

*Jane Austen  
as revealed  
in her novels.*

In "Jane Austen and her Country-House Comedy" (Lane), by Mr. W.

H. Helm, one finds oneself invited to

a pleasant and sympathetic, though in the main obvious, discussion, whose scope, as defined by the author, is "to show Jane Austen as she lives in her writings, and to suggest some at least of the many directions in which those writings may be explored." In so doing the letters are evidenced as well as the novels. The quality of the interpretation may be best indicated by citations from the book

itself. Miss Austen's field, Mr. Helm points out, is a narrow one, but she tills it perfectly. "Only genius could give a vital and enduring fascination to a record concerned with the ordinary experiences of a few respectable country people almost all of one class." Her "inability to be unintelligible," to adopt a phrase of Catharine Morland's, her natural dialogue, "the bright people being differentiated from the dull by their talk, and not, as in most novels, by the author's assurances"; her satiric humor, "rare among women," humor "of the essential kind, which is so nearly akin to wit that it is often almost identical with it . . . brothers who might be mistaken for one another by those who do not notice that the one has colder hands than the other"; her "wonderfully true presentation of the hearts and minds of girls," she herself "the most delightful of her own heroines," — all these characteristics combine to produce a "perennial timeliness" which Mr. Helm finds augmented by her avoidance of accessory descriptions. He is a no less temperately spoken or sincerely devoted lover than Mr. Knightley, and though a reader may discover on laying down the book that his sense of "one of the supreme literary artists of the world," as Mr. W. L. Phelps has styled the sprightly Jane, is less vivid than that induced by the few pages of the professor's introduction to the "Chawton" edition of the novels, he will not be averse to seeing some of his own thoughts affirmed in print. But when Mr. Helm denies to the chief characters both passion and sentiment many people will no doubt hold with Professor Phelps that he commits "the old error of assuming that only those persons have passions who are unable to control them." Yet the most ardent admirer must find it easy to forgive a difference of opinion to the man who writes of Godmersham: "The spirit of Jane Austen abides in the delicious air of this quiet and unspoilt valley, where, when the wind blows strongly from the south-east, the salt of the sea-breezes mingles with the perfumes of the grass and wood smoke as pleasantly as the Attic wit of Jane Austen mingles with the sweetness of her heroines and the thousand delights of her dialogue."