

\*\*\*\*\*

ANNE BRONTË (1820-49)

THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL (1948)

\*\*\*\*\*

TO J. HALFORD, ESQ.

Dear Halford,

When we were together last, you gave me a very particular and interesting account of the most remarkable occurrences of your early life, previous to our acquaintance; and then you requested a return of confidence from me. Not being in a story-telling humour at the time, I declined, under the plea of having nothing to tell, and the like shuffling excuses, which were regarded as wholly inadmissible by you; for though you instantly turned the conversation, it was with the air of an uncomplaining, but deeply injured man, and your face was overshadowed with a cloud which darkened it to the end of our interview, and, for what I know, darkens it still; for your letters have, ever since, been distinguished by a certain dignified, semi-melancholy stiffness and reserve, that would have been very affecting, if my conscience had accused me of deserving it.

Are you not ashamed, old boy - at your age, and when we have known each other so intimately and so long, and when I have already given you so many proofs of frankness and confidence, and never resented your comparative closeness and taciturnity? - But there it is, I suppose; you are not naturally communicative, and you thought you had done great things, and given an unparalleled proof of friendly confidence on that memorable occasion- which, doubtless, you have sworn shall be the last of the kind, - and you deemed that the smallest return I could make for so mighty a favour, would be to follow your example without a moment's hesitation. -

Well! - I did not take up my pen to reproach you, nor to defend myself; nor to apologize for past offences, but, if possible, to atone for them.

It is a soaking, rainy day, the family are absent on a visit, I am alone in my library, and

have been looking over certain musty old letters and papers, and musing on past times; so that I am now in a very proper frame of mind for amusing you with an old world story; - and, having withdrawn my well-roasted feet from the hobs, wheeled round to the table, and indited the above lines to my crusty old friend, I am about to give him a sketch - no not a sketch, - a full and faithful account of certain circumstances connected with the most important event of my life - previous to my acquaintance with Jack Halford at least; - and when you have read it, charge me with ingratitude and unfriendly reserve if you can.

I know you like a long story, and are as great a stickler for particularities and circumstantial details as my grandmother, so I will not spare you: my own patience and leisure shall be my only limits.

Among the letters and papers I spoke of, there is a certain faded old journal of mine, which I mention by way of assurance that I have not my memory alone - tenacious as it is - to depend upon; in order that your credulity may not be too severely taxed in following me through the minute details of my narrative. - To begin then, at once, with Chapter first, - for it shall be a tale of many chapters. -

\*\*\*\*\*