

"Parson Austen's Daughter."*

By Helen Ashton.

SO charming is this true story of the social and intimate family life of one whose literary gift destined her to lasting fame as a classical genius, that it holds us enthralled from beginning to end.

In writing the biography of Jane Austen in novel form, Helen Ashton shows remarkable originality, as she portrays not only the authoress, Jane, but all the members of the large Austen family, their relatives and many associates so true to reality that to the reader their personalities come out and live!

This beautiful story of Jane Austen's life is greatly enriched by the author's introduction of a running commentary of the history of the period, a time when England experienced some of the most critical events of her existence.

"Jane, a winter child, first blinked her bright eyes on 16 December in the year 1775." Coming seventh on the list of a family of eight, nurtured in the atmosphere of a Hampshire country vicarage, Jane had a lively, delightful early youth among her numerous brothers and with her one and only sister and constant companion, Cassandra.

Mrs. Austen, as Cassandra in her old age would relate—"My mother was very well connected—she came of a fine family, the Leighs of Stoneleigh Abbey in Warwickshire; they were called the Loyal Leighs, for their services to King Charles the Martyr.

"She was no fine lady though, for all her good blood; she brought up her eight children on very small means and she was a good housekeeper, who could turn her hand to anything. She kept all straight indoors and out. She had her dairy and her poultry yard behind the house and always kept Alderney cows. She would go into the kitchen and train her young maids in the ways of a gentleman's house.

"We baked our own bread and brewed our own beer; more was done at home in those days than is the custom now; she never sat down from morning till night; she must have been a very strong woman, for she lived to be eighty.

"My father was very different, quiet and gentle and none too practical; he was always wrapped up in his books. He came of good yeoman stock, the Kentish Austens, most of them were clothiers, doctors and attorneys, round about Ashford. . . . He was a wonderful teacher, patient and gentle, he made everything interesting to a child. He took pupils to help make ends meet. . . . He farmed his own glebe and did it very well. . . . When Jane was as yet only a blooming, unformed creature of sixteen . . . she was a clear brunette with a rich colour; she had a round merry face, a pretty, small, mouth and nose and sparkling hazel eyes and brown hair set in close curls round her forehead; she chatted like a starling and made all the young men laugh." But Mrs. Austen feared Jane was sadly heedless, neglecting her music, and complained "she wastes too much time scribbling."

The urge was always there, wherever she might be, she had the seeing eye—"She sat demurely at table or in the drawing-room, listening politely to the conversation and occasionally dropping a quiet comment of her own. . . ." Nobody took much notice of Fanny's aunt, that quiet Miss Austen from Hampshire, a poor relation, who displayed very elegant manners, but had not much to say for herself. They had no idea she was summing them all up, or how dryly amusing she could be about them afterwards, when they had all driven away in their fine carriages, with the high-stepping horses and the powdered coachman and footman on the box!

Aunt Jane was a delightfully easy guest to entertain, the smallest events pleased and amused her. She enjoyed a big party at Chilham Castle, with Fanny and the Wildman girls making music afterwards; but she was equally pleased to attend a family party with the Tildens at Milstead Vicarage and look at books of engravings on the sofa by the

fire. She was always ready to saunter round the estate with Papa and the bailiff, making sensible remarks about crops and cattle and admiring the growth of Bentigh and the Temple plantations.

She greatly attracted the young at all ages, who "were always crowding up to Aunt Jane. They were old enough now to be amused by her cleverness and enchanted with her sweetness. She could make anything amusing to a child."

It has surprised many that her novels scarcely refer to, or give any impression of, the war conditions of the country which prevailed during the greater part of her life, conditions that brought her brothers to serve in the army and navy—two of whom rose to be Admirals—must have greatly influenced her family circle.

This remarkable fact, it would seem, accentuates the genius of one endowed with a deep sense of accuracy—not to venture beyond her depth.

Though somewhat late, we would urge those of our readers who have not already read "Parson Austen's Daughter" to do so, and which, when they do, we do not doubt will result in their perusal once again of the novels, compiled in perfect English and not an unnecessary word, by an author, adored by her numerous nephews and nieces, one of whom, an admiring schoolboy, enquired of his Aunt Jane "how this was done, because he had made up his mind to write one himself. . . . only he did not know how to begin." He leant against her and she explained it all quite beautifully. "You must employ the material that lies closest to your hand; you must contrive your story curiously out of the simplest everyday matters, as a small bird builds its nest from the mosses and twigs of the tree it lives in. That is the best way to write a book."

Perhaps her reply explains something of why she lives to-day among the classics.

Miss Ashton has given us in "Parson Austen's Daughter" a moving and delightful biography of a unique writer—a book to treasure!

A. S. B.

* Collins, 14, St. James's Place, S.W.1. Price 8/6.

The Middlesex Hospital.††

By A. St. Grange Saunders.

THE history of the Middlesex Hospital is indeed one which will impress the professional and lay people alike. From its commencement, incidents of all types occurring from year to year are portrayed to the fullest. The Hospital meetings which took place weekly give some interesting notes. One amusing point is where the Matron is called upon to explain why in lieu of wages, she had issued to each nurse one pound of raw meat instead of the prescribed quantity of eight ounces of cooked.

Particularly attractive to the reader is the great Sir Charles Bell, with his unrelenting courage and tenacity, to which the Middlesex Hospital, in its early days, owed much of its success. Sir Charles was elected surgeon to the hospital in 1814, and it is interesting to note the amount of bribery and corruption which went on behind the scenes on this occasion. Nevertheless, in the case of Sir Charles, bribery was quite unnecessary as, although he was only an anatomist, he was undoubtedly brilliant and possessed great qualities of character.

Sir Arnold Lawson stands out as another great and notable surgeon whose sense of humour and justice influenced those with whom he came into contact.

In all instances, the descriptions of the various members of the staff are very convincing, and the history of the hospital shows the greatness of the pioneers of that time. Set-backs were many but in each instance, they were overcome after much difficulty.

To nurses, will be particularly attractive the descriptions

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