

to make to the first critic of Emma, whose depressing remarks upon its humorous personages had probably their baneful effect upon the humorous personages of Persuasion.

The prolonged interval which lies between the composition of Mansfield Park and Emma and the composition of Miss Austen's previously published novels has doubtless prompted the discovery of a difference between the styles of the earlier and later work — a difference which is perhaps more expected than apparent. For, if a comparison of style must be made, it should surely be between the books last written and Northanger Abbey, rather than between those books and Pride and Prejudice or Sense

and Sensibility, since both of these latter were revised by the author at Chawton, while Northanger Abbey was printed precisely as it had been left when the Bath bookseller buried it provisionally in his drawer. But without refining too nicely, it may be granted that the Chawton group of books exhibit just that progress towards perfection which should be expected when we contrast the efforts of a clever girl in her teens with the same person's productions after she has gained experience of life. We have seen that Miss Austen herself was prepared to be told that Emma was less witty than Pride and Prejudice, and it is manifest that there is a prodigality of sparkle in the one which is — at least — subdued in the other. In Emma,

indeed, Miss Austen appears to have adopted Mademoiselle de Lespinasse's motto of *Rien en relief*. With the exception of the somewhat laboured outburst in Chapter III in favour of the old-fashioned boarding-school as against the new, the style is everywhere carefully subordinated to the needs of the narrative, while the slender thread of the intrigue is followed with the closest tenacity. The heroine, at first, is scarcely as winning as some of her predecessors, certainly she is not so clever. 'I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like,' said Emma's creator at the outset, and in part she was right; for Emma's devices to alienate Harriet from Robert Martin do, at first, create a positive

prejudice against her. But her character is so subtly and gradually developed, that by the time she has come to see the errors of match-making, and has reached the luminous moment when 'it darted through her with the speed of an arrow, that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself,' we are almost prepared to forgive her for being rude to Miss Bates. Whether Mr. Knightley really made an ideal husband is impossible to say, since Miss Austen, although she seems to have vouchsafed some supplementary particulars to her family respecting Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax, has, on this topic, preserved a discreet silence. Lord Brabourne, who is only lukewarm about Emma as a novel, is distinctly

of opinion that the marriage did not prove a success. But he is unreasonably prejudiced against Mr. Knightley, who, he says, 'interfered too much.' Perhaps he does, but he loves Emma through all her faults, and all his fault-finding. Again, Lord Brabourne considers Mr. Knightley too old. But here he has Shakespeare against him : —

" Let still the woman take  
An elder than herself.  
So wears she to him,  
So sways she level in her husband's  
heart."

Emma, let us hope, wore well, for she can only have been forty when her husband was fifty-six. Those, however, who regard Mr. Knightley