other devastating consequences.

Mr. Brontë regarded this as the effect of an earthquake, and he sent a communication to the 'Leeds Mercury,' in which he says: 'At the time of the irruption, the clouds were copper-coloured, gloomy, and lowering, the atmosphere was strongly electrified, and unusually close.' In the same month—on Sunday, September 12th, 1824—he preached a sermon on the subject, in Haworth Church, in which he informed his hearers that, the day of disaster being exceedingly fine, he had sent his little children, who were indisposed, accompanied by the servants, to take an airing on the common, and, as they stayed rather longer than he expected, he went to an upper chamber to look out for their return. The heavens over the moors were blackening fast; he heard the muttering of distant thunder, and saw the frequent flashes of 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. 'My little family,' he continued, 'had escaped to a place of shelter, but I did not know it.' These were Charlotte, Branwell, Emily, and Anne. Their sisters, Maria

and Elizabeth, were then at Cowan Bridge.

When Mr. Brontë accepted the living of Haworth, he had found existing there a Grammar School, and he took in it a special and personal interest, for it was an old institution, was endowed, and had recently been renovated. It was his policy to show that he took an interest in it; so that, by adding his support to that of the trustees, he might possibly confirm their favourable opinion of him, and secure their continued good feeling. This was essential at the time, as any appearance of coldness on his part towards their cherished foundation would have perhaps evoked a spirit akin to that which caused the compulsory resignation of Mr. Redhead, or have induced an estrangement between himself and the trustees. It is stated, with regard to this Grammar School, that one Christopher Scott by will, dated the 4th of October, 13th of Charles I., gave a school-house which he had built adjoining the church-way; and ordained that there should be a school-master who should be a graduate at least, a bachelor, if not a master of arts, and who should teach Greek and Latin. The school had been

enlarged in 1818, when the Brontë family were still at Thornton, and a new house was then erected for the master by the trustees.

As this foundation was designed to provide a classical education for its students, it was one to which the better classes in the neighbourhood need not have hesitated to entrust their children for superior instruction than could possibly be had in the ordinary schools of the district. The school was situated close to the parsonage, a lane only intervening, and it was commodious and lightsome. But Mr. Brontë, on his arrival, found that it had not for some time been maintained as a regular Grammar School: that there was little or no demand for the advantages of a classical education for their children among the inhabitants of the chapelry. [\[8\]](#) Yet the master who received the appointment from the trustees at the Midsummer of 1826, although not even a graduate of either of the universities, was stated to be competent to teach Latin, and was a man of considerable attainments, instructing both boys and girls in every essential branch of knowledge. In this the tutor differed nothing from some of his

immediate predecessors. But, though education of this sort was thus immediately at hand, Mr. Brontë does not appear to have availed himself of it for his daughters, or his son Branwell, for any great length of time. Mrs. Gaskell says, indeed, that their regular tasks were given by himself. Mr. Brontë, however, probably heard his children repeat early lessons set by the master in order to ascertain with what facility they had learned them. At a later date, Branwell and his sisters took a larger interest in the Grammar School, and they became active and willing teachers in the Sunday-school, which was connected with it. They were, indeed, often seen, as is yet remembered, in the processions of the scholars.

Although Mr. Brontë had taken vigilant and affectionate care to promote the health of his children, he was well aware that though he could strengthen their constitutions in some sort, delicate by nature as they were, he could not ward off with certainty the diseases and sufferings incident to childhood, from which his children were, indeed, unfortunately destined to suffer. Solicitude therefore came upon the parsonage when Maria

and Elizabeth were attacked by measles and whooping-cough. Recovering partially from these attacks, it was thought desirable to send them—perhaps partly for change of air—to a school which had somewhat recently been established at Cowan Bridge, a hamlet on the coach-road between Leeds and Kendal, which was easily reached from Haworth, as the coach passed daily. This school was especially established for the board and education of the daughters of such clergymen of the Establishment as required it. It was begun, as we know from Mrs. Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' by the Rev. William Carus Wilson; and we are aware also that severe and unqualified censures were passed upon its situation and management by the author of 'Jane Eyre,' in after-years, under the description of Lowood, and that the Ellen Burns of the story was no other than Maria Brontë. Readers of 'Jane Eyre' became indignant, and the Cowan Bridge School was execrated, denounced, and condemned by the public, to the utter distress and pain of its founder and patron.

In reference to this affair, Charlotte indeed said to

her future biographer that 'she should not have written what she did of Lowood in "Jane Eyre" if she had thought the place would have been so immediately identified with Cowan Bridge, although there was not a word in her account of the institution but what was true at the time when she knew it. She also said that she had not considered it necessary in a work of fiction to state every particular with the impartiality that might be required in a court of justice, nor to seek out motives, and make allowances for human failings, as she might have done, if dispassionately analyzing the conduct of those who had the superintendence of the institution.' Mrs. Gaskell believes Charlotte 'herself would have been glad of an opportunity to correct the over strong impression which was made upon the public mind by her vivid picture, though even she, suffering her whole life long both in heart and body from the consequences of what happened there, might have been apt, to the last, to take her deep belief in facts for the facts themselves—her conception of truth for the absolute truth.' [\[9\]](#)

But it is only just to Mr. Wilson to say that the

low situation of the premises fixed upon, the arrangement of the school-buildings, and the inefficient management of the domestic department, do not appear to have been so fatal to the boarders, even if we admit all the alleged severities of the regimen. For, when a low fever, or influenza cold, which was not regarded by Dr. Batty as 'either alarming or dangerous,' broke out at the school, and some forty of the pupils fell more or less under its influence, none died of it at Cowan Bridge, and only one, Mrs. Gaskell informs us, from after consequences at home; and, though delicate, the Brontë children entirely escaped the attack. Mrs. Gaskell has, however, entered at considerable length into a detailed account of the alleged mismanagement of the school, the severities exercised over the pupils—especially by one of the responsible tutors, 'Miss Scatcherd,'—the cooking and insufficiency of food, the general neglect of sanitary regulations in the domestic department, and the utter unfitness of the place itself for the continued health and comfort of the inmates. But the biographer of Charlotte Brontë in after-years considerably

modified the severe strictures which her heroine had thought fit to describe in 'Jane Eyre,'—an admirable work of fiction, though not necessarily one of fact—and she says, speaking of Charlotte's account of the Cowan Bridge School: 'The pictures, ideas, and conceptions of character received into the mind of the child of eight years old were destined to be reproduced in fiery words a quarter of a century afterwards. She saw but one side of Mr. Wilson's character; and many of those who knew him at the time assure me of the fidelity with which this is represented, while at the same time they regret that the delineation should have obliterated, as it were, nearly all that was noble and conscientious.' It appears also that Mr. Wilson had 'grand and fine qualities'—which were left unnoticed by Charlotte—of which the biographer had received 'abundant evidence.'[\[10\]](#) Of these Mr. Brontë seems to have been aware, as Charlotte and Emily were sent back to Cowan Bridge after the deaths of Maria and Elizabeth. Mrs. Gaskell wonders Charlotte did not remonstrate against her father's decision to send her and Emily back to the place, knowing, as we

may suppose she did, of the alleged infliction which her dead sisters had endured at the very school to which she and Emily were returning. Surely such a very miserable state of things as is described in 'Jane Eyre' could not have existed at the time to impress on Charlotte's mind such a dread as we are asked to believe she had, and Mr. Brontë could not be aware that any serious objections to the school existed. Indeed, the true condition of the institution at the period is apparent from the testimony of the noble and benevolent Miss Temple of 'Jane Eyre,' whose husband thus writes: 'Often have I heard my late dear wife speak of her sojourn at Cowan Bridge; always in terms of admiration of Mr. Carus Wilson, his parental love to his pupils, and their love for him; of the food and general treatment, in terms of approval. I have heard her allude to an unfortunate cook who used at times to spoil the porridge, but who, she said, was soon dismissed.'

While at Cowan Bridge, Maria's health had suddenly given way, and alarming symptoms declared themselves. Mr. Brontë was sent for. He had known nothing of her illness, and was terribly

shocked when he saw her. He ascended the Leeds coach with his dying child. Mrs. Gaskell says, 'the girls crowded out into the road to follow her with their eyes, over the bridge, past the cottages, and then out of sight for ever.'

The poignancy of Mr. Brontë's grief on this occasion was profound, and all but insupportable. Here was his first-born, the early joy of his home at Hartshead, the intelligent and brilliantly gifted companion of the first few years of his widowed life—dying before him! She, whose innocent and thoughtful converse had cheered his solitary moments, and whose merry laugh had often made the hearth glad, whose affectionate care of her little brother and sisters, disinterested as it was incessant, supplied for them the offices of their deceased mother—was fading from his sight! Arriving at Haworth, they were received with sincere and tearful sympathy by Miss Branwell, and with childish alarm and dread by Branwell and Anne. Every care which affection could provide was bestowed on the sinking child, but she died, a few days after her arrival, on May 6, 1825.

Elizabeth, too, struck down with the same fatal disease, came home to die of consumption on June 15 in the same year, but a month and a few days after her sister. These sorrowful events were never forgotten by Branwell, and the impressions made upon his mind by the deaths and funeral rites he had witnessed became the theme of some of his later and more mournful effusions.

The early recollection of Maria at Cowan Bridge was that she was delicate, and unusually clever and thoughtful for her age. Of Elizabeth Miss Temple writes: 'The second, Elizabeth, is the only one of the family of whom I have a vivid recollection, from her meeting with a somewhat alarming accident; in consequence of which I had her for some days and nights in my bedroom, not only for the sake of greater quiet, but that I might watch over her myself.... Of the two younger ones (if two there were) I have very slight recollections, save that one, a darling child under five years of age, was quite the pet nursling of the school.'

'This last,' says Mrs. Gaskell, 'would be Emily.

Charlotte was considered the most talkative of the sisters—a "bright, clever little child." [\[11\]](#)

CHAPTER V.

BRANWELL'S BOYHOOD.

Reunion of the Brontë Family—Branwell is the supposed Prototype of Victor Crimsworth—That Character not a complete Portrait of Branwell—His Friendships—His Visit to the Keighley Feast—Its Effect on Branwell's Nerves—The Wrestle—The Lost Spectacles—Fear of his Father's Displeasure—Mrs. Gaskell's Story of the 'Black Bull' Incident Questioned—Miss Branwell and her Nephew.

Upon the return of Charlotte and Emily from Cowan Bridge, the youthful Brontës, whom death had spared, were united again; and, for some years more, followed their pursuits together, until

Charlotte went to school at Roe Head in 1831. Branwell was the constant companion of his sisters during these childish years, and they all looked upon him with pride and affection. Charlotte, in those days, was a sympathetic friend to him; and, in his later years, he felt it a source of deep regret that she was somewhat estranged. But the gentle Emily—after the death of Maria—was his chief companion, and a warm affection never lost its ardour between them. The sisters were quick to perceive the Promethean spark that burned in their brother, and they looked upon Branwell, as indeed did all who knew him, as their own superior in mental gifts. In his childhood even, Branwell Brontë showed great aptitude for acquiring knowledge, and his perceptive powers were very marked. He was, too, gifted with a sprightly disposition, tinged at times with great melancholy, but he acquired early a lively and fascinating address. There was a fiery ardour and eagerness in his manner which told of his abundant animal spirits, and he entered with avidity into the enjoyments of the life that lay before him. Charlotte, who knew well the

treasures of her brother's opening faculties, his ability, his learning, and his affection, saw also many things that alarmed her in his disposition. She saw the abnormal and unhealthy flashing of his intellect, and marked that weakness and want of self-control which left Branwell, when subjected to temptation, a prey to many destructive influences, whose effect shall hereafter be traced. There is reason to believe that Charlotte pictures this period of Branwell's life in 'The Professor,' where she describes the childhood of Victor Crimsworth; and, though the extract is rather long, it is given here as valuable, because it furnishes a full record of the early powers of Branwell, and of the manner in which his sister—by the light of subsequent events—looked upon them and upon his failings, and it will be seen that towards the latter she is somewhat inflexible.

'Victor,' she makes William Crimsworth say, 'is as little of a pretty child as I am of a handsome man ... he is pale and spare, with large eyes.... His shape is symmetrical enough, but slight.... I never saw a child smile less than he does, nor one who

knits such a formidable brow when sitting over a book that interests him, or while listening to tales of adventure, peril, or wonder.... But, though still, he is not unhappy—though serious, not morose; he has a susceptibility to pleasurable sensations almost too keen, for it amounts to enthusiasm.... When he could read, he became a glutton of books, and is so still. His toys have been few, and he has never wanted more. For those he possesses he seems to have contracted a partiality amounting to affection; this feeling, directed towards one or two living animals of the house, strengthens almost to a passion.... I saw in the soil of his heart healthy and swelling germs of compassion, affection, fidelity. I discovered in the garden of his intellect a rich growth of wholesome principles—reason, justice, moral courage, promised, if not blighted, a fertile bearing.... She (his mother) sees, as I also see, a something in Victor's temper—a kind of electrical ardour and power—which emits, now and then, ominous sparks; Hunsden calls it his spirit, and says it should not be curbed. I call it the leaven of the offending Adam, and consider that it should be, if

not *whipped* out of him, at least soundly disciplined; and that he will be cheap of any amount of either bodily or mental suffering which will ground him radically in the art of self-control. Frances (his mother) gives this *something* in her son's marked character no name; but when it appears in the grinding of his teeth, in the glittering of his eye, in the fierce revolt of feeling against disappointment, mischance, sudden sorrow, or supposed injustice, she folds him to her breast, or takes him to walk with her alone in the wood; then she reasons with him like any philosopher, and to reason Victor is ever accessible; then she looks at him with eyes of love, and by love Victor can be infallibly subjugated. But will reason or love be the weapons with which in future the world will meet his violence? Oh, no! for that flash in his black eye—for that cloud on his bony brow—for that compression of his statuesque lips, the lad will some day get blows instead of blandishments, kicks instead of kisses; then for the fit of mute fury which will sicken the body and madden his soul; then for the ordeal of merited and salutary suffering out of which he will come (I

trust) a wiser and a better man.'

The natural adornments and defects of Branwell's mind in boyhood, which may to some extent be traced in Charlotte's picture of Victor Crimsworth, in 'The Professor,' must not be regarded otherwise than as possessing a general resemblance to those which are found in that character. Physically, Branwell and Crimsworth were dissimilar, though mentally there is a portraiture; but even here, Charlotte, having him in her mind when she sketched the character of Victor, exaggerated therein, as she had done in other instances, the actual defects of her brother. It is true, nevertheless, that those who knew Branwell Brontë in early life could see in him the original of Victor Crimsworth.

In the following pages the greatness of Branwell's genius may be observed,—great, though marred by the errors and misfortunes of his life,—as well as by the sorrows which his impulsive, kindly, and affectionate nature brought upon himself, sorrows thus sadly set forth by his sister as the outcome of his passions, and described by her as the penalty

of his future years.

In Branwell Brontë, the 'leaven of the offending Adam' might now and then certainly be observed, but it was largely modified by the ameliorating influences of his home; and, although, from the failings common to humanity, the children of Mr. Brontë could not be free, his early waywardness and petulance were, by the influence of sex, more forcibly expressed than such failings could be in his sisters. Between the children of Mr. Brontë, however, there existed even more than the ordinary affections of childhood. At this period of their lives, they were ignorant of the wiles of corrupt human nature, and Branwell, with all the lightsome exuberance of his boyhood, returned without stint the ardent and deep affection of his sisters. But, when a few years had rolled on, he awoke to the sunny morning of youth; and, in the absence of a brother, sought companionship with certain youths of Haworth, and made them playmates. Amongst them was one, the brother of some friends of his sisters, who became to him a personal associate, and it was with this companion that he was wont to sport on the

moors, across the meadows, and, with joyous laugh, along the streets of the village.

The survivor of these two friends gives me an incident that occurred at the time of the annual Feast at Keighley, which the youths visited. The town was, as is usual on such occasions, crowded with booths and shows, and various places of entertainment. Players and riders,—men and women,—clothed in gay raiments, rendered brilliant with spangles, paced backwards and forwards along their platforms to the sound of drums, organs, and Pandean pipes, cymbals, tambourines, and castanets. There were stalls, too, weighted with nuts and various confectionaries, and there were also rocking-boats and merry-go-rounds, with other amusements.

As the evening advanced, and the shows were lighted up, Branwell's excitement, hilarity, and extravagance knew no bounds: he would see everything and try everything. Into a rocking-boat he and his friend gaily stepped. The rise of the boat, when it reached its full height, gave Branwell

a pleasant view of the fair beneath; but, when it descended, he screamed out at the top of his voice, 'Oh! my nerves! my nerves! Oh! my nerves!' On each descent, every nerve thrilled, tingled, and vibrated with overwhelming effect through the overwrought and delicate frame of the boy. Leaving the fair, the two proceeded homeward; and, reaching a country spot, near a cottage standing among a thicket of trees, Branwell, still full of exuberant life, proposed a wrestle with his companion. They engaged in a struggle, when Branwell was overthrown. It was not until reaching the village, and seeing the lights in the windows, with considerably enlarged rays, that he became aware he had lost his spectacles,—for Branwell was, like his sister Charlotte, very near-sighted. This was, indeed, no little trouble to him, as he was in great fear lest his father should notice his being without them, and institute unpleasant inquiries as to what had become of them. He told his fears to his companion; but, after a sleepless night for both, Branwell's friend was early on the spot in search of the missing spectacles, when the woman living in the cottage

close by, seeing a youth looking about, came to him, and, learning for what he sought, brought out the glasses which she had picked up from the ground just before he came. M——, glad of the discovery, hastened to the parsonage, which he reached to find Branwell astir, who was overjoyed on receiving the missing spectacles, as the danger of his father's displeasure was avoided.

Mrs. Gaskell has written an account of the brother of the Brontë sisters, but from what source I am unable to ascertain. After giving him credit for those abilities in his boyhood of which evidence is given in these pages, she says that: 'Popular admiration was sweet to him, and this led to his presence being sought at Arvills, and all the great village gatherings, for the Yorkshiremen have a keen relish for intellect; and it likewise procured him the undesirable distinction of having his company recommended by the landlord of the "Black Bull" to any chance traveller who might happen to feel solitary or dull over his liquor. "Do you want some one to help you with your bottle, sir? If you do, I'll send up for Patrick" (so the villagers called him to the day of his death, though,

in his own family, he was always Branwell). And, while the messenger went, the landlord entertained his guest with accounts of the wonderful talents of the boy, whose precocious cleverness and great conversational powers were the pride of the village.' This account of the landlord being accustomed to send to the parsonage for Branwell to come down to the 'Bull' at Haworth on these occasions is denied by those who knew Branwell at the time, as well as by the landlord. The latter always said that he never ventured to do anything of the kind. It would have been a vulgar liberty, and an unpardonable offence to the inmates of the parsonage had he done so. Besides, the message would, in all probability, have been delivered to a servant, or perhaps to Mr. Brontë himself, or to one of his daughters, and Branwell would have been forbidden, for the credit of the family, to lend himself for such a purpose at the public-house below.

Branwell in these early days was not only the beloved of the household, but the special favourite of his aunt. This good lady was proud of her

family and name, a name which her nephew bore to her infinite satisfaction, so that his sometimes rough and noisy merriment made his aunt glad, rather than grieved, because it was the true indication of health of mind and body. She easily pardoned his boyish defects: and at times, as she parted his auburn hair, she looked in his face with fondness and affection, giving him moral advice, consistent with his age, and showing him how, by sedulously cultivating the abilities with which God had blessed him, he would attain an excellent position in the world. It was this gentle and disinterested guide that Providence had placed in the stead of his mother, to impart to her son the good maxims she would herself have given him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LITERARY TASTES OF THE CHILDREN.

The youthful Compositions of the Brontës—Their

Character—Branwell's Share in them—'The Secret,' a Fragment—The Reading of the Brontë Children—Branwell's Character at this Period.

Mr. Brontë, perhaps, made use of a slight hyperbole when he said that, as soon as they could read and write, Charlotte and her brother and sisters used to invent and act little plays of their own; but it is certain that, at an early period of their lives, they took pleasure and pride in seeing their thoughts put down in the manifest form of written words. Charlotte, indeed, gives a list of the juvenile works she had composed. They filled twenty-two volumes, and consisted of Tales, Adventures, Lives, Meditations, Stories, Poems, Songs, &c. Without repeating all the titles which Mrs. Gaskell and others have published, it may be said that the productions manifested extraordinary ability and industry. Branwell, Emily, and Anne partook of the same spirit, and displayed similar energy according to the leisure they could command.

Before Charlotte went to Roe Head, in January, 1831, Branwell worked with his sisters in producing their monthly magazine, with its youthful stories. [\[12\]](#) Mrs. Gaskell has quoted Charlotte's introduction to the 'Tales of the Islanders,' one of these 'Little Magazines,' dated June, 1829, from which it appears that a remark of Branwell's led to the composition of the play of that name, and that he chose the Isle of Man as his territory, and named John Bull, Astley Cooper, and Leigh Hunt as the chief men in it. Charlotte gives the dates of most of their productions. She says: 'Our plays were established, "Young Men," June, 1826; "Our Fellows," July, 1827; "Islanders," December, 1827. These are our three great plays that are not kept secret. Emily's and my best plays were established the 1st of December, 1827; the others March, 1828. Best plays mean secret plays; they are very nice ones. All our plays are very strange ones. Their nature I need not write on paper, for I think I shall always remember them. The "Young Men's" play took its rise from some wooden soldiers Branwell had; "Our Fellows" from "Æsop's Fables;" and the

"Islanders" from several events which happened.'

[\[13\]](#)

It would be difficult to arrive at a correct understanding of the literary value of these productions of the youthful Brontës, but it would be interesting to know what kind of assistance Branwell was able to give in the work, as well as what was the general merit of these early compositions. Mrs. Gaskell makes some mention of Branwell's literary abilities in his youth. It is certain, from all we know, that his mind was as much occupied in these matters as his sisters', and that his ambition corresponded with theirs. It has, indeed, been placed on record by Mrs. Gaskell that he was associated with his sisters in the compilation of their youthful writings. This author says, also, that their youthful occupations were 'mostly of a sedentary and intellectual nature.' [\[14\]](#)

Among the youthful stories of which Charlotte, as has been already mentioned, wrote a catalogue or list, there was one, of which Mrs. Gaskell has published a fragment in fac-simile, written in a small, elaborate, and cramped hand—so small,

indeed, as to be of little use to the general reader. In the 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' this was inserted as a specimen of the hand-writing. It shows truly the literary ability, dramatic skill, and force of imagination of the children at the period of their lives of which I speak, and affords an interesting specimen of the character of these early works. A few extracts from it may be given here:—

THE SECRET.

CHAPTER I.

A dead silence had reigned in the Home Office of Verdopolis for three hours in the morning of a fine summer's day, interrupted only by such sounds as the scraping of a pen-knife, the dropping of a ruler, or an occasional cough; or whispered now and then some brief mandate, uttered by the noble first secretary, in his commanding tones. At length that sublime personage, after completing some score or so of despatches, addressing a small slightly-built young gentleman who occupied the chief

situation among the clerks, said:

'Mr. Rymer, will you be good enough to tell me what o'clock it is?'

'Certainly, my lord!' was the prompt reply as, springing from his seat, the ready underling, instead of consulting his watch like other people, hastened to the window in order to mark the sun's situation; having made his observation, he answered: "'Tis twelve precisely, my lord.'

'Very well,' said the marquis. 'You may all give up then, and see that all your desks are locked, so that not a scrap of paper is left to litter the office. Mr. Rymer, I shall expect you to take care that my directions are fulfilled.' So saying, he assumed his hat and gloves, and with a stately tread was approaching the vestibule, when a slight bustle and whispering among the clerks arrested his steps.

'What is the matter?' asked he, turning round. 'I hope these are not sounds of

contention I hear!'

'I—and—' said a broad, carrotty-locked young man of a most pugnacious aspect, 'but—but—your lordship has forgotten that—that——'

'That what?' asked the marquis, rather impatiently.

'Oh!—merely that this afternoon is a half-holiday—and—and——'

'I understand,' replied his superior, smiling, 'you need not tax your modesty with further explanation, Flanagan; the truth is, I suppose, you want your usual largess, and I'm obliged to you for reminding me—will that do?' he continued, as, opening his pocket-book, he took out a twenty-pound bank bill and laid it on the nearest desk.

'My lord, you are too generous,' Flanagan answered; but the chief secretary laughingly laid his gloved hand on his lips, and, with a condescending nod to the other

clerks, sprang down the steps of the portico and strode hastily away, in order to escape the noisy expressions of gratitude which now hailed his liberality.

On the opposite side of the busy and wide street to that on which the splendid Home Office stands, rises the no less splendid Colonial Office; and, just as Arthur, Marquis of Douro, left the former structure, Edward Stanley Sydney departed from the latter: they met in the centre of the street.

'Well, Ned,' said my brother, as they shook hands, 'how are you to-day? I should think this bright sun and sky ought to enliven you if anything can.'

'Why, my dear Douro,' replied Mr. Sydney, with a faint smile, 'such lovely, genial weather may, and I have no doubt does, elevate the spirits of the free and healthy; but for me, whose mind and body are a continual prey to all the heaviest cares of public and private life, it signifies

little whether sun cheer or rain damp the atmosphere.'

'Edward,' replied Arthur, his features at the same time assuming that disagreeable expression which my landlord denominates by the term 'sorney;' 'now don't begin to bore me, Ned, with trash of that description, I'm tired of it quite: pray have you recollected that to-day is a half-holiday in all departments of the Treasury?'

'Yes; and the circumstance has cost me some money; these silly old customs ought to be abolished in my opinion—they are ruinous.'

'Why, what have you given the poor fellows?'

'Two sovereigns;' an emphatic hem formed Arthur's reply to the communication.

They had now entered Nokel Street, and were proceeding in silence past the line of magnificent shops which it contains, when

the sound of wheels was heard behind them, and a smooth-rolling chariot dashed up and stopped just where they stood. One of the window-glasses now fell, a white hand was put out and beckoned them to draw near, while a silvery voice said,

'Mr. Sydney, Marquis of Douro, come hither a moment.'

Both the gentlemen obeyed the summons, Arthur with alacrity, Sydney with reluctance.

'What are your commands, fair ladies?' said the former, bowing respectfully to the inmates of the carriage, who were Lady Julia Sydney and Lady Maria Sneaky.

'Our commands are principally for your companion, my lord, not for you,' replied the daughter of Alexander the First; 'now, Mr. Sydney,' she continued, smiling on the senator, 'you must promise not to be disobedient.'

'Let me first know what I am required to perform,' was the cautious answer, accompanied by a fearful glance at the shops around.

'Nothing of much consequence, Edward,' said his wife, 'but I hope you'll not refuse to oblige me this once, love. I only want a few guineas to make out the price of a pair of earrings I have just seen in Mr. Lapis's shop.'

'Not a bit of it,' answered he. 'Not a farthing will I give you: it is scarce three weeks since you received your quarter's allowance, and if that is done already you may suffer for it.'

With this decisive reply, he instinctively thrust his hands into his breeches' pockets, and marched off with a hurried step.

'Stingy little monkey!' exclaimed Lady Julia, sinking back on the carriage-seat, while the bright flush of anger and disappointment crimsoned her fair cheek.

'This is the way he always treats me, but I'll make him suffer for it!'

'Do not discompose yourself so much, my dear,' said her companion, 'my purse is at your service, if you will accept it.'

'I am sensible of your goodness, Maria, but of course I shall not take advantage of it; no, no, I can do without the earrings—it is only a fancy, though to be sure I would rather have them.'

'My pretty cousin,' observed the marquis, who, till now, had remained a quiet though much-amused spectator of the whole scene, 'you are certainly one of the most extravagant young ladies I know: why, what on earth can you possibly want with these trinkets? To my knowledge you have at least a dozen different sorts of ear-ornaments.'

'That is true; but then these are quite of another kind; they are so pretty and unique that I could not help wishing for them.'

'Well, since your heart is so much set upon the baubles, I will see whether my purse can compass their price, if you will allow me to accompany you to Mr. Lapis's.'

'Oh! thank you, Arthur, you are very kind,' said Lady Julia, and both the ladies quickly made room for him as he sprang in and seated himself between them.

In a few minutes they reached the jeweller's shop. Mr. Lapis received them with an obsequious bow, and proceeded to display his glittering stores. The pendants which had so fascinated Lady Julia were in the form of two brilliant little humming-birds, whose jewelled plumage equalled if not surpassed the bright hues of nature....

This gay and pleasant fragment of a story, in which the characters and scenes are so freshly

drawn, may well be imagined as one of the best, if not the best, of these productions of the Brontë children. We may, indeed, regard the spirit and style of these early stories as the outcome of their eager and observant reading of the magazine and newspaper articles within their reach—when their plastic minds would receive indelible impressions, from which they, perhaps without knowing it, acquired the knowledge and practice of accurate literary composition, and of how to clothe their thoughts in fitting words. Their retentive memories, and their intuitive faculty of putting things, brought them thus early to the threshold of the republic of letters. Mrs. Gaskell states that these works were principally written by Charlotte in a hand so small as to be 'almost impossible to decipher without the aid of a magnifying glass.' The specimen she gives is written in an upright hand, and was an attempt to represent the stories in a kind of print, as near as might be to type. If, however, Charlotte and Emily ever accustomed themselves in these early works to this diminutive type-like writing, they threw it off completely in after-years. This, Branwell never did, and Mrs.

Gaskell's fac-simile page is not without some resemblance to one of his ordinary pages of manuscript reduced in size.

Mr. T. Wemyss Reid observes that Mrs. Gaskell, in speaking of the juvenile performances of the Brontë children, 'paid exclusive attention to Charlotte's productions.' 'All readers of the Brontë story,' he says, 'will remember the account of the play of "The Islanders," and other remarkable specimens, showing with what real vigour and originality Charlotte could handle her pen while she was still in the first years of her teens.' And he adds that 'those few persons who have seen the whole of the juvenile library of the family bear testimony to the fact that Branwell and Emily were at least as industrious and successful as Charlotte herself.' [\[15\]](#)

Even at this early period the youthful Brontës had read industriously. 'Blackwood's Magazine' had, as early as the year 1829, asserted itself to Charlotte's childish taste as 'the most able periodical there is,' and ever afterwards the whole family looked with the greatest pleasure for the

brilliant essays of Christopher North and his coterie. Of other papers they saw 'John Bull' and the 'Leeds Intelligencer,' both uncompromising Conservatives, and the 'Leeds Mercury,' of the opposite party. The youthful Brontës were also readers of the 'British Essayists,' 'The Rambler,' 'The Mirror,' and 'The Lounger,' and they were great admirers of Scott.

But the advice which Charlotte afterwards gave to her friend 'E,' with regard to books for perusal, shows that their reading had been much wider: Shakespeare, Milton, Thomson, Goldsmith, Pope, Byron, Campbell, and Wordsworth; Hume, Rollin, and the 'Universal History;' Johnson's 'Poets,' Boswell's 'Johnson,' Southey's 'Nelson,' Lockhart's 'Burns,' Moore's 'Sheridan,' Moore's 'Byron,' and Wolfe's 'Remains;' and for natural history, she recommends Bewick, Audubon, White, and, strangely enough, Goldsmith. Branwell's favourite poets were Wordsworth and the melancholy Cowper, whose 'Castaway' he was always fond of quoting. The Brontës, in their young years, obtained much of their intellectual food from the circulating library at

Keighley.

The extraordinary literary activity which prompted these children never afterwards left them; and Branwell, along with his sisters, was, as we have seen, the author of many effusions of remarkable character. But, as time passed on, and experience was gained, his literary productions began to acquire more vigour and polish. Yet the tone of his mind, however joyous it might be at times, recurred, when the immediate occasion had passed, to that pensive melancholy which, throughout his life, was his most marked characteristic.

Mr. Brontë looked with supreme pleasure on the growing talents of his children; but his principal hope was centred in his son, who, as he fondly trusted, should add lustre to and perpetuate his name. The boy, in these years, was precocious and lively, overflowing with humour and jollity, ready to crack a joke with the rustics he met, and all the time gathering in, with the quickest perception, impressions, both for good and ill, of human nature. Mr. Brontë sedulously, to the

utmost of his power, attending to the education of Branwell, did not see the instability of his son's character, or did not apprehend any mischief from the acquaintances he had formed.

The incumbent of Haworth had distinct literary leanings, and it delighted him to find that his son had manifested literary capacity. It has been urged as somewhat of a reproach against Mr. Brontë that he did not send Branwell to a public school, but relied solely upon his own tutorship for his son's education. Situated as Mr. Brontë was, such a step as that said to have been recommended to him was unnecessary. The Grammar School adjoining was under the superintendence of a master who was well qualified to give a higher education to his pupils, if required; and Mr. Brontë himself was equally well able to do the same, but his daily duties within his chapelry left him little or no time to take upon himself the entire education of his son: all he could do was to watch and ascertain occasionally how he was progressing. Mr. Brontë, indeed, might have given the finishing touches to his son's instruction. Those, however, who knew the brilliant youth in

the ripeness of his early manhood, recognized the extent of the knowledge he had acquired, and felt, too, that he had been sufficiently well-trained to know how to put it to good use.

CHAPTER VII.

YOUTH.

Charlotte goes to Roe Head—Return Home—
Branwell at the Time—The Companion of his
Sisters—Escorts Charlotte on a Visit—He
becomes Interested in Pugilism—His
Education—His Love for Music—His
Retentive Memory—His Personal
Appearance—His Spirit.

Little more of interest seems to be known concerning the Brontës prior to the year 1831, but it is very apparent that Mr. Brontë exercised a large influence in the formation of his children's habits and characters. He, for instance, had a

study in which he spent a considerable portion of his time. The children had their study also. Mr. Brontë had written poems and tales, and was wont to tell strange stories at the breakfast-table. The children imitated him in these things. Mr. Brontë took an enthusiastic interest in all political matters; and here the children followed him also. In short, they copied him in almost everything. Afterwards, he was accustomed to hold himself up as an example for their guidance, and to tell them how he had struggled and worked his way to the position he held; and there is no doubt that his children had a great admiration for his career.

Miss Branwell's influence was altogether distinct from that of Mr. Brontë. While taking pride in the mental ability of her nephew, she aimed at making his sisters into good housewives and patterns of domestic and unobtrusive virtue. With this object, turning her bed-chamber into a school-room, she taught them to sew and to embroider; and they occupied their time in making charity clothing, a work which she maintained 'was not for the good of the recipients, but of the sewers; it was proper for them to do it.' Under Miss Branwell they

likewise learned to clean, to wash, to bake, to cook, to make jams and jellies, with many other domestic mysteries; and here, as in everything else, they were apt pupils.

But, towards the end of the year 1830, it was decided that Charlotte should seek a wider training elsewhere; and a school, kept by Miss Wooler, at Roe Head, between Leeds and Huddersfield, was fixed upon. It was a quaint, old-fashioned house, standing in a pleasant country, which had an interest for Charlotte, for it lay not far from Hartshead, where her father's first Yorkshire curacy had been. This circumstance, together with the proximity of the remains of Kirkstall priory—which had their traditions of Robin Hood—and the strange local stories she heard from Miss Wooler, led her afterwards to make this district the scene of her novel of 'Shirley.' Miss Wooler was a kind, motherly lady who took an interest in each one of her pupils. She had long been a keen observer, and knew well how to put her knowledge to use in tuition. In this school, Charlotte, a girl of sixteen, was an indefatigable student, scarcely resting in her

pursuit of knowledge. She was not exactly sociable, and sat often alone with her book in play-hours—a thin fragile girl, whose brown hair overshadowed the page on which her eyes, 'those expressive orbs,' were so intently fixed. Her companions remarked at that time that she had a great store of out-of-the-way knowledge, while on some points of general information she was comparatively ignorant. But when Charlotte left Roe Head, in June, 1832, she returned to the parsonage at Haworth with more expanded ideas, and with wider knowledge, and possessing, perhaps, a keener relish for the delights of the literary world. At Roe Head Charlotte made the acquaintance of her life-long friend 'E,' and also of Mary and Martha 'T.'

The family of Brontë appears, about this time, to have been in perfect peace. Charlotte had corresponded with Branwell when she was at Roe Head, as a pupil of Miss Wooler; and Mrs. Gaskell has published portions of a letter sent from that place to him on May 17th, 1832, when he was in his fifteenth year, in which she showed her old political leanings wherein Branwell shared.

It runs: 'Lately I had begun to think that I had lost all interest which I used formerly to take in politics; but the extreme pleasure I felt at the news of the Reform Bill's being thrown out by the House of Lords, and of the expulsion, or resignation, of Earl Grey, &c., convinced me that I have not as yet lost all my penchant for politics. I am extremely glad that aunt has consented to take in "Fraser's Magazine;" for though I know from your description of its general contents it will be rather uninteresting when compared with "Blackwood," still it will be better than remaining the whole year without being able to obtain a sight of any periodical whatever; and such would assuredly be the case, as, in the little wild moorland village where we reside, there would be no possibility of borrowing a work of this description from a circulating library. I hope with you that the present delightful weather may contribute to the perfect restoration of our dear papa's health; and that it may give aunt pleasant reminiscences of the salubrious climate of her native place.'

[\[16\]](#)

Charlotte's political principles were strongly

Conservative, as were those of her father, brother, and sisters, and these principles were intensified in them all by their religious opinions. They held, consistently enough, the cherished political convictions of their party, and they looked upon every concession made to liberal clamour as an inroad on the very vitals of the Constitution. Hence the jubilation of Charlotte when the Reform Bill was rejected by the House of Lords on October 7th, 1831. But the march of events, in after-years, modified their political opinions considerably.

Branwell at this period, while still under tuition at home, was the constant companion of his sisters, and frequently accompanied them on their visits to the moors and picturesque places in the neighbourhood. 'E,' writing in 'Scribner,' says: 'Charlotte's first visit from Haworth was made about three months after she left school. She travelled in a two-wheeled gig, the only conveyance to be had in Haworth except the covered-cart which brought her to school. Mr. Brontë sent Branwell as an escort; he was *then* a very dear brother, as dear to Charlotte as her

own soul; they were in perfect accord of taste and feeling, and it was a mutual delight to be together. Branwell had probably never been from home before; he was in wild ecstasy with everything. He walked about in unrestrained boyish enjoyment, taking views in every direction of the turret-roofed house, the fine chestnut-trees on the lawn (one tree especially interested him because it was iron-girthed, having been split by storms, but still flourishing in great majesty), and a large rookery, which gave to the house a good background—all these he noted and commented upon with perfect enthusiasm. He told his sister he was leaving her in Paradise, and if she were not intensely happy she never would be! Happy, indeed, she then was *in himself*, for she, with her own enthusiasm, looked forward to what her brother's great promise and talent might effect. He would be, at this time, between fifteen and sixteen years of age. [\[17\]](#)

In the June of 1833, when Branwell was about this age, we learn that he drove his sisters with great delight in a trap, or dog-cart, to Bolton Bridge, to meet their friend 'E,' who waited for the young Brontës in a carriage at the 'Devonshire

Arms.' [\[18\]](#) This was a visit to the ancient abbey and immemorial woods and vales of Bolton. We may well imagine from the time of the year—the 'leafy month of June,' when all nature would be glad, and the deep woods gay with varied leaves, while the Wharfe, of amber hue, foamed and rushed impetuously down its rocky channel, from the moorland hills above historic Barden, to the peaceful meads of the ruined abbey—that the hearts of the Brontës rejoiced, enchanted and impressed by these glorious and stately solitudes.

It cannot but be regretted that, while his sisters could confer in confidence and familiarity together, and enjoy a community of interests in secrecy and affection, Branwell had no brother whose sympathetic counsel he could embrace; but, thrown back upon himself, was led to seek the society of appreciative friends, who made him acquainted with the manners and customs of the world, and the vices of society, before his time had yet come to know much concerning them. It was, indeed, unfortunately, no infrequent circumstance to see the plastic, light-hearted, unsuspecting Branwell listening to the coarse

jokes of the sexton of Haworth—the noted John Brown—while that functionary was employed in digging the graves so often opened in the churchyard, under the shadow of the parsonage.

It was the kind of society in which he sought relaxation at Haworth that led him to take an interest, which he long retained, in the pugilistic ring. The interest in pugilism and the 'noble art,' it must, however, be remembered, had been made fashionable by wealthy, influential, and titled people, amongst whom was Lord Byron, and by the fops and dandies of an earlier period. Jackson, the noted professor, was a great friend of the poet, and, on several occasions, visited him at Newstead. Early in this century, too, many men about town were accustomed to assemble for practice at the academy of Angelo and Jackson. Branwell, also, read with eagerness the columns of 'Bell's Life in London,' and other sporting papers of the day. The names and personal appearance of the celebrated pugilists who, at that time, to the delight of the *élite* of society, pounded each other till they were unlike anything human—for the applause of the multitude, and the

honour of wearing the 'Champion's Belt,'—were familiar to him. 'Bell's Life' was taken in by an innkeeper at Haworth; and the members of the village boxing-club, one of whom was Branwell, were posted up in all public matters relating to the 'noble art of self-defence.' They had sundry boxing-gloves, and, at intervals, amused themselves with sparring in an upper room of a building at Haworth. These practices, at the time of which we speak, were but boyish amusements, and were no doubt congenial to the animal spirits and energetic temperaments of those who entered into them, and they were so more especially to Branwell, who had abundance of both. But it may be that here he became acquainted with young men whose habits and conduct had a deleterious influence upon him at the very opening of his career. If, however, Branwell's high spirit allowed him sometimes to be led away by his companions, his natural goodness of heart brought a ready and vehement repentance. The respect he felt for his father's calling, magnified, in his eyes, any fault of his own—who ought to have been more than ordinarily good—and, exaggerating his failings, he

would lament his 'dreadful conduct' in deep distress. Such unmistakable evidences of sincerity and truthfulness procured him a ready pardon. He was necessarily his aunt's favourite; but he attached himself to all about him with so much readiness of affection that it is quite evident, whatever his youthful faults, they were of a superficial character only.

The studies which Branwell pursued in his youth were noticed by his literary friends, in after-years, to bear a considerable fruit of classical knowledge. He possessed then a familiar and extensive acquaintance with the Greek and Latin authors. He knew well the history and condition of Europe, and of this country, in past and present times; and his conversational powers on these, and the current literature of the day, were of the highest order. Mr. Brontë had obtained musical tuition for his son and daughters, and Branwell was enthusiastically fond of sacred music, and could play the organ. He was acquainted with the works of the great composers of recent and former times; and, although he could not perform their elaborate compositions well, he was always

so excited when they were played for him by his friends that he would walk about the room with measured footsteps, his eyes raised to the ceiling, accompanying the music with his voice in an impassioned manner, and beating time with his hand on the chairs as he passed to and fro. He was an enthusiastic admirer of the oratorio of 'Samson,' which Handel deemed equal to the 'Messiah,' and of the Mass-music of Haydn, Mozart, and others. Religion had, indeed, been deeply implanted in Branwell's breast; but, whenever he heard sacred music like this, his devotional impressions were deepened, and even in times of temptation, indulgence, and folly the influence of early piety was never effaced. Among his minor accomplishments, he had acquired the practice of writing short-hand with facility, and also of writing with both hands at the same time with perfect ease, so that he possessed the extraordinary power of writing two letters at once. His hand-writing was of an upright character. Branwell, too, had a wonderful power of observation, and a most retentive memory. It is on record that, before he visited London, he so

mastered its labyrinths, by a diligent study of maps and books, that he spoke with a perfect knowledge of it, and astonished inhabitants of the metropolis by his intimate acquaintance with by-ways and places of which they even had never heard. In person he was rather below the middle height, but of refined and gentleman-like appearance, and of graceful manners. His complexion was fair and his features handsome; his mouth and chin were well-shaped; his nose was prominent and of the Roman type; his eyes sparkled and danced with delight, and his fine forehead made up a face of oval form which gave an irresistible charm to its possessor, and attracted the admiration of those who knew him. Added to this, his address was simple and unadorned, yet polished; but, being familiar with the English language in its highest form of expression, and with the Yorkshire and Hibernian *patois* also, he could easily make use of the quaintest and broadest terms when occasion called for them. It was, indeed, amazing how suddenly he could pass from the discussion of a grave and lofty subject, or from a deep

disquisition, or some exalted poetical theme, to one of his light-hearted and amusing Irish or Yorkshire sallies. He could be sad and joyful almost at the same time, like the sunshine and gloom of April weather; exhibiting, by anticipation, the future lights and shadows of his own sad, short, and chequered existence. In a word, he seemed at times even to be jocular and merry with gravity itself.

It is known also that Branwell, at that period of his young life—when manhood with its hopes and joys, its enterprises and aspirations, its affections and its responsibilities, stretched before him—was also busily laying, to the best of his ability, the foundations, as he trusted, of a brilliant literary or artistic future.

CHAPTER VIII.

ART-AIMS OF THE BRONTËS.

Love of Art in the Youthful Brontës—Their

elaborate Drawings—J. B. Leyland, Sculptor—Spartacus—Mr. George Hogarth's Opinion —Art Exhibition at Leeds—Mr. William Robinson, their Drawing-Master—Branwell aims at Portrait-Painting—J. B. Leyland in London—Branwell and the Royal Academy—He visits London.

The biographers of the Brontë sisters have pointed out especially the artistic instinct of Charlotte and Emily; and the originality and fidelity of their written descriptions, and the beauty of the composition and 'colour' of their word-paintings, have formed an inexhaustible theme for the various writers on the excellencies of Brontë genius. The appreciation of art possessed by the members of this family, whether in drawing, painting, or sculpture, was manifested early; but, though highly gifted in felicity and aptness of verbal expression in describing natural scenery, and in the delineation of personal character, they were not endowed, in like degree, with the faculty of placing their ideas—weird and wild, or beautiful and joyous as they might be—in that

tangible and fixed shape in which artists have perpetuated the emanations of their genius. The devotion of Charlotte and Branwell to art was, nevertheless, so intense, and their belief was so profound, at one time, that the art-faculty consisted of little more than mechanical dexterity, and could be obtained by long study and practice in manipulation, that the sister toiled incessantly in copying, almost line for line, the grand old engravings of Woollett, Brown, Fittler, and others till her eyesight was dimmed and blurred by the sedulous application; and Branwell, with the same belief, eagerly followed her example. Great talent and perseverance they undoubtedly had; and, although we are not possessed of any original drawings by Charlotte of striking character, we know that Branwell drew in pen-and-ink with much facility, humour, and originality. His productions, in this manner, will be more particularly noticed in the course of this work. Charlotte's drawings were said to be pre-Raphaelite in detail, but they had no approach to the spirit of that school; and Branwell's pictures, however meritorious they might be as likenesses

of the individuals they represented, lacked, in every instance, that artistic touch which the hand of genius always gives, and cannot help giving. While at school at Roe Head, Charlotte had been noticed by her fellow-pupils to draw better and more quickly than they had before seen anyone do, and we have been told by one of them that 'she picked up every scrap of information concerning painting, sculpture, poetry, music, &c., as if it were gold.' The list she drew up a year or two earlier of the great artists whose works she wished to see, shows us that her interest in art, even in her thirteenth year, led her to read of them and their productions.

On her return home in 1832, Charlotte wrote on the 21st July respecting her course of life at the parsonage: 'In the morning, from nine o'clock till half-past twelve, I instruct my sisters, and draw; then we walk till dinner-time. After dinner I sew till tea-time, and after tea I either write, read, or do a little fancy-work, or draw as I please.' Charlotte also told Mrs. Gaskell 'that, at this period of her life, drawing, and walking with her sisters, formed the two great pleasures and

relaxations of her day.'

Mr. Brontë, observing that his son and daughters took pleasure in the art of drawing, and believing this to be one of their natural gifts that ought to be cultivated, perhaps as an accomplishment which they might some time find useful in tuition, obtained for them a drawing-master. But he also observed that Branwell excelled his sisters in the art, while he likewise painted in oils, and he may at times have had some hope that his son would become a distinguished artist.

It is apparent, indeed, that drawing not only engaged much of Charlotte's leisure, but that it formed a part of home-education. Her sisters as well as herself underwent great labour in acquiring the art in these early years, and Branwell also was not behind them in industrious pursuit of the same object. Charlotte even thought of art as a profession for herself; and so strong was this intention, that she could scarcely be convinced that it was not her true vocation. In short, her appreciative spirit always dwelt with indescribable pleasure on works of real art, and she derived,

from their contemplation, one of the chief enjoyments of her life. 'To paint them, in short,' says Jane Eyre, speaking of the pictures she is showing to Mr. Rochester, 'was to enjoy one of the keenest pleasures I have ever known.' [\[19\]](#)

The love the Brontës thus cherished for art became, as time passed on, a passion, and its cultivation a pressing and sensible duty. They were not aware that their industry in, and devotion to it, as they understood it, were a misdirection of their genius. How far this love of it, and this eagerness to acquire a knowledge of the mysteries of composition and analysis, and to be possessed of art-practice and art-learning, may have been excited and encouraged by the success that had been achieved by others with whom they were familiar, in the same direction, may be surmised.

In the year of Mr. Brontë's appointment to Hartshead, there was born, at Halifax, an artist, Joseph Bentley Leyland, who was destined to become the personal friend and inspirer of Mr. Brontë's son, Branwell. Leyland, in his early boyhood, showed, by the ease and faithfulness

with which he modelled in clay, or sketched with pencil, the objects that attracted his attention, the direction of his genius. The sculptor, as he grew in years, treated, with artistic power, classical subjects which had not hitherto been embodied in sculpture. At the age of twenty-one he modelled a statue of Spartacus, the Thracian, a general who, after defeating several Roman armies in succession, was overthrown with his forces by Crassus the prætor, and slain. The dead leader was represented at that moment after death before the muscles have acquired extreme rigidity. The statue, which was of colossal size, was modelled from living subjects, and was, in all respects, a production far beyond the sculptor's years. It was the most striking work of art at the Manchester Exhibition in the year 1832, and was favourably noticed in the 'Manchester Courier,' on November the 3rd of that year. Such notices were productive of increased exertion, which soon became manifest in the creation of other more lofty and successful works. Among these was a colossal bust of Satan, some six feet in height, which was pronounced to be 'truly that of

Milton's "Arch-angel ruined." Mr. George Hogarth, the father-in-law of Charles Dickens—a gentleman of literary power and knowledge—was the editor of the 'Halifax Guardian' at the time, and visited the artist's small studio, where he saw, in one corner, under its lean-to roof, for the first time, the bust of Satan. He was astonished at its merit, and published his criticism of the work in the paper on May the 24th, 1834. Leyland was then strongly urged to forward the bust to London, which he did, with some others he had modelled; and the critics were invited to visit his studio. The favourable opinion which Mr. Hogarth published, in the paper of which he was editor, was endorsed, but in more flattering terms, in the 'Morning Chronicle' of December 2nd, 1834. But there was held at Leeds, in these years, the Annual Exhibition of the Northern Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts; and Leyland, before he sent his work to London, included it in his contributions to the exhibition at Leeds.

The oil-paintings and water-colour drawings that were hung there, in the summer of 1834, appear to have formed a fine and varied collection. There

were beautiful landscapes in water-colour by Copley Fielding, and in oil by Alexander Nasmyth, John Linne, Robert Macreth; and others were well represented, while historical paintings by H. Fradelle, sea-pieces by Carmichael, and animal paintings by Schwanfelder, always good, were highly creditable to these well-known names. A number of fine portraits by William Bewick and William Robinson added interest and beauty to the galleries. The reader may conceive, if he will, the Brontës—Charlotte and Branwell, and, it may be, Mr. Brontë and Emily—enjoying to the full the paintings and sculptures which were before them. He may fancy the suddenly expressed, 'Look, Charlotte!' as some newly discovered picture flashed as a keen delight on the eager fancy of Branwell's appreciative spirit. He may imagine the ready criticism of Charlotte, and the attempts which she and her brother made to divine how much thought had gone to make up the composition of a work. The young Brontë critics, as they looked on the colossal head of Satan—on the stern and inflexible firmness of the features

'whose superhuman beauty is yet covered with a cloud of the deepest melancholy;' on the representation 'of the great and glorious being sunk in utter despair,'—might ponder, perhaps, whether an ideal has dawned upon the imagination of the artist, and so been wrought from no model, but from the vision of his meditations, or whether success is, after all, but the evidence of painful elaboration. At any rate, it was just on such an exhibition of paintings and works of art that Charlotte and Branwell delighted to dwell in intelligent and educated observation.

That a new impetus and a new meaning were given to their art-practice about this time is certain, and it was probably not long after this date that Mr. Brontë engaged, for the instruction of his son and daughters, an artist of Leeds, the Mr. William Robinson I have mentioned as having contributed a number of portraits to the exhibition. The object of the Brontës was now to practise painting, and this able instructor was consequently engaged.

Mr. Robinson was a native of Leeds, who had,

by natural talent and steady perseverance, acquired something more than a local reputation. His early love of art had been such that the wishes of his friends failed to divert him from its pursuit, and he received lessons from Mr. Rhodes, sen., of Leeds, an admirable painter in water-colours. But Mr. Robinson had a strong predilection for portrait-painting, to which he had devoted his powers, at the same time availing himself of every opportunity for improving in its practice. In the year 1820, he visited the metropolis, taking with him an introduction to Sir Thomas Lawrence, who received him with great kindness, and he became a pupil of this eminent artist. Sir Thomas, however, with noble generosity, declined any remuneration whatever, and Robinson assisted his master in his work. He was introduced to Fuseli, and gained the privilege of studying at the Royal Academy, his work being characterized by the requisite merit. He was stimulated to renewed exertion by this much desired success. In 1824, he had returned to his native town, where he procured numerous commissions. He was subsequently introduced to Earl de Grey, of

whom he painted portraits, as also of his family. Mr. Robinson, in addition, painted four portraits for the United Service Club, one of which was of the Duke of Wellington, who honoured him with several sittings. Besides these, amongst his other works, was a portrait of the Princess Sophia, and a copy of one of the Duke of York for the Duchess of Gloucester. It was from this gentleman that Branwell Brontë and his sister received a few lessons in portrait-painting at the time of which I speak, and a knowledge of the master's career did not a little to fire the mind of the enthusiastic Branwell with ardour to aim in the same direction, while the contemporary efforts of others added fuel to the fire.

At this time there were certain artists of the neighbourhood who were trying their fortunes in London, and who were known to Branwell Brontë by reputation: C. H. Schwanfelder, the animal painter, and John W. Rhodes, the son of the artist under whom Mr. Robinson had studied. The father of the latter had endeavoured to dissuade him from making art his profession, but all to no purpose: the bent of his genius could not

be curbed. He painted in water-colour and oil with great beauty and fidelity; the green lane, the wild flower hanging from an old wall, were his subjects. His works met with well-deserved encomiums in the London press, and with praise wherever they were exhibited; but, when full of aspiring hopes, he was attacked, like Girtin, Liversedge, and Bonnington, by inflammation in the eyes, and ill health. He died at the early age of thirty-three, and a memoir of him appeared in 'The Art Journal' of March, 1843. The determination of Charlotte and Branwell to take, as it were, the Temple of Art by forcible possession, was, it may be conceived, due also, in some measure, to the growing celebrity of Leyland; for, in literature and art, Halifax was nearer to the Brontës than any of the surrounding towns. The praise of Leyland's works, moreover, had been re-published from the London press in all the papers of his native county, and poetic eulogies appeared in the 'Leeds Intelligencer' and in the 'Leeds Mercury;' and, therefore, that they were eager to emulate his works and to equal his success seems very probable.

I have felt it necessary to mention these influences, as they alone serve to explain how it was that Branwell and his sister were led to think of, and—as regards the brother—to persist for a time in making a profession of painting for which they had no special aptitude. Branwell, in fact, designed to become himself a portrait-painter, and he conceived that a course of instruction at the Royal Academy afforded the best means of preparation for that profession.

Being gifted with a keen and distinct observation, combined with the faculty of retaining impressions once formed, and being an excellent draughtsman, he could with ease produce admirable representations of the persons he portrayed on canvas. But it is quite clear that he never had been instructed either in the right mode of mixing his pigments, or how to use them when properly prepared, or, perhaps, he had not been an apt scholar. He was, therefore, unable to obtain the necessary flesh tints, which require so much delicacy in handling, or the gradations of light and shade so requisite in the painting of a good portrait or picture. Had Branwell possessed this

knowledge, the portraits he painted would have been valuable works from his hand; but the colours he used have all but vanished, and scarcely any tint, beyond that of the boiled oil with which they appear to have been mixed, remains. Yet, even if Branwell had been fortunate in his work, he would only have attained the position, probably, of a moderate portrait-painter. His ambition, however, took a higher range, and he prepared himself for the venture, hoping that the desiderata which Haworth could not supply would be amply provided for him in London, when the long-desired opportunity arrived.

At Haworth he had been industrious, for he had painted some portraits of the members of his family, and of several friends. One of these is well described by Mrs. Gaskell, and her account is worth giving here:—'It was a group of his sisters, life-size, three-quarters length ... the likenesses were, I should think, admirable. I only judge of the fidelity with which the other two were depicted, from the striking resemblance which Charlotte, upholding the great frame of canvas, and consequently standing right behind it, bore to

her own representation, though it must have been ten years and more since the portraits were taken. The picture was divided, almost in the middle, by a great pillar. On the side of the column which was lighted by the sun stood Charlotte, in the womanly dress of that day of gigot sleeves and large collars. On the deeply shadowed side was Emily, with Anne's gentle face resting on her shoulder. Emily's countenance struck me as full of power; Charlotte's of solicitude; Anne's of tenderness. The two younger seemed hardly to have attained their full growth, though Emily was taller than Charlotte; they had cropped hair and a more girlish dress. I remember looking on these two sad, earnest, shadowed faces, and wondering whether I could trace the mysterious expression which is said to foretell an early death. I had some fond superstitious hope that the column divided their fate from hers who stood apart in the canvas, as in life she survived. I liked to see that the bright side of the pillar was towards *her*—that the light in the picture fell on *her*. I might more truly have sought in her presentment—nay, in her living face—for the sign of death in her prime.' [\[20\]](#)

From Mrs. Gaskell's description of this one picture, it is apparent that Branwell possessed, not only the faculty, as we have seen, of obtaining excellent portraits, but that he had the ability to impress the faces of his sisters with thought, intelligence, and sensibility; and to invest them with the habitual expressions they wore, of power, solicitude, and tenderness. The deep reflection which Branwell bestowed on this picture, and the care he lavished on its mysterious composition, show unquestionably the aptitude and capacity of his own mind, which enabled him to obtain these essential expressions; and it is evident that his peculiarity of thought invested his picture with that sadness and gloom which, in after times, tintured the poems he wrote under the solemn-sounding pseudonym of 'Northangerland.' This picture is only one among many others he painted in preparing himself for his intended studies at the Royal Academy; and the old nurse, Nancy Garrs, tells me that he often wanted to paint her portrait, but she told him that she did not think herself 'good-looking enough.'

At a later date Branwell related to Mr. George

Searle Phillips the story of his artistic hopes. [\[21\]](#) He spoke of the great fondness for drawing manifested by the whole family; and declared that Charlotte, especially, was well read in art-learning, and knew the lives of the old masters, whose works she criticized with discrimination and judgment. But he said that she had ruined her eyesight by making minute copies of line-engravings, on one of which she was occupied six months. He also spoke of his own passionate love of art, and of the bright and confident anticipations with which he had looked forward to his projected studies at the Royal Academy, which had been the cherished hope of his family and himself.

Leyland had visited London in the December of 1833, when he obtained from Stothard a letter of introduction to Ottley, the curator of the Elgin Marbles, to allow him to study the marbles in the British Museum. Permission was readily granted, and the sculptor availed himself of it. A year later Leyland took up his residence in the metropolis. He was received in a friendly manner by Chantrey and Westmacott, the latter inviting him to dinner,

and afterwards showing him his foundry at Pimlico, and his works in progress, among which was the statue of the Duke of York. He was also introduced to, and enjoyed the friendship of Nasmyth—the father of the eminent engineer whose story has recently been given to the world—and of Warley: one a landscape-painter of celebrity, and the other famed as an artist in water-colour. The latter, who had considerable faith in astrology, persisted in drawing the younger sculptor's horoscope. Among others, he became known to Haydon, under whom he subsequently studied anatomy. This lamented artist was a genuine friend, and it was under his instructions that Leyland perfected his natural perception of the grand and beautiful in art. While here he modelled, in life-size, a figure of 'Kilmeny,' in illustration of the passage in Hogg's 'Queen's Wake,' where the sinless maiden is awakened by Elfin music in fairy-land. It was a successful work, and was favourably noticed by the critics. It was subsequently purchased for the Literary and Philosophical Society of his native town.

It was while Leyland was in the metropolis that

Charlotte wrote, on the 6th July, 1835:

'We are all about to divide, break up, separate. Emily is going to school, Branwell is going to London, and I am going to be a governess. This last determination I formed myself, knowing that I should have to take the step sometime, "and better sune as syne," to use the Scotch proverb; and knowing well that papa would have enough to do with his limited income, should Branwell be placed at the Royal Academy, and Emily at Roe Head.'

While this project was warmly engaging the attention of the Brontë family, Leyland was living in London, at the house of Mr. Geller, a mezzotinto-engraver, who was a native of Bradford; and, at the time, the sculptor modelled a group of three figures illustrative of a passage in Maturin's tragedy of 'Bertram,' which represented the warrior listening to the prior reading. The work was engraved by Geller. This group was said to be conceived in the 'true spirit of Maturin,' and met with the favourable notice of the London periodicals of the year 1835, the year of

Branwell's visit to the metropolis. The reviews were also reproduced in most of the Yorkshire papers.

The design of putting Branwell forward as an artist, and of giving him the opportunity and the means of beginning and continuing his studies, where he might be imbued with the spirit of the great sculptors and painters who have left imperishable names, and whose works are stored in the public art-galleries of London, had at last been determined upon. The sacrifices the Brontë family were prepared to make in order to secure this object require but a passing notice here. Branwell was a treasured brother; and they would feel, no doubt, a sincere happiness in promoting his interests, in furthering his views, and in bringing his artistic abilities before the world. It would, however, seem scarcely possible that the difficulties attending Branwell's admission as a student at the Royal Academy had been duly considered. He could not be admitted without a preliminary examination of his drawings from the antique and the skeleton, to ascertain if his ability as a draughtsman was of such an order as would

qualify him for studentship; and, if successful in this, he would be required to undergo a regular course of education, and to pass through the various schools where professors and academicians attended to give instruction. No doubt it was wished that Branwell should have a regular and prolonged preparation for his professional artistic career; but it would have lasted for years, and the pecuniary strain consequent upon it would, perhaps, have been severely felt, even if Branwell's genius had justified the outlay. But there is no evidence that he ever subjected himself to the preliminary test, or made an application even to be admitted as a probationer.

It would seem that, so far as Mr. Brontë was concerned, his promotion of the wishes of his children arose rather from a desire to gratify them. It does not appear that he had any over-sanguine expectation that Branwell could carry out his ardent intention of becoming an artist. Mr. Brontë's own wish was, indeed, that his son should adopt his profession, but the mercurial youth was probably little attracted by the

functions of the clergyman's office.

To London Branwell, however, went, where, without doubt, his object was to draw from the Elgin Marbles, and to study the pictures at the Royal Academy and other galleries, with a perfectly honest intention. Whatever impression he may have received of his own powers as an artist, when he saw those of the great painters of the time, we have no certain knowledge; but it does not exceed belief that he was discouraged when he looked upon the brilliant chef d'oeuvres of Sir Joshua Reynolds, Gainsborough, Sir Thomas Lawrence, and others; and that, when he reflected on the immeasurable distance between his own works and theirs, his hopes of a brilliant artistic career were partially dissipated. Whether it was due to these circumstances, or that he had become more fully aware of the early struggles that meet all who attempt art as a profession, or that his courage failed him at the contemplation of the unhappy lot which falls to those who, either from lack of talent or through misfortune, fail to make their mark in the artistic world; or whether it was because his father was unable to support him

in London during the years of preparation and study for the professional career,—the requirements of which had not been sufficiently considered,—is not now accurately known. Branwell, during his short stay in London, visited most of the public institutions; and, among other places, Westminster Abbey, the western façade of which he some time afterwards sketched from memory with an accuracy that astonished his acquaintance, Mr. Grundy.

Before he left the metropolis, Branwell could not resist a visit to the Castle Tavern, Holborn, then kept by the veteran prize-fighter, Tom Spring, a place frequented by the principal sporting characters of the time. A gentleman named Woolven, who was present through the same curiosity which led Branwell there, noticed the young man, whose unusual flow of language and strength of memory had so attracted the attention of the spectators that they had made him umpire in some dispute arising about the dates of certain celebrated battles. Branwell and he became personal friends in after-years.

Branwell returned to the parsonage a wiser man. His disappointment that he was not to do as others were doing, whom he wished to emulate, was very great, but he was not yet finally discouraged. We shall see subsequently to what purpose Branwell put his artistic knowledge. The failure of the hopes regarding his academical career in art was keenly felt by his family. It was grievous as it was humiliating, but it was borne with exemplary patience and resignation. When these painful experiences had impressed the Brontë sisters with the hopelessness of high artistic study for Branwell, and when their eyes were opened to the consciousness that their large gifts did not include art, Charlotte wrote, in her novel of 'Villette,' under the character of Lucy Snowe: 'I sat bent over my desk, drawing—that is, copying an elaborate line-engraving, tediously working up my copy to the finish of the original, for that was my practical notion of art; and, strange to say, I took extreme pleasure in the labour, and could even produce curiously finished fac-similes of steel or mezzotinto plates—things about as valuable as so many achievements in

worsted work, but I thought pretty well of them in those days.'

CHAPTER IX.

CHARLOTTE AT ROE HEAD.

Charlotte returns as a Teacher, with Emily as a Pupil, to Roe Head—Their Determination to Maintain themselves—Charlotte's Fears respecting Emily—Charlotte's religious Melancholy—Accuses herself of Flippancy—She is on the Borders of Despair—Anxiety to Know More of the World—Emily at Law Hill, Halifax, as a Teacher—Charlotte's Excitability—She returns Home out of Health.

'We are all about to divide, break up, separate,' Charlotte said, when conveying to her friend the news of the Academy project, and of her determination to enter upon life as a governess. If Branwell's ambition had encouraged her own, its

failure made no change in her plans. She was 'sad,' she says, 'very sad,' at the thoughts of leaving home; yet she was going back to the school of Miss Wooler, whom she both loved and respected, to live at Roe Head, this time to teach, it is true, instead of to be taught. But her sister Emily was to accompany her, as a pupil of the school, and that they would be together was a consolation to both sisters; and Charlotte, too, would be near the homes of the friends she had made when she was herself a pupil there. It was a pleasure to think she would be able to see them sometimes.

At the end of July, then, the two proceeded to Roe Head. This was the first of those adventurous moves which the sisters, from time to time, made. One of the strongest features, indeed, in their lives is the persistency with which they essayed to maintain themselves, even when no apparently pressing necessity impelled them. Yet we may not doubt that one sad reflection sometimes moved them, and it was that their father's stipend ceased with his life; that they had no other resource beyond their own endeavours; and that, such was

the uncertainty of all human concerns, they might at any moment be deprived of home, support, and shelter. It behoved them then to secure by their personal energies, while they were able, the very means of subsistence.

When Mr. Brontë saw his young family around him, and when he enjoyed the comfort of his hearth, the contingency of his death, and the consequent helplessness of his children, often struck him with apprehension and sadness. But he had the alleviation that they inherited, in a marked degree, his own adventurous and energetic disposition, whose successful career was always before them as an example and incentive to honourable endeavour.

Mr. Brontë looked back with just satisfaction on the early sacrifices he had made to advance himself in the world. His children were familiar with the story of his exertions. They, however, with far higher talents, were not possessed of the physical strength and powers of endurance which had aided his progress; and Charlotte and Emily, when any unusual strain was cast upon them, soon

felt their strength exhausted, and they suffered depression of spirits as the consequence. Home-sickness was the great trouble of the younger sister, and, before she had been long at school, Emily grew pale and ill. Charlotte felt in her heart that, if she remained, she would die; and, at the end of three months, she returned to Haworth, where, alone among the moors, with all the wild things of nature, which had inspired so deep an interest in her feelings, she could be contented. But the youngest sister, Anne, came to Roe Head in her place, and she and Charlotte seem to have been very happy there for some time; but a tendency to religious melancholy had been developing in the elder sister's mind, imperceptibly, out of her deep religious feeling, and it increased upon her.

So early as the letter to 'E,' July 6th, 1835, she had spoken of 'duty, necessity, these are stern mistresses,' as controlling her action in seeking a situation. Her friend Mary went to see her, and in her letter to Mrs. Gaskell she says: 'I asked her how she could give so much for so little money, when she could live without it. She owned that,

after clothing herself and Anne, there was nothing left, though she had hoped to be able to save something. She confessed it was not brilliant, but what could she do? I had nothing to answer. She seemed to have no interest or pleasure beyond the feeling of duty, and, when she could get, used to sit alone and "make out." She told me afterwards, that one evening she had sat in the dressing-room until it was quite dark, and then, observing it all at once, had taken sudden fright.' Some relaxation was gained by the Midsummer holidays of the year 1836. All the family were at home, and their friend 'E' visited them, so that a pleasant period of mental diversion was secured. But, after her return to her school, despondency came upon her again, and crowded her thoughts; and she wrote respecting her feelings in religious concerns: 'I do wish to be better than I am. I pray fervently sometimes to be made so. I have stings of conscience, visitings of remorse, glimpses of holy, of inexpressible things, which formerly I used to be a stranger to; it may all die away, and I may be in utter midnight, but I implore a merciful Redeemer, that, if this be the dawn of the Gospel,

it may still brighten to perfect day. Do not mistake me—do not think I am good; I only wish to be so. I only hate my former flippancy and forwardness. Oh! I am no better than ever I was. I am in that state of horrid, gloomy uncertainty that, at this moment, I would submit to be old, grey-haired, to have passed all my youthful days of enjoyment, and to be settling on the verge of the grave, if I could only thereby insure the prospect of reconciliation to God, and a redemption through His Son's merits. I never was exactly careless of these matters, but I have always taken a clouded and repulsive view of them; and now, if possible, the clouds are gathering darker, and a more oppressive despondency weighs on my spirits. You have cheered me, my darling; for one moment, for an atom of time, I thought I might call you my own sister in the spirit; but the excitement is past, and I am now as wretched and hopeless as ever.'

Let us not under-estimate the mental suffering which could dictate this confession. Happily, this was not constantly present, nor her feelings always so acutely wrought upon. Even in the same

letter from which the above is taken, she wishes her friends should know the thrill of delight which she experienced when she saw the packet of her friend thrown over the wall by the bearer, passing in his gig to Huddersfield Market. She persevered in her place, the whole tendency of her exaggerated reasoning forbidding her to seek that ease and relaxation which she needed so much; but she was not incapacitated for her duties, and probably her family were quite unaware of her troubles: so she remained.

Branwell and Emily were resolved not to be behind their sister in their endeavours, and they were full of anxiety to know more of the world than they could meet with at Haworth. Emily obtained a similar situation to Charlotte's, in a large school at Law Hill, near Halifax, where she found her duties far from light. Her extreme reserve with strangers is remembered by one who knew her there, but she was not at all of an unkindly nature; on the contrary, her disposition was generous and considerate to those with whom she was on familiar terms: her stay at Law Hill terminated at the end of six months. The place

of her sojourn is a lofty elevation, overlooking Halifax. Emily would find the situation of the school agreeable to her taste, and to her delight in the weird and grand as presented by the solemn heath-grown heights of the West-Riding: besides, the air was as pure as that of Haworth, and Law Hill commanded finer views, among which the range of Oxenhope moors, in her father's chapelry, was visible. In the other direction, she could overlook the more cultivated district of Hartshead and Kirklees, and could see Roe Head, where her sisters Charlotte and Anne resided. Branwell also, emulating his sisters, obtained the situation of usher in the locality, which he retained for a few months.

Some adventures with their literary productions interested them at the close of this year, of which I shall have further to speak. Miss Wooler's removal of her school to Dewsbury Moor was, in some respects, unfortunate for the sisters, as the situation was less healthy than the former one, and, when Charlotte and Anne returned home at Christmas, in the year 1837, neither was well. Charlotte's nerves were over-strung, and Anne

was suffering from chest affections, which conjured up anew their recollection of the deaths of Maria and Elizabeth from consumption. To add to their troubles, Tabby fell on the ice in the lane, and fractured her leg. The consequence of this was, that they had to forego the expected pleasure of a visit from their friend 'E,' through their attendance on the old servant, whom they were unwilling should be removed to her friends, however desirable this might be on many grounds. They even went so far as to refuse to eat at all, till their aunt, who had arranged the matter to the satisfaction of all concerned, except her nieces, should give up her intention of removing Tabby. They succeeded, and Tabby remained at the parsonage, where in time she became convalescent, and Charlotte was enabled to visit her friends before she resumed her occupation.

Charlotte again returned to her accustomed duties, her nervousness increasing, not the less; and Mrs. Gaskell says: 'About this time she would turn sick and trembling at any sudden noise, and could hardly repress her screams when startled.' Through Miss Wooler's urgency, she was induced

to consult a medical man, who advised her immediate return to Haworth, where quiet and rest had become for her imperatively necessary. Then her father sought for her the companionship of her two friends, Mary and Martha T——, than whose society Charlotte had never known a more rousing pleasure. They came to stay at the parsonage, and their cheerful converse and agreeable manners greatly improved Charlotte's health and spirits. We obtain an interesting picture of the young party in the following letter that Charlotte addressed to her friend 'E,' which Mrs. Gaskell has published:

'Haworth,

'June 9th, 1838.

'I received your packet of despatches on Wednesday; it was brought me by Mary and Martha, who have been staying at Haworth for a few days; they leave us to-day. You will be surprised at the date of this letter. I ought to be at Dewsbury Moor, you know; but I stayed as long as I

was able, and at length I neither could nor dared stay any longer. My health and spirits had utterly failed me, and the medical man whom I consulted enjoined me, as I valued my life, to go home. So home I went, and the change has at once roused and soothed me. I am now, I trust, fairly in the way to be myself again.

'A calm and even mind like yours cannot conceive the feelings of the shattered wretch who is now writing to you, when, after weeks of mental and bodily anguish not to be described, something like peace began to dawn again. Mary is far from well. She breathes short, has a pain in her chest, and frequent flushings of fever. I cannot tell you what agony these symptoms give me; they remind me so strongly of my two sisters, whom no power of medicine could save. Martha is now very well; she has kept in a continual flow of good humour during her stay here, and has consequently been very fascinating....

'They are making such a noise about me, I cannot write any more. Mary is playing on the piano; Martha is chattering as fast as her little tongue can run; and Branwell is standing before her, laughing at her vivacity.'

Branwell, in these days, was well enough, and could be lively enough, when occasion served. He had his hopes, his enthusiasm yet: but, in after-years, he was to fall into a yet deeper and more serious depression than that through which Charlotte had passed.

CHAPTER X.

BRANWELL BRONTË AND HIS SISTERS' BIOGRAPHERS.

The Light in which Biographers have regarded
Branwell—Bibliography —Mrs. Gaskell—
The Causes which led her into Error—

Resentment of Branwell's Friends—Mr. George Searle Phillips—Branwell as Depicted by Mr. T. Wemyss Reid—Mr. F. H. Grundy's Notice of Branwell—Miss A. Mary F. Robinson's Portrait of Branwell.

It will be well here—before we reach the periods of Branwell's life that have been misunderstood—to pause, in our sketch of the Brontë family, in order to consider certain circumstances regarding him, which it will be impossible for any future writer on the Brontës to disregard. It is especially necessary to consider them in a book which—while dealing with the Brontë sisters, their lives and their works—proposes, as a special aim, to make Branwell's position clear. When Derwent Coleridge wrote the short biography of his father, which is prefixed to the poet's works, he approached the subject in a somewhat regretful way, asking if the public has a right to inquire as to that part of a poet's life which does not influence his fellow-men after death, and declaring that the privacy of the dead is sacred. He felt too keenly that the sanctity of Coleridge's life had

been broken in upon by those who lacked both accurate knowledge and just discretion. It is a source of sincere regret to the writer of this volume that he, too, is compelled by circumstances to treat a part of his work almost in a deprecatory spirit, and sometimes to assume the position of defence. For, if the failings of Coleridge have been discovered and fed upon by those whose curiosity leads them to delight in such things, what shall we say of Patrick Branwell Brontë, whose misdeeds have not only been sought out with a persistency worthy of a better cause, but have also been exaggerated and misrepresented to a great degree, and whose whole life, moreover, has been contorted by writers who have endeavoured to find in it some evidence for their own hypotheses? It has been the misfortune of Branwell that his life has, to some extent, been already several times written by those who have had some other object in view, and who, consequently, have not been studious to acquire a correct view of the circumstances of it. These writers, it will be seen, have therefore, perhaps unavoidably, fallen into

many grievous errors regarding him, so that his name, at this day, has come to be held up as a reproach and even as a token of ignominy. If it be remembered that Mrs. Gaskell, in her 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' describes him as a drunkard and an opium-eater, as one who rendered miserable the lives of his sisters, and might very well have shot his father; that Mr. T. Wemyss Reid, in his 'Charlotte Brontë, a Monograph,' has spoken of him as 'this lost and degraded man;' that Miss Robinson, in her 'Emily Brontë,' has called him a 'poor, half-demented lonely creature,' and has moralized upon his 'vulgar weakness,' his 'corrupt and loathsome sentimentality,' and his 'maudlin Micawber penitence;' and lastly that Mr. Swinburne, in a notice of the last-named work in the 'Athenæum,' has said, 'of that lamentable and contemptible caitiff—contemptible not so much for his common-place debauchery as for his abject selfishness, his lying pretension, and his nerveless cowardice—there is far too much in this memoir;' it may well appear that we have here a strange subject for a biography.

But, since the publication of Miss Robinson's

'Emily Brontë,'—in which Branwell is specially degraded,—it has been felt by many admirers of the Brontës that it was desirable his life should be treated independently of the theories and necessities of his sisters' biographers, and in a spirit not unfriendly to him; for there are many people who believe that Branwell's genius has never been sufficiently recognized, and there are a few who know that, notwithstanding his many failings and misdeeds, the charges made against him are, not a few of them, wholly untrue, while many more are grossly exaggerated, and that his disposition and character have been wholly misrepresented. Having in my possession many of his letters and poems, and having been personally acquainted with him, I have undertaken the task of telling the story of his life in connection with the lives of his sisters, for I think that there is much in his strange and sad history that ought to be known, while sufficient evidence exists of his mental power to prove that he was a worthy member of the intellectual family to which he belonged. It may not be amiss here, in order to illustrate circumstances that will be alluded to in

parts of this work, to touch slightly upon the bibliography of Branwell's life, and endeavour to discover the causes which have contributed to the ill-repute in which he is generally held.

Mrs. Gaskell, who became acquainted with Charlotte Brontë after the deaths of her brother and sisters, when all that was most sorrowful in her life had been enacted, saw, or thought she saw, in her the evidences of a deep dejection, the result of a life passed under circumstances of misery and depression. In her 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' this writer's endeavour to trace the successive influences of the trials of Charlotte's life upon her, and to find in them the explanation of what was, perhaps, in some measure, an idiosyncrasy of character, has led her, in the strength of her own preconception, to interpret many circumstances to the attestation of her theory. Such, at all events, is the explanation which Mr. T. Wemyss Reid has offered, in his 'Charlotte Brontë, a Monograph,' of the partial manner in which Mrs. Gaskell has dealt with certain of Miss Brontë's letters. If we conceive Mrs. Gaskell writing with this preconception,

tending to give undue weight to all that was unhappy in the history of her heroine, we need feel little surprise that her account of the lives of the Brontës is too often a gloomy one, that their isolation at Haworth, their poverty, and their struggles have been exaggerated, or that, in order to throw in a sombre background to her picture, she was unduly credulous in listening to those unfounded stories with which she made Mr. Brontë to appear, in act, at least, diabolical, and which have helped to depict the career of Patrick Branwell Brontë in such dark and tragic colours. She had heard at Haworth the story of his disgrace, his subsequent intemperance, and his death. Herein she believed was the great sorrow of the sisters' minds, the care which had induced a morbid peculiarity in their writings, and cast a shadow upon their lives. Mrs. Gaskell seems to have thought it devolved upon her, not merely to picture beginnings of evil in the brother, and trace them to his ruin; but, also, to punish the lady whom she held responsible for what has been termed 'Branwell's fall.' To this end she thought it right to lay at the lady's door, in part, the

premature deaths of the sisters; and, in sustaining the idea that the effect on them of the brother's disgrace was what she believed it to be, she was led to employ partial versions of the letters, and exaggerate the whole course of Branwell's conduct. Her book was read with astonishment by those whose characters were made to suffer by it, and she was obliged, in later editions, to omit the charges against the lady; and also those against Mr. Brontë. But Mrs. Gaskell still maintained that, whatever the cause, the effect was the same.

It was not believed at the time, by some, that, because Mrs. Gaskell had been obliged to withdraw the statements complained of, in the later editions of her work, they were necessarily untrue. Mr. Thackeray had said that the life was 'necessarily incomplete, though most touching and admirable,' and the original edition was still in circulation, and was pirated abroad.

The friends of Branwell Brontë, those who from actual acquaintance knew his mental power and real disposition, resented greatly the wrong that

had been done to his memory; and several representations were made in his favour. One of these was in an article entitled: 'A Winter's Day at Haworth,' published in 'Chambers's Journal,' 1869. Mr. George Searle Phillips, in the 'Mirror,' of 1872, also published some valuable reminiscences which tended to show Branwell's true elevation of character and gentleness of disposition.

The publication of Mr. Wemyss Reid's 'Charlotte Brontë, a Monograph,' in the year 1877, while it called attention to the original view of Branwell's life and character, did not aim to remove it. Mr. Reid repudiated, with success, the idea that the effect of Branwell's career upon Charlotte and Emily was what Mrs. Gaskell represented it to have been, without expressing any dissent from the story itself. This writer does not, indeed, appear to have suspected that the explanation was to be found in the fact that Branwell was not so bad as he had been made to appear, or that Mrs. Gaskell had fallen into other errors besides those of the letters which he corrected. But, though Mr. Reid carefully avoided the

reproduction of the details of Mrs. Gaskell's account of Branwell's life, what reference is made to him in the 'Monograph,' after the period of his youth, is always in terms of reprobation, which have done nothing to discourage belief in the suppressed scandal. Moreover, Mr. Reid revived some of the charges against Mr. Brontë, and painted a sinister portrait of him.

It was under these circumstances that Mr. F. H. Grundy, C.E., another friend of Branwell's, in his 'Pictures of the Past' (1879), endeavoured to do some justice to his memory, and declared, notwithstanding his great failings, that his abilities were of a very high order, and his disposition one that should be admired. I have found Mr. Grundy's materials of use in this work. But, unfortunately, this friend of Branwell's wrote from recollection, and made such great mistakes in the chronology of his life that his account did not give a true interpretation of actual circumstances. Mr. Grundy, too, had evidently refreshed his memory with a perusal of Mrs. Gaskell's volume, and so his information was considerably tainted with that writer's misconceptions. This notice had the

very opposite effect to that which was intended, and has since been largely used by writers whose purpose has led them to rank Branwell with the fallen.

In Miss Robinson's recently published 'Emily Brontë,' the scandal of Branwell's life, which Mrs. Gaskell laid before the reading world, has been reproduced, and her evil report of his character greatly increased. 'Why,' it might well be asked, 'should it be necessary to publish the records of a brother's misdeeds as a conspicuous feature in a sister's memoir? Why revive a scandal that has been so long suppressed?' Miss Robinson has, indeed, given her reason, in that Branwell's sins had so large a share in determining the bent of his sister's genius, that 'to have passed them by would have been to ignore the shock which turned the fantasy of the "poems" into the tragedy of "Wuthering Heights," and here, probably, is the only adequate purpose that could have been found in doing so; but it is scarcely sufficient to explain why Miss Robinson has, almost from her first mention of Branwell Brontë to her remarks on his death, treated every act of his life with

contumely, censure, and contempt, or that she has, in opposition to every previous opinion, represented his abilities as almost void. While Mr. Reid suggested that Emily Brontë, in writing her novel, must have obtained some of her impressions from her brother's conduct, Mr. Grundy had made a statement tending to show that Branwell had written a portion of the story himself. If Branwell's abilities were no better than Miss Robinson says they were, she has disposed of Mr. Grundy's assertion at once; but not the less does she employ other reasons for that end, and the degradation she has thought it necessary to show in Branwell, answers quite as much to prove the impossibility of his having written the work, as to picture the cause of brooding in Emily, under which she produced the tragedy of 'Wuthering Heights.'

With views similar to those with which Mrs. Gaskell wrote, Miss Robinson, in following the biographer of Charlotte, has fallen into the same errors. In order to make it clear that the part Branwell had in the production of 'Wuthering Heights,' by his sister, was subjective, this writer

has found it necessary to show in his life much of what is worst in the characters of the story. So completely has Miss Robinson carried out this portion of her work, that Mr. Swinburne was led to say, in his notice of it, that 'Emily Brontë's tenderness for the lower animals ... was so vast as to include even her own miserable brother.' [\[22\]](#) But Miss Robinson has not succeeded so far without much unfairness to the victim of her theory, in omissions and errors of fact. I shall have occasion to treat at some length, later, Branwell's relationship both to 'Wuthering Heights' and 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.'

I hope, indeed, to be able to prove that Branwell was (as all who personally knew him aver him to have been) a man of great and powerful intellectual gifts, to relieve his memory of much of the obloquy that has been heaped upon it, and to clearly show the remarkable individuality of his character. I shall find it necessary, in doing so, to take exception to the portions of Mrs. Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë' which deal with her brother, as to some extent I had to do to those which refer to Mr. Brontë. More especially,

however, will it be necessary to deal with the fuller statements in the first edition of the work, and with their repetition and amplification in the more recent volumes of Mr. Reid and Miss Robinson.

I have thought it necessary to introduce these remarks in this place, in order that the reader, when he comes to the consideration of certain statements made by previous writers concerning Branwell, and his relationship with his sisters, may have a clear understanding of the views with which the works containing these statements have been written.

CHAPTER XI.

BRANWELL AT BRADFORD.

Branwell becomes a Freemason—His love of Art undiminished—Has Instruction in Oil-Painting—Commences Portrait-Painting at Bradford—His Commissions—His Letter to Mr.

Thompson, the Artist —Miss Robinson's Charges of Misconduct—Her Erroneous Statements —Branwell's true Character and Conduct at Bradford—Remarks on his alleged Opium-eating there.

When Branwell returned from London it was not without sincere satisfaction that his acquaintances welcomed their gifted and versatile friend back to Haworth, certain of whom induced him to become a freemason. Thus Branwell was brought into closer connection with the convivial circles of the village.

There was held at Haworth, at the time, 'The Lodge of the Three Graces.' In this lodge Branwell was proposed as a brother, and accepted on the 1st of February, 1836, initiated February the 29th, passed March the 28th, and raised April the 25th of that year, John Brown being the 'Worshipful Master.' Branwell was present at eleven meetings in 1836, the minutes of one of these—September the 18th—being fully entered by him. On December the 20th of the

same year, he fulfilled the duties of 'Junior Warden;' and, at seven meetings of the lodge, from January the 16th to December the 11th, 1837, he was secretary, and entered the minutes. He also, on Christmas Day of the same year, officiated as organist. [\[23\]](#) In addition to his duties in connection with the Masonic Lodge, he likewise undertook the secretaryship of the local Temperance Society, of which he was a member.

Branwell's love of art had been too strong, and his interest in its practice too intense, to allow even such a check as that which his aspirations had received in the failure of the Academy project to finally discourage him. Hence it was, I suppose, when he had relinquished his place of usher that his passionate desire of becoming an artist, still cherished under disappointment, revived. He conceived, as the project of studying at the Royal Academy had not proved feasible, that, if he had a full course of instruction from Mr. Robinson, he could, in that way, qualify himself, perhaps as well, to adopt the profession of a portrait-painter, more valuable in those days, when photographers were not, than now; and Mr. Brontë, leaning to

his son's wish, was induced to sanction the proposal, as it might provide Branwell with an alternative occupation to that of tutor, the only other that seemed open to him.

Mr. Robinson's charge, on the few occasions of his lessons at Haworth parsonage, had been two guineas for each visit. But it was now arranged that Branwell should receive instruction from the artist at his studio in Leeds. In this way he would not only have better opportunities of acquiring the art, but the cost would be much less. For this purpose, he stayed at an inn in Briggate, but occasionally took his master's pictures to Haworth to copy. Under this kind of tuition he continued for some months, when, having completed his studies, he resolved upon turning the instruction he had received, probably through the kindness of his aunt, to profitable account. With this professional intention, he engaged private apartments in Bradford, and took up his residence as a portrait-painter, under the interest of his mother's relative, the Rev. William Morgan, of Christ Church. Among others, he painted portraits of this gentleman, and of the Rev. Henry

Heap, the vicar. For some months Branwell was successful in maintaining himself by these praiseworthy efforts; but it was scarcely to be expected that he could succeed sufficiently well in competition with the older and more experienced artists of the neighbourhood.

Among his other pictures, were portraits of Mrs. Kirby, his landlady, and her two children. One of these, a beautiful little girl, was his special favourite. At his frequent request, she dined with him in his private sitting-room, her pleasant smiles and cheerful prattling always charming him.

It may be mentioned here that, when Branwell had entered upon his studies under Mr. Robinson, he formed an acquaintance with a fellow-student, Mr. J. H. Thompson, who was a portrait-painter at Bradford. A close friendship grew up between them; and this artist, being more experienced than Branwell, gave, now and then, finishing touches to the productions of his young friend.

Soon after Branwell gave up his profession as an artist at Bradford, he wrote to Mr. Thompson, in reference to some misunderstanding which had

arisen between himself and his landlady. The letter is dated from 'Haworth, May the 17th, 1839.'

'Dear Sir,

'Your last has made me resolve on a visit to you at Bradford, for certainly this train of misconceptions and delays must at last be put a stop to.

'I shall (Deo volente) be at the "Bull's Head" at two o'clock this afternoon (Friday), and *do* be there, or in Bradford, to give me your aid when I arrive!

'I am astonished at Mrs. Kirby. I have no pictures of hers to finish. But I said that, if I returned there, I would varnish three for her; and also I do not understand people who look on a kindness as a duty.

'Once more my heartfelt thanks to you for your consideration for one who has none for himself.

'Yours faithfully,

Mrs. Kirby had not been quite satisfied with the pictures before mentioned; but, on hearing Mr. Thompson's favourable opinion, she at once gave way. Although Branwell ceased his residence at Bradford for the reasons assigned, he afterwards painted portraits occasionally at Haworth; but also frequently visited his friends at the former place, having become acquainted with the poets and artists of the neighbourhood, as we shall presently see.

Miss Robinson has undertaken to draw Branwell's portrait at this juncture of his affairs, when she says he had attained the age of twenty years, though in fact he was twenty-two; and the following is the labour of her hands: 'He went to Bradford as a portrait-painter, and—so impressive is audacity—actually succeeded for some months in gaining a living there.... His tawny mane, his pose of untaught genius, his verses in the poet's corner of the paper could not for ever keep afloat this untaught and thriftless portrait-painter of twenty. Soon there came an end to his

painting there. He disappeared from Bradford suddenly, heavily in debt, and was lost to sight until, unnerved, a drunkard, and an opium-eater, he came back to home and Emily at Haworth.'

[\[24\]](#)

These statements are simply untrue. I have the positive information of one who knew Branwell in Leeds, and who resided in Bradford at the time when he was there, that he did not leave that town in debt; that he certainly was not a drunkard; and that, if he took anything at all, it was but occasionally, and then no more than the commonest custom would permit. I would rather believe—if all other evidence were wanting—the account of Branwell given by the friends who knew him personally, and who, at the moment in which I write, are still living on the spot where he exerted himself to gain a living by the labour of his own hands, than the unfair, unjust, and exaggerated charges quoted above. But Branwell's letter to his friend disposes at once of the assertion that he 'disappeared from Bradford suddenly, heavily in debt, and was lost to sight.' And, as to the statement that he was unnerved

and a drunkard, one should surely rather accept the evidence of those who knew him, that he was, on the contrary, as they unhesitatingly say, 'a quiet, unassuming young man, retiring, and diffident, seeming rather of a passive nature, and delicate constitution, than otherwise.' And, moreover, his visits to Bradford, after he had given up his profession there, were frequent, for his literary tastes, his artistic pursuits, and his musical abilities had secured him many friends in that town. Assuredly the biographer of Emily has been very unfortunate, to say the least, in her account of Branwell's honest, upright, and honourable endeavour to make his living by the profession of art at Bradford.

Miss Robinson asserts that Branwell was an opium-eater 'of twenty,' in addition to the other baneful habits she ascribes to him. There is, however, no reliable evidence that, at this period of his life, he was any such thing; and, considering the fact that the biographer of Emily has assigned Branwell's art-practice at Bradford to a period subsequent to his tutorship at Broughton-in-Furness, one may, perhaps, be permitted to

suspect that she is equally in error in her assertions as to his opium-eating so young. Branwell did, indeed, later, fall into the baneful habit, and suffered at times in consequence; but there is no reason to believe that he became wholly subject to it, or was greatly injured by the practice, either in mind or body. We can only surmise as to the original cause of his use of opium; but, when we consider the extraordinary fascination which De Quincey's wonderful book had for the younger generation of literary men of his day, we shall recognize that Branwell, who read the book, in all probability fell under its influence. Let us remember, moreover, that the young man's two sisters had died of consumption, and that De Quincey declares the use of the drug had saved him from the fate of his father who had fallen a victim to the same scourge. Lastly, it should not be forgotten that, in the first half of this century, the use of opium became, in some sort, fashionable amongst literary men, and that many admirers of De Quincey and Coleridge deemed that the practice had received a sufficient sanction. But the former of these writers had used the drug

intermittently, and we have reason to believe that Branwell, who followed him, did likewise. Let us, then, imagine the young Brontë, revelling in the realm of the dreamy and impassioned, and hoping fondly that consumption might be driven away, resolving to try the effect of the 'dread agent of unimaginable pleasure and pain,' a proceeding from which many less brave would have shrunk. Branwell had doubtless read, in the 'Confessions of an English Opium-eater,' that the drug does not disorder the system; but gives tone, a sort of health, that might be natural if it were not for the means by which it is procured. He would believe that—in one under this magic spell, that is—'the diviner part of his nature is paramount, the moral affections are in a state of cloudless serenity; and high over all the great light of the majestic intellect.' Mrs. Gaskell describes the operation of opium upon herself. She says: 'I asked her' (Charlotte) 'whether she had ever taken opium, as the description of its effects, given in "Villette," was so exactly like what I had experienced—vivid and exaggerated presence of objects of which the outlines were indistinct, or lost in golden

mist, etc.' [25] Branwell could not have tasted these stronger effects of the drug when he first made use of it; but it should be remembered that he several times recurred to the practice, and suffered the consequent pains and penalties.

After his portrait-painting at Bradford, he never again resided there, and it was about the period of his leaving that place that he began to see the artistic career he had chosen was a mistake, and he determined to give it up as a profession. Moreover, other influences, as we shall see, had been, and were still, at work upon him which caused him to turn once more to literature. From the period of his acquaintance with the drawing-masters, he had become associated with the literary as well as the artistic circles of the neighbourhood; and he anticipated the literary future of his sisters.

CHAPTER XII.

LITERARY INFLUENCES AND

ASPIRATIONS.

New Inspiration of Poetry—Wordsworth—
Southey, Scott, and Byron —Southey to
Charlotte Brontë—Hartley Coleridge—His
Worthies of Yorkshire—Poets of the West-
Riding—Alaric A. Watts—Branwell's
Literary Abilities.

In the early part of the present century, the spirit of poetry began to make itself felt in quarters where previously it had never been known. The pedantic affectation of the Della Cruscan school gave place, in the works of a passionate lover of Nature like Wordsworth, to a fresher and purer inspiration, that delighted in familiar themes of domestic and rural beauty, which were often both humble and obscure. It was Wordsworth, indeed, who 'developed the theory of poetry,'—as Branwell Brontë well knew—that has worked a greater change in literature than has, perhaps, been known since the period of the Renaissance. In his endeavour to solve the difficulty of 'fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real

language of men in a state of vivid sensation,' Wordsworth had prepared the way for a natural outburst of poetic feeling, occupied with familiar and simple topics. The writers of the so-called 'Lake School' of poets, and especially Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, were, in fact, the leaders of the new movement; and, speedily, responsive to the free note of genius uncurbed, there arose from many an unknown place in England the sweet sound of poetic voices not heard before. At the same time, the touch of romanticism, which was imparted by Scott and Byron, had a great influence on many of the younger poets of the new school. It is evident, to anyone who has studied the local literature of that time, that the works produced under such inspiration were often of great and permanent merit. Southey, writing to Charlotte Brontë in 1837, indeed says, 'Many volumes of poems are now published every year without attracting public attention, any one of which, if it had appeared half-a-century ago, would have obtained a high reputation for its author.'

Nowhere, probably, in England was the influence

of the poets of Westmoreland felt more deeply than in the valleys of the West-Riding of Yorkshire. Indeed, a young publisher of that district, Mr. F. E. Bingley, had sufficient appreciation of genius, and enterprise enough, to bring him to Leeds for the purpose of publishing works from Hartley Coleridge's hand. The younger Coleridge—besides the prestige of his fathers name—had already become known as an occasional contributor to 'Blackwood's Magazine,' wherein first appeared his poem of 'Leonard and Susan,' so much admired. Mr. Bingley entered into an engagement to enable him to publish two volumes of poems, and a series of 'Biographical notices of the Worthies of Yorkshire and Lancashire,' which Hartley Coleridge was to write. One of the volumes of poems was issued from the press in 1833, and was well received. 'The Worthies' proceeded to the third number, forming an octavo volume of six hundred and thirty-two pages, when circumstances compelled Mr. Bingley to sell the remainders to another publisher, who issued a second edition of this well-known work, with a new title, in the year

1836. From the same press there came, in 1834, 'Cyril, a Poem in Four Cantos; and Minor Poems,' by George Wilson. C. F. Edgar, who was editor of the 'Yorkshire Literary Annual,' the first volume of which appeared in 1831, was also the author of a volume of poems, published by Mr. Bingley in the succeeding year; and other poetical works followed from the Leeds press.

But, in those days, there was scarcely a locality in the populous West-Riding of Yorkshire without its poet, and that poet, too, a man of no mean powers. Nicholson, the Airedale poet, had, previously to the time of which I speak, published his 'Airedale, and other Poems,' and his 'Lyre of Ebor.' His poetical talents were really excellent, and his versatility, and the happy character of his effusions, made Nicholson very popular in the West-Riding. He died in 1843. The gifted poet of Gargrave, Robert Story, had published, in earlier years, many songs and poems in the local papers; and he issued, in 1836, a volume, entitled, 'The Magic Fountain.' This was followed, in 1838, by 'The Outlaw,' and by 'Love and Literature,' in the year 1842. This poet was an ardent partizan of

the Conservatives, and his lyrical abilities were devoted with unflagging energy to their cause. His 'Songs and Poems,' and his 'Lyrical, and other Minor Poems,' were subsequently published. His political songs were vigorous, and his pastoral ones were redolent of pastures, meadows, and moors, breathing all the freshness of nature in its happiest time. Thomas Crossley, the 'Bard of Ovenden,' like Story, possessed of lyrical talents of the highest order, was a frequent contributor to the county papers; and he published, in 1837, an admirable and delightful volume, entitled, 'The Flowers of Ebor.' In the same year, William Dearden, the 'Bard of Caldene,' the possessor of high gifts, published his 'Star-Seer; a Poem in Five Cantos,' which was distinguished by great power, originality, and loftiness of conception. It was largely influenced by the spirit of romanticism, and flowed with the sweetest diction.

This also was the age of 'Souvenirs,' 'Keepsakes,' 'Forget-me-nots,' and 'Annuals,' which sold very largely, and contained much that was really good. Heath, the proprietor of the 'Keepsake,' as we are told by Southey, sold fifteen thousand copies

in one year, and used four thousand yards of watered-silk for the next issue; for these volumes were always resplendent in silk and gold. Alaric A. Watts, who published, in 1822, his 'Poetical Sketches' (a fourth edition of which, enlarged and exquisitely illustrated with designs by Stothard and Nesfield, was required), became, in the same year, editor of the 'Leeds Intelligencer,' which he conducted with much spirit and ability. He afterwards established the 'Manchester Courier,' which he for some time edited, and was well-known in the northern shires. In 1828 and 1829 appeared his 'Poetical Album,' 'Scenes of Life, and Shades of Character,' in 1831; and from 1825 to 1834 he produced his 'Literary Souvenir; a Cabinet of Poetry and Romance,' with great and deserved success. It is more than likely that the great popularity of his venture led to the publication of 'The White Rose of York,' a similar volume, which was brought out at Halifax in the year 1834. This work was edited by George Hogarth, and, in addition to the authors already mentioned—who were, with the exception of Nicholson, the Airedale poet, and the Leeds

authors, contributors to it—were F. C. Spencer, author of 'The Vale of Bolton,' a volume of poems; Henry Ingram, author of a volume entitled, 'Matilda'; Henry Martin, editor of the 'Halifax Express'; John Roby, author of 'The Traditions of Lancashire;' and others. There was also in the work a contribution, entitled 'Morley Hall,'—treating of a legend of the last-named county—by C. Peters, the subject of which also exercised the abilities of the author of 'The Flowers of Ebor'; and subsequently interested Branwell Brontë in a similar manner—his friend Leyland having modelled a scene from the story, in clay.

It is beyond question that these literary influences, which stirred the depths of feeling in Yorkshire, had a profound effect on the earlier writings of the Brontës, and probably were their original inspiration. All the local papers were filled with the news of the literary movement; and the busy brains in the parsonage of Haworth could not but be raised to emulation by the tidings. Branwell, especially, who knew personally many of the workers in the new field whom I have named, and

was never so happy as when he could enjoy their company, was soon moved, in the midst of his art-aspirations, to partake in their literary labours. At this time, the tastes of the Brontës in this direction, and their progress in poetical and prose composition, began to inspire them with hopes and anticipations of the brightest character. From childhood their attempts at literary composition had formed, according to Charlotte herself, the highest stimulus, and one of the liveliest pleasures they had known. They began to find out that their genius was not artistic, but literary, and to pursue its bent with increasing ardour and the warmest interest.

It cannot be doubted that Branwell, greatly influenced, perhaps, by his sisters, or they, more probably, by him—for they ever regarded his genius as greater than their own—was soon employing his pen as often, and more successfully, than his pencil. Mr. Brontë's daughters were possessed largely of discriminating and critical powers, sufficient to enable them to judge accurately of the abilities of their brother; and Mrs. Gaskell allows that, to begin with, he was

perhaps the greatest genius of this rare family, and this more even in a literary than in an artistic sense. Their favourable judgment was based on evidence they had before them. They were not ignorant of his poetical and prose compositions; and that these showed great beauty of thought and much felicity of expression, as well as considerable power, originality, and freshness of treatment, the evidences will appear in the subsequent pages.

CHAPTER XIII.

EARLY POEMS.

Branwell's Letter to Wordsworth, with Stanzas—
Remarks upon it—No Reply—He Tries
Again—His Interest in the Manchester and
Leeds Railway—Branwell's Literary and
Artistic Friends at Bradford and Halifax—
Leyland's Works there—Branwell's great
Interest in them—Early Verses—Mrs.

Gaskell's Judgment on his Literary Abilities.

Branwell, even while working at art with great energy, was not, as I have said, oblivious of his literary power. While, however, the work of his sisters was to be conducted with great earnestness of purpose, it was unfortunate that the scintillations of Branwell's genius were too often fitful, erratic, and uncertain: his mind, indeed, even at this time, was unstable.

It may be noted, as characteristic of all Mr. Brontë's children, that, united with sterling gifts of intellectual power and literary acumen, there was always some mistrust as to the merit of their *own* productions, especially of poetical ones. They seem to have felt themselves like travellers wandering in mist, or struggling through a thicket, or toiling on devious paths with no reliable information at hand, until they arrived at a point where progress looked impossible, until they had obtained a guide in whom they had confidence. It appeared, indeed, to the Brontës that, without an opinion on their work, time might be altogether

wasted on what was unprofitable. Charlotte, therefore, in the December of 1836, determined to submit some of her poems to the judgment of Southey; and it would seem that she also consulted Hartley Coleridge.

Before, however, Southey had answered his sister's letter, Branwell ventured, in a similar spirit, to address Wordsworth, for whose writings he had a great admiration. The following is his letter; and, although it has been previously published, it must not be omitted here. [\[26\]](#)

'Haworth, near Bradford,

'Yorkshire, January 19th, 1837.

'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 impulse and feelings of the mind; nor could I help it, for what came, came out, and there was the end of it. For as to self-conceit, that could not receive food from flattery, since to this hour not half-a-dozen people in the world know that I have ever penned a line.

'But a change has taken place now, sir; and I am arrived at an age wherein I must do something for myself: the powers I possess must be exercised to a definite end, and as I don't know them myself I must ask of others what they are worth. Yet there is not one here to tell me; and still, if they are worthless, time will henceforth be too precious to be wasted on them.

'Do pardon me, sir, that I have ventured to come before one whose works I have most loved in our literature, and who most has been with me a divinity of the mind,

laying before him one of my writings, and asking of him a judgment of its contents. I must come before some one from whose sentence there is no appeal; and such a one is he who has developed the theory of poetry as well as its practice, and both in such a way as to claim a place in the memory of a thousand years to come.

'My aim, sir, is to push out into the open world, and for this I trust not poetry alone—that might launch the vessel, but could not bear her on; sensible and scientific prose, bold and vigorous efforts in my walk in life, would give a further title to the notice of the world; and then, again, poetry ought to brighten and crown that name with glory; but nothing of all this can be ever begun without means, and as I don't possess these, I must in every shape strive to gain them. Surely, in this day, when there is not a *writing* poet worth a sixpence, the field must be open, if a better man can step forward.

'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, till, as youth hardens towards old age, evil deeds and short enjoyments end in mental misery and bodily ruin. Now, to send you the whole of this would be a mock upon your patience; what you see, does not even pretend to be more than the description of an imaginative child. But read it, sir; and, as you would hold a light to one in utter darkness—as you value your own kind-heartedness—*return me an answer*, if but one word, telling me whether I should write on, or write no more. Forgive undue warmth, because my feelings in this matter cannot be cool; and believe me, sir, with deep respect,

'Your really humble
servant,

'P. B. Brontë.'

Mrs. Gaskell gives the following six stanzas, which are about a third of the whole, and declares them not to be the worst part of the composition:

'So where He reigns in glory bright,
Above those starry skies of night,
Amid His Paradise of light,
Oh, why may I not be?

'Oft when awake on Christmas morn,
In sleepless twilight laid forlorn,
Strange thoughts have o'er my mind been
borne

How He has died for
me.

'And oft, within my chamber lying,
Have I awaked myself with crying,
From dreams, where I beheld Him dying
Upon the accursed tree.

'And often has my mother said,
While on her lap I laid my head,
She feared for time I was not made,

But for Eternity.

'So "I can read my title clear
To mansions in the skies,
And let me bid farewell to fear,
And wipe my weeping eyes."

'I'll lay me down on this marble stone,
And set the world aside,
To see upon her ebon throne
The Moon in glory ride.'

Branwell's letter to Wordsworth is, for the most part, well written, and breathes an eager spirit, which shows the anxiety he was under to know the opinion of a high and competent judge as to how he stood with the Nine. It tells us the ardour with which he read and wrote, the ambitious turn of his mind, and the special aims which he then had in the literary world. But the verses, although imbued with a fervent spirit of early piety, were such as Wordsworth could not justly review without giving discouragement, and it seems probable he preferred to keep silence rather than, by an open avowal, to give pain—if pain must be

given—as the lesser evil of the two. Or, perhaps, he took amiss the ready frankness and apparent self-esteem which, notwithstanding the disavowal, would probably seem present to him in the letter of the young stranger who addressed him, without sending any evidence of the powers of which he expressed himself so confidently. But, at any rate, Mrs. Gaskell informs us that the letter and verses were preserved by the poet till the Brontës became celebrated, and that he gave the communication to his friend, Mr. Quillinan, in 1850, when the real name of 'Currer Bell' became known.

It must not be overlooked that, in the verses which Mrs. Gaskell has printed, we have no opportunity of studying Branwell's dramatic powers, which apparently found scope in the poem he had written. In them is no development of the effect of the passionate feelings which Branwell describes: 'struggling with a high imagination and acute feelings,' and ending 'in mental misery and bodily ruin.'

However, discouraged by long waiting, or

assisted by friendly advice and criticism, he toiled on in silence at his literary work, as he did at art. The year 1837 turned out an important one for Charlotte. In March, she at last received the answer from Southey, which she considered a 'little stringent,' and from which she declared she had derived good. She says, in her reply to the Laureate, 'I trust I shall never more feel ambitious to see my name in print.... That letter is consecrated; no one shall ever see it, but papa, and my brother and my sisters.'

It would seem that Branwell, notwithstanding the failure of his first venture with Wordsworth, tried again, at a later date, with some other, and more matured, compositions, which he submitted to that poet and to Hartley Coleridge, 'who both,' says Mrs. Gaskell, 'expressed kind and laudatory opinions.' But, perhaps, the fact that, to the letter quoted above, Wordsworth sent no answer, and did not tell him whether he should 'write on, or write no more,' discouraged Branwell for a time; and he may have been led to suspect that his productions were worthless, and that time might 'henceforth be too precious to be wasted upon

them.' In this way, perhaps, he was induced to turn with greater energy to his profession of art, as a means of getting on, of which I spoke in a former chapter, though we shall see that he did not abandon his literary work.

Branwell also now found opportunities of making himself acquainted with the grand and wild scenery of the mountainous borders of the counties of York and Lancaster, a wider district than his sisters could well survey.

The Manchester and Leeds Railway was, at the time, in course of construction below Littleborough, passing through the picturesque and romantic vale of Todmorden. Branwell became greatly interested in the work; and as stores, and other things for the completion of the line to Hebden Bridge, were forwarded from Littleborough by canal, having been previously sent to that place from Manchester by train, he soon ingratiated himself with the boatmen, and was frequently seen in their boats. It was on one of these occasions that Mr. Woolven, previously mentioned, who was officially employed on the

works, recognized at once the clever young man who had surprised the company at the 'Castle Tavern,' Holborn, and entered into conversation with him. These incidents led to a friendly intercourse between them, which continued for some years.

Among his Bradford acquaintances, Branwell numbered, in addition to Geller, the mezzotinto-engraver, previously mentioned, Wilson Anderson, an admirable landscape-painter, whose productions are valued as truthful pictures of the places they represent, and on account of the skilfulness of their manipulation and colouring; and also Richard Waller, a well-known and excellent portrait-painter. To these may be added Edward Collinson, a local poet; Robert Story; and John James, the future historian of Bradford. All these were personal acquaintances of Branwell, as well as of Leyland, and the intercourse between them was frequent. For more than twenty years a party of these friends was accustomed to meet, from time to time, at the 'George Hotel,' Bradford, under the auspices of Miss Rennie, who greatly prided herself on seeing

at her house, in their hours of leisure, the artistic and literary celebrities of the neighbourhood. Leyland was at Halifax, being there to erect certain monuments, which he had executed in London for various patrons in his native town. While there, he modelled, in the upper room of an ancient house, his colossal group of 'African Bloodhounds,' his model being a living specimen of the breed; and the group, which was exhibited in London, was favourably noticed. Landseer regarded it as the 'noblest modern work of its kind.' It is now in the Salford Museum. The progress of this group intensely interested Branwell and his Bradford friends; and they frequently visited Leyland's temporary studio. It also formed the subject of a poem by Dearden. [\[27\]](#) Finding this studio of insufficient height for a great work he contemplated—a colossal group of 'Thracian Falconers'—Leyland afterwards took a suitable place in another part of the town, which, likewise, became a meeting-place of the local *literati*. The new work was to consist of three figures, the centre one being seated, and having upon his right fore-finger a hawk; while his left

hand rested on the shoulder of a youth just roused, as if by some sudden sound; and, on his right, was a similar youth, half-recumbent, and also in a listening attitude. The centre figure was alone completed, and is now in the Salford Museum.

Branwell, on his visits to the artist's studio, often lamented the dissipation of his high artistic hopes, and confessed that he saw with pain how misplaced his confidence in his own powers had been. But the sculptor was a poet also, and thus Branwell and he worked in the same field. Many of Leyland's poems were published in the Yorkshire papers, and also in the 'Morning Chronicle,' and were always considered to be of true poetic excellence. Branwell relied much on the artist's judgment in literary matters, and often submitted his productions to him.

Although Brontë had, as we have seen, abandoned the hope of a high artistic career, he still clung to the practice of portrait-painting, and this gave him leisure to court the muse. The following are the earliest of his poems, of which

the MSS. are in my possession; and these are fragments only. The first is a verse of eleven lines, dated January 23rd, 1838, which originally concluded a poem of sixty;—

'There's many a grief to shade the scene,
And hide the starry skies;
But all such clouds that intervene
From mortal life arise.
And—may I smile—O God! to see
Their storms of sorrow beat on me,
When I so surely know
That Thou, the while, art shining on;
That I, at last, when they are gone,
Shall see the glories of Thy throne,
So far more bright than now.'

This fragment, written by Branwell at the age of twenty-one, is characteristic of the early tone of his mind. His naturally amiable and susceptible disposition had soon become imbued with the spirit of Christian piety which surrounded his life. He was, too, at the time, full of noble impulses and high aspirations; but the shade of melancholy

implanted in his constitution had begun to influence his writings. The following, which is the beginning of another poem, must have been written in some such thoughtful mood, though the title is not borne out in the portion I am able to give.

DEATH TRIUMPHANT.

May, 1838.

'Oh! on this first bright Mayday morn,
That seems to change our earth to Heaven,
May my own bitter thoughts be borne,
With the wild winter it has driven!
Like this earth, may my mind be made
To feel the freshness round me spreading,
No other aid to rouse it needing
Than thy glad light, so long delayed.
Sweet woodland sunshine!—none but thee
Can wake the joys of memory,
Which seemed decaying, as all decayed.

'O! may they bud, as thou dost now,

With promise of a summer near!
Nay—let me feel my weary brow—
Where are the ringlets wreathing there?
Why does the hand that shades it tremble?
Why do these limbs, so languid, shun
Their walk beneath the morning sun?
Ah, mortal Self! couldst thou dissemble
Like Sister-Soul! But forms refuse
The real and unreal to confuse.
But, with caprice of fancy, She
Joins things long past with things to be,
Till even I doubt if I have told
My tale of woes and wonders o'er,
Or think Her magic can unfold
A phantom path of joys before—
Or, laid beneath this Mayday blaze—
Ask, "Live I o'er departed days?"
Am I the child by Gambia's side,
Beneath its woodlands waving wide?
Have I the footsteps bounding free,
The happy laugh of infancy?"

In this beautiful fragment we have the first
passionate out-pouring of the self-imposed woes,

which, proceeding from within, were thereafter to overspread and tincture with darkest colours every thought of Branwell's mind. We see him here for a moment, standing in incipient melancholia, in what appears to him to be a desert of mental despondency; but, turning back with a fond affection for the past, and recalling, in plaintive words, the joys of 'departed days.' He seems here, indeed, to seek in the mysteries of the soul those pleasures and hopes which his mortal self cannot afford him. Branwell never appears to have forgotten, as I have previously suggested, the sad circumstances of the death of his sisters; and his solitary broodings over these visitations gave a morbid tone to his writings. It was in 1838 that he adopted the pseudonym of 'Northangerland.' His earlier poems, although occasionally showing some power, were not sufficiently gifted to add to the lustre of Brontë literature.

Mrs. Gaskell, alluding to Branwell's literary abilities about this time, says: 'In a fragment of one of his manuscripts which I have read, there is a justness and felicity of expression which is very

striking. It is the beginning of a tale, and the actors in it are drawn with much of the grace of characteristic portrait-painting, in perfectly pure and simple language, which distinguishes so many of Addison's papers in the "Spectator." The fragment is too short to afford the means of judging whether he had much dramatic talent, as the persons of the story are not thrown into conversation. But, altogether, the elegance and composure of style are such as one would not have expected from this vehement and ill-fated young man. 'He had,' continues Mrs. Gaskell, 'a stronger desire for literary fame burning in his heart than even that which occasionally flashed up in his sisters'.' She says also that, 'He tried various outlets for his talents ... and he frequently contributed verses to the "Leeds Mercury." The latter statement, however, is incorrect, for nothing of Branwell's appears in that journal.

CHAPTER XIV.

POEMS ON 'CAROLINE.'

The Poetical bent of Branwell's Genius
—'Caroline's Prayer'—'On
Caroline'—'Caroline'—Spirit of these Early
Effusions.

While Branwell was occupying his leisure as stated in the last chapter, and otherwise employing himself in a desultory way, he pursued the poetic bent of his genius, and sought the improvement of his diction and verse. Among the earliest of his poetical productions, the following are, perhaps, the best. They are distinguished by a similar train of thought and reflection, and by similar sentiments of piety and devotion, as also by the same gloom and sadness of mood, which pervade the poems of his sisters. Indeed, without knowing they were actually Branwell's, we might easily believe them to be from the pen of Charlotte, Emily, or Anne.

The three following poetical essays are on 'Caroline,' under which name Branwell indicates

his sister Maria; and, in two of them, he records his reminiscences of her death and funeral obsequies. The first of the three, which he has framed in the sentiments and words of a child, is entitled:

CAROLINE'S PRAYER,
OR THE CHANGE FROM CHILDHOOD TO
WOMANHOOD.

'My Father, and my childhood's guide!
If oft I've wandered far from Thee;
E'en though Thine only Son has died
To save from death a child like me;

'O! still—to Thee when turns my heart
In hours of sadness, frequent now—
Be Thou the God that once Thou wert,
And calm my breast, and clear my brow.

'I'm now no more a little child
O'ershadowed by Thy mighty wing;
My very dreams seem now more wild

Than those my slumbers used to bring,

'I further see—I deeper feel—

With hope more warm, but heart less mild;
And former things new shapes reveal,
All strangely brightened or despoiled.

'I'm entering on Life's open tide;

So—farewell childhood's shores divine!
And, oh, my Father, deign to guide,
Through these wide waters, Caroline!"

The second is:

ON CAROLINE.

'The light of thy ancestral hall,

Thy Caroline, no longer smiles:
She has changed her palace for a pall,
Her garden walks for minster aisles:
Eternal sleep has stilled her breast
Where peace and pleasure made their
shrine;

Her golden head has sunk to rest—

Oh, would that rest made calmer mine!

'To thee, while watching o'er the bed

Where, mute and motionless, she lay,
How slow the midnight moments sped!

How void of sunlight woke the day!
Nor ope'd her eyes to morning's beam,
Though all around thee woke to her;
Nor broke thy raven-pinioned dream
Of coffin, shroud, and sepulchre.

'Why beats thy breast when hers is still?

Why linger'st thou when she is gone?
Hop'st thou to light on good or ill?
To find companionship alone?
Perhaps thou think'st the churchyard stone
Can hide past smiles and bury sighs:
That Memory, with her soul, has flown;
That thou canst leave her where she lies.

'No! joy *itself* is but a shade,

So well may its remembrance die;
But cares, life's conquerors, never fade,
So strong is their reality!

Thou may'st forget the day which gave
That child of beauty to thy side,
But not the moment when the grave
Took back again thy borrowed bride.'

Here Branwell, though he has changed the form of expression and the circumstance of the loss, is still occupied with the same theme of family bereavement, with which Charlotte herself was so much impressed.

The following was intended as the first canto of a long poem. It also is entitled, 'Caroline;' and is the soliloquy of one 'Harriet,' who mourns for her sister, the subject of the poem, calling to mind her early recollection of the death and funeral of the departed one. It is extremely probable that Branwell made 'Harriet' a vehicle of expression for Charlotte or Emily, as he had adopted the name of 'Caroline' for Maria.

CAROLINE.

'Calm and clear the day declining,
Lends its brightness to the air,
With a slanted sunlight shining,
Mixed with shadows stretching far:
Slow the river pales its glancing,
Soft its waters cease their dancing,
As the hush of eve advancing
Tells our toils that rest is near.

'Why is such a silence given
To this summer day's decay?
Does our earth feel aught of Heaven?
Can the voice of Nature pray?
And when daylight's toils are done,
Beneath its mighty Maker's throne.
Can it, for noontide sunshine gone,
Its debt with smiles repay?

'Quiet airs of sacred gladness
Breathing through these woodlands wild,
O'er the whirl of mortal madness
Spread the slumbers of a child:
These surrounding sweeps of trees
Swaying to the evening breeze,
With a voice like distant seas,

Making music mild.

'Woodchurch Hall above them lowering
Dark against the pearly sky,
With its clustered chimneys towering,
Wakes the wind while passing by:
And in old ancestral glory,
Round that scene of ancient story,
All its oak-trees, huge and hoary,
Wave their boughs on high.

"Mid those gables there is one—
The soonest dark when day is gone—
Which, when autumn winds are strongest,
Moans the most and echoes longest.
There—with her curls like sunset air,
Like it all balmy, bright, and fair—
Sits Harriet, with her cheek reclined
On arm as white as mountain snow;
While, with a bursting swell, her mind
Fills with thoughts of "Long Ago."

'As from yon spire a funeral bell,
Wafting through heaven its mourning knell,
Warns man that life's uncertain day

Like lifeless Nature's must decay,
And tells her that the warning deep
Speaks where her own forefathers sleep,
And where destruction makes a prey
 Of what was once this world to her,
But which—like other gods of clay—
 Has cheated its blind worshipper:
With swelling breast and shining eyes
That seem to chide the thoughtless skies,
She strives in words to find relief
For long-pent thoughts of mellowed grief.

"Time's clouds roll back, and memory's light
Bursts suddenly upon my sight;
For thoughts, which words could never tell,
Find utterance in that funeral bell.
My heart, this eve, seemed full of feeling,
Yet nothing clear to me revealing;
Sounding in breathings undefined
Æolian music to my mind:

 Then strikes that bell, and all subsides
Into a harmony, which glides
As sweet and solemn as the dream
Of a remembered funeral hymn.

 This scene seemed like the magic glass,

Which bore upon its clouded face
Strange shadows that deceived the eye
With forms defined uncertainly;
That Bell is old Agrippa's wand,
Which parts the clouds on either hand,
And shows the pictured forms of doom
Momently brightening through the gloom:
Yes—shows a scene of bygone years—
Opens a fount of sealed-up tears—
And wakens memory's pensive thought
To visions sleeping—not forgot.
It brings me back a summer's day,
Shedding like this its parting ray,
With skies as shining and serene,
And hills as blue, and groves as green.

"Ah, well I recollect that hour,
When I sat, gazing, just as now,
Toward that ivy-mantled tower
Among these flowers which wave below!
No—not these flowers—they're long since
dead,
And flowers have budded, bloomed, and
gone,
Since those were plucked which gird the head

Laid underneath yon churchyard stone!
I stooped to pluck a rose that grew
Beside this window, waving then;
But back my little hand withdrew,
From some reproof of inward pain;
For *she who loved it* was not there
To check me with her dove-like eye,
And something bid my heart forbear
Her favourite rosebud to destroy.
Was it that bell—that funeral bell,
Sullenly sounding on the wind?
Was it that melancholy knell
Which first to sorrow woke my mind?
I looked upon my mourning dress
Till my heart beat with childish fear,
And—frightened at my loneliness—
I watched, some well-known sound to
hear.
But all without lay silent in
The sunny hush of afternoon,
And only muffled steps within
Passed slowly and sedately on.
I well can recollect the awe
With which I hastened to depart;

And, as I ran, the instinctive start
With which my mother's form I saw,
Arrayed in black, with pallid face,
And cheeks and 'kerchief wet with tears,
As down she stooped to kiss my face
And quiet my uncertain fears.

"She led me, in her mourning hood,
Through voiceless galleries, to a room,
'Neath whose black hangings crowded stood,
With downcast eyes and brows of gloom,
My known relations; while—with head
Declining o'er my sister's bed—
My father's stern eye dropt a tear
Upon the coffin resting there.
My mother lifted me to see
What might within that coffin be;
And, to this moment, I can feel
The voiceless gasp—the sickening chill—
With which I hid my whitened face
In the dear folds of her embrace;
For hardly dared I turn my head
Lest its wet eyes should view that bed.
'But, Harriet,' said my mother mild,
'Look at *your* sister and my child

One moment, ere her form be hid
For ever 'neath its coffin lid!"

I heard the appeal, and answered too;
For down I bent to bid adieu.
But, as I looked, forgot affright
In mild and magical delight.

"There lay she then, as now she lies—

For not a limb has moved since then—
In dreamless slumber closed, those eyes
That never more might wake again.

She lay, as I had seen her lie

On many a happy night before,
When I was humbly kneeling by—

Whom she was teaching to adore:
Oh, just as when by her I prayed,

And she to heaven sent up my prayer,
She lay with flowers about her head—

Though formal grave-clothes hid her hair!
Still did her lips the smile retain

Which parted them when hope was high,
Still seemed her brow as smoothed from pain
As when all thought she could not die.

And, though her bed looked cramped and
strange,

Her *too* bright cheek all faded now,
My young eyes scarcely saw a change
From hours when moonlight paled her
brow.

And yet I felt—and scarce could speak—

A chilly face, a faltering breath,
When my hand touched the marble cheek
Which lay so passively beneath.

In fright I gasped, 'Speak, Caroline!'

And bade my sister to arise;
But answered not her voice to mine,
Nor ope'd her sleeping eyes.

I turned toward my mother then

And prayed on her to call;
But, though she strove to hide her pain,
It forced her tears to fall.

She pressed me to her aching breast

As if her heart would break,
And bent in silence o'er the rest

Of one she could not wake:
The rest of one, whose vanished years
Her soul had watched in vain;
The end of mother's hopes and fears,
And happiness and pain.

"They came—they pressed the coffin lid
Above my Caroline,
And then, I felt, for ever hid
My sister's face from mine!
There was one moment's wilder'd start—
One pang remembered well—
When first from my unhardened heart
The tears of anguish fell:
That swell of thought which seemed to fill
The bursting heart, the gushing eye,
While fades all *present* good or ill
Before the shades of things gone by.
All else seems blank—the mourning march,
The proud parade of woe,
The passage 'neath the churchyard arch,
The crowd that met the show.
My place or thoughts amid the train
I strive to recollect, in vain—
I could not think or see:
I cared not whither I was borne:
And only felt that death had torn
My Caroline from me.

"Slowly and sadly, o'er her grave,
The organ peals its passing stave,

And, to its last dark dwelling-place,
The corpse attending mourners bear,
While, o'er it bending, many a face
'Mongst young companions shows a tear.
I think I glanced toward the crowd
That stood in musing silence by,
And even now I hear the sound
Of some one's voice amongst them cry—
'I am the Resurrection and the Life—
He who believes in me shall never die!'

"Long years have never worn away
The unnatural strangeness of that day,
When I beheld—upon the plate
Of grim death's mockery of state—
That well-known word, that long-loved name,
Now but remembered like the dream
Of half-forgotten hymns divine,
My sister's name—my Caroline!

Down, down, they lowered her, sad and
slow,
Into her narrow house below:
And deep, indeed, appeared to be
That one glimpse of eternity,
Where, cut from life, corruption lay,

Where beauty soon should turn to clay!
Though scarcely conscious, hotly fell
The drops that spoke my last farewell;
And wild my sob, when hollow rung
The first cold clod above her flung,
When glitter was to turn to rust,
'Ashes to ashes, dust to dust!'

"How bitter seemed that moment when,
Earth's ceremonies o'er,
We from the filled grave turned again
To leave her evermore;
And, when emerging from the cold
Of damp, sepulchral air,
As I turned, listless to behold
The evening fresh and fair,
How sadly seemed to smile the face
Of the descending sun!
How seemed as if his latest race
Were with that evening run!
There sank his orb behind the grove
Of my ancestral home,
With heaven's unbounded vault above
To canopy his tomb.
Yet lingering sadly and serene,

As for his last farewell,
To shine upon those wild woods green
O'er which he'd loved to dwell.

"I lost him, and the silent room,
Where soon at rest I lay,
Began to darken, 'neath the gloom
Of twilight's dull decay;
So, sobbing as my heart would break,
And blind with gushing eyes,
Hours seemed whole nights to me awake,
And day as 'twould not rise.
I almost prayed that I might die—
But then the thought would come
That, if I did, my corpse must lie
In yonder dismal tomb;
Until, methought, I saw its stone,
By moonshine glistening clear,
While Caroline's bright form alone
Kept silent watching there:
All white with angel's wings she seemed,
And indistinct to see;
But when the unclouded moonlight beamed
I saw her beckon me,
And fade, thus beckoning, while the wind

Around that midnight wall,
To me—now lingering years behind—
Seemed then my sister's call!

"And thus it brought me back the hours
When we, at rest together,
Used to lie listening to the showers
Of wild December weather;
Which, when, as oft, they woke in her
The chords of inward thought,
Would fill with pictures that wild air,
From far off memories brought;
So, while I lay, I heard again
Her silver-sounding tongue,
Rehearsing some remembered strain
Of old times long ago!
And, flashed across my spirit's sight,
What she had often told me—
When, laid awake on Christmas night,
Her sheltering arms would fold me—
About that midnight-seeming day,
Whose gloom o'er Calvary thrown,
Showed trembling Nature's deep dismay
At what her sons had done:
When sacred Salem's murky air

Was riven with the cry,
Which told the world how mortals dare
The Immortal crucify;
When those who, sorrowing, sat afar,
With aching heart and eye,
Beheld their great Redeemer there,
'Mid sneers and scoffings die;
When all His earthly vigour fled,
When thirsty faintness bowed His head,
When His pale limbs were moistened o'er
With deathly dews and dripping gore,
When quivered all His worn-out frame,
As Death, triumphant, quenched life's flame,
When upward gazed His glazing eyes
To those tremendous-seeming skies,
When burst His cry of agony—
'My God!—my God!—hast Thou forsaken
me!"

My youthful feelings startled then,
As if the temple, rent in twain,
Horribly pealing on my ear
With its deep thunder note of fear,
Wrapping the world in general gloom,
As if her God's were Nature's tomb;

While sheeted ghosts before my gaze
Passed, flitting 'mid the dreary maze,
As if rejoicing at the day
When death—their king—o'er Heaven had
sway.

In glistening charnel damp arrayed,
They seemed to gibber round my head,
Through night's drear void directing me
Toward still and solemn Calvary,
Where gleamed that cross with steady shine
Around the thorn-crowned head divine—
A flaming cross—a beacon light
To this world's universal night!
It seemed to shine with such a glow,
And through my spirit piercing so,
That, pantingly, I strove to cry
For her, whom I thought slumbered by,
And hide me from that awful shine
In the embrace of Caroline!

I wakened in the attempt—'twas day;
The troubled dream had fled away;
'Twas day—and I, alone, was laid
In that great room and stately bed;
No Caroline beside me! Wide

And unrelenting swept the tide
Of death 'twixt her and me!"

There paused
Sweet Harriet's voice, for such thoughts
caused—'

This poem springs from the deepest feelings, and from sorrows the most poignant. The respective images, tintured with grief and despondency, pass before us with weird and vivid reality; and many of the passages are imbued with great tenderness, beauty, and pathos. The painful, and, perhaps, too morbid intensity of some of the pictures, whether of dreams or realities, is painted here with the skill of no common artist, whatever youthful defects may be observed in the composition. The poem is one more notable for tender sweetness than any other that remains from Branwell; but it lacks in places the vigour and power of his later compositions, and is, in several parts, of unequal merit. In the earlier portion of it, where he assumes the iambic measure, it is not

difficult to perceive the influence of Byron on his diction. In this work Branwell again recurs to the time when tears of anguish flowed from his yet 'unhardened heart,' whose present woes are forgotten in the swelling thoughts of 'things gone by.' We recognize with what pathetic feeling he paints in Caroline all the qualities of instructress, guardian, and friend, which had characterized his sister Maria. Long afterwards Charlotte Brontë, inspired by similar feelings, devoted the first chapters of 'Jane Eyre' to a delineation, in the character of Helen Burns, of the disposition of her dead sister, whose death, a few days after her return from Cowan Bridge, she could scarcely ever either forget or forgive.

CHAPTER XV.

EVENTS AT THE PARSONAGE.

Charlotte's first Offer of Marriage—Her Remarks

concerning it— A second Offer Declined—
Anne a Governess—She Moralizes upon it—
Charlotte obtains a Situation—Unsuited to
Her—She Leaves it—Branwell takes
Pleasure in Scenery—He Visits Liverpool
with his Friends—Charlotte goes to Easton—
Curates at Haworth—Their Visits to the
Parsonage—Public Meetings on Church
Rates—Charlotte's Attempt at a
Richardsonian Novel—She sends the
Commencement of it to Wordsworth for his
Opinion—Branwell receives an Appointment
as Private Tutor.

After the return of Charlotte and Anne from
Dewsbury Moor, whither Miss Wooler had
removed her school, the three sisters were at
home together for some months, and, in this
happy, unrestrained intercourse, with their literary
relaxations and their plans for the future,
Charlotte's mind expanded, and her strength
returned. There was Branwell, too, to think about;
his venture at Bradford and his progress with his
portraits. Then they would have to go and see the

likeness of Mr. Morgan; and, on such occasions, Branwell would have much to say of art and literature, and, acquaintances. But Branwell was usually at Haworth on Sundays, and then he would hear of Charlotte's visits to her friends, and her adventures on these occasions. It was shortly before the date of Branwell's return from Bradford, in the spring of 1839, that Charlotte received her first offer of marriage. A young clergyman, who had, as Mrs. Gaskell thought, some resemblance to the St. John in the last volume of 'Jane Eyre,' had evidently been attracted by Charlotte Brontë; but matrimony does not seem, at the time, to have seriously entered into her thoughts. In some respects the proposal might have had strong temptations for her, and she thought how happy her married life might be. However, it was not the way with Charlotte Brontë to take the path of smoothness and comfort, and leave the thorny one untrod; and she asked herself if she loved the clergyman in question as much as a woman should love her husband, and whether she was the one best qualified to make him happy. 'Alas!' she says, 'my

conscience answered "No" to both these questions.' She knew very well that she had a 'kindly leaning' towards him, but this was not enough for her, for it was impossible that she could ever feel for him such an intense attachment as would make her sacrifice her life for him. Short of such a devotion awakened in herself, she would never marry anyone. Her comment is characteristic: 'Ten to one I shall never have the chance again; but *n'importe*.'

Charlotte Brontë felt that there was a want of sympathy between the young clergyman and herself, for he was a 'grave, quiet young man;' and she knew that he would be startled, and would think her a wild, romantic enthusiast, when she showed her character, and laughed, and satirized, and said whatever came into her head. Nor was her next offer any more to her taste; for, within a few months, a neighbouring curate, a young Irishman, fresh from the Dublin University, made her a proposal. The circumstance amused Charlotte, for it was, on his part, a case of love at first sight. He came with his vicar to be introduced to the family, and was speedily struck with Mr.

Brontë's daughter. Charlotte was never troubled at home with the *mauvaise honte* that troubled her abroad; and so she talked and jested with the clergyman, and was much amused at the originality of his character. A pleasant afternoon was spent, for he made himself at home, after the fashion of his countrymen, and was witty, lively, ardent, and clever; but, withal, wanting in the dignity and discretion of an Englishman. As the evening drew on, Charlotte was not much pleased with the spice of Hibernian flattery with which he began to season his discourse, and, as she expresses it, she 'cooled a little.' The vicar and his curate went away; but what was Charlotte's astonishment to receive a letter next morning from the latter containing a proposal of marriage, and filled with ardent expressions of devotion! 'I hope you are laughing heartily,' she says to her friend. 'This is not like one of my adventures, is it? It more nearly resembles Martha's. I am certainly doomed to be an old maid. Never mind. I have made up my mind to that fate ever since I was twelve years old. Well! thought I, I have heard of love at first sight, but this beats all! I leave you to

guess what my answer would be, convinced that you will not do me the injustice of guessing wrong.'

Although the married state does not appear, from Charlotte's letters at this time, to have had many attractions for her, we know, from those she wrote later, and, perhaps, more than all from the concluding chapters of 'Jane Eyre,' that she could enter into the joys and sacrifices of domestic life, that she had a correct view of the affections, and knew how to appreciate conjugal love at its true value. But, in the present instances—although, at a later period of her life, when she was on the Continent, she is believed to have felt the full force of that 'passion of the heart' which those about whom she wrote had failed to evoke—she declined to sever herself from the contented circumstances that surrounded her, and in which she was mistress, for a condition of doubtful peace and certain obedience. Charlotte's decision was not discordant with the feelings of her family; for, as she had determined to continue at home, their plans for the future would not be disconcerted.

Anne was now resolved on making a trial of the life of a governess for herself, she having completed her education, and being wishful to exert herself as her sisters had done. Inquiries were made, and at length a situation was obtained. Anne continued in this kind of employment during the next six years, and it was her experience that suggested to her the subject of her first novel, 'Agnes Grey.' If we may suppose that she has recounted her own experience at this time, where her heroine describes the circumstances of her preparation and departure for her first situation, it would appear that she had some difficulty in convincing her friends of the wisdom of her purpose. Agnes Grey says, after she has made the suggestion to her family:

'I was silenced for that day, and for many succeeding ones; but still I did not wholly relinquish my darling scheme. Mary got her drawing materials, and steadily set to work. I got mine too; but, while I drew, I thought of other things. How delightful it would be to be a governess! To go out into the world; to enter upon a new life; to act for myself; to exercise my

unused faculties; to try my unknown powers; to earn my own maintenance, and something to comfort and help my father, mother, and sister, besides exonerating them from the provision of my food and clothing; to show papa what his little Agnes could do; to convince mamma and Mary that I was not quite the helpless, thoughtless being they supposed. And then, how charming to be entrusted with the care and education of children! Whatever others said, I felt I was fully competent to the task: the clear remembrance of my own thoughts in early childhood would be a surer guide than the instructions of the most mature adviser. I had but to turn from my little pupils to myself at their age, and I should know at once how to win their confidence and affections; how to waken the contrition of the erring; how to embolden the timid and console the afflicted; how to make virtue practicable, instruction desirable, and religion lively and comprehensible.' [\[28\]](#)

Anne Brontë was of a milder and more cheerful temperament than her sisters; she had not the fire, the morbid feeling, or the mental force that characterized Charlotte, yet she had more of the

initiatory faculty than she had hitherto received credit for. But her gentle nature, her confiding piety, her more equable temper, enabled her to succeed better in the circumstances she had chosen. She had her troubles, her timidity, and her diffidence to contend with, but she made life supportable and even happy. 'Agnes Grey' thus speaks of her departure, which we cannot doubt is the experience of Anne Brontë:

'Some weeks more were yet to be devoted to preparation. How long, how tedious those weeks appeared to me! Yet they were happy ones in the main, full of bright hopes and ardent expectations. With what peculiar pleasure I assisted at the making of my new clothes, and, subsequently, the packing of my trunks! But there was a feeling of bitterness mingling with the latter occupation too; and when it was done—when all was ready for my departure on the morrow, and the last night at home approached—a sudden anguish seemed to swell my heart. My dear friends looked sad, and spoke so very kindly, that I could scarcely keep my heart from overflowing; but I still affected to be gay. I had taken my last ramble with Mary on

the moors, my last walk in the garden and round the house ... I had played my last tune on the old piano, and sung my last song to papa, not the last, I hoped, but the last for what appeared to me a very long time.' [\[29\]](#)

Charlotte and Emily made themselves busy in assisting Anne with her preparations for departure, and they were very sad and apprehensive when she left them on Monday, April 15th, 1839. She went alone, at her own wish, thinking she could manage better if left to her own resources, and when her failings were unwitnessed by those whose hopes she wished to sustain. However, she wrote, expressing satisfaction with the place she had secured, for the lady of the house was very kind. She had two of the eldest girls under her charge, the children being confined to the nursery, with which she had no concern.

Charlotte, although remarking in a letter to her friend on the cleverness and sensibility with which Anne could express herself in epistolary correspondence, had some fear that, such was the

natural diffidence of her manner, her mistress would sometimes believe her to have an impediment in her speech.

Charlotte's eagerness to obtain a situation was now so great that she does not seem to have considered well the step she was about to take, and she obtained one that was not satisfactory to her. It was in the family of a wealthy Yorkshire manufacturer; and we may well believe that the stylish surroundings of her employers differed materially from those of the family at Haworth. Here a large quantity of miscellaneous work was thrown on Charlotte, which displeased her and destroyed her comfort. In a letter to Emily, she says she is 'overwhelmed with oceans of needlework; yards of cambric to hem, muslin night-caps to make, etc.' She found the outside attractions of the house beautiful in 'pleasant woods, white paths, green lawns, and blue, sunshiny sky;' but these surroundings did not compensate for the humiliations which her situation imposed upon her, and her mistress and she did not like each other; so Charlotte did not return to the place after the July holidays of 1839.

Branwell was as yet unemployed, and he sought, and took much pleasure in the scenery, the events and circumstances of the hills and valleys of the West-Riding of Yorkshire, and was frequently from home. He went about the country, associating with the people, and revelling in their ready wit, which enabled him afterwards, by such observations and experience, to give vivid pictures of life and character. At the time of the Haworth 'Rushbearing,' of July, 1839, he visited Liverpool with one or two friends, and, while there, in compliance with an injunction of his father, made a stenographic report, at St. Jude's church, of a sermon by the Rev. H. McNeile, the well-known evangelical preacher. Here, a sudden attack of Tic compelled him to resort to opium, in some form, as an anodyne, whose soothing effect in pain he had previously known. Subsequently, passing a music shop, in one of their rambles through the town, Branwell's attention was arrested by a copy of the oratorio of 'Samson,' by Handel, displayed in the window, the performance of which had always excited him to the highest degree, and he eagerly besought his

friend to purchase it, as well as some Mass, and various oratorio music, which was done.

On their return from Liverpool, Branwell, being under some obligation to his friend, proffered to paint his portrait, to which Mr. M—— agreed. A sitting once a week was decided upon, to be in the room at the parsonage where Branwell studied and painted. On his visits, Mr. M—— invariably noticed a row of potatoes, placed on the uppermost rib of the range to roast, Branwell being very fond of them done in this way, even as Jane Eyre was in the novel. 'That night,' she says, 'on going to bed, I forgot to prepare, in imagination, the Barmecide supper of hot roast potatoes ... with which I was wont to amuse my inward cravings.' When Mr. M—— paid his weekly visits to the parsonage he always heard some one speaking aloud in the room adjoining Branwell's studio; and, at last, his curiosity being excited, he inquired whom it was. Branwell answered that it was his father committing his Sunday's sermon to memory. When the portrait was ready for the finishing touches, Mr. M—— discovered that Branwell had painted the names

of Johann Sebastian Bach, Mozart, Haydn, and Handel at each corner of the canvas respectively. He remonstrated, but Branwell was firm, maintaining that, as his friend was an accomplished musician, and could perform the most elaborate and difficult compositions of these immortal men, with expression and ease, he was, in every way, worthy of being associated with them in the manner he designed. Mr. M—— complied. When the portrait was finished, Branwell pressed his friend to take a glass of wine; and, while the two were chatting over the affair, Mr. Brontë and his daughters entered the room to view Branwell's work on its completion. They were pleased with it, and praised it as a truthful likeness and an excellent picture.

We may well imagine the enthusiasm with which Branwell would recount his experience of Liverpool. How much he would have to tell of the wonders of the Mersey, the great ships that rode upon its surface, and its commerce with the new world, out across the ocean! His visit seems to have originated a proposal that the family should spend a week or a fortnight at that sea-port, but,

almost at the same moment, Charlotte's friend suggested to her that they should visit Cleethorpes together, a suggestion that pleased her very much.

'The idea of seeing the sea,' she says, 'of being near it—watching its changes by sunrise, sunset, moonlight, and noon-day—in calm, perhaps in storm—fills and satisfies my mind. I shall be discontented at nothing. And then I am not to be with a set of people with whom I have nothing in common—who would be nuisances and bores.'

The visit of Charlotte to the sea-side seems to have been put off again and again, by often-recurring obstacles. The irresolution of her family in regard to the Liverpool project, and the manifest unwillingness that she should leave home on a visit anywhere else, put off, from time to time, the pleasure she had anticipated for herself; but at last she decided to go. Her box was packed and everything prepared, but no conveyance could be procured. Mr. Brontë objected to her going by coach, and walking part of the way to meet her friend, and her aunt exclaimed against 'the weather, and the roads,

and the four winds of heaven,' so Charlotte almost gave up hope. She told her friend that the elders of the house had never cordially acquiesced in the measure, and that opposition was growing more open, though her father would willingly have indulged her. Even he, however, wished her to remain at home. Charlotte was 'provoked' that her aunt had deferred opposition until arrangements had been made. In the end 'E' was asked to pay a visit to the parsonage.

Owing to the circumstances indicated, Charlotte's visit to the sea-coast was put off until the following September, when an opportunity occurred favourable to the project, which does not seem to have been entirely abandoned; and she and her friend visited Easton where they spent a fortnight. Here for the first time Charlotte beheld the sea.

Afterwards she wrote, 'Have you forgotten the sea by this time, E.? Is it grown dim in your mind? Or can you still see it, dark, blue and green and foam-white, and hear it roaring roughly when the wind is high, or rushing softly when it is calm?'

The Liverpool journey appears to have been finally abandoned.

It was in a letter, written about this time that Mrs. Gaskell found the first mention of a succession of curates who henceforth revolved round Haworth Parsonage. Three years earlier Mr. Brontë had sought aid from the 'Additional Curates' Society,' or some similar institution, and was provided at once with assistance. The increasing duties of his chapelry had rendered this step necessary. It would seem also that a curate was appointed to Stanbury, while another became master of the National or Grammar School. These gentlemen were not infrequent in their visits to the parsonage, and they varied the life of its inmates, sometimes one way and sometimes another. This circumstance, at the same time, provided Charlotte Brontë with those living studies which she did not fail afterwards to remember in her delineation of the three curates in 'Shirley.' Emily, on the other hand, invariably avoided these gentlemen.

The arrival of the curates at Haworth was the

occasion of increased activity in the affairs of the chapelry; and, the church-rate question being uppermost at this juncture, the new-comers entered into a crusade against the Dissenters who had refused to pay church-rates. Charlotte wrote a long letter in which she spoke of a violent public meeting held at Haworth about the affair, and of two sermons against dissent—one by Mr. W. a 'noble, eloquent, high-church, apostolical-succession discourse, in which he banged the Dissenters most fearlessly and unflinchingly,' the other by Mr. C., a 'keener, cleverer, bolder, and more heart-stirring harangue,' than Charlotte, perhaps, had ever heard from the Haworth pulpit. She, however, did not entirely agree with either of these gentlemen, and thought, if she had been a Dissenter, she would have 'taken the first opportunity of kicking or of horse-whipping both.'

In the winter of 1839-40, Charlotte employed her leisure in the composition of a story which she had commenced on a scale commensurate with one of Richardson's novels of seven or eight volumes. Mrs. Gaskell saw some fragments of the manuscript, written in a very small hand: but she

was less solicitous to decipher it, as Charlotte had herself condemned it in the preface to 'The Professor.' Branwell, to whom she submitted it, seems to have understood, at the time, that in its florid style of composition she was working in opposition to her genius, and he told her she was making a mistake. It appears not unlikely that Branwell was himself similarly engaged on prose writing when he gave her this opinion. A few months later, however, Charlotte resolved to send the commencement of her tale to Wordsworth, and that an unfavourable judgment was the result, for which she was not altogether unprepared, may be gathered from the following letter she addressed to the poet:—

'Authors are generally very tenacious of their productions, but I am not so much attached to this but that I can give it up without much distress. No doubt if I had gone on I should have made quite a Richardsonian concern of it.... I had materials in my head for half-a-dozen volumes.... Of course it is with considerable regret I relinquish any scheme so charming as the one I have sketched. It is very edifying and profitable to create a world out of

your own brains, and people it with inhabitants who are so many Melchisedecs, and have no father or mother but your own imagination.... I am sorry I did not exist fifty or sixty years ago, when the "Ladies' Magazine" was flourishing like a green bay-tree. In that case, I make no doubt, my aspirations after literary fame would have met with due encouragement, and I should have had the pleasure of introducing Messrs. Percy and West into the best society, and recording all their sayings and doings in double-columned, close-printed pages.... I recollect, when I was a child, getting hold of some antiquated volumes, reading them by stealth with the most exquisite pleasure. You give a correct description of the patient Grisels of these days. My aunt was one of them, and to this day she thinks the tales of the "Ladies' Magazine" infinitely superior to any trash of modern literature. So do I; for I read them in childhood, and childhood has a very strong faculty of admiration, but a very weak one of criticism.... I am pleased that you cannot quite decide whether I am an attorney's clerk or a novel-reading dressmaker. I will not help you at all in the

discovery....'

In the midst of their literary endeavours, their efforts were not relaxed to obtain new places. Charlotte was obliged by circumstances to give up her subscriptions to the Jews, and she determined to force herself to take a situation, if one could be found, though she says, 'I hate and abhor the very thoughts of governess-ship.' An alternative which the sisters talked over in these holidays was the opening of a school at Haworth, for which an enlargement of the parsonage would be required.

Branwell was more successful in his pursuit of employment than Charlotte, having procured the place of a tutor; and he was to commence his duties with the new year. Charlotte says of this event, 'One thing, however, will make the daily routine more unvaried than ever. Branwell, who used to enliven us, is to leave us in a few days, and enter the situation of a private tutor in the neighbourhood of Ulverston. How he will like to settle remains yet to be seen. At present he is full of hope and resolution. I, who know his variable

nature, and his strong turn for active life, dare not be too sanguine.'

Branwell seems to have paid a farewell visit to the 'Lodge of the Three Graces' on the Christmas Day of this year, when he acted as organist. This is the only occasion on which he is recorded as having attended at the meetings of the Lodge in 1839, and it is the last on which his name appears in the minute book of the Haworth masonic body.

CHAPTER XVI.

BRANWELL AT BROUGHTON-IN-FURNESS.

The District of Black Comb—Branwell's Sonnet—Wordsworth and Hartley Coleridge—Branwell's Letter to the 'Old Knave of Trumps'—Its Publication by Miss Robinson in her 'Emily Brontë'—Branwell's familiar Acquaintance with the People of Haworth—

He could Paint their Characters with Accuracy—His Knowledge of the Human Passions—Emily's Isolation.

Branwell, being as desirous of employment as his sisters, had sought for, and obtained, a situation as tutor in the family of Mr. Postlethwaite, of Broughton-in-Furness. He entered upon his new duties on the 1st of January, 1840.

Now that he found himself resident near the English lake district, consecrated as it is by so many poetic memories, and dear to him as the home of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey he naturally felt an intense interest in all that surrounded him; and, when he was not engaged in teaching the sons of his employer, he took occasion to visit such places as had any attraction for him. On one of his pedestrian excursions, he had stepped into a wayside inn, and was seated musing before the parlour fire, when a young gentleman entered the room. Branwell turned round, and recognized at once a friend of the name of Ayrtton, whose acquaintance he had

formed in Leeds. The surprise and delight at this unexpected meeting was mutual; and Branwell's friend, who was driving about the country, requested his company for some distance on the journey, for the purpose of prolonging the interview, and of continuing the conversation that had been begun. The young tutor drove some ten miles with his friend, utterly regardless of the long return walk to Ulverston.

Branwell delighted in the writings of the 'Lake Poets,' and was much influenced by Southey's prose works. He read the 'Life of Nelson,' and was himself moved to write a poem illustrative of the life of that great naval hero. He also read the 'Colloquies on Society,' and others of Southey's works. But it was Wordsworth who at this moment, was the object of Branwell's chief admiration. He revelled in that poet's fine description of the view from the top of Black Comb, and, perhaps, knew the lines written by his 'deity of the mind' on a stone on the side of the mountain, and probably had himself looked from its summit. But Branwell certainly knew Black Comb from afar. Five miles away he could see it;

and he celebrated it in the following sonnet:

BLACK COMB.

'Far off, and half revealed, 'mid shade and
light,
Black Comb half smiles, half frowns; his
mighty form
Scarce bending into peace—more formed to
fight
A thousand years of struggles with a storm
Than bask one hour, subdued by sunshine
warm,
To bright and breezeless rest; yet even his
height
Towers not o'er this world's sympathies, he
smiles—
While many a human heart to pleasures' wiles
Can bear to bend, and still forget to rise—
As though he, huge and heath-clad, on our
sight,
Again rejoices in his stormy skies.
Man loses vigour in unstable joys.

Thus tempests find Black Comb invincible,
While we are lost, who should know life so
well!"

It was doubtless while Branwell was living at Ulverston that he obtained the favourable opinion of Wordsworth on some poems which he submitted for criticism. Probably he found opportunity to visit the writer whose works he 'loved most in our literature,' and it would be on some similar excursion that he obtained an encouraging expression of opinion from Hartley Coleridge. The author of 'The Northern Worthies' was not unknown to the circle at 'The George,' at Bradford, and was acquainted with Branwell Brontë and Leyland.

The master of the 'Lodge of the Three Graces,' at Haworth, did not, however, long permit Branwell to forget his old acquaintance there; for this worthy soon addressed to him a communication which provoked a reply that Branwell dated from Broughton-in-Furness on the 13th of the March following his arrival. This unfortunate response, in which Branwell addressed the masonic sexton of

Haworth, with sarcastic humour, as 'Old Knave of Trumps,' is the one which Miss Robinson has been so ill advised as to publish in her 'Emily Brontë;' and which has done not a little to draw down on the head of Branwell the full and unmitigated volume of Mr. Swinburne's vocabulary of abuse. And, in fact, if this letter could be taken as the proper and natural expression of an abject profligate, altogether shameless and unredeemed, he could find a defender neither here nor elsewhere. But there are good reasons for hoping that it was otherwise. We have seen that Branwell had been led to join the rude village society of Haworth, where, on account of his brilliance, and of his position as the incumbent's son, he was not a little looked up to. It was natural, then, that he should be led, foolishly enough, to endeavour to stand well with the friends he had selected, and his knowledge of character was sufficiently good to enable him to know what kind of letter would best suit the tastes and inclinations of many of his companions of the 'Lodge of the Three Graces.' He assumed in fact, that bravado of vice, that air of *diablerie*, which

was thought by many people, in those days, and is so yet by not a few, to be the best proof of manhood, because it betokened a knowledge of the world. Yet, at the end of the letter,—the passage is not given by Miss Robinson—Branwell appears to take it as a matter of course that the sexton will not show it, and he begs him, for 'Heaven's sake,' to blot out the lines scored in red. Branwell knew the 'Old Knave of Trumps' well, and he was certain that his letter would cause no little amusement among his immediate friends to whom the sexton was sure to read it. He was ashamed of certain passages in it, which is evidence enough that it was not the outcome of a depraved and shameless nature, but rather the expression of the *acted* character of a vicious and *blasé* worldling. And it is, moreover, inconceivable that a young man, who was of the sensitive nature betokened by the contemporary poems we have published, could, at the same time, have been a hardened and cynical profligate. Indeed, it is evident that the objectionable allusions were not of his origination, but were called forth by the remarks of others, for whom

Branwell does not fail to show his contempt.

It has, however, been the misfortune of Branwell Brontë, that a letter which he wrote in folly, for the eyes of personal friends alone, has been published to the world as the token and evidence of his infamy. One use, at any rate, flows from the publication of it, for it shows us the quick and vivid grasp of character, and the incisive mode of composition which now began, in his more vigorous moods, to distinguish its author. The letter is as follows:—

'Broughton-in-Furness,

'March 13, 1840.

'Old Knave of Trumps,

'Don't think I have forgotten you, though I have delayed so long in writing to you. It was my purpose to send you a yarn as soon as I could find materials to spin one with, and it is only just now that I have had time to turn myself round and know where I am. If you saw me now, you would not

know me, and you would laugh to hear the character the people give me. Oh, the falsehood and hypocrisy of this world! I am fixed in a little retired town by the sea-shore, among wild woody hills that rise round me—huge, rocky, and capped with clouds. My employer is a retired county magistrate, a large landowner, and of a right hearty and generous disposition. His wife is a quiet, silent, and amiable woman, and his sons are two fine, spirited lads. My landlord is a respectable surgeon, and six days out of seven is as drunk as a lord! His wife is a bustling, chattering, kind-hearted soul; and his daughter!—oh! death and damnation! Well, what am I? That is, what do they think I am? A most calm, sedate, sober, abstemious, patient, mild-hearted, virtuous, gentlemanly philosopher,—the picture of good works, and the treasure-house of righteous thoughts. Cards are shuffled under the table-cloth, glasses are thrust into the cupboard, if I enter the room. I take neither spirits, wine, nor malt

liquors. I dress in black, and smile like a saint or martyr. Everybody says, "What a good young gentleman is Mr. Postlethwaite's tutor!" This is fact, as I am a living soul, and right comfortably do I laugh at them. I mean to continue in their good opinion. I took a half year's farewell of old friend whisky at Kendal on the night after I left. There was a party of gentlemen at the Royal Hotel, and I joined them. We ordered in supper and whisky-toddy as "hot as hell!" They thought I was a physician, and put me in the chair. I gave sundry toasts, that were washed down at the same time, till the room spun round and the candles danced in our eyes. One of the guests was a respectable old gentleman with powdered head, rosy cheeks, fat paunch, and ringed fingers. He gave "The Ladies," ... after which he brayed off with a speech; and in two minutes, in the middle of a grand sentence, he stopped, wiped his head, looked wildly round, stammered, coughed, stopped again, and called for his

slippers. The waiter helped him to bed. Next a tall Irish squire and a native of the land of Israel began to quarrel about their countries; and, in the warmth of argument, discharged their glasses, each at his neighbour's throat instead of his own. I recommended bleeding, purging, and blistering; but they administered each other a real "Jem Warder," so I flung my tumbler on the floor, too, and swore I'd join "Old Ireland!" A regular rumpus ensued, but we were tamed at last. I found myself in bed next morning, with a bottle of porter, a glass, and a corkscrew beside me. Since then I have not tasted anything stronger than milk-and-water, nor, I hope, shall, till I return at Midsummer; when we will see about it. I am getting as fat as Prince William at Springhead, and as godly as his friend, Parson Winterbotham. My hand shakes no longer. I ride to the banker's at Ulverston with Mr. Postlethwaite, and sit drinking tea and talking scandal with old ladies. As to the young ones! I have one

sitting by me just now—fair-faced, blue-eyed, dark-haired, sweet eighteen—she little thinks the devil is so near her!

'I was delighted to see thy note, old squire, but I do not understand one sentence—you will perhaps know what I mean... How are all about you? I long to hear and see them again. How is the "Devil's Thumb," whom men call —— ——, and the "Devil in Mourning," whom they call —— ——? How are —— ——, and —— ——, and the Doctor; and him who will be used as the tongs of hell—he whose eyes Satan looks out of, as from windows—I mean —— ——, esquire? How are little —— ——, —— "Longshanks," —— ——, and the rest of them? Are they married, buried, devilled, and damned? When I come I'll give them a good squeeze of the hand; till then I am too godly for them to think of. That bow-legged devil used to ask me impertinent questions which I answered him in kind. Beelzebub will make of him a walking-stick! Keep to

thy teetotalism, old squire, till I return; it will mend thy old body.... Does "Little Nosey" think I have forgotten him? No, by Jupiter! nor his clock either. [\[30\]](#) I'll send him a remembrancer some of these days! But I must talk to some one prettier than thee; so good-night, old boy, and

'Believe me thine,

'The
Philosopher.

'Write directly. Of course you won't show this letter; and, for Heaven's sake, blot out all the lines scored with red ink.'

This letter, as I have intimated, was never intended for more than a moment's amusement, at most, to a small circle of acquaintances at Haworth, and was not to exist after having been read. But John Brown kept the letter, which I saw and copied. It is a curious circumstance, illustrating the hold which it obtained over the Haworth circle, that, though the original was lost

so long since as 1874, the brother of the sexton knew it by heart, and could repeat it with considerable accuracy. In this way it has been several times written down. No allusion would have been made to the letter in the present work, if Miss Robinson—strange to say—had not thought it a fitting embellishment for her 'Emily Brontë.' If Branwell had known its fate at the moment he wrote it, it would never have reached the 'Worshipful Master of the Lodge of the Three Graces,' but would have been committed to the flames by his own hand; for, as we have seen, he was ashamed of some expressions scored in red, which he begged might be obliterated.

This letter, however, is valuable; inasmuch as it shows what Branwell, at this young period of his life, knew about human nature, and the depths to which it can descend. He had penetrated into the passions, feelings, and dispositions of his acquaintances by frequent intercourse, by keen perception, and by familiar conversation. He had heard them, noticed them, and could paint their characters with unerring precision and vivid colouring. He was acquainted with the ways of

society, and the customs of domestic life. The world was to him a picture-gallery, and all living things in it were studies of the deepest interest. His knowledge of men and manners, of the hard, implacable, and selfish, and also of the soft, tender, and gentle natures of men and women, enabled him to cast their stories of sorrow and gladness faithfully and well.

At the time when he had attained manhood, when his intellects were reaching their full development, he had already been drawn into society, and indoctrinated into the mysteries of Haworth life; and had become acquainted with the excesses of men older and harder than himself. It cannot be wondered at that, if he had learned more than is usual in youth, he did not escape the temptations attendant on the peculiar knowledge he had acquired. But, while *he* was thus passing through the crooked ways and reckless deviations of the world, obtaining a large crop of experiences, good and bad, his *sisters* were, for the most part, at home, living like recluses, and, when away, were still in similar seclusion. Of Emily, Charlotte says, 'I am bound to avow that she had scarcely

more practical knowledge of the peasantry amongst whom she lived, than a nun has of the country people who sometimes pass her convent gates. My sister's disposition was not naturally gregarious; circumstances favoured and fostered her tendency to seclusion; except to go to church or take a walk on the hills, she rarely crossed the threshold of home. Though her feeling for the people round her was benevolent, intercourse with them she never sought, nor, with very few exceptions, ever experienced. And yet she knew them, knew their ways, their language, their family histories; she could hear of them with interest, and talk of them *with* detail, minute, graphic, and accurate; but with them she rarely exchanged a word.' [\[31\]](#) But Branwell walked and held personal intercourse, as we have seen, with the people whom Emily shunned; and his personal knowledge, and his unquestionable genius combined, enabled him to grasp and appreciate, to dissect with penetrating skill, and to estimate and define the tendency of the strong and marked character of the people around him. It is, therefore, doubly unfortunate that, from Branwell,

we have little remaining in the way of graphic description, and that the rich treasures of observation which he outpoured have, for the most part, left their impressions only in the memories of those who were privileged to hear him discourse.

CHAPTER XVII.

BRANWELL AT SOWERBY BRIDGE.—CHARLOTTE'S EXERTIONS.

Branwell's Appointment at Ulverston ends—He gets a Situation on the Railroad at Sowerby Bridge—Branwell at Luddenden Foot—His Friends' Reminiscences of him—Charlotte and Emily reading French Novels—Charlotte obtains a Situation—Anxious about Anne—School Project of the Sisters—Charlotte's keen Desire to visit Brussels —Her Letter to her Aunt Branwell.

If the performance of the responsible duties of his appointment at Mr. Postlethwaite's, which ended, at his father's wish, in the June of 1840, had been felt by Branwell as a banishment from the cheerful company of his Haworth acquaintances, it had been still greater from his artistic and literary friends in the neighbourhood of Bradford and Halifax. Hence he sought, with a perseverance amounting to anxiety, to obtain a post on the Leeds and Manchester Railway,—to the opening of which he had looked forward with concern—at some place in the valley of the Calder, near Halifax; and he received the appointment of clerk in charge, at the station at Sowerby Bridge. Charlotte says of Branwell's determination: 'a distant relation of mine, one Patrick Branwell, has set off to seek his fortune in the wild, wandering, adventurous, romantic, knight-errant-like capacity of clerk on the Leeds and Manchester Railroad.'

[\[32\]](#) Branwell commenced his new occupation at Sowerby Bridge on the 1st of October, 1840, just before the opening of the line from Hebden Bridge to Normanton.

As has been already seen, an acquaintance had

existed between Branwell and Leyland; but now that the former had become a resident in the immediate neighbourhood, after his visits to the artist's studio had been interrupted for six months, or more, by his stay at Broughton-in-Furness, a more frequent intercourse followed between the two. It was on a bright Sunday afternoon in the autumn of 1840, at the desire of my brother, the sculptor, that I accompanied him to the station at Sowerby Bridge to see Branwell. The young railway clerk was of gentleman-like appearance, and seemed to be qualified for a much better position than the one he had chosen. In stature he was a little below the middle height; not 'almost insignificantly small,' as Mr. Grundy states, nor had he 'a downcast look;' neither was he 'a plain specimen of humanity.' [33] He was slim and agile in figure, yet of well-formed outline. His complexion was clear and ruddy, and the expression of his face, at the time, lightsome and cheerful. His voice had a ringing sweetness, and the utterance and use of his English were perfect. Branwell appeared to be in excellent spirits, and showed none of those traces of intemperance with

which some writers have unjustly credited him about this period of his life.

My brother had often spoken to me of Branwell's poetical abilities, his conversational powers, and the polish of his education; and, on a personal acquaintance, I found nothing to question in this estimate of his mental gifts, and of his literary attainments.

Branwell stayed at Sowerby Bridge some months, whence he was transferred, in 1841, to Luddenden Foot, a place about a mile further up the valley, where a station had been recently fixed. Mr. Grundy, who was an assistant-engineer on the line, became acquainted with Branwell at the latter place; and says of it, 'there was no village near at hand,' and that, 'had a position been chosen for this strange creature, for the express purpose of driving him several steps to the bad, this must have been it.' [\[34\]](#)

Mr. Grundy must have spoken from memory only. The ancient village of Luddenden Foot, within two minutes' walk of the station, with its

population employed in the mills and manufactories of the neighbourhood, together with its two old hostleries of the 'Red Lion,' and the 'Shuttle and Anchor,' was surely sufficient to banish all solitude and wildness from the neighbourhood of Branwell's sojourn. Yet the change was scarcely a desirable one, and doubtless helped to disgust Branwell with his employment. It is to be regretted that the respective occupations of Branwell and Mr. Grundy were of such a nature as to prevent a regular and continual intercourse, and that distance of time and place have so far dimmed Mr. Grundy's reminiscences of his friend, that, valuable though the letters he has wisely preserved are, many inaccuracies have entered into his recollections of him, and Mrs. Gaskell's exaggerated account has had undue weight in the picture he has drawn.

Mr. William Heaton, author of a minor volume of poems entitled the 'Flowers of Caldervale,' knew Branwell Brontë well when he was at Luddenden Foot. He wrote to me a letter in which occurred the following description of his mind and

character, and also of his conversation when at one of the village inns, where they sometimes met:

'He was,' says Heaton, 'blithe and gay, but at times appeared downcast and sad; yet, if the subject were some topic that he was acquainted with, or some author he loved, he would rise from his seat, and, in beautiful language, describe the author's character, with a zeal and fluency I had never heard equalled. His talents were of a very exalted kind. I have heard him quote pieces from the bard of Avon, from Shelley, Wordsworth, and Byron, as well as from Butler's "Hudibras," in such a manner as often made me wish I had been a scholar, as he was. At that time I was just beginning to write verses. It is true I had written many pieces, but they had never seen the light; and, on a certain occasion, I showed him one, which he pronounced very good. He lent me books which I had never seen before, and was ever ready to give me information. His temper was always mild towards me. I shall never forget his love for the sublime and beautiful works of Nature, nor how he would tell of the lovely

flowers and rare plants he had observed by the mountain stream and woodland rill. All these had excellencies for him; and I have often heard him dilate on the sweet strains of the nightingale, and on the thoughts that bewitched him the first time he heard one.'

During Branwell's twelvemonths' stay at Luddenden Foot, he formed new acquaintances, but the avocations, tastes, and pursuits of the well-to-do inhabitants did not accord with his; and he, perhaps, more frequently than was compatible with his duties, visited Halifax to seek the intellectual enjoyment which his own narrow occupation and the society of Luddenden Foot did not afford.

While he was occupied in the service of the railway company at this place, we hear nothing relating to him, of moment, in Charlotte's correspondence. Happy that he was employed, his sisters engaged eagerly and earnestly in devising schemes for obtaining a livelihood that might enable them to work together for their mutual assistance in literary labour.

Charlotte was still at home with Emily, reading French novels, of which, we learn, she had got another bale, 'containing upwards of forty volumes.' 'I have read about half,' she says. 'They are like the rest, clever, wicked, sophistical, and immoral. The best of it is, they give one a thorough idea of France and Paris, and are the best substitute for French conversation.' We scarcely recognize, in this employment, the Charlotte Brontë of three years before, whose religious mania was driving her to despair, unless, indeed, it be in the force with which she pursues the new bent of her inclination. She has read twenty volumes of this, the second, batch, and was proposing to read twenty more. It was her expectation that, by this process, she would become sufficiently familiar with the language to enable her to teach it to others.

In the letter in which she announced that Branwell had gone to his post on the railway—written in good spirits, when she saw everything *couleur-de-rose*, which, however, she attributes to the high wind blowing over the 'hills of Judea' at Haworth—she says: 'A woman of the name of

Mrs. B——, it seems, wants a teacher. I wish she would have me; and I have written to Miss Wooler to tell her so. Verily, it is a delightful thing to live at home, at full liberty to do just what one pleases. But I recollect some scrubby old fable about grasshoppers and ants, by a scrubby old knave, yclept *Æsop*; the grasshoppers sang all the summer, and starved all the winter.'

Branwell was proving himself no grasshopper, for, if he sang, he was anxious to exert himself in a practical way at the same time; and, so far, he was doing well at Luddenden Foot. Charlotte, too, was resolved to be employed, but the negotiation with Mrs. B—— failed. The lady expressed herself pleased with the frankness with which Charlotte stated her qualifications, but she required some one who could undertake to give instruction in music and singing. This Miss Brontë could not do. She does not appear to have had the musical taste which her brother and sisters had inherited from the Branwell family. She resembled her father, perhaps, more closely than did any of the other children. At last, however, in March, 1841, she entered her second situation as a

private governess. 'I told you, some time since,' she writes to her friend, 'that I meant to get a situation, and, when I said so, my resolution was quite fixed. I felt that, however often I was disappointed, I had no intention of relinquishing my efforts. After being severely baffled two or three times—after a world of trouble, in the way of correspondence and interviews—I have at length succeeded, and am fairly established in my new place.'

Charlotte found her residence not very large, but the grounds were fine and extensive. She had made some sacrifice to secure comfort, as she says, not good living, but cheerful faces and warm hearts. Her pupils were two in number, one a girl of eight, and the other a boy of six. Though always more or less afflicted with home-sickness, whenever she was at a distance from her father's house, with its familiar and affectionate ways, she enjoyed, in her new place, considerable relief from it, owing to the spontaneous generosity and kindness of her employers. She says, indeed, 'My earnest wish and endeavour will be to please them. If I can but feel that I am giving satisfaction,

and if, at the same time, I can keep my health, I shall, I hope, be moderately happy. But no one but myself can tell how hard a governess's work is to me—for no one but myself is aware how utterly averse my whole mind and nature are for the employment. Do not think that I fail to blame myself for this, or that I leave any means unemployed to conquer this feeling. Some of my greatest difficulties lie in things that would appear to you comparatively trivial. I find it so hard to repel the rude familiarity of children. I find it so difficult to ask either servants or mistress for anything I want, however much I want it. It is less pain for me to endure the greatest inconvenience than to go into the kitchen to request its removal. I am a fool. Heaven knows I cannot help it.'

Charlotte found matters a little easier after the first month of her stay, and her home-sickness became less oppressive. Though her time was much occupied, great kindness was shown towards her, and her father and her friend were invited to come to see her.

In June she wrote, in the absence of her

employer, 'You can hardly fancy it possible, I dare say, that I cannot find a quarter-of-an-hour to scribble a note in; but so it is; and when a note is written, it has to be carried a mile to the post, and that consumes nearly an hour, which is a large portion of the day. Mr. and Mrs. —— have been gone a week. I heard from them this morning. No time is fixed for their return, but I hope it will not be delayed long, or I shall miss the chance of seeing Anne this vacation. She came home, I understand, last Wednesday, and is only to be allowed three weeks' vacation, because the family she is with are going to Scarborough. *I should like to see her*, to judge for myself of the state of her health. I dare not trust any other person's report, no one seems minute enough in their observations. I should very much have liked you to have seen her. I have got on very well with the servants and children so far; yet it is dreary, solitary work. You can tell as well as me the lonely feeling of being without a companion.'

[\[35\]](#)

The delicate Anne, struggling with all the troubles, the indignities, of the life of a governess, was a picture that was naturally distressing enough to

Charlotte, ever anxious, ever watchful over the welfare of her youngest sister, and she would, perhaps, be apt, in her imagination, to exaggerate her sister's difficulties in the light of her own. In truth the sisters had qualities of mind and heart which did much to unfit them for the enjoyment of content or happiness amongst strangers. Charlotte, in particular, with a nature, sensitive, observant, and tenacious; an imagination highly wrought, active, and fertile, but too often morbid; with a will, powerful, yet constrained by the nervous weakness of an excitable constitution, could with difficulty conform inclination to the necessities of such a career; she longed for freedom. It was not surprising, then, that when Charlotte reached Haworth—which she did before Anne's return—there was a revival of the project I have before mentioned of the opening of a school, wherein they could enjoy the liberty of home.

Mr. Brontë and Miss Branwell were not unfavourably disposed towards the project, and they conversed now and then, at the breakfast-table or in the evenings, as to how they could best

help the girls into the position they so much coveted. The sisters must always have had a friend in their father in these matters; he could not but be pleased and interested in struggles and expectations which reproduced so closely the hopeful days of his own early life, and we learn, as the result of the deliberations of the elders, that the aunt offered a loan, or intimated that she would, perhaps, offer one, in case her nieces could give some assurance of the solidity of their plans in the shape of a situation decided upon and of pupils promised. The East-Riding was thought to be not so well provided with schools as the West, and the favourite idea of the sisters was to open their projected academy in the neighbourhood of Burlington, where the health, both of themselves and of their pupils, might be hoped for. But there was a question how much their aunt would be disposed to advance them. Charlotte did not think she would sink more than £150 in such a venture, and she doubted if this would be a sufficient sum with which to establish a school and commence house-keeping, on however modest a scale. These were reflections

which damped a little the excitement of hopeful expectation in which the sisters, especially Charlotte, revolved these plans. She anxiously awaited the coming of her friend, on the day she was expected to visit them during their holidays at the parsonage, wearying her eyes with watching from the window, eye-glass in hand, and, sometimes, spectacles on nose, eager to talk over her schemes with some one else than her sisters and to hear a new opinion. But her friend could not come, and she says, 'a hundred things I had to say to you will now be forgotten, and never said.' Charlotte began to fear some time must elapse before her plans could be executed, and she resolved not to relinquish her situation till something was assured. But this expectation of keeping a school, cherished through long years, was never realized by the sisters; ever and anon the shifting sands of circumstance, the changing currents of life, moved them away, even while they believed themselves approaching the goal of their hopes.

Charlotte returned to her situation, and she tells her friend, in a letter dated August the 7th, 1841,

that she 'felt herself' again. Mr. and Mrs. —— were from home, and she takes the opportunity of saying that to be solitary there was to her the happiest part of her time. She enters into particulars of the household: the children were under decent control, and the servants were observant and attentive to her; she says of herself, moreover, that the absence of the master and mistress relieved her from the duty of always putting on the appearance of being cheerful and conversable.

Her friends, Martha and Mary T——, were enjoying great advantages on the Continent, where they had gone to stay a month with their brother. Charlotte had had a long letter from Mary, and a packet enclosing a handsome black silk scarf, and a pair of beautiful kid gloves bought in Brussels as a present. She was pleased with them, and that she had been remembered so far off, amidst the excitement of 'one of the most splendid capitals of Europe.' Mary's letters spoke of 'some of the pictures and cathedrals she had seen—pictures the most exquisite, cathedrals the most venerable.' Something swelled to the throat

of Charlotte as she read this account. She was seized with a 'vehement impatience of restraint and steady work; such a strong wish for wings—wings such as wealth can furnish; such an urgent thirst to see, to know, to learn; something internal seemed to expand bodily for a minute.' She was tantalized for a time by the consciousness of faculties unexercised; then all collapsed. She considered these emotions, momentary as they were, rebellious and absurd, and they were speedily quelled by the resolute spirit they had disturbed. She hoped they would not revive, as they had been acutely painful. The school project, instead of at all fading, was gaining strength, and the three sisters kept it in view as the pole-star round which all their other schemes, as of lesser importance, revolved. To this they looked in their despondency. Charlotte was haunted, sometimes, and dismayed, at the conviction that she had no natural knack for her occupation. She says that, if teaching only were requisite, all would be smooth and easy; and she adds, '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.'

It appears that Miss Wooler was about this time intending to give up her school at Dewsbury Moor, and had offered it to the Misses Brontë. One or two disadvantages had to be set against the favourable terms on which they might have the school. The situation could not commend itself to Charlotte, anxious as she was concerning Anne's health; the number of pupils had also diminished, and it would be necessary to offer special advantages in the way of education before they could hope to have a prosperous establishment—so their friends argued. But Charlotte had resolved to take the school. The sisters, however, could not feel confident that their qualifications were such as would render success certain. Hence, a suggestion that was made to Charlotte which would provide her with the necessary powers, was at once taken up with all the energy of her nature; she thus writes to her aunt, on whom all must depend:

'September 29th, 1841.

'Dear Aunt,

'I have heard nothing of Miss Wooler yet since I wrote to her, intimating that I would accept her offer. I cannot conjecture the reason of this long silence, unless some unforeseen impediment has occurred in concluding the bargain. Meantime a plan has been suggested and approved by Mr. and Mrs. ——' (the father and mother of her pupils) 'and others, which I wish now to impart to you. My friends recommend me, if I desire to secure permanent success, to delay commencing the school for six months longer, and by all means to contrive, by hook or by crook, to spend the intervening time in some school on the continent. They say schools in England are so numerous, competition so great, that without some such step towards attaining superiority, we shall probably have a very hard struggle, and may fail in the end. They say, moreover, that the loan of £100, which you have been so kind as to offer us, will, perhaps, not be all required now,

as Miss Wooler will lend us the furniture; and that, if the speculation is intended to be a good and successful one, half the sum, at least, ought to be laid out in the manner I have mentioned, thereby insuring a more speedy repayment both of interest and principal.

'I would not go to France or to Paris. I would go to Brussels in Belgium. The cost of the journey there, at the dearest rate of travelling, would be £5; living there is little more than half as dear as it is in England, and the facilities for education are equal or superior to any other place in Europe. In half a year, I could acquire a thorough familiarity with French. I could improve greatly in Italian, and even get a dash of German; *i.e.*, provided my health continued as good as it is now. Mary is now staying at Brussels, at a first-rate establishment there. I should not think of going to the Château de Kokleberg, where she is resident, as the terms are much too high; but if I wrote to her, she, with the

assistance of Mrs. Jenkins, the wife of the British Chaplain, would be able to secure me a cheap, decent residence and respectable protection. I should have the opportunity of seeing her frequently; she would make me acquainted with the city; and, with the assistance of her cousins, I should probably be introduced to connections far more improving, polished, and cultivated, than any I have yet known.

'These are advantages which would turn to real account, when we actually commenced a school; and, if Emily could share them with me, we could take a footing in the world afterwards which we can never do now. I say Emily instead of Anne; for Anne might take her turn at some future period, if our school answered. I feel certain, while I am writing, that you will see the propriety of what I say. You always like to use your money to the best advantage. You are not fond of making shabby purchases; when you do confer a favour, it is often done in style;

and depend upon it, £50 or £100, thus laid out, would be well employed. Of course I know no other friend in the world to whom I could apply on this subject except yourself. I feel an absolute conviction that, if this advantage were allowed us, it would be the making of us for life. Papa will, perhaps, think it a wild and ambitious scheme; but whoever rose in the world without ambition? When he left Ireland to go to Cambridge University, he was as ambitious as I am now. I want us all to get on. I know we have talents, and I want them to be turned to account. I look to you, aunt, to help us. I think you will not refuse. I know, if you consent, it shall not be my fault if you ever repent your kindness.'

Charlotte had some time to wait for an answer, but it came at last; her enthusiasm had carried the day. The answer was favourable: she and Emily were to go to Brussels.

At times, during his stay with the railway

company, Branwell would drive over from Luddenden Foot to visit his family at the Haworth parsonage, having hired a gig for the purpose. Mr. Grundy sometimes accompanied him, and they would escape to the moors together, or pay curious visits to the old fortune-teller, with the curates. Then, says his friend, he was 'at his best, and would be eloquent and amusing, though, on returning sometimes, he would burst into tears, and swear he meant to mend.' This last statement is favourable to Branwell's calm judgment upon himself. Few—and Branwell was one of the last—drift deliberately into wrong-doing. He was, like most other men, often placed under influences which a habit of attention and self-control would have enabled him to resist. He knew, perhaps, in a desultory way, what he ought to do, and what he ought not; but, owing to his inattention to consequences, he might, now and then, go wrong, sometimes yielding to whatever illusion was paramount within, acting in concert with whatever was most alluring without; yet he could draw his mental forces together, and review his past actions with keen and painful accuracy. Hence he

was not destitute of the faculty of analyzing his acts in the light of their moral quality, and, when his sober judgment enabled him to see them in their true bearing, he exhibited a due contrition.

On Branwell's visits home, he learned much of the exertions, the projects, and the resolves of his sisters. He was aware of their aims, and how important were the steps being taken to qualify them the better for teaching others, more especially in perfecting their knowledge of the French language and of music. He also knew of the ultimate hope of his sisters—that, were the future secure, they would have leisure to realize their early dream of one day becoming authors, never relinquished, even when distance divided, and when absorbing tasks occupied them. He had the highest appreciation of their genius; and, although he had his times of hilarity, indulgence, and enjoyment, he was certainly never forgetful of his own hopes and aspirations in the same direction.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BRANWELL'S POETRY, 1842.

Situation of Luddenden Foot—Branwell visits Manchester—The Sultry Summer—He visits the Picturesque Places adjacent—His impromptu Verses to Mr. Grundy—He leaves the Railway Company—Miss Robinson's unjust Comments—His three Sonnets—His poem 'The Afghan War'—Branwell's letter to Mr. Grundy—His Self-depreciation.

Luddenden Foot—the second place of Branwell Brontë's appointment as clerk in charge on the Leeds and Manchester Railway—was a village about equi-distant between Sowerby Bridge and Mytholmroyd, situated in a fertile and moderately-wooded valley, on the left bank of the Calder as it descends from its source in Cliviger Dean. The cultivated hills rise to a considerable height on both sides of the river, and are very romantic in

character. Among the manufacturers and gentry of the neighbourhood, Branwell found few to welcome him, and from these he turned to the artists and literary men he had previously known at Halifax.

But Branwell, in addition, made excursions up the valley (Mr. W——, his fellow-assistant, acting for him in his absence) in the direction of Hebden Bridge, Heptonstall, the Ridge, Todmorden, and the heights of Wadsworth. There were, indeed, many places of marvellous beauty and interest near, that have long been the theme of artists and poets, with which he did not fail to make himself acquainted.

The huge, rounded hills, which border this valley, are intersected in places by lovely cloughs and glens, whose peat-stained streams rush over their rocky beds, from the elevated grouse-moors around, to pour their waters into the Calder. From Luddenden Dean, between the townships of Warley and Midgley, a brook makes its way to Luddenden Foot, through a glen on whose verdant slopes stand several ancient houses of

architectural and historic interest. Among these are Ewood Hall, where Bishop Farrer was born, and Kershaw House, a beautiful Jacobean mansion. Crag Valley, which descends to the Calder on the opposite bank, a mile or more from Luddenden Foot, is deeper and more thickly wooded. On one hand lies Sowerby—with Haugh End, the birthplace of Archbishop Tillotson—and, on the other, Erringden, which was a royal deer-park in the days of the Plantagenets. But the loveliest of the valleys through which the confluent streams of the Calder run, is that of Hebden, a romantic glen, winding between the wooded and precipitous slopes of Heptonstall—crowned with the ancient and now ruined church of St. Thomas à Becket—and of Wadsworth, with its narrow dell of Crimsworth, which gave Charlotte Brontë a name for the hero of the earliest of her novels. Between these solemn heights the stream flows beneath the huge crags of Hardcastle, and roars over many a rocky obstruction in its channel before it reaches the Calder at Hebden Bridge. This was a district to which picnic-parties from Haworth often came, there being a direct road

over the hills.

Branwell also visited Manchester on one occasion; and, on his return, he gave an account to a young clergyman, then living in the neighbourhood of Mytholmroyd, who sometimes went to his wooden shanty at Luddenden Foot to hear his conversation, of how he had been impressed with the architecture of the parish church at Manchester, as he stood under the arched portal, and beheld the long lines of pillars and arches, and the fretted roof, the lightsome details of which had charmed him. He went forward on that occasion to the choir of the church, and saw the Lady Chapel—which still retained its beautiful screen, with its Perpendicular tracery and shafts of that period—occupied by the gravedigger's implements, which reminded him of the 'Worshipful Master of the Lodge of the Three Graces,' consisting of crowbar, mattock, spade, barrow, planks and ropes; for the Lady Chapel had been made a convenient receptacle for these dismal chattels.

The summer of 1841 was a somewhat

monotonous time for Branwell and his friend at the quiet station. Here, in the intervals of the trains, scarcely anything was heard except the occasional hum of a bee or a wasp, or the drone of a blue-bottle, while the almost vertical rays of a summer sun darted down on the roof of the wooden hut, and made the place unendurable. It was in moments of weary lassitude, or in hours of drowsy leisure, that Branwell whiled away the time by sketching carelessly on the margins of the books—for the amusement of himself and his friend—free-hand portraits of characters of the neighbourhood, and of the celebrated pugilists of the day.

But about Hebden Bridge there were people known to Branwell, and he did not fail to visit them. His sister, Charlotte, in after-years, sometimes came to Hanging Royd, Hebden Bridge, the house of my late friend, the Rev. Sutcliffe Sowden, then incumbent of Mytholm—the gentleman who afterwards performed the marriage ceremony between the gifted lady and Mr. Nicholls. The friendship of the latter and Mr. Sowden dated from earlier years, and to them

Branwell was known when he was at Luddenden Foot. He had, indeed, sometimes clerical visitors at his 'wooden shanty' to hear his conversation. Mr. Sowden was an enthusiastic lover of scenery, and the sphere of his duties abounded in moors, wilds, crags, rivers, brooks, and dells, which he often visited. Branwell's tastes accorded with his, but these attractions clearly drew Branwell's attention, too often and too far, from the imperative duties of his situation, comparatively light though they were. As might be expected, therefore, the work of this talented but changeful young man was found unsatisfactory, and explanations were demanded. About the time of the close of his twelve months' official duties at Luddenden Foot, an examination of his books was made, and they were found to be confused and incomplete. The irregularity and the defects of his returns had also been remarked, and an inquiry was set on foot respecting them. The officials, in looking over the books, discovered the pen-and-ink sketches on the margins of the pages, which I have already mentioned; and these were taken as conclusive evidence of carelessness

and indifference on the part of the unfortunate Branwell in the performance of his duties and the keeping of his accounts.

He had been made aware, by unwelcome inquiries and remonstrances, that his position with the railway company was precarious, and he was filled with apprehension as to the ultimate consequences. He was requested finally to appear at the audit of the company, and his friend W —— accompanied him.

It was at the Christmas of 1841, that the Brontës expected to meet at home together, in anticipation of Charlotte and Emily's journey to Brussels; but Charlotte had not found her brother there in the January of 1842, for she writes on the 20th of that month and year: 'I have been every week, since I came home, expecting to see Branwell, and he has never been able to get over yet. We fully expect him, however, next Saturday.' [\[36\]](#) Branwell certainly returned home, but only when it had been intimated to him that his services were no longer required by the railway company. How far he had felt the duties of his post irksome, and

the power of perseverance required inconsistent with his tastes and pursuits, does not appear, though the inference that they were so will scarcely be doubted. But the humiliation and sorrow he felt on the loss of his employment plunged him, for a time, into despair; and the natural gloom of his disposition, caused him to magnify the common pleasures and enjoyments of his leisure hours into crimes and omissions of duty of no ordinary magnitude. But the erroneous recollections of Mr. Grundy, respecting the situation of the station at Luddenden Foot, and its supposed deleterious influence on Branwell's manners and obligations, may justify a doubt as to the particular accuracy of many of his reminiscences of his friend.

The following incident of Branwell's stay at that place, which Mr. Grundy gives, may be regarded as affording a valuable contribution to his writings; for, although impromptu, the verses show that he could, even on unexpected occasions, bring into play his innate faculty of verse with no mean grasp of his subject, and a certain harmony of rhythmical expression.

Mr. Grundy says, 'On one occasion he (Branwell) thought I was disposed to treat him distantly at a party, and he retired in great dudgeon. When I arrived at my lodgings the same evening, I found the following, necessarily an impromptu:—

"The man who will not know another,
Whose heart can never sympathize,
Who loves not comrade, friend, or brother,
Unhonoured lives—unnoticed dies:
His frozen eye, his bloodless heart,
Nature, repugnant, bids depart.

"O, Grundy! born for nobler aim,
Be thine the task to shun such shame;
And henceforth never think that he
Who gives his hand in courtesy
To one who kindly feels to him,
His gentle birth or name can dim.

"However mean a man may be,
Know man *is* man as well as thee;
However high thy gentle line,
Know he who writes can rank with thine;
And though his frame be worn and dead,

Some light still glitters round his head.

"Yes! though his tottering limbs seem old,
His heart and blood are not yet cold.
Ah, Grundy! shun his evil ways,
His restless nights, his troubled days;
But never slight his mind, which flies,
Instinct with noble sympathies,
Afar from spleen and treachery,
To thought, to kindness, and to thee.

"P. B. Brontë." [\[37\]](#)

Branwell's extreme sensibility caused him, indeed, to exaggerate both the lights and the shadows of his existence. He was gleeful, as I found, full of fun, jest, and anecdote, in social circles, or where literature and art were the theme; and then, almost involuntarily, would rise to his feet, and, with a beaming countenance, treat the subject with a vivid flow of imagination, displaying the rich stores of his information with wondrous and enthralling eloquence. But, under disappointment or misfortune, he fell a prey to gloomy thoughts, and reached a state often near akin to despair. It was

at such moments that he usually took up his pen to express, in poetry, the fulness of his feelings and the depth of his sorrow; and it is to this fact that the pathetic sadness of most of his writings is due. I have had occasion already to speak of the melancholy tone which characterized also the minds of his sisters.

The worth of Branwell's poetic genius about this time,—the year of 1842,—has been unfairly commented upon. Miss Robinson, questioning the judgment of the Brontë sisters, undertakes to doubt if Branwell's mental gifts were any better than his moral qualities, and says: 'It is doubtful, judging from Branwell's letters and his verses, whether anything much better than his father's "Cottage in the Wood" would have resulted from his following the advice of James Montgomery. Fluent ease, often on the verge of twaddle, with here and there a bright felicitous touch, with here and there a smack of the conventional hymn-book and pulpit twang—such weak and characterless effusions are all that is left of the passion-ridden pseudo-genius of Haworth.' [\[38\]](#)

Miss Robinson's ignorance of Branwell's more matured poems and writings has caused her, in company with others, to fall into very grave errors regarding him; and she,—with extreme bitterness, it must be said,—has embellished her biography of Emily with elaborate censures of his misdeeds, and with accounts of his imputed glaring inferiority to his sisters in intellectual power. It is pitiable, indeed, that Miss Robinson,—and not she alone,—in the want of Branwell's true life and remains, with nothing to set against the primary errors of Mrs. Gaskell,—should have joined the hue and cry against him, and have essayed, almost as of set purpose, to write down the gifted brother of the author whose life she was giving to the world.

In 1842 Branwell began to feel more perceptibly the development of his intellectual powers, and to discern more clearly his natural ability to define, in poetic and felicitous language, his thoughts, feelings, and emotions. While under the depression and gloom consequent upon his disgrace, and the recent loss of his employment, he wrote the three following sonnets. The profound depth of feeling, expressed with

mournful voice, which pervades them, the full consciousness of woe by which they are informed, leave nothing wanting in their expression of pathetic beauty; and they are distinguished by much sweetness of diction. These sonnets favourably show the poetical genius of Branwell. His soul is carried beyond his frail mortality; but sadness and sorrow, enshrouding his imagination, bind it to the precincts of the tomb. Here, with pessimistic and gloomy philosophy, he bids us, impressed with the slender sum of human happiness, to recognize the constant recurrence of the misery to which we are born, and to discern how little there is beneficent in nature or mankind.

SONNET I.

On Landseer's Painting.

*'The Shepherd's Chief Mourner'—A Dog
Keeping Watch at Twilight over its Master's
Grave.*

The beams of Fame dry up affection's tears;

And those who rise forget from whom they
spring;
Wealth's golden glories—pleasure's
glittering wing—
All that we follow through our chase of years
—

All that our hope seeks—all our caution fears,
Dim or destroy those holy thoughts which
cling
Round where the forms we loved lie
slumbering;
But, not with *thee*—our slave—whose joys
and cares
We deem so grovelling—power nor pride
are thine,
Nor our pursuits, nor ties; yet, o'er this grave,
Where lately crowds the form of mourning
gave,
I only hear *thy* low heart-broken whine—
I only see *thee* left long hours to pine
For *him* whom thou—if love had power—
would'st save!

SONNET II.

On the Callousness produced by Care.

Why hold young eyes the fullest fount of
tears?

And why do youthful hearts the oftenest
sigh,

When fancied friends forsake, or lovers fly,
Or fancied woes and dangers wake their
fears?

Ah! he who asks has known but spring-tide
years,

Or Time's rough voice had long since told
him why!

Increase of days increases misery;
And misery brings selfishness, which sears
The heart's first feelings: 'mid the battle's
roar,

In Death's dread grasp, the soldier's eyes are
blind

To comrades dying, and he whose hopes
are o'er

Turns coldest from the sufferings of mankind;
A bleeding spirit oft delights in gore:

A tortured heart oft makes a tyrant mind.

SONNET III.

On Peaceful Death and Painful Life.

Why dost thou sorrow for the happy dead?

For, if their life be lost, their toils are o'er,
And woe and want can trouble them no
more;

Nor ever slept they in an earthly bed

So sound as now they sleep, while dreamless
laid

In the dark chambers of the unknown
shore,

Where Night and Silence guard each
sealed door.

So, turn from such as these thy drooping
head,

And mourn the *Dead Alive*—whose spirit
flies—

Whose life departs, before his death has
come;

Who knows no Heaven beneath Life's
gloomy skies,
Who sees no Hope to brighten up that gloom,
—
'Tis *He* who feels the worm that never dies,
—
The *real* death and darkness of the tomb.

It is painful to find the writer of these sad and beautiful sonnets spoken of in terms of reprobation, as being, at the time he wrote them, and when asking Mr. Grundy's aid while seeking a situation, 'sunk and contemptible.'

'Alas,' says Miss Robinson, 'no helping hand rescued the sinking wretch from the quicksands of idle sensuality which slowly engulfed him!' [\[39\]](#) Let us look further.

The Afghan War, which commenced in 1838, and had secured for the English arms what seemed at the time a complete conquest, was followed by the conspiracy of Akbar Khan, the son of Dost Mohammed, which occurred at the beginning of winter, when help from India was hopeless. There

was an uprising at Cabul, and several officers and men were slain, which compelled Major Pottinger to submit to humiliating conditions. The British left Cabul; and the disastrous retreat to India, through the Khyber Pass, which commenced on January 6th, 1842, will long be sadly remembered. Of sixteen thousand troops—accompanied by women and children to the number of ten thousand more—who were continually harassed by hostile tribes on the way, and benumbed by the severity of the winter, only one man, Doctor Brydon, survived to tell the tidings. Branwell, overwhelmed by these horrors, published the following powerful and impressive poem in the 'Leeds Intelligencer,' on May the 7th of the same year.

THE AFGHAN WAR.

'Winds within our chimney thunder,
Rain-showers shake each window-pane,
Still—if nought our household sunder—
We can smile at wind or rain.

Sickness shades a loved one's chamber,
Steps glide gently to and fro,
Still—'mid woe—our hearts remember
We are there to soothe that woe.

'Comes at last the hour of mourning,
Solemn tolls the funeral bell;
And we feel that no returning
Fate allows to such farewell:
Still a holy hope shines o'er us;
We wept by the One who died;
And 'neath earth shall death restore us;
As round hearthstone—side by side.

'But—when all at eve, together,
Circle round the flickering light,
While December's howling weather
Ushers in a stormy night:
When each ear, scarce conscious, listens
To the outside Winter's war,
When each trembling eyelash glistens
As each thinks of *one* afar—

Man to chilly silence dying,
Ceases story, song, and smile;

Thought asks—"Is the loved one lying
Cold upon some storm-beat isle?"
And with death—when doubtings vanish,
When despair still hopes and fears—
Though our anguish toil may banish,
Rest brings unavailing tears.

'So, Old England—when the warning
Of thy funeral bells I hear—
Though thy dead a host is mourning,
Friends and kindred watch each bier.
But alas! Atlantic waters
Bear another sound from far!
Unknown woes, uncounted slaughters,
Cruel deaths, inglorious war!

'Breasts and banners, crushed and gory,
That seemed once invincible;
England's children—England's glory,
Moslem sabres smite and quell!
Far away their bones are wasting,
But I hear their spirits call—
'Is our Mighty Mother hasting
To avenge her children's fall?"

'England rise! Thine ancient thunder
Humbled mightier foes than these;
Broke a whole world's bonds asunder,
Gave thee empire o'er the seas:
And while yet one rose may blossom,
Emblem of thy former bloom,
Let not age invade thy bosom—
Brightest shine in darkest gloom!

'While one oak thy homes shall shadow,
Stand like it as thou hast stood;
While a Spring greets grove and meadow,
Let not Winter freeze thy blood.
Till this hour St. George's standard
Led the advancing march of time;
England! keep it streaming vanward,
Conqueror over age and clime!"

In this poem Branwell prefaces his subject with a picture of domestic suffering—one with which he is familiar—and compares the consolation which accompanies the affectionate attentions of those present, with the hopeless fate and untended deaths of such as perish in the storms and wars of

distant places, far away from their homes and friends. In the true, loyal, and national spirit which animates him, his manly appeal to England, comprised principally in the last two verses, is perhaps one of the noblest and most vigorous ever written.

In the May of 1842, Leyland was commissioned to execute certain monuments for Haworth and its neighbourhood; and, on the 15th of that month, Branwell wrote to him, in reference to a design for a monument which he had sent for submission to a committee of which the Rev. P. Brontë was chairman, and invited him to the parsonage on the 20th of the month, being sure his father would be pleased to see him. Leyland visited Haworth and partook of Mr. Brontë's hospitality; and in the evening, accompanied by the incumbent and his son, appeared before the monument committee.

Branwell also wrote an interesting letter to Mr. Grundy on May 22nd, 1842, which that gentleman erroneously assigns to 1845. [\[40\]](#) In it he says that he cannot avoid the temptation, while sitting alone, all the household being at church,

and he being the sole occupant of the parsonage, to scribble a few lines to cheer his spirits. He alludes to the extreme pain, illness, and mental depression he has endured since his dismissal. He describes himself, while at Luddenden Foot, as a 'miserable wreck,' as requiring six glasses of whisky to stimulate him, as almost insane! And he feels his recovery from this last stage of his condition to be retarded by 'having nothing to listen to except the wind moaning among old chimneys and older ash trees,—nothing to look at except heathery hills, walked over when life had all to hope for, and nothing to regret.' He reproaches himself, in bitter terms, with seeking indulgence, while at Luddenden Foot, in failings which formed, he declares, the black spot on his character. His sister Charlotte's mind appears to have been cast in the same gloomy mould; for, when suffering under bodily ailment, or the despondency and hopelessness which overshadowed her soul, she was impelled, as we have seen, to make confessions to her friend 'E' of her 'stings of conscience,' her 'visitings of remorse.' She hates her 'former flippancy and

forwardness.' She is in a state of 'horrid, gloomy uncertainty,' and clouds are 'gathering darker,' and a more depressing despondency weighs upon her spirits. [\[41\]](#)

In another letter to her friend, Charlotte says she is 'in a strange state of mind—still gloomy, but not despairing. I keep trying to do right.... I abhor myself, I despise myself.' And again, later, she wonders if the new year will be 'stained as darkly as the last with all our sins, follies, secret vanities, and uncontrolled passions and propensities,' saying 'I trust not; but I feel in nothing better, neither humbler nor purer.' [\[42\]](#)

Branwell, however, while making, in a like tone, his unnecessarily exaggerated confession to his friend, sets forth his renovation of soul and body. He has, at length, acquired health, strength, and soundness of mind far superior to anything he had known at Luddenden Foot. He can speak cheerfully, and enjoy the company of another, without his former stimulus. He can write, think, and act, with some apparent approach to resolution, and he only wants a motive for

exertion to be happier than he has been for years. He has still something left in him which might do him service. He thinks he ought not to live too long in solitude, as the world soon forgets those who wish it 'Goodbye.' Then, although ashamed of it, he asks for answers to some inquiries he had made about obtaining a new situation, evidently thinking Mr. Grundy's influence of importance in the matter.

This letter must receive a passing notice. It shows Branwell's mind vigorous and healthy, although it had been disordered by physical illness accompanied by brooding melancholy. His picture of the lonely parsonage and the solitude of the surrounding country, combined with the expression of his own sad emotions, is graphic enough. His sisters wrote with the same power and the same artistic feeling. The occasion of his writing this letter to Mr. Grundy was his wish to obtain some employment in connection with the railway, and he made this overdrawn confession of his habits and indulgences when at Luddenden Foot, and contrasted them with the great mental, moral, and bodily improvement he had acquired

since he left. It was his hope that by this contrast he might make a favourable impression, and that Mr. Grundy's position with the Messrs. Stephenson might be a means of helping him to some employment suited to his tastes and abilities. But Mr. Grundy could not aid him in this object, which he pursued with all the feverish eagerness of his urgent and impetuous nature. With great vigour of expression he declares, 'I would rather give my hand than undergo again the grovelling carelessness, the malignant yet cold debauchery, the determination to find how far mind could carry body without both being chucked into hell.'

But Branwell, at the time of which I speak, was full of energy and industry; indeed, he could not be idle. He wrote another letter in reply to one he had received from Mr. Grundy, dated June the 9th, 1842. From this we learn that his friend had either not entertained his applications, or was unable to further his interests in the quarter from which employment could come, for he had given discouraging answers. Branwell felt the disappointment keenly, but says that it was allayed by Mr. Grundy's kind and considerate

tone. His friend had asked why he did not turn his attention elsewhere. To this Branwell replies that most of his relations are clergymen, and others of them, by a private life, removed from the busy world. As for the church, he declares he has not one mental qualification, 'save, perhaps, hypocrisy,' which might make him 'cut a figure in its pulpits.' He informs Mr. Grundy that Mr. James Montgomery and another literary gentleman, who had lately seen something of his work, wished him to turn his attention to literature. He declares that he has little conceit of himself, but that he has a great desire for activity. He is somewhat changed, yet, although not possessed of the buoyant spirits of his friend, he might, in dress and appearance, emulate something like ordinary decency.

In Leyland's art commissions at Haworth, Branwell took great interest, and in his correspondence considerable activity and industry appear. He wrote, on June the 29th, 1842, to the sculptor, a letter, in which he alludes to the conduct of some gentlemen of the committee at Haworth, who had acted in an unfair way to his

friend on a professional matter. He says:—

'I have not often felt more heartily ashamed than when you left the committee at Haworth; but I did not like to speak on the subject then, and I trusted that you would make that allowance, which you have perhaps often ere now had to do, for gothic ignorance and ill breeding; and one or two of the persons present afterwards felt that they had left by no means an enviable impression on your mind.

'Though it is but a poor compliment,—I long much to see you again at Haworth, and forget for half-a-day the amiable society in which I am placed, where I never hear a word more musical than an ass's bray. When you come over, bring with you Mr. Constable, but leave behind Father Matthew, as his conversation is too cold and freezing for comfort among the moors of Yorkshire.'

At the bottom of the sheet on which this letter is written, Branwell has drawn a pen-and-ink sketch of rare merit. The weird waste, which stretches to the horizon, may represent well the lonely wilds of

Haworth, overshadowed by the clouds of approaching night, and interspersed with streaks of fading day, among which the crescent moon appears. In the foreground is a group of monuments, one a tomb sunk on its side; and, of the head-stones, one is inscribed with the word 'Resurgam.' Branwell was no mean draughtsman, and that his hand did not shake with the excesses he is represented to have gone through at this period of his life, the delicacy of this elaborate drawing is sufficient proof.

Mr. Constable, mentioned in the letter, was an acquaintance of the sculptor, a gentleman of considerable ability in art and poetry. The conviviality, which Branwell did not consider altogether a dereliction of moral duty, led him to make his quiet and humorous allusion to Father Matthew.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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Footnotes

[\[1\]](#) 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. ii.

[\[2\]](#) 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. iii.

[\[3\]](#) 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. iii.

[\[4\]](#) Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. iii, 1st edition.

[\[5\]](#) 'Charlotte Brontë, a Monograph,' pp. 20, 21, 22.

[\[6\]](#) 'Emily Brontë,' by A. Mary F. Robinson, 1883, p. 16.

[\[7\]](#) Mrs. Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. iii.

[\[8\]](#) James's 'History of Bradford,' p. 358.

[\[9\]](#) Gaskell's 'Charlotte Brontë,' chap. iv.

- [10] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. iv.
- [11] 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. iv.
- [12] 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. v.
- [13] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap v.
- [14] 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. v.
- [15] 'Charlotte Brontë, a monograph,' p. 27.
- [16] 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. vi.
- [17] Scribner, ii., 18, 'Reminiscences of Charlotte Brontë.'
- [18] Reid's 'Charlotte Brontë, a Monograph,' p. 29.
- [19] 'Jane Eyre,' chap. xiii.
- [20] 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. vii.
- [21] 'The Mirror,' 1872.

[22] 'Athenæum,' June 16th, 1883, p. 762.

[23] Riley's 'History of the Airedale Lodge,' p. 48.

[24] 'Emily Brontë,' p. 64. It may be noted here, to show in some sort what amount of credibility attaches to these representations, that Miss Robinson has placed Branwell's portrait-painting at Bradford subsequent to his tutorship at Broughton-in-Furness, though really he did not go there until a year later.

[25] 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap, xxvii.

[26] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. viii.

[27] 'The Death of Leyland's African Bloodhound,' by William Dearden, author of 'The Star-Seer.' London, 1837. (Longmans.)

[28] 'Agnes Grey,' chap. i.

[29] 'Agnes Grey,' chap. i.

[30] The clock mentioned by Branwell was one that stood in a corner of the 'Snug' at 'The Bull,' inside the door of which the landlord—'Little Nosey'—used to chalk up the 'shots' of his guests.

[31] Charlotte Brontë.—Memoir prefixed to 'Wuthering Heights.'

[32] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. ix.

[33] 'Pictures of the Past,' by Francis H. Grundy, C.E. (1879) p. 75.

[34] 'Pictures of the Past,' p. 75.

[35] 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. x.

[36] 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. x.

[37] 'Pictures of the Past,' pp. 78-79.

[38] 'Emily Brontë,' p. 97.

[39] 'Emily Brontë,' p. 99.

[40] 'Pictures of the Past,' p. 84.

[41] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,'
chap. viii.

[42] 'Unpublished letters of Charlotte
Brontë,' *Hours at Home*, vol. xi.

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THE BRONTË FAMILY

**WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
PATRICK BRANWELL BRONTË**

VOL. II.

BY

FRANCIS A. LEYLAND.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

**LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,**

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THE BRONTË FAMILY.

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CHARLOTTE AND EMILY IN BRUSSELS.

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It was more than a month before Charlotte received the reply from her Aunt Branwell. Meanwhile she had waited patiently, pending the anxious discussions at the parsonage, and she breathed not a single word of the great project to her friend. It was her way to work in obscurity,

and to let her efforts 'be known by their results.' But at last, as I have said, consent was given to her plan; the necessary money was forthcoming; and it only remained for her to make the arrangements for her journey, and Emily had arrangements to make also. There was much of letter-writing to do, letters to Brussels—whither Charlotte would of all cities prefer to go,—and to many other places; and there were clothes to make, and farewells to be said.

It was a great disappointment to Charlotte,—when, having left her situation at Christmas, 1841, she came to Haworth to join the family circle,—that Branwell could not be there, and it troubled him very much too. But the plans were talked over, the letters were written, and Charlotte did not repent her boldness,—nay, she looked forward confidently to the venture. It seems a strange ambitious plan to us, and one showing little knowledge of the world, this of spending six months in Brussels, in that short time to become thoroughly acquainted with French, to be improved in Italian, and get a dash of German; and, so provided with accomplishments, to set up

a successful school at Burlington,—for the Dewsbury Moor project had already been relinquished.

Brussels was fixed upon by Charlotte for several reasons: because it was a cheap journey, because education could be had there at any rate as good as at any other place in Europe, and perhaps better; and then, Mary and Martha T——, her friends, were staying at Brussels at the Château de Kokleberg, and Mary, with Mrs. Jenkins, the wife of the English chaplain, would find the desired *pensionnat*. But there was a temporary disappointment: it was reported that the schools in Brussels were not good; and Charlotte immediately set to work to discover another establishment, which was found at Lille—one that Baptist Noel recommended, where the terms were £50 for each pupil. It had been at last arranged that Charlotte and Emily should journey to this place, about the middle of February, 1842, under the escort of Madame Marzials, a lady then in London, when again the plans were changed. Mrs. Jenkins, the chaplain's wife, had discovered, to Charlotte's great delight, the establishment of

Madame Héger in the Rue d'Isabelle, at Brussels, which was greatly eulogized, and thither it was finally decided that the two sisters could go.

Charlotte went to Brussels with a stout heart and in perfect confidence, and she left no regrets behind her; but it was not so with Emily. The elder sister was cast in a different mould from the younger; there was a spice of adventure in her composition, and the pleasure, too, of seeing new places was keen. It had been said to her by some inward voice, as to Lucy Snowe, who is the truest portrait of Charlotte, 'Leave this wilderness, and go out hence;' and she answered the query, 'Where?' with a sharp determination; and went out to enter into the spirit of the things she met, wherever her mental constitution would enable her to do so. 'For background,' she says of her journey in 'Villette,' 'spread a sky, solemn and dark blue, and—grand with imperial promise, with tints of enchantment—strode from north to south a God-bent bow, an arch of hope:' but that was to be struck out. 'Cancel that, reader—or rather let it stand, and draw thence a moral—an alliterative, text-hand copy:

"Day-dreams are delusions of the demon."

So was Charlotte to be disillusioned. But what a fairyland had she fashioned to herself of that gay Belgian capital, and what painful memories she brought thence! For, according to Mr. Wemyss Reid,—and doubtless he is right—her stay in Brussels with Emily, and afterwards alone, was the turning-point in Charlotte's career, and the record of it in 'Villette' was wrung from her as her heart's blood, amid paroxysms of positive anguish. But of these things she knew nothing in the January of 1842; then the future slept in sunny calm, so sunny, indeed, that to part from Haworth, and those she knew there, her father and her brother and sister, gave her scarcely a pang; and afterwards, so far as one can trace, from her letters, and from 'Villette,' which expresses even more, the troubles of the parsonage were never acute troubles to her. Her joys and troubles abroad were in fact her own, and they were borne and suffered alone.

But, with Emily, Haworth was no wilderness, a paradise rather, and with bitter pain she left the

moors that the coming summer should cover with purple billows. For Emily Brontë was inspired far more than her sister with the influences of locality and of her home. Amidst the distant Yorkshire hills dwelt, too, her father, with Branwell and Anne, whom she loved more than all else in the world; and many an hour, sitting in the bare rooms of the *pensionnat*, she pondered on their hopes and their sorrows. We cannot say that Emily's sojourn in Brussels changed her in any way whatever, nor that she was made by it of any nearer kinship with the outside world.

Mr. Brontë accompanied his daughters, and Mary and her brother, who travelled with them to Brussels. They stayed a day or two in London, at the Chapter coffee-house in Paternoster Row, and a good deal of sight-seeing was done before they left for the Belgian capital. In 'Villette' Charlotte has told us of her first visit to London, and of the travelling to Labassecour, but the actual details refer more probably to her second journey thither. Yet we may feel sure that it was with the same spirit that she saw the metropolis, that she revelled in its busy life and in the

earnestness that moved it. We may imagine her on the dome of St. Paul's looking over the river with its bridges, and, alongside it, the Temple Gardens, and Westminster beyond; and we may see her in the classic ground of Paternoster Row. Emily has left no record of her feelings on this journey, but we may be sure they differed very much from Charlotte's. We have an account in 'The Professor' of William Crimsworth's feelings when he entered Belgium, and they were doubtless Charlotte's also. 'This is Belgium, reader. Look! don't call the picture flat or a dull one—it was neither flat nor dull to me when I first beheld it. When I left Ostend on a fine February morning, and found myself on the road to Brussels, nothing could look vapid to me. My sense of enjoyment possessed an edge whetted to the finest; untouched, keen, exquisite.... Liberty I clasped in my arms for the first time, and the influence of her smile and embrace revived my life like the sun and the west wind.'

It was proposed at the time that the two sisters should remain in the *pensionnat* until the *grandes vacances* in September, when they were to return

home. They were in Brussels then to work, and the boisterous schoolgirls found no companions in them, for they remained together for a long time, and read and studied apart. These two sisters did not easily make friends; they were shy, and their companions thought them peculiar—Charlotte, clad in her plain, home-made dress, and Emily, with her gigot sleeves and long, straight skirts, walking in the garden together. Mrs. Jenkins told Mrs. Gaskell that she asked them to spend Sundays and holidays with her, but at last she found that even these visits gave them more pain than pleasure, and thenceforth they remained away. This reserve never passed from Emily entirely, but Charlotte afterwards gained confidence and made friends.

There were memories, as Mrs. Gaskell records, connected with Madame Héger's house in the Rue d'Isabelle, of mediæval chivalry and romance, which are doubtless reflected in the visits of the nun to the *grenier* and the old garden where Lucy Snowe is. From the gay, bright Rue Royale four flights of steps lead down to the Rue d'Isabelle, and the chimneys of its houses are level

with one's feet as one stands at the top of them. The quiet street was called the Fossé aux Chiens in the thirteenth century, because the ducal kennels were there, on the site of Madame Héger's house; but these gave place later to a hospital for the homeless and the poor. Afterwards the Arbalétriers du Grand Serment had their place there, and noble company visited them, and great ceremonials and feasts they gave. Later again the street was called the Rue d'Isabelle, because the Infanta Isabella induced the Arbalétriers to allow a road to be made through their grounds, and built them in return a noble mansion close by, which was afterwards Madame Héger's.

William Crimsworth saw the establishment. 'I remember, before entering the park, I stood awhile to contemplate the statue of General Belliard, and then I advanced to the top of the great staircase just beyond, and I looked down into a narrow back street, which I afterwards learnt was called the Rue d'Isabelle. I well recollect that my eye rested on the green door of a rather large house opposite, where, on a brass

plate, was inscribed, "Pensionnat de Demoiselles."

Madame Héger, the mistress of this *pensionnat*, was a woman of capacity, and understood the duties of her position, but apparently Charlotte did not get on very well with her, and in the second year of the residence in Brussels they were estranged. It was said that the *directrice* had 'quelque chose de froid et de compassé dans son maintien,' which did not prepossess people in her favour; and Charlotte, it appears, had little tolerance of her beliefs or her prejudices. Monsieur Héger, unlike his wife, was of a quick and energetic nature, choleric and irritable in temperament, but withal gentle and benevolent also. It was said that there were few characters so noble and admirable as his, that he was a zealous member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and that, after days occupied in arduous educational work, he was wont to gather the poor together in order that he might amuse and instruct them at the same time. He gave up his lucrative position, too, as prefect of the studies at the Athenée because he could not succeed in

introducing religious instruction into the curriculum there. Very many traits of Monsieur Héger's character are reproduced in that of Paul Emanuel.

The school was a large and prosperous one, conducted as continental schools usually are, and Charlotte, in a short time, was happy in the busy life she led there. She has left an admirable picture, a veritable photograph, of the establishment in the pages of 'Villette,' which indeed contains her mental history during her sojourn there. The training through which she and Emily were put was different from that of the other pupils. Monsieur Héger was quick to perceive that they were capable of greater things than most people, so he took the bold step of putting them to the higher walks of French literature, omitting the general work of grammar and vocabulary; and his experiment was justified by its success.

Charlotte and Emily, with one other girl and the *gouvernante* of Madame Héger's children, were the only exceptions to the Catholicism of the house, and the Brontës found that this difference

cut them off in sympathy from the rest of the inhabitants. 'We are completely isolated in the midst of numbers,' says Charlotte; but she adds, 'I think I am never unhappy; my present life is so delightful, so congenial to my own nature, compared with that of a governess. My time, constantly occupied, passes too rapidly.' We do not find that news from home gave her trouble, nor that she was particularly uneasy in her absence. 'I don't deny,' she says later, 'that I have brief attacks of home-sickness; but, on the whole, I have borne a very valiant heart so far; and I have been happy in Brussels, because I have always been fully occupied with the employments that I like.'

Charlotte's happiness at this time was in herself. She lived in bright anticipation of the time when it should be possible to the sisters to open a school, which was to be the reward of their arduous studies, and of that love for work and that perseverance of which Monsieur Héger spoke in his letter to Mr. Brontë, written when Charlotte and Emily were called to Haworth. Lucy Snowe in 'Villette' tells of such hopes; of the tenement

which she shall take, with its one large room and two or three smaller ones; of the few benches and desks, the black tableau, and the *estrade*, with its chair, tables, chinks, and sponge, where she shall teach the day-scholars. 'Madame Beck's commencement was—as I have often heard her say—from no higher starting-point, and where is she now?' This was the hope which Lucy Snowe repeated to Monsieur Paul, and it pleased him, though he called it 'an Alnaschar dream.' But it was the salt of Charlotte's life during the first months of her residence in Brussels.

Brussels was liked by Charlotte, and she calls it a beautiful city; and she liked the country about it, though it differed so much from her own hilly Haworth. But she did not like its inhabitants; the Belgians were to her people of a lower order; she could not enter into their pleasures, and she did not understand them. Charlotte, with her restricted views of life, came into the midst of strangers; she found them different from her ideal, and she was repulsed by them. The two books in which she has recorded her impressions of the Belgians are occupied with a frequent contrast of

'the daughter of Albion and nursling of Protestantism' with 'the foster-child of Rome, the protégée of Jesuitry,' always to the disadvantage of the latter. Mesdemoiselles Eulalie, Hortense, and Caroline in 'The Professor,' and Mesdemoiselles Blanche, Virginie, and Angélique in 'Villette,' are Charlotte's types of the Belgian female—heavy, stolid, unimpressionable to good, sensual, gross, and unintellectual. The Labasse-couriennes were 'a swinish multitude,' not to be driven by force; 'whenever a lie was necessary for their occasions, they brought it out with a careless ease and breadth, altogether untroubled by any rebuke of conscience;' and they were cold, animal, and selfish. Nevertheless, occupied in her duties, Charlotte was happy, even with these companions. We have no actual means of knowing what Emily thought of them, for her life amongst them was never reproduced in her writings, and it made but little permanent impression upon her. Charlotte said that her sister worked 'like a horse,' and that she did not get on well with Monsieur Héger.

The two sisters had now friends in Brussels, for

they sometimes saw Mary and Martha T—— who were staying there at the Château de Kokleberg, and these young ladies had cousins in the city, whose house was often a pleasant meeting-place. But Emily made little progress with these friendships.

The *grandes vacances* began in September, but Charlotte and Emily did not return home then as had been intended; all was well at Haworth, and there was no reason why they should. Madame Héger made a proposal that they should remain six months more, Charlotte as English teacher, and Emily to instruct some pupils in music; and they were to continue their studies and have board without payment, but they were offered no salary. These terms were at last accepted, and the sisters remained through the long *vacances* with a few boarders who were also there, and Charlotte, at least, was happy.

But a year later, when the rooms of the *pensionnat* were once more deserted, and Emily far away in the parsonage at Haworth, there can be no doubt that she became again subject to that

melancholia which had previously been remarked in her when she was at Miss Wooler's. The excitement of her first sojourn at Brussels wore off, she found no novelty in the things she saw, and she was left to solitary reflection a great deal. But her melancholy began with herself. 'My youth is leaving me,' she said to Mary; 'I can never do better than I have done, and I have done nothing yet,' and she seemed at such times, according to this friend, 'to think that most human beings were destined by the pressure of worldly interests to lose one faculty and feeling after another, till they went dead altogether. I hope I shall be put in my grave as soon as I'm dead; I don't want to walk about so,' she added. Mary advised her to go home or elsewhere, when she was in this state, for the sake of change, and Charlotte thanked her for the advice, but did not take it.

'That vacation! Shall I ever forget it? I think not,' says Lucy Snowe.... 'My heart almost died within me; miserable longings strained its cords. How long were the September days! How silent, how lifeless! How vast and void seemed the desolate premises! How gloomy the forsaken garden,—

grey now with the dust of a town summer departed!' To Lucy Snowe the future gave no promise of comfort; and a sorrowful indifference to existence often pressed upon her,—a 'despairing resignation to reach betimes the end of all things earthly.' She found the future but a hopeless desert: 'tawny sands, with no green fields, no palm-tree, no well in view.' And these were the thoughts, too, that oppressed Charlotte Brontë in Brussels and sorely weighed her down. It was in one of these fits of depression, overcome with melancholy, that she found consolation in the confessional, when she poured her tale of solitary sorrow into the ear of a priest—a Père Silas, like him in 'Villette,' who spoke of peace and hope to Lucy Snowe.

Troubles of another kind had, however, broken in sadly enough on the close of Charlotte's first *vacances* in Brussels in 1842, when she and Emily were greatly shocked by the death of Martha T—— at the Château de Kokleberg, after a very short illness. This was a great grief to the little circle in Brussels, for the dead girl had been a bright and affectionate companion,—

bewailed under the name of Jessie in 'Shirley,'—and she was deeply lamented. But another grief awaited the Brontë sisters; they heard that their aunt Branwell was ill,—was dead; they were wanted at home; and at once, after very hasty preparation, they left Brussels, Emily not to return. They came back to the parsonage at Haworth, to find the funeral over, and the house deprived of one who had been its support and guardian for years.

Thus their stay in Brussels was suddenly cut short, and their studies were interrupted; but they had learned a good deal during their stay there. Monsieur Héger wrote to console Mr. Brontë on his loss; and said that in another year the two girls would have been secured against the eventualities of the future. They were being instructed, and, at the same time, were acquiring the art of instruction: Emily was learning the piano, and receiving lessons from the best Belgian professors; and she had little pupils herself. 'Elle perdait donc à la fois un reste d'ignorance et un reste plus gênant encore de timidité.' Charlotte was beginning to give French lessons, and to gain

'cette assurance, cet aplomb si nécessaire dans l'enseignement.' It was this kind letter from Monsieur Héger that afterwards induced Mr. Brontë to allow Charlotte to return to Brussels.

CHAPTER II.

OTHER POEMS.

Branwell at the Parsonage: his Loneliness—'The Epicurean's Song'—'Song'—Northangerland—'Noah's Warning over Methusaleh's Grave'—Letter to Mr. Grundy—Miss Branwell's Death—Her Will—Her Nephew Remembered—Injustice done to Him in this Matter by the Biographers of his Sisters.

During the absence of his sisters Charlotte and Emily in Brussels, and while Anne was away as a governess, Branwell no doubt felt lonely at the parsonage at Haworth; but he appears to have sought consolation from his troubles in the

soothing influences of music and poetry. He knew that these employments softened many of the difficulties that beset the road of human life, and that they introduced men into a purer and nobler sphere than that which is called reality. He felt that they led 'the spirit on, in an ecstasy of admiration, of sweet sorrow, or of unearthly joy, to the music of harmonious, and not wholly intelligible words, raising in the mind beauteous and transcendent images.' Whatever may have been said as to Branwell's proneness to self-indulgence, and his enjoyment of society, even that of 'The Bull,' and of the corrupt of Haworth, none of his alleged depravity and coarseness of disposition disfigured his verses, however deficient his early effusions may have been in the higher excellencies of the Muse. From the general tenor of his writings, which is religious and sometimes philosophical, he seems, under his misfortunes, which were ever with him in one shape or another, to have sought consolation in the shadowed paths of poetry and reflection.

Some lights now and then diversify the general gloom of his stanzas; but, even then, an air of

sadness still pervades them. More I shall find to say on the special features of Branwell's poems in the later pages of the present work.

He wrote the following verses in 1842:

THE EPICUREAN'S SONG.

'The visits of Sorrow
Say, why should we mourn?
Since the sun of to-morrow
May shine on its urn;
And all that we think such pain
Will have departed,—then
Bear for a moment what cannot return;

'For past time has taken
Each hour that it gave,
And they never awaken
From yesterday's grave;
So surely we may defy
Shadows, like memory,
Feeble and fleeting as midsummer wave.

'From the depths where they're falling
Nor pleasure, nor pain,
Despite our recalling,
Can reach us again;
Though we brood over them,
Nought can recover them,
Where they are laid, they must ever remain.

'So seize we the present,
And gather its flowers,
For,—mournful or pleasant,—
'Tis all that is ours;
While daylight we're wasting,
The evening is hasting,
And night follows fast on vanishing hours.

'Yes,—and we, when night comes,
Whatever betide,
Must die as our fate dooms,
And sleep by their side;
For *change* is the only thing
Always continuing;
And it sweeps creation away with its tide.'

Here Branwell, writing, contrary to his custom, in

a gay mood, forgets the failures of the past, diverting his mind from them by seeking serenity in the diversions which now and then lighten his path. He is perfectly conscious of the fleeting nature of earthly things; and, with that natural and felicitous faculty of versification with which his images and figures are invariably described, he invests the Epicurean with the hopes of the Optimist, or with the indifference of the Stoic to the shadows which ever and anon dim the pleasures of human existence. There is nothing assuredly in this lyric of the 'pulpit twang,' to which Miss Robinson refers, nor is it a 'weak and characterless effusion.'

To the year 1842 belongs the following song which in feeling reminds one of Burns' 'Auld Lang Syne.' The subject, however, is distinct, and is pervaded by a profound sentiment of enduring affection, and is expressive of the deepest feeling in reference to it.

SONG.

'Should life's first feelings be forgot,
As Time leaves years behind?
Should man's for ever changing lot
Work changes in the mind?

'Should space, that severs heart from heart,
The heart's best thoughts destroy?
Should years, that bid our youth depart,
Bid youthful memories die?

'Oh! say not that these coming years
Will warmer friendships bring;
For friendship's joys, and hopes, and fears,
From deeper fountains spring.

'Its feelings to the *heart* belong;
Its sign—the glistening eye,
While new affections on the *tongue*,
Arise and live and die.

'So, passing crowds may *smiles* awake
The passing hour to cheer;
But only old acquaintance' sake
Can ever form a tear.'

Leyland was himself a poet, as I have said, and a literary critic of ability and judgment. Branwell submitted some poems to him for opinion, and he advised his friend to publish them with his name appended, rather than under the pseudonym of 'Northangerland,' for he considered them creditable to his genius. But Branwell, on July 12th, 1842, writing to Leyland, asking some technical questions, says, in a postscript, 'Northangerland has so long wrought on in secret and silence that he dare not take your kind encouragement in the light which *vanity* would prompt him to do.'

On August 10th, 1842, he wrote to Leyland in reference to a monument, which that sculptor had recently put up at Haworth, and he concluded by saying:

'When you see Mr. Constable—to whom I shall write directly,—be kind enough to tell him that—owing to my absence from home when it arrived, and to the carelessness of those who neglected to give it me on my return,—I have only *now* received his note. Its injunctions shall be gladly

attended to; but he would better please me by refraining from any slurs on the fair fame of Charles Freeman or Benjamin Caunt, Esquires.'

Branwell did not lose his early interest in the 'noble science,' but continued it with a half-serious constancy. Constable and Leyland regarded the pugilistic encounters of the 'Ring' as brutal and degrading, but Branwell always professed to defend its champions with energy and zeal; and in this letter he playfully alludes to two of them. Among his literary labours of the year 1842 is the following poem. It is entitled:

NOAH'S WARNING OVER METHUSALEH'S GRAVE.

'Brothers and men! one moment stay
Beside your latest patriarch's grave,
While God's just vengeance yet delay,
While God's blest mercy yet can save.

'Will you compel my tongue to say,
That underneath this nameless sod

Your hands, with mine, have laid to-day
The *last* on earth who walked with God?

'Shall the pale corpse, whose hoary hairs
Are just surrendered to decay,
Dissolve the chain which bound our years
To hundred ages passed away?

'Shall six-score years of warnings dread
Die like a whisper on the wind?
Shall the dark doom above your head,
Its blinded victims darker find?

'Shall storms from heaven *without* the world,
Find wilder storms from hell *within*?
Shall long-stored, late-come wrath be hurled;
Or,—will you, can you turn from sin?

'Have patience, if too plain I speak,
For time, my sons, is hastening by;
Forgive me if my accents break:
Shall *I* be saved and *Nature* die?

'Forgive that pause:—one look to Heaven
Too plainly tells me, he is gone,

Who long with me in vain had striven
For earth and for its peace alone.

'He's gone!—my Father—full of days,—
From life which left no joy for him;
Born in creation's earliest blaze;
Dying—himself, its latest beam.

'But he is gone! and, oh, behold,
Shown in his death, God's latest sign!
Than which more plainly never told
An Angel's presence His design.

'By it, the evening beams withdrawn
Before a starless night descend;
By it, the last blest spirit born
From this beginning of an end;

'By all the strife of civil war
That beams within yon fated town;
By all the heart's worst passions there,
That call so loud for vengeance down;

'By that vast wall of cloudy gloom,
Piled boding round the firmament;

By all its presages of doom,
Children of men—Repent! Repent!"

This poem has also the impress of sadness, but the onward sweep and dignity of its verse are not ruffled by the turbulent undercurrents of Branwell's mood. The idea of the piece is well borne out in majestic and suitable language, though some instances of that incoherence and indefiniteness which, at intervals, distinguish the earlier poems of his sisters, may be noticed in it.

In the latter part of the year 1842 the state of Miss Branwell's health became a cause of anxiety to the Brontë family. Acquainted as they had been, in years gone by, with sickness and death, they sorrowed, in anticipation of the inevitable loss of the lady, who had been for long years as a mother to them. Under the shadow which spread over their home, Branwell wrote to his friend—Mr. Grundy—referring to it, saying that he was attending the death-bed of his aunt who had been for twenty years as his mother. In another letter to Mr. Grundy, of the 29th of October, Branwell thus alludes in affectionate terms to her death:

'I am incoherent, I fear, but I have been waking two nights witnessing such agonizing suffering as I would not wish my worst enemy to endure; and I have now lost the pride and director of all the happy days connected with my childhood. I have suffered such sorrow since I last saw you at Haworth, that I should not now care if I were fighting in India or ——, since, when the mind is depressed, danger is the most effectual cure. But you don't like croaking, I know well, only I request you to understand from my two notes that I have not forgotten *you*, but *myself*.' [\[11\]](#)

Charlotte and Emily hurried home from Brussels on the death of their aunt, as is stated in the last chapter, to find her already interred.

Mrs. Gaskell, alluding to the death of Miss Branwell, has given the following version of that lady's will. She says:

'The small property which she (Miss Branwell) had accumulated, by dint of personal frugality and self-denial, was bequeathed to her nieces. Branwell, her darling, was to have had his share;

but his reckless expenditure had distressed the good old lady, and his name was omitted in her will.' [\[2\]](#)

Miss Robinson, implicitly, and without reflection, following this author, says:

'Miss Branwell's will had to be made known. The little property that she had saved out of her frugal income was all left to her three nieces. Branwell had been her darling, the only son, called by her name; but his disgrace had wounded her too deeply. He was not even mentioned in her will.' [\[3\]](#)

Miss Elizabeth Branwell had made her will in the year 1833 (when her nephew was about fifteen years of age), by which she left the following items to the children of Mr. Brontë:—

To Charlotte, an Indian Workbox.

To Emily Jane, a Workbox with China top,
and an Ivory Fan.

To Branwell, a Japanese Dressing-case.

To Anne, her Watch, Eye Glass, and Chain.

Amongst these three nieces, her rings, silver spoons, books, clothes, &c., were to be divided as their father should think proper. Her money, arising from various sources, she left in trust for the benefit of her nieces, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë, and Elizabeth Jane, the daughter of her sister, Jane Kingston, to be equally divided among them, when the youngest should have attained the age of twenty-one years. But, if these died, all was to go to her niece, Anne Kingston, and if she died, the accumulated money was to be divided between the children of her 'dear brother and sisters.' Had Branwell, who was one of these 'children,' survived his own sisters, and the cousin referred to in the will, he would have been one, if not the sole, recipient of the accumulated money in question. This contingency was present to Miss Branwell's mind when she made the bequest, and it was never either altered or revoked.

It is amazing that so much ignorance should have been displayed on a subject so easily capable of

being correctly stated; but it is lamentable that this ignorance should have led the biographers of the Brontës, by erroneous statements, to inflict additional and unmerited injury on Branwell.

CHAPTER III.

A MISPLACED ATTACHMENT.

Christmas, 1842—Branwell is Cheerful—Charlotte goes to Brussels for another Year—Branwell receives Appointment as Tutor—Branwell visits Halifax, and meets Mr. Grundy there—Charlotte's Mental Depression in Brussels—Mrs. Gaskell attributes it to Branwell's Conduct—Proofs that it was Not so—Charlotte's 'Disappointment' at Brussels—She returns to Haworth—Branwell's Misplaced Attachment—He is sent away to New Scenes.

The death of Miss Branwell had brought Charlotte and Emily home from Brussels; and Anne, from her situation, was present on the sad occasion. When the Christmas holidays came round, the sisters were all at home again. Branwell was with them; which was always a pleasure at that time, and Charlotte's friend, 'E,' came to see her. Having overcome the first pang of grief on the death of their aunt, they enjoyed their Christmas very much together. Branwell was cheerful and even merry; and in Charlotte's next letter, written in a happy mood to her friend, who had just left them, he sent a playful message. 'Branwell wants to know,' says Charlotte, 'why you carefully excluded all mention of him, when you particularly send your regards to every other member of the family. He desires to know in what he has offended you? Or whether it is considered improper for a young lady to mention the gentlemen of a house?' [\[4\]](#) While they were together, plans for the future were talked over with eagerness and hope. Charlotte had accepted the proposal of Monsieur Héger that she should return to Brussels for another year, when she

would have completed her knowledge of French and be fully qualified to commence a school on a footing which was yet impossible. Emily was to remain at home now to attend to her father's house, and Anne was to return to her situation as governess.

Branwell also found occupation as tutor in the same family where Anne had been for some time employed. He commenced his duties, in his new position, after the Christmas holidays of the year 1842. On his arrival at the house of his employer, he was introduced to the members of the family; and it is not too much to say that his new friends were more than satisfied with his graceful manners, his wit, and the extent of his information. Here Branwell felt himself happy; for, contrary to his expectation, he had found, to his mind, a pleasant pasture, with comparative ease, where he had only looked for the usual drudgery of a tutor's work. His family were contented that he was thus respectably and hopefully employed. The gentleman, who had engaged Branwell as tutor to his son, was a man of some literary attainments; he was fond of rural sports, and had

an urbane disposition, and quick perceptions. His wife was a lady of lofty bearing, of graceful manners, and kindly condescension; and, although approaching middle age at the time, was possessed of great personal attractions.

If the Brontës were glad at Branwell's appointment, the family he had entered were equally gratified that they had obtained a teacher whose talents they considered to be equalled only by his virtues. The time of his master, who was a clergyman, was often taken up with the duties and engagements of his position, and his lady was generally occupied with the cares of home and the enjoyments of fashionable country life. Branwell was not, therefore, too much harassed in the discharge of his duties; and he found, in the family in which he was placed, none of the rigid formality which might have rendered his position irksome. His occupation was varied by many rambles in the neighbourhood with his pupil; and, in the evening, after the duties of the day were discharged, when he retired to the farmstead where he lived, his time was entirely at his own disposal.

Unlike Anne, Branwell was not troubled with an excess of diffidence. Being naturally of an amiable and sociable disposition, he soon formed acquaintances in the neighbourhood of his sojourn, and among them was Dr. —, physician to the family in which he was a tutor. Besides, being possessed of a fund of anecdote, combined with an entertaining manner of relating stories, that alone made him excellent company, Branwell was found to be a thorough musician, for he had further cultivated this taste and acquired considerable skill in performance.

Six months soon passed away, and Branwell and Anne once more made the parsonage at Haworth happy with their presence. One of Branwell's first impulses, after his welcome at home, was to visit his friends at Halifax; where, on this occasion, he had the pleasure of meeting with Mr. Grundy. On the return of himself and his sister to their duties, there is no doubt that he continued the exertions he had made to conduct himself with such prudent diligence and self-possession as to ingratiate himself into the good favour of the family with whom he resided.

Charlotte was in the Rue d'Isabelle as English teacher; where, having gained a familiarity with the French language, though growing home-sick and not well, she resolved to remain till the end of the year; and, if possible, to acquire a knowledge of German.

It was at the beginning of August, as the *vacances* approached, that Charlotte became dispirited. The prospect of five weeks of loneliness in a deserted house, in a foreign city, was more than she could bear: the last English friend was leaving Brussels: she would have no one to whom she could turn her thoughts. 'I forewarn you, I am in low spirits,' she writes, —'that earth and heaven are dreary and empty to me at this moment.' For the first time in her life she really dreaded the vacation; 'Alas,' she says, 'I can hardly write, I have such a dreary weight at my heart; and I do so wish to go home. Is not this childish?' Yet she was bravely resolved, despite her weakness, to bear up, to stay; but for Charlotte Brontë, as for Lucy Snowe, those September days were days of suffering. Once, a little later, her resolution failed her. She was alone,

on some holiday; the other inmates had gone to visit their friends in the city; Charlotte had none there now. She was solitary, and felt herself neglected by Madame Héger; she could bear it no longer, so she went to madame herself and told her she could not stay; but Monsieur Héger, hearing of it, with characteristic vehemence, pronounced his decision that she should not leave, and she remained.

Mrs. Gaskell describes her suffering from depression of mind, arising from ill-health, in her second year at Brussels, in gloomy terms, and this seems, indeed, to be the main point she is aiming to illustrate. She says: 'There were causes for distress and anxiety in the news from home, particularly as regarded Branwell. In the dead of the night, lying awake at the end of the long deserted dormitory, in the vast and silent house, every fear respecting those whom she loved, and who were so far off in another country, became a terrible reality, oppressing her and choking up the very life-blood in her heart. Those nights were times of sick, dreary, wakeful misery, precursors of many such in after years.' [\[5\]](#) Mr. T. Wemyss

Reid, in his monograph on Charlotte, has very properly taken exception to the manner in which Mrs. Gaskell has laid stress upon and exaggerated the occasional depression from which Charlotte suffered; and, certainly, there is nothing to show, in any of her letters from Brussels, that there was cause for anxiety on Branwell's account. On the contrary, there is very good evidence that nothing of the kind interfered with his sister's peace. Charlotte left Brussels at the end of the year 1843, and arrived at Haworth on the 2nd of January, 1844. Branwell and Anne were also at home for the Christmas holidays, and Charlotte wrote to her friend 'E' in these words: 'Anne and Branwell have just left us to return to ——; they are both wonderfully valued in their situations.' [\[6\]](#)

It was known, then, that Branwell had given satisfaction to his employers, and the happiness at this reunion of the family would have been complete had it not been for one circumstance. Charlotte's friends were now expecting that she would commence a school. She desired it, she says, above all things. She had sufficient money

for the undertaking, and hoped she had some qualifications for success. Yet she could not then enter upon it. 'You will ask me, why?' she writes. 'It is on papa's account; he is now, as you know, getting old, and it grieves me to tell you that he is losing his sight. I have felt for some months that I ought not to be away from him; and I feel now it would be too selfish to leave him (at least so long as Branwell and Anne are absent) in order to pursue selfish interests of my own.' She appears, from an observation in one of her letters, written some time after the date at which we have arrived, to have regretted having gone to Brussels a second time. She says, 'I returned to Brussels after aunt's death against my conscience, prompted by what then seemed 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.' [7] While Charlotte was still at Brussels she heard that some of her friends thought that the '*époux* of Mademoiselle Brontë' must be on the Continent, since she had declined a situation of £50 a year in England, and accepted one at £16, and returned to Belgium.

This she appears, in a letter to one of them, to deny; though, whether with the intention of piquing her friend, or avoiding the question, is not distinct. Mr. Reid believes that, in this second sojourn at Brussels, Charlotte Brontë passed through an experience of the heart which proved the turning-point of her life, and made her what she was; and that it was not the subsequent misfortunes of her brother, as Mrs. Gaskell asks us to believe, that destroyed the happiness of her existence. [\[8\]](#)

In the middle of March, when the sisters had finished 'shirt-making for the absent Branwell,' Charlotte took a holiday to visit her friend, by which her health was improved. On her return she found Mr. Brontë and Emily well, and a letter from Branwell, intimating that he and Anne were pretty well, too.

Branwell visited Halifax on the 4th of July of this year. His health at that time was not so good as formerly, and his sisters noticed that he was excitable. Till within two or three months of his leaving Luddenden Foot, when he had attained his twenty-fifth year, though not strong, he had

enjoyed good health, his spirits having almost always been good. In his youth, unlike Charlotte, he had had no experience of severe mental depression, no deep suffering from religious melancholy. It was only when he turned to reflection that he became serious, and that his thoughts were shaded with the sadness evinced in some of his early poems. Now, however, his nerve-force was less certain; and, being more easily excited, that exuberance of spirit and that elasticity of mind which had distinguished him showed symptoms of decay. It was not to be expected that he should retain his more youthful characteristics through life: and Charlotte has told us, about this time, that something within herself, which used to be enthusiasm, was tamed down and broken; she longed for an active stake in life. As she was unable to leave home, she endeavoured to open a School at Haworth Parsonage. Could she have obtained the promise of pupils, she proposed to build a wing to the house; but, after meeting with more or less encouragement, she found that it was quite impossible to induce anyone by preference to

send children to a place so much exposed to wind and weather. The sisters were not sorry they had tried; and, it has been unjustifiably suggested, did not regret too much, that they had failed, because they had fears and apprehensions respecting Branwell, and thought that the place that might be his abode could scarcely be fitted for the home of the children of strangers. Branwell and Anne were at home again for the Christmas of 1844, and they returned to their duties early in the following January. In the course of that month Charlotte writes,

'Branwell has been quieter and less irritable, on the whole, than he was in the summer.'[\[9\]](#)

At this time there was no fear of his leaving his employment, and no fear that he would be dismissed from it; but a certain excitability and fitfulness of manner, a disposition to pass suddenly from gaiety to moody disquietude, which Anne had observed in her brother, had attracted, also, as has been seen, the serious attention of the other sisters, who were alarmed by it, and wondered greatly what the cause might be. And,

indeed, a change had been coming over Branwell, for six months or more, a change which in the beginning had scarcely been understood by himself. A new feeling had impressed itself upon his heart that he had never experienced before, and against which he strove in vain. Branwell, in fact, who had never yet loved beyond the confines of his own home, had conceived an infatuated admiration for the wife of his employer, which afterwards, with his warm feelings, became a deep affection, and finally developed into a fierce and over-mastering passion. The lady who had dazzled and confused his understanding, as will presently appear, was unaware of the effect she had thus produced on the heart of the tutor, and he began to mistake her kindly, condescending manners for a return of his affection, an illusion which, as the sequel will show, he nursed to the very end of his life. Under this peculiar aberration of his mind, he cherished the hope that, as his employer was in feeble health, he might ere long be in a position to marry the widow, whom he believed to have already bestowed her affections upon him; when, being in

easy circumstances, and possessed, as he termed it, of 'the priceless affluence of enduring peace,' he should be abler as he often declared, undisturbed by the usual perturbations of literary life, to make sure progress, and win for himself a name among the best authors of the day.

But at this period of his life Branwell is not known to have written much verse, his mind being otherwise occupied. The two following beautiful sonnets, however, are from his pen, dated May, 1845, and are, together, entitled:

THE EMIGRANT.

'When sink from sight the landmarks of our
home,
And,—all the bitterness of farewells o'er,

We yield our spirit unto ocean's foam,
And in the new-born life which lies before,
On far Columbian or Australian shore,
Strive to exchange time past for time to come:

How melancholy, then, if morn restore—
(Less welcome than the night's forgetful
gloom)

Old England's blue hills to our sight again,
When we, our thoughts seemed weaning from
her sky,—

That *pang* which wakes the almost
silenced pain!

Thus, when the sick man lies, resigned to die,
A well-loved voice, a well-remembered
strain,

Lets Time break harshly in upon Eternity.

When, after his long day, consumed in toil,
'Neath the scarce welcome shade of
unknown trees,

Upturning thanklessly a foreign soil,

The lonely exile seeks his evening ease,—

'Tis not those tropic woods his spirit sees;
Nor calms, to him, that heaven, this world's
turmoil;

Nor cools his burning brow that spicy
breeze.

Ah no! the gusty clouds of England's isle
Bring music wafted on their stormy wind,

And on its verdant meads, night's shadows
lower,
While "Auld Lang Syne" the darkness calls
to mind.
Thus, when the demon Thirst, beneath his
power
The wanderer bows,—to feverish sleep
consigned,
He hears the rushing rill, and feels the cooling
shower.'

While Branwell's mind was rendered bright by the sunny hopes of a happy future, he was enabled to write with pathos, coherency, and beauty, as is shown in the foregoing sonnets. But it was his misfortune that his mind was hung too finely upon the balance, and that, as the phantasy of his affections grew upon him, he became, as will hereafter be demonstrated, the victim of an 'overheated and discursive imagination,' and at last 'betrayed that monomaniac tendency' which Lucy Snowe says she 'has ever thought the most unfortunate with which man or woman can be cursed.' He became, in fact, almost as soon as the

new passion had taken full possession of his heart, a miserable victim to that morbid tendency of the mind which, in far lesser degree, characterized his sister Charlotte, and of which she seems to have lived in occasional dread. It may be noted that when Lucy Snowe is seeking wildly the letter, which has been stolen away from her, she accuses herself of monomania. These mental perturbations grew upon Branwell day by day.

Time passed on; and, when he had been with his employer some two years and a half, during the concluding portion of which the control he had exercised over himself was giving way, he began to exhibit the strange irregularities of his disposition, and the irresistible fervour of his long-suppressed and feverish passion. Great patience and forbearance were exercised towards him by the lady of the house; and her sincere regard for the feelings of his family forbade her, on the first blush of the affair, to be the means of his dismissal from his employment. He was not, indeed, dismissed until the step became an absolute necessity. The banishment from his post was not, however, long delayed, for Branwell had lost his

former self-control; and his imprudence overcame the reluctance of the lady, who at length made known to her husband, while Branwell was absent at home, on his holiday, in the July of 1845, what his conduct had been. A letter was at once sent to him by his employer, conveying the intimation of his dismissal.

We have been told much in Charlotte Brontë's letters to her friend 'E,' and in the works of Mrs. Gaskell and other writers, concerning this event, which laid prostrate the hopes of Branwell, that requires both comment and correction. We have already seen to what a low state of mind and body Branwell was for a time reduced by his dismissal from Luddenden Foot; but his condition in both was as that of sound health, compared with his utter prostration on his expulsion from his last employment,—a condition which renders any adequate description impossible. He had, indeed, been supremely happy. For him, the sun of prosperity had shone with unsullied splendour, and the rivers of hope had flowed with music richer and deeper than any of earth. The roses that bloomed in the paradise of his fervid

imagination, were brighter—and, as he thought, far more lasting—than those, far-famed, of Suristan, and the green pastures of his hopeful aspirations were more fertile and fragrant than he had ever thought possible to him in the years gone by. But, suddenly, the paradise which his poetic and imaginative spirit had created, was changed, without a moment's warning, to a region of sleepless nights and wretched days,—'eleven continuous nights of sleepless horror' he afterwards speaks of,—where his mind, dismayed and incoherent, reeled and shook in agony intense and ungovernable.

The distress of the Brontë family on this reverse of Branwell's prospects can scarcely be conceived in its entirety. So deeply agonizing was the then state of his affairs, that they could think of nothing else; and, in their sorrow, had no heart to contemplate the future. It was under the immediate influence of this misery that Anne Brontë wrote her pathetic poem, 'Domestic Peace,' in which she deploras the changed conditions of the family. Charlotte had just returned home from a visit to her friend, and found her brother in the condition I have

described. Thus she speaks of it, under the date of July the 31st, 1845: 'It was ten o'clock at night when I got home. I found Branwell ill. He is so very often, owing to his own fault. I was not therefore shocked at first. But when Anne informed me of the immediate cause of his present illness I was very greatly shocked. He had last Thursday received a note from Mr. ——, sternly dismissing him.... We have had sad work with him since. He thought of nothing but stunning or drowning his distressed mind. No one in the house could have rest, and at last we have been obliged to send him from home for a week with some one to look after him. He has written to me this morning, and expresses some sense of contrition for his frantic folly. He promises amendment on his return, but so long as he remains at home I scarce dare hope for peace in the house. We must all, I fear, prepare for a season of distress and disquietude. I cannot now ask Miss —— or anyone else.'

Branwell's distress had proved so really acute at the disgrace which had befallen him that Mr. Brontë, becoming alarmed for the consequences,

decided to send his son away to new scenes in the hope of diverting his mind from the subject. That this was, to some extent, successful is evident from Branwell's letter to his sister, in which his natural feelings and repentant disposition found expression. Branwell had remembered his former visit to Liverpool, and selected that place on this occasion, and sailed thence to the coast of Wales. The sad feelings that impressed him on the voyage were afterwards expressed in verse.

CHAPTER IV.

'BRANWELL'S FALL,' AS SET FORTH IN THE BIOGRAPHIES OF HIS SISTERS.

Branwell after his Disappointment—Parallel for his State of Mind in that of Lady Byron—Mrs. Gaskell's Misconceptions—True State of the Case—Charlotte Illustrates it in her Poem of 'Preference' —She alludes to

Branwell's Condition in 'The Professor'—
Mrs. Gaskell Compelled to Omit her Account
in the Later Editions of her Work—Branwell's
Prostration and Ill-health at the Time.

After the first shock to his feelings had been sustained, and, by its own intensity, toned down to less oppressive anguish and pain, a strange calm succeeded in Branwell, more agonizing and appalling to his friends than the stormy ebullitions which had preceded it. There is evidence that his family at this time misunderstood the actual state of his mind, and that their very anxiety about him caused them—but more especially Charlotte—to regard his acts, irresponsible though they might be, as inveterate offences and habitual sins. It has indeed been said by some that Charlotte did not afterwards speak to him for the space of two years.

The reproaches of his sister were probably as unwise as they were passionate, unmeasured, and, in outward semblance, unfeeling; yet they were censures pronounced in momentary anger,

utterances of the deep affection she had for her brother, and of sincere sorrow for his unhappy, hopeless, and insane passion. But Branwell's friends and acquaintances saw clearly that on one subject, and one only, his mind had given way; and that was in his conception of the undoubted love which the lady of his heart bore him. They also saw, notwithstanding this morbid perversion of the ordinary powers of his mind in one particular illusion, that he was not affected in his faculty of reasoning correctly and consistently on all other subjects. They knew, if the Brontë family did not, that Branwell's mind, naturally morbid and depressed, had been unhinged by the sudden and unexpected ruin of his hopes; and that his heart and his intellect had been so far bruised and wounded, that for many of the acts done, and the things said, under the abiding grief which followed it, he was irresponsible. This will shortly appear.

The sisters did not, however, long remain in ignorance of the true state of Branwell's mind. They became aware that he suffered from monomania touching the object of his sorrow, and the circumstance impressed them exceedingly. In

several of their novels they have, indeed, dwelt upon this condition, and have lamented the misery and mental prostration which it entails. Lucy Snowe suffers from it severely, as I have mentioned. But, in 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,' one of the characters charges Gilbert Markham—whose circumstances are precisely those of Branwell in regard to his love for a married lady—with monomania in this very matter; and, in 'Wuthering Heights,' speaking of the events that preceded Heathcliff's death, Nelly Dean alleges that he suffers from monomania in his love for the wife of Edgar Linton. Branwell's sisters, however, never took the tragic view of his conduct that impressed Mrs. Gaskell.

For a time Branwell could talk of nothing but of the lady to whom he was attached, and he made statements of circumstances regarding her which had no foundation but in his own heated imagination. The lady, he said, loved him to distraction. She was in a state of inconceivable agony at his loss. Her husband, cruel, brutal, and unfeeling, threatened her with his dire indignation, and deprivation of every comfort. Branwell,

indeed, told his friend W——, by letter, that, in consequence of this persecution, the suffering lady 'had placed herself under his protection!' and many other stories, equally unfounded, extravagant, and impossible, were circulated. In a word, he went about among his friends, telling to each, in strict confidence, the woes under which he suffered, and painting in gloomy colours the miseries which the lady of his love had been compelled to undergo. If all other proof were wanting of the unsound state of Branwell's mind on this one point, it would be enough, in all conscience, that he proclaimed abroad, of the lady he undertook to protect, circumstances that must infallibly redound to her infamy; and which, indeed, in the hands of injudicious persons, gave rise to the public scandal of his life, and ultimately made his name, and that of the lady whom he had loved and traduced in the same breath, of reproach among men. [\[10\]](#)

For Branwell's state of mind at this time, and for the circumstances that followed upon it, we have an exact parallel in the case of Lady Byron, after her separation from her husband. This unhappy

lady, living in retirement with her friends, had maintained, for more than five years after the poet's death, relations of the most friendly nature with his sister, the Honourable Mrs. Leigh. But, at the end of that period, weakened by misfortunes and by brooding upon particular evils, her mind gave way on one point; and she made, in the full belief of their truth, the most horrible of charges against her dead husband and his sister. These charges were, by some people, believed for a time; but a very little reflection showed that Lady Byron's mind must have been unhinged, for all the acts of her life went to disprove the statements she made. It was not in the nature of things possible that she could remain on affectionate terms with her sister-in-law, had she known—as in her monomania she asserted she did—the utter depth of that sister-in-law's imagined infamy. But it is not to be supposed that the unhappy lady was visibly insane; she was, on the contrary, as all remarked, gifted with a clear and accurate observation, with a lucid and logical method of thought, and with an expression more than ordinarily calm and natural.

It was precisely the same with Branwell Brontë; for, when the paroxysm of his grief was over, though he was ordinarily calm and his thoughts always clear and logical, strange impressions and misinterpretations of facts grew upon him, and he made, with all the certainty of belief, statements of circumstances relating to the lady of his dearest affections, redounding to her shame—which, had he been of sound mind, he must not only have known to be false, but would have carried, had they been true, in secrecy to the grave.

Just, too, as Lady Byron whispered the story of her woes in strict faith to many people, so did Branwell Brontë make confidants of several friends, revealing to each the extent of his misfortunes. And, further, just as the story circulated by Lady Byron was confided among others to good, honest, well-meaning Mrs. Beecher Stowe, who, conceiving herself to be the chosen champion of oppressed virtue, rushed into print, in 'Macmillan' of September, 1869, with the literary *bonne-bouche* she had received; so did Mrs. Gaskell, clad in like panoply, with anger far over-riding discretion, publish to the world the

scandal she had collected from the busy *gobemouches* of Haworth, to the utter undoing of the fair fame of Patrick Branwell Brontë, and of the lady on whom he had fixed his hopeless affection. The scandal which was spread about Lord Byron, through the delusions of his wife, was very soon overthrown; but that with which Branwell was concerned, though thirty-seven years have passed over his grave, has been republished and is still believed—all the biographers of his sisters having, with one accord, consigned his name to obloquy and contempt.

The stories originated by Branwell lost nothing in their circulation, but they gained immensely; and years had made the tales of disappointed love into scandals unfit to be detailed, when Mrs. Gaskell, eager for information, visited Haworth, and collected materials for her work from too-willing hands, who added their own embellishments to the original statements of Branwell.

In order to show how far Mrs. Gaskell deviated from the right direction in her account of these circumstances, it will be better to place before the

reader much of what she has said in direct reference to it, so that the whole matter may be made plain; and, before he closes this book, he will probably be convinced that she was wholly misled in her version of the story.

Mrs. Gaskell writes: 'All the disgraceful details came out. Branwell was in no state to conceal his agony of remorse, or, strange to say, his agony of guilty love, from any dread of shame. He gave passionate way to his feelings; he shocked and distressed those loving sisters inexpressibly; the blind father sat stunned, sorely tempted to curse the profligate woman who had tempted his boy—his only son—into the deep disgrace of deadly crime.

'All the variations of spirits and of temper—the reckless gaiety, the moping gloom of many months were now explained. There was a reason deeper than any mere indulgence of appetite, to account for his intemperance; he began his career as an habitual drunkard to drown remorse.

'The pitiable part, as far as he was concerned, was the yearning love he still bore to the woman

who had got so strong a hold upon him. It is true, that she professed equal love; we shall see how her professions held good. There was a strange lingering of conscience, when, meeting her clandestinely by appointment at Harrogate some months after, he refused to consent to the elopement which she proposed; there was some good left in this corrupted, weak young man, even to the very last of his miserable days. The case presents the reverse of the usual features: the man became the victim; the man's life was blighted, and crushed out of him by suffering, and guilt entailed by guilt; the man's family were stung by keenest shame. The woman—to think of her father's pious name—the blood of honourable families mixed in her veins—her early home, underneath whose roof-tree sat those whose names are held saint-like for their good deeds,—she goes flaunting about to this day in respectable society; a showy woman for her age; kept afloat by her reputed wealth. I see her name in county papers, as one of those who patronize the Christmas balls; and I hear of her in London drawing-rooms. Now let us read, not merely of

the suffering of her guilty accomplice, but of the misery she caused to innocent victims, whose premature deaths may, in part, be laid at her door.' [\[11\]](#)

Mrs. Gaskell further states: 'A few months later the invalid husband of the woman with whom he had intrigued, died. Branwell had been looking forward to this event with guilty hope. After her husband's death, his paramour would be free; strange as it seems, the young man still loved her passionately, and now he imagined the time was come when they might look forward to being married, and live together without reproach or blame. She had offered to elope with him; she had written to him perpetually; she had sent him money—twenty pounds at a time; he remembered the criminal advances she had made; she had braved shame, and her children's menaced disclosures, for his sake; he thought she must love him; he little knew how bad a depraved woman can be.' [\[12\]](#)

As Mrs. Gaskell had formed no conception of the possible state of Branwell's mind, she seems to

have known no reason for doubting the absolute truth of what she had heard; and, with an overweening confidence, and with no deficient expression of righteous indignation, she deals with the episode in this startling manner.

In support of the charges thus made, Mrs. Gaskell refers to the contents of the will of the lady's husband, by which, she says, what property he left to his wife was so left on the condition that she never saw Branwell again; and she adds that, on the death of her husband, the lady sent her coachman to Haworth; for, at the very time when the will was being read, she did not know but that Branwell might be on his way to her. Mrs. Gaskell furthers says that, after the interview with the coachman, Branwell was found utterly prostrated by the intimation that he must never again even see the lady whom he thought he might then marry. [\[13\]](#)

The biographer of Charlotte, having obtained her information from the floating rumours of Haworth, formed an inconsiderate, erroneous, and hasty opinion on this affair and its supposed

consequences. But she found many circumstances in the proceedings of Branwell and his sisters which failed to corroborate her views, and that were, in fact, at variance with what would naturally have been expected had Branwell's misconduct really been of so deep a dye as she states. In order to bring out fully the force of what she here says, Mrs. Gaskell had, previously, as we have seen, in speaking of Charlotte's stay in Brussels eighteen months before, alluded to intelligence from home calculated to distress Charlotte exceedingly with fears respecting Branwell. Yet, in the January of 1844, shortly after her return from Brussels, Charlotte told her friend 'E' that Anne and Branwell were 'both wonderfully valued in their situations.' And again, writing of the year 1845, Mrs. Gaskell says: 'He was so beguiled by this mature and wicked woman, that he went home for his holidays reluctantly, stayed there as short a time as possible, perplexing and distressing them all by his extraordinary conduct—at one time in the highest spirits; at another, in the deepest depression—accusing himself of blackest guilt and treachery,

without specifying what they were; and altogether evincing an irritability of disposition bordering on insanity. Charlotte and her sister suffered acutely from his mysterious behaviour ... an indistinct dread was creeping over their minds that he might turn out their deep disgrace.' [\[14\]](#) And it must be added that, when in the expurgated edition the opening of this passage was omitted, Mrs. Gaskell inserted—following where she ascribes to the sisters an 'indistinct dread,'—these words: 'caused partly by his own conduct, partly by expressions of agonizing suspicion in Anne's letters home.' [\[15\]](#) But we know, from Charlotte's letter to her friend, that, when she had returned home and found Branwell ill, which she says he was often, she was not therefore shocked at first, but, when Anne informed her of the immediate cause of his present illness, she was very greatly shocked, showing clearly enough that Branwell's dismissal and its cause were a complete surprise to her when she heard of them. How, then, could Anne's letters home have contained expressions of 'agonizing suspicion'?

Mrs. Gaskell found it necessary to summarize the

portion of Charlotte's letter which contained these expressions of surprise, and, in her version, significantly enough, the obvious inconsistency is lost. The succeeding part also has suffered mutilation in Mrs. Gaskell's work, Charlotte's allusion to Branwell's 'frantic folly,' and the sentence, 'He promises amendment on his return,' being entirely omitted. Mr. Wemyss Reid, in publishing this letter, points out the circumstance, and says that 'Mrs. Gaskell could not bring herself to speak of such flagrant sins as those of which young Brontë had been guilty under the name of folly, nor could she conceive that there was any possibility of amendment on the part of one who had fallen so low in vice.' [\[16\]](#) And, if we disregard Mrs. Gaskell's view of 'what *should have been*' Charlotte's feelings, and read the letter with the real state of the case before us, we shall at once see that, as Branwell had not fallen low in vice, the term 'frantic folly,' which his sister employed in speaking of his conduct, was precisely that which justly described it.

The simple truth respecting Branwell's conduct is this: he had been too fond of company and had

not escaped its penalty. Doubtless Anne occasionally saw influences upon her brother which she would have wished entirely absent. Moreover he had, as we have seen, become wildly in love. Reluctantly at first, and, from what we know of him, he may, probably, in his latest vacation have accused himself of 'blackest guilt.' But there is reason to believe that on this episode, as on others connected with Branwell Brontë, we have been told not a little of what *must have ensued* from a standpoint of initial error.

Of the principal accusations which Mrs. Gaskell brings against Mrs. ——— I shall have to speak when I come to consider the consequences to Branwell of the final defeat of his hopes; but it may be said here that it is clear the lady never wrote letters to Branwell at all. She carefully avoided doing anything that might implicate her in the matter of Branwell's strange passion, and, so far as any provision of the husband's will, which was dated near the end of the year, is concerned, Branwell Brontë might never have existed. Mrs. Gaskell cannot have seen the document.

If any further evidence of the view Charlotte Brontë took of Branwell's conduct, and of that of the lady whose character has been so much calumniated be needed, her poem entitled 'Preference' is sufficient. We may indeed infer from it that Charlotte herself never believed the stories concerning Mrs. ——— which were in circulation at the time, and that she has left, in this production of her pen, her version of how the circumstances truly stood. The lady is represented in the poem as censuring the person who is making advances to her, and who is addressed as a soldier for whom she has a sisterly regard, while she is devotedly attached to one of whom she speaks in the warmest terms.

'Not in scorn do I reprove thee,
Not in pride thy vows I waive,
But, believe, I could not love thee,
Wert thou prince, and I a slave.'

She then tells him that he is deceiving himself in thinking she has secret affection for him, and that her coldness towards him is assumed. She

appeals forcibly to her own personal bearing as proof that she has no love for him.

'Touch my hand, thou self-deceiver;
Nay—be calm, for I am so;
Does it burn? Does my lip quiver?
Has mine eye a troubled glow?
Canst thou call a moment's colour
To my forehead—to my cheek?
Canst thou tinge their tranquil pallor
With one flattering, feverish streak?'

Declaring that her goodwill for him is sisterly, she thus continues:

'Rave not, rage not, wrath is fruitless,
Fury cannot change my mind;
I but deem the feeling rootless
Which so whirls in passion's wind.
Can I love? Oh, deeply—truly—
Warmly—fondly—but not thee;
And my love is answered duly,
With an equal energy.'

Then she tells him, if he would see his rival, to draw a curtain aside, when he will observe him, seated in a place shaded by trees, surrounded with books, and employing his 'unresting pen.' Here Charlotte places the 'rival' in an alcove, in the grounds of his mansion, privately employing his leisure in the retirement of his home; and makes the lady show her husband to the soldier who addresses her. She says:

'There he sits—the first of men!

Man of conscience—man of reason;

Stern, perchance, but ever just;

Foe to falsehood, wrong, and treason,

Honour's shield and virtue's trust!

Worker, thinker, firm defender

Of Heaven's truth—man's liberty;

Soul of iron—proof to slander,

Rock where founders tyranny.'

She declares that her faith is given, and therefore the person she addresses need not sue; for, while God reigns in earth and heaven, she will be faithful to the man of her heart, to whom she is

immovably devoted; and who is a 'defender of Heaven's truth'—her husband.

No one, perhaps, would be better acquainted than Charlotte with the false and foul calumnies on this head, then circulating through the village; and it is well that she has left, in her poem of 'Preference,' an expression of her feeling as to the affairs which caused so much injurious gossip at the time. Yet, however desirous Charlotte might, be, in this poem, to clear the character of the lady who has been so cruelly aspersed, she appears to have had no mercy on her brother, who had been the principal actor in the drama. The following is the picture of him, in reference to this sad episode, which she puts into the mouth of William Crimsworth in 'The Professor':

'Limited as had yet been my experience of life,' he says, 'I had once had the opportunity of contemplating, near at hand, an example of the results produced by a course of interesting and romantic domestic treachery. No golden halo of fiction was about this example; I saw it bare and real; and it was very loathsome. I saw a mind

degraded by the practice of mean subterfuge, by the habit of perfidious deception, and a body depraved by the infectious influence of the vice-polluted soul. I had suffered much from the forced and prolonged view of this spectacle; those sufferings I did not now regret, for their simple recollection acted as a most wholesome antidote to temptation. They had inscribed on my reason the conviction that unlawful pleasure, trenching on another's rights, is delusive and envenomed pleasure—its hollowness disappoints at the time, its poison cruelly tortures afterwards, its effects deprave for ever.' It is probable that Charlotte would not have wished this passage to be applied literally to her brother; but, unfortunately, this, and similar unguarded declarations, have largely biassed almost all who have written on the lives and literature of the sisters.

Mrs. Gaskell, under threat of ulterior proceedings, on the advice of her friends, published the edition of 1860, omitting the charges referred to, as well as those against Mr. Brontë. She did not, however, allow the effect of her first assumption of guilt, or the moral of the tale, to be lost. She

inserted a few sentences intended to convey to the reader that something of the kind had gone wrong with Branwell in the place where his sister Anne was governess. Under the circumstances, therefore, I have felt it necessary to deal with the subject at large.

It may be remarked here that the indignation of the injured lady knew no bounds, and that she was only dissuaded from carrying the matter to a trial by the earnest desire of her friends, who represented that Mrs. Gaskell could not substantiate her statements, and that, as the book could not therefore be reprinted as it stood, and its circulation was consequently limited, it were better to let the matter rest, rather than incur the wide-spread reports of the newspaper press when the trial should be before the public; and, moreover, that those who knew her did not believe a word of Mrs. Gaskell's unfounded allegations. This had its effect, and the lady fretfully acquiesced. [\[17\]](#)

In Miss Robinson's 'Emily Brontë,' the stories which Charlotte's biographer was compelled to

omit, have been substantially reproduced; and this writer, in supporting similar views to those of Mrs. Gaskell, has found it necessary to quote her version of the letter containing Charlotte's account of Branwell's disgrace, and has also considerably enlarged upon the supposed contents of the letters of Anne. Much diffidence has been felt in dealing with this subject so closely; but, after the discussion of it in the public prints, consequent on the issue of Miss Robinson's book, it is thought the time has come for exposing the groundlessness of the stories. The reader will therefore observe that I have borne this matter in mind throughout the present work.

The distraction that overwhelmed Branwell on his dismissal from his late employment having caused him eleven nights of 'sleepless horror,' his wild attempt to drown his sorrow brought on an attack of delirium tremens. On one of these nights, in all likelihood, suddenly falling asleep, he overturned the candle and set the bedclothes on fire. The smell of burning attracted attention, and the sisters rushed into the room to extinguish the smouldering material. This accident would, doubtless, have

been lost sight of, had it not been for the researches of Miss Robinson, to whom the public is indebted for an account of the circumstance, which closely reminds us of the rescue of Mr. Rochester in 'Jane Eyre,' and of the removal of 'Keeper,' by Emily, from the best bed in which he had settled himself. It will be remembered also that, on the night when Mr. Lockwood stayed at Wuthering Heights, a similar accident befel him, through the candle falling against the books he was trying to read.

On his return from Wales Branwell wrote to his friend Leyland, who had to visit Haworth professionally, pressing him to come to the parsonage. Thus he writes in the midst of his distress. The vision of his hopes had become a haunting picture of misery, the prospect of the lady becoming free to marry him had not arisen to his mind in his confusion; he would never see her again, he would be forgotten; he must communicate with her.

'Haworth, August 4, 1845.

'Dear Sir,

'I need hardly say that I shall be most delighted to see you, as God knows I have a tolerably heavy load on my mind just now, and would look to an hour spent with one like yourself, as a means of at least, temporarily, lightening it.

'I returned yesterday from a week's journey to Liverpool and North Wales, but I found during my absence that, wherever I went, a certain woman robed in black, and calling herself "MISERY," walked by my side, and leant on my arm, as affectionately as if she were my legal wife.

'Like some other husbands, I could have spared her presence.

'Yours most
sincerely,

'P. B. Brontë.'

There are in one or two of Charlotte Brontë's

letters, written during this month, allusions to her brother. She tells us that things are not very bright as regards him, though his health, and consequently his temper, have been somewhat better this last day or two, because he is now '*forced* to abstain.' And again, on the 18th, 'My hopes ebb low indeed about Branwell. I sometimes fear he will never be fit for much. The late blow to his prospects and feelings has quite made him reckless.'

On the 19th, Branwell sends a short note to Leyland, in which he says, 'As to my own affairs, I only wish I could see one gleam of light amid their gloom. You, I hope, are well and cheerful.'

CHAPTER V.

BRANWELL'S PROJECTED NOVEL.

Review of Branwell's past Experiences of Life—

He seeks Relief in Literary Occupation—He Proposes to Write a Three-volume Novel—His Letter on the Subject—One Volume Completed—His Capability of Writing a Novel—His Letter to Mr. Grundy on his Disappointment.

Branwell had now attained his twenty-eighth year. The reader has seen in the early part of this work the intellectual promise of his opening career, the evidences of his genius, his versatility, and his mental power, and has marked the paths by which he, who was expected to be the crowning light of that remarkable family, had been brought, step by step, to the very depths of misery.

During the few short years of his life, Branwell Brontë, having tasted the sweets of a noble ambition, and surrendered himself to the influences of love, had suffered the agonies of his disappointment and disgrace, and was now feeling the very bitterness of despair. Such influences as these, shaking the soul with their tempestuous breath, cast their sad glamour on the imagination;

and he who has felt the spell is impressed thenceforth more deeply with the wondrous story of life, with the struggle of being, and with the fulness of emotion, and has a far deeper insight into the mysteries of human nature. It was in this way that Byron, when he had passed through his greatest misfortunes, and had abandoned for ever the shores of England, was fired with the gloomy glory of 'Manfred' and of 'Cain.' This storm and stress of the feelings, when the imagination receives a higher consciousness, is as the Eddaic struggle of Sigurd with Fafnir, the drinking of the monster's blood, that taught to the dragon-slayer the mystic language of the birds. The reader will see how these influences told on Branwell Brontë, and how sad the voices of the birds were for him; how his muse was inspired with the note of misery, and his longing was for peace alone. There seemed, indeed, to be no hope in those days.

However, there came at times to Branwell Brontë, as there must come to all men in his circumstances, a reaction from the consuming sorrow of despair, a longing for action, for mental

stimulus, to divert his mind from the woe he should never be able to forget. And, with this change in his methods of thought, there grew upon him another feeling, engendered of his broken sympathy with the actions of his kind: he learned to look upon human affairs as a spectator, rather than as one who felt any personal interest in them. It was in this way that his experience seemed to him to have unveiled the hidden springs of the actions of men; and, in recognizing the selfishness of them, he became himself something of a cynic.

Branwell was in this frame of mind when he resolved, soon after a visit to his friend Leyland,—whom he found engaged upon a tomb and recumbent statue of the late Doctor Stephen Beckwith, a benefactor to several public institutions in York, to be erected in the Minster there,—to make an effort to arouse himself. With the desire, then, of finding an absorbing occupation for his mind, by which he might be able to lay the tempest of the heart, the whirlwind of wounded vanity, of injured self-esteem, and of blighted hope, which swept through his mind in hours of reflection, and drove him to distraction or

desperation, he turned, with the resolution of a new-born energy, engendered of despair, to literary composition. He proposed to himself to depict, as best he could, in a fictitious form, and as an ordinary novel, which should extend to three volumes, the different feelings that work in the human soul. The necessary labour which this undertaking involved, gave a stimulus to his ambition, which for a time was sustained; and he evidently hoped that he might yet be able to make a place for himself in the busy world of letters. At this time the novels of his sisters were not in existence, and probably had scarcely been dreamed of. Charlotte had not yet lighted on the volume of verse in the handwriting of Emily, and the literary future of the sisters had still to dawn upon them. Yet Branwell, whose behaviour had given them cause enough for disquietude, and whose sorrows were embittering his mind, had now braced himself up for an object which they had not attempted, and to the accomplishment of which he looked forward with something like confidence. In the following letter to his friend Leyland, he discloses his design; and it is

probable that in this we have almost all the direct light upon it which can be found:—

'Haworth, Sept. 10th, 1845.

'My dear Sir,

'I was certainly sadly disappointed at not having seen you on the Friday you named for your visit, but the cause you allege for not arriving was justifiable with a vengeance. I should have been as cracked as my cast had I entered a room and seen the labour of weeks or months destroyed (apparently—not, I trust, really) in a moment. [\[18\]](#)

'That vexation is, I hope, over; and I build upon your renewed promise of a visit; for nothing cheers me so much as the company of one whom I believe to be a *man*, and who has known care well enough to be able to appreciate the discomfort of another who knows it *too* well.

'Never mind the lines I put into your hands, but come hither with them, and, if they should have been lost out of your pocket on the way, I won't grumble, provided you are present to apologize for the accident.

'I have, since I saw you at Halifax, devoted my hours of time, snatched from downright illness, to the composition of a three-volume *novel*, one volume of which is completed, and, along with the two forthcoming ones, has been really the result of half-a-dozen by-past years of thoughts about, and experience in, this crooked path of life.

'I felt that I must rouse myself to attempt something while roasting daily and nightly over a slow fire, to while away my torments; and I knew that, in the present state of the publishing and reading world, a novel is the most saleable article, so that—where ten pounds would be offered for a work, the production of which would require the utmost stretch of a man's

intellect—two hundred pounds would be a refused offer for three volumes, whose composition would require the smoking of a cigar and the humming of a tune.

'My novel is the result of years of thought; and, if it gives a vivid picture of human feelings for good and evil, veiled by the cloak of deceit which must enwrap man and woman; if it records, as faithfully as the pages that unveil man's heart in "Hamlet" or "Lear," the conflicting feelings and clashing pursuits in our uncertain path through life, I shall be as much gratified (and as much astonished) as I should be if, in betting that I could jump over the Mersey, I jumped over the Irish Sea. It would not be more pleasant to light on Dublin instead of Birkenhead, than to leap from the present bathos of fictitious literature to the firmly-fixed rock honoured by the foot of a Smollett or a Fielding.

'That jump I expect to take when I can model a rival to your noble Theseus, who

haunted my dreams when I slept after seeing him. But, meanwhile, I can try my utmost to rouse myself from almost killing cares, and that alone will be its own reward.

'Tell me when I may hope to see you, and believe me, dear sir,

'Yours,

'P. B. Brontë.'

A spirited sketch in pen-and-ink concludes this letter; it represents a bust of himself thrown down, and the lady of his admiration holding forth her hands towards it with an air of pity, while underneath it is the sentence: 'A cast, cast down, but not cast away!' [\[19\]](#)

We have in this letter an instance of Branwell's general coherency under his disappointment, in which the elegance and freedom of his style of composition are combined with a consequent and logical arrangement of the various parts of his subject; but he cannot help concluding his letter

with a direct allusion to the lady, whom he believes,—all evidence to the contrary notwithstanding,—to love him with undiminished devotion. Under this fascination he still hopes for the prosperity and happiness of which he had before spoken to his friends.

Moreover it will be seen, from Branwell's letter, that he had seriously undertaken, in the midst of sorrow, suffering, and ill-health,—though, I have reason to believe, that he had sketched some part of it during his tutorship—the production of a novel, one volume of which he had completed. He does not seem to have looked upon it as a great mental effort, but rather as the natural outcome of a painful experience, and the proper alleviation of a present misery. Yet he designed to give a vivid picture of human nature; and, with the strength of experience and the consciousness of power, he evidently hoped that it would be a better work than those productions of the day, of whose composition he speaks so lightly. His experience had, indeed, been such as would well enable one of his quick perception to grasp the character, feelings, and motives of those around him. His

knowledge of the country people of the West-Riding was very great; for, sitting, the admired of all observers, in the 'Black Bull,' at Haworth, he had met representatives of all classes of them. By the parlour fire, in the long winter evenings, he had had opportunities enough of entering into the spirit of the people; indeed, his letter to John Brown has shown us how he reviewed some of them. It was not merely for the enjoyment of an hour that he came to their company: he had longed for a glimpse of other life than that lived at the parsonage. And the Yorkshire peasants—whom he nevertheless held at their true value—to those who know their dialect, and can enter into their pursuits, as Branwell did and could, disclose a fund of shrewd observation, a sharp understanding, and a free and natural wit; and they delight in telling the stories of all the country side. But they must be understood before they can be appreciated. Branwell, too, had been a guest at the homesteads of the farmers, in the neighbourhood where he had latterly resided, who were always pleased to see him, when he visited them. But he had had experience of more fiery

emotions than those of peasants; he had longed to know something of the deeper life of London, and had found it, at last, in the company of pugilists and their patrons.

When the mood was upon him, all these varied experiences flowed with voluble eloquence from his lips; and the brightness of his wit and the brilliance of his imagination made him, at such times, a most enjoyable companion. But he delighted above all things, as has been seen, to spend his evenings, when possible, with the little band of literati which, in those times, characterized that district; and, in the society of Storey the poet of Wharfe, James the historian of Bradford, George Searle Phillips, Leyland the sculptor, and others, he found emulation and stimulus to better things. But the uses to which, under such influences, he put his experiences of life, and the colour that was given to them through his maddening misfortunes—so far as his novel is concerned—can probably never be told. His experience in 'this crooked path of life,' during his last half-dozen years, had been sufficiently varied; and an instructive story he could doubtless have

based upon it. But, what became of the volume he wrote, possibly no one can tell; and his intention of writing two more was probably not carried out.

From the following letter which Branwell wrote to Mr. Grundy in the October of 1845, we learn something of the condition of mind under which he must have written; and, from an allusion which it contains, we may, probably, infer that he had abandoned his intention of writing the two other volumes of his novel. [\[20\]](#) He says:

'I fear you will burn my present letter on recognising the handwriting; but if you will read it through, you will perhaps rather pity than spurn the distress of mind which could prompt my communication, after a silence of nearly three (to me) eventful years. While very ill and confined to my room, I wrote to you two months ago, hearing you were resident engineer of the Skipton Railway, to the inn at Skipton. I never received any reply, and as my letter asked only for one day of your society, to ease a very weary mind in the company of a

friend who *always* had what I always wanted, but most want now, *cheerfulness*, I am sure you never received my letter, or your heart would have prompted an answer.

'Since I last shook hands with you in Halifax, two summers ago, my life, till lately, has been one of apparent happiness and indulgence. You will ask, "Why does he complain, then?" I can only reply by showing the under-current of distress which bore my bark to a whirlpool, despite the surface waves of life that seemed floating me to peace. In a letter begun in the spring of 1845 and never finished, owing to incessant attacks of illness, I tried to tell you that I was tutor to the son of ——, a wealthy gentleman whose wife is sister to the wife of ——, M.P. for the county of ——, and the cousin of Lord ——. This lady (though her husband detested me) showed me a degree of kindness which, when I was deeply grieved one day at her husband's conduct,

ripened into declarations of more than ordinary feeling. My admiration of her mental and personal attractions, my knowledge of her unselfish sincerity, her sweet temper, and unwearied care for others, with but unrequited return where most should have been given ... although she is seventeen years my senior, all combined to an attachment on my part, and led to reciprocations which I had little looked for. During nearly three years I had daily "troubled pleasure, soon chastised by fear." Three months since I received a furious letter from my employer, threatening to shoot me if I returned from my vacation, which I was passing at home; and letters from her lady's-maid and physician informed me of the outbreak, only checked by her firm courage and resolution that whatever harm came to her, none should come to me.... I have lain during nine long weeks, utterly shattered in body and broken down in mind. The probability of her becoming free to give me

herself and estate never rose to drive away the prospect of her decline under her present grief. I dreaded, too, the wreck of my mind and body, which, God knows! during a short life have been severely tried. Eleven continuous nights of sleepless horror reduced me to almost blindness; and, being taken into Wales to recover, the sweet scenery, the sea, the sound of music caused me fits of unspeakable distress. You will say, "What a fool!" but if you knew the many causes I have for sorrow, which I cannot even hint at here, you would perhaps pity as well as blame. At the kind request of Mr. Macaulay and Mr. Baines, I have striven to arouse my mind by writing something worthy of being read, but I really cannot do so. Of course you will despise the writer of all this. I can only answer that the writer does the same, and would not wish to live if he did not hope that work and change may yet restore him.

'Apologizing sincerely for what seems like whining egotism, and hardly daring to hint

about the days when, in your company, I could sometimes sink the thoughts which "remind me of departed days," I fear departed never to return,—I remain, etc.'

In this letter we see that Branwell details to Mr. Grundy the story about Mrs. ———, which he was publishing whenever he could obtain a hearing. He speaks, too, of his ill-health, the shattering of body and the breaking down of mind, which at the time prostrated him. Charlotte seems scarcely to have credited Branwell's representations of the bodily condition into which he had fallen; for she says, in one of her letters, a little later, 'Branwell offers no prospect of hope: he professes to be too ill to think of seeking employment.'[\[21\]](#) There are passages of a like tendency in others of Charlotte's letters about this time; but we shall see presently that, whatever might be his condition of health, he was by no means so unsolicitous for employment, or so heedless of the future, as she supposed.

CHAPTER VI.

'REAL REST.'—'PENMAENMAWR.'

'Real Rest'—Comments—Spirit of Branwell and Emily Identical—Letter to Leyland—Branwell Broods on his Sorrows—'Penmaenmawr'—Comments—He still Searches and Hopes for Employment—Charlotte's somewhat Overdrawn Expressions—The Alleged Elopement Proposal—Probable Origin of the Story.

Though Branwell Brontë was so feeble in health that, despite his wishes, he found physical labour impossible, and though the reaction from utter despair—through whose impetus he completed one volume of his novel—had been followed by a condition which led him to think worthy literary work beyond his power, we find him, almost at the same time, writing two of the finest poems which remain from his hand. It has been seen, in

the letter addressed to Mr. Grundy, how he declares that, owing to the state of his mind, he is unable to undertake any literary work worth reading. But we have certain knowledge of an immediate movement of his genius, and that it found expression in verse, which gave a free course to his feelings. In the following poem we have perhaps the most powerful and weird expression of inconsolable sorrow ever penned. A strange calm had now succeeded the storms of feeling its author had passed through.

REAL REST.

'I see a corpse upon the waters lie,
With eyes turned, swelled and sightless, to the
sky,
And arms outstretched to move, as wave on
wave
Upbears it in its boundless billowy grave.
Not time, but ocean, thins its flowing hair;
Decay, not sorrow, lays its forehead bare;
Its members move, but not in thankless toil,

For seas are milder than this world's turmoil;
Corruption robs its lips and cheeks of red,
But wounded vanity grieves not the dead;
And, though those members hasten to decay,
No pang of suffering takes their strength
away.

With untormented eye, and heart, and brain,
Through calm and storm it floats across the
main;

Though love and joy have perished long ago,
Its bosom suffers not one pang of woe;
Though weeds and worms its cherished
beauty hide,

It feels not wounded vanity nor pride;
Though journeying towards some far off
shore,

It needs no care nor gold to float it o'er;
Though launched in voyage for eternity,
It need not think upon what is *to be*;
Though naked, helpless, and companionless,
It feels not poverty, nor knows distress.

'Ah, corpse! if thou couldst tell my aching
mind

What scenes of sorrow thou hast left behind,

How sad the life which, breathing, thou hast
led,
How free from strife thy sojourn with the
dead;
I would assume thy place—would long to be
A world-wide wanderer o'er the waves with
thee!
I have a misery, where thou hast none;
My heart beats, bursting, whilst thine lies like
stone;
My veins throb wild, whilst thine are dead and
dry;
And woes, not waters, dim my restless eye;
Thou longest not with one well loved to be,
And absence does not break a chain with
thee;
No sudden agonies dart through thy breast;
Thou hast what all men covet,—Real Rest.
I have an outward frame, unlike to thine,
Warm with young life—not cold in death's
decline;
An eye that sees the sunny light of Heaven,—
A heart by pleasure thrilled, by anguish riven
—

But, in exchange for thy untroubled calm,
Thy gift of cold oblivion's healing balm,
I'd give my youth, my health, my life to come,
And share thy slumbers in thy ocean tomb.'

Here the poet, his soul longing for freedom from mortality, his crushed and wounded spirit hovering above the salt and restless wave, contemplates the pale and ghastly body that floats thereon, and, holding communion with it, touches in melancholy and beautiful words its isolation and oblivion. Accompanying the dead in its watery wanderings, he sees, with keen sympathy, its utter dis severance from the world it has left, and contrasts with its condition the hopeless sorrow of his own disappointed youth. He delineates, in words of singular power and felicity, this weird and lonely picture; and, as an artist and a poet, paints wildly, but beautifully, the decay of the drowned in the ocean, and of the living, through the effects of long-continued woe. Branwell had loved, indeed, however unfortunately; and the misery of his passion caused him to turn his reflections within upon himself. As with the

'Wandering Jew,' who sees in every rock, in every bush, in every cloud, without hope of alleviation from his abiding woe, the *via crucis* of his suffering Lord—every thought of Branwell's gifted mind, every conception of his fertile brain, every aspect, to him, of ocean, earth, and sky,—was, in one way or other, instinct with his own initial and irrepressible affection. Apart, however, from the illusions respecting the lady of his heart, under which he laboured, and which drove him to madness, there was a tendency to gloom and despondency implanted in his very nature, a disposition of mind in which his sister Emily largely resembled him. To such an extent was this the case that, in her poem of 'The Philosopher,' written in the October of 1845, she not only gives expression to similar weird thoughts and desires, but one might think there had been some interchange of ideas between the two,—that, perhaps, she had read his 'Real Rest,' and wrote the following words in half-censure of its tendency. She is speaking of an enlightening spirit:

'Had I but seen his glorious eye

Once light the clouds that wilder me;
I ne'er had raised this coward cry
To cease to think, and cease to be;
I ne'er had called oblivion blest,
Nor stretching eager hands to death,
Implored to change for senseless rest
This sentient soul, this living breath—
Oh, let me die—that power and will
Their cruel strife may close;
And conquered good and conquering ill
Be lost in one repose!"

It is noteworthy that Charlotte, also, in the second part of her poem 'Gilbert,' has used the incident of a corpse floating upon the waters, which is seen by the unhappy man in his vision, not, indeed, to give him the calm of oblivion, but rather, in contrast to Branwell's poem, to wake in him the pains of sorrow and remorse.

Again, on the 25th of November, 1845, Branwell wrote to Leyland. He could not free himself from the unfortunate ideas which had perverted his understanding, but on every other subject he wrote justly.

'Haworth,
'Bradford, Yorks.

'My dear Sir,

'I send you the enclosed,—and I ought to tell you why I wished anything of so personal a nature to appear in print.

'I have no other way, not pregnant with danger, of communicating with one whom I cannot help loving. Printed lines, with my usual signature, "Northangerland," could excite no suspicion—as my late unhappy employer shrank from the bare idea of my being able to write anything, and had a day's sickness after hearing that Macaulay had sent me a complimentary letter; so *he* won't know the name.

'I sent through a private channel one letter of comfort in her great and agonizing present afflictions, but I recalled it through dread of the consequences of a discovery.

'These lines have only one merit,—that of

really expressing my feelings, while sailing under the Welsh mountain, when the band on board the steamer struck up, "Ye banks and braes!" God knows that, for many different reasons, those feelings were far enough from pleasure.

'I suffer very much from that mental exhaustion which arises from brooding on matters useless at present to think of,—and active employment would be my greatest cure and blessing,—for really, after hours of thoughts which business would have hushed, I have felt as if I could not live, and, if long-continued, such a state will bring on permanent affection of the heart, which is already bothered with most uneasy palpitations.

'I should like extremely to have an hour's sitting with you, and, if I had the chance, I would promise to try not to look gloomy. You said you would be at Haworth ere long, but that "ere" has doubtless changed to "ne'er," so I must wish to get to Halifax

some time to see you.

'I saw Murray's monument praised in the papers, and I trust you are getting on well with Beckwith's, as well as with your own personal statue of living flesh and blood.

'Mine, like your Theseus, has lost its hands and feet, and I fear its head also, for it can neither move, write, nor think as it once could.

'I hope I shall hear from you on John Brown's return from Halifax, whither he has gone.

'I remain, &c.,

'P. B. Brontë.'

The poem enclosed was entitled:

PENMAENMAWR.

'These winds, these clouds, this chill

November storm
Bring back again thy tempest-beaten form
To eyes that look upon yon dreary sky
As late they looked on thy sublimity;
When I, more troubled than thy restless sea,
Found, in its waves, companionship with thee.
'Mid mists thou frownedst over Arvon's
 shore,
'Mid tears I watched thee over ocean's roar,
And thy blue front, by thousand storms laid
 bare,
Claimed kindred with a heart worn down by
 care.
No smile had'st thou, o'er smiling fields
 aspiring,
And none had I, from smiling fields retiring;
Blackness, 'mid sunlight, tinged thy slaty
 brow,
I, 'mid sweet music, looked as dark as thou;
Old Scotland's song, o'er murmuring surges
 borne,
Of "times departed,—never to return,"
Was echoed back in mournful tones from
 thee,

And found an echo, quite as sad, in me;
Waves, clouds, and shadows moved in
restless change,
Around, above, and on thy rocky range,
But seldom saw that sovereign front of thine
Changes more quick than those which passed
o'er mine.

And as wild winds and human hands, at
length,
Have turned to scattered stones the mighty
strength
Of that old fort, whose belt of boulders grey
Roman or Saxon legions held at bay;
So had, methought, the young, unshaken
nerve—

That, when WILL wished, no doubt could
cause to swerve,
That on its vigour ever placed reliance,
That to its sorrows sometimes bade defiance

Now left my spirit, like thyself, old hill,
With head defenceless against human ill;
And, as thou long hast looked upon the wave
That takes, but gives not, like a churchyard

grave,
I, like life's course, through ether's weary
range,
Never know rest from ceaseless strife and
change.

'But, Penmaenmawr! a better fate was thine,
Through all its shades, than that which
darkened mine;
No quick thoughts thrilled through thy gigantic
mass
Of woe for what might be, or is, or was;
Thou hadst no memory of the glorious hour
When Britain rested on thy giant power;
Thou hadst no feeling for the verdant slope
That leant on thee as man's heart leads on
hope;
The pastures, chequered o'er with cot and
tree,
Though thou wert guardian, got no smile from
thee;
Old ocean's wrath their charms might
overwhelm,
But thou could'st still keep thy unshaken realm

While I felt flashes of an inward feeling
As fierce as those thy craggy form revealing
In nights of blinding gleams, when deafening
 roar

Hurls back thy echo to old Mona's shore.
I knew a flower, whose leaves were meant to
 bloom

Till Death should snatch it to adorn a tomb,
Now, blanching 'neath the blight of hopeless
 grief,

With never blooming, and yet living leaf;
A flower on which my mind would wish to
 shine,

If but one beam could break from mind like
 mine.

I had an ear which could on accents dwell
That might as well say "perish!" as "farewell!"
An eye which saw, far off, a tender form,
Beaten, unsheltered, by affliction's storm;
An arm—a lip—that trembled to embrace
My angel's gentle breast and sorrowing face,
A mind that clung to Ouse's fertile side
While tossing—objectless—on Menai's tide!

'Oh, Soul! that draw'st yon mighty hill and me

Into communion of vague unity,
Tell me, can I obtain the stony brow
That fronts the storm, as much unbroken now
As when it once upheld the fortress proud,
Now gone, like its own morning cap of
cloud?

Its breast is stone. Can I have one of steel,
To endure—infrict—defend—yet never feel?
It stood as firm when haughty Edward's word
Gave hill and dale to England's fire and
sword,
As when white sails and steam-smoke
tracked the sea,
And all the world breathed peace, but waves
and me.

'Let me, like it, arise o'er mortal care,
All woes sustain, yet never know despair;
Unshrinking face the grief I now deplore,
And stand, through storm and shine, like
moveless Penmaenmawr!'

These lines are shadowed, like all his other writings, with the grief that day and night

oppressed him. Throughout the theme, his eager yearning for mental quiet is finely expressed; and in it he contrasts the strength and calm of the everlasting hill in its chequered history, and in the ceaseless changes, and the lights and shadows that fall upon it, with his own wild and stormy existence; the lady, whose charms have bewildered his imagination, supplying him with a subject for sorrowful recollections. The giant hill is the mighty image with which his perturbed soul communes, and he implores for strength to enable him to rise superior to his misfortunes, and to face, like 'moveless Penmaenmawr,' the storm, adversity, and ruin that threaten him. But there was little likelihood of the lady seeing these lines.

We find Branwell, at the time, making efforts to obtain some employment that would divert him from useless brooding upon the unfortunate circumstances that destroyed his peace. Scarcely, also, was he less anxious to be away from home, for his presence there had been his greatest humiliation when his family knew of his disgrace; yet, with a method of which he was master, he appears to have kept silence there on the subject

his madness made him so ready to repeat to others. However his sisters Emily and Anne might regard him, Charlotte, at least, looked upon him as one of the fallen. She thus writes to her friend concerning him on the 4th of November, 1845: 'I hoped to be able to ask you to come to Haworth. It almost seemed as if Branwell had a chance of getting employment, and I waited to know the result of his efforts in order to say, dear ——, come and see us. But the place (a secretaryship to a railway committee) is given to another person. Branwell still remains at home; and while *he* is here, *you* shall not come. I am more confirmed in that resolution the more I see of him. I wish I could say one word to you in his favour, but I cannot. I will hold my tongue. We are all obliged to you for your kind suggestion about Leeds; but I think our school schemes are, for the present, at rest.' Again, she says on December 31st of the same year: 'You say well, in speaking of ——, that no sufferings are so awful as those brought on by dissipation; alas! I see the truth of this observation daily proved. —— and —— must have as weary and burdensome a life of it in

waiting upon their unhappy brother. It seems grievous, indeed, that those who have not sinned should suffer so largely.' [\[22\]](#) Charlotte also, writing to Nancy Garrs, who at times assisted at the parsonage, complained of the conduct of her brother; but, later, requested that the letter should be destroyed. Her wish was complied with.

It is, indeed, an almost impossible task to convey to the reader, in the pages of a biography, an idea which will, in an adequate degree, approach the intimate acquaintance which those who lived, saw, and spoke with its subject possessed. And, yet, how necessary is such knowledge to the right understanding of anyone's letters! But with what chance of a true insight, then, shall we read the letters of Branwell Brontë and his sister, if we have an incorrect view of his character?

Miss Robinson has confidently concluded, from certain depreciatory references to himself, in his letters to Mr. Grundy, that, at this period, 'he was manifestly, and by his own confession, too physically prostrate for any literary effort,' with how much accuracy the reader has seen and will

further see. And Mr. Wemyss Reid, with respect to the character of Mr. Brontë, adopting much of Mrs. Gaskell's view of him, and relying upon his children's letters, has produced a portrait of him to which, as he allows, 'some of those who knew him in his later years, including one who is above all others entitled to an opinion on the subject, have objected as being over-coloured.' We must not read, then, too literally all that we find in the letters. It would be folly to take word for word Charlotte's account of her father's anger when she announced to him a proposal of marriage which had been made to her, and which did not accord with his wish; or to believe that 'compassion or relenting is no more to be looked for from papa than sap from firewood,' when we know that he afterwards voluntarily gave way, and sacrificed his own opinion. Nor would it be right to accept any exaggerated confession of Charlotte about herself, in a literal sense. And thus it does not sound well in Mrs. Gaskell, after completing her account of the outward events of Branwell's life, to say, 'All that is to be said more about Branwell Brontë shall be said by Charlotte herself, not by me;' and

then to proceed to extract such portions of the sister's letters as condemned him, and to summarize or repress anything favourable. But Miss Robinson has gone further. She, by extracting a few censures from various letters, apart in date, and leaving out all mention of the chance of the secretaryship in the letter of November the 4th, and the words 'to him' in another, has left her reader under the impression that, after his dismissal, Branwell would not seek employment. 'Such was not his intention,' she says. But Branwell's efforts to obtain the secretaryship, to which Charlotte alludes, are sufficient evidence of a contrary disposition in him; and we shall find that he exerted himself in other directions also.

The failure of the school-keeping has likewise been duly laid to his charge, although, as we have seen, Mr. Brontë's oncoming blindness, in the first place, and the difficulty of procuring pupils at Haworth, were the causes of its failure. To the reason why no attempt was made to open a school elsewhere, I shall have further to allude.

We have been told by Mrs. Gaskell that, some months after Branwell's dismissal, he met the wife of his former employer clandestinely by appointment. 'There was,' she says, 'a strange lingering of conscience, when ... he refused to consent to the elopement which she proposed.'

[\[23\]](#) Miss Robinson, who adopts this report, thinks that the phrase 'herself and estate,' in the letter he sent to Mr. Grundy, throws quite a new light upon Mrs. Gaskell's opinion that there were any remains of conscience left in Branwell Brontë. She says he counselled 'a little longer waiting,'—that he might become possessed of the property, on the death of the lady's husband. But if this incident of the proposed elopement had actually taken place, the delay suggested by Branwell should surely be held as proof that anything positively dishonourable was repulsive to him. The lady, too, had an ample fortune of her own, of which, had she proposed an elopement, she would have informed him. But, if we consider the possible sources from which such a story as this could arise, we may surmise that Mrs. Gaskell,—who first gave it to the public, and on whose authority

it alone remains,—obtained it, with the many other incidents she has published, from the current scandal of Haworth,—where else could she have heard it?—and when we remember that the rumours of the village, though magnified a hundred-fold, had their origin in the infatuated belief and wild statements of Branwell himself, possibly we shall not be wrong if we conclude that it had no foundation whatever in fact. Certainly there is no sufficient evidence for it. And the story is in itself inherently improbable, for it alleges that the lady had been not only regardless of her reputation, but had cast to the winds all thoughts of those pecuniary considerations which, a little later, upon the death of her husband, are stated to have prevented her from marrying in honour the supposed object of her affections.

I have, earlier in this work, spoken of a poem on one of the traditions of Lancashire, by Mr. Peters, entitled: 'Leyland's Daughter,' which is the story of a romantic elopement. Branwell, early in 1846, proposed to write a poem on Morley Hall, in the parish of Leigh, where the elopement took place in the reign of Edward VI., in which he also would

touch upon the incident.

This tradition, and Branwell's intended work on the subject, became often a topic of conversation both at Haworth and Halifax: and, it is not improbable that, some ten years afterwards, when Mrs. Gaskell was searching at the former place for materials for her work, the story of this ancient elopement had become mixed with the stories of the village respecting Branwell and the lady of his late employer, and thus, with them, was ready for Mrs. Gaskell's hand, additions having been made as to time and place.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SISTERS' POEMS AND NOVELS.—BRANWELL'S LITERARY OCCUPATIONS.

The Sisters as Writers of Poetry—They Decide to Publish—Each begins a Novel—The Spirit

under which the Work was Undertaken—
'The Professor'—'Agnes Grey'—'Wuthering
Heights'—Branwell's Condition—A Touching
Incident—'Epistle from a Father to a Child in
her Grave'—Letter with Sonnet—Publication
of the Sisters' Poems.

If Branwell Brontë had devoted himself to literature under the impulse of his misfortune, his sisters were not long unoccupied ere they also entered upon its pursuit. 'One day, in the autumn of 1845,' says Charlotte, 'I accidentally lighted on a MS. volume of verse in my sister Emily's handwriting.' The elder sister was not surprised, knowing that the younger could and did write verse; but she thought these were no common effusions. 'To my ear,' she says, 'they had also a peculiar music—wild, melancholy, and elevating. My sister Emily was not a person of demonstrative character, nor one on the recesses of whose mind and feelings even those nearest and dearest to her could, with impunity, intrude unlicensed; it took hours to reconcile her to the discovery I had made, and days to persuade her

that such poems merited publication.' Charlotte Brontë here grasped, with unflinching precision, the very secret spell which we find in Emily's poetry; the strange, wild, weird voice, with which it speaks to us, spoke first of all to her, and she felt the heather-scented breath, even as we do, of the moorland air on which its music was borne. Anne also produced verses, which had 'a sweet, sincere pathos of their own;' and the three sisters, believing, after anxious deliberation, that they might get their respective productions accepted for publication in one volume, set on foot inquiries on the subject, and now adopted the pseudonyms of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell, which were afterwards to become so famous. It was not, however, to be expected that the effusions of inexperienced and unknown writers would be of such value as to induce any publisher to take them on his own risk. Indeed, Miss Brontë says 'the great puzzle lay in the difficulty of getting answers of any kind from the publishers to whom we applied.' She wrote to Messrs. Chambers, of Edinburgh, asking advice, and received a brief and business-like reply, upon which the sisters

acted, and at last made way.

On the 28th of January, 1846, Charlotte, as we have been informed, wrote to Messrs. Aylott and Jones, asking if they would publish a one-volume, octavo, of poems; if not at their own risk, on the authors' account. Messrs. Aylott and Jones did not hesitate to accept the latter proposal.

It must have been when the sisters became aware that publishers would not accept the poetry of unknown writers on any other terms, that they turned their thoughts to prose composition. Branwell, in his dire distress, had fixed his attention on the writing of a three-volume novel, principally as a refuge from mental disquiet; but his sisters, now, with very different feelings, each set to work on a one-volume tale. It had occurred to them, we are told, that by novel writing money was to be made. They were, in fact, influenced by precisely the view of the profit to be derived from fiction which Branwell had propounded in his remarkable letter to his friend Leyland. 'Ill-success,' says Charlotte, 'failed to crush us: the mere effort to succeed had given a wonderful zest

to existence; it must be pursued. We each set to work on a prose tale: Ellis Bell produced "Wuthering Heights," Acton Bell, "Agnes Grey," and Currer Bell also wrote a narrative in one volume.'

The business-like way in which the sisters went about their novel writing, forbids us to believe that they brooded very much on the conduct of their brother when the literary fervour was upon them; but Miss Robinson leads her readers to think that his character and failings had much to do with the tone which their works assumed. Writing under this belief, and with this intention,—as might have been expected,—she has found it necessary to paint every circumstance relating to him, and the inmates of the parsonage, in the darkest colours, and often has arrived at conclusions widely different from the actual facts. Moreover this writer, in supporting her views, has fallen into the serious error of placing the event which completed Branwell's disappointment, and its consequences to him, four months earlier than they occurred.

The novels which the sisters wrote under the influence of these troubles do not, indeed, bear any marked traces of them. 'The Professor,' Charlotte's story, which was not published until long after, is the direct outcome of her personal experiences in Brussels, and the few shadows that one finds in it are the record of such troubles as she had there. In this book, Currer Bell describes the life of endeavour, which seemed to her the most honourable, the treading of those paths in the outer world whose pleasures and pains she had found so keen. Already, in the March of 1845, she had written to a friend telling her that she was no longer happy at Haworth, though it was her duty to remain there. 'There was a time when Haworth was a very pleasant place to me; it is not so now. I feel as if we were all buried here. I long to travel; to work; to live a life of action.' Thus 'The Professor' is the story of the work and of the life of action for which the author herself was pining. William Crimsworth, neglected by his rich relations, cut off by his brutal brother, seeks his fortune in Brussels, and obtains a place as professor of English in a school there. He leads a

life that Charlotte knows well; he is in the place she has learned to love; and he describes, with close observation, the character and the routine to which she is so well accustomed. Pelet, his master, is an original, as Paul Emanuel is, and Zoraïde Reuter is the prototype of Madame Beck. These characters are forcibly conceived, as is that of Mademoiselle Henri; but the book bears the traces of a novice's hand. Thus, how unnatural does the proposal which Crimsworth makes to Frances read to us, where, while asking her to be his wife, demanding of her what regard she has for him, he says not a word of his own devotion to her; and where, even when she grants him all he has been hoping for so long, his sole remark is, 'Very well, Frances!' But a stronger point of interest for us in the book is the spirit which moves Crimsworth in his endeavours, where he struggles with might and main, just as Charlotte herself wished to do, for a competency; and there is the school, too, which his wife designs and establishes, the very pattern of that which was in Charlotte's own mind. It is instructive and singular that in this book we find Crimsworth suffering

from the hypochondria which beset its author, and that, too, at the time when he should have been happiest.

'Man,' he says, 'is ever clogged with his mortality, and it was my mortal nature which now faltered and plained; my nerves, which jarred and gave a false sound, because the soul, of late rushing headlong to an aim, had over-strained the body's comparative weakness. A horror of great darkness fell upon me; I felt my chamber invaded by one I had known formerly, but had thought for ever departed. I was temporarily a prey to hypochondria. She had been my acquaintance, nay, my guest, once before in boyhood; I had entertained her at bed and board for a year; for that space of time I had her to myself in secret; she lay with me, she ate with me, she walked out with me, showing me nooks in woods, hollows in hills, where we could sit together, and where she could drop her drear veil over me, and so hide sky and sun, grass and green tree; taking me entirely to her death-cold bosom, and holding me with arms of bone.' This was the phantom that visited Charlotte also. Of the effect of her

brother's conduct on her I have found but two passages in 'The Professor,'—that which I have quoted respecting the youth of Victor Crimsworth earlier in this volume, and that, in Chapter xx., where William Crimsworth leaves Pelet's house lest a 'practical modern French novel' should be in process beneath its roof. It was Charlotte's design, in writing 'The Professor,' to lend it no charm of romance. Her hero was to work his way through life, and to find no sudden turn to endow him with wealth, for he was to earn every shilling he possessed, and he was not even to marry a beautiful girl or a lady of rank in the end. 'In the sequel, however,' says Charlotte, 'I find that publishers in general scarcely approved of this system, but would have liked something more imaginative and poetical;' and for this reason, probably, the book did not find a publisher so soon as 'Agnes Grey,' and 'Wuthering Heights,' which were sent from the parsonage with it.

'Agnes Grey,' Anne Brontë's story, like 'The Professor,' is the picture of things its author had known, painted almost as she saw them. Anne's experience as a governess had made her

acquainted with certain phases of life, which she could not but reproduce. Hence Agnes Grey is thrown into the sphere of the careless and selfish family of the Bloomfields; and afterwards, with the Murrays at Horton Lodge, she sees a kind of personal character and social life which, on account of its coldness and worldliness, greatly repelled Anne Brontë, with her warm and sympathetic nature. She teaches the same lesson of the folly of *mariages de convenance*, and of the wrong of subjecting the affections, and bartering happiness for the sake of worldly position, which she afterwards dwells upon more strongly in 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.' It is in this fictitious parallel of Anne Brontë's own experience, if anywhere in her writings, that we might expect to find some reflection of the recent history of her brother's fall. Mr. Reid has asserted that this formed the dark turning-point in her life, for 'living under the same roof with him when he went astray,' she 'was compelled to be a closer and more constant witness of his sins and his sufferings than either Charlotte or Emily.' Her letters home, it has been stated, conveyed the

news of her dark forebodings. But, all the same, the story she wrote, almost under the shadow of her brother's disgrace, is the simple, straightforward, humorous narrative of the gentle and pious Anne Brontë, revealing not so much as a suspicion of vice or thought of evil; and, in this respect, it presents a contrast to her second work. There is evidence that when the sisters wrote their novels they had already attributed monomania to Branwell, and could thus explain his history for themselves. It was not in the nature of 'Agnes Grey' to be successful as a novel, but we find in it that Anne possessed a faculty which scarcely appears in Charlotte's writings,—that of humour. Look, for instance, at the way in which she sketches so forcibly, and with such droll perception, the character of the youthful Bloomfields, and, afterwards, of Miss Matilda Murray, with her equine propensities and masculine tastes.

'Wuthering Heights,' the work which Emily Brontë sent from the parsonage at the same time, incomparably finer in its powers than either 'The Professor' or 'Agnes Grey,' is a dramatic story of

passion and tragic energy that astonished the world,—and with which it has been said Branwell's life in those days had much concern. Inferentially, it is contended that, without the darkening effect on her understanding of Branwell's misfortunes, without the neighbourhood of the 'brother of set purpose drinking himself to death out of furious thwarted passion for a mistress he might not marry,' Emily Brontë could not have conceived it. It will, then, perhaps be better to defer the study of Emily's production till something more has been said of the period in which it was written; and until some new light has been thrown upon Branwell's character and career, and upon the anachronistic improprieties of previous writers.

Mrs. Gaskell passes over the period in which the sisters betook themselves to novel writing with little comment. But she keeps in remembrance the presence of Branwell while their literary labours continued,—'the black shadow of remorse lying over one in their home.' What it was that the biographer of Charlotte supposed stung Branwell's conscience is well-known; but, if there

had been this cause for it in one of a naturally remorseful disposition, as his was, we must have met with some expression of it in his letters or poems, for

'The Mind, that broods o'er guilty woes,
Is like the Scorpion girt by fire.'

Yet, perhaps, one of the most significant points to be observed in Branwell's writings, and in studying his conduct, is the absence of any such remorse. He encouraged himself—after the first shock of his disappointment—with the hope that time would bring him the happiness he wished; and, as some believe, with good and sufficient reason. He was unhappy when he thought of the supposed ill-health and sufferings of the lady.

It is noteworthy that something inconsequent, in putting down Branwell's conduct entirely to remorse in this way, was the feature of Mrs. Gaskell's work, to which so great an analyzer of motives as George Eliot, as shown by her letters published quite recently, took exception, and

If we believe Branwell to have been subject to hallucination, we may then, perhaps, gain an idea of the true cause of the wretchedness he endured when he fell back on his own reflections. His life had been one of severe disappointment. Those early aims in art, for which he had spent so much preparation, and from which he hoped so much, had fallen away before him; his first efforts as usher and tutor had come to nothing; then followed the lapse which ended his stay with the railway company; and, lastly, the infatuation which had seized him in his late employment, with its vision of future opulence, and rest from all former change and trouble, ending in dismissal, distraction, and disgrace. All these things, rushing back upon his mind in moments of reflection, were more than he could bear, and he sought, in various ways, some honourable to him, to divert himself from the subject, but sometimes in a manner that gave cause for complaint at home, and resulted in moodiness and irritability of temper. On the other hand, he seems to have felt himself aggrieved by a want of sympathy on the

part of his family in sufferings they did not comprehend.

Mr. George Searle Phillips, with whom Branwell became acquainted at Bradford, and who visited him at Haworth, says that he complained sometimes of the way in which he was treated at home; and, as an instance, relates the following:

'One of the Sunday-school girls, in whom he and all his house took much interest, fell very sick, and they were afraid she would not live. "I went to see the poor little thing," he said; "sat with her half-an-hour, and read a psalm to her, and a hymn at her request. I felt very like praying with her too," he added, his voice trembling with emotion; "but, you see, I was not good enough. How dare I pray for another, who had almost forgotten how to pray for myself! I came away with a heavy heart, for I felt sure she would die, and went straight home, where I fell into melancholy musings. I wanted somebody to cheer me. I often do, but no kind word finds its way even to my ears, much less to my heart. Charlotte observed my depression, and asked what ailed me. So I told her. She looked at

me with a look I shall never forget—if I live to be a hundred years old—which I never shall. It was not like her at all. It wounded me as if some one had struck me a blow in the mouth. It involved ever so many things in it. It was a dubious look. It ran over me, questioning, and examining, as if I had been a wild beast. It said, 'Did my ears deceive me, or did I hear aright?' And then came the painful, baffled expression, which was worse than all. It said, 'I wonder if that's true?' But, as she left the room, she seemed to accuse herself of having wronged me, and smiled kindly upon me, and said, 'She is my little scholar, and I will go and see her.' I replied not a word. I was too much cut up. When she was gone, I came over here to the 'Black Bull,' and made a note of it in sheer disgust and desperation. Why could they not give me some credit when I was trying to be good?"

[\[25\]](#)

At the beginning of March, Charlotte returned from a visit to a friend, and we hear that she found it very forced work to address her brother when she went into the room where he was; but he took no notice, and made no reply; he was stupefied;

she had heard that he had got a sovereign while she was away, on pretence of paying a pressing debt, and had changed it, at a public-house, with the expected result.

Again Charlotte says, on March 31st, 1846: 'I am thankful papa continues pretty well, though often made very miserable by Branwell's wretched conduct. *There*—there is no change but for the worse.'

At this time Branwell wrote the following beautiful ode, somewhat incomplete in its expression, yet characteristic of his genius, which seems to have been inspired by the outcast feelings of which he spoke to Mr. Phillips, and to contain some reproach to those who thought him deficient in natural affection. It bears date April 3rd, 1846:

EPISTLE FROM A FATHER TO A CHILD IN HER GRAVE.

'From Earth,—whose life-reviving April
showers

Hide withered grass 'neath Springtide's herald
flowers,
And give, in each soft wind that drives her
rain,
Promise of fields and forests rich again,—
I write to thee, the aspect of whose face
Can never change with altered time or place;
Whose eyes could look on India's fiercest
wars
Less shrinking than the boldest son of Mars;
Whose lips, more firm than Stoic's long ago,
Would neither smile with joy nor blanch with
woe;
Whose limbs could sufferings far more firmly
bear
Than mightiest heroes in the storms of war;
Whose frame, nor wishes good, nor shrinks
from ill,
Nor feels distraction's throb, nor pleasure's
thrill.

'I write to thee what thou wilt never read,
For heed me thou *wilt not*, howe'er may
bleed
The heart that many think a worthless stone,

But which oft aches for some belovéd one;
Nor, if that life, mysterious, from on high,
Once more gave feeling to thy stony eye,
Could'st thou thy father know, or feel that he
Gave life and lineaments and thoughts to thee;
For when thou died'st, thy day was in its
dawn,
And night still struggled with Life's opening
morn;
The twilight star of childhood, thy young days
Alone illumined, with its twinkling rays,
So sweet, yet feeble, given from those dusk
skies,
Whose kindling, coming noontide prophecies,
But tells us not that Summer's noon can
shroud
Our sunshine with a veil of thunder-cloud.

'If, when thou freely gave the life, that ne'er
To thee had given either hope or fear,
But quietly had shone; nor asked if joy
Thy future course should cheer, or grief
annoy;

'If then thoud'st seen, upon a summer sea,

One, once in features, as in blood, like thee,
On skies of azure blue and waters green,
Melting to mist amid the summer sheen,
In trouble gazing—ever hesitating
'Twixt miseries each hour new dread creating,
And joys—whate'er they cost—still doubly
 dear,
Those "troubled pleasures soon chastised by
 fear;"
If thou *had'st* seen him, thou would'st ne'er
 believe
That thou had'st yet known what it was to
 live!

 'Thine eyes could only see thy mother's
 breast;
Thy feelings only wished on that to rest;
That was thy world;—thy food and sleep it
 gave,
And slight the change 'twixt it and childhood's
 grave.
Thou saw'st this world like one who, prone,
 reposes,
Upon a plain, and in a bed of roses,
With nought in sight save marbled skies

above,
Nought heard but breezes whispering in the
grove:
I—thy life's source—was like a wanderer
breasting
Keen mountain winds, and on a summit
resting,
Whose rough rocks rose above the grassy
mead,
With sleet and north winds howling overhead,
And Nature, like a map, beneath him spread;
Far winding river, tree, and tower, and town,
Shadow and sunlight, 'neath his gaze marked
down
By that mysterious hand which graves the plan
Of that drear country called "The Life of
Man."

'If seen, men's eyes would loathing shrink
from thee,
And turn, perhaps, with no disgust to me;
Yet thou had'st beauty, innocence, and smiles,
And now hast rest from this world's woes and
wiles,
While I have restlessness and worrying care,

So sure, thy lot is brighter, happier far.

'So let it be; and though thy ears may never
Hear these lines read beyond Death's
darksome river,
Not vainly from the borders of despair
May rise a sound of joy that thou art freed
from care!'

On the 6th of April of this year, Charlotte wrote to Messrs. Aylott & Jones, informing them that 'the Messrs. Bell' were preparing for the press a work of fiction, consisting of three distinct and unconnected tales, which might be published either together, as a work of three volumes of the ordinary novel size, or separately, as single volumes. It was not their intention to publish these at their own expense, and they wished to know if Messrs. Aylott would be likely to undertake the work, if approved.

The novels must have been well on towards completion before the sisters ventured on these inquiries. The firm thus addressed kindly offered advice, of which Charlotte gladly availed herself

to ask some questions. These were respecting the difficulty which unknown authors find in obtaining assistance from publishers; and Charlotte has indeed informed us that the three tales were going about among them 'for the space of a year and a half.' But 'Wuthering Heights' and 'Agnes Grey' at last found acceptance in the early summer of 1847.

A friendly compact had been made between Branwell and Leyland that the latter should model a medallion of his friend, and that Branwell should write the poem 'Morley Hall,'—to which I have had occasion above to allude—a subject in which the sculptor was much interested. Shortly after his sister made the inquiries from Messrs. Aylott, Branwell visited Halifax to sit for his medallion; and, on the 28th of April, he wrote the following letter to his friend:—

'Haworth, Bradford,
'Yorks.

'My dear Sir,

'As I am anxious—though my return for your kindness will be like giving a sixpence for a sovereign lent—to do my best in my intended lines on Morley, I want answers to the following questions.... If I learn these facts, I'll do my best, but in all I try to write I desire to stick to probabilities and local characteristics.

'I cannot, without a smile at myself, think of my stay for three days in Halifax on a business which need not have occupied three hours; but, in truth, when I fall back *on* myself, I suffer so much wretchedness that I cannot withstand any temptation to get *out* of myself—and for that reason, I am prosecuting enquiries about situations suitable to me, whereby I could have a voyage abroad. The quietude of home, and the inability to make my family aware of the nature of most of my sufferings, makes me write:

'Home thoughts are not with me,
Bright, as of yore;

Joys are forgot by me,
Taught to deplore!
My home has taken rest
In an afflicted breast,
Which I have often pressed,
But may no more.

'Troubles never come alone—and I have some little troubles astride the shoulders of the big one.

'Literary exertion would seem a resource; but the depression attendant on it, and the almost hopelessness of bursting through the barriers of literary circles, and getting a hearing among publishers, make me disheartened and indifferent, for I cannot write what would be thrown unread into a library fire. Otherwise, I have the materials for a respectably sized volume, and, if I were in London personally, I might, perhaps, try —— ——, a patronizer of the sons of rhyme; though I daresay the poor man often smarts for his liberality in publishing hideous trash. As I know that,

while here, I might send a manuscript to London, and say good-bye to it, I feel it folly to feed the flames of a printer's fire. So much for egotism!

'I enclose a horribly ill-drawn daub done to while away the time this morning. I meant it to represent a very rough figure in stone.

'When all our cheerful hours seem gone
for ever,
All lost that caused the body or the
mind
To nourish love or friendship for our
kind,
And Charon's boat, prepared, o'er
Lethe's river
Our souls to waft, and all our thoughts
to sever
From what was once life's Light; still
there may be
Some well-loved bosom to whose
pillow we
Could heartily our utter self deliver;
And if, toward her grave—Death's

dreary road—
Our Darling's feet should tread, each
step by her
Would draw our own steps to the same
abode,
And make a festival of sepulture;
For what gave joy, and joy to us had
owed,
Should death affright us from, when he
would her restore?

'Yours most
sincerely,

'P. B. Brontë.'

The sketch, referred to in this letter, is in Indian-ink, and is of a female figure, with clasped hands, streaming hair, and averted face. We need not entertain a doubt as to whom it is intended to represent. It is inscribed, in Spanish, 'Nuestra Señora de la Pena'—Our Lady of Grief—which also appears on a headstone in the sketch.

The sonnet, which concludes this letter to

Leyland, is beautiful as it is sad, and not only possesses the musical cadences, and completeness of theme, so essential in this mode of expression, but exhibits the high culture of Branwell's mind, and the direction in which the irrepressible emotions of his heart are moved.

Branwell, in this communication, makes no further mention of his novel. Yet the experience of his sisters with their poems had only confirmed the judgment he expressed six months before, that no pecuniary advantage was to be obtained by publishing verse. The sisters had expended, on their little volume, over thirty pounds; but they valued it rightly as an effort to succeed. It was issued from the press early in May.

Charlotte had conducted the negotiations with the publishers in a very business-like way. She had directed them as to the copies to be sent for review, and as to the advertisements, on which she wished to expend little. The book appeared, and the world took little note of it: it was scarcely mentioned anywhere; but the sisters at Haworth waited patiently, and they were not dismayed that

they waited in vain; for they had new-born hope in their other literary venture of the three prose stories. 'The book,' says Charlotte of the Poems, 'was printed: it is scarcely known, and all of it that merits to be known are the poems of Ellis Bell. The fixed conviction I held, and hold, of the worth of these poems has not indeed received the confirmation of much favourable criticism; but I must retain it notwithstanding.'

In his letter Branwell expresses himself as still anxious for employment; and wise in the direction in which he seeks it. A total change of scene and circumstance would have been, at this time, his best cure and greatest blessing. Unhappily, he failed in the attempt; and we find him again writing to Mr. Grundy, inquiring for some kind of occupation.

CHAPTER VIII.

DESPONDENCY.—

BRANWELL'S LETTERS.

Death of Branwell's late Employer—Branwell's Disappointment—His Letters—His Delusion—Leyland's Medallion of Him—Mr. Brontë's Blindness—Branwell's Statement to Mr. Grundy in Reference to 'Wuthering Heights'—The Sisters Relinquish the Intention of Opening a School.

An event occurred, in the early summer of 1846, which plunged Branwell into a despair, wilder, and more distracting than the one from which he had partially recovered. This resulted from the death of his late employer. No doubt, during the interval which had elapsed between his dismissal from his tutorship, and the event last named, he had encouraged himself, it might be unconsciously for the most part, with the hope that, on the death of her husband, the lady on whom he doted would marry him. In this frame of mind, when his illusion was intensified by the clearance of the path before him, and his self-control unbridled, it may not be a subject of wonder, if he became

troublesome to the inmates of the dwelling afflicted by death.

The following story, with variations, has been told as having reference to some actual or intended act of indiscretion of Branwell's at the time. It has been said that, at this juncture, a messenger was sent over to Haworth by Mrs. —, forbidding Branwell 'ever to see her again, as, if he did, she would forfeit her fortune.' [26] It will be seen shortly that no such provision was made in her husband's will, and that the fortune she had secured to her could not be forfeited by any such act of Branwell's. The whole story, therefore, to which Mrs. Gaskell and Miss Robinson have devoted so much space may well be discredited. But Mrs. Gaskell says absolutely that Mrs. — 'despatched *a* servant in hot haste to Haworth. He stopped at the "Black Bull," and a messenger was sent up to the parsonage for Branwell. He came down, &c.' [27] Miss Robinson, twenty-five years later, amplifies the story. She says: '*two* men came riding to the village post haste. They sent for Branwell, and when he arrived, in a great state of excitement, one of the riders dismounted

and went with him into the "Black Bull." [28]
Without inquiring into Branwell's excitement, or into the variations in the two accounts—for there is but one point in the story on which the two authors are perfectly agreed, *viz.*, that Branwell, on the occasion, 'bleated like a calf!'—there can be little doubt that this case, on such evidence, could not get upon its legs before any country jury impanelled to try petty causes. But Branwell himself, in his letter to Mr. Grundy, given below, says the coachman *came* to *see* him, not that the lady *sent* him; and we may justly infer—if ever he came at all—that he come on his own account, having been personally acquainted with Branwell when he was tutor at ——. But, can it be believed that, supposing Mrs. —— to have been enamoured of Branwell, as asserted, she could find no other confidant than her 'coachman,' as a means of communicating her sorrows and lamentations to the distracted object of her devotion? There is, in this story, the inconsistency of madness. And it must be borne in mind that the other stories, relating to Branwell at the time of his tutorship at ——, which appear to have so much

interested the biographers of Charlotte and Emily, have their paternity at Haworth, and are not the more trustworthy on that account.

I regret to trouble the reader still further with the errors of fact, and the exaggerated statements into which Mrs. Gaskell has fallen respecting this event. She says of Mrs. ———: '*Her husband had made a will, in which what property he left her was bequeathed solely on the condition that she should never see Branwell Brontë again.*'

[\[29\]](#) (The Italics are my own.) Mrs. Gaskell's postulations concerning this will are quite as erroneous as that she made in reference to Miss Branwell's, so far as it related to her nephew. Indeed, like her other allegations respecting this most painful epoch of Branwell's life, she derived the information on which they were based, more from hearsay than from respectable or documentary evidence. It is clear she never saw the wills about which she speaks with so much assurance.

Mrs. ———, by virtue of an indenture and a certain marriage settlement, was put into possession of an

income that would, after her husband's death, have enabled her to live for the term of her life with Branwell in comparative plenty. To his wife, Mr. —, in addition to this, left the interest arising from his real and personal estate. She was also principal trustee, executor, and guardian of his children. Moreover, he enjoined upon her co-trustees always to regard the wishes and interests of his wife, and to do nothing without consulting her about the administering of his affairs. But all this—and it is quite usual—was to continue only during her widowhood; and this common arrangement, let it be borne in mind, was no more directed against Branwell than anyone else. What then, it may well be asked, becomes of Mrs. Gaskell's assertion that the property left to Mrs. — was bequeathed solely on the condition that 'she should never see Branwell Brontë again'? Whatever Mrs. Gaskell and her followers may have asserted respecting Mr. —'s will, it was made without the slightest reference to Branwell, who himself misconceived its character, and whose very existence is unknown to it, its provisions being made without the most distant

allusion to the affair that worried the unfortunate tutor day and night.

If the widow's love for Branwell had not been a mere figment of his wounded humanity, but the real affection which he fervently believed it to be, she had now the opportunity, with a sufficient income for the residue of her days, of enjoying with him an honourable and peaceful life. But the affection that makes sacrifices light, where they present themselves, was not there to call for them on behalf of Branwell, even had they now been needed. Moreover, there is no evidence worth the name that Mrs. ——— ever committed the acts in relation to him attributed to her; on the contrary, the sincere affection and touching reliance on his wife, manifested throughout his will, is proof enough that her husband had had no cause to call her fidelity in question. It is, indeed, true that, while the lady's reputation was unblemished in the wide circle of her friends in the neighbourhood of her residence, she was being traduced, misrepresented, and belied at Haworth and its vicinity alone. This was all known to Charlotte Brontë when she wrote her poem of 'Preference.'

The state of Branwell's mind, and the extent of his hallucinations under their last phase, may be observed in the following letters, written in the month of June, 1846, the first being to Mr. Grundy. [\[30\]](#)

'Haworth, Bradford,
'York.

'Dear Sir,

'I must again trouble you with—' (Here comes another prayer for employment, with, at the same time, a confession that his health alone renders the wish all but hopeless.) Subsequently he says, 'The gentleman with whom I have been is dead. His property is left in trust for the family, provided I do not see the widow; and if I do, it reverts to the executing trustees, with ruin to her. She is now distracted with sorrows and agonies; and the statement of her case, as given by her coachman, who has come to see me at Haworth, fills me with inexpressible grief. Her mind is

distracted to the verge of insanity, and mine is so wearied that I wish I were in my grave.

'Yours very
sincerely,

'P. B. Brontë.'

He also wrote to Leyland in great distraction.

'I should have sent you "Morley Hall" ere now, but I am unable to finish it at present, from agony to which the grave would be far preferable. Mr. —— is *dead*, and he has left his widow in a dreadful state of health.... Through the will, she is left quite powerless. The executing trustees' (the principal one of whom, as we have seen, was the very lady whose hopeless love for him he was deploring) 'detest me, and one declares that, if he sees me, he will shoot me.

'These things I do not care about, but I do

care for the life of the one who suffers even more than I do....

'You, though not much older than myself, have known life. I now know it, with a vengeance—for four nights I have not slept—for three days I have not tasted food—and, when I think of the state of her I love best on earth, I could wish that my head was as cold and stupid as the medallion which lies in your studio.

'I write very egotistically, but it is because my mind is crowded with one set of thoughts, and I long for one sentence from a friend.

'What shall I *do*? I know not—I am too hard to die, and too wretched to live. My wretchedness is not about castles in the air, but about stern realities; my hardihood lies in bodily vigour; but, dear sir, my mind sees only a dreary future, which I as little wish to enter on as could a martyr to be bound to a stake.

'I sincerely trust that you are quite well, and hope that this wretched scrawl will not make me appear to you a worthless fool, or a thorough bore.

'Believe me, yours
most sincerely,

'P. B. Brontë.'

With this letter was enclosed a pen-and-ink sketch of Branwell bound to the stake, his wrists chained together, and surrounded by flames and smoke. The rigidity of the muscles, the fixed expression of the face, and the manifest beginning of pain are well portrayed. Underneath the drawing, in a constrained hand, is written, 'Myself.'

Again he writes to Leyland a letter in which he dwells on his unavailing grief, and vividly points out its effects upon him. He says, alluding to the lady of his distracted thoughts, 'Well, my dear sir, I have got my finishing stroke at last, and I feel stunned into marble by the blow.

'I have this morning received a long, kind, and faithful letter from the medical gentleman who attended —— in his last illness, and who has since had an interview with one whom I can never forget.

'He knows me *well*, and pities my case most sincerely.... It's hard work for me, dear sir; I would bear it, but my health is so bad that the body seems as if it could not bear the mental shock.... My appetite is lost, my nights are dreadful, and having nothing to do makes me dwell on past scenes,—on her own self—her own voice—her person—her thoughts—till I could be glad if God would take me. In the next world I could not be worse than I am in this.'

On June the 17th, Charlotte writes:

'Branwell declares that he neither can nor will do anything for himself; good situations have been offered him, for which, by a fortnight's work, he might have qualified himself, but he will do nothing except drink and make us all wretched.'[\[31\]](#)

It would seem that the sisters were unaware of the

depth of his present misery, and in part misunderstood the disturbed condition of their brother's mind at this juncture. But Branwell, although suffering great mental prostration under the infliction of any sudden and unexpected disappointment, was possessed of considerable recuperative power; and, after a period of brooding melancholy over his woes, he appeared to take renewed interest in the events that were passing around him. This seems to have been the case even under his late circumstances; there was, in the depth of his own heart, a woe from which he endeavoured to escape by engaging in the pursuits and pleasures of his friends.

On the 3rd of July, having, to all appearance, somewhat recovered from this disappointment, Branwell wrote to his friend the sculptor:

'Dear Sir,

'John Brown told me that you had a relievo of my very wretched self, framed in your studio.

'If it be a *duplicate*, I should like the carrier to bring it to Haworth; not that I care a fig for it, save from regard for its maker,—but my sisters ask me to try to obtain it; and I write in obedience to them.

'I earnestly trust that you are heartier than I am, and I promise to send you "Morley Hall" as soon as dreary days and nights will give me leave to do so.

'Believe me,

'Yours most
sincerely,

'P. B. Brontë.'

This was a life-size medallion of him, head and shoulders, which Leyland had modelled. The work was in very high relief, and the likeness was perfect. It was inserted in a deep oval recess, lined with crimson velvet, and this was fixed in a massive oak frame, glazed. It projected, when hung up in the drawing-room of the parsonage at Haworth, some eight inches from the wall; this

was the one Mrs. Gaskell saw, of which she says: —'I have seen Branwell's profile; it is what would be generally esteemed very handsome; the forehead is massive, the eye well set, and the expression of it fine and intellectual; the nose, too, is good; but there are coarse lines about the mouth, and the lips, though of handsome shape, are loose and thick, indicating self-indulgence, while the slightly retreating chin conveys an idea of weakness of will.' [\[32\]](#) Mrs. Gaskell had only an imperfect view of the work she describes, for it was hung on the wall directly *opposite* to the windows, so that it was destitute of any side-light.

Again Branwell writes to Leyland, on the 16th of July, now more himself, and anxious to see his friends:

'I enclose the accompanying bill to tempt you to Haworth next Monday....

'For myself, after a fit of horror inexpressible, and violent palpitation of the heart, I have taken care of myself bodily, but to what good? The best health will not kill *acute*, and *not ideal*, mental

agony.

'Cheerful company does me good till some bitter truth blazes through my brain, and then the present of a bullet would be received with thanks.

'I wish I could flee to writing as a refuge, but I cannot; and, as to *slumber*, my mind, whether awake or asleep, has been in incessant action for seven weeks.'

Branwell wrote also to Mr. Grundy. [\[33\]](#)

'Since I saw Mr. George Gooch, I have suffered much from the accounts of the declining health of her whom I must love most in the world, and who, for my fault, suffers sorrows which surely were never her due. My father, too, is now quite blind, and from such causes literary pursuits have become matters I have no heart to wield. If I could see you it would be a sincere pleasure, but.... Perhaps your memory of me may be dimmed, for you have known little in me worth remembering; but I still think often with pleasure of yourself, though so different from me in head and mind.'

'I invited him,' says Mr. Grundy, 'to come to me at the Devonshire Hotel, Skipton, a distance of some seventeen miles, and in reply received the last letter he ever wrote.' Branwell says,

'If I have strength enough for the journey, and the weather be tolerable, I shall feel happy in visiting you at the Devonshire on Friday, the 31st of this month. The sight of a face I have been accustomed to see and like when I was happier and stronger, now proves my best medicine.'

Mr. Grundy, supposing these letters to have been written in the year 1848, is in error in stating this to have been the last Branwell ever wrote. The Friday Branwell mentions must have been the one that fell on the 31st of July, 1846. About the close of that month, Charlotte and Emily went to Manchester to consult Mr. Wilson, the oculist, who, later, removed the cataract from Mr. Brontë's eyes. Under these circumstances, Branwell failed in his intended journey to Skipton.

The cataract had slowly increased as the summer advanced, till at last Mr. Brontë was quite blind. This gradual disappearance from his vision of the things he knew had necessarily a very depressing effect upon him. The thought would sometimes come to him that, if his sight were permanently lost, he would be nothing in his parish; but he supported himself, for the most part, under his affliction with his accustomed stoicism of endurance. His great trouble was that, when his sight became so dim that he could barely recognize his children's faces, and when he was debarred from using his eyes in reading, he was shut off from the solace of his books, and from the sources—the periodical press—of his knowledge of the current affairs of the outside world, wherein he took such intense interest. He was, then, left dependent on the information of others, or on his children, who read to him in such time as they could spare from literary and household occupations. Yet there was hope—hope of an ultimate restoration of sight, and Mr. Brontë was still able to preach, even when he could not see those to whom he spoke. It was

remarked that even then his sermons occupied exactly half-an-hour in delivery. This was the length of time he, with his ready use of words, had always found sufficient, and he did not exceed it now.

Every inquiry had been made from private friends that might throw light upon the chances of success in any possible operation, and it was in view of this object that the sisters visited Manchester. There they met with Mr. Wilson, who was, however, unable to say positively from description whether the eyes were ready for an operation or not. He proposed to extract the cataract, and it was accordingly arranged that Mr. Brontë should meet him.

Charlotte took her father to Manchester on the 16th of August, and, writing a few days later, she says to her friend, 'I just scribble a line to you to let you know where I am, in order that you may write to me here, for it seems to me that a letter from you would relieve me from the feeling of strangeness I have in this big town. Papa and I came here on Wednesday; we saw Mr. Wilson,

the oculist, the same day; he pronounced papa's eyes quite ready for an operation, and has fixed next Monday for the performance of it. Think of us on that day! We got into our lodgings yesterday. I think we shall be comfortable; at least, our rooms are very good.... Mr. Wilson says we shall have to stay here for a month at least. I wonder how Emily and Anne will get on at home with Branwell. They, too, will have their troubles. What would I not give to have you here! One is forced, step by step, to get experience in the world; but the learning is so disagreeable. One cheerful feature in the business is that Mr. Wilson thinks most favourably of the case.'

Charlotte's fears respecting her brother happily proved to be unfounded; he was himself anxious about his father's recovery; and, on her return, Charlotte, says Mrs. Gaskell, expressed herself thankful for the good ensured, and the evil spared during her absence.

From Charlotte's next letter we learn that the operation was over. 'Mr. Wilson performed it; two other surgeons assisted. Mr. Wilson says he

considers it quite successful; but papa cannot yet see anything. The affair lasted precisely a quarter-of-an-hour; it was not the simple operation of couching, Mr. C. described, but the more complicated one of extracting the cataract. Mr. Wilson entirely disapproves of couching. Papa displayed extraordinary patience and firmness; the surgeons seemed surprised. I was in the room all the time, as it was his wish that I should be there; of course, I neither spoke nor moved till the thing was done, and then I felt that the less I said, either to papa or the surgeons, the better. Papa is now confined to his bed in a dark room, and is not to be stirred for four days; he is to speak and be spoken to as little as possible.' No inflammation ensued, yet the greatest care, perfect quiet, and utter privation of light were still necessary to complete the success of the operation; and Mr. Brontë remained in his darkened room with his eyes bandaged. Charlotte thus speaks of her father under these trying circumstances. 'He is very patient, but, of course, depressed and weary. He was allowed to try his sight for the first time yesterday. He could see dimly. Mr. Wilson

seemed perfectly satisfied, and said all was right. I have had bad nights from the toothache since I came to Manchester.' But, when the danger was over, daily progress was made, and Mr. Brontë and his helpful daughter were able to return to Haworth at the end of September, when he was fast regaining his sight.

It was probably during the six weeks when Mr. Brontë and Charlotte were absent in Manchester that Mr. Grundy resolved to visit Branwell. He says: 'As he never came to see me, I shortly made up my mind to visit him at Haworth, and was shocked at the wrecked and wretched appearance he presented. Yet he still craved for an appointment of any kind, in order that he might try the excitement of change; of course uselessly.'

[\[34\]](#)

It must, it seems, have been on this occasion, in the course of conversation at the parsonage, that Branwell made a statement, respecting his novel, to Mr. Grundy, which has acquired considerable interest. I give it in the words in which Mr. Grundy recalls the incident. 'Patrick Brontë

declared to me, and what his sister said bore out the assertion, that he wrote a great portion of "Wuthering Heights" himself.' It should be remembered, in connection with this occurrence, that, when Mr. Grundy talked with Branwell and Emily at Haworth, the three novels which the sisters had completed a few months before, had met only with repeated rejection, and, perhaps, they felt little confidence in the ultimate publication of them. 'The Professor,' indeed, had come back to Charlotte's hands, curtly rejected, on the very day of the operation. Doubtful of ever finding a publisher willing to take this tale, or, at any rate, undaunted, she had commenced, while her father was confined to his darkened room at Manchester, the three-volume story which was afterwards to become famous as 'Jane Eyre;' Anne, too, since she had finished 'Agnes Grey,' had been busily writing 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,' also meant to be a three-volume story. So absorbed had the sisters become in novel writing, that a suggestion made by a friend, at this period, of a suitable place for opening a school, met only with an evasive answer.

'Leave home!' exclaims Charlotte, in her reply. 'I shall neither be able to find place nor employment; perhaps, too, I shall be quite past the prime of life, my faculties will be rusted, and my few acquirements in a great measure forgotten. These ideas sting me keenly sometimes; but, whenever I consult my conscience, it affirms that I am doing right in staying at home, and bitter are its upbraidings when I yield to an eager desire for release. I could hardly expect success if I were to err against such warnings. I should like to hear from you again soon. Bring —— to the point, and make him give you a clear, not a vague, account of what pupils he really could promise; people often think they can do great things in that way till they have tried; but getting pupils is unlike getting any other sort of goods.'

CHAPTER IX.

BRANWELL'S LETTERS AND LAST INTERVIEW WITH MR.

GRUNDY.

Branwell's Sardonic Humour—Mr. Grundy's Visit to him at Haworth—Errors regarding the Period of it—Tragic Description—Probable Ruse of Branwell—Correspondence between him and Mr. Grundy ceases —Writes to Leyland—A Plaintive Verse—Another Letter.

Branwell, having shared the family anxiety, as the time drew near for the operation which restored his father's sight, experienced a sense of deep relief when all went well; moreover, the keenness of his disappointment had had time to soften, and now a grim and sardonic humour began to characterize his proceedings and his correspondence. In this frame of mind he wrote to Leyland, early in October, 1846, a letter illustrated by some of his most spirited pen-and-ink sketches, in black and outline. It was headed by a drawing of John Brown, who had been engaged in lettering a monument, and who was represented under two different aspects. These

are in one sketch, divided in the middle by a pole, on which is placed a skull. In the first compartment, the sexton is exhibited in a state of glorious exultation, kicking over the table and stools, while the chair he occupies is falling backwards. He holds a tumbler in his right hand, and swears, in his Yorkshire dialect, that he is 'King and a hauf!' under this, the word 'PARADISE' is inscribed. The second tableau represents John Brown commencing his work. On a table-tomb, the sexton's maul and chisels are placed. Being in uncertainty as to how, or where, to begin, he exclaims, 'Whativver mun I do?' In the corner, is a drawing of the western elevation of Haworth Church, and, near to Brown, a head-stone, with skull and crossbones, inscribed, 'Here lieth the Poor.' Underneath the subject is the word 'PURGATORY.' The following is the letter:

'My dear Sir,

'Mr. John Brown wishes me to tell you that, if, by return of post, you can tell him the nature of his intended work, and the time it will probably occupy in execution,

either himself or his brother, or both, will wait on you *early* next week.

'He has only delayed answering your communication from his unavoidable absence in a pilgrimage from Rochdale-on-the-Rhine to the Land of Ham, and from thence to Gehenna, Tophet, Golgotha, Erebus, the Styx, and to the place he now occupies, called Tartarus, where he, along with Sisyphus, Tantalus, Theseus, and Ixion, lodge and board together.

'However, I hope that, when he meets you, he will join the company of Moses, Elias, and the prophets, "singing psalms, sitting on a wet cloud," as an acquaintance of mine described the occupation of the Blest.

"Morley Hall" is in the eighth month of her pregnancy, and expects ere long to be delivered of a fine thumping boy, whom his father means to christen *Homer*, at least, though the mother suggests that "Poetaster" would be more suitable; but that sounds too aristocratic.

'Is the medallion cracked that Thorwaldsen executed of Augustus Cæsar?' To this question is appended a drawing of a coin, about the size of an ordinary penny, with the head of Branwell—an excellent likeness—around which the name of the emperor is placed. He continues:

'I wish I could see you; and, as Haworth fair is held on Monday after the ensuing one, your presence there would gratify one of the FALLEN.' Here he represents himself as plunging head foremost into a gulf.

'In my own register of transactions during my nights and days, I find no matter worthy of extraction for your perusal. All is yet with me clouds and darkness. I hope you have, at least, blue sky and sunshine.

'Constant and unavoidable depression of mind and body sadly shackle me in even trying to go on with any mental effort, which might rescue me from the fate of a

dry toast, soaked six hours in a glass of cold water, and intended to be given to an old maid's squeamish cat.'

Here is a sketch of the cat, distracted between a tumbler on each side held by an attenuated hand.

'Is there really such a thing as the *Risus Sardonicus*—the sardonic laugh? Did a man ever laugh the morning he was to be hanged?'

The tail-piece to this letter is a drawing of a gallows, a hand holding forth the halter to the culprit, who is John Brown, and an excellent portrait, grinning at the rope that is to terminate his existence!

Mr. Grundy—'very soon'—visited Haworth again. But I must premise, to the account of his visit which Mr. Grundy has published, some observations respecting the period at which it occurred. Mr. Grundy, having attributed the later letters, which Branwell Brontë addressed to him,

to the year 1848—though they really belong to 1846—has, with some appearance of consistency, produced the following picture of his friend, under the impression that 'a few days afterwards he died.' But the circumstances that Mr. Grundy's journey to Haworth arose out of the wish to see him, which Branwell had expressed in a letter written at the time when his father was 'quite blind,' and that, as Mr. Grundy says his visits followed shortly after Branwell had failed to go to Skipton, are themselves sufficient evidence as to the question of date.

Mr. Grundy says of his final interview: 'Very soon I went to Haworth again to see him, for the last time. From the little inn I sent for him to the great, square, cold-looking Rectory. I had ordered a dinner for two, and the room looked cosy and warm, the bright glass and silver pleasantly reflecting the sparkling fire-light, deeply toned by the red curtains. Whilst I waited his appearance, his father was shown in. Much of the Rector's old stiffness of manner was gone. He spoke of Branwell with more affection than I had ever heretofore heard him express, but he also spoke

almost hopelessly. He said that when my message came, Branwell was in bed, and had been almost too weak for the last few days to leave it; nevertheless, he had insisted upon coming, and would be there immediately. We parted, and I never saw him again.

'Presently the door opened cautiously, and a head appeared. It was a mass of red, unkempt, uncut hair, wildly floating round a great, gaunt forehead; the cheeks yellow and hollow, the mouth fallen, the thin white lips not trembling but shaking, the sunken eyes, once small, now glaring with the light of madness—all told the sad tale but too surely. I hastened to my friend, greeted him in the gayest manner, as I knew he best liked, drew him quickly into the room, and forced upon him a stiff glass of hot brandy. Under its influence, and that of the bright, cheerful surroundings, he looked frightened—frightened of himself. He glanced at me a moment, and muttered something about leaving a warm bed to come out into the cold night. Another glass of brandy, and returning warmth, gradually brought him back to something like the Brontë of old. He even ate some dinner, a

thing which he said he had not done for long; so our last interview was pleasant, though grave. I never knew his intellect clearer. He described himself as waiting anxiously for death—indeed, longing for it, and happy, in these his sane moments, to think that it was so near. He once again declared that that death would be due to the story I knew, and to nothing else.

'When at last I was compelled to leave, he quietly drew from his coat sleeve a carving-knife, placed it on the table, and holding me by both hands, said that, having given up all thoughts of ever seeing me again, he imagined when my message came that it was a call from Satan. Dressing himself, he took the knife, which he had long had secreted, and came to the inn, with a full determination to rush into the room and stab the occupant. In the excited state of his mind he did not recognise me when he opened the door, but my voice and manner conquered him, and "brought him home to himself," as he expressed it. I left him standing bareheaded in the road, with bowed form and dropping tears. A few days afterwards he died.... His age was twenty-eight.' [\[35\]](#)5

Mr. Grundy's account of this interview is inconsistent in itself. Of course, if his friend had really been so far gone as he represents, it is incredible that Mr. Brontë would have been privy to his son's visit to the inn. It is quite clear that Mr. Grundy's recollection of the interview, and of Branwell's appearance, at this distance of time, with Mrs. Gaskell's account before him, has received a new significance. I incline to the belief that the truth of the matter is this: that, in the spirit of his letters to Leyland, Branwell acted a part, and imposed this ruse upon his friend to gratify the peculiar humour that was then upon him, an episode which the latter, with his erroneous impression as to the date, has been led to depict in somewhat lurid colours. It is most probable, indeed, that, like Hamlet, he 'put an antic disposition on.' Something confirmatory of this view will appear in the next chapter. Among his friends, as I know, Branwell would now and then assume an indignant, and sometimes a furious mood, and put on airs of wild abstraction from which he suddenly recovered, and was again calm and natural, smiling, indeed, at his successful

impersonation of passions he scarcely felt at the time. The absence of further correspondence between Branwell and Mr. Grundy, and the fact that the Skipton and Bradford railway, for which that gentleman was resident engineer, was fully opened more than a year before Branwell's death, seem to indicate that further intercourse ceased between the two at this date. It would not, perhaps, have been necessary to trouble the reader with these explanations, had not Mr. Grundy's narrative of his last evening with Branwell appeared to receive some sort of confirmation through its republication by Miss Robinson, in her picture of the brother of Emily Brontë shortly before his end.

Again Branwell wrote to Leyland:

'Dear Sir,

'I had a letter written, and intended to have been forwarded to you a few days after I last left the ensnaring town of Halifax.

'That letter, from being kept so long in my

pocket-book, has gone out of date, so I have burnt it, and now send a short note as a precursor to an awfully lengthy one.

'I have much to say to you with which you would probably be sadly bored; but, as it will be only asking for advice, I hope you will feel as a cat does when her hair is stroked down towards her tail. She *purrs* then; but she *spits* when it is stroked upwards.

'I wish Mr. —— of —— would send me my bill of what I owe him, and the moment that I receive my outlaid cash, or any sum that may fall into my hands, I shall settle it.

'That settlement, I have some reason to hope, will be shortly.

'But can a few pounds make a fellow's soul like a calm bowl of creamed milk?

'If it can, I should like to drink that bowl dry.

'I shall write more at length (Deo Volente)

on matters of much importance to me, but
of little to yourself.

'Yours in the bonds,

'Sanctus Patricius Branwellius Brontëio.'

With the foregoing letter, Branwell enclosed a page containing three spirited sketches. The first is a scene in which the sculptor and Branwell are the principal actors. They are seated on stools, facing one another, each holding a wine glass, and, between them on the ground, is a decanter. Behind the sculptor is placed the mutilated statue of Theseus. A copy of Cowper's 'Anatomy' is open at the title-page; and, leaning over it, is a figure of Admodeus, Setebos, or some other winged imp, taking sight at the two. The second sketch is of Branwell himself, represented as a recumbent statue, resting on a slab, under which are the following mournful lines:—

'Thy soul is flown,
And clay alone
Has nought to do with joy or care;

So if the light of light be gone,
There come no sorrows crowding on,
And powerless lies DESPAIR.'

The third drawing is a landscape, having in the foreground a head-stone, with a skull and crossbones in the semi-circular head. On the stone are carved the words, HIC JACET. Distant peaked hills bound the view. Two pines are to the right of the picture, and the crescent moon, which represents a human profile, is accommodated with a pipe. Underneath it is inscribed the sentence:

'MARTINI LUIGI IMPLORA ETERNA
QUIETE!'

The following letter, written to Leyland a little later, shows again the stormy perturbations of Branwell's mind. He still clings to the fond imagination that he is the object of the lady's unwavering devotion; and, with the incoherency of the monomania with which he continues to be afflicted, he solemnly declares to the sculptor that he had said to no one what he is then saying to him; while, in truth, he was telling the story of his

disappointed hopes to all who would hear the recital. The theme is that of a wild, eager, and unavailing love—whose joys and sorrows he tells in vivid words—which he believes to be returned with equal energy and passion.

'My dear Sir,

'I am going to write a scrawl, for the querulous egotism of which I must entreat your mercy; but, when I look *upon* my past, present, and future, and then *into* my own self, I find much, however unpleasant, that yearns for utterance.

'This last week an honest and kindly friend has warned me that concealed hopes about one lady should be given up, let the effort to do so cost what it may. He is the ———, and was commanded by ———, M.P. for ———, to return me, unopened, a letter which I addressed to ———, and which the Lady was not permitted to see. She too, surrounded by powerful persons who hate me like Hell, has sunk into

religious melancholy, believes that her weight of sorrow is God's punishment, and hopelessly resigns herself to her doom. God only knows what it does cost, and will, hereafter, cost me, to tear from my heart and remembrance the thousand recollections that rush upon me at the thought of four years gone by. Like ideas of sunlight to a man who has lost his sight, they must be bright phantoms not to be realized again.

'I had reason to hope that ere very long I should be the husband of a Lady whom I loved best in the world, and with whom, in more than competence, I might live at leisure to try to make myself a name in the world of posterity, without being pestered by the small but countless botherments, which, like mosquitoes, sting us in the world of work-day toil. That hope and herself are *gone*—*she* to wither into patiently pining decline,—*it* to make room for drudgery, falling on one now ill-fitted to bear it. That ill-fittedness rises from causes

which I should find myself able partially to overcome, had I bodily strength; but, with the want of that, and with the presence of daily lacerated nerves, the task is not easy. I have been, in truth, too much petted through life, and, in my last situation, I was so much master, and gave myself so much up to enjoyment, that now, when the cloud of ill-health and adversity has come upon me, it will be a disheartening job to work myself up again, through a new life's battle, from the position of five years ago, to that from which I have been compelled to retreat with heavy loss and no gain. My army stands now where it did then, but mourning the slaughter of Youth, Health, Hope, and both mental and physical elasticity.

'The last two losses are, indeed, important to one who once built his hopes of rising in the world on the possession of them. Noble writings, works of art, music, or poetry, now, instead of rousing my imagination, cause a whirlwind of blighting

sorrow that sweeps over my mind with unspeakable dreariness; and, if I sit down and try to write, all ideas that used to come, clothed in sunlight, now press round me in funereal black; for really every pleasurable excitement that I used to know has changed to insipidity or pain.

'I shall never be able to realize the too sanguine hopes of my friends, for at twenty-nine I am a thoroughly *old man*, mentally and bodily—far more, indeed, than I am willing to express. God knows I do not scribble like a poetaster when I quote Byron's terribly truthful words—

"No more—no more—oh! never more
on me

The freshness of the heart shall fall
like dew,

Which, out of all the lovely things we
see,

Extracts emotions beautiful and
new!"

'I used to think that if I could have, for a week, the free range of the British Museum—the library included—I could feel as though I were placed for seven days in Paradise; but now, really, dear sir, my eyes would rest upon the Elgin marbles, the Egyptian saloon, and the most treasured columns, like the eyes of a dead cod-fish.

'My rude, rough acquaintances here ascribe my unhappiness solely to causes produced by my sometimes irregular life, because they have known no other pains than those resulting from excess or want of ready cash. They do not know that I would rather want a shirt than want a springy mind, and that my total want of happiness, were I to step into York Minster now, would be far, far worse than their want of a hundred pounds when they might happen to need it; and that, if a dozen glasses, or a bottle of wine, drives off their cares, such cures only make me outwardly passable in company, but *never* drive off mine.

'I know only that it is time for me to be something, when I am nothing, that my father cannot have long to live, and that, when he dies, my evening, which is already twilight, will become night; that I shall then have a constitution still so strong that it will keep me years in torture and despair, when I should every hour pray that I might die.

'I know that I am avoiding, while I write, one greatest cause of my utter despair; but, by G——, sir, it is nearly too bitter for me to allude to it!' Here follow a number of references to the subject, with which the reader is already familiar, and therefore it is unnecessary to repeat them here. Then Branwell continues:

'To no one living have I said what I now say to you, and I should not bother yourself with my incoherent account, did I not believe that you would be able to understand somewhat of what I meant—though *not all*, sir; for he who is without

hope, and knows that his clock is at twelve at night, cannot communicate his feelings to one who finds *his* at twelve at noon.'

CHAPTER X.

BRANWELL BRONTË AND 'WUTHERING HEIGHTS.'

'Wuthering Heights'—Reception of the Book by the Public—It is Misunderstood—Its Authorship—Mr. Dearden's Account—Statements of Mr. Edward Sloane and Mr. Grundy—Remarks by Mr. T. Wemyss Reid—Correspondences between 'Wuthering Heights' and Branwell's Letters—The 'Carving-knife Episode'—Further Correspondences—Resemblances of Thought in Branwell and Emily.

We have now become acquainted with the

principal features of Branwell's career, have obtained some insight into his character, and learned much respecting his genius. We have gained also some knowledge of the history of the Brontë sisters in that most crucial period of their lives, when they returned again to literature with the new earnest which led them to fame.

We have seen that it was Branwell who first seriously undertook the production of a novel, and we have noticed Mr. Grundy's statement concerning the authorship of 'Wuthering Heights.' Here, then, is the proper place in which to say something on this question; for there have not been wanting others also to assert that Branwell was, in great part, the writer of it. Miss Robinson, in her 'Emily Brontë,' dismisses the assertion as altogether untrue; but she rightly says, as all will agree, that 'in the contemptuous silence of those who know their falsity, such slanders live and thrive like unclean insects under fallen stones.' It cannot, therefore, be inappropriate, in such a work as the present, to record, as clearly and succinctly as may be, what has been said on the subject, and to make a suggestion—for it is

nothing more—as to what is the truth of the matter.

When 'Wuthering Heights,' after its slow progress through the press, was given to the world in the December of 1847, neither the critics nor the public were very well able to grasp its meaning. Reviewers, to quote Charlotte Brontë, 'too often remind us of the mob of Astrologers, Chaldeans, and Soothsayers gathered before the "writing on the wall," and unable to read the characters or make known the interpretation.' In 'Wuthering Heights' they found the subject disagreeable, the characters brutal, the conception crude, and the object of the work wholly unintelligible. The most that could be made of it, was that some rude soul in the north of England, burning with spite against his species, had set himself, with intent little short of diabolical, to lay open the most vicious depths of selfishness and crime, which he had embodied in the actions of characters so lost and revolting, that the mind recoiled with a shudder from the perusal of the monstrosity he had created. One critic, who dwelt at some length on the want of 'tone' and polish in the book, surmised that the

writer of it had suffered, 'not disappointment in love, but some great mortification of pride,' which had so embittered his spirit that he had prepared this stinging story in vengeance on his species, and had flung it, crying, 'There, take that!' with cynical pleasure, in the very teeth of humankind.

This writer even felt it his duty to caution young people against the book. 'It ought to be banished from refined society,' he says. 'The whole tone of the book smacks of lowness.'—'A person may be ill-mannered from want of delicacy of perception or cultivation, or ill-mannered intentionally; the author of "Wuthering Heights" is both.'—'But the taint of vulgarity in our author extends deeper than mere snobbishness; he is rude, because he prefers to be so.' I quote these remarks, as an extreme instance, to show that a critic, who could recognize the great imaginative power, the subtlety, the keen insight, and the fine dramatic character of 'Wuthering Heights,' yet felt such a strong repugnance to its unknown author that he thought him unfit to associate with his fellow-men. It never crossed the minds of the critics in those times that the book could be by any but a man of

strong personal character, and one with a wide experience of the dark side of human nature.

However, a feeling speedily grew up that 'Wuthering Heights' was an earlier and immature production, attempted to be palmed off upon the public, of the author of 'Jane Eyre,' against whom a charge of bad faith was thereby virtually made; and even Sydney Dobell (in the 'Palladium' of September, 1850), the first critic who had sympathy enough with genius to discern the nature and comprehend the significance of the book, did not escape this error. It is not necessary here to repeat the unfortunate consequences of this misunderstanding, which caused Charlotte eventually to throw off the disguise, and declare openly that 'Wuthering Heights' was the work of her sister Emily. 'Unjust and grievous error!' says Charlotte. 'We laughed at it at first, but I deeply lament it now.' In the face of her statement, further remark on the authorship was naturally silenced; but, from time to time, when the book was discussed, much astonishment was manifested that a simple and inexperienced girl, like Emily Brontë, had been able to draw, with such nervous and

morbid analysis, so sombre a picture of the workings of passions which she could never have actually known, and of natures 'so relentless and implacable, of spirits so lost and fallen,' as those of Heathcliff and Hindley Earnshaw.

A writer in the 'Cornhill Magazine' [\[36\]](#) who attributes to Emily Brontë the distinction that she has written a book 'which stands as completely alone in the language as does "Paradise Lost," or the "Pilgrim's Progress,"' thus speaks of it: 'Its power,' he says, 'is absolutely Titanic; from the first page to the last it reads like the intellectual throes of a giant. It is fearful, it is true, and perhaps one of the most unpleasant books ever written: but we stand in amaze at the almost incredible fact that it was written by a slim country girl, who would have passed in a crowd as an insignificant person, and who had had little or no experience of the ways of the world. In Heathcliff, Emily Brontë has drawn the greatest villain extant, after Iago. He has no match out of Shakespeare. The Mephistopheles of Goethe's "Faust" is a person of gentlemanly proclivities compared with Heathcliff.... But "Wuthering Heights" is a

marvellous curiosity in literature. We challenge the world to produce another work in which the whole atmosphere seems so surcharged with suppressed electricity, and bound in with the blackness of tempest and desolation.'

Perhaps this same grim and Titanic power of 'Wuthering Heights' is one reason why many readers do not understand it fully. 'It is possible,' Mr. Swinburne says, 'that, to take full delight in Emily Brontë's book, one must have something by natural inheritance of her instinct, and something by earlier association of her love of the special points of earth—the same lights, and sounds, and colours, and odours, and sights, and shapes of the same fierce, free landscape of tenantless, and fruitless, and fenceless moor.'

But the composition of 'Wuthering Heights' was in great part incomprehensible to Charlotte herself, though she endeavours to account for it by a consideration of her sister's character and circumstances. For, as we have seen, she says, 'I am bound to avow that she had scarcely more practical knowledge of the peasantry amongst

whom she lived, than a nun has of the country people who sometimes pass her convent gates.'

"'Wuthering Heights,'" to quote Charlotte Brontë's Preface to the new edition of it, 'was hewn in a wild workshop, with simple tools, out of homely materials. The statuary found a granite block on a solitary moor; gazing thereon, he saw how from the crag might be elicited a head, savage, swart, sinister; a form moulded with at least one element of grandeur—power. He wrought with a rude chisel, from no model but the vision of his meditations. With time and labour, the crag took human shape; and there it stands colossal, dark, and frowning, half statue, half rock: in the former sense, terrible and goblin-like; in the latter, almost beautiful, for its colouring is of mellow grey, and moorland moss clothes it; and heath, with its blooming bells and balmy fragrance, grows faithfully close to the giant's foot.'

Many years ago, a writer in the 'People's Magazine,' speaking of the authorship of 'Wuthering Heights,' said: 'Who would suppose that Heathcliff, a man who never swerved from his

arrow-straight course to perdition from his cradle to his grave, ... had been conceived by a timid and retiring female? But this was the case.' The perusal of this sentence led Mr. William Dearden—author of the 'Star Seer' and the 'Maid of Caldene'—who was acquainted with Branwell Brontë, to communicate to the 'Halifax Guardian,' in June, 1867, some facts, within his personal knowledge, touching the question, which he extracted from the MS. preface to his poem entitled, 'The Demon Queen,' not then published.

It appears, from this account, that Branwell and Mr. Dearden had entered into a friendly poetic contest. Each was to write a poem in which the principal character was to have a real or imaginary existence before the Deluge. They met, on the occasion, at the 'Cross Roads,' a hostel a little more than a mile from Haworth on the road to Keighley, where an evening was spent in the reading of their respective productions. Leyland was to decide upon the merits of the poems. In reference to this meeting Mr. Dearden says,

'We met at the time and place appointed

... I read the first act of the "Demon Queen;" but, when Branwell dived into his hat—the usual receptacle of his fugitive scraps—where he supposed he had deposited his MS. poem, he found he had by mistake placed there a number of stray leaves of a novel on which he had been trying his "prentice hand." Chagrined at the disappointment he had caused, he was about to return the papers to his hat, when both friends earnestly pressed him to read them, as they felt a curiosity to see how he could wield the pen of a novelist. After some hesitation, he complied with the request, and riveted our attention for about an hour, dropping each sheet, when read, into his hat. The story broke off abruptly in the middle of a sentence, and he gave us the sequel, *vivâ voce*, together with the real names of the prototypes of his characters; but, as some of these personages are still living, I refrain from pointing them out to the public. He said he had not yet fixed upon a title for his

production, and was afraid he should never be able to meet with a publisher who would have the hardihood to usher it into the world. The scene of the fragment which Branwell read, and the characters introduced in it—so far as then developed—were the same as those in "Wuthering Heights," which Charlotte Brontë confidently asserts was the production of her sister Emily.'

Another friend of Branwell Brontë also, Mr. Edward Sloane of Halifax, author of a work entitled, 'Essays, Tales, and Sketches,' (1849) declared to Mr. Dearden that Branwell had read to him, portion by portion, the novel as it was produced, at the time, insomuch that he no sooner began the perusal of 'Wuthering Heights,' when published, than he was able to anticipate the characters and incidents to be disclosed. [\[37\]](#) Thus Mr. Dearden and the late Mr. Sloane claimed to have knowledge of 'Wuthering Heights' as the work of Branwell, before it was issued from the press; and we have seen that Mr. Grundy

declares Branwell to have said, with the consent of his sister, that he had written 'a great portion of "Wuthering Heights" himself,' a statement which, remembering the 'weird fancies of diseased genius' with which Branwell had entertained him at Luddenden Foot, inclined Mr. Grundy to believe 'that the very plot was his invention rather than his sister's.' [\[38\]](#)

The evidence for the original ascription of authorship is simple in the extreme. Charlotte Brontë has told us in the Biographical Notice, as well as in the Preface, which she has prefixed to 'Wuthering Heights,' that the book was the work of Ellis Bell; and clearly no shadow of doubt was on her mind at the time as to the accuracy of this statement; nor had the publisher of the book any uncertainty as to the matter. Moreover, the servant Martha is said to have seen Emily Brontë writing it. We are told, also, that it is impossible that the upright spirit of the gentle Emily could resort to the miserable fraud of appropriating a work which was not her own. And, lastly, modern critics have not found it difficult to believe that a woman might be the author of 'Wuthering

Heights.' They see nothing incongruous or impossible in the possession, by a feminine intellect, of such a searching knowledge of sinister propensities as are developed in that book, nor of its descending to those chaotic depths of black moral distortion, where it is possible for Hindley Earnshaw, with hideous blasphemy, to drink damnation to his soul, that he may be able to 'punish its Maker,' and where the life-long vengeance of Heathcliff is drawn out, with wondrous power, to its ghastly and impotent end.

How far Charlotte's statement is weakened by the fact that, up to the time when she discovered the volume of verse, and the three sisters commenced their novels—at which period it will be remembered one volume of Branwell's work was written—they had made no communication to one another of the literary work which each had in progress, is, perhaps, a matter for personal opinion. The declaration of Martha would probably be of little value, unless we knew that what Emily was writing was entirely independent of Branwell's work. And, again, those who have sought to defend Ellis Bell from the charge of

fraud, have perhaps been over hasty; for, so far as I know, that charge has never been either made or implied.

As to the capability of Branwell to write 'Wuthering Heights,' not much need be said here. Those who read this book will see that, despite his weaknesses and his follies, Branwell was, indeed, unfortunate in having to bear the penalty, in ceaseless open discussion, of '*une fanfaronnade des vices qu'il n'avait pas*,' and that, moreover, his memory has been darkened, and his acts misconstrued, by sundry writers, who have endeavoured to find in his character the source of the darkest passages in the works of his sisters.

Far from being hopelessly a 'miserable fellow,' an 'unprincipled dreamer,' an 'unnerved and garrulous prodigal,' as we have been told he was, he had, in fact, within him, an abundance of worthy ambition, a modest confidence in his own ability, which he was never known to vaunt, and a just pride in the celebrity of his family, which, it may be trusted, will remove from him, at any rate, the imputation of a lack of moral power to do

anything good or forcible at all.

Those who have heard fall from the lips of Branwell Brontë—and they are few now—all those weird stories, strange imaginings, and vivid and brilliant disquisitions on the life of the people of the West-Riding, will recognize that there was at least no opposition, but rather an affinity, between the tendency of his thoughts and those of the author of 'Wuthering Heights.' And, as to special points in the story, it may be said that Branwell Brontë had tasted most of the passions, weaknesses, and emotions there depicted; had loved, in frenzied delusion, as fiercely as Heathcliff loved; as with Hindley Earnshaw, too, in the pain of loss, 'when his ship struck; the captain abandoned his post; and the crew, instead of trying to save her, rushed into riot and confusion, leaving no hope for their luckless vessel.' He had, too, indeed, manifested much of the doating folly of the unhappy master of the 'Heights'; and, finally, there is no doubt that he possessed, nevertheless, almost as much force of character, determination, and energy as Heathcliff himself.

The following extract from a lecture by Mr. T. Wemyss Reid, will show the opinion of that gentleman—which he applies to prove that Branwell was in part the subject of his sister's work—that there is a distinct correspondence in the feelings and utterances of Heathcliff and Branwell in this book, which, as he observes, critics have again and again declared to be like the dream of an opium-eater, which we have seen that Branwell was. Mr. Reid states: 'I said that, perhaps, the most striking part of "Wuthering Heights" was that which deals with the relations of Heathcliff and Catherine, after she had become the wife of another. Whole pages of the story are filled with the ravings and ragings of the villain against the man whose life stands between him and the woman he loves. Similar ravings are to be found in all the letters of Branwell Brontë written at this period of his career; and we may be sure that similar ravings were always on his lips, as, moody and more than half mad, he wandered about the rooms of the parsonage at Haworth. Nay, I have found some striking verbal coincidences between Branwell's own language

and passages in "Wuthering Heights." In one of his own letters there are these words in reference to the object of his passion: "My own life without her will be hell. What can the so-called love of her wretched, sickly husband be to her compared with mine?" Now, turn to "Wuthering Heights," and you will read these words: "Two words would comprehend my future—*death* and *hell*: existence, after losing her, would be hell. Yet I was a fool to fancy for a moment that she valued Edgar Linton's attachment more than mine. If he loved with all the powers of his puny being, he couldn't love as much in eighty years as I could in a day." [\[39\]](#)

If Mr. Reid had quoted the beginning of this paragraph, another point of correspondence would have been perceived between the feelings manifested in it and those which had actuated Branwell Brontë. Heathcliff is speaking: "'You suppose she has nearly forgotten me?" he said. "Oh, Nelly! you know she has not! You know as well as I do, that for every thought she spends on Linton, she spends a thousand on me! At a most miserable period of my life, I had a notion of the

kind: it haunted me on my return to the neighbourhood last summer; but only her own assurance could make me admit the horrible idea again. And then, Linton would be nothing, nor Hindley, nor all the dreams that ever I dreamt!"

We have seen that, in the summer of 1845, Branwell lost his employment, and returned to the neighbourhood of Haworth, and that he, too, at that most miserable period of *his* life, when he wrote his novel, and 'Real Rest,' and 'Penmaenmawr,' had had a notion that the lady of his affections had nearly forgotten him.

It may be observed that Catherine Earnshaw, in an earlier part of the book, uses a like antithesis to that quoted by Mr. Reid. 'Whatever our souls are made of,' says she, speaking of Heathcliff and herself, 'his and mine are the same; and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire.' Though it is not strictly accurate that in *all* Branwell's letters at this period there are similar ravings, or that such were always on his lips, there are, at all events, other coincidences of thought and expression to be found in his letters

and poems with certain features and passages in 'Wuthering Heights,' which are not less striking. A few instances will illustrate much in that work which it is not easy to believe could have been transcribed by the writer from the utterances of another. Even so early as his letter to John Brown, we have seen with what force Branwell could express himself when he chose. He speaks in that letter of one who 'will be used as the tongs of hell,' and of another 'out of whose eyes Satan looks as from windows.' Let us turn to where Heathcliff's eyes are described, in Chapter vii. of the novel, as 'that couple of black fiends, so deeply buried, who never open their windows boldly, but lurk glinting under them, like devil's spies;' and, in Chapter xvii., where Isabella Heathcliff says of them: 'The clouded windows of hell flashed a moment towards me; the fiend which usually looked out, however, was so dimmed and drowned that I did not fear to hazard another sound of derision.'

We have noticed how Branwell plays upon the word *castaway* at the close of his letter on his novel. Charlotte has said they all had a leaning to

Cowper's poem, 'The Castaway,' and appropriated it in one way or another; she told Mrs. Gaskell that Branwell had done so. The word is used twice in 'Wuthering Heights.' Heathcliff is described as having been a 'little Lascar, or an American or Spanish castaway,' and the younger Catherine addresses pious Joseph, oddly enough, and by a coincidence singular enough, remembering Branwell's allusion in his letter, in these words: 'No, reprobate! you are a castaway—be off, or I'll hurt you seriously! I'll have you all modelled in wax and clay.'

Mention may also be made here, with reference to the occurrence of the names 'Linton' and 'Hareton' in 'Wuthering Heights,' that, somewhat before the time of the writing of his novel, Branwell was accustomed frequently to visit a place of the former designation, and that he had, as we have seen, when he was in Broughton-in-Furness, a friend of the name of Ayrtton.

In the above letter on his novel it will be remembered, in speaking of the character of his work, that Branwell says he hopes to leap from

the present bathos of fictitious literature to the firmly-fixed rock honoured by the foot of a Smollett or a Fielding, and speaks of revealing man's heart as faithfully as in the pages of 'Hamlet' or 'Lear.' In the first four chapters of 'Wuthering Heights,' which serve as prelude to the darker portions of the story, we are introduced to the inmates of the farm that gives its name to the novel. Mr. Lockwood, who has rented Thrushcross Grange of Heathcliff, and has come to reside there, relates his experience of two visits he pays to his landlord at the 'Heights.' In the excellent humour of this portion of the story we are certainly reminded of Branwell Brontë, and perhaps of Smollett and Fielding too. The succeeding chapters are related in a manner more subdued, proper to the narration of the housekeeper. There is just one mention of 'King Lear' in 'Wuthering Heights,' on the second of these visits, when, at last, Mr. Lockwood, after he has been knocked down by the dogs, addresses the inmates of the 'Heights,' 'with several incoherent threats of retaliation, that, in their infinite depth of virulency, smacked of "King

Lear." More than once have this story and Shakspeare's great tragedy been named in kinship, and Miss Robinson, unaware of Branwell's observation on his own prose tale, gives a second place, with 'King Lear,' to 'Wuthering Heights.'

It is impossible to read 'Wuthering Heights' without being struck with the part which consumption and death are made to play in the progress of the story. Scarcely a character is there depicted in whom we do not recognize some trait, some weakness, remotely or more closely, indicating deep-seated phthisis; and evidences of a true and certain observation, in the writer, are to be found in the pictures of its power there delineated. In Branwell's poem on 'Caroline,' we have already seen with what certain touch he depicts her death from that disease; and how deeply, and almost morbidly, he broods on its ravages; and, in one of his later poems, we have a second and more striking picture of decline. In Emily's verse anything of the kind is entirely wanting; and, indeed, it is what we miss in her poems, even more than what we find in

Branwell's, that must ever surprise us when we look for the author of 'Wuthering Heights.' Branwell, in his writings, is often engaged with subjects of real and personal interest, and the scheme of his work is apparent. Several of his poems, indeed, when once read, leave an impress on the memory which is evidence enough of the power and originality by which they are inspired. For the most part, Emily's poems are impersonal, imaginative, and ideal.

It will be remembered that Mr. Grundy, in his 'Pictures of the Past,' has given an account of his last interview with Branwell, which he declares took place but a few days before Branwell died. I have shown conclusively that the interview is ascribed by Mr. Grundy, and by Miss Robinson following him, to a wrong date, and that it took place, in fact, in 1846, when the manuscript was still in the author's hands, perhaps, indeed, undergoing revision at the time. Branwell, according to his friend, had concealed in his coat sleeve, on this occasion, a carving-knife, with which, in his frenzy, he designed to kill the devil, whose call, he supposed, had summoned him to

the inn; and he was surprised to find Mr. Grundy there instead. I have surmised that, when this grotesque episode occurred, Branwell was but jesting with his friend, who, in his surprise, took him altogether *au sérieux*; and, remembering that Mr. Grundy says Branwell had declared to him before that 'Wuthering Heights' was in great part his own work, it will be seen that there are passages in the novel which seem to lend probability both to this surmise as to Branwell's intention, and also to Mr. Grundy's statement. Thus, in Chapter ix., Hindley Earnshaw returns to the house in a state of frenzied intoxication, and, finding Nelly Dean stowing away his son in a cupboard, he flies at her with a madman's rage, crying: 'By heaven and hell, you've sworn between you to murder that child! I know how it is, now, that he is always out of my way. But, with the help of Satan, I shall make you swallow the carving-knife, Nelly! You needn't laugh; for I've just crammed Kenneth, head-downmost, in the Blackhorse marsh; two is the same as one—and I want to kill some of you: I shall have no rest till I do!' To which Nelly Dean replies, 'But I don't like

the carving-knife, Mr. Hindley; it has been cutting red herrings. I'd rather be shot, if you please.' Again, in Chapter xvii., when Isabella's taunts have stung Heathcliff to retaliation, he snatches up a dinner-knife and flings it at her head; and she is struck beneath the ear. We may believe, then, that when Branwell appeared in this strange guise before his friend, he was but jestingly rehearsing in act, with an 'antic disposition' such incidents as he had recently described in the volume he had mentioned to Mr. Grundy.

Miss Robinson, in her 'Emily Brontë' (p. 95), has some sarcastic remarks about Branwell's pride in his family name. 'Proud of his name!' she writes: 'He wrote a poem on it, "Brontë," an eulogy of Nelson, which won the patronizing approbation of Leigh Hunt, Miss Martineau, and others, to whom, at his special request, it was submitted. Had he ever heard of his dozen aunts and uncles, the Pruntys of Ahaderg? Or if not, with what sensations must the Vicar (*sic*) of Haworth have listened to this blazoning forth and triumphing over the glories of his ancient name?' Branwell's pride in the name of Brontë would have been foolish

enough if it had been of the nature Miss Robinson supposes; but perhaps it had another meaning. At any rate Nelly Dean puts pride of birth in quite a different light in 'Wuthering Heights,' where she gives good advice to Heathcliff. 'You're fit for a prince in disguise,' she says even to the 'little Lascar,' the 'American or Spanish castaway.' 'Who knows but your father was Emperor of China, and your mother an Indian queen, each of them able to buy up, with one week's income, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange together? And you were kidnapped by wicked sailors and brought to England. Were I in your place, I would frame high notions of my birth; and the thoughts of what I was should give me courage and dignity to support the oppressions of a little farmer!' This was exactly what Branwell Brontë did.

There are two other points in which I will indicate correspondences between the phraseology and ideas of 'Wuthering Heights' and those of Branwell Brontë. In one of his letters here published, Branwell, sketching a criminal grinning with the halter round his neck, asks the question:

'Is there really such a thing as the *Risus Sardonicus*? Did a man ever laugh the morning he was to be hanged?' Now, in the novel, Isabella Heathcliff says: 'I was in the condition of mind to be shocked at nothing: in fact, I was as reckless as some malefactors show themselves at the foot of the gallows.' Lastly, Heathcliff declares, speaking of Hindley Earnshaw: 'Correctly, that fool's body should be buried at the cross-roads, without ceremony of any kind.' Now Branwell was not only familiar with the traditions of suicides buried at the cross-roads near Haworth, as well as at similar cross-roads, but he was accustomed, in his perambulations through the district, when in this direction, to visit the ancient hostel at that place: and, indeed, it was this house he fixed upon for the reading of the poem he had written, and where he read, as we have seen, in lieu of it, the portion, of his novel, surmised to be 'Wuthering Heights,' to Mr. Dearden and his other friend. It would be tedious to indicate all the minor similarities of expression in the novel to those in Branwell's letters.

Yet there are two or three points noticeable in

'Wuthering Heights,' which are marked in Emily's verse. Emily's love of Nature, of the moors; her deep brooding on the mystery of being, which led her to look on the calm of death as an assurance of future rest for all, are to be found in her poetry; and, in a lesser degree, also in 'Wuthering Heights.' Thus we read, in Chapter xvi. of the story, of Linton and his dead wife: 'Next morning—bright and cheerful out of doors—stole softened in through the blinds of the silent room, and suffused the couch and its occupant with a mellow, tender glow. Edgar Linton had his head laid on the pillow, and his eyes shut. His young and fair features were almost as death-like as those of the form beside him, and almost as fixed: but *his* was the hush of exhausted anguish, and *hers* of perfect peace. Her brow smooth, her lids closed, her lips wearing the expression of a smile; no angel in heaven could be more beautiful than she appeared. And I partook of the infinite calm in which she lay: my mind was never in a holier frame than while I gazed on that untroubled image of Divine rest. I instinctively echoed the words she had uttered a few hours before: "Incomparably

beyond and above us all! Whether still on earth or now in heaven, her spirit is at home with God!"

The reflections suggested to Nelly Dean by the spectacle of repose presented by the dead Catherine seem to Mr. Reid to be characteristic of Emily, speaking 'out of the fulness of her heart.' 'I don't know if it be a peculiarity in me,' says the narrator in the story, 'but I am seldom otherwise than happy while watching in the chamber of death, should no frenzied or despairing mourner share the duty with me. I see a repose that neither earth nor hell can break, and I feel an assurance of the endless and shadowless hereafter—the Eternity they have entered—where life is boundless in its duration, and love in its sympathy, and joy in its fulness. I noticed on that occasion how much selfishness there is even in a love like Mr. Linton's, when he so regretted Catherine's blessed release! To be sure, one might have doubted, after the wayward and impatient existence she had led, whether she merited a haven of peace at last. One might doubt in seasons of cold reflection; but not then, in the presence of her corpse. It asserted its own

tranquillity, which seemed a pledge of equal quiet to its former inhabitants.' But Mr. Lockwood is made to say, speaking of the housekeeper's anxiety to know if he thinks such people are happy in the other world, 'I declined answering Mrs. Dean's question, which struck me as something heterodox.' The story also concludes, speaking of the head-stones of Edgar Linton, Heathcliff, and Catherine: 'I lingered round them, under that benign sky: watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells, listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass, and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth.' But there is in these very points a remarkable coincidence of feeling between Branwell and Emily also. Indeed, in the expression of these thoughts, Branwell's verse is well-nigh more powerful than Emily's. We have known his desire for the oblivious peace of 'Real Rest'; and, in his letters, he has sketched many head-stones, on one of which are the words: 'I implore for rest'; and, in the 'Epistle to a Child in her Grave,' he has told us of the freedom from ill

of that quiet and painless sepulchre. Here are a few stray lines of Branwell's, which will serve as illustration of this coincidence:

'Think not that Life is happiness,
But deem it *duty* joined with *care*;
Implore for *hope* in your distress,
And for your answers, get *despair*;
Yet travel on, for Life's rough road
May end, at last, in rest with *God*!'

Again we may ask: did Branwell Brontë write 'Wuthering Heights,' or any part of it? The evidence that he did so is, probably, insufficient. But let it be remembered that, as stated in his letter to Leyland, he had clearly undertaken a three-volume novel, and, in one way or other, had written a volume of his story. The charge of falsehood brought against Branwell in his statement to Mr. Grundy will not now probably be renewed; but there may not be wanting some to say that Mr. Grundy is in error in connecting what his friend said to him about his own novel with some allusion of his sister's to 'Wuthering

Heights,' and that those gentlemen who believe the novel Branwell read to them to be the same as that attributed to Emily are in error also. It has been said that, on the rare occasions on which the father or brother entered the room where the sisters were writing their novels, nothing was said of the work in progress. But it must be confessed that these views meet with little encouragement from what we know of the history of that period.

We have seen that, prior to the autumn of 1845, Branwell had been employed in writing his novel; a little later, we have reason to suspect that he is not going on with it, and we find him writing a poem with the same theme as a contemporary one of Emily's. We then find the sisters taking up novel writing with precisely Branwell's views of the profit to be derived from it. When he writes to Leyland on the 28th of April, 1846, shortly before the poems of his sisters were published, and while they are finishing their novels, Branwell has ceased to speak of his, but says that, if he were in London personally, he would try a certain publisher with his poems. Now it was an edition of Wordsworth by this same publisher that

Charlotte had, four months earlier, fixed upon as a model for the sisters' own volume of poems. Branwell, then, however strained his relations with his sister Charlotte might be at this late date, must have known that his sisters were writing their tales. Why, then, the change in his aims? Why is he, who had propounded that view of the superior advantages of prose over poetic writing, which afterwards determined the sisters to write novels, silent about his own, and thinking of publishing his poems? and never again do we hear of any attempt on his part to finish his novel, though he lived a year after his sisters' works were published. What had become of his novel in the interim?

Perhaps there is evidence, then, to warrant us in throwing out a suggestion that there may have been some measure of collaboration between Branwell and his sister, that he originated the idea, moulded the characters, and wrote the earlier portion of the work, which she, taking, revised, amended, completed, and imbued with enough of an individual spirit to give unity to the whole. In support of this view, it may be noted that, though

there is no break in the style of 'Wuthering Heights,' yet all the interests of the original story are, in a manner, completed in the seventeenth chapter—that is, something more than half-way through the book. In that first portion of it we trace the vehement passion of Heathcliff for Catherine up to her death. We see his enmity to Edgar Linton, which is satisfied by his possession of Linton's sister, whom he hates and despises, but who is the mother of a child to be heir to Thrushcross Grange, and we see the death of this unhappy wife. In this first portion of the novel is unrolled also the gradual growth of Heathcliff's hatred of Earnshaw, from the time when he says: 'I'm trying to settle how I shall pay Hindley back. I don't care how long I wait, if I can only do it at last. I hope he will not die before I do,' up to the death of that miserable character, whose son remains an ignorant dependent, because his drunken father has been lured to make away with his wealth at the gaming-table to his Mephistophelian pursuer. Here is depicted that dark and malevolent spirit which ranks Heathcliff with the demons, as where he says: 'I have no pity

—I have no pity! The more the worms writhe, the more I yearn to crush out their entrails. It is a moral teething, and I grind with greater energy in proportion to the increase of pain.'

In the second part of the story, opening with the eighteenth chapter, we are occupied with the fates of the children of Linton, Earnshaw, and Heathcliff. We learn how the latter trains up his miserable, puling son for the purpose of marrying the daughter of Linton, which he forcibly brings about, and thus completes his possession of the Grange; how he endeavours to pervert the youthful Hareton Earnshaw, to 'see if one tree won't grow as crooked as another with the same wind to twist it;' and in the end how his vengeance is completely thwarted. Thus there are two distinct parts in 'Wuthering Heights,' one being the completion and complement of the other.

As some evidence for the view here thrown out, I may mention that, in reading 'Wuthering Heights' in order to discover what correspondences there might exist between it and Branwell's writings, in letters, etc., I was very much struck with the fact

that, for every five of such correspondences which I discovered in the first part of the novel, I could find only one in the latter. We need not, therefore, be surprised if, in the concluding half of 'Wuthering Heights,' Branwell has stood to the author as model for some details of character, though these can be very few. Yet Nelly Dean does say of Heathcliff's love for Catherine: 'He might have had a monomania on the subject of his departed idol; but on every other point his wits were as sound as mine.' [\[40\]](#)

The collaboration which I have mentioned would by no means imply unfair action on the part of Emily Brontë: she was ever a kind, gentle, and faithful friend to Branwell, and had looked forward, perhaps more anxiously than her sisters, to his success in the world. There would be nothing extraordinary, then, in Branwell handing over to his favourite sister, to whom he was always grateful for her abiding affection, the work which he had begun, and which he, perhaps, felt himself dissatisfied with, or unable to complete, or in his supplying her with a plot, and assisting her with his experience in the delineation of the

characters in any story she might wish to produce. To have done so would be quite consistent with what we know of him; and he never claimed the authorship, so far as I know, after the occasion of Mr. Grundy's visit to the parsonage twelve months before the publication of the novel; and he read it to two or three personal friends only, and to these, if my supposition be correct, perhaps before his sister had taken up the work.

One other circumstance, besides the disappearance of Branwell's novel, finds explanation in this view of the matter: that Emily, who never undertook a second novel, produced, not only the most original and powerful of the contemporary tales of the sisters, but one that is also a much longer story than 'The Professor,' by Charlotte, and half as long again as 'Agnes Grey,' by Anne. Here, then, must probably remain the question of the origin of 'Wuthering Heights.'

CHAPTER XI.

BRANWELL BRONTË AND 'THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL.'

Statement of Charlotte that her Sister Anne wrote the Book in consequence of her Brother's Conduct—Supposition of Some that Branwell was the Prototype of Huntingdon—The Characters are Entirely Distinct—Real Sources of the Story—Anne Brontë at Pains to Avoid a Suspicion that Huntingdon was a Portrait of Branwell.

Charlotte Brontë, who never dreamed of attributing the production of so dire a story as 'Wuthering Heights,' by her sister Emily, to brooding on Branwell's misfortunes, has, however, in her remarks on Anne Brontë's second novel, 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,'—meant by its author as a tale of warning against the evils of intemperance,—intimated that it was carried out as a duty by Anne, in consequence of the impression made upon her by her brother's

conduct; and certain writers, questioning the statement of Charlotte that the characters are fictitious, have concluded that, in Arthur Huntingdon, we have 'a picture' and a 'portrait' of Branwell Brontë. It seems to me, rightly considered, a cruel thing to Anne Brontë to believe that she has given us a portrait of her brother in the character of the perfidious Huntingdon. Had her brother been thus vile, she could not have borne to write over the details of his character; were he not like Huntingdon, she could not have libelled him so.

As none of the biographers of the Brontë sisters ever knew Branwell, it is probable that the Branwell Brontë of the biographies owes more to the supposed Branwell of the novels, than the characters in the novels do to the brother of the Brontës. It is Huntingdon's wit, superficial as it is, that has connected him with the ideal of Branwell Brontë. A few traits of his, indeed, there may be in Huntingdon, but they are not the worst of those depicted in that character. The contempt for gambling which Huntingdon expresses may be taken as an instance.

We shall, however, look in vain for any true resemblance between the characters of Arthur Huntingdon and Branwell Brontë, and, certainly, in almost every respect, one is a direct contrast to the other. The biographer of Emily Brontë says, indeed, that Branwell 'sat to Anne sornily enough for the portrait of Henry (*sic*) Huntingdon;' but I would ask where that portraiture lies? Huntingdon, be it marked, is not only a drunkard, but he is a libertine, a man who has even the callous brutality to recount to his trusting wife, as she sits by him on the sofa, endeavouring to amuse him, the 'stories of his former amours, always turning upon the ruin of some confiding girl, or the cozening of some unsuspecting husband; and when I express my horror and indignation,' she says, 'he lays it to the charge of jealousy, and laughs till the tears run down his cheeks.' But it was different with Branwell, against whom it has never been charged that he sank to these low depths of criminal debauchery, indulgence, and treachery; and even those who have recounted the story of his passion for the wife of his employer, are compelled to say that he

remained pure, and shrank in horror from the advances which they suppose she made. Huntingdon's vicious disposition, too, is so sunk in selfishness, and there is in him such a cold brutality,—as where on many an occasion he triumphs over his powerless wife,—that he is placed in absolute contrast to Branwell, with his confiding, considerate, open-hearted, and generous nature.

It is but necessary to allude to Huntingdon's hypocrisy to establish a further difference between his character and Branwell's; and it is, moreover, very distinctive of Huntingdon's mind that he is, throughout, utterly irreverent and irreligious, to such an extent that he jests at sacred things, and declares that his wife's piety is enough to make him jealous of his Maker. Again he says, when he places her hand on the top of his head, and it sinks in a bed of curls, 'rather alarmingly low, especially in the middle;' 'if God meant me to be religious, why didn't He give me a proper organ of veneration?' This irreverence he carries with him into domestic life, and he invades the sanctity of human affection, and the places the heart keeps

holy, with his gross and insensate brutality. How different is this from Branwell Brontë, in whose character reverence and affection, above all things, were strong! Can we imagine Huntingdon dwelling so fondly in the affection of the long departed, as Branwell does in his poems of 'Caroline;' can we imagine him venerating as a precious possession to his dying day the sacred memories of his early years, as his supposed prototype did? What 'swell of thought,' seeming to fill 'the bursting heart, the gushing eye' with the memories of bygone years, could flood the shallow brain of the selfish and unfeeling Huntingdon? And Huntingdon, too, is afflicted with that well-known complaint of the continual drinker; he loses all interest in the affairs of life, and exists in perpetual levity. 'There is always a "but" in this imperfect world,' says his wife, 'and I do wish he would sometimes be serious. I cannot get him to write or speak in real, solid earnest. I don't much mind it now, but if it be always so what shall I do with the serious part of myself?' I would ask when Branwell Brontë displayed this unseemly levity? if he did not always write and

speak in solid earnest; if, indeed, he did not live in the very midst of that storm and stress of acute feeling which Huntingdon's wretched nature was incapable of experiencing at all?

Lastly, Helen Huntingdon tells us that her husband is impenetrable to good and lofty thoughts, that he never reads anything but newspapers and sporting magazines, that she wishes he would take up some literary study, or learn to draw or play; and that, when deprived of his friends, his condition is comfortless, unalleviated as it is by the consolations of intellectual resources, and the answer of a good conscience towards God. What, then, were Branwell's mental resources? His thoughts, on the contrary, were good and lofty enough; he was a student of literature, and especially a reader of the great poets; he had, indeed, taken up literary work; and he could and did both draw, and play on the organ; and when he was deprived of society, or cast into trouble, he found his consolation in his literary labours, and we have seen that, for the very purpose of obtaining alleviation in distress, he had written a volume of his novel. In short, he was, as far as his

intellectual character and habits were concerned, exactly what Helen Huntingdon wished her husband might be.

If, then, there is no resemblance between Branwell Brontë's disposition, character, and capabilities and those of Huntingdon in the novel, we might, after what has been said, surely expect to find that, in the unique point in which there is a correspondence of fact—their indulgence in drink—there would be some similar traits. But here, again, the resemblance is of the faintest, while the differences are radical. Huntingdon, for instance, is a continual and inveterate drinker; Branwell drank but occasionally, and had long periods of temperance: Huntingdon drinks for the love of drink; Branwell drank in order to drown his sorrows. It is, moreover, made a special point by the Brontë biographers that part of Branwell's intemperance was in taking opium, but this feature does not exist in Huntingdon, though Anne was clearly acquainted with the practice, for she mentions in the novel that Lord Lowborough at one time took it.

But, for the character of Huntingdon, we must look elsewhere. The account Charlotte gave of one whom the Brontës had known well, will show from what sources Anne drew her plot.

'You remember Mr. and Mrs. ——? Mrs. —— came here the other day, with a most melancholy tale of her wretched husband's drunken, extravagant, profligate habits. She asked papa's advice; there was nothing, she said, but ruin before them. They owed debts which they could never pay. She expected Mr. ——'s instant dismissal from his curacy; she knew, from bitter experience, that his vices were utterly hopeless. He treated her and her child savagely; with much more to the same effect. Papa advised her to leave him for ever, and go home, if she had a home to go to. She said this was what she had long resolved to do; and she would leave him directly, as soon as Mr. B—— dismissed him. She expressed great disgust and contempt towards him, and did not affect to have the shadow of regard in any way. I do not wonder at this, but I do wonder she should ever marry a man towards whom her feelings must always have

been pretty much the same as they are now. I am morally certain no decent woman could experience anything but aversion towards such a man as Mr. ——. Before I knew, or suspected his character, and when I rather wondered at his versatile talents, I felt it in an uncontrollable degree. I hated to talk with him—hated to look at him; though, as I was not certain that there was substantial reason for such a dislike, and thought it absurd to trust to mere instinct, I both concealed and repressed the feeling as much as I could; and, on all occasions, treated him with as much civility as I was mistress of. I was struck with Mary's expression of a similar feeling at first sight; she said, when we left him, "That is a hideous man, Charlotte!" I thought, "He is indeed." [\[41\]](#)

And here is another case known to the Brontës. 'Do you remember my telling you—or did I ever tell you—about that wretched and most criminal Mr. ——? After running an infamous career of vice, both in England and France, abandoning his wife to disease and total destitution in Manchester, with two children and without a farthing, in a strange lodging-house? Yesterday

evening Martha came upstairs to say that a woman—"rather lady-like," as she said—wished to speak to me in the kitchen. I went down. There stood Mrs. ———, pale and worn, but still interesting-looking and cleanly and neatly dressed, as was her little girl who was with her. I kissed her heartily. I could almost have cried to see her, for I had pitied her with my whole soul when I heard of her undeserved sufferings, agonies, and physical degradation. She took tea with us, stayed about two hours, and frankly entered into a narrative of her appalling distresses.... She does not know where Mr. ——— is, and of course can never more endure to see him. She is now staying a few days at E—— with the ——s, who, I believe, have been all along very kind to her, and the circumstance is greatly to their credit.' [\[42\]](#)

It was with cases like these before them that the Brontës wrought the infelicity of Heathcliff and Isabella, of Huntingdon and Helen. They felt themselves compelled to represent life as it appeared to them, they said.

Consumption and intemperance, the curses of our

island and our climate, are found not the less in the West-Riding of Yorkshire. A cold and humid atmosphere, like poverty and want, begets a recourse to stimulants, and, with some natures, the bounds of moderation are soon passed. The prevalence of the latter evil had entered deeply into Anne's thoughts. Her brother's occasional indulgence had made it familiar to her; but we should clearly commit an error, as well as a great injustice to her, in supposing that, in the character of Huntingdon, she wished to present his failings to the public.

A careful study of the question has, indeed, convinced me, not only that Huntingdon is no portrait of Branwell Brontë, but that he is distinctly and designedly his very antitype. The author of 'Wildfell Hall' could scarcely have created a character so completely different from Branwell, unless she intended to do so; for, otherwise, writing under the influence of circumstances, and the inspiration of the moment, something of his strong personality must surely have found its way into the book. It is pleasant to be thus able to record, as an act of justice to

Anne Brontë, that, though she had been compelled to witness the results of intemperance both in Branwell and in others, she purposely conveyed her lesson of these evils in the acts and thoughts of a character utterly distinct from her brother. Indeed, she was at considerable pains—which have unfortunately availed little—to prevent even a suspicion that her brother was the prototype of Huntingdon; for, to remove that impression, she has placed the hero of the story, Gilbert Markham, to a considerable extent, in Branwell's very circumstances. There is no resemblance between Markham's character and Branwell's, beyond that of an ardent and generous temperament; but it should be observed that—exactly as with Branwell—Markham is enamoured of a married woman, the death of whose husband he anxiously awaits; that this passion is attributed to him as a monomania—'A monomania,' says his brother Fergus, 'but don't mention it; all right but that;' and, lastly, that Markham, too, thinks, as Branwell did, that the deceased husband of the lady 'might have so constructed his will as to place restrictions upon

her marrying again.'

It should likewise be observed that 'Wildfell Hall' is just as much a protest against *mariages de convenance*, as it is against intemperance; but what had this to do with the family circumstances of the Brontës? It had far more to do with such instances as that of 'Mr. and Mrs. ——,' quoted above from Charlotte's letter, where infelicity was combined with intemperance, as it is in the case of Arthur and Helen Huntingdon.

CHAPTER XII.

BRANWELL'S FAILINGS.— PUBLICATION OF 'JANE EYRE.'

Novel-writing—The Sisters' Method of Work—
Branwell's Failing Health and Irregularities
—'Jane Eyre'—Its Reception and Character
—It was not Influenced by Branwell—Letter

and Sketches of Branwell, 1848.

But, at this time, neither 'Wuthering Heights' nor 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall' was before the public. It was not, indeed, till the summer of 1847 that the former, with 'Agnes Grey,' was accepted for publication. Meanwhile Anne was toiling away at her second book, and Charlotte was writing 'Jane Eyre,' under spells of inspiration.

Mrs. Gaskell has told us that the sisters were wont to put away their work at nine o'clock, and to walk about the sitting-room, talking over the plots of their stories, and discussing the incidents of them. Once or twice a week each was accustomed to read to the others what she had written, and hear the opinions they passed upon it. Mr. Brontë retired early to rest, and was in ignorance of the nature of the work going on, for his daughters never spoke to him of it, any more than they did to their friends. The writing of the sisters was, in fact, a secret shared only by their brother Branwell, who unquestionably gave his advice upon it, and instructed them on many

points, besides, of practical value in their dealings with publishers and literary men, which their small knowledge of the world caused them to overlook.

But, at the time, Branwell's health was visibly failing, and it became evident that, though naturally stronger than his sisters, he was not exempt from the consumptive tendency of his family. All his endeavours to obtain employment had proved futile. His physical health had long been giving way, and this soon rendered him incapable of sustained exertion. Much of his strange conduct arose probably from the reaction of this weakness on a mind endowed with so much intellectual power.

In most winters on these Yorkshire hills there are spells of severe frost and cold, and these were always times of suffering to the Brontës. Influenza would become epidemic at Haworth, and seldom neglected the inmates of the parsonage, close by the churchyard as the house was. Mr. Brontë had struggled hard to have proper drainage introduced into the village, but in vain. There was, indeed, 'such a series of North-pole days' in the

December of 1846, as Charlotte did not remember; the sky looked like ice, and the wind was as keen as a two-edged blade. The consequence was that all the house was laid up with coughs and colds. Anne suffered from asthma; Mr. Brontë and Branwell had influenza and cough. Anxiously must they have watched every indication of change in the wind, and longed for the southwest breezes that, even in winter, sometimes came over the moors with all the softness of spring; and, on this occasion, they were not long disappointed, and Anne became much better. The novel writing went on as before. Branwell's weakness and failings sometimes broke in upon this employment, but we do not find that, during the year 1847, he gave such trouble as would be likely to influence his sisters' work. Of course he had little or no money at hand, and we know that he had contracted some small obligations during the period of distraction of the previous year. The result of this was that a sheriff's-officer arrived at Haworth, and Branwell's debts had to be paid, whereat his sister Charlotte seems to have been very angry, for she

appears afterwards to accuse herself of being 'too demonstrative and vehement.' About three months later Charlotte was again in doubt about Branwell; she says his behaviour was 'extravagant,' and that he dropped 'mysterious hints,' which led her to believe that he had contracted further debts. In this, however, she was mistaken.

In the May of 1847, Charlotte invited 'E.' to visit her, and said that Branwell was quieter, for the good reason that he had got to the end of a considerable sum of money he became possessed of in the spring, and was obliged to restrict himself in some degree. 'You must,' she continues, 'expect to find him weaker in mind, and the complete rake in appearance. I have no apprehension of his being uncivil to you; on the contrary, he will be as smooth as oil.' It would appear that he had had some sum laid out, which he then recovered; but, as we have seen, he had got into debt before, and, in his alarm at the prospect of imprisonment in York Castle, it is said, told his friends, in the neighbourhood where he had been tutor, of his straits; upon which the widow of his late employer sent him money in

kindness of heart, through a third person. At this period he expended much of his time at home in reading, and he wrote several poems.

At the end of July, Charlotte, as we have been told, consulted her brother as to the reason why Messrs. Smith and Elder, to whom she had sent 'The Professor,' did not reply. He at once set it down to her not having enclosed a postage stamp. On the 2nd of August, she wrote again, and promptly received the considerate answer which encouraged her to send to them, on the twenty-fourth of the same month, her three-volume work, 'Jane Eyre.' This was accepted, and given to the world in the following October. Meanwhile, in the beginning of August, 'E.' had paid her visit to the parsonage, and the friends had enjoyed the glorious weather in walking on the moors. Charlotte had returned the visit almost immediately, and the proofs of 'Jane Eyre' were corrected by her during her absence, sitting even at the same table with her friend, to whom, curiously enough, she said not a word about the work in hand. Upon her return to Haworth, she wrote: 'I reached home, and found all well. Thank

God for it.' 'Wuthering Heights' and 'Agnes Grey' still lingered in the hands of the publisher, from whom the authors had obtained but impoverishing terms; 'a bargain,' says Mrs. Gaskell, in mentioning the circumstance, 'to be alluded to further.' Nothing more, however, appears in the 'Life of Charlotte' on the subject; and we may hope that the celebrity which the novels of the 'Messrs. Bell' soon acquired, made a substantial difference in the first terms of the agreement. During the next three months, Charlotte was in correspondence with Messrs. Smith and Elder, Mr. G. H. Lewes, and Mr. W. S. Williams, in respect of the reviews of 'Jane Eyre,' which were then appearing.

'Jane Eyre' came upon the reading world of 1847 as a veritable revelation. It was a tragic story of the feelings, so different in character from the trite affectations of the commonplace novel of the day; it was informed with such a passionate energy, and filled with such soul-absorbing interests, that it was received at once as a monument of great and undoubted genius. Reading the book to-day, we can easily understand why Charlotte Brontë

gained such a mastery over the spirits of her time, and earned for herself an imperishable renown. She would do the same now. The strange, lonely, unfriended childhood of Jane Eyre, the experiences she undergoes at Gateshead, and at the Lowood School, and her confidence and self-reliance through them all, mark the story as vitally true; but, when this plain little personage manifests the depths of her feelings, and calls forth our human sympathies in her hopes and her sorrows; when we read the terrific tragedy of her relationship with Rochester, and are shaken with the storm and stress of the feelings that move her; when, above all, we see her come out from the shadow, with her nobility and purity unsullied, though once more she is friendless and alone, we are carried beyond ourselves in admiration of the genius who has painted a picture at once so truly human and so very strange.

'Jane Eyre,' the book, was the natural and unforced outcome of its author's personality, and, though Jane Eyre, the character, is not Charlotte Brontë in the sense in which Lucy Snowe is, yet in Charlotte Brontë were all the powers and

capabilities that moved Jane Eyre. This book, then, came upon people in 1847 as a revelation; they felt themselves in the hands of a very Titan, and were carried on by an uncontrollable stream. But there were some amongst them who struggled against its influence, when they found that the shallow bounds of conventionality had been far overpassed, and when they saw that its author was little skilled in the ways of the world. These revolted against the power that made them, perforce, interested in a character, in Rochester, who had fallen away from the high Christian ideal. Hence arose that outcry against what was termed the 'immorality' of the book, against its 'coarseness,' its 'laxity of tone,' and the 'heathenish doctrine of religion' that filled it, which gave such pain, in the parsonage at Haworth, to the simple-minded girl, its author, against whom the dictum of the 'Quarterly Review' was written: 'If we ascribe the book to a woman at all, we have no alternative but to ascribe it to one who has for some sufficient reason long forfeited the society of her own sex.'

But such critics as these forgot that the people

whom we love most in life, are not those who are supremely noble, absolutely perfect, superhuman, and angelic; but those who are beautiful and true in spite of their failings, and though clogged with all the faults with which our humanity has laden them; those who, like the child in Wordsworth's ode, live 'trailing clouds of glory' with them from divinity, in the midst of the shame and sin of the world. These are the lights which illumine 'Jane Eyre,' with a loveliness that is truly and perfectly human. So the book made its way, after the wild fervour of its first reception, to a pinnacle in English literature where it must ever remain, as the work of a great and original genius, and, as we now know, of a true and noble woman.

Small need was there, then, that Mrs. Gaskell should seek to explain those features of Charlotte's genius, which brought down upon 'Jane Eyre' and its author such expressions of blame as these, by references to her brother's character and history, as she understood them. Whatever may have been the case with the novels of Emily and Anne, those of Charlotte were clearly the outcome of her own nature and of her

own experience, and were uninfluenced in one way or other by her brother. If she takes a suggestion from his affairs at all, she deals with it coldly or sternly. Take for instance that passage I have quoted from 'The Professor,' where William Crimsworth speaks of his recollection of an instance of domestic treachery.

In December, 1847, appeared the works of Ellis and Acton Bell. The Christmas of that year found the three sisters noted in the world of authors—Curren Bell, famous. Not often can so much be recorded of a family. Branwell seems to have been considerably elated by their success, and the festivities of the season were indulged in by him to his injury. His feeble health was soon affected by things that would have had little influence upon ordinarily strong men, and he suffered the consequences. On the 11th of January, 1848, Charlotte writes:—'We have not been very comfortable here at home lately. Branwell has, by some means, continued to get more money from the old quarter, and has led us a sad life.... Papa is harassed day and night; we have little peace; he is always sick; has two or three times fallen down

in fits; what will be the ultimate end, God knows. But who is without their drawback, their scourge, their skeleton behind the curtain? It remains only to do one's best, and endure with patience what God sends.' In this month the second edition of 'Jane Eyre' appeared.

It must have been in reference to this period that Mrs. Gaskell has said it might well have happened that Branwell had shot his father. But the statement is an exaggeration; and, indeed, I have been told, both by Martha Brown and Nancy Wainwright, that Branwell was not nearly so bad as Mrs. Gaskell has made him appear. 'If he had wanted to shoot his father,' says my informant, 'he could easily have done it, for there were loaded guns and pistols hung over the bed-room door constantly.' She relates that, on one occasion, she was occupied in tidying up the bed-room, and had just taken down the fire-arms to dust, when Mr. Brontë entered the room in great consternation, forbidding her, at any time thenceforth, on any account whatever, to meddle with them, for they were loaded even then, and might have been accidentally discharged to her

own danger. He again hung up the arms himself. Mr. Brontë carried on this singular practice, and could not be induced to discontinue it; and, as the reader is aware, Branwell and his father occupied this bed-room.

Branwell himself was very conscious of his failings at this time, and somewhat ashamed of them. He writes to Leyland during the January of 1848: 'I was *really* far enough from well when I saw you last week at Halifax; and, if you should happen to see Mrs. —— of ——, you would greatly oblige me by telling her that I consider her conduct towards me as most kind and motherly, and that, if I did anything during temporary illness, to offend her, I deeply regret it, and beg her to take my regret as my apology till I see her again; which I trust will be ere long.' He continues, speaking in general terms of his literary work, and his poems, mentioning especially the poem of 'Caroline,' which he had written a long time before, and concludes by promising a longer letter later on.

There is prefixed to this letter a drawing, one of the strangest that Branwell ever made,—which he

advises his friend to destroy,—a portrait of himself, head and shoulders, vigorously executed with the pen, and an admirable likeness too, in profile, grave and thoughtful, wearing his spectacles, but a portrait of Branwell in what a plight! For, just as the martyrs of old are represented with the knife planted in their breast, and the rope placed round their neck, so has Branwell pictured himself, with the halter about his throat, in the morbid martyrdom of his feverish imagination.

CHAPTER XIII.

BRANWELL'S LATER POETICAL WORKS.

Branwell's Poetical Work—Sketch of the Materials which he intended to use in the Poem of 'Morley Hall'—The Poem—The Subject left Incomplete—Branwell's Poem, 'The End of All'—His Letter to Leyland

asking an Opinion on his Poem, 'Percy Hall'—Observations—The Poem.

Branwell's poetical work in this period, when his health was failing, is incomplete, for there remain two pieces from his hand, both of which are fragments only. The first of these is 'Morley Hall,' which he was writing for his friend Leyland, but which he never lived to finish. He designed it to be an epic, in several cantos, dealing with a succession of romantic episodes, of which an elopement that actually took place, as I have previously had occasion to mention, was the chief feature. The part he completed was the introductory canto, or rather a portion of it, which is given below; but, since this was a work into which he entered with much spirit, and which would have been a long and important one, had it been completed, it may not be amiss here to sketch briefly the materials with which he proposed to work.

Morley Hall, or all that remains of it, is situated in the parish of Leigh, in the county of Lancaster;

and was the residence of two families in succession, which became allied by marriage, and attained some celebrity. The first family was that of Leyland, originally of the place of that name in Lancashire, and afterwards, for many generations preceding the reign of King Henry VIII., residing at Morley Hall.

In Henry VIII.'s time the mansion was owned by Sir William Leyland, or Leland, whose family consisted of Thomas, his son and heir, and his daughters Anne and Elizabeth, by his marriage with Anne, daughter and heiress of Allan Syngleton of Whitgill, in Craven, Esq. Living in great opulence at Morley, Sir William was visited by the learned antiquary, his friend, and probably his relative, John Leland. This writer says of his visit: 'Cumming from Manchestre towards Morle, Syr William Lelande's howse, I passid by enclosid grounde, ... leving on the left hand a mile and more of, a fair place of Mr. Langforde's caulled Agecroft.... Morle, Mr. Lelande's Place, is buildid, saving the Foundation, of stone squarid that risith within a great Moote a vi foot above the water, al of tymbre, after the commune sort of

building of Houses of the Gentlemen for most of Lancastreshire. Ther is as much Plesur of Orchardes, of great Varite of Frute and fair made Walkes and Gardines as ther is in any Place of Lancastreshire.' [\[433\]](#)

Sir William was succeeded by Thomas, his son, who had married Anne, daughter of Sir John Atherton, and had issue Robert, his son and heir, [\[44\]](#) and two daughters, Anne and Alice. Anne married Edward Tyldesley, of Tyldesley, with whom the legend, versified by Mr. Peters, and on which Branwell intended to write at greater length, alleges that she eloped. The tradition of this event still lingers at Morley Hall. It is said that when the attachment sprang up between Anne, the eldest daughter of Thomas Leyland, and Edward Tyldesley, the connection was forbidden by the lady's father. It is further said that, regardless of this prohibition, a night was fixed upon for an elopement, and that, when the inmates of the house were buried in sleep, it was arranged she should tie a rope round her waist, the loose end of which she should throw across the moat to Tyldesley, who was to be in waiting, and, with

another, should lower herself into the water, and be drawn to the land by him. The legend says this was successfully accomplished, and that the marriage was celebrated before the elopement was known to the family. [\[45\]](#)

It is remarkable that, while Thomas Leyland had a legitimate son and heir in Robert Leyland, the manor-house of Morley and its demesnes passed into the family of Tyldesley by marriage alone, as if there had been no such person.

There are other stories relating to this family, of wild and weird interest, with which Branwell was acquainted; but this passing allusion is all that the scope of the present work will allow.

Of the family of Tyldesley of Morley was the brave Sir Thomas, a major-general in the royal army, who was slain at Wigan on the 25th of August, 1651. To this circumstance Branwell alludes in his poem. The fragment is as follows:—

MORLEY HALL,

LEIGH—LANCASHIRE.

'When Life's youth, overcast by gathering
clouds

Of cares that come like funeral-following
crowds,

Wearying of that which is, and cannot see

A sunbeam burst upon futurity,

It tries to cast away the woes that are

And borrow brighter joys from times afar.

For what our feet tread may have been a road

By horses' hoofs pressed 'neath a camel's
load;

But what we ran across in childhood's hours

Were fields, presenting June with May-tide
flowers:

So what was done and borne, if long ago,

Will satisfy our heart, though stained by tears
of woe.

'When present sorrows every thought employ,

Our father's woes may take the garb of joy,

And, knowing what our sires have undergone,

Ourselves can smile, though weary,

wandering on.

For if our youth a thunder-cloud o'ershadows,
Changing to barren swamps Life's flowering
meadows,

We know that fiery flash and bursting peal
Others, like us, were forced to hear and feel;
And while they moulder in a quiet grave,
Robbed of all havings—worthless all they
have—

We still, with face erect, behold the sun—
Have bright examples in what has been done
By head or hand—and, in the times to come,
May tread bright pathways to our gate of
doom.

'So, if we gaze from our snug villa's door,
By vines or honeysuckles covered o'er,
Though we have saddening thoughts, we still
can smile

In thinking our hut supersedes the pile
Whose turrets totter 'mid the woods before
us,
And whose proud owners used to trample
o'er us;
All now by weeds and ivy overgrown,

And touched by Time, that hurls down stone
from stone.

We gaze with scorn on what is worn away,
And never dream about our own decay.

Thus, while this May-day cheers each flower
and tree,

Enlivening earth and almost cheering me,
I half forget the mouldering moats of Leigh.

'Wide Lancashire has changed its babyhood,
As Time makes saplings spring to timber
wood;

But as grown men their childhood still
remember,

And think of Summer in their dark December,
So Manchester and Liverpool may wonder,
And bow to old halls over which they ponder,
Unknowing that man's spirit yearns to all
Which—once lost—prayers can never more
recall.

The storied piles of mortar, brick, and stone,
Where trade bids noise and gain to struggle
on,

Competing for the prize that Mammon gives

Youth killed by toil and profits bought with
lives—
Will not prevent the quiet, thinking mind
From looking back to years when Summer
wind
Sang, not o'er mills, but round ancestral halls,
And, 'stead of engine's steam, gave dews
from waterfalls.

'He who by brick-built houses closely pent,
That show nought beautiful to sight or scent,
Pines for green fields, will cherish in his room
Some pining plant bereft of natural bloom;
And, like the crowds which yonder factories
hold,
Withering 'mid warmth, and in their spring-
tide old,
So Lancashire may fondly look upon
Her wrecks fast vanishing of ages gone,
And while encroaching railroad, street, and
mill
On every side the smoky prospect fill,
She yet may smile to see some tottering wall
Bring old times back, like ancient Morley
Hall.

But towers that Leland saw in times of yore
Are now, like Leland's works, almost no
more—

The antiquarian's pages, cobweb-bound,
The antique mansion, levelled with the ground.

'When all is gone that once gave food to
pride,

Man little cares for what Time leaves beside;
And when an orchard and a moat, half dry,
Remain, sole relics of a power passed by,
Should we not think of what ourselves shall
be,

And view our coffins in the stones of Leigh.
For what within yon space was once the
abode

Of peace or war to man, and fear of God,
Is now the daily sport of shower or wind,
And no acquaintance holds with human kind.
Some who can be loved, and love can give,
While brain thinks, pulses beat, and bodies
live,

Must, in death's helplessness, lie down with
those

Who find, like us, the grave their last repose,

When Death draws down the veil and Night
bids Evening close.

'King Charles, who, fortune falling, would not
fall,
Might glance with saddened eyes on Morley
Hall,
And, while his throne escaped misfortune's
wave,
Remember Tyldesley died that throne to
save.'

Branwell's next poem of this period is entitled the 'End of All,' which is complete, and is one of the most pathetic he ever wrote. It constitutes a true picture of his mood, and illustrates, at this time, the sombre and troubled nature of his thoughts. He portrays, in shades of great depth, his reflections on the death of one dear to him, whose loss leaves his soul a blank and desolate void, an evil which nothing can alleviate or remove. But he dreams for a moment that a life of peril in far-off

lands, and in battle, strife, and danger, that the 'stony joys' of solitary ambition, may shrine the memory of sorrows which cannot be destroyed. Yet, even from this cold dream, this cruel opiate of the heart, he is recalled by the groans of her who is dying, to the consciousness that, with her departure, all will go. The bereaved is Branwell himself, and his 'Mary' is doubtless the lady of his misplaced affection, over whose loss he still broods in melancholy and afflicted language, each pathetic chord vibrating with intense mental anguish, as he contemplates the future years of desolation in which he is left to wander tombward unaided and alone. Here, as in his other poems, the rhythmic sweetness of Branwell's verse flows on in words well chosen to express the idea he intends to convey, which itself is worked out with great suggestiveness of power.

THE END OF ALL.

'In that unpitying Winter's night,
When my own wife—my Mary—died,

I, by my fire's declining light,
Sat comfortless, and silent sighed,
While burst unchecked grief's bitter tide,
As I, methought, when she was gone,
Not hours, but years, like this must bide,
And wake, and weep, and watch alone.

'All earthly hope had passed away,
And each clock-stroke brought Death
more nigh
To the still-chamber where she lay,
With soul and body calmed to die;
But *mine* was not her heavenward eye
When hot tears scorched me, as her doom
Made my sick heart throb heavily
To give impatient anguish room.

"Oh now," methought, "a little while,
And this great house will hold no more
Her whose fond love the gloom could while
Of many a long night gone before!"
Oh! all those happy hours were o'er
When, seated by our own fireside,
I'd smile to hear the wild winds roar,
And turn to clasp my beauteous bride.

'I could not bear the thoughts which rose
Of what *had* been, and what *must* be,
And still the dark night would disclose
Its sorrow-pictured prophecy;
Still saw I—miserable me—
Long, long nights else, in lonely gloom,
With time-bleached locks and trembling
knee—
Walk aidless, hopeless, to my tomb.

'Still, still that tomb's eternal shade
Oppressed my heart with sickening fear,
When I could see its shadow spread
Over each dreary future year,
Whose vale of tears woke such despair
That, with the sweat-drops on my brow,
I wildly raised my hands in prayer
That Death would come and take me now;

'Then stopped to hear an answer given—
So much had madness warped my mind—
When, sudden, through the midnight heaven,
With long howl woke the Winter's wind;
And roused in me, though undefined,
A rushing thought of tumbling seas

Whose wild waves wandered unconfined,
And, far-off, surging, whispered, "Peace."

'I cannot speak the feeling strange,
Which showed that vast December sea,
Nor tell whence came that sudden change
From aidless, hopeless misery;
But somehow it revealed to me
A life—when things I loved were gone—
Whose solitary liberty
Might suit me wandering tombward on.

"Twas not that I forgot my love—
That night departing evermore—
'Twas hopeless grief for her that drove
My soul from all it prized before;
That misery called me to explore
A new-born life, whose stony joy
Might calm the pangs of sorrow o'er,
Might *shrine* their memory, not destroy.

'I rose, and drew the curtains back
To gaze upon the starless waste,
And image on that midnight wrack
The path on which I longed to haste,

From storm to storm continual cast,
And not one moment given to view;
O'er mind's wild winds the memories
 passed
Of hearts I loved—of scenes I knew.

'My mind anticipated all
 The things my eyes have seen since then;
I heard the trumpet's battle-call,
 I rode o'er ranks of bleeding men,
 I swept the waves of Norway's main,
I tracked the sands of Syria's shore,
 I felt that such strange strife and pain
Might me from living death restore.

'Ambition I would make my bride,
 And joy to see her robed in red,
For none through blood so wildly ride
 As those whose hearts before have bled;
 Yes, even though *thou* should'st long have
 laid
Pressed coldly down by churchyard clay,
 And though I knew thee thus decayed,
I *might* smile grimly when away;

'Might give an opiate to my breast,
Might dream—but oh! that heart-wrung
groan

Forced from me with the thought confessed
That all would go if *she* were gone;
I turned, and wept, and wandered on
All restlessly—from room to room—
To that still chamber, where alone
A sick-light glimmered through the gloom.

'The all-unnoticed time flew o'er me,
While my breast bent above her bed,
And that drear life which loomed before me
Choked up my voice—bowed down my
head.

Sweet holy words to me she said,
Of that bright heaven which shone so near,
And oft and fervently she prayed
That I might some time meet her there;

'But, soon enough, all words were over,
When this world passed, and Paradise,
Through deadly darkness, seemed to hover
O'er her half-dull, half-brightening eyes;
One last dear glance she gives her lover,

One last embrace before she dies;

And then, while he seems bowed above
her,

His *Mary* sees him from the skies.'

Another poem of Branwell's of this date, the last he ever wrote, is entitled 'Percy Hall,' which he did not live to complete. The first draft was sent for Leyland's opinion, with the following letter:

'Haworth, Bradford,
'Yorks.

'My dear Sir,

'I enclose the accompanying fragment, which is so soiled that I would have transcribed it, if I had had the heart to exert myself, only in order to get from you an opinion as to whether, when finished, it would be worth sending to some respectable periodical, like "Blackwood's Magazine."

'I trust you got safely home from rough

Haworth, and am,

'Dear Sir,

'Your most
sincerely,

'P. B. Brontë.'

At the foot of the page on which the letter is written, is drawn, in pen-and-ink, a low, massive, stone cross, inscribed with the word, 'POBRE!' standing on the top of a bleak hill, with a wild sky behind; and Branwell says of it below: 'The best epitaph ever written. It is carved on a rude cross in Spain, over a murdered traveller, and simply means "Poor fellow!"' It will be remembered, in connection with this idea of Branwell's, that Lord Byron, in one of his letters, describes the impression produced upon him by seeing the inscription, 'Implora pace!' upon a tomb at Bologna. The poet says: 'When I die, I should wish that some friend would see these words, and no other, placed above my grave—"Implora pace!"' The perusal of this remark induced Mrs.

Hemans to write her pathetic little poem which has the Italian epitaph for its title.

This letter of Branwell's is particularly interesting, because it shows us that, even in the last year of his life, and when dealing with the last uncompleted poem he ever wrote, he preserved the ambition of appearing in the literary world as a poet; and because he again speaks of 'Blackwood's Magazine,' whose value, it will be remembered, had impressed itself upon the youthful minds of himself and his sisters.

The fragment, 'Percy Hall,' which was enclosed with the letter to Leyland, though still morbid, is one of the most exquisite its author wrote. Here, by a strange and beautiful coincidence—if coincidence it be—we find Branwell, in his latest work, as in his youthful ones, given in the earlier part of this work, occupied with the dread study of a consumptive decline; we find him, in short, tinctured with the shadows of his later career, telling again of the death of that sister, whose memory he cherished with a life-long affection; and perhaps, too, with a deeper insight than the

other members of his family possessed, he foretells the end that awaited his sisters Emily and Anne, from that disease, whose poison was working in his own slender frame. The treatment of the subject, indeed, is truly characteristic of Branwell's feelings at the time, and of his impressions engendered by the mournful malady with which his family was afflicted. This poem, like some of those already noticed in the former pages of the present work, is distinguished by images, scenes, and conceptions, almost invariably animated by the instinctive power and originality of genius. His descriptions of the condition of the lady, of the way in which weakness has schooled her to regard the future—the natural expression doubtless of Branwell at the time—of the influences that 'forbade her heart to throb, her spirit to despond,' and of the agonized feelings of the survivor, are all instinct with the living breath of reality; they have the sublime dignity of truth, springing, as they do, from a knowledge far too intimate with the sorrows which inspired the poem. Perhaps, in the gaiety of the affectionate Percy, Branwell depicts, in some

sort, his own disposition, though it has never been charged against him that he was beguiled by 'syren smiles,' or seduced by the delights of 'play.' It seems to me that Branwell's poetical genius is as much higher than that of his sister Emily as hers was superior to the talents of Charlotte and Anne, in their versified productions. Beautiful, wild, and touching, like strains from the harp of Æolus, as are the emanations of Emily's poetical inspiration, they lack the force, depth, and breadth of Branwell's more expansive power of imagination, as displayed in his best productions; though even Branwell's poetical remains contain rather the evidence of power than the full expression of it.

PERCY HALL.

'The westering sunbeams smiled on Percy
Hall,
And green leaves glittered o'er the ancient
wall
Where Mary sat, to feel the summer breeze,
And hear its music mingling 'mid the trees.

There she had rested in her quiet bower
Through June's long afternoon, while hour on
hour

Stole, sweetly shining past her, till the shades,
Scarce noticed, lengthened o'er the grassy
glades;

But yet she sat, as if she knew not how
Her time wore on, with Heaven-directed
brow,

And eyes that only seemed awake, whene'er
Her face was fanned by summer evening's air.

All day her limbs a weariness would feel,
As if a slumber o'er her frame would steal;
Nor could she wake her drowsy thoughts to
care

For day, or hour, or what she was, or where:
Thus—lost in dreams, although debarred from
sleep,

While through her limbs a feverish heat would
creep,

A weariness, a listlessness, that hung
About her vigour, and Life's powers unstrung

She did not feel the iron gripe of pain,

But *thought* felt irksome to her heated brain;
Sometimes the stately woods would float
 before her,
Commingled with the cloud-piles brightening
 o'er her,
Then change to scenes for ever lost to view,
Or mock with phantoms which she never
 knew:
Sometimes her soul seemed brooding on to-
 day,
And then it wildly wandered far away,
Snatching short glimpses of her infancy,
Or lost in day-dreams of what yet might be.

'Yes—through the labyrinth-like course of
 thought—
Whate'er might be remembered or forgot,
Howe'er diseased the dream might be, or
 dim,
Still seemed the *Future* through each change
 to swim,
All indefinable, but pointing on
To what should welcome her when Life was
 gone;
She felt as if—to all she knew so well—

Its voice was whispering her to say "farewell;"
Was bidding her forget her happy home;
Was farther fleeting still—still beckoning her
to come.

'She felt as one might feel who, laid at rest,
With cold hands folded on a panting breast,
Has just received a husband's last embrace,
Has kissed a child, and turned a pallid face
From this world—with its feelings all laid by
—

To one unknown, yet hovering—oh! how
nigh!

'And yet—unlike that image of decay—
There hovered round her, as she silent lay,
A holy sunlight, an angelic bloom,
That brightened up the terrors of the tomb,
And, as it showed Heaven's glorious world
beyond,
Forbade her heart to throb, her spirit to
despond.

'But, who steps forward, o'er the glowing
green,

With silent tread, these stately groves
between?
To watch his fragile flower, who sees him not,
Yet keeps his image blended with each
thought,
Since but for *him* stole down that single tear
From her blue eyes, to think how very near
Their farewell hour might be!

'With silent tread
Percy bent o'er his wife his golden head;
And, while he smiled to see how calm she
slept,
A gentle feeling o'er his spirit crept,
Which made him turn toward the shining sky
With heart expanding to its majesty,
While he bethought him how more blest *its*
glow
Than *that* he left one single hour ago,
Where proud rooms, heated by a feverish
light,
Forced vice and villainy upon his sight;
Where snared himself, or snaring into crime,
His soul had drowned its hour, and lost its
count of time.

'The syren-sighs and smiles were banished
now,
The cares of "play" had vanished from his
brow;
He took his Mary's hot hand in his own,
She raised her eyes, and—oh, how soft they
shone!
Kindling to fondness through their mist of
tears,
Wakening afresh the light of fading years!—
He knew not why she turned those shining
eyes
With such a mute submission to the skies;
He knew not why her arm embraced him so,
As if she *must* depart, yet *could not* let him
go!

'With death-like voice, but angel-smile, she
said,
"My love, they need not care, when I am
dead,
To deck with flowers my capped and confined
head;
For all the flowers which I should love to see
Are blooming now, and will have died with

me:

The same sun bids us all revive to-day,
And the same winds will bid us to decay;
When Winter comes we all shall be no more

Departed into dust—next, covered o'er
By Spring's reviving green. See, Percy, now
How red my cheek—how red my roses
blow!

But come again when blasts of Autumn come;
Then mark their changing leaves, their
blighted bloom;
Then come to my bedside, then look at *me*,
How changed in all—*except my love for*
thee!"

'She spoke, and laid her hot hand on his own;
But he nought answered, save a heart-wrung
groan;
For oh! too sure, her voice prophetic
sounded
Too clear the proofs that in her face
abounded
Of swift Consumption's power! Although
each day

He'd seen her airy lightness fail away,
And gleams unnatural glisten in her eye;
He had not dared to dream that she could die,
But only fancied his a causeless fear
Of losing something which he held so dear;
Yet—now—when, startled at her prophet-
cries,
To hers he turned his stricken, stone-like
eyes,
And o'er her cheek declined his blighted
head.

He saw Death write on it the *fatal red*—
He saw, and straightway sank his spirit's light
Into the sunless twilight of the starless night!

'While he sat, shaken by his sudden shock,
Again—and with an earnestness—she spoke,
As if the world of her Creator shone
Through all the cloudy shadows of her own:
'Come grieve not—darling—o'er my early
doom;
'Tis well that Death no drearier shape assume
Than this he comes in—well that widowed
age
Will not extend my friendless pilgrimage

Through Life's dim vale of tears—'tis well that
Pain

Wields not its lash nor binds its burning chain,
But leaves my death-bed to a mild decline,
Soothed and supported by a love like thine!"

My copy of the poem is illustrated with a portrait, by J. B. Leyland, in pen-and-ink, of the ideal Percy. The drawing is bold and effective; and, though not intended for an exact portrait of Branwell, bears some resemblance to him in general character. The sketch is signed, 'Northangerland,' at the top; and, at the bottom, 'Alexander Percy, Esq.;' while the artist's name is discerned among the shadows which fall from the figure of Percy.

CHAPTER XIV.

FAME AT HAWORTH.

Charlotte Corresponds on Literary Subjects—

Novels—Confession of Authorship—
Branwell's Failing Health—He Writes to
Leyland—Branwell and Mr. George Searle
Phillips—Branwell's Intellect Retains its
Power—His Description of 'Professor
Leonidas Lyon'—The latter Gentleman's
Account of his Reading of 'Jane Eyre'—
Branwell's Remarks on Charlotte and the
Work.

The early months of the year 1848 proved a severe trial for the Brontë family, as they did to the whole of the Haworth villagers. Influenza and other ailments were prevalent, and the sisters did not escape the former: Anne, indeed, suffered from a severe cough, with some fever, and her friends became alarmed. The position of the parsonage in relation to the churchyard rendered it unhealthy; but, at the instance of Mr. Brontë, a new grave-yard was opened in another place. He did not, however, succeed in his attempt to get a good supply of water laid on to each house.

Charlotte, at the time, was still in correspondence

with Mr. Lewes and Mr. Williams, about the review of 'Jane Eyre' in 'Fraser's Magazine,' and about other literary subjects. She was still keeping the secret of the authorship of her book from her friends, putting off 'E.' with evasive letters, and wishing her to 'laugh or scold A—— out of the publishing notion.' 'Wuthering Heights' had not been received by the public with much favour, and we do not hear of any further literary work by Emily. But Charlotte was writing 'Shirley,' and Anne was going on with 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,' despite a consumptive listlessness that was upon her, such as Branwell describes in the wife of 'Percy;' and, in her letter written in January, Anne told 'E.' that they had done nothing 'to speak of' since she was at Haworth; yet they contrived to be busy from morning till night. In the spring, however, when this friend visited the Brontës again, full confession of authorship was made, and the poems and novels were shown to her. The identity of Mr. Brontë's daughters with the 'Messrs. Bell,' had, however, been known to some, in connection with the poems, at an earlier date, and was occasionally spoken of, though the

fact was not made public. Branwell himself was at home, quieter, but still failing in health and strength, for the constitutional taint, aided by his low spirits, and a bronchitis which had become chronic, was telling upon him.

'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,' was submitted to the publisher of 'Wuthering Heights' and 'Agnes Grey,' and accepted by him in the June of this year. If the first works of Ellis and Acton Bell were undervalued because they were believed to be the earlier productions of the author of 'Jane Eyre,' Acton's new volume derived enhanced importance from being thought to be a production of the same hand. 'Jane Eyre' had had a great run in America, and a publisher there had offered Messrs. Smith and Elder a high price for early sheets of the next work of its author, which they accepted. But the publishers of 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,' believing that Acton Bell was but a second name assumed by Currer Bell, made a similar offer to another American house. This circumstance led to questions and explanations; and Charlotte and Anne determined to visit London, in order to assure Messrs. Smith and

Elder that they were indeed distinct persons. The publishers were very much astonished to see the two delicate ladies, and they made them very welcome. Charlotte and Anne went to the Opera, they went to the Royal Academy and the National Gallery, and they visited Mr. Smith and Mr. Williams before returning to Haworth.

They found Branwell at home, physically the same as when they left him, gradually failing from the chronic bronchitis which had lasted through the summer, and with the perceptible wasting away of decline. Writing to his friend Leyland on July 22nd, he speaks of 'five months of utter sleeplessness, violent cough, and frightful agony of mind.' 'Long have I resolved,' he continues, 'to write to you a letter of five or six pages, but intolerable mental wretchedness and corporeal weakness have utterly prevented me.' The letter is signed, 'Yours sincerely, but nearly worn out, P. B. Brontë.' Charlotte attributed his illness to indulgence solely, and she had no suspicion that the end was but two months away. She writes on July 28th: 'Branwell is the same in conduct as ever. His constitution seems much shattered.

Papa, and sometimes all of us, have sad nights with him. He sleeps most of the day, and consequently will lie awake at night. But has not every house its trial?' [\[46\]](#) But Branwell's condition of health was not such as to keep him within doors, and there were revivals, as in Anne's case also, which permitted him to visit his friends. I spoke to him once in Halifax at the time, and he was often seen in the village of Haworth.

An interesting episode occurred in August or September, for an account of which we are indebted to Mr. George Searle Phillips. [\[47\]](#) We learn from it that, in the midst of physical decay and mental distress, Branwell's intellect retained its power to the last; and we learn also what pride he took in the works of his sisters, and in the reputation they had made. I can myself, from personal knowledge, endorse all that Mr. Phillips says as to Branwell's brilliancy of intellect at this time. When Charlotte and Anne went to London, they had assumed the name of Brown; but their real name and the place of their residence were communicated to some people, and it was not long before it became quietly known. Then began

the stream of pilgrims to the shrine of genius at Haworth, which has continued from that day to this, and will for many more. One gentleman, indeed, at the time, stayed three days at Haworth, maintaining a close intimacy with Branwell, and we know, from Mr. Phillips' narrative, in what light Branwell looked upon the first-comers.

'Branwell,' says his friend, 'during the latter part of my acquaintance with him, was much altered for the worse, in his personal appearance; but if he had altered in the same direction mentally, as his biographer says he had, then he must have been a man of immense and brilliant intellect. For I have rarely heard more eloquent and thoughtful discourse, flashing so brightly with random jewels of wit, and made more sunny and musical with poetry, than that which flowed from his lips during the evenings I passed with him at the "Black Bull," in the village of Haworth. His figure was very slight, and he had, like his sister Charlotte, a superb forehead. But, even when pretty deep in his cups, he had not the slightest appearance of the sot that Mrs. Gaskell says he was. "His great tawny mane"—meaning thereby the hair of his

head—was, it is true, somewhat dishevelled; but, apart from this, he gave no sign of intoxication. His eye was as bright, and his features were as animated, as they very well could be; and, moreover, his whole manner gave indications of intense enjoyment.'

Branwell described some of the characters in the novels, and talked much about his sisters, and especially about Charlotte, whose celebrity, he said, had already attracted more strangers to the village than had been known before; and Mr. Phillips gives the following account of the visit of one gentleman, an enthusiastic admirer of 'Jane Eyre,' whose somewhat eccentric personality he has veiled under the style and title of 'Leonidas Lyon, Professor of Greek in the London University':—

'One evening, as we sat together in the little parlour of the Inn, the landlord entered, and asked Branwell if he would see a gentleman who wanted to make his acquaintance.

"'He's a funny fellow," said the landlord; "and is somebody, I dare swear, with lots of money."

'As the landlord spoke, a squat little dapper fellow, with a white fur hat on his head, an umbrella under his arm, and a pair of blue spectacles on his nose, strutted into the room *sans cérémonie*. He approached the table in a very fussy and excited manner, exclaiming:

"Landlord, bring us some brandy. I must have the pleasure of drinking a glass with the brother of that distinguished lady, who wrote the great book that made London blaze. Three glasses,—landlord—do you hear? And you, sir, are the great lady's brother, I presume? Professor Leonidas Lyon, sir, has the honour of introducing himself to your distinguished notice."

'Branwell responded, gravely:

"Patrick Branwell Brontë, sir, has the honour of welcoming you to Haworth, and begging you to be seated."

'Whereupon the little man bowed and scraped, and laughed a good-humoured laugh all over his good, round face, and said it was an honour he

could not have hoped for, to sit as a guest at the same board, as he might say, "with the brother, the very flesh and blood, of the great lady who wrote the book."

'Here the brandy and water came in, and the little man grew merrier still, and more communicative. He was a Professor of Greek at the London University, and, chancing to be at Smith's, the London publisher's, whose friend Williams was a "wonderful man of letters—a very wonderful man indeed!"—Williams asked the Professor if he had seen the book of the season—"the immense book," he called it—which was going to make one good reputation, and half a dozen fortunes. Mr. Williams praised it so highly that he (the Professor) grew wild about it, and asked where it could be got. Upon this, he threw a sovereign to pay for it, and ran home without his change, to read it. "It was prodigious, sir," he exclaimed.'

The Professor went on in high praise of 'Jane Eyre,' and told Branwell and Mr. Phillips that his bed-time was ten o'clock, but that, when reading the book, he had sat on, completely absorbed,

until six o'clock in the morning, when the housemaid came. Then he had retired to his own room, but, instead of going to bed, had sat on the edge of it, until he finished the story at ten A.M. Branwell said this history of a Professor's reading of 'Jane Eyre' made him laugh 'as if he would split his sides.' And when he told Charlotte about it the next day, she laughed heartily, too, as did the other sisters, when she went up stairs to tell them, and their laughter moved Branwell to renewed merriment.

'When the Professor's story was ended,' continues Mr. Phillips, 'he tried to cajole Branwell into introducing him to the "great lady" who wrote the book. He was dying to see her, he said, and had come all the way down into Yorkshire, from London, in the fond hope of getting a glimpse of her, and perhaps of touching the hem of her garment. When he found that Branwell fought shy of the proposition he actually offered him a large sum of money, and then, taking from his fob a valuable gold watch, laid it on the table, and said he would throw that in to boot, if he would only let him see her and shake hands with her. ...

'Poor Branwell spoke of his sister in most affectionate terms, such as none but a man of deep feeling could utter. He knew her power, and what tremendous depths of passion and pathos lay hid in her great surging heart, long before she gave expression to them in "Jane Eyre." When she wrote the first chapters of her Richardsonian novel, he condemned the work as in opposition to her genius—which is good proof of his discrimination and critical judgment. But when "The Professor" was written, he said that was better, but that she could do better still; and, although it is not equal to "Jane Eyre," yet it is a work of great originality and dramatic interest.

"I know," said Branwell, after speaking of Charlotte's talents, "that I also had stuff enough in me to make popular stories; but the failure of the Academy plan ruined me. I was felled, like a tree in the forest, by a sudden and strong wind, to rise no more. Fancy me, with my education, and those early dreams, which had almost ripened into realities, turning counter-jumper, or a clerk in a railway-office, which last was, you know, my occupation for some time. It simply degraded me

in my own eyes, and broke my heart."

'It was useless,' says Mr. Phillips, 'to remonstrate with him, and yet I could not help it, and did my best to rouse the sleeping energies within him to noble action once more.

"It is too late," he said; "and you would say so, too, if you knew all." He used to be the oracle of the secluded household in earlier days—before the love of drink mastered him. His opinion was invariably sought for upon the literary performances of his sisters; but at the time I am now speaking of, he was a cipher in the house.'

Such is the account given by Mr. Phillips of his friend; so different in its character from that which Mr. Grundy, and, following him, Miss Robinson, offer, in the incredible episode of the carving-knife and the slaying of the devil, unless we believe the incident—which that gentleman states to have taken place at this period, how erroneously we have seen—to have been acted, as is most probable, in grotesque humour.

During the last two months of his life, Branwell

became the object of much interest and received some homage; for, his sisters living secluded lives, he was generally the only member of the family accessible to the public. When he met with strangers, he invariably comported himself with becoming dignity, and did not lay himself open to the effects of their curiosity. Those who made his acquaintance were impressed, as Mr. Phillips was, with his great mental calibre, and with the grace and wit of his conversation. One gentleman—himself at the present time in the first place in one of the professions—who knew Branwell intimately, declares to me that he always believed the abilities of Charlotte's brother were such as might have placed him in the very front rank of literature.

CHAPTER XV.

DEATH OF BRANWELL.

Branwell's failing Health—Chronic Bronchitis and

Marasmus—His Death—Charlotte's allusions to it—Correction of some Statements relating to it—Summary of the subsequent History of the Brontë Family.

The spring and summer of the year 1848 were wild, wet, and unfavourable, and the fine weather in August was of little benefit to Branwell. His appetite was diminished, and he was weaker. He was suffering, in addition to his chronic bronchitis, from marasmus, a consumptive wasting away, arising from hereditary tendency, as well as from mental agony and the effects of irregular life. However, neither himself nor his family, nor his medical attendants had any anticipation of immediate danger.

He was not, indeed, altogether confined to the house, and he was in the village only two days before his death; but, on that occasion, his strength failed before he reached his home. William Brown, the sexton's brother, found him in the lane which leads up to the parsonage, quite exhausted, panting for breath, and unable to

proceed. He was helped to the house, which he never again left alive.

In the last few days of his life, Branwell was more reconciled, more subdued, and better feelings filled his mind. The affection of his family returned undiminished, and they watched with intense anxiety the end of their cherished brother. The strange madness that had clouded his mind for so many months, left him now, and the simple thoughts and feelings of his early years came back to him again. He died on the morning of Sunday, September the 24th. He had talked through the night of his mis-spent life, his wasted youth, and his shame, with compunction. He was also filled with the

'Sense of past youth and manhood come in
vain,
Of genius given, and knowledge won in vain.'

His natural love likewise came out in beautiful and touching words, that consoled and satisfied those he was about to leave for ever.

Some time before the end, John Brown entered Branwell's room, and they were alone. The young man, though faint and dying, spoke of the life they had led together. He took a short retrospect of his past excesses, in which the grave-digger had often partaken; but in it he made no mention of the lady whose image had distracted his brain. He appeared, in the calmness of approaching death, and the self-possession that preceded it, to be unconscious that he had ever loved any but the members of his family, for the depth and tenderness of which affection he could find no language to express. But, presently, seizing Brown's hand, he uttered the words: 'Oh, John, I am dying!' then, turning, as if within himself, he murmured: 'In all my past life I have done nothing either great or good.' Conscious that the last moment was near, the sexton summoned the household; and retreated to the belfry. It was about nine in the morning when the agony began. Branwell's struggles and convulsions were great, and continued for some time: in the last gasp, he started convulsively, almost to his feet, and fell dead into his father's arms.

Mrs. Gaskell says, of this event: 'I have heard, from one who attended Branwell in his last illness, that he resolved on standing up to die. He had repeatedly said, that as long as there was life, there was strength of will to do what it chose; and, when the last agony began, he insisted on assuming the position just mentioned.' This account does not accord with that given to me by the Browns, and, perhaps, it arose from some exaggeration of what actually took place.

On October the 9th, Charlotte writes thus of her brother's end: 'The past three weeks have been a dark interval in our humble home. Branwell's constitution has been failing fast all the summer; but still neither the doctors nor himself thought him so near his end as he was. He was entirely confined to his bed but for one single day, and was in the village two days before his death. He died, after twenty minutes' struggle, on Sunday morning, September 24th. He was perfectly conscious till the last agony came on. His mind had undergone the peculiar change which frequently precedes death, two days previously; the calm of better feelings filled it; a return of

natural affection marked his last moments. He is in God's hands now; and the All-Powerful is likewise the All-Merciful. A deep conviction that he rests at last—rests well after his brief, erring, suffering, feverish life—fills and quiets my mind now. The final separation, the spectacle of his pale corpse, gave me more acute, bitter pain than I could have imagined. Till the last hour comes, we never know how much we can forgive, pity, regret a near relative. All his vices were and are nothing now. We remember only his woes. Papa was acutely distressed at first, but, on the whole, has borne the event well. [\[48\]](#)

A few days later she wrote to another friend, speaking of her brother's death. 'The event to which you allude came upon us indeed with startling suddenness, and was a severe shock to us all.... I thank you for your kind sympathy. Many, under the circumstances, would think our loss rather a relief than otherwise; in truth, we must acknowledge, in all humility and gratitude, that God has greatly tempered judgment with mercy; but, yet, as you doubtless know from experience, the last earthly separation cannot take

place between near relations without the keenest pangs on the part of the survivors. Every wrong and sin is forgotten then; pity and grief share the hearts and the memory between them. Yet we are not without comfort in our affliction. A most propitious change marked the last few days of poor Branwell's life ... and this change could not be owing to the fear of death, for within half-an-hour of his decease he seemed unconscious of danger.'

Charlotte concludes by referring to her own health, which had given way under the strain. [\[49\]](#)

Branwell was buried in the grave in which the remains of his sisters Maria and Elizabeth lay, and his name is placed next after theirs on the tablet. Thus, after twenty-three years, he joined in the dust those from whom in life he had never been separated in affection.

It would have been well if, when the grave closed over his mortal remains, it had buried in oblivion the memory of his failings and his sorrows. Charlotte, as we have seen, when her brother was

gone, remembered nothing but his woes; and, if the biographers of herself and her sister Emily had consulted the feelings of those on whom they wrote—which have been so touchingly and tearfully expressed by Charlotte—they would have drawn the veil over whatever offences Branwell, as mortal, might have committed. But, amongst Mrs. Gaskell's other statements regarding him, there is one, relating even to his death, which cannot be passed over in silence here, since, though she had been compelled to omit it, with her other charges, from the second edition of her work, Miss Robinson has reproduced it recently in her 'Emily Brontë.' The statement was to the effect that, when Branwell died, his pockets were filled with the letters of the lady whom he had admired. [\[50\]](#) To this bold statement Martha Brown gave to me a flat contradiction, declaring that she was employed in the sick-room at the time, and had personal knowledge that not one letter, nor a vestige of one, from the lady in question was so found. The letters were mostly from a gentleman of Branwell's acquaintance, then living near the place

of his former employment. Martha was indignant at the misrepresentation.

It may not be amiss here, in the briefest possible way, to give an outline of the subsequent history of the Brontë family. Emily's health began rapidly to fail after Branwell's death, which was a great shock to her, and she never left the house alive after the Sunday succeeding it. Her cough was very obstinate, and she was troubled with shortness of breath. Charlotte saw the danger, but could do nothing to ward it off, for Emily was silent and reserved, gave no answers to questions, and took no remedies that were prescribed. She grew weaker daily, and the end came on Tuesday, December the 19th. At the same time Anne was slowly failing, but she lingered longer. 'Anne's decline,' said Charlotte, 'is gradual and fluctuating; but its nature is not doubtful.' Unlike Emily, she looked for sympathy, took medicines, and did her best to get well. It was arranged at last that Charlotte and she should go to Scarborough, hoping the change of air might invigorate her, and they left the parsonage on May the 24th, 1849. But the change had no beneficial

effect, and Anne died on May the 28th, at Scarborough, where she was buried.

After this the more purely literary portion of Charlotte's life commenced. She completed 'Shirley' early in September, 1849, and it was published on October the 26th. Her real name, and the neighbourhood in which she resided, became now generally known. The reviews showered rapidly; but Charlotte thought that one the best by Eugène Forçade, in the 'Revue des deux Mondes.' The cloud now passed away from her, and she visited London, made the acquaintance of Thackeray, Miss Martineau, and others, and entered eagerly into the occupations of literary life. 'Villette' was completed in November, 1852. Charlotte married the Rev. Arthur Bell Nicholls, who had long been her father's curate, on June the 29th, 1854, and she died on Saturday, March the 31st, 1855. The Rev. Patrick Brontë, whom I knew, a fine, tall, grey-haired, and venerable old man, survived all his children, and died at Haworth on January 7th, 1861.

CHAPTER XVI.

BRANWELL'S CHARACTER.

Branwell's Character in his Poetry—The Pious and Tender Tone of Mind which it Displays—Branwell's Tendency to Dwell on the Past rather than on the Future—Illustrated—The Sad Tone of his Mind —He is Inclined to be Morbid—The Way in which Branwell regarded Nature—Observations on the Character Displayed in his Works.

It has often been observed that the life of a poet may best be learned from the works he has left behind him. We may fall into error in dealing with the circumstances of his external life, and may make mistakes as to chronology or facts, and, in this way, may be led often to form a false estimate of his character; but, if we discover the personality concealed in his writings, if we can

grasp the hidden spirit by which they are informed, we shall be enabled to follow his heart in its cherished affections, to understand the characteristic tendency of his thoughts, and to comprehend even the very psychology of his soul. This enquiry, it is true, is often difficult in the extreme; one cannot always unravel the tangled mysteries in which natural expression is wrapped up, nor fully pierce the cloudy medium of conventionality or affectation through which it may be dimly revealed; it is especially difficult, also, to follow it in the works of a writer of a school like that of the Euphuists, or of Pope, where the medium is one of exaggerated refinement, or of classical and formal preciseness.

But, with the writings of Branwell Brontë, the case is entirely different; and for a very simple reason, viz., that everything he wrote proceeded from a personal inspiration, and was the direct expression of the fulness of emotion, and of vivid thoughts or feelings which could scarcely be hidden; because, in short, he wrote in the true artistic spirit of having something to say.

If Branwell's affectionate nature led him to dwell upon the memories of his earlier years, and upon the thoughts of those dead sisters whom he had loved so much, he spoke in the voice of Harriet weeping for the departed Caroline; it needed but his remembrance of the fell disease that had deprived him of his sisters, and the fearful havoc which it was yet to work in his family, to inspire him with the sad fancy of his 'Percy Hall.' If he sank into the depths of morbid melancholy, and was filled with a consciousness of the worthlessness of ambition, the folly of pride, and the universality of sorrow, his sonnets were a natural expression, in which he found both relief and consolation.

In his case it requires no Pheidian hand to bring out the statue from the marble, but only a sympathetic spirit, a heart filled with the affections of humanity, and a mind attuned to thoughts somewhat sad, to enable one to enter into every mood in which Branwell wrote, and to understand the moral and tender pathos that fills his works. It is because Branwell's poems are so fully expressive of his feelings at the time when they

were written that they are so separately placed in this work. But, before we conclude it, it will be well to sum up, in a slight sketch, a few of the most characteristic features of his writings, and, in so doing, we shall arrive at a correct estimate of his disposition and of his poetry together.

The first thing, then, that strikes one in Branwell's verse, beginning at its youthful period, is the tone of piety that distinguishes it. The simple stanzas which he sent to Wordsworth, even, however worthless as poetry, are valuable, because they show us the early bent of his mind; and the beautiful lines which he wrote a year later, in 1838, where he first manifests that consciousness of the vanity of earthly things, which his sister Anne also versified, tell us of the hope of a heavenly future, which is contrasted, in its serenity, with the evils of mortal life. The poem entitled 'Caroline's Prayer,' and the one 'On Caroline' also, simple though they are, are evidence of a devotional turn of mind; and mark again, in the longer poem of 'Caroline,' how Harriet finds divine consolation in the calm of Nature:

'Quiet airs of sacred gladness

Breathing through these woodlands wild,

O'er the whirl of mortal madness

Spread the slumbers of a child;'

and how tenderly she remembers the pious lessons which her dead sister had drawn from the sufferings of the Saviour of man, a recollection, let it be remembered, which Branwell himself preserved. A little later, we find Branwell occupied upon a long poem, of which we possess only a fragment, wholly sacred in its character, and moral in its purpose,—'Noah's Warning over Methusaleh's Grave.' Here Noah, before the universal Deluge, in the presence even of the cloudy wall 'piled boding round the firmament,' harangues the people, bidding them withdraw from sin, ere it be too late. It is true, however, that in the later poems, when Branwell's mind is cast into its deepest gloom, this disposition is not so prominent, and, perhaps, can be gathered only from an abundance of tender touches, which could proceed from nothing but a devotional spirit; and thus we may infer that, though he might

have lost some of his early piety, he never lost the effect of it. There is, besides, throughout Branwell's work, the evidence of a justly balanced morality, in that he nowhere exalts depraved passions, or manifests impiety, or, more than all, corrupts his readers with the painting of sensuous ideas, or the description of sensuous incidents. And I would ask the reader, in connection with this admirable characteristic of his poetry, to remember that he has never been charged with indulgence of the kind that has lured away too many men of genius and mental power.

The next thing that strikes me in Branwell's poetry is the strong love that he manifests for the past, which he seems to value more than the present, and whose pleasures he deems sweeter and purer than any the future can have in store. This tone of thought could be very well understood if we had regard to circumstances of the later period of his life, when despair had cut off hope; but it is just as prominent in the earliest poems he wrote. It would seem that, to the pensive mind of Branwell, all the thoughts of childhood, all the joys of youth and its affections, became, as years passed on, hallowed

and exalted in the golden halo of recollection. There were places in the sanctity of the past where the roses of Bendemeer grew, unchanging ever; places to which he turned for the joys of memory, when solitude inclined him to reflection. These pleasures of memory were often of a pensive order, for they were connected with sorrowful events, or they were joys turned sorrowful, as joys will turn, when they have been long enough departed. In Branwell's letter to Wordsworth, and in his other letters, he expresses plenty of honest ambition, and talks bravely of work in the future; and he spoke in the same way also. But I have received from his poems the impression that this ambition grew from the requirements of circumstances, and from literary emulation; that, in fact, the constitution of Branwell's mind was of the gentle reflective nature to which the pleasures of ambition appear hollow and insufficient in themselves. At least it is clear that he dwelt with more satisfaction on the past than on the future. So far, indeed, as his poetry is concerned, we saw, in 'The End of All,' that it was only when loss made the past too painful for

thought, that he turned to the stony joys of solitary ambition and personal fame. This seems to me to be a very tender trait in his character, however little it might fit him to fight the battle of life with those who looked for the joys of the future, rather than turned to pleasures they could actually taste no more.

In Branwell's thoughtful moods, it required but the woodland sunshine, perhaps, or the sound of the distant bells, to bring back memories to him, as they brought back to Harriet, in the poem of 'Caroline,' many a scene of bygone days, opening the fount of tears, and waking memory to the thought

'Of visions sleeping—not forgot.'

Thus, under the pensive influence, there passed over her

'That swell of thought, which seems to fill
The bursting heart, the gushing eye,
While fades all *present* good or ill

Before the shades of things gone by.'

It called up in her, also, the hours when Caroline, too, listening to the wild storms of winter, had filled the nights with pictures and feelings

'From far-off memories brought.'

These treasures of memory, to which Branwell refers in many of his poems, were to him of a sacred nature, and might not be profaned. He tells us, indeed, in one of his sonnets, that the tears of affection are dried up by the growth of honours, and by the interests and pursuits of life, which

'Dim or destroy those holy thoughts which
cling
Round where the forms we loved lie
slumbering.'

For the past was thus hallowed by Branwell, because in it lay his earliest affections, and his most poignant sorrows. I have had occasion, in

speaking of several of the poems in this volume, to point out the love which he shows for his dead sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, and how he mourned them up to the last year of his life. For his disposition was of a deeply affectionate order. He has, indeed, painted for us too vividly, in both the poems of 'Caroline' and 'Percy Hall,' the pangs of separation, and the cheerless void that remains when the loved one has departed, to leave us any doubt as to the sensitiveness of his nature.

It will not have escaped the reader's attention that Branwell's muse sings often morbidly enough, and that,—like some spirit that cannot forsake the scene of its mortal sorrows, and haunts the place of its affliction—he dwells frequently upon details of a painful kind, that others would gladly have relegated to oblivion. In the poem of 'Caroline,' the picture of his mother, clad in black, is still before his eyes; he remembers even the grave-clothes of his sister in her coffin, and

'Her *too* bright cheek all faded now;'

the closing of the coffin lid, and the lowering of it into its narrow bed are yet before his eyes; and painfully he remembers his feeling at the grave-side:

'And wild my sob, when hollow rung
The first cold clod above her flung.'

Later, though he was occupied with different subjects, Branwell could not entirely free himself from a morbid and painful analysis of the physical effects of the disease he dreaded so much; and very beautifully does he suggest the picture of consumptive decline and early decay.

This tone of thought, and the many misfortunes and gloomy forebodings that attended Branwell's later years, had a natural effect in giving a mournful cast to almost every emanation of his muse; and we find, in effect, throughout the poems here collected, that, save in one instance—'The Epicurean's Song'—which we feel to be the production of a moment of elation, there is scarcely a line that does not breathe a

consciousness of sad regret, or of cruel and bitter sorrow.

He was filled with the sense of the futility of human joy, and the abiding presence of woe:

'No! joy *itself* is but a shade,
So well may its remembrance die,
But cares, Life's conquerors, never fade,
So strong is their reality.'

These sorrows, as years went by, grew so terrible in their crushing weight, that the mind could barely withstand them, and Branwell felt, in that period when his cry was for peace in death, that, when the light of life is gone,

'There come no sorrows crowding on,
And powerless lies Despair.'

With Branwell, indeed, as with Mary in his poem of 'Percy Hall,' 'thought felt irksome to the heated brain.'

It was then that oblivion became to him a coveted relief from immediate woe, and that he envied the dreamless head of the wandering, water-borne corpse, whose rolling bed seemed calmer than the turmoil of the world.

This figure of the body rocked by the waves of ocean, brings me to a consideration of the way in which Branwell regarded Nature, which had something very noteworthy in it. It was always remarked by his friends that the young poet was a great observer, and took an especial pleasure in the works of Nature. It is, therefore, somewhat surprising, at first sight, that, in his poems, he does not dwell upon them descriptively or in a marked manner, and that we have to infer, from certain suggestive touches and pictures—which do, indeed, speak more plainly than words could—that he observed them at all. But we learn that the works of Nature had for Branwell a deeper significance than for most people, that he conceived they had some mysterious sympathy or unspeakable connection with human affections, and were, in a manner, the expression or immediate reflection of the Deity. Wordsworth,

Southey, and Coleridge had already looked upon Nature somewhat in this wise; but it would be a mistake to suppose that Branwell imitated them: his thoughts flow too swiftly and impetuously to admit of such a conclusion. It is possible that, if his life had passed calmly, he might have dwelt upon the simple beauties of Nature, and found in them a homely harmony with familiar ideas; Charlotte and Anne in their poetry scarcely get beyond this; but it was different with Emily and Branwell. Emily, with her reserved, passionate nature, had a sympathetic spell in the solitary moorland; and Branwell, labouring with his sorrows, found, in the wildest storms, a being with whom he must battle, or saw, in the mighty mountains, an image of unbroken strength and everlasting fortitude, such a power as he must strive after and make his own. But, in Branwell's earlier poems, this influence is not so marked, and his muse is simply attuned to the saddened thoughts in which Nature participates. Thus Wordsworth had sung:

'Fancy, who leads the pastimes of the glad,

Full oft is pleased a wayward dart to throw;
Sending sad shadows after things not sad,
Peopling the harmless fields with signs of woe:
Beneath her sway, a simple forest cry
Becomes an echo of man's misery.'

And thus we see, in Branwell's 'Caroline,' how, even in its calmness, the beautifully suggested picture of eve—when the sunlight slants, and the waters cease their motion, and the calm and hush tell of rest from labour—is made to harmonize with the plaintive thoughts of Harriet. But then comes the more significant question:

'Why is such a silence given
To this summer day's decay,
Does our earth feel aught of Heaven,
Can the voice of Nature pray?'

What, in short, is the harmonious and sympathetic spell that breathes through Nature?

The wild places of the earth, mountains and moorlands, where the storms raged, and the great

winds blew, were nearest akin to the Titanic genius of Branwell and Emily. Thus, in the sonnet, the everlasting majesty of Black Comb was held up by Branwell as an example to man, and as a contrast to human feebleness; and later, when his woe was most acute, he was drawn into a 'communion of vague unity' with Penmaenmawr, comparing the living, beating heart of man with the stony hill, and begging,

'Let me, like it, arise o'er mortal care,
All woes sustain, yet never know despair,
Unshrinking face the griefs I now deplore,
And stand through storm and shine like
moveless Penmaenmawr.'

And, lastly, in the 'Epistle from a Father to a Child in her Grave,' we find him comparing himself with one in the midst of wild mountains:

'I, thy life's source, was like a wanderer
breasting
Keen mountain winds, and on a summit
resting,

Whose rough rocks rise above the grassy
mead,
With sleet and north winds howling overhead.'

It will be seen from this short inquiry that the poetry of Branwell Brontë was entirely introspective, having, almost to the last line, some direct reference to his own thoughts or feelings; and that it may thus be read as an actual part of the story of his life. The disposition it reveals, though often hidden, as the readers of this book know, through the effects of folly and indulgence, was one of a singularly gentle, affectionate, and sympathetic character; passionate and unstable, it is true, but a disposition, nevertheless, that has been frequently misunderstood, and not seldom wronged. One of the aims of this book has been to set Patrick Branwell Brontë right with the public; an attempt, not to clear him from follies and weaknesses that really were his—which the public, but for the mistakes of biographers, would never have known—but to show that, at any rate, his nature was one rather to be admired than condemned. It has aimed also, by the publication

of his poetical writings, to demonstrate that his genius is not unworthy to be ranked with that which made his sisters famous. Yet it may, perhaps, be held that the poems here published contain more of rich promise than of real fulfilment, rather the earnest of literary success than the actual accomplishment of it. But, in reading the poetry of Branwell Brontë, which is so uniformly sad, it may be well to remember what Mr. Swinburne has said, in speaking of Mr. Browning, that 'to do justice to any book which deserves any other sort of justice than that of the fire or waste-paper basket, it is necessary to read it in a fit frame of mind.'

THE END.

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Footnotes

[\[1\]](#) 'Pictures of the Past,' p. 83.

[\[2\]](#) 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xi.

[\[3\]](#) 'Emily Brontë,' p. 102.

[\[4\]](#) 'Unpublished Letters of Charlotte Brontë,' *Hours at Home*, chap. xi., p. 204.

[\[5\]](#) 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xii.

[\[6\]](#) 'Unpublished Letters of Charlotte Brontë,' *Hours at Home*, xi.

[\[7\]](#) 'Charlotte Brontë,' by T. Wemyss Reid, chap. vi.

[\[8\]](#) 'Charlotte Brontë, a Monograph.'

[\[9\]](#) 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xiii.

[\[10\]](#) The condition into which Branwell fell at this period is one very well-known

to mental physiologists. Thus Carpenter speaks of it: 'In most forms of monomania, there is more or less of disorder in the *ideational* process, leading to the formation of positive *delusions* or *hallucinations*, that is to say, of fixed beliefs or dominant ideas which are palpably inconsistent with reality. These delusions, however, are not attributable to original perversions of the reasoning process, but arise out of the perverted *emotional state*. They give rise, in the first place, to *misinterpretation of actual facts or occurrences*, in accordance with the prevalent state of the feelings.'—'Principles of Mental Physiology,' (1874), p. 667.

[\[11\]](#) 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap, xiii., 1st edition.

[\[12\]](#) 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap, xiii., 1st edition.

[\[13\]](#) 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap, xiii.,

1st edition.

[\[14\]](#) 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xiii.,
1st edition.

[\[15\]](#) 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. v.,
1860 edition.

[\[16\]](#) 'Charlotte Brontë, a Monograph,'
chap. vii.

[\[17\]](#) A gentleman with whom I have recently conversed, who knew this lady personally, on seeing the first edition of Mrs. Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' expressed his astonishment at the 'gross form of the libel,' of which he had had no conception. He had good reason for entirely disbelieving the stories, for which Mrs. Gaskell was responsible, relating to the lady in question.

[\[18\]](#) Branwell here speaks of an accident which had happened to one part of the monument referred to above.

[\[19\]](#) Charlotte Brontë told her friend

'Mary,' that Branwell had appropriated Cowper's poem, 'The Castaway.'

[20] Mr. Grundy has assigned the date of this letter to within a few months of January, 1818; but, from internal evidence, it is clear that it belongs really to the period I have named.

[21] 'Unpublished Letters of Charlotte Brontë,' *Hours at Home*, xi.

[22] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xiii.

[23] 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap, xiii., 1st edition.

[24] 'George Eliot's Life, as related in her Letters and Journals,' arranged and edited by her husband, J. W. Cross, 1885, vol. i., p. 441.

[25] 'The Mirror,' 1872.

[26] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap, xiii., 1st. edit.

- [27] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap, xiii., 1st. edit.
- [28] Robinson's 'Emily Brontë,' p. 145.
- [29] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap, xiii., 1st edit.
- [30] 'Pictures of the Past,' p. 89.
- [31] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xiv.
- [32] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. ix.
- [33] 'Pictures of the Past,' p. 89.
- [34] 'Pictures of the Past,' p. 90.
- [35] 'Pictures of the Past,' pp. 90-92.
- [36] Vol. xxviii, p. 54. 1873.

[37] It should be stated, perhaps, that one recent newspaper writer, possibly with the intention of discrediting any claim that might be set up for Branwell's authorship

of 'Wuthering Heights,' has drawn from the depths of his memory, or, possibly, of his imagination, a story that Branwell had read to him, as his own, the plot of 'Shirley.' But, since 'Shirley' was not commenced very many months before Branwell's death, and since he had been in his grave a year when it was published, it is obviously impossible that he can ever have desired to draw to himself the praise which was bestowed upon it. And this ingenious writer has adopted, curiously enough, almost the phraseology of Mr. Dearden's account, published eighteen years ago, saying, 'he took from his hat, the usual receptacle, &c.,' which suggests an impression of unconscious plagiarism.

[38] 'Pictures of the Past,' by Francis H. Grundy, C.E. 1879, p. 80.

[39] Lecture by Mr. T. Wemyss Reid.

[40] 'Wuthering Heights,' chap. xxxiii.

[41] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,'

chap. ix.

[42] T. Wemyss Reid's 'Charlotte Brontë, a Monograph,' chap. vii., p. 83.

[43] Itinerary, vol. 5, p. 83.

[44] Inquisition *post mortem* of Thomas Leyland of the Morleys, co. Lanc., Esq. (Yorkshire lands) taken at Bradford, co. York, 11th Sept., 6 Eliz.

[45] 'The White Rose of York,' 1834, pp. 226-229.

[46] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xvi.

[47] 'Branwell Brontë,' *The Mirror, a reflex of the World's Literature*, 1872.

[48] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' chap. xvi.

[49] 'Charlotte Brontë: a Monograph,' by T. Wemyss Reid, p. 90.

[50] Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,'

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