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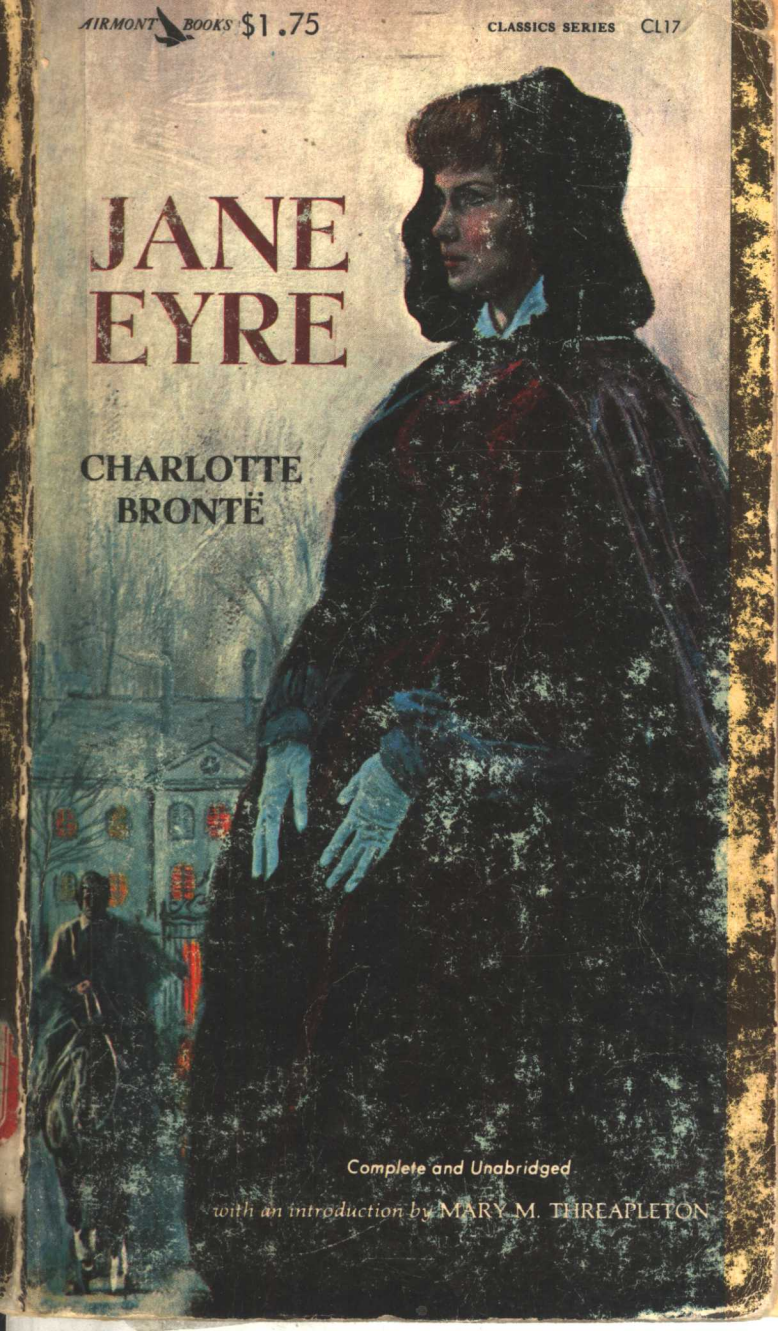
CLASSICS SERIES CL17

JANE EYRE

CHARLOTTE
BRONTË

Complete and Unabridged

with an introduction by MARY M. THREAPLETON



Jane Eyre



CHARLOTTE BRONTË

Introduction

English fiction of the nineteenth century had settled into three trends: the comedy of manners, the tale of grief and sentiment, and the tale of romance, whether historical or "Gothic." *Jane Eyre* belongs to none of these: this novel was an innovation. Never before had English readers met a heroine like Jane—small, plain, and even bold and unladylike. Never before had they read such a searching portrayal of passion. Nor had they entered so completely into the character of the narrator, seeing everyone and everything through her eyes and her emotions. The first person narrative, or autobiographical technique, had certainly been used before, but not so subjectively, so personally. Indeed, Charlotte Brontë was the first subjective novelist, the literary ancestress of Proust and James Joyce.

Despite the continuing popularity of *Jane Eyre*, it would be absurd to insist that the book is a perfect work of art. It has glaring faults in craftsmanship, which the critics have not been slow to point out. It lacks unity, other than that which resides in Jane herself. It lacks proportion and perspective: all the emo-

tions are major. There are melodramatic improbabilities in the plot. For example, it is highly unlikely that the presence of a lunatic wife could have been kept secret, and yet this point is absolutely essential to the novel. The most disturbing improbability, however, comes when Jane has left Thornfield and is wandering half-starved over the moors, only to collapse by sheer chance on the doorstep of relatives whose existence she had not even suspected. There are absurdities and improbabilities in the style and dialogue as well. The language shifts from homely colloquialism to stilted rhetoric. Yet there are vivid phrases and apt descriptions, and Jane's angry speeches vibrate with life and energy. As David Cecil points out, "There is hardly a page where we do not meet, sandwiched between commonplace and absurdity, some evocative image, some haunting, throbbing cadence."

There are other faults, some of which follow from Jane's—and Charlotte Brontë's—lack of a sense of humor. The attempts at satirical comedy in the portrayal of Blanche Ingram and her mother fall heavily flat. Charlotte Brontë did not know this range of character at firsthand, as Jane Austen did. The only real humor in the book is unintentional humor. Parts of Mr. Rochester's proposal would have sent a Jane Austen heroine into giggles. Jane Eyre, contemplating the melancholy picture of ravens picking at her bones, pauses to consider whether or not ravens frequent this part of the country. And yet these excursions into the ridiculous are not really disturbing, because by this time the reader has entered completely into Jane's mind.

With all these faults, how is it that *Jane Eyre* retains a place among the best-loved classics of English literature? The answer is simple: the book is a work of genius. It is pervaded with the author's passionate intensity of imagination. As we read, we *are* Jane Eyre, and that little governess is not a dull person to be. Jane is a very real character, with a fierce longing for life and love. She feels that she cannot live without affection; she cannot go through a day without an acute physical and emotional response to everything around her. From the moment we meet her, lonely and rebellious, tucked up on the window sill at Gateshead, she absorbs us. She is limited, she is narrow, as is her creator, but that very narrowness gives her power.

Because we see the other characters only through Jane's eyes, they lack objective reality. Rochester is vivid enough, but not quite convincing. As Walter Allen remarks, "Rochester is not so much a man as a most powerful symbol of virility." His relationship with Jane is a facet of the master-pupil relationship that Charlotte Brontë often uses in her love stories, in a stronger and more vital version of the Cinderella theme. The master stoops to the pupil, and is mastered. But this is not just romantic wish-fulfilment and escapism. Unlike Cinderella, Jane does not receive a "perfect" husband; he is maimed and half-blind. Nor is Rochester a conventional hero at any time. His faults are emphasized; we know that he has been immoral, that he is surly, proud, even ugly. The conventionally handsome Greek god of a man appears as the cold and unloving St. John Rivers. A French writer has said that one of the aims of the novelist is "to discover those hidden virtues, those areas of grace in the souls of sinners, and to lay bare the arid places, the unloving areas, in the souls of the righteous." Certainly Charlotte Brontë has done this in her portrayals of Rochester and Rivers. Many of the other characters are stock figures, but they are not just cardboard, for Jane's reactions to them are so vivid and real that they receive a vitality from her consciousness of them.

The treatment of nature in *Jane Eyre* is worthy of consideration. The descriptions of weather and scenery are not for mere decoration, although some of the descriptive writing is strong or lovely in itself. Jane is acutely aware of her natural surroundings, and responds to their moods. Often nature provides a harmonising background for the events of the story, as when the wind howls as Jane suffers in the Red Room, and when the nightingale sings as Jane and Rochester declare their love. Sometimes the background forms an ironic contrast to the human situation, as the heartbroken heroine observes as she roams the moors on a lovely summer day. Sometimes it takes on symbolic significance. The chestnut tree by which the lovers have stood is blasted by lightning, in a prophecy of the doom which will divide Rochester and Jane. Always we are aware of Jane's surroundings, indoors and out, for we share in her vivid consciousness of them.

Charlotte Brontë's strengths and weaknesses as a novelist

come from the limitations and narrowness of her background. Narrow as that background was, it was productive of enough passion and tragedy to make the life of the Brontë sisters more romantic than most novels. *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* are the most strongly autobiographical of Charlotte's novels; they are also her best, not necessarily in structure or in probability, but in fire and life. *Jane Eyre* does not achieve the heights of Emily's one novel, *Wuthering Heights*, which Cecil describes as "the one perfect work of art amid all the vast and varied canvases of Victorian fiction." *Wuthering Heights* may be the more admired, but perhaps *Jane Eyre* is the better loved.

CHARLOTTE BRONTË

The Brontë family moved to the remote parish of Haworth in Yorkshire in 1820. The six children, soon motherless, were a close-knit group, haphazardly educated by their father and aunt, until the four older girls were sent to Cowan Bridge School for the daughters of clergymen. The unhealthy situation of the school, the appalling food, and the harsh discipline are portrayed unmercifully by Charlotte in *Jane Eyre*. The bitterness of the portrait comes from the fact that life at the school brought on the death of her eldest sister, Maria, who appears in the novel as Helen Burns. After the death of the next sister, Elizabeth, Charlotte and Emily were called home, where Maria's rôle as mother to the younger ones fell on Charlotte. With Emily and Anne as junior partners, Charlotte and her brother Branwell initiated elaborate and imaginative games, and wrote little books in minute handwriting depicting their imaginary kingdom of Angria. These Angrian daydreams continued for years, even while Charlotte was absent from Haworth at Miss Wooler's school, first as a pupil and later as a teacher. Although work with children was distasteful to her, she was earnestly preparing herself, as was Anne, for life as a governess, since this was almost the only occupation open to her. She and Anne both found situations, while Emily kept house at Haworth and Branwell flitted from one possible career to another, but Anne's health and Charlotte's nerves suffered. With the idea of opening a small school of their own at home, Charlotte and Emily went to Brus-

sels to study at the Pensionnat Héger. The school plan came to nothing, but Charlotte's feelings for M. Héger colored the next years of her life, and are reflected in her novels.

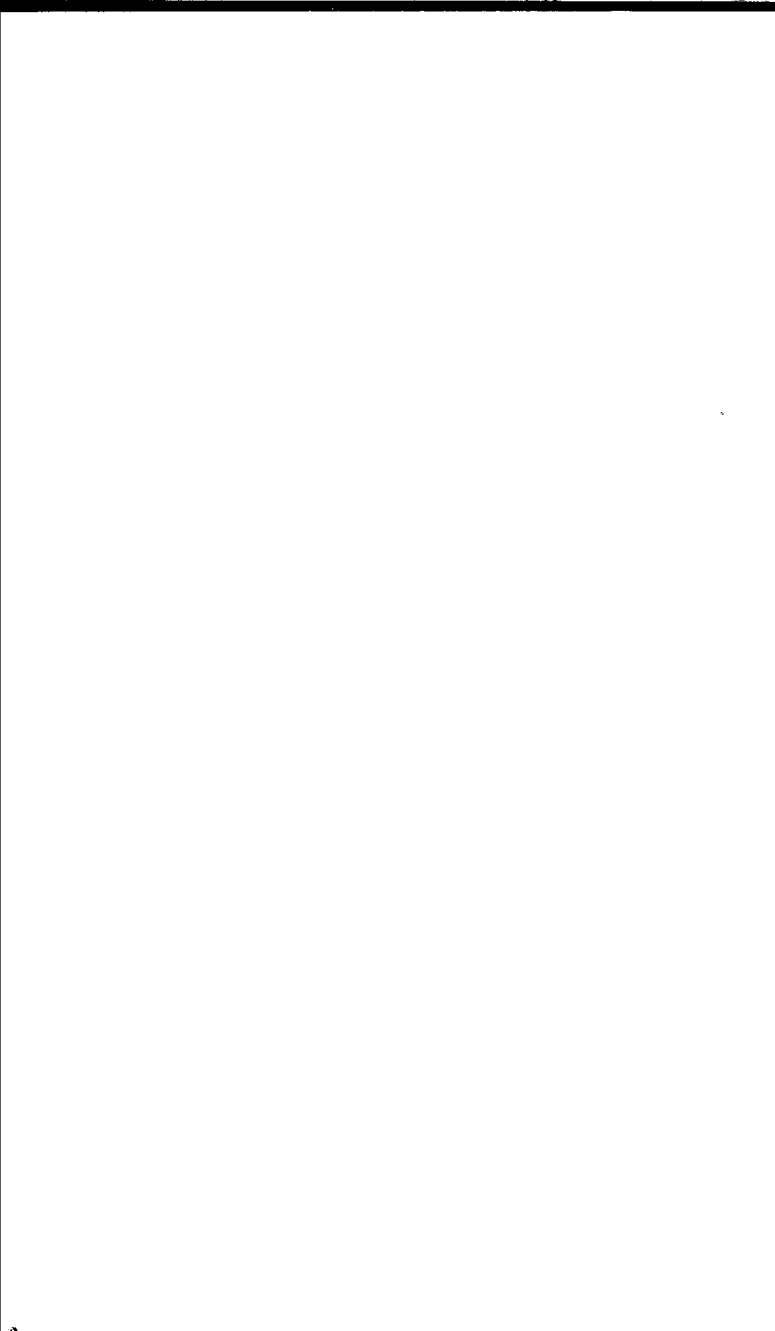
The three sisters published a book of verse at their own expense in 1846, and Charlotte particularly was bitterly disappointed at its failure. Their next venture was in fiction. Still using their pseudonyms—Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell—they each sent a novel to make the rounds of publishing houses. The firm of Smith and Elder sent Charlotte an encouraging comment on *The Professor*, and published her next novel, *Jane Eyre*, which had an outstanding and immediate success. Thackeray called it "the first English novel I've been able to read for many a day." Emily's *Wuthering Heights* and Anne's *Agnes Grey* were published in its wake, but Emily's genius went unappreciated at this time.

The next year brought Charlotte great grief. Her brother Branwell, whose youth had shown brilliant promise, had been drinking heavily for years, and this condition hastened his death from tuberculosis. The same disease took stoical Emily and gentle Anne within a few months of Branwell's funeral.

Charlotte now moved back and forth between her father at Haworth and literary society in London. Shy, near-sighted, and dowdily dressed, she made an odd figure in the city. In 1849, her third novel, *Shirley*, which she laid aside to nurse her sisters, was well received, although it lacked the imaginative fire of *Jane Eyre*. For *Villette*, published in 1853, she drew on her experiences in Brussels, and there is much of Charlotte herself in its heroine, Lucy Snowe.

In 1854, Charlotte entered on a happy but pitifully brief married life with Arthur Nicholls, her father's curate. She died in 1855, weakened by a lingering cold and the illness of her pregnancy, and victim at last to the disease that had killed her sisters.

MARY M. THREAPLETON





Jane Eyre

CHARLOTTE BRONTË



AIRMONT BOOKS
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specially selected for the Airmont Library
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THE SPECIAL CONTENTS OF THIS EDITION

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PREFACE

A PREFACE to the first edition of *Jane Eyre* being unnecessary, I gave none: this second edition demands a few words both of acknowledgment and miscellaneous remark.

My thanks are due in three quarters.

To the Public, for the indulgent ear it has inclined to a plain tale with few pretensions.

To the Press, for the fair field its honest suffrage has opened to an obscure aspirant.

To my Publishers, for the aid their tact, their energy, their practical sense, and frank liberality have afforded an unknown and unrecommended Author.

The Press and the Public are but vague personifications for me, and I must thank them in vague terms; but my Publishers are definite: so are certain generous critics who have encouraged me as only large-hearted and high-minded men know how to encourage a struggling stranger; to them, *i.e.*, to my Publishers and the select Reviewers, I say cordially, Gentlemen, I thank you from my heart.

Having thus acknowledged what I owe those who have aided and approved me, I turn to another class; a small one, so far as I know, but not, therefore, to be overlooked. I mean the timorous or carping few who doubt the tendency of such books as *Jane Eyre*: in whose eyes whatever is unusual is wrong; whose ears detect in each protest against bigotry—that parent of crime—an insult to piety, that regent of God on earth. I would suggest to such doubters certain obvious distinctions; I would remind them of certain simple truths.

Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion. To attack the first is not to assail the last. To pluck the mask from the face of the Pharisee, is not to lift an impious hand to the Crown of Thorns.

These things and deeds are diametrically opposed; they are as distinct as is vice from virtue. Men too often confound them; they should not be confounded: appearance should not be mistaken for truth; narrow human doctrines, that only tend to elate and magnify a few, should not be substituted for the world-redeeming creed of Christ. There is—I repeat it—a difference; and it is a good, and not a bad action to mark broadly and clearly the line of separation between them.

The world may not like to see these ideas dissevered, for it has been accustomed to blend them; finding it convenient to

make external show pass for sterling worth—to let white-washed walls vouch for clean shrines. It may hate him who dares to scrutinise and expose—to raze the gilding, and show base metal under it—to penetrate the sepulchre, and reveal charnel relics: but, hate as it will, it is indebted to him.

Ahab did not like Micaiah, because he never prophesied good concerning him, but evil: probably he liked the sycophant son of Chenaanah better; yet might Ahab have escaped a bloody death, had he but stopped his ears to flattery, and opened them to faithful counsel.

There is a man in our own days whose words are not framed to tickle delicate ears: who, to my thinking, comes before the great ones of society, much as the son of Imlah came before the throned Kings of Judah and Israel; and who speaks truth as deep, with a power as prophet-like and as vital—a mien as dauntless and as daring. Is the satirist of *Vanity Fair* admired in high places? I cannot tell; but I think if some of those amongst whom he hurls the Greek fire of his sarcasm, and over whom he flashes the levin-brand of his denunciation, were to take his warnings in time—they or their seed might yet escape a fatal Ramoth-Gilead.

Why have I alluded to this man? I have alluded to him, Reader, because I think I see in him an intellect profounder and more unique than his contemporaries have yet recognised; because I regard him as the first social regenerator of the day—as the very master of that working corps who would restore to rectitude the warped system of things; because I think no commentator on his writings has yet found the comparison that suits him, the terms which rightly characterise his talent. They say he is like Fielding: they talk of his wit, humour, comic powers. He resembles Fielding as an eagle does a vulture: Fielding could stoop on carrion, but Thackeray never does. His wit is bright, his humour attractive, but both bear the same relation to his serious genius, that the mere lambent sheet-lightning playing under the edge of the summer-cloud, does to the electric death-spark hid in its womb. Finally, I have alluded to Mr. Thackeray, because to him—if he will accept the tribute of a total stranger—I have dedicated this second edition of *Jane Eyre*.

Currer Bell.
Dec. 21st, 1847.

NOTE TO THE
THIRD EDITION

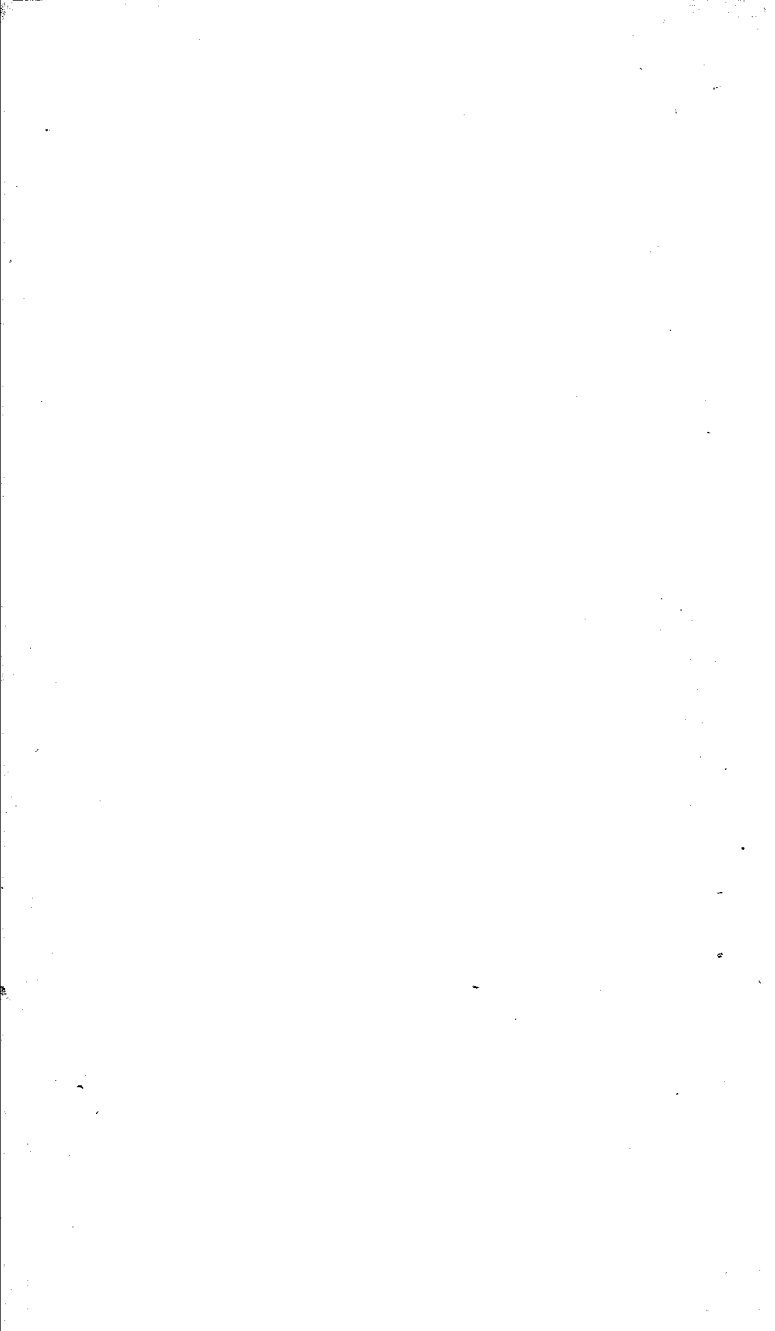
I avail myself of the opportunity which a third edition of *Jane Eyre* affords me, of again addressing a word to the Pub-

lic, to explain that my claim to the title of novelist rests on this one work alone. If, therefore, the authorship of other works of fiction has been attributed to me, an honour is awarded where it is not merited; and consequently, denied where it is justly due.

This explanation will serve to rectify mistakes which may already have been made, and to prevent future errors.

Currer Bell.

April 13th, 1848.



ONE

THERE was no possibility of taking a walk that day. We had been wandering, indeed, in the leafless shrubbery an hour in the morning; but since dinner (Mrs. Reed, when there was no company, dined early) the cold winter wind had brought with it clouds so sombre, and a rain so penetrating, that further outdoor exercise was now out of the question.

I was glad of it: I never liked long walks, especially on chilly afternoons: dreadful to me was the coming home in the raw twilight, with nipped fingers and toes, and a heart saddened by the chidings of Bessie, the nurse, and humbled by the consciousness of my physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed.

The said Eliza, John, and Georgiana were now clustered round their mama in the drawing-room: she lay reclined on a sofa by the fireside, and with her darlings about her (for the time neither quarrelling nor crying) looked perfectly happy. Me, she had dispensed from joining the group; saying, "She regretted to be under the necessity of keeping me at a distance; but that until she heard from Bessie, and could discover by her own observation that I was endeavouring in good earnest to acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition, a more attractive and sprightly manner,—something lighter, franker, more natural as it were—she really must exclude me from privileges intended only for contented, happy, little children."

"What does Bessie say I have done?" I asked.

"Jane, I don't like cavillers or questioners: besides, there is something truly forbidding in a child taking up her elders in that manner. Be seated somewhere; and until you can speak pleasantly, remain silent."

A small breakfast-room adjoined the drawing-room. I slipped in there. It contained a book-case: I soon possessed myself of a volume, taking care that it should be one stored with pictures. I mounted into the window-seat: gathering up my feet, I sat cross-legged, like a Turk; and, having drawn the red moreen curtain nearly close, I was shrined in double retirement.

Folds of scarlet drapery shut in my view to the right hand; to the left were the clear panes of glass, protecting, but not separating me from the drear November day. At intervals, while turning over the leaves of my book, I studied the aspect of that winter afternoon. Afar, it offered a pale blank of mist and

cloud; near, a scene of wet lawn and storm-beat shrub, with ceaseless rain sweeping away wildly before a long and lamentable blast.

I returned to my book—Bewick's History of British Birds: the letter-press thereof I cared little for, generally speaking; and yet there were certain introductory pages that, child as I was, I could not pass quite as a blank. They were those which treat of the haunts of sea-fowl; of "the solitary rocks and promontories" by them only inhabited; of the coast of Norway, studded with isles from its southern extremity, the Lindenes, or Naze, to the North Cape—

"Where the Northern Ocean, in vast whirls,
Boils round the naked, melancholy isles
Of farthest Thule; and the Atlantic surge
Pours in among the stormy Hebrides."

Nor could I pass unnoticed the suggestion of the bleak shores of Lapland, Siberia, Spitzbergen, Nova Zembla, Iceland, Greenland, with "the vast sweep of the Arctic Zone, and those forlorn regions of dreary space,—that reservoir of frost and snow, where firm fields of ice, the accumulation of centuries of winters, glazed in Alpine heights above heights, surround the pole, and concentrate the multiplied rigors of extreme cold." Of these death-white realms I formed an idea of my own: shadowy, like all the half-comprehended notions that float dim through children's brains, but strangely impressive. The words in these introductory pages connected themselves with the succeeding vignettes, and gave significance to the rock standing up alone in a sea of billow and spray; to the broken boat stranded on a desolate coast; to the cold and ghastly moon glancing through bars of cloud at a wreck just sinking.

I cannot tell what sentiment haunted the quiet solitary churchyard, with its inscribed headstone; its gate, its two trees, its low horizon, girdled by a broken wall, and its nearly-risen crescent, attesting the hour of eventide.

The two ships becalmed on a torpid sea, I believed to be marine phantoms.

The fiend pinning down the thief's pack behind him, I passed over quickly: it was an object of terror.

So was the black, horned thing seated aloof on a rock, surveying a distant crowd surrounding a gallows.

Each picture told a story; mysterious often to my undeveloped understanding and imperfect feelings, yet ever profoundly interesting: as interesting as the tales Bessie sometimes narrated on winter evenings, when she chanced to be in good humour; and when, having brought her ironing-table to the nursery-hearth, she allowed us to sit about it, and while she

got up Mrs. Reed's lace frills, and crimped her night-cap borders, fed our eager attention with passages of love and adventure taken from old fairy tales and older ballads; or (as at a later period I discovered) from the pages of Pamela, and Henry, Earl of Moreland.

With Bewick on my knee, I was then happy: happy at least in my way. I feared nothing but interruption, and that came too soon. The breakfast-room door opened.

"Boh! Madame Mope!" cried the voice of John Reed; then he paused: he found the room apparently empty.

"Where the dickens is she?" he continued. "Lizzy! Georgy! (calling to his sisters) Jane is not here: tell mama she is run out into the rain—bad animal!"

"It is well I drew the curtain," thought I; and I wished fervently he might not discover my hiding-place: nor would John Reed have found it out himself; he was not quick either of vision or conception; but Eliza just put her head in at the door, and said at once:—

"She is in the window-seat, to be sure, Jack."

And I came out immediately, for I trembled at the idea of being dragged forth by the said Jack.

"What do you want?" I asked, with awkward diffidence.

"Say, 'What do you want, Master Reed?'" was the answer. "I want you to come here;" and seating himself in an armchair, he intimated by a gesture that I was to approach and stand before him.

John Reed was a schoolboy of fourteen years old; four years older than I, for I was but ten; large and stout for his age, with a dingy and unwholesome skin; thick lineaments in a spacious visage, heavy limbs and large extremities. He gorged himself habitually at table, which made him bilious, and gave him a dim and bleared eye and flabby cheeks. He ought now to have been at school; but his mama had taken him home for a month or two, "on account of his delicate health." Mr. Miles, the master, affirmed that he would do very well if he had fewer cakes and sweetmeats sent him from home; but the mother's heart turned from an opinion so harsh, and inclined rather to the more refined idea that John's sallowness was owing to over-application and, perhaps, to pining after home.

John had not much affection for his mother and sisters, and an antipathy to me. He bullied and punished me; not two or three times in the week, nor once or twice in the day, but continually: every nerve I had feared him, and every morsel of flesh on my bones shrank when he came near. There were moments when I was bewildered by the terror he inspired, because I had no appeal whatever against either his menaces or his inflictions; the servants did not like to offend their young mas-

ter by taking my part against him, and Mrs. Reed was blind and deaf on the subject: she never saw him strike or heard him abuse me, though he did both now and then in her very presence; more frequently, however, behind her back.

Habitually obedient to John, I came up to his chair: he spent some three minutes in thrusting out his tongue at me as far as he could without damaging the roots: I knew he would soon strike, and while dreading the blow, I mused on the disgusting and ugly appearance of him who would presently deal it. I wonder if he read that notion in my face; for, all at once, without speaking, he struck suddenly and strongly. I tottered, and on regaining my equilibrium retired back a step or two from his chair.

"That is for your impudence in answering mama awhile since," said he, "and for your sneaking way of getting behind curtains, and for the look you had in your eyes two minutes since, you rat!"

Accustomed to John Reed's abuse, I never had an idea of replying to it; my care was how to endure the blow which would certainly follow the insult.

"What were you doing behind the curtain?" he asked.

"I was reading."

"Show the book."

I returned to the window and fetched it thence.

"You have no business to take our books; you are a dependent, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama's expense. Now, I'll teach you to rummage my book-shelves: for they *are* mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years. Go and stand by the door, out of the way of the mirror and the windows."

I did so, not at first aware what was his intention; but when I saw him lift and poise the book and stand in act to hurl it, I instinctively started aside with a cry of alarm: not soon enough, however; the volume was flung, it hit me, and I fell, striking my head against the door and cutting it. The cut bled, the pain was sharp; my terror had passed its climax; other feelings succeeded.

"Wicked and cruel boy!" I said. "You are like a murderer—you are like a slave-driver—you are like the Roman emperors!"

I had read Goldsmith's History of Rome, and had formed my opinion of Nero, Caligula, etc. Also I had drawn parallels in silence, which I never thought thus to have declared aloud.

"What! what!" he cried. "Did you say that to me? Did you hear her, Eliza and Georgiana? Won't I tell mama? but first"—