W.H. HELM

JANE AUSTEN AND HER COUNTRY-HOUSE COMEDY



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Jane Austen

JANE AUSTEN

AND HER

COUNTRY-HOUSE COMEDY

BY

W. H. HELM

AUTHOR OF "ASPECTS OF BALZAC," ETC.

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FAWSIDE HOUSE
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TO MY MOTHER

"I concluded, however unaccountable the assertion might appear at first sight, that good-nature was an essential quality in a satirist, and that all the sentiments which are beautiful in this way of writing, must proceed from that quality in the author. Good-nature produces a disdain of all baseness, vice, and folly; which prompts them to express themselves with smartness against the errors of men, without bitterness towards their persons."—STEELE, *Tatler*, No. 242.

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A LETTER OF JANE AUSTEN'S

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admiration.

The year 1775, which deprived England of her American colonies, was generous to English art and literature. Had it only produced Walter Savage Landor, or even no better worthy than James Smith of the *Rejected Addresses*, it would not have done badly. But these were its added bounties. Its greater gifts were Turner, Charles Lamb and Jane Austen. Could we be offered the choice of re-possessing the United States, or losing the very memory of these three, which alternative would we choose?

It is difficult to appreciate the lapse of time since Jane Austen was at work. We are now within a few years of the centenary of her death. She had been laid beneath that black slab in Winchester Cathedral before the first railway had been planned, or the first telegraph wire stretched from town to town, or the first steamship steered across the Atlantic. Yet the must of age has not settled on her books. The lavender may lie between their pages, but it is still sweet, and there is many a successful novelist of our own times whose work is already far more out of date than hers.

This perennial timeliness of atmosphere is no necessity of genius. Fielding and Scott remain a delight for succeeding generations, because they possess the essential quality of humanity, but the life which they offer us is largely remote from our own, foreign to our experience. Jane Austen invites us to enjoy a change of air among people with most of whom we may soon feel at ease, finding nothing in their conversation that will disturb our equanimity. If you are one of Jane Austen's lovers, you come back to her novels for a holiday from the noise and whirl of modern fiction, as you would come from a great

city to the countryside or the coast village for rest and restoration.

The failure of her books to attract the mass of novel-readers is due in the first place to a lack of "exciting" qualities. No syndicate that knew its business would offer them for serial purposes; they have no breathless "situations," and their strong appeal is to the calmer feelings and the intellect, not to the passions and the prejudices. In one respect only has she anything in common with the popular novelists of our day. Her set of characters is even more limited than theirs. The virtuous heroine, the handsome hero, the frivolous coquette, the fascinating libertine, the worldly priest, are to be encountered in her pages, but the wicked nobleman and the criminal adventuress find no places there. What is often overlooked, however, by those who speak of Jane Austen's few characters, is that no two of them have quite the same characteristics of mind. They are differentiated with admirable art. Even so, the types are few, and the smallness of the field which she cultivated has been frequently adduced as a bar to her inclusion among the masters of English fiction. She has the least range of them all. When one thinks of the host of strongly-marked types in Scott, in Dickens, in Thackeray, of the diversity of scenes and incidents which fill the pages of their books, her few squires and parsons and unemployed officers, with their wives and daughters, who live out their days in Georgian parlours and in shrubberies and parks, make a poor enough show in the dramatic and spectacular way.

No particular passion dominates the life of any one of her leading personages. Avarice, which has afforded such notable figures to almost every great novelist, in her world is only represented by meanness; lust and hate are nowhere strongly emphasized, even love is rarely permitted to suggest the possibility of becoming violent. There are no

Pecksniffs, Quilps, Père Grandets, nor Lord Steynes; no Lady Kews, Jane Eyres, nor Lisbeth Fischers. Only into the hearts of her younger women does Jane Austen throw the searchlight of complete knowledge, lit by her own feelings, and tended with self-analysis, and her heroines still leave a large part of virtuous womankind unrepresented.

Balzac, describing the origins of his play *La Marâtre* to the manager who produced it, said: "We are not concerned with an appalling melodrama wherein the villain sets light to houses and massacres the inhabitants. No, I imagine a drawing-room comedy where all is calm, tranquil, pleasant. The men play peacefully at the whist-table, by the light of wax candles under little green shades. The women chat and laugh as they do their fancy needlework. Presently they all take tea together. In a word, everything shows the influence of regular habits and harmony. But for all that, beneath this placid surface the passions are at work, the drama progresses until the moment when it bursts out like the flame of a conflagration. That is what I want to show."

The scene described is Jane Austen's—the quiet parlour, the card-players, the women chatting, and working with their coloured silks, the tea-tray, the shaded candles, the general air of ease and tranquillity. We find it at Mansfield Park with the Bertrams, at Hartfield with the Woodhouses, and, in spite of Lydia and her "mamma," at Longbourn with the Bennets. But the *dénouement* to which Balzac looked for his effect has no attraction for Jane Austen. Catherine Morland, at Northanger Abbey, imagines some such tragedy smouldering into life below the surface of quiet habitude as Balzac discovers in his horrid war of step-daughter and step-mother, and Jane Austen herself laughs with Henry Tilney at this impressionable country

maiden whom he mocks while he admires.

Balzac and Jane Austen both strove to depict life, to show the motives and instincts of men and women as the causes of action; in his case of an energetic and passionate type, wherein the primary instincts are freely exercised, in her case, of a simple, orderly kind, which allows but little scope for the display of violence or the elaboration of plots. There are exceptions, of course, which for fear of the precise critic must at least be illustrated. Balzac has his quiet Pierrettes and Rose Cormons, who suffer as patiently and far more poignantly than an Elinor Dashwood or a Fanny Price; Jane Austen has her dissolute Willoughbys and disturbing Henry Crawfords, and also her Maria Rushworths and Mrs. Clays, who throw their bonnets over the windmills with even less regard for their reputations than a Beatrix de Rochefide or a Natalie de Manerville. When a lapse from virtue on the part of any of her characters was, on some rare occasion, necessary to her plan, Jane Austen did not allow any prudish reserve to stand in the way, but it may be said no less unreservedly that she never introduced vice where her story could do quite as well without it, and it is never the central motive of her novels. It is, then, not alone for the narrowness of her field that her title to greatness has often been disputed. Many persons whose literary tastes are marked by understanding and catholicity refuse to acknowledge the genius of so peaceful a novelist. Because of the absence of passion and sentiment in Jane Austen's works, the author of *Jane Eyre* would not recognize in her the great artist that Scott and Coleridge believed her to be. "The passions," wrote Miss Brontë, "are perfectly unknown to her; she rejects even a speaking acquaintance with that stormy sisterhood. Even to the feelings she vouchsafes no more than an occasional graceful but distant recognition—too frequent converse with them would ruffle the smooth

elegance of her progress." The three novelists here brought into momentary association, the creators of *Eugénie Grandet*, *Emma*, and *Jane Eyre* represent three distinctive forces in fiction. Charlotte Brontë, disillusioned with the world, of which she knew very little, and angry at its follies and injustices, sat alone and poured out her feelings in her books; Balzac, hungry for fame, wrote furiously all night by the light of a dip, stimulating his fiery imagination with the strong coffee which was the irresponsible author of many of his most astonishing chapters; Jane Austen, taking her meals and her rest regularly, sat at her little desk in the parlour where her mother and sister were sewing or writing letters, and placidly turned her observations and reflections into manuscript. Her hazel eyes, we may be certain, never rolled in any kind of frenzy, her brown curls were never disturbed by the spasmodic movements of nervous hands. Great artist as she was, she had no greater share of the "artistic temperament" than many a popular novelist who "turns out" two or three serial stories at a time by the simple process of shuffling the situations, changing the scenery, and re-naming the characters. If she had been touched by the strong emotion of a Charlotte Brontë, or the burning imagination of a Balzac, she might have produced work which would have set the world on fire, instead of merely infusing keen happiness into responsive minds and compelling their love and admiration. That is only to say that if she had been somebody else she would not have been herself. It is peace, not war, that she carries to us. Even her irony is not of the sardonic kind, and in her work the "master spell" is so daintily mingled that the bitter ingredients seem to have disappeared in the making.

Respect and admiration and sympathy in a high degree have been given by millions of minds, not always emotional, to many authors, but Jane Austen is loved as

few have been. The love is inspired by her works, and she shares it with Elizabeth Bennet, Emma Woodhouse, and Anne Elliot. Milton, in a line which is as clear in meaning as it is foggy in construction, speaks of Eve as "the fairest of her daughters." Jane Austen is regarded by the generality of her lovers as the most delightful of her own heroines, and not merely as the woman who brought them into existence.

Could we have loved her so much if we had lived with her at Steventon Rectory or at Chawton Cottage? What she was at home I think we know much better from her own letters than from her brother Henry's panegyric, which, in spite of its obvious sincerity of intention, too nearly resembles the memorial inscriptions of his own period to be regarded with quite as much confidence as respect. "Faultless herself," he wrote, "as nearly as human nature can be, she always sought, in the faults of others, something to excuse, to forgive, or forget." "Always" is a word which—as Captain Corcoran discovered of its reverse—can hardly ever be used without considerable reservations. We know, from her own pen, that Jane—we call one unwedded queen "Elizabeth," why should we not call another "Jane"?—did not "always" show so much tenderness for the faults of others, and when we remember the endless variety of human nature we cannot but regard this ascription of "faultlessness" by an affectionate brother as of little more evidential value than Mrs. Dashwood's opinion (in *Sense and Sensibility*) of the "faultlessness" of Marianne's lovers. It is no disparagement to Henry Austen to say that his little memoir is more convincing as a record of his own character than of his sister's. Their nephew, Mr. Austen Leigh, who wrote the fullest and most admirable account of Jane Austen, was still in his teens when she died. Apart from these sparse reminiscences we know practically nothing about her except from her own novels

and letters, but from them we may learn almost as much of the mind of this delightful woman as any loving relation could have told us. It may be possible for an author to write an artificial novel without betraying his own nature to any positive extent, but such novels as Jane Austen's cannot so be produced; it is possible to write letters which, apart from the penmanship, offer no evidences of character; but a pair of devoted sisters, however different their ability or their philosophy of life, could not correspond during twenty years without displaying much of the workings of their minds.

Some of Jane's literary admirers think that she was lively and talkative, others that she was prone to silence in company. Probably both views are correct. It depended on the company. Among those who could appreciate her fun and her wit, her harmless quips and quizzing, she was full of vivacity; among those who raised their eyebrows at her impromptu verses and missed the points of her piquant remarks on persons and incidents she was speedily content, within the bounds of good manners, to observe rather than to join in the comedy of conversation. We need not unreservedly believe her brother's assurance that "she never uttered either a hasty, a silly, or a severe expression," but we may, from all we know of her, be fairly confident that she had a control over her tongue which few such gifted humourists have possessed. As for her temper, it was said in her family that "Cassandra had the *merit* of having her temper always under command, but that Jane had the *happiness* of a temper that never required to be commanded."

That her nature was not, in any marked degree, what is commonly called "sympathetic" we may see from many passages in her letters, and her novels afford ample corroboration. There was no avoidable hypocrisy about her. In this at least she is the counterpart of Elizabeth or

Anne. "Do not be afraid of my encroaching on your privilege of universal goodwill. You need not. There are few people whom I really love, and still fewer of whom I think well. The more I see of the world, the more am I dissatisfied with it; and every day confirms my belief of the inconsistency of all human characters, and of the little dependence that can be placed on the appearance of either merit or sense." In a letter from Jane Austen to Cassandra there would have been nothing to surprise us in this passage, which is actually taken from the remarks of Elizabeth Bennet to her sister on the subject of Bingley's long silence after the Netherfield ball.

If Jane Austen did not cry over misfortunes which did not affect her, neither did she pretend to ignore the affectations and weaknesses even of her nearest relations. Can it be supposed, for instance, that she was in the least degree blinded to the shortcomings of a beloved mother of whom she could, on various occasions, write such news as that she "continues hearty, her appetite and nights are very good, but she sometimes complains of an asthma, a dropsy, water in her chest, and a liver disorder"?

A daughter and sister and friend whose attention was so closely devoted, however unobtrusively, to the study of character in a narrow circle, would in most cases be "a little trying," but when the observer was endowed with a keen sense of the absurd, and an irony which, however weak in caustic, was strong in veracity, it might be supposed that she would be an *enfant terrible* of that mature kind which in our own days is commoner than the nursery variety. In her case, the supposition would be ill-founded. She was at once too well-bred, and too kind-hearted, to let her special powers of wounding take exercise on gentle hearts. But falsehood of any sort was abhorrent to her, and as a consequence she was inclined, in communing with her sister, to show herself a little

intolerant even of those amiable pretences of sorrow for common ailments and small troubles which are so soothing to weak humanity. She rejected, for example, the idea of commiserating with any one on account of a cold or a headache, unless there were feverish symptoms!

Of the "vacant chaff well-meant for grain" of which Tennyson sings so sadly, Jane brought little to market. She would express to Cassandra her sympathy with their acquaintances under great disasters and trivial misfortunes with the same penful of ink. What she wrote to her sister—of her devotion for whom, from earliest childhood, her mother said, "If Cassandra was going to have her head cut off, Jane would insist on sharing her fate"—is far more free than what she uttered in the family circle. Few have realized better the value of the unspoken word, or given their relations less opportunity to remind them of the evils of indiscretion.

If she was unemotional and, in the ordinary sense of the word, unsympathetic, she is not to be blamed for this lack of the qualities with one of which she so amply endowed Marianne and with the other Elinor Dashwood. We can no more make ourselves emotional or sympathetic than we can make ourselves fair or dark, or rather, we can only alter our ways as we can alter our complexions, by artifice. The outward show of sympathy which is not felt is one of the commonest of hypocrisies, perhaps inevitable at times from very charity. Happily it is not a necessary part of that ultimate barrier which, even in the truest friendships and the deepest love, makes it as impossible for one human being to see the whole of another's heart as it is impossible to see more than a little of the "other side" of the moon. We cannot help being more or less unfeeling, but we can subdue our selfishness in action. Almost everything that can be learned about Jane Austen strengthens the conviction that she was one of the least selfish of women.

In her last illness the fidelity of her spirit is constantly shown, and her affection becomes more unreserved in its utterance. There is one letter wherein, after speaking of Cassandra, she says, in a phrase curiously suggestive of Thackeray: "As to what I owe her, and the anxious affection of all my beloved family on this occasion, I can only cry over it, and pray God to bless them more and more."

That she was by nature "meek and lowly," as one of her American adorers declares, I cannot believe, but if she preferred the spacious rooms and well-spread board of her brother's mansion to the common parlour and boiled mutton-and-turnips of her father's rectory, she did not grizzle over her state, nor did she allow her conscious superiority of intelligence to claim distinction in her home. One of the few glimpses (apart from her own writings) that we have of her in her family relations is when, in the closing year of her life, her illness having begun to weaken her body, she was obliged to lie down frequently during the day. There was only one sofa at Chawton Cottage, and although Mrs. Austen, in spite of the many ailments she had formerly complained of, was a tolerably healthy old lady, the stricken daughter made herself a couch by putting several chairs together, and declared that she preferred it to the sofa which her mother commonly occupied. Sofas, we must remember, were at least as rare then as oak-panelled walls are now. It was in those days that Cobbett regretted that the sofa had ever been introduced into his country, and he no doubt, according to his habit, held the Prime Minister responsible for the aid to effeminate indulgence of which his contemporary Cowper sang.

Jane's discontent with the comparative poverty of her surroundings was not translated into ill temper. There are many reasons for believing, and few indeed for doubting, that she tried to do her duty in that state of life to which

she was born, and from which she was not destined to emerge into the more varied pleasures and pains of a larger world. What if, among those whom she trusted, she could not resist expressing the lively thoughts suggested to her acute wit by the acts or utterances of her friends. She was the pride of her family, and its sunshine, even if her rays were more akin to the sun as we know him on a fine spring day at home than as we seek him on the Côte d'Azur.

She seems to have been more nearly understood among the clergy and squires, and other members of her family, than most humourists in their immediate circles. The common experience of the genius in childhood and youth, if biographers are to be credited, is for the delicate shoots of his intelligence to be nipped by domestic frosts; but if there had been any freezing in the Austen family, it was more likely to be produced by the chill of Jane's own satirical remarks than by any harm that the convention and narrowness of others could do to a mind so well defended as hers. There are few traces of any such wintry weather having occurred at Steventon or Chawton. Jane was certainly beloved, greatly and deservedly, in her home. She was, no doubt, a little lonely, as genius, one may suppose, must always be, and as those who are blest, or curst, with a strong sense of the absurd must be whether they be geniuses or not. Her sister was her closest friend, but Jane's published letters to Cassandra, read in the light of the novels, suggest a reserve in discussing her inmost thoughts with that devoted spirit which seems hardly compatible with the closest concordance of ideas, in spite of the completest concordance of affection and a high respect on Jane's part for Cassandra's sound sense and critical judgment. Very different is the tone of the letters of that other pretty humourist, Dorothy Osborne, to William Temple. In Dorothy's case there was a perfect confidence in the entire sympathy and comprehension of the recipient.

This factor apart, how much there is in common between the two dear women. The one was dead more than eighty years before the other was born, but in all the history of womanhood is there any pair in which the smiling philosophy that is the salt of the mind is more fairly divided? Jane Austen lives still in Elizabeth Bennet and in Emma Woodhouse; Dorothy Osborne only in her sweet self. The one had no passion but her work—and it was a quiet, unconsuming passion. The other had no passion but her love, and it was never able to overmaster her intelligence. "In earnest," she wrote, "I am no more concerned whether people think me handsome or ill-favoured, whether they think I have wit or that I have none, than I am whether they think my name Elizabeth or Dorothy." It was not quite true in her case, nor would it have been in Jane's, but it contains no more exaggeration than is allowed to any woman of sense, and it was as true of the one as of the other.

Love has lately been defined by a ruthless analyzer of feelings as "a specific emotion, exclusive in selection, more or less permanent in duration, and due to a mental fermentation in itself caused by a law of attraction." Jane Austen had never read such an explanation of love as this, yet her views on the most powerful of the mixings of animal and spiritual instincts are usually more placid than would please the fancies of maidens who sleep with bits of wedding-cake beneath their pillows. That passionate love "is woman's whole existence" is not exemplified by Jane's favourite heroines. Emma or Elizabeth did not so regard it, even if Anne Elliot did lose some of her good looks and Catherine Morland her appetite when their hopes of particular bridegrooms seemed likely to be disappointed. Elizabeth would not have worried greatly over Darcy if he had not come back for her, and Emma would have been as happy at Hartfield without a husband as she had always

been, so long as Knightley was friendly.

We cannot imagine that Jane Austen could ever have written to any man, as Dorothy Osborne wrote to Temple of a love which she could not make her family understand: "For my life I cannot beat into their heads a passion that must be subject to no decay, an even perfect kindness that must last perpetually, without the least intermission. They laugh to hear me say that one unkind word would destroy all the satisfaction of my life, and that I should expect our kindness should increase every day, if it were possible, but never lessen."

The conjugal instinct was not strongly developed in Jane; and, although she seems to have been very fond of children, and especially of her nephews and nieces, it may be assumed with some confidence that the maternal instinct also found little place in her nature.

Marianne Dashwood, emotional, fastidiously truthful—she left to her elder sister "the whole task of telling lies when politeness required it"—romantically fond of scenery and poetry as any of Mrs. Radcliffe's heroines, stands out among the girls of Jane's imagining as the only one who outwardly exhibits the conventional signs of passionate affection for a lover, Catherine's and Fanny's emotions being more suggestive of maiden fancies, of "the flimsy furniture of a country miss's brain," than of the yearnings of a Juliet or a Roxane.

Nevertheless the idea that the Austen people are cold-blooded is warmly opposed in an appreciative little essay published in America a few years ago by Mr. W. L. Phelps. "Let no one believe," he writes, "that Jane Austen's men and women are deficient in passion because they behave with decency: to those who have the power to see and interpret, there is a depth of passion in her characters

that far surpasses the emotional power displayed in many novels where the lovers seem to forget the meaning of such words as honour, virtue, and fidelity." It may be that, like Richard Feverel on a certain occasion, the Henrys and Edwards, the Emmas and Annes are "too British to expose their emotions." But Lucy Feverel, one of the purest and truest women in fiction, shows passion so that no special "power to see and interpret" is requisite on the reader's part, and the same note is true of many of the charming heroines drawn by the masters of imagination.

At any rate Jane allowed her heroines as much passion and sentiment as—so far as we can discover—she experienced herself. The one known man who seems to have come near to being regarded as her accepted lover was Thomas Lefroy, who lived to be Chief Justice of Ireland.

"You scold me so much," she writes, in her twenty-first year, to Cassandra, "in the nice long letter which I have this moment received from you, that I am almost afraid to tell you how my Irish friend and I behaved. Imagine to yourself everything most profligate and shocking in the way of dancing and sitting down together. I *can* expose myself, however, only *once more*, because he leaves the country soon after next Friday, on which day we *are* to have a dance at Ashe after all. He is a very gentlemanlike, good-looking, pleasant young man, I assure you. But as to our having ever met, except at the three last balls, I cannot say much; for he is so excessively laughed at about me at Ashe, that he is ashamed of coming to Steventon, and ran away when we called on Mrs. Lefroy a few days ago."

No coquettish "reigning beauty" was ever more easy as to the fate of her lovers, or less likely to suffer at their hands, than this Hampshire maiden, whose fine complexion, hazel eyes, and well-proportioned figure

attracted so much admiration, and whose sweet voice and lively conversation completed the conquest of those whom she cared to entertain.

"Tell Mary," she writes to her sister (also in 1796), "that I make over Mr. Heartley and all his estate to her for her sole use and benefit in future, and not only him, but all my other admirers into the bargain wherever she can find them, even the kiss which C. Powlett wanted to give me, as I mean to confine myself in future to Mr. Tom Lefroy, for whom I don't care six-pence."

This agreeable Irishman, to whom, in later years, we find references in the records of the Edgeworth family, was speedily to pass out of Jane's young life. Very soon she has to write: "At length the day is come on which I am to flirt my last with Tom Lefroy, and when you receive this it will be over. My tears flow as I write at the melancholy idea. William Chute called here yesterday. I wonder what he means by being so civil."

We need not picture her as stopping her writing while she wiped the tears from her streaming eyes. "We went by Bifrons," she says on another occasion, "and I contemplated with a melancholy pleasure the abode of him on whom I once fondly doted." She never did "dote" on any man, so far as can be discovered or reasonably surmised, to any greater extent than her favourite Emma may be said to have "doted" on Frank Churchill. Emma's feelings about the man who was secretly engaged to Jane Fairfax at the time, are thus analyzed by Jane Austen—

> "Emma continued to entertain no doubt of her being in love. Her ideas only varied as to

> the how much. At first she thought it was a good deal; and afterwards but little. She had great pleasure in hearing Frank Churchill talked of; and, for his sake, greater pleasure than ever in seeing Mr. and Mrs. Weston; she was very often thinking of him, and quite impatient for a letter, that she might know how he was, how were his spirits, how was his aunt, and what was the chance of his coming to Randalls again this spring. But, on the other hand, she could not admit herself to be unhappy, nor, after the first morning, to be less disposed for employment than usual.... 'I do not find myself making any use of the word *sacrifice*,' said she. 'In not one of all my clever replies, my delicate negatives, is there any allusion to making a sacrifice. I do suspect that he is not really necessary to my happiness. So much the better. I certainly will not persuade myself to feel more than I do. I am quite enough in love. I should be sorry to be more.'"

Save for Willoughby's burst of misplaced enthusiasm over Marianne, Frank Churchill's description of Jane Fairfax to Emma is the warmest bit of love-painting in the Austen comedy—

> "She is a complete angel. Look at her. Is not she an angel in every gesture? Observe the turn of her throat. Observe her eyes, as she is looking up at my father. You will be glad to hear (inclining his head, and whispering seriously) that my uncle means to give her all

> my aunt's jewels. They are to be new set. I am resolved to have some in an ornament for the head. Will not it be beautiful in her dark hair?"

Such raptures as these are rarely permitted to the Austen lovers. In their affairs of the heart, as in the general conduct of their lives, plain living and quiet thinking reflect the simple habits of the people among whom Jane passed her own smoothly-ordered life.

To the simplicity of that life we owe one of her peculiar charms. If she had been the famous, sought-after literary woman who is the necessary complement of a dinner-party in a house of cultured luxury, and whose name is found in the index of every volume of contemporary reminiscences, she would not have been half so attractive to the type of mind that most enjoys her novels. Yet when all possible allowance has been made for her lightness of expression her own predilections were certainly for the conditions of "opulent leisure" rather than of decent comfort, for the amenities of Mansfield Park and Pemberley rather than for those of Fullerton Rectory or the Dashwoods' cottage. "People get so horridly poor and economical in this part of the world," she wrote from Steventon to her sister at Godmersham, "that I have no patience with them. Kent is the only place for happiness; everybody is rich there."

This was written early in her life. In the year before she died, writing to her niece Fanny, she said: "Single women have a dreadful propensity for being poor, which is one very strong argument in favour of matrimony, but I need not dwell on such arguments with *you*, pretty dear."

Contempt for poverty is expressed by several characters in her work. "Be honest and poor, by all means"—says

Mary Crawford to Edmund Bertram—"but I shall not envy you; I do not much think I shall even respect you. I have a much greater respect for those that are honest and rich."

Perhaps neither the real Jane nor the imaginary Mary is to be taken quite literally, but that Jane would have freely assented to a disbelief in the wisdom of marrying on a small income, however little she approved of Mary's "too positive admiration for wealth," is certain from all that we know of her opinions on the essentials of happiness.

Godmersham is in Kent, and it was in that spacious, well-provided house of her brother Edward, amid all the charms of parks and beechwoods, of home comforts and "elegances" that marked the life of the large landowner in those days, that she usually found herself most contented. Then was the time when the squire was not driven to find an income by letting his manor to a company promoter to whom the difference between an oak and an elm is scarcely known, and whose chief object in hiring a mansion in rural surroundings is to fill it with week-end parties who play bridge indoors on summer afternoons and leave the beauties of the gardens and the park to the peacocks and the deer.

With such a modern plutocrat Jane would have had little in common, but she would have had less with the modern Socialist. Landed property stood for everything stable and dignified in her days, and those critics of *Pride and Prejudice* who unkindly emphasized the fact that Elizabeth Bennet only decided to marry Darcy after she had seen the glories of Pemberley and its park and gardens, while they implicitly libelled the girl, were not so unfair to the general sentiment of her period. Sir Walter Scott, by the way, was one of those who regarded Elizabeth Bennet's change of feeling towards Darcy as the result of her visit to the fine place in Derbyshire. Surely such a view connotes a failure

to appreciate the humour of the conversation on this point between Jane Bennet and her sister. The elder girl asks the younger how long it is since she has felt any affection for Darcy, and Elizabeth replies: "It has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it began; but I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley." Even Jane Bennet, whose humour sense was not strongly developed, asks her to give a serious answer.

This much may be admitted, that the idea of marrying the curate never presented itself to any one of the maidens who brighten the novels of Jane Austen with their charms of mind and appearance. Elinor Dashwood seems to have regarded about £600 a year (with sure prospect of increase) as the minimum on which married life could hopefully be entered upon, and I fancy Jane would have agreed with her. The majority of novel-readers may still prefer the hero and heroine whose love will triumph over all obstacles of position, and opposition, of want of sympathy on the part of others or of sense on their own, and there have actually been readers who thought Lydia Bennet more "interesting" than Elizabeth! The prudence of the heroines may to some small extent account for the failure of Jane Austen's work to captivate the "great heart of the public." In any case her fame is far from universal. She has never been, and never will be, popular in the sense in which the men and women whose publishers cheerfully print first editions of a hundred thousand copies are popular. Her appeal, in her own lifetime, when her name was unknown, was not to "the general," and it is only much less restricted now because of the enormous increase in the reading public. Actually it is immensely greater; relatively, its increase is evidently small. One cannot, as in the case of some authors, describe her work as being enjoyed only by the cultured class, and neglected, because misapprehended, by the rest. True culture is always discriminating, even in the

presence of its divinities. Mr. Anthony Hope said not long ago, referring to literary snobbishness: "There are certain companies in which to suggest, even with the utmost humility, that certain parts of Jane Austen's novels are less entertaining than other parts is thought considerably worse than drawing invidious distinctions between various passages of Holy Writ."

With those who regard Jane Austen's work as equally excellent in every part, no patience is possible. The reader who finds it easy to get as much enjoyment from *Sense and Sensibility* or *Northanger Abbey* as from *Pride and Prejudice* or *Mansfield Park* must be blessed with a comfortable absence of discrimination. Those who see no degree of superiority in the presentation of the characters of Elizabeth Bennet and Anne Elliot as compared with Elinor Dashwood and Catherine Morland might be expected to regard Blanche Amory and Mrs. Jarley as the equals respectively of Becky Sharp and Mrs. Gamp.

Such uncritical admiration as Mr. Anthony Hope referred to is even more annoying than the tone in which I have heard a distinguished writer speak of Jane Austen as "that woman"—the mildest of the contemptuous terms that Napoleon applied to Madame de Staël. The author who spoke of Jane Austen so slightingly admitted her power of presenting a "bloodless" and trivial society in a life-like manner. No such recognition of power is allowed to her by an American critic of to-day, who says of her work "it may be called art, but it is a poor species of that old art which depended for its effect upon false similitudes." It is hard to believe that the writer of this astonishing opinion had read many pages of the author he thus condemned to a place among the third-rates.

II
EQUIPMENT; AND METHOD

Literary influences—Jane Austen's defence of novelists—The old essayists—Her favourite authors—Some novels of her time—Criticism of her niece's novel—Sense of her own limitations—Her method—Humour—Familiar names—Some characteristics of style—Suggested emendations—A new "problem" of authorship—A "forbidding" writer—"Commonplace" and "superficial"—Thomas Love Peacock—Sapient suggestions.

"I believe there is no constraint to be put upon real genius; nothing but inclination can set it to work," was one of the many sensible, if unoriginal, observations of the monarch in whose reign Jane Austen was born and died. But the inclination itself is usually started by external suggestions, and it is a mere truism that most books are written because others have appeared before them. Macaulay declared that but for Fanny Burney's example Jane Austen would never have been a novelist. Some of her early attempts at a complete novel did indeed take the epistolary form which was common in the preceding age, and was the method of her admired Richardson, who, I think, fired her ambition quite as much as Miss Burney. It would also seem that Mrs. Radcliffe's wild romances had induced in Jane the desire to do something that should please by the absence of every quality that had made them popular.

I doubt if there is any author of any period to whom the most famous remark of Buffon could be more justly

applied than to Jane Austen. "*Le style est la femme même*" is a conviction which becomes more and more firm as one reads her novels and her letters, and reflects over their relationship. Her simple life and her limited opportunities, her genius being granted, are a sufficient explanation of her work. Part of that life, and a part more important, in proportion to the rest, than it would have been in the case of one who had lived less remote from the world of thought and action, was the reading of favourite books. *Clarissa*, *Sir Charles Grandison* and *Pamela* influenced her strongly, but she avoided more than she took from them in the formation of her style. Miss Burney she now and then laughs at a little, as when, after John Thorpe has said to Catherine (who confesses she has never read *Camilla*): "You had no loss, I assure you; it is the horridest nonsense you can imagine; there is nothing in the world in it but an old man's playing at see-saw and learning Latin; upon my soul, there is not," Jane Austen adds that "the justness" of this critique "was unfortunately lost on poor Catherine." But where she loved she laughed. She appreciated her sister-novelist's work very highly, and she writes of a young woman whom she met at a neighbour's house: "There are two traits in her character which are pleasing—namely, she admires Camilla, and drinks no cream in her tea."

Scott's poetry, of course, Jane read and enjoyed. Three of his most popular novels—*Waverley*, *Guy Mannering*, and *The Antiquary*—appeared during her lifetime, and their authorship, like that of her own works, was not avowed until after her death. How wide-open was the "secret" of their origin from the very first, years before Scott's acknowledgment, we may see in one of Jane's letters of 1814, where she says: "Walter Scott has no business to write novels; especially good ones. It is not fair. He has fame and profit enough as a poet, and should

not be taking the bread out of the mouths of other people. I do not like him, and do not mean to like *Waverley* if I can help it, but I fear I must." She herself declared, half jestingly, that she wrote for fame and not for profit. Neither, in any but shallow measure, was granted to her whilst she lived. She did not, like Robert Burns, "pant after distinction," nor was she of the "pushing" type. The offering-up of self-respect in the cause of self-interest was the least possible of sacrifices with her.

The machine-made horrors of Ann Radcliffe—"*la reine des épouvantements*" as she has been aptly called, in spite of her retiring disposition—were as familiar to Jane as were those, far less *pouvantable*, of Ainsworth to the girls of a later generation. The Radcliffe novels were published between Jane's fourteenth and twenty-third years, when she was most open to romantic influences, but however much she may have shuddered over them in her teens, she laughed at them in her twenties, and it is certainly to the desire to satirize the melodramatic sensations of the school of fiction which they represent that we chiefly owe *Northanger Abbey*, a pleasant mixture of a serious love-story and a burlesque, a motto for which might have been found in a sonnet of Shakespeare:

> "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
> Coral is far more red than her lips' red:
> *****
> I grant I never saw a goddess go,—
> My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground."

It is in this novel that, leaving her characters for a page or two to take care of themselves, the author thus refers to the sorrows of the novel-making craft, and expresses her high appreciation of the work of Miss Burney and of Miss Edgeworth—

"Let us not desert one another—we are an injured body. Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried. From pride, ignorance, or fashion, our foes are almost as many as our readers; and while the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the history of England, or of the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the *Spectator*, and a chapter from Sterne, are eulogized by a thousand pens,—there seems almost a general wish of decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of the novelist, and of slighting the performances which have only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them. 'I am no novel-reader.—I seldom look into novels.—Do not imagine that '*I* often read novels.—It is really very well for a novel.' Such is the common cant. 'And what are you reading, Miss——?' 'Oh! it is only a novel!' replies the young lady; while she lays down her book with affected indifference, or momentary shame. 'It is only *Cecilia*, or *Camilla*, or *Belinda*;' or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language. Now, had the same young lady been engaged with a

> volume of the *Spectator*, instead of such a work, how proudly would she have produced the book, and told its name! though the chances must be against her being occupied by any part of that voluminous publication of which either the matter or manner would not disgust a young person of taste; the substance of its papers so often consisting in the statement of improbable circumstances, unnatural characters, and topics of conversation, which no longer concern any one living; and their language, too, frequently so coarse as to give no very favourable idea of the age that could endure it."

This is a hard saying for those who count "Sir Roger de Coverley," "Mr. Bickerstaff," and many "Clarindas" and "Sophronias" among their friends. The age of the Regency may or may not have been as lax in its morality as some of its detractors have declared, but that it was one in which ladies could reasonably have been expected to blush over the pages of the *Spectator* is not easily to be believed.

The girls in the manor-houses and parsonages of those days formed their literary tastes on native productions without going abroad for their novels. They did not read French fiction as their grandmothers and great-grandmothers had done, or as their cousins in town still did in spite of such warnings as that of a contemporary critic who held it scarcely possible to read French "without contracting some pollution, so extensively and radically is its whole literature depraved." Times had changed since Dorothy Osborne discussed the voluminous romances of Calprenède and Mademoiselle de Scudéri with William

Temple.

Another important branch of Jane's private and voluntary curriculum was her reading not only in the "coarse" journalism of Steele and Addison and their colleagues, but in the various successors of the *Spectator* and the *Tatler* which had their little days and died, particularly during the reign of George II. Not only in the *Rambler* and the *Idler* of the great man whom she so highly respected, but in the *World*, the *Mirror*, the *Lounger*, the *Connoisseur*, and other less remembered publications of their class, you may come upon characters and reflections and incidents which may have afforded fruitful suggestions to one who, after the manner of genius, could turn even the dulness of others into sparkling delight of her own.

Her favourite poet was Crabbe. She never met him, but she was so charmed by his work that, as her nephew has recorded, she used jokingly to say, "If she ever married at all, she could fancy being Mrs. Crabbe." Her appreciation of such poems as *The Village* and *The Parish Register* is suggestive. She herself made no attempt to illustrate the "simple annals of the poor." Born in a family which was itself a part of the landed gentry, in those days in its pride, she was obviously conscious of a lofty barrier between her own class and the peasantry. George Crabbe, on the other hand, the son of lowly folk, was born and nurtured in poverty, and he never forgot that he had sprung from the sand-dunes of the East Coast. His pictures of the poor, their sorrows and joys, fill the most delightful of his verses; his ease in their society, his understanding of their minds and characters mark him off as clearly from Jane Austen as—to take a very modern instance—the admirable and sympathetic pictures of farm-life in la Vendée offered in *La Terre qui meurt* distinguish M. René Bazin from M. Marcel Batilliat, who has dealt so feelingly with the

decadence of the château in *La Vendée aux Genêts*. Jane found in Crabbe something that she missed in herself, a ready appreciation of all classes.

She loved Cowper too, both in his poems and his prose. There was much in *The Task* that could not but please her, though the humour must have struck her as being exceedingly mild, and the descriptions over-laboured. Cowper, though kindly to the rural poor, and often referring to their occupations, smiles derisively at those who pretend to envy the labourer's lot and to regard his cottage, if properly "rose-bordered," as preferable to any other kind of residence.

> "So farewell envy of the *peasant's nest*!
> If Solitude make scant the means of life,
> Society for me! thou seeming sweet,
> Be still a pleasing object in my view;
> My visit still, but never mine abode."

Jane was wholly in accord with the sentiment of these lines. In some verses—composed in 1807 for a family competition in producing rhymes with "rose"—which, but for the rhyming, are a burlesque of Cowper's style, we find a picture of a cottager, wherein, if the "poetry" be naturally of small account, are lines that would mark it, without the direct evidence of the name, as hers, and not Cassandra's or Mrs. Austen's.

> "Happy the lab'rer in his Sunday clothes!
> In light-drab coat, smart waistcoat, well darn'd hose,
> And hat upon his head, to church he goes;
> As oft, with conscious pride, he downward throws
> A glance upon the ample cabbage-rose,

Which, stuck in button-hole, regales his nose,
He envies not the gayest London beaux.
In church he takes his seat among the rows,
Pays to the place the reverence he owes,
Likes best the prayers whose meaning least he knows,
Lists to the sermon in a softening doze,
And rouses joyous at the welcome close."

There is a letter of January 1758 from Johnson to Bennet Langton which, as Boswell remarks, shows its writer "in as easy and pleasant a state of existence, as constitutional unhappiness ever permitted him to enjoy." I cannot help quoting it here as evidence of an affinity of Johnson, in his happiest hours, with his constitutionally cheerful admirer, Jane Austen—

"The two Wartons just looked into the town, and were taken to see *Cleone*, where, David says, they were starved for want of company to keep them warm. David and Doddy have had a new quarrel, and, I think, cannot conveniently quarrel any more. *Cleone* was well acted by all the characters, but Bellamy left nothing to be desired. I went the first night, and supported it as well as I might; for Doddy, you know, is my patron, and I would not desert him. The play was very well received. Doddy, after the danger was over, went every night to the stage-side, and cried at the distress of poor Cleone. I have left off housekeeping, and therefore made presents of the game which you were pleased to send me. The pheasant I gave to Mr.

> Richardson, the bustard to Dr. Lawrence, and the pot I placed with Miss Williams, to be eaten by myself.... Mr. Reynolds has within these few days raised his price to twenty guineas a head, and Miss is much employed in miniatures. I know not anybody else whose prosperity has increased since you left them."

If the date and the reference to the writer's relations with the dramatist had been suppressed the letter might have been given as one of Jane's own without arousing suspicion in any but a confirmed "Boswellian." "David" is Garrick, of course, while "Doddy" is Dodsley, author of the play, and the fortunate recipient of the Langton pheasant is the author of *Clarissa*, another of Jane's favourites more than thirty years after, when she had had time to be born and grow up.

Richardson, Fanny Burney, Ann Radcliffe, Maria Edgeworth (after 1800), Scott (as poet), Johnson, Crabbe, and Cowper, then, afforded the more solid literary nourishment of Jane Austen. She had studied the essayists of Queen Anne's time and their emulators, and was not unfamiliar with Fielding, and she did not neglect the ordinary books that came from the circulating libraries of the day. "Mrs. Martin," she writes of a bookseller in her neighbourhood who had started such a library, "as an inducement to subscribe tells me that her collection is not to consist only of novels, but of every kind of literature, etc. She might have spared this pretension to *our* family, who are great novel-readers, and not ashamed of being so; but it was necessary, I suppose, to the self-consequence of half her subscribers." Unhappily, this "high-class" venture was a total failure.

The novels supplied by "Mrs. Martin" and others, forerunners of those which now go forth from the Strand and Oxford Street, are frequently referred to in Jane's letters, and some of them, if we are so disposed, we can read at the British Museum. There was, for example, Sarah Burney's *Clarentine*, which Jane and her mother read for the third time (in 1807), and "are surprised to find how foolish it is ... full of unnatural conduct and forced difficulties"; there was *Self-Control*, a book "without anything of nature or probability," but which Jane feared might be "too clever," and that she might find her own work forestalled by it; there was the *Alphonsine* of Madame de Genlis, which "did not do. We were disgusted in twenty pages, as, independent of a bad translation, it has indelicacies which disgrace a pen hitherto so pure"; and there was *Margiarna*, which the Austens were reading in the winter of 1809, at Southampton, and "like very well indeed. We are just going to set off for Northumberland to be shut up in Widdrington Tower, where there must be two or three sets of victims already immured under a very fine villain."

About the same time Cassandra tells of some romance which the Godmersham circle has been devouring, and Jane replies—"To set up against your new novel, of which nobody ever heard before, and perhaps never may again, we have got *Ida of Athens*, by Miss Owenson, which must be very clever, because it was written, as the authoress says, in three months. We have only read the preface yet, but her Irish girl does not make me expect much. If the warmth of her language could affect the body it might be worth reading in this weather."

We shall not find much criticism of books either in the novels or the letters. There is a passage in one of "Aunt Jane's" letters to her niece Anna, written in 1814, in which her point of view on one important question of style is

clearly expressed. Anna, probably inspired by her aunt's example—for the authorship of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* had leaked out in the family in spite of all precaution—had written a novel herself, and had sent the MS. to Jane for kindly consideration and advice. The result was not wholly encouraging—

> "Your Aunt C. (Cassandra) does not like desultory novels, and is rather afraid yours will be too much so, that there will be too frequently a change from one set of people to another, and that circumstances will be introduced of apparent consequence which will lead to nothing. It will not be so great an objection to me if it does. I allow much more latitude than she does, and think nature and spirit cover many sins of a wandering story, and people in general do not care so much about it for your comfort.... I have scratched out the introduction between Lord Portman and his brother and Mr. Griffin. A country surgeon (don't tell Mr. C. Lyford) would not be introduced to men of their rank, and when Mr. P. is first brought in, he would not be introduced as the Honourable. That distinction is never mentioned at such times, at least I believe not."

Of a later novel of Anna's, which Jane "read to your Aunt Cassandra in our own room at night, while we undressed," she tells the girl that "Devereux Forester's being ruined by his vanity is extremely good, but I wish you would not let him plunge into a 'vortex of dissipation.'

I do not object to the thing, but I cannot bear the expression; it is such thorough novel slang, and so old that I dare say Adam met with it in the first novel he opened...."

Mrs. Austen had said, and Jane agreed with her, that Anna had allowed a married couple in the novel to be too long in returning a visit from the Vicar's wife, and Jane had ventured to expunge, as "too familiar and inelegant," the "Bless my heart" in which Sir Thomas, one of the characters, indulged. Jane's own Emma might say "Good God!" when she pleased, but Anna's Sir Thomas might not even bless his heart!

A last criticism on Anna's book is worth quoting for its direct bearing on the critic's own method. "You describe a sweet place, but your descriptions are often more minute than will be liked. You give too many particulars of right hand and left."

Jane's estimate of her own manner of work is modest enough. "The little bit (two inches wide) of ivory on which I work with so fine a brush as produces little effect after much labour," she says. With this phrase of her own as a text she has been called a "miniaturist," but if authors and artists are to be compared, there is quite as much of the selection and the richness of a Gainsborough in her work as of the minuteness of a Metzu or a Meissonier.

In her reply to the amazing proposal of the librarian at Carlton House that she should compose an historical romance founded on the records of the Saxe-Coburg family, she writes, not without a touch of her gentle satire —

"I am fully sensible that (such a romance)

> might be much more to the purpose of profit or popularity than such pictures of domestic life in country villages as I deal in. But I could no more write a romance than an epic poem. I could not sit seriously down to write a serious romance under any other motive than to save my life; and if it were indispensable for me to keep it up and never relax into laughing at myself or at any other people, I am sure I should be hung before I had finished the first chapter. No, I must keep to my own style and go on in my own way; and though I may never succeed again in that, I am convinced that I should totally fail in any other."

Her limitations of subject are clear to her own mind. Even of the "domestic life in villages" she would only deal with the side where the daily bread was provided out of income, not out of retail profits or weekly wages. It is a suggestive fact, to which I have already alluded, that she never even tried to draw a peasant's family. Her heroines may, on the rarest occasions, call at a cottage to inquire after a sick child or leave a charitable gift, but of the conditions under which the labouring classes lived, during the hard times of the French wars, we learn nothing at all from her writings. The nearest approaches to such subjects are the account of the Prices' home at Portsmouth (a sordid interior which has been held, I think not unjustly, to be as vivid in its suggestion of impecuniosity and discomfort as anything written by Zola), and the similar, but far less effective, picture of the Watsons' family life.

Her literary style seems to be spontaneous, and so, in comparison with that of "stylists," it certainly is. She had stored her mind with good literature while still in her teens,

and no doubt most of her limpid sentences flowed freely from her pen. But the consistent absence of superfluous epithets and other redundancies is evidence that she had consciously formed an ideal of composition, and that she thought out the means of producing her effects is clear from several passages in her letters. To her niece who addressed her as "Dear Miss Darcy," and wanted her to answer in that character, Jane replied—"Even had I more time I should not feel at all sure of the sort of letter that Miss D. would write." She had studied her art till she could analyze its qualities, as we may see from a letter written from Chawton in 1813. Mrs. Austen had been reading *Pride and Prejudice* aloud to Jane and Martha Lloyd (who lived with the Austens), and Jane tells Cassandra that—

> "Though she perfectly understands the characters herself, she cannot speak as they ought. Upon the whole, however, I am quite vain enough, and well satisfied enough. The work is rather too light and bright and sparkling, it wants shade—to be stretched out here and there ... an essay on writing, a critique on Walter Scott, or the history of Buonaparte, or something that would form a contrast, and bring the reader with increased delight to the playfulness and epigrammatism of the general style."

Happily she did not provide the conventional "shade," which would have been on a par with the "brown tree" that, according to Sir George Beaumont, was an indispensable feature of every properly composed landscape painting. Shade, however, did appear in several

chapters of *Persuasion*, which, for a certain suggestion of melancholy, stands apart from the other novels, though not as markedly as *Northanger Abbey* stands apart for its exuberant frivolity.

Macaulay declared of Fanny Burney's later style that it was "the worst that has ever been known among men." Jane Austen's style, in its happy hours, is so admirably adapted to its purpose that, while we may not call it "the best," a term which advertisement has rendered meaningless as a standard of excellence, it has never been surpassed as a means to a desired end. It seems trite to say that the first point to consider in any question of style is the intended result, but it is a point so frequently overlooked that much criticism about art and letters, as about politics or agriculture, is vitiated by the hopeless effort to set up an abstract ideal applicable to all cases, like a universal watch-key.

The result for which Jane Austen worked can scarcely be put in question. She was impelled to make her little world live in fiction, not precisely as she saw it and heard it, but as she could most attractively present it to minds possessing the indispensable modicum of humour, without which the charm is lost at least as nearly as the charm of a Turner sunset by a person whose optic nerve is irresponsive to the red rays. Apart from her prevailing humour, the modesty of her style is a continual beauty. There is none of that florid eloquence which depends more on sound than sense for its effect, nor of that forcing of strange phrases which in these days so often passes for literary excellence. There is no preciosity about her books; the narrative is easy, the incidents are probable; the dialogue, with few exceptions, is natural, the bright people being differentiated from the dull by their talk, and not, as in most novels, by the author's assurances. If Mr. Meredith was right when he declared that "it is unwholesome for

men and women to see themselves as they are, if they are no better than they should be," there must be many "unwholesome" pages in Jane Austen's work for the tolerably large class to which he referred. Neither in real life nor in the life of her books did she "suffer fools gladly," and so far as the men of her creation are concerned she is on the whole more successful in representing the foolish than the wise. Her chief failure is in the realization of such a young man as one of her heroines would have been likely to admire. Most of the younger men are sketchily drawn, and we who are men would fain believe that she did not understand the nature of a man's heart, seeing that she never found one worth accepting. Knightley and Bertram seem to have been favourites of hers, but they are not lively people, nor sufficiently wanting in priggishness. The liveliest of them all is Henry Tilney, whatever his qualities of mind. The Jane Austen touch is charmingly varied, and it is felt in some of its happy strokes in the talk between this mercurial young rector and the girl whose early-budding affections he so speedily returns.

> "'Have you been long in Bath, madam?'
>
> "'About a week, sir,' replied Catherine, trying not to laugh.
>
> "'Really!' with affected astonishment.
>
> "'Why should you be surprised, sir?'
>
> "' Why, indeed!' said he, in his natural tone; 'but some emotion must appear to be raised by your reply, and surprise is more easily assumed, and not less reasonable, than any

other.'"

This bit of dialogue recalls a remark in a letter written by Jane to Cassandra: "Benjamin Portal is here. How charming that is! I do not exactly know why, but the phrase followed so naturally that I could not help putting it down."

Mr. Collins is one of the most finished of Jane's studies of men. He comes near to the impossible at times, but she makes him a living creature. The speech in which he offers his hand and advantages to his cousin Elizabeth has often been quoted, and its charms can never fade. Only a page of it is necessary to tempt the reader to turn—again or for the first time—to *Pride and Prejudice* in order that he may find the rest of the inimitable scene—

> "My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in his parish; secondly, that I am convinced it will add very greatly to my happiness; and, thirdly, which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier, that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady whom I have the honour of calling patroness. Twice has she condescended to give me her opinion (unasked too!) on this subject; and it was but the very Saturday night before I left Hunsford—between our pools at quadrille, while Mrs. Jenkinson was arranging Miss de Bourgh's footstool—that she said, 'Mr. Collins, you must marry. A clergyman like you

> must marry. Choose properly, choose a gentlewoman for my sake, and for your own; let her be an active, useful sort of person, not brought up high, but able to make a small income go a good way. This is my advice. Find such a woman as soon as you can, bring her to Hunsford, and I will visit her.' Allow me, by the way, to observe, my fair cousin, that I do not reckon the notice and kindness of Lady Catherine de Bourgh as among the least of the advantages in my power to offer. You will find her manners beyond anything I can describe; and your wit and vivacity, I think, must be acceptable to her, especially when tempered with the silence and respect which her rank will inevitably excite."

The immediate consequences of Elizabeth's refusal are delightfully imagined and described. The moment Mrs. Bennet hears of it, she rushes to her husband's room—

> "'You must come and make Lizzy marry Mr. Collins, for she vows she will not have him; and if you do not make haste he will change his mind and not have *her*.'
>
> "Mr. Bennet raised his eyes from his book as she entered, and fixed them on her face with a calm unconcern, which was not in the least altered by her communication.
>
> "'I have not the pleasure of understanding you,' said he, when she had finished her

speech. 'Of what are you talking?'

"'Of Mr. Collins and Lizzy. Lizzy declares she will not have Mr. Collins, and Mr. Collins begins to say that he will not have Lizzy.'

"'And what am I to do on the occasion? It seems a hopeless business.'

"'Speak to Lizzy about if yourself. Tell her that you insist upon her marrying him.'

"'Let her be called down. She shall hear my opinion.'

"Mrs. Bennet rang the bell, and Miss Elizabeth was summoned to the library.

"'Come here, child,' cried her father as she appeared. 'I have sent for you on an affair of importance. I understand that Mr. Collins has made you an offer of marriage. Is it true?' Elizabeth replied that it was. 'Very well—and this offer of marriage you have refused?'

"'I have, sir.'

"'Very well. We now come to the point. Your mother insists upon your accepting it. Is it not so, Mrs. Bennet?'

"'Yes, or I will never see her again.'

"'An unhappy alternative is before you, Elizabeth. From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents. Your mother will never see you again if you do not marry

> Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you *do*.'"

There is nothing "commonplace" about this. What matter that the characters are only middle-class and "respectable," if they can afford material for such excellent wit?

In one respect, judged by the present standard in fiction, Jane Austen's work assuredly is "commonplace." No novelist was ever less troubled in the search for names. She merely took those of people she had heard of or met, preferring the common to the unusual. Bennet, Dashwood, Elliot, Price, Woodhouse—names that the modern "popular" novelist would reject at sight, served her turn, a Darcy or a Tilney being her highest flights in nomenclature. As for the Christian names, they are of the most ordinary and are used over and over again. In *Sense and Sensibility*, for example, three of the prominent characters are named John—John Dashwood, John Middleton, and John Willoughby. There are two Catherines in *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeths, Fannys, Annes, Marys, Henrys, Edwards, Roberts, "fill the bills," and such a name as Frank Churchill seems recondite. It is much the same in the letters, the truth being that the Gwladyses, and Evadnes, and Marmadukes of those days were very rare, and almost unknown in rural society. The burden which her sister Cassandra bore must have strengthened Jane's determination that her heroes and heroines should not have unusual names, and so we have our Elinors and Elizabeths, and Fannys, with their Edwards and Edmunds, and Henrys. The Darcys are almost the only exceptions that try the rule; "Fitzwilliam" and "Georgiana" are more in the style of the ordinary novel of "high life."

So much for names. How are the men and women who bear them "introduced" to us? When a Colonel Newcome, or an Alfred Jingle, or a Sylvain Pons comes upon the scene, we hear a good deal about his personal appearance, his manner of dress, his bearing, and those who introduce him have a huge circle of men and women to bring before us with similar formalities. Jane Austen, like a casual hostess at a modern dance, leaves us, as often as not, to make acquaintance in any way we can. Scott, with his wealth of character-studies among high and middle and low, his kings and cavaliers and covenanters and crofters, was the most generous giver of types among Jane Austen's contemporaries; Maria Edgeworth in depicting the gentry and peasantry of Ireland, and John Galt the small shop-keepers and their customers in the Scottish country-towns, managed to present us to a large circle of new acquaintances, of various classes and occupations. Jane had no use for characters, or centres of social life, that required to be specially described for a particular purpose. Only in one of her novels (*Sense and Sensibility*) is the busy life of London made the subject of any but the most casual description, and even then it is but the transference of the country people to town, and of the two or three towns-people back to their London houses from their country visits that is effected. (The general life of the metropolis, its theatres, parks, and bustle are left, to all intent, unnoticed. Yet, as we know from many passages in her letters, Jane during her visits was a keen spectator of the pageantry of life in a city which, she jestingly declared, played havoc with her character. "Here I am once more in this scene of dissipation and vice," she writes from Cork Street in August 1796, "and I begin already to find my morals corrupted." And in the next month she sends this little message to Mr. Austen: "My father will be so good as to fetch home his prodigal daughter from town, I hope, unless he wishes me to walk the hospitals, enter at the

Temple, or mount guard at St. James'." She was not "prodigal"—save in gloves and ribbons—but she enjoyed the delights of the country-cousin in town. She went very often to the play, so often at times as to be weary of it. *The Hypocrite* (Bickerstaff's "alteration" of Cibber's "adaptation" of *Tartuffe*) "well entertained" her, Dowton and Mathews being the chief actors; and she saw Liston, Miss Stephens, Miss O'Neill, and Kean at the outset of his fame. "The Clandestine Marriage" was a favourite piece, and on one occasion she notes that her nieces, whom she sometimes took to the theatre, "revelled last night in Don Juan, whom we left in hell at half-past eleven." Such joys, however, did not move her mind enough to seduce her from the country as a source of inspiration for her work.

"*All* lives lived out of London are mistakes more or less grievous—but mistakes," said Sydney Smith, adapting, consciously or not, the saying of Mascarille to the *Précieuses*: "Pour moi, Je tiens que hors de Paris, il n'y a point de salut pour les honnetes gens." The life of Jane Austen, whose humour the author of the *Plymley Letters*, the father and uncle of a hundred diverting anecdotes, so greatly enjoyed, may serve to show the weakness of such unreserved generalization. Her subjects were found in the restful backwaters of life, not in the crowded centres where mankind is more and more bewildered by the failure of wisdom to keep pace with the advance of knowledge.

It is one of Jane's qualities as a writer that she shows little hospitality to the stock phrases of ordinary people. Lord Chesterfield told his son: "If, instead of saying that tastes are different, and that every man has his own peculiar one, you should let off a proverb, and say, that 'What is one man's meat is another man's poison.' ... everybody would be persuaded that you had never kept company with anybody above footmen and housemaids." Proverbial philosophy finds little encouragement from

Jane, who places it in the mouths of her least agreeable characters, and one may believe, after reading her books and her letters, that she agrees with her own Marianne Dashwood, who, when Sir John Middleton has dared to suggest that she will be "setting her cap" at Willoughby, warmly replies: "That is an expression, Sir John, which I particularly dislike. I abhor every commonplace phrase by which wit is intended; and 'setting one's cap' at a man, or 'making a conquest,' are the most odious of all. Their tendency is gross and illiberal; and if their construction could ever be deemed clever, time has long ago destroyed all its ingenuity." The offending Sir John "did not much understand this reproof," but he "laughed as heartily as if he did." Elizabeth Bennet's use of the saying, "Keep your breath to cool your porridge," gives us a worse shock than it can have given to Darcy, so unexpected is it from the mouth of a Jane Austen heroine. When one of Cassandra's letters had diverted Jane "beyond moderation," and she added: "I could die of laughter at it," she felt the banality of the phrase as keenly as Marianne would have done, and saved herself with "as they used to say at school."

Whatever the words and phrases she employed, it can never be held that she "spoke well" according to the test proposed by Catherine Morland when she said to Henry Tilney, "I cannot speak well enough to be unintelligible," a remark which Mr. Tilney hailed with delight as "an excellent satire on modern language." Its origin may be found in that first volume of *The Mirror* which Catherine's mother brought down-stairs for her edification, where we are told that "many great personages contrive to be unintelligible in order to be respected."

A peculiarity of Jane Austen's vocabulary and manner is her fondness for negatives in "un," such words as "unabsurd," "unpretty," "unrepulsable," "unfastidious," "untoward," and "unexceptionable"—a pet fancy of hers,

which occurs, I am told, at least eight times in *Emma* alone —being as common in her novels as "halidome" and "minion" in the older romances of Wardour Street. Some day, perhaps, a lost novel of hers, written during the apparently idle years of her residence at Bath, will be identified by the prevalence of "uns" in its text.

In clarity of meaning her style is usually of the purest, and there is reason to think that her few obscurities are as often due to carelessness as to defective art. Not that she was exempt from all the weaknesses that she discovers for our amusement in the generality of her sex. Henry Tilney's appreciation of women as letter-writers can hardly have been imagined without at least a moment's reflection by the author over her own achievements—

> "'I have sometimes thought,' says Catherine, doubtfully, 'whether ladies *do* write so much better letters than gentlemen. That is, I should not think the superiority was always on our side.'
>
> "'As far as I have had opportunity of judging,' replies Tilney, 'it appears to me that the usual style of letter-writing among women is faultless, except in three particulars.'
>
> "'And what are they?'
>
> "'A general deficiency of subject, a total inattention to stops, and a very frequent ignorance of grammar.'
>
> "'Upon my word, I need not have been afraid of disclaiming the compliment! You do not

think too highly of us in that way.'

> "'I should no more lay it down as a general rule that women write better letters than men, than that they sing better duets, or draw better landscapes. In every power, of which taste is the foundation, excellence is pretty fairly divided between the sexes.'"

Deficiency of subject has not been charged against Jane's published letters, but they have often been charged with deficiency of serious interest. Her works certainly do exhibit an occasional looseness of grammar, mostly due to bad punctuation. The faulty construction of Lucy's letters (*Sense and Sensibility*) is noted by the author, but while Jane would not have been likely to regard "Sincerely wish you happy in your choice" as a proper way of beginning a sentence, her own delinquencies with respect to commas are sometimes no less grave than those of Mrs. Robert Ferrars. She would have felt no serious sympathy with Cyrano's declaration concerning his literary compositions —

> "... Mon sang se coagule
> En pensant qu'on y peut changer une virgule."

Her blood was too cool to be frozen by the printer's fancies in punctuation.

In an old number of the *Cambridge Observer* the curious student may find some suggested emendations of Jane Austen's text by Mr. A. W. Verrall, many of them being concerned with what are probably printers' errors. Those which deal with punctuation need not reflect on the printer

as prime offender. The author was a woman. Mr. Verrall's ingenious suggestion that when Jane Austen is made to say that William Price's "direct holidays" might justly be given to his friends at Mansfield Park (his own family seeing him frequently at Portsmouth, where his ship was lying), she really wrote "derelict holidays," has little to commend it, "direct" so evidently, I think, being used to differentiate his actual leave from his ordinary leisure hours when on service. But there are two emendations, typical of many which might be suggested (Mr. Verrall has probably noted them for the edition which he ought to undertake in time for the centenary), which are entirely acceptable. Fanny Price is made to say to Mr. Rushworth, on the occasion when Maria Bertram and Crawford gave that unfortunate person the slip in his own garden, "They desired me to stay; my cousin Maria charged me to say that you would find them at that knoll, or thereabouts." Mr. Verrall justly observes that no one had desired Fanny to stay, and she would be the last girl to utter "an irrelevant falsehood." He holds that "she really did on this occasion, for kindness' sake, say something 'not quite true,'" and it was: "They desired me to say—my cousin Maria charged me to say, that you would find them at that knoll, or thereabouts."

Again, when in describing the discussion over Mrs. Weston's proposed dance, Jane Austen is made to say (in *Emma*), "The want of proper families in the place, and the conviction that none beyond the place and its immediate environs could be attempted to attend, were mentioned," the author's words were, in Mr. Verrall's opinion, "tempted to attend." Like Shakespeare's, the MSS. of Jane Austen's masterpieces are to seek, so that what she wrote we cannot prove. The probability that in these two cases, as in others, the author omitted to notice in proof the errors of the printer is more likely, on the whole, than that her pen had slipped badly, and that her "copy" had never been carefully

read over. She cared little for such slips, however, as we know from a letter written after *Pride and Prejudice* was published, wherein she says: "There are a few typical errors, and a 'said he' or 'said she' would sometimes make the dialogue more immediately clear, but 'I do not write for such dull elves,' as have not a great deal of ingenuity themselves." "Typical," of course, is here used in its obsolete sense of "typographical."

The negative bond of union referred to above between Jane Austen and the only English writer whom some of her eminent admirers have allowed to take precedence of her —that the MSS. of both have disappeared—suggests the passing reflection that in these days when Shakespeare is not allowed to hold the title to his plays without challenge, when Anne and Emily Brontë are accused of being (so far as the public is concerned) mere pseudonyms of their sister Charlotte, when George Henry Lewes has been given the credit for George Eliot's novels, and the speeches of eminent statesmen are said to be written by their wives, it is rather surprising that no one in search of a striking subject for a magazine article has attacked the claims of Jane Austen to a place among English authors. There is no evidence in the memoirs of her time that any distinguished person ever found himself in her company, her name did not appear on the title-pages of any books, she was almost unknown outside a small provincial circle, and in that circle no one seems to have had any idea that there was anything specially remarkable about her. Is it likely that such an obscure little body should have written such admirable books? Is it not much more likely that they were the work of Madame d'Arblay, or that in these peaceful compositions Mrs. Radcliffe found rest and recreation after the fearful strain on her delicate nervous system involved in the production of her "*èpouvantable*" melodramas? Jane Austen lays claim to some of the novels in her letters, it is

true, but, since Ben Jonson's references to Shakespeare, and all other contemporary evidence in favour of the Stratford actor's authorship of the plays have been explained away to the complete satisfaction of those who dispute his claims, it would be no very difficult task to persuade a number of earnest souls that Jane Austen's letters are not really evidence of her authorship of the novels. As for her nearest relations, they were not in the real secret. The secret they are supposed to have kept during her life was that she wrote the novels, but if so, where are the MSS.? Why did not her admiring brothers treasure those most precious relics? Two of her MSS. (in addition to the opening chapters of her final effort in fiction) her family did, as a fact, preserve, those of *Lady Susan* and *The Watsons*, and these (here italic type becomes necessary) *are so inferior to the six novels acknowledged, soon after her death, as hers*, that it is easy (if we like) to find it *difficult to believe that they are from the same pen*! The real secret was that she did not write those six novels. This fascinating theory is freely offered to whomsoever it may please to follow it up.

We gain many vivid glimpses of Jane Austen's views of life in her novels, and *Northanger Abbey* holds a place apart from the others, not only for its many pages of burlesque, but as the vehicle by which so many of the author's reflections are conveyed, in a bright wrapping, to her appreciative readers. Let me give one or two examples —

> "The advantages of natural folly in a beautiful girl have been already set forth by the capital pen of a sister author; and to her treatment of the subject I will only add, in justice to men, that though, to the larger and

> more trifling part of the sex, imbecility in females is a great enhancement of their personal charms, there is a portion of them too reasonable, and too well-informed themselves, to desire anything more in woman than ignorance. But Catherine did not know her own advantages—did not know that a good-looking girl, with an affectionate heart and a very ignorant mind, cannot fail of attracting a clever young man, unless circumstances are particularly untoward."

The sister author is Fanny Burney. The opinion of men, the "trifling" or the "reasonable," is Jane Austen's. In Henry Tilney's remarks upon Catherine's extraordinary fears concerning his father's conduct to Mrs. Tilney we may discover something of Jane's view of the general condition of society in her time.

> "Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English: that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you. Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing; where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of

> voluntary spies; and where roads and newspapers lay everything open? Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?"

Of Jane Austen as humourist there is no need to write specifically at any length. Almost every extract given from her novels, whatever the point to be illustrated, shows her in that capacity. It is impossible for long to separate her humour from the rest of her qualities. Yet there are people who see no humour in her, and actually like her novels in spite of their "seriousness "!

An American author, Mr. Oscar Adams, wrote a book about her some years ago in order "to place her before the world as the winsome, delightful woman that she really was, and thus to dispel the unattractive, not to say forbidding, mental picture that so many have formed of her." Who were these "many" people? Evidently they existed (either without or within the author's own circle) or there would have been no reason to write a book for their conversion. They were probably those worthy persons—we have all met a few of them ourselves—who read *Emma*, and *Pride and Prejudice*, and the rest, without noticing that a malicious little sprite is for ever peeping between the lines. Imagine a reader who regards all Mr. Bennet's remarks as sober statements of considered opinion, and you will understand how Jane Austen might seem formidable. Though she is never so ruthless to her characters as Mr. Bennet is to his wife, Jane is herself a member of his family. Perhaps "ruthless" is the wrong word. You might apply it to a boy who throws pebbles at a donkey, but if the object of his attack was a rhinoceros, the boy would suffer more than the pachyderm. To the slings and arrows of her husband's outrageous humour Mrs.

Bennet was less sensible than was Gulliver to the darts of the Lilliputians. Gulliver did feel a pricking sensation, whereas Mrs. Bennet was merely annoyed that Mr. Bennet did not always agree with her mood of the moment. In his critical introduction to *Pride and Prejudice* Professor Saintsbury forcibly says, in reply to those who resent the presence of such a husband as Mr. Bennet, that Mrs. Bennet was "a quite irreclaimable fool; and unless he had shot her or himself there was no way out of it for a man of sense and spirit but the ironic." The most unpleasant aspect of Mr. Bennet's sarcasms is not that they hurt his wife, which they could not, but that they were heard by his five daughters, three of whom at least were more or less able to understand them.

Jane Austen the novelist, then, may truly be "forbidding" to readers who take her *au pied de la lettre*. Such readers are in the position of Catherine Morland listening to Henry Tilney's imaginary account of the antiquities and mysteries of Northanger Abbey. She went there and painfully discovered the truth, while they can no more hope to discover it than a man with one eye can hope to see things as they appear to his fellows who have two. Still, he is a king among the blind, and the readers who find pleasure in Jane Austen as an entirely serious author are to be counted happy as compared with those who cannot read her at all.

It has been said by Mr. Goldwin Smith that there is no philosophy beneath the surface of Jane Austen's novels "for profound scrutiny to bring to light," her characters typifying nothing, because "their doings and sayings are familiar and commonplace. Her genius is shown in making the familiar and commonplace intensely interesting and amusing." Such justification as may be discovered for the charge that the subjects of the novels are commonplace is chiefly negative in kind. It is not that we may find in real life innumerable people as distinctive and entertaining as

the principal characters of these stories, but that Jane does not introduce us to dramatically unusual scenes or persons. There are no houses like Dotheboys Hall or Ravenswood Tower, no incidents like the flight of Jos Sedley from Brussels or the arrest of Vautrin, no strange creatures like Mr. Rochester or Jonas Chuzzlewit, no scenes like those in Fagin's kitchen or Shirley's mill. She was immediately followed by a humourist whose scenes and characters are as unusual as hers were familiar. He is almost unknown to the great fiction-devouring public, and little read in comparison even with Jane Austen, with whom he has some strong affinities as well as antipathies. Thomas Love Peacock was never, so happily inspired—or so happy perhaps—as when he was "ironing" the insincerity or the unreasonable prejudice of the "well-to-do" class. There is, among the parsons of Jane Austen's creating, none who is more gloriously diverting than Dr. Ffolliot in *Crotchet Castle*, and it is pleasant to imagine Mr. Collins as curate to that militant theologian. The talk of the young women in Peacock's modern novels is better "informed" and much less natural than that of Elizabeth Bennet, or Emma, or Anne, and as for the men, while Mr. Tilney or Mr. Darcy might not have found it difficult to hold their own with most of the lovers in Peacock's novels, his intellectuals—Milestone, McQueedy, and the rest—would have found no one to refute their arguments among the company at Netherfield or at Mansfield Park. Peacock allows his satirical hobby-horse to run wild over the bramble-covered desert of British prejudice, while Jane Austen never leaves go of the rein. The result is that while he frequently makes us laugh at the absurdities of his Scythrops and Chainmails, whose performances we know to be burlesque, she makes us chuckle by her silver-shod satire of the class which she had studied from childhood. There are some who read Jane Austen and cannot read Peacock, and the reverse is also true. Those who can read both are

never likely to be in want of pleasure on winter evenings so long as mind and eyes are left.

It is certain that no one familiar with either author could mistake a page written by one of them for a page by the other. Jane Austen's people, in spite of the humour with which the atmosphere is charged, are always possible—except, some of her most intimate admirers say, for Mr. Collins—while Peacock was never to be deterred from breaking through the fence which borders the pathway of probability. Only such readers as the prelate who declined to believe some of the incidents in *Gulliver's Travels* could be expected to regard *Melincourt* or *Nightmare Abbey* as veracious narratives. For all that Peacock, whose first novel, *Headlong Hall*, appeared in the year (1816) in which Jane Austen's last (published) work was done, was her immediate successor as a satirist of the follies and foibles of English men and women, and he was succeeded in turn by the splendid Thackeray, whose most obvious difference from Jane Austen lies in his frequent indulgence in sentimental reflections.

Jane was amused by the suggestions for improving her work, or for the plots of fresh novels, given to her from time to time, and among the papers found after her death was one endorsed "Plan of a novel according to hints from various quarters," the names of some of these human "quarters" being given in the margin. There were to be a "faultless" heroine and her "faultless" father driven from place to place over Europe by the vile arts of a "totally unprincipled and heartless young man, desperately in love with the heroine, and pursuing her with unrelenting passion." Wherever she went somebody fell in love with her, and she received frequent offers of marriage, which she referred to her father, who was "exceedingly angry that he should not be the first applied to." The "anti-hero" again

and again carried her off, and she was "now and then starved to death," but was always rescued either by her father or the hero! For even the mildest varieties of the plots thus burlesqued Jane had no use, unless to laugh at them.

III
CONTACT WITH LIFE

Origins of characters—Matchmaking—Second marriages—Negative qualities of the novels—Close knowledge of one class—Dislike of "lionizing"—Madame de Staël—The "lower orders"—Tradesmen—Social position—Quality of Jane's letters—Balls and parties.

In her letters, as in her books, the satiric touch was on almost everything that Jane Austen wrote. Her habit of making pithy little notes on the doings of her acquaintances was, in writing to her sister, irrepressible. The pith was not bitter. It was just the comment of a highly intelligent woman to whom the gods had given the gift of humour, and who, at an age when most girls of her day were as ingenuous as Evelina or as Catherine Morland, had learnt how much insincerity and affectation coloured the conduct even of kind and well-meaning people.

In her references to the foibles of real men and women we gain many glimpses of the origins—if not the originals—of some of her character studies. At an Ashford ball in

1798 one of the Royal Dukes was present, and among those who supped in his company were Cassandra and a Mrs. Cage, with whom the Austens were well acquainted. This lady was uneasy in the presence of Royalty, and her mistakes were described in a letter from Cassandra. Jane's mention of the incident in her reply is a fair sample of the way in which, in her more serious mood, this young woman of twenty-three regarded the weakness of her less cool and reasonable friends: "I can perfectly comprehend Mrs. Cage's distress and perplexity. She has all those kind of foolish and incomprehensible feelings which would make her fancy herself uncomfortable in such a party. I love her, however, in spite of all her nonsense."

One can see a hint of Mrs. Allen and Mrs. Bennet in the silly woman who flustered herself and fidgeted her companions in her attempts to assume what she supposed to be the right behaviour on such an occasion. Jane, who had never seen a prince, so far as we know, would have had no "distress and perplexity." She would have curtsied in the prettiest way, the Duke would have been charmed by her graceful figure, her clear complexion, and her soft brown eyes, and she would next day have written to her sister "all the minute particulars, which only woman's language can make interesting."

Her reflections on the gossip of the hour are not always quite so kindly. When Charles Powlett (of whose rejected offer of a kiss we have already heard) brings home a wife, Jane tells her sister that this bride "is discovered to be everything that the neighbourhood could wish her, silly and cross as well as extravagant." Once, when a story has reached her in the way that "Russian Scandal" is played, by the muddling up of half-understood particulars in the process of transmission from mouth to ear, she has to correct a previous statement about some of the Austen circle—

> "On inquiring of Mrs. Clerk, I find that Mrs. Heathcote made a great blunder in her news of the Crooks and Morleys. It is young Mr. Crook who is to marry the second Miss Morley, and it is the Miss Morleys instead of the second Miss Crook who were the beauties at the music meeting. This seems a more likely tale, a better devised imposture."

The sting is where stings usually are.

Scandal was as distasteful to her as it can have been to Madame du Châtelet, of whom Voltaire said that "*tout ce qui occupe la société était de son ressort, hors la médisance.*" Jane gave Cassandra many little bits of news about their friends which the principals might have resented, but between sister and sister such things are not scandalous, and as for those who read them now, they may talk about the incidents referred to as freely as they like without harm to any one. Many of the "scandals" Jane mentions are "serious" only in her innocent fun. We hear, for instance, that in 1809, "Martha and Dr. Mant are as bad as ever, he runs after her in the street to apologize for having spoken to a gentleman while she was near him the day before. Poor Mrs. Mant can stand it no longer; she is retired to one of her married daughters." Jane amused herself and her sister and teased poor Martha by her jokes on this affair. "As Dr. M. is a clergyman," she writes, "this attachment, however immoral, has a decorous air." Mrs. Jennings, Sir John Middleton's mother-in-law, would have told the story quite seriously, and with immense gusto, at the Barton breakfast-table, but Dr. Mant and Martha were

not transferred to a novel to the discomfort of themselves and their families and the delight of the *roman à clef* hunters of Southampton.

The letters do seem occasionally to bring us into the company of people whom we know quite well in the novels. Jane, replying to Cassandra at Christmas 1798, says: "I am glad to hear such a good account of Harriet Bridges; she goes on now as young ladies of seventeen ought to do, admired and admiring.... I dare say she fancies Major Elkington as agreeable as Warren, and if she can think so, it is very well." Alter the surnames, and this passage might apply as well to Harriet Smith as to Harriet Bridges. "I dare say she fancies Mr. Martin as agreeable as Mr. Churchill, and if she can think so, it is very well," might have been written by Emma to dear Anne Weston about the "little friend" from the boarding-school. Jane, as in this case of Harriet Bridges, took so much interest in the love affairs of her friends that we often think of Emma Woodhouse and her match-making propensities, about which Mr. Knightley spoke so harshly. By Emma's advice Harriet Smith, having refused Robert Martin, the young farmer, had regarded Mr. Elton as a prospective husband, and when he went elsewhere Emma had selected Frank Churchill for the vacant post. Then, through a serious mistake, Mr. Knightley was the man, until at last the "inconsiderate, irrational, unfeeling" nature of her conduct became clear to her mind, and Harriet was allowed to marry the constant Martin.

Mrs. Mitford declared that Jane Austen was husband-hunting at twelve years of age, but the old lady's memory was evidently quite untrustworthy about people and dates when she talked such nonsense. Jane was, however, on her own showing, fond of looking out for possible husbands for her pretty little nieces. Here is an instance, from a letter of 1814—"Young Wyndham accepts the invitation. He is

such a nice, gentlemanlike, unaffected sort of young man, that I think he may do for Fanny." Next day she is less pleased with him—"This young Wyndham does not come after all; a very long and very civil note of excuse is arrived. It makes one moralize upon the ups and downs of this life."

That the habit was hereditary—it was a custom of Jane's time, even more than it is of our own—we may see from a report she sent to Cassandra of the pleasure with which Mr. and Mrs. Austen, with one accord, lighted upon a suitable "match" for their elder daughter. He was "a beauty of my mother's." Having no *affaire* of her own to trouble her rest, Jane took an active part as adviser for those in whose fate she was affectionately interested. Especially was this the case with this favourite niece, Fanny Knight, who, having fancied she was "in love" with one man, discovered that she preferred, or thought she preferred, another.

> "Do not be in a hurry," wrote Aunt Jane, "the right man will come at last; you will in the course of the next two or three years meet with somebody more generally unexceptionable than anyone you have yet known, who will love you as warmly as possible, and who will so completely attract you that you will feel you never really loved before."

Fanny, who was "inimitable, irresistible," whose "queer little heart" and its flutterings were "the delight of my life," might have been fickle, but she did not, said her aunt, deserve such a punishment as to fall in love after marriage,

and with the wrong man.

Jane's views on second marriages are expressed in the case of Lady Sondes, whose haste to find consolation after the death of Lord Sondes was the subject of much chatter among the Mrs. Jenningses and Mrs. Bennets of her neighbourhood. "Had her first marriage been of affection, or had there been a grown-up single daughter, I should not have forgiven her; but I consider everybody as having a right to marry once in their lives for love, if they can, and provided she will now leave off having bad headaches, and being pathetic, I can allow her, I can *will* her, to be happy."

In the novels no woman of consequence—excepting the callous and selfish Lady Susan Vernon—is allowed a second mate, nor is the courtship before any of the marriages much in accord with the general practice of English fiction. There is not even a description of some splendid wedding. Jane, by the way, did not regard a marriage as the proper occasion for public advertisement of the bride's qualities. "Such a parade," she writes of the conduct of a certain "alarming bride," is "one of the most immodest pieces of modesty that one can imagine. To attract notice could have been her only wish."

It might seem, indeed, that the most original characteristic of her works is the absence of almost all the qualities of plot and treatment on which fiction usually depends for success with the public. If we were asked of some modern lady writer, "What are her books like?" and we replied, "In one respect they are conventional, for they all end in the choosing of wedding-rings. But scarcely anybody in these novels feels the 'grand passion,' they have no relation to current events, nobody ever has a strange adventure, only one married woman is faithless to her vows, no adventuress appears, there are no foreigners, no one is in revolt against anything, nobody is seriously

troubled about the trend of society or the decadence of morals and taste, nobody starves, or commits a murder, or engineers a swindle, there are no cruel husbands, no triple *ménages* and no mysterious occurrences or detectives, and as nobody dies, nobody makes death-bed revelations," the retort would probably imply, "What stupid stuff they must be." These novels do, indeed, depend for their effect on less of "plot and passion" than almost any others of consequence yet written. There are many novels of small plot. Balzac, in *Eugénie Grandet*, George Sand, in *Tamaris*, show what even "stormy" novelists can do with a modicum of events. But the lack of both plot and passion is rare in the work that lives. It is thus that the genius of Jane Austen is strongly displayed. Only genius could give a vital, an enduring fascination to a record chiefly concerned with the ordinary experiences of a few respectable country people, almost all of one class.

She had the power, because, with the gifts of expression and of humour, she combined an almost perfect knowledge of a typical section of society, all the more clearly exhibited because of her comparative ignorance of any other section. She did not care to study the very poor, the very rich were outside her circle of common experience, and she would rarely write about people or phases of life that were not as familiar to her as the squire's daughter and the manners of the hunt ball. She had none of Disraeli's audacity. "My son," said Isaac Disraeli, when some one expressed surprise at the knowledge of "exalted circles" shown in *The Young Duke*, "my son, sir, when he wrote that book, had never even *seen* a duke." Jane Austen, "never having seen a duke," or a ducal palace, never attempted to describe either. She shrank from any kind of "lionizing," whether in village society or in the "great world," and to this healthy pride is no doubt partly due the obscurity in which she lived and died. One instance of her

reserve may be adduced. Soon after the appearance of *Mansfield Park* she was invited, "in the politest manner," to a party at the house of a nobleman who suspected her of the authorship of that book, and who, as an inducement, intimated that she would be able to converse with Madame de Staël. "Miss Austen," says her brother, "immediately declined the invitation. To her truly delicate mind such a display would have given pain instead of pleasure." The story, which has sometimes been regarded as evidence of improper pride on the part of the English novelist, is in keeping with all that is known of Jane Austen's nature.

Had the meeting of the authors of *Emma* and *Corinne* come about, one would like to have heard their conversation. The talking would have been largely on one side. Madame, who knew the "world," and enjoyed the distinction of having been called a "wicked schemer" and a "fright" by the greatest man of her time, would have tried in vain to impress the unaffected Englishwoman who cared so little for politics and Napoleon that, in those novels which Madame regarded as "*vulgaire*," she scarcely alluded to either. Jane would have listened attentively, and now and again, when Madame paused for breath, would have made a polite remark, the covert humour of which would have been lost on her famous companion. There is no suggestion that any hint as to Madame de Staël's reputation had reached Chawton Cottage, otherwise some might suppose that it was not only the diffident modesty Jane's brother alleges which prevented her from going to the party. It is quite likely that she who described the loves of Lydia Bennet and Maria Rushworth with such an entire absence of sermonizing would yet have felt that, though she might like to converse on a more private occasion with the author of *Corinne* and *Delphine*, she would prefer not to be matched with a lady who had put to so practical a test her theories "*de l'influence des passions sur le bonheur*."

Could there be a stronger contrast, physical or moral, than between the country parson's slight and good-looking daughter, whose knowledge of men and affairs was gained in the parlours of manor-houses and the assembly-rooms of watering-places, and the financier's stout and ugly daughter, whose political activities were so persistent that she had been expelled from Paris, who had travelled, mingling in the society of the governing classes, the artists, the men of letters in Italy, Germany, and other lands, and whose literary performances, historical, political, and imaginative, were read wherever educated readers existed?

If Jane had no strong desire to be brought into contact with the great, wise, and eminent of her time, neither were her tastes at all in the direction of social equality or the advocacy of the "rights of man," and while she was indifferent to the famous and influential, she was scarcely more concerned for the obscure and lowly. Admire her work as we may, and love her as many of us must, we cannot recognize that she was much in sympathy with any class but her own. It is certainly to no undue regard for social position, to no want of charitable intention, that we can attribute her general neglect of the drama, comedy and tragedy alike, of humble life. It might be said that she could, and if she would, have drawn the poor as well as she drew the "gentry." She knew her limitations, and thus such rare sketches of the "lower orders" as she gives stop short of any errors of understanding. Mrs. Reynolds, Darcy's housekeeper, whose admiration for her master and his sister is so strongly expressed, and Thomas, the servant at Barton Cottage, who comes in to describe how he has seen "Mr. and Mrs. Ferrars" in Exeter, are in no way out of drawing, though the phrase with which the author finishes off the man-servant—"Thomas and the table-cloth, now alike needless, were soon dismissed"—so aptly suggests the position accorded to the working classes in her own

works that it almost seems to have a double meaning. Let any one familiar with the novels try to recall occasions when a servant is introduced even in such common cases as the answering of a bell or waiting at table, and he will find it hard to add to the examples already given any with a better part than the overworked Nanny at the Watsons', who, when Lord Osborne is paying his untimely visit, puts her head in at the door and says, "Please, ma'am, master wants to know why he be'nt to have his dinner." As for the class from which most of these servants came, it has no place at all. Emma takes Harriet to a cottage where there is a convalescent child who requires jellies or beef tea, but the incident is of no account except as leading up to the visit to Mr. Elton; and she goes to see an old servant while Harriet pays her formal call at the Abbey Mill Farm. Robert Martin is a farmer, and a letter from him is introduced, but he has no share of any consequence in the dialogue. When we remember Jane Austen's avowed partiality for Emma, and Emma's disgust at the idea of Harriet marrying a mere farmer, no matter how much her admirer Knightley might support the man's claims, we may not unreasonably suppose that Jane to some extent shared Emma's prejudice. There was, however, a notable exception to Jane's remoteness from the farming class. The joint tenant of the Manor farm at Steventon, the happily named James Digweed—who seems to have been ordained later on—was admitted to so much favour that she could not only dance and dine, and gossip with him, but could chaff her sister about his evident desire to gain Cassandra's affection.

Two or three apothecaries are admitted into the novels. One attends Jane Bennet at Netherfield, and another attends Marianne Dashwood at Cleveland. Apothecary was almost a term of contempt in those days, and one of Jane's hits at the neighbourhood of Hans Place was that there

seemed to be only one person there who was "not an apothecary." She even, as we have seen, corrects her niece for supposing that a country doctor—not a mere "apothecary"—would ever be "introduced" to a peer!

The only country tradesman who figures at all prominently is Sir William Lucas, who had "risen to the honour of Knighthood by an address to the King during his mayoralty. The distinction had perhaps been felt too strongly. It had given him a disgust to his business.... By nature inoffensive, friendly, and obliging, his presentation at St. James's had made him courteous." He is not so diverting a creature as Martin Tinman of Crikswich in Mr. Meredith's delightful comedy *The House on the Beach*, who, when rescued from that storm-beaten home on a terrible night, was found to be wearing the Court suit in which, long before, he had presented an address to the throne! But Sir William Lucas's constant recollection of the fact that *he* had been received by the sovereign, while his neighbours, the "small" country-gentlemen, had not, is illustrated with admirable art. In his "emporium," with his stock-in-trade around him, his portrait would never have been drawn. Mr. Weston also made money in trade, apparently "in the wholesale line," after he had retired from the militia, and of the proud and conceited Bingley sisters we are told that "they were of a respectable family in the north of England; a circumstance more deeply impressed on their memories than that their brother's fortune and their own had been acquired by trade."

Jane has many kindly things to tell her sister about, her mother's maids, especially of a faithful and industrious "Nannie." Of the maids' relations, the agricultural class, amid whose homes she passed nearly all her life, she has, as I have said, left no account in her novels. Her letters do indeed contain many bits of news concerning the ploughmen and washerwomen of the parish, and they are

significant as to the manner, proper to the age, in which she regarded her humble neighbours. Her references to the cottagers are commonly devoid of any indication of deeper feeling than the consciousness of a need to give them clothes. Of the people employed on her father's farm, she says—

> "John Bond begins to find himself grow old, which John Bond ought not to do, and unequal to much hard work; a man is therefore hired to supply his place as to labour, and John himself is to have the care of the sheep. There are not more people engaged than before, I believe; only men instead of boys. I fancy so at least, but you know my stupidity as to such matters. Lizzie Bond is just apprenticed to Miss Small, so we may hope to see her able to spoil gowns in a few years."

About Christmas (1798) she writes—

> "Of my charities to the poor since I came home you shall have a faithful account. I have given a pair of worsted stockings to Mary Hutchins, Dame Kew, Mary Steevens, and Dame Staples; a shift to Hannah Staples, and a shawl to Betty Dawkins, amounting in all to about half-a-guinea. But I have no reason to suppose that the *Battys* would accept of anything, because I have not made them the offer."

Of personal service we hear but little. There is just the old "Lady Bountiful" idea, adapted to the purse of the parson's younger daughter. Alms were what the poor chiefly wanted, and alms they received—if not in money, in warm garments. She gave them worsted stockings, and flannel to wear in the cold weather. She did not often, so far as we hear, sit and chat with Dame Staples and Dame Kew over the things that made up their life-interests, or listen to the confidences of Lizzie Bond and Hannah Staples concerning their rustic lovers.

Sometimes we do hear of talks with poor women, as when Jane writes, "I called yesterday upon Betty Londe, who inquired particularly after you, and said she seemed to miss you very much, because you used to call in upon her very often. This was an oblique reproach at me, which I am sorry to have merited, and from which I will profit." We may well believe that Jane was no pioneer in "district visiting." Her services to humanity were of another kind. Almost alone among the greater novelists who have written the fiction of drawing-rooms, she was hardly less indifferent as a writer to the concerns of the governing class of her day than of the voteless class, unless, indeed, she was a hostile witness so far as her knowledge went. Among the worst-bred persons in the novels, with John Thorpe, Mr. Collins, and the ever-delightful Mrs. Bennet, are Sir Walter Elliot and Lady Catherine de Bourgh, and the hero whose manners are most open to reproach is Lady Catherine's nephew, Darcy—before he has been refused by Elizabeth.

Jane Austen's views on the claims of social position, as distinct from individual character, were much the same as Anne Elliot's. Mr. Elliot and Anne, we learn—

> "Did not always think alike. His value for rank and connection she perceived to be greater than hers. It was not merely complaisance, it must be a liking to the cause, which made him enter warmly into her father's and sister's solicitudes on a subject which she thought unworthy to excite them.... She was reduced to form a wish which she had never foreseen—a wish that they had more pride.... Had Lady Dalrymple and her daughter even been very agreeable, she would still have been ashamed of the agitation they created; but they were nothing. There was no superiority of manner, accomplishment, or understanding."

The Dalrymples and Lady Catherine de Bourgh do not lead one to suppose that Jane's acquaintance with their class was a fortunate one. Had it been, she would probably have given some happier examples of the titular aristocracy. Lord Osborne, in *The Watsons*, is in some ways a more amiable type, but too "sketchy" to be of much account as an antidote to such unpleasing people as the aunt of Darcy and the cousins of Anne Elliot.

If persons of artificial eminence are almost unknown in the novels, there is an even more complete dearth of men or women distinguished for their individual gifts or achievements. Sir John Middleton fills his too hospitable mansion with an endless supply of guests who keep his maid-servants hard at work in preparing spare bedrooms, that were occupied the night before, for fresh arrivals in the afternoon. He hardly allows time to speed the parting guests before he must turn to welcome their successors.

But no statesman, or traveller, or professor, not so much as a rising politician or a poet, crosses those ever-open doors. They do not come, for one reason—and it seems a sufficient one—because they scarcely exist for the author, or if they do, the people who eat mutton and drink port and Madeira around the mahogany tables at Netherfield, or Barton, or Uppercross, know and care nothing whatever about them and their performances. "Each thinks his little set mankind" is as true of the characters in Jane Austen's books as in a sense it is true, one is sometimes inclined to think, of their author. The Morlands, and Musgroves, and Woodhouses, and Bennets have never travelled, unless an occasional visit to London may count as travel. They have been into some neighbouring county, they have been perchance to Bath. They have not so much as been to Paris. Emma had never seen the sea. Twenty years earlier it would have been different. Darcy at any rate would have known something of France had he been twenty years older. From the outbreak of the Revolution till the first exile of Napoleon, France was not a likely place for any but the most adventurous of squires to choose for a pleasure-trip, nor, after the rise of Napoleon's star, were the accessible parts of the Continent very attractive for any but soldiers of fortune and spies. Thus, not only are the conversations which Jane Austen offers devoid of any such elements of interest as are introduced, for example, by the appearance of Byron in *Venetia*, or of Shelley in *Nightmare Abbey*, but the opportunities of lively talk offered by reminiscences of foreign manners and scenes are not allowed to the author. On the other hand, we do not meet with any of those egotistical travellers who, as a contemporary of Jane Austen's declared, "If you introduce the name of a river or a hill, instantly deluge you with the *Rhine*, or make you dizzy with the height of *Mont Blanc*."

In any case, however much the fact may be due to want

of opportunities for enlarging her knowledge, Jane, literature apart, took very little interest in anything outside the social and family life of her own class in the country. Her published correspondence has been described as "trivial" (as her novels have been, for that is what Madame de Staël meant by "*vulgaire*," and not "vulgar," as Sir James Mackintosh and others have supposed), and, in comparison with such contemporary letters as Byron's or Lamb's, her accounts of her dances and her bonnets are certainly weak tea for serious readers. They are, however, exactly such letters as she might have been expected to write. Her satire gives them an agreeable tartness which somehow suggests the syllabubs which were so common a feature of the supper-tables of her time. It is all, one may reasonably suppose, like the common talk of the drawing-room in a manor-house on an afternoon when the men are hunting or shooting—the choice of a winter frock, the prospects of a ball at some territorial magnate's, the errors of cooks and housemaids, the fatuity of this young man who is so rich, and the silliness of that young woman who is so pretty—enlivened by Jane's wit.

The dances, whether full-dress balls or merely "small and early hops" were among the favourite pleasures of Jane Austen. If you have read her letters you will feel that she is present when Fanny Price dances so prettily at Mansfield Park, or when Darcy declines to dance with Elizabeth because though she is "tolerable," she is "not handsome enough" to tempt him. "I danced twice with Warren last night, and once with Mr. Charles Watkins, and to my inexpressible astonishment I entirely escaped John Lyford. I was forced to fight hard for it, however. We had a very good supper, and the greenhouse was illuminated in a very elegant manner." Such bits of news are common at all periods of Jane's correspondence. For example: "The ball on Thursday was a very small one indeed, hardly so

large as an Oxford smack;" and again, "Our ball on Thursday was a very poor one, only eight couple, and but twenty-three people in the room"—just as it was when they got up the scratch dance at the Bertrams, "the thought only of the afternoon, built on the late acquisition of a violin player in the servants' hall."

On another occasion, at a public hall at the county town —

> "The Portsmouths, Dorchesters, Boltons, Portals, and Clerks were there, and all the meaner and more usual etc., etcs. There was a scarcity of men in general, and a still greater scarcity of any that were good for much. I danced nine dances out of ten—five with Stephen Terry, T. Chute, and James Digweed, and four with Catherine. There was commonly a couple of ladies standing up together, but not often any so amiable as ourselves."

Jane, from all we know of her, would almost as soon dance with another girl as with a man—it was the dancing she loved, and watching the behaviour of others, their flirtations, their love-making, their airs and affectations.

Emma Woodhouse, the day after a dance at Highbury, might have sent to her sister in Brunswick Square just such an account as Jane Austen to her sister at Godmersham—

"There were very few beauties, and such as there were were not very handsome." One of the girls seemed to her: "A queer animal with a white neck. Mrs. Warren, I was

constrained to think a very fine young woman, which I much regret. She danced away with great activity. Her husband is ugly enough, uglier even than his cousin John; but he does not look so *very* old. The Miss Maitlands are both prettyish, very like Anne, with brown skins, large dark eyes, and a good deal of nose. The General has got the gout, and Mrs. Maitland the jaundice."

A ball to which Jane Austen went in 1808—her thirty-fourth year—was "rather more amusing" than she expected. "The melancholy part was to see so many dozen young women standing by without partners, and each of them with two ugly naked shoulders. It was the same room in which we danced fifteen years ago. I thought it all over, and in spite of the shame of being so much older, felt with thankfulness that I was quite as happy now as then. We paid an additional shilling for our tea." This letter is but one of many bits of evidence that no memory of a Captain Wentworth troubled Jane's own life. The "shame" such a woman could have felt in being "older" one can scarcely imagine, and the context shows it was not seriously felt.

The most pathetic dancing incident in the novels was the impromptu affair at Uppercross (in *Persuasion*), where Anne saw her old lover apparently losing his heart elsewhere. "The evening ended with dancing. On its being proposed, Anne offered her services, as usual; and though her eyes would sometimes fill with tears as she sat at the instrument, she was extremely glad to be employed, and desired nothing in return but to be unobserved." She did not know that Wentworth, who was making so merry with the Musgrove girls, was faithful all the time to his old love —herself. We might doubt whether the author knew it until later on in the story, were it not that the idea of ending a novel without the marriage of the principal maiden to the man she liked best would have been entirely foreign to Jane Austen's method. So Frederick Wentworth danced

with the Musgroves, and Anne played for their delight.

The dance most fully described was that given by the Westons at the "Crown," when Mr. Elton behaved so abominably to Harriet Smith, and Mr. Knightley showed himself a *preux chevalier* and saved Emma's lovely *protégée* from the humiliation of being the only "wallflower." In describing how Elizabeth at Netherfield, Catherine at Bath, Harriet at Highbury, and Fanny at Mansfield Park idly watched the dancing because no man had asked them to join it, Jane, pretty girl and excellent dancer as she was, spoke from personal experience. Once at any rate, when "in the pride of youth and beauty," she was able to write, after a dance at a neighbouring house—

> "I do not think I was very much in request. People were rather apt not to ask me till they could not help it; one's consequence, you know, varies so much at times without any particular reason. There was one gentleman, an officer of the Cheshire, a very good-looking young man, who, I was told, wanted very much to be introduced to me; but as he did not want it quite enough to take much trouble in effecting it, we never could bring it about."

She would not, if she could help it, dance with bad partners. "One of my gayest actions," she writes after a ball, "was sitting down two dances in preference to having Lord Bolton's eldest son for my partner, who danced too ill to be endured."

It is in connection with one of the Westons' parties that

Mr. Woodhouse makes his sage observations on the eternal question of ventilation. When Frank Churchill says that the fresh air difficulty will be settled by their dancing in a large room, so that the windows need not be opened, because "it is that dreadful habit of opening the windows, letting in cold air upon heated bodies, which does the mischief," Mr. Woodhouse cries—

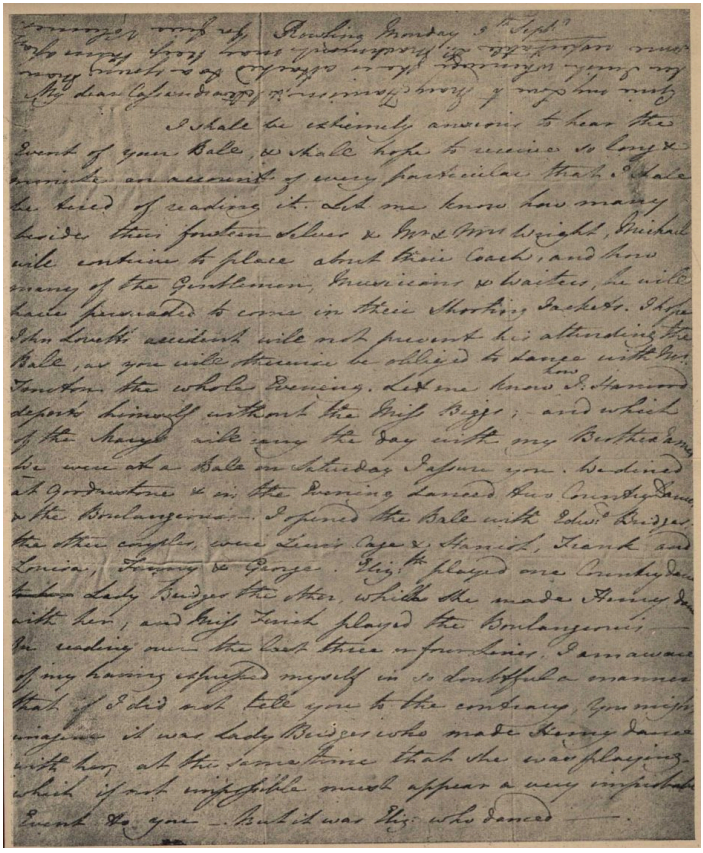
> "'Open the windows! but surely, Mr. Churchill, nobody would think of opening the windows at Randalls. Nobody could be so imprudent! I never heard of such a thing. Dancing with open windows! I am sure neither your father nor Mrs. Weston (poor Miss Taylor that was) would suffer it.'
>
> "'Ah! sir—but a thoughtless young person will sometimes step behind a window-curtain, and throw up a sash, without its being suspected. I have often known it done myself.'
>
> "'Have you, indeed, sir? Bless me! I never could have supposed it. But I live out of the world, and am often astonished at what I hear.'"

The conversation of this valetudinarian quietist is always diverting. He suggests that Emma should leave the Coles' party before it is half over, as it is so bad to be up late. "But, my dear sir," cried Mr. Weston, "if Emma comes away early it will be breaking up the party."

"And no great harm if it does," said Mr. Woodhouse.

"The sooner every party breaks up the better."

Advancing maturity did not do much to spoil Jane's love of dances. From Southampton, in 1809, she wrote: "Your silence on the subject of our ball makes me suppose your curiosity too great for words. We were very well entertained, and could have stayed longer but for the arrival of my list shoes to convey me home, and I did not like to keep them waiting in the cold."



A letter of Jane Austen's

If Jane tells Cassandra about her own dances, she is ever ready in return for news of Cassandra's. "I shall be extremely anxious to hear the event of your ball, and shall hope to receive so long and minute an account of every particular that I shall be tired of reading it.... We were at a ball on Saturday I assure you. We dined at Goodnestone and in the evening danced two country dances and the Boulangeries." This French dance, by the way, was on the unwritten programme at Mr. Bingley's ball, in *Pride and Prejudice*. It seems to have had its birth in the Revolution, when the bakers, men and women together, kept themselves warm by joining hands and dancing up and down the streets.

After Jane Fairfax had sung herself hoarse at the Coles' party—

> "The proposal of dancing—originating nobody exactly knew where—was so effectually promoted by Mr. and Mrs. Cole that everything was rapidly clearing away, to give proper space. Mrs. Weston, capital in her country dances, was seated, and beginning an irresistible waltz; and Frank Churchill, coming up with most becoming gallantry to Emma, had secured her hand, and led her up to the top, (where) she led off the dance with genuine spirit and enjoyment."

The waltz was a novelty still in those days, and seems here to be classed as a country dance. It had been imported from Germany, where Mozart had done much to forward

its triumph, after Jane Austen had written her earlier novels, and I cannot remember any other reference to it in her work. It was at first considered an "improper" dance, and one need not be surprised that a generation which had danced nothing more intimate than the "boulangeries" was at first a little flustered by the new fashion. Sheridan, watching the dancers in a ball-room, repeated the following lines of his own composition, which aptly suggest the contrast between the old dancing and the new as it struck the eyes of our great-grand-aunts about the time when Emma danced at the "Crown" and Jane Austen at Goodnestone.

> "With tranquil step, and timid, downcast glance,
> Behold the well-paired couple now advance.
> In such sweet posture our first parents moved,
> While, hand in hand, through Eden's bowers they roved,
> Ere yet the Devil, with promise fine and false,
> Turn'd their poor heads, and taught them how to waltz."

Little wonder, when a waltz was regarded as forbidden fruit, if Edmund Bertram, Fanny, and Sir Thomas were shocked at the very idea of play-acting by the family and guests at Mansfield Park. Not that there were wanting plenty of quiet souls who were in nowise personally distressed at the "impropriety" of the waltz on their own account, just as, in the other matter of amateur theatricals, and the choice of a play, when Lady Bertram asked her children not to "act anything improper," it was not because she had any personal objection to offer, but because "Sir Thomas would not like it."

The Bertrams' ill-fated theatricals, and the waltz which

Mrs. Weston played, serve to emphasize the place which Jane Austen fills as an historian of the transition from the formal prudery of the sceptical eighteenth century to the broader liberties of the scientific nineteenth. "What is become of all the shyness in the world?" she asks her sister in 1807; "shyness and the sweating sickness have given way to confidence and paralytic complaints." Morals change but little as compared with *moeurs*. The girls who act in private theatricals every winter and dance twenty waltzes a night half the year round are no whit less virtuous than their great-grandmothers who were shocked at the waltz, and caught cold in clothes which were so thin that, as a close observer has recorded, you could "see the gleam of their garter-buckles" through the silks and kerseymeres as they danced, and altogether so suitable for a classical revival that a contemporary poet was moved to utter the quatrain—

> "When dressed for the evening the girls now-a-days,
> Scarce an atom of dress on them leave;
> Nor blame them, for what is an evening dress
> But a dress that is suited to Eve."

Thus the mother of mankind is accused by one poet of having danced the first waltz, and held responsible by another for the airy fashions of the Récamier period.

One of the principal differences of etiquette, we may note before passing on, between the customs of the ball-room a century ago and now, was that in the days when John Lyford was eluded with so much difficulty a girl danced two successive dances with the same partner as a matter of course, so that neither an imaginary John Thorpe nor a real John Lyford could be got rid of by the promise of one dance.

The scraps from the letters, given on the last few pages,

help us to realize how clearly Jane Austen's own life is at times reflected in her books.

IV
ETHICS AND OPTIMISM

Dr. Whately on Jane Austen—"Moral lessons" of her novels—Charge of "Indelicacy"—Marriage as a profession—A "problem" novel—"The Nostalgia of the Infinite"—The "whitewashing" of Willoughby—*Lady Susan* condemned by its author—*The Watsons*—Change in manners—No "heroes"—Woman's love—The Prince Regent—*The Quarterly Review*.

"The moral lessons of this lady's novels," wrote Archbishop Whately in his *Quarterly* article of 1821, "though clearly and impressively conveyed, are not offensively put forward, but spring incidentally from the circumstances of the story." So inoffensively, indeed, are they offered to our notice, that Dr. Whately himself seems to have been unable to discover them at all. "On the whole," writes the Archbishop, "Miss Austin's (*sic*) works may safely be recommended, not only as among the most unexceptionable of their class, but as combining, in an eminent degree, instruction with amusement, though without the direct effort at the former, of which we have complained, as sometimes defeating its object."

The most obvious "moral" of Jane Austen's novels is that if you are a heroine you need not trouble yourself

about your future. You are certain to marry a worthy man with an income sufficient for a comfortable existence. He may be endowed with something less than a thousand a year, like Edward Ferrars, with a couple of thousand like Captain Wentworth, or with the ten thousand a year which made Darcy appear so admirable to Mrs. Bennet. In any case you will not have to eat bread-and-scrape or go without a fire in your bedroom. The Country-house Comedy of Jane Austen is full of morals if you are in need of them, but it was not written to improve you, only to amuse you—and its maker. If you must have a clear moral for each story, after the manner of tracts, you may take them thus. *Pride and Prejudice* conveys the useful lesson that the person you most dislike in one month may be the one you will very sensibly give your affection to in the next; *Sense and Sensibility* that when the bad man falls into the pit he has dug for himself, the good man comes by his own; *Emma* that the man whose society is most necessary to a woman's quiet contentment is the man she ought to marry; *Mansfield Park* that a simple, unaffected girl who gains the second place in a man's affections may win the prize through the disqualification of her more brilliant rival; *Persuasion* that nothing is more likely to revive an old passion than to see its object warmly admired by some other eligible party; *Northanger Abbey* that a tuft-hunting father may be induced to receive a daughter-in-law of no importance by the kindly influence of a son-in-law of superior rank. As for *Lady Susan*, the moral of that unpleasing story is that if a worldly *mater pulchra* is the rival in love of an ingenuous *filia pulchrior* she will probably lose the battle after much suffering on either side; and from *The Watsons* we may see that if a girl is educated above her family she will find it hard to be happy beside the domestic hearth. All these are plain workable morals. Whether the author of the novels would have endorsed them we cannot certainly know, but it is more than

probable she would not.

We need not suppose that Jane Austen was ignorant of the coarseness of conversation, the hard-drinking, the wild gambling, the moral laxity of a large section of society that are so frequently exhibited in the records of the age, in spite of the improvement in manners. But we can hardly help laughing at the objection taken to her novels even by some of her contemporaries, that they were "indelicate"! The "indelicacy" was usually found in the views of marriage held and expressed by the heroines and their families. The love-affairs of these country maidens were not often, we must admit, such as to steal away their beauty sleep or spoil their appetites for breakfast. Mrs. Jennings' kindly endeavour to cure a girl's disappointment in love by a variety of sweetmeats and olives, and a good fire, was perhaps not wholly unjustified by experience. In those days, when no profession save that of governess was open to women, when nursing the sick was regarded as an occupation specially suitable for those of a low class, when no door opened from the drawing-room on to the professional stage, and when the very idea of a "female" as secretary to a man of affairs or of business would have been condemned as "improper," marriage was undoubtedly viewed by most people as the only aim of a young woman, "the pleasantest preservative from want," as Charlotte Lucas regarded it, and, moreover, the average age of brides was much lower than it is now-a-days. To avoid being a governess by attracting the admiration of a man who could afford a wife was the hope, at least, of most poorly endowed girls, and even if matrimony is not viewed with so much sentiment and reserve by Jane Austen's heroines as by the excessively squeamish Evelina, we may be inclined to prefer the "indelicacy" of Jane Austen to the elaborate, delicacy of Fanny Burney. Scott himself, by an ingenious paradox, has been accused—as a novelist—of

immorality, and *Quentin Durward* in particular described as "one of the most immoral novels that has even been written," because its romance expresses nothing. The interest a boy takes in its romantic passages "depends on the fact that he dreams himself to be in similar circumstances; he must treat the novel subjectively, and it is the subjective use of the imagination which does all the damage. It is in reading such books as this that a bad habit of mind is begun, and *Quentin Durward* is more immoral for a boy of fourteen than a translation of the most shockingly indecent French novel." Well may the anonymous writer of this unexpected criticism add: "There are paradoxes to be met everywhere, and most of all in the question of morality." This particular kind of immorality has not yet, so far as I know, been charged against Jane Austen. She cannot be justly accused of writing romance which "expresses nothing," but she certainly leaves plenty of opportunity for young readers to exercise their imaginations, and thus begin a "bad habit of mind."

The view of marriage as a profession, with or without ardent affection, is not the only thing that has shocked the delicacy of many of Jane Austen's readers. Serious objection has been taken to her introduction of episodes of an "improper" nature. How is the charge supported? Lydia Bennet, a vulgar, badly brought-up girl still in her teens, infatuated with the red coats of the militia officers, insists on going away with Wickham, and lives with him as his mistress until, by the generous aid of Darcy, and the determination of the Gardiners—her uncle and aunt—"a marriage is arranged" and does "shortly take place." This episode, say the stern critics, was (1) unnecessary to the plot, and (2) if it was necessary, it is too much insisted on and developed. That it is an essential part of the little plot, worked in to exhibit the best side of Darcy's character, which before has only been seen in its least attractive light,

seems to me obvious, and I agree with Professor Saintsbury's opinion that it brings about the *dénouement* with complete propriety. Lydia's entire indifference to the moral aspect of her conduct is and was unusual in a girl of sixteen and of her class, but her character from first to last is consistently drawn, and the contrast between the selfishness of Wickham and Lydia, who care nothing for any one's happiness except their own, and not even for each other's, and the sympathy of heart and variety of temperament which bring Elizabeth and Darcy together is admirably drawn.

Then we are asked to be shocked at the illustration of the bad character and selfish cruelty of Willoughby given to Elinor Dashwood by the very worthy and very dull Colonel Brandon in *Sense and Sensibility*. It is a painful story. Willoughby, the faithless lover of Marianne Dashwood, had seduced an impressionable girl whom Brandon, out of affection for the memory of her mother, herself ruined by a scoundrel, had practically adopted, and whom such scandal-mongers as Mrs. Jennings declared to be the Colonel's own child. "Why drag in this nasty story?" ask the objectors, and above all, "why allow the Colonel to pour it into the ears of a young girl like Elinor?" That it comes unfortunately from Brandon, who is a rival—hopeless as it had seemed—of Willoughby for Marianne's affection, and that in the middle-class society of to-day a well-bred man would not tell such a tale to a girl if he could find any other means of achieving an imperative object is undeniable.

What was Brandon to do? He knew that Marianne was pining for love of a man at least as unworthy of her as, in his worst days, was Tom Jones of Sophia, and he believed, with or without reason, that the knowledge of Willoughby's character would be a bitter but efficacious medicine for her heart-sickness. Elinor, the sensible,

prudent, devoted sister, seemed the only person to whom he could tell the story with any hope that it would be discreetly used. "He had spent many hours in convincing himself that he was right," and when Elinor said, "I understand you, you have something to tell me of Mr. Willoughby that will open his character farther. Your telling it will be the greatest act of friendship that can be shown to Marianne. My gratitude will be ensured immediately by any information tending to that end, and hers must be gained by it in time. Pray, pray let me hear it," there is little reason for wonder that "upon this hint he spake," and told the story of the moral ruin of the mother and the cruel desertion of the daughter which the reader of *Sense and Sensibility* will recall, Elinor lost little time in retailing it to her sister, with the immediate and apparently unexpected effect of increasing the girl's unhappiness. "She felt the loss of Willoughby's character yet more heavily than she had felt the loss of his heart," though we know that she soon afterwards became as fond a wife of Colonel Brandon as she ever could have been of Willoughby.

Far more remarkable, I think, than Brandon's telling Elinor the miserable story of his sister-in-law and her daughter is the manner in which Elinor herself receives Willoughby's attempt to excuse his conduct. He admits his treatment of Miss Williams, but asks how Elinor could think Colonel Brandon an impartial reporter of the affair, and proceeds to offer his own excuse in the words that follow—

> "I do not mean to justify myself, but at the same time cannot leave you to suppose that I have nothing to urge,—that because she was injured, she was irreproachable,—and because I was a libertine, she must be a saint. If the

> violence of her passion, the weakness of her understanding—I do not mean, however, to defend myself. Her affection for me deserved better treatment, and I often, with great self-reproach, recall the tenderness which, for a very short time, had the power of creating any return. I wish—I heartily wish it had never been. But I have injured more than herself; and I have injured one whose affection for me (may I say it?) was scarcely less warm than hers, and whose mind—oh! how infinitely superior."

In other words, the inexperienced child was of weak understanding, and loved him passionately, and therefore he was not so much to blame as if she had been less warm in her affection and stronger in her intelligence. Surely the reasoning should have been reversed. Yet after this fine oration Elinor "pities" him, and, when he goes on to disparage his wife, whom he has married for her fortune, and to express his continued love for Marianne, all that Elinor says is, "You are very wrong, Mr. Willoughby, very blamable, you ought not to speak in this way, either of Mrs. Willoughby or my sister," and in saying this "her voice, in spite of herself, betrayed her compassionate emotion." When he left her, Elinor assured him that she thought better of him than she had done, "that she forgave, pitied him, wished him well—was even interested in his happiness—and added some gentle counsel as to the behaviour most likely to promote it;" counsel which he showed little disposition to take.

This tolerance by Elinor for a man who, on his own admission, had "taken advantage" of a simple young girl, ignorant in the world's ways, this readiness to allow extenuating circumstances to a mercenary breaker of

reputations and hearts, is a far more serious fact than the mere introduction of a story which does fit quite easily into the plan of the novel. Elinor's reflections when Willoughby had ended his apologies sufficiently show that the point of view suggested in the duologue between the sinner and the sister was deliberately set up by the author—

> "She made no answer. Her thoughts were silently fixed on the irreparable injury which too early an independence and its consequent habits of idleness, dissipation, and luxury, had made in the mind, the character, the happiness, of a man who, to every advantage of person and talents, united a disposition naturally open and honest, and a feeling, affectionate temper. The world had made him extravagant and vain; extravagance and vanity had made him cold-hearted and selfish. Vanity, while seeking its own guilty triumph at the expense of another, had involved him in a real attachment, which extravagance, or at least its offspring necessity, had required to be sacrificed. Each faulty propensity, in leading him to evil, had led him likewise to punishment. The attachment from which, against honour, against feeling, against every better interest he had outwardly torn himself, now, when no longer allowable, governed every thought; and the connection, for the sake of which he had, with little scruple, left her sister to misery, was likely to prove a source of unhappiness to himself of a far more incurable nature."

The chapter describing this interview between Willoughby and Elinor is the only one in all the novels of Jane Austen wherein a "problem," after the kind dear to the dramatist of to-day and the novelists of yesterday, is fully presented and considered, the heroines, with this exception, answering to Mr. Andrew Lang's description, being "ignorant of evil, as it seems, and unacquainted with vain yearnings and interesting doubts." Elinor only, as we find her on this occasion, is a pioneer of that school of sociology which whitewashes the individual at the expense of his early environment and education. Her defence of this wretched man is, in principle, that which an Old Bailey advocate offers when he cites the theories of Lombroso in favour of a beetle-browed criminal who has stuck his knife into the breast of some confiding woman. It was "the world" that had made him what he was, he was to be pitied, not condemned.

Though we have not to consider here whether Elinor and the advocate are right or wrong, it is hard to avoid the thought that, when she wrote this remarkable chapter, Jane Austen was influenced in a degree quite unusual in that age with people of her class by the sense of futility which, not long before her day, had been the motive of *Candide*. Voltaire's irony is bitter, in spite of the optimism which his book preaches, and of the essential kindness of his nature, while Jane Austen's is as sweet as irony can ever be. That she was intentionally ironical in this case of Elinor's tolerance is scarcely possible. Only a cynic would treat a pure-minded maiden's apology for a heartless seducer as a subject for covert satire, and Jane was not a cynic.

Writing of Maria Edgeworth in his *Notes for a Diary*, Sir M. E. Grant Duff says: "In her, as in Miss Austen, there is something wanting. Is it what has been called the *nostalgie de l'Infini*?" That intellectual ailment is more common now-a-days than it was in the eighteenth century,

and there was little of it in the grey matter of any country brains when Jane was born. Certainly it cannot be diagnosed from her work generally. Only in the particular case of Elinor and Willoughby does that idea of the helplessness of man in the maelstrom of Infinity which has paralyzed the wills of so many unhappy victims, and induced the devastating literature of determinism, seem to have entered into her plan of work—for only thus can I account for the moral whitewashing of Willoughby, not by a "man-of-the-world," with his "after all," and his "human nature" arguments, but by a country ingénue. The more I read Jane Austen's writings the stronger grows my conviction that she was one of those fortunate beings whose optimism is differentiated from pessimism by the good offices of an excellent digestion and an even pulse.

We need not suppose that she had thought much about the philosophical sanction of conduct as opposed to the purely religious, or that she had studied the French *Encyclopædia*. She was born and brought up in an atmosphere wherein convention, in regard to the things that matter, was almost omnipotent, and she was not of the type whereof iconoclasts are made. She attacked no system, social or religious; but she had no fondness for "isms," and thus it is that dogmatism is quite as hard to discover in her writings as scepticism.

It has been said already that Jane Austen was not a cynic. Yet it would be easy, by making *Lady Susan* one's text, and ignoring the rest of her writings, to show that she was as cynical as a Swift or an Anatole France. Of course I do not mean that her apparent cynicism in this case was exercised on the kind of subjects which is ridiculed in *The Tale of a Tub* or in *L'Ile des Pingouins*. But I know nothing, in its way, more cold-blooded in the presentation of "love" than the conclusion of that novel of Jane's springtime, which she herself, her own wise critic,

withheld from publication. The rivalry of mother and daughter for the affections of the same man must always be an unpleasant subject, and the story of the conflict between Lady Susan Vernon and her daughter for the matrimonial prize represented by Reginald de Courcy, as told in letters among the characters concerned, is on a low plane. The morals of the "heroine" may not be suspect, but her tone is below suspicion.

What is the *dénouement* of *Lady Susan*? The mother's schemes to marry the man of the daughter's choice have ended in her own marriage to the wealthy noodle whom she had tried to force upon the daughter. "Frederica," says the author,—dropping the "correspondence" plan in order to wind up the book more readily—"was therefore fixed in the family of her uncle and aunt till such time as Reginald de Courcy could be talked, flattered and finessed into an affection for her which, allowing leisure for the conquest of his attachment to her mother, for his abjuring all future attachments, and detesting the sex, might be reasonably looked for in the course of a twelve-month. Three months might have done it in general, but Reginald's feelings were no less lasting than lively. Whether Lady Susan was or was not happy in her second choice, I do not see how it can ever be ascertained...."

It is certain that to some considerable extent *Lady Susan* was a satire on several lady novelists of the period. All Jane Austen's novels are more or less satirical, from *Northanger Abbey*, which is full of burlesque passages, to *Persuasion*, in which they are so rare that it needs a hunt to discover any. Whether or not *Lady Susan* was intended to be taken more seriously than in jest, it is a dull performance. The whole plan and treatment of the book are artificial. It was not Jane's natural instinct or her finer art which was at work in its making. So foreign is it to herself that if the MS. had been found in some cupboard of a

manor-house no occupants of which had been of known relationship to the Austens, I doubt if it would have been attributed to her by any one who had not made a meticulous comparison of its phraseology with her acknowledged works.

There is, I think, no surer evidence of Jane's fine taste, alike in character and in literature, than that, having brought this novel to completion, she deliberately suppressed it. Had she sold it to a publisher, and allowed it to run its chance of popularity like the rest of her finished novels, we should have had to revise our views on her nature and judgment to a considerable extent. As it is, the fact that having written a poor novel of disagreeable tendency she recognized the unsatisfactory thing that she had done in time to cancel it is much in her favour, and justifies the opinion that whatever defects of subject or of treatment we may find in *Lady Susan* were condemned by its author. It is for this reason that we need not regret the decision of her nephew and niece to publish, many years after their aunt's death, the book which she herself had withheld. Only, let us never forget as we read it that it was cancelled by the author.

The Watsons was produced, as far as can be ascertained, in that middle period of Jane's life when, after her father's resignation of the Steventon living he was spending his few remaining years at Bath with his wife and daughters. Having written three of her six novels in the nineties of the eighteenth century—the six novels by which she chose to be judged—at Steventon, she produced nothing more of her best until at Chawton, in the early years of the nineteenth century, she completed her life's work.

All her books that live by their own merits were written in the heart of the country. The book that comes nearest to

the commonest fiction of her period was chiefly written in a town which, however staid and irreproachable in its tone at the present date, was in her time a centre of worldliness and frivolity.

The Rivals was first acted in the year of Jane Austen's birth, but the picture it offers of Bath society is almost as true of 1802 as of 1775. Dress had changed much in the intervening years, but in all else there seems to have been little change between the Bath of Sheridan the lover of Elizabeth Linley, and the Bath of Sheridan the friend of the Prince Regent. It was among Lydia Languishes and Captain Absolutes that Jane Austen walked in Milsom Street and danced at the Assembly-rooms in 1802-5, and it was in an atmosphere of social affectation and busy idleness that she found her powers unequal to any nobler performance than the account of the husband-hunting and silly young women who angle for Lord Osborne and his friends. The futilities of *The Watsons* form a remarkable interlude between *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*.

The rural society into which Jane Austen takes us in all her novels marks a rapid development from the manners of the preceding age. If we regard the Squire Western of Fielding as representative of a considerable class of the country gentlemen of his time, we may wonder how it is that no such rude disturber of the peace bursts in among the Woodhouses and the Dashwoods. His nearest relation in Jane's novels is Sir John Middleton, and he, with all his noise and ignorance, is a quiet, well-bred person in comparison with the rude father of the delicious Sophia. Even the less rubicund and animal squire of the Hardcastle species is here unknown, and Squire Allworthy himself would have been strange in the drawing-rooms of Mansfield Park and Pemberley, or the parlours of Longbourn and Hartfield. There is less change to be seen

in the "manners and tone" of the women, especially the younger women, than of the men. Sophia and Amelia would have used a few expressions, perhaps, that might have made Emma stare and cry "Good God!" or the fine colour deepen on Elizabeth's cheeks, and Marianne Dashwood would have confided to Elinor her astonishment that such otherwise attractive girls should be so ignorant of the poets, and of the proper arrangement of natural scenery. Had the girls become confidential on further acquaintance, Sophia might have wondered why Elizabeth said so little about the appearance of her lover, and so much about his intelligence. But Tom Jones and Booth would never have got on intimate terms with Knightley, or Darcy, or Edward Ferrars, until these Austen young men had drunk more port than anybody in Jane's novels—with the exception of John Thorpe as described by himself—could carry without disaster.

There are no "heroes" among these honest gentlemen of a hundred years ago. Wentworth has indeed won credit and fortune at sea. Bertram and Knightley do nothing to entitle them to the name, beyond marrying the heroine. Edward Ferrars merely behaves properly in keeping faith with Lucy as long as she wants him. Darcy is heroic in taking Mrs. Bennet for a mother-in-law; Henry Tilney makes fun of his chosen mate in a way that would have cost him her heart in a more conventional novel. "Il y a des héros en mal comme en bien," says Rochefoucauld, but of the evil-doing kind there are none here, unless, indeed, the effrontery with which, after jilting Marianne for a rich wife, Willoughby comes to her sister Elinor and asks for her sympathy for his sad fate, or the coolness of Wickham in the presence of the people he has wronged may be regarded as evidence of heroism.

It is to the wonderfully true presentation of the hearts and minds of girls that these novels chiefly owe their

immense power of attraction even for readers who miss the greater part of the humour. Fanny Price and Elinor Dashwood are themselves but poorly endowed with humour, and Catherine Morland only possesses it in the rudimentary way of a lively school-girl. With how much of understanding, how clearly and fully are the hopes and fears, the innocent little plans of Fanny and Catherine, the more mature and reasoned ways of Elinor shown to us, without the least apparent effort.

The trustful reader nurtured on the successful fiction of our own time, especially that of the last ten years, during which English novelists have been able to indulge themselves and their public by the introduction of incidents and types of character which up to about the commencement of that decade would have secured the ban of the circulating libraries, has been led to believe that sensual impulse plays as large a part in woman's life as in man's. That such women as Lady Bellaston in *Tom Jones*, Arabelle in *Le Lys dans la Vallée*, or the Bellona of *Richard Feverel* exist, and in great numbers, is certain, but they are not representative of woman. Balzac, who was not: much restrained by any fear of the libraries, knew that many faithless wives (so very common in French fiction and drama, whatever they might be in life) gave themselves to men their love for whom contained much less of sensuality than of other instincts. Esther, the unhappy Jewess of *Splendeurs et Misèes de Courtisanes*, loves Lucien with an affection far more chaste than that which many a correct heroine is made to display for the man with whom she goes to the altar in the last chapter. The mistresses of famous men, as known to us from memoirs and histories, have not generally been of a sensual nature. Aspasia, most distinguished of them all, was of the intellectual, not the sensual, type. Strangely indelicate as was Madame du Châtelet, her relations with

Voltaire were based on affinity of literary taste and critical appreciation much more than on physical attraction. Even among the unintellectual women who have figured among the *grandes amoureuses* of history, the passion of the woman does not in most instances appear to have been of the coarser kind. Louise de la Vallière is at least more typical of womanhood than Barbara Villiers.

Emma Woodhouse, deeply distressed at the supposed intention of Knightley to marry Harriet Smith, feels that she cares not what may happen, if he will but remain single all his life. "Could she be secure of that, indeed, of his never marrying at all, she believed she should be perfectly satisfied. Let him but continue the same Mr. Knightley to her and her father, the same Mr. Knightley to all the world; let Donwell and Hartfield lose none of their precious intercourse of friendship and confidence, and her peace would be fully secured. Marriage, in fact, would not do for her." Marriage, we know, "did for her" very well, and not at all, so far as we have her story, in the idiomatic sense in which the words are commonly used. But in this healthy maiden, who could regard with equanimity a future wherein the man she liked best should never be more to her than a dear friend who dropped in for tea or supper, we have an effective illustration of the relative insignificance of passion in Jane Austen's view of life.

Emma Woodhouse has near relations in Elinor Dashwood and Edward Ferrars, who, after the marriage of Lucy Steele to Robert Ferrars had cleared away the only barrier to their own avowals of affection, "were neither of them quite enough in love to think that three hundred and fifty pounds a year would supply them with the comforts of life." Kitty and Lydia Bennet could simultaneously adore all the officers of a militia regiment, but there was nothing of the "all for love, and the world well lost" nonsense about any of the agreeable women of Jane Austen's

creation. They were not to be captured by a man's attractions of mind and person in the way that Millamant was by Mirabell's, nor even by the art of others, as Beatrice was won for Benedick—and he for her. The names of Millamant and Beatrice were in the ancestral tree of Elizabeth Bennet, but her pulses beat more regularly than theirs.

In the effect of Mary Crawford's charms on Edmund Bertram we may see some pale suggestion of such an awakening as that of Robert Orange (in *The School for Saints*), who, on meeting with Brigit, "suddenly had found presented to him a mind and a nature in such complete harmony with his own that it had seemed as though he were the words and she the music, of one song." But it was only a "seeming" in Edmund's case, and while we read Jane Austen our thoughts are rarely allowed to flow into a "Romeo and Juliet" channel for more than a few moments at a time.

The re-awakening of Wentworth's dormant love for Anne Elliot would have afforded to most lady novelists an opportunity for some fine, romantic writing. Jane Austen allows herself no romance in the matter. The sea air at Lyme has heightened Anne's colour, and a passing visitor —her cousin, as it happens—is attracted by her appearance. Wentworth notices his glances of admiration and is *reminded* that she is charming!

> "When they came to the steps leading upwards from the beach, a gentleman, at the same moment preparing to come down, politely drew back and stopped to give them way. They ascended and passed him; and as

> they passed, Anne's face caught his eye, and he looked at her with a degree of earnest admiration which she could not be insensible of. She was looking remarkably well; her very regular, very pretty features having the bloom and freshness of youth restored by the fine wind which had been blowing on her complexion, and by the animation of eye which it had also produced. It was evident that the gentleman (completely a gentleman in manner) admired her exceedingly. Captain Wentworth looked round at her instantly in a way which showed his noticing of it. He gave her a momentary glance—a glance of brightness which seemed to say, 'That man is struck with you'—and even I, at this moment, see something like Anne Elliot again."

This scene may be deficient in the sentiment that delights Catherine Morlands and Marianne Dashwoods, but it is a bit of true observation of a familiar phase of human folly. Archbishop Whately remarks that: "Authoresses ... can scarcely ever forget that they *are authoresses*. They seem to feel a sympathetic shudder at exposing naked a female mind. *Elles se peignent en buste*, and leave the mysteries of womanhood to be described by some interloping male, like Richardson or Marivaux, who is turned out before he has seen half the rites, and is forced to spin from his own conjectures the rest. Now from this fault Miss Austin is free. Her heroines are what one knows women must be, though one never can get them to acknowledge it." It is a striking proof of the little that was known of Jane Austen by her contemporaries that, even four years after her death, neither Whately himself, nor the editor of the *Quarterly Review* knew how to spell her

name.

The criticism that the mind brought up on modern fiction would be likely to make on the girls of Jane Austen would be the reverse of Whately's. It would be that her chief defect in depicting woman's character was that she almost invariably did force the reader to spin from his own conjectures when the "mysteries of the heart" were the subject of her pages. The truth is divided, I think, between the Archbishop and the supposed modern critic. Jane's heroines are true women, admirably portrayed, but they only represent a certain proportion of their sex. It could never be suspected of Elizabeth, or Elinor, or Anne, or Fanny that there was Southern blood in her veins. There might have been a few drops—no more—in Marianne's. The feelings of the author are reflected in her most attractive characters. She might have married, again and again, of that there can be small doubt; and while for herself she shared Dorothy Osborne's opinion as to the essentials of conjugal happiness, I fancy that she would also have agreed with Dorothy's brother that "all passions have more of trouble than satisfaction in them, and therefore they are happiest that have least of them." That, indeed, as we have already seen, was very much the fault that Miss Brontë found in her as a novelist.

Anne Elliot comes nearer than any of her fellow-heroines to Dorothy Osborne's ideal of the changelessness of affection, the true union of hearts, but, save for her involuntary tears at the Musgroves', she kept her feelings under the most perfect control, and never, we may be sure, tried to beat her convictions into the heads of her silly family, or even of her faithful friend Lady Russell.

There were, we may fairly believe, not a few who would like to have been Jane's chosen mate. One such unhappy being seems, as we read, to be the actor in the little bit of

serious comedy related, with lively exaggeration, in a letter written when she was twenty-five years old. "Your unfortunate sister was betrayed last Thursday into a situation of the utmost cruelty. I arrived at Ashe Park before the party from Deane, and was shut up in the drawing-room with Mr. Holder alone for ten minutes. I had some thoughts of insisting on the housekeeper or Mary Corbett being sent for, and nothing could prevail on me to move two steps from the door, on the lock of which I kept one hand constantly fixed."

Elizabeth Bennet was not more uncomfortable when her mother took Kitty up-stairs after breakfast in order that Mr. Collins might have what he called "The honour of a private audience" with the elder girl. "Dear ma'am," Elizabeth cried, "do not go. I beg you will not go. Mr. Collins must excuse me. He can have nothing to say to me that anybody need not hear. I am going away myself." But her mother's, "Lizzy, I *insist* upon your staying and hearing Mr. Collins," compelled her to remain, with results for which we must ever be grateful to Mrs. Bennet. It is not clear, however, that Mr. Holder was a suitor for Jane. We are left in doubt both as to his hopes and his demerits.

There is a little matter connected with the *Quarterly's* two articles in praise of Jane which is perhaps worth noting here. Gifford, who was editor when both appeared, was so warm a supporter of the Prince Regent that Hazlitt—one of Gifford's "beasts"—wrote in an open letter to him: "When you damn an author, one knows that he is not a favourite at Carlton House." Now the Prince is said to have been so fond of Jane Austen's novels that he kept a set in each of his residences, and it is unquestionable that, in consequence of a suggestion that was "equivalent to a command," she dedicated Emma to him. "You will be pleased to hear," she wrote on April 1, 1816, to John Murray the First, who published the book, "that I have

received the Prince's thanks for the *handsome* copy I sent him of 'Emma.' Whatever he may think of *my* share of the work, yours seems to have been quite right."

In the same letter she expresses her disappointment at the "total omission of 'Mansfield Park'" in the *Quarterly's* review of her work in the preceding autumn. As to that review, it is a curious fact that until Lockhart's "Life of Scott" appeared, Whately, who wrote the 1821 article, was credited with the authorship of the earlier review, and it is still to be found against his name in the British Museum catalogue, not from the ignorance of the cataloguers, but because he appears as author on the title-page of a reprint of the article issued at Ahmedabad in 1889.

V
THE IMPARTIAL SATIRIST

What has woman done?—"Nature's Salic law"—Women deficient in satire—Some types in the novels—The female snob—The valetudinarian—The fop—The too agreeable man—"Personal size and mental sorrow"—Knightley's opinion of Emma—Ashamed of relations—Mrs. Bennet—The clergy and their opinions—Worldly life—Absence of dogma—Authors confused with their creations.

It is a commonplace of those who refuse to recognize the claims of woman to equal treatment in spheres of activity where man has long held a monopoly, to ask what great thing has woman done in any walk of life? One may talk in

reply of Sappho, of Joan of Arc, of George Sand, of George Eliot, of Florence Nightingale, and two or three others, and the retort, if the greatness of these be admitted, is that they are the exceptions that "prove" the rule. It is difficult, impossible perhaps, to upset the man who denies that anything of "the greatest" in art, or literature, or science has been achieved by a woman. The list of women who have left an abiding fame as poets, or novelists, or painters is soon exhausted, and there is not a name that can, without reserve, be placed among the Rembrandts and Turners, the Goethes and Miltons, the Newtons and Darwins of mankind. Maybe this deficiency is largely due to lack of opportunity. Since the gates were partly opened to woman, within the lifetime of those who are still not old, she has done enough to change the opinions of many who held that rocking the cradle was a sufficiently active share in the ruling of the world for the sex that produced the Maid of Orleans and the Lady with the Lamp. Such justly conspicuous success as Madame Curie has attained in chemistry, or Mrs. Garrett Anderson in medicine, or Mrs. Scharlieb in surgery, has compelled the admission that even if woman were by nature unfitted to reach the highest levels of intellectual achievement, she at least could not be excluded from the learned professions on the ground of inadequate mental equipment.

"Nature's old Salic law," said Huxley, "will not be repealed, and no change of dynasty will be effected." Jane Austen, at any rate, did not desire to repeal it. She was among the most feminine of the women writers who have left an enduring reputation. It is something of a paradox, therefore, that the quality on which her fame chiefly rests is one which is rare among women, and in which most of those women who have attained success in literature have been conspicuously lacking—satirical humour. Apart from physical disabilities, want of humour is woman's heaviest

handicap in the conflict of life. Humour is the principal ingredient of the philosophic temperament. Woman has courage in adversity, she can suffer intensely without complaint, but she rarely possesses the power of laughing at her own misfortunes.

It has been said, and the saying might not easily be gainsaid, that none of the great jokes of the world was made by a woman. There are perhaps fifty great jokes—spoken jokes, of course, are meant, not those generally humourless things known as "practical jokes"—and the good stories that are told and received as novelties are, save in the rarest instances, merely new editions of some wheeze which was already ancient when it was told to a circle of mead-drinkers round a fire the smoke whereof—or some of it—escaped through the roof. It is, there is reason to believe, no mere figure of speech that originally most of the basic jokes were told round the galley fire of the Ark during the long dark evenings after the animals had been fed, the decks swept down, and the women had retired to their quarters. Thus may we account for the otherwise inexplicably large proportion of sea-faring and animal tales among the mirth-provoking yarns of man. A woman might never make a joke, and yet have a keen sense of humour, while, on the other hand, she might make many jokes, and have no sense of humour at all. Most of the jokes that have any element of freshness are alive with fun, and not with humour. Who is more humourless than the notoriously funny man?

Jane Austen is not often funny and seldom makes jokes in her novels. Her humour is of the essential kind, which is so nearly akin to wit that it is often almost identical with it. Wit and humour, after all definitions, are brothers who might be taken for one another by those who do not notice that the one has colder hands than the other.

If you want to laugh heartily you must not trust to Jane's novels for a stimulant. Her characters laugh but little among themselves, and are the cause of intellectual joy rather than of physical contractions in those who read about them.

When, after a re-reading of the novels, we sit and think over their delights, many are the admirable bits of character-drawing that come to mind. After we have thought of the heroines, the "good" people, in the common meaning of the word, do not come back to us so readily as those who, if not "bad," are decidedly faulty. The Westons, the Gardiners, the Harvilles, the Crofts, Lady Russell, the John Knightleys, we recall when we jog our memories. After Elizabeth, and Emma, and Anne, it is the appallingly tactless Mrs. Bennet, the odiously snobbish Mrs. Elton, the race-proud Lady Catherine, the entirely selfish Mr. Collins, the lazy and thoughtless Lady Bertram, the mean and tyrannical Mrs. Norris, the fatuous Sir Walter Elliot, these and their like, who throng into view. No writer—not even Thackeray—has realized the female snob more knowingly than Jane Austen in Mrs. Elton, whose constant reference of all matters of taste to the standard presented by "Maple Grove" and the "barouche-landau" renders her as diverting to us as she was insufferable to Emma Woodhouse. A woman like this, who is never betrayed into an unselfish action or a noble aspiration, is happily not a common object in real life, but there are enough of Mrs. Elton's great-granddaughters about the world to exculpate Jane from the charge of undue exaggeration. Emma herself has been called a snob, and only the other day was described as "perpetually acting with bad taste." But Emma's disdain for Robert Martin, and her opinion of the degradation of marrying a governess, were due to prejudices of convention, which thought—under Knightley's influence—dispelled. Mrs. Elton was a snob at heart, who revelled in

her own vulgarity of instinct.

If the snob is portrayed to perfection in Mrs. Elton, the valetudinarian is no less happily presented in Mr. Woodhouse—"My dear Emma, suppose we all have a little gruel"—and for a picture of an empty-headed, frivolous wife married to a rational and bearish husband, the Palmers, in *Sense and Sensibility*, have few equals. As for Miss Bates, she is without a serious rival as an inconsequential babbler, and though we may be, and ought to be, as angry with Emma for her rudeness at the Box Hill picnic as was Mr. Knightley himself, we must admit that years of Miss Bates's disjoined garrulity were some set-off against that gross breach of charity and good manners. Lady Catherine de Bourgh has been placed by some critical readers among Jane Austen's obvious caricatures. Is she not an entirely credible, if happily rare, type? She is seen in a strong light in her attempt to bully Elizabeth into a promise not to marry Darcy—

> "'With regard to the resentment of his family,' says Elizabeth at last, 'or the indignation of the world, if the former *were* excited by his marrying me, it would not give me one moment's concern—and the world in general would have too much sense to join in the scorn.'
>
> "'And this is your real opinion!' replies Lady Catherine. 'This is your final resolve! Very well. I shall now know how to act. Do not imagine, Miss Bennet, that your ambition will ever be gratified. I came to try you. I hoped to find you reasonable; but, depend upon it, I will carry my point.'

> "In this manner Lady Catherine talked on till they were at the door of the carriage, when, turning hastily round, she added—
>
> "'I take no leave of you, Miss Bennet. I send no compliments to your mother. You deserve no such attention. I am most seriously displeased.'
>
> "Elizabeth made no answer, and without attempting to persuade her ladyship to return into the house, walked quietly into it herself."

Thus ends one of the great scenes of Jane Austen, a bit of duologue which gives us the natures and capacities of two remarkable people, a charming, clear-headed, self-reliant girl, and a blustering, stupidly proud old woman.

Sir Walter Elliot is the companion figure, more highly-coloured, of Lady Catherine. This man, a vain fop who has not sense enough to govern his own affairs, regards professional men as contemptible, if necessary, adjuncts of society, and, at a time when only the splendid services of our sailors had saved England from disaster he thus babbles about the navy—

> "Yes; it is in two points offensive to me, I have two strong grounds of objection to it. First, as being the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of; and, secondly, as it cuts up a man's youth and vigour most

> horribly; a sailor grows old sooner than any other man. I have observed it all my life. A man is in greater danger in the navy of being insulted by the rise of one whose father his father might have disdained to speak to, and of becoming prematurely an object of disgust himself, than in any other line. One day last spring, in town, I was in company with two men, striking instances of what I am talking of, —Lord St. Ives, whose father we all know to have been a country curate, without bread to eat: I was to give place to Lord St. Ives,—and a certain Admiral Baldwin, the most deplorable-looking personage you can imagine; his face the colour of mahogany, rough and rugged to the last degree; all lines and wrinkles, nine grey hairs of a side, and nothing but a dab of powder at top. 'In the name of heaven, who is that old fellow?' said I to a friend of mine who was standing near (Sir Basil Morley). 'Old fellow!' cried Sir Basil, 'it is Admiral Baldwin. What do you take his age to be?' 'Sixty,' said I, 'or perhaps sixty-two.' 'Forty,' replied Sir Basil, 'forty, and no more.' Picture to yourselves my amazement: I shall not easily forget Admiral Baldwin. I never saw quite so wretched an example of what a sea-faring life can do; but to a degree, I know it is the same with them all: they are all knocked about, and exposed to every climate, and every weather, till they are not fit to be seen. It is a pity they are not knocked on the head at once, before they reach Admiral Baldwin's age."

There have been such fools as Sir Walter Elliot, but as a

type he is overdrawn. Jane loved the navy so much that her anger with those who disparaged it gave her pen speed and added colour to the ink.

Anne's cousin William Elliot, whose attentions to her help to revive Wentworth's affection, is more closely studied by the author than any of her "heroes."

> "Everything united in him; good understanding, correct opinions, knowledge of the world, and a warm heart. He had strong feelings of family attachment and family honour, without pride or weakness; he lived with the liberality of a man of fortune, without display; he judged for himself in everything essential, without defying public opinion in any point of worldly decorum. He was steady, observant, moderate, candid; never run away with by spirits or by selfishness, which fancied itself strong feeling; and yet, with a sensibility to what was amiable and lovely, and a value for all the felicities of domestic life, which characters of fancied enthusiasm and violent agitation seldom really possess."

Anne, however, was not long in discovering grave defects in this outwardly model person. She saw that while he was

> "rational, discreet, polished, he was not open. There never was any burst of feeling, any warmth of indignation or delight, at the evil or

> good of others. This, to Anne, was a decided imperfection. Her early impressions were incurable. She prized the frank, the open-hearted, the eager character beyond all others. Warmth and enthusiasm did captivate her still. She felt that she could so much more depend upon the sincerity of those who sometimes looked or said a careless or a hasty thing, than of those whose presence of mind never varied, whose tongue never slipped.
>
> "Mr. Elliot was too generally agreeable. Various as were the tempers in her father's house, he pleased them all. He endured too well, stood too well with everybody."

Those who accuse Jane Austen of hardness have sometimes relied on her treatment of Mrs. Musgrove's sorrow over her ne'er-do-well son, long after his death, to support this charge. Anne and Wentworth, whose mutual liking was just beginning to bloom again, were "actually on the same sofa, for Mrs. Musgrove had most readily made room for him; they were divided only by Mrs. Musgrove. It was no insignificant barrier, indeed. Mrs. Musgrove was of a comfortable, substantial size, infinitely more fitted by nature to express good cheer and good humour than tenderness and sentiment; and while the agitations of Anne's slender form, and pensive face, may be considered as very completely screened, Captain Wentworth should be allowed some credit for the self-command with which he attended to her large fat sighings over the destiny of a son, whom alive nobody had cared for." And then the author stops in her narrative to observe that "Personal size and mental sorrow have certainly no necessary proportions. A large, bulky figure has as good a

right to be in deep affliction as the most graceful set of limbs in the world. But, fair or not fair, there are unbecoming conjunctions, which reason will patronize in vain—which taste cannot tolerate—which ridicule will seize."

She thus bluntly expresses what almost every satirist merely implies, but she underrates her own powers. The ordinary writer might or might not be able to describe the grief of "a large, bulky figure" without offence to the ordinary "taste." Genius could assuredly do this thing. Shakespeare, with whom Whately, Macaulay and Tennyson compared Jane Austen, made one of his greatest characters "fat and scant of breath," but when Hamlet says to his friend, "Thou woulds't not think how ill all's here about my heart," we do not find it "ridiculous" that this "too, too solid flesh" should be joined with a mind weighted with such poignant sorrow. In any case, whether she mistrusted her own powers, or wanted Mrs. Musgrove to be slightly ridiculous, which seems more likely, Jane did not here strive to achieve what she pointedly tells us it would be beyond reason to expect.

The character of Emma is described with unusual fulness, but the description is placed in the mouth of George Knightley, her candid admirer, who was perhaps not guiltless of the fault which Fainall attributed to Mirabell, of being "too discerning in the failings of his mistress." Mrs. Weston ("Miss Taylor that was") has said that Emma means to read with Harriet Smith—

> "'Emma has been meaning to read more ever since she was twelve years old,' replies Mr. Knightley. 'I have seen a great many lists of her drawing-up, at various times, of books that she meant to read regularly through—and very good lists they were, very well chosen, and very neatly arranged—sometimes alphabetically, and sometimes by some other rule. The list she drew up when only fourteen —I remember thinking it did her judgment so much credit, that I preserved it some time, and I dare say she may have made out a very good list now. But I have done with expecting any course of steady reading from Emma. She will never submit to anything requiring industry and patience, and a subjection of the fancy to the understanding. Where Miss Taylor failed to stimulate, I may safely affirm that Harriet Smith will do nothing. You never could persuade her to read half so much as you wished. You know you could not.'
>
> "'I dare say,' replied Mrs. Weston, smiling, 'that I thought so *then*; but since we have parted, I can never remember Emma's omitting

to do anything I wished.'

"'There is hardly any desiring to refresh such a memory as *that*,' said Mr. Knightley, feelingly; and for a moment or two he had done. 'But I,' he soon added, 'who have had no such charm thrown over my senses, must still see, hear, and remember. Emma is spoiled by being the cleverest of her family. At ten years old she had the misfortune of being able to answer questions which puzzled her sister at seventeen. She was always quick and assured; Isabella slow and diffident. And ever since she was twelve, Emma has been mistress of the house and of you all. In her mother she lost the only person able to cope with her.'"

An unhappy condition of most of Jane's heroines is that they are of necessity ashamed of their nearest relations. Anne Elliot felt this trouble keenly, when at length she and Wentworth decided to take the happiness which she had refused years before—

"Anne, satisfied at a very early period of Lady Russell's meaning to love Captain Wentworth as she ought, had no other alloy to the happiness of her prospects than what arose from the consciousness of having no relations to bestow on him which a man of sense could value. There she felt her own inferiority keenly. The disproportion in their fortune was nothing; it did not give her a moment's regret; but to have no family to receive and estimate him properly, nothing of respectability, of

> harmony, of good will, to offer in return for all the worth and all the prompt welcome which met her in his brothers and sisters, was a source of as lively pain as her mind could well be sensible of under circumstances of otherwise strong felicity."

One can readily understand her regret. Her father was a fool, her elder sister Elizabeth a slave of convention, with few rational ideas of her own, and her younger sister a neurotic egotist, who grudged to others the simplest pleasures if she did not feel able or disposed to share them.

Fanny Price was ashamed of the slovenly home at Portsmouth to which Henry Crawford so inopportunely penetrated. Elizabeth Bennet's mother was, of course, more nearly "impossible" even than Lady Catherine had so pointedly suggested, for her defects were far worse than those of obscure birth. This terrible woman, who kept her elder daughters constantly on the rack by her fatuous chatter, who always said the wrong thing, who had no desire for her children's welfare but to marry them to anybody, with money if possible, or without it rather than not at all, made one of her usual quick changes when she heard the surprising news of Elizabeth's engagement to Darcy—

> "She began at length to recover, to fidget about in her chair, get up, sit down again, wonder, and bless herself.
>
> "'Good gracious! Lord bless me! only think!

dear me! Mr. Darcy! Who would have thought it! And it is really true? Oh, my sweetest Lizzy! how rich and how great you will be! What pin-money, what jewels, what carriages you will have! Jane's is nothing to it—nothing at all. I am so pleased—so happy! Such a charming man!—so handsome! so tall—Oh, my dear Lizzy! pray apologize for my having disliked him so much before. I hope he will overlook it. Dear, dear Lizzy! A house in town! Everything that is charming! Three daughters married! Ten thousand a-year! Oh, Lord! what will become of me? I shall go distracted.'

"This was enough to prove that her approbation need not be doubted; and Elizabeth, rejoicing that such an effusion was heard only by herself, soon went away. But before she had been three minutes in her own room, her mother followed her.

"'My dearest child,' she cried, 'I can think of nothing else! Ten thousand a-year, and very likely more! 'Tis as good as a lord! And a special license. You must and shall be married by a special license. But, my dearest love, tell me what dish Mr. Darcy is particularly fond of, that I may have it to-morrow.'

"This was a sad omen of what her mother's behaviour to the gentleman himself might be; and Elizabeth found that, though in the certain possession of his warmest affection, and secure of her relations' consent, there was still something to be wished for."

Of Catherine Morland we are told that "her whole family were plain matter-of-fact people, who seldom aimed at wit of any kind; her father at the utmost being contented with a pun, and her mother with a proverb." Having given us this little *aperçu* of Mr. and Mrs. Morland, the author, *more suo*, adds the information: "They were not in the habit, therefore, of telling lies to increase their importance, or of asserting at one moment what they would contradict the next."

If we seek in our memories for scenes of particular excellence we shall recall with renewed pleasure the rehearsals (*Mansfield Park*), the encounters between Elizabeth and Mr. Collins and Elizabeth and Lady Catherine (*Pride and Prejudice*), the second and last proposal of Wentworth to Anne Elliot (*Persuasion*), the picnic at Box Hill and the dance at the "Crown" (*Emma*). In all of these the spontaneity of the narrative, the vitality of the talk and the vividness with which the circumstances are realized with the smallest amount of description show the author's art in its most delightful vein.

It is often in little touches, generally satirical, that Jane Austen reveals the characters of her people. Lady Middleton, whose "reserve was a mere calmness of *manner* with which *sense* had nothing to do"; Mary Bennet, whom, when her sisters visited her, "they found, as usual, deep in the study of thorough bass and human nature, and had some new extracts to admire, and some new observations of threadbare morality to listen to"; the gushing Louisa Musgrove, who declared that if she loved a man as Mrs. Croft loved the Admiral, she "would always be with him, nothing should ever separate" them, and that she "would rather be overturned by him, than driven safely by anybody else"; Mr. Allen, a country gentleman of

fortune who "did not care about the garden, and never went into it"; and General Tilney, poring over pamphlets when he ought to be in bed, blinding his eyes "for the good of others" who would never benefit in the least by his exertions; the heartless and humbugging Mrs. Norris, whose plentiful talk about helping her poor, child-burdened sister ended in her "writing the letters" while others sent substantial assistance—these, and many other entertaining people live for us largely from such casual peeps into their natures and sentiments.

Jane Austen rarely describes a man or woman as possessing qualities which are not justified by the evidence she offers. Almost the only notable exceptions are Mrs. Dashwood, of whom we are told that "a man could not very well be in love with either of her daughters, without extending the passion to her," but who does not herself give us any reason to regard her as other than an affectionate, well-meaning, and injudicious person, and Captain Wentworth, who is stated to have been witty, but who usually manages to restrain his wit when we happen to meet him.

The many parsons of the novels are at once too steady and too prosperous to be in accord with either of the types of eighteenth-century clergy most frequently conveyed by the literature of their period. They may not have done much for their parishioners beyond preaching to them once or twice a week, and sending them soup occasionally, but they set them good examples by conducting themselves decently and soberly. Of their "views" we know little. Indeed, few things are more remarkable in these novels, in the light of later fiction, than that almost complete absence of any reference to dogmatic religion to which attention has already been drawn. You may hunt through them all and hardly find two definite statements that, except to see what the vicar's bride was like, any of the characters went

to church. We know that the parsons preached, but whether there was any one to hear their sermons we are usually left in doubt. In fact, as Dr. Whately puts it, the author's religion is "not at all obtrusive." His favourable view of Jane Austen's influence may be contrasted with Robert Hall's of Maria Edgeworth's: "In point of tendency I should class her books among the most irreligious I ever read.... She does not attack religion nor inveigh against it, but makes it appear unnecessary by exhibiting perfect virtue without it."

It has frequently been said that the atmosphere of Jane Austen's books is "Church of England," and this is in a sense true. She assumes that the squires of whom she writes are adherents of Church and State, much as a provincial clergyman wrote quite recently in his Parish Magazine: "It is generally taken for granted that Church is the only possible religion for an English gentleman." We meet with no Romish priests or Methodist preachers, not so much as a member of the Society of Friends, but, on the other hand, we meet with no one who talks against faith. It was a period when the Church itself had become apathetic, when pluralists abounded, and when many rectors lived comfortably on their great tithes, far from the parishes which they left to the care of curates who were often worse off than gamekeepers. A young man went into the Church, if there was a good living to be had, just as he went to the Bar if his uncle was a flourishing attorney, or into the navy if his friends had influence with the Board of Admiralty. Many parsons, if they were well-to-do and fond of society, did not even wear any distinctive dress. One meets vicars and curates to-day, in summer-time, wearing green ties and grey tweed suits, and even a bishop has been known to abandon his episcopal uniform when he was away on a holiday. But, to take an instance from the novels, Catherine Morland, who has met Henry Tilney at a dance in Bath,

and meets him again at the Pump-room or elsewhere, does not know he is a clergyman until she is told. The Church was merely a profession for most of those who entered it. "Did Henry's income depend solely on his living," says General Tilney, "he would not be well provided for. Perhaps it may seem odd, that with only two younger children, I should think any profession necessary to him; and certainly there are moments when we could all wish him disengaged from every tie of business." The most conscientious clergyman in the Austen Comedy is Edmund Bertram, who really seems to have wished to do his duty, and thereby damaged his chance of marrying Mary Crawford.

The scanty reference to the observances of religion in the novels bears on the worldly life of the age, as we know it from those who were of it and saw it at its centre of activity, London society. Doctor Warner, George Selwyn's chaplain, who attracted large congregations by his eloquent preaching, and who was an avowed sceptic away from church, who toadied the rich and noble, and told stories that delighted the Duke of Queensberry, was no rare type of the clergy of his time, and we may be pretty certain that Jane Austen's Mr. Collins (who was not at all likely to tell an improper story himself) would have found it very difficult to believe that so exalted a personage as "Old Q." was unfit for the society of clergymen.

Jane frankly admitted that she knew too little of literature, philosophy, and science, to allow her adequately to draw the character of a scholarly and serious parson. "The comic side of the character I might be equal to, but not the good, the enthusiastic, the literary. Such a man's conversation must at times be on subjects of science and philosophy of which I know nothing, or at least occasionally abundant in quotations and allusions which a woman who, like me, knows only her own mother tongue,

and has read little in that, would be totally without the power of giving." According to her brother and her nephew, Jane was better educated than she here makes out, knowing French, and a good deal of Italian. Whether we believe her or not about her literary and linguistic limitations, we can have small doubt that she knew very little indeed about science and philosophy, in spite of being so much of a philosopher. In those days, when Cuvier was bringing his genius in palæontology to bear on the recovery of lost types, and preparing a way for Darwin, whose own grandfather was bravely aiding in the clearance of paths in hitherto trackless jungles of prejudice and obscurantism, science was scarcely regarded as a decent subject of conversation before ladies in country drawing-rooms, and it never obtrudes itself at Hartfield or at Mansfield Park.

If we may read through every word of Jane's novels without discovering any expression of dogmatic belief, we may equally find no direct evidence, unless in that one story of Elinor and Willoughby, of acceptance of the chilly Deism which had eaten so deeply into the intellects both of laymen and clergy. The unrest, both moral and physical, which had spread from Paris, from Holland, and from Switzerland over the whole of Western Europe at that time, finds little place for its fidgeting in the families to whom we are here introduced. People, with the rare exceptions of a Wickham or a Willoughby, are born, live, and die, in peace with the world and in general harmony with their environments.

Admirable as Jane Austen's pictures of country life in house and garden are, they are not to be accepted as literal transcripts. She was, before all else, an artist, and the more an artist is devoted to finicking reproduction of exact details the further is he removed from art. Almost every

author, if he writes with sincerity, must draw his own moral portrait in his best work. In a literal sense there is no reason to suppose that novelists often give us studies of themselves in any degree comparable with the self-portraits of Rembrandt, Velasquez, Madame Vigée le Brun or the moderns in the Uffizi Gallery. Sometimes, of course, as in *Villette* and *Delphine*, an author reports episodes in his life almost as they happened, and it is certain, save in the rarest cases, that something of an author's mental processes is reproduced in all his creatures, "bad" as well as "good," though he is more likely to show his own temperament and experience in a prominent and sympathetic character than in any other. Very few writers follow the example of Milton, of whom Coleridge declared "his Satan, his Adam, his Raphael, almost all his Eve, are all John Milton." The common mistake, a mistake so obvious that we may wonder at its continuance, is such a close identification of the author with any one of his creations. Thus, because "Vivian Grey is Disraeli himself," Disraeli is to be credited with the strange experiences of that uneasy hero among foreign politicians and card-sharpers; and because "Jane Eyre is Charlotte Brontë," Charlotte Brontë must at least have wished to unite herself with a wild man whose wife had gone mad. There were no doubt readers of Goethe's *Faust* who, ignoring the legend, thought the author had bargained with Mephisto and, it "goes without saying" (Marianne Dashwood is not within hearing), that "Hamlet is Shakespeare." Such arbitrary reasoning may account for the general confusion of Frankenstein with the creature that he made.

Among the widest traps, indeed, for those who love to see a *roman à clef* in every novel, is this identification of the author with one or other of his characters. Some people have convinced themselves that Cassandra and Jane Austen were the originals of Elinor and Marianne

Dashwood. Such an idea could only be held by those who had not seen Jane's letters. Marianne, sentimental, romantic, disagreeable in a quite serious way, and usually inattentive "to the forms of general civility," could not be Jane, and as certainly not Cassandra as we know her, and while Elinor, the patient, long-suffering girl, might in some ways represent either of the Austen sisters, she is very far from being a portrait.

Yet if neither Elinor Dashwood nor Marianne is to be described as a likeness of Jane, the elder sister in her philosophical submission to what she believed to be the loss of her lover, and the younger in her literary tastes and her impatience with people who talk without thinking may fairly be regarded as in part reflecting the author's personality. None of her heroines *is* Jane, but there is much of her also in Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse, and a good deal in Anne Elliot, though she admitted that Anne was too nearly perfect to be altogether after her heart. The simple little souls of Fanny Price and Catherine Morland, so dependent on the direct assistance of others in the formation of their feelings, are in very small degree expressions of the author's temperament. We may, I think, regard Emma Woodhouse as the nearest approach to a portrait of the artist who painted her, but "nearest" is a relative superlative. Many people do not care for Emma. A strong expression of recent disapproval was quoted a few pages back. Jane Austen anticipated objections. "I am going," she said, when she was beginning the book, "to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like."

Whether or not we may see in Emma a good deal of Jane herself, we may fairly be certain that none of her characters is an intentional copy of any one in the circle of her friends and acquaintances. She herself declared her opinion, which tallies with all that we know of her, that the introduction of living people as actors in a work of

imagination is a breach of good manners, and that, propriety apart, she was too proud of her characters to admit that they were "only Mrs. A. or Colonel B." How far she made use of individuals in the composition of such strongly-marked figures as Mrs. Elton, Mr. Collins and Sir Walter Elliot, we cannot, of course, know. The point, for what it is worth, could have been better elucidated if Miss Austen's circle had been less far removed from the world wherein the Wraxalls, the Gronows and the Grevilles listen and watch. We know that, whatever the degree of similitude, Disraeli's Rigby offers a recognizable likeness to Croker, Dickens's Boythorn to Landor, Stevenson's Weir of Hermiston to Braxfield. Accepting Jane Austen's denial of the deliberate introduction of real persons in her novels, we cannot tell how many of her Hampshire acquaintances served intellectually for her pictures of country society as the maidens of Crotona served physically for the picture of Helen by Zeuxis. We may be certain that, all unconsciously, they gave her of their best, each according to his means.

VI
PERSONAL AND TOPOGRAPHICAL

The novelist and her characters—Her sense of their reality—Accessories rarely described—Her ideas on dress—Her own millinery and gowns—Thin clothes and consumption—Domestic economy—Jane as housekeeper—"A very clever essay"—Mr. Collins at Longbourn—The gipsies at Highbury—Topography of Jane Austen—Hampshire—Lyme Regis—Godmersham—Bath—London.

On an earlier page a contrast between Balzac and Jane Austen has been suggested. One characteristic they had in common was the sense of the reality of their own creations. Madame de Surville, the sister of Balzac, has recorded how, when the affairs of the family were being discussed, he would say, "Ah, yes, but do you know to whom Felix de Vandenesse is engaged? One of the Grandville girls. It is an excellent marriage for him." Further than this an author's sense of the actuality of his own imaginings could hardly go, unless, indeed, like one modern author—if the story is true, as it probably is not—he were to invite the figments of his brain to lunch!

Jane Austen was not quite so much obsessed by her inventions, though she spoke of the very novels themselves as personal entities. *Pride and Prejudice* was "my own darling child," and of *Sense and Sensibility* she writes, when it is passing through the press: "No, indeed, I am never too busy to think of *S. and S*. I can no more forget it than a mother can forget her sucking child; and I am much obliged to you for your inquiries." As for the characters, she loved to talk of them as living people, and was so fond of Elizabeth Bennet, for instance, that, as she wrote to Cassandra, she did not know how she should be "able to tolerate" those who did not like her.

She used to tell her nieces what happened to her imaginary people after the novels were ended, how Mary Bennet married her uncle's clerk, or her sister Kitty a clergyman, and how Mrs. Robert Ferrars's sister "never caught the doctor." One of the most delightful of her letters, as evidence of her happiness in her work, and of her half-serious consciousness of the reality of her creations, was written after a round of London picture galleries. The portraits she looked for were not those of

Knights, or Austens, or Leighs, but of beautiful women out of her own novels. They might be labelled Lady this or Mrs. that, but she should recognize them if they were portraits of her darling Elizabeth or her dearest Anne. She was disappointed. It is true that at the Gallery in Spring Gardens she found "a small portrait of Mrs. Bingley, excessively like her," and, moreover, "she is dressed in a white gown, with green ornaments, which convinces me of what I had always supposed, that green was a favourite colour with her. I dare say Mrs. D. will be in yellow." For it was "Mrs. D."—the beloved Elizabeth Darcy (*née* Bennet), whose face her creator and devoted admirer looked forward to seeing on some fashionable portrait-painter's canvas. Alas! at none of the shows was the desired picture to be found. "I can only imagine," writes the disappointed "friend," soothing her regrets with a reflection natural to her mind, "that Mr. D. prizes any picture of her too much to like it should be exposed to the public eye. I can imagine he would have that sort of feeling —that mixture of love, pride, and delicacy."

Thus we can see that Jane knew exactly what her heroines were like, even if in their case, as in that of nearly all her characters, the reader is left to fill in details of colour and feature very much as he chooses. She was far more particular in describing the personal appearance of real people, and in her letters the handsome and the ugly are as clearly differentiated as the lively and the dull. "I never saw so plain a family"—she declares after calling on some people named Fagg—"five sisters so very plain! They are as plain as the Foresters, or the Franfraddops, or the Seagraves, or the Rivers, excluding Sophy. Miss Sally Fagg has a pretty figure, and that comprises all the good looks of the family." Sometimes she attributed the blame for ill-looks to a definite part of the genealogical tree. "I wish she was not so very Palmery," she says of one of her

nieces, "but it seems stronger than ever, I never knew a wife's family features have such undue influence." The Mrs. Palmer of *Sense and Sensibility* was not of that family. She was as pretty as she was foolish.

Even if it be true that Jane Austen only painted the life which she found immediately around her, and that she would almost as soon have attempted to depict the interior of a Thibetan lamassary as of an English country-house of the kind Disraeli loved to paint, yet do her characters "typify nothing?" If Mrs. Elton, and Sir John Middleton, and Mary Musgrove are not types, then I do not see why Sir Charles Grandison, or Mrs. Proudie, or Mr. Tulliver should be regarded as types. Perhaps they should not, but then, what are types? Most of Jane Austen's people may be common; there may be, in the flesh, a hundred Lady Russells for one Lady Camper, and five hundred John Willoughbys for one Willoughby Patterne. That is only to say that humanity is richer in one type than in another.

Jane was a realist, though Realism, in the sense in which we apply the term in the criticism of living writers, has little place in her novels. She assumes that her readers—the men and women of her own age—are neither blind nor unaccustomed to the ordinary resources of contemporary civilization. When her characters dine, they may usually, for all we hear to the contrary, eat out of a common dish with the aid of their unassisted fingers, after the manner of the nomads of the Asiatic Steppes; they may drink out of gourds like the Bushmen, while, after the custom of the Romans, they recline on raised couches in the attitude of Madame Récamier. We know that they sat round solid mahogany or oaken tables, covered with damask cloths during the meat and pudding service, that the silver was polished, and the glass bright, even though the supply of plates was perhaps not always equal to the number of courses; we have little doubt as to the kind of chairs

whereon the diners sat, and we may wish we had more of them in our own dining-rooms.

As to the costumes of the men and women who sat on the chairs, we are usually left to dress them as we like, and there is little doubt that many a modern reader has mentally pictured Darcy wearing a tweed suit and a bowler hat, Charles Musgrove in a golfing-cap and loose knickerbockers, and Mr. Collins or Mr. Elton in a stiff "round-about" collar of the kind usually worn by the Anglican clergy of to-day. For the ladies, the whirligig of time has brought back the modes of a century ago. In spite of the cry for the equality of the sexes, there are, as the Lord Chancellor and other eminent authorities have laid down, marked distinctions between the ways of women and of men. One of such distinctions may be found in the fact that the fashions of feminine dress move in a (very irregular and therefore theoretically impossible) circle, while those of masculine dress rarely cross the same point twice. Thus while, during the last few years, we have seen our sisters and aunts affecting "modes" that were in vogue in the periods of the Renaissance, the Directory, and the Empire, we have never seen our brothers and uncles abroad in the streets attired like the courtiers either of François *premier* or of the First Consul. A woman need not despair of wearing, without being followed by a crowd, almost any costume of any period of woman's history. A man need not look for the day when he may walk in the parks in the garb of Raleigh or of Burke without attracting more attention than will be agreeable to the modesty of any one but an actor-manager or the European agent of some American world-industry. The Misses Bertram, of Mansfield Park, might go shopping in Regent Street to-day without any one remarking that their dress, or their coiffure, was seriously out of date. But we only know how they dressed because we know the date of their birth, not

because the author of a bit of their life-history has told us.

Who that has ever read *Weir of Hermiston* can forget the description of the heroine as she first appeared to Archie in the kirk? It was in the very year (1814) in which Fanny Price's story was related, and of Mary Crawford, if not of Fanny, a tale of town finery as bright as that of Kirstie might have been told. We know how alluring Kirstie looked to Archie in her "frock of straw-coloured jaconet muslin, cut low at the bosom and short at the ankle," and "drawn up so as to mould the contour of both breasts, and in the nook between ... surely in a very enviable position, trembled the nosegay of primroses." Of some such charming pictures we get at least the preliminary sketches in Jane Austen's letters, but the finished works are never shown in the novels, and we may dress the pretty heroines to our own fancy so long as we keep to the style of their period, or, if our imaginations are feeble and our knowledge of Regency costume deficient, Mr. Brock will do the work for us in the more delightful of his coloured drawings, or Mr. Hugh Thomson in his lively illustrations in pen and ink.

This point—that the material factors of manners and habits are little noted by Jane Austen—will strike many readers, at first sight, as of quite trivial importance. But it is largely the reason why her novels have so modern an external air compared with those, let us say, of Scott, or even of Balzac, who only began to write when her short career was ending. If Jane Austen had described the conditions of life at Hartfield or Kellynch with the particularity with which Balzac describes the Grandets' house at Saumur, and the Guenics' at Guerande, or had given us such full accounts of the villagers on the estate of the Bertrams of Mansfield Park as Scott gave us of the smugglers and gipsies on the lands of the Bertrams of

Ellangowan, we should see more clearly the changes that a hundred years have wrought in the habits of the English country.

Jane Austen was by no means indifferent to the cut and colour of her own clothing, however little she allowed her heroines to talk about theirs. But when we read of "Jane Austen frocks" for bridesmaids in the accounts of modern weddings, they are copied from the illustrations of Mr. Thomson or Mr. Brock, or else are so-called merely because they are of the period of her novels, which is much the same thing. With the general subject of dress she deals as a novelist, we may almost say once for all, in a single paragraph of *Northanger Abbey*. The occasion was the dance at Bath which was to prove so momentous an event in Catherine's life.

> "What gown and what head-dress she should wear on the occasion became her chief concern. She cannot be justified in it. Dress is at all times a frivolous distinction, and excessive solicitude about it often destroys its own aim. Catherine knew all this very well; her great-aunt had read her a lecture on the subject only the Christmas before; and yet she lay awake ten minutes on Wednesday night debating between her spotted and her tamboured muslin; and nothing but the shortness of the time prevented her buying a new one for the evening. This would have been an error in judgment, great though not uncommon, from which one of the other sex rather than her own, a brother rather than a great-aunt, might have warned her; for man only can be aware of the insensibility of man

> towards a new gown. It would be mortifying to the feelings of many ladies could they be made to understand how little the heart of man is affected by what is costly or new in their attire; how little it is biassed by the texture of their muslin, and how unsusceptible of peculiar tenderness towards the spotted, the sprigged, the mull, or the jackonet. Woman is fine for her own satisfaction alone. No man will admire her the more, no woman will like her the better, for it. Neatness and fashion are enough for the former, and a something of shabbiness or impropriety will be most endearing to the latter."

If we regard these as the author's considered opinions, expressed with a characteristic touch of *malice*, we shall probably agree that she is, on the whole, right. Were women to make a note, every time a man describes one of them as "well dressed," of what the subject of the remark was wearing, they would, I believe, find an overwhelming preponderance of votes in favour of well-fitting, plain, if not actually "tailor-made" costumes for the daytime, and simple though not conventual frocks for the evening, as compared with all the highly decorated "confections," covered with what one may call "applied art," whereon women spend so large a proportion of their allowances.

The letters to Cassandra make up to some extent for the deficiencies of the novels in a matter so attractive to the author's admirers among her own sex, though the particulars given are almost always incomplete; that is to say, they depend on information which Cassandra possessed, but which is denied to us. Such a case is presented when we read: "Elizabeth has given me a hat,

and it is not only a pretty hat, but a pretty *style* of hat too. It is something like Eliza's, only, instead of being all straw, half of it is narrow purple ribbon. I flatter myself, however, that you can understand very little of it from this description. Heaven forbid that I should ever offer such encouragement to explanations as to give a clear one on any occasion myself! But I must write no more of this." The tantalizing thing is that while we know that this pretty hat was something like Eliza's, we have no idea what Eliza's was like, beyond the untrimmed fact that it was "all straw."

Then Cassandra is told by Jane, "I believe I *shall* make my new gown like my robe, but the back of the latter is all in a piece with the tail, and will seven yards enable me to copy it in that respect?" Alas! that we cannot discover how the robe was made, except that "the back was all in a piece with the tail." Often, of course, the news about dress is mixed up with other news, as when Jane writes: "At Nackington ... Miss Fletcher and I were very thick, but I am the thinnest of the two. She wore her purple muslin, which is pretty enough, though it does not become her complexion...." Once Jane's account of her own necessities in the way of dress is nearly followed by a sentence which not only contains evidence of her close acquaintance with Fielding's greatest novel, but also reminds us of Mr. Tom Lefroy. "You say nothing of the silk stockings; I flatter myself, therefore, that Charles has not purchased any, as I cannot very well afford to pay for them; all my money is spent in buying white gloves and pink persian.... After I had written the above, we received a visit from Mr. Tom Lefroy and his cousin George. The latter is really very well-behaved now; and as for the other, he has but *one* fault, which time will, I trust, entirely remove—it is that his morning coat is a great deal too light. He is a very great admirer of Tom Jones, and therefore wears the same

coloured clothes, I imagine, which *he* did when he was wounded."

Many of her references to dress are of the partly serious, partly humorous kind which came naturally from her pen. "Flowers are very much worn," she writes from Bath in the summer of 1799, "and fruit is still more the thing. Elizabeth has a bunch of strawberries and I have seen grapes, cherries, plums, apricots. There are likewise almonds and raisins, French plums, and tamarinds at the grocers', but I have never seen any of them in hats." She had, in the Southampton days, a spotted muslin which she meant to wear out, in spite of its durability. "You will exclaim at this, but mine really has signs of feebleness, which, with a little care, may come to something." Then she has some "bombazins" with trains, which "I cannot reconcile myself to giving up as morning gowns; they are so very sweet by candlelight. I would rather sacrifice my blue one ... in short I do not know and I do not care."

A peep into the economy of Steventon parsonage is now and again offered. In 1796, "We are very busy making Edward's shirts, and I am proud to say that I am the neatest worker of the party. They say that there are a prodigious number of birds hereabouts this year, so that perhaps *I* may kill a few."

Another bit of work that the want of the riches of Kent forced upon the poorer folks of Hampshire is shown to us when Jane writes: "I bought some Japan ink and next week shall begin my operations on my hat, on which you know my principal hopes of happiness depend." In this case there is no difficulty of interpretation. Now-a-days there are simple "dips" wherewith young ladies whose allowances are small or who in any case wish to make the most of their money can change old straw hats into new, soiled

white into black, or green, or heliotrope. It was not so a century ago, and when Jane wanted to turn her old white straw hat into a new black one, she must needs Japan it.

"I have read the 'Corsair,' mended my petticoat, and have nothing else to do," she writes from London in 1814, and on another day about the same time she informs her sister: "I have determined to trim my lilac sarsenet with black satin ribbon, just as my China crape is, six-penny width at the bottom, threepenny or four-penny at top." An even closer glimpse of Jane in her home is afforded by a letter in which she says—

> "I find great comfort in my stuff gown, but I hope you do not wear yours too often. I have made myself two or three caps to wear of evenings since I came home, and they save me a world of torment as to hair-dressing, which at present gives me no trouble beyond washing and brushing, for my long hair is always plaited up out of sight, and my short hair curls well enough to want no papering."

Such references may remind us of Henry Tilney's astonishment that Catherine did not keep a journal of her doings. "How are your absent cousins to understand the tenor of your life...? How are your various dresses to be remembered, and the particular state of your complexion and curl of your hair to be described, in all their diversities, without having constant recourse to a journal? My dear madam, I am not so ignorant of young ladies' ways as you wish to believe me."

Jane Austen was not reduced, as was her own Mrs. Hurst, to playing with her bracelets and rings when there were no games or dances in progress. On such occasions, like Elizabeth Bennet, she took up some needlework, and amused herself by listening to the general conversation, and entering into it when opportunity offered. Like everything done by her deft fingers, her fancy sewing is admirable, and her embroidery would be treasured by her family for its intrinsic beauty even if no such charming associations attached to it. There is a muslin scarf adorned by her needle which, to her true lovers, might seem a more precious relic than even her mahogany desk itself.

One little "interior" sketched by Jane, after a visit to a young wife who had just been blessed with a baby, is so illustrative of her own neat habits, and her ideas of the material needs of happiness, that, intimate as it is, it merits quotation: "Mary does not manage matters in such a way as to make me want to lay in myself. She is not tidy enough in her appearance; she has no dressing-gown to sit up in; her curtains are all too thin, and things are not in that comfort and style about her which are necessary to make such a situation an enviable one."

We have seen on an earlier page that Jane Austen provided warm garments for the village poor. On one occasion we know where she bought her flannel. In an entry (made at Basingstoke) which might form the text for a dissertation on prejudice and economy, she notes that: "I gave 2*s.* 3*d.* a yard for my flannel, and I fancy it is not very good, but it is so disgraceful and contemptible an article in itself that its being comparatively good or bad is of little importance." Why this contempt for what, in spite of all patent substitutes, inflammable and otherwise, is still commonly esteemed one of the most harmless and necessary of materials? Marianne Dashwood included the wearing of a flannel waistcoat by Colonel Brandon among

the several defects which made it impossible that she should ever be his wife, and when, for reasons not all unconnected with the "happy ending" of the novel, she agreed at last to marry him, it was in spite of the fact that this gallant officer had "sought the constitutional safeguard" of the much-despised garment. To Jane Austen and Marianne Dashwood flannel, it seems, was as entirely unpleasing a commodity as celluloid collars and cuffs are to most people of our own day.

The ravages of consumption, as the Baron de Frenilly reflects in his recently published memoirs, would have been far less terrible in those times if women had been less hostile to warm dresses and flannel petticoats. Fresh air and thick boots were also to seek. The women could not walk ten yards on a wet day without the water coming through the thin soles of their dainty little shoes. Miss Bates was quite exceptional in wearing shoes with reasonable soles.

One more sumptuary extract must be quoted; it comes from a letter from London in 1814: "My poor old muslin has never been dyed yet. It has been promised to be done several times. What wicked people dyers are. They begin with dipping their own souls in scarlet sin." The last sentence brings its writer for the moment very near to modern fiction, a considerable proportion of which is mainly occupied with the vivid representation of the process in question as applied to the world in general.

After clothes, the table. Out of the works of some novelists you might draw up menus, or at least bills-of-fare, for a month. People who dwell in a bracing air, and take a great deal of exercise, could live very comfortably on a small selection from the dishes served up in the novels of Dickens, and those who like an even more simple cuisine could rely quite confidently on the meals

described by Dumas *père*. There is plenty of substantial fare, of course, in the Waverley novels, and as for the works of Harrison Ainsworth, they groan under the sirloins and haunches that were provided in those imaginary ages when in Merry England the spits were always turning in every castle and hall. The people of Jane Austen ate quite as much as was good for them. They had breakfast, lunch —or noonshine—dinner, supper, and tea, and everybody—always excepting Mr. Woodhouse and those whose spirits were temporarily depressed—came with an appetite to every meal, for all we know of the matter. No dinner is particularly described, but those who want to know what people ate and drank at the end of the eighteenth century may partly gratify their appetite from the references which inevitably occur. Except that there were not quite so many dishes on the table at once the meals differed little from that to which Swift introduces us in his dialogue between the company at Lady Smart's table. The Smarts, by the way, dined at three, which in Jane Austen's time was still about the hour for the small country-houses, though in the big houses it was five, marking the gradual advance from the ten o'clock in the morning of the twelfth century to the eight o'clock in the evening or later of the twentieth.

Plain roast and boiled joints of mutton, pork, beef and veal, chickens, game in season, sweetbreads, meat pies, boiled vegetables, suet puddings, apple-tarts, jellies and custards were the ordinary food of the well-to-do. Port and Burgundy were their principal drinks, but probably the port was not usually such as is chiefly sold now-a-days. It was less fortified, nearer to the natural wine, which is itself more like a Burgundy than the port of modern commerce. Wine of any sort is scarcely mentioned in Jane Austen's works. One of the few exceptions I can recall is that—of unnamed species—offered to Mrs. and Miss Bates at the Woodhouses', which the host advised them to mix freely

with water, advice they successfully managed to avoid taking, thanks to the good offices of Emma. Jane Austen herself seems to have been fond of wine. In her thirty-eighth year she writes: "As I must leave off being young, I find many *douceurs* in being a sort of *chaperon*, for I am put on the sofa near the fire, and can drink as much wine as I like." On a much earlier occasion, when she was herself under chaperonage, she had written: "I believe I drank too much wine last night at Hurstbourne. I know not how else to account for the shaking of my hands to-day. You will kindly make allowance therefore for any indistinctness of writing, by attributing it to this venial error." With our full knowledge of Jane's habit of playful exaggeration we may be certain that her "too much" was nothing to shake our heads over, and that the "error" was indeed "venial."

Jane gives us sufficient evidence of the simplicity with which the Austens' own table was furnished. From Steventon parsonage, in 1798, she thus refers to one of the doctor's professional visits to her mother. "Mr. Lyford was here yesterday; he came while we were at dinner, and partook of our elegant entertainment. I was not ashamed at asking him to sit down to table, for we had some pease-soup, a spare rib, and a pudding. He wants my mother to look yellow and to throw out a rash, but she will do neither."

Years later, from Chawton, she writes that: "Captain Foote dined with us on Friday, and I fear will not soon venture again, for the strength of our dinner was a boiled leg of mutton, underdone even for James."

Jane herself did the housekeeping when her mother was indisposed and Cassandra away, and she prided herself on her success, though she detested the necessity of great economy. Her ideas on the eternal servant question are not,

we may be sure, quite faithfully expressed when she writes: "My mother looks forward with as much certainty as you can do to our keeping two maids; my father is the only one not in the secret. We plan having a steady cook and a young, giddy housemaid, with a sedate, middle-aged man, who is to undertake the double office of husband to the former, and sweetheart to the latter. No children, of course, to be allowed on either side." The simple life of the parsonage is more accurately reflected in a comparison between the house of the Austens and that of the Knights at Godmersham. "We dine now at half-past three, and have done dinner, I suppose, before you begin. We drink tea at half-past six. I am afraid you will despise us. My father reads Cowper to us in the morning, to which I listen when I can. How do you spend your evenings? I guess that Elizabeth works, that you read to her, and that Edward goes to sleep." Jane declares that she "always takes care to provide such things as please (her) own appetite," which she considers "the chief merit in housekeeping." Ragout of veal and haricot mutton seem to have been specially attractive to her.

Picnics we hear of—one in particular, of course, at Box Hill—and the Middletons were always getting them up. Cold pies and cold chickens, and no doubt cold punch, were provided in plenty on those happy occasions.

French cookery was not so much appreciated in England in those days as it had been twenty or thirty years earlier, before the Revolution. The bread of our then hostile neighbours across the Channel was, however, not infrequently copied in the bakehouse, as was the Boulanger dance in the ball-room. Mrs. Morland reproached Catherine for talking so much at breakfast about the French bread at Northanger, but the poor little girl who had been so shamefully treated by General Tilney, and sadly missed the attentions of his younger son, replied

that she did not care about the bread, and it was all the same to her what she ate. Mrs. Morland could only attribute the girl's obvious unhappiness to the contrast afforded by their humble parsonage to the glories of the Tilney mansion, "There is a very clever essay in one of the books up-stairs, upon much such a subject," says this anxious mother, "about young girls that have been spoilt for home by great acquaintance—*The Mirror*, I think. I will look it out for you some day or other, because I am sure it will do you good." Catherine tried to be cheerful, but presently relapsed into languor and weariness; and Mrs. Morland went off to seek for the "very clever essay." As Henry Tilney arrived before she returned with it, its efficacy as a prophylactic for listlessness and discontent was never put to the test. I will take the risk of inducing the "listlessness and discontent" of the present reader by devoting a page to this moral souvenir of Jane Austen's infancy and of her own literary diversions.

The "very clever essay" is dated March 6, 1779, and is in the form of a letter from John Homespun, a "plain country gentleman, with a small fortune and a large family," two of whose daughters had been allowed—his opposition having been overcome—to spend the Christmas holidays with a "great lady" whom they had met at the house of a relation. They went with sparkling eyes and rosy cheeks, they came back with "cheeks as white as a curd, and eyes as dead as the beads in the face of a baby." Their father sees no reason to wonder at the change when he hears the girls, with new-found affectations of speech and manner, describe the habits of their new friends.

> "Instead of rising at seven, breakfasting at nine, dining at three, supping at eight, and getting to bed by ten, as was their custom at

> home, my girls lay till twelve, breakfasted at one, dined at six, supped at eleven, and were never in bed till three in the morning. Their shapes had undergone as much alteration as their faces. From their bosoms (*necks* they called them), which were squeezed up to their throats, their waists tapered down to a very extraordinary smallness; they resembled the upper half of an hour-glass. At this, also, I marvelled; but it was the only shape worn at ——. Nor is their behaviour less changed than their garb. Instead of joining in the good-humoured cheerfulness we used to have among us before, my two *fine* young ladies check every approach to mirth, by calling it *vulgar*. One of them chid their brother the other day for laughing, and told him it was monstrously ill-bred.... Would you believe it, sir, my daughter *Elizabeth* (since her visit she is offended if we call her *Betty*) said it was *fanatical* to find fault with card-playing on Sunday; and her sister *Sophia* gravely asked my son-in-law, the clergyman, if he had not some doubts of the soul's immortality?"

Mr. Homespun declares that the moral plague among the worldly rich should be dealt with by Government "as much as the distemper among the *horned cattle*."

Happily Catherine Morland had not caught this particular disease of all—it was only the plague of love that troubled her innocent soul, and the medicine was provided without the interference of a Government inspector.

From such a deliberate departure from the straight path I come back to the subject of the economy of accessories in Jane Austen's novels. When the French bread at Northanger led me astray, I was writing about domestic economy, costumes and cookery. Why *should* the dresses be described or the dishes be named? We are concerned with the sayings and doings of squires and parsons and their wives and daughters, not with the achievements of cooks and milliners. This would be quite a fair criticism, but it is none the less certain that an author who tells you what people eat and drink and wear does enable you to realize more fully the contrast between the present and the period with which the novel is concerned. That is our business, however, not his. He is an artist, not an historian. There is a common practice on the stage of "furbishing up" old plays by cutting out obsolete references and introducing topical touches. The comedies of Robertson may be "freshened" considerably to meet the taste of thoughtless play-goers, by giving Captain Hawtrey a motor-car and Jack Poyntz a magazine-rifle. The "moral" of these present pages is merely this, that with a few such slight changes as making post-chaise read motor and coach read train, and retarding the dinner from three or five to eight or half-past, cutting out the occasional "elegants," and otherwise changing a word here and there in the dialogue, long scenes from any one of Jane Austen's novels could be acted without material alteration, in the costume of to-day, with no serious offence to the unities. The absence of physical detail in her narrative is no artistic defect. Mr. Collins's first evening at Longbourn, for instance, is so vividly represented that we gain the impression of having been in the room, though of its size and shape, and furniture, or of the appearance and costume of its occupants, we are told little or nothing—

"Mr. Bennet's expectations were fully answered. His cousin was as absurd as he had hoped, and he listened to him with the keenest enjoyment, maintaining at the same time the most resolute composure of countenance, and except in an occasional glance at Elizabeth, requiring no partner in his pleasure.

"By tea-time, however, the dose had been enough, and Mr. Bennet was glad to take his guest into the drawing-room again, and when tea was over, glad to invite him to read aloud to the ladies. Mr. Collins readily assented, and a book was produced; but on beholding it (for everything announced it to be from a circulating library), he started back, and begging pardon, protested that he never read novels. Kitty stared at him, and Lydia exclaimed. Other books were produced, and after some deliberation he chose *Fordyce's Sermons*. Lydia gaped as he opened the volume, and before he had, with very monotonous solemnity, read three pages she interrupted him with—

"'Do you know, mamma, that my Uncle Phillips talks of turning away Richard; and if he does, Colonel Forster will hire him? My aunt told me so herself on Saturday. I shall walk to Meryton to-morrow to hear more about it, and to ask when Mr. Denny comes back from town.'

"Lydia was bid by her two eldest sisters to hold her tongue; but Mr. Collins, much

offended, laid aside his book, and said—

> "'I have often observed how little young ladies are interested by books of a serious stamp, though written solely for their benefit. It amazes me, I confess; for certainly, there can be nothing so advantageous to them as instruction. But I will no longer importune my young cousin.'
>
> "Then turning to Mr. Bennet, he offered himself as his antagonist at backgammon. Mr. Bennet accepted the challenge, observing that he acted very wisely in leaving the girls to their own trifling amusements."

The mephistophelian delight of the father in the unconscious absurdity of his sententious guest, the rudeness of the younger daughters, and the attempts of the elder girls to enforce the observance of ordinary good manners, could not well be realized with finer effect, and no description of accessories would heighten it.

It is not only material accessories and necessaries, furniture, dress, and so on that are slighted by Jane Austen. Incidents that are of positive value to her plan are not allowed to linger a moment after they have served the turn. The adventure of Harriet Smith (in *Emma*) with the gipsies, ending in her rescue by Frank Churchill, fills just half a page. It would have filled a chapter in a novel by Scott or Dickens. One possible reason for this brevity is clear enough. The author knew little about gipsies, they were to her merely low ruffians and drabs, horse-stealers and pilferers, and of their fascination for the student of character she had no idea at all. There were hundreds and

hundreds of genuine Romany about the country in those days. Borrow was not yet at work, and few people had taken the trouble to discover what manner of mind the "Egyptians" possessed, and how they spent their time when they were not robbing henroosts or swindling housemaids. Scott felt something of the mysterious charm of this ancient and nomadic race, but he was romantic, and romance, in Jane Austen's way of thinking, was very nearly a synonym for absurdity. So it is, therefore, that the gipsies in the Highbury lane appear for half a page, speak no word that is reported, and then vanish from our ken. The author implies that they hurried away to avoid prosecution. Perhaps she was almost as glad to see the last of them as were the inhabitants of Highbury. Thus is a fine opportunity for a "picturesque" scene thrown away. Undeveloped as it is, the adventure stands absolutely alone in the novels as the sole occasion whereon any of the characters has reason to fear violence at the hands of ill-disposed persons. It was only in imagination that Catherine Morland was carried off by masked men, though a spirited illustration of Mr. Hugh Thomson's did once mislead a too hurried critic into regarding the affair as an event in the heroine's life.

There are, in fact, very few digressions in these books. Fielding "digressed" by whole chapters at a time, Sterne's digressions filled more space than his tale in his one "novel." Jane Austen keeps to the road, and leaves the by-lanes unexplored. It is a pleasant road, old, and bordered here and there with attractive-looking houses into which we may enter by her kindly introduction, but if we wish to go off to that hamlet on the right, or that coppice on the left, we must go alone. She will sit on a stile till we return to pursue the direct route. It is to her effort to avoid all but the essential factors in achieving her object that the general absence of landscape and topographical detail of all kinds

in her work is to be attributed. In the case of a Dickens, a Balzac, a Hardy or a Meredith, you can constantly identify the places where the scenes are laid. In Lincoln's Inn Fields you can watch Mr. Tulkinghorn's windows; at Rochester you can see the very room where Mr. Pickwick slept; at Nemours you can gaze at the house where The Minoret-Levraults (in *Ursule Mirouet*) lived; at Woolbridge you can find the manor house where the unhappy Tess passed her bridal night. Down in Surrey you can take a photograph of the Crossways House which was almost the whole fortune of Diana, at Seaford you can see the "Elba Hall" of *The House on the Beach* sheltering beneath the downs, and as in these instances so in scores of others. But in connection with the Austen novels, save for the London streets and squares, there are only Bath and Lyme Regis and Portsmouth where one can truly feel sure that such or such an incident in one or other novel "occurred" on this very spot.

If, however, there is no special "Jane Austen country" to be traced out by the diligent seeker for visible associations, there are scattered spots where her presence is still to be felt. At Steventon, where the earlier works were produced, the house of the Austens no longer stands, having given place long since to a rectory on the other side of the valley, more convenient and comfortable than that wherein the father wrote his sermons and the daughter her novels—sermons and novels which at the time seemed equally likely to achieve enduring fame. Only the well and the pump remain to mark the site. The surroundings are not all new—how should they be in a thinly populated parish? There are still farms and cottages that were old before Jane was born. The church is in better trim, but, externally at least, it is much the same.

Probably with scenery as with men and women Jane Austen did not usually draw from models, and when she

did, she gave the models their own names. The one real bit of description of a place named in her work is the account of the environs of Lyme Regis, which is so obviously written from personal interest that some of her biographers have supposed that her own experiences during her visits there had included a Captain Wentworth or at least a Captain Benwick.

> "A very strange stranger it must be," she writes, "who does not see charms in the immediate environs of Lyme, to make him wish to know it better. The scenes in its neighbourhood, Charmouth, with its high grounds and extensive sweeps of country, and still more its sweet retired bay, backed by dark cliffs, where fragments of low rock among the sands make it the happiest spot for watching the flow of the tide, for sitting in unwearied contemplation; the woody varieties of the cheerful village of Up Lyme; and, above all, Pinny, with its green chasms between romantic rocks, where the scattered forest trees and orchards of luxuriant growth declare that many a generation must have passed away since the first partial falling of the cliff prepared the ground for such a state, where a scene so wonderful and so lovely is exhibited, as may more than equal any of the resembling scenes of the far-famed Isle of Wight—these places must be visited, and visited again, to make the worth of Lyme understood."

This was quite an exceptional digression from the

thoughts and conversation of Jane Austen's characters. One of those letters which Leslie Stephen and others have thought so "trivial," but which are so characteristic in their spirit, was written from Lyme by Jane to Cassandra, on September 14, 1804—

> "I continue quite well; in proof of which I have bathed again this morning..... I endeavour, as far as I can, to supply your place, and be useful and keep things in order. I detect dirt in the water decanters, as fast as I can, and keep everything as it was under your administration.... The ball last night was pleasant.... Nobody asked me for the two first dances; the two next I danced with Mr. Crawford, and had I chosen to stay longer might have danced with Mr. Granville ... or with a new odd-looking man who had been eyeing me for some time, and at last, without any introduction, asked me if I meant to dance again."

It is impossible to leave Lyme Regis without recalling how Tennyson, when he was shown the place where the Duke of Monmouth was supposed to have landed, cried: "Don't talk to me of the Duke of Monmouth! Show me the exact spot where Louisa Musgrove fell!"

Jane's intimacy with places was chiefly confined to Steventon, Godmersham, Chawton, Southampton, Bath, and their neighbourhood. It is not a day's walk or an hour's motoring from Steventon to Chawton, where, after the long interval of comparative inactivity, the later novels were

"born." At Chawton, according to one of her later biographers, the "cottage" where she lived and worked has disappeared. This is happily not true. It is true that it is now turned to other uses than that of sheltering a parson's widow and her daughters. It has been divided internally, and now forms a couple of labourers' cottages and a village club, where tired toilers who have never read a line of the books that were written under that roof discuss the merits and defects of the tobacco tax and the Old Age Pensions Act. Chawton House itself shows little structural change, and the park is scarcely altered since Jane walked across from the Cottage to take tea with her relations at the great house.

At either of these villages, Steventon the birthplace of Jane herself and of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*, and Chawton where *Persuasion* and *Emma* came into being, you may find scenes which you will associate with this or that story or incident, but nowhere are you likely to feel the influence of locality more strongly in connection with either author or novels than at Godmersham, the home of her brother Edward, where, until long after her death, her relations dwelt amid their own broad acres. The place, with other property, came to Edward Austen from Mr. and Mrs. Knight, who had adopted him, and whose name he ultimately took. There is no more typically English seat in the typically English county of Kent. The small sylvan village, the old church above the Stour river, offer no special attractions for tourists, and Godmersham House itself is one of the plainest even among the country seats of the early Georgian age. Its one external charm is its unpretentiousness. It has not even the huge classic portico on which so many of the country houses of its period depend for "impressiveness." Plain, commodious, well-placed, the house is lovely for us only in that it sheltered

for many a week, from year to year, the author of *Pride and Prejudice*. It is just such a house as Sir John Middleton filled with visitors at all seasons, or Mr. Darcy showed to his future bride and her Uncle and Aunt Gardiner.

If the house itself is without external beauty, the park surrounding it is delightful. The sparkling river flows through the midst of great elms and oaks beneath which mingled herds of deer, sheep, and oxen browse in the peaceful security of the golden age. As you sit on the low wall of the lichen-covered bridge you see nothing that can have changed in character since Jane Austen sat there and thought over the doings of her dear heroines. One can almost hear the rumble of the barouche that brought her mother and herself from the coach at Ashford to the Hall at Godmersham, and if that high-hung carriage were suddenly to turn the corner beside the big elm near the gate one would scarcely be astonished. This park and this house, this river, the old trees, the thatched cottages, the lanes and brooks all speak of the days when Bingley came for Jane Bennet, and Henry Tilney for Catherine Morland. If there is anything in the influence of place, Godmersham was part author of the novels. 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-breeze mingles with the perfumes of the grass and the 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.

These are the chief country scenes of Jane's life. As to the towns, we know more or less of her associations with Bath, Southampton, and Winchester, as well as London. At Bath she used to stay in early youth with her uncle and aunt, and she lived there for four years with her parents. The fruits of her experience there may be enjoyed in *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, though her lack of the

topographical instinct is suggested by the absence of evident interest in the buildings of Bath. We learn as much about the place from the *Pickwick Papers*, which merely touch there on their way, or from the allusions of the characters in *The Rivals*, where the events are of a few days, as we do from chapters that cover long periods of residence in one of the most beautiful, and still, in spite of the disproportionate and architecturally discordant hotel, the least injured cities of England. Souvenirs of the personal association of Jane Austen with Bath are almost as plentiful as those of Johnson with Fleet Street. The house in Sydney Place where the Austens lived during most of the time between Mr. Austen's resignation and his death is the only one that bears a tablet to Jane's memory. But in Queen Square, whence several of her letters are dated, in Gay Street, in the Green Park, in the Paragon, the rooms she occupied with her relations at one time or another remain very much as they were in her day, and externally the buildings are unaltered, one and all being built of the local stone which gives so notable a character to the Georgian architecture of the city. In Camden Place where the Elliots rented "the best house," in Pulteney Street where Catherine stayed with the Allens, in Westgate Buildings where Anne cheered Mrs. Smith's lonely days, there has been little change since *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* were written. There is probably no town in the world associated with the work of a famous person of even so near a period which has altered less in appearance than Bath since 1805.

At Southampton the mother and daughters lived, after the father's death, in a house in that secluded part of the town which stands between the High Street and the old walls above the "Water." There is a bit of those walls which abuts on the spot where the Austens' house stood, and it is one of the places where we may feel confident that

we are walking where Jane often walked, and gazing out over a scene which was familiar to her in almost all save the funnels of the steam yachts and the distant view of the train on its way to Bournemouth or to London.

In London itself there are many spots that will always recall Jane Austen to her devoted friends and her lovers. In Henrietta Street (Covent Garden), in Hans Place, in Cork Street, we know that she herself stayed. Many of the characters in *Sense and Sensibility*—the only novel in which we hear much of London—are associated with familiar streets. Edward Ferrars stayed in Pall Mall, the Steele girls in Bartlett's Buildings, Mrs. Jennings in Berkeley Street, the John Dashwoods in Harley Street. The Gardiners (*Pride and Prejudice*) lived in Gracechurch Street.

The day has not yet come when public bodies could be sufficiently affected by imaginative literature to place memorials on the houses where fictitious personages have been supposed to dwell. In Paris the memorial to Charlet is an admirable group of a grenadier and a gamin—typical characters from his work, and a musketeer guards the monument of Dumas. The gods forbid that any sculptor should be commissioned to give us life-size figures of Emma, Elizabeth, Anne, and Fanny to sit around a statue of Jane Austen. But when next the London County Council contemplates the placing of plaques on the former residences of departed worthies they might consider whether—of course with the consent of the freeholder and the leaseholder—her name might not be placed on the house in Henrietta Street, once her brother Henry's home, where so many of her letters were written. She tells of the convenient arrangement of its rooms for the comfort of herself and her nieces, and from its door she went to the neighbouring church, or the theatres, which were within a few minutes' walk. It is not likely that any political

prejudice would cause even the most advanced Progressive on the Council to object to the name of so very mild a Tory being thus honoured. As to the more probable objection that she did not "reside" there, but was only a visitor, one may plead that as there is a plaque on a newly-erected tube station recalling the "residence" of Mrs. Siddons, and that a tablet proclaims that Turner "lived" in a house built thirty years after his death, there would be no great straining of logic in admitting the claim of a house in which Jane Austen did undoubtedly write, and sleep, and talk. The front was cemented in the middle of the last century, and the ground-floor is now used for business purposes, but otherwise the house is little changed since the Austens were there.

VII
INFLUENCE IN LITERATURE

Jane Austen's genius ignored—Negative and positive instances—The literary orchard—Jane's influence in English literature.

The author of a book bearing the title *Great English Novelists*, published just ninety-one years after Jane Austen's death, does not include her in his selection. He deals with eleven authors—Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Scott, Lytton, Disraeli, Dickens, Thackeray, Meredith. The very fact that he stops short at eleven, instead of making a round dozen, suggests that he really could not think of any other novelist worthy to be

credited with greatness. It will be observed that all the team are men. Without quibbling as to whether they are all "English," or all "great," or even all "novelists" in the ordinary sense of the word, we may legitimately suppose that the author is one of those to whom Jane Austen makes no strong appeal. The peculiarity of her position among English novelists could not well be more pointedly emphasized than in the fact that while Macaulay placed her next to Shakespeare as a painter of character-studies, a critic should be found—and he is by no means isolated—who can choose eleven great representatives of English fiction without adding her as a twelfth. In the same week in which the book just referred to was published, came a portfolio of twelve photogravures entitled *Britain's Great Authors*. Scott, Thackeray, Dickens, of course, were among them, and of right, but not Jane Austen.

Perhaps even more suggestive is the statement of a clever woman-writer the other day that Jane Austen's novels are merely "memorials," books which no gentleman's (or lady's) library should be without, but which are for show rather than for use.

Her name may never be among those that are painted round the reading-rooms of National Libraries, nor included by many school-children in examination lists of eminent authors. Hers is too delicate a product to attract the man or woman "in the street." There is a bouquet about it that is lost on the palate which enjoys the "strong" fiction of the material phase through which humanity is now passing—passing perhaps more briefly than most of us imagine.

It has been the endeavour of this book 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, and thus, if so may be, to bring new members

into the large but comparatively restricted circle wherein she is regarded, not always as the first of English novelists, but at least as second to none in the quality of her work. Sappho enjoys undying fame with only a few fragments of verse still to her credit, Omar for his one poem transformed by another mind, Boccaccio for a volume of short stories, Boswell for one biography, Thomas à Kempis for one devotional manual. Sparsity of performance, it is evident, is no bar to enduring fame. Jane Austen's work, indeed, was not sparse. There are, undoubtedly, novelists who have passed the record of Balzac with his forty novels and scores of short stories, but their books for the most part suggest the interminable succession of poplars along so many a high road of France. Some of the trees have more foliage than others, some are more green or more blue in tone, a little more tortuous, or robust, but in spite of all trivial differences *plus ça change plus c'est la même chose*. If this arboreal parallel may be pursued, may we not compare the work of Jane Austen with a group of apple-trees in a sunny corner of some vast orchard? There are eight Austen trees in the literary orchard. Two of them are stunted and bear a poor crop of a sort little better than crabapples. The other six are of several kinds, but all of fine quality and producing delicious fruit of varying sweetness. Countless thousands of novels have been published since Jane Austen's were given to the world, and many of them have been unseemly, and of evil influence. But the taste of countless writers and readers has been sweetened by the fruit of her delightful mind, of the passing of whose fragrant harvest through English literature it is not too much to say, as Jane herself said of Anne Elliot's walk through Bath: "It was almost enough to spread purification and perfume all the way."

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

1811. *Sense and Sensibility*. [Completed in 1798. Commenced many years earlier in the form of letters, under the title *Elinor and Marianne*.]

1813. *Pride and Prejudice*. [Completed in 1797. Originally entitled (in MS.) *First Impressions*.]

1814. *Mansfield Park*. [Written in 1811-14.]

1816. *Emma*. [Written in 1811-16.]

1818. *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. [*Northanger Abbey* (mostly written in 1798) was sold to a Bath bookseller for £10 in 1803. He laid it aside, and it was bought back by Henry Austen, *at the same price*, after *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* had appeared. *Persuasion*, as originally completed (in 1816) had only eleven chapters, but the author was not satisfied with Chapter X, and replaced it by the present Chapters X and XI. The cancelled chapter is included in Mr. Austen Leigh's memoir. It brings about the re-engagement of Anne and Wentworth in a different, and certainly less admirable, manner.]

1871. *Lady Susan*, *The Watsons*, and some extracts from the novel on which Jane was at work until four months before her death. [These are all included in Mr. Austen Leigh's book. The MS. of *Lady Susan*, written before Jane was of age, was given by Cassandra Austen to her niece Fanny (Lady Knatchbull), who consented to its publication. As for the incomplete novel known as *The Watsons*, written about 1802, Jane was not responsible for the naming of it, and had laid it aside several years before *Mansfield Park* was written. The work from which she was compelled by

illness to cease in March 1817 had not, in the twelve chapters we possess, reached a point when its plan could be foretold with reasonable confidence.]

1884. *Letters of Jane Austen*, edited by her great-nephew, the first Lord Brabourne. [These, which, with few exceptions were addressed to Cassandra Austen, belonged to Lady Knatchbull, to whom some of them were written. Many of Jane's letters were destroyed by Cassandra as being too private to pass into other hands.]

Mr. J. E. Austen Leigh's *Memoir* of his aunt is not only to be highly valued for its biographical details, but for its many anecdotes of Jane Austen, and for the letters which fill a good many gaps in the other published correspondence.

Those to whom the subject of the present volume is fresh, and who care to pursue it, are advised to read the "introductions" contributed to recent editions of Jane Austen's novels by various critics, particularly Mr. Austin Dobson, Professor Saintsbury, and Mr. E. V. Lucas, as well as the *Life* contributed by Mr. Goldwin Smith to the *Great Writers* series.

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