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THE POEMS OF CHARLOTTE, EMILY AND ANNE BRONTE.

When Charlotte Brontë wrote to Southey entreating his opinion of her poems, she received for answer the following advice :—

“You evidently possess, and in no inconsiderable degree, what Wordsworth calls ‘the faculty of verse.’ I am not depreciating it when I say that in these times it is not rare. Many volumes of poems are now published every year, without attracting public attention, any one of which, if it had appeared half a century ago, would have obtained a high reputation for its author. Whoever, therefore, is ambitious of distinction in this way, ought to be prepared for disappointment. * * * * Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment and recreation. To these duties you have not yet been called, and when you are, you will be less eager for celebrity, you will not seek in imagination for excitement of which the vicissitudes of this life, and the anxieties from which you must not hope to be exempted, be your state what it may, will bring with them but too much.”

And though to this advice,* discouraging, as it seems to us, in spite of his protest to the contrary, and even in a degree harsh and narrow, he adds :

*In his letter he says : “It is not my advice you have asked as to the direction of your talents, but my opinion of them, and yet the opinion may be worth little, and the advice much.”

“But do not suppose that I disparage the gift which you possess, nor that I would discourage you from exercising it.

* * Write poetry for its own sake ; not in a spirit of emulation, and not with a view to celebrity ; the less you aim at that, the more likely you will be to deserve, and finally to obtain it. So written it is wholesome, both for the heart and soul ; it may be made the surest means, next to religion, of soothing the mind and elevating it ; you may embody in it your best thoughts and your wisest feelings, and in so doing, discipline and strengthen them,”—yet looking at the matter impartially, and comparing the main portion of the letter with its more soothing conclusion, we are still forced to think that Southey’s “opinion” was not favorable to the literary and poetical aspirations of his correspondent. That Miss Brontë herself considered it in this light is evident from her reply :—“I trust I shall never more feel ambitious to see my name in print.” She writes, “If the wish should rise I’ll look at Southey’s letter and suppress it.”

Vain pledge, though made in all sincerity, for who can guarantee perpetually to “suppress” the dominant de-