

Chapter IV

A Comparison of Literary Materials and Methods

Of the two writers, Mrs. Gaskell was more varied than Charlotte in her choice of materials. One reason, in my view, is that Mrs. Gaskell turned her interests towards people and incidents outside herself; while Charlotte **loved** to write about her inner self and about those who happened to come into her narrow circle. Since Mrs. Gaskell knew many more different kinds of people and places, owing to her fuller life, she had more varied literary materials to choose from than Charlotte, who spent most of her time in the Haworth Parsonage. Moreover, being shy and unsociable, Charlotte knew fewer people of any kind than ^{did} her friend. Mrs. Gaskell's books fall into three categories: Novels of social reform and of manners and a biography

Her books of social reform are of two kinds.

(1) Mary Barton and North and South which deal with the problems of industrial employers and employees. Her dominant theme is the need for both sides to cooperate and the idea that this cooperation should come through the individual rather than through the mass, and through voluntary acts rather than by Parliamentary laws. She tells us movingly :

" I had always felt a deep sympathy with the ~~careworn~~ men, who looked as if doomed to struggle through their life in strange alternations between work and want; tossed to and fro by circumstances, apparently in even a greater degree than other men. A little manifestation of this sympathy, and a little attention to the expression of feelings on the part of some of the work people with whom I was acquainted, had laid open to me the hearts of one or two of the more thoughtful among them; I saw that they were sore and irritable against the rich ----- The more I reflected on this unhappy state of things between those so bound

to each other by common interests, as the employers and employed must ever be, the more anxious I became to give some utterance to the agony which from time to time convulsed this dumb people; the agony of suffering without the sympathy of the happy. "1

Mrs. Gaskell changed her view somewhat when she wrote North and South, for in 1855 the condition of the working men was much better than at the time when Mary Barton had been published. Indeed, her earlier novel had almost certainly contributed to this improvement. Mrs. Gaskell saw that the workmen were more independent and could help themselves better, so she felt that there was less need to write appeals for them; on the contrary, she now felt the need to be on the side of the long-suffering manufacturers, who had borne the brunt of all attacks made in favour of the working men. North and South is her last "novel with a purpose" in which her desire to break down barriers, to overturn prejudice, and to work for harmony among all men, is very evident. The materials for Mary Barton were collected after she had moved to live in Manchester, at that time the manufacturing center of England. As a minister's wife, Mrs. Gaskell had to mediate in the struggle between the capitalist and the working classes around the year 1840. The scene of North and South is also of a great manufacturing town where a Southern-bred girl, Margaret Hale goes to live.

(2) Ruth is an example of another kind of social reformist work. There is nothing in this book concerning the strife between the two industrial classes which plays such an important part in Mary Barton and North and South. Ruth is concerned with personal morals and ethics; it demonstrates fully Mrs. Gaskell's creed and her relatively broad-minded religion. Though her kindness and sympathy towards the poor were obvious, she herself was scarcely known as a social worker. In Ruth's

1 The Preface to the original edition of Mary Barton
by Mrs. Gaskell

life, Mrs. Gaskell showed her own trust in divine help. This book was written in the period when novels of reform, such as the works of Dickens and Charles Kingsley, were popular; it concerns an equally needed reform — the treatment of men and women who have transgressed the ethical and moral rules of society.

Cranford and Wives and Daughters are Mrs. Gaskell's novels of manners which deal with the personal affairs of the people living in and around a small country town. These two books were written when Mrs. Gaskell had become less intensely interested in social reform. She relaxed more and so her books in this vein are much more charming than her previous works. Cranford grew immediately out of her life at Knutsford when she was growing up. What was the force that led to the consideration of this experience as a source of literary materials? Sir Adolphus Ward, in his Introduction to Cranford, surmised that some parts of "The Maid's Story" from Tales of the Hall by George Crabbe might have given Mrs. Gaskell the idea of writing Cranford. He quoted the following to affirm his point of view.

" Poor granmamma among the gentry dwelt
Of a small town, and all the honours felt;
Shrinking from all approaches to disgrace
That might be marked in so genteel a place;
Where every daily deed, as soon as done,
Ran through the town as fast as it could run —
At dinners what appear'd — at cards who lost or won.

Our good appearance through the town was known,
Hungor and thirst were matters of our own;
And you would judge that she in scandal dealt
Who told on what we fed, or how we felt."¹

It is possible that these words suggested to Mrs. Gaskell the general condition of life in a place like Knutsford which she knew so well — the tiny townlet, the inhabitants, and the ways of the people. Cranford was all about Knutsford. Characters mentioned in the book could easily be recognized by people who

1 Elizabeth Gaskell by Gerald De Witt Sanders

had been familiar with Mrs. Gaskell in her Knutsford days, as the following quotation from a life of Mrs. Gaskell shows :

" - - - many of the characters ^{have been traced} to their originals since Mrs. Gaskell's day. Beatrix L. Tollemache identified Captain Brown, who comes into the story at the beginning, as a Captain Hill, adjutant of the Cheshire Yeomanry; and Thomas Holbrook, Miss Matty's lover, as an eccentric Peter Leigh. Others have identified Mrs. Jameison as Lady Jane Stanley who lived in Brook House, Knutsford, and in a will left money to build a footpath, which was to be wide enough for one only, so that young folk could not stroll along it side by side; the **tea**-selling episode in which Miss Matty took part with a similar instance that happened to a Miss Betty Harker; the disappearance of Peter in the story with that of Mrs. Gaskell's own brother; and the George Hotel with the Royal George named in honor of George IV ----- She had plenty of material upon which to draw, and her task was chiefly to sift this material, heighten the effects here and there, and work the various incidents and persons into a consecutive narrative."¹

In this book, Mrs. Gaskell did not pay much attention to plot. The story depends more on characterization, incidents and descriptions of the location. The book may be regarded as gentle satire, for Mrs. Gaskell created many humorous characters. but there is not even one instance of harsh words which might show a lack of kindly understanding in its writer.

Wives and Daughters is the story of everyday people in a small town — Knutsford again, now called Hollingford. The plot is very simple, yet deeply interesting, because Mrs. Gaskell had such power to narrate ordinary matters. Many of the characters resemble those in Cranford, for example, the Misses Brown-
ing are very much like the Misses Jenkyns. The originals of Lord and Lady Cunnor were Lord and Lady Egerton, who lived at Tarton Park, near Knutsford, when Mrs. Gaskell was living there.

1 Elizabeth Gaskell by Gerald De Witt Sanders

Molly's grief when she heard of her father's engagement is very realistic and it is impossible for us to get away from the thought that much of Molly's early life is reminiscent of Mrs. Gaskell's own childhood.

This book, more than any other of Mrs. Gaskell's, is a picture of English life and manners. It was written when the author was more than fifty years old, so it contains more literary materials. Mrs. Gaskell had been travelling a good deal both in England and on the Continent, and her knowledge of different places gave her wider scope for her novels. Not only rural England has been described, but also London when visited by Cynthia and Mrs. Gibson. Cynthia's experience in France before she came to live in Hollingsford is also true to life. Similarly, the people she knew ranged through almost every class of English society. Mrs. Gaskell brings in the aristocracy when showing us the luxurious life at the Towers and, also when describing the rather poor life at Hamley Hall which is occupied by aristocrats who cannot keep up their position. The character of the middle-

class Dr. Gibson is drawn from Dr. Peter Holland at Knutsford. The gossiping spinsters, who are on the border line between the lower middle and upper middle classes, are real spinsters, who once lived in the same neighbourhood. Mrs. Gibson, besides being a portrait of Mrs. Gaskell's step-mother, represents those middle class country people who try desperately to be highly respectable by aping their betters.

Mrs. Gaskell's The Life of Charlotte Brontë is of course biographical. So, in this case, we do not have to guess at all as to the sources of her materials. The two women had known and admired each other's works before they actually met in August 1850, at the house of a friend in Windermere, where both of them had been invited for a visit. After Charlotte's death; Mr. Brontë saw some cruelly exaggerated statements about her

life and works in published articles, so he wished someone to write a true account of them. His letter to Mrs. Gaskell, quoted by her in the biography itself, contains the following:

" You seem to me to be the best qualified for doing what I wish should be done -----
Mr. Nicholls and I will give you such information as you may require."¹

Mrs. Gaskell's first step was to collect materials. For two years she spent her time visiting localities, examining correspondence and interviewing eye-witnesses. The method she used in writing this book was extremely simple. She tried to let Charlotte tell her own story through her correspondence, and to supplement this from other sources only where absolutely necessary. The biography was written carefully and the writer's ability in the handling of her materials is obvious. The book has been popular ever since, and it is generally placed just below Boswell's Life of Johnson and Lockhart's Life of Scott only because the authors had greater subjects to deal with.

In Charlotte Brontë's work, the relation of fiction to its source-material in real life is one of deep interest. Charlotte is quite an exceptional case as a writer, for though she had such very limited material, she nevertheless managed to become one of the greatest of all English novelists. If Mrs. Gaskell's works contain nourishment, Charlotte's are full of wonderful flavour. All Charlotte's books, except Shirley (to some extent), are mainly concerned with the problems of individual people rather than social problems. Moreover, as we have seen, the individuals about whom she wrote had to be selected or compounded from among very few originals and most of all from the person she knew best — herself. The same characters are usually drawn repeatedly in her various books, where we meet Charlotte again and again,

¹ The Life of Charlotte Brontë by Mrs. Gaskell

disguised in the forms of Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe, Caroline Helstone, William Crimsworth, and so on. These characters have a perceptible original in Charlotte's own self — mentally, physically or both; her other characters are usually more or less compound; **they** sprang originally from real people seen through Charlotte's eyes and somewhat transformed. Even in Shirley, which is meant to be a novel with a social purpose, that purpose is rather overlaid by the personal affairs of characters based on people she knew. During most of her life, Charlotte was obliged to live in isolated Haworth which had only tenuous relations with the outside world. Charlotte seldom went anywhere else, so she knew only Haworth and Brussels, apart from the little she had learnt from her glimpses of London. Being cut off from outside society, Charlotte was lonely and became a dreamer. Her dreams, interwoven with her limited experience, form the essential material of her novels. Therefore, despite the poverty of her material as regards people and places, Charlotte was able to produce a considerable number of highly readable novels, due to her skill in making the most of the little she had.

Even in Yorkshire, Charlotte was not acquainted with people of as many classes as those to which Mrs. Gaskell's characters belonged. Charlotte knew only the clergy, two or three of the landed gentry, a few school mistresses and some of her fellow-pupils and teachers. In Shirley, a large number of the characters can be recognized as actual people. Mrs. Gaskell tells us :

"The 'three curates' were real living men, haunting Haworth and the neighbouring district; and so obtuse in perception that, after the first burst of anger at having their ways, ^{and habits chronicled was} over, they rather enjoyed the joke of calling each other by the names she had given them.

Mrs. Pryor was well known to many who loved the original dearly. The whole family of the Yorkes were, I have been assured, almost daguerreotypes. Indeed, Miss Brontë["] told me that before publication, she had sent those parts of the novel in which these remarkable persons are introduced, to one of the sons; and his reply after reading it, was simply that 'she had not drawn them strong enough'. From those many-sided sons, I suspect, she drew all that there was of truth in the characters of the heroes of her first two works. They, indeed, were the only young men she knew intimately, besides her brother #1

(It would seem that Mrs. Gaskell, in her anxiety to minimize the Héger affair, deliberately omits that other source of material for male characters)

The miserable girlhood of Jane Eyre at Lowood School had its source from Cowan Bridge, established by the Rev. Carrus Wilson. The fever which broke out in the spring of 1825 before Maria Brontë["]'s death was described in Jane Eyre. Charlotte's impression was so painful that it made her see only the unfavorable side of Cowan Bridge; so Lowood is more horrible than the original school.

It was in Brussels that Charlotte happened to strike a goldmine of literary material. As a pupil and later, teacher, Charlotte had to work rather close to M. Héger, in his capacity of school-principal and professor, and she came to perceive that he had many qualities like her ideal heroes in Angria. She could not help falling in love with him though it must have seemed terrible to her to find herself in love with a man who already had a wife. This became yet another tragedy in Charlotte's sad life. The Professor is mainly an indirectly autobiographical account of Charlotte's experiences in Brussels. The school, the characters and feelings were all real.

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

M. Héger is recognizable in several of the heroes of Charlotte's novels — somewhat in Rochester, very much so in Paul Emmanuel and Louis Moore, and to some extent in that part of Crimsworth which is not Charlotte herself. Her frequently used themes of love between master and pupil or between an experienced middle-aged man and a young girl also have their origin in her Belgian experience. Crimsworth and Mdlle Henri; Louis Moore and Shirley; Rochester and Jane; Paul Emmanuel and Lucy all reflect in a greater or lesser degree Charlotte's affair with M. Héger.

Héger's wife was also a source of inspiration from which sprang several jealous female characters, such as Mdlle. Reuter and Madame Beck.

With Mrs. Gaskell's works, the case is somewhat different. When she wrote a book, she always had in mind a purpose, either moral or social, rather than a collection of individuals. Even in her Wives and Daughters, which is least concerned with such purposes, we can sense her concern for high principles. This is illustrated rather humourously by Molly's saying

" Tell the truth, now and ever more ! Truth is generally amusing, if it's nothing else. "1

Mrs. Gaskell's characters are usually rewarded and her bad characters are punished to enforce her teaching. Charlotte wrote more directly for the sake of writing and as an emotional release, so, in spite of her limited experience of people and places, she could make excellent stories out of them. She created novels from her heart rather than head and, since her heart was rich in passion, emotion and resolution, she could describe adventures of the soul and attach them to any kind of plot. That is why Charlotte was unkindly criticized by some of her contemporaries for producing such stories as Jane Eyre which seemed improper

1 Wives and Daughters by Mrs. Gaskell

for a Victorian young lady to write.

Mrs. Gaskell's material is more interesting than Charlotte's because of its variety. She often achieved a complete and vivid picture of what she knew or had experienced. However Charlotte was more skilful in describing the inner feelings of her characters, and we, the readers, feel, rather than see when we study her works. Charlotte went to London several times, but her knowledge of that city was very slight; so, in her descriptions, we get only a glimpse of it together with a clear picture of her feelings about it. The same is true about Brussels. In The Professor, Charlott's nostalgia for that city can be seen in Crimsworth's outburst.

" Belgium ! name unromantic and unpoetic, yet name that whenever uttered has in my ears a sound, in my heart an echo, such as no other assemblage of syllables, however sweet or classic, can produce. Belgium ! I repeat the word, now as I sit alone near midnight. It stirs my world of the past like a summon to resurrection; the graves unclose, the dead are raised; thoughts, feelings, memories that slept, are seen by me ascending from the clods — haloed most of them — but while I gaze on their vapoury forms, and strive to ascertain definitely their outline, the sound which wakened them dies and they sink, each and all, like a light wreath of mist, absorbed in the mould, recalled to urns, resealed in monuments. Farewell, luminous phantoms."¹

Scenes

Both Mrs. Gaskell and Charlotte were nature-lovers and they could write about rural scenes, which they both knew well. The quiet atmosphere of Knutsford charmed Mrs. Gaskell so that when she had to live in the suburbs of a great manufacturing

1 The Professor by Charlotte Brontë

town with her husband, she sometimes felt

" ----- a stirring instinct and longed to be off into the grassy solitudes of the country, just like a bird (which) wakens up from its content at the change of seasons and tends its way to some well-known but till then forgotten land ----- Near the little, clean, kindly country town ----- on summer mornings did we often come, a merry young party, on donkey, pony; or even in a cart with sacks swung across ----- Here we rambled, lounged and meditated : some stretched on the grass in indolent repose, half reading, half musing, with a posy of musk-roses from the old-fashioned trim garden behind the house, lulled by the ripple of the waters against the grassy lawn ----- " (" Stray Notes from Mrs. Gaskell in Good Words)¹

Consequently, Mrs. Gaskell generally preferred to describe the soft, warm, lazy southern countryside which represents Knutsford. She showed herself at ease when she described the fields in Mary Barton

" It was an early May evening — the April of the poets; for heavy showers had fallen all the morning, and the round, soft, white clouds which were blown by a west wind over the dark blue sky, were sometimes varied by one blacker and more threatening. The softness of the day tempted forth the young green leaves, which almost visibly fluttered into life; and the willows, which that morning had had only a brown reflection in the water below, were now of that tender gray-green which blends so delicately with the spring harmony of colours. "2

We also feel a similar atmosphere when we read about Cranford in the book of that name and about Hollingford in Wives and Daughters.

1 quoted from Elisabeth Gaskell by Gerald De Witt Sanders.

2 Mary Barton by Mrs. Gaskell

Charlotte loved nature as much as Mrs. Gaskell and included some wonderful descriptions of it in her books; but she generally described the grim, cold, hard, yet to her beautiful north, the scenes she was so accustomed to. Such an atmosphere attracted her because it contained something of her own character — strong, wild and passionate. Her scenery is usually full of frosts of winter, chilly snow and cutting winds. The scenery well reflects the sadness of most of her characters.

In Mrs. Gaskell's Life of Charlotte Brontë, the writer for the first time had to deal with Yorkshire scenery; because it played an important part in Charlotte's life, and it was therefore impossible to omit considerable mention of it in her biography. Mrs. Gaskell tried her best to convey its grimness, even though she did not like such a harsh climate and scenery herself. After the book was published, many distinguished literary men expressed high approval. It appeared that the northern **wind-swept** scenery had been depicted as accurately as her usual charming soft southern countryside. She was not repelled by Haworth, but she saw it for what it was, a grim, lonely Yorkshire village situated at a point where the fringe of a manufacturing district touched the moors, and she so described it. For example :

" The air is dim and lightless with the smoke from all these habitations and places of business. The soil in the valley **is rich**; but, as the road begins to ascend, the vegetation becomes poorer; it does not flourish, it merely exists; ----- and what crops there are, on the patches of arable land, consist of pale, hungry-**l**ooking, grey-green oats. Right before the traveller on this road rises Haworth village ----- with a background of dun and purple moors, rising and sweeping away yet higher than the church, which is built at the very summit of the long narrow street. All round the horizon there is this same line of sinuous

wave-like hills; the scoops into which they fall only revealing other hills beyond, of similar colour and shape, crowned with wild, bleak moors — grand, from the ideas of solitude and loneliness which they suggest or oppressive from the feeling which they give of being pent-up by some monotonous and illimitable barrier, according to the mood of mind in which the spectator may be."¹

For indoor scenes, Mrs. Gaskell is perhaps better than Charlotte because she had a more feminine eye in perceiving every particularity. She, like most Victorian ladies, had been brought up to pay attention to matters of taste (as Victorians understood that word), so she could describe her indoor scenes beautifully and accurately. Her settings are painted with minute detail, while Charlotte often used a broad brush to depict only the main objects. Mrs. Gaskell describes the Barton home before the descent of economic troubles as being simple, but possessed of warmth, comfort and every necessary piece of furniture — all signs of good times for the mill-workers. The ledge, the dresser, the drawers, the cupboard, even plates, dishes, cups, saucers, tablecloths and some more nondescript articles are included to emphasize the atmosphere of a small house which is crammed with things.

An example of exceedingly detailed description is contained in Cranford. The wealthy Mrs. Jameison's drawing-room is depicted as being cheerful in the evening sun which comes streaming through a large square window. The furniture is white and in the style of Louis Quatorze.

" Mrs. Jameison's chairs and tables had not a curve or bend about them. The chairs and table legs diminished as they neared the ground, and were straight and square in all their corners. The chairs were all in a row against the walls, with the exception of four or five, which stood in a circle round

¹ The Life of Charlotte Brontë by Mrs. Gaskell

the fire. They were railed with white bars across the back, and nothed with gold; neither the railings or the nobbs invited to ease. "1

Charlotte's best indoor scene is perhaps her description of the little home and school prepared for Lucy by Paul, which really emerged from Charlotte's dream of the place she would love to have shared with Héger :

" Opening an inner door, M. Paul disclosed a parlour, or salon -- very tiny, but I thought very pretty. Its delicate walls were tinged like a blush; its floor was waxed; a square of brilliant carpet covered its hearth; there was a little couch a little chiffonnière, the half-open, crimson silk door of which, showed porcelain on the shelves, there was a French clock, a lamp; there were ornaments of biscuit china; the recess of the single ample window was filled with a green stand, bearing three green flower-pots, each filled with a fine plant glowing in bloom; in one corner appeared a gueridon with a marble top, and upon it a work-box, and a glass filled with violets in water. The lattice of this room was open; the outer air breathing through gave freshness; the sweet violets lent fragrance."2

The above quotation is one among indoor scenes which Charlotte took pains to depict in detail. Usually she was more inclined to give us pictures of rural scenery as seen in Villette, Shirley and Jane Eyre. However, the room where little Jane is shut up in Mrs. Reed's Victorian house is also described minutely. This is called "the red room" from the colour of the carpet, and the tablecloth. It is ordinarily furnished, but Charlotte is very skilful in enabling the reader to see this room through a ten-year-old child's eyes. There is a feeling

1 Cranford by Mrs. Gaskell

2 Villette by Charlotte Brontë"

of appalling loneliness, for the room is chilly, silent, remote, solemn and evocative of the presence of her dead uncle — its former occupant.

Plots

Mrs. Gaskell's plots vary as regards the solidity of their construction. They are in some cases chiefly vehicles for conveying to the readers the need for reform or suggestions of remedies for various ills such as those of industry and society. Mary Barton, for instance, as a book with a vital purpose, contains a plot which is much better constructed than those of her novels which were less concerned with social reform. The story is full of suspense, because it is generated by an intensity of sympathy; but, at the same time, it reveals a certain lack of experience in writing. Yvonne Ffrench says:

" The plot is involved, the characters too numerous. death-beds and anti-climaxes redundant. Passages of power are remarkable throughout the crowded scenes; this is a strength in all Mrs. Gaskell's work, an instinctive ability to handle dramatic effects which are a feature of many of her novels."¹

The somewhat melodramatic and sentimental incidents, though very striking, make the plot rather unrealistic, yet her book is really a work of art in spite of all.

In Cranford and Wives and Daughters, the plots serve as pegs on which to hang descriptions of rural and country-town society. Cranford scarcely has any plot and in Wives and Daughters the plot is slight, yet the descriptions are so delightful that we are hardly conscious of this lack. The plot of Wives and Daughters, though slight, is not altogether unlike those of Jane Austen's novels, particularly of Pride and Prejudice. The construction is simple yet excellent and the

¹ Mrs. Gaskell by Yvonne Ffrench

story is touching. The book, which has recently been republished for the first time in many years, is now thought by some critics to be the best among Mrs. Gaskell's works.

Like Mrs. Gaskell's, few of Charlotte's plots are really well constructed. In Villette, for instance, the opening chapters contain lengthy and detailed information about Mrs. Bretton and her son, John, who seems destined to be the hero of the book; and also about Paulina, a pretty little girl much attached to John, who seems designed to be the heroine; in this section, Lucy plays only an unimportant part. Then, suddenly, there is a break. The story makes a jump and we discover that Lucy is now a miserable young lady of twenty-two or three. No explanation is given of the cause of her misfortunes or why her character has become so cold and bitter. Thenceforward, Lucy is the heroine and both John and Paulina are relegated to rather unimportant positions. At the time of writing, Charlotte's own life had been deeply shadowed by the death of her brother and sisters and this preoccupation with grief may have been the cause of the jerky nature of the plot. Her unhappiness spread to the character of Lucy who, of course, represents the writer herself. In Shirley, the plot is also unstable; the affairs of Caroline occupy about half the story; and then, suddenly, Shirley appears as another and in some ways more important heroine.

Jane Eyre perhaps has a **better**-constructed plot than the others. The story falls into seven **well**-defined periods: Jane's childhood at Gateshead; her school days at Lowood; her governesshood at Thornfield; an interlude at Gateshead when Mrs. Reed is dying; her return to Thornfield which leads to Rochester's proposal; her flight to Moor House where she meets the Rivers; and, finally, her seeking out of Rochester, followed by their marriage. However, there are many unbelievable incidents

involved in this otherwise well-built plot. The exaggerated episode of Rochester's lunatic wife and the coincidence by which Jane's flight unexpectedly brings her to the house of her kind relations are both incredible. Such coincidences and some heavily melodramatic incidents occur very often in all Charlotte's works.

These defects of plot, however, do not matter much, for Charlotte's writing is generally appreciated for reasons unconnected with her plots. We are fascinated by her colourful characters and their feelings, for she was chiefly concerned with their inner lives, which she recorded with deep insight. Having suffered so many disappointments and learnt that God would probably do little to soften them for her in this life, she did not force happy endings. Apart from the coincidences, her ideas do not seem contrived. In the case of Villette, Charlotte obviously wished to have a realistically unhappy ending echoing the "Charlotte-Héger" affair, but was deterred by her father and probably told by her publisher that she should let Paul marry Lucy in order to satisfy the readers. Charlotte's conscience would not allow this, hence she leaves us in doubt as to whether Paul will return to Lucy or die at sea. In general Charlotte's good characters and bad characters do not get what they deserve. So in this way Charlotte is more realistic and more honest than Mrs. Gaskell, who, with an eye on her readers, is inclined to give happy endings, to reform bad characters and to reward good ones, even at the cost of truth. For this, as we have noticed, Charlotte chided her by suggesting that Mrs. Gaskell failed to see justly, though she always felt kindly. Charlotte cared more for what seemed to her truth than for moral lessons like those given by Mrs. Gaskell and Charles Dickens. She wrote as she wished, although she was quite aware that

publishers and readers might disapprove. In her Introduction to The Professor, she tells us how she refused to change the plot, although she could not get the book accepted by a publisher.

" I find that publishers in general scarcely approved of this system, but would have liked something more imaginative and poetical ~~---~~ something more consonant with a highly wrought fancy, with a taste for pathos, with sentiments more tender, elevated, unworldly. "1

This love of truth made Charlotte try to report life as she saw it, with all its disappointments; it seemed to her nonsense to pretend that the good are always rewarded or that the bad always suffer in this life. Nor did she pretend that the world is peopled by handsome heroes and beautiful heroines. In The Professor, both Crimsworth and Henri are unhappy when the story first opens. When they marry, their life grows prosperous and happier, but not to an extent which strains the imagination. Moreover, Victor, their son, is realistically described as not at all pretty but pale and spare, being born from plain parents. Crimsworth's cruel brother, though represented as a bad character, is not punished at the end; instead he becomes rich and very successful.

The plot of Jane Eyre does not allow the characters to be perfectly happy at the end. Rochester and Jane are able to marry, but neither of them appears triumphant in a worldly sense. Rochester loses his property and his appearance has been ruined

Introduction to The Professor by Charlotte Brontë["]

by the fire; and after his marriage to Jane, they live a retired life. St. John, an altogether perfect, physically handsome, staunchly religious character, fails to get Jane, an obscure and helpless girl, as his wife.

Shirley is still more realistic ——— it is something "real, cool, and solid". Its plot is based on the realities of Yorkshire life. It contains descriptions of roads and mills, woods and fields, curates and manufacturers ——— in short of outdoor daylight life, rather than of life confined to the school-room and drawing-room where unhappy persons have to face their opposites and so on.

Villette demonstrates clearly Charlotte's realism in creating plots, incidents and different kinds of characters who are not rewarded for their virtue, or punished for evil deeds. Lucy Snowe suffers terribly from her love for John Bretton, which nevertheless comes to nothing in the end. Ginevra, a spoilt young lady is happily married in spite of being a heartless little flirt.

The fact that so many of Charlotte's novels are built around the teacher-pupil love theme or something very like it reflects the one really powerful and sustained emotional episode in her life — apart from episodes involving her family and her neighbourhood.

Just as in Charlotte's books the same themes constantly recur, in Mrs. Gaskell's there are many recurrent plot situations principally autobiographical — a young man lost at sea, the death of a baby and so on. She was also fond of supernatural stories, which appear throughout much of her work, giving it another sort of unity. This fondness for the supernatural arose from some of her own experiences. She seems to have accepted as true many country superstitions and to have been influenced

by them :

" There are many superstitions, kept up about Cheshire and Lancashire. The servant-maids wear a bag containing a druggist powder called Dragon's Blood upon their heart, which will make them beloved by the person they love. A pretty servant once told me : 'It always had the desired effect with her'. They make a curtsey to the new moon when first they see it, and turn the money in their pockets, which ought to be doubled before the moon is out ----- A shooting star is unlucky to see : I have so far a belief in this that. I always have a chill in my heart when I see one, for I have often noticed them when watching over a sick-bed and very, very anxious "1

The above was from a letter which Mrs. Gaskell wrote in August 1838, to Mary Howitt; it clearly demonstrates her acceptance of superstitions.

There are also recurring sentiments concerning the beautiful country-town of her childhood, her dislike of the horrid manufacturing town where she had gone to live, her trust in God, and an optimistic idea that all evils have a good purpose. Her plots and characters largely reflect her strong social and moral purpose.

1 quoted in Elizabeth Gaskell by Gerald De Witt Sanders.

Characters

As we have already observed, Mrs. Gaskell's range of characters is much greater than Charlotte's. On the other hand, her treatment of character is more superficial. Only in her later work, do we get very fine characterizations such as the characters of the gentle Miss Matty, Cynthia and Mrs. Gibson. Many of Charlotte's characters both male and female are, to some extent, herself, or else people she loved or had reasons to hate. So despite a certain sameness running through the main characters, they are more alive and we feel more deeply for them. Very often Charlotte's characters not only reflect her own loves, fears, hatreds, hopes, disappointments and so on, but actual episodes in her own life only slightly altered.

Mrs. Gaskell's characters represent groups of people seen impersonally. They appear much the same regardless of the persons through whose eyes they are seen. Charlotte created her characters with a more vivid imagination, and such characters as Jane, Paul and Rochester vary considerably according to which particular character is viewing them at a given moment. To many, Jane seems plain, obscure and unimportant, but Rochester sees her as strong, **self-respecting** and resolute in spite of her poverty. Charlotte also had a special sympathy for the sufferings of people whose lives, like her own, were full of undeserved disappointments. Jane, Rochester, Lucy and Paul all suffer mentally or physically and most of all they suffer like herself from love — either unrequited or else, because of fate's cruelty, unrewarded.

Rochester is once made to voice Charlotte's ^{views} about life in this

world :

" This life is hell : this is the air — those are the sounds of the bottomless pits ! I have a right to deliver myself from it if I can. The sufferings of this mortal state will leave me with the heavy flesh that now cumber, my soul. Of the fanatic's burning eternity I have no fear : there is no fear : there is not a future state worse than this present one ——— let me break away and go home to God ! "1

Charlotte's experiences and feelings towards London and the Continent are transferred to her characters. For example, Lucy's travels to Villette, Crimsworth's to Belgium, and Jane's to Whitcross all reflect Charlotte's own feelings when travelling to or from Brussels. Her excitement at getting quite an ordinary letter from a man she loved is transferred to the character of Lucy, when waiting for Dr. Bretton's letter. Her sorrow at being parted from M. Héger is reflected by Jane's when she leaves Thornfield. Her wistful love for her unknown mother is depicted when Crimsworth sees his mother's portrait. Her grief at the deaths of Branwell, Emily and Anne, her rather special relationship with her father, the agony of being ardently in love and only liked in return are all reflected in her novels. With regard to this connection between reality and the writer's characters, it is interesting to note that Mrs. Gaskell's greatest character is Mrs. Gibson — a portrait of her hated step-mother which is well worth comparison with Charlotte's two or three portraits of the treacherous, but clever and charming Mademe Héger. Charlotte depicts the latter as Reuter, Madame Beck, Miss Scatcherd, and (to some extent) Hortense. However, all of these "portraits" of that lady are somewhat altered for

1 Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë"

better or for worse.

While Mrs. Gaskell's characters have less depth, they do, on the other hand, exhibit their creator's skill in observation. The old ladies at Cranford, the country doctor, the impoverished squire, the aristocratic household at the Cumnors', the respectable but not so-high-born ladies such as the Misses Brown, the handsome, rascally bailiff, etc. are all superbly drawn, though we seldom penetrate as closely to their hearts as we do to those of Charlotte's characters. To generalize, Mrs. Gaskell paints her varied minor characters with greater skill whereas Charlotte concentrates/^{her skill} chiefly on her few major characters, particularly Jane Eyre, Shirley Keeldar and Lucy Snowe, though a few of her minor ones are well-drawn too. For instance, the Curates in Shirley are realistic and so is the house-keeper of Thornfield in Jane Eyre, and also Mr. and Mrs. Yorke also in Shirley.