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COWAN BRIDGE.

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A green, well-wooded valley, sheltered by wild and lonely fells, and lovely even among the beautiful valleys of the North: a bustling, chattering beck, rushing headlong over a broad and stony bed to its meeting with the swiftly-flowing river: pleasant mansions in richly-timbered parks, and well-favoured farmhouses set amidst wide, rolling pastures: a white ribbon of high road carried over the beck on an old stone bridge, with a cluster of sturdy grey cottages on either hand, some pressing forward to the roadway and divided from it only by a little causeway of cobblestones, others standing in sedate retirement behind narrow flower-gardens and clipped holly trees—such is Cowan Bridge, the first home of the School for Clergymen's Daughters, and the scene of a tragedy of childhood that found expression in the pitiful chapters of the first volume of "Jane Eyre."

To the casual traveller hurrying through by motor on his way to or from the Lake District, Cowan Bridge can show little or nothing of interest. No stately church or ruined abbey recalls the pageantry of mediaeval Christendom; no frowning castle keeps alive the tales of daring and chivalry; no famous battlefield is there, no great house where the fortunes of the state have been tossed to and fro in the game of intrigue that men call politics: not even a village maypole to tell of the gaieties of country life in days when the world went more merrily than now.

But, though no history has been made at Cowan Bridge, the life of the hamlet has not been entirely without event. Eighteen centuries ago the Romans

were there, building the fort of Overborough where the Leck Beck meets the Lune. To this fort came the Roman road, still easily to be traced, which, leaving the great north-western highway at Ribchester, swept round the Forest of Bowland and up Lunesdale to Sedbergh, Kirkby Thore and Carlisle. Camden and Leland identified Overborough with Brematonacæ, now known to be Ribchester; others have argued that it is the Roman Galacum. Nothing, however, can be asserted very definitely, and the site has not yet been fully excavated.

In the days of the Plantagenets Cowan Bridge passed into the hands of the Tunstalls of Tunstall, who built for themselves a moated house at Thurland, two miles away, which Sir Thomas Tunstall obtained licence to crenellate in 1402. This Sir Thomas was one of the heroes of Agincourt, and on his death in 1416 was buried in the Perpendicular church of Tunstall, which he had restored and rebuilt. It was to this church, where Sir Thomas lies in effigy, that, four centuries later, the little Brontës came with the other children from the school at Cowan Bridge, all dressed in purple stuff dresses, purple cloth pelisses and straw cottage bonnets, to listen, cold, tired and hungry, to the depressing, interminable sermons of the Rev. William Carus Wilson. One of Sir Thomas's descendants, Sir Brian Tunstall, the "Stainless Knight" of "Marmion," fell at Flodden; another, Cuthbert Tunstall, was the last Romanist Bishop of Durham, the friend of Erasmus and Sir Thomas More, and almost the only prelate of the Old Faith who refused to join in the Marian persecution.

In 1605, Thurland was sold to John Girlington, and became a centre of the Roman Catholics in North Lancashire. It was fortified for the King in the Civil War by Sir John Girlington, the grandson of the purchaser, and was besieged by Col. Assheton in June, 1643. It surrendered, but Sir John was allowed to

remain in possession on favourable terms, which he almost at once broke. In October of the same year, therefore, Col. Rigby attacked it and took it after a "strait siege" of seven weeks. That it might no more trouble the Parliament, the castle was "slighted," and remained a partial ruin until the beginning of the nineteenth century, when its restoration was taken in hand by the Norths of Newton, to whom it then belonged.

There are two objects in Cowan Bridge which even the most casual visitor cannot but notice—the fine old bridge which gives the place its distinguishing name, and the long, bow-windowed cottage just beyond, with its pleasant garden running down to the beck. The date of the bridge is not known, but it was in existence in 1200, and was referred to in the Cockersand Abbey Chartulary of that year. It was one of the earliest bridges in England to be maintained by tolls; these were, in 1511 and for some centuries before, collected by the Corporation of Lancaster, but in 1562 they were held by William Redmayne, of Ireby, by grant from Francis Tunstall, of Aldcliffe.

The house beyond the bridge, built when the eighteenth century was young, is, to the Brontë student, almost as sacred a place as the wind-swept Parsonage at Haworth. For it was here that William Carus Wilson, full of pity for the hard lot of so many of his fellow clergy, and eager to help them in some practical way to bear their crushing burden of poverty, set up the School for Clergymen's Daughters which was to acquire such unenviable fame as the Lowood of "Jane Eyre." Patrick Brontë, with a large family of girls, a small living, and little or no private means, was one of that large class whom Carus Wilson wished to help; but it was probably through the good offices of his neighbour Theodore Dury, Rector of Keighley, and one of the first Trustees of the School, that his two eldest children, Maria and Elizabeth, were among the first twenty pupils at Cowan Bridge.

The first Register of the School is interesting reading. Maria and Elizabeth are entered under the date of July 21st, 1824 (not July 1st, as is stated in the note at the foot of page 63 of the Haworth Edition of "The Life"), their register numbers being 17 and 18 respectively. Under the head of "Acquirements on entering," we learn that Maria, aged 10½, "reads tolerably, writes pretty well, ciphers a little, works very badly, knows a little Grammar, Geography and History, and has made some progress in reading French, but knows nothing of the language grammatically." Poor Elizabeth "reads a little, writes pretty well, ciphers none and works very badly, and knows nothing else." On August 10th, 1824, Mr. Brontë brought Charlotte to school, and on November 26th Emily came to join her sisters. Charlotte's number in the register is 30; Emily's, 44. Of the former, Miss Evans, the Superintendent of the School, wrote:—"altogether clever of her age, but knows nothing systematically." Of Emily, then six and a quarter, the register records that she "works a little, and reads very prettily."

In the school account books are various entries relating to the Brontës. Thus we find that for each child Mr. Brontë paid, on entrance, £7 for a half-year's board and education, and £4 for clothes and books. Later entries include £3 for Drawing and French for Maria, £1 14s. 8d. for extra clothes for Maria and Elizabeth, 18s. 7½d. for "clothes for Miss Charlotte," and 13s. 0d. for Emily.

At the end of the printed Report of the first year's working of the school, dated August, 1824, there is a list of the pupils then being educated, including Maria, Elizabeth and Charlotte Brontë. Emily's name, of course, does not appear; and by the time the next Report was published the two elder girls had died, and Charlotte and Emily had left the school.

The present aspect of the house at Cowan Bridge,

with its long grey front, quaint bow - windows, and pleasant garden running down to the beck, is little different from its appearance when it first left the builders' hands, and, later, when it was visited by Mrs. Gaskell after Charlotte Brontë's death. But its appearance from 1823, when it became a school, until 1833, when the school was moved to its present beautiful home at Casterton, was very different. As originally built, it was too small even for the infant days of the Clergy Daughters' School, and Carus Wilson at once set about altering, modernising and enlarging it, his greatest change being the building of a large wing at right angles to the old house. This wing was, after 1833, used as a bobbin factory, but had been destroyed by fire before Mrs. Gaskell visited the place, so that much of her description of the building was merely hearsay. Recently, however, I have come across an engraving of the school made in 1824, just after the alterations had been completed. As copies of this engraving are very rare, it occurred to me that Brontë students might be interested in a reproduction of it, so that they might see for themselves what Cowan Bridge School was like when Charlotte Brontë was a pupil there.

But the engraving, and the reproduction of it which is attached to this issue of the Society's "Transactions," has a greater interest. Turn to pages 51 and 52 of the Haworth Edition of "Jane Eyre," and read the description of Lowood School. "The garden was a wide enclosure, surrounded with walls so high as to exclude every glimpse of prospect; a covered verandah ran down one side, and broad walks bordered a middle space divided into scores of little beds; these beds were assigned as gardens for the pupils to cultivate, and each bed had an owner. I looked round the convent-like garden, and then up at the house; a large building, half of which seemed grey and old, the other half quite new. The new part, containing the

"schoolroom and dormitory, was lit by mullioned and latticed windows, which gave it a church-like aspect; a stone tablet over the door bore this inscription ."

Compare the description of Lowood with the picture of the Cowan Bridge School in 1824, and the two will be found to agree in every detail. The high-walled garden, with its covered verandah, broad paths and little flower beds; the house, half old, half new; the high mullioned and latticed windows of the description in the novel are all clearly seen in the engraving. The door referred to is that in the corner, where the old and the new work join, but the picture does not show, and I have been so far unable to ascertain whether there was actually a memorial tablet let into the stone above.

Even before Mrs. Gaskell proved that Lowood and Cowan Bridge were one and the same, it was considered quite clear that the first volume of "Jane Eyre" was autobiographical; and there were people, quite unconnected with the Brontës, who easily identified Lowood with its original. For one feels, in reading those first chapters of "Jane Eyre," the personal note very strongly; and one knows instinctively that the incidents related must have happened so, and must have formed part of Charlotte Brontë's own experience. Yet in spite of — perhaps because of — its transparent honesty and passionate truth, the description of Lowood roused a controversy that was long and very bitter. It may be that Charlotte, brooding over the sufferings of her sisters at Cowan Bridge, formed judgments that were unduly harsh; perhaps, in her eagerness to waken in grown-up people a sense of what hardships sensitive girls may have to undergo at school, she allowed her reason to be overruled by her feelings. But her account of her school-life as given in "Jane Eyre" remains, in all essentials, intact; and, if the old engraving of the school proves how accurate was her remembrance of every detail of a building which she had not seen for over twenty years, and had even then

known only for ten months as a child of eight, may it not also be evidence that her memory of the life within that building during those few months was equally true?

The Clergy Daughters' School has had many trials, not the least of which has been the necessity of living down the unpopularity into which it came as a result of the publication of "Jane Eyre," and, later, of Mrs. Gaskell's "Life of Charlotte Brontë." Its founders, with the best intentions in the world, made mistakes, the consequences of which were far-reaching; wisdom only was attained by the hard road of bitter experience. But success came at last. For nearly a century the school has carried on, quietly and unobtrusively, a noble work, by helping, in a peculiarly useful way, a class which cannot, because of its education and its social position, ask for charity; but which, while unduly burdened with the world's cares, is pitifully lacking in the world's riches. The Institution has had to meet many difficulties, and to overcome many obstacles, and is even now faced with very grave financial problems. Charlotte Brontë had no pleasant memories of the School, and had many harsh things to say of it; but, were she alive to-day, one feels that she, its greatest pupil, would be the first to give it the credit it so richly deserves, and to wish it the success it has so truly earned.