

easy to name many for which there exists a more continuous demand. They are read, studied, admired, and appreciated by intellects of every grade, and by persons of all ages – by the young, by the middle-aged, and by the old. They are the food of minds occupied in pursuits the most opposite. The natural historian pores over them. The artist studies them. The general admirer of nature or of rural life and pursuits loves them; and the poet dotes upon them.’ (Vol II, p 554).

This is no isolated opinion, but part of a chorus that had begun in the early years of the century, and was still sounding in Ruskin and Kingsley in the 1860s.<sup>1</sup> It may have been this very review which drew Charlotte Brontë’s attention once again to the well-thumbed Parsonage copy of *Birds*; the Haworth family had owned Bewick since at least 1829, and probably earlier. It was in June 1825 that Mr Brontë brought Charlotte and Emily home from Cowan Bridge School to save them from the fate of their elder sisters, and inaugurated the period of home education. Charlotte was then nine. That Bewick was early among the books studied is shown by several references. In 1834, Charlotte gave Ellen Nussey a list of books for self-improvement, saying ‘for natural history, read Bewick’. In 1832, at the age of sixteen, she had written some memorial ‘Lines on Bewick’ which derive from loving attention to his work (see Appendix). We have her copy of Bewick’s figure ‘The Mountain Sparrow’, dated 16 March, 1830. Earlier still, we have Emily’s drawing of the Whinchat, also copied from a Bewick figure, and dated April 1st, 1829, when Emily was ten. Significantly, for Emily, the Whinchat is described by Bewick as ‘a solitary bird, frequenting heaths and moors.’<sup>2</sup>

Apart from other evidence, the laudatory references to Bewick in their favourite magazine, *Blackwood’s*, make it probable that the Brontës would know *British Birds* by at least 1826, when an enlarged and definitive edition appeared. *Blackwood’s* had carried a substantial appreciation of Bewick’s achievement the year before, in July, 1825: ‘Take his *British Birds*, and in the tail pieces to these two volumes you shall find the most touching presentations of nature in all her forms, animate and inanimate. . . . This is far beyond the mere pencilling of fur or feathers . . . a man of genius.’<sup>3</sup>

Another tribute appeared in the number for June 1828: ‘Have we forgotten the “Genius that dwells on the banks of the Tyne”, the Matchless, the Inimitable Bewick? No. His books lie on our parlour, bedroom, dining-room, drawing-room, study table, and are never out of place or time. Happy old man! The delight of childhood, manhood, decaying age! – A moral in every tail-piece – a sermon in every vignette.’<sup>4</sup>

Thomas Bewick, then, was a ‘household word’ in England in the years up to 1860, so that Charlotte could rely on the implications of