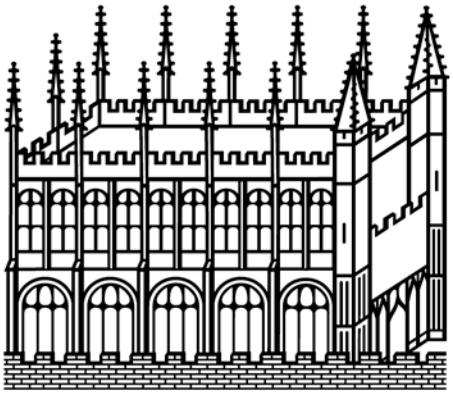


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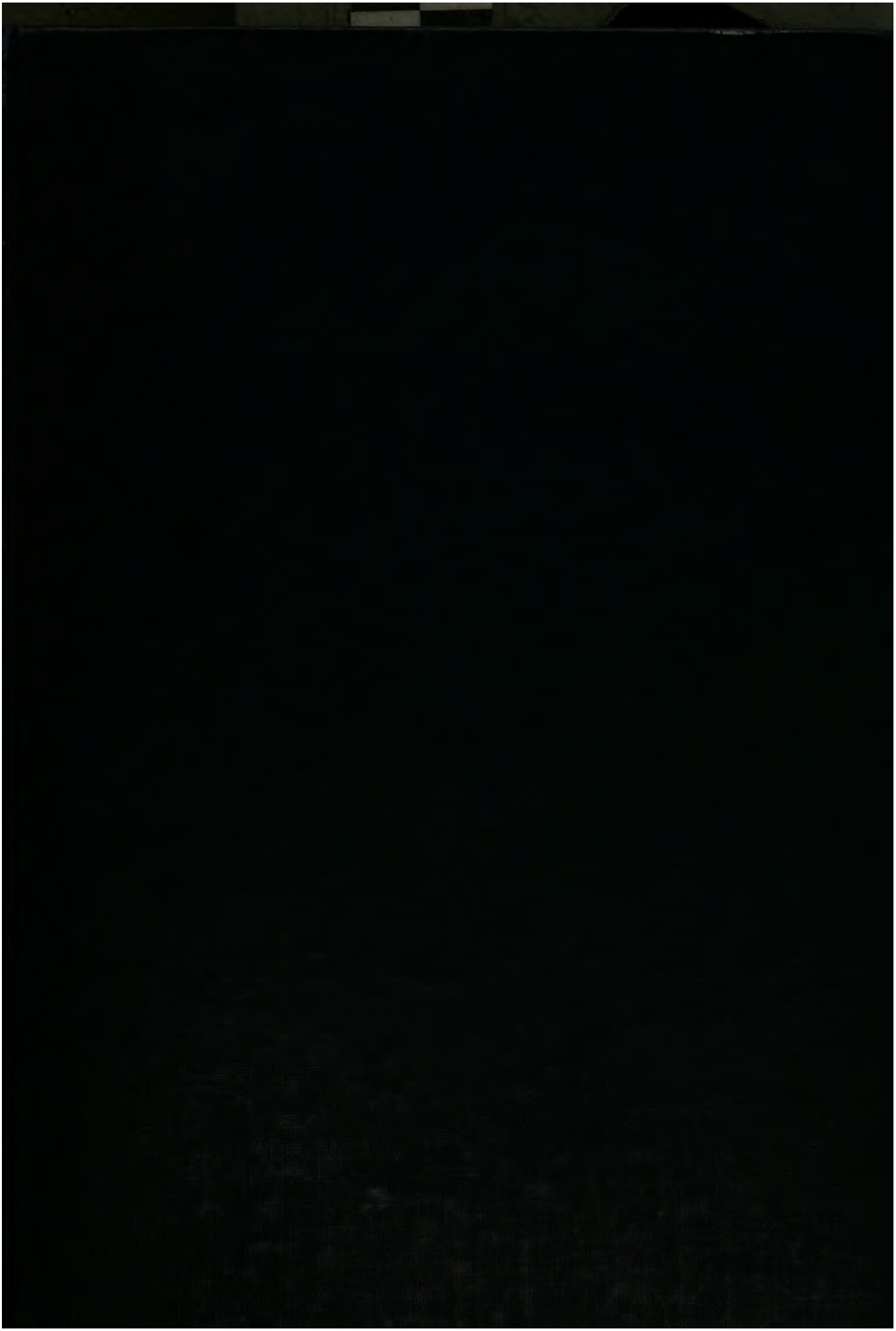
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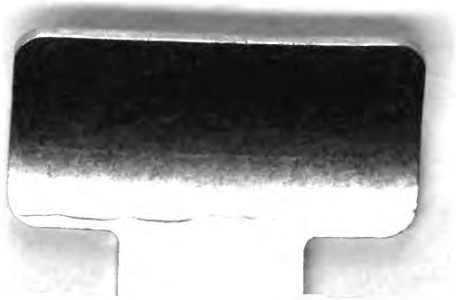
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INTRODUCTIONS TO

JANE AUSTEN

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JANE AUSTEN

By

JOHN BAILEY

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'The Continuity of Letters'

'Poets and Poetry'

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PREFACE

I CONTRIBUTED, in 1927, introductions to the Georgian Edition of Jane Austen. The present volume is a reprint, with some new matter, of what appeared in that edition. There were seven original introductions dealing with *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Persuasion*, and *Lady Susan* with *The Watsons*. It has been thought well, in reprinting them, to add a short study of Jane Austen's Letters and give with it the main facts of her uneventful life. With this the present volume opens. And to render it complete, the final introduction to *Lady Susan* and *The Watsons* has been enlarged to take in *Love and Friendship* and *Sanditon*, which were not included in the Georgian Edition.

I will only add that, in the new matter as in the old, my object has been not to make discoveries—I doubt if there are any to make—still less to use Jane as an excuse for the display of things so unlike her as learning and research about sources and parallels; but simply to share with others my enjoyment of the most enjoyable of authors. After

all, as I perhaps rashly remind myself, in this rare and happy field of human experience, it is by its own fault if sharing does not increase the store which each sharer already possessed.

J. B.

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I

JANE AUSTEN'S LIFE AND HER LETTERS

JANE AUSTEN'S novels are, I suppose, much the quietest, the least dependent on tragic accidents or violent emotions, of all in the great novels of the world. And her life was as quiet as her work. She got a great deal of amusement and interest out of it, as we get out of her books; but what she got, like what we get, comes from herself, not from any external adventures or circumstances. The difference is that in the one case she has passed it on to us, and in the other she has not. Whether she could have written an autobiography is very doubtful; anyhow she has not. So that what was done for the pleasant and peaceful lives of Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse has not been done for the equally pleasant and peaceful life of Jane Austen.

Yet of course when, fifty or sixty years ago, she began to take admitted rank as an English classic, it was inevitable that a life of her should be written. And so there appeared in 1870 her nephew Edward Austen-Leigh's *Memoir of Jane Austen*. Other biographical and personal books have

followed, especially Lord Brabourne's *Letters of Jane Austen* in 1884. And the whole story has been gathered together, perhaps finally, by two more Austen-Leighs, a son and grandson of the writer of the Memoir, in *Jane Austen. Her Life and Letters. A Family Record.* But it all comes to very little. The truth is, though these last authors do not like one to say so, that Jane's life was very uneventful: as unexciting, and indeed, except for her writings, unimportant, as it was pleasant to herself and her little world. Nothing of interest ever happened to her; and she did nothing of interest except the writing of her books.

This being so, it is obvious that the novels give one much more chance, if one can take it, of finding something of interest to say than is provided by the life. Still it has seemed right in reprinting these Prefaces which deal only with the novels, to add some preliminary pages about their authoress: for no one can get such pleasure, as most of us get, out of her creations, without wishing to know something of herself; when she lived and where, how she spent her life and with whom, and in what occupations.

Let us take the bare facts first. She was born on 16 December 1775 at Steventon Rectory, about seven miles from Basingstoke. Her father was the

Rev. George Austen, and her mother Cassandra, daughter of the Rev. Thomas Leigh. Jane was the seventh of eight children, of whom six were sons. Most of her letters are addressed to her only and very intimate sister Cassandra, who, like Jane, died unmarried. Jane was in the habit of writing stories when a child, and by the time she was twenty-one had begun *First Impressions*, which was later to become *Pride and Prejudice*. In 1801 her family left Steventon and went to live at Bath, where she had already been for short stays in 1797 and 1799. In or about 1801 she is supposed to have had a love-affair, and in 1802 she received an offer of marriage. In 1804 she visited Lyme, which is, after Bath, the place readers of her novels have most cause to remember. In 1805 her father died, and the next year his family left Bath and, after some wanderings, settled at Southampton in 1806. There they stayed till 1809 when they moved to Chawton, where Jane's brother Edward, afterwards Edward Knight, had offered his mother a house. He lived chiefly at Godmersham in Kent, but he owned a large house at Chawton which he occasionally visited. Chawton is in Hampshire, about a mile from Alton; and the house to which Mrs. Austen now moved with her two daughters and their friend Martha Lloyd,

who later on married their brother Francis, was, and is, at the spot in the middle of that village where the two roads from Gosport and Winchester meet on their way to London. Here was Jane's home for the rest of her short life. Hitherto her attempts at writing had had no success. She had sold *Northanger Abbey*, then called *Susan*, in 1803, but the buying publisher had not published it and had refused to do so when she pressed him in 1809. She was then at Southampton, and this discouragement may help to account for the fact, or what seems to be the fact, that she did no writing there. At Chawton, however, she began again, and was at last rewarded with success. *Sense and Sensibility* was in a printer's hands by April 1811, and was advertised for sale in October. The publisher was one Egerton, of 'the Military Library, Whitehall'. Apparently the book was printed at Jane Austen's risk as she put by a sum to provide for the loss she expected. But every copy was sold by July 1813, and the happy authoress had made a profit of £140. Before then —in January of that year—*Pride and Prejudice* had also appeared, and Jane's success was assured. This time Mr. Egerton had the courage to buy the manuscript; and he probably did very well, for the price he gave was £110. There was a

second edition of *Sense and Sensibility* in September 1813, *Mansfield Park* was published in May 1814, *Emma* in December 1815. Before that, *Persuasion* had been begun. It was finished during 1816 but not published till after Jane's death.

Her health seems to have begun to show signs of failing in the autumn of 1815, or at least early in 1816. But no serious alarm could be felt about a person who enjoyed the good spirits of a constitutional optimist, and, besides, gave such good proof of being very much alive as was provided by the writing of *Persuasion*. She even began a new novel, part of which we may now read as *Sanditon*, in January 1817, and worked at it for seven weeks. But by that time she was becoming an invalid, and even beginning to recognize herself as driven to submit to being ill, which she called 'a dangerous indulgence at my time of life'. In March she made her will, and about that time one of her nieces who visited her found her very much altered and unable to talk much. On 24 May she was moved to Winchester for better medical advice; and though she herself and others had some hope at first, it soon ceased, and she gradually got weaker till she died on 18 July. She is buried in Winchester Cathedral.

That is the simple story. There are only forty-

one years in it and no events of importance except the writing and publishing of the novels. And it would not be going much too far to say that it is the novels and not the Memoir or even her Letters that give us our best notion of Jane herself and what she was like. She was not in the habit of 'giving herself away' much at any time; indeed, to do so hardly belonged to her conception of a well-bred woman: but it is scarcely a paradox to say that she does that quite as much in her books as in her Letters. It is from *Persuasion*, and not from any letter, that we discover how tender she could be, how deeply she could enter into sorrow and feel for it. It is *Pride and Prejudice* and no letter that shows us the full powers of her brain, the brilliance of her wit, the exact felicity of her writing. In fact it must be confessed that coming from a woman so observant and so clever the letters are something of a disappointment. They are very pleasant reading, of course: she was incapable of writing anything that was not. But one might have expected beforehand that they would have ranked with the great letters of the world. That they certainly do not. Perhaps the two arts differ more than one would at first expect. People have sometimes suggested—I have myself been one of them—that Cowper, who has such a charming

humour, and tells his little stories so deliciously, might have written a novel not unlike those of Jane Austen. But that is probably a delusion. The business of a letter-writer is with himself; that of a novelist is with other people. The garrulous egotism which is so fatal in a novel is the very salt and savour of a letter. There are some famous letters of Madame de Sévigné which talk of great events and great personages, but her real subjects are her daughter and herself. Cowper will occasionally talk about public affairs, but it is the Unwins and Lady Hesketh, Olney and Weston Underwood, that show him at his best. Edward FitzGerald's only subjects are a few friends, a few books, nature, and himself. Even Horace Walpole, whose letters are the delight and resource of the student of political history, leaves us much more intimately acquainted with himself than with anybody else.

It will be said, perhaps, that Jane Austen's letters are egotistical enough; for their only subject is her own small doings, and those of her relations and friends. That is true. But we can all write letters about our own affairs without writing what will interest anybody a hundred years after we are dead. Jane's letters do interest people to-day. But that is not because she does much more in

them than many of us could do: it is simply because she is herself; that is to say, what we shall never be, a person about whom posterity wants to know all it can. The interest of her letters comes not, or not very much, of what she writes, but simply of her being the writer. The truth is that they are undesirably full of what the French call *faits divers*. A single letter often mentions, and no more than mentions, twenty people and fifty incidents, and these promiscuous and too numerous mouthfuls leave us at the end unfed and with a sense of indigestion.

Her nieces Fanny Knight and Anna Lefroy are perhaps the only people of whom she makes us feel that we know even a very small part of what we know of Lady Hesketh and Fanny Kemble; and of herself we are left knowing nothing at all compared with what we know of FitzGerald or Cowper. It is true that the most intimate of her letters no longer exist. Her sister Cassandra, whom she loved more than any one else in the world, unfortunately thought it right to destroy many of the letters she had had from Jane as too private to be seen by any eye but her own. They would no doubt have added to our knowledge; but neither the existing letters to Cassandra, nor even the really more intimate and amusing letters

to the nieces, suggest that she would ever have put on paper destined for the postman's hands the sort of free and unconscious self-revelation which we should have liked to have.

It must be confessed, then, that the letters are not among the few that can stand alone. But if they could not have done much to interest us in a Jane Austen whom we did not know, they are able at any rate to come to meet us, who are already lovers of the Jane of the novels, and to answer at least a few of the questions we are eager to ask. What we find in them does not altogether disappoint us, for the simple reason which Mr. Bradley has given: 'the Jane Austen who wrote the novels is in them.' And some things about her are in them which could not be in the novels, where she commonly speaks through her creations and is to some extent limited by their circumstances. Many novelists have used their books to write concealed autobiographies. But that was not Jane's way. The novels give us the mind and temper, the humour and character, which we find again in less concentrated and arresting form, in the letters. But the novels are neither recollections of her experiences, nor portraits of her acquaintances, nor confessions of her secret joys or sorrows. So perfect an artist hardly needed to deny that her

characters were drawn from people she had known: that is not the way novels that are to live can be written; and she had the right to say that she was too proud of the men in her books 'to admit that they were only Mr. A., or Colonel B.': Mr. A. and Colonel B. no doubt served her purpose, but what they served was something much subtler and finer, or again much more universally human, than themselves. In the letters, on the other hand, we have glimpses of these and their like, of both sexes, as nature made them and before art had taken them in hand, or done more than just touch them. We see the little social world in which Jane lived, the world of the clergy and the smaller squires, with here and there a breath of pure aristocracy, and we see her looking at it, recording its doings, often in quite commonplace fashion, sometimes in a manner which betrays the satirist and novelist at work underneath the correspondent of Cassandra Austen or Fanny Knight. We feel that she is reaching out her hand to her proper raw material when she writes: 'Miss Payne told us a great deal about her friend Lady Cath. Brecknell, who is most happily married, and Mr. Brecknell is very religious and has got black whiskers.' 'I am very sorry for Mary but I have some comfort in there being two curates now lodging in Bookham,

beside their own Mr. Waineford from Dorking, so that I think she must fall in love with one or the other.' Things of this sort are just specimens of Jane's *faits divers* of which I spoke just now: the reader knows nothing of Mr. Waineford or the curates, and is not likely to remember who Mary was without the help of a note; but he finds Jane in it all, and forgives her for his finding nothing else. It is she that matters, and not the curates; nor, again, a young man who stayed in a house with her, who 'seems a very harmless sort of young man, nothing to like or dislike in him—goes out shooting or hunting with the two others all the morning, and plays at whist and makes queer faces in the evening'. If she had cared or known how to make these people come alive to us we should have welcomed it; but it is enough that in them she comes alive to us herself. Here is a longer extract, a picture of Bath, which in her letters, as in her novels, generally shows the satirist very much awake:

'In the evening I hope you honoured my toilette and ball with a thought: I dressed myself as well as I could and had all my finery much admired at home. By nine o'clock my uncle, aunt, and I entered the rooms and linked Miss Winstone on to us. Before tea it was rather a dull affair: but then the before tea did not last long, for there was only

one dance, danced by four couple. Think of four couple, surrounded by about an hundred people, dancing in the Upper Rooms at Bath.

'After tea we *cheered up*; the breaking up of private parties sent some scores more to the ball, and though it was shockingly and inhumanly thin for this place, there were people enough I suppose, to have made five or six very pretty Basingstoke assemblies.

'I then got Mr. Evelyn to talk to, and Miss T. to look at: and I am proud to say that though repeatedly assured that another in the same party was the *She*, I fixed upon the right one from the first. A resemblance to Mrs. L. was my guide. She is not so pretty as I expected: her face has the same defect of baldness as her sister's, and her features not so handsome: she was highly rouged, and looked rather quietly and contentedly silly than anything else.

'Mrs. B. and two young women were of the same party, except when Mrs. B. thought herself obliged to leave them to run round the room after her drunken husband. This avoidance, and her pursuit, with the probable intoxication of both, was an amusing scene.'

There we get the manners of the time, depicted, much as we know them from other sources, by one who took them very much as she found them, or at any rate felt no call to sit in moral judgement upon them. It is as when, in another letter, she writes to Cassandra: what, we may be sure, none of her Victorian nieces or great-nieces would have

written: 'I see nothing to be glad of, unless I make it a matter of joy that Mrs. Wylmot has another son and that Lord Lucan has taken a mistress, both of which events are of course joyful to the actors.' Yet it is worth noting, as one of the proofs of her tact of artistry, that, though her world might be full of drunkenness and mistresses, yet her novels have little or nothing to say of either. She knew her business, and such things were no part of it. There was no room for them and their big crudities on what she herself modestly called 'the little bit (two inches wide) of ivory on which I work with so fine a brush as produces little effect after much labour'. Even in the letters she seldom goes outside the small social game which she knew was very far from being the whole drama of life, but into which she had the gift to put so much of life that most of those who attempt a great deal more seem in the end to have actually given us much less. As in the novels, so in the letters: Napoleon is never mentioned and the war scarcely ever, and then chiefly as it bore on the prospects of her naval brothers. She had a near relation guillotined but she never mentions the French Revolution. She was herself very near being once the inmate of a prison when her father offered her companionship to an aunt who had been arrested on an

absurd charge of theft and, having been committed to Ilchester prison in August, did not get out till the following March, when she was tried and acquitted at the Taunton Assizes. But crime and criminals play no more part in Jane's letters than in her books. She once accompanied her brother Edward when he inspected a gaol, and says that she 'went through all the feelings which people must go through, I think, in visiting such a building'; but that is all she says. Like every born artist she had an instinctive consciousness of what it was that her pen was meant to do; and that, and that alone, she did.

If there ever was much autobiographical or confessional matter in the letters (which seems to me, at any rate, unlikely) it was contained in the letters destroyed by Cassandra. In those which remain, love affairs, engagements, and marriages are among the most frequent topics as they are the pivot on which the plots of all the novels turn. But of her own affairs of the heart, if she really had any, they tell us nothing. Marriage was in her view the only natural goal of a woman's life: she considered it 'a great improver' of women, independent of the fact that, as she says in another letter, 'Single women have a dreadful propensity for being poor.' But for herself there

is no sign that either the prospect of poverty, quite real in her case, or the forfeiture of matrimonial improvement, affected her very deeply. We know that she once, when on a visit, accepted a proposal of marriage, but repented very decidedly within a few hours, returned at once to her brother's house close by, and insisted, in spite of the inconvenience she caused him, on his immediately taking her home to Bath, apparently in order that she might be out of any danger of meeting the lover again. Her niece says that he had every advantage of character, connexions, income, and position in life, 'everything in fact except the subtle power of touching her heart'. That was in 1802. Three or four years earlier there was a certain Mr. Blackall who made some approaches, but got little encouragement from Jane, who says of a letter of his, written perhaps to be shown to her, and expressing hopes of nearer acquaintance:

'There is less love and more sense in it than sometimes appeared before, and I am very well satisfied. It will all go on exceedingly well, and decline away in a very reasonable manner. There seems to be no likelihood of his coming into Hampshire this Christmas and it is therefore most probable that our indifference will soon be mutual, unless his regard, which appeared to spring from knowing nothing of me at first, is best supported by never seeing me.'

Fourteen years afterwards the gentleman married another lady; and, though she had evidently never cared for him, there is perhaps a spice of *spretae injuria formae* under the humour of her comment. A woman may not want a man for herself, but it by no means follows that she will look with friendly eyes on another woman who takes the place she might herself have had. Here is Jane:

'I should very much like to know what sort of a woman she is. He was a piece of perfection—noisy perfection—himself, which I always recollect with regard. . . . I could wish Miss Lewis to be of a silent turn and rather ignorant, but naturally intelligent and wishing to learn, fond of cold veal pies, green tea in the afternoon, and a green window-blind at night.'

There was also a flirtation with Tom Lefroy, the nephew of her friend Mrs. Lefroy, and her family seems to have believed that he rather disappointed her by not proposing. But she always writes of him in a vein of chaff—'I rather expect to receive an offer from my friend in the course of the evening. I shall refuse him, however, unless he promises to give away his white coat'; and the owner of the white coat, who lived to be ninety, used to say that 'he had been in love with Jane Austen, but it was a boy's love'.

The only serious feeling of that sort which she

seems ever to have entertained was connected, according to the account given by Cassandra to her niece Caroline, with a man whom she only saw during some sea-side visit. He was much attracted by her and she by him, and further meetings were planned; but he died very soon afterwards. These little stories give, so far as we know, the whole of the small part played in Jane's life by the matrimonial and love-making interests which are everything in the plots of all her novels. Her material for the novels lay in what she saw going on all round her rather than in her own personal experiences, with one exception, perhaps. It may not be without significance that in the great scene at the end of *Persuasion* she makes Anne Elliot lay such stress on the faithfulness of a woman's love even after the man whom she has loved is dead. She admits that a man's love is capable of every devotion 'while the woman you love lives, and lives for you. All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one: you need not covet it), is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone,' that is, one cannot but fancy, nearer to a confession of the deepest and most recent feelings of Jane's heart than anything to be found in her letters. They, like all but this and a few other passages in the

novels, are in a lighter vein. She certainly never wore her heart on her sleeve. I do not even believe that it came very easily into any kind of action. The letters certainly do not exhibit a nature of ready emotions or facile sympathy. I expect it took big things, and generally things that could not be talked about, to move her much. In other matters she affects, perhaps feels, a humorous detachment which is not afraid of appearing rather heartless. She will say, for instance, such things as this of some battle (the only one she ever alludes to): 'how horrible it is to have so many people killed! And what a blessing that one cares for none of them!' Her great-nephew biographers assert that behind this ironical reserve there were the most ardent emotions and affections. Perhaps there were, but I doubt whether they embraced more than a very small circle. One of her nieces goes further, denying that she looked out for other people's foibles, and adding 'I do not suppose she ever in her life said a sharp thing'. There, to speak frankly, is something which no reader of either the novels or the letters will find it easy to believe. That sharply observant eye, that quick and brilliant tongue, must have refused to be denied their natural exercise. Malice indeed she never shows: but few people have got more

pleasure out of the follies of her acquaintances; and that pleasure she has redoubled by her art and passed on to all who choose to enjoy it.

Altogether the picture we get of her from the letters is that of a young woman of no gifts or qualities that would strike her casual acquaintance as very remarkable: a born writer who began writing as a child but carefully concealed the fact from all but one or two of her very nearest relations: a brilliant and witty talker again, in the family circle, but not one who was inclined to make herself conspicuous elsewhere in that or any other way: a lover of walking and of nature which gave her so much delight that she once said, in language of an enthusiasm very rare in her cool and critical mouth, that she thought the sight of the beauties of nature must form one of the joys of heaven: no enthusiast about music, as she frequently tells us: a lover and reader of novels and poetry. Of the poets we get mentions of Milton, Cowper, Scott, Byron, and Crabbe, whose humour, when genial, was not unlike hers, which was perhaps the reason why she said she would marry him if he asked her, adding when she heard of the death of Mrs. Crabbe, of whose existence she had not been aware: 'I have only just been making out from one

of his prefaces that he probably was married. It is almost ridiculous. Poor woman! I will comfort *him* as well as I can, but I do not undertake to be good to her children. She had better not leave any.' We hear of 'my dear Dr. Johnson' and 'dear Mr. Piozzi', and we find her buying Boswell. Many novelists, remembered or unremembered, are mentioned: especially Richardson, and though she once wrote to her novel-writing niece, 'I have made up my mind to like no novels really but Miss Edgeworth's, yours and my own', yet in the letters, as in *Northanger Abbey*, she shows herself jealous for her own art, so that she is by no means pleased with a certain Mrs. Martin who gave out as the attraction of her circulating library that it did not consist only of novels, but of every kind of literature. 'She might have spared this pretension to *our* family who are great novel-readers and not ashamed of being so: but it was necessary, I suppose, to the self-consequence of half her subscribers.'

Yet though she loved reading, she had nothing in her either of the bibliophile or of the scholar. One is surprised to hear that when the family left Steventon she sold her books, which cannot have brought her very much. And no novels in the world are more independent than hers of the knowledge that is found in books. She neither

imitates nor quotes: all is herself. And when she declined the absurd suggestion of the Regent's ridiculous librarian who desired her to write a novel with a learned clergyman, in fact himself, as its hero, she was perfectly justified in ending her letter by 'boasting' herself to be 'with all possible vanity, the most unlearned and uninformed female who ever dared to be an authoress'.

That then is Jane Austen: the exact opposite of a highly educated, obviously serious or intellectual woman: yet, beyond all other women who have attempted to write English (and all but a few men) a creator and an artist, the smallness of whose scale of operations cannot alter the perfection of her achievement. Both her modesty and her humour could have shied at the word perfection. That was a thing, she would have said, with which she had nothing to do: she would have laughed it away as she laughed at the gentleman who wanted her to give her heroines fewer faults or none at all.

'Do not oblige him', she says, 'to read any more. . . . He and I should not in the least agree in our ideas of novels and heroines. Pictures of perfection, as you know, make me sick and wicked: but there is some very good sense in what he says, and I particularly respect him for wishing to think well of all young ladies: it shows an amiable and a delicate mind.'

But that, of course, was because such pictures are false, since perfect men and women do not in fact exist on this earth. But art is not a whole, as character is: it is a special activity; indeed any one branch apart is the specialism of a specialism. So, for ourselves, we need not let Jane laugh us out of the word perfection. There are spheres of art which she never attempted and would only have failed in if she had. But in her tiny field it is the truth and not an exaggeration to say that she and her art are perfect. The heights and depths of life she did not, and could not, touch. But of much that is to be seen by those who walk its middle paths of every day, no one has ever been a more acute observer, and no one has so well known how to catch hold of it, to select from it, and at last to touch it to that new and indestructible life which belongs to a perfect work of art.

II

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

THE extraordinary spread of the cult of Jane Austen would have surprised nobody more than herself. What it has been can be crystallized in a single word. Fifty years ago she was Miss Austen. To-day she is always Jane. Nothing could be further from her expectations, or even her dreams, than that, a hundred years after her death, she would be universally admitted to be an English classic. She wrote her novels for the best of all reasons: the thing was in her and had to come out. She must have been aware that she had far more than most people of the gifts of observation and humour which are a chief part of a novelist's equipment: very probably she did not know till she had tried—and perhaps only half knew after she had tried—that she also possessed an abundance of those other indispensables for the novelist who is to live, the art of construction and the power of putting on paper exactly what she saw and felt and thought. But she soon found that she enjoyed writing, and, though she at first kept her writings to herself, published them anonymously and certainly would not have used any big words about

them, what she enjoyed was, of course, the artist's joy, the joy of creation. The way of the novelist must have been made a little more natural, or less unnatural, to her, as well as a little smoother, by the success of one or two other women who had written novels, especially of course Fanny Burney. And, of course, she in part used the path which had been prepared for her. But though she might never have thought of writing novels at all if Dr. Johnson's Fanny had not led the way, yet she is no echo or imitator of any one. Her books are, like all good literature, a new thing made out of very old ingredients. She saw life as it was around her in her small world: narrow and petty and silly and absurd: amusing and surprising and exciting and moving: full of folly and meanness and selfishness, full of simplicity and kindness and love; and she drew the picture of it to please herself, with the contemporary manners and customs which she knew so well and was so conscious of knowing; and also with something which she was much less conscious of knowing, the eternal and universal humanity which belongs no more to her England of the Regency than to the Alexandria of Theocritus, the Rome of Horace, or the Paris of Molière. So she enjoys herself, finds herself, expresses herself. Not knowing what she is doing, or only

a little of it, in those escapes to her writing-desk which she kept as unnoticed as she could, she is all the while making the small parlour of the small house in the obscure village the birthplace of masterpieces. The word would have frightened her: with masterpieces or their makers she never dreamt of having anything to do. She did not set out to rival or imitate *Clarissa* or *Evelina* or anything else. She wrote for her relations, who were nearly all her world and to whom she sometimes read her chapters aloud; and still more of course for herself: writing well, because she could write well and liked it, and all the better because she did not know how well she wrote; certainly not choosing this famous style rather than that, or dreaming of being ranked with one famous writer rather than with another. She would have laughed, or blushed, or both, at anything said of so great a man as Burke being applied to her. Yet there is a saying of Johnson's about Burke which is far truer of her than of him. When there was talk of ancient orators and Burke's possible debt to them Johnson said: 'I don't believe it, Sir. He is neither like Cicero nor like Demosthenes nor like any one else but *speaks as well as he can*.' Johnson did not altogether mean that for praise. But when genius speaks or writes its own things 'as well as it can',

the result, whether it is *American Taxation* or *Pride and Prejudice*, is a work which posterity will not allow to die.

Most editions of the novels begin, like the present one, with *Sense and Sensibility*. This is the usual and right order, for it was the first to be published. But it is not certain that it was the first to be written. There were first drafts both of it and of *Pride and Prejudice*, and that of *Pride and Prejudice* was written in 1796 and 1797 and called *First Impressions*, while the first draft of *Sense and Sensibility*, called *Elinor and Marianne*, and composed, in part or in whole, in the eighteenth-century fashion of a series of letters, was written still earlier. But of the novel in that form we know nothing. Jane Austen began to re-write it as *Sense and Sensibility* as soon as she had finished *First Impressions*. If therefore *Pride and Prejudice* is *First Impressions* with little change except the title, that, and not *Sense and Sensibility*, is the earliest written of the novels we possess. But we cannot answer that question, as *First Impressions* no longer exists. Nor is the answer to it of much importance. There is no doubt that *Pride and Prejudice* is at once more mature in conception and more brilliant in execution than *Sense and Sensibility*. It is therefore commonly thought that

First Impressions must have been largely re-written, probably some years later than the composition of *Sense and Sensibility*. Indeed, Mr. R. W. Chapman considers that Sir Frank Mackinnon has shown that the dates of the story are taken from calendars of the years 1811 and 1812. The proof is perhaps not so complete as Mr. Chapman thinks, but it includes some strong points. And if his conclusion is correct, *Sense and Sensibility*, which was published in 1811, was already in the hands of its readers before *Pride and Prejudice*, as we know it, was even written.

No one has ever called *Sense and Sensibility* the best of the novels, and good judges have thought it the weakest of all. Such comparisons are inevitable and will always be made. Lovers of Scott will always enjoy disputing among themselves whether it is *The Heart of Midlothian* or *The Antiquary* or *Rob Roy* which is his very best; lovers of Hardy will discuss the rivalry, perhaps, of *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Return of the Native*; and 'Janeites' will delight in disagreeing about their differing preferences among the inimitable six. But a more important thing than these pleasant diversions is the fact that all the six, including this earliest of them, are a new thing, a thing inimitable and unique. At once, in the first

chapters of *Sense and Sensibility*, Jane Austen is herself; something which never was before, something which no one has ever succeeded in being again. The comedy of the second chapter, like that of the still finer first and second chapters of *Pride and Prejudice*, is a thing of its own kind which, in that kind, has never been equalled before its own day or since. It is a little world that Jane lives in; but she knows every inch of it and can get it all into her picture. Edward FitzGerald said of her, 'she never goes out of the parlour'. But he adds, justly as well as characteristically, 'she is quite capital in a circle I have found quite unendurable to walk in'.

In art—and is it very different in life?—the secret of success lies in at once using all our powers and accepting all our limitations. Outside her limitations Jane Austen only rarely tries to go. And here in this first book she at once begins to exercise all her powers. It is just because she keeps so modestly to her own small field that she is able at once to exhibit so much of her peculiar genius. Has any one ever walked that difficult road of the novelist either more surely, or more lightly and delicately, than she? As soon as we have read the second chapter of *Sense and Sensibility* we know that we are in the hands of one of those rare artists

who know perfectly where to go for the exact material which suits them, and who have in them that secret magic of creation which, out of the dull insignificance and confusion of everyday things, can evoke the definite form and order, the interest, the distinction, by which art gives its immortality to life.

I will not anticipate the story which the reader has before him. It will be enough to say a word about one or two of the characters. Everything in the novel turns on the two sisters, Elinor who is Sense, and Marianne who is Sensibility. The story is that of their two love-affairs. Of course the sensible Elinor loves a man who deserves her love, and of course the romantic Marianne loves a man who does not. Some people have complained—Mr. Warre Cornish, for instance, in his book in the *English Men of Letters* Series—that Marianne ought to have died for love instead of marrying Colonel Brandon and his flannel waistcoat. And others have complained that Colonel Brandon and Edward Ferrars, and indeed Elinor herself, are far too virtuous and sensible to play their part in a novel satisfactorily. There may be something to be said for such criticisms in the mouths of certain people. But I do not think anything can be said for them when they come from admirers of Jane

Austen who accept her view of life and art. We are accustomed to-day to novels which invite our chief sympathies for characters who scorn anything which calls itself virtue and are as far as possible removed from being sensible people. Such novels may have their interest and power. But it is not the interest which Jane Austen ever aimed at arousing. She definitely, and very strongly, preferred good people to bad, and sensible people to fools. If a reader does not share these preferences, let him keep to the great Russians; or, if they are above him, to the western writers who inherit or imitate their intellectual and moral incoherence without being able to imitate their imaginative power. Jane Austen he must leave alone; he can never get hold of more than half of her, if so much. Her wit, her brilliance, the acuteness of her mind, the fineness of her art, he may enjoy; but her sympathies and her character, her heart and will, he will never understand. She would willingly herself have married either Colonel Brandon or Edward; and she intends us not only to respect them, but to like them, and understand their being loved. And the complete Janeite finds no difficulty in doing so. And as to Marianne and her dying for love, that is a complete misunderstanding of the conception of the novel. The whole book is

a protest against the 'romantic' fashions then coming in. It laughs at the preference of tumble-down cottages to comfortable houses, at the taste for the new landscapes which put 'blasted and crooked' trees in the place of tall and healthy ones, and at such notions as that first loves were fatal and final, and second marriages unpardonable. The conversion of Marianne from her follies is an essential part of its business, and to let her die of love would have been to make her just the 'romantic' figure calculated to arouse the sentimentalism which it was the very object of the novel to ridicule. Later on, at the very end of her life, Jane Austen will create a figure who might have died for love and carried all hearts, not only those of sentimentalists, with her. But Anne Elliot is a woman who has put her whole nature, heart, and mind, and character, into her love; and we could bear to see her die rather than surrender it. Marianne is a silly and rather selfish girl, and the business of the book is to send her through the painful experiences which turn selfishness into kindness and silliness into sense.

But that business, however serious, is for the most part lightly and amusingly done. *Sense and Sensibility* is not nearly so brilliant as *Pride and Prejudice*, but it has very good things. And many

of them are, as it were, studies for better things that will be found in the second novel. Elinor is obviously a first sketch of one side of Elizabeth Bennet. She is even more commonsensical than Elizabeth: not merely cooler but wiser: she sees at once what is to be her way to happiness, and has not, like Elizabeth, to find it only after stumbling badly and confessing her blindness. Like Elizabeth, too, she is the brain of her family. But she has nothing at all of Elizabeth's wit and brilliance, and little of her charm, and she sometimes carries her sense and virtue dangerously near the borderland of priggishness. Mr. Palmer, again, is obviously, in his amused contempt of his wife and family, a rude beginning of Mr. Bennet, but when we have enjoyed Mr. Bennet we cannot think at all of Mr. Palmer, who never gets within miles of the world of the first chapter of *Pride and Prejudice*. On the other hand, Willoughby is certainly a more plausible scoundrel than Wickham, whose often alleged charms have to be taken wholly on trust. But neither is very successful. Jane Austen did not understand scoundrels, and they never come alive in her hands. The greatest surprise in the book—and a story which never surprises is hardly alive—is Willoughby's midnight appearance at Cleveland during Marianne's illness. But the

surprises of art ought to seem probable and even natural as soon as we look back at them from the vantage-ground of possession of the secret; and did any one ever think Willoughby's coming, or what he said when he came, convincing or probable? Again, did any one ever find the marriage of Lucy Steele and Robert Ferrars anything but a violent and wholly incredible method of setting Edward free to marry Elinor?

These are the crudities of a beginner. But, in spite of them, if *Sense and Sensibility* were the only novel Jane Austen had left us, we should have had no difficulty in recognizing that its author was an admirable artist, a mistress of language, and one of the finest, if not the finest of all, of those who have created for us the comedy of manners which moves as well as amuses. We care very much that Elinor, and even that Marianne, should at last find their way to matrimonial happiness. And, as they find it, they and their friends amuse us with capital scenes and some very entertaining conversations. How first-rate Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood would be on the stage! How admirable, again, are such scenes as that in chapter xxxv—the awkward meeting of Elinor, Marianne, Lucy, and Edward! Or best of all, perhaps, though with a touch or two approaching farce in it, the ludicrous

misunderstanding of chapters xxxix and xl, in which is included the fine stroke, so naturally brought about, which makes Elinor the transmitter to Edward of the offer of the living which alone will make it possible for him to marry her rival. And, if, in these last two, the satire of human nature is less brilliantly barbed than in the conversation between the John Dashwoods, they have a quality which that has not. The best comedy of all has always a hint of something else in it. And so have these scenes. There is heart in them as well as wit and absurdity. If we were not so busy laughing we should be half inclined to cry. But that is the very quality of Jane Austen: we always laugh and yet we always feel and care. And think too. The wit and humour are always there or never long away. But they would not be so delightful as they are if they did not come from a head that had thought about life and a heart that had felt it.

III

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

AFTER *Sense and Sensibility*, in the order of publication, comes *Pride and Prejudice*, which was published in January 1813. There is, as we have seen, just a possibility that it may have been written before its predecessor. But if there be any shadow of doubt about the priority of time there is none at all about the priority of rank. *Pride and Prejudice* is certainly the most brilliant of the six novels. *Emma* has one kind of merit which it does not possess, and *Persuasion* another; but of the brilliance, wit, satire, the entire and never-failing felicity of expression, which are the central characteristics of Jane Austen's art, none of her books has so much as *Pride and Prejudice*. Mr. Bennet is by far the most amusing of the men she means us to like, and Elizabeth is the cleverest, wittiest, liveliest, and most like the writer herself, of all her creations. And no doubt the one she liked best of all. 'I must confess', she once wrote of Elizabeth, 'that I think her as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print: how I shall be able to tolerate those who do not like *her*, at least, I do not know.' A century of readers has felt just as Jane herself

did: we know no one so delightful as Elizabeth; and as for those who do not like her, we do not tolerate them, and do not wish to.

It is curious, perhaps, that with Jane Austen's most perfect creation, *Pride and Prejudice* contains her one absolute failure. Why she introduced Mary Bennet into the book it is difficult to say. She plays no part in the main story and hardly any even in the minor episodes. And it is not only that she has no connexion with the action and little with the other characters: she is nothing whatever in herself and never comes alive for a moment. No studious or priggish girl ever behaved at all like her. She is useless and even dull as a caricature because the last vestiges of life and truth have been caricatured out of her. In fact, she is a failure even as a caricature because the essence of caricature is to combine recognizable truth with entertaining distortion; and here is neither truth nor entertainment. She scarcely says one word which even such a fool as she is could have actually said in life. When we contrast her with Mr. Collins we see the difference between art and its absence or negation. The immortal Collins, like the still more immortal Micawber, is a caricature. No actual parson would ever have said or done many of the things which Collins says and does. But if that were all that

there is to be said against Mary Bennet she would escape easily enough. Indeed it may be said that a large part of the method of the dramatist's or novelist's art consists in making people utter or act what in life they only think. That is Hamlet and Macbeth as well as Collins and Micawber. The business of art is the revelation of life and character, and in order to achieve it the artist makes the creatures of his imagination much more self-revealing, much more articulate, than they are in the world of experience. Mr. Collins utters by letter and by word of mouth all the imbecilities that might come into the head of a very stupid and very snobbish clergyman. But the things which Mary says are commonly such as could not have been really felt or thought by anybody. And there is this other difference. If Mary might conceivably have thought some of the things she is made to say, she could not conceivably have said any of them. Collins says many things which such a man might not only have thought but said. When he says that he considers 'music as a very innocent diversion and perfectly compatible with the profession of a clergyman', or when in the course of his proposal to Elizabeth he assures her that he is 'not now to learn that it is usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man whom they secretly mean to

accept, when he first applies for their favour', he only says what such a man as he might well have actually said in real life. Much of him is in this way firmly based on fact, naturalness, and reality. And when he goes on to make such remarks as those in his letter to Mr. Bennet, that Lydia's 'disposition must be naturally bad, or she could not be guilty of such an enormity at so early an age', and that 'this false step in one daughter will be injurious to the fortunes of all the others; for who, as Lady Catharine herself condescendingly says, will connect themselves with such a family?' he is plainly writing what he might well think but could not possibly have written. He is only taking art's privilege of being more articulate than life. On other occasions Jane Austen's delight in the absurdity of her creation plainly leads her over the edge and makes him say things which he could scarcely even have thought. He might well have thought that 'the clerical office' was 'equal in point of dignity with the highest rank in the kingdom'; but when he adds 'provided that a proper humility of behaviour is at the same time maintained', we are evidently stepping outside 'the modesty of nature'. All art does that in one way or another; but when it is done in this way, and done so often, the result inevitably becomes a particular kind of

art which is not the highest. The character, so treated, however delightful, leaves the impression, at any rate the partial impression, of a caricature. Nature had given the sitter a very large nose: the artist has, for the fun of the thing, given him one which is fantastic and incredible.

Of the method of art which never runs over the border into caricature, there are no finer examples in Jane Austen than Elizabeth and her father and mother. Caricature does not ask us to think that its subject or victim is in fact quite like what its picture represents him to be. But a higher art, while never leaving people as they are, always leaves the reader under the impression that that is just what it has done. We say and think that Falstaff or Mrs. Poyser or Sam Weller or Elizabeth Bennet is 'perfectly natural'. But in fact, of course, no drunken knight was ever half so witty as Falstaff, no farmer's wife so shrewd and pithy as Mrs. Poyser, no cockney servant such a perpetual fountain of good things as Sam Weller, no young lady so unfailingly brilliant and humorous, such a combination of sense and character, wit and charm, as Elizabeth Bennet. Art concentrates and intensifies: turns all its light upon the quality it wants to bring out; yet so as to make it no caricature but something more natural than nature,

truer than truth itself. When we read or hear *Hamlet* we do not ask ourselves whether princes are in the habit of making eloquent soliloquies in blank verse: as we listen we forget all doubts and criticisms; first, in sheer wonder that human thought can be so searching and profound, human language of a quality so extraordinary, of a music so divine; and then in delighted rest at the discovery that these thoughts, though they at first so astonish us, are in truth our very own, are of ourselves as we really are or as we can secretly imagine ourselves to be: that these words somehow belong to us and seem natural to us, though their language is one which in our present state we cannot speak. And this law of surprise followed by recognition of truth is to be seen in all art, not only in Hamlet and Macbeth, but in the Dashwoods, the Woodhouses, and the Bennets. When we read *Pride and Prejudice* we do not ask ourselves whether any husband and father ever gave himself so continuously and humorously as Mr. Bennet to that business of laughing at his family which he makes us enjoy as much as he enjoyed it himself: or whether any wife and mother was ever so entirely absorbed in being ridiculous as Mrs. Bennet. She never once speaks but to expose her own folly. But, though it would be hard to discover in life a woman who never says

a sensible thing, yet the magic of art knows how to make Mrs. Bennet alive and convincing from her first word to her last. That is the secret. Art is not art if it is not surprising: it is not great art if it is not true. We are surprised at the silliness of Mrs. Bennet, at the wit and sense of Elizabeth. And they are, of course, each a concentration and intensification transcending any individual whom we have ever known. But as we read the book for the second, or fifth, or fiftieth time our surprise is more and more absorbed, as it was in the case of Hamlet, in recognition that, as Hamlet's heights and depths turned strangely out to be our own, so, too, Mrs. Bennet's silliness is our silliness, and Elizabeth's sense our sense. The surprise never ceases altogether; if it did, too much of the delight would go with it; but at each reading the surprise, which began by asking whether such things could be true, comes more and more to ask only how so much of truth can be known and uttered with such certainty and force. And, if we have laughed at Mrs. Bennet with some aloofness and superiority all through the book, don't we at the end recognize that the last and silliest of all her outbursts is the one in which, if we will but confess it, we most see ourselves?—

'Oh! my sweetest Lizzy! How rich and how great you

will be! What pin-money, what jewels, what carriages you will have! Jane's is nothing to it—nothing at all. . . . Dear, dear Lizzy! A house in town! Everything that is charming! Three daughters married! Ten thousand a year! Oh Lord! What will become of me?'

It is true that we don't care so much about there being three Miss Bennets married, and of one of them we are thankful to be rid. But Mrs. Bennet's 'dear, dear Lizzy' is our dear, dear Lizzy; and certainly, for us as for her, Jane's marriage, and indeed Jane herself, is 'nothing to it, nothing at all'. We are as sure as Mrs. Bennet that Elizabeth's marriage will have 'everything that is charming' in it: partly, indeed, because Elizabeth is Elizabeth and for other reasons of which Mrs. Bennet knows nothing; but partly also—let us not be hypocritical enough to pretend to deny it—exactly for Mrs. Bennet's reasons; because of Pemberley and the house in town and the ten thousand a year. Mr. Darcy is the biggest fish that swims in any of Jane Austen's waters and, silly or not, we are enchanted that he should fall into the basket of our dear Elizabeth, the most delightful of all Jane Austen's young women!

All the novels depend primarily on their heroines, and none more than *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth may not, indeed, stand so much alone

as some of the others; for we are interested in Darcy on his own account: but she and her father make their story the wittiest and most brilliant of Jane Austen's books; and she makes it the one most of us love best. And it is also in several, though not in all, ways the best of the stories. All the novels are stories of love and marriage: their business is to get the heroine into the port of matrimony; and while that is being accomplished to let the rest of the characters act on that philosophy of life which Mr. Bennet offered to Elizabeth at such an inconvenient moment: 'for what do we live but to make sport for our neighbours and laugh at them in our turn?' In *Pride and Prejudice* the main business is exceptionally interesting and the episodes exceptionally entertaining. The love-affair, though not the most moving, is the most exciting of all Jane Austen gives us. If our hearts are not quite so much concerned as they are for Anne Elliot, our minds are much more entertained and absorbed. That is not merely because Elizabeth is much more than Anne: it is also because Darcy is much more than Wentworth, and in fact more than any of Jane Austen's lovers. He gains, no doubt, by the foil of the other lover of the book, his colourless, insignificant, and docile friend Bingley: of whom Eliza-

beth, a few minutes after her engagement, 'longed to observe' that he 'had been a most delightful friend: so easily guided that his worth was invaluable'; but had to check herself by remembering that Darcy 'had yet to learn to be laughed at and it was rather too early to begin'. But, apart from that, Darcy stands out among the men of all the novels as the one most difficult to win and most worth winning. Beside him all the others have simple, obvious, merely amiable characters: they are good fellows, likely to make good husbands, but nothing more. Darcy took some conquering. He begins by being something like a mere stage embodiment of aristocratic insolence; and the story from the fifth chapter of the book to the last is that of the difficult victory of love over pride. Love wins, of course, as the experienced reader of novels knows it will. But even the most experienced has his moments of more than excitement, of actual anxiety and alarm, as Mrs. Bennet and Wickham and Lydia, and even Elizabeth herself, raise their formidable obstacles in the path to marriage, which is, of course, for Jane Austen, love's natural and only goal. Darcy seems to be the very last man in all the world who could accept the position of Mrs. Bennet's son-in-law. Yet he does accept it: proposes to Elizabeth actually from his proud aunt's

house, is evidently again going to propose at Lambton when the dreadful news about Lydia arrives; and is not finally deterred even by the discovery that the son-in-law of Mrs. Bennet must also be the brother-in-law of Wickham. Our being made to believe in all this and see its probability is the strongest thing in all Jane Austen. She has the courage to make her hero positively disagreeable at first, so much so, indeed, that, until you look carefully, you may easily think that the Darcy of the first chapters is not the Darcy of the last and that Jane changed her mind about him as the story progressed. I have at times been tempted to that delusion myself—but a delusion it plainly is. What she meant to do, and did, was to make a hero who, unlike most heroes in novels, had some very disagreeable qualities; and to show them modified and purified, but by no means destroyed, by the power of love. She was evidently and justly proud of her creation. Soon after the book came out, and when it was being read by her relations, she wrote of the niece whose judgement she valued as much as any: 'her liking Darcy and Elizabeth is enough. She might hate all the others if she would.' And she amused herself by following Darcy outside the book and showing his pride still in him, though now the ally instead of the rival of his love.

Mrs. Bingley's portrait she found at the Pall Mall Exhibition in 1813; but she could not find Mrs. Darcy. 'I can only imagine Mr. D. prizes any picture of her too much to like it should be exposed to the public eye. I can imagine he would have that sort of feeling; that mixture of love, pride and delicacy.'

Pride and Prejudice was probably, as it well might be, Jane Austen's own favourite among her books. She calls it her 'darling child', and often introduces allusions to its characters into her letters. She was no doubt proud of its strength; and of course she delighted in its brilliance and wit. But she must also have taken great pleasure in its satisfactory combination of irony and probability. She was a mistress of irony; it is at play everywhere in all her letters. At play: for hers were really 'life's little ironies'; not the grim ones to which Mr. Hardy gave that name. And it is at play continually all through *Pride and Prejudice*. Everything goes by contraries and yet everything is natural and probable. All the characters do the opposite of what they wish to do and experience the opposite of what they and others expect them to experience; and yet we, who look on, see that what they do and suffer and enjoy is in them from the first. Sometimes the irony lies even in the

fulfilment of expectation, as when Charlotte says that 'it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life'; and does not know that she will marry Mr. Collins. Mr. Darcy at his first sight of Elizabeth is 'in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men' and has no notion how much meaning there may be in 'at present'. Miss Bingley, setting her cap at Darcy, again and again forces from him the praise of Elizabeth which is to her the most disagreeable sound on earth, and which, but for her, he might not have uttered. Darcy does what his sense of honour really forbids him to do in order to prevent his friend marrying a Miss Bennet; and he marries one himself. Lady Catharine demeans herself to forbid Elizabeth to accept Darcy, who has not in fact proposed, with the result that her report of her interview gives him the courage to do so. Mrs. Bennet thinks Darcy the most disagreeable man in the world; and declares she will 'go distracted' with delight directly she hears he is to be her son-in-law. Mr. Bennet thinks Darcy 'a proud unpleasant sort of man'; and, in his blind detachment from the affairs of his family, asks Elizabeth, after he hears of the proposal, whether she had not 'always hated him';

but has his eyes rather forcibly opened by what she has to tell him; at once becomes himself again with 'If any young men come for Mary or Kitty, send them in, I am quite at leisure'; and is able, the very next day, to say to Elizabeth: 'I admire all my three sons-in-law highly. Wickham, perhaps, is my favourite: but I think I shall like *your* husband quite as well as Jane's.'

Yet all the ironies do not affect the probability of the story. There are weak spots, of course. Beside Mary, there are the charms of Wickham, so often asserted, so little exhibited. The chief use of him seems to be to bring out the other characters: the blindness and wilfulness of which Elizabeth is to be cured; the wilfulness and worthlessness of which Lydia will never be cured; above all the generosity of Darcy, or rather the love out of which it springs. But though Wickham is a scoundrel who never comes alive, his Lydia is a fool who has plenty of life in her. Jane Austen never did anything better of its kind, anything more entirely convincing, than Lydia's letter announcing her elopement, or the account she gives Elizabeth of her marriage. Indeed, everybody in the book, except Wickham and Mary, is alive and quite capable of playing his or her part in it. Nor does the plot turn upon any strained or improbable

incidents. Here is no concealed engagement confusing all the action as in *Emma*, no absurd accident on the Cobb where one young lady nearly dies of a fall of a few feet though there is a gentleman to catch her, and another is thought likely to die of the shock of standing by: no melodramatic delusions about General Tilney and his murdered wife: no far-fetched and incredible untying of the knot such as that in *Sense and Sensibility* where the vulgar and worthless young woman who has somehow to be got out of Elinor's way is simply married to the last man in the world who would ever have looked at her, at any rate in the matrimonial way. From violences of this kind *Pride and Prejudice* is quite free. It has its points of inferiority to *Emma* and to *Persuasion*. But of all the novels it is not only the most brilliant but at once the strongest and the most probable.

IV

MANSFIELD PARK

THE third of Jane Austen's novels, *Mansfield Park*, was begun in 1811 and published in 1814. It had the great advantage of bearing on its title-page the statement that it was 'by the Author of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*'. The first edition was sold out within six months.

Jane Austen had in fact begun that conquest of her public which has been becoming more and more complete all through the hundred years which separate those days from our own; till, as we have seen, she has ceased to be the 'Miss Austen' of our parents and become our own 'Jane Austen' or even 'Jane'. Mr. Kipling, the other day, recorded her conquest and crowned her glory by showing us 'Janeites' bound together by such wonderful links as to make a single fraternity not only of Colonels and Subalterns but even of officers and men. Jane Austen has in fact now proved that she had in her, and could convey to her novels, those universal and classical qualities which enable a book to defy the lapse of time and render it acceptable to all who in any degree know what literature is.

In a sense, of course, no book, not the greatest

in the world, can altogether defy the effects of time. The immense majority of readers read nothing whatever but newspapers; or, if they read books at all, only the books of the moment. Even people who know and like the best, independent of time and country, commonly give less time to it than to the products of the contemporary press. Everybody who is not a fool knows that Shakespeare and Milton are better worth reading than the newspapers. But *The Times*, and even the *Daily Mail*, of to-day have more readers than either; and readers who are not fools. Nor is there anything very wicked or shameful in that. It is true that three very distinguished living Englishmen are reported never to read newspapers at all. And it is certainly true that nine people out of ten give ten times as much time to reading newspapers as newspapers deserve. There is a good deal to be said for the suggestion of a poet and saint of the last century who proposed the foundation of a new Religious Order whose only rule should be that all newspaper reading be done standing up. But, in spite of Aubrey de Vere, and in spite of our three living intellectual celebrities, it remains true that for most of us it seems scarcely human not to take more interest in our own time and country than in other countries or past times. We are all

more moved by an accident in Piccadilly which kills five people than by an earthquake in South America which kills five thousand. We are ourselves, and neither South Americans of to-day nor Hebrews or Greeks of ancient times; and we necessarily care more for our own affairs and our own manners and customs than for those of foreign countries or of antiquity, just as we are more interested in our own relations than in those of other people. And therefore our first and not at all unreasonable tendency is to prefer contemporary books to classical. The man who never reads a new book is a prig. But then the man who forgets that of the books published in any ten years all but two or three will be forgotten in fifty is a fool. It is folly not to take advantage of the useful sifting done for us by time. The classics are still accessible; and the reason why they are accessible is that time soon showed them to have something in them which could not be forgotten. And that something is worth getting at. A living writer has well said that 'the thing which enslaves us most, narrows the range of our thoughts, cramps our capacities, lowers our standards, is the mere present'. And he adds that that 'bondage of the present' is the thing from which it is the function of literature to deliver us. Obviously, for the performance of that

function we must go outside the books of the hour. The man who reads only newspapers and contemporary books can have no mental freedom. His thoughts will be as narrow and dull as the conversation of a man who knows no one but his own relations. So we cannot do without the classical novel. The contemporary novel may give us the passing fashions of the hour: the classical novel would not be classical if it did not give us the things which are not only of this hour but of all hours, human life as it is and always has been. No one now doubts that Jane Austen does that. There is an admirable phrase, used by Mr. Saintsbury of Molière, which exactly describes her achievement. She 'sets the way of the world in a comic light of eternity'. Like all the classics, for the simple reason that they are distant from us in time or place, she may seem a little strange and difficult of approach to those who have read nothing but their contemporaries. But so great men often seem when we first meet them. And as we gladly endure our shyness and pass through it to their acquaintance, if we are so lucky as to get the chance, so we may well endure and pass through the foreign language or the unfamiliar atmosphere which at first alarm us when we take up any book which is not English or is a hundred years old.

Perhaps there is none of Jane Austen's novels in which those difficulties are more felt than in *Mansfield Park*. Of the two leading characters in it, Fanny Price appears exasperatingly meek and modest to a generation which has taken Danton's *De l'audace et toujours de l'audace* for its motto; and Edmund Bertram's scrupulous seriousness makes our present casual non-morality at once dismiss him as a prig. And certainly he does more than once say very priggish things: as Fanny does also once or twice; and Elinor Dashwood; and even Elizabeth Bennet herself. That is partly the eighteenth-century and Johnsonian habit of talking about morals. All the characters whom Jane Austen means us on the whole to admire, Elizabeth and Jane Bennet and Darcy, Elinor Dashwood and Edward Ferrars, Emma and Mr. Knightley, Fanny Price and Edmund Bertram, and even Mary Crawford, continually discuss questions of character and ethics. That is, of course, because the books are their authoress and Jane admired goodness as much as she was amused by folly. The two between them make up her books, or make up their success; for, as I have said already, her scoundrels never come alive. But perhaps the ethical interest is nowhere so predominant as in *Mansfield Park*. Evidently she meant it to be so.

She herself described the subject of the book as 'ordination'. And in fact it is Edmund's ordination which makes Mary Crawford unwilling to marry him, and her contempt of a clergyman's life and position which more than anything else opens his eyes to her shallow worldliness. But the ordination is not really the subject of the book: it is only a hinge, one of several hinges, on which the story turns. Indeed it is hardly mentioned when it takes place; and neither it nor anything else belonging to Edmund is the central interest of the book. That belongs to Fanny. The story is the story of a shy girl transferred to an unfamiliar and rather alarming atmosphere: her fears and miseries, her enjoyments and affections: the love she inspires and tries to escape, the love she feels, but is forced to hide; which she cannot confess and indulge till the very last pages of the novel. The best things in it are the conversations in which Edmund either consults Fanny about whether he should propose to Mary Crawford, or advises her to accept Henry Crawford, never dreaming of the secret which makes both consultations equally painful to her—the secret, that is, that she is all the while in love with himself. No one is fonder than Jane of this ancient device, so dear to the Greek dramatists, of a conversation in which the spectator

or reader perceives a significance which is quite concealed from one or both of the actors or speakers. She brings the situation about very naturally and uses it with great effect: never more naturally or with more effect than in *Mansfield Park*. The modesty of Fanny is the key to the book and it is a fine and true stroke to make her think Crawford's proposal can be nothing but a joke: as it is also to make that proposal open her uncle's eyes to her being something more in the world than a good little girl and the humble companion of her aunt.

With Fanny the novel seems to me to stand or fall. It is true that Mr. A. C. Bradley[1] can consider calmly the question whether *Pride and Prejudice* or *Mansfield Park* is the best of the novels and yet confess that he cares very little for Fanny and is not 'greatly concerned about her destiny'. To me, on the other hand, the question seems almost absurd anyhow and becomes much more than absurd if Jane Austen has failed in making us care about Fanny. For the whole story turns on her: we live inside her all the time and see all the characters through her spectacles. There is

[1] In his lecture on Jane Austen, published in vol. ii of *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*: by far the best critical study of the novels known to me.

no doubt that Jane Austen meant us to care for her: if she has failed the book is a failure. She speaks of Fanny as 'my Fanny' in the novel itself: a compliment she pays to others in her letters but to Fanny alone in the ear of the public on the printed page. Of course, this cannot mean that Fanny was her favourite character: the language she uses about Elizabeth would be enough, if there were nothing else, to disprove that. But there is no doubt, and Mr. Bradley himself does not doubt, that she herself liked Fanny and meant us to like her and to be anxious about her fate. To assert, as was asserted a few years ago by a writer in the *Quarterly Review*, that she did not care for Fanny or Edmund, and herself preferred the Crawfords, but was influenced by her clerical relations to favour Edmund and Fanny, is simply to fly in the face of the known facts. We have seen how she speaks of Fanny, even in public: we have seen that she declared ordination to be the subject of the book; and those who knew her and had heard her talk about her books expressly tell us that Edmund Bertram was one of her favourite men. We may agree or disagree with her; but, as I said in the Preface to *Sense and Sensibility*, we must leave Jane her own likings and opinions and not foist ours upon her. She certainly meant us

to think Edmund and Fanny an attractive couple, meant for each other and sure to be happy; and, equally certainly, she meant us to think Fanny well delivered from Henry Crawford and Edmund from Mary. These are the four characters who make the story: if they fail the book fails. Do they? The answer, I think, must be that only one of them wholly succeeds and two of them are farther from success than from failure. Fanny, though so much less brilliant than Elizabeth, and so much less a personage than Emma or even Elinor, succeeds, for me at any rate, with a success of sympathy. We see more of her heart than we do of any of Jane Austen's characters except Anne Elliot, and I am not sure that we do not for that reason know her better than anybody except Anne, who completes and improves Fanny as Elizabeth completes and improves Elinor. I think that I feel more anxious about Fanny than I do about anybody else except Anne. Somehow we know that Elizabeth and Emma can take care of themselves, but Fanny and Anne are just the sort of girls who become the victims of men and fortune. The result of this is that there is more of the sympathy which is at once pleasure and pain in reading *Persuasion* and *Mansfield Park* than in reading any of the other novels. These two appeal less to the head but more to the heart.

Of Edmund I do not think one can say more than that he is a partial success. He is the most serious of Jane Austen's much discussed clergymen who have passed away from the eyes of this generation so much more completely than her country gentlemen and her young women. But I will leave what I have to say of them till I come to *Northanger Abbey*. Edmund is, to our ears, rather too often a prig; and, though he is at first hardly more than a schoolboy, his conversation lets us see a good deal more than is usually thought desirable of the schoolmaster who, according to Stevenson, 'is in all men, to the despair of all girls and most women'. But Fanny is not one of those girls or women; the schoolmaster in Edmund is far from filling her with despair; and we, if we surrender ourselves to Jane's handling, see everything, including Edmund, through Fanny's eyes. And Edmund, even if a little solemn, is in fact a thoroughly good fellow: not only, what he calls himself, a 'matter-of-fact plain-spoken being', but also an extremely kind-hearted one; and yet a very long way from being one of those 'pictures of perfection' of whom Jane said that they made her 'sick or wicked': human enough to forget all his kindness, to forget Fanny herself, to treat her with a neglect which once or twice is almost cruel,

whenever Mary Crawford is in the way. We are quite happy to leave our Fanny in his hands: he will make a good husband as well as a good clergyman; and prosperity will give Fanny courage to make a little freer use of her excellent wits, perhaps sometimes at the expense of her father-in-law and even of her husband. Could Elizabeth Bennet herself have been so brilliant if she had been brought up a poor relation?

There is no doubt that Jane Austen meant the Crawfords to be a greater success than they are. She meant them to be amusing; and so they are, to some extent—the most amusing bad characters whom Jane ever drew. But, of course, she also meant them to be coherent and convincing; and that I confess I cannot think either of them is. Henry Crawford is a scamp like Wickham and Willoughby and partakes of the unreality which is hardly avoidable when authors describe what they have only seen from a very long way off. He is more alive than Wickham, who is nothing at all; and more human than Willoughby, who, like the great Lovelace himself, is hardly more than the rake as he appears to the imagination of parloured spinsters. Crawford can be agreeable and even witty. But the question is whether it is possible to believe in him, or in Mary. It is not enough

for their defenders to say, as I have heard them say, that they have met such people. That is the fallacy which Aristotle dealt with long ago. Art deals not with what happens but with what may reasonably be expected to happen; with the probable, not with the mere actual. Henry and Mary stand or fall by the answer which we give, when we lay the book down, to the question whether we can believe in them, whether we see in them whole human beings, speaking and acting as, in the circumstances, such people would have acted and spoken. It seems to me very doubtful whether we can give the answer which Jane Austen, of course, meant us to give. It is not very easy to believe that such a mere worldling as Henry Crawford would ever have been drawn to Fanny at all. A man whose one object was to be amused does not seem likely to have ever noticed so very unamusing a creature as she would have appeared to him, and indeed was. However, let the flirtation pass as possible. But the serious proposal of marriage: is that even possible, not to speak of probability? Are we ever made to believe it likely that such a girl, without money, or fashion, or wit, or great beauty, could carry her conquest of such a man so far as to make him seriously and persistently anxious to marry her? And there is a similar

inconsistency about Mary. She and Henry are both moved at times by the genuine goodness of Fanny and of others at Mansfield. 'You have all so much more *heart* among you than one finds in the world at large.' That is natural enough: like Henry's momentary wish to be fighting his own way up in life after the fashion of William Price; like a fashionable lady's fancy that she would enjoy living in a country cottage on a couple of hundred a year. But Mary is as worldly though not so immoral as her brother. Would her kindness to Fanny ever have gone beyond words and actions said and done to please Edmund? Would they ever have had a heart in them? Would she have wished to prevent the marriage, as she says she would have wished, if she had believed Henry would prove a bad husband? Or, again, would she ever have thought or cared whether 'it was wrong' to speak as she had spoken of the clergy?

The truth seems to be that Jane Austen never got really firm hold of either of the Crawfords: she never was so far inside them as to be quite sure whether they had hearts or not. We never for a moment see things from their point of view or even know exactly what it is, while we perfectly know Mrs. Norris's point of view, and even Lady Bertram's, much as we may despise or dislike it.

Jane's uncertainty about the Crawfords leads in the last pages to what is, I must think, the worst inconsistency about any important character in all her novels. She actually tells us that, if it had not been for the insurmountable obstacle which Henry had put between Fanny and himself, and—what is almost equally important—between Edmund and Mary, both marriages would have ultimately taken place. Who believes that? We may have our doubts about Edmund and Mary, but we have none whatever about Fanny. She has always seen through both the Crawfords and nothing would ever have induced her to make herself miserable for life by marrying a man whom she could neither respect nor trust.

The failure of the Crawfords is enough by itself to be fatal to the claims of *Mansfield Park* to the first place among the novels. For myself I cannot think it will ultimately rank even among the first three. Mrs. Norris is excellent; there is no one in Jane Austen whom we so much enjoy disliking. Lady Bertram is a much better edition of Lady Middleton. Lady Middleton says nothing quite so good as Lady Bertram's greeting to Fanny on her return to Mansfield in the midst of the family catastrophes: 'Dear Fanny! Now I shall be comfortable.' The Prices, Jane Austen's solitary

attempt at picturing anything like 'low life', are amusing enough. But the long business of the play is rather a bore because we have none of us read *Lovers' Vows*,[1] and so we are all at sea in the eternal discussions about it. And the double matrimonial disasters at the end are almost melodramatically violent, and justify Jane's confession in the last chapter that 'guilt and misery' are for other pens than hers. Perhaps we may, in a generous moment, sum up *Mansfield Park* as the most moving of the novels except one; but even in such a moment we must add that it is, except one, the least convincing, and possibly the least brilliant of all.

[1] Since this was written it has been acted in Oxford, and it is printed in the Oxford edition.

V

EMMA

EMMA, the fourth of Jane Austen's novels in order of publication, was written between January 1814 and March 1815, and published in December of that year. Scott reviewed it—of course anonymously—in the *Quarterly Review*, and it was dedicated to the Prince Regent. These two facts taken together show the position which Jane Austen had now attained, though even now her name did not appear on the title-page.

Scott held in 1815 the first place among English men of letters. His fame as a poet had scarcely begun to pale before the rising sun of Byron, and his mysterious anonymity as 'the author of Waverley' was becoming less anonymous and less mysterious every day. An author could scarcely receive a higher compliment than a review, in the *Quarterly*, written by Scott. It is true that the article was by no means one of unmixed praise. But it seized at once upon some of the qualities in which Jane Austen exceeds almost all novelists: the 'neatness and point' with which the narrative is conducted, and the 'quiet yet comic dialogue, in which the characters of the speakers evolve

themselves with dramatic effect'. Still more striking praise, as is well known, occurs in Scott's Journal of the year 1826 when he had been reading *Pride and Prejudice* 'for the third time at least'. Miss Austen, he says, 'has a talent for describing the involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with. The big Bow-Wow strain I can do myself like any now going; but the exquisite touch which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting from the truth of the description and the sentiment is denied to me.' She has never perhaps received praise more exactly just than this royal tribute from the ever-generous Scott. The power of describing 'the involvements and feelings of ordinary life': 'the touch which renders commonplace things and characters interesting': these, with her admirable felicity of phrase, are her great gifts as a novelist. She once wrote to her favourite niece: 'you are so odd, and all the time so perfectly natural: so peculiar in yourself and yet so like everybody else.' Whether this was true or not of Fanny Knight I do not know. But it is the exact truth about many of the finest characters—one might say, in one sense, about all—in drama and fiction; and about none more than the creations of

Jane herself. What Scott said of her and she of her niece is the central law of imaginative creation, which is at once universal and particular, human and individual; and we see it at its perfect work not only in Falstaff and Bérénice but also in the smaller world of Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse.

The story of how *Emma* came to be connected with the political as well as the literary Sovereign of the day is told in some entertaining pages of the Life. However, it is not the Regent himself but his librarian, the Rev. Mr. Clarke, who furnishes the entertainment. George himself comes, on the whole, quite creditably out of the business. I am not one of those who admire the modern craze of trying to prove that the scamps of history were in fact interesting and even admirable persons. But I do believe that George IV has, thanks to Thackeray and others, received less than his deserts. Nothing whatever is to be said for his character. But the man whom Scott found good company, who collected the fine gallery of pictures at Buckingham Palace, who made Windsor Castle what we see it to-day, the most magnificent royal residence in the world, and did more than any one, after Charles I, to give it works of art worthy of its own splendour, was no mere fool. I have heard

two living Prime Ministers agree that his abilities have been much underrated. Whether they were thinking of politics or of literature and the arts I do not know, or forget; but we Janeites shall all be inclined to think that their judgement is confirmed by the fact, known to us through one of his physicians, that he read Jane Austen's novels 'often, and kept a set in every one of his residences'. And this was before he had received the dedication of *Emma*. Unlike most patrons, he had earned his compliment before he received it, though he can scarcely have guessed that a hundred years after his death it would seem, after those he won from Scott, to be perhaps the most worth having of all the many which fell to him, whether as Regent or as King.

Emma stands almost alone among Jane Austen's novels in one important quality. Emma Woodhouse does what none of the other heroines do: she learns and changes and grows. In the first half and more of the book she is a blind, wilful, conceited girl: before it ends she is a woman who has been taught by bitter experience to see herself and others as they really are. There is no such change in Elizabeth or Elinor, Fanny or Anne. The only important character who exhibits an equal, indeed a greater change, is not a woman but a man. It is

the Darcy of *Pride and Prejudice*. The change there is more violent, more difficult to believe, and less amusing. In each case it is love that opens the eyes, but the two openings are as unlike as they can be. In Darcy it is conscious and at first very painful. In Emma it is for a long time entirely unconscious, very gradual, and very entertaining. Emma's slow discovery of her own conceit and her own foolishness is, unlike Darcy's rapid awakening to his, much assisted by jealousy, which, except in *Othello*, is a feeling belonging to, and creating, comedy. Darcy fears no rival with Elizabeth. Emma dislikes her imaginary rivals before she is aware of her love. She only discovers her love through discovering her jealousy. And there is jealousy on the other side too. The sensible Knightley is aware of his love, but not at all aware of his jealousy. We, who are aware of everything, except, indeed, the one thing on which nearly all the rest turns, watch the conscious and unconscious loves and jealousies with equal amusement. The business of *Emma*, like that of all Jane Austen's novels, and even more than the rest, is that of getting people engaged and married. Everybody is busy about it and everybody blunders. Emma supposes Mr. Elton to be in love with Harriet, Harriet to be in love with Frank Churchill, Jane

to be in love with Mr. Dixon, even, a little, Mr. Knightley to have some idea of Jane; she imagines Frank to be in love with herself and even supposes herself to be in love with him. She never sees that Mr. Elton is thinking of her, or Harriet of Mr. Knightley: never for a moment guesses the secret of Frank and Jane, remains blind, as long as blindness is possible, to Mr. Knightley's devotion to herself, and even to her own love of him. Most of the other characters blunder with her, though not so badly. Mrs. Weston is sure Mr. Knightley has thoughts of Jane: both she and her husband think Frank and Emma are in love with each other; even the wise Mr. Knightley fancies or fears it is so. The book is in fact a comedy of match-making errors. But some of the characters have hearts; so that it gets beyond comedy at the end. Indeed the final scene between Mr. Knightley and Emma, when the misunderstanding thickens up to the very moment of its sudden clearing, is, I think, the most anxiously exciting love-scene in Jane Austen except the last scene of *Persuasion*.

There are people who think *Emma* the best of the novels. And Emma herself is certainly one of the best conceived and worked out of all Jane Austen's characters. And she is more completely the sole centre of interest than Elinor or Elizabeth,

though not more than Anne or Fanny. We are mildly anxious to know the fate of Marianne Dashwood and Jane Bennet. About Harriet Smith and Jane Fairfax we care even less than we do about Mary Crawford and Louisa Musgrove. Indeed, of all the amiable, 'good' young women in Jane Austen, Harriet is the silliest and most insignificant. But she is not at all improbable, as the somewhat similar Mrs. Smith of *Persuasion* is, and she plays an important part in the plot. But all that is best in the book depends on Emma, and Emma is alive and convincing from the first page to the last, in her selfishness and in her goodness, in her common sense and in her folly, in the social and personal vanity which is always leading her into disasters, and in the soundness both of heart and mind which is always there to get her ultimately out of them. She is a delightful creation and the all-important pivot on which a delightful book turns. But she does not run away with my heart as Anne Elliot does, or with my heart and head too as Elizabeth does. Nor do the minor characters give me quite so much pleasure as Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. A wise woman would rather marry Mr. Knightley (one of Jane's own favourite men) than Mr. Bennet; but I think the wise novel-reader would rather have Mr. Bennet's company on a

journey. Mr. Knightley has sense and humour and a better character than Mr. Bennet: what he says is always worth listening to. But Mr. Bennet's wine is of a rarer vintage; to be sipped with a lingering watchfulness of luxury. Luxury indeed is the word; it comes from him and comes to us: no one in all the world of novels exhibits so much of what Mr. Herbert Paul once described as 'the priceless luxury of intellectual contempt'. No doubt the husband of Mrs. Bennet started with an unfair advantage in that matter. Still, if *Emma* has no minor characters that come up to the level of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, it has a fine gallery of successes of its own. Miss Bates is incomparable: among all the attempts to put incessant and inconsequent garrulity upon the stage of the novel, this one of Jane Austen stands out alone in solitary certainty of success. Miss Bates's chatter is so lifelike that those who know nothing about the art of creation might suppose it to have been taken down by a shorthand writer. But those who have ever made any humblest attempt at art or letters know what an immeasurable gulf lies between the results of shorthand or photography and such a miracle of creation as this. Mrs. Elton, too, is excellent, though more in the caricature world of Mr. Collins and Lady Catharine. She is not unlike

Lady Catharine in insolence and snobbery, only hers is the still more odious snobbery of money. On the whole she is more amusing: we hate and despise her, but we also laugh when she pours forth her endless boastings about the barouche-landau and 'people who have extensive grounds'. There remain Mrs. Weston, a quietly convincing figure, and Mr. Weston, one of the best sketches ever made of the cheerful, amiable, optimistic, unimportant man whom we all know; with nothing to do and always busy about doing it. And then there is Mr. Woodhouse; Mr. Woodhouse, for whom I cannot feel all or indeed much of Mr. Bradley's extraordinary admiration. To call him 'next to Don Quixote, perhaps the most perfect gentleman in fiction', seems to me merely absurd, and particularly absurd when speaking of a novel in which Mr. Knightley is one of the characters. Indeed, he is not a gentleman, or at any rate not a man, at all: he is an old woman—a dear old woman, no doubt, and Emma's father; but he is only there to provide some pleasant comic business which he does very well. But it is all he does.

However, for the purposes of the plot none of these minor characters is so important as are Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax, on whose secret engagement so much turns. Unluckily even the most

loyal of Janeites can hardly deny that they are both failures; their whole relation is fundamentally unconvincing. It is curious how often Jane Austen repeated the situation of a marriage or proposed marriage between a rich man of fashion and a poor or obscure girl. We have Robert Ferrars and Lucy Steele, Darcy and Elizabeth, Henry Crawford and Fanny, Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax. Not one of these marriages is probable in itself, and only one, the one which had the narrowest gulf of social division to cross, is made probable by Jane's handling of it. Darcy is so violently in love and Elizabeth is so delightful that in their case nothing, not even Wickham, can block our way to belief in their marriage. And Darcy is a man big enough to undergo a great experience. But all the others are shallow worldlings who, we feel sure, would never under any circumstances have done anything likely to bring upon them the ridicule of their friends; and what could be so certain to do that as a poor and unfashionable marriage? It may be said that Frank Churchill is the son of Mr. Weston, no great personage. But he is the heir of the Churchills, who have brought him up; and his tone is the tone of an idle and smart young man. Such a man might flirt with a penniless girl preparing to be a governess. But it would take much more

than Jane Austen has been at the pains of doing to make us believe that he would seriously want to marry her. And even if Jane had got us over that stile, there are others behind it quite unclimbable. Let us suppose, what we never see, that he is enough in love with his Jane to break with his world and marry her. His conduct only becomes the more inexplicable. He puts her to continual torture by his heartless flirtations with Emma, which, we are told, are only acting. When all is discovered Emma says: 'Now I can tolerably comprehend his behaviour. He never wished to attach me. It was merely a blind to conceal his real situation with another.' She 'tolerably comprehends' more than most readers of the story can. The same excuse for his conduct is put forward by himself in his long letter to Mrs. Weston. But how little plausibility there is in it! He wanted to conceal his engagement to Jane. He had nothing to do but to appear quite indifferent, as a fashionable young man well might, to all the Highbury young ladies. There is not the slightest necessity for the flirtation with Emma. And the flirtation, carried so far as it is, is quite inconsistent with what we are asked to believe of the reality and depth of his secret love for Jane.

No: the truth, I am afraid, is that neither Frank

Churchill nor Jane Fairfax is ever really alive. Nothing which either does is done because his or her character and circumstances demand it. Frank's flirtation with Emma is there to show us one side of Emma; and to that Jane Austen has sacrificed the consistency and probability of Frank. Jane Fairfax's reserve is there, not for her own sake, but to reconcile us to Emma's rash openness of speech and conduct. Jane Austen is never at her best when drawing what she dislikes: unless, as in Mrs. Norris and Mrs. Elton, the odious is merged in the ridiculous. There was nothing she disliked more than every kind of concealment, especially when it involved deceit. She disliked the secret engagement too much to be able to give her proper gift of life to the secret engagers. Frank and Jane are necessary to the plot; but they are nothing else: they are not among the people whom we ever remember. And I am not sure that the plot might not have gone better if the reader had been let into the secret earlier. Have not the conversations between Frank and Emma, for instance, or Emma and Mr. Weston, a richer entertainment of irony at the second reading, when we know the facts, than at the first when we do not?

'My Emma,' says Mr. Knightley, when all is known and he is safely engaged, 'does not every-

thing prove the beauty of truth and sincerity in all our dealings with each other?' That is the essence of the book; and it belongs to the whole heart and mind of Jane Austen. It has been remarked that there is in all, or nearly all, her books a repentance on which considerable stress is laid. There are the repentances of Willoughby and Marianne; of Darcy, Elizabeth, and Mr. Bennet; of Sir Thomas Bertram, which amounts to 'anguish' and extends over three pages; of Anne and Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion*. And so in *Emma*. Emma, who learns and grows more continuously than any other of Jane Austen's characters, repents again and again, as she makes each new discovery of her own conceit, folly, and unkindness. But it is not she who commits what was in the author's eyes the unpardonable sin. If only Frank and Jane had been live people we may be sure that their repentance would have been the bitterest in all the novels. As it is, like everything else about them, it makes very little impression: as we do not believe in the sinners we are unmoved by their repentance. In this respect as in all others their importance to the story and their unimportance in themselves combine to weaken what, but for them, might perhaps have claimed the second place among Jane Austen's novels.

VI

NORTHANGER ABBEY

ONLY four of Jane Austen's novels were published in her lifetime. The last of these, *Emma*, appeared, as we have seen, in 1816. She died on the 18th of July 1817. *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* were published together in 1818. Part of that last year of Jane's life had been spent in writing *Persuasion*. But its companion volume had been first written twenty years before, in 1797 and 1798, as we learn from a note written by Jane's sister Cassandra. It was sold to a publisher and announced for publication under the name of *Susan* in 1803, but was never printed and was bought back by one of Jane's brothers in 1816 for the same sum which the publisher, one Mr. Crosby, had originally given for it. Having recovered it she contemplated publishing it with the title 'Catherine'; and wrote for it the 'Advertisement' which tells us it was ready for publication in 1803, and apologies for the parts of it which the lapse of thirteen years 'have made comparatively obsolete'. A few months before she died she wrote to her niece, Fanny Knight, '*Miss Catherine* is put upon the shelf for the present and I do not know

that she will ever come out'. Whether 'Susan' was much revised or altered before it became 'Catherine', it is impossible to say for certain. Such evidence as there is points the other way; for a few things remain in it which were out of date or untrue in 1816 but true and natural in 1803. For instance, as Mr. Chapman has pointed out, the Mr. James King who is described as M.C. of the Lower Rooms at Bath ceased to hold that office in 1805.

After her death Jane Austen's friends wisely came to the conclusion that *Northanger Abbey*, as they decided to call it, was too good to be left in manuscript, and they brought it out with *Persuasion*, each of these two being about half the length of the earlier novels. They were right, and we are all grateful to them. But it is easy to understand the hesitation Jane herself may have felt. 'The author of *Pride and Prejudice*' and its companions could not be very proud of *Northanger Abbey*, and might be afraid of suffering some loss of reputation by it. By the side of any of them it appears a somewhat crude production. And when she wrote that doubting letter to her niece she could not but remember that she had a 'something ready for publication' which was, as she must have known, the most delicate, and in some respects the most perfect, of all her books. *Northanger Abbey*

suffers, as youthful works commonly do, from the defect which is most opposite both to delicacy and to perfection. It is the most extravagant and violent of Jane Austen's novels, the farthest removed from probability. Its whole conception is dominated by a desire to satirize certain popular romances, especially Mrs. Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, which appeared just before it was originally written. And just as part of *Mansfield Park* suffers from the fact that we have not read *Lovers' Vows* and know nothing about the characters who play their parts in it, so nearly all *Northanger Abbey* suffers from our not having read *The Mysteries of Udolpho* or any of the other novels mentioned, and never having been in the state of mind which such reading produced. Satire, when the thing satirized is not morals but a fashion, is the least permanent of all literary forms. Butler's *Hudibras* was enormously popular so long as people remembered the pious phrases, ugly clothes, and uncouth manners of the Puritans. On their disappearance it became unreadable except to the curious. Gilbert's *Patience*, another satire upon clothes and language, is the least alive of his comedies. And in the same way, so far as *Northanger Abbey* is a satire on Mrs. Radcliffe and her world, now dead and forgotten, it cannot be as alive as the other novels, which

satirize vanity and vulgarity, selfishness and worldliness, which still so visibly walk our streets to-day. Of course, if it had not had in it much else besides Mrs. Radcliffe it would be unreadable. It has much else, but the satire goes all through it and fills enough space to be rather in the way for people to whom it has little meaning. When originally announced, *Northanger Abbey* was called 'A Romance', in contrast to *Persuasion*, which was called 'A Novel'. But of course, like *Sense and Sensibility*, it is not a Romance but an Anti-Romance. And the business of ridiculing Romance has affected its story much more, and much more unfortunately, than it affected that of *Sense and Sensibility*. The absurdity of Catherine's easy surrender, on no evidence at all, to the suspicion that General Tilney had murdered his wife, the absurdity of Henry Tilney being able to hear of the suspicion without serious anger, the absurdity of General Tilney turning Catherine out of his house, as he does, in a moment, for no reason whatever, are all due to the fact that, for a Romance, the most necessary of all characters is an ogre of incredible pride and cruelty. And so Anti-Romance has to have its ogre too. But Anti-Romance is comedy; and such figures, when converted to comedy, are seldom either amusing or convincing.

The best part of the book is, of course, the first half, or really two-thirds, of which the scene is Bath. If the satire marks the youth of *Northanger Abbey* in one way it is not the only youthful thing about it. The characters themselves are very young. Catherine is only fifteen and must be the youngest of the heroines except Fanny Price, who makes her first appearance at the age of nine; and the whole atmosphere of the relations between her and Isabella, between her brother and Isabella's brother, and even between herself and Henry Tilney, is very young, markedly younger, for instance, than the similar Bath scenes of *Persuasion*. There is almost a schoolboy-schoolgirl note about the follies and pleasures and flirtations, the dancing and driving, the laughing and talking, of these young people. And Henry Tilney—though already a clergyman—is much the youngest in manners, if not in years, of Jane Austen's lover-heroes. His character is unimpeachable, but we hear much less of his conscience and his views of right and wrong than of those of Jane's other clerical hero, Edmund Bertram. He is one of the wittiest and perhaps the most cultivated of Jane's men. His chaff of Catherine's 'romantic' fancies is often brilliant and always amusing, and his discussion of novels, history, and language with

her and her sister is, I fancy, the most literary conversation in all the novels.

It is noticeable that, although he is already a beneficed clergyman, he appears, like all the other men in the novels, including the clergymen, to have nothing particular to do. He does not take his clerical duties very seriously. It is at least possible[1] that he stayed in his father's house, doing nothing of importance, on Easter Day itself, although his parish was within an easy drive of the Abbey. But he was not an habitual absentee—that is, he had his home in the parsonage; and no doubt, after his marriage, he lived in it as regularly as Dr. Grant, Dr. Shirley, Mr. Collins, and Mr. Elton appear to have lived in theirs. The whole clerical standard of those days, as seen in other books besides Jane Austen's, was far below that of the Victorian period or of the present day. All Jane's clergymen are decent respectable men; and of one of them, at any rate, Dr. Shirley, we are told that he and his wife 'have been doing good all their lives'. If two of them are snobs and fools, that might happen even to-day. And there are many clergymen to-day who are merely respectable and no more. But what Jane Austen does with her

[1] Mr. Chapman, in the Oxford Edition, discusses the evidence and gives him the benefit of the doubt.

clergy is something which would be quite impossible to do to-day. No novelist of to-day would dream of introducing nearly a dozen clergymen into a set of novels, while giving only one of them any visible sense of the gravity of the calling of a man who accepts 'a cure of souls'. Edmund has something of that, but even he not much more than something: Dr. Shirley we know only by report; and of any such feeling the others show nothing at all. That is one reason, no doubt, why Edmund was one of Jane's favourite men. For she herself certainly did not approve of careless or idle clergymen. Her religion was no mere easy convention. It had no violences of 'enthusiasm' about it, of course: that sort of thing was no more in her religious nature than in any other part of her. But it was serious and sincere, and not without admiration for people who were a little more than that. When her favourite niece hesitated about accepting a man for fear of his being too religious, Jane replied: 'As to there being any objection from his *goodness*, from the danger of his becoming even evangelical, I cannot admit *that*. I am by no means convinced that we ought not all to be evangelicals, and am at least persuaded that they who are so from reason and feeling must be happiest and safest.' Her brother Henry, after going bankrupt

in business, took orders and 'became an earnest preacher of the evangelical school'. Another brother refused as a matter of conscience to hold a living under a pledge to resign as soon as a young man became old enough to be presented to it, a practice which Charles Hayter and even Sir Thomas Bertram regard as absolutely normal and proper. But the Evangelical wave had not then spread through the bulk of the clergy and the Oxford Movement had not begun. Jane described the clergy as she saw them, and her interest in them, as a writer of novels, was in their social, not in their religious, position. Whatever the sincerity of her own religious life she never introduces religion into her books. I do not remember any mention in them of the doctrines or ceremonies of the Church, though Henry Crawford, of all people, once discourses on the merits and defects of 'our Liturgy'; the many ethical discussions are purely ethical and make no direct allusion to Christian ideals or teaching. Perhaps the only mention of prayer or of God in all the novels is in her last book, and at its very end, when Captain Wentworth cries 'Thank God' in a tone and with a look which Anne was sure she would never forget; 'nor the sight of him afterwards as he sat near a table, leaning over it with folded arms and

face concealed as if overpowered by the various feelings of his soul and trying by prayer and reflection to calm them'. Jane certainly meant her books to be 'on the side of the angels'; and they are. Nobody was ever the worse for reading them; and probably few people read them without consciously or unconsciously being a little more ashamed than they were before of their own folly, vanity, and selfishness, and a little more resolved on trying to get rid of them. But she would have thought it presumptuous and ridiculous to set up directly as a teacher. Her business is with the comedy of manners, which is always, for those who choose to look below the surface, also the tragedy of morals. But she does not compel any one to look below the surface. And the great majority of her readers do not care to do so. Nor do her characters, not even her clergymen. They are just gentlemen like her other gentlemen, or very little different. In those days, as Mary Crawford rejoices, they did not even wear a distinctive dress. But, in Mary's world, as in the world of Mrs. Ferrars, they are unknown or despised. Edward Ferrars 'always preferred the Church' but he was not allowed to follow his own inclination, because 'that was not smart enough for my family'. Mary Crawford, trying to persuade Edmund not to take

orders, asserts that 'one scarcely sees a clergyman out of his pulpit' and that 'distinction may be gained' in the Army or the Navy or the Law 'but not in the Church. A Clergyman is nothing.' So, in another conversation, she declares that it is indolence which makes men become clergymen: '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.' 'A Clergyman has nothing to do but be slovenly and selfish; read the newspaper, watch the weather, and quarrel with his wife. His curate does all the work, and the business of his own life is to dine.' To all of which Edmund and Fanny make replies which partly anticipate the view of a clergyman's office which a generation later was to become universal, and partly remind us that the casual and light-hearted view of clerical responsibilities taken by so many of Jane Austen's people had never, even in those days, been allowed to pass unquestioned. If Mary Crawford's talk of ease and indolence finds its precedent and confirmation in the wish expressed by Johnson's friend Edwards that he had been a parson, and so enjoyed 'a much easier life' than he had had as a solicitor, Edmund's reply looks back to Johnson's, who would not allow that a clergyman's life was an easy one, at any rate

if he had a conscience. 'I would rather have Chancery suits upon my hands than the cure of souls.' Still there is no doubt that Jane Austen's clergy have no appearance of lying awake at nights thinking of the souls of whom they have undertaken the care. In her novels a living is a piece of property, like any other, and its attraction consists in a good house, a pleasant neighbourhood, good shooting, and such things. Whatever might be the practice, according to Miss Crawford, in London, in the country the clergy shared the life of the neighbouring squires. A Clergyman is even lifted a little above the other sons of small squires by 'having chosen' like Charles Hayter 'to be a scholar and a gentleman'. And the Rectors of good livings, like Dr. Grant, are well supplied with servants and carriages, and above all keep excellent tables. This last characteristic seems to go with the title of Doctor which they mostly enjoy. Even Miss Steele's young man is 'The Doctor', and clearly not of medicine but of divinity. So are the rectors of Mansfield and Uppercross. Few clergymen now become Doctors unless they are Professors or Bishops. It seems then to have been the regular title for what Boswell called 'a wealthy and well-beneficed clergyman'. Dr. Shirley and Dr. Grant take their places in a long line of Doctors,

not only with real ones like Boswell's Dr. Taylor, but with the creations of poetry and fiction, like the Doctor of Thomson's *Autumn*, Peacock's Doctor Folliott, Meredith's Doctor Middleton, and many more. In those days, the word Doctor, standing by itself, meant a clergyman quite as often as a physician. This use is now so forgotten that it is commonly misunderstood. How many readers of Wordsworth's *Poet's Epitaph* are aware that it is a parson who is being warned not to come too close to the grave in these lines?—

> Art thou a man of purple cheer?
> A rosy man, right plump to see?
> Approach; yet, Doctor, not too near;
> This grave no cushion is for thee.

The 'rosy man' and the 'purple cheer' now take us even farther away from our notion of a clergyman than the title Doctor. But that is how things were in those days, and are in Jane Austen's novels, especially in all we hear of the Rector and Rectory of Mansfield.

But Henry Tilney is neither a Doctor nor, in any offensive sense, a diner; and perhaps some apology is due to him for making him an introduction to his plumper and more self-indulgent brethren whose memory is cherished by satire and fiction. The excuse is, of course, that, except

Edmund Bertram, he is the only one of Jane Austen's parsons who occupies the first place in a book. But it must be admitted that we see him more as a lover than as a parson; and perhaps even more as the embodiment and spokesman of the anti-romance which is, as I have said, the motive of the novel. *Northanger Abbey* is, on the whole, the least important and least interesting of the novels. But Jane Austen, if as yet rather crude and extravagant, is already an entertaining satirist. John Thorpe's vulgarity and his sister's emptiness, both of heart and head, sometimes pass the bounds of credibility. But his vanity, and the lies which flow from it so spontaneously, are natural enough; and the unintended and undesired effect which they produce on the greed of General Tilney is very pleasant in itself and is told with a swift concentration and a certainty of stroke worthy of the maturer hand which gave us *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*. Take this as an example:

'With whomsoever he was, or was likely to be, connected, his own consequence always required that theirs should be great; and as his intimacy with any acquaintance grew, so regularly grew their fortune. The expectations of his friend Morland, therefore, from the first overrated, had, ever since his introduction to Isabella, been gradually increasing, and by merely adding twice as much for the

grandeur of the moment, by doubling what he chose to think the amount of Mr. Morland's preferment, trebling his private fortune, bestowing a rich aunt, and sinking half the children, he was able to represent the whole family to the General in a most respectable light.'

If that was written in 1797 it shows how early Jane Austen came into her own as a writer. Her hands are full, but she neither drops nor bungles anything: all her pieces are quickly and safely placed where she means them to go, and the whole is crowned with the agreeable satire of the last four words. And if the story of *Northanger Abbey* is not on a level with the best of the writing, there are good things in it. What a characteristic touch, characteristic of the maturest Jane Austen in its honesty, humour and, as it were, slyness, is the confession that Henry Tilney would never have given Catherine 'a serious thought' if he had not discovered that she was giving him a good many! And how the very last words of the book unite satire and sympathy, the critical and the accepting view of human nature, into a summing up which is pure Jane Austen, both in matter and style, and could not for a moment be anybody else. In no other conclusion, I think, does she put so much of herself into the last drops of ink which flowed from her pen.

'To begin perfect happiness at the respective ages of twenty-six and eighteen is to do pretty well; and professing myself, moreover, convinced that the General's unjust interference, so far from being really injurious to their felicity, was perhaps rather conducive to it, by improving their knowledge of each other, and adding strength to their attachment, I leave it to be settled by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny or reward filial disobedience.'

Whoever does not like that will never like, or understand, Jane Austen.



VII

PERSUASION

PERSUASION was Jane Austen's last book. It was only completed in the summer or autumn of 1816, less than a year before her death. She had begun to be ill early in 1816 and had even sometimes given friends the impression that she thought of herself as visiting old haunts for the last time. But her letters that year are as cheerful as always, and certainly *Persuasion* shows no falling off in her powers. And even after 1817 had begun she was able to occupy herself with a new novel. She wrote, as we shall see presently, as many as twelve chapters of what is now printed as *Sanditon*, between 27 January and 17 March, when she was obliged to give up the attempt. In May she was moved to Winchester, where she died in a little house close to the College, on 18 July, and was buried in the Cathedral.

Obviously she had not thought of *Persuasion* as her last novel. And yet there is a quality in it which fits it for being that. 'Ripeness is all.' It is the ripest, the mellowest, the most completely humane, of all her novels. It came out, as we have seen, with *Northanger Abbey*, and while that

was described as 'A Romance', *Persuasion* was described as 'A Novel'. But if the word Romance be associated, as it now commonly is, not so much with the medieval and the mysterious as with a certain emotional quality of sympathy and tenderness, *Persuasion* is much more of a Romance than *Northanger Abbey*. Indeed it is by far the most Romantic book this anti-Romantic writer has left us. The 'moving accident' was no more her trade than Wordsworth's; and when she tried it, as in the matrimonial crimes of *Mansfield Park*, or in the violent illness of Marianne Dashwood with its accompaniment, the midnight arrival of Willoughby, or, as here, in the absurdly extravagant results of Louisa's fall on the Cobb, she invariably failed. She had no gift for melodrama. But, if the 'accidents' fail, she can do the moving without them, as this book is alone enough to show. There are few heroines in fiction whom we love so much, feel for so much, as we love and feel for Anne Elliot. All Jane Austen's novels are stories of love ending in marriage, and we may be more entertained by the ups and downs and uncertainties of the love-affairs of Elizabeth and Emma, but our hearts are not stirred for them as they are for Anne. I do not for a moment say that we are heart-whole, if that means indifferent, as we follow

the fates which now encourage and now obstruct the transformation of Elizabeth into Mrs. Darcy and of Emma into Mrs. Knightley. Far from it. We owe both those ladies too much and, indeed, love them too well. But they do not move us to that suffering of love without which its experience is not completed. We are in pain of heart for Anne's lonely fears all along, in every chapter, till we get to the famous twenty-third, the only chapter, so far as we know, which Jane ever re-wrote, and attain to the relief, the consolation, it would not be too much to say, the fullness of joy, of the scene in the White Hart Hotel.

Anne Elliot's marriage is, in fact, less of a social and more of a private and emotional event than those of the heroines of the only two of the novels which can be thought of as rivals to *Persuasion*. Both Elizabeth and Emma live in a cooler world than Anne, where they play pleasantly with circumstances and events, and are long quite unaware of that one thing which will mean life or death to them and of which Anne bears the secret agony in her heart from the first page almost to the very last. The note of comedy, in fact, which prevails in the other novels, though still very present in *Persuasion*, hardly touches Anne herself and is sometimes almost silenced by the note of a romance

which is not far away from tragedy. And Jane responds to the new call with a new language. There are no such passages in the earlier books as that in which she describes Anne's feelings after she has discovered that Louisa was nothing to Captain Wentworth and that she herself, almost certainly, was a great deal.

'Prettier musings of high-wrought love and eternal constancy could never have passed along the streets of Bath than Anne was sporting with from Camden Place to Westgate Buildings. It was almost enough to spread purification and perfume all the way.'

And in none of the earlier heroines do we ever catch quite the note of passion which comes out in the concealed confession lying behind Anne's words to Captain Harville which, overheard by Frederick Wentworth, made him 'half agony, half hope'. She is not denying, she says, the strength or constancy of a man's love. Only she thinks that a man must have hope to keep his love alive. 'All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one: you need not covet it), is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone.'

Yet the tenderness and poetry of *Persuasion* do not make Jane Austen forget either her humour or her common sense. Mrs. Elton's pride of purse is

more odious but not more ridiculous than Sir Walter Elliot's pride of birth. Pomposity and self-importance have seldom stood in nakeder absurdity than they do in the scene of the letting of Kellynch Hall; and the snobbery of rank was never more contemptible than it is in Mary Musgrove's insistence on her precedence over her mother-in-law at a seaside lodging in which her husband's sister is at that moment lying at the gates of death! The whole of the relations between the great House at Uppercross and the Cottage are a continual stream of incidents which unite comedy and truth. And no one in all Jane Austen is fuller than Mary of that humour of unconsciousness with which Jane always enjoys making play. Mary makes everybody about her the victim of her selfishness, snobbery, and imaginary illnesses, and is all the while continually supposing herself to be the injured innocent who is victimized by the unkindness of others. When her husband wants to dine with his parents she is the anxious mother who thinks her boy may die that evening; but, only a few minutes later, when she finds that her husband is resolved to go whatever she says, she discovers that Anne, 'not having a mother's feelings', is 'a great deal the properest person' to be with the child, while she herself 'has not the

nerves for that sort of thing'; moreover, she is sure she 'ought to go' to the big house; for the parents 'want me excessively to be acquainted with Captain Wentworth'. So she blunders, at once to our entertainment and exasperation, all through the novel, pitying herself and preventing anybody else from pitying her. For the worst of her blunders, indeed, the one for which we hate her most, she is not wholly responsible; for she had never known that Frederick Wentworth and Anne had loved each other some years before. But even in ignorance it is brutal enough. 'Captain Wentworth is not very gallant by you, Anne, though he was so attentive to me. Henrietta asked him what he thought of you, when they went away, and he said "you were so altered he should not have known you again".' It stabs us with its cruelty. And the gentle modesty of Anne's secret thoughts about it makes us all the angrier. But Jane Austen seldom leaves things in that atmosphere; and we remember even this with pleasure, when we come to a certain happy morning at Bath and hear Frederick assuring Anne that his brother had inquired after her 'very particularly; asked even if you were personally altered, *little* suspecting that to my eye you could never alter'; and, like Anne herself, we 'smile and let it pass'.

We do not know Sir Walter as we know Mary; but he too is very absurd and very pleasantly unconscious of his absurdity. There is no more agreeable satire in Jane Austen than Sir Walter on Admiral Croft and Admiral Croft on Sir Walter. No doubt the Admiral would only have given a laugh of contempt if he had heard of Sir Walter's encouraging decision that 'if his own man might have had the arranging of his hair, he should not be ashamed of being seen with him anywhere'. But what Sir Walter would have said if the cool comment of the Admiral had come to his ears it is impossible even to conjecture. 'The Baronet will never set the Thames on fire, but there seems no harm in him.' One sadly fears that, in the presence of such an enormous outrage on the Baronetage, not even 'Gowland, merely Gowland' could have saved his hair from turning grey on the spot, or his cheeks from becoming as wrinkled as those of the sea-beaten Admirals whom he was so indignant to find disfiguring the elegance of Bath.

In his book on Milton's Prosody Mr. Bridges remarks that romantic art allows and even demands 'a realism far stronger than classical art would bear'. Is it something akin to this that makes Jane Austen give freest, one may almost say most cruel, play to her common sense in this her most

Romantic novel? She always had a Johnsonian contempt for false sentiment. It appears in her letters; as, for instance, when her comment on the death of a certain Mrs. H. is:

'I had no idea anybody liked her, and therefore felt nothing for any survivor, but I am now feeling away on her husband's account, and think he had better marry Miss Sharp.'

So in *Emma*, when she comes to record the death of 'the great Mrs. Churchill', her comment is characteristically cool and common-sensical.

'Goldsmith tells us that, when lovely woman stoops to folly, she has nothing to do but to die: and when she stoops to be disagreeable, it is equally to be recommended as a clearer of ill fame.'

In *Persuasion*, perhaps, as I say, because it is her most sentimental book, she goes even farther, approaching brutality, in her remarks about Mrs. Musgrove's 'large fat sighings over the destiny of a son whom alive nobody had cared for'; the 'very troublesome, hopeless son' whom the Musgroves had 'the ill fortune' to have born to them, and the 'good fortune to lose before his twentieth year'. That is one of her strengths to-day, her perfect frankness. There is much of human life which she never touches at all. But wherever she does go she goes with eyes wide open

and tongue unbridled by any sentimental reserves or compromises. The truth is her business and, as here in this matter of poor Dick Musgrove, she sticks at nothing in telling it. She is as fond, in her pleasant way, as Mr. Hardy in his grim and sardonic way, of noting how fate makes us say and do—as she shows us Anne again and again saying and doing—exactly the thing calculated to defeat our secret hopes and block our way to happiness; and she enjoys the laughing comment made by the facts on the dreams of sentiment. Anne is not spared such comment: she has many times to bear it as she can: most amusingly, perhaps, that day when she is in Lady Russell's carriage, sees her friend looking across the street in the direction where Captain Wentworth is standing, and is imagining her astonishment at his youthful appearance and her admiration of his good looks, when all at once her castle of romance is shattered, reality and prose make their cold voices heard, and it appears that the fixed gaze had not been directed at the lover at all but at some window-curtains praised by a certain Lady Alicia as 'the handsomest and best hung of any in Bath'!

There is another and graver piece of anti-sentiment in this book to which there are parallels

in the others but none, I think, which goes so far as this in *Persuasion*. Jane Austen was, we gather from her biographers, a very loving and a much loved Aunt. Anne is the principal Aunt in her novels. Emma is one also; but her aunt-ship plays much less part than Anne's. One might have expected that Jane would have lingered over and idealized a position which she knew so well and enjoyed so much. But no. Her sincerity and frankness never desert her. It is painful to those who think children by far the most delightful things on earth to find that Jane certainly did not agree with them. But when we have got over that, if we can at all get over it, her treatment of children, as invariably critical and condemnatory as La Fontaine's, even more surprising in another way, is at any rate one more reassuring proof of her absolute sincerity. Indeed there must certainly be more than sincerity, there must be experience, in those repeated allusions to the disagreeableness, both of noisy and ill-managed children and of the vanity and selfishness which, in spite of it, they occasion in their parents. It is the same story again and again; Lady Middleton and Mrs. Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility*, poor Mrs. Price in *Mansfield Park*, Mary Musgrove and her mother-in-law in *Persuasion*. There is more than observation, I am

sure there is autobiography, in Elinor Dashwood's reply to Lucy Steele's insincere praise of the Middleton children, 'I cannot bear children if they are tame and quiet'. 'I confess', replies Elinor, 'that while I am at Barton Park I never think of tame and quiet children with any abhorrence.' Again, there must be unpleasant experiences behind the bitter account of Lady Middleton who 'seemed to be roused to enjoyment only by the entrance of her four noisy children, who pulled her about, tore her clothes, and put an end to every kind of discourse, except what related to themselves'. And the 'fine family-piece' of the Musgroves is painted in exactly the same colours, and shows their grandfather unable to make his voice heard through their noise when he is trying to talk to a lady in his own drawing-room.

So we see the woman, with her preferences and prejudices, discoverable behind the artist, whether she wishes it or not. All the attempts at identification of particular persons in her books are absurd and merely show the same sort of ignorance of what art is after as the discoveries of political mystifications or verbal acrostics in Shakespeare's plays. But no one, not even Shakespeare, can write without letting us see a little of what kind of man he was; and what kind of woman Jane

Austen was she is at no pains to conceal. Here in this very book, her one romance, she is as sure as ever that duty is duty, and that no high-flown talk about sentiment and passion can turn wrong into right or right into wrong. She actually goes so far, it is to be noticed, as to justify sense against sensibility even in this story in which, it would seem, sense had done all the mischief; for she makes Anne, at the very end, look back and say quite definitely that, however much mistaken Lady Russell had been in giving her the advice which caused her years of loneliness and sorrow, she herself had been right to follow it: for 'if I had done otherwise, I should have suffered more in continuing the engagement than I did even in giving it up, because I should have suffered in my conscience'. So we see a little of the woman but perhaps more of the artist in the fact that this book, written in 1815 and 1816, with its action taking place in 1814, contains scarcely an allusion to the great events of those days. Neither the war nor the peace concerns her except so far as the peace brings home Admirals to take country houses and Captains to make love to young ladies. This is partly because Jane knew her limitations as an artist, and knew that Pitt and Fox and Castlereagh, Nelson and Wellington, were outside her range

altogether; and probably partly also because she had some unconscious instinct of the truth that individual men and women, as they are, always have been, and always will be, are the true subject of the novel, and not theories or propaganda of any kind, whether political or social or religious. *Daniel Deronda* will never do beside *Middlemarch*, and if we enjoy the social and political discussions of *Sybil* or the religious discussions of *Marius the Epicurean*, it is not because we ever believe in the people who take part in them. But there is the woman too in this reticence of Jane Austen. She lived at a time when all but a very few women found it best to keep their cleverness, if they had any, to themselves. And she was quite aware of the unpopularity of clever women. Sometimes she is a little impatient of it. There is autobiography in the remark she makes in *Northanger Abbey*:

> 'To come with a well-informed mind is to come with an inability of administering to the vanity of others. A woman, especially if she have the misfortune of knowing anything, should conceal it as well as she can.'

So I am sure she had heard of herself being called satirical, and was remembering it, when she said that Lady Middleton fancied Elinor and Marianne were satirical 'because they were fond of reading'. But on the whole hers was a very modest, and what

was then thought feminine, nature. She enjoyed such fame as she got when it came but she never went out of her way to seek it. She declined an invitation to a literary party at which Madame de Staël was to be present, and her nephew doubts whether she ever 'was in company with any person whose talents or whose celebrity equalled her own'. She was content to be herself. More than that indeed. For we are all that, as she remarks in this book:

'Saved as we all are by some comfortable feeling of superiority from wishing for the possibility of exchange';

that is, exchange of minds or what we now call personalities. The beggar wishes for the millionaire's house and park, cars and dinners, but he does not wish to be the millionaire: he wishes to have what the millionaire has without ceasing to be himself. But Jane Austen was content not only with herself but with her surroundings: she was content to be her mother's daughter and her sister's sister: she had no more desire to be Madame de Staël than to be the Prince Regent.

A novel a hundred years old has a gulf of time, manners, and language between it and the ordinary reader which the ordinary reader is generally too lazy or too stupid to be at the pains of crossing. But for another sort of reader that escape from the

contemporary and the familiar is, at any rate in certain novels, a great attraction. The old fashions and formalities are interesting and entertaining now just for that very reason, that they are old, and that we no longer see them practised in our streets or our drawing-rooms. And of course they have an actual value for the social historian. So, if it be not too profane a handling of a story so beautiful as *Persuasion*, it may not be unamusing, nor even uninstructive, to note some sayings and doings in it which are no longer said or done to-day. Some we may regret, and some we may rejoice to be rid of. Of the fuss about rank and precedence made by Sir Walter and Mary we are certainly well delivered, though it is possible to argue that we now go rather too far in the opposite direction. And we all prefer our present quick and easy scattering of Christian names to the formality which makes Mrs. Musgrove talk of her daughter-in-law as Mrs. Charles, and Sir Walter of his daughter as Miss Elliot; which even makes Sir Thomas Bertram, when speaking to his young niece of his young son, call him 'Mr. Bertram'! On the other hand, we may regret that we have now lost that power of tacking 'Sir' or 'Madam' on to our sentences which Dr. Johnson used with such tremendous effect. A hundred years ago they

still possessed it, and could use it with any one, even with social inferiors. 'Pray, Sir,' says Mary Musgrove to the waiter at Lyme, 'did not his servant say whether he belonged to the Kellynch family?' How awkward it is to be forced to a choice, as we now are, between a surname, which we very likely do not know, and the bleak nakedness of no address at all! How convenient to be able, like the French, to say Madame to the lady whose name we have not caught! How useful to have Mademoiselle to help out and grace our rebukes to the housemaid, and Monsieur to heighten with its icy politeness the effect of our pointing out to an innkeeper that he has robbed us!

Here is one loss, at any rate. But there is much gain. Nobody will wish to revive the old practices about mourning which make Miss Elliot wear black for a second cousin's wife whom she had never seen; which, indeed, fifty years after Jane Austen, made the daughters of a peer continually watch their colour-blind father lest, though in mourning, he should use the red sealing-wax in place of the black! Nor will those at any rate who hire houses in the country wish to go back to the days when a still self-important though impoverished squire could take such a high line as Sir

Walter takes about letting his house. 'I am not particularly disposed', he loftily says, 'to favour a tenant. The Park would be open to him, of course, and few navy officers or men of any other description can have had such a range: but what restrictions I might impose on the use of the pleasure-grounds is another thing. I am not fond of the idea of my shrubberies being always approachable: and I should recommend Miss Elliot to be on her guard with respect to her flower-garden.' Gardens were, of course, then, walled spaces, often some distance away from the house; but the shrubberies at least were, as a rule, close by: and the modern owner will perhaps envy, as much as the modern hirer will stand aghast at, a state of affairs in which the landlord could think of dictating to a tenant so far as to order him to 'keep to the paths' of the place he is living in!

So again, though sport is not to-day what it was before the war, it is curious to note that Jane Austen retains something of the contemptuous tone about it common in the eighteenth century. Addison made his Tory fox-hunter a fool, and evidently knew that that is what his readers would expect: Gibbon's sarcastic account of the society in a country-house is, 'I found Lord Egremont and four-score fox-hounds'; and Chesterfield, the

very high-priest of fashion, writes to his godson: 'Mange du gibier si tu veux mais ne sois pas ton propre boucher.' Jane does not say things so severe as these; but her tone about the sporting proclivities of Sir John Middleton, Charles Musgrove, and others is far from being so complimentary as Victorian fashions would have made it. One other note of manners appears in the fact that Bath is still socially important in Jane Austen's books. Perhaps its appearance in *Persuasion* may be its last appearance in literature as almost dividing with London the honours of the fashionable and pleasure-seeking world. Its grave began to be dug when George III took to going to Weymouth. Then followed the Regent and Brighton and the Pavilion; and now, for good and evil, the whole of the South Coast is given over to places of amusement, while Bath and the inland Spas are confined, except for their residents, to their original role of ministering to the sick. The change may be seen even in Jane herself. Her unfinished last book, *Sanditon*, is a story of the sea-side.

But *Persuasion* is far too fine a work to be treated as a document in the history of manners. It is a living thing, a work of the imagination, full of heart as well as mind, one may even say of soul as well as body, provided that one does not mean

by soul anything mystical or supernatural. Jane never got out of the parlour, as we know; and into the parlour nothing mystical or supernatural ever very easily gets. Nor anything very wicked either. Neither great saints, as the Church knows them, nor great sinners either, are often to be seen in parlours. So Jane has little to do with either. She walks the middle way of human life as we, most of us, walk it and know it: not often encountering either the heights or the depths of humanity. She found it amusing: a place in which the intellect can enjoy itself. That she shows us everywhere. But she also found it moving: a place of joys and sorrows which she felt and can make us feel; and that she shows us nowhere so completely as in *Persuasion*.

VIII

LADY SUSAN, THE WATSONS, LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP, AND SANDITON

LITTLE or nothing is known of the origin of *Lady Susan*, and there is not much to be said about it. It is written, as was the first and entirely unknown draft of *Sense and Sensibility* and the lately printed *Love and Friendship*, in the form of letters: the form of the great *Clarissa*, and of other novels of the eighteenth century. Almost certainly it was an early work: given up, probably, for the reasons, whatever they were, which led to the transformation of *Sense and Sensibility*. The epistolary form had, in fact, had its day: though Scott was still to put it to one of its best uses in the opening chapters of *Redgauntlet*; and Jane Austen may probably have recognized, what is plainly the truth, that it cramped her powers and prevented her from being fully herself. Perhaps that form requires an intenser action, a more emotional atmosphere, than ever suited the creator of Elizabeth Bennet. It does well enough with Clarissa and Pamela pouring out their agonies of anxiety, their overflowings of heart, to the trusted ear at the other end of the post. But for a lighter and more

varied situation we need conversation and description with the author's comment. No doubt Richardson manages to get a good deal of conversation, and other things too, into his letters. But it is always at the risk of forcing beyond itself the form he has deliberately chosen and compelling it to do work which it cannot quite naturally do. Anyhow, for whatever reason, Jane gave up that way of writing; and, if *Lady Susan* is the best she could do with it, she was clearly right. The letters of Mr. Collins, Mary Musgrove, Lydia Bennet, Mrs. Gardiner, Isabella Thorpe, and others show what first-rate use she could make of letters when opportunity served. But she possessed other gifts, fitting other opportunities which letters could not serve; and so *Lady Susan* remained in manuscript so long as she lived. It was first printed in her nephew's 'Memoir', published in 1870, and perhaps he would have been wiser if he had yielded to the doubts, which he evidently felt, as to the policy of giving it to the public. One of the worst of the literary habits of our day is that of fishing out of drawers and cupboards the crudities and juvenilities of authors who have subsequently written famous books. Very few of us have time to read the best books of more than a few great writers; and, if we are at all aware of the shortness

of life and the small part of that shortness which we give to any reading that counts, we shall not be grateful, but rather the reverse, to editors who discover and proudly print, as I remember with shame that I myself once did, unpublished poems of a great poet having no interest whatever except the fact that they had not been published before.

However, as things have turned out, we have got *Lady Susan* and, as it is there, it is difficult perhaps not to include it in editions of Jane Austen. There is no harm in reading it, and not much good. It once more proves that a thoroughly bad character was not Jane's affair. Lady Susan is an absolutely heartless worldling, a cynically selfish flirt, an odious and cruel mother. And, as she is the leading figure of the book, and always on its stage, we suffer more from her than we do from Wickham and Willoughby and Elliot, who only appear occasionally, and can be, as they are, false and unreal without depriving the stories in which they appear of life and truth. Lady Susan—partly no doubt because she is a woman—is much more alive than they are. But she is not nearly enough alive for the chief figure of a novel: we cannot care about her and her fortunes as we care about those of Clarissa Harlowe or Elizabeth Bennet or Anne Elliot. Nor is that merely because she is a bad

woman; for we care enormously about the fortunes of Becky Sharp. But then Thackeray knew all about bad people and could make Becky and even Barnes Newcome, for instance, two of the most convincing and living figures he or anybody else ever drew. But Jane Austen cannot do anything of the kind. Who believes a word of the rambling story of Mrs. Smith and Mr. Elliot in *Persuasion*? Lady Susan is a more credible figure than Mrs. Smith and her story a more credible story. But it never gets hold of us and, beyond a mild interest in the fate of her daughter, we care nothing whatever about what happens to anybody in the book. By far the best thing in it is the conclusion, in which Jane Austen drops the epistolary convention and becomes herself. And how entirely she does so may be judged from the very last words of all.

'Whether Lady Susan was or was not happy in her second choice I do not see how it can ever be ascertained: for who would take her assurance of it on either side of the question? The world must judge from probabilities: she had nothing against her but her husband, and her conscience. Sir James may seem to have drawn a harder lot than mere folly merited: I leave him, therefore, to all the pity that anybody can give him. For myself, I confess that *I* can pity only Miss Mainwaring; who, coming to town, and putting herself to an expense in clothes which impoverished her for two years, on purpose to secure him,

was defrauded of her due by a woman ten years older than herself.'

There at last we hear the voice we know so well; and can almost imagine it to be already commenting on the doings of Longbourn or Hartfield or Uppercross.

The Watsons, the other unfinished story contained in this volume, is much more interesting than *Lady Susan*. We do not need the proof given by the paper on which it is written that it is later and maturer; that, in fact, when she wrote it, she had learnt—what she had not learnt when she wrote *Lady Susan*—her own particular business, the thing which she could do as no one else had ever done it. Or, at least, she had begun to learn it. The watermarks of the manuscript, which still exists, are those of the year 1803. That proves that *The Watsons* belongs to the Bath period of Jane's life. It was written some years after the first drafts of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* and *Northanger Abbey*; some years before the first two of these were re-written and received their present names, and about the time, as we know from Jane's own statement, that *Northanger Abbey* was 'finished' in its present form. In the 'Advertisement', written in 1816, which was afterwards prefixed to that novel when it appeared with *Persuasion*,

she writes that 'thirteen years have passed since it was finished and many more since it was begun'. The *Susan* which became *Northanger Abbey* was therefore begun before *The Watsons* and may have been finished immediately before *The Watsons* was begun. We cannot therefore expect to find in *The Watsons* the perfect art of *Pride and Prejudice* and the later novels. Though showing a great advance on *Lady Susan* it belongs to the period of *Northanger Abbey*, when Jane had not yet freed herself, as we have seen, from the extravagances which are the ordinary weakness of youthful writers.

But one regrets its incompleteness as one does not regret that of *Lady Susan*. *Lady Susan* could not have come to anything worthy of Jane. *The Watsons* is much more promising. It is free from the 'romantic' absurdities of *Northanger Abbey*. In it Jane is herself, not a caricaturist of Mrs. Radcliffe or anybody else. The heroine, Emma Watson, promises to be quite as interesting as Catherine Morland, and shows no sign of being forced into any such unrealities as poor Catherine is forced into by the exigencies of caricature. The situation in which she is placed is admirably suited to give free play to Jane Austen's peculiar gifts. It is the exact opposite of that of Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*. Fanny comes from a poor home

to live with a rich uncle. Emma Watson, after being brought up by a rich uncle with expectations of being his heiress, has to return, penniless and without prospects, to her rather poor and already overcrowded home. Of course she finds her sisters, like all young women in Jane Austen, much occupied with the difficult business of finding themselves husbands. And of course, being what she is, a young woman of sense and beauty, and having been brought up as her sisters have not been brought up, she at once accomplishes things undreamt of by them. At the ball to which she is immediately taken, she attracts not only the young man to whom her sisters vainly aspire, nor even only a neighbouring clergyman, a peer's chaplain, who, because of his chaplaincy and friendship with his former pupil, seemed to them quite out of their reach, but actually arouses from his noble indifference and remoteness the young lord himself, who had always appeared to the Watson sisters as a being belonging to another planet. Out of him and his chaplain and his mother and their relations to Emma, the story was apparently to have been made. Jane's sister, Cassandra Austen, told her nieces, when she showed them the manuscript, that Emma's father was soon to die and she was to become dependent on her vulgar and narrow-

minded sister-in-law. Lord Osborne was to make her a proposal which she was to decline; and she was ultimately to marry the chaplain, Mr. Howard, after complications caused by the fact that, while he loved Emma, he was loved by Lady Osborne, the mother of his pupil and patron, who did not intend him to marry any one but herself.

This is quite a promising scheme for an Austenian novel. The danger is that too much would have depended on Lady Osborne and her son. They would have been central characters, essential to the plot, and if they had not come fully alive it would certainly have suffered and perhaps failed altogether. Jane Austen's other great personages are secondary figures, except Darcy; and apart from him none of them is a great success, except Lady Catharine, whose success is largely that of caricature. Lady Dalrymple is nothing: the real General Tilney is nearly as incredible as the General Tilney of Catherine Morland's disordered imagination: Sir Walter Elliot is rather a type than a character. He has nothing visible in him except aristocratic vanity and insolence. Was *The Watsons* given up because Jane Austen felt that she did not know enough of the great world to make Lord and Lady Osborne really belong to it and at the same time be really alive? At that time, it is to be

remembered, peers and peeresses were much farther away from ordinary mortals than they are now. Was Jane sufficiently at home with that world to let characters taken from it come from her hands true enough and natural enough to occupy safely the front part of the stage in a novel of manners and characters? We do not know: we never can know.

For the rest, what we have of the book is pleasing enough, though it has some uncertainties and immaturities. The ball is excellent, almost as good as the balls in *Emma* and *Northanger Abbey*. The kindness of Emma to the little boy Charles reminds us of the kindness of Mr. Knightley to Harriet at the Highbury ball. Mrs. Robert Watson is as disagreeable and almost as vulgar but not nearly so amusing as Mrs. Elton. Mr. Watson drinks gruel of an evening like Mr. Woodhouse, but that is almost all we hear or see of him. Mr. and Mrs. Edwards and their daughter are only sketches but they are very much alive, and we foresee pleasant complications in the difference between the views of parents and daughter on the subject of her marriage. Tom Musgrave has been thought a success. I cannot find in him much more than a less vulgar, less caricatured, but also less developed John Thorpe. We are not told

what part Emma's sisters were to play in the book. The elder, Elizabeth, seems to me to exhibit the uncertainty which is one of the characteristics of immature writing. In the opening conversation with Emma she is ill-natured and spiteful in what she says of her sisters, vain and silly in what she says of herself. What can be more like the Mary Musgrove of *Persuasion* than what she says of Tom Musgrave?

'A young man of very good fortune, quite independent, and remarkably agreeable, an universal favourite wherever he goes. Most of the girls hereabout are in love with him, or have been. I believe I am the only one among them that has escaped with a whole heart; and yet I was the first he paid attention to when he came into this country six years ago; and very great attention did he pay me. Some people say that he has never seemed to like any girl so well since, though he is always behaving in a particular way to one or another.'

Or this of her sister Penelope:

'You do not know Penelope. There is nothing she she would not do to get married. She would as good as tell you so herself. Do not trust her with any secrets of your own, take warning by me, do not trust her: she has her good qualities, but she has no faith, no honour, no scruples, if she can promote her own advantage.'

And yet, before we come to the end of the brief fragment, this silly and selfish creature has come

to have not only a 'juster reason' than Emma, but also 'good will', a 'simple mind', and a 'kind-hearted' disposition! It is fair, of course, to remember that *The Watsons* is only an unfinished sketch, but it is plain that Jane Austen had not got her characters clear enough in her mind to preserve them from inconsistencies even in the little we see of them.

Of Emma Watson, on whom everything would have depended, all that we can say is that she is a typical Jane Austenian heroine, sensible, intelligent, and kind, without any affectations either of head or heart. Like most of them, like Elinor Dashwood in particular and even Elizabeth Bennet, she is sometimes rather too sagaciously common-sensical for a young girl going to her first ball. But that has not prevented our liking Elinor and loving Elizabeth, and need not have been fatal to this almost unknown Emma. As it is we like her quite well enough to be very sorry not to have had the chance of knowing more of her.

I do not know that there is any more to be said of *The Watsons* except, if we choose, that it adds some curious notes of the social customs of the day to those we discussed in connexion with *Persuasion*. For instance, there is an 'assembly' every month in the winter at the town of 'D.' How

much we may regret the disappearance of those eighteenth-century assemblies, perhaps the greatest social achievement ever recorded to the credit of our rather unsocial nation! There the great people of the neighbourhood met, on a more or less equal footing, with the lawyers and doctors, even with the shopkeepers, of their little town. There the old could play cards while the young danced. There the neighbourhood could become one society instead of, what it now too often is, a number of envious or disdainful atoms. Here also we note one or two points about manners as seen in the assemblies and elsewhere. Elizabeth and Emma drive to the town for the assembly in a 'chair', whatever that is. It is described as a 'very unsmart family equipage'. Then they have tea at the assembly but no supper. That comes after they get home, where they find the table 'prepared' in the dining-room. The Edwards family live in a house which has its 'windows guarded by posts and chains' and its 'door approached by a flight of stone steps': one of those attractive Georgian houses, in fact, a few of which still linger to give a charm to our country towns. We observe, too, that after the Edwards dinner, they 'draw round the fire to enjoy their dessert': a pleasant practice no longer observed, so far as I know, except by

the Fellows of Oxford Colleges. One other note and only one. They can then say 'Sir' to a boy of ten years old, and they must say 'My Lord', and say it frequently, to a young peer.

Two other volumes of Jane Austen's writing have since appeared. Both afford striking proof of the passion of her public, or the less wise section of it, to be given everything of hers that it can possibly get hold of. That fact, coming a hundred years after her death, is not the best but a very real tribute to her genius; and in it lies the chief importance of these resurrections of abandoned or unfinished and uncorrected manuscripts.

The first of the two new volumes is a little book called *Love and Friendship and Other Early Works, By Jane Austen* which appeared in 1922 with an introduction by Mr. Chesterton. The first items in it are *Love and Friendship* and *Lesley Castle*, of which I will say something presently: the third is *The History of England*, a rather dull pseudo-comic series of sketches of the reigns of English Sovereigns from Henry IV to Charles I. It is dedicated to Cassandra, and perhaps the pleasantest sentence which it contains for us now is that in which, after mentioning Sir Francis Drake, Jane goes on:

- 'Yet great as he was, and justly celebrated as a sailor, I cannot help foreseeing that he will be equalled in this or

the next century by one who, tho' now but young, already promises to answer all the ardent and sanguine expectations of his Relations and Friends, amongst whom I may class the amiable Lady to whom this work is dedicated, and my no less amiable self.'

To this we may add as not uncharacteristic of a maturer Jane the last words of all:

'The Events of this Monarch's reign are too numerous for my pen, and indeed the recital of any Events (except what I make myself) is uninteresting to me: . . . I shall therefore satisfy myself with vindicating him from the Reproach of Arbitrary and tyrannical Government with which he has often been charged. This, I feel, is not difficult to be done, for with one argument I am certain of satisfying every sensible and well-disposed person whose opinions have been properly guided by a good Education—and this Argument is that he was a STUART.'

After *The History of England* came some letters never even partially worked up into novels like those of which *Love and Friendship* and *Lesley Castle* are composed, but apparently put together into some sort of bundle by Jane herself, for they are preceded by a dedication to her cousin Miss Cooper in which she amuses herself by making twenty-three of its forty-six words begin with a C, and ends by calling the Letters 'this Clever Collection of Curious Comments, which have been Carefully Culled Collected and Classed by your

Comical Cousin, The Author.' They are of no importance, of course, mere unused notes or material, but, unlike the History, they could not have been written by any one but Jane Austen. The first deals with the absurdities of a mother who is bringing out her daughters; the second with those of a young woman who has, we note with interest, a Willoughby for her faithless lover (there are also Crawfords and Musgroves here). It ends with a stroke which is pure Jane: '"but, my love, why lament *his* perfidy when you bore so well that of so many young men before?" "Ah Madam, I was used to it then but when Willoughby broke his Engagement I had not been disappointed for half a year." "Poor Girl!" said Miss Jane.' The third fragment is almost a chapter from one of the novels, with a ball in it and a very vulgar, odious, and insolent great lady, who never finds

'fault with people because they are poor; for I always think that they are more to be despised and pitied than blamed for it, especially if they cannot help it: but at the same time I must say that in my opinion your old striped Gown would have been quite fine enough for its Wearer—for to tell you the truth (I always speak my mind) I am very much afraid that one half of the people in the room will not know whether you have a Gown on or not.'

It is the very voice of Lady Catharine de Bourgh:

one is almost driven to form a fancy (though there is nothing in the Life or Letters to confirm it) that Jane must somewhere have met and suffered from some such strange specimen of aristocracy. The fourth Letter is a satire on impertinent questioning of acquaintances: the fifth is a love-affair between an heiress who, though 'adored by a Colonel and toasted by a Baronet', prefers a young gentleman who is anxious to die at her feet, and who in the meanwhile pours out a natural indignation against the laws of England 'for allowing Uncles and Aunts to possess their Estates when wanted by their Nephews or Nieces'. The volume is completed by a few more trifles, justly described as 'Scraps'.

To return, then, to the two stories in the form of letters which fill more than half the book. Of these the second, *Lesley Castle*, is unfinished and is in every respect much the less important. The isolated and fragmentary letters, just mentioned, have in them much more of Jane's wit and humour than this connected series, where none of the personages either come alive by the force of truth or compel laughter by that of farce. The level here is favourably illustrated by such a passage as this from one of the letters. It is from a young woman just arrived for her first stay in London.

'In short, my dear Charlotte, it is my sensibility for the sufferings of so many amiable young men, my dislike of the extreme admiration I meet with, and my aversion to being so celebrated both in Public, in Private, in Papers, and in Printshops, that are the reasons why I cannot more fully enjoy the Amusements so various and pleasing of London.'

Love and Friendship is another matter altogether. It is in its way a capital farce: 'a thing', as Mr. Chesterton says with something but not too much of his usual exaggeration, 'to laugh over again and again as one laughs over the great burlesques of Peacock or Max Beerbohm'. It is said that Jane wrote it when she was seventeen with Cassandra for her illustrator; and part of its interest lies in its youthfulness. For it goes to show that Jane wrote because she wanted to enjoy laughing herself and making other people laugh with her. Her 'inspiration', to quote Mr. Chesterton again, was 'the gigantic inspiration of laughter'. The epithet is not of the happiest: Jane never went within ten miles of anything gigantic: never went, and never wished to go. She never envied Aristophanes or Rabelais or Swift, one may be sure; or thought of herself as having by any possibility anything to do with them. But there are people who can listen to her stiller, smaller voice when they are in no mood for the thunders of these geniuses,

and her comedy, though so small a thing and so delicate, is as true a child of the pure spirit of laughter as their loud-lunged and large-boned creations. However, that is to anticipate her later achievements. If she had written nothing but *Love and Friendship* we should never have heard of her. But the little extravaganza is very good fun, and, of course, all the better for having in it now not only its own interest but the interest of what was to follow it.

It is in every respect a great advance on *Lesley Castle*, which must, one would think, be earlier. Here the epistolary scheme, which evidently hampered Jane, is only followed in a merely formal fashion. There is only one writer and only one recipient of the letters; and they relate one story, that of the writer's adventures. The game it plays is that satire of romance and sentimentality in general, and of the romantic novel in particular, with which readers of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Northanger Abbey* are already familiar. Only here, of course, it is frankly farce and caricature. The young ladies, for instance, faint continually. When two men friends meet, their mutual expressions of affection prove 'too pathetic for the feelings of Sophia and myself—we fainted alternately on a sofa'. So ends the eighth letter. The ninth has a

threat of bailiffs in the house which justifies a similar end: 'we sighed and fainted on the sofa'. And, when the two young ladies lose their husbands by a carriage accident, while one (the writer of the letters) goes temporarily mad, the other faints, and, dying a few days later, utters a last warning to her friend:

'beware of fainting fits. Though at the time they may be refreshing and agreable yet believe me they will in the end, if too often repeated and at improper seasons, prove destructive to your Constitution. My fate will teach you this.... One fatal swoon has cost me my life. Beware of swoons, Dear Laura... a frenzy fit is not one quarter so pernicious: it is an exercise to the Body and if not too violent, is I daresay conducive to Health in its consequences. Run mad as often as you choose: but do not faint.'

So there is a lot of caricature of those youthful affectations of independence and defiance which were then the romantic thing and have somehow returned to us to-day as part of the anti-romantic reaction. The young man rejects the bride proposed to him by his father: ' "never shall it be said that I obliged my father." We all admired the noble manliness of his reply. He continued, "Sir Edward was surprised, he had perhaps little expected to meet with so spirited an opposition to his will. 'Where, Edward, in the name of wonder

(said he) did you pick up this unmeaning gibberish? You have been studying Novels, I suspect.' I scorned to answer: it would have been beneath my dignity."' And when he has completed his defiance and married the lady who is the writer of the letters, we find his sister asking him whether he thinks his father will ever be reconciled to such an 'imprudent connection'; to which he majestically replies: 'Augusta, I thought you had a better opinion of me than to imagine I would so abjectly degrade myself as to consider my Father's Concurrence in any of my affairs either of Consequence or concern to me.' The common sense, the sense of the plain objects and duties of life and the absurdity of trying to deny them or kick against them, is as visible here in this early farce as it is in the comedy of the great novels. Whatever Jane wrote has that in it, for it is the very essence of herself. In her art, as in her life, she was everything the romantic novelists despised. One fancies almost that she may be giving the retort of caricature to some contempt to which she had herself been exposed from some high-falutin acquaintance, when she makes her Laura describe a country girl as

'very plain, and her name was Bridget. Nothing therefore could be expected from her—she could not be supposed to

possess either exalted Ideas, Delicate Feelings or refined Sensibilities. She was nothing more than a mere good-tempered, civil and obliging young woman; as such we could scarcely dislike her—she was only an object of Contempt.'

It is a picture of herself: she has left out nothing but her wit and genius: neither of which such an affected critic as I am imagining was capable of perceiving.

Love and Friendship, then, is of no particular importance. It has nothing to say to Jane's place in English letters and tells us nothing about her that we did not know before or could not guess. But except *The Watsons* it is probably the best worth having of the things published after her executors issued *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. For it is at least very good fooling; and most of the rest are not very good anything at all.

That, unfortunately, must be the verdict of candour on the last to appear of all these unpublished productions of Jane's. They have been forced into a daylight from which she would herself almost certainly have protected them; and the best service her truest lovers can render her is to take what care they can to remind everybody who will listen that these things would never have been heard of but for the fame of the great six

by which, and which alone, her genius is to be measured.

Sanditon is not only the last printed: it is also the last written of Jane Austen's productions. She wrote it between January and March of 1817, the year in which she died. The last date on the manuscript is 17 March: about two months before the increasing alarm felt about her caused her removal to Winchester, where she died on the 18th of July. The fact of her having been at work on a new novel so short a time before her death was mentioned in her nephew's *Memoir*; and some account was there given of it. But it was never printed till 1925, when a scholarly edition was issued by the Clarendon Press. Jane is now a classic; and, as such, receives all the honours, which would have amused her, of various readings and textual notes. Or, perhaps, the readings cannot strictly be called 'various': what we get in the text is her final corrections, while the notes give us her rejected first thoughts. An examination of the manuscript has shown that the author of the *Memoir* was wrong in supposing that the substitution of a pencil for a pen in part of it was due to weakness preventing her from sitting at her desk. The place in which the pencil appears is about the middle of what was written; and the last part of

the manuscript is as accurate and legible as the beginning. But still it remains true that the interest of *Sanditon*, as the family called the fragment, is partly one of pathos. Jane had been ill for some time when she began it; but was just then persuading herself that she had 'gained strength through the winter' and even that she was 'not far from being well'. No doubt her characteristic hopefulness combined with her desire to cheer up her anxious family to induce her to set her pen again to work. So she began this last novel of which we can now read twelve chapters.

In one respect it is a new departure. All the great novels are built on the interplay of human character. In them the thing to which our attention is held throughout is the comedy and tragedy, especially the comedy, which result from Marianne coming into contact with Willoughby, Elizabeth with Darcy, Fanny with the Crawfords, and so on. Apart from the satire of romanticism and the sentimental novel, which is always kept subordinate to the story, there is no general subject at all. Of *Sanditon*, on the other hand, it would not be a grave exaggeration to say that it is all subject, and has in it no story and hardly anything in the way of character. Of course it is a fragment and both story and character might have come later.

But never elsewhere did Jane write twelve chapters, or anything like twelve, without getting her story well started, her characters clearly drawn on the canvas, and her readers in a mood of amused interest and eager anticipation. Here we get from first to last little more than a continuous satire of the new craze for the sea-side, and especially of the sanguine absurdities of the land speculators who built or developed it. It is more or less amusing, of course; and it has its historical interest as exhibiting the beginnings of a fashion which is, in different conditions, still very visible and widespread to-day. Like most of such fashions, it began as we see it in the novel, with the fashionable world, or at least its outskirts: to-day it ends, or rather continues—for there is no sign of its ending—with the frequenters of Southend and Blackpool. One hardly realized till one took up *Sanditon* what a long time it is since our present enemy, the speculator in sea fronts, had started his baneful carer. Here he is rearing his Trafalgar House and almost immediately wishing he had called it Waterloo, 'for Waterloo is more the thing now'; but consoling himself with the plan of a Waterloo Crescent next year, when 'the name joined to the form of the Building, which always takes, will give us the command of Lodgers'. It

is true that he is here no common builder, but a landowner and a gentleman; a very harmless and respectable person: and of course not the less but rather the more ridiculous on that account. Mr. Parker (that is his name) comes nearer than any one else in the book to being a true Austenian creation. He is as pleased with himself and all that is his as Sir Walter Elliot and at the same time as cheerful and good natured as Admiral Croft. When he arrives at the old village which is to be superseded by his new Sanditon he breaks out into pleasantly fatuous enthusiasm:

'He anticipated an amazing Season.—At the same time last year (late in July) there had not been a single Lodger in the Village! nor did he remember any during the whole Summer; excepting one family of children who came from London for sea air after the whooping Cough, and whose Mother would not let them be nearer the shore for fear of their tumbling in. "Civilization, Civilization indeed!" cried Mr. Parker, delighted.—"Look, my dear Mary—Look at William Heeley's windows.—Blue Shoes and nankin Boots! Who would have expected such a sight at a Shoemaker's in old Sanditon! This is new within the Month. There was no blue Shoe when we passed this way a month ago. Glorious indeed!—Well, I think I *have* done something in my Day. Now for our Hill, our health breathing Hill!"'

This is 'pretty well, Sir', as Johnson said, but one

feels that both Sir Walter Elliot expatiating on the glories of his name and family and property, and Mrs. Elton recounting the splendours of Maple Grove, do it with more gusto. Perhaps the truth is that 'gusto' is the last thing possible to an invalid and that the comparative tameness of *Sanditon* is due simply to failing strength. The joy of living and laughing, which is in every chapter of the great six, was perhaps no longer within the reach of the author of this last attempt at a novel. So I, at any rate, find the Parker *malades imaginaires* very much less amusing than, say, Mr. Woodhouse or Mary Musgrove. They do not seem to have the power of abounding in their own sense exhibited by those great creations whenever they come upon the scene. We are told what we are to find, but, so far as it comes, it comes as a thing reported, not seen by the eyes or heard by the ears. We get little more than a description:

'while the eldest brother found vent for his superfluity of sensation as a Projector, the Sisters were perhaps driven to dissipate theirs in the invention of odd complaints. The whole of their mental vivacity was evidently not so employed: Part was laid out in a Zeal for being useful. It should seem that they must either be very busy for the Good of others, or else extremely ill themselves. Some

natural delicacy of Constitution, in fact, with an unfortunate turn for Medicine, especially quack Medicine, had given them an early tendency at various times to various Disorders: the rest of their sufferings was from Fancy, the love of Distinction and the love of the Wonderful.... (The chief invalid) talked however the whole evening as incessantly as Diana—and excepting that she sat with salts in her hand, took Drops two or three times from one out of the several Phials already at home on the Mantlepiece—and made a great many odd faces and contortions. Charlotte could perceive no symptoms of illness which she, in the boldness of her own good health, could not have undertaken to cure by putting out the fire, opening the windows, and disposing of the drops and the salts by means of one or the other.'

Are they not conceived, these people, without ever being quite created? Jane has thought of what they are to be, but she has not quite brought them to birth. There are one or two new features in *Sanditon*. Sir Edward Denham is perhaps a more deliberately bad character than the Crawfords and Willoughbys of the earlier books; and he is a more pretentious humbug than any of them. He likes discoursing on the 'Sublimity' of the Sea, and 'the terrific grandeur of the Ocean in a storm, its glassy surface in a calm'; and affects to be so sensitive to poetic descriptions that he thinks 'the man who can read them unmoved must have the nerves of

an assassin'. The surprising thing is that his highest praise is for Burns, whom one would not have expected Jane to know much about. Evidently, however, she had read him, for she makes her heroine reply to Sir Edward's raptures, 'I have read several of Burns's Poems with great delight'. But her Charlotte goes on to pull the affected enthusiast up, first with a stroke of morality expressing her difficulty in separating 'a man's poetry entirely from his character' and, consequently, her doubts as to the sincerity of Burns's poems; and when her little sermon fails to stop an outburst about 'the sovereign impulses of illimitable ardour' she gets rid of the ranting impostor at last with a different and even more Austenian weapon: 'I really know nothing of the matter. This is a charming day. The wind I fancy must be southerly.'

The fragment, though there are twelve chapters of it, remains a mere setting of the scene and introducing of the characters with hardly any indication of what the story was to be. Lady Denham is another of Jane's caricatures of great ladies, heartless, selfish, and self-satisfied; but she will never be remembered by those who have made the more arresting acquaintance of Lady Catharine de Bourgh. Whether the action of the novel was to have turned on some serious attempt by her

stepson to carry out his intention of seducing the young lady whom she had taken to live with her, who was 'young, lovely and dependant' and, besides, 'his rival in Lady Denham's favour', cannot, of course, be known. But it seems unlikely that Jane Austen would have so far departed from her usual practice and avowed preference. 'Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can,' she had written in the last chapter of *Mansfield Park*. And here, in an interesting discussion on the novel between Charlotte and Sir Edward she indicates much the same feeling.

'The Novels which I approve', says Sir Edward, 'are such as display Human Nature with Grandeur—such as shew her in the Sublimity of intense Feeling—such as exhibit the progress of strong Passion from the first germ of incipient Susceptibility to the utmost Energies of Reason half-dethroned—where we see the strong spark of woman's Captivations elicit such Fire in the Soul of Man as leads him (though at the risk of some aberration from the strict line of primitive Obligations)—to hazard all, dare all, achieve all, to obtain her.'

To all of which, and more of the same sort which follows, Charlotte only replies: 'if I understand you aright our taste in Novels is not at all the same.' And no doubt she speaks for Jane herself.

There is no reconciling Jane's aims and preferences with a caricature of those of Richardson, of whom she was thinking here. With Lovelaces she had nothing to do. She neither knew nor wished to know anything about them. So that we may feel fairly sure that she would not have allowed this Lovelace of hers to play a really leading part in her story: he would almost certainly have been to the end a ridiculous rather than a criminal figure. Just before and just after her death there were born, in a Yorkshire village, two girls destined like her to be famous and to die young, but to be in other respects as unlike Jane Austen as women could be, to have tragedy as the key-note both of their lives and of their art. Jane Austen could well afford, without ever hearing their names, to leave the terrors and agonies of the human spirit to Charlotte and Emily Brontë. They are safe on their throne, from which they frown a little at her. But she is even safer on hers; and meets their frown with a smile.

And now let me end by a word or two of final attempt to sum up the nature and quality of the gift that so quickly set her on that throne and has so surely fixed her on it.

How does she manage, being so small, to be also so great? What is it in her writing which makes

her, perhaps more than any other English novelist, the peculiar delight of men of letters? These are two large questions and anything like a full answer to them would require a chapter or perhaps a book. All I have space for is a note or two on each point. To the first I have already made some allusion in previous Introductions. The truth is that it is because Jane Austen is so small that she is so great. Or perhaps 'great' is not quite the right word: 'perfect' may be nearer what is wanted. If you demand of a novel that it should do the greatest things: should replace, under modern conditions and with prose instead of poetry for its instrument, the epic of Homer or the tragedy of Aeschylus or Shakespeare, it is of course out of the question to go to Jane Austen. Hugo and Balzac, Scott and George Eliot and the Brontës and Hardy, Tolstoy and Dostoievsky, all do, in their very different ways, attempt to perform something of one or other of these high functions. Jane is not of that order of mind at all. She has in her nothing whatever of the poet or the prophet and she deliberately renounces for herself any attempt to climb those heights, or descend to those depths, of human nature with which these others stir us to joy and wonder, fear and pity and awe. She 'keeps to the parlour', if I may for the last time use that exactly

truthful phrase, and to such joys and sorrows as can be got into it without bursting its walls. If you are not content with this ordinary atmosphere and middling mood and temper; if, and when, you demand tragedy and its great emotions, you must not go to Jane. She cannot give them to you: she knows she cannot and she has never made the mistake of trying. What she has, she gives. And those who understand and love her think that that particular thing was extremely well worth giving and that she gives it as it has only been given by a very few writers in all the world. Such things as the first two chapters of *Pride and Prejudice* or the second of *Sense and Sensibility* are comedy of the finest quality, comedy such as the greatest comic writers would not have disdained. In fact —why should we be afraid to say it?—Jane Austen is among the very greatest of all writers of comedy. No great one of them all has surpassed her incomparable delicacy, felicity, and certainty: she will be of their company in Elysium, and will be welcomed at the feet, or perhaps by the side, even of Molière and Cervantes: whose genius, though so much larger, is scarcely finer, more exquisitely perfect, than hers.

Obviously, if that can be said of her, there can be no denying, at least by those who say it, that

among English novelists she holds one of the very first places. I have already remarked that of all the novelists of the last hundred years she has gained far the most in fame during my lifetime. Her art and her temper have both been steadily telling in her favour. Flaubert said after reading *Pickwick*: 'il y a des parties superbes: mais quelle composition défectueuse! Tous les écrivains anglais en sont là: Walter Scott excepté, ils manquent de plan.' Probably he did not know very many English writers: certainly he did not know Jane Austen. If he had he would assuredly have excepted her as well as Scott from his not unfounded condemnation. She probably thought little about art at all. But she had the instinct of construction to a rare degree: she is never confused or superfluous or tedious. All she tells us is significant and is working for the main end of the story. Her form, like her temper, has the simplicity and directness of the classics. Our other novelists have, of course, great qualities to which she can lay no claim at all. But how she excels them all in those classical gifts, than which none have commonly had more to do with immortality! Beside her the Brontës and Dickens seem often melodramatic, Thackeray often formless and drifting, George Eliot laboured and pretentious, Meredith a puller

of strings whose puppets do not come alive enough to take things into their own hands, Henry James an artist of language and master of observation whose felicities, unlike Jane's, are almost exclusively addressed to those intellectuals for whose sake he was content to lose the world. The fineness of Jane Austen, her wit and style, which so delight the clever young people of this post-Victorian age, rebuke both them and Henry James by marrying themselves to an interest in common life and plain people. Jane is English and human: she could never have been made the idol of a coterie.

Nor was she merely interested in plain people. She made them her audience as well as her subject. There is scarcely a sentence in all her work of which the plainest could for a moment doubt the meaning. And how few there are which the subtlest could improve! She does indeed, sometimes, indulge in Thucydidean constructions, forcing her way through to her meaning, as Thucydides forced his, in defiance of grammar; but she has not such difficult things to say as he had, and, unlike him, if she occasionally ignores grammar she never forgets lucidity. All who have ever practised the art of writing delight in seeing it so finely practised as it is by her. They know how hard it is to say exactly what has to be said, and all of it, without

being cumbrous or confused, without introducing some intellectual or emotional suggestion alien to the business in hand. They know how hard it is to be easy without being slipshod, to be quiet without being dull, to write a very plain prose without ever being prosaic, to be humorous without being tiresome, to combine wit with simplicity and truth. All this they find in Jane Austen and she has the reward of it in their admiring and delighted allegiance. And not only they but others who claim no special literary gifts or interests pay her a compliment which many of them pay to no other novelist. They read her aloud: they choose one of her books if they are to be read to by others. There is no other evidence equal to this that a writer has style. Why—if we care for poetry at all—do we always want to read it aloud, even when we are alone? Because, if it is worthy of the name, it has so much more than all but a very little prose ever has of that supreme excellence of writing, 'the best words in the best places'. Why, among the poets themselves, are we so much more anxious to read Milton aloud than Byron, Gray than Cowper? Once more because Milton and Gray have so much more of that quality than the others: the best words exactly doing the work that has to be done, and no other words at all. That is Jane Austen again; and

that is why we choose her before all her rivals for reading aloud. In her modest sphere, she has something of the same sort of perfection as even Milton and Virgil themselves. With her in her little world of plain prose, as with them in their high world of poetry, word follows word and sentence sentence, not merely with a lucidity which was much easier for her than for them, but with an unerring certainty of reaching its mark which is never easy for any writer in any style. What is a great writer? Is he not one who can make us quite sure of his meaning, and, while he does that, can, at the same time, arouse in us the peculiar stirring and quickening of the intellectual and aesthetic faculties which happens, or should happen, when we are in the presence of art? The books which produce that stirring are in other ways very unlike each other; they may be poetry or religion or philosophy: a page of history, a nursery tale, a hymn, or a fable. But when it comes we know it, and want to hear its voice aloud; and one of these voices, one of the smallest but one of the purest, is that which we hear in the novels of Jane Austen.

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Jane
Austen

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