JANE AUSTEN.*

THE chronicle of Miss Austen's life is brief and simple. For twenty-five years from her birth on December 16, 1775, she lived in her father's family at the rectory of Steventon in Hampshire, making of course occasional visits to relatives and friends, some of which visits took her to Bath. In 1801, on the resignation of her father, she went with her family to Bath, and from thence, after Mr. Austen's death in February, 1805, she removed to Southampton. There she remained for four years, when her mother, her sister Cassandra, and herself, took up their abode at Chawton in Hampshire, in a house belonging to Mr. Austen's second son. This continued to be her home till her last illness. She died in Winchester, whither she had gone for medical advice, on July 10, 1817. She made few friends beyond the circle of her own family, and it is not known that she was ever seriously in love.

Her literary activity falls into two distinct sections. She began "Pride and Prejudice" in October, 1796, at the age of twenty, and finished it in August, 1797. "Sense and Sensibility" was begun in November, 1797. "Northanger Abbey" was composed in 1798. Then came a pause. During the nine years passed at Bath and Southampton, extending from her 26th to her 35th year, we do not know that she wrote anything except the short but striking history of "Lady Susan," a novel in letters, though it is probable that the fragment which Mr. Austen Leigh entitles "The Watsons," was begun in these nine years. She published nothing till 1811; but from that date onward, novel followed novel with great rapidity. "Sense and Sensibility," after undergoing revision, was published in 1811; "Pride and Prejudice" in 1813; "Mansfield Park" followed in 1814; "Emma" at the end of 1815; and "Persuasion" came out with "Northanger Abbey," after her death, in 1818.

This silence may be explained by the discouragement which attended Miss Austen's first attempts to put her work in print. A proposal made by her father to Mr. Cadell for the publication of a novel "comprising three volumes—about the length of Miss Burney's 'Evelina'" —("Pride and Prejudice") was declined by return of post. The fate of "Northanger Abbey" was still more humiliating. It was sold in 1803 to a publisher in Bath for ten pounds, but "it found so little favor in his eyes that he chose to

* Novels, by Jane Austen, with a biography, in six volumes. Bentley and Son.

abide by his first loss rather than risk further expense by publishing such a work." The "Thorpes," "Tilneys," and "Catherine Morland" for ten pounds, and dear at the price! Afterward, when four novels had been published, Jane wished to recover the copyright.

"One of her brothers undertook the negotiation. He found the purchaser very willing to receive back his money, and to resign all claim to the copyright. When the bargain was concluded, and the money paid, but not till then, the negotiator had the satisfaction of informing him that the work thus lightly esteemed was by the author of 'Pride and Prejudice.'"

Six novels, of which four only were published in her life, and a few fragments, do not make up a large bulk of work for one who wrote so rapidly and well as Miss Austen. It is true that she died in her forty-third year, but on the other hand she began to write at a very early age. She was barely twenty when she began "Pride and Prejudice," and she finished it in ten months. After a brief interval she is engaged upon a fresh work, "Sense and Sensibility," which is completed with equal rapidity. Thus before she was twenty-three she had written two of the best novels in the language. At this rate she might have filled our shelves, as recent novelists have filled them. But the great stimulus to overproduction was wanting: there was no demand for her labor. No printer's boy waited to carry off her "copy," no editor insisted on another sheet to make up his forthcoming number. Unknown and in silence she created her wonderful stories. Mrs. Bennet lamented in vain; Mr. Collins made love and no one laughed. With nothing but her own taste to guide her, she produced work almost faultless in style, and wrote English which puts us to shame. She composed in the first instance for her own amusement—from her earliest childhood writing rather than reading attracted her—and therefore she wrote when and as she pleased. She altered, excised, rewrote, caring for nothing but the perfection which satisfied her own judgment. She steadily refused to travel beyond the circle within which she felt that her powers ranged. In the last years of her life, when she became known as an authoress, she received various suggestions from friends that she should write a novel on this or that subject. Mr. Clarke, for instance, the librarian of Carlton House, requested her to "delineate the habits, character and enthusiasm of a clergyman who should pass his time between the metropolis and the country, who should be something like Beattie's minstrel—

"'Silent when glad, affectionate though shy,
And in his looks was most demurely sad;
And now he laughed aloud, yet none knew why.'"

What induced the man to make this request, it is hard to say; Jane's clergymen are far enough removed from such a type. The qualities which they distinctly have *not*, are earnestness and enthusiasm. Mr. Collins and Mr. Elton are selfish, underbred men, whose thoughts are wholly occupied with themselves. Dr. Grant, in "Mansfield Park," is a *bon-vivant*, of whom we hear in connection with a roast turkey and the best means of turning a living to good account. The young men who are about to take orders, the Bertrams, Tilneys and Ferrars, have common sense, and morals enough to enable them to fill the place of a country clergyman, and that is all. They never exhibit any peculiar fitness for their vocation, unless it be that they appear to be fit for nothing else. Jane knew this, and answered Mr. Clarke thus:

"I am quite honored by your thinking me capable of drawing such a clergyman as you gave the sketch of in your note. But I assure you I am not. The comic part of the character I might be equal to, but not the good, the enthusiastic, the literary. Such a man's conversation must at times be on subjects of science and philosophy, of which I know nothing, or at least be occasionally abundant in quotations and allusions, which a woman who, like me, knows only her mother tongue, and has read little in that, would be totally without the power of giving. A classical education or, at any rate, a very extensive acquaintance with English literature, ancient and modern, appears to me quite indispensable for the person who would do any justice to your clergyman; and I think I may boast myself to be with all possible vanity the most unlearned and uninformed female who ever dared to be an authoress."

The same gentleman, failing with his parson, suggested yet another subject. "A historical romance, illustrative of the august House of Coburg would just now be very interesting," he writes, on the occasion of the approaching marriage of Princess Charlotte and Prince

Leopold, whose chaplain and secretary he had recently become. It is difficult to believe that any man, even a chaplain, could have made such a proposal. What have history and the august house of Coburg to do with life in English villages and watering-places, with the ultra-genteel and demi-vulgar, and the artful or artless young women, and somewhat flabby young men, whom Jane Austen knew from the heart outward? She answers, humorously:

"I am fully sensible that a historical romance founded on the House of Saxe-Coburg might be much more to the purpose of profit or popularity than such pictures of domestic life in country villages as I deal in. But I could no more write a romance than an epic poem. I could not sit seriously down to write a serious romance under any motive than to save my life, and if it were indispensable to keep it up and never relax into laughing at myself or at other people, I am sure that I should be hung before I had finished the first chapter. No! I must keep to my own style and go on in my own way: and though I may never succeed again in that, I am convinced that I shall totally fail in any other."

This is from a letter dated April 1, 1816. In August she had finished "Persuasion." Who would exchange Anne Elliot for "a wilderness" of heroines of the "august house of Coburg?"

The same self-command and certainty of aim showed itself in her mode of composition:

"She had no separate study to retire to, and most of the work must have been done in the general sitting-room, subject to all kinds of casual interruptions. She was careful that her occupation should not be suspected by servants, or visitors, or any persons beyond her own family party. She wrote upon small sheets of paper, which could easily be put away, or covered with a piece of blotting-paper. There was, between the front door and the offices, a swing door which creaked when it was opened; but she objected to having this little inconvenience remedied, because it gave her notice when any one was coming. I have no doubt," her nephew and biographer continues, "that I and my sisters and cousins, on our visits to Chawton, frequently disturbed this mystic process, without having any idea of the mischief we were doing: certainly we should never have guessed by any signs of impatience or irritability in the writer."

Of herself Jane says in a letter:

"What should I do with your strong, manly, vigorous sketches, full of variety and glow? How could I possibly join them on to the little bit (two inches wide) of ivory on which I work with so fine a brush as produces little effect after much labor?"

Miss Austen read little; she seems to have shared Lamb's aversion to the acquirement of useful knowledge. He could read anything but the authors who form the necessary part of a gentleman's library. She "detested quartos." "Ladies who read those enormous great, stupid, thick quarto volumes, which one always sees in the breakfast parlor there, must be acquainted with everything in the world." To write and create was her pleasure: her vein of original composition was so full and strong that she had no need to replenish it with reading. She knew French well and something of Italian, but we find little or no traces of either French or Italian literature in her works. Richardson she had carefully studied and knew minutely; she was so far influenced by his example that some of her earliest attempts seem to have been written in the form of letters—as "Lady Susan" still is. "Sense and Sensibility" was so composed, but was rewritten after the removal to Chawton in 1809. She is accurate in all her descriptions of ships and naval affairs; but her knowledge of these matters was derived from conversation and correspondence with her two youngest brothers, who were in the navy, rather than from any study of the subject in books. Not that she shrank from such reading: she mentions with pleasure an "Essay on the Military Police, and Institutions of the British Empire," by Captain Pasley, "which I find delightfully written and highly interesting. I am as much in love with the author as ever I was with Clarkson or Buchanan. The first soldier I ever sighed for, but he does write with extraordinary force and spirit." Captain Pasley's book was an *octavo*. Her opinion of the far-famed "Spectator," the great thesaurus of sound English and sound morality, she has given us in "Northanger Abbey," in a passage in which she makes a powerful claim for the novel as against other kinds of literature.

"'I am no novel reader—I seldom look into novels—Do not imagine that I often read novels—It is really very well for a novel.' Such is the common cant. 'And what are you reading, Miss ——?' 'Oh! It is only a novel!' replies the young lady; while she lays down her book with affected indifference or momentary shame. It is only 'Cecilia' or 'Camilla' or 'Belinda';

or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humor, are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language. Now, had the same young lady been engaged with a volume of the "Spectator," instead of such a work, how proudly would she have produced the work and told its name; though the chances must be against her being occupied with any part of that voluminous publication, of which the matter or manner would not disgust a young person of taste."

This passage is the more interesting because it is perhaps the sole instance of irritation and severity to be found in Miss Austen's works.

So far as we know, her favorite authors were Johnson in prose, Crabbe in verse, and Cowper in both. "She would sometimes says, in jest, that if ever she married at all, she could fancy being Mrs. Crabbe."

The truth is that she estimated the knowledge which comes from life far above the knowledge which comes from books. In this learning she was herself skilled as few have been, and she knew the value of it. When Fanny Price appears at Mansfield Park, she is at a great disadvantage in all accomplishments as compared with her cousins, the Bertrams.

"'My cousin is really so very ignorant,' says one Miss Bertram. 'Do you know, we asked her last night what way she would go to get to Ireland! and she said she should cross to the Isle of Wight, and she calls it *the island*, as if there were no other island in the world. I am sure I should have been ashamed of myself if I had not known better long before I was as old as she is. I cannot remember the time when I did not know a great deal that she has not the least notion of yet. How long ago is it since we had to repeat the chronological order of the Kings of England with the dates of their accession, and most of the principal events of their reigns?'

"'Yes,' added the other, 'and of the Roman Emperors as low as Severus, besides a great deal of the heathen mythology and all the metals, semi-metals, plants and distinguished philosophers.'"

As the story develops, these young ladies, so precocious and well-informed, make but a poor show beside the ignorant Fanny Price, for, "with all their promising talents and early information," "they were entirely deficient in the common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity and humility." In this matter, we may take Fanny for a reflection of the authoress. Her knowledge, like all the best knowledge, came from within, not from without; she needed no books to open the world to her; she possessed that divine gift, "from worlds not quickened by the sun," which enables persons to see for themselves and at first-hand.

This want of knowledge derived from books has had a wholesome effect on her work. No author is so free from book-making—very few tell us so much that is strictly their own. Jane Austen is not the prophet of a superior culture or the slave of general ideas. She does not weary us with art or anatomy; she has nothing to say about evolution and the Jews. She plucks her wild flowers and paints them; whether beautiful or not, there they are in their native soil, delineated with such fidelity and grace, with so thorough an insight into their habitats and life, such an exquisite discrimination of color and curve, as hardly another writer in the language has attained. This was her knowledge—she knew what was around her and close to her. She never sought in distant places or remote ages for a scene and a subject; the nearest village with its hall or parsonage was enough. It is seldom that we meet with this close connection between author and subject; but when we do, the result is of peculiar value. It is this which makes Wordsworth's poetry what it is. While his great contemporaries "went attitudinizing through life," rapt in fictitious emotions, plunged in unreal sorrows, telling Eastern stories and painting the visions of a dream, he laid his hand on the country and the life nearest to him. And therefore his poetry is the English poetry of the early part of this century; for better or worse it is the poetry by which that generation will be known in the history of literature. In his later work, when he came to write "Don Juan," Byron got close to reality, but the reality was itself unreal, the fevered existence of a restless spirit, not a calm, self-controlled life. For this reason even "Don Juan" will wear out before the best parts of Wordsworth. The same reality breathes through Miss Austen's work. If we wish to know what life was like in the

scenes she depicts, we turn to her ; and we might ask with the ancient critic,

" O life ! O Menander !
Which of you two was the plagiarist ?"

In this respect she has perhaps only two rivals, Scott in his best novels, and Fielding. They also have the supreme gift of making literary and artistic the world in which they live. They have the humor which transforms like " heavenly alchemy" what would otherwise be commonplace, or even repellent ; they are creative as Homer and Shakespeare are creative. Their range is wider, their touch more powerful than Jane Austen's ; but in faithfulness of delineation and finish of work, she is more than an equal.

Yet while we commend the faithful realism of Jane Austen, we cannot deny, and she would not have denied, that her range is limited. The incidents of her novels are the incidents of common, every-day, social life : family conversations or gatherings, morning calls, dinners, balls, weddings, and the like—things intensely real perhaps, but intensely prosaic. Regions familiar to later novelists are left untouched by her. In her works we shall look in vain for scenes such as the meeting of Maggie and Philip in the " Red Deeps ;" of mother and daughter in Caroline Helstone's sick-room. She has nothing to tell us of rebellion and aspiration ; of that ideal world which " after all is the world as we shall one day know it." Wives weary of their husbands cannot turn to her for refuge, and in her pages maidens will find little of the rapture and bliss so prominent in the tender scenes of recent novels. Jane's heroines say what they have to say unimpeded by kisses ; even when the " illusion of the feelings" is at its strongest, they behave as rational creatures ; at any rate we are spared the descriptions of their weakness—or it may be that their joys are silent, " too deep for words," as best befits a feeling which must wear through a lifetime. Whatever realism there is in uncontrolled passion, is not Jane's " realism." Nor can we find in her works brilliant descriptions of natural scenery. That she was not insensible to these things we see from more than one speech put in the mouth of Fanny Price, the most meditative of her characters, but her sensitiveness was never aided by imagination. Such a passage as this, in which Georges Sand describes the scenery of the Creuse, is beyond the reach of the English authoress :

" C'est unmouvement gracieux de la bonne déesse ; mais, dans ce mouvement, dans ce pli facile de son vêtement frais, on sent la force et l'ampleur de ses allures. Elle est là comme couchée de son long sur les herbes, baignant ses pieds blancs dans une eau courante et pure c'est la puissance en repos ; c'est la bonté calme des dieux amies. Mais il n'y a rien de mou dans ses formes, rien d'énervé dans son sourire. Elle a la souveraine tranquillité des immortels, et, toute mignonne at delicate qu'elle se montre, on sent que c'est d'une main formidablement aisée qu'elle a creusó ce vaste et délicieux jardin dans cet horizon de son choix."

The passion for nature which is sometimes prompted by inward dissatisfaction or despair, was unknown to Miss Austen. Completely in harmony with the life around her, her attention was absorbed by that, and not absorbed only, but satisfied. Neither in her books, nor in her letters, do we find any trace of a heart ill at ease, of a spirit seeking rest and finding none. Such satisfaction is at once a source of strength and of weakness ; it gives finish, but it necessitates limitation. When, therefore, we speak of the realism of Jane Austen, we do not mean that there are not a thousand and one things beyond her reach, and yet real ; we mean that what she gives us, she gives without exaggeration, or deficiency, or adulteration.

Some have said : " Her conversations might have been written down from actual life." This is true : they migh have been so written, but we have no the least reason to suppose that they were. If we heard her characters speaking, they would undoubtedly say what she makes them say ; but the characters are nevertheless her own creation. From the fragments of real life she has given us a complete whole, just as a physiologist might restore a skeleton from a bone. The characters of real life are not so complete and concentrated as the characters of fiction, for the sufficient reason that we cannot know our acquaintance as the novelist knows his creations, or govern their actions and words at our will. And very many of the personages of real life are

without any character at all, though they may supply the materials of a character to a great genius, who knows them better than they know themselves. They leave no distinct impression on us; a novelist cannot therefore write down what they say or describe what they do. The fragmentary photograph must be made into a picture, the dry bones must live, the dulness of country life must become a source of never-ending amusement—so far is the realism of Jane Austen removed from the mere imitation of real life.

How this transformation is effected we learn from herself when she tells us that she can only depict those characters at whom she can laugh. Her gift is pre-eminently humor—a rare gift at any time, and perhaps peculiarly so just now, when a general earnestness seems likely to make existence intolerable. For it is truly melancholy to think how serious we have become; we have lost the power of laughing at ourselves or others, and all our energies are absorbed in universal criticism and the higher thought. Music, "heavenly maid," is now an "educational force." Poetry to be classical must have "the note of seriousness;" and poets who have not this note, like Chaucer and Burns, must begin with shame to take the lower room, while Elegiac Gray is permitted to go up higher. "A common grayness silvers everything." Nay, even the Premier himself may perhaps owe his exalted position to his inability to appreciate the lighter aspects of life, while Lord Beaconsfield has fallen under the condemnation which a serious generation inevitably pronounces on a frivolous statesman of threescore years and ten. Humor itself has come to be regarded as something which postulates sadness. This was not the temper of Jane Austen. She did not laugh at herself or her friends because there is always a tragedy underlying a comedy, or because she suffered under the burden of a *Weltschmerz* which must have relief in laughter or tears. She laughed because she could not help it, and makes those who read her laugh for the same reason. And if we, in this serious age, are tempted to think lightly of a genius which merely amuses us in this "phenomenal" way, we may console ourselves with the reflection that under Jane Austen's guidance we learn to smile at the weaknesses of mankind rather than to fret over them. Such an attitude of mind will at once save us some trouble and furnish us with a comfortable feeling of superiority.

To define humor is difficult, and perhaps the wisest course is to treat it as Mr. M. Arnold treats poetry, and describe it by examples. We cannot set forth in brief and precise terms what constitutes the poetical element in a fine passage of Milton, but when we read it we feel and know that it is poetical. The same is the case with humorous writing. When we read the opening sentences in "Pride and Prejudice," or "Persuasion," we say at once, "this is humor," "this is the humorous aspect of life."

"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife."

"Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellyinch Hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the 'Baronetage'; there he found occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one; there his faculties were roused into admiration and respect, by contemplating the limited remnant of the earliest patents; there any unwelcome sensations, arising from domestic affairs, changed naturally into pity and contempt, as he turned over the almost endless creations of the last century."

If we mean to weep rather than laugh over the follies and vulgarities of life, we may as well put away the volumes at once; Miss Austen will certainly be no favorite of ours. We shall not get through a single novel, or even a single chapter, if we are resolutely bent on being serious. Turn where we will, the same murmur of quiet laughter rings in our ears. Mrs. Allen never talked a great deal, and could never be entirely silent:

"While she sat at her work, if she lost her needle or broke her thread; if she heard a carriage in the street, or saw a speck upon her gown, she must observe it aloud, whether there was any one at leisure to answer it or not."

We can hardly read the words without at once calling to mind some equally good-natured, equally vacuous person, who is only tolerable so long as we are tolerant—a person about whom deeper questions of use or purpose in life can never be asked. Of the same type, but more obviously ridiculous, is Mrs. Pal-

mer, who, when she heard of Willoughby's iniquities,

"was determined to drop his acquaintance immediately, and was very thankful that she had never been acquainted with him at all. She hated him so much that she was resolved never to mention his name again, and she should tell everybody she saw how good-for-nothing he was!"

These are not in the least abnormal characters, they are samples of an abundant stock; and only differ from others in their transparent silliness. The world is at play, and we are interested spectators of the game. We find that people do not say what they mean or mean what they say; that their motives in action are often mixed to such a degree that they could themselves with much difficulty disentangle the threads. The most excellent young men fall in love with the wrong women, and are only too glad to find themselves delivered from the chains in which they once yoked themselves with such rapture. Young ladies who exert their utmost skill, fail to gain their ends, while others, apparently without effort, secure the happiness so richly deserved. But whatever the situation, with few exceptions it is amusing. Even Anne Elliot herself, whom we dearly love, provokes a smile as she trips down the streets of Bath:

"Prettier musings of high-wrought love and eternal constancy could never have passed along the streets of Bath than Anne was sporting with from Camden Place to Westgate Buildings. It was almost enough to spread purification and perfume all the way."

Humor such as this, it may be said, does but skim the surface of life. It takes no heed of the depths of sorrow lying underneath; it fails even to sound the fountains of joy. It is superficial, and exists only by reason of its superficiality. Had Miss Austen felt more deeply, she would have written differently. The "verities" of life, the "great mysteries" beyond it, would have attracted a more reflective mind. Does not this humor imply something like insensibility or half-knowledge? There is a tragic aspect of life, we may reply, as well as a comic; but it does not therefore follow that the tragic is more real than the comic. Laughter is human no less than tears; the laughable is as certainly a legitimate object of art, as the sad or terrible. The important point is that we should not confuse the two. It is as great a mistake to turn errors into tragedies, as it is to ridicule what is really tragic. Jane Austen was aware of her limitations; the tragic side of life was not for her. She knew indeed how to depict the pangs of disappointed affection, but she also knew that they were curable. Over the results of vicious conduct she prefers to draw a veil; she could not enter upon them without dropping into a serious vein, which is not her vein. She wrote to amuse, and to a clear mind and happy nature like hers, from which irritation was almost wholly absent, the pursuits of the world round her, often aimless, often perverse, were an inexhaustible source of laughter.

Yet we must not think of her as one who saw nothing in life but what was ridiculous. She makes us love some characters and despise others, though we smile at them all. In spite of her vulgarity and fussiness, her ill-timed jokes, domestic hints, and epicurean sentiments, we still have something like an affection for Mrs. Jennings.

"'Well, my dear, 'tis a true saying about an ill wind, for it will be all the better for Colonel Brandon. He will have her at last; ay, that he will. Mind me, now, if they ain't married by midsummer. Lord! how he'll chuckle over this news. I hope he will come to-night. It will be all to one a better match for your sister. Two thousand a year without debt or drawback—except the little love-child; indeed, ay, I had forgot her; but she may be 'prenticed out at small cost, and then what does it signify? Delaford is a nice place I can tell you; exactly what I call a nice, old-fashioned place, full of comforts and conveniences; quite shut in with great garden-walls, that are covered with the best fruit-trees in the country; and such a mulberry-tree in one corner! Lord! how Charlotte and I did stuff the only time we were there! Then there is a dovecote and some stew-ponds, and a very pretty canal; and everything in short that one could wish for.'"

It is difficult to get over such a speech as that; but we do get over it, because Mrs. Jennings is at all times willing to include others in her comforts. She is without any trace of malignity or selfishness, a sympathetic friend in affliction, a careful nurse in sickness. But Mrs. Norris we hate, as perhaps we never hated any living person. She is ridiculous, it is true, but she is also mean, grasping, covetous, and ill-tempered.

Whenever she appears, we feel that there is a dark spot in the scene, that some one will be made uncomfortable, if it is in her power to do it. She is one of those persons whose object in life it is to keep "people in their places;" in other words, to tyrannize over them as much as possible. Yet, in spite of this strong feeling, we cannot help but laugh when one amiable scheme after another for spreading discomfort falls to the ground, and when advice given for selfish aims is set aside as of no value. Listen to her shrill, staccato tones!

"Mrs. Norris called out: 'Stay, stay, Fanny! What are you about? Where are you going? Don't be in such a hurry. Depend upon it, it is not you that are wanted; depend upon it, it is me (looking at the butler); but you are so ready to put yourself forward. What should Sir Thomas want you for? It is me, Baddeley, you mean. I am coming this moment. You mean me, Baddeley, I am sure; Sir Thomas wants me, not Miss Price.'

"But Baddeley was stout. 'No, ma'am, it is Miss Price, I am certain of its being Miss Price.' And there was a half smile with the words which meant, 'I do not think *you* will answer the purpose at all.'"

Poor Mrs. Norris! the very servants understand and sit in judgment. Gradually she finds herself, in spite of her very animated efforts, more and more neglected and useless, till at length nothing is left for her but to retire into a distant part of the country with her disgraced and favorite niece, Mrs. Rushworth.

It would not be easy within the limits of a short paper to go through the catalogue of Miss Austen's characters. Unlike many modern novelists, she never repeats herself. Other authors have given us the same characters in different scenes; she gives us the same general scenes, but the characters are always different. The silly chatter of Miss Bates is as unique in its way as the rattle of Mr. John Thorpe. Mr. Collins and Mr. Elton both marry for money, and both propose to a lady who has not the least intention of accepting them; but the formal pomposity of the one is not in the least like the pushing vanity of the other. Miss Lucy Steele and Miss Fairfax both contract secret engagements, but we despise the one and admire the other. Vulgarity meets us in Miss Steele, Isabella Thorpe, and Lydia Bennet; we see it in a variety of forms and in different degrees, and perhaps Miss Steele may be allowed to bear away the palm. The same holds good of the more serious characters. Catherine Morland, if she can be called serious, is not like Fanny Price, yet both are types of a natural, simple-minded girl. Elizabeth Bennet is extremely clever, and not less so is Emma Woodhouse, yet neither reminds us of the other. Anne Elliot and Elinor Dashwood are patient and constant in their affections, and are perhaps more alike than any of the others we have compared. Both have an unusual force of character, though called upon to exercise it in very different spheres of action; both, under a quiet exterior, conceal a great depth of affection, but the story of Anne's life is more pathetic, her love is more deeply tried than Elinor's. If Colonel Brandon may rank with Mr. James Knightley in regard to tact, sense, and delicacy, sentiment and melancholy, rheumatism and a flannel waistcoat, serve to distinguish the former, while Mr. Woodhouse, who to himself is a sufficiently serious subject, is *sui generis*, not to be approached, and never to be forgotten.

"'That young man is very thoughtless,' he says of Mr. Churchill, who proposes to find room for a ball at the 'Crown,' by using two rooms, and dancing across the passage. 'Do not tell his father; but that young man is not quite the thing. He has been opening the doors very often this evening, and keeping them open very inconsiderately. He does not think of the draught. I do not mean to set you against him, but, indeed, he is not quite the thing!'"

Among such a variety of different scenes and actors, different readers will find different favorites. The author herself was greatly pleased with "Pride and Prejudice." One or two letters have been preserved in which she speaks of her book. The work, as we have seen, came out at the beginning of 1813, and was her second published novel. On January 29th, Jane "must write" to her sister Cassandra:

"I want to tell you that I have got my own darling child from London. I must confess that I think her (Elizabeth Bennet) as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print, and how I shall be able to tolerate those who do not like *her* at least, I don't know."

And again on February 11th she writes to her sister:

"Upon the whole I am quite v ain enough and well satisfied enough. The v ork is rather too light, and bright, and sparkling; it wants shade; it wants to be stretched out here and there with a long chapter of sense, if it could be had; if not, of solemn, specious nonsense, about something unconnected with the story; an essay on writing, a critique on Walter Scott, or the history of Buonaparte, or something that would form a contrast, and bring the reader with increased delight to the playfulness and epigrammatism of the general style."

Walter Scott also thought highly of this novel, and many will select it as the best of her productions. Others are in favor of "Persuasion," which, though written in declining health, certainly exhibits no sign of declining vigor. In no other is the interest more sustained, the characters more striking or exact, the incidents more fresh and unconventional; in no other is pathos so largely blended with humor. Most careful readers will probably find a difference between the first three of the novels and the last three. "If the former show quite as much originality and genius, they may perhaps be thought to have less of the faultless finish and high polish which distinguish the latter"—these words of Mr. Austen Leigh are a true criticism. On the whole, looking at the truth, variety and exquisite development of the characters, "Emma" seems to deserve the first place. Miss Austen said of the principal character, "I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like." If we cannot read the story of Emma's blunders without a smile at her perverse love of match-making, and her conceited assumption that she can govern others, and arrange their private concerns as she will, we also feel that she grows upon us; she learns by experience; step by step she becomes more worthy of the manly regard which has watched over her from childhood. She is always clever and refined; often brilliant; a little imperious, as her situation permits, a little wayward, but always a lady, and always charming. We part from her with a feeling that we have been in good and amusing society, with a woman who, though capable of foolish actions, has sense and good humor, and we go about our way cheered by the thought that persons may make life very pleasant without being monsters of perfection.

Of the many amusing scenes in Miss Austen's works, perhaps the two most irresistibly laughable, are those in which Mr. Elton proposes to Emma, and the Dashwoods, Miss Lucy Steele, and Mr. E. Ferrars are brought together. Emma has done her best to bring about a match between Mr. Elton, the clergyman of the parish, and her friend Miss Harriet Smith. On returning from Mr. Weston's party, she finds herself *tête-à-tête* with the parson, shut up in the carriage with no possibility of escape. Mr. Elton had waited for his opportunity and did not let it slip: he poured out his professions of affection into Emma's astonished ears.

"'It is impossible for me to doubt any longer. You have made yourself too clear. Mr. Elton, my astonishment is much beyond anything I can express. After such behavior as I have witnessed during the last month to Miss Smith—*such attentions* as I have been daily in the habit of observing—to be addressing me in this manner—this is an unsteadiness of character, indeed, which I had not supposed possible! Believe me, sir, I am far, very far from gratified on being the object of such professions.'

"'Good heaven!' cried Mr. Elton; 'what can be the meaning of this? Miss Smith! I never thought of Miss Smith in the whole course of my existence: never paid her any *attentions but as your friend; never* cared whether she were dead or alive, but as your friend. If she has fancied otherwise, her own wishes have misled her, and I am very sorry—extremely sorry. But Miss Smith, indeed! Oh, Miss Woodhouse, who can think of Miss Smith when Miss Woodhouse is near! No, upon my honor, there is no unsteadiness of character. I have thought only of you. I protest against having paid the smallest attention to any one else. Everything that I have said or done, for many weeks past, has been done with the sole idea of marking my adoration of yourself. You cannot really, seriously doubt it. No!' (in an accent meant to be insinuating), 'I am sure you have seen and understood me.'"

What an *éclaircissement!* Poor Emma! No wonder that her mind was in great perturbation on her arrival home, and it "needed a very strong effort to appear attentive and cheerful till the usual hour of separating allowed her the relief of quiet reflection."

The other scene is of a more complicated nature. Mr. Edward Ferrars is secretly engaged to Miss Lucy Steele, who has confided the fact to Elinor Dashwood, of whom she has reason to be jealous. Elinor is very partial to Edward, who is only deterred by his

engagement, and hardly deterred by it, from making love to her. He has no suspicion that his engagement is known to any one but Lucy. Marianne Dashwood is greatly in favor of her sister's marriage with Edward, and anxious to do all that she can to bring it about. In this chaos of secrecy and knowledge, Lucy, Edward, Marianne and Elinor are all brought into one room.

"It was a very awkward moment; and the countenance of each (Marianne has not yet entered) showed that it was so. They all looked exceedingly foolish; and Edward seemed to have as great an inclination to walk out of the room again as to advance farther into it." Marianne enters, and "her pleasure in seeing him was like every other of her feelings, strong in itself and strongly spoken. She met him with a hand that would be taken, and a voice that expressed the affection of a sister.

"'Dear Edward!' she cried, 'this is a moment of great happiness! This would almost make amends for everything!'

"Edward tried to return her kindness as it deserved, but before such witnesses he dared not say half what he really felt. Again they all sat down, and for a moment or two all were silent; while Marianne was looking with the most speaking tenderness, sometimes at Edward, and sometimes at Elinor, regretting only that their delight in each other should be checked by Lucy's unwelcome presence. Edward was the first to speak, and it was to notice Marianne's altered looks, and express his fear of her not finding London agree with her.

"'Oh, don't think of me!' she replied with spirited earnestness, though her eyes were filled with tears as she spoke, 'don't think of *my* health. Elinor is well, you see. That must be enough for us both.'"

No wonder that Edward, after a little more of this pointed conversation, got up to go away.

"'Going so soon!' said Marianne; 'my dear Edward, this must not be.'

"And drawing him a little aside, she whispered her persuasion that Lucy could not stay much longer. But even this encouragement failed, for he would go; and Lucy, who would have outstayed him had his visit lasted two hours, soon afterwards went away.

"'What can bring her here so often?' said Marianne, on her leaving them. "Could she not see that we wanted her gone? How teasing to Edward!'"

Other scenes hardly less amusing will be found scattered up and down the volumes with no niggardly hand. In an age so prone to making selections as the present, it is a little remarkable that no one has ventured to publish a series of scenes from the great novelists, whose works are no longer generally read. The small circle—for small it probably is—who read Fielding and Jane Austen, might resent the application of the scissors to their favorite authors, but they would be consoled with the reflection that in this way a wider interest would be awakened in books now too generally neglected. We have selections from poets by the dozen, why should we not have selections from novelists? The novel is the form of literature in which the dramatic genius of the last hundred years has most adequately expressed itself; we can hardly imagine that Jane Austen, or Scott, or Thackeray, or Charlotte Brontë, will not find some readers, as long as English literature is read at all. Unfortunately the trick of writing a novel is so easily caught that we are apt to lose sight of the great masters in the scores of stories—often far from uninteresting—which are poured out on the world from year to year. All the more necessary is it that we should read the best, and ascertain why they are the best. This is a duty for every one; more especially when we think of the education and the reading of women, we might demand, with some show of reason, that among a young lady's accomplishments should be included the power of distinguishing a good novel from a bad one. From this point of view a course of Miss Austen would be most salutary. — *Temple Bar.*