

of one who had known sin, and sorrow, and fate, but had risen above adverse fortune into peaceful victory.

All this is much more than a twice-told tale, yet it is well to recall it once again, it may perhaps lead others to open their Shakespeare with loving reverence, and help them in some measure to make books their friends, and cultivate the society of the great masters in the English tongue.

D. KINMONT ROY.

THE HOME OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË.

MUCH as railway penetration has done to open up the moorland regions of the north of England, it has effected here but little change. Upon leaving the platform of a small, primitive station, we mounted the steep and narrow little street—(it might have been the original of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Hill called Straight)—and steeper and steeper it rose in front of us at every step; while down its centre there presently poured, with a clatter, clatter, clatter of wooden clogs, the village lads and lasses just let loose from school, each lusty urchin clad in such a suit of brown corduroys as must have set at nought the rudest blasts of winter, to say nothing of rugged walls and gnarled branches.

"Could anybody show us to Mr. Brown's?" was our first enquiry, Mr. Brown being the nephew of that Martha Brown who, it may be remembered, was the "new girl" who succeeded Tabby, when Tabby's days at Haworth parsonage were numbered. A mite of four was told off to trot in front of the ladies to the neat little stationer's shop, within which stood Martha Brown's nephew, only too glad to lead the way up his little back staircase to the room wherein was laid out all he had to show pertaining to the revered family, in whose service his old relation had lived the best part of her life.

And now I must just remark that it is a mistake to suppose that the memory of the Brontës is dying out in the place which once knew them so well. Every old villager we spoke to—and these were not few—had something to say, and usually some reminiscence to offer on the subject. The names of "Charlotte," "Emily," and "Branwell" dropped easily and familiarly from their lips; and yet there was nothing impertinent, nothing the least disrespectful, in the sound: it merely seemed as if these simple folks cherished a hallowed remembrance, with which any of the ordinary forms of speech would have been incompatible.

One nice little matron, with a chastened, subdued demeanour, and a face that plainly told life had been to her no child's play, had perhaps more to tell than all the rest about the Brontës. She had seen "Mrs. Nicholls" pass into the church in her bridal attire on the wedding morn—very plain, but Charlotte always was very plain in her dress; and again had seen her re-enter the same churchyard gates but a few brief months later, when carried to her grave. "She was never very intimate, never at all free-spoken with the Haworth people." "Oh, they liked her: nobody had ever a word against her; but it was understood that she, and indeed all the family, liked best to be let alone. Charlotte would come and go. She was a very quick walker, and she would turn the corner of the parsonage lane and be down the street all in a moment; and then she would drop into the shop"—(we were sitting in "the shop" as we listened)—"order what she wanted, and be off home again at once, without a word more than was needed. My father," continued the narrator, "had always himself to take the cloth, or whatever it was that had been ordered, up to the parsonage, when his work was done; and he had to measure it there, and cut off the length required. No, none of them would ever have it measured and cut off in the shop; it had to be taken up in the piece to the house, and cut there. The Brontës had ways of their own, and that was one of them. They were strange people, but very much beloved. Mr. Brontë was a fine old gentleman" (with a sudden little glow of warmth), "a very fine old gentleman" (most emphatically); and the speaker had heard that there were some who had written about Charlotte, and made up books about her, "who had not spoken quite true about Mr. Brontë." All she could say was that "there was no one in Haworth now living who had not a good word for the old gentleman, and to see him and Mr. Nicholls together after they were left alone, and poor Mr. Brontë so helpless and blind, was just a beautiful sight—that it was." She would have discoursed till midnight, but time pressed.

To return, however, to Martha Brown's collection. It was pathetically poor and scanty, I am afraid I must confess; though I trust her very obliging and intelligent nephew, its present possessor, will never know I said so. Marvellously little of this world's goods had those poor Brontës, and of course the better portion of these—such as they were—were not here. Their oak cradle I had seen in another part of Yorkshire that very morning, and Charlotte's doll's tea-set I treasure among my own valuables.* A few gold hair-rings of enormous size, such as could only have been worn by the venerable patriarch on his forefinger, a fob seal, and some Paisley shawls—none of which could with any certainty be traced as the property of any one nearer than an aunt—had also been shown me in the little nook where the cradle was installed. All of these had been sold, on the passing of Haworth living into other hands. They had not been bequeathed either to friends or relatives. Martha Brown, however, had been given the relics, which were now shown us; they were

laid out in a small glass-case, and consisted of a green purse of netted silk, a thimble-case of enamelled copper, and a few more such odds and ends. There were also some shawls (presumably belonging to the aforementioned aunt, for I am positive Charlotte never draped herself in anything so gorgeous), and a number of elementary pencil-drawings of eyes, noses, and other interesting features, such as might be supposed to have been laboured through by reluctant and unskilful schoolgirl fingers. As far as I can judge, none of the Brontës had the slightest real talent for drawing. The oil-painting of the spaniel, which has the place of honour over the mantelpiece in Mr. Brown's little upper chamber, is simply ludicrous from its badness.

One or two really interesting objects were, however, lying on the centre-table. These were Charlotte's own time-worn copies of the *Quarterly* for December, 1848, and other periodicals of a like date, in which were inserted those miserable criticisms which were meant to crush the author of "Jane Eyre." How often, we reflected, had her brow been bent over those cruel pages? We know they made her heart bleed, and that for a moment she fancied she read in them her doom. Strangely, strangely do they read now.

But perhaps I have undervalued the relics which Mr. Brown offered recently to the museum at Keighley, and for which the custodians would not pay the price required. Keighley—pronounced Keathley—is only a short distance from Haworth, and it has been thought that the good folks there would jump at the offer. They did not, as we know; and somehow I agreed with them, though my reason for so doing sprang from a cause they little guessed. Briefly, the friend who accompanied me to Haworth has in her possession treasures far more precious and interesting than any Martha Brown had to bequeath, and these were given her by the original of "Rochester" and "Paul Emmanuel" himself. "Paul Emmanuel" is still alive, and but recently delivered up, among other curiosities, a number of essays composed both by Charlotte and Emily Brontë while under his charge at Brussels, and corrected and emended by him as their master. These essays are upon no account to get into print, and it is easy to discern why. Although Charlotte's letters to her preceptor are, it is feared, by this time destroyed, no letter could breathe more transparently and more unconsciously the emotions by which that proud yet tender spirit was torn in twain than does one of the short papers which I saw the other day at Ilkley. The elaborate epistle in which Monsieur Héger detailed his reasons for turning a deaf ear to all petitions on the subject was not required by me, after one brief perusal of the little essay. The refusal breathes a high and chivalrous tone, and with the motive one can find no fault; but, apart from publicity, it is sad to think that neither letters nor essays were treasured for their own sakes by the Brussels schoolmaster. It almost makes one's blood boil to think of that warm, imaginative, hungry and thirsty girlish heart, beating against its bars, underrated and misunderstood by the sprightly, amiable, but withal undiscerning and self-opinionated man who was its ideal.

Holding the faded manuscripts in my hand, a tremor thrilled through my veins. How, when, and with what feelings had they been written? The penmanship is daintily fine, small, and clear. They are in French, of course, and are finished off with feminine neatness and precision; the exquisite signature "C. Brontë" being traced with the utmost delicacy in the upper left-hand corner, instead of being appended to the final words. They are full of subtle touches, and deep, impassioned utterances. It must be added that the subjects handled were such as admitted of these; and on such subjects could the author of "Villette" be bald or cold?

But Monsieur Héger, calmly correcting and emending, understood nothing—still understands nothing of what lay beneath the surface. Even now, even after a lapse of over forty years, when the fame of Charlotte Brontë has echoed to the very ends of the earth, the two who should have been so proud of her, should have deemed themselves so much exalted by her, are simply at a loss to account for such an extraordinary and inexplicable state of affairs. The venerable pair—for both the late master and mistress of the celebrated school are living—have now retired to "dwell among their own people"; they live in a small world of their own, tenderly cherished by sons and daughters, who are themselves grandfathers and grandmothers, several of whom have, moreover, achieved distinction in various walks in life. No aged parents are more devotedly revered, or more dutifully waited upon, than they; and but for his little "kink"—if I may use an old Scotch word—about Charlotte Brontë, I should say that, in talent, sense, and acumen, they seldom meet their equals. But regarding "Jane Eyre" and its sister products, Monsieur and Madame Héger purse their lips. They do not care to talk about them, nor their author. She was, in their eyes, only a shy, impulsive, affectionate, but somewhat oversensitive and impressionable, young nursery governess, who learned nearly everything she knew while under their charge, and who should not have gone home and written tales about her good friends at Brussels.

Much better, infinitely better, would it have been if Charlotte had pursued her vocation as a teacher of youth—that vocation for which she came to them to be perfected—than have so misused her time and talents. As for recalling any little traits of character, any little sayings or doings, any grave or gay idiosyncrasies—why Charlotte Brontë was only a pupil among pupils, and, moreover, a pupil too reserved, too undemonstrative, too morbidly

ungenial to have been either attractive as a child or charming as a woman.

I have seen the portraits of Monsieur and Madame Héger. They represent two such faces as one seldom sees; but of the two I prefer that of the wife. It is that of a calm, judicial, restful nature, capable of infinite patience and of strong endurance; but it is easy to conceive that with just such a nature Charlotte Brontë had nothing in common. In consequence, but scant justice is done to "Madame Beck" at her hands. Doubtless each mistook the other; and while Madame wondered and sighed over the petulant outbursts of the incomprehensible English girl, Madame's own quieter, more gentle spirit, her toleration, forbearance, self-control and outward imperturbability, would in its turn be almost intolerable to one of Charlotte's temperament.

But Monsieur Héger is a figure of more general interest, therefore one word more regarding him. He is a bright, vain, handsome octogenarian, charming and delighting to charm, eager to talk, and as eager for an audience, as exacting of homage and subservience as in the days when schoolgirls trembled at his glance. Imagine him fifty years ago, and you can hardly go wrong in imagining a very fascinating personage; then recollect that fifty years ago or thereabouts the little Yorkshire nursery-governess took her first flight to Brussels, and there beheld "Paul Emmanuel"—*et voilà tout!*

Haworth Church has been so much altered and "improved" under the auspices of its present vicar, that nearly every vestige of interest or romance has been "improved" off the face of it. An ordinary marble slab in the wall records that the different members of the Brontë family repose in a vault at the other end of the building, and over the vault itself a small brass plate has the names of Charlotte and Emily Brontë engraved upon its face.

We had thought this had been all, when the deaf old sexton, who had been in vain endeavouring to elicit our admiration for a reredos presented by the vicar's wife (which, to my mind, made but poor amends for all her husband had swept away)—when the old fellow suddenly exclaimed, "Well, there's the window!"

"The window? What window?"

Without waste of words, he jogged down a side aisle, and called a halt in front of a very handsome, small, stained-glass window bearing this inscription:—"In pleasant memory of Charlotte Brontë," put up by—whom do you think? *An American citizen!* There was no name, no indication given whereby the plain "American citizen" might be identified; and it has actually been left to this unknown, noble-minded denizen of another country to erect the only spontaneous memorial which has so far been granted to the memory of one of England's greatest female novelists?

Haworth Churchyard is full of grey, weather-beaten tablets, above which the storm-tossed alders sigh, and amongst which the leaves were dropping as we stood. Behind lies the open moor, not purple and heathery, but covered with short-cropped, starved-looking grass, occasionally intersected by the stone walls of the district. The nearest of these enclosures, lying at the back of the church and parsonage, would doubtless be the playground of the poor little motherless Brontës when first that sombre parsonage became their home. Through it, when older grown, they would ramble forth on solitary walks and thoughts intent. (Emily, we know, was an especial lover of such expeditions, and this field-path would be her only outlet.) Roads are few in the vicinity, and her only alternative would be that which traverses the main street of the village. We can hardly picture her making it her choice.

The Black Bull Inn is still Brontë to the core. A kindly welcome was there for us, and true Yorkshire hospitality, more especially when the honoured name became our passport. Would we have our luncheon in Branwell Brontë's little back parlour. It would be ready in a few minutes, and meantime—and meantime? We were only too glad to hearken to anything and everything the good soul who preceded us had to tell. So this was poor young Brontë's favourite resort?

"That was his chair," she said simply, and pointed to a tall, old Chippendale arm-chair, with a quaintly-carved "fiddle" back, and square seat, set edgewise. That was his chair, and in that corner it always stood. You see it is a nice corner, between the fireplace and the window; and there he used to sit, and sit—(alas poor Branwell!) and when he had been sitting longer than maybe he should have been, Charlotte would be heard out at the door there (pointing along the dark, stone passage to the front entrance), asking after him, an' if he were in the parlor? And he would hear her voice, and he would up wi' this window, and be out of it like a flash of lightning." (It was a broad, low casement, opening upon an inn yard, whose jutting stone walls were well fitted for concealment.) So that when Charlotte came in to look for him, continued our narrator, she would see nowt, d'ye see? And our folks they would know nowt, i' course. But Branwell, he were round the corner, down i' the yard yonder; as soon as she were gone, he jumps through the window again—you can open it easily from the outside—an' back to his chair, an' she never the wiser. It would be dark, too, maybe.

As the quiet words fell upon our ears the bygone scene stole upon our vision.

As we gazed, a silence fell upon the little room. It had been the haunt of genius, even though—sorrowful thought!—genius had passed that way to ruin.

What had Haworth to show after this?—*Mrs. L. B. Walford, in The Critic.*

* It is of old Leeds ware, ornamented by little pictures of the principal features of the surrounding country.