

## WANT OF PASSION IN JANE AUSTEN.

Charlotte Brontë vigorously depreciates Jane Austen in the following terms: "Anything like warmth or enthusiasm, anything energetic, poignant, heartfelt is utterly wanting in Jane Austen. She ruffles her reader by nothing vehement, disturbs him by nothing profound. The passions are perfectly unknown to her." This depreciation is partly justified because Miss Austen's novels are wholly lacking in elements of great passion and strong action and she never appeals to our deeper feelings. There is no hidden meaning in her, no philosophy beneath the surface for profound scrutiny to bring to light, nothing calling for elaborate interpretation.

Jane Austen never deals with ardent affairs. Hers is a pastoral muse, a muse that inhabits rectories and country houses, not a Goddess of romance, dwelling in caves and glaciers. Of romance, Jane Austen has none, either in character or in setting. The rocks and streams, the forests and castles which form the furniture of romantics like Scott, have no place in her novels. In her reaction from romance she discarded all aids borrowed from romance. Naturally therefore, it is in vain that we seek for the fervour of romantic passion in her works.

Her fiction belongs to the movement towards naturalism and the study of common life and character. Her novels are mostly of home-life. Her reaction against romance is best seen in her earliest novel *Northanger Abbey* where she made fun of sensational and romantic novels. She drew upon ordinary things of life. A visit to a country house or a drive supplied her with materials of adventure. Of set purpose, she keeps her eye fixed upon a small circle of country gentlefolk who have nothing to do but to pay calls, take walks, drive out, talk and dance. Thus her theme and treatment did not give her scope enough for the display of titanic passions.

The life of her simple people is not broken by any startline incidents. The most exciting incidents in her six novels are the fall of Louisa Musgrave from the steps, the fall of Marianne on the hill and the sudden return of Sir Thomas to Mansfield Park. There are certain elopements, no doubt, in her novels; for instance, that of Lydia with Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*, or of Julia with Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park*. But these elopements are quite natural and are the inevitable consequence of Lydia's and Julia's character. These are not used for their own dramatic force but for their effect upon the lives of others. They are in no sense romantic affairs but fall in the natural course of events. We do not derive any profound sensation from these episodes.

Character, not incident, was Jane Austen's chief aim; and of character again, she confined herself to the humdrum life encountered by her immediate view. She is blind to the multi-coloured life which is reflected in the pages of Fielding or Dickens. There is a class of readers who are always in search for stimulus to their appetite and Charlotte Brontë is one among them. But Jane Austen by her very choice of subject-matter fails to satisfy their craving. Her whole way of thinking, her appreciation of the dramatic element in common life, are foreign to the taste of such readers.

The pictures of Jane Austen are dispassionate. She neither idealises the country poor nor deprecates them. She has a sound sense and a Greek feeling for balance and proportion. Her temper is equable and unruffled throughout. She is never carried off her feet by warmth of feeling or a violent gust of passion and enthusiasm. Her extremely critical and sane attitude which always keeps her judgment unbiassed is partly accountable for her want of intensity of passion. She never went into raptures over any character, scene or incident but followed a steady course. There is not the least intrusion of emotion in her strict fidelity to the reproduction of common life. There are no extremes in her books she equally avoids peasants and noblemen. She never swerves from the golden

mean., Besides, she does not concern herself with social problems, for example, the problem about the curse of poverty. Hence she is lacking in the power and intensity of passion which : sweeps through the writings of Charlotte and Emily Brontes.

Her self detachment and sense of aloofness is also a cause for this want of passion. She has her likes and dislikes ; but these are not strong, ardent and vigorous like those of Fielding. She never rages at vice nor does she shower praises in profusion on virtue. She eliminated from her story those strong, predilections which sway an author's creations. Therefore a want of passion is counterbalanced by a cool radiance and happy sanity that pervade all her works. If we compare her with 'Dickens' we find that Dickens is in a continual state of exuberant excitement about his characters ; but Jane Austen is always alert, sane and unsentimental. Naturally therefore, her characters have the qualities of sharpness and clearness about them. She sees everything in clear outline and perspective. She does not search out the grounds of motive like George Eliot, nor illumine them like Meredith by search light flashes of insight, nor like Hardy display them by irony. In other words, she does not reveal her characters by external analysis but by narrative in which they appear to reveal themselves.

So far as characterisation is concerned, the charge of want 'of passion must' be understood with proper limitations. This charge does not extend to her imaginative vision or her understanding. She could make her characters real and life-like by the clarity of her imaginative vision and by her fidelity to what she saw with it. Critics admire this "Shakespearean discrimination" in her. Her understanding was extraordinarily sensitive and perspicacious. She saw deeply and clearly to the springs of action and understood the finest shades of feeling and motive. Her women are never insipid. Emma, Elizabeth and Elinor Dashwood are gifted with innumerable little failings which serve to enhance the loveliness of

their character. The nearest approach to passion is the un-governed sensibility of Maria Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*. In the picture of her sufferings and in the contrast between her and her sister Elinor, Miss Austen exerts all her skill and her knowledge of the female heart. Marianne regards prudence and circumspection as worldly wisdom of the worst type. She is warm-hearted, romantic and imprudent. A modern novelist would have given Marianne a more adventurous experience and would have exposed her virtue to more fiery temptations. But Jane Austen always fought shy of fiery temptations and the virtue of her heroines is well guarded. Thus the character of Marianne shows how, although it is passionate it is kept within the bounds of moderation.

If we now turn to Jane Austen's lovers we find little passion in them. Love in her novels is a mere matter-of-fact affair and both parties concerned keep their eyes wide open to the marriage settlement. In *Northanger Abbey* the origin of love is ascribed to gratitude, a pure but cold fountain. There is nothing of the consuming heat and intensity of the passion of love which we feel in the pages of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare conveys to us the elemental force of love but Miss Austen with her tranquil, common-sense conduct of life fails to do that. Therefore the comparison between her and Shakespeare as drawn by Macaulay appears to be merely fanciful. She was quite incapable of any kind of enthusiasm and romantic raptures were unknown to her. The raptures of Emma and Knightley in *Emma*, of Fanny and Edmund in *Mansfield Park*, of Anne Elliot and Wentworth in *Persuasion* are moderate. The relation between Knightley and Emma is beautifully drawn out,—the gradual growth of his affection for her and with it the growth of his feeling that she might possibly return his affection. As he had known Emma all her life it is quite natural that as she grew into womanhood his friendship should grow into love. It is not romantic love or 'love at first sight' but it is true and harmonious. Nor do lovers die of love in Jane Austen's works. Marianne in *Sense*

*and Sensibility* should have died for love but such a thing did not come within the purview of Jane Austen's personal experience. She drew life as she saw it in her quiet Hampshire nook and studiously avoided high action and high passion. The life in which she moves is real, not ideal, lived among moderate hills and valleys ; for summits and abysses we search in vain in her.

But Jane Austen's novels are not entirely wanting in passages which show the depth and intensity of passion as well as the keenness of her perception of character. In *Pride and Prejudice* there is such a passage where the state of Elizabeth's mind after she had received the news of Lydia's elopement is described. Elizabeth was reading Jane's letter when Darcy entered and all reserve was at an end ; she burst into tears and was silent. The passage (Vol. III, Ch. 4) may be quoted as follows :—

"Darcy made no answer. He seemed scarcely to hear her, and was walking up and down the room in earnest meditation ; his brow contracted, his air gloomy. Elizabeth soon observed and instantly understood it. Her power was sinking ; everything must sink under such a reproof of family weakness, such an assurance of the deepest disgrace, she could neither wonder nor condemn, but the belief of his self conquest brought nothing consolatory to her bosom, afforded no palliation to her distress. It was on the contrary exactly calculated to make her understand her own wishes ; and never had she honestly felt that she could have loved him, as now, when all love must be vain. But self, though it would intrude, could not engross her. Lydia,—the humiliation, the misery, she was bringing on them all, soon swallowed up every private care."—*Pride and Prejudice*

The complexity of human motives, the power of entertaining at the same moment a number of different emotions and thoughts, the sudden realisation of the truth, all these are set forth very well in this short paragraph. Love and pride are still conflicting in Elizabeth's mind ; but the cooler judg-

ment is upset by love revealed in despair which compels her to seek sympathy from the injured and disdainful Darcy. The situation is eminently dramatic and passionate. At no other time was Elizabeth more assailable than now, when her pride was humbled and she had no helper at home to turn to. Moments such as these do not often occur in Miss Austen's books. Such moments of fine intensity happen only when her feelings master her method. There is another such moment in *Persuasion* when Jane Austen speaks of the love musings of Anne Elliot, as she walks the streets of Bath, and says that these love-musings are enough "to spread purification and perfume all the way".

Although Jane Austen's vision is limited in range, it is very intense within its limits. She detected the foibles of human nature very clearly. Leaving aside broad and tumultuous effects she became a miniature painter. There are no sudden white-heats of exalted imagination or momentary illuminations of the abysses of human life. She throws a clear and steady stream of daylight on familiar objects. She lays touch upon touch with great delicacy so that she produces a finished picture which reaches absolute artistic perfection.

It is foolish to expect from her what she does not profess to give, such as romantic or high flown sentiment or the tragedy of great passions. She painted the world she knew, with fidelity. It is not her fault that romance and sentiment and large passions are not found in her pages; they could not be found in the world she knew. But the Brontës had a far better opportunity than Jane Austen. They lived among a people in whom the primitive passions are very strong. The country they inhabited had also a primeval beauty and savageness. Great dramas, full of intense love and passion and revenge can be enacted on such a stage; there is a suggestion of the titanic in the very scenery. But Miss Austen was nurtured in an atmosphere over which the very spirit of dulness broods her wings. Her habitation was near smooth lawns and among people whose character was marked by self-poise. Her

neighbours loved with discretion and sobriety and when disappointed in love they took it quite calmly. Very naturally therefore we find that the scheme, characters and events in her novels are strictly ordinary. This may not give stimulus to the appetite of a certain class of readers but she will ever remain a friend of those who are lovers of simplicity and common life.

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## THE BURDEN OF PROPAGANDA.

[ *Found in the waste-paper basket of A. C. Swinburne.*  
—N. N. R.]

1.        Here, to this Council-Chamber,  
             Here, where everything seems  
             Meant for a noon's quiet slumber  
             Fed with Freedom's dreams,  
             We come, from all four quarters  
             Across the fields and waters  
             Sent by the sons and daughters  
             Of this land of shouts and screams.
2.        We are tired of weaving and spinning ;  
             Of men that weave and spin,—  
             We want a new beginning  
             Always, with hurrah and din.  
             We are tired of hours and days  
             Of grilling Junes and Mays  
             In cheerless villages—  
             We find no fun therein.