

"Jane Austen and English Life"

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I. INTRODUCTION OF REALISM.

### JANE AUSTEN AND ENGLISH LIFE.

A new author appeared on the stage of English fiction in 1811 with the publication of "Sense and Sensibility".<sup>1</sup> The reading public had become acquainted with the mysteries of the Gothic romance from Horace Walpole's fantastic novels and had been initiated even more deeply into the world of trap doors, secret rooms and unknown staircases through the productions of Mrs. Radcliffe. The modern romance of Scott,<sup>2</sup> too, was soon to appear with its battalions of historical characters, its chivalric tournaments, and its breathless battle scenes exactly fitted to serve a populous engaged in a titanic struggle against a world oppressor. But the new author, whose name appeared not on the title page, brought before the English people no mighty heroes of war, nor yet any dark gruesome rooms or supernatural terrors. The ordinary characters of a quiet English village<sup>3</sup> walked across her pages to ask their partners to dance at an Assembly ball, the country squires who spent their time hunting, or drinking tea in the drawing room did little more dramatic than disappoint their relatives in choosing a wife, while the young ladies of the district, urged on by their matchmaking mothers devoted their energy, time and abilities to captivating the said squires. Occasionally the heroine visited the

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1. Simond's "Introduction to English Fiction". P. 61.
  2. Hutton's "Sir Walter Scott", p. 103-4.  
Saintsbury's "The English Novel", chapter 5.
  3. Lady Sackville's "Jane Austen", p. 467.

fashionable watering place of Bath and indulged a season of a few weeks among the fast set who walked in the Pump Room all morning, drove around in the afternoon and attended the dances at the Upper Rooms at night; but aside from an exciting elopement few events breathed the fire and fury without which a Radcliffe romance would not dare to appear before the printer.<sup>4</sup> Such were the new people to whom the lovers of English fiction were introduced, people whom they met every day in their own towns and whom they knew in their own homes - people in a word who were exactly like themselves, who lived in ordinary houses devoid of mysterious passages, who travelled the country by post, who enjoyed the London season and who, generally speaking, passed through life without ever once doing anything more heroic than getting married. The great nineteenth century age of English realism had begun and it was Jane Austen who rang the curtain up on the first act to be later followed by such master hands as Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and William Makepeace Thackeray.

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4. Mair's "Modern English Literature". "If we miss great emotions that is simply because in the society which she set herself to depict great emotions very seldom intrude."

## II Life and Situation of Jane Austen.

### III A. Novels of First Period.

Born in the little village of Steventon in 1775 Jane Austen lived the customary simple life of a clergyman's daughter and an English village girl, a life which was afterwards to furnish the background and foundation for the lives of so many of her characters. Her father, Reverend George Austen, was a "profound scholar" and a capable man and though a representative of a class which was not in too high a repute at the time he performed his duties with more than common faithfulness and diligence.<sup>5</sup> Jane had five brothers and one sister and her life was singularly uneventful. One of her brothers became a clergyman while two younger ones entered the navy finally becoming admirals, and it is this close connection with both these professions which gave the novelist her great interest in them. Jane attended school and doubtless learned the usual accomplishments of young ladies in those days, such as French, history, geography and even a smattering of science.<sup>6</sup> When she began writing she did it in a most obscure and unpretentious manner using small pieces of paper and writing in the common living room.<sup>7</sup> When a stranger entered she covered her work and for a long time refused to reveal the identity of the novel's author. "Pride and Prejudice" was the first novel to be completed

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5. Milton's "Jane Austen and Her Times", p. 15-16.

6. Milton's "Jane Austen and Her Times", p. 31.

7. Long's "History", p. 438.

being written in 1796-7, although "Sense and Sensibility" was the completion of an old attempt made before "Pride and Prejudice" was thought of. "Sense and Sensibility" was the second novel while "Northanger Abbey", a parody on Mrs. Radcliffe's "Mysteries of Udolpho", was written in 1798.<sup>8</sup> Regarding the first novel, Jane's father wrote to a publisher to enquire about publishing it but this worthy person refused even to read it and "Pride and Prejudice" did not see the printer for sixteen years.<sup>9</sup> The second novel was published in 1811 when "Northanger Abbey" was sold at once for ten pounds though the bookseller never brought it out. It remained for Henry Austen to buy it back for the same price, before the public were able to have the book in printed form.

"Pride and Prejudice" is universally conceded to be her best book; it is the brightest and most interesting, abounds in those sharp clever sentences which Jane knew so well how to use and has some characters which are the most famous, even though the most ridiculous, in English fiction. The hero of the book stands for pride against whom the heroine has a strong prejudice and the denouement is of course brought about by the inevitable marriage. "Sense and Sensibility" is not so clever nor bright as the former but there are some excellent pictures of London life.

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8. Cross's "Development of the English Novel", p. 115.

9. Mitton's "Jane Austen and Her Times", p. 177.



The chief characters are again represented by the title, one girl standing for sense while her sister is addicted to sensibility. The former meets her lover early in the story and marries him near the end though it is a debatable point whether she shows as much sense as she might have in choosing this particular man for her husband. The second sister falls in love with an unprincipled scoundrel who suddenly deserts her and goes off to London to seek a wife with a large dowry. The girl suffers hysterics which turn to fever and in the end her sensibility leads her to marry a bachelor twenty years her senior. "Northanger Abbey",<sup>10</sup> as has been said, is primarily a criticism of the extreme Gothic romance as found in "The Mysteries of Udolpho". The heroine goes to spend the night at an old abbey which, considerably to her disappointment she finds fitted up as a modern residence. Nevertheless, a timely rainstorm and a good imagination enable Miss Morland to spend a delightful night in all, the terrible enjoyment of creaking doors, mysterious noises and the written deathbed confession of a murderer which later turns out to be a laundry ticket.<sup>11</sup>

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10. Lady Sackville's "Jane Austen", p. xv Intro.  
Cambridge "History", p. 235.

11. "Northanger Abbey", p. 231.



B. Novels of Second Period.

"Mansfield Park", "Emma" and "Persuasion" are the remaining three novels of this writer and were published in the order named. The first book has the usual setting of a country gentleman's large house and estate and the heroine this time is a poor niece of the master of the house. She is a talented, patient girl - patient almost to the point of vexation, and after being wooed in vain by a shallow young man of fortune she finally weds her cousin and takes upon herself the duties of a clergyman's wife. "Emma",<sup>12</sup> published in 1816, was dedicated to the Prince of Wales and in this story the novelist shows the frequent fate of the habitual matchmaker. The heroine twice makes serious blunders in this respect and then ends by marrying one of the subjects herself. In "Persuasion" the naval element is chiefly present and as in "Northanger Abbey" the scene is largely laid in Bath. The heroine here makes up with a certain friend whom she had formerly been practically engaged to and the handsome young naval officer of the big fortune wins his bride. The foregoing preliminary sketch of Jane Austen's life and works is necessary to a clear understanding of the subject under discussion. This novelist wrote, as has been said, entirely of her own every-day life, and for that reason her novels are invaluable in giving us a true picture of English life as it

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12. Lady Sackville's "Jane Austen", p. xv Intro.

existed in her day,<sup>13</sup> but a knowledge of the character of the author, her disposition and her style of writing will also enable us to comprehend more easily the life she has pictured.

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13. Lang's "Letters to Dead Authors", p. 72.  
"The manners of your age were not the manners of today, and young gentlemen and ladies who think Scott 'slow' think Miss Austen 'prim' and 'dreary'".

IV. JANE AUSTEN AND CONTEMPORARY HISTORY.

When we remember the period during which Jane Austen's work was written we are at once struck with the entire lack of allusions to contemporary historical events. This period may be said to extend from 1796 to 1818 and when one remembers that this bounds the rise and fall of Napoleon with the colossal upheaval which followed in his wake, the fact is all the more extraordinary.<sup>14</sup> The brilliant Italian campaign of the Corsican general, the frustration of his attempt on Egypt by the indomitable Nelson, the overthrow of the French directorate, the forming of mighty coalitions against England - these are the events which were shaking the whole of Europe while Jane went quietly on living her own life, attending the country dances and making occasional trips to Bath. This too is the time of Trafalgar when Nelson after a vain rush across the Atlantic returned to fight a combined fleet. The period also covers the preparations of France for an invasion of England when a huge army was collected at Boulogne and the price of wheat rose to five dollars a bushel. The great retreat from Moscow, the Peninsular War, the final capture of "Bonny" with his banishment to Elba, followed by the anxious Hundred Days and the grand victory of Waterloo - surely these were happenings sufficiently soul stirring to find their way into the books of every

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14. Raleigh's "The English Novel", p. 265.  
Hutton's "Jane Austen and Her Times," chapter 4.

author who wrote. The fact that Jane had two brothers in the navy who would daily be in risk of their lives would seem to make the question more inexplicable still. But we know from other sources that the English people lived their own lives largely at this time and rested their faith in their ministers for carrying on the war intelligently. The frivolous London society during such dark days when Englishmen did not know when they might wake up some morning to find the French at their very doors, is one of the most astonishing things of all, but it is nevertheless a true one. Thackeray has given an excellent picture of this and has even described the society at Brussels just prior to the greatest battle of the whole fifteen years. The great ball on the eve of Waterloo is an incident hard for present day people to believe and yet it shows vividly the apparent absence of alarm or anxiety felt by the majority of the British people.<sup>15</sup> We can then forgive Jane Austen for her books containing only the story of uneventful life in the country with occasional seasons at Bath or London, for it was doubtless, exactly the life of the people at the time. No doubt master minds at Westminster spent many sleepless nights when the country was trembling on the abyss of destruction but the masses believed implicitly in their leaders and contented themselves with going their own way.

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15. Thackeray's "Vanity Fair", Chapter XXIX.

V. PECULIARITIES OF JANE AUSTEN'S STYLE

A. DISLIKE OF CHILDREN.

Jane Austen was primarily a realist and it will be necessary to keep this continually in mind, but her style frequently is such that her own character seems to suffer.. Probably one of the most notable of these singularities is her dislike of children.<sup>16</sup> Throughout her novels we look in vain for a single instance of a child who has been brought up in the way he should go. Wordsworth was celebrated for his idealisation of childhood but he failed to see that there were some children so petted and indulged by their parents as to be thoroughly spoiled and disagreeable. Jane Austen is the exact reverse of this - she fails to understand that although there are bad and ungovernable children there are others who are attractive and well trained. Probably one of the most outstanding examples of this critical opinion of children is found in her description of the Middleton youngsters in "Sense and Sensibility":

"Fortunately for those who pay their court to such foibles, a fond mother, though in pursuit of praise for her children the most rapacious of human beings is likewise the most credulous, her demands exorbitant, but she will swallow anything; and the excessive affection and endurance of the Miss Steeles towards her offspring were viewed therefore by Lady Middleton without the smallest surprise

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16. Mitton's "Jane Austen and Her Times", Chapter II.



or distrust. She saw with maternal complacency all the impertinent encroachments and mischievous tricks to which their cousins submitted. She saw their sashes untied, their hair pulled about their ears, their work bags searched and their knives and scissors stolen away and felt no doubt of its being a reciprocal enjoyment. It suggested no other surprise than that Elinor and Marianne should sit composedly by without claiming a share in what was passing.<sup>17</sup>

"John is in such spirits today!" said she, on his taking Miss Steele's pocket-handkerchief, and throwing it out of the window - "he is full of monkey tricks."<sup>17</sup>

Soon afterwards, on the second boy's pinching one of the same lady's fingers, she fondly observes, "How playful William is!" This can easily be an example of Jane's realism in depicting a spoiled type of child and the picture in that case would not be overdrawn but there are other instances of the same kind of children and the mannerly yet interesting members of the younger generation never appear. The children of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Musgrove in "Persuasion"<sup>18</sup> are described similarly as spoiled and indulged and are totally devoid of any kind of good manners. On the surface then, it appears that Jane had very little understanding of child life and seems to have had no affection for such as were not related to her.

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17. "Sense and Sensibility", Vol. I, P. 175.

18. "Persuasion", p. 115-16

Nevertheless she was popular with her nephews and nieces and Austen Leigh says "we valued her as one always kind, sympathetic and amusing" and "Her first charm to children was great sweetness of manner . . . she could make everything amusing to a child."<sup>19</sup> These side lights on Jane Austen's own life help us to understand the way in which she portrayed characters and if in her own life she showed an interest in children we can only attribute her portrayal of them in her books as something due to her style. As has been said she was an intense realist and delights in picturing the infinite details which in a less masterful hand would have resulted in the utmost of tedium. She allowed herself to be governed by this same principle in drawing child characters and the result is we miss the refreshing innocence and get only the mischievous pranks which on close analysis are found to be no worse than those of ninety per cent of all children. It is no doubt true of course that the children of such silly mothers would be naturally spoiled and unattractive and this brings us to a consideration of those absolutely absurd women which Jane makes such a specialty of portraying.

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19. Mitton's "Jane Austen and Her Times", p. 23

B. SATIRIZATION OF MARRIED WOMEN.

The chief duty of all mothers of grown up daughters in those days seems to have been to get their daughters married as quickly and as well as possible. Jane has satirized<sup>20</sup> this with such complete success that there is not, as one writer says, a single woman having eligible daughters who is not entirely a fool if not worse.<sup>21</sup>

The character of Mrs. Bennett in the leading novel is the most extreme instance of this. The very opening scene presents us with her whole character contrasted with that of her much more practical and sensible husband. She begins by telling him that Netherfield Park is let at last and goes on to enlarge upon the prospects of an eligible young man moving into their neighborhood. Mr. Bennett persistently refuses to see the point and asks,

"Is he married or single?"

"Oh! single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune, four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!"

"How so? how can it affect them?"

"My dear Mr. Bennett," replied his wife, "how can you be so tiresome! You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them."

"Is that his design in settling here?"<sup>22</sup>

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20. Haleigh's "The English Novel", p. 266. "It would be difficult to name an English author, except perhaps Swift, whose works are more intimately pervaded with the spirit of satire."

21. Mitton's "Jane Austen and her Times" p. 60

Probably a much more vivid passage is found further on in the book when Mr. Collins, as ridiculous and as absurd a clergyman as ever wore the cloth, has proposed to the second daughter and is incapable of comprehending his refusal. Mrs. Bennett rushes to her husband "'Oh, Mr. Bennett, you are wanted immediately; we are all in an uproar. You must come and make Lizzie 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.'"<sup>23</sup> Mrs. Jennings in "Sense and Sensibility" is another in the same class as Mrs. Bennett though she is not pictured quite so strongly. She is "a good humoured, merry, fat, elderly woman, who talked a great deal, seemed very happy and rather vulgar" and prides herself on finding signs of attachment between all the young women and men who are around her.<sup>24</sup> She is not quite so detestable as Mrs. Bennett and gives the Dashwood girls a season in town with delightful hospitality. Mary Musgrove in "Persuasion" although not the mother of grown up daughters is among the chief of Jane's absurd women. Her small son has been suffering from an accident when she and her husband are asked out to spend the evening. Charles - the husband -

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22. "Pride and Prejudice", Vol. I, p. 2

23. "Pride and Prejudice", Vol. I, p. 168-9

24. "Sense and Sensibility", Vol. I, p. 48.

decides on going and Mary is at once vehement in her protestations of his heartlessness and his desire to avoid unnecessary trouble. "'So you and I are to be left to shift by ourselves, with this poor sick child - and not a creature coming near us all the evening!'" she says to her sister. "'I knew how it would be. This is always my luck. If there is anything disagreeable going on the men are always sure to get out of it, and Charles is as bad as any of them. Very unfeeling! I must say it is very unfeeling of him to be running away from his poor little boy; talks of his going on so well!'"<sup>25</sup> She continues in this way for a considerable time and finally ends up by deciding to go herself in spite of the boy. Mrs. Allen in "Northanger Abbey" is another of these married women whom the author delights to satirise. She is represented as having "neither beauty, genius, accomplishment nor manner," and "The air of a gentlewoman, a great deal of quiet inactive temper, and a trifling turn of mind were all that could account for her being the choice of a sensible, intelligent man like Mr. Allen."<sup>26</sup> She takes the heroine to Bath and is delighted in the society when she finds many old acquaintances not dressed nearly as well as herself. These examples of extraordinarily foolish women are so numerous in Jane

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25. "Persuasion", p. 79

26. "Northanger Abbey", p. 11.

Austen's work that it at once strikes us as similar to the peculiarity of her attitude toward children. Her private life gives us nothing to lead us to believe that she had had any personal experiences with this type in her own family. Her mother<sup>27</sup> seems to have been an ordinary woman but certainly not possessed of the freaks of disposition found in the remarkable Mrs. Bennett. We must allow then that Jane Austen was impelled by an irony which never escaped getting into her writing.<sup>28</sup> Her characters are probably exaggerated but in the main they are founded upon actual people, being colored only by the author's desire to point out mistakes and by her peculiar style - that of observing even the smallest details and presenting them in a pleasantly ironical manner.<sup>29</sup>

Her style is humorous and bright and she has a gift of describing people with a few sharp touches of her pen which show us their character better than a whole book might do. She tells us in "Northanger Abbey" that "Mrs. Thorpe was a widow and not a very rich one, she was a good-humoured, well-meaning woman, and a very indulgent mother. Her eldest daughter had great personal beauty; and the

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27. Mitton's "Jane Austen and Her Times", p. 60

28. Saintsbury's "The English Novel", p. 195. "That Miss Austen's irony is consummate can hardly be said to be a matter of serious contest."

29. Halleck's "History of English Literature", p. 335. "She sees the oddities and foibles of people with the insight of the true humorist and paints them with most dexterous cunning."

youngest ones, by pretending to be as handsome as their sister, imitating her air, and dressing in the same style, did very well."<sup>30</sup> She then finishes the chapter with

"This brief account of the family is intended to supersede the necessity of a long and minute detail from Mrs. Thorpe herself on her past adventures and sufferings, which might otherwise be expected to occupy the three or four following chapters - in which the worthlessness of lords and attorneys might be set fourth and conversations which had passed twenty years before, be minutely repeated."

The whole description is thus given to us in a nutshell and we know what to expect from this woman throughout the rest of the story. In "Mansfield Park" we are introduced to the Honourable John Yates who is one of those undesirable younger sons and who has just ceased rehearsing for a private play which was suddenly called off through the death of a relative. One sentence is all that Jane needs to enable us to "place" him. "To be so near happiness, so near fame, so near the long paragraph in praise of the private theatricals at Ecclesford, the seat of the Right Honourable Lord Ravenshaw, in Cornwall, which would of course have immortalised the whole party for at least a twelvemonth: and being so near, to lose it all, was an injury to be keenly felt and Mr. Yates could talk of nothing else."<sup>31</sup> There are instances galore throughout

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30. "Northanger Abbey", p. 30-31.

31. "Mansfield Park", Vol. I, p. 178-9.



the novels of Jane Austen's mastery of the art of writing these telling sentences and we must therefore remember to give her style its due place in forming an opinion of the life of England in her day. She pictures events as she saw them like the children and the absurd married woman who no doubt existed but they appear even more extreme by the very way in which the author writes and our views of them must therefore be frequently modified. Generally speaking, however, even after making due allowance for her style Jane Austen has given us a remarkably truthful and vivid account of the customs and habits of the English people at the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>32.</sup>

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32. Dawson's "The Makers of English Fiction", p. 45.  
Bonnell's "Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Jane Austen", p. 329-30.

VI. EDUCATION OF GIRLS AS SEEN IN HER NOVELS.

A. READING.

The number of foolish women in Jane Austen's novels, which has been referred to, surprises us but a knowledge of the education of girls at this time will doubtless throw some light on this singularity. Marriage was considered to be the chief aim in life for girls, no other career was ever thought possible, and it is probably in this fact that we find the reason for their education being so very superficial if not entirely neglected.<sup>33</sup>

The girl was educated more for the drawing-room than for the executive position and in "Pride and Prejudice" we have a good summary of the usual accomplishments thought necessary. The scene is the Bingley home one evening and the subjects of a girl's education are under discussion. Miss Bingley gives her idea of an accomplished girl in the following paragraph:

"A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing and the modern languages to deserve the word, and besides all this she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expression or the word will be but half deserved."<sup>34</sup> Mr. Darcy adds to this the necessity for extensive reading and the fact that Elizabeth Bennett at once declares she has never seen such a woman gives us the idea that even in this small list of attainments most women were very deficient. Certainly in the matter of reading their tastes seem to have been

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33. James Cliphant's "Victorian Novelists", p. 26, p. 29

34. "Pride and Prejudice", Vol. I, p. 56.

limited as we find from the dialogue in "Northanger Abbey" where Miss Thorpe is discussing "Udolpho" and other books of that type. She takes an intense delight in the black veil and the lurid skeletons and books which appeal to her have such titles as "Mysterious Warnings", the "Midnight Bell" and "Horrid Mysteries".<sup>35</sup> It is doubtful if we can take this as being true of all girls, however, for we know from a previous paragraph that novels were looked upon with impatience by people of good breeding. The author, herself, says: "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 labor of a novelist, and of slighting the performances which have only genius, wit and taste to recommend them."<sup>36</sup> What a difference this is from our own day when the novel is the chief form of literature and when people have discovered that there is no more harm in reading a long story in book form than a short story published in a magazine. Nevertheless in spite of this opposition to the novel girls continued to read these kind of books as we find from Henry Tilney's reference to having read hundreds and hundreds of

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35. "Northanger Abbey", p. 39.

36. "Northanger Abbey", p. 35-36.

novels - more than some women.<sup>37</sup> Apart from novels, however, the girls of Jane Austen's time do not appear to have read very much and we cannot wonder at Miss Bennett not having seen a girl possessing the accomplishments of which extensive reading was one of the chief.

B. MUSIC AND SINGING. C. DANCING.

D. ACADEMIC SUBJECTS.

Music and singing were much more popular than academic studies. Elizabeth herself is a finished player on the piano - or pianoforte as it is called - and we find great stress laid on Miss Darcy's success in this branch of music. Miss Crawford in "Mansfield Park" plays the harp with great skill while both Emma and Miss Fairfax are exceptionally brilliant on the first named instrument. Most girls learned to sing as in the case of Marianne Dashwood and even of Mary Bennett who makes such an unfortunate scene at the Bingley's ball with her ill-advised attempts to display her lack of talent.<sup>38</sup> Drawing was an occupation of which nearly all the girls had some knowledge particularly Miss Dashwood. Dancing, apparently, was something which no girl ever had to learn any more than a fish has to learn to swim, for at any and all times Jane's girls are ready to attend

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37. "Northanger Abbey", p. 140.

38. "Pride and Prejudice", Vol. I, p. 153.

or arrange a ball on the shortest notice. Fanny Price, even, can open the magnificent dance at Squire Bertram's home though she has had no opportunity of learning since leaving her rather riotous home at Portsmouth. These drawing room accomplishments were not the only ones known however as we find in that criticism of Fanny by her cousins.<sup>39</sup> "Dear mamma, only think my cousin cannot put the map of Europe together or my cousin cannot tell the principal rivers in Russia, or she never heard of Asia Minor, or she does not know the differences between water colours and crayons." "How strange!" "Did you ever hear anything so stupid." Then she goes on to speak of history and other subjects: "I cannot remember the time when I did not know a great deal that she has not the least notion of yet. How long ago is it, aunt, since we used to repeat the chronological order of the Kings of England, with the dates of their accession and most of the principal events of their reigns?"

"Yes, added the other, and of the Roman Emperors as low as Severus, besides a great deal of heathen mythology and all the metals, semi-metals, planets and distinguished philosophers."

According to this it would appear that some attempt at least was made at history, geography and even science but as there is practically no other instance in the books of such an academic education we cannot decide that all girls received such extensive schooling. Generally we can only say that the

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39. "Mansfield Park", Vol. I, p. 24.

great majority of girls of the better class - and this is the class with which Jane deals exclusively - received a smattering of drawing room accomplishments but very little of the deeper subjects which aim to develop the mind.

This in all probability accounts for the astonishingly large number of absurd women and frivolous girls with which the books of Jane Austen abound.



VII. EDUCATION OF MEN.

A. UNIVERSITY EDUCATION  
B. NEGLECT OF YOUNGER SONS.

Regarding the education of the men, Jane has not given such clear definite evidence as to what they did, or did not study but it is significant there are comparatively few absurd men pictured in her novels. The majority possess at least ordinary intelligence and although there are a few extreme types such as the extraordinary Mr. Collins or the proud and foolish Mr. Robert Ferrars they are not nearly of such frequent occurrence as the ridiculous women. With the eldest sons doubtless great care was taken to assure them sufficient education to carry on their duties of managing their estates and acting as members of Parliament when they became of age. We know that at this time Eton school was considered to be a school of embryo-members of Parliament and this of course was the logical occupation for eldest sons.<sup>40</sup> Younger sons were usually compelled to go into some profession of which there was singularly little choice, the navy, army, and church being practically the only doors open. There was usually considered to be some education necessary for these and many of the men attended one or other of the great universities. We have James Morland and Edmund Bertram attending Oxford but great scholars or brilliant students never appear in Jane Austen's work. The majority of men were well read as we find - to give one instance- in the intelligent discussion

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40. "My Relations" - Charles Lamb.

which Henry Filney is able to carry on with Catherine Morland about books and history.<sup>41</sup> He has read hundreds and hundreds of books and began his studies at Oxford when Catherine was a little girl. He dislikes history but affirms that he reads it as a duty. When he finds that Catherine takes a delight in history he is willing to declare that "At this rate, I shall not pity the writers of history any longer. If people like to read their books it is all very well". Captain Benwick in "Persuasion" is an ardent reader and can discuss "Wormion" and "The Lady of the Lake", and take an interest in prose works by the great moralists and great memoir writers of the day.<sup>42</sup> The boys then were much better educated than the girls, particularly the eldest boys who would be required to possess considerable knowledge at some date in their lives. The younger sons, however, were not given such attention even though they were expected to enter some profession and the reason for this will soon be seen in a discussion of these three professions.

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41. "Northanger Abbey", p. 140-143.

42. "Persuasion", p. 147.

VIII. PROFESSIONS FOR MEN.

A. THE NAVY.

The navy plays a very prominent part in Jane Austen's books doubtless owing to her own personal interest in it. She had two brothers in the service, as has been said, and the importance of the navy at this time in protecting England from the waiting hordes of French was bound to be reflected in her characters. The conditions in the naval service at this time, however, were notoriously bad and it seems rather extraordinary that so many men adopted this career. G. E. Mitton has given us an excellent picture of the state of affairs in the fleet in those days.<sup>43</sup> The ships were ill equipped for the accommodation of men, food was bad, water was scarce and rank brutality were the customary methods of discipline. The son of a gentleman was compelled to serve six years on board a ship, nominally as a midshipman but really as a sort of servant or "boy" to the captain. He could then try for a lieutenancy; once he secured that his position was secure and he lived a very different life. Promotion went largely by influence, however, as we find in the case of Fanny Price's brother who was advanced to a lieutenancy through the efforts of Henry Crawford, exerted on his father the Admiral. That even the highest positions went by official influence, rather than through ability is seen in the following sug-

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43. Mitton, "Jane Austen and Her Times". Chapter XI

gestion sent to the "Morning Chronicle" by a satirical correspondent when there were prospects of a vacancy in the Admiralty.

He should know nothing of a ship,

He should never have been to sea,

He should be ignorant of geography,

He should be ignorant of naval tactics,

He should never attend office until four in the  
afternoon,

He should be unfit for business every day,

He should be very regular in keeping officers waiting  
for orders,

He should not know a bumboat from a three decker,

His hair should always be well dressed,

And his head should be empty.

This is no doubt an extreme instance but it gives rather a good idea of the popular opinion of the navy. Brutality was atrocious and when it is remembered that criminals from the jails were forced to serve on board and press gangs resorted to it is obvious that the navy would be in low repute.

Nevertheless men continued to choose the navy as a life occupation and when we consider that many of the officers made great fortunes out of prize money the reason is not far to seek. In "Persuasion", during the discussion between Sir Walter Elliot and his attorney over renting the former's countryseat, a good light is thrown on the situation. The

advisability of getting a rich naval officer for tenant is at once suggested because as Mr. Shepherd says, "Many a noble fortune has been made during the war".<sup>44</sup> The subject is discussed further but Sir Walter expresses himself rather strongly regarding the whole navy and all connected with it. He admits that it has its utility but he says that he would be sorry to see a friend of his belonging to it, for, as he remarks, "It is in two points offensive to me; I have two strong objections to it. First, as being the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honour 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."<sup>45</sup> There are few who will feel any sympathy with Sir Walter's first objection and as for the second we have many examples in Jane's novels of extremely handsome young naval officers such as Captain Wentworth. It is nevertheless a fact that the navy was frequently used as a dumping ground to get rid of troublesome sons as the author tells in her description of the Musgrove boy - "The real circumstances of this pathetic piece of family history were, that the Musgroves had had the ill fortune of a very troublesome hopeless son, and the good fortune to lose him before he reached his twentieth year; that he had been sent to sea because he was stupid

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44. "Persuasion", p. 22.

45. "Persuasion", p. 25-6

and unmanageable on shore."<sup>46</sup> From such a state of affairs as this it is not hard to see that very little education was required for the navy and that the training of the younger sons was necessarily not as thorough as that of the eldest.

### B. THE ARMY.

The second profession that attracted the young men of Jane Austen's time was the army although this holds but a very subordinate position in her work. "Pride and Prejudice" containing practically the only reference to it. The militia is quartered at Meryton and at once the dashing young officers become the attraction of the village society.<sup>47</sup> Such girls as Lydia Bennett immediately set their caps for these men and the result is a pretty continual series of flirtations. No mention is made of private soldiers in these books and we are left to conclude that such persons were entirely below the notice of polite society. That there were many unscrupulous men who entered the army after other prospects had failed is borne out by the case of Mr. Wickham, the villain in "Pride and Prejudice". He had decided to enter the ministry owing to a certain will which had given him the chance of getting a good living, but he gave up the

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46. "Persuasion", p. 71-2.

47. "Pride and Prejudice", Vol. I, p. 108.



prospect and entered law.<sup>48</sup> His idle and profligate nature made this profession impossible for him and he then decided to go back to his original intention of taking orders. The living was no longer vacant, however, and he finally joined the army. His greatest piece of villainy is his elopement with Lydia Bennett which is one of the most dramatic incidents in Jane's novels.<sup>49</sup> All things considered then Jane Austen gives short shift to the army as a profession and we are left to the conclusion that it was in much the same state as the navy with a degenerate type of men who received their commissions through official influence and preferment.

### C. THE CHURCH.

#### 1. Preferment of Livings to Strangers.

The profession which receives greatest attention from Jane Austen in her books is that of the Church. A clergyman is one of the leading characters in almost everyone of Jane's novels and to fully understand the rather remarkable light in which these men are portrayed, a short summary of the general conditions in the Church will be necessary.<sup>50</sup>

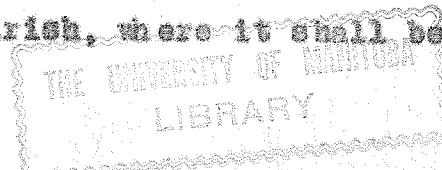
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48. "Pride and Prejudice", Vol. II, 3-14

49. "Pride and Prejudice", Vol. II, Chapter XIVII.

50. Mitton's "Jane Austen and Her Times", Chapter III.  
De Quincey's "Confessions of an English Opium Eater",  
p. 28-9

The English Church at the close of the eighteenth century had reached a period of stagnation due chiefly to the manner in which the livings were presented. The control of these livings was usually in the hands of the lord of the manor and he had power to bestow them on whoever he wished. The result of this is obvious - the living was given invariably to either some close friend of the lord or to a younger son or near relation. In many cases the son or friend might not be old enough to enter into his duties and in that case the living was given to some man who would promise to leave whenever it was required. This naturally gave rise to many evils from the subserviency of these incumbents for there was no man who would dare to speak his opinions openly when he was in constant danger of being ejected. Doubtless the most flagrant example of this evil is found in that well known Mr. Collins in "Pride and Prejudice". Jane Austen has excelled herself here in picturing an absolutely unutterable fool without one redeeming trait. His first letter to Mr. Bennett admirably reveals his own character and also the peculiar situation in which he was placed regarding his living. "My mind, however, is now made up on the subject, for having received ordination at Easter, I have been so fortunate as to be distinguished by the patronage of the Right Honourable Lady Catherine de Bourgh, widow of Sir Lewis de Bourgh, whose bounty and beneficence has preferred me to the valuable rectory of this parish, where it shall be



my earnest endeavour to demean myself with grateful respect towards her Ladyship and be ever ready to perform those rites and ceremonies which are instituted by the Church of England."<sup>51</sup> He proceeds to say that he is willing to visit Mr. Bennett for two weeks as Lady Catherine is far from objecting to his occasional absence on Sunday providing another minister is engaged for the day, and throughout the book he is continually showing this absurd deference to his patroness. He goes into ecstasies at Bingley's ball, when he learns that Mr. Darcy is a nephew of this mighty creature and makes a spectacle of himself in seeking his acquaintance.<sup>52</sup> His conduct when proposing to Miss Elizabeth Bennett is so ludicrous as to form one of the most humorous episodes in all of the author's works. After she has expressed unwillingness to listen to his proposal he gives her in his usual pompous and conceited style, his reasons for matrimony chief among them being Lady Catherine's desire that he should enter into that state. "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.

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51. "Pride and Prejudice", Vol. I, p. 93-95.

52. "Pride and Prejudice", Vol. I, p. 148.

Collins you must marry - choose properly, choose a gentle-woman 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."<sup>53</sup> And Mr. Collins promptly runs off to secure the wife. When he finds that Elizabeth will not consider the advantages of being the wife of a man enjoying Lady Catherine's great patronage, he promptly pays a visit to Charlotte Lucas and almost instantly becomes engaged.<sup>54</sup> He has two weeks in which to obtain his wife and he apparently has little worry about who it should be as long as he pleases this august lady. When Elizabeth visits Mrs. Collins later on in the story his behaviour towards Lady Catherine is so grotesque as to seem impossible. An invitation from her is the greatest of all felicities and he takes untold pride in displaying her greatness to his wife's friend. His delight in advising Elizabeth about her apparel just prior to one of these visits to the Hall is easily seen in this paragraph.

"Do not make yourself uneasy, my dear cousin, about your apparel. Lady Catherine is far from requiring that elegance of dress in us which becomes herself and her daughter. I would advise you merely to put on whatever of your clothes is superior to the rest, there is no occasion

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53. "Pride and Prejudice", Vol. I, p. 160-1

54. "Pride and Prejudice", Vol. I, p. 242.

for anything more. Lady Catherine will not think the worse of you for being simply dressed. She likes to have the distinction of rank preserved."<sup>55</sup>

Mr. Collins is then as we have found from these passages one of the most extreme types of this dependent clergy who through their situation were compelled to grovel to their superiors for their daily bread.

### 2. Preferment of Livings to Relatives.

### 3. Clergyman in Jane Austen's Novels.

When a relative or close friend filled the living we can imagine that such excessive subserviency was not practised nor necessary but in that case another evil usually projected itself - namely that of the incumbent doing as little work as possible. He frequently lived miles from his church and in some cases hired a curate perpetually to do even the preaching.<sup>56</sup> If he performed the actual services himself one sermon on Sunday usually sufficed, with a sacrament perhaps three times a year. Marriages and burials were looked upon as nuisances, Mitton tells us, the clergyman very often galloping up on his horse

<sup>55</sup>. "Pride and Prejudice", Vol. I, p. 242.

<sup>56</sup>. Mrs. Oliphant's "Literary History of England", p. 196.  
"That was the time when to obtrude religion upon your

to gabble over the service. The sermons were tiresome, uninteresting ones and frequently were read out of a book. The old fashioned pews with their high backs made a quiet nap during service quite easy and in general the public regarded church-going as a mere formality. The clergy, in the majority of instances made little attempt to minister to the masses and spent most of their time drinking tea or playing quadrille with their distinguished friends. It is not to be wondered then that the clergy was held in little respect and we can appreciate Sir Walter Elliot's remark, "'Wentworth? Oh ay, Mr. Wentworth the curate of Monkford. You mislead me by the term gentleman. I thought you were speaking of some man of property. Mr. Wentworth was nobody,'"<sup>57</sup> Jane ridicules them, however, not for their lack of property but for their utter folly as in the case of Mr. Collins, already mentioned, or of Dr. Grant in "Mansfield Park" who can raise a fair quarrel when the dinner is not suited to his taste, and can compel his wife to remain at home when he is attacked by the gout.<sup>58</sup> The ease with which men could get into the church accounted in large measure for the misfits that so frequently found their way to it. We know that Mr. Wickham was much

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neighbors or indeed any subject of the kind, save in the pulpit was the worst of bad taste."

57. "Persuasion", p. 32.

58. "Mansfield Park", Vol. I, p. 43.

annoyed because he could not get the living after he had proved himself such a moral failure and the ease with which Mr. Edward Ferrars decides to take orders after having been disinherited by his mother is one of the things which astonish us, of the present day.<sup>59</sup> Of all the clergymen in Jane's books none comes nearer the standard of what a minister should be than Edmund Bertram. Henry Tilney cannot be called reprehensible but he seems to prefer a lively social season at Bath to the more sombre and tiresome duties of attending to his parishioners. Mr. Elton in "Emma" is more or less of a ridiculous fop who shifts his affections in an incredibly short space of time and apparently only marries to spite the girl who has refused him. Edmund Bertram, however, decides to enter the Church of his own free will and without regard to his love for Mary Crawford who argues that "It is indolence and love of ease - a want of all laudable ambition, of taste for good company, or of inclination to take the trouble of being agreeable, which make men clergymen."<sup>60</sup> Edmund aims to be above the ordinary type of minister, however and it is refreshing to read his father's opinion of a clergyman's duty.

"A parish has wants and claims which can be known only by a clergyman constantly resident, and which no proxy can be capable of satisfying to the same extent. Edmund might,

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59. "Sense and Sensibility", Vol. II, p. 144

60. "Mansfield Park", Vol. II, p. 15



in the common phrase, do the duty of Thornton, that is he might read prayers and preach without giving up Mansfield Park; he might ride over every Sunday to a house nominally inhabited and go through divine service; he might be the clergyman of Thornton Lacy every seventh day, for three or four hours if that would content him. But it will not. He knows that human nature needs more lessons than a weekly sermon can convey and that if he does not live among his parishioners and prove himself by constant attention to be their well wisher and friend, he does very little either for their good or his own."

Unfortunately instances of this type are almost totally lacking in Jane Austen's books and we are able to appreciate Edmund's high ideals all the more in the light of this. Generally speaking then, the clergy is represented as being filled by men who entered the profession from a mere desire for material betterment, and with the very minimum of qualifications, and who performed as few services as possible and lived a life of the greatest ease and enjoyment.



IX. SOCIAL LIFE IN ENGLAND.

The novels of Jane Austen are primarily novels of domestic life and social intercourse naturally forms one of the chief subjects dealt with. The historical situation at the time of Jane's writing has already been mentioned and the social life therefore seems all the more remarkable. The noise of battle appears to have been heard but little in England and the brilliant London season is a feature of one of her books. The greater number of Jane's characters live in the country however, and it is with this rural society that we have mostly to deal. The spectacular dances of "Mansfield Park" and "Pride and Prejudice" give us a vivid picture of the way in which the young people found amusement. Jane's own life will enable us to appreciate more thoroughly the pictures of social life that she has given in her novels.

#### A. LIFE IN THE COUNTRY.

##### 1. Country Dances.

The daughter of a clergyman, she had access to all the great houses round about and was able to take advantage of the entertainments which were being constantly held at these places. The difficulty of travelling made it necessary for these people in the country to depend upon their neighbourhood for the enjoyments and although it was customary for anyone who could to move to London for the

winter season, those whom circumstances compelled to remain behind kept up the social side of life with great success. Balls, particularly were very frequent in Jane Austen's district and the Austen girls of course missed few of these. Jane herself was a lover of the art and we have frequent references in her letters to her experiences at these affairs. Regarding these entertainments, Mitton tells us that they were more formal in one way and more simple in another than those given in the present day. Music, floors and rooms were not considered of such importance and young people arranged a dance on very short notice; refreshments too were largely secondary matters.<sup>61</sup>

Nevertheless, the dances themselves were more formal and dignified. Waltzes and other similar steps were unknown and the stately minuets and cotillions were the staple numbers at nearly all the dances which Jane herself attended. Deportment was very strict and proper conduct in the ball-room was regulated with the utmost precision. It was permissible at a private dance for a gentleman to ask any girl to dance with him regardless of whether he was acquainted with her or not but at public balls the master of ceremonies did the introducing. Dresses were apparently not as elaborate as those worn today at similar parties for we hear of muslin gowns being seen at large

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61. Mitton's "Jane Austen and Her Times", Chapter VII.

public balls. Astonishingly high headdresses were worn, however, which must have made a picturesque scene in the room. Ladies were always conducted to and fro in chairs and we can contrast the scene at the close of such a dance with that at the close of a ball in the present day. Jane's novels are full of dancing and some of the best descriptions of balls in literature are given in her books.

(a) The Netherfield Ball.

"Pride and Prejudice" furnishes us with a typical country dance near the opening of the book. The dance at Netherfield<sup>62</sup> is one of the most brilliant affairs which the Bennett girls have had the opportunity of attending and the provoking irritations which rise are typical of Jane's critical method of picturing society. It was the custom to dance two dances with a partner - up and down the minuet - and we remember Elizabeth's chagrin at having the ridiculous Mr. Collins to lead her out on the floor. "Mr. Collins, awkward and solemn, apologizing instead of attending and often moving wrong without being aware of it, gave her all the shame and misery which a disagreeable partner for a couple of dances can give." Half an hour was the usual length of one of these double dances and

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62. "Pride and Prejudice", Vol. I, Chapter XVII.

we have an amusing episode described in Elizabeth's experience with Mr. Darcy, who by his pride instead of by his awkwardness, agonizes Miss Bennett through the length of this time. The supper closes the first period of the dance and here again Elizabeth suffers - this time from the loquacity of her mother who persists in talking quite audibly to Lady Lucas of the possibilities of a match between Jane and Mr. Bingley. Her crowning mortification is the behaviour of her sister Mary who is one of those detestable creatures who cannot sing but always persists in trying to before company. The dance closes with a fifteen minute wait for the Bennett carriage which, as the author aptly puts it "gives them time to see how heartily they were wished away by some of the family." Nevertheless, in spite of the numerous mortifications which the heroine suffers we can see the brilliance of the ball shining through and the utter enthusiasm which fills everyone, not even excepting Elizabeth with all her mishaps.

(b) The Mansfield Ball.

The ball at Mansfield Park<sup>63</sup> which takes place during the absence of the Bertram girls is one of the other brilliant entertainments described in the author's novels.

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63. "Mansfield Park", Vol. II, Chapter XXVIII.

The pleasurable anticipation of Fanny Price as she prepares to attend her first dance is one of the prettiest and most beautiful scenes we have. Lady Bertram's misplaced kindness in sending her own maid to assist Fanny's dressing receives the treatment it deserves from the author as do the caustic and patronising compliments of Mrs. Norris. The time approaches and Miss Price is all in ecstasies for she "has not been brought up to the trade of coming out" and is consequently in mortal terror of making some mistake or committing some blunder. Her mind is intent on Edmund but considerably to her surprise and somewhat to her disappointment Henry Crawford claims her attention - and the first two dances. She receives the greatest thrill of all, however, when Sir Thomas comes to her and she finds that she is expected to open the ball with her partner. "She could hardly believe it. To be placed above so many elegant young women! The distinction was too great" and poor Fanny is so overcome with astonishment that she can scarcely enjoy the distinction. The dancing begins and like Elizabeth, Fanny is fated to be annoyed by petty irritations which had so nearly spoiled the Netherfield ball for the former girl. Miss Crawford's ill-judged compliments and Henry's more unacceptable attentions would have marred the whole evening if it had not been for the sheer enjoyment of watching William, her handsome naval officer brother, and for those

quiet thoughts of Edmund which to her are perfect happiness. The two dances with this latter gentleman are the delight to which she looks forward the whole evening but at their conclusion she is compelled to rest. The ball closes at three o'clock and William and Henry prepare for an early start in the morning. It is significant of Jane's realism that she never pictures one of these dances without giving us those mortifications and irritations which so frequently accompany even the best planned social entertainments. Several dances are described in the novels where the scene is laid in Bath but these will be discussed later in dealing with that very fashionable and entrancing resort.

## 2. LIFE OF MARRIED WOMEN.

Dancing, however, is not the only form of amusement which Jane's characters employ to break the monotony of life, although when we read these books we are struck by the lack of entertainment and by the general humdrum existence which these people lead. Lady Middleton<sup>64</sup> and Lady Bertram<sup>65</sup> are two who apparently do nothing but sit in their drawing room from morning till evening, trying to pass the time with a little sewing. The former has

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64. "Sense and Sensibility", Vol. I, p. 49

65. "Mansfield Park", Vol. II, p. 26-7

her children about her but is too languid to care much about their conduct when visitors call, while the latter is so exceptionally dull that we instinctively contrast the life of her lively daughters who certainly are far from following the example of their mother. Not all of the women of Jane's novels are so altogether lifeless as these, however, for many of them of Mrs. Bennett's class are constantly on the lookout for husbands for their daughters and consequently leave no stone unturned to accomplish that desirable end. Morning visits to the neighbors are frequent and in the case of an eligible like Mr. Bingley, Mrs. Bennett insists on Jane staying with his sisters until she is entirely recovered from her indisposition.<sup>66</sup> Mrs. Dashwood is a constant visitor to the Middleton home and the intercourse between the two families is as much as Sir John in his overflowing hospitality can encourage. These visits between different families are emphasized throughout Jane's novels and we are left with the impression that the women never by any chance had any housework which required their attention. Those in less affluent circumstances even are apparently little troubled about domestic cares and Mrs. Norris never has the slightest difficulty in calling at the great house at any time of the day, anymore than has Mrs. Grant or Miss Crawford. This is one outstanding characteristic of these stories

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66. "Pride and Prejudice", Vol. I, p. 59-60



that the women have absolutely no work to do. Mrs. Bennett is quite annoyed when asked if her daughters have shared in cooking the dinner and assures her guest that they are well able to keep a housekeeper.<sup>67</sup> Even the women who have a large establishment and a large staff of servants to superintend spend little time in the directing and even inexperienced Emma has plenty of time to talk to Mr. Knightly<sup>68</sup> when he makes his morning calls. That these women were troubled with ennui is not to be wondered and we have little sympathy for Lady Catherine when she has to resort to the impossible Mr. Collins to fill up a table at quadrille.<sup>69</sup> Sewing, cards, and occasional visits was the program of the day and the contrast with the active life of women in similar positions in modern days is very striking. The woman of wealth now, has an innumerable number of occupations to take up her attention from clubs to charities and church work and the women who live the quiet life at their country seats are few and far between. They doubtless saw things differently in Jane Austen's time however, civilization was not so complex nor so highly developed as it is today and the sphere of women's activities was necessarily limited.

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67. "Pride and Prejudice". Vol. I, p. 98

68. "Emma", Vol. I, p. 79

69. "Pride and Prejudice". Vol. I, p. 99.

### 3. LIFE OF GIRLS

The married women having no home cares it is to be expected that the young girls found their greatest hardship in filling in time. Long rides around the country were an excellent device for whiling away a forenoon or even a whole day. A visit to the Rushworth residence proves a splendid excuse for the Bertram girls to spend the day abroad from home and incidentally gives the author a chance to picture in her customary satirical way the petty annoyances which so frequently occur even on the greatest of pleasure excursions.<sup>70</sup> The Dashwood girls are constantly planning some such trips and the chagrin of the party at the Middleton home when their intended visit to the country place of Colonel Brandon's brother-in-law is suddenly terminated, shows clearly the eagerness to which these were looked forward.<sup>71</sup> Walks around the countryside was another of the diversions which occupied the time of the young women and the added attraction of a few young men to share these walks was always appreciated. The quartering of a regiment near home was a piece of good fortune not to be ignored and the Bennett girls enjoy many good times with the dashing young officers at Meryton. We cannot say then that the girls lived such prosaic lives as their mothers but in general aimlessness and lack of active employment they were exactly similar.

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70. "Mansfield Park". Vol. I, chapters IX and X.

71. "Sense and Sensibility". Vol. I, Chapter XIII.

#### 4. LIFE OF MEN

The occupation of the men presents a more startling condition of affairs than that of the women. It is true that there were a few professions which the younger sons usually entered such as the Church or the Navy but the great majority of the men in Jane's novels do practically nothing. They visit around from one estate to another, spend the time in hunting or calling on young ladies and in general appear to have even a harder time than the female characters in whiling away the hours. Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley are two outstanding examples of this type. Both are men possessed of ample property and incomes, both are without professions and both spend their time in much the same ways. Darcy visits Bingley at the latter's home and appears to enjoy a rather quiet social time with Miss Bingley and her sister, spending the mornings in writing letters or repulsing the advances of the Bingley girl<sup>72</sup> and in the evening being bored to death at an assembly ball where he can find no girl handsome enough to dance with. Such is a picture of Mr. Darcy when visiting his friend. When visiting his aunt Lady Catherine his enjoyment is almost as great and he spends as little time as possible indoors with his haughty and overbearing relative.<sup>73</sup>

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72. "Pride and Prejudice", Vol. I, p. 68-70.

73. "Pride and Prejudice", Vol. I, chapter 31

At his own home at Pemberby he is the perfect gentleman and receives Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner with the utmost of cordiality and invites the former to spend the next day fishing.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, in no instance do we find Mr. Darcy engaging in any particular business or profession and we are left to the conclusion that his sole occupation is in managing his estates, although from the amount of spare time he has it is difficult to understand when he performs these duties. Colonel Brandon in "Sense and Sensibility" is another example of these single men of fortune who spends his time between London and Sir John Middleton's home. His military title is apparently a relic of some bygone connection with the army for we hear nothing of his active participation in the service. The Ferrars sons mentioned in the same book are a similar type though Edward suddenly decides to take orders when he finds himself cut off from the property. Edmund Bertram also enters the Church but this is to be expected from his character. The clergymen of Jane's books, however, do not even have much to employ themselves with as we have seen. A sermon once on Sunday with an occasional communion is the customary extent of their labors and Mr. Tilney has no difficulty in attending the social season at Bath. Mr. Elton in "Emma" is a similar gentleman who does little but attend social

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74. "Pride and Prejudice", Vol. II, p. 89.

entertainments and act the snob when he finds his affections misplaced. Like the women, the men in Jane Austen's novels have little to do but to contribute to the social life of the community and it is this characteristic which makes the novels so entirely novels of manners and quiet domestic life.

#### 5. PRIVATE THEATRICALS.

The discussion of society of the time brings us to that rather singular question of private theatricals found in "Mansfield Park".<sup>75</sup> Jane, in no place condemns professional acting for we have frequent mention of the theatre in Bath and in one place of Drury Lane<sup>76</sup> in London, but the amateur play which the young people of Mansfield are endeavoring to rehearse receives decisive condemnation from the author. The Honourable John Yates who has just come from Lord Ravenshaw's country seat in Cornwall is in the throes of a great disappointment over a play which they had been practising and which had to be given up three days before the performance on account of a death. The suggestion of a play at once fills the Bertram girls with delight. Here is a novel way of spending the next few weeks and they all enter into it at once with enthusiasm. Fanny and Edmund, however, who we can take to be the mouthpieces of

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75. "Mansfield Park", Vol. I, Chapters XIII-XVIII  
76. "Sense and Sensibility" Vol. II, p. 208.

the author totally disapprove of the idea and do their utmost to discourage it. They are overruled, nevertheless, and a room is fitted up for the theatre, curtains are ordered, scenery is secured and after an incredible amount of wrangling a play is chosen and rehearsals begin.

Fanny fails to give a concrete reason for her dislike of acting except that it is not a suitable pastime for young ladies in the Bertram class and we reach the conclusion that amateur acting was then considered to be the height of vulgarity. There were some people in all probability who were prepared to defy the conventions as in the case of Mr. Yates' aristocratic friends but in the best families it was resolutely denounced. Sir Thomas Bertram, on his arrival just previous to the big rehearsal gives short notice to the whole plan and it collapses without further delay; and the Honourable John Yates is disappointed a second time. Throughout the chapters which describe these preparations, however, we find no direct reference to the reason for amateur acting being considered such bad form. The general prejudice against the stage, which still lingered on was doubtless the chief factor and we can note this as a characteristic of the age.

B. LIFE IN LONDON.

The society of the country as we have seen was frequently very dull and it is not surprising that all who could, went to London for the winter season. The capital during these months was the scene of a brilliant society and with balls theatres and entertainments of every description the gay life of the upper <sup>class</sup> life was quite a contrast to their quieter and more sedate life at their country seats.<sup>77</sup> "Sense and Sensibility" is the novel which devotes most space to this life in London and we are given here a fairly good account of the typical pastimes and amusements enjoyed in the metropolis. Mrs. Jennings, whose husband had amassed a considerable sum in business, invites the Dashwood girls to visit her and in spite of the first objections of Elinor their mother persuades them to go. This worthy lady has a palatial house near Portman Square and although hardly of sufficient culture to mix in the best society she keeps on the fringe to a certain extent and is enabled to introduce the Dashwood girls. The Middletons also move up to town as do Mr. and Mrs. Palmer and later even John Dashwood and his wife decide to brave bankruptcy by securing a house in the centre of social life.

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<sup>77</sup>. Mitton's "Jane Austen and Her Times". Chapter XVI.

1. PROGRAM OF DAY.

2. EVENING ENTERTAINMENTS.

A day's program in the city among the fashionable set will be useful in giving us an idea of the general life of the time. The forenoon, or rather the larger part of the day was usually spent in shopping. The stores on Bond Street were a favorite centre of trade and the women could enjoy themselves in these stores as much as though they were at a theatre as did Mrs. Palmer,<sup>78</sup> "whose eye was caught by everything pretty, expensive or new; who was wild to buy all, could determine on none, and dawdled away her time in rapture and indecision." Dinner was served late in the afternoon and then the people were free for their evening enjoyments. Another method of spending the forenoons was in that rather vexatious practice of making morning calls. Men as well as women frequently chose the forenoons for these visits and Marianne is quite disappointed when Willoughby calls at the house during one of her absences with Mrs. Jennings. The evenings were spent either at home with cards or more frequently out at one of the large balls which were of such frequent occurrence. These dances were much more formal than those given in the country as we see from Lady Middleton's protest against her husband's little plan of entertaining his young

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78. "Sense and Sensibility", Vol. I, p. 237



relations. "In the country an unpremeditated dance was very allowable; but in London where the reputation of elegance was more important and less easily obtained, it was risking too much for the gratification of a few girls, to have it known that Lady Middleton had given a small dance of eight or nine couple, with two violins and a mere sideboard collation."<sup>79</sup> Many people of a practical turn of mind like John Dashwood and his wife exercised considerable economy in their own parties and devoted most of their time to attending those given by others. One of the grandest parties<sup>80</sup> which Elinor and Marianne have an opportunity of attending causes the latter extreme chagrin when she meets Willoughby and is actually insulted by him. The mental shock which she suffers is quite in keeping with her sensibility but it unfortunately compels the reader to withdraw from the room before seeing much of the way in which one of these fashionable entertainments was conducted. The opening description, however, is typical of Jane's style and gives us a good glimpse of the "room splendidly lit up, quite full of company and insufferably hot." "When they had paid their tribute of politeness by courtesying to the lady of the house, they were permitted to mingle in the crowd, and take their share of the heat and inconvenience to which their arrival must

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79. "Sense and Sensibility". Vol. I, p. 245-6.

80. "Sense and Sensibility", Vol. I, Chapter XXVIII

necessarily add." "After some time spent in saying little and doing less, Lady Middleton sat down to cards; and as Marianne was not in spirits for moving about, she and Elinor, luckily succeeding to chairs, placed themselves at no great distance from the table." The Willoughby episode which follows this was perhaps a blessing in disguise for it is difficult to say how long the Dashwood girls would have had to keep their seats and we can imagine the interesting evening they would have enjoyed.<sup>81</sup>

Willoughby's chief design in frequenting London is of course to become acquainted with a wealthy heiress and his success leads us to suppose that there were many other young men who sought to better their condition through a prudent alliance in the matrimonial world. His marriage with Miss Grey is the talk of the town and Colonel Brandon has no difficulty in hearing all the particulars from the loud conversation of two society women in a stationer's shop on Pall Mall.<sup>82</sup> The lady's fifty thousand pounds is her chief attraction and Willoughby makes no denial of this when later he tells Elinor that "In honest words, her money was necessary to me, and in a situation like mine anything was to be done to prevent a rupture." This cynical view of marriage gives us a light on the artificiality of much of this London society and although the

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81. "Sense and Sensibility", Vol. II, p. 4

82. "Sense and Sensibility", Vol. I, p. 12

author has not drawn the picture as powerfully as Thackeray does in "Vanity Fair" for instance, the conduct of Willoughby, the disinheriting of Edward Ferrars by his mother, the humorous alarm of John Dashwood for the latter - all these tend to show us that the season was maintained solely for a little gaiety for the upper and middle classes the majority of whom, if girls, were trying their best to meet an eligible man with a large fortune, or if men, were leaving no stone unturned to find a wealthy wife.

### C. LIFE IN BATH.

#### 1. BATH AS A WINTER RESORT

The London season, however, was not the only attraction for English society during Jane's day and the ultra fashionable Bath,<sup>83</sup> which is comparable to Newport, brought a gay throng during the autumn and winter months. Jane Austen herself had lived there and knew the society which she so vividly portrays in "Persuasion" and "Northanger Abbey". Bath first became popular in the early part of Queen Anne's reign but about 1705, under the leadership of Nash, the attractions of the resort were increased and Bath took the lead as a fashionable rendezvous for the English upper class. The city in the present day is very much as

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83. Mitton's "Jane Austen and Her Times", Chapter XII.

it was when Jane lived there and the narrow streets which still have familiar names, the peculiar houses of eighteenth century architecture, the well known Upper Rooms recall at once many of the scenes pictured in the author's works. As many as sixteen thousand visitors would come to Bath during a single season and the attractions as we know them seem to be modest enough to cause some surprise at the popularity of the place. The waters doubtless attracted many who were troubled with illness - or imagined they were but as at many similar resorts in the present day they were a mere excuse. The Pump Room, the theatre, and the Assembly were the chief places of congregation for the gay multitude.

## 2. THE PUMP ROOM

The Pump Room was a handsome structure built in 1796 just previous to the time of Jane's own residence at Bath. It was a long low building with short but beautiful pillars and was the rendezvous for all of Bath society, particularly in the forenoons. Here, the fashionable set walked around and displayed their clothes, met their friends, arranged for drives or filled in the time envying their better dressed rivals or endeavoring to seek the acquaintance of any titled people who might happen to be in town. The Pump Room occupies a very prominent place in Jane's Bath

novels and we have constant references to incidents which took place there. Catherine, after she has met Tilney hurries to the Room the following morning but as usually happens meets with disappointment. "Every creature in Bath except himself was to be seen in the room at different periods of the fashionable hours, crowds of people were every moment passing in and out, up the steps and down, - people whom nobody cared about, and nobody wanted to see - and he only was absent."<sup>84</sup> Miss Morland and her aunt continue walking the Room until they are quite tired when Mrs. Allen is at last rewarded by meeting one of her old schoolmates whom she had not seen for fifteen years.<sup>85</sup> Both try vigorously to tell all that has happened to themselves since they last met but Mrs. Thorpe as a talker is the superior of the two and has the advantage of a family of children whose talents and beauties are so great that Mrs. Allen can only console herself with the fact that the lace on her friend's pelisse is "not half so handsome as that on her own." This also was the beginning of that friendship with Isabella Thorpe which occupies such a prominent part in the book and leads to the misunderstanding with her brother. Sunday, particularly, was a day on which the Pump Room was most popular. Even on the most beautiful of days when all nature seemed calling for companionship, the hall was filled immediately after church

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84. "Northanger Abbey", p. 25-6.

85. "Northanger Abbey", p. 27-8

even though the "crowd was insupportable and there was not a genteel face to be seen."<sup>86</sup> Thus the Pump Room filled the place of a general assembly where all the idlers - in which category might be included fully ninety per cent of Bath's winter population - whiled away the time and made arrangements with their friends for visits to the theatre, the Lower or Upper Rooms, or morning lounges.

### 3. THE THEATRE.

It has been mentioned before that although private or amateur theatricals were looked upon with great disdain in Jane Austen's time, attendance at public theatres was not at all censored and we are then not surprised at the prominent part which the theatre plays in the life of her characters at Bath. These places of amusement were constructed differently from what they are now.<sup>87</sup> The main floor was filled with benches instead of with chairs and the upper class invariably sat in the boxes. These were arranged in as many as three tiers above each other and extended along each side of the building. They were even built up on the stage though the curtain of course was placed farther back. The people occupying the boxes were naturally conspicuous to everyone in the house and just as at the Pump Room, everyone was certain of meeting all

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86. "Northanger Abbey", p. 32

87. "Northanger-Abbey", Mitton's "Jane Austen and Her Times", p. 291-1

their acquaintances before the entertainment ended. That the theatre was used largely as a social meeting place we know from such incidents as the appearance of Mr. Tilney and his father in the theatre at the end of the fourth act. Catherine who has been anxiously awaiting their appearance can give little attention to the stage from then on and every second glance is directed towards the Tilney box.<sup>88</sup> The conclusion of the play is the signal for a social half hour for Henry at once comes to Catherine to explain some rather awkward incident of the morning. The whole audience seems to spend the time in wandering around for John Thorpe is noticed talking to General Tilney and giving some interesting though incorrect information. The entertainment at last breaks up and Catherine is escorted to her chair by the ever present Thorpe. We are struck at once by the leisurely way in which these performances were conducted and it shows very vividly the idle frivolous life lead by these frequenters of the popular watering place.

#### 4. THE UPPER AND LOWER ROOMS.

The greatest social attractions of Bath, however, were the Upper and Lower Rooms, two Assembly rooms where all the brilliant dances were held. Although these were public only the fashionable classes attended and the Master of

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88. "Northanger Abbey", p. 118-22

Ceremonies was always present to insure the best conduct. Nash who has been mentioned before did a tremendous amount in bringing these assemblies up to the popularity which they enjoyed in Jane's time. The dances were conducted according to strict rules and usually started very early in the evening - at about six o'clock. The minuet was danced first and the ball was invariably opened by the two people of highest social position. These minuets continued for two hours when the "country" dances began which lasted until exactly eleven o'clock. Mr. Nash always insisted on stopping at this hour and even if in the middle of a dance the orchestra stopped precisely on the minute.<sup>89</sup> Card-rooms and tea-rooms were provided and it was the custom to play a few games of cards before entering the ball-room and thus, frequently the time allowed for dancing was very materially shortened. Many important episodes in both "Persuasion" and "Northanger Abbey" take place in one or other of these assemblies and it is interesting to read the account of Catherine's first appearance in the Upper Rooms with Mrs. Allen.<sup>90</sup>

"Mrs. Allen was so long in dressing, that they did not enter the ball-room till late. The season was full, the room crowded and the two ladies squeezed in as well as they could. As for Mr. Allen he repaired directly to the card-room, and left them to enjoy the mob by themselves. With

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89. See note 63 on Bath.

90. "Northanger Abbey", p. 12-16



more care for the safety of her new gown than for the comfort of her protegee, Mrs. Allen made her way through the throng of men by the door, as swiftly as the necessary caution would allow; Catherine, however, kept close at her side, and linked her arm too firmly within her friend's to be torn asunder by any common effort of a struggling assembly.<sup>91</sup> She follows with an account of their wandering further and further without ever seeming to get out of the press until they manage to reach the top of the room where Catherine is able to obtain a fairly good view of the dancers in spite of the high feathers worn by some of the ladies. After a few repeated and ineffectual wishes of Mrs. Allen that her young friend could secure a partner they squeeze out with the rest of the crowd for tea. This too, is almost denied them and they only secure seats at the end of a table near a private party one gentleman of which displays his charity by helping Catherine and her aunt to the desired refreshments. This is the only person who speaks to them during the evening and when Mr. Allen comes to take them home Catherine, vainly trying to hide a yawn declares she has had a very agreeable time, and receives his consolation that she may be able to dance next time. Her second appearance<sup>91</sup> at a dance is rewarded with success for it is at the Lower Rooms that she meets Henry Tilney, the introduction being performed by the Master of Ceremonies.

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<sup>91</sup>. "Northanger Abbey", p. 18.

Tee is again partaken of but this time with the more agreeable conversation of Mr. Filney rather than with the fears of Mrs. Allen about having her gown crushed. A later dance is still more of a triumph for she comes with a party and the evening is consequently more enjoyable for her. Besides the balls an occasional concert was given and in "Persuasion" we have the description of one of these, held under the patronage of a distinguished relative of the Elliots.

#### 5. THE CONCERT.

A few of the very ultra-exclusive society did not attend the public assemblies for as we find "the theatre or the rooms ..... were not fashionable enough for the Elliots whose evening amusements were solely in the elegant stupidity of private parties, in which they were getting more and more engaged."<sup>92</sup> They did not hesitate to attend a concert patronized by Lady Dalrymple, however, and the description of this gives the reader an opportunity of taking a view of one of these fashionable musical entertainments.<sup>93</sup> The party all collects in the octagon room before proceeding into the auditorium and then, when all are assembled, under the leadership of the titled member of the group they advance into the hall. The program is

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92. "Persuasion", p. 263

93. "Persuasion", Chapter 20.

arranged in acts, tea is always available during the intermissions and most of the audience leave the hall for these refreshments. Anne experiences the customary annoyances and irritations which are never absent from Jane Austen's social entertainments and the hero, from jealousy of an imagined rival, leaves before the last number.

We can thus see that the people who flocked to Bath paid little regard to the curative waters and with the Pump Room all morning, the drives on the Crescent in the afternoon, and the theatre or ball in the evening they made the time pass very pleasantly - and no doubt expensively, for six weeks was a long stay at Bath. The society in London, in Bath, and in the country all lead us to a question, however, which receives more consideration from the novelist than any other.

X. QUESTION OF MARRIAGE IN ENGLISH SOCIETY.

A. IMPORTANCE OF WEALTH IN MATRIMONY.

The novels are novels of simple domestic life and naturally the matter of marriage receives the major place; but the popular view of marriage<sup>94</sup> in Jane Austen's time is so extraordinary that it is almost impossible for us to realize it. The whole question was looked at from purely a financial or business viewpoint and one gasps at the almost shameless lack of even pretended sentiment. The whole aim in life of every girl was to marry but it had to be a man with a large fortune. Younger sons, whose social position entitled them to mix in the best society were discouraged by every matchmaking mother and these are practically the only men of small means or prospects who are ever allowed to intrude themselves upon the reader. It is significant that in every instance with the exception of Edmund Bertram, the heroes who wed the heroines are men of large incomes or great property or at least have the prospects natural to ~~youngest~~<sup>eldest</sup> sons and it would seem that the author was afraid of making an inexcusable blunder if she allowed any of her heroines to marry a man of no fortune even though he might have been a man of the highest integrity. Some of the most lovable girls in the novels seem to have no difficulty in falling in love with money and property at first sight and the quiet but charming Jane Bennett, it is noticeable, almost immediately gives

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94. Oliphant's "Victorian Novelists", p. 26

her affection to Mr. Bingley - a thing which Mrs. Bennett had planned and hoped for, long before the man even came into their neighborhood. That the mothers should be anxious for their daughters to marry well is natural but it is carried to such an extent as to be absolutely revolting. Mrs. Bennett's repeated desires for good marriages have been mentioned before and her great rejoicing over a possible union with Bingley more than once causes Elizabeth much mortification.

1. CONSIDERATION OF QUESTION IN "PRIDE AND PREJUDICE".

It is refreshing to find Elizabeth repeatedly refusing to allow herself to be attracted towards Darcy on account of his pride even though she knows he is worth ten thousand a year and owner of one of the finest estates in England. Mr. Darcy's conduct is in keeping with the average man of the time for in spite of his own affection for Elizabeth he cannot bring himself to admit it, simply because her family is poor and some of its members not as mannerly or as cultured as they might be. What Mr. Darcy should desire to marry wealth for it is difficult to imagine. The beautiful description of his country home given in "Pride and Prejudice" shows us the kind of estate

which we would think could satisfy any man's desire.<sup>95</sup>

The huge park, ten miles in circumference covered with woods surrounds a large stone house built on a small rise of ground and beautified by the careful development of a small stream which flows in front. The rooms are spacious and furnished in appropriate but unostentatious style and Elizabeth and her aunt and uncle are quite astonished by the grandeur and elegance of the whole establishment. We can understand the man being desirous of marrying a woman who would be a worthy mistress of such a place but his intense fear of marrying a poor girl is certainly little to his credit. His insulting method of proposing is so unusual as to cause us to marvel at the man's effrontery.<sup>96</sup>

When Elizabeth gives him the refusal which he so well merits he even denies that he is ashamed of having had the opinion that he did concerning her low social position.

"Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections? - to congratulate myself on the hope of relations, whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own."<sup>97</sup>

Surely this is an extraordinary method for a man to seek the affections of the woman he loves yet it gives us a true picture of the general attitude toward marriage in Jane's time. Mr. Darcy is even better than

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95. "Pride and Prejudice", Vol. II, p. 73-5.

96. "Pride and Prejudice", Vol. I, p. 284-5

97. "Pride and Prejudice", Vol. I, p. 290

the ordinary man for he finally regrets his ill-advised remarks and on the next occasion behaves with proper civility for which he receives the reward of Elizabeth's consent. Jane Austen has done her best here to prevent us doubting the sincerity of Elizabeth in falling in love with this wealthy young man and although from this we can judge that the author herself, was apparently not as materialistic as the average woman of the day, the events and scenes and the opinions which creep into the book show us clearly that the great majority of both men and women thought only of matrimony as a means of bettering themselves and gave practically no thought to the moral or emotional side of the matter whatever.

2. CONSIDERATION OF QUESTION IN "SENSE AND SENSIBILITY".

"Sense and Sensibility" probably pictures this popular view of marriage in a more extraordinary light than any of the others. Marianne Dashwood after she has met Willoughby is very anxious to know his condition and talents and Sir John Middleton assures her that he is well worth catching for he is due to inherit a large fortune and has a small estate of his own in Somersetshire.<sup>98</sup> Mrs. Dashwood hastens to assure him that her girls are not the kind who

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98. "Sense and Sensibility", Vol. I, p. 63-4



pursue a man for his money but nevertheless she is glad to hear that he is respectable and "not ineligible". We get an idea of the average expectations of a girl when marrying from the conversation between Elinor and her sister later on in the book. Marianne modestly declares that a competence is all that is necessary for happiness but her "competence" turns out to be a small matter of two thousand pounds a year. "A family cannot well be maintained on a smaller. I am sure I am not extravagant in my demands. A proper establishment of servants, a carriage, perhaps two, and hunters cannot be supported on less." This, we must remember, comes from a girl who lives in a cottage with her mother and sisters and cannot afford any more of the necessaries of life than are absolutely essential. It is typical however, of the ambitions of these girls, who whatever their own station in life always looked forward to a substantial improvement in their situation through marriage.

The views of John Dashwood on the matter of matrimony are doubtless the most cynical of all those expressed. A conversation with his sister relative to Colonel Brandon in which he is trying to point out the advantages of such a match is so remarkable as to deserve almost complete quotation. Two thousand a year is the amount of his fortune and Dashwood at once becomes enthusiastic over the prospects. The fact of Brandon's having any affection

for Elinor or her for him is a trifling matter which need scarcely be taken into account at all.<sup>99</sup> "A very little trouble on your side secures him. Perhaps just at present he may be undecided, the smallness of your fortune may make him hang back; his friends may all advise against it. But some of those little attentions and encouragements which ladies can so easily give will fix him in spite of himself. And there can be no reason why you should not try for him. It is not to be supposed that any prior attachment on your side; in short you know, as to an attachment of that kind, it is quite out of the question, the objections are insurmountable - you have too much sense not to see that. Colonel Brandon must be the man; and no civility shall be wanting on my part to make him pleased with you and your family." We see from this that Elinor's brother has set his mind on a marriage between her and the colonel and nothing is to be left undone to accomplish this regardless of what may be the feelings of either party to the proposed contract.

3. CONSIDERATION OF QUESTION IN "NORTHANGER ABBEY".

"Northanger Abbey" gives us further light on this subject both from the conduct of Isabella Thorpe and that of General Tilney. The former becomes engaged to Catherine's brother on condition that he shall receive the consent of

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<sup>99</sup>. "Sense and Sensibility", Vol. II, p. 50.

his parents before the engagement is considered final but as it develops later her real reason for insisting on this is to find out the income that he is to have. She imagines that it will be liberal but when the letter at length arrives she is thrown into the depths of despair. Her ardent love for James Morland vanishes into thin air when she hears that a living of only four hundred pounds yearly is to be his sole source of wealth. True, a further estate of equal value is promised as a future inheritance but the whole plan is very disappointing, to Isabella. She has little scruple in expressing her chagrin to Catherine and her veiled attempts to conceal her real opinion are so transparent as to leave no doubt of her inner thoughts. "It is not on my own account I wish for more; but I cannot bear to be the means of injuring my dear Morland, making him sit down upon an income hardly enough to find one in the common necessities of life. For myself, it is nothing; but I never think of myself." 100 Fortunately for Isabella a new candidate appears on the scene in the person of Captain Tilney who, with a large income, promptly displaces James Morland in Isabella's affections and Catherine's brother receives his dismissal.

The case of General Tilney offers a more humorous example of their excessive love of money considered from a matrimonial standpoint. The general hears from John

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100. "Northanger Abbey", p. 178

Thorpe at the theatre one evening that Catherine Morland is a young lady of great fortune and of very wealthy parents and he at once begins an elaborate campaign to secure her for his son Henry. He behaves towards her with remarkable solicitation, invites her to their house in Bath and then finally asks for her company for a few weeks at Northanger Abbey, the Tilney's country residence.<sup>101</sup> She accepts the invitation and is treated with the utmost of cordiality by Henry and his sister and has prepared herself for a few weeks of the greatest enjoyment. The fourth week of her visit comes and the general is compelled to leave on a business trip of a few days and although Henry is at home as much as possible he must give two days to his Church duties and the girls settle themselves in anticipation of rather a dull time while the brother is away. Mr. Tilney has left on his trip with many earnest regrets "that any necessity should rob him, even for an hour of Miss Morland's company" and there is then considerable surprise when he returns a day or two later at eleven o'clock at night and Catherine is informed within a very few minutes that she must leave the house the following morning. No explanation is given, she does not see Mr. Tilney and the command is delivered through Eleanor who vainly tries to offer some apology but even admits that she is not equal to the task when Catherine must leave at seven o'clock

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101. "Northanger Abbey", p. 184.

without even a servant being offered. The overwhelming astonishment of Miss Morland on hearing this is not relieved until near the end of the book when Henry, in seeking Catherine's hand gives the explanation of his father's remarkable conduct. He had met John Thorpe in town who, smarting under his own refusal by Catherine had hastened to contradict everything he had said previously of the prosperity of the Morland family. The father, he said, had acted in a mean and false way towards his son and Isabella Thorpe, having promised them a liberal income which he failed to produce, the family were "numerous, too, almost beyond example and the Fullerton estate would certainly not fall to Catherine". This is sufficient to set the general in a rage and he rushes home without delay to order Miss Morland off the premises at once. Henry is astounded at this insult offered to Catherine, makes an immediate breach with his father and goes to seek her for his wife.

#### 4. GENERAL SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS.

There is a paragraph inserted here which seems to spoil the book and rather darkens the character of Henry. "I must confess that his affection originated in nothing better than gratitude; or in other words that a persuasion

of her partiality for him had been the only cause of giving her a serious thought. It is a new circumstance in romance, I acknowledge, and dreadfully derogatory of a heroine's dignity; but if it be as new in common life, the credit of a wild imagination will at least be all my own."<sup>102</sup>

We are liable to criticise Jane Austen on this point for although she is a realist we are tempted to believe that she has fallen into the common fault of realists, that of overstating the case and neglecting the better side of life entirely. We know, however, that she wrote the book expressly to ridicule the strained and impossible romance of Mrs. Radcliffe and throughout the novel there are repeated assertions of the lack of the heroic in her characters. She takes great pains to assure us that Catherine is only an ordinary girl with plain common sense thoughts on most subjects and she would give us to understand that the great majority of men and women look upon marriage as a mere matter of convenience. Her personal views on the subject were probably otherwise for there is usually a great deal of affection on the part of her heroines but she is endeavoring to picture the times as they were and it is in this fact that we must look for vindication of her statements in the paragraph under discussion. The social conditions, as we find them from all her books were exactly of a kind to justify these statements. Money and

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<sup>102</sup>. "Northanger Abbey", p. 334

matrimony were inseparably connected and the girl who encouraged a man without property and income was such a rarity that they seldom appear in the novels at all. Marriages were arranged on incredibly short notice as we find in the case of Mr. Collins who has only two weeks in which to find a wife and who, on Elizabeth's refusal of him was able to return in a few hours with the announcement of his engagement to Miss Lucas. We remember also Isabella Thorpe's consternation at having to wait for two and a half years and Mr. Elton in "Emma" is able to secure a wife within a very few weeks after Emma has refused to accept the honor he wished to confer upon her.<sup>103</sup> All these incidents show us clearly that the young people of Jane's time looked for matrimony as a step in advancement of their worldly prosperity. They did not scruple to show this design, in some cases even when proposing and as soon as a man or woman as the case might be, was found with suitable manners and character and a good fortune there was no reason to delay the nuptials. The twentieth century reader stands aghast at this state of affairs for although money is still frequently an object in matrimony the persons concerned invariably make at least a strong pretence of feeling affection. In Jane's time, however, they viewed matters differently and as a realist she was compelled to picture these conditions exactly as she saw them. Romance was vir-

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103. "Emma", p. 190

tually dead and Jane Austen takes up her pen to tell us, not what the people should have been, but what they actually were, and we must not criticise the novelist if her characters do not measure up to our own standard of ideals and our own opinion as to what is right.



II. CONCLUSION: JANE AUSTEN'S PORTRAYAL OF  
ENGLISH LIFE.

This discussion of English Life in Jane Austen's time furnishes us with a picture of the general social conditions of the country at the beginning of the last century. Girls, we have found, were educated primarily for the drawing room and trained in the art of captivating wealthy husbands while the men, nearly all of whom had large fortunes spent almost their entire time in society with only occasional hunting or fishing excursions on their own estates. A few of the younger sons entered professions such as the navy where good fortunes were frequently made, or more often the Church, provided they were able to secure livings with large incomes. Society in the country was kept alive as much as possible by parties, dances or drives but as many as could do so went to either London or Bath to enjoy the winter in the much more brilliant and fashionable social life of those centres. The parties and balls in the metropolis were at their height during the great Napoleonic conflict and contemporary historical events apparently made little impression on this English society, the novels of Jane Austen containing no references whatever to these epoch making wars. Marriage was treated with the utmost of cynicism and money and property were the chief questions which arose when a man and woman contemplated settling in life. All the principal men of Jane Austen's works have large fortunes and great estates and the author usually makes them the reward of some

high-minded and deserving young woman. The older married women with grown up daughters are invariably presented as foolish and ridiculous individuals without character or taste and the men of the novels are incomparably of a higher degree of intelligence than the women. Jane Austen employs a peculiar ironical style which frequently exaggerates but nevertheless by the wealth of detail and the poignancy of her observations<sup>104</sup> she has given us a more complete and illuminating picture of the life of her time than any other author in English Literature.

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104. Leonard's "The Pageant of English Prose".  
p. 691, Macaulay: "Shakespeare has no equal nor second. But among the writers who have approached nearest to the manner of the great master we have no hesitation in placing Jane Austen."

# JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS

With Dates of Publication.

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| "Sense and Sensibility" . . . . . | 1811 |
| "Pride and Prejudice" . . . . .   | 1813 |
| "Mansfield Park" . . . . .        | 1814 |
| "Emma" . . . . .                  | 1816 |
| "Northanger Abbey" . . . . .      | 1818 |
| "Persuasion" . . . . .            | 1818 |

EDITIONS OF JANE AUSTEN'S WORKS.

I. Macmillan Illustrated Standard Novels.

Illustrated by Hugh Thompson.

Introduction by Austin Dobson.

New York: The Macmillan Co.

II. Everyman Series.

Introduction by F. B. Johnson.

London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd.

III. Winchester Edition.

"Pride and Prejudice", "Sense and Sensibility", "Mansfield Park", and "Emma" - each in two volumes.

"Northanger Abbey" and "Persuasion" - each in one volume.

"Lady Susan, the Watsons and Letters" - in one volume.

"Letters" - continued from first volume.

Edinburgh: John Grant.

IV. Other Editions.

London: Bentley and Sons.

Boston: Little, Brown and Co.

N. B. All references in footnotes are to Winchester Edition.

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Boston: Little Brown & Co.

Bonnell, H. H.:

"Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Jane Austen -  
Studies in Their Works."

New York: Longman's Green & Co.

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