

Deborah Bates, (H.E.'s paternal grandmother)

(1856-1883)

Deborah was born on Higham Hill in Rushden, the youngest of John Bates and Eliza Partridge's 10 children. At the age of 15 she was the only child still living at home with her widowed mother and was working as a machinist in a shoe factory, sewing uppers. When she was 23 she gave birth to a boy, Albert; Albert's father was Charles Lawrence. The story passed down to H.E. was that Deborah had been a highly sensitive girl devoted to the world of nature who died of a broken heart after Charles refused to marry her. This appears to be supported by her death certificate, and local reports echo the story that Deborah found it impossible to overcome the heartache she felt at being rejected by Charles.

The mystery surrounding the story of Deborah's unhappy love affair with Charles Lawrence was a source of great fascination to the young H.E. and may have been responsible for him developing in his work an empathy toward women and the themes of unrequited love. In *The Vanished World* H.E. wrote: '*In photographs she is shown as a proud, very beautiful girl in that pure mould for which the Midland valleys of England are justly famous*'.<sup>1</sup>No photographs of Deborah have been found and it is not known if John Ward's portrait of Deborah in the autobiography was drawn from a photograph or Ward's imagination.

In the biographical story *The Far Distant Journey* H.E. accompanies his father, on a visit to the taxidermy shop kept by Deborah's brother, Joseph Bates. For the sake of little H.E. Albert and his aunt refer to Deborah and Charles without naming them: '*Have you seen him?*' asks the aunt, '*Only at Christmas*' Albert replies, '*I'll Christmas the skin off his back*' the old lady responds. Of Deborah she says: '*She was like a tallow candle, no more to her 'n tallow candle and not much of it at that*'.

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<sup>1</sup> The Vanished World