to them or to their over-indulgent mother. Mrs Lydia Robinson, some 17 years older than Branwell, at first enjoyed Branwell’s company, and spoke highly of his work. What happened next in their relationship is unclear; biographers have not been able to establish a consensus on whatever factual base existed for Branwell’s subsequent claims that she had fallen passionately in love with him. Branwell’s engagement as tutor, which had lasted two and a half years, and which also evoked (at least for a while) the unqualified praise of Mr Robinson, ended abruptly, and without prior warning, in July 1845, when Mr Robinson sent Branwell a letter of dismissal. Branwell’s reaction was one of shock, and a failure to clarify in his own mind what might have happened during his absence from Thorp Green Hall. (The letter reached him at Haworth.) Later, Mrs Gaskell was forced to retract passages in The Life of Charlotte Brontë, that claimed Mrs Robinson was directly responsible for Branwell’s subsequent ruin.

10. This letter should be dated June 1846 – Harold Orel.

11. George Gooch, the Robinsons’ coachman, came to Branwell after the death of Mr Robinson (26 May 1846), with a verbal message from Mrs Robinson to the effect that he was never to attempt to communicate with her again. The message also told Branwell that if she saw Branwell again, a codicil to her husband’s will would require her to forfeit her entire inheritance, and to lose her children to the trustees. (These stern warnings had been concocted by Mrs Robinson and two of her five advisers and trustees for the Robinson estate, Thomas Evans and the Reverend Charles Thorpe.) The impact of this message can well be imagined. Branwell never learned that the so-called codicil was fictitious.

12. This letter should be dated July 1846 – Harold Orel.


AN EARLY ACQUAINTANCE
about 1842
[Note from Miss Dorothy Melling]

My Great-grannie (Charlotte Browne) died in 1917 at the age of eighty-nine, and when I was ten. I was very keen on Charlotte Brontë at the time, and it was due to this that she told me the little I know. She
was born in the house next to Thornton in Craven church, where her Father was Sexton, and it was during the time that Mr Brontë was Minister there that the two men struck up an acquaintance.

My Great-great-grandfather had such an admiration for Mr Brontë that he called his daughter after Charlotte, and went to Haworth frequently to hear him preach. When my Great-grannie was fourteen or fifteen, her Father, as a special treat, took her to Haworth with him, and that visit was the beginning of a slender though adored friendship between her and Charlotte.

My relatives paid their visits – on fine Sundays – in a pony and trap, eating their lunch in a field on their way back, for not once did Mr Brontë ask them inside the Vicarage. Her Father, Charlotte said, intensely disliked company. My Grannie and Charlotte sat in the church and chatted quietly, while the Fathers talked in the vestry. The sisters were alive then, but unfortunately, I know nothing of them, as my Grannie had eyes for no-one but Charlotte.

She told me that Charlotte always wore such dull colours, and she longed to see her in some pretty blue or pink, but her fichus and cuffs were always spotless. ‘Her hands were always quiet and in repose, a great contrast to the keen, almost passionate look in her eyes’; eyes, my Grannie said, that reminded her of lighted lamps shining through the dim distance of a church. Also ‘there was no boastfulness or uplifted pride about her looks, just a gratefulness’. My Grannie was very taken aback with Mr Brontë. She had been brought up on the legend of his goodness and his upright life, and she was a little shocked to find a brusque autocrat, who never as much as looked at her, and was fretful with Charlotte for ‘hurrying him across the churchyard to his own garden’.

It was there that my Grannie last saw Charlotte. She turned at the church gate and waved her hand and Charlotte waved back. The sisters died, and my Grannie’s Father did not wish to trouble the old man and so the friendship ceased. There were letters from Charlotte, but like all things which are thought to be of no value, they were thrown away.

NOTE

E. M. Delafield (1840–93) was the pen-name taken by Edmée Elisabeth Monica. The descendant of a family who had left France for England because