

Chapter III

Works

Mrs. Gaskell's Works :

Mary Barton

In 1844, Mrs. Gaskell's only son died: an event destined to have a profound influence on her way of life. Mrs. Gaskell showed no signs of recovering from the deep sorrow of this loss, so her husband suggested that she should write a long novel to occupy her mind. Hence Mary Barton was begun. There is a direct reference to Mrs. Gaskell's "writing to keep off grief" in a paragraph of that book.

" Oh! I do think that the necessity for exertion, for some kind of action (bodily, or mental) in time of distress, is a most infinite blessing, although the first efforts at such seasons are painful. Something to be done implies that there is yet hope of some good thing to be accomplished or some additional evil that may be avoided; and by degrees the hope absorbs much of the sorrow. "1

After its publication in 1848, Mary Barton immediately won popularity in the literary world and its author has been recognized as a talented writer since then.

It is a story based on Manchester's industrial problems during the early nineteenth century not long after the Battle of Waterloo. The introduction of the Corn Laws caused distress and chronic poverty in the North of England. The influx of population from the countryside into urban areas made people poorer and poorer during the gradual changeover from hand-labour to machines. Then the difficulties of the poor reached

1 Mary Barton by Mrs. Gaskell

their climax, for a new ruling class appeared — the industrialists. The mill-owners and mine-owners found no limit to their fortunes, for their machines could produce an inexhaustible supply of goods. Men were thrown out of work; and, in 1838 those who were in work only received 1 s. 6 d. a week, instead of 20 s. as formerly. Finally over-production at home closed down many mills through lack of markets. Men lived hopelessly in dreadfully unhealthy conditions — cholera found an easy prey in weakened bodies and spirits.

Under these circumstances, Mary Barton was created. Mrs. Gaskell's mood was one of sympathy quickened by the loss of her own son, who had succumbed to an attack of scarlet fever. The theme of Mary Barton is based on conditions found among the mill hands and operatives throughout the 'thirties. Her aim was to persuade the employers that the operatives had a case; to convince the operatives that the employers also had their troubles.

The story opens with the chief characters crossing the fields in spring. From the first paragraph, Mrs. Gaskell's descriptions of rural scenes are moving and full of nostalgic feeling for her childhood home. They stand out vividly against the drab Manchester background.

" There are some fields near Manchester, well-known to the inhabitants as "Green Hey Fields," through which runs a public footpath to a little village about two miles distant. In spite of these fields being flat, and low, nay, in spite of the want of wood ----- there is a charm about them which strikes even the inhabitant of a mountainous district, who sees and feels the effect of contrast in these commonplace but thoroughly rural fields, with the busy, bustling, manufacturing town he left but half an hour ago. Here and there an old black and white

farm-house with its rambling outbuildings speaks of other times and other occupations than those which now absorb the population of the neighbourhood.¹

Mrs. Gaskell never allows us to forget with what affection she looked back towards her childhood when she was still living with her aunt at Knutsford. This nostalgia is expressed in the words of many of her characters: Alice always returns back to her own life as a child with her mother in the country, as seen in many of her dialogues :

" Ye don't know what rocks are in Manchester ! Grey pieces o' stone as large as a house, all covered over wi' mosses of different colours, some yellow; some brown, and the ground beneath them knee-deep in purple heather, smelling sae sweet and fragrant, and the low music of the humming bee forever sounding among it. Mother used to send Sally and me out to gather ling and heather for besoms and it was such pleasant pleasant work ! "²

John Barton is another character who demonstrates Mrs. Gaskell's longing for the country in a different way. The death of his wife saddens him for the rest of his life and his solemnity separates him from the others in one way, but in another he is sympathetic to them, the poor who, like himself, suffer patiently from the evils of the new society. He never forgets the day he saw the manager's wife coming out to her carriage loaded with parcels of luxuries for her party, while he himself was standing outside a shop, waiting for a chance to steal food for his dying son.

Mrs. Gaskell was not a one-sided reformer unable to see the opposite point of view, though in Mary Barton she is, of course, very largely on the side of the poor, who needed champions more than the industrialists. She tried to reveal

1 Mary Barton by Mrs. Gaskell

2 Mary Barton by Mrs. Gaskell

the point-of-view of both sides, to make them understand each other — but not to give moral lessons to either. As a minister's wife, she came into contact with poor people — she observed their deplorable conditions and (herself being far from rich in those days) she felt as Alice whom she describes as a poor woman able to feel for the poor.

Mary Barton is John's pretty daughter, tempted for a time by her rich admirer's attentions. Later, her illusion is swept away because she comes to appreciate the honest love Jem Wilson has felt for her since their childhood, and she tries her best to undo her folly.

The Carsons are typical mill-owners. They have become rich and prosperous as the owners of machines, but they are unhappy because the neighbours are not their friends, and they are plunged into grief when the son of the family is shot in the middle of the story. In the end all the characters are reformed and rewarded and the Carsons come to be on good terms with the dying John Barton. This is typical Mrs. Gaskell. Except for this, she is not often too sentimental, but her incidents are somewhat melodramatic. For example, as Lettice Copper has pointed out, the murder of young Carson is not realistic, and the appearance of the prostitute Esther is like that of the ghost in Hamlet.¹ But such mistakes are often made by a writer who is only a beginner. Mrs. Gaskell is fond of death-bed scenes, of which there are numerous examples, because at the time when she was writing her mind was still taken up with her dear son's death. There are many passages in Mary Barton that reveal her thoughts about this lost son. Mr. Carson's love and suffering for his son also reflect Mrs. Gaskell's own feelings.

1 The Introduction to Mary Barton by Lettice Copper

" _____ Who shall ever imagine the love I bore him ? Even he never dreamed how my heart leapt up at the sound of his footstep, and how precious he was to his poor father. And he is gone — killed — out of the hearing of all loving words — out of my sunshine, and now it is night ! "1

Some of the earlier parts of Mary Barton, where children die and their parents suffer, also come from Mrs. Gaskell's experience.

Superstitions play their part in Mary Barton as well as in Mrs. Gaskell's later books.

" He often looked at Mary, and wished she were not so like her aunt, for the very bodily likeness seemed to suggest the possibility of a similar likeness in their fate; and then this idea enraged his irritable mind, and he became suspicious and anxious about Mary's conduct ----- Her father now began to wish Mary was married. Then this terrible superstitious fear suggested by her likeness to Esther would be done away with. "2

Again, Alice Wilson (a character in the same novel) tries to separate a dying baby from its mother for :

" He cannot die, while she's wishing him. "

" Wishing him ? " said Mary, in a tone of inquiry.

" Ay; donno ye know what 'wishing' means ? There's none can die in the arms of those who are wishing them sore to stay on earth. The soul o' them as holds them won't let the dying soul go free; so it has a hard struggle for the quiet of death. We mun get him away fra' his mother, or he'll have a hard death, poor lile fellow. "3

1 Mary Barton by Mrs. Gaskell

2 Mary Barton by Mrs. Gaskell

3 Ibid

In the earlier chapter of the book we have plenty of time to get to know the characters. Mrs. Gaskell presents them to us day by day so that we get to know them as we get to know our neighbours. Her method of introducing the characters is different from that of modern writers or even of her contemporaries, such as Charlotte Brontë, most of whom reveal their characteristics by words, significant moments, and by analysing their inner emotions. Mrs. Gaskell lets us see them little by little at their homes and we understand and get to like them. The book is indeed a work of art. It was the first book concerning the social problems of that era, so it was more popular at the time of its first publication than now, and it won for Mrs. Gaskell the friendship and admiration of Carlyle, Landor and Dickens.

Cranford

Cranford was published in 1853. This book is of a very different sort to Mrs. Gaskell's other books; it differs widely from Mary Barton, which deals with employees; North and South, which gives the employers' point of view; and Ruth, in which Mrs. Gaskell "poked her finger in the pie of gossiping morality."¹

In all her books except Cranford the moral is made too obvious. Cranford is as unlike Mrs. Gaskell's other works as Shirley is untypical of Charlotte's writings; but, whereas the first enabled its author to rank high as a novelist, the latter was the least liked among its writer's works.

Cranford offers a marked contrast to its author's novels about industrial town life; it is about village life in the South of England. The book contains no serious problems at all and shows Mrs. Gaskell's humour at its best. It is not

¹ An Introduction to Wives and Daughters
by Rosamond Lehman



really a novel, because of having hardly any plot. At first it appeared as a series of papers contributed in 1851-1853 to Household Words, which belonged to Dickens who recognized Mrs. Gaskell's talent after the publication of Mary Barton in 1848.

Cranford may be called a description of actual conditions, barely disguised as fiction, in the village of the writer's childhood. All the characters are nominally fictitious, but based on what people really did, thought and felt in Knutsford. They may have been modeled on real people or else they may be composite creations — but not purely fictional. All incidents and **all** personal characteristics must either have existed or been selected because they could easily have existed in that place and time. The book contains wonderful characterization, and a blend of delicate humour and pathos all through. It is a study of the daily life, habits and feelings of middle-aged and elderly ladies, mostly unmarried. They try to make friends with each other and ^{form little} groups. "Gentility" is the predominant note in Cranford, and the ladies (there are hardly any gentlemen) practise "elegant economy".

Two different classes are described in this book : ladies living on tiny unearned incomes and a few ladies, with or without titles, belonging to wealthy landowning families. Characters are at once lovable for their kindness and **self**sacrifice for their friends. They are laughable at the same time for their foolish pride in the little habits and other things which distinguish their class from those below. This is due to their attachment to old customs. Mrs. Gaskell drew delightful portraits of these ladies, from the honourable but dull and pompous Mrs. Jameison to Miss Betty Barker, the old clerk's daughter. But the principal characters are the daughters of a former rector; they are Matilda Jenkyns (the gentle Miss Matty) and her stern elder sister Miss Deborah. Matty worships her sister without realizing that

her own scatter-brained simplicity is much more lovable. She is simple, sweet and honest and her faults are made up for by "great virtues" -- for example, she is rather economical about candles.

" Now Miss Matty Jenkyns was chary of candles. We had many devices to use as few as possible. In the winter afternoons she would sit knitting for two or three hours -- she could do this in the dark, or by firelight,"¹

Her broken engagement is always regretted but kept hidden very deep in her heart. Her fear of men and dislike of servants' followers are at last mitigated by sympathy arising from her own loss.

Miss Jenkyns, the elder sister, is not so lovable, being rather pretentious. She admires Dr. Johnson's style and her letters are more wordy than meaningful. She thinks Pickwick by no means equal to Dr. Johnson's works.

We have sketches of such incidents as the tragedy of the genial Captain Brown, run over by a train while deep in the perusal of a number of the "obnoxious" Pickwick; Miss Matty's unhappy love story; the panic caused in the village by a succession of purely imaginary robberies; the flutter due to the visit of Lady Glenmire (the widow of a Scottish baron) and still more to her marriage with the vulgar surgeon, Mr. Hoggins; and so forth. The story draws to its close with the ruin, through the failure of a bank, of Miss Matty who receives the kindest advice and help from her friends. At the very end there occurs the fortunate return from India of her long-lost brother, Peter, which reminds us of the story of Mrs. Gaskell's own brother, John Stevenson, who had vanished at the sea in 1827 or so. Mrs. Gaskell revealed her power to make clear even subtle

1 Cranford by Mrs. Gaskell

social shades : Mrs. Jameison is connected with the aristocracy, Miss Matty is a rector's daughter, and Miss Barker a retired shop-keeper. All of them are elderly women of moderate means living the same sort of life, yet we can guess their different origins by watching them. Mrs. Jameison is arrogant in her manners; Miss Matty is unselfconscious and well-bred; Miss Barker is exaggeratedly polite — ^{and} she produced oysters and cherry-brandy at her suppers. Mrs. Jameison takes it for granted that anyone she is gracious enough to ask to her house will be satisfied with her biscuits. These women are poor but they wish at all costs to keep up appearances and to appear "delicate" and "gentle". This snobbery towards the lower classes is mitigated by their kindness. They are far from being monsters. On the contrary, they are excellent, kind, contented and, at the same time, hard-working. But the unchangeable order of the society in which they have grown up naturally makes them proud, in an innocent way, of such social position as they have; and they pay ~~inordinate~~ respect to those great people they have been taught to revere. No doubt they are snobs. Mrs. Gaskell could penetrate into the "world of snobs" as well as Thackeray, only she was kinder, so her point of view was rosier and we are delighted by her humour in depicting those gentle snobs who are really quite as human as all the rest. We cannot help laughing at their being so absurdly ritualistic: for example, they have very exact ideas on the proper degree of thinness of bread and butter; and so on

" Very delicate was the china, very old the plates, very thin the bread and butter, and very small the lumps of sugar. Sugar was evidently Mrs. Jameison's favorite economy. "1

1 Cranford by Mrs. Gaskell

The length of calls has to be just right and they are strict about who to visit and not to visit. They feel it an absolute necessity to wear caps when receiving visitors, even though they do not care much about dresses. They have to use silver and ^{good} china for their almost non-existent refreshments and food. The words "genteel," and "elegant" are constantly on their lips. They pretend that having lots of food is vulgar and, moreover, they have a horror of talking about money or disclosing their poverty.

Since Mrs. Gaskell somewhat lacked imaginative originality, the themes of her other stories often recur to her own autobiography; her plots and incidents are rather repetitive; so it is chiefly her skill in observation and description which makes readers enjoy her works, and this skill is admirably displayed in Cranford. The motherly instinct in her was immense and it is much displayed in this and all her other books. The Signora Brunoni, who gives an exhaustive account of hairbreath escapes while carrying her baby through the Indian jungles reflects Mrs. Gaskell's own devotion to her babies. In Cranford Mrs. Gaskell found for once a form proper to her inspiration; short, episodic, exclusively concerned with women: and it is the most consistent of her works. Even so, Cranford is somewhat spoiled by a stroke of melodrama — the episode of Brown the conjuror, which is rather artificial and contrasts with the realism of the rest of her book.

At the close, Mrs. Gaskell's weakness for a happy ending appears again when we see Miss Matty suddenly endowed with a long lost brother.

However, Mrs. Gaskell was the first writer to make the English village aware of itself as an object of interest. It was she who recognized a way of life that was already dying out

while she was growing up, and it was she who recorded this village way of life before it was blotted out by the rising of the new industrial order.

The Life of Charlotte Brontë["]

This book was written because Mr. Brontë["] had specially requested Mrs. Gaskell, then already well-known to the literary world, to write what he intended to be:

" A brief account of her life, " with perhaps
"some remarks on her works."¹

This request was not at all hard to satisfy, for Mrs. Gaskell herself had, since her first meeting with Charlotte, been fascinated by the delicate-looking little creature — a woman of genius who led her life in the hidden world of Haworth. During the five years before her death Mrs. Gaskell had come to know Charlotte well and was interested in her being so different from other people. She saw that the latter was emotional and rather passionate owing to being brought up in a wild solitary place by an eccentric Irish father. Mrs. Gaskell observed in her letter to Catherine Winkworth:

" Such a life as Miss Brontë's I never heard of before. "²

After spending a great deal of time, and taking much trouble in finding out the materials, Mrs. Gaskell published The Life of Charlotte Brontë["] in 1857. It has turned out to be not merely a record of a woman's life, but also a literary masterpiece; and it gives many minute and fascinating details concerning most aspects of that life. It is very worth while studying, having been written with a deep understanding and a careful analysis of how one event gave birth to another until Charlotte's death.

1 Elizabeth Gaskell by Gerald De Witt Sanders

2 The Brontës["] by Phyllis Bentley

Charles Norton once wrote to Lowell :

" The Life of Charlotte Brontë
was almost as much an exhibition of
Mrs. Gaskell's character as of Miss Brontë's "

This is true and not surprising, for most writers often write of things and people in a way which reflects themselves. Mrs. Gaskell has been well summed up in Mr. Leslie Stephen's brief notice of her death which appeared in The Cornhill Magazine.

" She was what her works show her to have been —
a wise, good woman. "

Emily Brontë["] has often been regarded as a greater writer than her sister on the strength of her poems and of single novel, Wuthering Heights. Her imaginative power and her ability to communicate mysterious sentiments are unsurpassed both in fiction and poetry. But Mrs. Gaskell, who was naturally affectionate and sociable, found^{her} unattractive and did not pay attention to her except in so far as she was one of Charlotte's concerns. She thought Emily was too reserved.

" I distinguish reserve from shyness because I imagine shyness would please, if it knew how; whereas reserve is indifferent whether it pleases or not. Anne, like her eldest sister, was shy; Emily was reserved."1

The above shows her understanding of subtle distinctions of character and explains her inclination towards Charlotte who was not so utterly different from herself as Emily.

Mrs. Gaskell seemed much moved by Charlotte's sad destiny and circumstances, as can be seen from her rather exaggerated description of Mr. Brontë's["] behavior and of the harsh side of

1 The Life of Charlotte Brontë["] by Mrs. Gaskell

his nature. Having such ^a father was, according to Mrs. Gaskell, one of ^{the} essential factors that caused Charlotte to be unhappy and pessimistic all through her life. The description of this Irishman is **one-sided**, however much we may esteem it from a literary point of view as being poetic and picturesque — for Mr. Brontë["] had some sympathetic qualities. If Mrs. Gaskell had attended to and questioned Martha Brown, the servant at the parsonage, the picture of Mr. Brontë["] would have been more true and less dramatic. As a biographer, she was in any case rather partial on Charlotte's behalf and biased against her critics. Usually when she wrote, she was very careful about other people's opinions and rather afraid of criticism. Yet, in writing about Charlotte's life, she offended first of all the Yorkshiremen by describing them as somewhat worse than they really were

" Even now, a stranger can hardly ask a question without receiving some crusty reply, if, indeed, he receives any at all. Sometimes the sour rudeness amounts to positive insult."¹

Of course they had their virtues too, but Mrs. Gaskell could not like their over-strong and over-independent temper, which, she believed, had influenced Charlotte's bitter temperament. She exposed the bad conditions of the School for Daughters of the Clergy which the Brontës["] had attended for a period, and later she was accused by Mr. Carus-Wilson, the head of the school, of having damaged the reputation of his institution.

While attacking those whom she thought had acted against Charlotte's happiness, she did not, on the other hand, write much about the part of Charlotte's life spent in Brussels. She saw evidently that Charlotte had fallen in love with a married man which would have seemed shameful behavior to a Victorian reading public. She wrote about Charlotte being disliked by

¹ The Life of Charlotte Brontë["] by Mrs. Gaskell

Madame Héger in such a way that, if the readers do not take much notice, they will not know at all about the love affair, which is largely hidden by Mrs. Gaskell's attempts to be, in this case, more tactful than truthful.

" One of the reasons for the silent estrangement between Madame Héger and Miss Brontë["], in the second year of her residence in Brussels, is to be found in the fact, that the English Protestant's dislike of Romanism increased with her knowledge of it, and its effects upon those who professed it."¹

In fact, this was only "one of the reasons" for their mutual dislike; Mrs. Gaskell did not put the most important reason into words, lest she should blacken Charlotte, with whom in spite of her rigid virtue, she sympathized. This also shows Mrs. Gaskell to have been delicate and tactful.

In dealing with death, Mrs. Gaskell could write very tragically and she well understood Charlotte's grief at losing her beloved brother and sisters. This was another reflection of the grief she once experienced when her son died. All the death-bed scenes described by her are dramatic and sentimental.

When Charlotte became a well-known writer towards the end of her life, Mrs. Gaskell was reminded of the difficulties of a writer who, at the same time, is a woman. She wrote of Charlotte, in the light of her own experience :

" Henceforward Charlotte Brontë["]'s existence becomes divided into two parallel currents - her life as Currer Bell, the author; her life as Charlotte Brontë["], the woman. There were separate duties belonging to each other; not impossible, but difficult to be reconciled."²

1 The Life of Charlotte Brontë by Mrs. Gaskell

2 Ibid.

In spite of Mrs. Gaskell's partiality towards Charlotte, her bias against some people, such as old Mr. Brontë, and her deliberate suppression of Charlotte's passionate though one-sided love for her professor, there is no doubt that this biography is a masterpiece. Though the biographer's approach is unscientific and though she breaks several of the rules which biographers ought to observe, she brings to us a picture of Charlotte as a living woman; she makes us vividly aware of the sights and sounds forming a background to Charlotte's life; and she succeeds in making us share her affection for her remarkable friend.

Wives and Daughters

Mrs. Gaskell's last and perhaps best work of fiction is entitled Wives and Daughters - the name sounds unimaginative, unlike a name such as Wuthering Heights, but it is homely. It may have been begun in 1862 or so and it was published posthumously, in 1866, in a still unfinished state.

This is her most charming book and reminds us a little of Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice. It is also characteristic of Mrs. Gaskell herself. Not only wives and daughters are concerned in the book, but husbands and sons, fathers and mothers, brothers and half-sisters as well. Mrs. Gaskell had more experience of life when she came to write this book than when she wrote her earlier ones, so she knew that it was better to relax and not concentrate too much on serious problems such as religion or class problems.

Wives and Daughters is the story of many kinds of people, different in character as well as in background. All of them are more or less involved with Molly Gibson (who is a highly typical Victorian heroine), the daughter of a middle-class

provincial doctor. The day-to-day description of rural life, because it does not touch on many contemporary problems, makes the book easier to appreciate to-day than when it first appeared. Most of the story is about the love affairs of two half-sisters, Molly Gibson and Cynthia Kirkpatrick. In spite of their differences in character, they love each other as much as sisters can possibly do. Mrs. Gaskell, even though she had limitations in writing, could give us pictures of life on a wider canvas than Charlotte Brontë. In Wives and Daughters, there are many groups of people at different levels of society; Dr. Gibson is a bright, intelligent, down-to-earth middle-class doctor, the Cumnors are typical aristocrats, and the Hamleys are of ancient lineage, but Squire Hamley is poor and uneducated. They come into contact with each other in a small English country town, Hollingford, which represents the Knutsford of Mrs. Gaskell's happy childhood.

The story is not extraordinary, but the characters show Mrs. Gaskell to be a keen observer of human nature and a careful artist in giving minute descriptive details. The most interesting characters are all women; for one of the few characteristics she shared with Charlotte Brontë["] was that she seldom went deeply into the male mind. Molly Gibson, Mrs. Gibson and Cynthia, especially the last, are drawn wonderfully. Molly is the sweet darling of her father, an affectionate sister to her half-sister and submissive to those she loves. She is a girl of high moral standards and by all means virtuous. Though the book is left unfinished, we have no doubt that she will be happily married to Roger Hamley whom she adores. Mrs. Gaskell never failed to reward her good characters in such ways; or in a word, she did not like to deprive most of her characters of a happy fate, because she herself was so kind and soft-hearted. When we come to Cynthia, we are quite surprised, for Mrs. Gaskell never drew

any other character like this one. Cynthia is unique among her creations and such a character can be found only in the world of the greatest novelists. Rosamond Lehman described her as :

" A bewitching Victorian girl decked in all the fresh, the wanton allurements of muslins, ribbons, flowers; belle of the ball, flirt, tease, heartless siren."¹

Cynthia's "exquisite power of adaptation to varying people and still more various moods"² is a half-conscious power — she is aware of her dangerous power to attract and yet cannot help acting towards people charmingly. She likes to be loved by everybody without exception and does not care much to return anyone's love; she would be very proud if she could make a young man die of love for her. Unscrupulous as she is, she has many admirable qualities; she is warm, generous, honest and self-critical. She is a dutiful daughter, though she despises and condemns her mother with good reason. She is charming not only to those who know her, but to us, the readers, who love her too when we remember that she once destroyed her most becoming hat that she might use its trimmings to adorn Molly's; and that she risked the chance of losing a brilliant match in order to nurse her old friend. But we cannot call her virtuous — her admiration of Mr. Gibson and desire to be admired (as a daughter) by him do not allow her to tell him the truth about her misdoings, so she allows the innocent Molly to take the blame. She is naturally a hedonist. She would do anything right or wrong, because her actions are directed by her instinctive love of pleasure. Yet she is often so charming and so kind that she is a hard person to judge.

1 The Introduction to Wives and Daughters

by Rosamond Lehman

2 Ibid

Mrs. Gibson is drawn from Mrs. Gaskell's unpleasant memories of her step-mother. She is another of Mrs. Gaskell's masterpieces. She is not altogether a bad woman — at least she is relatively kind in her conduct towards her step-daughter; however her kindness springs from selfishness. When the newly married Cynthia promises to visit the Gibsons, Mrs. Gibson suggests that Molly should have a new gown, but Molly refuses it; whereat Mrs. Gibson says :

" You might have allowed me to beg (your father) for a new gown for you, Molly, when you knew how much I admired the figured silk at Brown's the other day. And now, of course I can't be so selfish as to get it for myself, and you to have nothing."¹

It is evident that her generosity proceeds from selfishness. She is sentimental and stupid and yet she considers her sentimentality to be real sensitivity. She always talks about her late husband's love for her :

" I used to tell him that his love for me was quite romantic. I think I have told you about his walking five miles in the rain to get me a muffin once when I was ill."²

She makes people who live near her feel uncomfortable by her foolish attempts at behaving as really high-class people do. She does not allow "vulgar" bread and cheese, Mr. Gibson's favorite, to be given to him for dinner. When she leaves for London for three days, poor Molly's heart dances with joy at the idea of being perfectly free from the restraint she and her father are under in Mrs. Gibson's presence.

She has, however, been a great favorite as governess to the aristocratic family at The Towers, because she has proved herself to be witty and worthwhile as an appendage of the

1 Wives and Daughters by Mrs. Gaskell

2 Ibid

Cummers :

" So ready to talk, when a little trickle of conversation was required; so willing to listen ----- with tolerable intelligence, if the subjects spoken about did not refer to serious solid literature, or science, or politics, or social economy. About novels and poetry, travels and gossip, personal details, or anecdotes of any kind, she always made exactly the remarks which are expected from an agreeable listener; and she had sense enough to confine herself to those short expressions of wonder, admiration and astonishment, which may mean anything, when more recondite things were talked about."¹

Mr. Gibson is based on a real country doctor, Mrs. Gaskell's own uncle, Dr. Peter Holland, with whom she lived when young. He is a sensible person whom Cynthia admires most. He behaves honestly towards his clients and never betrays his Hippocratic oath, even to his own wife.

Concerning the male characters in this and other works of Mrs. Gaskell, David Cecil says that Mrs. Gaskell knew very little of men, as she lived a narrow life. Of course her life was narrow compared to the lives of women of our day; but, as a Victorian, she had a wider experience of life and of men than women were supposed to have then. As we know, she travelled in France, Italy, Switzerland and Germany and made friends with famous people, such as Dickens, Thackeray, Carlyle and Kingsley, and her friendship with Charlotte Brontë is known to the world. She did not confine herself to mere household affairs; rather, she was interested in Dante and Mozart and showed great intellectual curiosity. In Wives and Daughters her male characters are fully convincing though they do not play a main part in the book. Mr. Gibson is a good example of a clever

1 Wives and Daughters by Mrs. Gaskell

old-fashioned doctor who shows misjudgment only once — in his remarriage to "Clare". This episode was no doubt suggested by Mrs. Gaskell's consciousness of her own father's mistake of a similar kind.

Roger Hamley is far from David Cecil's comment :--

" As for her (Mrs. Gaskell's) young men, they are terrible."¹

He is the prototype of many genuine virtues; brilliant, tender and true. Mrs. Gaskell again reminds us of her memory of her brother John by sending Roger out to Africa — then a remote land.

Preston, " tigerish with his beautiful striped skin "² is a typical example of a low class person who rises to wealth by aristocratic patronage. He is no mere " drawing-room figure ", but a subtle portrait of a ~~very~~ killing cad. Mrs. Gaskell's description of him hints at his animal passions towards attractive women.

Lord Cumnor and Squire Hamley are two high class people : one keeps up his high position by means of his wealth, while the other, in spite of his ancient blood, has not enough wealth to retain material respectability in the eyes of his fellows.

The distinctions between the various classes of society are drawn in detail. Mrs. Gaskell not only classifies her characters but also demonstrates the differences between people of the same class with different backgrounds and surroundings. This shows the breadth of her experience and observation. In comparing her novels with Charlotte's, we are constantly reminded of Mrs. Gaskell's advantages over Charlotte who could deal only with types of people like those included in her limited acquaintance in Yorkshire and Brussels — all of them just on the

1 Early Victorian Novelists by David Cecil

2 Wives and Daughters by Mrs. Gaskell

fringe of the upper middle class — and, in most of her books, the important characters are governesses, teachers and students.

The defect of the book, if any, is that it contains over-long descriptions. However, Mrs. ^{Caskell's} gift for telling a story can keep up our interest until the end.

Charlotte Brontë's Works.

Charlotte's Imaginary World

After Maria and Elizabeth died in 1825, Charlotte, Branwell, Emily and Anne lived all together at Haworth Parsonage. Nothing seemed to happen to their quiet life outwardly; but in fact, all of them were busy and occupied. Naturally Charlotte and the rest, living so cut-off from normal society, were dreamers, so their day-dreams were woven into games to provide an escape from loneliness. The immediate cause of their beginning to write their stories was a present of a box of wooden soldiers given by Mr. Brontë["] to Branwell. Charlotte records this event in The History of the Year 1829 :

" When Papa came home it was night, and we were in bed, so next morning 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'.^{"1}

So the children invented names and characters for the soldiers. There were twelve of these characters originally, but they increased by the end to more than a hundred. The little Brontës["] supplied them with a continuous history of adventure. They built a kingdom for the Duke of Wellington on the African coast with Great Glass Town as capital. Later, various members of the Twelve (i.e. the twelve wooden soldiers) founded allied

1 The Brontë Story by Margaret Lane

kingdoms, each with a Glass Town capital. Thus arose a whole new world — the Glass Town Confederacy, for which Charlotte conducted the romances of the population and Branwell depicted the battles and political struggles. All of these were at first based on stories and events they had read from books, heard from Tabby, the servant (who had many a tale to tell of by-gone days), and picked up from Papa's newspapers. Their new world was a complete world containing a parliament and politicians, poets and publishers, newspapers, magazines, actresses, generals, a flag, a national anthem, and a geography of its own. Angria was one of the Glass Town provinces which Charlotte and Branwell proceeded to develop when Emily and Anne turned from the kingdoms they originally shared with their brother and sister to invent Gondal. Charlotte made the Dukes of Zamorna and Northangerland conquer Angria. Both of them were dark, ruthless and irresistible to women, yet they were opponents. Charlotte and Branwell wrote and painted them and the events concerning them as though they themselves were Angrian characters. Angria was an exciting world, prosperous and full of beautiful scenery, inhabited by handsome, fascinating Byronic men and lovely women dying for love — it was indeed Charlotte's escape world as we may see later from Charlotte's grown-up works. All Angrian documents have a very great importance in the study of her works. Angria represents the "Irish element" in Charlotte, the romanticism and passionateness of which she always felt guilty; so in her published works she condemned what in Angria she loved :-- as we can deduce from comparing Jane Eyre's refusal to be Rochester's mistress and Lucy Snowe's dislike of wearing bright silk with conditions in Angria where Charlotte glorified illicit love and where richness in houses and draperies were admired. In her Farewell to Angria, Charlotte makes us feel her regret in

ceasing to write about all the things she loved :

" It is no easy theme to dismiss from my imagination the images which have filled it so long; they were my intimate acquaintances, and I could with little labour describe to you the faces, the voices, and actions, of those who peopled my thoughts by day, and not seldom stole strangely even into my dreams by night. When I depart from these I feel almost as if I stood on the threshold of a home and were bidding farewell to its inmates ----- Still I long to quit for awhile that burning clime -----."1

Yet Charlotte could not leave Angria without referring to it sometimes. Her early unpublished works still had a powerful influence on her mind. Clear prototypes of Rochester, Paul Emmanuel and Paulina Home had existed before in Angria; The call of the dead Marina Angus to Albion in Albion and Marina resembles Rochester's call in Jane Eyre .

The Professor

Charlotte began to write this book in 1846. Apart from her childhood writings, it was the first book she wrote, though not the first to be published, because it was rejected many times during her lifetime; so it did not appear until 1857, two years after her death. This story was based on her experiences in Brussels, while she and Emily were at M. and Madame Héger's school. The hero, a young school-master called William Crimsworth, is to a large extent Charlotte herself. He is an Englishman who goes to teach English in a Brussels girls' school, where he meets and falls in love with an Anglo-Swiss girl who is gradually won over by his personality and character. This part is preceded by a dramatic account of his experiences in a Yorkshire cloth mill which points forward to Shirley and also relates the story to Villette.

1 The Brontës arranged and introduced by Phyllis Bentley

It is said that a first book reveals its author's inner self much more clearly than later books. This is true of The Professor which reveals Charlotte's real self better than her other books, even though they are all stories closely related to her experiences in Yorkshire and Brussels and to her life as a governess, pupil and instructor at school. Scarcely troubling to disguise her own experiences as a girl who went to study French in Belgium and fell in love with her Belgian professor, Charlotte made a young English professor go to teach in Brussels and have a love-affair with his foreign student. The relationships between the characters and the writer are rather complicated. On the one hand, Crimsworth's character is largely that of Charlotte herself, yet he is also more or less cast in the rôle of M. Héger; and his treatment of Mademoiselle Henri the continental pupil (who, to add to the complications, is also, in a sense, Charlotte) is almost certainly based on M. Héger's method of teaching Charlotte and other students :

" In the course of my next lesson, I made a report of the other devoirs, dealing out praise and blame in very small retail parcels according to my custom, for there was no use in blaming severely, and high encomiums were rarely merited. I said nothing of Mademoiselle Henri's exercise and, spectacles on nose, I endeavoured to decipher in her countenance her sentiments at the omission. I wanted to find out whether in her existed a consciousness of her own talent

"As to the substance of your devoir, Mdlle. Henri (said Mr. Crimsworth) it has surprised me; I perused it with pleasure, because I saw in it some proofs of taste and fancy. Taste and fancy are not the highest gifts of the human mind, but such as they are you possess them — not probably in a paramount degree, but in a degree beyond what the majority can boast. You may then take courage; cultivate the faculties that God and nature have bestowed on you, and do

not fear in any crisis of suffering, in any pressure of injustice, to derive free and full consolation from the consciousness of their strength and rarity!

----- A smile shone in her eyes — a smile almost triumphant, it seemed to say —

' I am glad you have been forced to discover so much of my nature; you need not so carefully moderate your language. Do you think I am myself a stranger to myself? What you tell me in terms so qualified, I have known fully from a child' #1

The story is told in the first person. William Crimsworth is its narrator. After quarreling with his aristocratic maternal uncles, he decides to engage in trade and becomes a clerk to his "nouveau rich" brother, Edward, who is a tyrannical manufacturer in what is obviously Yorkshire. The first five chapters concern a manufacturing town through which Charlotte meant to show the bad industrial conditions of that period. This idea was later used in Shirley. William Crimsworth is not happy under his brother's unsympathetic care, but he does not easily give up what he has undertaken. A paragraph in this part refers strikingly to Charlotte's own determination :

" No man likes to acknowledge that he has made a mistake in the choice of his profession, and every man, worthy of the name, will row along against wind and tide before he allows himself to cry out, 'I am baffled!' and submits to be floated passively back to land ----- I should not have whispered, even inwardly, that I longed for liberty ----- I should have set up the image of Duty, the fetish of Perseverance, in my small bedroom at Mrs. King's lodgings. #2

Charlotte regarded life with passionate stoicism. She early learned the truth that any real help must be found in

1 The Professor by Charlotte Brontë"

2 The Professor by Charlotte Brontë"

oneself. She expected nothing of the world; nor does her hero.

William is discharged by Edward and has to obtain a post as professor in Mr. Pelet's boys' school in Brussels and also has extra teaching work in a 'Pensionnat de demoiselles' next door, conducted by Mademoiselle Zoraide Reuter. The latter's character is certainly based on that of Madame Héger who did not get on well with Charlotte after she had perceived the attachment between Charlotte and her husband. Later Crimsworth falls in love with the neat little needlework teacher, Frances Evans Henri, who becomes his pupil for English lessons. It is evident that, during all the time she was writing this book, Charlotte had in her mind the love she felt for M. Héger. It is noteworthy that Mdlle Henri, in writing a poem about herself and her love for her professor, refers to herself as Jane — the same name used by Charlotte for the heroine of Jane Eyre, who is, in many ways, Charlotte herself. We are even tempted to think that Charlotte may originally have written that very poem to express her own feelings for M. Héger.

Crimsworth and Henri marry and set up a school together and later retire to Yorkshire to live happily with their child — a reflection of Charlotte's ardent, hopeless dream of setting up school with M. Héger which was also persistently in her mind when she wrote Villette.

Charlotte intended The Professor to be more realistic than her imaginary Angria stories, so the book is **anti-romantic**. The characters are drawn in the most prosaic terms. The hero looks ordinary, with a thin, irregular, spectacled face, sunk dark eyes; and nothing in his appearance that could be called attractive. At first, he is not altogether guiltless of a feeling of attachment to Mdlle Reuter. (This supplies an added touch of realism. Charlotte well knew how easily human affections

turn from one object to another, as Villette so clearly shows.) The heroine herself is not at all beautiful, being as moderate in attractions as her hero. Charlotte explained that she had written this book because she was rather tired of the glittering tinsel of Angria ^{about} which she and Branwell had jointly written.

" I said to myself that my hero should work his way through life as I had seen real living men work theirs — that he should never get a shilling he had not earned — that no sudden turns should lift him in a moment to wealth and high station ----- that he should not even marry a beautiful girl or a lady of rank. As Adam's son he should share Adam's doom, and drain throughout life a mixed and moderate cup of enjoyment. "1

This insistence on unexciting, common-or-garden realism was why her book was refused six times, for Charlotte mistakenly thought that publishers, being businessmen, would prefer something real. It seemed they enjoyed plots that were sentimental, pathetic and tender, or wild and thrilling. So The Professor was not much to the Victorian taste.

Mrs. Brontë["] had died before Charlotte was old enough to recognize her, but she seemed to feel that her mother was a lovable woman and she was much attached to a picture of her at the Rectory, which had features in common with Charlotte's own. In this book she described Crimsworth's mother thus :

" I gazed long, earnestly; my heart grew to the image. My mother, I perceived, had bequeathed to me much of her features and countenance — her complexion. No regular beauty pleases egotistical human beings so much as a softened and refined likeness of themselves. "2

1 The Professor by Charlotte Brontë["]

2 The Professor by Charlotte Brontë["]

That this refers to her own mother is clear from something she once wrote :

" A few days since, a little incident happened which curiously touched me: Papa put into my hands a little packet of letters and papers, -- telling me that they were Mamma's and that I might read them -- ----- It was strange now to peruse for the first time the records of a mind whence my own sprang; and most strange and at once sad and sweet, to find that mind of a truly fine, pure and elevated order --- There is a rectitude, a refinement, a constancy, a modesty, a sense, a gentleness about them indescribable. I wished that she had lived, and that I had known her."¹

Some people have thought that Charlotte was uninterested in social problems, for she usually concentrated on individuals whenever she wrote. But, from the words she put into Mr. Hunsden's mouth, it is evident that she somehow felt disgusted by the disgraceful conditions of industrial life in England :

" Come to England and see. Come to Birmingham and Manchester; come to St. Giles' in London, and get a practical notion of how our system works. Examine the footprints of our august aristocracy; see how they walk in blood, crushing hearts as they go. Just put your head in at English cottage doors; get a glimpse of Famine crouched torpid on black hearth-stones; of Disease lying bare on beds without coverlets, of Infamy wantoning viciously with Ignorance, though indeed Luxury is her favorite paramour, and princely halls are dearer to her than thatched hovels. "²

However, she makes the speaker add something which implies praise of England :

" You cannot appreciate the efforts of industry, the achievements of enterprise, or the discoveries of science," because of your "narrowness of education and obscurity of position,"³

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- 1 The Brontë Story by Margaret Lane
 - 2 The Professor by Charlotte Brontë["]
 - 3 The Professor by Charlotte Brontë["]

Although, in The Professor, Charlotte clothes herself in male form, she cannot help letting readers see that her hero is not really the picture of a man. His feelings are expressed in a manner very uncharacteristic of a man, such as :

" I hated his fashion of mentioning love;
I abhorred, from my soul, mere licentiousness."¹

Jane Eyre

In 1846 Charlotte took her father to have a cataract operation in Manchester. There she began to write Jane Eyre which was published in 1847 over the name of "Currer Bell." This book is considered the best among Charlotte's works, and was described by Thackeray as the best book of its time.

Jane Eyre, the chief character, narrates the whole story in the first person -- Charlotte's favorite way of telling a story. Jane's childhood opens at Gateshead Hall where the Reeds, who are the owners of the house and Jane's relatives by marriage, treat her cruelly. Even though Jane is at that time a little girl no more than ten years old, she exhibits strong emotions and apparently feels very much as the adult Charlotte felt. She gathers her energies to dart out in retaliation at her antagonist, the hateful Mrs. Reed, as if BOTH opponents were of adult age.

" I declare I do not love you : I dislike you the worst of anybody in the world except John Reed .
----- I am glad you are no relation of mine.
I will never call you aunt again as long as I live.
I will never come to see you when I am grown up;
and if anyone asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick, and that you treated me with miserable cruelty ----- You think I have no feelings,

¹ The Professor by Charlotte Brontë"

and that, I can do without one bit of love or kindness; but I cannot live so ; and you have no pity ----- People think you a good woman, but you are bad, 'hard-hearted. You are deceitful."1

Here Jane for the first time in the book expresses her own feelings, which seem strangely precocious. She is not like ordinary children who can find joy in playthings or in going out of doors in a carriage. When her **self-esteem** is wounded by a false charge brought by the servant about her crying, she answers :

" I never cried for such a thing in my life : I hate going out in a carriage. I cried because I am miserable."2

Jane, like Charlotte herself, does not care about childish games and enjoyments; instead she longs for love and kindness and, since she has neither at Gateshead, she concentrates on the one thing left for her to enjoy — reading. Her eager desire to learn helps her to be a little happier at Lowood School, kept for the poor by the Rev. Mr. Brocklehurst. There she meets a friend, Helen Burns, who dies of typhus; for the Asylum, as it is called, lies in a forest dell, the cradle of fog and ~~fog~~-bred pestilence. Jane's experience of Lowood is based on Charlotte's at Cowan Bridge. The descriptions of her sufferings there are deeply moving. One of them deserves to be quoted at length as an example of straight, unembellished narrative, especially moving because of its simplicity.

" My first quarter at Lowood seemed an age ----- Our clothing was insufficient to protect us from the severe cold : we had no boots, the snow got into our shoes, and melted there : our unglazed hands became numbed and covered with chillblains, as were our feet :

1 Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë"

2 Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë"

I remember well the distracting irritation I endured from this cause every evening, when my feet inflamed; and the torture of thrusting the swelled, raw and stiff toes into my shoes in the morning. Then the scanty supply of food was distressing: with the keen appetites of growing children, we had scarcely sufficient to keep alive a delicate invalid. From this deficiency of nourishment resulted an abuse, which pressed hardly on the younger pupils: whenever the famished great girls had an opportunity, they would coax or menace the little ones out of their portion. Many a time I have shared between two claimants the precious morsel of brown bread distributed at tea-time; and after relinquishing to a third half the contents of my mug of coffee, I have swallowed the remainder with an accompaniment of secret tears, forced from me by the exigency of hunger ----- Semi-starvation and neglected colds had predisposed most of the pupils to receive infection: forty five out of the eighty girls lay ill at one time. Classes were broken up, rules relaxed ----- some died at school, and were buried quietly and quickly, the nature of ~~the~~ malady forbidding delay."1

Jane's sufferings at Lowood School were not very much worse than Charlotte's own at Cowan Bridge. It was the death there of Maria, one of Charlotte's sisters, which inspired her to write about Helen Burns' illness and death.

Jane is a version of Charlotte herself — the dull school rules, school duties, school habits and notions, voices, faces and costumes soon tire her after six years of studies and two years of teaching at Cowan Bridge. She feels keenly the lack of liberty which she so much desires and prays for. So she tries to seek a lesser servitude and at last finds one as governess to Adèle Varens, at Thornfield, the mansion of Mrs. Rochester. Again Charlotte's feelings are voiced by Jane when she tells us that she soon grew tired of a smooth career surrounded by kind

1 Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë"

people such as Mrs. Fairfax and her lovely, active pupil, Adèle.

"Who blames me? Many, no doubt; and I shall be called discontented. I could not help it; the restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes."¹

Before Jane's impatience increases to an unbearable extent, Mr. Rochester happens to return to Thornfield after a journey on the Continent. This character is partly inspired by M. Héger and partly by the strong, stern characters found in Angria, such as the romantic Zamorna and Northangerland. We feel there is a certain vague kinship between Rochester and Emily's Heathcliffe, though the former is not an evil character. Jane falls in love with Rochester with all her heart and soul, even though she ~~says~~ ^{that his} colourless, olive face, square massive brow, broad and jetty eyebrows, deep eyes, strong features, firm, grim mouth — all energy, decision, will — were not beautiful, according to the rule."²

But to Jane, Rochester is an influence that quite masters her, that takes her feelings from her own power and fetters them to him. Mr. Rochester loves her just as deeply. On their wedding day, the ceremony is interrupted by the announcement of the existence of Rochester's lunatic first wife.

It is obvious that ^{the} desire to love and be loved, preferably by a strong, masterful, almost Heathcliffian man, is the main source of Charlotte's inspiration, and this is well-illustrated in Jane Eyre. Had Charlotte written this book according to her own feelings, Jane would have become Rochester's mistress. Neither of them can leave the other without being deeply distressed, and Jane has neither relatives nor acquaintances to be offended by her living with Rochester; but Charlotte,

1 Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë"

2 Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë"

unlike Emily in Wuthering Heights, checked herself from allowing her heroine to surrender to her passion; for, as Jane is made to say :

" I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more ~~will~~ respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man."¹

So Jane leaves Rochester and chances to meet some distant cousin, the Rivers, at Moor House. St. John Rivers asks her to go with him as a missionary's wife. He is young, handsome, and ambitious, but Jane still loves Rochester and feels, besides, that her new suitor does not really love her. He asks her to be his wife only because he feels she would be a good partner in answering the call he feels to missionary work. Jane's attitude to Rivers is obviously a reflection of Charlotte's attitude to one of her own suitors, Ellen Nussey's brother.

A genuine supernatural experience of Charlotte's is reflected in the following incident. One night St. John is pressing her for a final decision. The one candle is dying out; the room is full of moonlight. Jane hears a voice from somewhere cry :

" Jane, Jane, Jane "

It is ^{to} Jane a known, loved and well-remembered voice — a voice speaking in pain and woe, wildly and urgently.

The conclusion suggests that Charlotte would have been delighted to marry M. Héger even if he had been maimed and poor. Jane finds Rochester, now widowed by a fire and living at the gloomy Ferndean Manor. He is sadly hurt by the fire; one eye has been knocked out and one hand so crushed that the surgeon has to amputate it directly. He also loses his sight, the other eye being inflamed. Jane marries him and both of them "live happily ever after".

1 Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë"

We cannot say the story ends with Jane's triumph in a worldly sense, for she marries a man semi-blind and living in a narrow retirement, yet both of them feel real enjoyment. The realistic ending mixed with the highly exciting story makes Jane Eyre a remarkable example of that truth-through-beauty which is the function of the novelist's art.

The minor characters are drawn superbly with a mixture of good and bad which is very true to life. Mrs. Fairfax is good, simple and kind, yet extremely boring. Adèle is lovable and lively, though a little bit silly. Helen Burns, drawn from Maria Brontë¹, has a similar mixture of good and bad qualities. On the one hand, she is wonderfully patient and possesses an admirable brain. She once says to Jane :

" Would you not be happier if you tried to forget her (= Mrs. Reed's) severity, together with the passionate emotions it excited ? Life appears to me too short to be spent in nursing animosity, or registering wrong. "1

On the other hand she has some rather serious faults — she seldom puts and never keeps things in order; she is careless and reads when she should ^{be} learning her lessons. Miss Scatcherd, on the contrary, is naturally neat, punctual and particular, but also "cross and cruel". The chilly St. John is noble-hearted and idealistic, yet quite impossible to marry. Bessie, the housemaid, is quick-tempered but kind.

The character of Jane is Charlotte's greatest achievement. Jane is like Charlotte; outwardly poor, obscure and simple, but inwardly passionate, resolute and emotional. She once said to Helen :

1 Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë

" If others don't love me, I would rather die than live — I cannot bear to be solitary and hated ----- to gain some real affection from you, or Miss Temple, or any other whom I truly love, I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken, or let a bull toss me, or to stand behind a kicking horse, and let it dash its hoof at my chest -----."1

Jane's fight against falling in love with Mr. Rochester is just like Charlotte's attempt to control her love for M. Héger. In the following passage, we can hear the true ring of Charlotte's voice :

" You have nothing to do with the master of Thornfield" Jane said to herself, "further than to receive the salary he gives you for teaching his protégé ----- Be sure that this is the only tie he seriously acknowledges between you and him; so don't make him the object of your fine feelings, your raptures, agonies, and so forth. He is not of your order: keep to your caste, and be too self-respecting to lavish the love of the whole heart, soul and strength, where such a gift is not wanted and would be despised."2

Yet Jane cannot resist her love and, / ^{though} Rochester returns it, she feels that she is not a person born to be happy. She is conscious of her unlucky fate as was Charlotte who never had a taste of happiness all her life.

" Human beings never enjoy complete happiness in this world. I was not born for a different destiny to the rest of my species: to imagine such a lot befalling me is a fairy-tale ; — a daydream. "3

1 Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë"

2 Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë"

3 Ibid

As already noted, the character of Rochester is partly drawn from Héger, and partly a survival from Charlotte's childhood heroes, Zamorna and Northangerland, although (unlike them) he is ugly. Charlotte makes him a romantic and colourful figure, so that he harmonizes very well with the equally romantic plot.

Shirley

Charlotte warns her readers in the first chapter of Shirley that it is not a book of sentiment, poetry and reverie containing passion and melodrama, but :

" Something real, cool, and solid lies before you; something unromantic as Monday morning."¹

Yet, in fact, the book is by no means lacking in excitement bordering on melodrama. Moreover, it is probably a good deal more closely related to Charlotte's own experiences and feelings than she intended when she wrote the rather chilling words just quoted. The plot did not come to her spontaneously; for, as she once told Mrs. Gaskell, she had deliberately

" sought a subject for her next work."²

In some ways, Shirley is her least attractive work, for it concerns historical events of the Industrial Revolution in 1812 and Charlotte's imagination was not one that could be nourished on social history: so, when she began to write Shirley in 1847, she found it very difficult to make progress and to satisfy herself. However, she managed to complete the book and it was published in 1849. Though her publishers had hoped to see a new book similar to Jane Eyre instead of such a departure from her usual style as Shirley, Charlotte received the same amount, £. 500, for the copyright as she had done for the

1 Shirley by Charlotte Brontë"

2 The Brontë Story by Margaret Lane

Former Work.

The events of Shirley occurred in England in 1812 when France had placed an embargo on the import of all English goods into Europe. Many English manufacturers could not export their goods and they were in danger of bankruptcy. Robert Gerald Moore, one of the two heroes, is a character depicting one of these millowners. He is half-Yorkshire and half-Belgian by birth. Being proud and ambitious, he decides to use some newly invented machines to reduce the number of labourers he employs. Some of the local workers realize that this new method will cause them unemployment so they band together in order to smash the machines, to attack the mill and to make an attempt to take Robert Moore's life; but they only succeed in wounding him. Such bands of workers were known as "Luddites".

Shirley Keeldar, the major heroine, is an heiress whom Robert Moore intends to marry because she is rich enough to solve his financial difficulties; he is ruthless enough to press this suit despite his love for Caroline Helstone — a submissive, gentle and exceedingly charming young girl. Shirley rejects him because she has fallen in love with Louis Moore, Robert's brother. So in the book, there are two relationships which can be called master-pupil relationships — one of Charlotte's favorite themes: Robert helps Caroline with her arithmetic, and Shirley is Louis's pupil in French.

The character of Shirley herself, so Mrs. Gaskell tells us, is Charlotte's representation of Emily Brontë. In fact it is the character of Emily as Charlotte imagined she would have been, had she been born rich. Many traits of Emily's character can be discovered in such passages as :

" ----- her way of sitting on the rug reading, with her arm round her rough bulldog's neck; her calling to a strange dog, running past, with hanging head and lolling tongue, to give it a merciful draught

of water, its maddened snap at her, her nobly stern presence of mind, going right into the kitchen and taking up one of Tabby's red-hot Italian irons to sear the bitten place, and telling no one till the danger was well nigh over, for fear of the terrors that might beset their weaker minds. "1

Such passages are not at all the well-invented fiction which contemporary readers of Shirley may have supposed them to be. Tartar, the tawny bull-dog in Shirley is Keeper in Haworth parsonage. Shirley's love of freedom is typical of Emily as Charlotte saw her. Shirley's delight in the wilder aspects of nature reminds us how Emily loved the moor and her grim native place so deeply that she could not bear to be away from home for a long time.

" Shirley said she liked the green sweep of the common turf and, better still, the heath on its ridges, for the heath reminded her of moors: she had seen moors when she was travelling on the borders near Scotland ----- they (had) journeyed from noon till sunset, over what seemed a boundless waste of deep heath, and nothing had they seen but wild sheep; nothing heard but the cries of wild birds."2

Shirley is an unconventional heroine like Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe; but, in some ways, she is more lovable — indeed, we may think that Shirley is the most attractive of all Charlotte's heroines because her creator drew her character lovingly as a representation of her beloved sister, whereas those other heroines have some of the faults which Charlotte clearly saw in herself. Shirley is high-spirited, independent, brilliant and charming; she loves Louis Moore, but being strong-minded, she can bear to leave him. Caroline is the secondary heroine in Shirley. She is soft and rather mute like most Victorian heroines, for Charlotte

1 The Brontë["] Story by Margaret Lane

2 Shirley by Charlotte Brontë["]

made her a contrast to Shirley. Like Molly in Mrs. Gaskell's Wives and Daughters, Caroline is a sweet girl who suffers painfully from being secretly in love. Her adoration of Robert is so great that his seeming indifference to her almost kills her.

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the whole book is this accurate (and therefore exceedingly painful) description of a girl sickening almost to death from unrequited love. Fortunately, Charlotte has pity on her and, at last, her devotion is rewarded. At the end of the story, the two couples both enjoy happy marriages.

The main incidents in Shirley are historical, but most of the characters are taken from those of Charlotte's contemporaries; and even the scenery and places are drawn more or less from the writer's own surroundings. The family of Yorke is based on that of Mary Taylor; Caroline's feelings are partly those of Charlotte when she was in love with M. Héger. Robert is a mixture of M. Héger and of an acquaintance of Charlotte's, the owner of Raw Folds, which is the original of Hollow's mill in Shirley. Louis is a mixture of Charlotte and M. Héger. The curates, though David Cecil describes them as being "unreal as the cardboard puppets in a toy theatre", are copied from real curates at Haworth and the neighbouring districts. Whatever David Cecil may say, the fact remains that those curates certainly recognized themselves and one another. The kind Mrs. Pryor can be identified with Miss Wooler.

The plot of Shirley is not well-constructed, for Charlotte often jumps from one theme to another. In the first part, she concentrates the readers' attention on Caroline and then, in the middle, she suddenly turns our interest away from Caroline and towards Shirley. Charlotte by no means concentrates on social problems alone (as she first intended). The insertion

of the love stories of two heroes and two heroines soon draws our attention away from the exciting scenes of bloodshed involving the workmen and the mill-owner, and it thus decreases the social and historical interest of the book. In Mrs. Gaskell's Mary Barton, the love story is properly interwoven with the main theme of social reform.

In spite of the badly constructed plot and the presence of too many characters, Charlotte nevertheless displays remarkable ability, especially in describing scenery. She loved nature and so she could describe outdoor scenes perfectly; these descriptions are much better than her indoor scenes. In Shirley, most of the settings are, of course, from Yorkshire, the only country she knew well.

Shirley is the most original of Charlotte's works and it can be said to tend towards a new social direction soon to be taken by other Victorian novelists. Mrs. Gaskell's Mary Barton, published just before Shirley, is also a historical novel based on industrial problems. Of the two, Shirley is now more widely read, because it is a finer book; but Mrs. Gaskell should have the credit for having been the first ^{woman} to take this new and important direction.

Villette

Charlotte spent two years writing Villette. It was published in 1853 and was received, according to Mrs. Gaskell, with enthusiasm by the public. As in every one of Charlotte's novels, except Shirley, the story is told in the first person. The narrator is Lucy Snowe, who, throughout the book, is determined to live an independent life; this illustrates the writer's opinion that intelligent women can get along very well without marriage. The story concerns different groups of people who

sooner or later come into contact with the heroine. First of all, as a small girl, Lucy is introduced into the house of Mrs. Bretton, her godmother, where we met John Graham Bretton, a young schoolboy with a charming personality. Another child living there is Paulina Mary Home, a little elfin beauty who is left under the care of this family during one of her father's journeys on the Continent. John and Paulina are obviously attached to each other in the eyes of the precocious and matter-of-fact, though quiet little Lucy. Then there is a sharp break in the story which has left some things forever unexplained. We can never be quite sure why Lucy, suddenly grown up, is found as an invalid old lady's companion. Presently, the death of her employer forces her to find a job abroad, as she is alone and penniless in England. On the ship she happens to meet a pretty but spoilt young girl called Ginevra Fanshaw who is on her way to school in Villetta — this helps Lucy to decide upon her destination. By chance she is brought to an inn by an Englishman whom she meets on the quay; later, she finds a job at Madame Beck's establishment as nursery governess to the Beck children; and, finally, she becomes an English teacher at the Beck school where Ginevra is a pupil. In spite of their contrasting characters, Lucy and Ginevra become friends and Lucy learns that the latter is flirting with two men — the mysterious "Isidore" and a Belgian count, Alfred de Hamal. "Isidore" is in fact the school doctor whom Lucy soon recognizes as her companion on the short journey from the quay to the inn. Lucy does not immediately reveal a much more important fact — namely, that this "Isidore" is also John Graham Bretton, until considerably later.

We come across another important character, M. Paul Emmanuel, a tutor at the school who feels deeply interested in Lucy. Madame Beck (undoubtedly drawn from Madame Héger) secretly

wishes to marry Paul Emmanuel, so she grows exceedingly jealous of Lucy and tries to separate the two by sending Emmanuel abroad.

At first Lucy falls in love with John Bretton who requites her love merely with friendship; and, soon afterwards, he accidentally meets Paulina Home, his boyhood admirer. They fall in love and marry. So the story turns out to have two couples of lovers -- Lucy and Emmanuel; John Bretton and Paulina. (As for Ginevra, in the end, she marries de Hamal.) The rest of the book is chiefly an account of the heroine's sufferings, which are due at first to her unrequited love for John and later to her much more passionate love for Paul Emmanuel. All this could, in the hands of a lesser writer, seem very dull; but Charlotte succeeds in making us profoundly interested in every page of her narrative.

The characters, settings and incidents are, as usual, taken from Charlotte's own experiences in Brussels and later in England. Much the same themes are used as in her other books: Lucy Snowe is drawn from Charlotte's own character. Her love affair with M. Emmanuel is based on her master-pupil relationship with M. Héger and written from the pupil's point of view. Charlotte must have been conscious all the time that Lucy was herself, and she describes her as a martyr to suffering of the same kind that she herself endured. Though Lucy has high moral principles, she is somehow much less attractive to the reader than most of Charlotte's other heroines. John Bretton was certainly drawn from George Smith, one of the three men who had proposed to Charlotte. In the first part, while Lucy is still in love with him, she torments herself by writing him ardent letters. But Charlotte decided not to let them marry. While she was engaged on the third volume of Villette,

she wrote to Smith, who, as her publisher, knew her fairly intimately :

" Lucy must not marry Dr. John; he is far too youthful, handsome, bright spirited, and sweet - tempered; he is a "curled darling" of Nature and Fortune, and must draw a prize in life's lottery. His wife must be young, rich, pretty; he must be very happy indeed.----- I never meant her lines (i.e. Lucy's) to fall in pleasant places. "1

So Dr. John re-encounters the lovely Paulina Mary Home, who soon brings back to our minds Marina in Albion, and Marina — a tale from Angria, the imaginative world of Charlotte's childhood. This Marina, incidentally, is much the same as Marian Hume, Zamorna's first wife in another story. Here the similarity to Paulina's second and third names is even more striking. In those early "Angrian" works, Marina and Marian really seem to be the same character. They both have a medical father and, much more important than this, their names and even the clothes they wear remind us closely of Paulina Mary Home in Villette. If Lucy had been able to marry anybody, it would surely have been Emmanuel; but Charlotte finished the book in such a way that the reader is left in doubt as to whether Paul lives or dies. This is undoubtedly because Charlotte wanted a sad ending symbolic of her own unhappy fate, whereas her publishers and readers might have objected to this. Moreover, Mr. Brontë, according to Mrs. Gaskell, was anxious that her new tale should end well. He disliked novels which left a melancholy impression upon the mind. And he requested her to make her heroes and heroines (like the heroes and heroines in fairy tales) "marry and live very happily ever after."2 We can see that the reason for M. Emmanuel's ship being lost at sea during

1 The Brontë Story by Margaret Lane

2 The Brontë Story by Margaret Lane

a storm while Lucy is waiting for his return home is a complicated one. The doubt as to his fate reflects not only to the impossibility of Charlotte's marrying M. Héger, but also Mr. Taylor's departure to India for a period of many years after her rejection of his proposal. This incident is, in one respect; like Mrs. Gaskell's frequent stories of young men vanishing at sea which appear in so many of her novels.

John's letters are as precious to Lucy as those from M. Héger to Charlotte. Lucy's feelings on receiving one of them are described in a passage which, though long, deserves to be quoted in full, as it indicates something of the tremendous depth of feeling for which Charlotte had to seek an outlet in her writings.

" Yes I held in my hand not a slight note, but an envelop which must at least contain a sheet : it felt not flimsy, but firm substantial, satisfying And here was the direction, "Miss Lucy Snowe," in a clean, clear, equal, decided hand; and here was the seal, round, full, deftly dropped by untremulous fingers, stamped with the well-cut impress of initials, " J. G. B. " I experienced a happy feeling — a glad emotion which went warm to my heart, and ran lively through all my veins. For once a hope was realized, I held in my hand a morsel of real solid joy; not a dream, not an image of the brain, not one of those shadowy chances imagination pictures. and on which humanity starves but cannot live; not a mess of that manna I drearly eulogised awhile ago — which indeed, at first melts on the lips with an unspeakable and preternatural sweetness, but which, in the end our souls full surely loathe; longing deliriously for natural and earth-grown food, wildly praying Heaven's spirits to reclaim their own spirit — dew and essence — an aliment divine, but for mortals deadly. It was neither sweet hail nor small coriander seed — neither slight wafer, nor luscious honey, I had lighted on; it was the wild, savory mess of the hunter, nourishing and

salubrious meat, forest fed or desert - reared, fresh, healthful, and life sustaining. It was what the old dying patriarch demanded of his son, Esau, promising in requital the blessing of his last breath: It was a godsend; and I inwardly thanked the God who vouchsafed it."¹

Like Charlotte, Lucy believes that every individual's fate is ordained by God; and her fate is that she must suffer painfully; so she forces herself to accept whatever comes to her! In one passage from Villette, Lucy exclaims :

" How I used to pray to heaven for consolation and support ! With what dread force the conviction would grasp me that Fate was my permanent foe, never to be conciliated. I did not, in my heart, arraign the mercy or justice of God for this; I concluded it to be a part of His great plan that some must deeply suffer while they live, and I thrilled in the certainty that of this number, I was one. "²

Charlotte believed that it was fate, i.e. the will of God, that she personally was never to have a lasting taste of happiness in this world, yet she was unselfish enough to believe that it was the right of some people to be always lucky, though she herself was not included. She expressed this thought through Lucy's consolation to Paulina, when the latter was hesitating to confide the secret of her love for Bretton to her father :

" Be in no hurry to do so, Paulina. Leave the revelation to Time and your kind Fate. I also have noticed the gentleness of her care for you : doubt not she will benignantly order the circumstances, and fitly appoint the hour. -----
----- We know not the future, but the past has been propitious."³

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- 1 Villette by Charlotte Brontë"¹
2 Villette by Charlotte Brontë"²
3 Villette by Charlotte Brontë"³

The character of Ginevra is heartless even in comparison to that of Cynthia in Mrs. Gaskell's Wives and Daughters. Both of them are pretty, proud of being loved, but never care to return any man's love. However, Cynthia is much more lovable and lively — she knows her fault and really regrets it. She really does love her step-sister, Molly; whereas Ginevra lightly entrusts Lucy with her secret that two men are running after her — treating Lucy as a close friend, not from any depth of affection, but just because Lucy is patient enough to bear her selfishness and thoughtless twaddle, even though she is deeply shocked by it. If we compare their conversation we shall see that Ginevra is a mere shallow flirt while Cynthia is thoughtful and charming in spite of her defects. In one passage, Lucy, talking of "Isidore", asks :

" Do you encourage him ? "

" Furieusement sometimes," said Ginevra

" Without being certain that you will be permitted to marry him ? "

" Oh, how dowdyish you are ! don't want to be married.

I am too young. "

" But if he loves you as much as you say, and yet it comes to nothing in the end, he will be miserable."

" Of course he will break his heart. I should be shocked and disappointed if he didn't."¹

The character of Madame Beck, described as, " a charitable woman who did a great deal of good,"²

is not pleasant, for "both masters and teachers (of her school) were often changed ; they vanished and others filled their places, none could well explain how."³

Obviously, her spying in list slippers, her reading of other people's letters and her jealousy towards Lucy were all

1 Villette by Charlotte Brontë"

2 Ibid

3 Ibid

characteristics taken from Madame Héger's as observed by Charlotte.

Except for the curiously unimportant and unskilfully attached first part, Villette is based on personal experiences. The characters are true to life when the writer tries to reveal their inner selves, but they converse rather awkwardly and unnaturally, in spite of Charlotte's efforts to make them seem clever; for, in all her novels, she appears much more skilful at describing emotions and peoples' inner lives than at portraying the manners and conversation of intellectuals.

Emma

Emma was begun under different circumstances from the rest of Charlotte's novels. She had just married the Rev. A. B. Nicholls, one of Mr. Brontë's curates, in 1845. After that she told Ellen:

" My life is changed indeed — to be wanted continually — to be constantly called for and occupied seems so strange. "1

In spite of this, her scanty leisure was devoted to her new novel. Mr. Nicholls, who felt a little jealous of her works, remarked discouragingly that the public might find the theme repetitive, so Charlotte made many beginnings, none of which entirely pleased herself. At last her death prevented her from carrying on with the book and she left us only a fragment.

The story starts with an opening paragraph which shows the reader Charlotte's conception of human life, especially her own :

" We all seek an ideal in life ----- I had certainly not found mine in youth ----- I had not found it in maturity. I was resigned never to find it. I had lived certain dim years entirely tranquil and unexpectant -----"2

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- 1 The Brontë Story by Margaret Lane
2 Emma by Charlotte Brontë

Then the story leads us to a boarding school run by the Misses Wilcox. There the atmosphere is familiar to us who have read Jane Eyre, Villette and The Professor. A little girl, Miss Fitzgibbon who is a newcomer to this school is favoured and petted on all possible occasions because she appears rich and well-born. Later, letters addressed to the girl's father, previously thought to be a distinguished gentleman, are returned by the Post Office, the address being a quite unknown one. The disappearance of the man, who may or may not be her real father, leaves the little girl's fees unpaid, so the favour of the head-mistress turns into rage — and the girl with a high-flown name falls fainting in fear — the story breaks off.

In considering this fragment, we are reminded of a weakness in Villette. There, the character of Lucy Snowe is not well-explained psychologically, and this is one reason why the book has been criticized as being badly-constructed. Lucy's childhood is introduced unnecessarily and her position then does not show the reason for her growing up to be so bitter and, Phyllis Bentley says, "rather disagreeable to accompany through a long novel."¹ Had the story of poor Matilda Fitzgibbon's childhood misfortune been given to Lucy; the latter's grim view of life would then be more understandable. However, we feel that Charlotte would have created a new type of heroine and undoubtedly produced an interesting story, if she had continued it till the end. It is not clear that the heroine, whoever she was going to be, would be either poor and distressed like Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, or really rich like Shirley Keeldar. We cannot guess the fate Charlotte's imagination had in store for her. It is a pity that Charlotte's admirers are unable to enjoy a story containing such characters as Mr. Fitzgibbon who, perhaps, was going to be Northangerland's

¹ The Brontës by Phyllis Bentley

reincarnation;and the description of the sensibilities of an honest child faced with such a dubious situation, would have shown more of Charlotte's ability to illustrate her constant theme of integrity, independence and courage against an adverse world.