

Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855)

Proposal from Henry Nussey (1812-1860). Declined (1839).

Proposal from David Pryce (1811-40). Declined (1839).

Proposal from Arthur Nicholls (1819-1906). Initially declined (1852), then accepted.

Married 1854.



Charlotte Brontë



Arthur Nicholls

Proposal from Rev'd Henry Nussey, March 1839, Declined

Charlotte Brontë, famous as the author of *Jane Eyre*, was the daughter of the Reverend Patrick Brontë (one of whose own marriage proposals is included further on in this collection), a minister in an Anglican church in Haworth, Yorkshire, and Maria Branwell Brontë. She was the third of six children: Maria (born 1814), Elizabeth (b. 1815), Charlotte (b. 1816), Branwell (b. 1817), Emily (b. 1818), and Anne (b. 1820). Her mother died in 1821. Her older sisters Maria and Elizabeth both died of tuberculosis in 1825, largely due to the appalling conditions at the Cowan School which they, Charlotte, and Emily were then attending. (The Cowan School and Maria were the models for Lowood Institution and Helen Burns in *Jane Eyre*).

Charlotte Brontë spent a year and a half, from January 1831 to June 1832 at the Roe Head School run by Margaret Wooler, about 15 miles from home. She was a star student but in general she did not enjoy it. In 1839 she returned to Roe Head School to work as a teacher. However she hated teaching — she considered her students “fat-headed oafs” — and after a few months she

returned home in a state of collapse. While she was recovering at home and considering what she should do next, she received two proposals of marriage.

Proposal from Reverend Henry Nussey, March 5 1839

Ellen Nussey (1817-1897) was a fellow student of Charlotte's at Roe Head School. The two became lifelong friends (with occasional periods of coolness). Over her life, Charlotte wrote her about 500 letters of which 350 survive; six of these are included below. (All of Ellen's letters to Charlotte were burned at the instruction of Charlotte's husband).

In 1839 Ellen's brother Henry (1812-1860) was a curate at a church in a small village in Sussex, who was hoping to become a missionary. (Apparently he was the model for St. John Rivers in *Jane Eyre*.) He decided at that point that he needed a wife, so, apparently, he went down the list of eligible and acceptable unmarried women in his acquaintance. His diary entry for March 1 1839 reads as follows:

Diary of Henry Nussey, March 1, 1839

On Tuesday last, received a decisive reply from M.A.L.'s¹ papa. A loss but I trust a providential one. Believe not her will but her father's. All right. God knows best what is good for us, for his Church, and for his own Glory. This I humbly desire. And his will be done & not mine in this or in anything else. Evermore give me this Spirit of my Lord and Master! Wrote to a Yorkshire friend C.B.

Henry Nussey did, indeed write to Charlotte proposing marriage a few days after being rejected by Margaret Lutwidge. His letter does not survive. Her answer to him declining the proposal and a letter to Ellen discussing her reasons for rejecting him are below. Note: Charlotte's punctuation and capitalization in her letters were non-standard. In particular, she often used dashes instead of periods as separators between sentences. I have followed *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë* in that regard. In all these letters, ellipses marked with three dots are editorial.

Charlotte Brontë to Rev'd Henry Nussey, 5 March 1839

Haworth

¹Margaret Anne Lutwidge — incidentally the aunt of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson a.k.a. Lewis Carroll, then seven years old.

My dear Sir

Before answering your letter. I might have spend a long time in consideration of its subject; but as from the first moment of its reception and perusal I determined on which course to pursue, it seemed to me that delay was wholly unnecessary.

You are aware that many reasons to feel grateful to your family, that I have peculiar reasons for affections toward one at least of your Sisters, and also that I highly esteem yourself. do not therefore accuse me of wrong motives when I say that my answer to your proposal must be a *decided negative*. In forming this decision — I trust I have listened to this dictates of conscience more than to those of inclination; I have no personal repugnance to the idea of a union with you — but I feel convinced that mine is not the sort of disposition calculated to form the happiness of a man like you. It has always been my habit to study the characters of those amongst whom I chance to be thrown, and I think I know yours and can imagine what description of woman would suit you for a wife. Her character should not be too marked, ardent and original — her temper should be mild, her piety undoubted, her spirits even and cheerful, and her “*personal attractions*” sufficient to please your eye and gratify your just pride. As for me you do not know me, I am not the serious, grave, cool-headed individual you suppose — you would think me romantic and eccentric — you would say I was satirical and severe — however I scorn deceit and I will never for the sake of attaining the distinction of matrimony and escaping the stigma of an old maid take a worthy man whom I am conscious I cannot render happy. . . . It is a pleasure to me hear that you are so comfortably settled and that your health is so much improved. I trust God will continue his kindness toward you — let me say also that I admire the good sense and absence of flattery and cant which your letter displayed. Farewell—! I shall always be glad to know you as a friend—

believe me Yours truly
C. Brontë

Henry Nussey’s Diary, 9 March 1839

Received an unfavorable reply from C.B. The Will of the Lord be done.

Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, 4 August 1839

My dearest Ellen

...

You ask me my dear Ellen whether I have received a letter from Henry — I have about a week since — The Contents I confess did a little surprise me, but I have kept them to myself, and unless you had questioned me on the subject I would never have adverted to it. — Henry says that he is comfortably settled at Donnington in Sussex that his health is much improved & that it is intention to take pupils after Easter — he then intimates that in due time he shall want a Wife to take care of his pupils and frankly asks me to be that Wife. Altogether the letter is written without cant or flattery — & in a common-sense style which does credit to his judgment — Now my dear Ellen there were in this proposal some things that might have proved a strong temptation — I thought if I were to marry so, Ellen could live with me and how happy I should be, but again I asked myself two questions — Do I love Henry Nussey as much as a woman ought to love her husband? Am I the person best qualified to make him happy —?— Alas Ellen my Conscience answered “*no*” to both these questions. I felt that though I esteemed Henry — though I had a kindly leaning toward him because he is an amiable — well-disposed man. Yet I had not, and never could have that intense attachment which would make me willing to die for him — and if ever I marry it must be in that light of adoration that I will regard my Husband ten to one I shall never have the change again but n’importe. Moreover I was aware that Henry knew so little of me he can hardly be conscious to whom he was writing — why it would startle him to see me in my natural home-character he would think I was a wild romantic enthusiast indeed — I could not sit all day long making a grave face before my husband — I would laugh and satirize and say whatever came into my head first — and if he were a clever man & loved me the whole world weighed in the balance against his smallest wish should be light as air —

Could I — knowing my mind to be such as that could I conscientiously say that I would take a grave quiet young man like Henry? No it would have been deceiving him — and deception of that sort is beneath me. So I wrote a long letter back in which I expressed my refusal as gently as I could and also candidly avowed my reason for that refusal. I describe to him too the sort of Character I thought would suit him for a wife. — Goodbye my dear Ellen — write to me soon and say whether you are angry with me or not.

C. Brontë

Charlotte remained at least somewhat in contact with Henry Nussey, and a few further letters from her to him have survived. In a letter dated October 28, 1839, she congratulated him on a promising attachment to another lady,

who had not been identified. However, apparently that fell through. In May 1845, Henry Nussey married Emily Prescott, a wealthy woman. He had mental problems that eventually became acute, and in the 1850s he was admitted to a lunatic asylum. He died in 1860.²

Proposal from Reverend David Pryce, July 1839

In May 1839, Charlotte took a two-month appointment as governess in a family with two children. By July she had returned to her father's house.

Reverend David Pryce (1811-1840) was born in Wiklow, Ireland and graduated Trinity College, Dublin in 1830. He paid a visit to the Brontës looking for a woman to marry.

Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, 4 August 1839

Haworth

...

I have an odd circumstance to relate to you — prepare for a hearty laugh — the other day — Mr Hodgson — Papa's former Curate — now a Vicar — came over to spend the day — with us — bringing with him his own Curate. The latter Gentleman by name Mr Price is a young Irish Clergyman — from Dublin University — it was the first time we had any of us seen him, but however after the manner of his Countrymen he soon made himself at home — his character quickly appeared in his conversation — witty — lively, ardent — clever too — but deficient in the dignity & discretion of an Englishman — at home you know Ellen I talk with ease and am never shy — never weighed down and oppressed by that miserable *mauvaise honte* which torments & constrains me elsewhere — so I conversed with this Irishman & laughed at his jests — & though I saw faults in his character excused them because of the amusement his originality afforded — I cooled a little indeed & drew in toward the latter part of the evening — because he began to season his conversation with something of Hibernian flattery which I did not quite relish, however they went away and no more was thought about them.

A few days after I got a letter the direction of which puzzled me it being in a hand I was not accustomed to see — evidently it was neither from you nor Mary Taylor, my only Correspondents — having opened & read it proved to be a declaration of attachment — & proposal of Matrimony — expressed in the ardent language of the sapient young Irishman!

²Information about Henry Nussey's later life is taken from the web page "What Became Of the Real St. John Rivers?"

well thought I — I've heard of love at first sight but this beats all. I leave you to guess what my answer would be — convinced that you will not do me the injustice of guessing wrong.

When we meet I'll shew you the letter. I hope you are laughing heartily. this is not like one of my adventures is it? it more nearly resembles Martha Taylor's — I'm certainly doomed to be an old maid Ellen — I can't expect another chance — never mind I made up my mind to that fate ever since I was twelve years old. I need not tell you to consider this little adventure is told in confidence — write soon

C. Bronte

Proposal from Reverend Arthur Nicholls. Declined December 1852, then accepted in April 1854. Married July 1854

In October 1847, Charlotte published *Jane Eyre* under the pseudonym Currer Bell. It was immediately an enormous success. In December Emily and Anne published *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* under pseudonyms Ellis and Acton Bell; those were also great successes, though more controversial. Between September 1848 and May 1849, Branwell, Emily, and Anne all died; Charlotte and her father were thus the only surviving members of the family. In 1849 Charlotte published *Shirley*. In November-December 1849 and May-June 1850 Charlotte made two trips to London, meeting many of the leading writers and cultural figures of the time.

Arthur Bell Nicholls (1819-1906) was born near Belfast. He graduated Trinity College, Dublin in 1844. He became an assistant curate to Patrick Brontë in June 1845. Charlotte's immediate reaction, in a letter to a friend, was that he "appears to be a respectable young man, reads well, and I hope will give satisfaction."

In July 1846, Ellen Nussey wrote the Charlotte, saying that someone had asked her "whether Miss Brontë was going to be married to her father's curate?" Charlotte wrote back, entirely denying it.

Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, 10 July 1846

I scarcely need say that never was rumour more ill-founded — it puzzles me to think how it could possibly have originated — A cold, far-away sort of civility are the only terms on which I have ever been with Mr Nicholls — I could by no means think of mentioning such a rumour to him even as a joke — it would make me the laughing-stock of himself and his fellow-curates for half a year to come. They regard me as an old maid, and I regard them, one and all, as highly uninteresting, narrow and unattractive specimens of the "coarser sex"

There is reason to think that Nicholls had fallen in love with Charlotte at least by June 1847, when he declined an offer of a better position. Be that as it may, in December of 1852, he summoned the nerve to pop the question.

Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, 15 December 1852

Haworth

Dear Nell,

...

I enclose another note which — taken in conjunction with the incident immediately preceding it — and with a long series of indications whose meaning I scarce ventured hitherto to interpret to myself — much less hint to any other — has left on my mind a feeling of deep concern.

This note — you will see is from Mr. Nicholls. I know not whether you have ever observed him specially — when staying here —: your perception in these matters is generally quick enough — *too* quick — I have sometimes thought — yet as you never said anything — I restrained my own misgivings — which could not claim the sure guide of vision.³ What Papa has seen or guessed — I will not inquire — though I may conjecture. He has minutely noticed all Mr. Nicholls' low spirits — all his threats of expatriation — all his symptoms of impaired health — noticed them with little sympathy and much indirect sarcasm.

On Monday evening — Mr. N — was here to tea. I vaguely felt — without clearly seeing — as without seeing, I have felt for some time — the meaning of his constant looks — and strange, feverish restraining.

After tea — I withdrew to the dining room as usual. As usual — Mr. N sat with Papa till between eight & nine o'clock. I then heard him open the parlour door as if going. I expected the clash of the front-door. — He stopped in the passage: he tapped: like lightning it flashed on me what was coming. He entered — he stood before me. What his words were — you can guess; his manner — you can hardly realize — nor can I forget it — Shaking from head to foot, looking deadly pale, speaking low, vehemently yet with difficulty — he made me for the first time feel what it costs a man to declare affection when he doubts response.

The spectacle of one ordinarily so statue-like — thus trembling, stirred, and overcome gave me a kind of strange shock. He spoke of sufferings he had borne for months — of sufferings he could endure no longer — and craved leave for some hope. I could only entreat him to leave me then and promise a reply on the morrow. I asked

³It is not clear to me whether this, and the references to “without seeing” in the next paragraph are purely metaphorical or whether they refer to Charlotte's extremely poor eyesight.

him if he had spoken to Papa. He said — he dared not — I think I half-led, half put him out of the room. When he was gone I immediately went to Papa — and told him what had taken place. Agitation and Anger disproportionate to the occasion ensued — if I had *loved* Mr. N — — and had heard such epithets applied to him as were used — it would have transported me past my patience — as it was — my blood boiled with a sense of injustice — but Papa worked himself into a state not to be trifled with — the veins on his temples started up like whip-cord — and his eyes became suddenly blood-shot — I made haste to promise that Mr. Nicholls should on the morrow have a distinct refusal.

I wrote yesterday and got this note. There is no need to add to this statement any comment — Papa's vehement antipathy to the bare thought of any one thinking of me as a wife — and Mr. Nicholls' distress — both give me pain. Attachment to Mr. N — you are aware I never entertained — but the poignant pity inspired by his state on Monday evening — by the hurried revelation of his sufferings for many months — is something galling and irksome. That he cared something for me — and wanted me to care for him — I have long suspected — but I did not know the degree or strength of his feelings

Dear Nell — good-bye

C. Brontë

Charlotte Bronte to Ellen Nussey, December 18, 1852

Haworth

Dear Nell

You may well ask, how is it? for I am sure I don't know. This business would seem to me like a dream — did not my reason tell me it has been long brewing It puzzles me to comprehend how and whence comes this turbulence of feeling.

You ask how Papa demeans himself to Mr. N. I only wish you were here to see Papa in his present mood: you would know something of him. He just treats him with a hardness not to be bent — and a contempt not to be propitiated.

The two have had no interview as yet: all has been done by letter. Papa wrote — I must say — a most cruel note to Mr. Nicholls, on Wednesday. In his state of mind and health (for the poor man is horrifying his landlady — Martha's Mother — by entirely rejecting his meals) I felt that the blow must be parried, and I thought it right to accompany the pitiless dispatch by a line to the effect that — while Mr. N must never expect me to reciprocate the feeling he had expressed — yet at the same

time — I wished to disclaim participation in sentiments calculated to give him pain; and I exhorted him to maintain his courage and spirits.

On receiving the two letters, he set off from home. Yesterday came the enclosed brief epistle.

You must understand that a good share of Papa's anger arises from the idea — not altogether groundless — that Mr. N has behaved with disingenuousness in so long concealing his aims — forging that Irish fiction &c. I am afraid also that Papa thinks a little too much about his want to money; he says the match would be a degradation — that I should be throwing myself away — that he expects me, if I marry at all — to do very differently; in short — his manner of viewing the subject — is — on the whole, far from being one in which I can sympathize. — My own objections arise from a sense of incongruity and uncongeniality in feeling, tastes — principles.

How are you getting on — dear Nell — and how are all at Brookroyd? Remember me kindly to everybody — Yours — wishing that Papa would resume his tranquility — and Mr. Nicholls his beef and pudding

C. Brontë

Arthur Nicholls left his position at Haworth in May; between his own feelings for Charlotte and Patrick Brontë's undisguised hostility, his position there had become impossible. However, he had an secret ally in Charlotte's friend Elizabeth Gaskell (see below), who persuaded her friend Richard Monckton Milnes to visit Nicholls in January 1854 and offer him a choice of two positions, substantially better than the one he held. With this improvement in his standing he resumed his courtship of Charlotte, who now decided to marry him. She, Nicholls, and their friends; they assured him that they would continue to live with him and take care of him. Her father first acquiesced to the plan and then became enthusiastic about it.

Charlotte Bronte to Ellen Nussey, 11 April 1854

My dear Ellen

Thank you for the collar — It is very pretty, and I *will* wear it for the sake of her who made and gave it.

Mr Nicholls came on Monday 3rd. and was here all last week.

Matters have progressed thus since last July. He renewed his visit in September — but then matters so fell out that I saw little of him. The correspondence pressed on my mind. I grew very miserable in keeping it from Papa. At last sheer pain made me gather courage to break it. — I told all. It was very hard and rough work at

the time — but the issue after a few days was that I obtained leave to continue the communication. Mr. N came in January — he was ten days in the neighborhood. I saw much of him — I had stipulated ‘with Papa’ for opportunity to become better acquainted — I had it and all I learnt inclined me to esteem and, if not love — at least affection — Still Papa was very — very hostile — bitterly unjust. I told Mr. Nicholls the great obstacles that lay in his way. He has persevered — The result of this is last visit is — that Papa’s consent is gained — that his respect, I believe is won — for Mr. Nicholls has in all things proved himself disinterested and forbearing. He has shewn too that while his feelings are exquisitely keen — he can freely forgive. Certainly I must respect him — nor can I withhold from him more than mere cool respect. In fact, dear Ellen, I am engaged.

Mr. Nicholls in the course of a few months will return to the curacy of Haworth. I stipulated that I would not leave Papa — and to Papa himself I proposed a plan of residence — which should maintain his seclusion and convenience uninvaded and in a pecuniary sense bring him gain instead of loss. What seemed at one time — impossible — is now arranged — and Papa begins really to take a pleasure in the prospect.

For myself — dear Ellen — while thankful to One who seems to have guided me through much difficulty, much and deep distress and perplexity of mind — I am still very calm — *very* — inexpectant. What I taste of happiness is of the soberest order. I trust to love my husband — I am grateful for his tender love to me — I believe him to be an affectionate — a high-principled man — and if with all this, I should yield to regrets — that fine talents, congenial ‘tastes’ and thoughts are not added — it seems to me I should be most presumptuous and thankless.

Providence offers me this destiny. Doubtless then it is the best for me — Nor do I shrink from wishing those dear to me one not less happy.

It is possible that our marriage may take place in the course of the Summer. Mr. Nicholls wishes it to be in July. He spoke of you with great kindness and said he hoped you would be at our wedding. I said I thought of having no other bridesmaid. Did I say right? I mean the marriage to be literally *as quiet as possible*.

Do not mention these things just yet. I mean to write to Miss Wooler shortly. Good-bye — There is a strange — half-sad feeling in making these announcements. The whole thing is something other than imagination paints it beforehand: cares — fears — come mixed inextricably with hopes. I trust yet to talk the matter over with you — Often last week I wished for your presence and said so to Mr. Nicholls — Arthur — as I now call him — but he said it was the only time and place when he could not have wished to see you.

Good bye
Yours affectionately
C. Brontë

Margaret Wooler, the head-mistress of Roe School, was a life-long friend and correspondent of Charlotte's

Charlotte Brontë to Margaret Wooler, 12 April 1854

Haworth

My dear Miss Wooler

The truly kind interest which you have always taken in my affairs makes me feel that it is to due to you to transmit an early communication on a subject respecting which I have already consulted you more than once.

I must tell you then — that since I wrote last — Papa's mind has gradually come round to a view very different to that which he once took, and that after some correspondence, and as the result of a visit Mr. Nicholls paid here about a week ago — it was agreed that he is to resume the curacy of Haworth, as soon as Papa's present Assistant is provided with a situation, and in due course of time he is to be received as an inmate into this house.

It gives me unspeakable content to see that — now my Father has once admitted this new view of the case — he dwells on it complacently. In all arrangements his convenience and seclusion will be scrupulously respected. Mr. Nicholls seems deeply to feel the wish to comfort and sustain his declining year. I think — from Mr. N's character — I may depend on this not being a mere transitory impulsive feeling, but rather that it will be accepted steadily as a duty — and discharged tenderly as an office of affection.

The destiny which Providence in His goodness and wisdom seems to offer me will not — I am aware — be generally regarded as brilliant — but I trust I see in it some germs of real happiness. I trust the demands of both feeling and duty will be in some measure reconciled by the step in contemplation. It is Mr. N's wish that the marriage should take place this Summer — he urges the month of July — but that seems very soon.

...

Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, 15 April 1854

Haworth
Saturday

My own dear Nell

I hope to see you somewhere around the 2nd. week in May.

...

I suppose I shall have to go to Leeds. My purchases cannot be either expensive or extensive — You must just revolve in your head the bonnets and dresses — something that can be turned to decent use and worn after the wedding-day will be best — I think.

I wrote immediately to Miss Wooller and received a truly kind letter from her this morning. If you think she would like to come to the marriage I will not fail to ask her.

Papa's mind seems wholly changed about this matter. And he has said both to me and when I was not there — how much happier he feels since he allowed all to be settled. It is a wonderful relief to me to hear him treat the thing rationally — and quietly and amicably talk over with him themes on which, once I dared not touch. He is quite anxious that things should get forward now — and takes quite an interest in the arrangement of preliminaries. His health improves daily, though this east-wind still keeps up a slight irritation in the throat and chest.

The feeling which had been disappointed in Papa — was ambition — paternal *pride*, ever a restless feeling — as we all know. Now that this unquiet spirit is exorcised — Justice, which was once quite forgotten — is once more listened to — and affection — I hope — resumes some power.

My hope is that in the end this arrangement will turn out more truly to Papa's advantage — than any other it was in my power to achieve. Mr. N only in his last letter — refers touchingly to his earnest desire to prove his gratitude to Papa by offering support and consolation to his declining age. This will not be mere *talk* with him — he is no talker — no dealer in professions. Dear Nell — I will write no more at present. You can of course tell your Sister Ann & Mr. Clapham — the Healds too if you judge proper — indeed I now leave the communication to you — I know you will not obtrude it where no interest would be taken.

Yours affectionately
C. Brontë

Elizabeth Stevenson Gaskell (1810-1865), usually known as "Mrs. Gaskell", was a successful and important Victorian novelist. She became fascinated by Charlotte Brontë with the publication of *Jane Eyre* and met her at the home of a common friend in 1850. The two soon became close friends. After Charlotte's death, Mrs. Gaskell wrote a biography, published in 1857.

Charlotte Brontë to Mrs Gaskell, ?18 April 1854

Haworth

My dear Mrs Gaskell,

I should have deferred writing to you till I could fix the day of coming to Manchester, but I have a thing or two to communicate which I want to get done with.

You remember — or perhaps you do not remember — what I told you when you were at Haworth. Towards the end of autumn the matter was again brought prominently forward. There was much reluctance, and many difficulties to be overcome. I cannot deny that I had a battle to fight with myself; I am not sure that I have even yet conquered certain inward combatants. Be this as it may — in January last papa gave his sanction for a renewal of acquaintance, Things have progressed I don't know how. It is no use going into detail. After various visits and as the result of perseverance in one quarter and a gradual change of feeling in others, I find myself what people call 'engaged'. Mr. Nicholls returns to Haworth. The people are very glad — especially the poor and old and very young — to all of whom he was kind, with a kindness that showed no flash at first, but left a very durable impression. He is to become a resident in this house. I believe it is expected that I shall change my name in the course of summer—perhaps in July. He promises to prove his gratitude to papa by offering faithful support and consolation to his age. As he is not a man of fine words, I believe him. The Rubicon once passed, papa seems cheerful and satisfied; he says he has been far too stern; he even admits that he was unjust — terribly unjust he certainly was for a time, but now all this is effaced from memory — now that he is kind and declares himself happy — and talks reasonably and without invective. I could almost cry sometimes that in this important action in my life I cannot better satisfy papa's perhaps natural pride. My destiny will not be brilliant, certainly, but Mr Nicholls is conscientious, affectionate, pure in heart and life. He offers a most constant and tried attachment — I am very grateful to him. I mean to try and make him happy, and papa too ...

... in contemplating the coming event — I cannot boast these things. I won't say any more on paper. I may venture to consult you a little when I see you

Good bye

Yours faithfully & affectionately
C Brontë

Mrs Gaskell to John Forster ?17 May 1854 Extract

... I enclose you Miss Brontë's announcement of her marriage-to-be.— It is quiet, quaint, & a little formal; but like herself & meaning the full force of every word she uses. She told me of Mr. Milnes interview with Mr Nicholls, & of the latter's puzzle to account for Mr. Milnes interest in him. She never for an instance suspected anything; or my head would not have been safe on my shoulders. To hear her description of the

conversation with her father when she quietly insisted on her right to see something more of Mr. Nicholls was really fine. Her father thought that she had a chance of some body higher or at least farther removed from poverty. She said “Father I am not a young girl, not a young woman even — I never was pretty. I now am ugly. At your death I shall have 300£ besides the little I have earned myself — do you think there are many men who would serve seven years for me?” And again when he renewed the conversation and asked her if she would marry a curate? — “Yes I must marry a curate if I marry at all; not merely a curate but *your* curate; not merely *your* curate but he must live in the house with you, for I cannot leave you.” The sightless old man stood up & said solemnly ‘Never. I will never have another man in this house’, and stalked out of the room. For a week he never spoke to her. She had not made up her mind to accept Mr. Nicholls, & the worry on both sides made her ill — Then the old servant interfered, and asked him, sitting blind & alone, “if he wished to kill his daughter?” and went up to her and abused Mr. Nicholls for not having “more brass.” And so it has ended where it has done. Since I have seen her I am more content than this letter made me at first.

Charlotte Brontë and Arthur Nicholls were married on June 29, 1854. Charlotte died on March 31, 1855; it is believed that her death was caused by complications of pregnancy. Nicholls lived with Patrick Brontë and supported him until his death in 1861. He then returned to Ireland where he managed a small farm. He died of bronchitis in 1906.

The information here is taken from *Charlotte Brontë: A Life* by Claire Harman and *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: with a selection of letters by family and friends* ed. Margaret Smith.