

Classic Poetry Series

Charlotte Brontë

- poems -

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Charlotte Brontë (21 April 1816 – 31 March 1855)

Charlotte Brontë was an English novelist and poet, the eldest of the three Brontë sisters who survived into adulthood, whose novels are English literature standards. She wrote *Jane Eyre* under the pen name Currer Bell.

Early life and education

Charlotte was born in Thornton, Yorkshire in 1816, the third of six children, to Maria (née Branwell) and her husband Patrick Brontë (formerly surnamed Brunty or Prunty), an Irish Anglican clergyman. In 1820, the family moved a few miles to the village of Haworth, where Patrick had been appointed Perpetual Curate of St Michael and All Angels Church. Charlotte's mother died of cancer on 15 September 1821, leaving five daughters and a son to be taken care of by her sister Elizabeth Branwell.

In August 1824, Charlotte was sent with three of her sisters, Emily, Maria, and Elizabeth, to the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge in Lancashire (Charlotte later used the school as the basis for the fictional Lowood School in *Jane Eyre*). The school's poor conditions, Charlotte maintained, permanently affected her health and physical development and hastened the deaths of her two elder sisters, Maria (born 1814) and Elizabeth (born 1815), who died of tuberculosis in June 1825. Soon after their father removed them from the school. At home in Haworth Parsonage Charlotte acted as "the motherly friend and guardian of her younger sisters". She and the other surviving children — Branwell

, Emily,

and Anne - created their own literary fictional worlds, and began chronicling the lives and struggles of the inhabitants of these imaginary kingdoms. Charlotte and Branwell wrote Byronic stories about their imagined country ("Angria") and Emily and Anne wrote articles and poems about theirs ("Gondal"). The sagas which they created were elaborate and convoluted (and still exist in partial manuscripts) and provided them with an obsessive interest during childhood and early adolescence, which prepared them for their literary vocations in adulthood. Charlotte continued her education at Roe Head, Mirfield, from 1831 to 32, where she met her lifelong friends and correspondents, Ellen Nussey and Mary Taylor. During this period, she wrote her novella *The Green Dwarf* (1833) under the name of Wellesley. Charlotte returned to Roe Head as a teacher from 1835 to 1838. In 1839, she took up the first of many positions as governess to various families in Yorkshire, a career she pursued until 1841. Politically a Tory, she preached tolerance rather than revolution. She held high moral principles, and, despite her shyness in company, she was always prepared to argue her beliefs.

Brussels

In 1842 Charlotte and Emily travelled to Brussels to enroll in a boarding school run by Constantin Heger (1809–96) and his wife Claire Zoé Parent Heger (1804–87). In return for board and tuition, Charlotte taught English and Emily taught music. Their time at the boarding school was cut short when Elizabeth Branwell, their aunt who joined the family after the death of their mother to look after the children, died of internal obstruction in October 1842. Charlotte returned alone to Brussels in January 1843 to take up a teaching post at the boarding school. Her second stay at the boarding school was not a happy one; she became lonely, homesick and deeply attached to Constantin Heger. She finally returned to Haworth in January 1844 and later used her time at the boarding school as the inspiration for some experiences in *The Professor* and *Villette*.

First publication

In May 1846, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne self-financed the publication of a joint collection of poetry under the assumed names of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell. These pseudonyms deliberately veiled the sisters' gender whilst preserving their real initials, thus Charlotte was "Currer Bell". "Bell" was also the middle name of Haworth's curate, Arthur Bell Nicholls, whom Charlotte would later marry. Of the decision to use nom de plumes, Charlotte later wrote:

<I>Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our own names under those of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because — without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called 'feminine' — we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice; we had noticed how critics sometimes use for their chastisement the weapon of personality, and for their reward, a flattery, which is not true praise.</I>

Although only two copies of the collection of poetry were sold, the sisters continued writing for publication and began their first novels, continuing to use their nom de plumes when sending manuscripts to potential publishers.

Jane Eyre

Charlotte's first manuscript, called *The Professor*, did not secure a publisher, although she was heartened by an encouraging response she received from Smith, Elder & Co of Cornhill, who expressed an interest in any longer works which "Currer Bell" might wish to send. Charlotte responded by finishing and sending a second manuscript in August 1847, and six weeks later this second manuscript (titled *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*) was published. *Jane Eyre* was a success, and initially received favourable reviews. Straightaway there was speculation about the identity of Currer Bell, and whether Bell was a man or a woman. A couple of months later this speculation heightened upon the subsequent publication of the first novels by Charlotte's sisters: Emily's *Wuthering Heights* (by "Ellis Bell") and Anne's *Agnes Grey* (by "Acton Bell"). Accompanying this speculation was a change in the critical reaction to Charlotte's work; accusations began to be made that Charlotte's writing was "coarse", a judgement which was made more readily once it was suspected that "Currer Bell" was a woman. However sales of *Jane Eyre* continued to be strong, and may even have increased due to the novel's developing reputation as an 'improper' book.

Shirley and family bereavements

Following the success of *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte began work in 1848 on the manuscript of what was to become her second novel, *Shirley*. However the manuscript was only partially completed when the Brontë household suffered a tragic turn of events, experiencing the deaths of three family members within a period of only eight months. In September 1848 Charlotte's brother,

Branwell, the only son of the family, died of chronic bronchitis and marasmus exacerbated by heavy drinking, although Charlotte believed his death was due to tuberculosis. Branwell was also a suspected "opium eater", (i.e. a laudanum addict). Emily became seriously ill shortly after Branwell's funeral, dying of pulmonary tuberculosis in December 1848. Anne died of the same disease in May 1849. Charlotte was unable to continue writing during this period.

After Anne's death Charlotte resumed writing as a way of dealing with her grief, and *Shirley* was published in October 1849. *Shirley* deals with the themes of industrial unrest and the role of women in society. Unlike *Jane Eyre*, which is written from the first-person perspective of the main character, *Shirley* is written from the third-person perspective of a narrator. It consequently lacks the emotional immediacy of *Jane Eyre*, and reviewers found it less shocking.

In society

In view of the success of her novels, particularly *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte was persuaded by her publisher to visit London occasionally, where she revealed her true identity and began to move in a more exalted social circle, becoming friends with Harriet Martineau and Elizabeth Gaskell, and acquainted with William Makepeace Thackeray and G. H. Lewes. However Charlotte never left Haworth for more than a few weeks at a time as she did not want to leave her ageing father's side. Thackeray's daughter, the writer Anne Isabella Thackeray Ritchie recalled a visit to her father by Charlotte:

...two gentlemen come in, leading a tiny, delicate, serious, little lady, with fair straight hair, and steady eyes. She may be a little over thirty; she is dressed in a little barège dress with a pattern of faint green moss. She enters in mittens, in silence, in seriousness; our hearts are beating with wild excitement. This then is the authoress, the unknown power whose books have set all London talking, reading, speculating; some people even say our father wrote the books – the wonderful books... The moment is so breathless that dinner comes as a relief to the solemnity of the occasion, and we all smile as my father stoops to offer his arm; for, genius though she may be, Miss Brontë can barely reach his elbow. My own personal impressions are that she is somewhat grave and stern, specially to forward little girls who wish to chatter... Every one waited for the brilliant conversation which never began at all. Miss Brontë retired to the sofa in the study, and murmured a low word now and then to our kind governess... the conversation grew dimmer and more dim, the ladies sat round still expectant, my father was too much perturbed by the gloom and the silence to be able to cope with it at all... after Miss Brontë had left, I was surprised to see my father opening the front door with his hat on. He put his fingers to his lips, walked out into the darkness, and shut the door quietly behind him... long afterwards... Mrs. Procter asked me if I knew what had happened... It was one of the dullest evenings [Mrs Procter] had ever spent in her life... the ladies who had all come expecting so much delightful conversation, and the gloom and the constraint, and how finally, overwhelmed by the situation, my father had quietly left the room, left the house, and gone off to his club.

Friendship with Elizabeth Gaskell

Charlotte sent copies of *Shirley* to selected leading authors of the day, including Elizabeth Gaskell. Gaskell and Charlotte subsequently met in August 1850 and began a friendship which, whilst not necessarily close, was significant in that Gaskell would write a biography of Charlotte after Charlotte's death in 1855. The biography, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, was published in 1857 and was unusual at the time in that, rather than analysing its subject's achievements, it instead concentrated on the private details of Charlotte's life, in particular placing emphasis on aspects which countered the accusations of 'coarseness' which had been levelled at Charlotte's writing. Though frank in places, Gaskell was selective about which details she revealed; for example, she suppressed details of Charlotte's love for Heger, a married man, as being too much of an affront to contemporary morals and as a possible source of distress to Charlotte's still-living friends, father and

husband. Gaskell also provided doubtful and inaccurate information about Patrick Brontë, claiming, for example, that he did not allow his children to eat meat. This is refuted by one of Emily Brontë's diary papers, in which she describes the preparation of meat and potatoes for dinner at the parsonage, as Juliet Barker points out in her recent biography, *The Brontës*. It has been argued that the particular approach of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* transferred the focus of attention away from the 'difficult' novels of not just Charlotte but all the Brontë sisters, and began a process of sanctification of their private lives.

Villette

Charlotte's third published novel (and her last to be published during her lifetime) was *Villette*, which came out in 1853. The main themes of *Villette* include isolation, and how such a condition can be borne, and the internal conflict brought about by societal repression of individual desire. The book's main character, Lucy Snowe, travels abroad to teach in a boarding school in the fictional town of Villette, where she encounters a culture and religion different to her own, and where she falls in love with a man ('Paul Emanuel') whom she cannot marry due to societal forces. Her experiences result in her having a breakdown, but eventually she achieves independence and fulfilment in running her own school. *Villette* marked Charlotte's return to the format of writing from a first-person perspective (that of Lucy Snowe), a technique which she had used so successfully in *Jane Eyre*. Also similar to *Jane Eyre* was Charlotte's use of aspects from her own life history as inspiration for fictional events in the novel, in particular her reworking of her own time spent at the pensionnat in Brussels into Lucy spending time teaching at the boarding school, and her own falling in love with Constantin Heger into Lucy falling in love with 'Paul Emanuel'. *Villette* was acknowledged by the critics of the day as being a potent and sophisticated piece of writing, although it was still criticised for its 'coarseness' and for not being suitably 'feminine' in its portrayal of Lucy's desires.

Illness and subsequent death

In June 1854, Charlotte married Arthur Bell Nicholls, her father's curate and, in the opinion of many scholars, the model for several of her literary characters such as *Jane Eyre*'s Rochester and St. John. She became pregnant soon after the marriage. Her health declined rapidly during this time, and according to Gaskell, her earliest biographer, she was attacked by "sensations of perpetual nausea and ever-recurring faintness." Charlotte died, along with her unborn child, on 31 March 1855, at the young age of 38. Her death certificate gives the cause of death as phthisis (tuberculosis), but many biographers[who?] suggest she may have died from dehydration and malnourishment, caused by excessive vomiting from severe morning sickness or hyperemesis gravidarum. There is also evidence to suggest that Charlotte died from typhus she may have caught from Tabitha Ackroyd, the Brontë household's oldest servant, who died shortly before her. Charlotte was interred in the family vault in The Church of St. Michael and All Angels, Haworth, West Yorkshire, England.

Posthumously, her first-written novel was published in 1857, the fragment she worked on in her last years in 1860 (twice completed by recent authors, the more famous version being *Emma Brown: A Novel from the Unfinished Manuscript by Charlotte Brontë* by Clare Boylan, 2003), and much *Angria* material over the ensuing decades

Eserleri:

Juvenilia
The Young Men's Magazine, Number 1 - 3 (August 1830)
The Spell
The Secret
Lily Hart
The Foundling
The Green Dwarf
My *Angria* and the *Angrians*

Albion and Marina
Tales of the Islanders
Tales of Angria (written 1838–1839 - a collection of childhood and young adult writings including five short novels)
Mina Laury
Stancliffe's Hotel
The Duke of Zamorna
Henry Hastings
Caroline Vernon
The Roe Head Journal Fragments
The Green Dwarf
Novels
Jane Eyre, published 1847
Shirley, published in 1849
Villette, published in 1853
The Professor 1857
Emma
Poetry
Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell (1846)
Selected Poems of The Brontës, Everyman Poetry (1997)

Apostasy

THIS last denial of my faith,
Thou, solemn Priest, hast heard;
And, though upon my bed of death,
I call not back a word.
Point not to thy Madonna, Priest,-
Thy sightless saint of stone;
She cannot, from this burning breast,
Wring one repentant moan.

Thou say'st, that when a sinless child,
I duly bent the knee,
And prayed to what in marble smiled
Cold, lifeless, mute, on me.
I did. But listen ! Children spring
Full soon to riper youth;
And, for Love's vow and Wedlock's ring,
I sold my early truth.

'Twas not a grey, bare head, like thine,
Bent o'er me, when I said,
' That land and God and Faith are mine,
For which thy fathers bled.'
I see thee not, my eyes are dim;
But, well I hear thee say,
' O daughter, cease to think of him
Who led thy soul astray.

Between you lies both space and time;
Let leagues and years prevail
To turn thee from the path of crime,
Back to the Church's pale.'
And, did I need that thou shouldst tell
What mighty barriers rise
To part me from that dungeon-cell,
Where my loved Walter lies ?

And, did I need that thou shouldst taunt
My dying hour at last,
By bidding this worn spirit pant
No more for what is past ?
Priest-must I cease to think of him ?
How hollow rings that word !
Can time, can tears, can distance dim
The memory of my lord ?

I said before, I saw not thee,
Because, an hour ago,
Over my eye-balls, heavily,
The lids fell down like stone.
But still my spirit's inward sight
Beholds his image beam
As fixed, as clear, as burning bright,

As some red planet's gleam.

Talk not of thy Last Sacrament,
Tell not thy beads for me;
Both rite and prayer are vainly spent,
As dews upon the sea.
Speak not one word of Heaven above,
Rave not of Hell's alarms;
Give me but back my Walter's love,
Restore me to his arms !

Then will the bliss of Heaven be won;
Then will Hell shrink away,
As I have seen night's terrors shun
The conquering steps of day.
'Tis my religion thus to love,
My creed thus fixed to be;
Not Death shall shake, nor Priestcraft break
My rock-like constancy !

Now go; for at the door there waits
Another stranger guest:
He calls-I come-my pulse scarce beats,
My heart fails in my breast.
Again that voice-how far away,
How dreary sounds that tone !
And I, methinks, am gone astray
In trackless wastes and lone.

I fain would rest a little while:
Where can I find a stay,
Till dawn upon the hills shall smile,
And show some trodden way ?
' I come ! I come !' in haste she said,
' 'Twas Walter's voice I heard !'
Then up she sprang-but fell back, dead,
His name her latest word.

Charlotte Brontë

Evening Solace

THE human heart has hidden treasures,
In secret kept, in silence sealed;-
The thoughts, the hopes, the dreams, the pleasures,
Whose charms were broken if revealed.
And days may pass in gay confusion,
And nights in rosy riot fly,
While, lost in Fame's or Wealth's illusion,
The memory of the Past may die.

But, there are hours of lonely musing,
Such as in evening silence come,
When, soft as birds their pinions closing,
The heart's best feelings gather home.
Then in our souls there seems to languish
A tender grief that is not woe;
And thoughts that once wrung groans of anguish,
Now cause but some mild tears to flow.

And feelings, once as strong as passions,
Float softly back-a faded dream;
Our own sharp griefs and wild sensations,
The tale of others' sufferings seem.
Oh ! when the heart is freshly bleeding,
How longs it for that time to be,
When, through the mist of years receding,
Its woes but live in reverie !

And it can dwell on moonlight glimmer,
On evening shade and loneliness;
And, while the sky grows dim and dimmer,
Feel no untold and strange distress-
Only a deeper impulse given
By lonely hour and darkened room,
To solemn thoughts that soar to heaven,
Seeking a life and world to come.

Charlotte Brontë

Frances

SHE will not sleep, for fear of dreams,
But, rising, quits her restless bed,
And walks where some beclouded beams
Of moonlight through the hall are shed.

Obedient to the goad of grief,
Her steps, now fast, now lingering slow,
In varying motion seek relief
From the Eumenides of woe.

Wringing her hands, at intervals-
But long as mute as phantom dim-
She glides along the dusky walls,
Under the black oak rafters, grim.

The close air of the grated tower
Stifles a heart that scarce can beat,
And, though so late and lone the hour,
Forth pass her wandering, faltering feet;

And on the pavement, spread before
The long front of the mansion grey,
Her steps imprint the night-frost hoar,
Which pale on grass and granite lay.

Not long she stayed where misty moon
And shimmering stars could on her look,
But through the garden arch-way, soon
Her strange and gloomy path she took.

Some firs, coeval with the tower,
Their straight black boughs stretched o'er her head,
Unseen, beneath this sable bower,
Rustled her dress and rapid tread.

There was an alcove in that shade,
Screening a rustic-seat and stand;
Weary she sat her down and laid
Her hot brow on her burning hand.

To solitude and to the night,
Some words she now, in murmurs, said;
And, trickling through her fingers white,
Some tears of misery she shed.

' God help me, in my grievous need,
God help me, in my inward pain;
Which cannot ask for pity's meed,
Which has no license to complain;

Which must be borne, yet who can bear,
Hours long, days long, a constant weight-

The yoke of absolute despair,
A suffering wholly desolate ?

Who can for ever crush the heart,
Restrain its throbbing, curb its life ?
Dissemble truth with ceaseless art,
With outward calm, mask inward strife ?'

She waited-as for some reply;
The still and cloudy night gave none;
Erelong, with deep-drawn, trembling sigh,
Her heavy plaint again begun.

' Unloved-I love; unwept-I weep;
Grief I restrain-hope I repress:
Vain is this anguish-fixed and deep;
Vainer, desires and dreams of bliss.

My love awakes no love again,
My tears collect, and fall unfelt;
My sorrow touches none with pain,
My humble hopes to nothing melt.

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

That mind my own. Oh ! narrow cell;
Dark-imageless-a living tomb !
There must I sleep, there wake and dwell
Content, with palsy, pain, and gloom.'

Again she paused; a moan of pain,
A stifled sob, alone was heard;
Long silence followed-then again,
Her voice the stagnant midnight stirred.

' Must it be so ? Is this my fate ?
Can I nor struggle, nor contend ?
And am I doomed for years to wait,
Watching death's lingering axe descend ?

And when it falls, and when I die,
What follows ? Vacant nothingness ?
The blank of lost identity ?
Erasure both of pain and bliss ?

I've heard of heaven-I would believe;
For if this earth indeed be all,
Who longest lives may deepest grieve,
Most blest, whom sorrows soonest call.

Oh ! leaving disappointment here,
Will man find hope on yonder coast ?
Hope, which, on earth, shines never clear,
And oft in clouds is wholly lost.

Will he hope's source of light behold,
Fruition's spring, where doubts expire,
And drink, in waves of living gold,
Contentment, full, for long desire ?

Will he find bliss, which here he dreamed ?
Rest, which was weariness on earth ?
Knowledge, which, if o'er life it beamed,
Served but to prove it void of worth ?

Will he find love without lust's leaven,
Love fearless, tearless, perfect, pure,
To all with equal bounty given,
In all, unfeigned, unfailling, sure ?

Will he, from penal sufferings free,
Released from shroud and wormy clod,
All calm and glorious, rise and see
Creation's Sire-Existence' God ?

Then, glancing back on Time's brief woes,
Will he behold them, fading, fly;
Swept from Eternity's repose,
Like sullyng cloud, from pure blue sky ?

If so-endure, my weary frame;
And when thy anguish strikes too deep,
And when all troubled burns life's flame,
Think of the quiet, final sleep;

Think of the glorious waking-hour,
Which will not dawn on grief and tears,
But on a ransomed spirit's power,
Certain, and free from mortal fears.

Seek now thy couch, and lie till morn,
Then from thy chamber, calm, descend,
With mind nor tossed, nor anguish-torn,
But tranquil, fixed, to wait the end.

And when thy opening eyes shall see
Mementos, on the chamber wall,
Of one who has forgotten thee,
Shed not the tear of acrid gall.

The tear which, welling from the heart,

Burns where its drop corrosive falls,
And makes each nerve, in torture, start,
At feelings it too well recalls:

When the sweet hope of being loved,
Threw Eden sunshine on life's way;
When every sense and feeling proved
Expectancy of brightest day.

When the hand trembled to receive
A thrilling clasp, which seemed so near,
And the heart ventured to believe,
Another heart esteemed it dear.

When words, half love, all tenderness,
Were hourly heard, as hourly spoken,
When the long, sunny days of bliss,
Only by moonlight nights were broken.

Till drop by drop, the cup of joy
Filled full, with purple light, was glowing,
And Faith, which watched it, sparkling high,
Still never dreamt the overflowing.

It fell not with a sudden crashing,
It poured not out like open sluice;
No, sparkling still, and redly flashing,
Drained, drop by drop, the generous juice.

I saw it sink, and strove to taste it,
My eager lips approached the brim;
The movement only seemed to waste it,
It sank to dregs, all harsh and dim.

These I have drank, and they for ever
Have poisoned life and love for me;
A draught from Sodom's lake could never
More fiery, salt, and bitter, be.

Oh ! Love was all a thin illusion;
Joy, but the desert's flying stream;
And, glancing back on long delusion,
My memory grasps a hollow dream.

Yet, whence that wondrous change of feeling,
I never knew, and cannot learn,
Nor why my lover's eye, congealing,
Grew cold, and clouded, proud, and stern.

Nor wherefore, friendship's forms forgetting,
He careless left, and cool withdrew;
Nor spoke of grief, nor fond regretting,

Nor even one glance of comfort threw.

And neither word nor token sending,
Of kindness, since the parting day,
His course, for distant regions bending,
Went, self-contained and calm, away.

Oh, bitter, blighting, keen sensation,
Which will not weaken, cannot die,
Hasten thy work of desolation,
And let my tortured spirit fly !

Vain as the passing gale, my crying;
Though lightning-struck, I must live on;
I know, at heart, there is no dying
Of love, and ruined hope, alone.

Still strong, and young, and warm with vigour,
Though scathed, I long shall greenly grow,
And many a storm of wildest rigour
Shall yet break o'er my shivered bough.

Rebellious now to blank inertion,
My unused strength demands a task;
Travel, and toil, and full exertion,
Are the last, only boon I ask.

Whence, then, this vain and barren dreaming
Of death, and dubious life to come ?
I see a nearer beacon gleaming
Over dejection's sea of gloom.

The very wildness of my sorrow
Tells me I yet have innate force;
My track of life has been too narrow,
Effort shall trace a broader course.

The world is not in yonder tower,
Earth is not prisoned in that room,
'Mid whose dark pannels, hour by hour,
I've sat, the slave and prey of gloom.

One feeling-turned to utter anguish,
Is not my being's only aim;
When, lorn and loveless, life will languish,
But courage can revive the flame.

He, when he left me, went a roving
To sunny climes, beyond the sea;
And I, the weight of woe removing,
Am free and fetterless as he.

New scenes, new language, skies less clouded,
May once more wake the wish to live;
Strange, foreign towns, astir, and crowded,
New pictures to the mind may give.

New forms and faces, passing ever,
May hide the one I still retain,
Defined, and fixed, and fading never,
Stamped deep on vision, heart, and brain.

And we might meet-time may have changed him;
Chance may reveal the mystery,
The secret influence which estranged him;
Love may restore him yet to me.

False thought-false hope-in scorn be banished !
I am not loved-nor loved have been;
Recall not, then, the dreams scarce vanished,
Traitors ! mislead me not again !

To words like yours I bid defiance,
'Tis such my mental wreck have made;
Of God alone, and self-reliance,
I ask for solace-hope for aid.

Morn comes-and ere meridian glory
O'er these, my natal woods, shall smile,
Both lonely wood and mansion hoary
I'll leave behind, full many a mile.

Charlotte Brontë

Gilbert

I. THE GARDEN.

ABOVE the city hung the moon,
Right o'er a plot of ground
Where flowers and orchard-trees were fenced
With lofty walls around:
'Twas Gilbert's garden-there, to-night
Awhile he walked alone;
And, tired with sedentary toil,
Mused where the moonlight shone.

This garden, in a city-heart,
Lay still as houseless wild,
Though many-windowed mansion fronts
Were round it closely piled;
But thick their walls, and those within
Lived lives by noise unstirred;
Like wafting of an angel's wing,
Time's flight by them was heard.

Some soft piano-notes alone
Were sweet as faintly given,
Where ladies, doubtless, cheered the hearth
With song, that winter-even.
The city's many-mingled sounds
Rose like the hum of ocean;
They rather lulled the heart than roused
Its pulse to faster motion.

Gilbert has paced the single walk
An hour, yet is not weary;
And, though it be a winter night,
He feels nor cold nor dreary.
The prime of life is in his veins,
And sends his blood fast flowing,
And Fancy's fervour warms the thoughts
Now in his bosom glowing.

Those thoughts recur to early love,
Or what he love would name,
Though haply Gilbert's secret deeds
Might other title claim.
Such theme not oft his mind absorbs,
He to the world clings fast,
And too much for the present lives,
To linger o'er the past.

But now the evening's deep repose
Has glided to his soul;
That moonlight falls on Memory,
And shows her fading scroll.
One name appears in every line

The gentle rays shine o'er,
And still he smiles and still repeats
That one name-Elinor.

There is no sorrow in his smile,
No kindness in his tone;
The triumph of a selfish heart
Speaks coldly there alone;
He says: ' She loved me more than life;
And truly it was sweet
To see so fair a woman kneel,
In bondage, at my feet.

There was a sort of quiet bliss
To be so deeply loved,
To gaze on trembling eagerness
And sit myself unmoved.
And when it pleased my pride to grant,
At last some rare caress,
To feel the fever of that hand
My fingers deigned to press.

'Twas sweet to see her strive to hide
What every glance revealed;
Endowed, the while, with despot-might
Her destiny to wield.
I knew myself no perfect man,
Nor, as she deemed, divine;
I knew that I was glorious-but
By her reflected shine;

Her youth, her native energy,
Her powers new-born and fresh,
'Twas these with Godhead sanctified
My sensual frame of flesh.
Yet, like a god did I descend
At last, to meet her love;
And, like a god, I then withdrew
To my own heaven above.

And never more could she invoke
My presence to her sphere;
No prayer, no plaint, no cry of hers
Could win my awful ear.
I knew her blinded constancy
Would ne'er my deeds betray,
And, calm in conscience, whole in heart,
I went my tranquil way.

Yet, sometimes, I still feel a wish,
The fond and flattering pain
Of passion's anguish to create,

In her young breast again.
Bright was the lustre of her eyes,
When they caught fire from mine;
If I had power-this very hour,
Again I 'd light their shine.

But where she is, or how she lives,
I have no clue to know;
I 've heard she long my absence pined,
And left her home in woe.
But busied, then, in gathering gold,
As I am busied now,
I could not turn from such pursuit,
To weep a broken vow.

Nor could I give to fatal risk
The fame I ever prized;
Even now, I fear, that precious fame
Is too much compromised.'
An inward trouble dims his eye,
Some riddle he would solve;
Some method to unloose a knot,
His anxious thoughts revolve.

He, pensive, leans against a tree,
A leafy evergreen,
The boughs, the moonlight, intercept,
And hide him like a screen;
He starts-the tree shakes with his tremor,
Yet nothing near him pass'd,
He hurries up the garden alley,
In strangely sudden haste.

With shaking hand, he lifts the latchet,
Steps o'er the threshold stone;
The heavy door slips from his fingers,
It shuts, and he is gone.
What touched, transfixed, appalled, his soul ?
A nervous thought, no more;
'Twill sink like stone in placid pool,
And calm close smoothly o'er.

II. THE PARLOUR.

WARM is the parlour atmosphere,
Serene the lamp's soft light;
The vivid embers, red and clear,
Proclaim a frosty night.
Books, varied, on the table lie,
Three children o'er them bend,
And all, with curious, eager eye,

The turning leaf attend.

Picture and tale alternately
Their simple hearts delight,
And interest deep, and tempered glee,
Illume their aspects bright;
The parents, from their fireside place,
Behold that pleasant scene,
And joy is on the mother's face,
Pride, in the father's mien.

As Gilbert sees his blooming wife,
Beholds his children fair,
No thought has he of transient strife,
Or past, though piercing fear.
The voice of happy infancy
Lisps sweetly in his ear,
His wife, with pleased and peaceful eye,
Sits, kindly smiling, near.

The fire glows on her silken dress,
And shows its ample grace,
And warmly tints each hazel tress,
Curled soft around her face.
The beauty that in youth he wooed,
Is beauty still, unfaded,
The brow of ever placid mood
No churlish grief has shaded.

Prosperity, in Gilbert's home,
Abides, the guest of years;
There Want or Discord never come,
And seldom Toil or Tears.
The carpets bear the peaceful print
Of comfort's velvet tread,
And golden gleams from plenty sent,
In every nook are shed.

The very silken spaniel seems
Of quiet ease to tell,
As near its mistress' feet it dreams,
Sunk in a cushion's swell;
And smiles seem native to the eyes
Of those sweet children, three;
They have but looked on tranquil skies,
And know not misery.

Alas ! that misery should come
In such an hour as this;
Why could she not so calm a home
A little longer miss ?
But she is now within the door,

Her steps advancing glide;
Her sullen shade has crossed the floor,
She stands at Gilbert's side.

She lays her hand upon his heart,
It bounds with agony;
His fireside chair shakes with the start
That shook the garden tree.
His wife towards the children looks,
She does not mark his mien;
The children, bending o'er their books,
His terror have not seen.

In his own home, by his own hearth,
He sits in solitude,
And circled round with light and mirth,
Cold horror chills his blood.
His mind would hold with desperate clutch
The scene that round him lies;
No-changed, as by some wizard's touch,
The present prospect flies.

A tumult vague-a viewless strife
His futile struggles crush;
'Twixt him and his, an unknown life
And unknown feelings rush.
He sees-but scarce can language paint
The tissue Fancy weaves;
For words oft give but echo faint
Of thoughts the mind conceives.

Noise, tumult strange, and darkness dim,
Efface both light and quiet;
No shape is in those shadows grim,
No voice in that wild riot.
Sustained and strong, a wondrous blast
Above and round him blows;
A greenish gloom, dense overcast,
Each moment denser grows.

He nothing knows-nor clearly sees,
Resistance checks his breath,
The high, impetuous, ceaseless breeze
Blows on him. cold as death.
And still the undulating gloom
Mocks sight with formless motion;
Was such sensation Jonah's doom,
Gulphed in the depths of ocean ?

Streaking the air, the nameless vision,
Fast-driven, deep-sounding, flows;
Oh ! whence its source, and what its mission ?

How will its terrors close ?
Long-sweeping, rushing, vast and void,
The Universe it swallows;
And still the dark, devouring tide,
A Typhoon tempest follows.

More slow it rolls; its furious race
Sinks to a solemn gliding;
The stunning roar, the wind's wild chase,
To stillness are subsiding.
And, slowly borne along, a form
The shapeless chaos varies;
Poised in the eddy to the storm,
Before the eye it tarries.

A woman drowned-sunk in the deep,
On a long wave reclining;
The circling waters' crystal sweep,
Like glass, her shape enshrining;
Her pale dead face, to Gilbert turned,
Seems as in sleep reposing;
A feeble light, now first discerned,
The features well disclosing.

No effort from the haunted air
The ghastly scene could banish;
That hovering wave, arrested there,
Rolled-throbbled-but did not vanish.
If Gilbert upward turned his gaze,
He saw the ocean-shadow;
If he looked down, the endless seas
Lay green as summer meadow.

And straight before, the pale corpse lay,
Upborne by air or billow,
So near, he could have touched the spray
That churned around its pillow.
The hollow anguish of the face
Had moved a fiend to sorrow;
Not Death's fixed calm could rase the trace
Of suffering's deep-worn furrow.

All moved; a strong returning blast,
The mass of waters raising,
Bore wave and passive carcass past,
While Gilbert yet was gazing.
Deep in her isle-conceiving womb,
It seemed the Ocean thundered,
And soon, by realms of rushing gloom,
Were seer and phantom sundered.

Then swept some timbers from a wreck,

On following surges riding;
Then sea-weed, in the turbid rack
Uptorn, went slowly gliding.
The horrid shade, by slow degrees,
A beam of light defeated,
And then the roar of raving seas,
Fast, far, and faint, retreated.

And all was gone-gone like a mist,
Corse, billows, tempest, wreck;
Three children close to Gilbert prest
And clung around his neck.
Good night ! good night ! the prattlers said
And kissed their father's cheek;
'Twas now the hour their quiet bed
And placid rest to seek.

The mother with her offspring goes
To hear their evening prayer;
She nought of Gilbert's vision knows,
And nought of his despair.
Yet, pitying God, abridge the time
Of anguish, now his fate !
Though, haply, great has been his crime,
Thy mercy, too, is great.

Gilbert, at length, uplifts his head,
Bent for some moments low,
And there is neither grief nor dread
Upon his subtle brow.
For well can he his feelings task,
And well his looks command;
His features well his heart can mask,
With smiles and smoothness bland.

Gilbert has reasoned with his mind-
He says 'twas all a dream;
He strives his inward sight to blind
Against truth's inward beam.
He pitied not that shadowy thing,
When it was flesh and blood;
Nor now can pity's balmy spring
Refresh his arid mood.

' And if that dream has spoken truth,'
Thus musingly he says;
' If Elinor be dead, in sooth,
Such chance the shock repays:
A net was woven round my feet,
I scarce could further go,
Are Shame had forced a fast retreat,
Dishonour brought me low. '

' Conceal her, then, deep, silent Sea,
Give her a secret grave !
She sleeps in peace, and I am free,
No longer Terror's slave:
And homage still, from all the world,
Shall greet my spotless name,
Since surges break and waves are curled
Above its threatened shame.'

III. THE WELCOME HOME

ABOVE the city hangs the moon,
Some clouds are boding rain,
Gilbert, erewhile on journey gone,
To-night comes home again.
Ten years have passed above his head,
Each year has brought him gain;
His prosperous life has smoothly sped,
Without or tear or stain.

'Tis somewhat late-the city clocks
Twelve deep vibrations toll,
As Gilbert at the portal knocks,
Which is his journey's goal.
The street is still and desolate,
The moon hid by a cloud;
Gilbert, impatient, will not wait,-
His second knock peals loud.

The clocks are hushed; there's not a light
In any window nigh,
And not a single planet bright
Looks from the clouded sky;
The air is raw, the rain descends,
A bitter north-wind blows;
His cloak the traveller scarce defends-
Will not the door unclose ?

He knocks the third time, and the last;
His summons now they hear,
Within, a footstep, hurrying fast,
Is heard approaching near.
The bolt is drawn, the clanking chain
Falls to the floor of stone;
And Gilbert to his heart will strain
His wife and children soon.

The hand that lifts the latchet, holds
A candle to his sight,
And Gilbert, on the step, beholds

A woman, clad in white.
Lo ! water from her dripping dress
Runs on the streaming floor;
From every dark and clinging tress,
The drops incessant pour.

There's none but her to welcome him;
She holds the candle high,
And, motionless in form and limb,
Stands cold and silent nigh;
There's sand and sea-weed on her robe,
Her hollow eyes are blind;
No pulse in such a frame can throb,
No life is there defined.

Gilbert turned ashy-white, but still
His lips vouchsafed no cry;
He spurred his strength and master-will
To pass the figure by,-
But, moving slow, it faced him straight,
It would not flinch nor quail:
Then first did Gilbert's strength abate,
His stony firmness quail.

He sank upon his knees and prayed;
The shape stood rigid there;
He called aloud for human aid,
No human aid was near.
An accent strange did thus repeat
Heaven's stern but just decree:
' The measure thou to her didst mete,
To thee shall measured be !'

Gilbert sprang from his bended knees,
By the pale spectre pushed,
And, wild as one whom demons seize,
Up the hall-staircase rushed;
Entered his chamber-near the bed
Sheathed steel and fire-arms hung-
Impelled by maniac purpose dread,
He chose those stores among.

Across his throat, a keen-edged knife
With vigorous hand he drew;
The wound was wide-his outraged life
Rushed rash and redly through.
And thus died, by a shameful death,
A wise and worldly man,
Who never drew but selfish breath
Since first his life began.

Charlotte Brontë

Life

LIFE, believe, is not a dream
So dark as sages say;
Oft a little morning rain
Foretells a pleasant day.
Sometimes there are clouds of gloom,
But these are transient all;
If the shower will make the roses bloom,
O why lament its fall ?

Rapidly, merrily,
Life's sunny hours flit by,
Gratefully, cheerily,
Enjoy them as they fly !

What though Death at times steps in
And calls our Best away ?
What though sorrow seems to win,
O'er hope, a heavy sway ?
Yet hope again elastic springs,
Unconquered, though she fell;
Still buoyant are her golden wings,
Still strong to bear us well.
Manfully, fearlessly,
The day of trial bear,
For gloriously, victoriously,
Can courage quell despair !

Charlotte Brontë

Mementos

ARRANGING long-locked drawers and shelves
Of cabinets, shut up for years,
What a strange task we've set ourselves !
How still the lonely room appears !
How strange this mass of ancient treasures,
Mementos of past pains and pleasures;
These volumes, clasped with costly stone,
With print all faded, gilding gone;

These fans of leaves, from Indian trees-
These crimson shells, from Indian seas-
These tiny portraits, set in rings-
Once, doubtless, deemed such precious things;
Keepsakes bestowed by Love on Faith,
And worn till the receiver's death,
Now stored with cameos, china, shells,
In this old closet's dusty cells.

I scarcely think, for ten long years,
A hand has touched these relics old;
And, coating each, slow-formed, appears,
The growth of green and antique mould.

All in this house is mossaing over;
All is unused, and dim, and damp;
Nor light, nor warmth, the rooms discover-
Bereft for years of fire and lamp.

The sun, sometimes in summer, enters
The casements, with reviving ray;
But the long rains of many winters
Moulder the very walls away.

And outside all is ivy, clinging
To chimney, lattice, gable grey;
Scarcely one little red rose springing
Through the green moss can force its way.

Unscared, the daw, and starling nestle,
Where the tall turret rises high,
And winds alone come near to rustle
The thick leaves where their cradles lie.

I sometimes think, when late at even
I climb the stair reluctantly,
Some shape that should be well in heaven,
Or ill elsewhere, will pass by me.

I fear to see the very faces,
Familiar thirty years ago,
Even in the old accustomed places
Which look so cold and gloomy now.

I've come, to close the window, hither,
At twilight, when the sun was down,
And Fear, my very soul would wither,
Lest something should be dimly shown.

Too much the buried form resembling,
Of her who once was mistress here;
Lest doubtful shade, or moonbeam trembling,
Might take her aspect, once so dear.

Hers was this chamber; in her time
It seemed to me a pleasant room,
For then no cloud of grief or crime
Had cursed it with a settled gloom;

I had not seen death's image laid
In shroud and sheet, on yonder bed.
Before she married, she was blest-
Blest in her youth, blest in her worth;
Her mind was calm, its sunny rest
Shone in her eyes more clear than mirth.

And when attired in rich array,
Light, lustrous hair about her brow,
She yonder sat-a kind of day
Lit up-what seems so gloomy now.
These grim oak walls, even then were grim;
That old carved chair, was then antique;
But what around looked dusk and dim
Served as a foil to her fresh cheek;
Her neck, and arms, of hue so fair,
Eyes of unclouded, smiling, light;
Her soft, and curled, and floating hair,
Gems and attire, as rainbow bright.

Reclined in yonder deep recess,
Ofttimes she would, at evening, lie
Watching the sun; she seemed to bless
With happy glance the glorious sky.
She loved such scenes, and as she gazed,
Her face evinced her spirit's mood;
Beauty or grandeur ever raised
In her, a deep-felt gratitude.

But of all lovely things, she loved
A cloudless moon, on summer night;
Full oft have I impatience proved
To see how long, her still delight
Would find a theme in reverie.
Out on the lawn, or where the trees
Let in the lustre fitfully,

As their boughs parted momentarily,
To the soft, languid, summer breeze.
Alas ! that she should e'er have flung
Those pure, though lonely joys away-
Deceived by false and guileful tongue,
She gave her hand, then suffered wrong;
Oppressed, ill-used, she faded young,
And died of grief by slow decay.

Open that casket-look how bright
Those jewels flash upon the sight;
The brilliants have not lost a ray
Of lustre, since her wedding day.
But see-upon that pearly chain-
How dim lies time's discolouring stain !
I've seen that by her daughter worn:
For, e'er she died, a child was born;
A child that ne'er its mother knew,
That lone, and almost friendless grew;
For, ever, when its step drew nigh,
Averted was the father's eye;
And then, a life impure and wild
Made him a stranger to his child;
Absorbed in vice, he little cared
On what she did, or how she fared.
The love withheld, she never sought,
She grew uncherished-learnt untaught;
To her the inward life of thought
Full soon was open laid.
I know not if her friendlessness
Did sometimes on her spirit press,
But plaint she never made.

The book-shelves were her darling treasure,
She rarely seemed the time to measure
While she could read alone.
And she too loved the twilight wood,
And often, in her mother's mood,
Away to yonder hill would hie,
Like her, to watch the setting sun,
Or see the stars born, one by one,
Out of the darkening sky.
Nor would she leave that hill till night
Trembled from pole to pole with light;
Even then, upon her homeward way,
Long-long her wandering steps delayed
To quit the sombre forest shade,
Through which her eerie pathway lay.

You ask if she had beauty's grace ?
I know not-but a nobler face
My eyes have seldom seen;

A keen and fine intelligence,
And, better still, the truest sense
Were in her speaking mien.
But bloom or lustre was there none,
Only at moments, fitful shone
An ardour in her eye,
That kindled on her cheek a flush,
Warm as a red sky's passing blush
And quick with energy.
Her speech, too, was not common speech,
No wish to shine, or aim to teach,
Was in her words displayed:
She still began with quiet sense,
But oft the force of eloquence
Came to her lips in aid;
Language and voice unconscious changed,
And thoughts, in other words arranged,
Her fervid soul transfused
Into the hearts of those who heard,
And transient strength and ardour stirred,
In minds to strength unused.
Yet in gay crowd or festal glare,
Grave and retiring was her air;
'Twas seldom, save with me alone,
That fire of feeling freely shone;
She loved not awe's nor wonder's gaze,
Nor even exaggerated praise,
Nor even notice, if too keen
The curious gazer searched her mien.
Nature's own green expanse revealed
The world, the pleasures, she could prize;
On free hill-side, in sunny field,
In quiet spots by woods concealed,
Grew wild and fresh her chosen joys,
Yet Nature's feelings deeply lay
In that endowed and youthful frame;
Shrined in her heart and hid from day,
They burned unseen with silent flame;
In youth's first search for mental light,
She lived but to reflect and learn,
But soon her mind's maturer might
For stronger task did pant and yearn;
And stronger task did fate assign,
Task that a giant's strength might strain;
To suffer long and ne'er repine,
Be calm in frenzy, smile at pain.

Pale with the secret war of feeling,
Sustained with courage, mute, yet high;
The wounds at which she bled, revealing
Only by altered cheek and eye;

She bore in silence-but when passion
Surged in her soul with ceaseless foam,
The storm at last brought desolation,
And drove her exiled from her home.

And silent still, she straight assembled
The wrecks of strength her soul retained;
For though the wasted body trembled,
The unconquered mind, to quail, disdained.

She crossed the sea-now lone she wanders
By Seine's, or Rhine's, or Arno's flow;
Fain would I know if distance renders
Relief or comfort to her woe.

Fain would I know if, henceforth, ever,
These eyes shall read in hers again,
That light of love which faded never,
Though dimmed so long with secret pain.

She will return, but cold and altered,
Like all whose hopes too soon depart;
Like all on whom have beat, unsheltered,
The bitter blasts that blight the heart.

No more shall I behold her lying
Calm on a pillow, smoothed by me;
No more that spirit, worn with sighing,
Will know the rest of infancy.

If still the paths of lore she follow,
'Twill be with tired and goaded will;
She'll only toil, the aching hollow,
The joyless blank of life to fill.

And oh ! full oft, quite spent and weary,
Her hand will pause, her head decline;
That labour seems so hard and dreary,
On which no ray of hope may shine.

Thus the pale blight of time and sorrow
Will shade with grey her soft, dark hair
Then comes the day that knows no morrow,
And death succeeds to long despair.

So speaks experience, sage and hoary;
I see it plainly, know it well,
Like one who, having read a story,
Each incident therein can tell.

Touch not that ring, 'twas his, the sire
Of that forsaken child;

And nought his relics can inspire
Save memories, sin-defiled.

I, who sat by his wife's death-bed,
I, who his daughter loved,
Could almost curse the guilty dead,
For woes, the guiltless proved.

And heaven did curse-they found him laid,
When crime for wrath was rife,
Cold-with the suicidal blade
Clutched in his desperate gripe.

'Twas near that long deserted hut,
Which in the wood decays,
Death's axe, self-wielded, struck his root,
And lopped his desperate days.

You know the spot, where three black trees,
Lift up their branches fell,
And moaning, ceaseless as the seas,
Still seem, in every passing breeze,
The deed of blood to tell.

They named him mad, and laid his bones
Where holier ashes lie;
Yet doubt not that his spirit groans,
In hell's eternity.

But, lo ! night, closing o'er the earth,
Infects our thoughts with gloom;
Come, let us strive to rally mirth,
Where glows a clear and tranquil hearth
In some more cheerful room.

Charlotte Brontë

On The Death Of Anne Brontë

THERE 's little joy in life for me,
And little terror in the grave ;
I 've lived the parting hour to see
Of one I would have died to save.

Calmly to watch the failing breath,
Wishing each sigh might be the last ;
Longing to see the shade of death
O'er those belovèd features cast.

The cloud, the stillness that must part
The darling of my life from me ;
And then to thank God from my heart,
To thank Him well and fervently ;

Although I knew that we had lost
The hope and glory of our life ;
And now, benighted, tempest-tossed,
Must bear alone the weary strife.

Charlotte Brontë

Parting

THERE'S no use in weeping,
Though we are condemned to part:
There's such a thing as keeping
A remembrance in one's heart:

There's such a thing as dwelling
On the thought ourselves have nurs'd,
And with scorn and courage telling
The world to do its worst.

We'll not let its follies grieve us,
We'll just take them as they come;
And then every day will leave us
A merry laugh for home.

When we've left each friend and brother,
When we're parted wide and far,
We will think of one another,
As even better than we are.

Every glorious sight above us,
Every pleasant sight beneath,
We'll connect with those that love us,
Whom we truly love till death !

In the evening, when we're sitting
By the fire perchance alone,
Then shall heart with warm heart meeting,
Give responsive tone for tone.

We can burst the bonds which chain us,
Which cold human hands have wrought,
And where none shall dare restrain us
We can meet again, in thought.

So there's no use in weeping,
Bear a cheerful spirit still;
Never doubt that Fate is keeping
Future good for present ill !

Charlotte Brontë

Passion

SOME have won a wild delight,
By daring wilder sorrow;
Could I gain thy love to-night,
I'd hazard death to-morrow.

Could the battle-struggle earn
One kind glance from thine eye,
How this withering heart would burn,
The heady fight to try !

Welcome nights of broken sleep,
And days of carnage cold,
Could I deem that thou wouldst weep
To hear my perils told.

Tell me, if with wandering bands
I roam full far away,
Wilt thou, to those distant lands,
In spirit ever stray ?

Wild, long, a trumpet sounds afar;
Bid me-bid me go
Where Seik and Briton meet in war,
On Indian Sutlej's flow.

Blood has dyed the Sutlej's waves
With scarlet stain, I know;
Indus' borders yawn with graves,
Yet, command me go !

Though rank and high the holocaust
Of nations, steams to heaven,
Glad I'd join the death-doomed host,
Were but the mandate given.

Passion's strength should nerve my arm,
Its ardour stir my life,
Till human force to that dread charm
Should yield and sink in wild alarm,
Like trees to tempest-strife.

If, hot from war, I seek thy love,
Darest thou turn aside ?
Darest thou, then, my fire reprove,
By scorn, and maddening pride ?

No-my will shall yet control
Thy will, so high and free,
And love shall tame that haughty soul-
Yes-tenderest love for me.

I'll read my triumph in thine eyes,

Behold, and prove the change;
Then leave, perchance, my noble prize,
Once more in arms to range.

I'd die when all the foam is up,
The bright wine sparkling high;
Nor wait till in the exhausted cup
Life's dull dregs only lie.

Then Love thus crowned with sweet reward,
Hope blest with fulness large,
I'd mount the saddle, draw the sword,
And perish in the charge !

Charlotte Brontë

Pilate's Wife's Dream

I've quenched my lamp, I struck it in that start
Which every limb convulsed, I heard it fall-
The crash blent with my sleep, I saw depart
Its light, even as I woke, on yonder wall;
Over against my bed, there shone a gleam
Strange, faint, and mingling also with my dream.

It sunk, and I am wrapt in utter gloom;
How far is night advanced, and when will day
Reteinge the dusk and livid air with bloom,
And fill this void with warm, creative ray ?
Would I could sleep again till, clear and red,
Morning shall on the mountain-tops be spread!

I'd call my women, but to break their sleep,
Because my own is broken, were unjust;

They've wrought all day, and well-earned slumbers steep
Their labours in forgetfulness, I trust;
Let me my feverish watch with patience bear,
Thankful that none with me its sufferings share.

Yet, Oh, for light ! one ray would tranquilise
My nerves, my pulses, more than effort can;
I'll draw my curtain and consult the skies:
These trembling stars at dead of night look wan,
Wild, restless, strange, yet cannot be more drear
Than this my couch, shared by a nameless fear.

All black-one great cloud, drawn from east to west,
Conceals the heavens, but there are lights below;
Torches burn in Jerusalem, and cast
On yonder stony mount a lurid glow.
I see men stationed there, and gleaming spears;
A sound, too, from afar, invades my ears.

Dull, measured, strokes of axe and hammer ring
From street to street, not loud, but through the night
Distinctly heard-and some strange spectral thing
Is now upreared-and, fixed against the light
Of the pale lamps; defined upon that sky,
It stands up like a column, straight and high.

I see it all-I know the dusky sign-
A cross on Calvary, which Jews uprear

While Romans watch; and when the dawn shall shine
Pilate, to judge the victim will appear,
Pass sentence-yield him up to crucify;
And on that cross the spotless Christ must die.

Dreams, then, are true-for thus my vision ran;

Surely some oracle has been with me,
The gods have chosen me to reveal their plan,
To warn an unjust judge of destiny:
I, slumbering, heard and saw; awake I know,
Christ's coming death, and Pilate's life of woe.

I do not weep for Pilate-who could prove
Regret for him whose cold and crushing sway
No prayer can soften, no appeal can move;
Who tramples hearts as others trample clay,
Yet with a faltering, an uncertain tread,
That might stir up reprisal in the dead.

Forced to sit by his side and see his deeds;
Forced to behold that visage, hour by hour,
In whose gaunt lines, the abhorrent gazer reads
A triple lust of gold, and blood, and power;
A soul whom motives, fierce, yet abject, urge
Rome's servile slave, and Judah's tyrant scourge.

How can I love, or mourn, or pity him ?
I, who so long my fettered hands have wrung;

I, who for grief have wept my eye-sight dim;
Because, while life for me was bright and young,
He robbed my youth-he quenched my life's fair ray-
He crushed my mind, and did my freedom slay.

And at this hour-although I be his wife-
He has no more of tenderness from me
Than any other wretch of guilty life;
Less, for I know his household privacy-
I see him as he is-without a screen;
And, by the gods, my soul abhors his mien !

Has he not sought my presence, dyed in blood-
Innocent, righteous blood, shed shamelessly ?
And have I not his red salute withstood ?
Aye,-when, as erst, he plunged all Galilee
In dark bereavement-in affliction sore,
Mingling their very offerings with their gore.

Then came he-in his eyes a serpent-smile,
Upon his lips some false, endearing word,
And, through the streets of Salem, clanged the while,
His slaughtering, hacking, sacrilegious sword-
And I, to see a man cause men such woe,
Trembled with ire-I did not fear to show.

And now, the envious Jewish priests have brought
Jesus-whom they in mockery call their king-

To have, by this grim power, their vengeance wrought;
By this mean reptile, innocence to sting.
Oh ! could I but the purposed doom avert,
And shield the blameless head from cruel hurt!

Accessible is Pilate's heart to fear,
Omens will shake his soul, like autumn leaf;
Could he this night's appalling vision hear,
This just man's bonds were loosed, his life were safe,
Unless that bitter priesthood should prevail,
And make even terror to their malice quail.

Yet if I tell the dream-but let me pause.
What dream ? Erewhile the characters were clear,
Graved on my brain-at once some unknown cause
Has dimmed and rased the thoughts, which now appear,
Like a vague remnant of some by-past scene;-
Not what will be, but what, long since, has been.

I suffered many things, I heard foretold
A dreadful doom for Pilate,-lingering woes,
In far, barbarian climes, where mountains cold
Built up a solitude of trackless snows,
There, he and grisly wolves prowled side by side,
There he lived famished-there methought he died;

But not of hunger, nor by malady;
I saw the snow around him, stained with gore;

I said I had no tears for such as he,
And, lo ! my cheek is wet-mine eyes run o'er;
I weep for mortal suffering, mortal guilt,
I weep the impious deed-the blood self-spilt.

More I recall not, yet the vision spread
Into a world remote, an age to come-
And still the illumined name of Jesus shed
A light, a clearness, through the enfolding gloom-
And still I saw that sign, which now I see,
That cross on yonder brow of Calvary.

What is this Hebrew Christ ? To me unknown,
His lineage-doctrine-mission-yet how clear,
Is God-like goodness, in his actions shewn !
How straight and stainless is his life's career !
The ray of Deity that rests on him,
In my eyes makes Olympian glory dim.

The world advances, Greek, or Roman rite
Suffices not the inquiring mind to stay;
The searching soul demands a purer light

To guide it on its upward, onward way;
Ashamed of sculptured gods-Religion turns
To where the unseen Jehovah's altar burns.

Our faith is rotten-all our rites defiled,
Our temples sullied, and methinks, this man,
With his new ordinance, so wise and mild,
Is come, even as he says, the chaff to fan

And sever from the wheat; but will his faith
Survive the terrors of to-morrow's death ?

* * * * *

I feel a firmer trust-a higher hope
Rise in my soul-it dawns with dawning day;
Lo ! on the Temple's roof-on Moriah's slope
Appears at length that clear, and crimson ray,
Which I so wished for when shut in by night;
Oh, opening skies, I hail, I bless your light !

Part, clouds and shadows ! glorious Sun appear !
Part, mental gloom ! Come insight from on high !
Dusk dawn in heaven still strives with daylight clear,
The longing soul, doth still uncertain sigh.
Oh ! to behold the truth-that sun divine,
How doth my bosom pant, my spirit pine !

This day, time travails with a mighty birth,
This day, Truth stoops from heaven and visits earth,
Ere night descends, I shall more surely know
What guide to follow, in what path to go;
I wait in hope-I wait in solemn fear,
The oracle of God-the sole-true God-to hear.

Charlotte Brontë

Pleasure

A Short Poem or Else Not Say I

True pleasure breathes not city air,
Nor in Art's temples dwells,
In palaces and towers where
The voice of Grandeur dwells.

No! Seek it where high Nature holds
Her court 'mid stately groves,
Where she her majesty unfolds,
And in fresh beauty moves;

Where thousand birds of sweetest song,
The wildly rushing storm
And hundred streams which glide along,
Her mighty concert form!

Go where the woods in beauty sleep
Bathed in pale Luna's light,
Or where among their branches sweep
The hollow sounds of night.

Go where the warbling nightingale
In gushes rich doth sing,
Till all the lonely, quiet vale
With melody doth ring.

Go, sit upon a mountain steep,
And view the prospect round;
The hills and vales, the valley's sweep,
The far horizon bound.

Then view the wide sky overhead,
The still, deep vault of blue,
The sun which golden light doth shed,
The clouds of pearly hue.

And as you gaze on this vast scene
Your thoughts will journey far,
Though hundred years should roll between
On Time's swift-passing car.

To ages when the earth was young,
When patriarchs, grey and old,
The praises of their god oft sung,
And oft his mercies told.

You see them with their beards of snow,
Their robes of ample form,
Their lives whose peaceful, gentle flow,
Felt seldom passion's storm.

Then a calm, solemn pleasure steals
Into your inmost mind;
A quiet aura your spirit feels,
A softened stillness kind.

Charlotte Brontë

Preference

NOT in scorn do I reprove thee,
Not in pride thy vows I waive,
But, believe, I could not love thee,
Wert thou prince, and I a slave.
These, then, are thine oaths of passion ?
This, thy tenderness for me ?
Judged, even, by thine own confession,
Thou art steeped in perfidy.
Having vanquished, thou wouldst leave me !
Thus I read thee long ago;
Therefore, dared I not deceive thee,
Even with friendship's gentle show.
Therefore, with impassive coldness
Have I ever met thy gaze;
Though, full oft, with daring boldness,
Thou thine eyes to mine didst raise.
Why that smile ? Thou now art deeming
This my coldness all untrue,-
But a mask of frozen seeming,
Hiding secret fires from view.
Touch my hand, thou self-deceiver,
Nay-be calm, for I am so:
Does it burn ? Does my lip quiver ?
Has mine eye a troubled glow ?
Canst thou call a moment's colour
To my forehead-to my cheek ?
Canst thou tinge their tranquil pallor
With one flattering, feverish streak?
Am I marble ? What ! no woman
Could so calm before thee stand ?
Nothing living, sentient, human,
Could so coldly take thy hand ?
Yes-a sister might, a mother:
My good-will is sisterly:
Dream not, then, I strive to smother
Fires that inly burn for thee.
Rave not, rage not, wrath is fruitless,
Fury cannot change my mind;
I but deem the feeling rootless
Which so whirls in passion's wind.
Can I love ? Oh, deeply-truly-
Warmly-fondly-but not thee;
And my love is answered duly,
With an equal energy.
Wouldst thou see thy rival ? Hasten,
Draw that curtain soft aside,
Look where yon thick branches chasten
Noon, with shades of eventide.
In that glade, where foliage blending
Forms a green arch overhead,
Sits thy rival thoughtful bending
O'er a stand with papers spread-

Motionless, his fingers plying
That untired, unresting pen;
Time and tide unnoticed flying,
There he sits-the first of men !
Man of conscience-man of reason;
Stern, perchance, but ever just;
Foe to falsehood, wrong, and treason,
Honour's shield, and virtue's trust !
Worker, thinker, firm defender
Of Heaven's truth-man's liberty;
Soul of iron-proof to slander,
Rock where founders tyranny.
Fame he seeks not-but full surely
She will seek him, in his home;
This I know, and wait securely
For the atoning hour to come.
To that man my faith is given,
Therefore, soldier, cease to sue;
While God reigns in earth and heaven,
I to him will still be true !

Charlotte Brontë

Presentiment

' SISTER, you've sat there all the day,
Come to the hearth awhile;
The wind so wildly sweeps away,
The clouds so darkly pile.
That open book has lain, unread,
For hours upon your knee;
You've never smiled nor turned your head
What can you, sister, see ? '

' Come hither, Jane, look down the field;
How dense a mist creeps on !
The path, the hedge, are both concealed,
Ev'n the white gate is gone;
No landscape through the fog I trace,
No hill with pastures green;
All featureless is nature's face,
All masked in clouds her mien.

' Scarce is the rustle of a leaf
Heard in our garden now;
The year grows old, its days wax brief,
The tresses leave its brow.
The rain drives fast before the wind,
The sky is blank and grey;
O Jane, what sadness fills the mind
On such a dreary day ! '

' You think too much, my sister dear;
You sit too long alone;
What though November days be drear ?
Full soon will they be gone.
I've swept the hearth, and placed your chair,
Come, Emma, sit by me;
Our own fireside is never drear,
Though late and wintry wane the year,
Though rough the night may be.

' The peaceful glow of our fireside
Imparts no peace to me:
My thoughts would rather wander wide
Than rest, dear Jane, with thee.
I'm on a distant journey bound,
And if, about my heart,
Too closely kindred ties were bound,
'T would break when forced to part.

' ' Soon will November days be o'er: '
Well have you spoken, Jane:
My own forebodings tell me more,
For me, I know by presage sure,
They'll ne'er return again.
Ere long, nor sun nor storm to me

Will bring or joy or gloom;
They reach not that Eternity
Which soon will be my home.'

Eight months are gone, the summer sun
Sets in a glorious sky;
A quiet field, all green and lone,
Receives its rosy dye.
Jane sits upon a shaded stile,
Alone she sits there now;
Her head rests on her hand the while,
And thought o'ercasts her brow.

She's thinking of one winter's day,
A few short months ago,
When Emma's bier was borne away
O'er wastes of frozen snow.
She's thinking how that drifted snow
Dissolved in spring's first gleam,
And how her sister's memory now
Fades, even as fades a dream.

The snow will whiten earth again,
But Emma comes no more;
She left, 'mid winter's sleet and rain,
This world for Heaven's far shore.
On Beulah's hills she wanders now,
On Eden's tranquil plain;
To her shall Jane hereafter go,
She ne'er shall come to Jane !

Charlotte Brontë

Regret

Long ago I wished to leave
" The house where I was born; "
Long ago I used to grieve,
My home seemed so forlorn.
In other years, its silent rooms
Were filled with haunting fears;
Now, their very memory comes
O'ercharged with tender tears.

Life and marriage I have known,
Things once deemed so bright;
Now, how utterly is flown
Every ray of light !
'Mid the unknown sea of life
I no blest isle have found;
At last, through all its wild wave's strife,
My bark is homeward bound.

Farewell, dark and rolling deep !
Farewell, foreign shore !
Open, in unclouded sweep,
Thou glorious realm before !
Yet, though I had safely pass'd
That weary, vexed main,
One loved voice, through surge and blast,
Could call me back again.

Though the soul's bright morning rose
O'er Paradise for me,
William ! even from Heaven's repose
I'd turn, invoked by thee !
Storm nor surge should e'er arrest
My soul, exulting then:
All my heaven was once thy breast,
Would it were mine again !

Charlotte Brontë

Regret (1846)

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Charlotte Brontë

Speak of the North! A Lonely Moor

Speak of the North! A lonely moor
Silent and dark and tractless swells,
The waves of some wild streamlet pour
Hurriedly through its ferny dells.

Profoundly still the twilight air,
Lifeless the landscape; so we deem
Till like a phantom gliding near
A stag bends down to drink the stream.

And far away a mountain zone,
A cold, white waste of snow-drifts lies,
And one star, large and soft and lone,
Silently lights the unclouded skies.

Charlotte Brontë

Stanzas

IF thou be in a lonely place,
If one hour's calm be thine,
As Evening bends her placid face
O'er this sweet day's decline;
If all the earth and all the heaven
Now look serene to thee,
As o'er them shuts the summer even,
One moment-think of me !

Pause, in the lane, returning home;
'Tis dusk, it will be still:
Pause near the elm, a sacred gloom
Its breezeless boughs will fill.
Look at that soft and golden light,
High in the unclouded sky;
Watch the last bird's belated flight,
As it flits silent by.

Hark ! for a sound upon the wind,
A step, a voice, a sigh;
If all be still, then yield thy mind,
Unchecked, to memory.
If thy love were like mine, how blest
That twilight hour would seem,
When, back from the regretted Past,
Returned our early dream !

If thy love were like mine, how wild
Thy longings, even to pain,
For sunset soft, and moonlight mild,
To bring that hour again !
But oft, when in thine arms I lay,
I've seen thy dark eyes shine,
And deeply felt, their changeful ray
Spoke other love than mine.

My love is almost anguish now,
It beats so strong and true;
'Twere rapture, could I deem that thou
Such anguish ever knew.
I have been but thy transient flower,
Thou wert my god divine;
Till, checked by death's congealing power,
This heart must throb for thine.

And well my dying hour were blest,
If life's expiring breath
Should pass, as thy lips gently prest
My forehead, cold in death;
And sound my sleep would be, and sweet,
Beneath the churchyard tree,
If sometimes in thy heart should beat

One pulse, still true to me.

Charlotte Brontë

The Letter

WHAT is she writing ? Watch her now,
How fast her fingers move !
How eagerly her youthful brow
Is bent in thought above !
Her long curls, drooping, shade the light,
She puts them quick aside,
Nor knows, that band of crystals bright,
Her hasty touch untied.
It slips adown her silken dress,
Falls glittering at her feet;
Unmarked it falls, for she no less
Pursues her labour sweet.

The very loveliest hour that shines,
Is in that deep blue sky;
The golden sun of June declines,
It has not caught her eye.
The cheerful lawn, and unclosed gate,
The white road, far away,
In vain for her light footsteps wait,
She comes not forth to-day.
There is an open door of glass
Close by that lady's chair,
From thence, to slopes of mossy grass,
Descends a marble stair.

Tall plants of bright and spicy bloom
Around the threshold grow;
Their leaves and blossoms shade the room,
From that sun's deepening glow.
Why does she not a moment glance
Between the clustering flowers,
And mark in heaven the radiant dance
Of evening's rosy hours ?
O look again ! Still fixed her eye,
Unsmiling, earnest, still,
And fast her pen and fingers fly,
Urged by her eager will.

Her soul is in th' absorbing task;
To whom, then, doth she write ?
Nay, watch her still more closely, ask
Her own eyes' serious light;
Where do they turn, as now her pen
Hangs o'er th' unfinished line ?
Whence fell the tearful gleam that then
Did in their dark spheres shine ?
The summer-parlour looks so dark,
When from that sky you turn,
And from th' expanse of that green park,
You scarce may aught discern.

Yet o'er the piles of porcelain rare,
O'er flower-stand, couch, and vase,
Sloped, as if leaning on the air,
One picture meets the gaze.
'Tis there she turns; you may not see
Distinct, what form defines
The clouded mass of mystery
Yon broad gold frame confines.
But look again; inured to shade
Your eyes now faintly trace
A stalwart form, a massive head,
A firm, determined face.

Black Spanish locks, a sunburnt cheek,
A brow high, broad, and white,
Where every furrow seems to speak
Of mind and moral might.
Is that her god ? I cannot tell;
Her eye a moment met
Th' impending picture, then it fell
Darkened and dimmed and wet.
A moment more, her task is done,
And sealed the letter lies;
And now, towards the setting sun
She turns her tearful eyes.

Those tears flow over, wonder not,
For by the inscription, see
In what a strange and distant spot
Her heart of hearts must be !
Three seas and many a league of land
That letter must pass o'er,
E'er read by him to whose loved hand
'Tis sent from England's shore.
Remote colonial wilds detain
Her husband, loved though stern;
She, 'mid that smiling English scene,
Weeps for his wished return.

Charlotte Brontë

The Missionary

LOUGH, vessel, plough the British main,
Seek the free ocean's wider plain;
Leave English scenes and English skies,
Unbind, dissever English ties;
Bear me to climes remote and strange,
Where altered life, fast-following change,
Hot action, never-ceasing toil,
Shall stir, turn, dig, the spirit's soil;
Fresh roots shall plant, fresh seed shall sow,
Till a new garden there shall grow,
Cleared of the weeds that fill it now,-
Mere human love, mere selfish yearning,
Which, cherished, would arrest me yet.
I grasp the plough, there's no returning,
Let me, then, struggle to forget.

But England's shores are yet in view,
And England's skies of tender blue
Are arched above her guardian sea.
I cannot yet Remembrance flee;
I must again, then, firmly face
That task of anguish, to retrace.
Wedded to home-I home forsake,
Fearful of change-I changes make;
Too fond of ease-I plunge in toil;
Lover of calm-I seek turmoil:
Nature and hostile Destiny
Stir in my heart a conflict wild;
And long and fierce the war will be
Ere duty both has reconciled.

What other tie yet holds me fast
To the divorced, abandoned past?
Smouldering, on my heart's altar lies
The fire of some great sacrifice,
Not yet half quenched. The sacred steel
But lately struck my carnal will,
My life-long hope, first joy and last,
What I loved well, and clung to fast;
What I wished wildly to retain,
What I renounced with soul-felt pain;
What-when I saw it, axe-struck, perish-
Left me no joy on earth to cherish;
A man bereft-yet sternly now
I do confirm that Jephtha vow:
Shall I retract, or fear, or flee ?
Did Christ, when rose the fatal tree
Before him, on Mount Calvary ?
'Twas a long fight, hard fought, but won,
And what I did was justly done.

Yet, Helen ! from thy love I turned,

When my heart most for thy heart burned;
I dared thy tears, I dared thy scorn-
Easier the death-pang had been borne.
Helen ! thou mightst not go with me,
I could not-dared not stay for thee !
I heard, afar, in bonds complain
The savage from beyond the main;
And that wild sound rose o'er the cry
Wrung out by passion's agony;
And even when, with the bitterest tear
I ever shed, mine eyes were dim,
Still, with the spirit's vision clear,
I saw Hell's empire, vast and grim,
Spread on each Indian river's shore,
Each realm of Asia covering o'er.

There the weak, trampled by the strong,
Live but to suffer-hopeless die;
There pagan-priests, whose creed is Wrong,
Extortion, Lust, and Cruelty,
Crush our lost race-and brimming fill
The bitter cup of human ill;
And I-who have the healing creed,
The faith benign of Mary's Son;
Shall I behold my brother's need
And selfishly to aid him shun ?
I-who upon my mother's knees,
In childhood, read Christ's written word,
Received his legacy of peace,
His holy rule of action heard;
I-in whose heart the sacred sense
Of Jesus' love was early felt;
Of his pure full benevolence,
His pitying tenderness for guilt;
His shepherd-care for wandering sheep,
For all weak, sorrowing, trembling things,
His mercy vast, his passion deep
Of anguish for man's sufferings;
I-schooled from childhood in such lore-
Dared I draw back or hesitate,
When called to heal the sickness sore
Of those far off and desolate ?
Dark, in the realm and shades of Death,
Nations and tribes and empires lie,
But even to them the light of Faith
Is breaking on their sombre sky:
And be it mine to bid them raise
Their drooped heads to the kindling scene,
And know and hail the sunrise blaze
Which heralds Christ the Nazarene.
I know how Hell the veil will spread
Over their brows and filmy eyes,

And earthward crush the lifted head
That would look up and seek the skies;
I know what war the fiend will wage
Against that soldier of the cross,
Who comes to dare his demon-rage,
And work his kingdom shame and loss.
Yes, hard and terrible the toil
Of him who steps on foreign soil,
Resolved to plant the gospel vine,
Where tyrants rule and slaves repine;
Eager to lift Religion's light
Where thickest shades of mental night
Screen the false god and fiendish rite;
Reckless that missionary blood,
Shed in wild wilderness and wood,
Has left, upon the unblest air,
The man's deep moan-the martyr's prayer.
I know my lot-I only ask
Power to fulfil the glorious task;
Willing the spirit, may the flesh
Strength for the day receive afresh.
May burning sun or deadly wind
Prevail not o'er an earnest mind;
May torments strange or direst death
Nor trample truth, nor baffle faith.
Though such blood-drops should fall from me
As fell in old Gethsemane,
Welcome the anguish, so it gave
More strength to work-more skill to save.
And, oh ! if brief must be my time,
If hostile hand or fatal clime
Cut short my course-still o'er my grave,
Lord, may thy harvest whitening wave.
So I the culture may begin,
Let others thrust the sickle in;
If but the seed will faster grow,
May my blood water what I sow !

What ! have I ever trembling stood,
And feared to give to God that blood ?
What ! has the coward love of life
Made me shrink from the righteous strife ?
Have human passions, human fears
Severed me from those Pioneers,
Whose task is to march first, and trace
Paths for the progress of our race ?
It has been so; but grant me, Lord,
Now to stand steadfast by thy word !
Protected by salvation's helm,
Shielded by faith-with truth begirt,
To smile when trials seek to whelm
And stand 'mid testing fires unhurt !

Hurling hell's strongest bulwarks down,
Even when the last pang thrills my breast,
When Death bestows the Martyr's crown,
And calls me into Jesus' rest.
Then for my ultimate reward-
Then for the world-rejoicing word-
The voice from Father-Spirit-Son:
' Servant of God, well hast thou done !'

Charlotte Brontë

The Teacher's Monologue

THE room is quiet, thoughts alone
People its mute tranquillity;
The yoke put on, the long task done,-
I am, as it is bliss to be,
Still and untroubled. Now, I see,
For the first time, how soft the day
O'er waveless water, stirless tree,
Silent and sunny, wings its way.
Now, as I watch that distant hill,
So faint, so blue, so far removed,
Sweet dreams of home my heart may fill,
That home where I am known and loved:
It lies beyond; yon azure brow
Parts me from all Earth holds for me;
And, morn and eve, my yearnings flow
Thitherward tending, changelessly.
My happiest hours, aye ! all the time,
I love to keep in memory,
Lapsed among moors, ere life's first prime
Decayed to dark anxiety.

Sometimes, I think a narrow heart
Makes me thus mourn those far away,
And keeps my love so far apart
From friends and friendships of to-day;
Sometimes, I think 'tis but a dream
I measure up so jealously,
All the sweet thoughts I live on seem
To vanish into vacancy:
And then, this strange, coarse world around
Seems all that's palpable and true;
And every sight, and every sound,
Combines my spirit to subdue
To aching grief, so void and lone
Is Life and Earth-so worse than vain,
The hopes that, in my own heart sown,
And cherished by such sun and rain
As Joy and transient Sorrow shed,
Have ripened to a harvest there:
Alas ! methinks I hear it said,
'Thy golden sheaves are empty air.'
All fades away; my very home
I think will soon be desolate;
I hear, at times, a warning come
Of bitter partings at its gate;
And, if I should return and see
The hearth-fire quenched, the vacant chair;
And hear it whispered mournfully,
That farewells have been spoken there,
What shall I do, and whither turn ?
Where look for peace ? When cease to mourn ?

'Tis not the air I wished to play,
The strain I wished to sing;
My wilful spirit slipped away
And struck another string.
I neither wanted smile nor tear,
Bright joy nor bitter woe,
But just a song that sweet and clear,
Though haply sad, might flow.

A quiet song, to solace me
When sleep refused to come;
A strain to chase despondency,
When sorrowful for home.
In vain I try; I cannot sing;
All feels so cold and dead;
No wild distress, no gushing spring
Of tears in anguish shed;

But all the impatient gloom of one
Who waits a distant day,
When, some great task of suffering done,
Repose shall toil repay.
For youth departs, and pleasure flies,
And life consumes away,
And youth's rejoicing ardour dies
Beneath this drear delay;

And Patience, weary with her yoke,
Is yielding to despair,
And Health's elastic spring is broke
Beneath the strain of care.
Life will be gone ere I have lived;
Where now is Life's first prime ?
I've worked and studied, longed and grieved,
Through all that rosy time.

To toil, to think, to long, to grieve,-
Is such my future fate ?
The morn was dreary, must the eve
Be also desolate ?
Well, such a life at least makes Death
A welcome, wished-for friend;
Then, aid me, Reason, Patience, Faith,
To suffer to the end !

Charlotte Brontë

The Wife's Will

SIT still-a word-a breath may break
(As light airs stir a sleeping lake,)
The glassy calm that soothes my woes,
The sweet, the deep, the full repose.
O leave me not ! for ever be
Thus, more than life itself to me !

Yes, close beside thee, let me kneel-
Give me thy hand that I may feel
The friend so true-so tried-so dear,
My heart's own chosen-indeed is near;
And check me not-this hour divine
Belongs to me-is fully mine.

'Tis thy own hearth thou sitt'st beside,
After long absence-wandering wide;
'Tis thy own wife reads in thine eyes,
A promise clear of stormless skies,
For faith and true love light the rays,
Which shine responsive to her gaze.

Aye,-well that single tear may fall;
Ten thousand might mine eyes recall,
Which from their lids, ran blinding fast,
In hours of grief, yet scarcely past,
Well may'st thou speak of love to me;
For, oh ! most truly-I love thee !

Yet smile-for we are happy now.
Whence, then, that sadness on thy brow ?
What say'st thou ? ' We must once again,
Ere long, be severed by the main ? '
I knew not this-I deemed no more,
Thy step would err from Britain's shore.

' Duty commands ?' 'Tis true-'tis just;
Thy slightest word I wholly trust,
Nor by request, nor faintest sigh
Would I, to turn thy purpose, try;
But, William-hear my solemn vow-
Hear and confirm !-with thee I go.

' Distance and suffering,' did'st thou say ?
' Danger by night, and toil by day ?'
Oh, idle words, and vain are these;
Hear me ! I cross with thee the seas.
Such risk as thou must meet and dare,
I-thy true wife-will duly share.

Passive, at home, I will not pine;
Thy toils-thy perils, shall be mine;
Grant this-and be hereafter paid

By a warm heart's devoted aid:
'Tis granted-with that yielding kiss,
Entered my soul unmingled bliss.

Thanks, William-thanks ! thy love has joy,
Pure-undefiled with base alloy;
'Tis not a passion, false and blind,
Inspires, enchains, absorbs my mind;
Worthy, I feel, art thou to be
Loved with my perfect energy.

This evening, now, shall sweetly flow,
Lit by our clear fire's happy glow;
And parting's peace-embittering fear,
Is warned, our hearts to come not near;
For fate admits my soul's decree,
In bliss or bale-to go with thee !

Charlotte Brontë

The Wood

BUT two miles more, and then we rest !
Well, there is still an hour of day,
And long the brightness of the West
Will light us on our devious way;
Sit then, awhile, here in this wood-
So total is the solitude,
We safely may delay.

These massive roots afford a seat,
Which seems for weary travellers made.
There rest. The air is soft and sweet
In this sequestered forest glade,
And there are scents of flowers around,
The evening dew draws from the ground;
How soothingly they spread !

Yes; I was tired, but not at heart;
No-that beats full of sweet content,
For now I have my natural part
Of action with adventure blent;
Cast forth on the wide world with thee,
And all my once waste energy
To weighty purpose bent.

Yet-say'st thou, spies around us roam,
Our aims are termed conspiracy ?
Haply, no more our English home
An anchorage for us may be ?
That there is risk our mutual blood
May redden in some lonely wood
The knife of treachery ?

Say'st thou-that where we lodge each night,
In each lone farm, or lonelier hall
Of Norman Peer-ere morning light
Suspicion must as duly fall,
As day returns-such vigilance
Presides and watches over France,
Such rigour governs all ?

I fear not, William; dost thou fear ?
So that the knife does not divide,
It may be ever hovering near:
I could not tremble at thy side,
And strenuous love-like mine for thee-
Is buckler strong, 'gainst treachery,
And turns its stab aside.

I am resolved that thou shalt learn
To trust my strength as I trust thine;
I am resolved our souls shall burn,
With equal, steady, mingling shine;

Part of the field is conquered now,
Our lives in the same channel flow,
Along the self-same line;

And while no groaning storm is heard,
Thou seem'st content it should be so,
But soon as comes a warning word
Of danger-straight thine anxious brow
Bends over me a mournful shade,
As doubting if my powers are made
To ford the floods of woe.

Know, then it is my spirit swells,
And drinks, with eager joy, the air
Of freedom-where at last it dwells,
Chartered, a common task to share
With thee, and then it stirs alert,
And pants to learn what menaced hurt
Demands for thee its care.

Remember, I have crossed the deep,
And stood with thee on deck, to gaze
On waves that rose in threatening heap,
While stagnant lay a heavy haze,
Dimly confusing sea with sky,
And baffling, even, the pilot's eye,
Intent to thread the maze-

Of rocks, on Bretagne's dangerous coast,
And find a way to steer our band
To the one point obscure, which lost,
Flung us, as victims, on the strand;-
All, elsewhere, gleamed the Gallic sword,
And not a wherry could be moored
Along the guarded land.

I feared not then-I fear not now;
The interest of each stirring scene
Wakes a new sense, a welcome glow,
In every nerve and bounding vein;
Alike on turbid Channel sea,
Or in still wood of Normandy,
I feel as born again.

The rain descended that wild morn
When, anchoring in the cove at last,
Our band, all weary and forlorn,
Ashore, like wave-worn sailors, cast-
Sought for a sheltering roof in vain,
And scarce could scanty food obtain
To break their morning fast.

Thou didst thy crust with me divide,
Thou didst thy cloak around me fold;
And, sitting silent by thy side,
I ate the bread in peace untold:
Given kindly from thy hand, 'twas sweet
As costly fare or princely treat
On royal plate of gold.

Sharp blew the sleet upon my face,
And, rising wild, the gusty wind
Drove on those thundering waves apace,
Our crew so late had left behind;
But, spite of frozen shower and storm,
So close to thee, my heart beat warm,
And tranquil slept my mind.

So now-nor foot-sore nor opprest
With walking all this August day,
I taste a heaven in this brief rest,
This gipsy-halt beside the way.
England's wild flowers are fair to view,
Like balm is England's summer dew,
Like gold her sunset ray.

But the white violets, growing here,
Are sweeter than I yet have seen,
And ne'er did dew so pure and clear
Distil on forest mosses green,
As now, called forth by summer heat,
Perfumes our cool and fresh retreat-
These fragrant limes between.

That sunset ! Look beneath the boughs,
Over the copse-beyond the hills;
How soft, yet deep and warm it glows,
And heaven with rich suffusion fills;
With hues where still the opal's tint,
Its gleam of poisoned fire is blent,
Where flame through azure thrills !

Depart we now-for fast will fade
That solemn splendour of decline,
And deep must be the after-shade
As stars alone to-night will shine;
No moon is destined-pale-to gaze
On such a day's vast Phoenix blaze,
A day in fires decayed !

There-hand-in-hand we tread again
The mazes of this varying wood,
And soon, amid a cultured plain,
Girt in with fertile solitude,

We shall our resting-place descry,
Marked by one roof-tree, towering high
Above a farm-stead rude.

Refreshed, erelong, with rustic fare,
We'll seek a couch of dreamless ease;
Courage will guard thy heart from fear,
And Love give mine divinest peace:
To-morrow brings more dangerous toil,
And through its conflict and turmoil
We'll pass, as God shall please.

Charlotte Brontë

Winter Stores

WE take from life one little share,
And say that this shall be
A space, redeemed from toil and care,
From tears and sadness free.

And, haply, Death unstrings his bow
And Sorrow stands apart,
And, for a little while, we know
The sunshine of the heart.

Existence seems a summer eve,
Warm, soft, and full of peace;
Our free, unfettered feelings give
The soul its full release.

A moment, then, it takes the power,
To call up thoughts that throw
Around that charmed and hallowed hour,
This life's divinest glow.

But Time, though viewlessly it flies,
And slowly, will not stay;
Alike, through clear and clouded skies,
It cleaves its silent way.

Alike the bitter cup of grief,
Alike the draught of bliss,
Its progress leaves but moment brief
For baffled lips to kiss.

The sparkling draught is dried away,
The hour of rest is gone,
And urgent voices, round us, say,
'Ho, lingerer, hasten on !'

And has the soul, then, only gained,
From this brief time of ease,
A moment's rest, when overstrained,
One hurried glimpse of peace ?

No; while the sun shone kindly o'er us,
And flowers bloomed round our feet,-
While many a bud of joy before us
Unclosed its petals sweet,-

An unseen work within was plying;
Like honey-seeking bee,
From flower to flower, unwearied, flying,
Laboured one faculty,-

Thoughtful for Winter's future sorrow,
Its gloom and scarcity;

Prescient to-day, of want to-morrow,
Toiled quiet Memory.

'Tis she that from each transient pleasure
Extracts a lasting good;
'Tis she that finds, in summer, treasure
To serve for winter's food.

And when Youth's summer day is vanished,
And Age brings Winter's stress,
Her stores, with hoarded sweets replenished,
Life's evening hours will bless.

Charlotte Brontë