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A Brontë Family Chronology

Edward Chitham

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General Editor's Preface

Most biographies are ill adapted to serve as works of reference – not surprisingly so, since the biographer is likely to regard his function as the devising of a continuous and readable narrative, with excursions into interpretation and speculation, rather than a bald recital of facts. There are times, however, when anyone reading for business or pleasure needs to check a point quickly or to obtain a rapid overview of part of an author's life or career; and at such moments turning over the pages of a biography can be a time-consuming and frustrating occupation. The present series of volumes aims at providing a means whereby the chronological facts of an author's life and career, rather than needing to be prised out of the narrative in which they are (if they appear at all) securely embedded, can be seen at a glance. Moreover, whereas biographies are often, and quite understandably, vague over matters of fact (since it makes for tediousness to be forever enumerating details of dates and places), a chronology can be precise whenever it is possible to be precise.

Thanks to the survival, sometimes in very large quantities, of letters, diaries, notebooks and other documents, as well as to thoroughly researched biographies and bibliographies, this material now exists in abundance for many major authors. In the case of, for example, Dickens, we can often ascertain what he was doing in each month and week, and almost on each day, of his prodigiously active working life; and the student of, say, *David Copperfield* is likely to find it fascinating as well as useful to know just when Dickens was at work on each part of that novel, what other literary enterprises he was engaged in at the same time, whom he was meeting, what places he was visiting, and what were the relevant circumstances of his personal and professional life. Such a chronology is not, of course, a substitute for a biography; but its arrangement, in combination with its index, makes it a much more convenient tool for this kind of purpose; and it may be acceptable as a form of 'alternative' biography, with its own distinctive advantages as well as its obvious limitations.

Since information relating to an author's early years is usually scanty and chronologically imprecise, the opening section of some volumes in this series groups together the years of childhood and adolescence. Thereafter each year, and usually each month, is dealt with separately.

Information not readily assignable to a specific month or day is given as a general note under the relevant year or month. The first entry for each month carries an indication of the day of the week, so that when necessary this can be readily calculated for other dates. Each volume also contains a bibliography of the principal sources of information. In the chronology itself, the sources of many of the more specific items, including quotations, are identified, in order that the reader who wishes to do so may consult the original contexts.

NORMAN PAGE

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Many Brontë scholars have engaged in discussion with me over the years and modified my understanding of Brontë chronology, and to each of these I am most grateful.

In the preparation of this volume I have been most indebted for the receipt from Margaret Smith of some details of changes to the traditional chronology of a number of Brontë letters from 1852 onwards, which will appear in the final volume of *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*. As always I am grateful to staff at the Brontë Parsonage, especially Rachel Terry and Ann Dinsdale.

I have made unsuccessful attempts to trace copyright in the drawing of Top Withens from Whiteley Turner's *A Spring-Time Saunter*. The Brontë Society kindly supplied a copy of the illustrations for Figures 1 and 6.

Table of Non-standard Abbreviations

The principle has been to use abbreviations for the names of members of the Brontë family and those with whom they came in very frequent contact for much of their lives. Details of abbreviations used for most source material can be found in the annotated bibliography.

AB – Anne Brontë

BPM – Brontë Parsonage Museum

CB – Charlotte Brontë, later Charlotte Brontë Nicholls (I retain the original abbreviation even after her marriage).

EB – Elizabeth Brontë

ECG – Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell

EJB – Emily Jane Brontë

EN – Ellen Nussey

MBB – Maria Branwell, later Brontë (I use this abbreviation even before her marriage).

MB – Maria Brontë

PB – Patrick Brontë

PBB – Patrick Branwell Brontë

WSW – William Scott Williams