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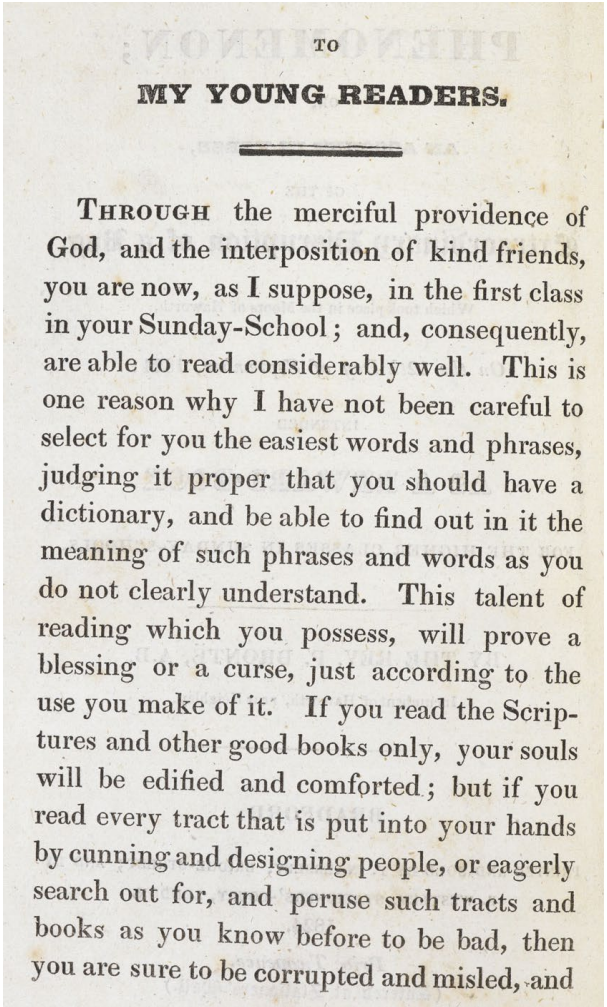
PATRICK BRONTË WRITES TO HIS YOUNG READERS

In 1824 there was a geological eruption that took place near Haworth after a period of heavy rain. Miraculously no-one was injured but it devastated the moors at Crow Hill. Patrick Brontë saw in this event a message from God and he preached a sermon based upon it in which he explained both the scientific as well as the theological aspects. He also published an account of it in verse as a reward for children who excelled in their Sunday School classes. This is his preface to the poem, *The Phenomenon*, in which he gives advice about being very careful about what the children should read.

However he allowed his own children to read widely and, indeed, their juvenilia is full of violence, intrigue, deception and extra-marital relationships. Christine Alexander in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* writes:

Unlike most middle-class Victorian households, there was little censorship of reading in the Brontë parsonage. The Bible was staple fare; yet Patrick Brontë also encouraged an eclectic diet of Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, Bunyan, Milton, Pope, Johnson, Gibbon, Cowper, Burns, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, Southey, and Byron…



TO

MY YOUNG READERS.

THROUGH the merciful providence of God, and the interposition of kind friends, you are now, as I suppose, in the first class in your Sunday-School; and, consequently, are able to read considerably well. This is one reason why I have not been careful to select for you the easiest words and phrases, judging it proper that you should have a dictionary, and be able to find out in it the meaning of such phrases and words as you do not clearly understand. This talent of reading which you possess, will prove a blessing or a curse, just according to the use you make of it. If you read the Scriptures and other good books only, your souls will be edified and comforted; but if you read every tract that is put into your hands by cunning and designing people, or eagerly search out for, and peruse such tracts and books as you know before to be bad, then you are sure to be corrupted and misled, and your talent of reading will become a source of sin and misery to yourselves and others.

Whatever may tend to give you unworthy notions of Christ; whatever may be calculated to make you think highly of yourselves, or to look down with discontentment upon your lot; whatever would aim at inflaming your natural passions, which are already much too fiery and ungovernable, is bad, and ought carefully to be avoided. Never let the fine style in which a book may be written, nor the recommendations of licentious, though learned people, induce you to read it, if you have reason beforehand to conclude, that it will not make you both wiser and better. Should you have a taste for poetry or history, biography or science, you may find, within the range of what is altogether unexceptionable, excellent treatises on these subjects. The Scriptures themselves afford the finest specimens of beauty and sublimity in the world. I have here written to you, in the most interesting manner I could, on a subject which is of itself very interesting; and I have taken care occasionally to intersperse such observations, as might be profitable as well as pleasing.

THE CHURCHMEN OF HAWORTH

A talk given by Christopher Cooper on 11th May 2019

Early years The village of Haworth has a long history. It isn't mentioned in the Domesday Book but there's evidence of the early Normans having heard of the fierce reputation of the Haworth folk. The first specific reference to Haworth is in 1296 when there's mention of Godfrey de Haworth who acquired property there. So that's where the name Haworth came from.

We don't know how long there has existed a place of worship on the site of the Haworth church. There's a reference to the chapelry of Haworth in the Archbishop's Register at York in 1317.

In 1338 the curate's salary was augmented by the founding of a chantry. This was a small chapel within the church set aside for the celebration of masses for the dead. This one was endowed by Adam de Copley for himself and his wife, Jane de Oxenhope. She gave her name to the village of Oxenhope, just a couple of miles from Haworth.

The endowment consisted of seven acres of land, which brought in the yearly rent of twenty shillings to assist in supporting the chaplain. In return, the chaplain was to "celebrate Divine Service for the soul of the said Adam, and the souls of his ancestors, the souls of Thomas de Thornton and Ellen his wife, for all whose goods he had ill gotten, and all the faithful deceased in the Chapel of St Michael at Haworth, every day". Here we recognise the name Thornton which is the name of the village where Patrick served prior to going to Haworth.

For the next two centuries this chantry was the chaplain's main income. But in 1547, thanks to King Henry, chantries were abolished, leaving the incumbent of Haworth without an income. I'm not sure how the people of Haworth coped in the next twelve years, but in 1559, just after Elizabeth came to the throne, they raised £36 to buy land at Stanbury.


William Grimshaw

This was vested in the trustees. From the income produced by this land, the trustees paid the salary of the incumbent of Haworth, and this continues to the present day. But, along with this, came the trustees' right to be consulted in relation to the choice of clergy. The Vicar of Bradford could nominate a potential candidate but the trustees had the right to approve or veto the choice by the simple expediency of refusing to pay the incumbent if they didn't approve of the choice.

I was in the Haworth church a few years ago and I noticed on one wall of the church a wooden board with the names of the incumbents painted in gold, just like a roll of honour in a school assembly hall. The eleventh name on the list is W. Grimshaw in 1742. The thirteenth is J. Charnock in 1791, followed by S. Redhead in 1819, P. Brontë in 1820 and J. Wade in 1861. These are all names that I shall refer to.

William Grimshaw Let's begin with the Reverend William Grimshaw. The right of the trustees to be able to veto a nomination made by the Vicar of Bradford was exercised on many occasions and often brought the trustees into conflict with the Vicar. In March 1741 the Haworth trustees wanted William Grimshaw, a renowned churchman and a powerful preacher. But the Vicar of Bradford said "no". The trustees said that if the Vicar of Bradford appointed someone else, they wouldn't pay him. The battle went on for five months and finally, in May 1742, the Vicar of Bradford backed down and William Grimshaw was appointed.

Although their ministries were almost a century apart, William Grimshaw greatly influenced Patrick, so it's worthwhile learning a little about him. He was born in Lancashire in 1708 in Brindle, Lancashire. Like Patrick he was born into a humble family, and like Patrick he went to Cambridge. But unlike Patrick he succumbed to the prevailing life-style of the university and he learnt to drink and swear. When he graduated he applied to be ordained in the Church of England. He later wrote that his motive was getting an easy occupation and being paid for doing very little. He fulfilled his duties in the pulpit on Sundays and spent the other six days hunting and fishing. His evenings were given over to gambling, drinking and swearing.

But in 1734 Grimshaw became aware of the sin in his life and became conscious of his lack of faith. Two of his parishioners lost their baby daughter and the mother

continued to care for her dead child as if it was still alive. Grimshaw's advice was to "put away all gloomy thoughts, and go into merry company and divert yourselves and all will soon be right".

Thinking about the shallowness of the advice that he'd given he began to realise that he was inadequate as a minister. This prompted him to feel uneasy about his lifestyle and his role as God's representative and so he began to reform himself. Instead of his nightly carousing he stayed home and read and prayed.

He kept a strict record of his sins, balancing them against his good deeds, just like in an account book. He began to faithfully visit his parishioners and urged them to reform their lives. In so doing he reformed his own life. He was probably also influenced by the Methodist revival that was sweeping England at the time.

His preaching became transformed. No longer was he preaching dramatic fire and brimstone, but he engaged the sinners from the perspective of one who was a sinner like themselves. He preached as one who really cared for their welfare and one who gave them the perspective of hope.

Like Wesley, he wasn't urging his flock to repent just to avoid hellfire in the next world but also to reduce their suffering, and that of their families, in this world – suffering that resulted directly from their sins.

So it was a quite different William Grimshaw who, in May 1742, walked up Kirkgate, now called Main Street, in Haworth. He had just been appointed incumbent of St Michael and All Angels. He encountered a wild and stubborn, and fiercely independent people. But he learnt to understand his flock and he showed real Christian generosity towards them. At the old parsonage (not the one we know today) he held prayer meetings for the destitute and helped those who had no decent clothes with which to go to church. He gave food to the hungry and lodging to the homeless. There were times when he had so many people sleeping in the parsonage that he, himself, had to sleep in his stables. He was compassionate, but he could be ruthless.

One of his famous tricks was to include in the service a really long psalm. While it was being sung he would duck out the side door of the church and go out to the nearby Black Bull pub where, with his riding whip, he would chase those whom he found absenting themselves from the service, into the church.

He won the people over by his fierce charity and he changed the lives of many people. If he went to a house where there was someone who was sick or dying he would pray with them. And if they refused to let him in, he would pray loudly outside their window so that, as he said, "at least he will die with the word of God in his lugs".

Grimshaw often invited Charles and John Wesley to Haworth and they drew large crowds. On one occasion Charles Wesley spoke to a packed church and, when he had finished, the crowd outside in the churchyard cried out that they couldn't hear. So he went outside and stood on top of a tombstone to preach.

By 1746 Grimshaw was preaching to congregations of over a thousand people. The church was extended in the 1750s. Even this was not sufficient to hold the crowds and so a scaffolding pulpit was rigged up just outside so that the preacher could emerge from the church through a window and preach from the raised platform to the crowds thronging in the graveyard below.

Grimshaw finally wore himself out and died in 1763, at the age of 54, of typhus fever. But his reputation lasted for centuries. The poet Ted Hughes, who was brought up in a nearby village in the 1930s and 40s, commented that Grimshaw's influence still reverberated round his boyhood haunts.

Patrick Brontë On 25th May 1819, the Reverend James Charnock, who had been perpetual curate of Haworth since 1791, died after a long illness. Henry Heap was then the Vicar of Bradford and a few days after Charnock's death he offered the incumbency to Patrick. His big mistake was not consulting the Haworth trustees.

Patrick Brontë

Patrick felt it a great honour to be preaching from the same pulpit from which William Grimshaw had preached eighty years earlier and he accepted the nomination, calling it "a gift and a call of Providence".

Providence it may well have been, not just for Patrick but also for us. If Patrick had stayed on in Thornton we may never have heard of the Brontë sisters. Some of you have seen the Brontë Birthplace, the Thornton parsonage where Charlotte, Branwell, Emily and Anne were born. It's an ugly terrace house in a crowded residential area, populated mainly by immigrants from the sub-continent, on a busy main road close to Bradford, with what used to be a butcher's shop tacked onto the front.

Thornton Parsonage

There are no moors nearby, no sense of isolation, no romantic atmosphere such as we can still find around the Haworth parsonage. If Patrick hadn't moved to Haworth it's highly likely that the girls may never have become writers at all or, if they did, their writing would have been very different from what it was.

Before Patrick had a chance to take up his appointment, Heap was scheduled to take the service and he intended to announce that Mr Brontë would be their new minister. But word had already got around that he had jumped the gun and had already appointed Patrick, without consulting them. When he arrived they shut the church doors in his face.

Heap was furious and wrote to the Archbishop of York asking for a licence for Patrick to become the incumbent at Haworth.

Patrick heard that they had nothing against him personally, but they would resist his appointment if it was forced upon them. He didn't want to get involved in this dispute so he sent his letter of resignation to the Vicar of Bradford. Heap took this as an act of betrayal and said that Patrick could not resign 'in honour, and with propriety' and said that the archbishop would be displeased.

So Patrick went to Haworth to take the service on 12th July but the congregation disrupted it by shouting out during the sermon and walking out. Patrick resigned, sending letters to the trustees, the Vicar of Bradford and the Archbishop of York. End of round 1 with a win to the trustees.

The trustees then wrote a gracious letter to Patrick, saying that they might nominate him themselves if he would come over to Haworth and give them a sample of his preaching. Considering how he had been driven from their pulpit the week before Patrick was angry at their impudence. However his response was tactful. He declined their invitation but suggested that they turn up unannounced in Thornton. "It is an easy matter to compose a fine sermon for a particular occasion, but no easy thing to *always* give satisfaction." Also he said that if they came to Thornton they could use the opportunity to learn about him from his parishioners. He wrote that "the character and conduct of a man *out* of the pulpit is as much to be considered as his character and conduct *in* the pulpit." It doesn't appear that they took up this offer and Patrick remained at Thornton.

The Vicar of Bradford, with the support of the Archbishop, then appointed Samuel Redhead to Haworth, again without consulting the trustees. On 31st October Samuel Redhead arrived to take his first service. Mrs Gaskell gives a colourful, but perhaps somewhat exaggerated, report of what happened.

According to Gaskell, the entire congregation walked out of the first service, a man was tied backwards on the back of a donkey at the second service and in the last service a drunken chimney sweep climbed into the pulpit, hugged the preacher and chased him into the churchyard where he emptied a bag of soot over him.

Redhead, in his diary, tells a less colourful account of the incident. He said that he was admitted to the church on producing his licence. But the churchwardens refused to allow the bells to be rung for the service, so that it began with only a handful of people. Gradually this number increased to about 500. When Redhead got up into the pulpit the whole congregation, on a certain signal from the trustees, rose to their feet and stormed out noisily. On leaving the church Redhead was pursued and hooted at by many people from the village.

Things didn't go much better the next Sunday. Again there was shouting, leaping over the tops of the pews, stamping of feet and shouting. Redhead fled to the vestry and asked the churchwardens for protection. Redhead was chased out of Haworth with hootings and shouting and insults.

Redhead gained an interview with the Archbishop, who said that if things didn't improve he would apply to have the church closed down. On the third Sunday of Redhead's incumbency again riots broke out from the time he entered the village until the time he left. The next day he gave in his resignation. End of round 2 – another win to the trustees.

On 17th January 1820 Anne was born. The little house in Market Street, Thornton, was bursting at the seams with six children, two parents and two young servants, living in the small house. Moreover Patrick's income of £140 was stretched to breaking point to maintain such a large household. He wrote to the governors of Queen Anne's Bounty, a charity which supplemented the salaries of underpaid clergyman. He sent a copy of his application to the Archbishop of York, asking him to support his application.

This reminded the Archbishop of how Patrick had been hardly done by in missing out on Haworth. Also, Heap had written to suggest that he himself should take over Haworth in addition to Bradford. The Archbishop wrote back that this would never work. Jolted into finally resolving the Haworth problem the Archbishop decided to call a meeting between the Vicar of Bradford and the trustees.

It seems that, for once, Heap was able to handle things tactfully. An agreement was drawn up which respected the rights of the trustees of Haworth. So Patrick was offered the incumbency of Haworth yet again, with the assurance that the trustees supported the offer and he accepted. But though the Vicar was forced to back down he made sure that Patrick, and perhaps the trustees, were in no doubt as to who was the real winner. Because Haworth was a satellite of Bradford Patrick was required to pay half of all the fees he received for weddings, baptisms and funerals to the "mother church" at Bradford.

Haworth Parsonage

The family remained in Thornton for the first couple of months of 1820 while Patrick

walked the six miles to Haworth when required. Anne was christened on 5th March at the Old Bell Chapel at Thornton and in early April 1820 the contents of the parsonage at Thornton were transported to Haworth and the family relocated.

Having felt that they had won, the people of Haworth warmly received Patrick as the new incumbent. He quickly gained their respect and took a strong interest in them pastorally. His down-to-earth preaching resonated with the no-nonsense attitude of the people of Yorkshire.

His theology was firmly in the Evangelical camp, following the tradition of John Wesley. And like Wesley he had no time for fire and brimstone. His message was not one of guilt and fear, but rather of hope and encouragement.

Patrick's preaching was direct and down to earth. He barely mentioned Hell, and when he did it was to give thanks to God for His mercy in sparing us by His love. He mentioned the blessings of Heaven, but most of all he focussed on God's mercy and love in this world. His pastoral work was untiring. He had no horse and so walked many miles to reach his flock. He was just as conscientious in providing for their practical needs as he was for their spiritual ones. Unlike his many counterparts in the south he had no time during the week for fishing and hunting.

His preaching was particularly popular. They soon got used to Patrick's Irish brogue. But although they listened to his sermons it must be said that they were quite apathetic to the other parts of the service. There were yawns during the prayers and the sexton would walk around the aisles during the scripture readings, gently tapping those who had nodded off with his staff.

And it wasn't always because they agreed with what he had to say. Often they had some defiant objection to something he'd said in his sermon and they were keen to point this out to him afterwards. But their objections revealed that they had been listening intently and they mingled respect with their forthright views. They had soon come to think very highly of this fiery red-headed Irishman.

His sermons were nearly always extempore – entirely without notes. One memorable sermon was the one he gave on Sunday 12th September 1824. The text was from Psalm 97. "His lightnings enlightened the world; the earth saw, and trembled. The hills melted like wax at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth." Everyone knew that he was alluding to the Great Bog Burst that had occurred ten days earlier.

On that day Patrick had sent Emily, Branwell and Anne out for a walk on the moors with the servants Nancy and Sarah Garrs. It was, according to Patrick, exceedingly fine. However it was somewhat wet underfoot because it had been raining quite heavily the previous day.

Although it had been fine when his family had left the sky soon became very dark and overcast and Patrick heard loud thunder and a torrent of water poured from the heavens. Then Patrick heard a distant explosion that shook the whole house and made the windows rattle. He was worried for his children and, although it was still raining heavily, he set out to look for them. He found them huddled together in a porch at Ponden Hall.

He later found that a seven-foot high wall of mud, peat and water had swept down the narrow Ponden Glen from Crow Hill towards Ponden. A local farmer just managed to cross a stone bridge before the torrent swept it away. Several bridges were destroyed or damaged.

Some children who were playing in Ponden Valley were rescued by another farmer just before they would have been engulfed. Boulders were carried almost a mile down the valley. The burst left a crater nearly half a mile in length and, in places, nearly twenty feet deep. It was a miracle that nobody was hurt!

In his sermon Patrick considered two points: how do earthquakes occur and why does God send them? He began by explaining in simple terms the geological forces that produce earthquakes and volcanic eruptions – even though the bog burst was neither. Then he explained that God produces earthquakes both as a demonstration of His power and majesty and as a wake-up call to turn sinners from the errors of their ways. It's interesting to note that he didn't suggest that it was a punishment from an angry God.

Patrick's motivation was to use the bog burst experience to urge his flock to reflect on their lives and, where appropriate, to mend their ways – not just for the life to come but also for the present one.

Today, even those with a belief in God don't consider that it is God who sends natural disasters either as punishment, or to urge people to repent. But before you judge him consider the context of the time in which he lived. As a churchman, Patrick was one of the more enlightened ones of his day. He was a personal friend of William Wilberforce and strongly supported his anti-slavery views. Moreover, as chairman of the Parish Council, he was very active in trying to improve the living conditions of the area. Most notable were his efforts to improve the sanitation of Haworth.

As well as being a member of the Evangelical camp of the Church of England Patrick was quite ecumenical. For some years, when there was no evening service at his own church, he attended the evening service at the local Methodist church. He was on friendly terms with the local Baptists. He was chairman of the parish council which approved the erection of the Hall Green Baptist Church and when I attended a service there I was shown, hanging in pride of place, a document with Patrick Brontë's signature.

We don't know to what he thought of the Catholics. At the time there was no Catholic church in Haworth. But it doesn't appear that Patrick preached any anti Catholic sermons or wrote any tracts against them at a time when anti-Catholic feeling was sweeping the country. In fact it is recorded that once, when talking to a workman who declared that he was a Catholic, he urged the man to remain in the faith that he was used to and to be a good Christian.

William Hodgson By 1835, Patrick's eyesight was giving trouble and his workload was becoming challenging with the large increase in the local population. The number of funerals and baptisms was soaring. He was performing an average of two to three burials and six baptisms a week. Sometimes he baptized twenty children in one day.

He applied for an assistant curate and at the end of 1835 William Hodgson was appointed. We don't know much of his background, but there is a suggestion that he may have been Irish. He was a fiery and somewhat tactless young man. I'm sure he was one of the three curates described by Charlotte in the opening chapters of *Shirley*. Unlike Patrick he attacked the Dissenters both in his sermons and in his tracts.

There's an amusing story told about Hodgson. His lodgings appeared to have been haunted! He lodged in a house with a lady, her daughter and her three year old granddaughter. One morning the granddaughter said that she had seen "a lady standing in the middle of the room with something tied around her throat". The bedroom was searched but nothing was found.

Then, one evening, when Hodgson had come home after a visit, he saw a light moving around the bedrooms upstairs. He thought it must have been one of the family getting ready for bed but when he went downstairs again he found all of them sitting round the kitchen fire.

He claimed to have had several such experiences, including once when he was in his four poster bed he felt it heave as if someone was underneath pushing up. But,

when he lit his candle and looked underneath, there was no-one there.

Hodgson told Branwell about all the disturbances. Branwell said "pooh, it's just your imagination!" So Hodgson asked Branwell to come and share his bed for a night. Branwell agreed and, after examining the room thoroughly and locking the door and windows, he climbed into bed beside Hodgson.

At once the bed began to heave and Branwell was nearly thrown onto the floor. They looked under the bed and found nothing, so they got back into bed. It happened again. In fact the heaving went on and off for some time. After a sleepless night Branwell declared that he'd had enough and wouldn't try the next night.

William Weightman Hodgson left in 1837 and for some time Patrick had the sole responsibility of Haworth. But by 1839 his eyes were getting worse and so he applied for a new curate. In August of that year William Weightman was appointed. As John Lock and Canon Dixon wrote in a biography of Patrick called *A Man of Sorrow*, Weightman brought "the delights of spring into the village, the parsonage, and yes – into the very hearts of the three girls. Patrick could work well with him, Aunt Branwell could tolerate him. Branwell found the companion he so badly needed. Charlotte was fonder of him than she has admitted, Emily was amused by him and, when he was dead, Anne realized she loved him."

William Weightman

Weightman grew up in Appleby in Westmorland. He went to Durham University where he graduated with a BA and an MA. He was ordained and then appointed as Patrick's curate as his first position at the age of 25.

He was a good looking young man. Charlotte noticed his "blue eyes, auburn hair and rosy cheeks". The Brontë girls nicknamed him "Celia Amelia" but despite this name and his good looks he was not at all effeminate or foolish. Patrick was most pleased to have obtained such a sincere and hard working assistant whose religious views ran parallel to his own.

Weightman brought not just a ray of sunshine but a virtual torrent of warmth and cheerfulness. He flirted with all the young ladies of the village in a way that offended nobody. As Lock describes his effect on the Brontë family, with echoes of the bog-burst, "the new curate acted as a summer rainstorm upon a parched earth. Their shyness was washed away in a flood of laughter, pranks and good humoured fun. He was the most amusing person they had met, the gayest they would ever know." The three years he was at Haworth were certainly the happiest the girls would ever know. The tragic deaths of their mother and older sisters were long gone and the tragedies of their own deaths, one after the other, were still some time off.

Weightman flirted with all the young ladies, with Charlotte and Anne, with Ellen Nussey and with the serious-minded Mary Taylor. Many of Charlotte's letters refer to Celia Amelia. She wrote that nearby Keighley "has yielded him a fruitful field of conquest".

Charlotte related Weightman's romances in detail, claiming to do so with a detached heart, but in Lock's opinion "the lady doth protest too much". Emily is reported to have danced with joy when they all went walking together with Weightman on the moors, though whether this was in response to the curate or to her beloved moors is a matter for argument. But she certainly did like him, though her heart may not have been involved in her judgement. Once, Weightman asked Ellen Nussey to walk with him on the moors. Emily insisted on being the chaperone, which earned for her the name "The Major".

In 1840 Weightman heard that no valentine card had ever been delivered to the

Haworth parsonage and so he anonymously sent each of the three girls a valentine. He did this again the following year. He wrote the verses himself and even walked the ten miles to Bradford to post them so that Patrick wouldn't guess who had sent them.

There's the story, which most of you will have heard, when Weightman was giving a lecture at the Keighley Mechanics' Institute. He invited the three girls to hear this lecture and gained Patrick's permission. They went to tea at the home of a Keighley clergyman. It is almost certain that this was the infamous Mr Collins. After tea both clergymen escorted them to the lecture.

Following the lecture the two clergymen escorted them on the four mile walk home back to Haworth where they didn't arrive until midnight. They entered the parsonage in high spirits with much giggling. Aunt Branwell had prepared hot coffee for the girls but she was quite put out when she realised that she had to provide for the two clergymen as well. Weightman teased her by declaring that he was absolutely dying of thirst, which made things even worse.

Weightman was very thoughtful and generous and, when he was away in his home country on holiday he sent the Brontë family a brace of each of the following: wild ducks, black grouse, partridges, snipes and curlews, plus a large salmon.

Patrick and Weightman often went for long walks across the moors to discuss church matters or theological points of view. But when the season was right, such as in late August when there were plenty of grouse, they engaged in some pleasant sport. Weightman was a good shot but Patrick, despite the difficulties with his eyesight, was the better one. He rarely missed a bird.

But they had to make sure that Emily wasn't around or there would have been a scene. She is reported to have said, "if you must have living prey shoot at each other, but leave harmless dumb creatures alone!" I wonder what she said when she discovered that the evening meal consisted of grouse and potatoes. Did Patrick and Weightman pretend that a kind parishioner had left the birds on the doorstop?

Patrick couldn't fault Weightman for his pastoral duties. His cheerfulness and generosity were enormous. But he felt that Weightman's sermons were a little too academic. He tried unsuccessfully to get him to speak plainly. Nevertheless when Patrick applied to the Church Pastoral Aid Society for the second year he asked for the grant to provide Weightman's stipend to be increased from £80 to £100, which it was.

Charlotte wrote in January 1842, just before she and Emily left for Brussels, about Weightman and Anne. "He sits opposite to Anne at Church, sighing softly and looking out of the corners of his eyes to win her attention – and Anne is so quiet, her look so downcast – they are a picture." But nothing came of it. Meanwhile Charlotte and Emily went off to Brussels, little realising that they would never see Weightman again.

In August 1842 Weightman was struck down with cholera. Patrick visited him twice a day and soon realised that he was dying. He was heartbroken because Weightman had been like a son. True, Patrick had Branwell but Branwell had recently been dismissed from the railways and was now moping about at home. Weightman had such a bright future ahead of him.

This was the beginning of the second long period of tragedy for the Brontë family. On returning to the parsonage after visiting Weightman Patrick was told that Aunt Branwell was unwell. She was to die a month or two later.

Weightman died on 6th September and was buried on 10th September. Patrick officiated at the service. Charlotte and Emily were still in Brussels and Anne was away governessing. Only Branwell sat in the family pew. He had been a close friend of Willie Weightman and, as they laid the body under the flags of the north aisle, his loud sobs echoed throughout the church.

William Smith Early the following year, in March 1843, the Reverend William Smith arrived in Haworth as a replacement to Weightman. Like Patrick, and Hodgson, Smith was an Irishman. But, unlike those other two, Smith was avaricious and unscrupulous. He was also on the lookout for a rich wife. He bestowed his attentions on Ellen Nussey, when she visited the parsonage, and asked Charlotte if Ellen had money. Charlotte later wrote to Ellen that "Papa has two or three times expressed a fear that Mr Smith paid you too much attention … he keeps saying that I am to write to you and dissuade you from thinking of him, I never saw Papa make himself so uneasy about a thing of this kind before."

Patrick developed a strong dislike to Smith and he made discreet enquiries as to a possible replacement so that "Mr Smith may be at liberty to go". In 1844 Smith was appointed to Keighley. Whether Patrick had anything to do with this appointment isn't known.

If he had he'd certainly done the right thing because Smith later disappeared from Keighley under a cloud, leaving a lot of debts including money that had been given to him to go towards charitable causes. He was last heard of as having migrated to Minnesota where he worked as a lumberjack. He did find a wife, but it appears that she was not a lady with money.

Arthur Nicholls After such an unsatisfactory curate as William Smith, Patrick was anxious as to the suitability of his replacement, Arthur Bell Nicholls. John Lock, in his book *A Man of Sorrows*, gives a rather poetic description of the arrival of Nicholls. Lock makes an educated guess as to what Patrick may have been thinking at the time and gives us a rather poetical account of the arrival.

"The year 1845 was the beginning of that golden period in the life of the Brontës, a year which first saw a glimmer of that vivid sun that would blaze and scorch for a brief span and then turn into an unforgettable sunset, leaving Patrick in a dark, cold world."

"In May there came up the steep Kirkgate a tall, dark, bearded young man of twenty-six, the new curate, Arthur Bell Nicholls. Patrick met him at the parsonage door, and inwardly cursed his failing eyesight. He saw the man and yet he did not not; he trusted him and yet he could not; he was satisfied with his new curate's appearance and yet he was not. As he returned to his parlour after directing Nicholls to his lodgings at the home of John Brown the sexton in Parsonage Lane, he reflected that only time would tell of the true value of Mr Nicholls."

"Arthur Bell Nicholls remains the enigma of the Brontë story. He was the intruder from outside world who penetrated the Brontë fastness, yet the loved a woman and not a legend. He saw Charlotte's courage, not her genius, her loyalty, not her fame, he brought her happiness, not praise. It was a perfect match, because it was brief. If the fates protracted the union, it could have ended in disaster."

Arthur Bell Nicholls was born on 6th January 1819, making him about 9 months younger than Charlotte. He was born of Scottish descent in County Antrim in what is now Northern Ireland. He entered Trinity College in Dublin in 1840 where he graduated with second class honours in 1844. Although he was supported financially by the Evangelical Pastoral Aid Society, Nicholls was a Puseyite, a follower of high church theology and practice, in contrast to Patrick's evangelical, or low-church, principles.


Arthur Bell Nicholls

Charlotte's first impressions were non-committal. She wrote "he appears a respectable young man, reads well, and I hope will give satisfaction …"

By now Patrick was now almost completely blind. He

could still preach on Sundays, as he always did this without notes, but almost everything else was done by Nicholls. Of necessity he was a very frequent visitor to the parsonage.

But tongues started wagging that he was developing feelings for Charlotte. A rumour started circulating in Haworth that Charlotte would become Mrs Nicholls in due course.

When she heard of this rumour Charlotte was horrified and wrote to Ellen Nussey, assuring her that nothing was further from the truth.

"I scarcely need to say that never was rumour more unfounded – it puzzles me to think how it could possibly have originated – A cold, far-away sort of civility are the only terms on which I have been with Mr Nicholls – I could by no means think of mentioning such a rumour to him even as a joke – it would make me the laughing stock of himself and his fellow curates for half a year to come – They regard me as an old maid, and I regard them, one and all, as a highly uninteresting, narrow and unattractive specimens of the 'coarser sex'.

Nicholls was much stricter and less pragmatic than Patrick when it came to the parishioners. For example there's the famous "battle of the washerwomen". It had long been the custom for the women of the village to spread their wet sheets and laundry

on the tombstones in the churchyard to dry, having no gardens in which to erect clotheslines. Patrick had turned a blind eye to the practice. Indeed on washdays the churchyard that the windows of the parsonage overlooked would have appeared less gloomy and more homely than at other times.

But Nicholls was deeply offended by the lack of propriety of this practice and the lack of respect to the dead and so he pushed Patrick into agreeing to outlaw this practice. The sanction against the practice was announced in church but, for some time, Nicholls had to chase those women who chose to ignore the injunction out of the graveyard. Patrick was greatly amused by the battle and wrote a comic verse to immortalise the skirmishes.

The females all routed have fled with their clothes
To stackyards and backyards and where no-one knows,
And loudly have sworn by the suds which they swim in,
They'll wring off his head, for his warring with women.
Whilst their husbands combine and roar out in their fury,
They'll lynch him at once, without trial by jury.
Bad saddest of all, the fair maidens declare.
Of marriage or love, he must ever despair.

The claim in the last line turned out not to be true. It may not have been love at first sight, but Mr Nicholls began to privately develop a warm regard towards Charlotte. At first Charlotte's opinion of him changed from indifference to something bordering on hostility. When Nicholls went back to Ireland for a month's holiday Charlotte wrote to Ellen:

"Mr Nicholls is not yet returned but is expected next week. I am sorry to say that many of the parishioners express a desire that he should not trouble himself to re-cross the channel but should remain quietly where he is. This is not the feeling that ought to exist between shepherd and flock. It is not such as poor Mr Weightman excited."

But eventually Charlotte began warm to him, though 'luke-warm' might be more

accurate. She began to respect his earnestness and she certainly appreciated the way he willingly took on extra duties after Patrick's stroke.

In her biography *The Brontës*, Juliet Barker describes Nicholls as a big tall man with a strong square face, framed by dark hair and by long side whiskers. She likens him to Rochester as being a man of hidden depths. He was a religious bigot and was stern, harsh and unbending. But he had his moments when he softened. He had the responsibility of superintending the church school in Stanbury and he showed real kindness to the pupils.

After more than seven years at Haworth Nicholls decided that the time had come to propose to Charlotte. Charlotte described the occasion to Ellen.

"On Monday evening Mr Nicholls was here to tea. I vaguely felt, without clearly seeing, the meaning of his constant looks and strange, feverish, restraint."

"After tea I withdrew to the dining room as usual. As usual Mr Nicholls sat with Papa till between eight and nine o'clock. I then heard him open the parlour door as if he was going. I expected the clash of the front door. He stopped in the passage; he tapped; like lightning it flashed on me what was coming."

"He entered – he stood before me. What his words were you can guess; his manner – you can hardly realize – nor can I forget it. Shaking from head to foot, looking deadly pale, speaking low, vehemently yet with difficulty – he made me for the first time feel what it costs a man to declare affection where he doubts response."

"The spectacle of one ordinarily so statue-like, thus trembling, stirred, and overcome gave me a kind of strange shock. He spoke of sufferings he had borne for months – of sufferings he could endure no longer – and craved leave for some hope. I could only entreat him to leave me then and promise a reply on the morrow."

"I asked if he had spoken to Papa. He said he dared not. I think I half led, half put him out of the room. When he was gone I immediately went to Papa and told him what had taken place."

"Agitation and Anger disproportionate to the occasion ensued. If I had loved Mr Nicholls and heard such epithets applied to him as were used it would have transported me past my patience. As it was my blood boiled with a sense of injustice but Papa worked himself into a state not to be trifled with.

The veins on his temples started up like whip-cord and his eyes became suddenly blood-shot. I made haste to promise that Mr Nicholls should on the morrow have a distinct refusal."

It is highly likely that she would have refused him even if her father had agreed. Indeed she probably had no doubt as to what Patrick might say, though the violence of his reply appeared to take her by surprise. My guess is that she chose to defer her reply until she had spoken to her father as a way of letting Nicholls down gently. She could then tell him quite honestly that she was declining the proposal in deference to her father. She wrote to Nicholls the next day and received a reply that made her realise his pain and despair.

Patrick was furious, firstly that Nicholls had not asked him first for permission to marry his daughter, secondly that Nicholls presumed to marry his now famous daughter when he had so little money. The passions in the parsonage raged so high that the situation was unresolvable. Nicholls would have to go. This he did, though not straight away. Patrick and Nicholls managed to work together but at arm's length. The situation was made easier by the fact that soon after the proposal, Charlotte went to London to visit George Smith and his mother.

But Patrick had over-reached himself. By his vehemence and his cruel words about Nicholls Patrick had put Nicholls in a new light as far as Charlotte was concerned. As Juliet Barker described it "Mistreated and misunderstood, Mr Nicholls

was suddenly a much more interesting person to Charlotte than the quiet clergyman conscientiously but unremarkably performing his parish duties."

Mr Nicholls stayed on for over a month and although there was no outright hostility between himself and Mr Brontë they kept out of each other's way. Charlotte felt anguish at the pain that Nicholls felt. Charlotte wrote to Ellen about the difficulty Nicholls had in performing the sacrament of communion at the Whitsunday service. "He struggled – faltered – then lost command of himself – stood before my eyes and in the sight of all the communicants white, shaking, voiceless – Papa was not there – thank God! Joseph Redman (he was the visiting preacher) spoke some words to him – he made a great effort – but could only with difficulty whisper through the service. I suppose he thought; this would be his last time; he goes either this week or the next. I heard the women sobbing round – and I could not quite check my own tears.

When Mr Brontë heard about this he showed no compassion. Instead he referred to Nicholls as an 'unmanly driveller'. Charlotte said of her father that "compassion or relenting is no more to be looked for than sap from firewood".

Before he left Haworth Nicholls applied to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel as a missionary to the Australian Colonies of Sydney, Melbourne or Adelaide.

He gave his reason for wanting to be a missionary as "I have for some time felt a strong inclination to assist in ministering to the thousands of our fellow Countrymen, who by Emigration have been in a great measure deprived of the means of grace."

Unsurprisingly he made no mention of the fact that his motivation was the fact that he was disappointed in love. And the suggestion that the Australian colonists, in the mid 19th century, were deprived of the means of grace was surely an exaggeration designed to curry favour with the Society. He later withdrew his application.

Imagine if he had gone ahead with it. Charlotte was beginning to feel warm towards him, partly because she felt sorry for him and partly because of the fact that his love for her seemed to burn so brightly inside him despite his efforts to conceal his passion. Who knows, Charlotte may have followed him out to these parts. In our more favourable climate she may not have died so young. Whether she would have written more novels after that is another question.

On 25th of May 1853 there was a farewell for Nicholls at the schoolroom where he was presented with a gold watch, suitably inscribed. Mr Brontë had offered his apologies claiming to be unwell. This was to be the same excuse he used the following year for not attending Charlotte's and Nicholls' wedding.

The following evening, Nicholls called at the parsonage to hand over the deeds of the school to Mr Brontë. Charlotte hid herself in the dining room, feeling it best if they didn't meet. After some time she heard Nicholls leaving Patrick's study and the front door shutting. Charlotte was listening out for the click of the garden gate and, when she didn't hear it she went out to investigate. Charlotte wrote to Ellen:

"I took courage and went out trembling and miserable. I found him leaning against the garden-door in a paroxysm of anguish – sobbing as women never sob. Of course I went straight to him. Very few words were interchanged – those few barely articulate. Poor fellow! but he wanted such hope and such encouragement as I could not give him. Still I trust he must know now that I am not cruelly blind and indifferent to his constancy and grief … However he is gone – gone – and there's an end of it."

But it wasn't to be the end of it. Mr Nicholls took up the curacy at Kirk Smeaton, near Pontefract. From there he wrote to Charlotte. She ignored the first five letters but replied to the sixth. Despite his poor eyesight Patrick began to suspect that some of the letters arriving for Charlotte

might be from Nicholls. On one occasion, while Charlotte was away, a letter arrived which Patrick suspected had come from Nicholls. He opened it, only to find that it was from Mrs Gaskell, hoping to visit Charlotte. When Charlotte returned she was quite angry that her father had opened her correspondence.

A clandestine correspondence began between Charlotte and Nicholls. How she avoided her father's prying eyes is not known. But we do know that Nicholls went to Oxenhope a few times to stay with Mr Grant and that he secretly visited Charlotte and at least once she secretly walked to Oxenhope to visit him.

She was beginning to see him in a different light. He didn't have the sparkling personality of Willie Weightman but what he did have was constancy, which was something that Weightman could never be accused of!

Mr Brontë was also softening his opinion of Nicholls. The replacement for Nicholls was the Reverend George de Renzy. Patrick became less and less satisfied with his new curate and even confessed to Charlotte that he almost wished to have Nicholls back again! Charlotte took this opportunity to confess that she had been secretly in contact, both in person and by letter, with Mr Nicholls and she demanded the right to be able to openly continue to see him and to correspond with him.

She was expecting a bog-burst of fury but was surprised at her father's somewhat mild response. This may have been partly because he had had to admit that he was in the wrong in having opened Charlotte's mail, partly because she said that she had not yet made up her mind whether to marry Nicholls and partly because Charlotte made it clear that, if she *did*, it would only be on the condition that she and Arthur both lived at the parsonage.

This last condition helped to bring Patrick around. Having lost his wife and five of his six children Patrick was afraid at being left alone. So if Charlotte would stay he could put up with Nicholls, especially as this would give him the opportunity of getting rid of de Renzy.

In January 1854 Nicholls spent ten days at the Oxenhope vicarage and he and Charlotte saw much of each other. Then at Easter he was allowed to stay for a week at the Haworth parsonage. Patrick was, at last, able to sanction the marriage.

I could give a whole talk about the wedding, the honeymoon in Ireland and the very brief marriage. Indeed there have been a couple of books that deal with just this part of the Brontë story. Let me just outline some of the key points.

They were married on Thursday 29th June 1854. The service was conducted by a friend of Nicholls, the Reverend Sutcliffe Sowden. At the last minute Patrick declared that he was too unwell to attend and so Miss Wooler had to give Charlotte away.

Charlotte and Nicholls spent their honeymoon in, what is now, Northern Ireland and Charlotte met his family. They returned to Haworth and Nicholls again became curate at Haworth. The marriage seemed to be a happy one, but was short, for Charlotte died on 31st March 1855.

Before she fell ill in January 1855 she took great pleasure in her role as a clergyman's wife. It has been said that Nicholls discouraged her from continuing her writing. Certainly he regarded her as a loving wife rather than as a literary giant. But it seems that her neglect of her writing was her own choice. She seemed to embrace her new life with great fervour.

After Charlotte died Mr Nicholls remained as curate to Patrick and lived with him in the parsonage for the next six years. As Patrick became more and more infirm Nicholls took over most of the work. When Patrick died in 1861 it was assumed that Nicholls would take over the incumbency. But the trustees had other ideas and instead appointed the Reverend John Wade.

The vote was close, but several reasons have been advanced for why Nicholls was rejected. Firstly, he wasn't as

popular as Patrick had been. Secondly, as Nicholls had high church leanings there was the fear that, without Patrick to hold the reins, Nicholls may have introduced Catholic rituals and vestments. A third reason was that a few months previously the chairman of the Haworth Church Land Trustees died and his family asked if he could be buried with his wife in the family grave. Patrick was too ill to consider the matter and referred them to Nicholls. Nicholls said that that part of the churchyard was now full and was now closed for burials. The family applied to the Secretary of State in Whitehall and Nicholls was over-ruled. As Patrick was too ill to conduct the funeral, and Nicholls refused to, Joseph Grant came over from Oxenhope to conduct the service. Yet another reason given was that the trustees wanted to distance the church from its Brontë associations. They wanted the church to be a house of God, not a shrine to the Brontës.

But possibly the main reason was that John Wade had independent means and was in a position to help out with church and parsonage repairs and to contribute to parish funds. Nicholls, like Mr Brontë, was poor and entirely dependent on his living.

However the vote could not have been closer. There were four votes for Nicholls, five against and the one dissenter on the board abstained. So with just a few days notice Mr Nicholls had to pack up and, having nowhere else to go, he went back to Ireland. There he left the church, became a farmer and married his cousin.

John Wade

I'll end with just a few quick things about Reverend John Wade. He is said to have had a great inferiority complex in having to follow the father of such a famous family and he was called "the envious Wade". He left his mark, however, in three ways. He added the wing to the parsonage, he had the church demolished and rebuilt and he managed to finally make Haworth independent of Bradford.

Program for the rest of 2019

The Australian Brontë Association meets in Sydney five times a year. Meetings are held at the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel, 169 Castlereagh Street (near Park Street) at 10:30am, though we serve morning tea from 10:00am. Those who wish to do so, have a light lunch at the hotel. At each meeting, a paper on some aspect of the Brontës' life and work is presented. There is a meeting charge of $5 (members and non-members).

Saturday 14th September Annette & Graham Harman and Mandy Swann: Shores, Moors and Indoors

Location, location, location. The Bells (Acton, Currer and Ellis) were writers who continue to surprise us with their individual presentations of areas they knew well.

Saturday 9th November Patrick Morris: Trauma in the Brontë Novels

The talk involves an analysis from a modern psychiatric perspective and comparison of the description of family violence and its effects in the three novels, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë.

Christmas Lunch: For many years we have had a joint Christmas Lunch with the NSW Dickens Society. But the Dickens Society has now decided to split from us and to have their own celebration at Cellos on 7th December, to which Brontë members are invited. However we still hope to have our own ABA Christmas Lunch and, if so, we will let you know the details later in the year.