

The Professor

Charlotte Bronte

Preface

This little book was written before either “Jane Eyre” or “Shirley,” and yet no indulgence can be solicited for it on the plea of a first attempt. A first attempt it certainly was not, as the pen which wrote it had been previously worn a good deal in a practice of some years. I had not indeed published anything before I commenced “The Professor,” but in many a crude effort, destroyed almost as soon as composed, I had got over any such taste as I might once have had for ornamented and redundant composition, and come to prefer what was plain and homely. At the same time I had adopted a set of principles on the subject of incident, &c., such as would be generally approved in theory, but the result of which, when carried out into practice, often procures for an author more surprise than pleasure.

I said to myself that my hero should work his way through life as I had seen real living men work theirs—that he should never get a shilling he had not earned—that no sudden turns should lift him in a moment to wealth and high station; that whatever small competency he might gain, should be won by the sweat of his brow; that, before he could find so much as an arbour to sit down in, he should master at least half the ascent of “the Hill of Difficulty;” that he should not even marry a beautiful girl or a lady of rank. As Adam’s son he should share Adam’s doom, and drain throughout life a mixed and moderate cup of enjoyment.

In the sequel, however, 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. Indeed, until an author has tried to dispose of a manuscript of this kind, he can never know what stores of romance and sensibility lie hidden in breasts he would not have suspected of casketing such treasures. Men in business are usually thought to prefer the real; on trial the idea will be often found



fallacious: a passionate preference for the wild, wonderful, and thrilling—the strange, startling, and harrowing—agitates divers souls that show a calm and sober surface.

Such being the case, the reader will comprehend that to have reached him in the form of a printed book, this brief narrative must have gone through some struggles—which indeed it has. And after all, its worst struggle and strongest ordeal is yet to come but it takes comfort—subdues fear—leans on the staff of a moderate expectation—and mutters under its breath, while lifting its eye to that of the public, “He that is low need fear no fall.”

CURRER BELL.

The foregoing preface was written by my wife with a view to the publication of “The Professor,” shortly after the appearance of “Shirley.” Being dissuaded from her intention, the authoress made some use of the materials in a subsequent work—“Villette,” As, however, these two stories are in most respects unlike, it has been represented to me that I ought not to withhold “The Professor” from the public. I have therefore consented to its publication.

A. B. NICHOLLS

Haworth Parsonage, September 22nd, 1856.

