She provokes the remark from her companion that the post-office has a great charm at one period of people's lives. When Miss Fairfax has lived to Mr. John Knightley's age, she will begin to think letters are never worth going through such a shower of rain as he has seen her out in that morning, to obtain them.

He makes her blush. What is worse than his blunt, friendly remonstrance, he attracts the attention of the rest of the company to the subject. Mr. Woodhouse strikes in with his plaintive protest against anybody, a young lady especially, exposing herself to wet. Mrs. Elton rushes to the rescue with her loud, authoritative[Pg 265] reproach: "My dear Jane, what is this I hear? Going to the post-office in the rain! You sad girl; how could you do such a thing?" Mrs. Weston is appealed to, and she adds her quiet, sensible prohibition against young people's running any risk.

"Oh!" cries Mrs. Elton, "she *shall not* do such a thing again. The man who fetches our letters shall inquire for yours too, and bring them to you."

Jane, thus baited, stands mildly but firmly at bay. Mrs. Elton is extremely kind, but Jane cannot give up her early walk.[59] She is advised to be out of doors. The post-office is an object.

Mrs. Elton, who has neither good breeding nor tact, will not be put down.

"My dear Jane, say no more about it. The thing is determined—that is" (laughing affectedly) "as far as I can presume to determine anything without the concurrence of my lord and master. You know, Mrs. Weston, you and I must be cautious how we express ourselves."

Still Jane looks unconquered.

The conversation wanders to handwriting. John Knightley refers to the statement that the same sort of writing often prevails in a family, and observes that Isabella and Emma write very much alike.

"Yes," said his brother hesitatingly, "there is a likeness. I know what you mean—but Emma's hand is the strongest."

"Isabella and Emma both write beautifully," said poor Mr. Woodhouse, "and always did, and so does Mrs. Weston," with half a sigh and half a smile at her.

Dinner is on the table. Mrs. Elton, before she can be spoken to, is ready; and before Mr. Woodhouse has reached her, with his request to be allowed to hand her into the dining-parlour, is saying—

"Must I go first? I really am ashamed of always leading the way!"

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Jane's solicitude about fetching her letters has not escaped Emma, who ascribes it to an unworthy source; and if the young hostess had not been in her own house, therefore on honour to Jane, Emma might have been wicked enough to make some remark on the expedition or the expense of Irish mails.

Frank Churchill returns on the earliest opportunity, and the ball at the Crown is to take place. A council of ladies and gentlemen is first summoned to pronounce on the rooms. Emma thinks the preliminary gathering absurdly large. It is no great compliment to be the confidential adviser of Mr. Weston when he takes everybody into his confidence.

Frank Churchill is almost as bad, restlessly rushing to the door to receive every new arrival, and providing umbrellas, under which Miss Bates and her niece may cross the street.

The Eltons, too, are there, Mrs. Elton eager to put in her word, and demonstrative as usual to Jane Fairfax. Emma wonders what Frank Churchill will think of the bride's manners. She is not long left in doubt.

"How do you like Mrs. Elton?" Emma asks him in a whisper.

"Not at all."

"You are ungrateful," said Emma, thinking of a flattering account she has heard the lady give his father of what she had been told of Frank.

"Ungrateful! What do you mean?" he cries quickly; then, changing from a frown to a smile, "No, do not tell me. I do not want to know what you mean. Where is my father?"

Emma can hardly understand Frank Churchill; he seems in an odd humour, but she makes no objection when he claims her for his partner, though she has to submit to stand second to Mrs. Elton, who opens the ball with Mr. Weston; yet Emma has always considered it her ball. It is almost enough to make her think of marrying. Still Emma is able to enjoy the dance, and be satisfied that Frank Churchill dances as[Pg 267] well as she had thought; though it is indubitable to her, and to her honour, the conviction rather affords her relief than wounds her vanity, that Frank Churchill thinks less of her than formerly. There is nothing like flirtation between them; they seem more like easy, cheerful friends than lovers.

What troubles Emma more than Frank Churchill's early secession as a lover is Mr. Knightley's not dancing. There he is, among the standers by, where he ought not to be.

He ought to be dancing, not classing himself with the husbands, and fathers, and whist-players, who are pretending to feel an interest in the dance, till their rubbers are made up—so young as he looks, his tall, upright figure among the bulky forms and stooping shoulders of the elderly men.

He moves a few steps forward, and these few steps forward are enough to prove in how gentlemanlike a manner, with what natural grace he must have danced would he but take the trouble.

Indeed, Emma has always entertained the highest opinion of George Knightley's air and looks. She has told Harriet Smith, in trying to teach her simply what a well-bred man is like, that Mr. Knightley must be put out of count, he is so very superior to other people. Emma has never seen a man on whose whole person and address "gentleman" is more legibly written—and here Emma is right.

The ball rewards the anxious cares and incessant attentions of Mrs. Weston by going off happily, as old balls in county halls and ball-rooms of market-town inns had a knack of doing. People had fewer pleasures then, and were more easily entertained. They have left a pleasant flavour behind them—these early, social, eminently respectable country balls, when whitewashed walls were considered picturesquely hidden by a few common evergreens, and the mere sight of primitively chalked floors set young hearts dancing before the feet executed their "steps."

One incident impresses Emma. Harriet Smith is[Pg 268] sitting down—the only young lady without a partner. Mr. Elton is strolling about ostentatiously in her vicinity. Mrs. Weston, as in duty bound, tries to get him to dance. He professes his willingness, though getting an old married man, to become her partner. She points out to him a more fitting partner—the young lady who has sat down—Miss Smith. "Miss Smith! Oh, Miss Smith he has not observed. Mrs. Weston is extremely obliging, but his dancing days are over;" and a meaning smile passes between him and his wife.

This is the amiable, obliging Mr. Elton of other days! Emma can scarcely conceal her indignation, until she sees Mr. Knightley, whom Mr. Elton has joined, come forward and lead Harriet to the set. Never has Emma been more surprised, seldom more delighted. His dancing is as good as she anticipated, and she would have been tempted to think Harriet too lucky had it not been for what went before.

Emma expresses her gratification to Mr. Knightley later in the evening, and he increases it by telling her he has found Harriet Smith more conversable than he expected. She has some first-rate qualities which Mrs. Elton is totally without. An

unpretending, single-minded, artless girl is infinitely to be preferred, by any man of sense and taste, to such a woman as Mrs. Elton.

They are interrupted by Mr. Weston calling on everybody to begin dancing again. "Come, Miss Woodhouse, Miss Otway, Miss Fairfax, what are you all doing? Come, Emma, set your companions the example. Everybody is lazy! everybody is asleep!"

"I am ready," said Emma, "whenever I am wanted."

"Whom are you going to dance with?" asks Mr. Knightley.

She hesitates a moment, and then replies, "With you, if you will ask me."

"Will you?" said he, offering his hand.

"Indeed I will. You have shown that you can[Pg 269] dance, and you know we are not really so much brother and sister as to make it at all improper."

"Brother and sister!—no, indeed."

As ill luck will have it, the very next day Frank Churchill rescues Harriet Smith from the rudeness of a party of tramps and gipsies, and brings her on his arm to the nearest house (Hartfield); when, acting according to the instincts of such amiable but helpless heroines, Harriet immediately faints away.

Such a romantic adventure is not lost on Emma. It stimulates immensely her idle dream of how handsome a young couple Frank Churchill and Harriet would make, and how desirable it would be to bring them together.

Emma is not deterred from this last mischievous crochet, by a special revelation of Harriet's former foolish sentiments, which the girl considers herself called on to make. Mr. Elton has behaved so very badly to Harriet, that meek as the girl is, she can admire him at a humble distance no longer. She brings solemnly to Emma a little Tunbridge box, full of treasures which have become valueless, and which Harriet wishes Miss Woodhouse should see her destroy. There is a bit of court-plaister, left over from a piece with which Emma had made Harriet supply Mr. Elton, when he had happened to cut his hand in their service. There is also a stump of a pencil, which he flung aside after he had used up the lead in writing a recipe for spruce-beer, at Mr. Knightley's dictation.

Emma is lost between wonder and shame. Harriet's *auto da fé* has a double motive. She can no longer reverence Mr. Elton, and she can reverence another man, for whose sake she vaguely protests she is determined to remain single, since it would be utter presumption in her to think he could ever seek her out.

Emma gathers as much as this from her companion, and hesitates, with just a grain of dawning prudence, whether she ought to speak, or let Harriet's heroic resolution pass in silence.

But Harriet may think it unkind; besides, just a[Pg 270] little encouragement, judiciously administered, may not be amiss to check further confidences on Harriet's part. She is to be shown that her "dear Miss Woodhouse" does not disapprove of her aspirations, and at the same time made to comprehend that the old, improper, undesirable discussion of hopes and chances is not to be renewed. Therefore, without mentioning Frank Churchill's name, Emma tells Harriet that her feelings are natural and honourable to her, and at the same time bestows on her some excellent significant advice about not giving way to her feelings; on the contrary, she must let the gentleman's behaviour be the guide to her sentiments as well as to her conduct. But Emma rather undoes her teaching by volunteering an additional "He is your superior, no doubt, and there do seem objections and obstacles of a very serious nature; but yet, Harriet, more wonderful things have taken place; there have been matches of greater disparity."

At the end of the little lecture Harriet is at once grateful and submissive.

In the course of the summer, when, from Mr. and Mrs. Churchill's staying so near as Richmond, Frank Churchill can come often to Randalls, Mr. Knightley, who has taken an early dislike to the popular young man, learns to dislike him still more. He, Mr. Knightley, begins to suspect double dealing on Frank Churchill's part, double dealing which has to do with Emma Woodhouse and Jane Fairfax. It seems plain that Emma is his object. His own attentions coincide with his father's hints, and his step-mother's guarded silence. But while all their world is giving Frank Churchill to Emma, and Emma herself is secretly giving him to Harriet, Mr. Knightley learns to suspect him of an inclination to trifle with Jane Fairfax.

Mr. Knightley cannot read the riddle; but he is convinced that he perceives symptoms of intelligence between Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax. There are not only betrayals of admiration for Jane—out of place in Emma's lover; but Mr. Knightley is persuaded, in[Pg 271] spite of his belief in Jane Fairfax's discretion, that there is a liking, even a private understanding, between the two visitors to Highbury.

A large party, including Mrs. Weston and Frank Churchill, Miss Bates and Jane Fairfax, and Mr. Knightley, have met by chance at Hartfield. Mr. Perry passes by on horseback.

"By-the-bye," said Frank Churchill to his step-mother, "what became of Mr. Perry's plan of setting up his carriage?"

Mrs. Weston answers she never heard of it.

He maintains she wrote him word of it three months before.

She declares it is impossible.

He insists that he remembers it perfectly. Mrs. Perry had told somebody, and was very happy about it. It had been her proposal, as she thought being out in bad weather did him harm.

Mrs. Weston cannot remember.

Then it must have been a dream, Frank Churchill turns round and suggests.

His father, who has not heard all the conversation, inquires if Perry is really going to set up a carriage. Mr. Weston is glad Perry can afford it. Did Frank have it from himself?

No, Frank replies, laughing, he seems to have had it from nobody. Of course, it must have been a dream. He dreams of everybody at Highbury, and when he has gone through his particular friends, then he begins dreaming of Mr. and Mrs. Perry.

His father comments on the odd coherence and probability of the dream, just what was likely to happen.

At last Miss Bates gets in her word. It is very singular—she does not mean that Mr. Frank Churchill may not have had such a dream, but there actually had been such a proposal. Mrs. Perry had come to Miss Bates one morning in great spirits, believing that she had prevailed in persuading her husband to have a carriage. It had been spoken of in confidence, but[Pg 272] the Coles had known of it. It was an extraordinary dream.

Mr. Knightley, who has been listening to the whole discussion, thinks he discerns confusion, suppressed and laughed away, in Frank Churchill's face. Mr. Knightley tries to see the expression of Jane Fairfax's, but in vain; at the same time he becomes aware that Frank Churchill is striving still more intently to catch her eye, with equal want of success.

During the evening Frank Churchill looks on a side-table for the little Knightleys' alphabets. It is a dull-looking evening, he says, fit for winter amusements; and he wishes to puzzle Emma as he did once before. When the box with the letters is brought, Frank and Emma begin quickly forming words. He pushes one before Jane Fairfax. She glances round the table and applies herself to it, discovers the word, and with a faint smile pushes away the letters. They are not mixed with the others, and

Harriet Smith, who tries every heap without making anything of it, draws this one towards her and begins to puzzle over it.

Mr. Knightley is sitting next to Harriet, and she turns to him for help. Soon she proclaims with exultation, *blunder*. Jane Fairfax blushes.

Mr. Knightley connects the word and the blush with the dream. Yet how the delicacy of his favourite must have gone to sleep! He is grieved and angry. He suspects the game is being made a mere vehicle for trick and gallantry in Frank Churchill's hands.

Indignant and alarmed, Mr. Knightley continues to watch Frank Churchill. He prepares a short word for Emma, which she soon makes out. The two laugh over it, though she cries, "Nonsense, for shame!"

Mr. Knightley hears Frank Churchill say, with a glance towards Jane, "I will give it to her, shall I?"

Emma opposes the proceeding with laughing urgency. It is done, however. Mr. Knightley's keen curiosity assists him. He deciphers "*Dixon*," though he has not Jane Fairfax's key to the insinuation.

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She is evidently displeased; looks up, and seeing herself watched, blushes deeply. She says, "I did not know that proper names were allowed," and pushes away the letters with even an angry spirit. She turns to her aunt as a signal that it is time to leave.

Mr. Knightley thinks he sees another collection of letters anxiously pushed towards her, and swept away by her unexamined. She is looking for her shawl afterwards, and Frank Churchill is searching also for it. It is growing dusk, the room is in confusion, and Mr. Knightley cannot tell how they part.

Mr. Knightley remains behind the others, to give Emma a warning. He asks her what is the peculiar sting of the last word given to her and Miss Fairfax? Why is it entertaining to the one, and distressing to the other?

Emma looks disconcerted. It is only a joke among themselves, she says.

The joke, he observes, gravely, seems confined to her and Mr. Churchill.

Mr. Knightley has not done. He tries, though disappointed by her silence, and painfully impressed with the conviction of her attachment to young Churchill, to furnish her

with another hint. Is she perfectly acquainted with the degree of intimacy between the gentleman and lady they have been speaking of?

Perfectly, Emma tells him, with conviction.

Has she never received any reason to think he admired her, or she admired him.

Never, for the twentieth part of a moment. How could such an idea come into his head?

He has imagined he has seen something of attachment—looks which he did not believe were meant for the public.

Emma is very much amused. She rallies him on the flights of his fancy, which she would be sorry to check. There is no admiration. The appearances he has noticed proceed from peculiar circumstances she cannot explain. There is a good deal of nonsense in it all, but no two people can be farther from admiration[Pg 274] or attachment—at least, she presumes it is so with Jane Fairfax. As to the gentleman's indifference, Emma can answer for it. She is in gay spirits, which Mr. Knightley, in quitting her, does not at all share.

IV.

There are to be two expeditions to Box Hill, the one having given rise to the other. Mrs. Elton has organised an "exploring" picnic for her brother and sister, the Sucklings, of Maple Grove, with their barouche-landau. Emma and the Westons are to have something of the same description, but very different—quiet, unpretending, and elegant, in contrast to the fuss, ostentation, and regular eating and drinking of the first.

What is Emma's disgust to find that Mr. Weston, in his incorrigible good nature, has proposed to unite the two parties, since Mrs. Elton had been deprived of the company of the Sucklings. Chagrin or no chagrin, Emma has to submit; and Mrs. Elton is impatient to settle about the pigeon pies and cold lamb, when a lame carriage-horse overthrows all calculation, and threatens a delay of weeks.

"Is not this most vexatious, Knightley?" Mrs. Elton appeals, with her characteristic freedom, to the Squire of Donwell. "Such weather for exploring!"

"You had better explore Donwell," suggests the forbearing gentleman; "that may be done without horses. Come and eat my strawberries; they are ripening fast."

If he has spoken in jest, he has to act in earnest, for the proposal is caught at with delight. Not only so; Mrs. Elton elects herself queen of the feast. “I am lady patroness, you know. It is my party. I will bring my friends with me.”

But the host is quite capable of repelling aggression.[Pg 275] “I hope you will bring Elton,” he says, with courteous calmness; “but I will not trouble you to give any other invitation.”

Oh, he need not be afraid of delegating power to *her*. She is no young lady on preferment. Married women may be safely authorised. It is her party. Leave it all to her; she will invite the guests.

“No,” he calmly replies; “there is but one married woman in the world whom I can allow to invite what guests she pleases to Donwell, and that one is——”

“Mrs. Weston, I suppose?” interrupts the mortified Mrs. Elton.

“No—Mrs. Knightley; and till she is in being I will manage matters myself.”

Was ever rebuff better given, with equal judgment and moderation? In spite of her pushing self-assertion Mrs. Elton has to subside into a mere guest, with the comfort, however, of telling everybody that she has originated the party—that Knightley has given it to gratify her.

Mrs. Elton has insisted it is to be a morning scheme—quite a simple thing. She is to wear a large bonnet, and bring one of her little baskets hanging on her arm. They are to walk about the gardens, and gather the strawberries themselves, sit under trees, and have a table spread in the shade—everything as natural and simple as possible. Is not that his idea?

“Not quite;” he puts down her officiousness and affectation with quiet, well-bred humour. His idea of the simple and the natural would be to have the table spread in the dining-room; when they were tired of eating strawberries in the garden, there should be cold meat in the house.

She wishes she had a donkey, the thing would be for them all to come on donkeys—Jane, Miss Bates, and herself, with her *cara sposa* walking by. In country life a donkey is a sort of necessary; in summer there is dust and in winter there is dirt.

No doubt Mr. Knightley keeps his countenance[Pg 276] while he assures her Donwell Lane is never dusty, and at that season of the year it is dry. “Come on a donkey, however, if you prefer it; you can borrow Mrs. Cole’s.”

One reason for Mr. Knightley's declining to make his guests dine out of doors is, that he hopes to persuade Mr. Woodhouse to accompany Emma; and Mr. Woodhouse, who has not been at Donwell for two years, is open to persuasion.

In fact, everybody accepts his or her invitation, and as happy events—like sad ones—do not come singly, the lame horse recovers, so the party to Donwell is settled for the one day and the excursion to Box Hill for the next.

Mr. Weston, in the innocence of his heart, proposes to get his son Frank over from Richmond to attend both parties, and Mr. Knightley is obliged to say he will be glad to see the young man.

On a bright June day Mr. Woodhouse is safely driven over in the carriage, with one window down, to join in the *al fresco* party, by sitting in one of the most comfortable rooms in the Abbey where a fire has burnt all the morning, with Mrs. Weston to bear him company.

The few words representing Donwell Abbey have the usual effect of Jane Austen's spare but graphic, and perfectly unaffected, unlaboured descriptions. The house and grounds, under the brooding heat of the midsummer day, lie before us. The Abbey is an ample and irregular building, low-lying, with all the old neglect of "prospect," but having abundance of "timber" in rows and avenues, which neither fashion nor extravagance has rooted up. There are extensive gardens, stretching down to meadows washed by a stream. We can understand Emma Woodhouse's "honest pride and complacency" in her connection with the present and future proprietor of Donwell Abbey.

There is an unaccountable delay in the arrival of Frank Churchill, who was to have come on horseback, and some fears as to his horse are entertained.

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In the meantime Mrs. Elton picks strawberries and talks for everybody—not excepting Miss Bates.

At last, when the various groups are resting on the seats in the shade, Emma cannot help overhearing Mrs. Elton urging on Jane Fairfax the acceptance of a situation as governess, offered to her through the Sucklings of Maple Grove.

Miss Fairfax is replying that she cannot fix on any arrangement till the return of the Campbells from Ireland.

Mrs. Elton is declining to be put off, and insisting on returning an answer in the affirmative by the next post.

Emma wonders how Jane can bear it, and even Jane looks vexed, speaks pointedly, and proposes to walk farther.

It is hot, and insensibly the company gather under the "delicious" shelter of a short avenue of limes, stretching beyond the gardens, and leading to nothing, unless to a view over a low stone wall, with high pillars, giving the appearance of an approach to the house where none had ever existed. The author objects to the sham, but expatiates—for her—on the view:—the distant bank, well clothed with wood—the Abbey Mill Farm, and its meadows—the river, making a curve around them. Jane Austen adds the short, significant sentence:—"It was a sweet view—sweet to the eye and mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun bright without being oppressive."

In this walk, Emma is amused to find Mr. Knightley and Harriet Smith leading the way. It is an odd *tête-à-tête*, but Emma is glad to see it, and to meet Mr. Knightley's smile when she joins the couple, and finds him giving Harriet information on modes of agriculture. The smile seems to say—"These are my own concerns. I have a right to talk on such subjects, without being suspected of introducing Robert Martin."

The cold repast is over, and still Frank Churchill does not put in an appearance. His father and mother are anxious, but take refuge in attributing his absence[Pg 278] to some nervous attack of his aunt's. Emma looks at Harriet. That young lady is learning self-restraint; she behaves very well, betraying no emotion.

The party go out again to see some old fish-ponds, and, perhaps, to get as far as the clover, which is to be cut to-morrow.

Emma makes up her mind to remain indoors with her father. He has been very well entertained hitherto with the books of engravings, drawers of medals, cameos and shells brought out of the cabinets for his amusement. He has shown them all to Mrs. Weston; he will show them over again to Emma. The occupation is not so engrossing to Emma as to her father; she strolls into the hall, where she meets Jane Fairfax, coming quickly from the gardens, with a look of escape about her.

Jane hurriedly begs Emma to make her excuses if she should be missed. It is late. She ought to be at home. She does not want to say anything about going to give trouble. But will Miss Woodhouse kindly say, when the others come in, that she is gone?

Certainly, Emma says; but she remonstrates on Jane Fairfax's walking to Highbury alone.

It will not hurt her; she walks fast; she will be at home in twenty minutes.

Emma, who never forgets what is due to herself and others when she can render her neighbour a service, offers her father's servant; wishes to order the Hartfield carriage.

"Thank you, thank you!" Jane says, but resolutely declines, adding with agitation, "For *me* to be afraid of walking alone!—I, who may so soon have to guard others."

Emma's really kind heart is touched. She entreats to be allowed to lend the carriage, and urges that the heat is cause sufficient, since Jane is fatigued already.

Some of the bonds which fetter Jane's spirit give way; she and Emma are nearer being friends at that moment than they have ever been before. Jane confides so far in her companion: "I am fatigued," she owns,[Pg 279] "but it is not the sort of fatigue—quick walking will refresh me. Miss Woodhouse, we all know at times what it is to be wearied in spirits. Mine, I confess, are exhausted. The greatest kindness you can show me will be to let me have my own way, and only say that I am gone when it is necessary."

Emma has not another word to say, and is full of commiseration, when the words that burst from Jane at parting, "Oh! Miss Woodhouse, the comfort of being sometimes alone!" betray the continued endurance the poor girl has to practise, even with some of those who love her best.

Jane has not been gone for a quarter of an hour, and Emma and her father have only reached the views of St. Mark's Place, Venice, when Frank Churchill enters the room. His father and mother were right. A nervous seizure which had attacked Mrs. Churchill was the cause of his delay. He had almost given up the idea of coming, and if he had known how late he must be, and what he should have to suffer from the heat of the weather, he would not have started.

This is not like a speech which could come from the gallant Frank Churchill; but he continues to rail at the heat and at his own sufferings—sitting at the greatest possible distance from the small remnant of Mr. Weston's fire, and looking deplorable—though Emma takes it upon her to assure him, somewhat exasperatingly, perhaps, that he will soon be cooler if he will sit still.

As soon as he is cooler he will go back again. He could ill be spared, only such a point had been made of his coming. They will all be going presently. He has met one of the party as he came—madness in such weather.

Emma can come to no other conclusion than that Frank Churchill is out of humour. Some people are always cross when they are hot. Eating and drinking often cures such incidental complaints. She obligingly recommends him to take some refreshment, and points out the dining-room door.

No, he is not hungry; eating would only make him[Pg 280] hotter; but he thinks better of it and goes off, muttering something about spruce beer.[60]

Emma is glad she has done being in love with him; but Harriet has a sweet temper.

He comes back with his good manners, if not his good spirits, restored, enters into the Woodhouses' occupation, but announces, *apropos* of sketches and Switzerland, that he hopes soon to go abroad. He wants a change. He is sick of England.

He is sick of prosperity, his lively companion tells him; but she does not think he is so miserable as when he arrived. Let him eat and drink a little more. Another slice of cold meat, another draught of madeira and water, and he will do very well.

No, he will sit by her; she is his best cure.

They are going to Box Hill to-morrow. It is not Switzerland, but it will be something for a young man so much in want of a change.

No, certainly not; he will go home in the cool of the evening.

But he may come back again in the cool of the morning.

No, it would not be worth while. If he came he would be cross.

Then pray let him stay at Richmond.

But if he does, he will be crosser still. He could never bear to think of them all enjoying themselves without him.

He must settle these difficulties, and choose his own degree of crossness. She will press him no more.

Chaff was not a slang word early in the century. But how charmingly Jane Austen can chaff by the lips of more than one of her heroines! And what arch, sweet, perfectly womanly and ladylike chaff it is!

Frank Churchill[61] is very wrong, and yet there is a[Pg 281] grain of excuse for him when he says to Emma at parting, "Well, if *you* wish me to stay and join the party, I will."

Emma smiles her acceptance of the concession, very nearly as indefensibly.

There is another fine day for Box Hill; but though the scenery is much admired, the excursion somehow is not successful.

There is a want of spirit and a want of union which cannot be got over. The Eltons walk by themselves, Mr. Knightley takes charge of Miss Bates and Jane Fairfax, Frank Churchill escorts Emma and Harriet. Mr. Weston tries in vain to bring everybody together, and make the thing harmonious.

At first it is downright dulness to Emma, for Frank Churchill is actually stupid, and, of course, Harriet is no better. They are both insufferable. It would have been well if they had continued dull, though Emma flatters herself it is a great deal better when they all sit down together, and Frank grows talkative and gay, making Emma his first object; while she, glad to be enlivened, and not sorry to be flattered, affords him every encouragement, in forgetfulness, it must be confessed, of what Harriet's feelings may be. But then Harriet is the most placid of human beings, the most confiding of friends.

Emma means nothing: she even believes that he means nothing; but in the opinion of most people present only one English word, "flirtation," could describe their behaviour. "Mr. Frank Churchill and Miss Woodhouse flirted together excessively" might be the report sent off in a letter to Maple Grove by one lady, to Ireland by another. Yet it is really because Emma is less—not more—happy than usual, that she lays herself open to the imputation.

Frank Churchill piles up his compliments, and Emma parries them merrily. The rest of the company fall into silence, as if to constitute themselves an audience for the genteel comedy, until Emma objects aloud to[Pg 282] talking nonsense for the entertainment of seven silent people.

"They shall talk," Frank ordains. "Ladies and gentlemen, I am desired by Miss Woodhouse to say that she desires to know what you are all thinking of?"

There is a little flutter of amusement here, and indignation there.

Mr. Knightley's answer is most distinct, and most to the purpose: "Is Miss Woodhouse sure she would like to hear what we are all thinking of?"

"Oh, no! no!" cries Emma, laughing as carelessly as she can; "upon no account in the world. Let me hear anything rather than what you are thinking of."

"It will not do," whispers Frank to Emma; "they are most of them affronted. I will attack them with more address. Ladies and gentlemen, I am ordered by Miss Woodhouse to say that she waives her right of knowing exactly what you may all be thinking of, and only requires something very entertaining, from each of you, in a general way. Here are

seven of you besides myself (who, she is pleased to say, am very entertaining already), and she only demands from each of you either one thing very clever, be it prose or verse, original or repeated; or two things moderately clever; or three things very dull indeed; and she engages to laugh heartily at them all."

"Oh, very well," exclaims Miss Bates; "then I need not be uneasy. 'Three things very dull indeed!' That will just do for me, you know. I shall be sure to say three dull things as soon as ever I open my mouth, sha'n't I?" (looking round with the most good-humoured dependence on everybody's assent). "Do not you all think I shall?"

Emma cannot resist. "Ah, ma'am, but there may be a difficulty. Pardon me, but you will be limited as to the number—only three at once."

Miss Bates, deceived by the mock ceremony of the manner, does not immediately catch the meaning; but[Pg 283] when it bursts on her, it cannot anger, though a slight blush shows that it can pain her.

"Ah! well, to be sure! Yes, I see what she means," turning to Mr. Knightley, "and I will try to hold my tongue. I must make myself very disagreeable, or she would not have said such a thing to an old friend."

Mr. Weston volunteers a conundrum, which is not very clever, but which he is sure Emma will not guess. "What two letters stand for perfection?—'M' and 'A'—Em—ma."

It may be a very indifferent piece of wit, but Emma finds a great deal to laugh at and enjoy in it.

Mr. Knightley says, gravely, "This explains the sort of clever thing that is wanted, and Mr. Weston has done very well for himself; but he must have knocked up everybody else. *Perfection* should not have come quite so soon."

Mrs. Elton is swelling with resentment. "I really cannot attempt—I am not at all fond of the sort of thing. I have a great deal of vivacity in my own way, but I must really be allowed to judge when to speak, and when to hold my tongue. Pass us, if you please, Mr. Churchill! pass Mr. E., Knightley, Jane, and myself. We have nothing clever to say—not one of us?"

"Yes, yes, pray pass *me*," adds her husband, with a sort of sneering consciousness. "I have nothing to say that can entertain Miss Woodhouse, or any other young lady. An old married man—quite good for nothing. Shall we walk, Augusta?"

"With all my heart. I am really tired of exploring so long on one spot. Come, Jane, take my other arm."

Jane declines, and the husband and wife walk off.

“Happy couple!” says Frank Churchill, as soon as they are out of hearing; “how well they suit one another! Very lucky, marrying, as they did, upon an acquaintance formed only in a public place. They only knew each other, I think, a few weeks, at Bath.”[Pg 284] Then, suddenly becoming serious, he volunteers his emphatic opinion that there can be no knowledge of a person’s disposition in such circumstances, finishing with the sentence, “How many a man has committed himself on a short acquaintance, and rued it all the rest of his life!”

Jane Fairfax wishes to speak. “Such things do occur, undoubtedly.” She is stopped by a cough.

“You were speaking?” said Frank Churchill.

She recovers her voice. “I was only going to observe that though such unfortunate circumstances do sometimes occur both to men and women, I cannot imagine them to be very frequent. A hasty and imprudent attachment may arise, but there is generally time to recover from it afterwards. I would be understood to mean that it can be only weak, irresolute characters (whose happiness must be always at the mercy of chance) who will suffer an unfortunate acquaintance to be an inconvenience, an oppression for ever.”

He makes no answer, merely looks and bows in submission, then resumes his flirtation with Emma, more furiously than before. Will she choose a wife for him? He is sure he will like anybody fixed on by her. He is in no hurry. Emma may adopt her, educate her.

“And make her like myself!” cries the heedless Emma.

By all means, if she can.

She undertakes the commission in high glee. He shall have a charming wife.

He only stipulates for two things. She must be lively, and she must have hazel eyes. He will go abroad for a couple of years, and when he returns he will come to her for a wife.

This jesting commission appeals to Emma’s special weakness. Will not Harriet be the very creature described—barring the liveliness and the hazel eyes—either sops of personal flattery thrown in for Emma herself, whose appetite for that commodity is not small, or words[Pg 285] spoken at random? Might not Harriet be in his thoughts when he referred the education of his wife to Emma?

“Now, ma’am,” said Jane to her aunt, “shall we join Mrs. Elton?”

Miss Bates is ready, so is Mr. Knightley; it seems, to use a homely expression, that their absence will be better than their company.

Yet, after the rest of the party are gone, the pitch to which the young man's spirits rise becomes almost unpleasant to Emma. She is fairly tired of fun and flattery. She welcomes the appearance of the servants and the ordering of the carriages.

But Emma is not to escape without the rebuke she deserves. She finds Mr. Knightley seeking to speak with her where nobody can hear. He says, "'Emma, I must once more speak to you as I have been used to do—a privilege rather endured than allowed, perhaps; but I must still use it. I cannot see you acting wrong without a remonstrance. How could you be so unfeeling to Miss Bates? How could you be so insolent in your wit to a woman of her character, age, and situation? Emma, I had not thought it possible.'

"Emma recollected, blushed, was sorry, but tried to laugh it off. 'Nay, how could I help saying what I did? Nobody could have helped it. It was not so very bad. I daresay she did not understand me.'

"'I assure you she did. She felt your full meaning. She has talked of it since. I wish you could have heard how she talked of it—with what candour and generosity. I wish you could have heard her honouring your forbearance, in being able to pay her such attentions as she was for ever receiving from yourself and your father, when her society must be so irksome.'

"'Oh!' cried Emma, 'I know there is not a better creature in the world; but you must allow that what is good and what is ridiculous are most unfortunately blended in her.'

"'They are blended,' said he, 'I acknowledge, and[Pg 286] were she prosperous I could allow much for the occasional prevalence of the ridiculous over the good. Were she a woman of fortune, I would leave her every harmless absurdity to take its chance. I would not quarrel with you for any liberties of manner. Were she equal in situation—but, Emma, consider how far this is from being the case. She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to; and if she live to old age must probably sink more. Her situation should secure your compassion. It was badly done, indeed! You, whom she had known from an infant, whom she had seen grow up from a period when her notice was an honour—to have you now, in thoughtless spirits, and the pride of the moment, laugh at her, humble her—and before her niece, too, and before others, many of whom (certainly *some*) would be entirely guided by *your* treatment of her. This is not pleasant to you, Emma, and it is very far from pleasant to me; but I must, I will, tell you truths while I can; satisfied with proving myself your friend by very faithful

counsel, and trusting that you will, some time or other, do me greater justice than you can do now.'"

Nothing can be juster, manlier, more faithful than the remonstrance. It goes straight to Emma's heart. Mr. Knightley is quite mistaken in imagining that she cannot appreciate it at its true worth. In the middle of her contrition and distress, she is eager to show him that she feels no sullenness. Not the least of her vexation is occasioned by her having failed, in the hurry of the moment, to acknowledge the true friendship of his tone, and by their having exchanged no friendly leave-taking.

How could she have been so brutal, so cruel to Miss Bates; how could she have exposed herself to such an ill opinion in any one she valued, and then to suffer him to go without one word of gratitude and common kindness?

Truly, Emma is candid, good, and gracious, in spite of her worst faults, when these are contrasted with the intolerable flippancy, the selfish heartlessness of some[Pg 287] so-called heroines. We are sorry for her as she drives away with Harriet, the tears stealing down Emma's cheeks in the comparative privacy of such companionship.

That scene at Box Hill, with its lights and shades, its apparent comedy and hidden tragedy, its diversity of characters and feelings so finely indicated, is the best in the book.

"Who breaks—pays." Emma has, next morning, as the inevitable result of her regardless folly the day before, to face a host of wretched reflections. Girl-like, she is in haste to atone, as if atonement were always easy or possible. She will go that very day to the Bateses, and, though she cannot speak out her compunction, she will, from this time henceforth, do all that is in her power to make up for her offence, by lavishing friendly kindness on the family.

She fears for a moment she is to be refused admittance, but it is only Jane Fairfax who is retreating from the visitor. The mother and daughter are as civil and humble as usual, though it pains Emma to recognise, at first, that Miss Bates is less cheerful and easy in her volubility.

But Emma's special friendliness soon reconciles the good old lady to herself and all the world. Emma hears the present trouble poured forth in the usual jumble of ideas and sentences. The substance is that Jane has suddenly made up her mind to accept the situation Mrs. Elton hunted up for her.

Emma is sincerely interested, and sorry for them all, and expresses her feelings earnestly.

“So very kind,” replies the grateful Miss Bates, “but you are always kind.”

This is certainly heaping coals of fire on Emma’s head. She hastens to ask where Miss Fairfax is going.

“To Mrs. Smallridge—charming woman—to have the charge of three little girls—delightful children.”

Jane will be only four miles from Maple Grove; but unfortunately Mrs. Smallridge is in a great hurry, and Jane is to leave in a fortnight.

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On Emma’s return home, she finds Mr. Knightley with her father, looking in upon him before leaving for London, and wishing to learn if they have any messages for John and Isabella, with whom he is going to spend a few days.

Emma had not heard of the visit, though Mr. Knightley says he had been thinking of it for some time; and she is certain he has not forgiven her, he looks so unlike himself.

As they stand talking, Mr. Woodhouse begins to inquire for Mrs. Bates and her daughter, with whom Emma has been—she is so attentive to them.

At this peculiarly *mal apropos* praise, Emma’s colour rises, while she looks at Mr. Knightley and shakes her head.

It seems as if he instantly understands all that has been passing in her heart. He looks at her with a glow of regard, he takes her hand—she is not sure afterwards that she did not offer it, but he takes it, presses it, and is certainly on the point of carrying it to his lips, when, from some fancy or other, he suddenly lets it go.

He would have judged better, she thinks, if he had not stopped, but she can at least recall the attempt with great satisfaction. It speaks such perfect amity. The next moment he is gone.

The following day brings news from Richmond which throws everything else into the shade. An express had arrived at Randalls to announce the death of Mrs. Churchill. The great Mrs. Churchill (the tyrannical rich woman who has demanded such deference from both husband and nephew) is no more.

Jane Austen has a most pertinent reflection on the event and some of its consequences. “It was felt as such things must be felt. Everybody had a degree of gravity and sorrow; tenderness towards the departed, solicitude for the surviving friends; and, in a reasonable time, curiosity to know where she would be buried.

Goldsmith tells us, that when lovely woman stoops to folly, she has nothing to do but to die; and when she[Pg 289] stoops to be disagreeable, it is equally to be recommended as a clearer of ill fame. Mrs. Churchill, after being disliked at least twenty-five years, was now spoken of with compassionate allowances. In one point she was fully justified. She had never been admitted before to be seriously ill. The event acquitted her of all the fancifulness, and all the selfishness of imaginary complaints."

Emma soon begins to consider that now an attachment on Frank's part to Harriet Smith will have nothing to encounter.

Mr. Churchill, independent of his wife, is feared by nobody; an easy, guidable man—to be persuaded into anything by his nephew.

Harriet again behaves admirably, and betrays no agitation. Emma is delighted to have this evidence of her friend's strengthened character.

In the interval, before anything can be known of Frank Churchill's future, Emma longs to do the little she can to compensate for her neglect of Jane Fairfax, and for the idle, unworthy fancies of which she begins to feel thoroughly ashamed. But Jane is not so accessible to advances as her aunt is. Emma would have Jane spend a day at Hartfield before she quits Highbury, and writes to invite her. The invitation is refused, and a message sent that "Miss Fairfax is not well enough to write."

Mr. Perry, in visiting the Woodhouses, confirms the accounts of Jane Fairfax's illness. She is seriously indisposed, suffering from headaches, with nervous fever, and her appetite is gone. He doubts the possibility of her going to Mrs. Smallridge's at the time fixed. He is uneasy about Jane Fairfax, though there are no absolutely alarming symptoms. Her present home is unfavourable to a nervous disorder.

Emma's regrets and self-reproaches increase. She is eager to be useful; she writes again, with the greatest tact and feeling she can command, and proposes to take Jane for a drive, at any hour she will name.

Once more a verbal message is returned:—"Miss[Pg 290] Fairfax's compliments and thanks, but is quite unequal to any exercise."

Emma thinks her note deserves more, but cannot be angry under the circumstances. She would have tried personal persuasion, but only Miss Bates comes to the carriage door to excuse her niece.

Hearing of Mr. Perry's recommendation of nourishing food, Emma returns home, and calling the housekeeper, despatches some arrowroot of very superior quality, with a

most friendly note to Miss Bates. In half an hour the arrowroot is returned with a thousand thanks from Miss Bates, but “dear Jane” would not be satisfied till it was sent back. It is a thing she cannot take, and she insists on her aunt saying that her niece is not in want of anything.

Such obduracy is unconquerable, and when Emma hears that Jane Fairfax had been wandering about the meadows at some distance from Highbury on the afternoon of the day on which she declined carriage exercise, Emma is forced to see that Jane is resolved to receive no kindness from *her*. She is sorry and mortified, but she has the comfort of thinking Mr. Knightley would have understood and appreciated her motives.

Ten days after Mrs. Churchill’s death, Mr. Weston comes himself one morning to Hartfield to beg Emma to accompany him to Randalls. Mrs. Weston is not ill, but she has something very particular to say to her friend. He will not tell beforehand what has happened, but on the road he is led into such explanations as “The most unaccountable business;” “she will break it to you better than I can.”

At the last words Emma stops short in terror. Something must have happened in Brunswick Square (where Isabella lives). Which of them is it? She must hear at once.

It is only on his solemnly assuring her that what has occurred has nothing to do with the name of Knightley that she is relieved, and walks on. “Who is that gentleman on horseback?” she asks, speaking[Pg 291] in order to keep up a conversation on indifferent topics.

It is one of the Otways. Not Frank. She will not see him. He is half way to Windsor by this time.

Has his son been with them, then?

Oh, yes! Did she not know? Well, never mind.

Mrs. Weston looks ill, and much disturbed, and no sooner is she left alone with Emma than the girl begs affectionately to be informed what unpleasant event has befallen her friends.

“Have you no idea?” said Mrs. Weston, in a trembling voice.

Emma does guess it has to do with Mr. Frank Churchill.

She is right, Mrs. Weston confesses, resuming her work, and fixing her eyes upon it. He had been there that morning on a most extraordinary errand. He came to speak to his father—to announce an attachment.

Emma thinks first of herself and then of Harriet.

“More than an attachment—a positive engagement. What will you say, Emma, what will anybody say, when it is known that Frank Churchill and Miss Fairfax are engaged—nay, that they have been long engaged?”

Emma even jumped with surprise and consternation. Jane Fairfax! Mrs. Weston is not serious. She does not mean it?

“You may well be amazed,” returns Mrs. Weston, steadily averting her eyes; “you may well be amazed.”

There had been a solemn engagement between them ever since October, formed at Weymouth, and kept a secret from everybody, not a creature knowing it but themselves, neither the Campbells, nor her family, nor his.

Emma scarcely hears what is said. Her mind is divided between two overwhelming ideas—her own former conversations with him about Jane Fairfax, and poor Harriet. “Well,” she exclaims at last, “this is a circumstance I must think of at least half a day before I can comprehend it. What! engaged to her all the winter, before either of them came to Highbury?”

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“It has hurt me very much,” said Mrs. Weston; “it has hurt his father equally; some part of his conduct we cannot excuse.”

Emma cannot pretend to misunderstand the speaker’s meaning. On the contrary, she is eager and glad to remove this load from the Westons’ minds. In a few words she explains that Frank Churchill’s attentions to her have not produced the effect his father and mother feared. It seems too good news to be true; but Emma confirms her assertions of indifference by owning there was a time when she did like him, but that time soon passed—why, she cannot tell, and she has not cared about him for the last three months.

Mrs. Weston kisses her, and cries with joy and thankfulness. On this point she and her husband have been wretched. They had warmly wished the match, and heartily believed in a mutual attachment. They have been miserable on Emma’s account.

Emma is grateful for her escape, but she is by no means inclined to excuse the offender. She turns, with her usual frankness and fervour, to protest against his conduct. “What right had he to come among us with affections and faith engaged, and manners so very disengaged? What right had he to endeavour to please—as he

certainly did—to distinguish any young woman, as he certainly did, while he really belonged to another? How could *she* bear such behaviour? Composure, with a witness! to look on while repeated attentions were offering to another woman before her face, and not resent it."

Now that Mrs. Weston's mind is so agreeably relieved, she seeks to find an apology for the delinquents.

Emma will not even listen to a reminder of his many good qualities. "Mrs. Smallridge, too!" she is exclaiming; "Jane actually on the point of going as governess! What could he mean by such horrible indelicacy? To suffer her to engage herself—to suffer her even to think of such a measure!"

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But Mrs. Weston is able to clear her stepson on this point—he knew nothing of it. There had been misunderstandings. Jane had taken a private resolution, which had somehow come round to Frank only the day before; it had determined him to come forward at once, own all to his uncle, and throw himself on his kindness. Had Mrs. Churchill lived there could hardly have been a hope of the family's consent; with her influence gone everything had been easy. Frank was off with the morning light to Highbury, went straight to the Bateses, and then came on to his father's. He had to return immediately to his uncle, but was to write in full to his stepmother.

Emma remarks dryly, she supposes they will immediately get reconciled to the idea, and she wishes the couple happy. But she will always think it a very abominable system of hypocrisy, deceit, espionage, and treachery. They must take the consequence, if they have heard each other spoken of in a way not perfectly agreeable.

Mrs. Weston congratulates herself that she has always thought so highly of Jane Fairfax, she can never have said ill of her to Frank.

Emma, smarting under her own consciousness, can only say her friend is in luck. But she is able to set worthy Mr. Weston's mind at rest at once, by congratulating him, without the smallest difficulty, on having the loveliest and most accomplished young woman in England for his daughter-in-law.

"Harriet! poor Harriet!" There is the next torment. How is Emma to break such news a second time to her friend? Mr. Knightley's words begin to sound prophetic—"Emma, you have been no friend to Harriet Smith."

There is no necessity for farther solicitude on Jane Fairfax's behalf. Her days of insignificance and evil are over. Now Emma can comprehend why her late offers of assistance and regard have been repulsed. In Jane's eyes she has been a successful rival. In that[Pg 294] light an airing in the Hartfield carriage would have been the rack, and arrowroot from the Hartfield store-room must have proved poison.

But Harriet. Frank Churchill's engagement is to be still kept a strict secret during the family's period of mourning for Mrs. Churchill; however, there must be an explanation, on Harriet's account.

Emma is reflecting Mrs. Weston's agitation on her own behalf, when Harriet comes in, with the eager exclamation, "Is not this the oddest news that ever was about Jane Fairfax?" Mr. Weston has told her as the greatest secret. "How very odd!"

Harriet's behaviour is so extremely odd, that Emma does not know what to make of it. She may spare her pity, if Harriet's self-command has reached this height. Harriet is even asking, with the utmost coolness, if Miss Woodhouse had ever guessed that Mr. Frank Churchill was in love with Miss Fairfax?

"Never!" protests Emma; "you may be sure of that. If I had, I should have cautioned you accordingly."

"Me!" cries Harriet, colouring; "why should you caution me? You do not think that I care about Mr. Frank Churchill?"

If it is not Frank, who can it be? Is Emma to suppose——?

But Harriet is quite ready to explain herself in the middle of her agitation. They have agreed not to name him; but he is so infinitely superior to everybody else, that Harriet does not see how she could have been thought to mean any other person. Mr. Frank Churchill, indeed! Harriet does not know who would look at him in the presence of the other. And she has received the encouragement from Emma herself, when it would have seemed too much presumption almost, to dare to think of him—that more wonderful things had happened—there had been matches of greater disparity.

"Harriet," cries Emma, "let us understand each other now, without the possibility of further mistake—are you speaking of Mr. Knightley?"

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To be sure she is—she never could have an idea of anybody else.

Emma brings herself to ask, has Harriet any idea of Mr. Knightley's returning her affection?

“Yes,” replies Harriet modestly, but not fearfully, “I must say I have.”

Emma is silent, in the bitterness of her heart. Why is it so much worse that Harriet should be in love with Mr. Knightley than with Mr. Churchill? Why is the evil so dreadfully increased by Harriet’s having some hope of a return of her love? There can only be one explanation—it darts through Emma’s mind with the swiftness of an arrow’s flight—Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself.

Her own conduct, as well as her own heart, lies bare before her. How inconsiderate, how indelicate, how irrational, how unfeeling has been her behaviour! And if she has acted improperly by Harriet, she may have done still worse by Mr. Knightley. He had said she had been no friend to Harriet Smith. She may prove to have been his worst enemy, if it be possible that his association with Harriet can bring him to demean himself to make a girl, so inferior to him in every respect, his wife.

But Emma must not make Harriet suffer for her fault. Emma is always courageous in taking upon herself the heaviest penalty for her misdoings.

She gently questions Harriet as to her reason, besides the assurance Emma has given her, under a misconception, of Mr. Knightley’s growing regard for her. And as Harriet, with great *naïveté*, brings forward the different proofs—from his dancing with her at the ball at the Crown, down to his seeking her out, and walking with her at his own party at Donwell, including the change in his tone, his increased kindness, the pains he takes to ascertain her opinions in conversation, even to an effort to discover whether her affections are still disengaged, Emma, sick at heart, is compelled to admit there is some truth in what Harriet alleges. Emma[Pg 296] herself has been struck with the additional notice which Mr. Knightley bestows on Harriet Smith, and several times lately he has praised her cordially to Emma.

If one could go so far as to conceive Mr. Knightley choosing a partner for life so inferior to him in understanding, as well as in every other desirable recommendation, then it might be that he would marry Harriet, though the vision of her as the mistress of Donwell Abbey humbles Emma for its master’s sake even more than for her own. If she had only not brought the two together; if she had but left Harriet to marry the unexceptionable young man who would have made her happy in the line of life to which she belonged—in which she ought to have remained. Mr. Knightley and Harriet Smith! It is a union to distance every wonder of the kind. The attachment of Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax becomes commonplace and threadbare—presents no disparity by comparison. Such elevation on Harriet’s side—such debasement on Mr. Knightley’s. It is impossible. And yet it is very far from impossible. Is it a new

circumstance for a man of first-rate abilities to be captivated by very inferior powers? Is it new for one, perhaps too busy to seek, to be the prize of a girl who will seek him?

Still Emma can be honourably fair to Harriet, and gentle with her. But she does faintly suggest that Mr. Knightley may be paying attention to Harriet with Mr. Martin's interest in view.

But Harriet rejects the suggestion with such spirit—she hopes she knows better now than to care for Mr. Martin, or to be suspected of it—and so holds Emma to her former advice to observe the gentleman's behaviour, and let it be the rule of hers (Harriet's); that, though it requires a great exertion, Emma brings herself to say Mr. Knightley is the last man in the world who would intentionally give any woman the idea of his feeling more for her than he really did.

In return for the guarded speech, Harriet could have worshipped her reluctant friend.

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Emma seeks to weigh her regard for Mr. Knightley—to ascertain its beginning and strength. Till she was threatened with its loss, she had never known how much her happiness was dependent upon him. She had long been first with him, for there was only Isabella to compete with her in his affections; and she had been aware that she came before her sister with him. She had known she was dear to him; and in her self-confident security, and her delusions and fancies, she had never so much as suspected that to be first and dearest with Mr. Knightley, or to have another woman supplant her, constituted the fulness or the blankness, the gladness or the sadness, of her lot.

Tried as Emma is, her good sense does not forsake her; she will not believe in her own and Mr. Knightley's loss, so long as unbelief is possible. To continue to discuss the matter with Harriet is intolerable. She contrives to keep Harriet away from Hartfield.

A visit from Mrs. Weston is a distraction to Emma's cares, though it is no longer of the importance it would have been before the last miserable discovery.

Mrs. Weston comes with the news of the Westons' visit to the Bateses. Very great had been the evident distress and confusion of *the* lady, while the innocent satisfaction and delight of her grandmother and aunt had been almost touching.

Jane Fairfax had spoken with energy to Mrs. Weston on the misery she had suffered during the concealment for so many months. This was one of her expressions:—"I will not say that since I have entered into the engagement I have not had some happy moments, but I can say that I have never known the blessing of one tranquil hour."[62]

She had added:—“After all the punishment that misconduct can bring, it is still not less misconduct. The fortunate turn that everything has taken, and the kindness I am now receiving, is what my conscience tells me[Pg 298] ought not to be. Do not imagine, madam, that I was taught wrong. I shall dread making the story known to Colonel Campbell.”

Emma is softened. “Poor girl! her affection must have overpowered her judgment.”

Mrs. Weston’s communications increase Emma’s esteem, compassion, and sense of past injustice to Jane Fairfax. To all her other regrets and sources of self-reproach is added the sense of having missed, by a feeling of jealousy, the friendship with Jane—marked out by equality of birth, abilities, and education, which all her friends had proposed for her, and which might have been of benefit to both girls. Instead, Emma had preferred the unsuitable, humble companionship and worship of Harriet Smith; and what has come of it?

V.

A cold, stormy rain sets in, stripping the July trees and shrubs. Mr. Woodhouse, whose spirits are easily affected by the weather, is more than usually dependent on cheering, at the very time that visitors fail. Emma, struggling to do a loving daughter’s part, cannot prevent herself from foreseeing how much more deserted Hartfield must soon prove. Mrs. Weston’s baby will engross her, and supersede even Emma in her friend’s affections. Both Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax will be gone from Highbury; and—far worst change of all, Mr. Knightley will be no longer walking in at all hours, when he has Harriet to keep him company at Donwell. And if he can be content with Harriet, only one reflection can increase Emma’s wretchedness—that it has been all her own work.

The rainy clouds clear away the following afternoon, and Emma seizes the opportunity of Mr. Perry’s calling and sitting with her father, to stroll out into the[Pg 299] shrubbery—where the first thing she sees is Mr. Knightley passing the garden gate and coming towards her. She had not heard of his return from London, but she must be collected and calm. (Emma is a girl who possesses much self-respect and womanly dignity.)

Mr. Knightley, on his side, does not look cheerful; but he is perfectly capable of conversing quietly, as he turns and walks with her.

Emma fancies that he wishes to talk to her of Harriet, and shrinks from leading the way in the conversation, but braces herself to follow when he takes the initiative. It is only his recurring fits of silence she cannot bear.

She considers; tries to smile, and refers to some news for him to hear, which ought to surprise him.

If she means Miss Fairfax and Frank Churchill, he has heard that already, he tells her shortly.

Emma is relieved, but as she reminds him that he had once tried to give her a caution, and she wishes she had attended to it, her voice sinks and she sighs, adding, “I seem doomed to blindness.”

She suddenly finds her arm drawn within his and pressed, and hears him fairly faltering, “Time, my dearest Emma, time will heal the wound—the feelings of the warmest friendship—indignation—abominable scoundrel!”

Emma[63] must undeceive him instantly.

“You are very kind, but you are mistaken. I am not in want of that sort of compassion. I was very foolishly tempted to say and do many things which may well lay me open to unpleasant conjectures; but I have no other reason to regret that I was not in the secret earlier.”

“Emma,” he cries eagerly, “are you indeed——” but checking himself, “No, no. I understand you: forgive me. I am pleased that you can even say so much. He[Pg 300] is no object of regret. I could only be certain there was a preference. He is a disgrace to the name of man, and is he to be rewarded with that sweet young woman?”

Emma has to renew her protestations, striving for the old liveliness to carry off her sense of awkwardness.

“I am in a very extraordinary situation. I cannot let you continue in your error; and yet, perhaps, since my manners gave such an impression, I have as much reason to be ashamed of confessing that I never have been at all attached to the person we are speaking of, as it might be natural for a woman to feel in confessing exactly the reverse. But I never have.”

Her companion says nothing, and Emma, to convince him, recapitulates earnestly the true particulars of the case—Frank’s being the son of Mr. Weston, his having been continually at Hartfield; the fact that his attentions flattered her, even after she had come to look on them as a habit, a trick, nothing that had called for seriousness on her part. He had imposed on her, still he had not taken her in, in the serious meaning of the words.

Mr. Knightley grows cooler, and admits he may have underrated Frank Churchill. With such a woman he has a chance. He is a fortunate man, at three-and-twenty to have drawn a prize. Everything turns out well for him. “He meets with a young woman at a watering-place, gains her affection, cannot even weary her by negligent treatment; and had he and all his family sought round the world for a perfect wife for him, they could not have found her superior. His aunt is in the way. His aunt dies. He has only to speak; his friends are eager to promote his happiness. He has used everybody ill, and they are all delighted to forgive him.”

“You speak as if you envied him,” exclaims Emma.

“And I do envy him, Emma. In one respect he is the object of my envy.”

Emma can say no more; they seem within half a[Pg 301] sentence of Harriet. Emma wishes to change the subject, and speaks of the children in Brunswick Square.

But he is too fast for her. “You will not ask me what is the point of envy. Emma, I must tell you what you will not ask, though I may wish it unsaid the next moment.”

“Oh, then don’t speak of it; don’t speak of it,” she cries impulsively; “take a little time; consider; don’t commit yourself.”

“Thank you!” he said, in a tone of deep mortification.

Emma cannot bear to give him pain. He is wishing, perhaps, to consult her. She may help him; give just praise to Harriet, represent to him his independence.

Emma refuses to go in, and as they take another turn, says hurriedly, “I stopped you ungraciously just now, Mr. Knightley; but if you have any wish to speak to me openly, as a friend, you may command me. I will hear whatever you like, I will tell you exactly what I think.”

“As a friend,” repeats Mr. Knightley. No, he has no wish. But why should he hesitate when he has gone too far for concealment? He accepts her offer as a friend. Will she tell him if he has any chance of ever succeeding? He stops to look the question, and the expression of his eyes overpowers her.

“My dearest Emma, for dearest you will always be to me, whatever the event of this hour’s conversation, tell me at once; say ‘no’ if it is to be said.”

She can really say nothing.

“‘You are silent,’ he cries, with great animation, ‘absolutely silent! at present I ask no more.’

“Emma was almost ready to sink under the agitation of this moment. The dread of being awakened from the happiest dream was perhaps the most prominent feeling.

“‘I cannot make speeches, Emma,’ he soon resumed, and in a tone of such sincere, decided, intelligible[Pg 302] tenderness as was tolerably convincing. ‘If I loved you less, I might be able to talk about it more. But you know what I am; you hear nothing but truth from me. I have blamed you, and lectured you, and you have borne it as no other woman in England would have borne it. Bear with the truths I would tell you now, dearest Emma, as well as you have borne with them. The manner, perhaps, may have as little to recommend them. God knows I have been a very indifferent lover. But you understand me. Yes, you see—you understand my feelings, and will return them if you can. At present I ask only to hear, once to hear your voice.’”

Emma’s mind is busy. Harriet’s hopes have been groundless—a delusion as complete as any of her own—and Emma rejoices that Harriet’s secret has not escaped her. “It was all the service she could now render her poor friend; for as to any of that heroism of sentiment which might have prompted her to entreat him to transfer his affection from herself to Harriet, as infinitely the more worthy of the two—or even the more simple sublimity of resolving to refuse him at once and for ever, without vouchsafing any motive, because he could not marry them both, Emma had it not.” “She spoke then on being entreated. What did she say? Just what she ought, of course. A lady always does. She said enough to show there need not be despair, and to invite him to say more himself.”

“Mr. Knightley had, in fact, been wholly unsuspicious of his own influence. He had come to see how she bore Frank Churchill’s engagement with no selfish view, the rest had been the work of a moment.

“*Her* change was equal. This one half-hour had given to each the same precious certainty of being beloved, had cleared from each the same degree of ignorance, jealousy, or distrust. On his side there had been a long-standing jealousy, old as the arrival, or even the expectation, of Frank Churchill. He had been in love with Emma and jealous of Frank Churchill from about the same period, one sentiment having probably[Pg 303] enlightened him as to the other. It was his jealousy of Frank Churchill that had taken him from the country. The Box Hill party had decided him on going away. He would save himself from witnessing again such permitted, encouraged attentions. He had gone to learn to be indifferent, but he had gone to a wrong place. There was too much domestic happiness in his brother’s house; woman wore too amiable a form in it. Isabella was too much like Emma, differing only in those striking inferiorities which always brought the other in brilliancy before him, for much to have

been done, even had his time been longer. He had stayed on, however, vigorously, day after day, till this very morning's post had conveyed the history of Jane Fairfax. Then, with the gladness which must be felt, nay, which he did not scruple to feel, having never believed Frank Churchill to be at all deserving Emma, was there so much fond solicitude, so much keen anxiety for her, that he could stay no longer. He had ridden home through the rain, and had walked up directly after dinner to see how this sweetest and best of all creatures, faultless in spite of all her faults, bore the discovery.

"He had found her agitated and low. Frank Churchill was a villain. He heard her declare that she had never loved him. Frank Churchill's character was not desperate. She was his own Emma, by hand and word, when they returned into the house; and if he could have thought of Frank Churchill then, he might have deemed him a very good sort of fellow." The concluding paragraph, in its mingled vivacity and satire, is peculiarly Jane Austen's.

Emma had left the house for a little respite from suffering. She returns to it in an exquisite flutter of happiness. The reflections of a sleepless night tranquillise Emma's feelings. Her gravest considerations are her father and Harriet, since Emma's happiness by no means absolves her, in her own opinion, in that of her author, or in reality, from caring for others. She hardly knows yet what Mr. Knightley will ask; but a[Pg 304] very short parley with her own heart produces the most solemn resolution of never quitting her father. She even weeps at the idea of it, as a sin of thought. While he lives it must be only an engagement, which, she flatters herself, might become an additional comfort to him.

With regard to poor Harriet, Emma must still experience much bitter self-reproach and many sorrowful regrets. The best that Emma can devise for her friend, while still avoiding a meeting, and communicating what she has to tell by letter, is to procure for Harriet an invitation to visit Isabella. A few weeks spent in London will furnish some amusement.

Emma's letter to Harriet, written the first thing before breakfast, is so hard a task that Mr. Knightley, in walking over to breakfast, does not come too soon. He has not left her long when a thick packet from Mrs. Weston encloses Frank Churchill's promised explanation.

It is a good letter—appealing not unsuccessfully to the candour and indulgence of his reader. The writer dwells eloquently on all the difficulties which beset his devoted attachment to Miss Fairfax, so that if he had not persuaded her to stoop to a secret

engagement, he must have gone mad. He confesses ingenuously what had really been the motive of his first visit to Highbury.

He admits that his attentions to Miss Woodhouse were partly for the purpose of assisting in the concealment of his real object. But he insists that, if he had not been convinced of her indifference, he would not have acted as he did. They seemed to understand each other. When he called to take leave of her, he had been on the verge of confessing the truth. He believes she had some suspicion of it. He remembers her telling him at the ball that he ought to be grateful to Mrs. Elton. His heart was in Highbury, and his business was to get his body there as often as might be, and with the least suspicion.

Of the piano so much talked of, he need not say that it was ordered entirely without the knowledge of Miss[Pg 305] Fairfax, who would never have allowed him to send it had any choice been given her. Afterwards he had behaved shamefully. Does Mrs. Weston remember the morning at Donwell? He was late. He met Miss Fairfax walking home by herself, and wanted to walk with her; but she would not suffer it. He had thought her over-cautious, even cold. He now saw she was perfectly right. "While I, to blind the world to our engagement, was behaving one hour with objectionable particularity to another woman, was she to be consenting the next to a proposal which might have made every previous precaution useless? Had we been met walking together between Donwell and Highbury, the truth must have been suspected. I was mad enough, however, to resent—I doubted her affection. I doubted it more the next day on Box Hill, when, provoked by such conduct on my side—such shameful, insolent neglect of her, and such apparent devotion to Miss W., as it would have been impossible for any woman of sense to endure—she spoke her resentment in a form of words perfectly intelligible to me."

Even then he was not such a fool as not to mean to be reconciled in time; but he went away, determined that she should make the first advances.

In the meantime she closed with the offer of a situation as governess; and wrote to him that, as she felt the engagement to be a source of repentance and misery to each, she dissolved it.

The letter reached him on the very morning of his aunt's death. He answered it within the hour, but in the confusion which followed, his answer, instead of being sent off with the many letters despatched that day, was locked up in his writing-desk, while he trusted that he had said enough, though in but a few lines, to satisfy her. He was surprised at getting no answer till he received a parcel—his own letters returned, with

a note stating her surprise at not having heard from him in reply to her last letter, and begging him to forward her letters to Mrs. Smallridge's, near Bristol.

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He knew the name, the place, and instantly saw what she had been about. What was to be done? One thing only. He must speak to his uncle; without his sanction Frank could not hope to be listened to again. And Mr. Churchill, softened by the late event, was earlier reconciled than Frank could have ventured to expect.

Is Mrs. Weston disposed to pity Frank for having to plead his cause with so much at stake? She must not pity him till he reached Highbury, and saw how ill he had made *her*. He knew when to find her alone. A great deal of very reasonable—very just—displeasure he had to persuade away. But it was done; they were reconciled—dearer, much dearer, than ever.

The letter makes its way to Emma's heart. Frank had been wrong, but he has suffered, and is very sorry; and he is so grateful to Mrs. Weston, and so much in love with Miss Fairfax, and Emma is so happy herself, that there is no being severe. Could he have entered the room, she must have shaken hands as heartily as ever.

Emma knows Mrs. Weston will like Mr. Knightley to see the letter; and she herself is anxious that he should read it when he comes again. He wishes to take it home with him; but when he has to look over it then and there, he goes through it, supplying a running commentary of caustic, humorous remarks: "Playing a dangerous game," he observes at one place; and when he comes to the piano, exclaims, "Ah! that was the act of a very young man—too young to consider whether the inconvenience of it might not very much exceed the pleasure." "I perfectly agree with you, sir," Mr. Knightley echoes, "you did behave very shamefully." "What a letter the man writes!" protests the lover, impatient on his own account.

"I wish you would read it with a kinder spirit towards him," interposes Emma.

"Well, there is feeling here," admits Knightley. "He does seem to have suffered in finding her ill. He has had great faults—faults of inconsideration and[Pg 307] thoughtlessness; and I am very much of his opinion in thinking him likely to be happier than he deserves; but still, as he is, beyond doubt, really attached to Miss Fairfax, and will soon, it may be hoped, have the advantage of being constantly with her, I am very ready to believe his character will be improved, and acquire from hers the steadiness and delicacy of principle it wants."

But Mr. Knightley has something else to talk of. “And it is in plain, unaffected, gentlemanlike English, such as Mr. Knightley used even to the woman he was in love with” that he introduces his subject, “how to be able to ask her to marry him, without attacking the happiness of her father.”

Emma’s answer is ready. She can never quit her father.

Mr. Knightley, unselfish in everything, feels this as strongly as herself. But his mind has been at work all the morning to overcome the obstacle. He had first hoped to induce Mr. Woodhouse to remove with her to Donwell; but Mr. Knightley’s knowledge of his future father-in-law’s habits soon convinced him that this step was impossible. Mr. Woodhouse taken from Hartfield! it ought not to be attempted. But Mr. Knightley’s next plan “he trusted his dearest Emma would not find in any respect objectionable: it was, that he should be received at Hartfield! that so long as her father’s happiness—in other words, his life—required Hartfield to continue her home, it should be his likewise.”

The last solution of the difficulty has never occurred to Emma. “She was sensible of all the affection it evinced. She felt that in quitting Donwell he must be sacrificing a great deal of independence of hours and habits; that in living constantly with her father, and in no house of his own, there would be much—very much—to be borne with.[64] She promised to think of it, and advised him to think of it more; but he was[Pg 308] fully convinced that no reflection could alter his wishes or his opinion on the subject. He had given it, he could assure her, very long and calm consideration. He had been walking away from William Larkins the whole morning, to have his thoughts to himself.”

“Ah! there is one difficulty unprovided for,” cried Emma. “I am sure William Larkins will not like it. You must get his consent before you ask mine.”

“She promised, however, to think of it; and pretty nearly promised, moreover, to think of it with the intention of finding it a very good scheme.

“It is remarkable that Emma, in the many, very many, points of view in which she was now beginning to consider Donwell Abbey, was never struck with any sense of injury to her nephew Henry, whose rights as heir-expectant had formerly been so tenaciously regarded.”

Emma would be too happy but for poor Harriet. “In time, of course, Mr. Knightley would be forgotten, that is, supplanted; but this could not be expected to happen very early. Mr. Knightley himself would be doing nothing to assist the cure; not like Mr. Elton. Mr. Knightley, always so kind, so feeling, so truly considerate for everybody,

would never deserve to be less worshipped than now; and it really was too much to hope, even of Harriet, that she could be in love with more than three men in one year."

Mrs. Weston's friends are made happy by the birth of a daughter to her. Emma and Mr. Knightley compare notes on Miss Weston's education. He declares he is losing his bitterness against spoiled children; they are disagreeable in infancy, but correct themselves as they grow older.

Emma reminds him she had the advantage of his endeavours to qualify the indulgence of other people. It would be the greatest humanity if he would do as much for poor little Anna Weston, except fall in love with her when she is thirteen.

"How often when you were a girl," he tells her,[Pg 309] "have you said to me with one of your saucy looks, 'Mr. Knightley, I am going to do so and so; papa says I may,' or 'I have Miss Taylor's leave;' something which you knew I did not approve. In such cases my interference was giving two bad feelings instead of one."

"'What an amiable creature I was! No wonder you should hold my speeches in such affectionate remembrance.'

"'Mr. Knightley, you always called me. Mr. Knightley, and from habit it has not so very formal a sound. And yet it is formal. I want you to call me something else, but I do not know what.'

"'I remember once calling you George in one of my amiable fits, about ten years ago. I did it because I thought it would offend you; but, as you made no objection, I never did it again.'

"'And cannot you call me George now?'

"'Impossible! I never can call you anything but Mr. Knightley. I will not promise even to equal the elegant terseness of Mrs. Elton by calling you Mr. K. But I will promise,' she added presently, laughing and blushing, 'I will promise to call you once by your Christian name. I do not say when, but perhaps you may guess where: in the building in which N. takes M. for better, for worse.'"

Harriet had answered Emma's letter, breaking to her the true state of affairs, much as might have been supposed, without reproaches, or apparent sense of ill-usage; and yet Emma fancied there was a something of resentment, a something bordering on it in her style, which increased the desirableness of their being separate. It might be only her own consciousness, but it seemed as if an angel only could have been quite without resentment under such a stroke.

But an invitation from Isabella is procured, Harriet finds the excuse of wishing to see a dentist, and Emma has the comfort of getting Harriet conveyed in state, in Mr. Woodhouse's carriage, to Brunswick Square, and established there for a fortnight.

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John Knightley replies to his brother's announcement of his intended marriage, with brotherly congratulations, in which Emma declares he writes like a sensible man. It is very plain he considers the good fortune of the engagement as all on her side, but that he is not without hope of her growing, in time, worthy of Mr. Knightley's affection.

Mr. Knightley remonstrates like a lover on this inference. He means no such thing; he only means——

"Oh!" she cries, "if you fancy your brother does not do me justice, only wait till my dear father is in the secret, and hear his opinion. Depend upon it, he will be much farther from doing *you* justice. He will think all the happiness, all the advantage, on your side of the question—all the merit on mine. I wish I may not sink into 'poor Emma' with him at once. His tender compassion towards oppressed worth can go no farther."

The communication of the couple's purpose is made in the gentlest manner to Mr. Woodhouse. The information gives the poor gentleman a considerable shock. He tries earnestly to dissuade Emma from her intention. "She was reminded more than once of her having always said she would never marry, and assured that it would be a great deal better for her to remain single, and told of poor Isabella and poor Miss Taylor. But it would not do. Emma hung about him affectionately and smiled, and said it must be so, and that he must not class her with Isabella and Mrs. Weston, whose marriages, taking them from Hartfield, had, indeed, made a melancholy change. But she was not going from Hartfield. She was introducing no change in their numbers or their comforts but for the better. Did not he love Mr. Knightley very much? Would not he like to have him always on the spot?"

"Yes, that was all very true; Mr. Knightley could not be there too often; he should be glad to see him every day; but they did see him every day as it was. Why could not they go on as they had done?"

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Mr. Woodhouse cannot soon be reconciled, but at least the matter is broken to him.

Contrast the tender, protecting reverence of the gay and witty Emma Woodhouse to her father's weakness, with the flippant, bold, offensive disrespect displayed by so

many of the silly, ill-bred, unprincipled heroines of modern novels to their despised and insulted fathers.

The proposed marriage has the warmest support from the rest of Emma's friends—above all, from Isabella and Mrs. Weston. Mrs. Weston, with her baby on her knee, indulging in reflections on the perfection of the match in every respect, "was one of the happiest women in the world. If anything could increase her delight, it was perceiving that the baby would soon have outgrown its first set of caps."[65]

Mr. Weston walks into Highbury the morning after he has heard the good news, to ascertain if "Jane" had any suspicion of it, and before night it is all over the place. It is, generally speaking, a well-approved match, though Mr. Elton can do no more than hope the young lady's pride will now be contented, and suppose she has always meant to "catch Knightley;" and Mrs. Elton is forced to cry, "Rather he than I! Poor Knightley!" There will be an end to their pleasant intercourse. No more exploring parties to Donwell made for her. Shocking plan, living together! She knew a family near Maple Grove who had tried it, and been obliged to separate before the end of the first quarter.

I must beg Mrs. Elton's pardon for differing from her, in remarking how far Jane Austen—with her hero and heroine—was above selfish insular prejudices, in contemplating the humane, kindly arrangement which did not fear to unite, in one household, kindred, old and young, of different generations.

Harriet's visit to London has been protracted to a[Pg 312] month's duration, and Emma is rather anxiously anticipating her friend's return in company with John Knightley and his wife, when Mr. Knightley walks in one morning, to tell her some news which he will not undertake to define as either good or bad.

She cries, it is good, for she sees him trying not to smile.

"I am afraid," he said, composing his features, "I am very much afraid, my dear Emma, that you will not smile when you hear it." He goes on to observe there is one subject on which they differ—does she not recollect it—Harriet Smith?

Emma's cheeks flush, and she feels afraid for what is coming.

"You are prepared for the worst, I see, and very bad it is. Harriet Smith marries Robert Martin."

Emma gives a violent start.

It is so, indeed. Mr. Knightley has had it from Robert Martin himself. He left him not half an hour before.

Still Emma sits, the picture of amazement.

Mr. Knightley prepares to try to reconcile her to the fact.

She interrupts him. It is not that such a circumstance can now make her unhappy; but she cannot believe it. He must only mean that Robert Martin intends to propose to Harriet!

“I mean that he has done it, and been accepted.”

“Well!” exclaims Emma; and, oh! the significance of the interjection!—she has to bend her face over her work-basket, to conceal her expression of delight and entertainment, while she begs for particulars.

“It is a very simple story. He went to town on business three days ago, and I got him to take charge of some papers which I was wanting to send to John. He delivered these papers to John at his chambers, and was asked by him to join their party the same evening to Astley’s. They were going to take the two eldest boys to Astley’s. The party was to be our brother and[Pg 313] sister, Henry, John,—and Miss Smith. My friend Robert could not resist. They called for him in their way; were all extremely amused; and my brother asked him to dine with them next day, which he did; and in the course of that visit, as I understand, he found an opportunity of speaking to Harriet, and certainly did not speak in vain. She made him, by her acceptance, as happy even as he is deserving. He came down by yesterday’s coach, and was with me this morning, immediately after breakfast, to report his proceedings, first on my affairs, and then on his own. That is all I can relate of the how, where, and when. Your friend Harriet will make a much longer history when you see her. She will give you all the minute particulars, which only woman’s language can make interesting. In our communications we deal only in the great. However, I must say that Robert Martin’s heart seemed for *him* and to *me* very overflowing; and that he did mention, without its being much to the purpose, that on quitting their box at Astley’s, my brother took charge of Mrs. John Knightley and little John, and he followed with Miss Smith and Henry; and that at one time they were in such a crowd, as to make Miss Smith rather uneasy.”

Emma dares hardly speak, lest she should betray her unreasonable happiness; but she ventures to say she has learnt to think Harriet is doing extremely well; only the affair is so sudden, for she received reason lately to believe Harriet Smith more determined against Mr. Martin than ever.

“You ought to know your friend best,” replies Mr. Knightley; “but I should say she was a good-tempered, soft-hearted girl, not likely to be very, very determined against any young man who told her he loved her.”

Emma cannot help laughing. “Upon my word, I believe you know her quite as well as I do.”

He says he has taken some pains, as Emma must have seen, both for her sake and Robert Martin’s[Pg 314] sake—he had reason to believe him as much in love with Harriet as ever—to get better acquainted with Harriet; and he has come to the satisfactory conclusion that she is an artless, amiable girl, with “very good notions, very seriously good principles, placing her happiness in the affections and utility of domestic life.”

No doubt, simple young Harriet Smiths, who are like wax in the hands of their friends, have not died out in the land; but the great thing for them, as for the wisest of their sex, is that they should possess integrity, a high sense of duty, that “good and honest heart,” which brings forth fruit a hundredfold. Having this greatest grace, they can dispense even with the intellectual gifts which have been denied them.

Emma is very serious and humble in her thankfulness; “yet there was no preventing a laugh sometimes. She must laugh at such a close—such an end of the doleful disappointment of five weeks back—such a heart—such a Harriet!”

“Now there would be a pleasure in her returning; everything would be a pleasure; it would be a great pleasure to know Robert Martin.”

High among Emma’s pleasures is the consciousness that there will soon be no farther need for concealment in any of her relations. Her rejoicing at the prospect of a speedy escape from “disguise, equivocation, mystery—so hateful to her in practice”—ought to be written in letters of gold for an age of sorry romance, which is no true romance, since its foundations are so often laid in deception and double-dealing.

There is a charming conclusion to the second last chapter of “Emma,” in which many of the actors in the story meet accidentally at Randalls. There Emma first sees Frank Churchill after the explanations which have occurred, and after the announcement of their respective marriages. When a few moments of awkwardness have been surmounted, he thanks her for her message of forgiveness; and after they have renewed their friendly alliance on a more secure foundation, his spirits soon[Pg 315] rise to their old high level. “Was she not looking well?” he said, confident of Emma’s sympathy, as he turned his eyes towards Jane; “better than she used to do?”

He is soon ready to fix laughing eyes on his companion, as he mentions the return of the Campbells, and names the name of Dixon.

Emma blushes, and forbids its being pronounced in her hearing.

“I can never think of it,” she cries, “without extreme shame.”

“The shame,” he answers, “is all mine—or ought to be”—a wise reservation. Then he asks if it is possible she never had any suspicion, and mentions how near he had once been to telling her everything. He demands Emma’s pity for his being compelled to remain at such a distance from Miss Fairfax, as not to have seen her once before since their reconciliation. Then with a gay, “Oh, by-the-bye,” he hopes Mr. Knightley is well, and returns her congratulations with interest. “He is a man,” said Frank Churchill, “whom I cannot presume to praise.”

Emma is delighted, and wants him to go on in the same style.

No, he is off the next moment to his own concerns and his own Jane. Did Emma ever see such a skin, such smoothness, such delicacy, a most distinguishing complexion, just colour enough for beauty?

“‘I have always admired her complexion,’ replied Emma, archly; ‘but do not I remember the time when you found fault with her for being so pale?—when we first began to talk of her—have you quite forgotten?’

“‘Oh, no. What an impudent dog I was; how could I dare——’

“But he laughed so heartily at the recollection, that Emma could not help saying, ‘I do suspect that in the midst of your perplexities at that time, you had very great amusement in tricking us all. I am sure you had. I am sure it was a consolation to you.’

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“‘Oh, no, no, no! How can you suspect me of such a thing? I was the most miserable wretch.’

“‘Not quite so miserable as to be insensible to mirth. I am sure it was a source of high entertainment to you, to feel that you were taking us all in. Perhaps I am the readier to suspect, because, to tell you the truth, I think it might have been some amusement to myself in the same situation. I think there is a little likeness between us.’

“He bowed.

“‘If not in our dispositions,’ she presently added, with a look of true sensibility, ‘there is a likeness in our destiny—the destiny which bids fair to connect us with two characters so much superior to our own.’

“‘True, true,’ he answered warmly. ‘No, not true on your side. You can have no superior. But most true on mine. She is a complete angel. Look at her! Is not she an angel in every gesture? Observe the turn of her throat. Observe her eyes, as she is looking up at my father. You will be glad to hear’ (inclining his head, and whispering seriously) ‘that my uncle means to give her all my aunt’s jewels. They are to be new set. I am resolved to have some in an ornament for the head. Will it not be beautiful in her dark hair?’[66]

“‘Very beautiful indeed,’ replied Emma; and she spoke so kindly that he gratefully burst out, ‘How delighted I am to see you again! and to see you in such excellent looks! I would not have missed this meeting for the world. I should certainly have called at Hartfield, had you failed to come.’

“Mrs. Weston is talking of some little alarm she had felt about the child, when she was within half a minute of sending for Mr. Perry.

“Frank Churchill caught the name. ‘Perry!’ said he to Emma, and trying as he spoke to catch Miss[Pg 317] Fairfax’s eye, ‘My friend, Mr. Perry. What are they saying about Mr. Perry? Has he been here this morning? and how does he travel now? Has he set up his carriage?’

“Emma soon recollected and understood him; and while she joined in the laugh, it was evident from Jane’s countenance that she too was really hearing him, though trying to seem deaf.

“‘Such an extraordinary dream of mine!’ he cried. ‘I can never think of it without laughing. She hears us; she hears us, Miss Woodhouse. I see it in her cheek, her smile, her vain attempt to frown. Look at her! Do not you see that, at this instant, the very passage of her own letter, which sent me the report, is passing under her eye; that the whole blunder is spread before her; that she can attend to nothing else, though pretending to listen to the others?’

“Jane was forced to smile completely, for a moment; and the smile partly remained as she turned towards him, and said in a conscious, low, yet steady voice—‘How you can bear such recollections is astonishing to me! They will sometimes obtrude; but how can you *court* them?’”

Jane Austen is not in favour of blindness in love. In the room of doting adoration, she makes her men and women feel the nobler, more rational, and infinitely more lasting

love which sees all the faults of the person beloved, yet loves on fondly and faithfully, doing love's best work in helping to remedy the imperfections. George Knightley is capable—not merely of finding fault with Emma, but of sharply reproving her, in his true and tender regard for her. Nay, we suspect there is something which may find even less approval from some critics, in Elizabeth Bennet and Jane Fairfax, at the summit of their happiness, remaining still clear-sighted and impartial enough to perceive the weak points, in characters so different as those of the two heroes, Darcy and Frank Churchill, and to set themselves to remove the flaws, even as the women themselves[Pg 318] desire to be taught to recognise and amend their own foibles.

What worthy, enduring, consecrated love it is which stands such wholesome tests!

Neither is Miss Austen greatly on the side of love at first sight. She is a little distrustful of first impressions, and rather prefers—as the wiser and safer course—to give her girls to old and tried friends, who have developed into faithful lovers.

It is Harriet's turn to look a little foolish when she and Emma meet; but having once owned that she had been presumptuous, silly, and self-deceived, her pain and confusion seem to die away, and leave her without a care for the past, and with the fullest exultation in the present and future—Emma's unqualified congratulations removing every fear on the score of Harriet's friend. Harriet is most happy to give every detail of the evening at Astley's, and the dinner next day.

The fact is, she had always liked Robert Martin, and his continuing to love her has proved, under the circumstances, irresistible.

Emma becomes acquainted with Robert Martin, who is introduced at Hartfield. She feels perfectly satisfied with regard to the future respectability and happiness of her friend. At the same time Harriet's engagements with the Martins, which draw her more and more from Hartfield, are not to be regretted. Jane Austen, with her uncompromising good sense, adds—"The intimacy between her and Emma must sink; their friendship must change into a calmer sort of good-will; and fortunately what ought to be, and must be, seemed already beginning, and in the most gradual, natural manner."

But Emma does not fail to attend Harriet to church, in the end of that September, and see her hand bestowed on Robert Martin, with the blessing pronounced by Mr. Elton; while Emma has not a thought to spare for the identity of the officiating clergyman, beyond being engrossed by the reflection that it will probably be the[Pg 319] same man who will do a like office for her and Mr. Knightley in the coming month of October.

Jane Fairfax has already quitted Highbury. She is restored to the comforts and refinements of her beloved home with the Campbells. The two Mr. Churchills—uncle and nephew—are also in town, and they are only waiting for the expiration of their first three months' mourning, to celebrate the event which will remove Jane to preside over the dignified establishment at Enscombe.

After all, Emma and Mr. Knightley owe to a comical accident the power to go on with their share of the triple marriages at the time appointed, without distressing Mr. Woodhouse too much, as Emma recoiled from doing—though she perfectly believed the assurances of both the Mr. Knightleys, that when the catastrophe was over, the distress would soon be over too.

During the period of suspense, by an ill wind which blows somebody good, Mrs. Weston's poultry-house is robbed of all her turkeys—evidently by the ingenuity of man. "Other poultry yards in the neighbourhood also suffered. Pilfering was *house-breaking* to Mr. Woodhouse's fears. He was very uneasy; and but for the sense of his son-in-law's protection, would have been under wretched alarm every night of his life. The strength, resolution, and presence of mind of the Mr. Knightleys, commanded his fullest dependence. While either of them protected him and his, Hartfield was safe. But Mr. John Knightley must be in London again, by the end of the first week in November."

The result is, that with a much more cheerful and voluntary consent than she had ever ventured to hope for from her father, his daughter is able to fix the marriage day.

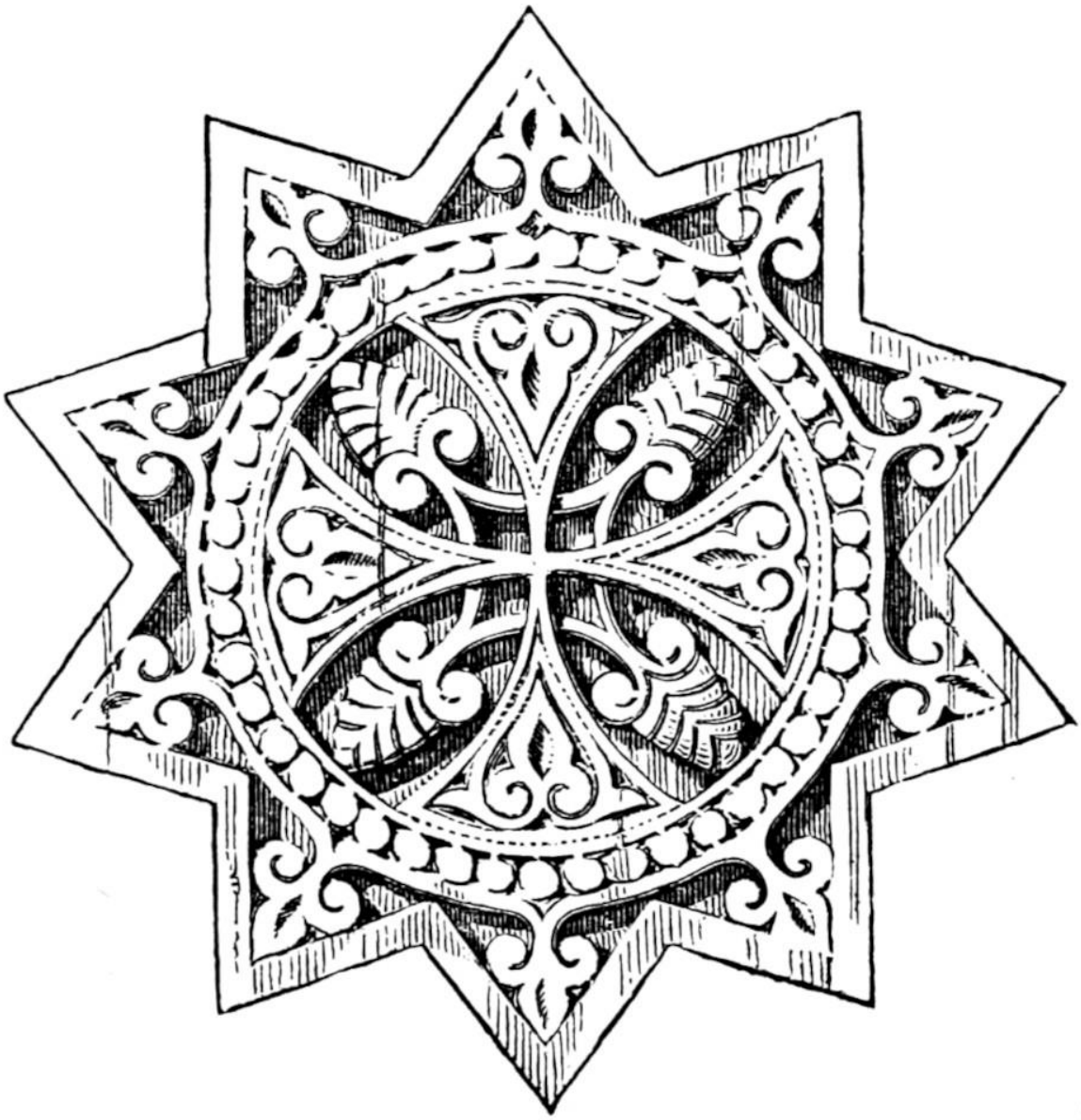
"The wedding was very much like other weddings, where the parties have no taste for finery and parade; and Mrs. Elton, from the particulars detailed by her husband, thought it all extremely shabby and very inferior to her own. 'Very little white satin; very few lace veils; a most pitiful business! Selina would stare[Pg 320] when she heard of it.' But in spite of these deficiencies, the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union."

In some respects "Emma" stands first among Jane Austen's novels. In construction it is as nearly as possible perfect. The unparalleled art which, from characters and incidents even simpler and more ordinary than usual, builds up a tale which never for a moment loses its charm and interest, which is made to "grow," as in real life—the one motive and the one action springing out of the other—the characters developing and ripening in exact proportion, is carried to such a height that critics have been justified in saying—and how rarely is such an assertion warranted in fiction?—that there is not a single chapter which could have been withdrawn without serious injury

to the skilfully interwoven threads of the story. For that matter, critics might have gone a good deal further, and asserted that not a scene or a conversation, hardly a paragraph, could have been abstracted or shortened, without marring in a measure the succession of clearly discriminating, exquisitely delicate touches by which the author has done her work.

It is this artistic completeness which makes it so difficult—in a sense so ungracious a task, to condense Jane Austen's pages, or tamper with them, however carefully and scrupulously. When one thinks by contrast of the disgracefully slovenly—not to say weak and foolish—performances which are often allowed to pass muster as story-telling, it is with mortification and misery for many of the professors of the "craft."

Besides the incomparable finish which belongs to the author's later novels, we have a nearly unique power of reading nice varieties of character in "Emma:" whether we turn to the plaintive, cautious Mr. Woodhouse; to John Knightley in his trenchant speeches; to Miss Bates in her pitter-patter of innocent gossip, to Emma in her rash blindness; to Harriet in her sweet[Pg 321] silliness; to Frank Churchill, in his boyish enjoyment of stolen waters and bread eaten in secret, and the general mystification of his friends and acquaintances, no less than in his wilful, yet lovable and loyal passion for Jane Fairfax; to Mrs. Elton in her vain airs and clamorous self-assertion; to Mr. Knightley in his unpretending, kindly manliness.



FOOTNOTES:

[45]Written in 1815-16.

[46]What a capital picture, of an amiable rich man's bondage.

[47]Are old abbeys so common in Hampshire that Jane Austen should have made two of her country-houses abbeys?

[48]The habit, now gone out of fashion, of having grown-up parlour-boarders in schools, rendered them more like homes for young people of all ages.

[49]These old genial suppers have vanished, being crowded out of existence by late dinners, which are very different meals.

[50]We can, however, imagine Harriet's showing that book, with lingering pride and pleasure, to her grandchildren.

[51]The more convivial habits of the period peep out here and there in Jane Austen's novels.

[52]Disingenuous, mocking Emma!

[53]In reading Jane Austen's novels one is carried back to the time when good playing on the piano, or "the instrument" as it is frequently called, was held, in the higher classes, as it is now in much lower grades, a crowning mark of a liberal education in a girl. Yet Jane Austen herself fell short of this attainment, and she almost invariably makes her heroines—as in the experiences of Elizabeth Bennet, Emma Woodhouse, Catherine Morland, and Fanny Price—either to have failed in the duty of practising, so as not to have acquired more than a moderate proficiency in music, or else to have been deficient in musical taste or deprived of musical education.

[54]I have already said that Jane Austen wastes no time in descriptions of places; yet she often contrives to suggest so much in a few lines, that her pleasant, homely English scenes, no less than her life-like characters, rise vividly before the mind. That briefest description of Abbey Mill Farm—comfortable and tidy, with the short, straight walk between the apple-trees up to the front door—does its business thoroughly. I have seen more than one such cosy, trim, old-fashioned farmhouse, which has brought the exclamation to my lips, "That was where Harriet Smith visited the Martins."

[55]I think it was Archbishop Whately who said, *apropos* of Jane Austen's novels, that so far from its being easy to represent the simplicity and folly which, like poverty, we have always with us, so as to divert a reader, it demands nothing short of genius for the task.

[56]Already, in the interval between the writing of "Pride and Prejudice" and of "Emma," the constant use of men's surnames in conversation was going out in good society.

[57]I have heard that a great modern statesman, who takes some relaxation in reading novels, and who is an ardent admirer of Jane Austen, is specially in love with Mrs. Elton. Her portrait is his favourite in this wonderful picture-gallery.

[58]In the course of the conversation, Jane Austen puts into Jane Fairfax's mouth a strong expression of admiration for the post-office arrangements, with their regularity and despatch. Yet these were the days of heavily-taxed letters and delayed conveyance by coach. What would Jane Austen have thought of the penny post, with its multiplied responsibilities and requirements, to which railway celerity is given? and still the system bears the strain, and admirably fulfils the intention of its founder.

[59]Morning walks, "taken fasting," are now, we may be thankful, an utterly exploded prescription for delicate men and women.

[60]In how many country houses in England is spruce beer to be found to-day?

[61]The position of Frank Churchill—dependent on his uncle and aunt, bound to humour their whims and wait on their pleasure—seems never to have struck Jane Austen as unmanly and undesirable.

[62]A striking illustration of what a good woman must suffer from such a false step as that which Jane Fairfax had taken.

[63]Emma has as much trouble in convincing her friends that she is not attached to Frank Churchill, as Elizabeth Bennet found in persuading her relations that she returned the affection of Darcy.

[64]Mr. Knightley's quiet superiority to public opinion in making such a suggestion, is another fine point in a fine character.

[65]Babies' tiny caps have disappeared, like some other articles of costume in Emma's day. What would Mrs. Weston have thought of the bald little polls which are now fearlessly exposed by mothers and nurses?

[66]

"They've robed that maid so poor and pale

In silks and samites rare;

And pearls for drops of frozen hail

Are glistening in her hair."

“SENSE AND SENSIBILITY,” AND “MANSFIELD PARK.”

f the two novels for which I have not found space here, the one belongs to the first, and the other to the second series of Jane Austen’s tales.

“Sense and Sensibility” in its original form was, with the exception perhaps of “Lady Susan,” the first written of the author’s stories which have come down to us. It has always seemed to me inferior to the novels which follow it, though its writer not only re-wrote it in her youth, but prepared it again for the press in her mature years, and brought it out before “Pride and Prejudice.” The astonishing precedence thus given might, however, have been accidental, or it might have been the result of the publisher’s choice. It might also have been an instance of Jane Austen’s confidence in her own powers and steadfastness of purpose. Certainly she appears to have valued “Sense and Sensibility” as highly as her other novels: an example of the proverbial blindness of authors to the proportion of merit in their own writings.

To say that “Sense and Sensibility” is inferior to its companions is by no means to suggest that it is without excellence. It has many of the attractions of Miss Austen’s work. It is bright, clever, interesting and exceedingly life-like. Here and there, as in the characters[Pg 323] of Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood, Mr. and Mrs. Palmer, and Mrs. Jennings there is a good deal of the author’s critical acumen and dry humour, yet they hardly arrive at their subsequent perfection. Thus Mr. and Mrs. Palmer, who are a little like Mr. and Mrs. Bennet in their youth, lag behind that entertaining couple.

In accordance with the name,[67] the story turns upon the relative advantages and disadvantages of sense and sensibility, the verdict being given, as might have been expected from the author, in favour of sense.

Two sisters, Ellinor and Marianne Dashwood, equally good, but the one full of quiet self-control, the other of impetuous feeling, which she never seeks to restrain, rather priding herself on its indulgence, as a proof of the strength and depth of her opinions and affections, have an oddly similar fate, being both in turn disappointed in love, and in a manner jilted by their respective lovers—Edward Ferrars, the reserved, sober-minded, somewhat sad, young clergyman; and John Willoughby, a frank, fervent, reckless young fellow, the masculine type which matches with the style of girls like Marianne Dashwood.

The causes and ends of the two sisters' histories are quite different from each other. And the happy termination of Ellinor's trials is not made a consequence of her superior wisdom and moderation—a nice distinction, with its appreciation of the facts of life, and of the rewards and punishments which must be inward, not outward, certainly remarkable in a young author.

Edward Ferrars' unwitting injury to Ellinor proceeds from his too great susceptibility to her attractions, and his involuntary betrayal of his attachment when he is thrown much in her company, while all the time he is an unresisting victim to a foolish youthful engagement. The lady is a pert, underbred Lucy Steele, with an irrepressible sister Anne; both of them determined not to lose sight of a great match for Lucy.

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Willoughby, after a romantic introduction to Marianne, first compromises himself by paying the most marked attention to the girl; and then, to meet the views of the relative on whom he is dependent, consents to give her up with the most cruel abruptness and harshness, and to pay his addresses to an heiress who is, in every respect save her fortune, repugnant to him.

Ellinor, who is made painfully aware of her lover's entanglement by the cunning of Lucy Steele in selecting the very girl whom Edward Ferrars prefers for her confidante, behaves not merely with perfect honour, but bears the mortification and grief with such gentle dignity and patience, and such magnanimous consideration for the unhappiness of Edward and the rights of Lucy, as to rob her unhappiness of half its sting, and to escape all humiliating exposure to the speculation and pity of her friends and acquaintances.

Marianne—who, far from checking, has gloried in Willoughby's extravagant devotion, and has never dreamt of concealing her answering devotion, which she regards as his due—abandons herself in the same proportion to incredulity, anguish, and despair on

his desertion, until her life nearly pays the forfeit, and she has rendered herself an object either of ridicule or compassion to her whole circle.

At last Edward Ferrars is released, without dishonour on his part, from his rash engagement to Lucy Steele, by that calculating young lady's having found a still better match in Edward's less worthy brother, who is, however, the favourite son of their rich, tyrannical mother. The jilted man is thus free to consult his heart, and lays his tithes and parsonage at the feet of Ellinor Dashwood, who, on her part, is not too intolerant to accept the offer.

Marianne is cured of her folly by the shock of the illness which brings her to the brink of the grave, and by such atonement as Willoughby can offer, in the violence of his self-accusation and misery, when he believes she is dying, really killed by his barbarity.[Pg 325] He takes a long night's journey to inquire for her, and makes a clean breast to Ellinor of the reality of his love for her sister, and his remorse for the ill usage which, in his cowardliness and selfishness, he has inflicted on her.

Marianne Dashwood is so effectually cured—there is much hope for the broken heart of eighteen—that she listens before long, with gratitude and sympathy, to the constant, tender suit of that Colonel Brandon whom she had formerly laughed at and scorned as a lover, because he had reached the advanced age of thirty-five, had to take precautions against rheumatism, and confessed to having, when a young man, suffered from an unfortunate attachment; while Marianne Dashwood has not believed hitherto in any love save first love.

The evil of the gushing sensibility or sentimentality which, during the last century, girls were understood to cherish till it disqualified them for sober duty and rational behaviour, against which their mentors—whether young, blooming, and arch, like Jane Austen when she wrote "Sense and Sensibility," or old, wrinkled, and grave, like Dr. Gregory when he delivered his advice to his daughters—were constantly warning young women, has given place in many quarters in this nineteenth century to a rollicking pretence of no feeling, a fast assumption of hardness, heartlessness and utter carelessness. Of the two evils the last would be the worse, if we could believe in its being anything more than an unlovely mask, in which bad manners and bad taste are occasionally combined with morbid shyness and sensitiveness, which, rather than betray themselves, assume the guise of levity, worldly-mindedness, or stolid indifference.

But the old frantic manifestations of love, hatred, and anguish are still to be found in a coarse, crude enough fashion; and, strange to say, are welcomed when found by the

very readers who reprobate the existence in their own breasts of a pin's prick of the piled-up agonies which they enjoy in print in not a few modern novels.

"Mansfield Park," one of Jane Austen's later tales,[Pg 326] is also one of her best. The story is intended to show the wrong and suffering, the positive moral taint produced by an entirely worldly education—whether the worldliness has been confined to practice in opposition to principles, or whether the very principles have never been inculcated, or have been presented in such a distorted form as to lose all power for good.

The handsome, healthy, wealthy, well-born and well-bred sons and daughters of Sir Thomas Bertram, of Mansfield Park, have been fortunate in inheriting all the good things of this life; and not the least fortunate in possessing an honourable and upright father—though his social prejudices and his partiality to his own flesh and blood somewhat warp his judgment and dull his perceptions—and a mother who, though an indolent, self-indulgent woman, is utterly incapable of active unkindness or wrong-doing.

The counteracting, overbalancing loss against so much gain is, that the young Bertrams, with one exception, have never learnt the first rudiments of self-denial and self-restraint. Tom, Maria, and Julia Bertram, under a thin varnish of polish and liveliness, are thoroughly selfish, self-willed young people, not really happy amidst all their advantages and the popularity secured by them, and altogether unprepared for the temptations and vicissitudes of life. Only Edmund Bertram—who, as the younger son, brought up to fill the family living, may by comparison have borne the yoke in his youth—is manly, generous, and kind.

The Bertrams' great friends, Henry and Mary Crawford, who had been left as orphans to the care of an uncle and aunt—of whom the first was one of the worst specimens of the coarse and vicious naval officer[68] of the day, and the second had lived a cat-and-dog life with[Pg 327] her husband—have missed what ought to have been the firm foundation of the Bertrams' characters.

No sacred sense of duty, no fine perception of rectitude extending to word and thought, no unsullied purity of tone, had been, even in theory, instilled into the Crawfords by the couple who, with all their faults, had still loved and petted the boy and girl entrusted to them; and so had been in one sense armed with deadliest weapons to destroy the children's moral nature.

Henry and Mary Crawford have, according to a graphic old saying, hung as they grew, without training, unless in evil. They have been endowed with many fine natural gifts

and qualities, in addition to the accessories of rank and wealth. With regard to the last, Henry has a good estate in Norfolk, and Mary possesses a fortune of twenty thousand pounds. In reference to the first, Mary is a lovely brunette, as well as a witty, merry, good-natured woman, who can play on the harp and sing in the long summer evenings to distraction—so far as young men are concerned. Henry, though not handsome, has a good figure and "a fine countenance," by which old-fashioned phrase I understand a highly agreeable and intelligent expression of face. He is even wittier and more talented than his sister, frank, equal to any difficult occasion of social life, and capable of winning golden opinions in all; a special treasure in a dull country house; "a charming fellow"—in short, a very fascinating young man.

The two Crawfords present the fairest exterior on first acquaintance. They are cast in an altogether finer mould than Tom Bertram and his sisters, and are fitted for better things by a subtle touch of their author's art. It takes time and trial to discover that under the winning surface there is neither soundness nor steadfastness: the very core is corrupt.

In broad contrast to the Crawfords and the Bertrams—all save Edmund—are Fanny and William Price, the daughter and son of the poor, worthless Lieutenant of Marines. They have been called upon from their[Pg 328] earliest childhood to be helpful, contented with little, and self-forgetful. If Jane Austen dwelt somewhat strongly in "Emma" on the blessings of prosperity, in "Mansfield Park" she had already taught, and never with greater effect, how sweet were the uses of adversity.

Probably, of all the author's heroines, Fanny Price, if not the most charming, is the greatest triumph of genius, for one can hardly conceive two natures moulded by circumstances more unlike than the life of Jane Austen in her youth, and that of the timid, shrinking, sickly Fanny Price. She comes as a humble *protégée* to Mansfield Park, and has to endure all the well-meant but somewhat oppressive patronage of Sir Thomas, the perpetual fault-finding of her aunt Norris, and the alternate condescension and snubbing of her cousins—always excepting her champion, Edmund. But a little later on, even Edmund turns without knowing it against his little cousin, whom he has defended, encouraged, and been fond of ever since she came to Mansfield Park. For it is the worst heart-ache of all to Fanny to see the cousin Edmund whom she has looked up to, and loved all these years, about to throw himself away on Mary Crawford, whom Fanny knows, by sure instinct, to be unworthy of him. Edmund in his blindness insists on making his friend-pupil the confidante of his hopes and fears; nay, as if to add insult to injury, in his affectionate zeal for his young cousin's welfare, he presses on her to accept the suit of another man.

So completely did Jane Austen realise all the softness and sweetness, and yet the staunchness—all the fragrant, white-violet-like charm of Fanny Price—so well did the author describe the pangs of wounded love in the tenderest of hearts—the meek mortification of a gentle nature which bore no grudge against its enemies—the pensive joys, the tremulous apprehensions of the situation—that Archbishop Whately went near to asserting the conviction that only a woman who had been herself crossed in love could thus fully interpret her heroine.

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Mrs. Norris—Fanny's terrible Aunt Norris, with her unslumbering activity, her restless meddling, her good deeds done by proxy in the parsimony which was stronger even than the love of rule, her doting indulgence to the young Bertrams, her carping snappishness to Fanny Price and her brother William—is an unsurpassed representation of a domineering, time-serving, radically harsh and mean nature, under all its pretensions and self-deceptions, as well as an inimitable piece of genteel comedy.

William Price—Fanny's frank, light-hearted young sailor brother—with his pride in his profession, and his fondness for his sister, is also very good.

I do not wish to tell in a few words how Fanny escaped the imminent peril of being won by Henry Crawford. Indeed the peril, in the author's fidelity to nature, is so imminent, in spite of Fanny's pre-engaged affections—granting that they were hopeless—and the reader is so enchanted with the flattered young prince's sudden keen appreciation of the neglected Cinderella, that he or she is tempted against reason, almost against conscience, to long that Henry Crawford's love may prevail over his levity, vanity, and lack of settled principles, and earn its reward, rendering him at once a better and a happier man.

But Jane Austen knew better, and the grievous sin and shame which separate for ever Henry Crawford and Fanny Price, is made to open Edmund Bertram's eyes to the moral gulf between his nature and that of Mary Crawford, which, no less than his sister's degradation, simply renders it impossible for him to marry Mary.

The obstacles between the couple, who have been fitted for each other from the first, thus doubly swept away, Jane Austen does not waste many words in bringing them together, and leaving them happy for ever afterwards.

The scenes during the private theatricals—when Sir Thomas is lending dignified encouragement to Mr.[Pg 330] Crawford's attentions to his niece, by giving a ball at Mansfield Park—when Fanny is sent to pay her visit to her home at Portsmouth, not so

much to punish her for her obstinate refusal of her gallant, undaunted lover, as to teach her when she is well off, and how she ought to prize the good fortune within her reach—are among the best Jane Austen has painted.

Jane Austen had something of a parental affection for her books. She wrote to a friend, whose little daughter had been lately born, "I trust you will be as glad to see my 'Emma' as I shall be to see your Jemima." She did not dismiss from her mind the creatures of her fancy with the narrative in which they had figured. She seemed to like to follow them in imagination in the careers into which she had launched them. They were real men and women[69] to her. She would, when asked, supply further particulars of the history of some of these brain-children. Her friends learned in this way that Anne Steele found a husband in the doctor; that Kitty Bennet was satisfactorily married to a clergyman near Pemberley, while Mary obtained nothing higher than one of her Uncle Philip's clerks, and was content to be considered a star in Meryton; that the considerable sum given by Mrs. Norris to William Price was one pound; that the letters placed by Frank Churchill before Jane Fairfax, which she swept away unread, contained the one word "*pardon!*" and that Mr. Woodhouse survived his daughter's marriage, and kept her and Mr. Knightley from Donwell about two years.

FOOTNOTES:

[67]Jane Austen must have had a partiality for alliteration.

[68]In "Mansfield Park" it would seem as if Jane Austen impartially afforded a glimpse in Admiral Crawford and Lieutenant Price—though, to be sure, the last was only a lieutenant of marines—of the dark side of the members of the naval profession, whose bright side she illustrated, *con amore*, in William Price and in the naval officers in "Persuasion."

[69]Children and animals are as much in the background in Jane Austen's novels as they were in the society of her day.

"PERSUASION."[70]

I.

t eighteen Anne Elliot, a pretty, gentle, motherless girl, one of the three daughters of a poor and proud baronet, had met a gallant young naval officer, a Lieutenant Wentworth, who had paid ample homage to her attractions. The couple had fallen very genuinely and deeply in love. Their marriage was impossible till the gentleman should rise in his profession, or come home with prize-money. But Sir Walter Elliot, more from indifference than indulgence to Anne, would have permitted the engagement—entered into for a brief space of mingled happiness and misery—to continue. It was Lady Russell—Anne's mother's friend—who interfered, and by her urgent representations of the trials of a long engagement, and the sacrifice of the man's prospects, still more than those of the woman, in a poor marriage, induced Anne to consent to the engagement being broken off.

The couple parted in mutual sorrow, strongly dashed by resentment on the gentleman's side. They did not meet, they hardly heard of each other again, for eight years, during which the young officer followed his profession and won honours and fortune; while the girl he had loved lived on with her uncongenial relatives, and passed, with more than usual rapidity, from blooming,[Pg 332] light-hearted girlhood to pale, serious womanhood.[71] In the interval certainly she might have married, with the approval of Lady Russell, who began to take alarm, and grow less exacting for her favourite. But Anne refused Charles Musgrove, younger, of Uppercross, who contented himself afterwards with her sister Mary. This event happened two years after the rupture with Lieutenant Wentworth, and six or seven years before the opening of the story. Since then, to Lady Russell's mortification, no desirable wooer had succeeded these earlier suitors.

In the course of the thirteen years during which Elizabeth Elliott, a handsome, cold-hearted woman, had presided over Kellynch and her father's house in London, opened county balls, and taken the lead at county dinner parties, Sir Walter, a foolish old coxcomb, had managed to get into embarrassed circumstances. The father and daughter had a capacity for spending, but none for retrenchment; so that when economy became absolutely necessary, the only feasible plan which presented itself was for Sir Walter to let Kellynch, and retire to Bath, where he could practise a certain

amount of display with less outlay. Lady Russell, the great friend of the family, reluctantly advised this course.

The termination of the war is turning many naval officers ashore, and Kellynch is soon let to an Admiral Croft. On the first mention of him as a possible tenant Sir Walter asks superciliously, "And who is Admiral Croft?" and Anne joins in the conversation all at once, volunteering the minute information, "He is Rear-admiral of the White. He was on the Trafalgar station, and has been in the East Indies since. He has been stationed there, I believe, several years."

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When it is nearly settled that Admiral Croft is to come to Kellynch, Anne Elliott reflects sadly as she paces her favourite walk, "A few months more, and *he*, perhaps, may be walking here." "He" is not Admiral Croft, but his brother-in-law, Captain Wentworth.

When it is fixed that the Crofts are to come to Kellynch, and the Elliots are to go to Bath, it is also fixed that Anne is to pay visits to Lady Russell and to young Mrs. Musgrove, before she joins the rest of her family.

At Uppercross village there are the Great House, occupied by the squire and his wife, with their numerous younger children, prominent among whom are the two pleasant girls, Henrietta and Louisa Musgrove, and the Cottage where Charles Musgrove and his wife, Anne Elliott's sister, reside. Mrs. Charles, though selfish, and not over-wise, is less destitute of family affection than Elizabeth Elliot. Charles Musgrove is well-intentioned and friendly, with more brains than his wife, though the great object of his life is sport.

The Great House gaieties serve to enliven the family life at the Cottage, for the Musgroves are extremely popular, have a constant succession of neighbourly visitors, give many dinner-parties, and even an occasional unpremeditated little ball, because the girls are "wild for dancing."

Kellynch and Uppercross are near enough for visiting, and the Musgroves have to call for the Crofts. Anne is glad enough to be spared the visit, but she has no objection to be at home during the return visit.

Admiral Croft and his wife, who has been almost as much at sea as her husband—since these were the days when entire domestic establishments were permitted, to some extent, on board the ships in his Majesty's navy—show themselves frank, unaffected, and cordial, as become their antecedents. Anne would have heartily approved of Mrs. Croft, even though she had not been prepossessed in her favour, and

specially interested in her, because of the opportunity of watching[Pg 334] for a likeness. The regard is extended to the bluff, good-humoured admiral. Just one or two awkward references are made. Mrs. Croft reminds Anne of her acquaintance with the elder lady's brother, but it turns out to be Edward Wentworth, the clergyman, and not Frederick, the sailor, to whom their sister refers. It may be, also, the same Edward of whom the admiral is thinking, when he remarks, "We are expecting a brother of Mrs. Croft's here soon," and is prevented from saying anything more.

But the next communication with one of the Misses Musgrove proves it was not Edward who was the coming brother. When the Crofts had called that morning, they had happened to say her brother, Captain Wentworth, just returned to England, or paid off, or something, was coming to see them almost directly; "and, most unluckily, it came into mamma's head, when they were gone, that Wentworth, or something like it, was the name of poor Richard's captain at one time; I do not know when, or where, but a great while before he died, poor fellow! And upon looking over his letters and things she found it was so, and is perfectly sure that this must be the very man; and her head is quite full of it, and of poor Richard."[72]

In a few days Captain Wentworth is at Kellynch. Mr. Musgrove has fulfilled his intention of calling for him, and it is by the merest chance that Anne and Mary, in one of their daily visits to the Great House, have not encountered Captain Wentworth paying his return visit.

The two sisters were stopped by a bad fall which one of the children had, in which his collar-bone was dislocated, and such alarming consequences apprehended for a time, that Anne was entirely engrossed by the claims upon her.

When the little boy is rather better, his young aunts who have come to inquire for him are at liberty to speak of some other person, and to try to express how perfectly[Pg 335] delighted they are with Captain Wentworth—how much handsomer, how infinitely more agreeable they think him than any individual among their male acquaintances who has been at all a favourite before; how glad they are that he has promised, in reply to their papa and mamma's pressing invitation, to dine with them to-morrow.

To begin with, neither Charles Musgrove nor his wife can think of leaving the child to join the dinner party. But after the boy has passed a good night, and the surgeon's report is favourable, they—first the father and then the mother—allow themselves to leave him, for a few hours, in the care of his aunt.

Charles Musgrove and his wife come home delighted with their new acquaintance. He is to shoot with Charles Musgrove next morning. There had been some mention of Captain Wentworth's coming to breakfast at the cottage, but he had been afraid of being in Mrs. Charles Musgrove's way on account of the child, and it had been agreed that Charles should meet him at the Great House instead.

Anne understands it. He wishes to avoid seeing her. He has inquired for her slightly, as might suit a former slight acquaintance, seeming to acknowledge such as she had acknowledged, probably with the same view of escaping an introduction when they do meet.

The morning hours of the Cottage were later than those at the other house. Mary and Anne are only beginning breakfast when Charles comes in for his dogs, and announces that his sisters are following with Captain Wentworth, who proposes to wait on Mrs. Charles Musgrove, for a few minutes, if convenient; and though Charles has answered for the state of the child, he would not be satisfied without Charles's running on to give notice.

Mary is full of gratification at the little attention, "while a thousand feelings rushed on Anne, of which this was the most consoling that it would soon be over. And it was soon over. In two minutes after Charles's preparation the others appeared; they were in the drawing-room.[Pg 336] Her eye half met Captain Wentworth's; a bow, a curtsey passed. She heard his voice; he talked to Mary, said all that was right, said something to the Misses Musgrove, enough to mark an easy footing; the room seemed full, full of persons and voices; but a few minutes ended it. Charles showed himself at the window. All was ready; their visitor had bowed and was gone, the Misses Musgrove were gone too, suddenly resolving to walk to the end of the village with the sportsmen; the room was cleared, and Anne might finish her breakfast as she could."

"It is over! it is over!" she repeated to herself again and again in nervous gratitude. "The worst is over!"

After the Misses Musgrove have finished their visit at the Cottage, Anne receives the spontaneous information from Mary, "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."

Mary had no feelings to make her respect her sister's in a common way, but she was perfectly unsuspicious of having inflicted any peculiar wound. She had been a girl at school during Anne's brief engagement, and had never been made acquainted with it.

“Altered beyond his knowledge! Anne fully submitted in silent, deep mortification. Doubtless it was so, and she could take no revenge, for he was not altered, or not for the worse, she had already acknowledged it to herself, and she could not think differently, let him think of her as he would. No; the years which had destroyed her youth and bloom had only given him a more glowing, manly, open look, in no respect lessening his personal advantages. She had seen the same Frederick Wentworth.

“Frederick Wentworth had used such words, or something like them, but without an idea that they would be carried round to her. He had thought her wretchedly[Pg 337] altered;[73] in the first moment of appeal had spoken as he felt. He had not forgiven Anne Elliot. She had used him ill, deserted and disappointed him; and worse, she had shown a feebleness of character in doing so, which his own decided, confident temper could not endure. She had given him up to oblige others. It had been the effects of over-persuasion. It had been weakness and timidity.

“He had been most warmly attached to her, and had never seen a woman since, whom he thought her equal; but, except from some natural sensation of curiosity, he had no desire of meeting her again. Her power with him was gone for ever.

“It was now his object to marry. He was rich, and being turned on shore, fully intended to settle as soon as he could be properly tempted; actually looking round, ready to fall in love with all the speed which a clear head and quick taste could allow. He had a heart for either of the Misses Musgrove if they could catch it; a heart, in short, for any pleasing young woman who came in his way, excepting Anne Elliot. This was his only secret exception.”

II.

From this time Captain Wentworth and Anne Elliot meet repeatedly in the same circle, and whatever may have become of former feelings, former times are[Pg 338] inevitably alluded to in the conversation:—“That was in the year ’six,” “That happened before I went to sea in the year ’six,” he has occasion to say, the very first evening they spend together, and though his voice does not falter, while she has no reason to suppose his eyes wander towards her, she knows what must be in the minds of both.

“They had no conversation together, no intercourse but what the commonest civility required. Once so much to each other! now nothing! There had been a time when of all the large party now filling the drawing-room at Uppercross they would have found it most difficult to cease to speak to one another, with the exception, perhaps, of Admiral and Mrs. Croft, who seemed particularly attached and happy (Anne would

allow no other exception, even among the married couples), there could have been no two hearts so open, no tastes so similar, no feelings so in unison, no countenances so beloved. Now they were as strangers—nay, worse than strangers, for they could never become acquainted. It was a perpetual estrangement."

He is in the foreground, the greatest and best talker present. Anne is in the background, silent, like

"One mute shadow, watching all."

The pretty, sweet young daughter of Sir Walter Elliot, whom Lieutenant Wentworth must have found a person of some consequence, however unassuming in her disposition, in the old society in which they mingled, appears now an individual of very little moment, though she is civilly treated, of course, even well liked, when he meets her again, in the character of an unmarried sister of Mrs. Charles Musgrove, at Uppercross.

Anne hears Captain Wentworth enlightening the ignorance of the Misses Musgrove as to the manner of living on board ship. "Their surprise at his accounts, at learning the degree of accommodation and arrangement which was practicable, drew from him some pleasant ridicule, which reminded Anne of the early days[Pg 339] when she, too, had been ignorant, and she, too, had been accused of supposing sailors to be living without anything to eat, or any cook to dress it if there were, or any servant to wait, or any knife and fork to use."

"It was a merry, joyous family party, and no one seemed in higher spirits than Captain Wentworth. She felt that he had everything to elevate him which general attention and deference, and especially the attention of all the young women, could do. The Misses Hayter (belonging to a family of cousins of the Musgroves) were apparently admitted to the honour of being in love with him; and as for Henrietta and Louisa, they both seemed so entirely occupied by him, that nothing but the continued appearance of the most perfect good-will between themselves could have made it credible that they were not decided rivals. If he were a little spoilt by such universal, such eager admiration, who could wonder?"

These are some of the thoughts which occupy Anne while her fingers are mechanically at work. *Once* she feels he is looking at her, perhaps trying to find some traces of the face which had formerly charmed him. "*Once* she knew that he must have spoken of her; she was hardly aware of it till she heard the answer, but then she was sure of his having asked his partner whether Miss Elliot never danced. The answer was 'Oh, no! never. She has quite given up dancing. She had rather play. She is never tired of

playing.' *Once*, too, he spoke to her. She had left the instrument on the dancing being over, and he had sat down to try to make out an air which he wished to give the Misses Musgrove an idea of. Unintentionally she returned to that part of the room. He saw her, and instantly rising said, with studied politeness, 'I beg your pardon, madam, this is your seat;' and though she immediately drew back with a decided negative, he was not to be induced to sit down again."

"Anne did not wish for more of such looks and speeches. His cold politeness, his ceremonious grace, were worse than anything."

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Captain Wentworth has come to Kellynch as to a home, to stay as long as he likes. It is soon Uppercross with him every day. There is one other person besides Anne whose peace is likely to be disturbed by this arrangement. Charles Hayter, the eldest of the humble cousins of the Musgroves, had received a college education and taken orders. As the heir of his father's small property, he is also more on an equality socially with the Musgroves than his brothers and sisters could hope to be. He is an agreeable, amiable young man, and there has been some appearance of an attachment between him and Henrietta Musgrove. "Her parents have not objected. It will not be a great match for Henrietta; but if Henrietta likes him—and Henrietta did like him till Captain Wentworth came, when cousin Charles has been very much forgotten."

It is at this stage of the proceedings that Charles Hayter returns from a fortnight's absence to find Captain Wentworth engrossing the attention of the Misses Musgrove, with their interest in their cousin's prospect of securing a particular curacy eclipsed by more exciting speculations. Even Henrietta has nothing better to spare than a hurried "Well, I am very glad indeed, but I always thought you would have it. In short, you knew Dr. Shirley must have a curate, and you had his promise. Is he coming, Louisa?"—to her sister, who is at a window, looking out for Captain Wentworth.

One morning Captain Wentworth walks into the drawing-room at the Cottage, when there are only Anne and the little invalid Charles, who is lying on the sofa.

"The surprise of finding himself almost alone with Anne Elliot deprived his manners of their usual composure. He started, and could only say, 'I thought the Misses Musgrove had been here; Mrs. Musgrove told me I should find them here,' before he walked to the window to recollect himself, and feel how he ought to behave."

"They are up stairs with my sister; they will be down in a few moments, I dare say," had been Anne's reply, in all the confusion that was natural, and if the[Pg 341] child had

not called her to come and do something for him she would have been out of the room the next moment, and released Captain Wentworth as well as herself.

“He continued at the window; and after calmly and politely saying, ‘I hope the little boy is better,’ was silent.”

“She was obliged to kneel down by the sofa, and remain there to satisfy her patient; and thus they continued a few minutes, when, to her very great satisfaction, she heard some other person crossing the little vestibule. She hoped on turning her head to see the master of the house, but it proved to be one much less calculated for making matters easy—Charles Hayter—probably not at all better pleased by the sight of Captain Wentworth than Captain Wentworth had been by the sight of Anne.”

“She only attempted to say, ‘How do you do? Will you not sit down? The others will be here presently.’”

“Captain Wentworth, however, came from his window, apparently not ill-disposed for conversation; but Charles Hayter soon put an end to his attempts by seating himself near the table and taking up the newspaper, and Captain Wentworth returned to his window.”

“Another minute brought another addition. The younger boy, a remarkably stout, forward child of two years old, having got the door opened for him by some one without, made his determined appearance among them, and went straight to the sofa to see what was going on, and put in his claim to anything good that might be given away.

“There being nothing to eat, he could only have some play; and as his aunt would not let him tease his sick brother, he began to fasten himself upon her, as she knelt, in such a way that, busy as she was about Charles, she could not shake him off. She spoke to him, ordered, entreated, and insisted in vain. Once she did contrive to push him away, but the boy had the greater pleasure in getting upon her back again directly.

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“‘Walter,’ said she, ‘get down this moment. You are extremely troublesome. I am very angry with you.’

“‘Walter,’ cried Charles Hayter, ‘why do you not do as you are bid? Do not you hear your aunt speak? Come to me, Walter; come to cousin Charles.’

“But not a bit did Walter stir.

“In another moment, however, she found herself in the state of being released from him; some one was taking him from her, though he had bent down her head so much, that his little sturdy arms were unfastened from around her neck, and he was resolutely borne away before she knew that Captain Wentworth had done it.”

She cannot even thank him, she can only hang over little Charles, while the conviction is forced upon her, from the noise which Captain Wentworth is studiously making with the other child, that her thanks and her conversation are the last of his wants, till the entrance of Mary and the Misses Musgrove enables her to leave the room.

Anne Elliot has soon been often enough in the company of Charles Hayter and Captain Wentworth, Henrietta and Louisa Musgrove, to warrant her in forming her own conclusions. Louisa may be rather the favourite with Captain Wentworth, but, as far as Anne dares to judge from memory and experience, he is not in love either with Louisa or Henrietta. “They were more in love with him; yet there, it was not love. It was a little fever of admiration; but it might, probably must, end in love with some. Charles Hayter seemed aware of being slighted, and yet Henrietta had sometimes the air of being divided between them.”

After a short struggle, Charles Hayter appears to quit the field. Three days have passed without his coming to Uppercross. He has even refused one regular invitation to dinner, and Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove chancing to see their nephew with some big books before him, talk with a grave face of his studying himself to death.

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The sisters from the Great House call one day, when Charles Musgrove and Captain Wentworth have gone out shooting together, for the sisters at the Cottage as they are sitting quietly at work. It is a fine November day, and the Misses Musgrove have only come in, according to the inconvenient habit of the two families which makes it necessary to do everything in common, just as they are setting out for a long walk, in which, they suppose Mary will not care to join them.

Mary, who generally gives herself out as half an invalid, resents the imputation on her walking powers, and declares she would like to accompany her sisters-in-law; she is very fond of a long walk.

Anne sees the glances of annoyance which pass between the girls, and does her best to keep her sister at home. When she cannot prevail, as the next best thing she accepts the Misses Musgrove’s invitation to go also, that she may be useful in turning back with her sister.

At the moment of starting the gentlemen return. They had taken out a young dog which had spoilt their sport. They are exactly ready for this walk.

After the walking party have gone some distance, Anne is tempted to say, “Is not this one of the ways to Winthrop?” (the Hayters’ place), but nobody hears, or, at least, nobody answers her, till Winthrop, without beauty and without dignity, is stretched before them, an indifferent house, standing low, and hemmed in by the barns and buildings of a farmyard.

Mary exclaims, “Bless me! here is Winthrop, I declare; I had no idea!” then announces herself excessively tired, and proposes turning back. Henrietta, conscious and ashamed, seeing no cousin Charles walking along any path, or leaning against any gate, is ready to do as Mary wishes; but “No!” says Charles Musgrove, and “No, no!” cries Louisa, still more energetically, and taking her sister aside, seems to remonstrate with her warmly. Charles declares his intention of calling on his aunt when he is so near, and tries to induce his wife to go too. But the lady is unmanageable. The difficulty[Pg 344] is settled between the brother and sisters: Charles and Henrietta are to run down for a few moments to see their aunt and cousins, while the rest of the party wait for them at the top of the hill.

Mary, finding a comfortable seat for herself on the step of a stile, is very well satisfied so long as the others stand about her, but when Louisa draws Captain Wentworth away, to try for a gleaning of nuts in an adjoining hedgerow, and they go by degrees out of sight and sound, Mary is happy no longer. She is sure Louisa has got a better seat, and follows without finding her. Anne sees another nice seat for her sister, on a sunny bank under the hedgerow, but Mary quarrels with that also, and leaves Anne in possession. Anne is really tired, and sits on till she hears Captain Wentworth and Louisa in the hedgerow behind her, as if making their way back in the rough, wild sort of channel down the centre.

“Louisa’s first audible words showed that she was confiding to Captain Wentworth the secret of the walk, so far as it concerned herself and her sister, with a good deal more of the family history which explained the secret. “And so I made her go,” Anne heard Louisa say. “I could not bear that she should be frightened from the visit by such nonsense. What! would I be turned back from doing a thing I had determined to do, and that I knew to be right, by the airs and interference of such a person, or of any person, I may say?””

“She would have turned back then, but for you!”

“She would; indeed; I am almost ashamed to say it.”

“Happy for her to have such a mind as yours at hand,” exclaimed Captain Wentworth, hastily. “Woe betide him and her, too, when it comes to things of consequence, when they are placed in circumstances requiring fortitude and strength of mind, if she have not resolution enough to resist idle interference in such a trifle as this.” He dwells emphatically on the importance of firmness in all the relations of life, and winds up with the declaration: “My first wish for all[Pg 345] whom I am interested in, is that they should be firm. If Louisa Musgrove would be beautiful and happy in her November of life, she will cherish all her present powers of mind.”

“He had done and was unanswered. It would have surprised Anne if Louisa could have readily answered such a speech; words of such interest, spoken with such serious warmth. She could imagine what Louisa was feeling. For herself, she feared to move lest she should be seen. While she remained a bush of low rambling holly protected her, and they were moving on. Before they were beyond her hearing, Louisa spoke again.”

“Mary is good-natured enough in many respects,” said she; “but she does sometimes provoke me excessively with her nonsense and her pride—the Elliot pride. She has a great deal too much of the Elliot pride. We do so wish that Charles had married Anne instead. I suppose you know he wanted to marry Anne?”

After a moment’s pause, Captain Wentworth said, “Do you mean that she refused him?”

“Oh! yes, certainly.”

“When did that happen?”

“I do not exactly know, for Henrietta and I were at school at the time; but I believe about a year before he married Mary. We should all have liked her a great deal better; and papa and mamma always think it was her great friend Lady Russell’s doing that she did not. They think Charles might not be learned and bookish enough to please Lady Russell, and that, therefore, she persuaded Anne to refuse him.”

This was a travesty of the real state of matters with a vengeance; and there had been just that degree of feeling and curiosity about her in Captain Wentworth’s manner which must give Anne extreme agitation and keep her rooted to the spot, though she heard no more.

As soon as she could she went after Mary, and it is a relief when all the party are again collected, with the[Pg 346] addition of Charles Hayter, whom Charles Musgrove and Henrietta brought back with them as might have been conjectured. There had been a

withdrawing on the gentleman's side, a relenting on the lady's, and they are very glad to be together again. Henrietta looks a little ashamed but very well pleased, Charles Hayter exceedingly happy, and they are devoted to each other on their way back to Uppercross.

Everything now marks out Louisa for Captain Wentworth, and they walk side by side nearly as much as the other two. The party are thus separated into three divisions, with Anne tired enough to be very glad of Charles Musgrove's disengaged arm. "But Charles, though in very good humour with her, was out of temper with his wife. Mary had shown herself disobliging to him, and was now to reap the consequence, which consequence was his dropping her arm almost every moment to cut off the heads of some nettles in the hedge with his switch; and when Mary began to complain of it, and lament her being ill-used, according to custom, in being on the hedge-side, while Anne was never incommoded on the other, he dropped the arms of both, to hunt after a weasel which he had a momentary glimpse of, and they could hardly get him along at all." This boyish mode of expressing a pet is exquisitely characteristic of the ordinarily easy-going young fellow.

"The long meadow bordered a lane which their footpath, at the end of it, was to cross, and when the party had all reached the gate of exit, the carriage advancing in the same direction, which had been some time heard, was just coming up, and proved to be Admiral Croft's gig. He and his wife had taken their intended drive and were returning home. Upon hearing how long a walk the young people had engaged in, they kindly offered a seat to any lady who might be particularly tired; it would save her full a mile, and they were going through Uppercross. The invitation was general, and generally declined. The Misses Musgrove were not all tired, and Mary was either offended[Pg 347] by not being asked before any of the others, or what Louisa called the Elliot pride could not endure to make a third in a one-horse chaise.

"The walking party had crossed the lane and were surmounting an opposite stile, and the Admiral was putting his horse into motion again, when Captain Wentworth cleared the hedge in a moment to say something to his sister. The something might be guessed by its effects.

"'Miss Elliot, I am sure you are tired,' cried Mrs. Croft; 'do let us have the pleasure of taking you home?'

"Anne was still in the lane, and though instinctively beginning to decline, she was not allowed to proceed. The Admiral's kind urgency came in support of his wife's, and Captain Wentworth, without saying a word, turned to her, and quietly obliged her to be assisted into the carriage.

“Yes, he had done it; she was in the carriage, and felt that he had placed her there, that his will and his hands had done it, that she owed it to his perception of her fatigue and his resolution to give her rest. He could not forgive her, but he could not be unfeeling. Though perfectly careless of her, and though becoming attached to another, still he could not see her suffer without the desire of giving her relief.”

III.

Captain Wentworth learns that there is an old mess-mate with his family settled for the winter at Lyme. He goes to visit them, and comes back with such a glowing description of the beautiful neighbourhood that the young people at Uppercross are all eager to see it. Although it is so late in the season, a party is made up, consisting of Charles Musgrove, Mary, Anne, Henrietta,[Pg 348] Louisa, and Captain Wentworth, to drive to Lyme, stay the night there, and come back for next day’s dinner. It is in connection with Lyme that we have Jane Austen’s most finished bit of descriptive landscape-painting. Full of appreciation as it reads, it is sober and restrained indeed, contrasted with modern word-painting of sea and shore and sky. “The remarkable situation of the town, the principal street almost hurrying into the water, the walk to the Cobbe skirting round the pleasant little bay, which in the season is animated with bathing machines and company; the Cobbe itself, its old wonders and new improvements, with the very beautiful line of cliffs stretching out to the east of the town, are what the stranger’s eye will seek; and a very strange stranger it must be who does not see charms in the immediate environs of Lyme to make him wish to know it better. The scenes in its neighbourhood,—Charmouth, with its high grounds and extensive sweeps of country, and still more its sweet retired bay, backed by dark cliffs, where fragments of low rock among the sands make it the happiest spot for watching the flow of the tide, for sitting in unwearied contemplation; the woody varieties of the cheerful village of Up-Lyme; and, above all, Pinney, with its green chasms between romantic rocks, where the scattered forest trees and orchards of luxuriant growth declare that many a generation must have passed away since the first partial falling of the cliff prepared the ground for such a state, where a scene so wonderful and so lovely is exhibited as may more than equal any of the resembling scenes of the far-famed Isle of Wight;—these places must be visited again and again to make the worth of Lyme understood.”

Not only Captain Harville, Captain Wentworth’s friend, and his wife are brought by Captain Wentworth to be introduced to his companions; Captain Benwick, another old friend, accompanies the others. Captain Benwick has a sad little history which renders him especially interesting. He had been engaged to Captain Harville’s sister, and is still mourning her loss. “They[Pg 349] had been a year or two waiting for fortune

and promotion. Fortune came, his prize-money as lieutenant being great. Promotion, too, came *at last*; but Fanny did not live to know it. She had died the preceding summer when he was at sea."

"And yet," said Anne to herself, "he has not, perhaps, a more sorrowing heart than I have."

Captain Harville, who looks sensible and benevolent, is delicate and lame. Captain Benwick has a pleasing face and a melancholy air, just as he ought to have. Mrs. Harville shows the same good feeling as her husband, and nothing can be more pleasant than their desire to consider the whole party as friends of their own.

Captains Harville and Benwick pay a visit to the inn in the evening. Captain Benwick's spirits do not seem fit for the mirth of the party, and Anne kindly talks to him of their favourite books.

Anne and Henrietta, the earliest risers next morning, agree to take a stroll down to the sea before breakfast. Captain Wentworth and Louisa come after the two others. As they are all returning to town, at the steps leading up from the beach, a gentleman about to descend, politely draws back and waits. As they pass him Anne's face catches his eye, and he looks at her with evident admiration. "She was looking remarkably well; her very regular, very pretty features having the bloom and freshness of youth restored by the fine wind which had been blowing on her complexion, and by the animation of eye which it had produced. It was evident that the gentleman (completely a gentleman in manners) admired her exceedingly. Captain Wentworth looked round at her instantly in a way which showed his noticing it. He gave her a momentary glance, a glance of brightness, which seemed to say, 'That man is struck with you, and even I at this moment see something like Anne Elliot again.'"

After the party have returned to the inn, Anne, in passing quickly from her own room to the dining-room, had nearly run against the same gentleman as he came[Pg 350] out of an adjoining apartment. "This second meeting, short as it was, also proved again, by the gentleman's looks, that he thought hers very lovely, and by the readiness and propriety of his apologies, that he was a man of exceedingly good manners. He seemed about thirty, and though not handsome, had an agreeable person. Anne felt that she should like to know who he was."

"They had nearly done breakfast when the sound of a carriage, almost the first they had heard since entering Lyme, drew half the party to the window. It was a gentleman's carriage, a curricle, but only coming round from the stable-yard to the front door. Somebody must be going away. It was driven by a servant in mourning.

“The word curricle made Charles Musgrove jump up, that he might compare it with his own; and the whole six were collected to look, by the time the owner of the curricle was to be seen issuing from the door, amidst the bows and civilities of the household, and taking his seat to drive off.”

“Ah!” cried Captain Wentworth, instantly, and with half a glance at Anne, “it is the very man we passed.”

“The waiter came into the room soon afterwards.

“‘Pray,’ said Captain Wentworth, immediately, ‘can you tell us the name of the gentleman who has just gone away?’

“‘Yes, sir, a Mr. Elliot, a gentleman of large fortune, came in last night from Sidmouth, and going on now for Crewkerne, on his way to Bath and London.’

“‘Elliot!’ Many had looked at each other, and many had repeated the name before all this had been got through, even by the smart rapidity of a waiter.

“‘Bless me!’ cried Mary; ‘it must be our cousin, it must be our Mr. Elliot, it must, indeed!—Charles, Anne, must not it? In mourning, you see, just as our Mr. Elliot must be. How very extraordinary! In the[Pg 351] same inn with us, Anne; must not it be our Mr. Elliot, my father’s next heir? Pray, sir,’ turning to the waiter, ‘did not you hear—did not his servant say—whether he belonged to the Kellynch family?’

“‘No, ma’am; he did not mention no particular family; but he said his master was a very rich gentleman, and would be a baronight, some day.’

“‘There, you see,’ cried Mary, in an ecstacy, ‘just as I said! Heir to Sir Walter Elliot! I was sure that would come out, if it was so! Depend upon it, that is a circumstance which his servants take care to publish, wherever he goes. But, Anne, only conceive how extraordinary! I wish I had looked at him more. I wish we had been aware in time who it was, that he might have been introduced to us. What a pity that we should not have been introduced to each other! Do you think he had the Elliot countenance? I hardly looked at him, I was looking at the horses; but I think he had something of the Elliot countenance. I wonder the arms did not strike me. Oh! the great-coat was hanging over the panel, and hid the arms—so it did; otherwise, I am sure I should have observed them, and the livery, too. If the servant had not been in mourning, one should have known him by the livery.’

“‘Putting all these very extraordinary circumstances together,’ said Captain Wentworth, ‘we must consider it to be the arrangement of Providence that you should not be introduced to your cousin.’”

Though Anne tries to quiet Mary by reminding her of the terms on which her father is with his heir, still it is a secret gratification to have seen her cousin, and to know that the future owner of Kellynch is undoubtedly a gentleman, and has an air of good sense.

Breakfast over, Captain and Mrs. Harville, with Captain Benwick, arrive to join the visitors in their last walk about Lyme.

Captain Harville says aside to Anne that she has done a good deed in making that "poor fellow," Captain Benwick, talk so much.

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Anne reminds him gently of what time does in every case of affliction, and remarks that Captain Benwick's is still of a recent date, only last summer.

"Ay, true enough," with a deep sigh, "only June."

"And not known to him, perhaps, so soon?"

"Not till the first week in August, when he came home from the Cape, just made into the *Grappler*. I was at Plymouth, dreading to hear of him; he sent in letters, but the *Grappler* was under orders for Portsmouth. There the news must follow him, but who was to tell it? Not I. I would as soon be run up to the yard-arm. Nobody could do it but that good fellow" (pointing to Captain Wentworth). "The *Laconia* had come into Plymouth the week before; no danger of her being sent to sea again. He stood his chance for the risk; wrote up for leave of absence, but without waiting the return, travelled night and day till he got to Portsmouth, rowed off to the *Grappler* that instant, and never left the poor fellow for a week. That's what he did, and nobody else could have saved poor James. You may think, Miss Elliott, whether he is dear to us!"

The pleasure-seekers part with the Harvilles at their own door, and turn at the special request of Louisa Musgrove, with only Captain Benwick attending them to the last, to walk along the Cobbe once more, before setting out for Uppercross.

"There was too much wind to make the high part of the new Cobbe pleasant for the ladies, and they agreed to get down the steps to the lower, and all were contented to pass quietly and carefully down the steep flight excepting Louisa; she must be jumped down them by Captain Wentworth. In all their walks he had had to jump her from the stiles; the sensation was delightful to her. The hardness of the pavement for her feet made him less willing upon the present occasion; he did it, however, she was safely down, and instantly to show her enjoyment, ran up the steps to be jumped down again. He advised her against it, thought the jar too great; but no, he reasoned and

talked in vain, she[Pg 353] smiled and said, 'I am determined I will;' he put out his hands; she was too precipitate by half a second, she fell on the pavement on the Lower Cobbe, and was taken up lifeless! There was no wound, no blood, no visible bruise; but her eyes were closed, she breathed not, her face was like death. The horror of that moment to all that stood around!

"Captain Wentworth, who had caught her up, knelt with her in his arms, looking on her with a face as pallid as her own, in an agony of silence. 'She is dead! She is dead!' screamed Mary, catching hold of her husband, and contributing with his own horror to make him immovable; and in another moment Henrietta, sinking under the conviction, lost her senses too, and would have fallen on the steps but for Captain Benwick and Anne, who caught and supported her between them."

"'Is there no one to help me?' were the first words which burst from Captain Wentworth in a tone of despair, and as if all his own strength were gone.

"'Go to him! go to him!' cried Anne; 'for Heaven's sake go to him. I can support her myself. Leave me and go to him. Rub her hands, rub her temples! here are salts;[74] take them, take them!'"

Captain Benwick obeyed, and Charles at the same moment disengaging himself from his wife, they were both with him, and Louisa was raised up and supported more firmly between them, and everything was done that Anne had prompted, but in vain; while Captain Wentworth, staggering against the wall for his support, exclaimed, in the bitterest agony, "Oh, God! her father and mother!"

"A surgeon!" said Anne. He caught the word; it seemed to rouse him at once, and saying only, "True, true, a surgeon this instant," was darting away, when Anne eagerly suggested—

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"Captain Benwick! would it not be better for Captain Benwick? He knows where a surgeon is to be found."

"Every one capable of thinking felt the advantage of the idea, and in a moment (it was all done in rapid moments) Captain Benwick had resigned the poor corpse-like figure entirely to the brother's care, and was off for the town with the utmost rapidity.

"As to the wretched party left behind, it could scarcely be said which of the three, who were completely rational, was suffering most; Captain Wentworth, Anne, and Charles who, really a very affectionate brother, hung over Louisa with sobs of grief, and could only turn his eyes from one sister to see the other in a state as insensible, or to

witness the hysterical agitation of his wife, calling on him for help which he could not give.

“Anne, attending with all the strength and zeal and thought which instinct supplied, to Henrietta, still tried at intervals to suggest comfort to the others, tried to quiet Mary, to animate Charles, to assuage the feelings of Captain Wentworth. Both seemed to look to her for directions.[75]

“‘Anne, Anne!’ cried Charles, ‘what is to be done next? What, in Heaven’s name, is to be done next?’

“Captain Wentworth’s eyes were also turned towards her.

“‘Had she not better be carried to the inn? Yes, I am sure; carry her gently to the inn.’

“‘Yes, yes, to the inn,’ repeated Captain Wentworth, comparatively collected and eager to be doing something. ‘I will carry her myself.’”

The Harvilles meet the melancholy cavalcade, and Louisa is carried to their house instead of to the inn. A surgeon pronounces that her limbs have escaped, and[Pg 355] though there is concussion of the brain, the case is not by any means hopeless.

In the end, Captain Wentworth, Henrietta Musgrove, and Anne return to Uppercross to break the news of the accident to the old Musgroves, while Charles and Mary remain with the sufferer.

“It was growing quite dusk, however, before the travellers were in the neighbourhood of Uppercross, and there had been total silence among them for some time, Henrietta leaning back in the corner, with a shawl over her face, giving the hope of her having cried herself to sleep; when, as they were going up their last hill, Anne found herself all at once addressed by Captain Wentworth. In a low, cautious voice, he said, “I have been considering what we had best do. She must not appear at first. She could not stand it. I have been thinking whether you had not better remain in the carriage with her while I go in and break it to Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove. Do you think this a good plan?”

“She did; he was satisfied and said no more. But the remembrance of the appeal remained a pleasure to her, as a proof of friendship and of deference for her judgment; a great pleasure, and when it became a sort of parting proof its value did not lessen.

“When the distressing communication at Uppercross was over, and he had seen the father and mother quite as composed as could be hoped, and the daughter all the better for being with them, he announced his intention of returning in the same carriage to Lyme, and when the horses were baited, he was off.”

Anne only remains two days longer at Uppercross with the Musgroves. The accounts which Charles Musgrove brings of Louisa are favourable on the whole. A speedy cure cannot be looked for, but she is going on as well as can be expected. The Harvilles are kindness itself.

Anne persuades Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove and Henrietta to join the others by going into lodgings at Lyme. They can at least be of use by taking care of the Harville[Pg 356] children. "They were so happy in the decision that Anne was delighted with what she had done, and felt that she could not spend her last morning at Uppercross better, than in assisting their preparations and sending them off at an early hour, though her being left to the solitary range of the house was the consequence.

"She was the last, excepting the little boys, at the Cottage; she was the very last, the only remaining one of all that had filled and animated both houses, of all that had given Uppercross its cheerful character. A few days had made a change indeed.

"If Louisa recovered, it would all be the same, more than former happiness would be restored. There could not be a doubt, to her mind there was none, of what would follow her recovery. A few months hence, and the rooms now deserted, occupied but by her silent, pensive self, might be filled again with all that was happy and gay, all that was glowing and bright in prosperous love, all that was most unlike Anne Elliot."

I think my readers will endorse the cordial praise bestowed by Captain Harville on Anne at a later part of the story: "good soul!" The simple words may be lightly esteemed, as they are frequently bestowed indiscriminately and contemptuously—and what a lowered standard of morality the contempt involves—but how much they imply. Good, true, courageous, christian Anne Elliot, true to herself, to Captain Wentworth, to Louisa Musgrove, to every living creature! Anne Elliot is worth scores—hundreds—of the outrageous, reckless, self-indulgent, and idiotic heroines frequently held up for admiration and imitation.

IV.

At Kellynch Lodge, with Lady Russell, Anne has to fall into a new, or rather an old set of interests, in which[Pg 357] the house her father has taken in Camden Place, Bath, and the disagreeable fact that Mrs. Clay, the daughter of Sir Walter Elliott's agent, and a humble companion of Elizabeth, is still on a visit there, figure prominently; while Anne's thoughts are still hovering, in spite of herself, about Lyme and her friends there.

Elizabeth Elliott's last letter to Kellynch Lodge has communicated an unexpected piece of news of some interest. There has been a reconciliation between the head of

the house and his heir. Mr. Elliot is in Bath, and has called more than once or twice in Camden Place. If Elizabeth and her father are right, he is now as anxious to renew and proclaim the connexion as he had formerly been to treat it with scorn.

A degree of unlooked-for warmth in the welcome home which Anne receives does her good, but Jane Austen is careful to mention that Anne's father and sister are glad to see her for the sake of showing her the house and furniture. Besides, they are unwontedly happy in finding themselves people of consequence in Bath, and in receiving once more the attentions of Mr. Elliot. He is now everything and without a fault in his cousins' eyes. Even the old offence of his marriage—when Sir Walter had destined him for Elizabeth, and Elizabeth had fully acquiesced in the arrangement—has been partly smoothed away. A friend of Mr. Elliot's, a Colonel Wallis, whom Mr. Elliot has introduced to Sir Walter, mentions in confidence various particulars which soften the delinquency. The late Mrs. Elliot had not been a woman of family, but she had been a very fine woman, with a large fortune, excessively in love with her husband.

Anne is rendered very uneasy by Mrs. Clay's protracted stay in Camden Place, and by the increasing influence she is gaining over her host as well as over his eldest daughter. That Mrs. Clay cherishes designs of becoming Lady Elliot, opposed as the match might seem to Sir Walter's vanity and conceit, Anne does not doubt, and she begins to fear more and more that Mrs.[Pg 358] Clay's designs may prove successful. How relentlessly Anne is made to gauge her father's character is shown by the impetus given to her fears, in the course of a conversation with him. He has just complimented Anne on her greater clearness and freshness of complexion, and attributed the improvement to Gowland's Lotion. On her saying she uses no lotion, he expresses his surprise. She cannot do better than she is doing, otherwise he would recommend Gowland—the constant use of Gowland during the spring. Mrs. Clay has been using it at his recommendation, and Anne can see what it has done for her; Anne can see how it has carried away her freckles.

The most alarming symptom of all is, that it does not appear to Anne Mrs. Clay's freckles are lessened.

But there is no use in warning Elizabeth, without whose countenance Mrs. Clay could not stay on in Camden Place. Mrs. Clay's flattery infatuates Elizabeth, and in any circumstances she would have been incapable of accepting beforehand a suggestion so injurious and disagreeable to her, especially if it came from her sister Anne.

Lady Russell is quite won by Mr. Elliot, whose steadiness of character and coolness of judgment, in addition to what she believes to be his high principles and warmth of

heart, unite all the recommendations which she prizes most highly. She is delighted to find that his previous marriage—suspected to have been an unhappy one—has not soured him, or prevented him from thinking of another wife—not in the person of Elizabeth, but in that of Anne Elliot, as is soon plain to Lady Russell. She rejoices to believe that Anne is at last done justice to, in becoming the object of Mr. Elliot's constant presence in Camden Place. Anne, in her turn, allows herself to be more and more pleased with her cousin's good qualities and friendship, although she still retains doubts of the consistency of his sentiments and behaviour, and of the motives which actuate him.

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V.

A grand triumph is provided for Sir Walter and his eldest daughter, which in the meantime may happily prove a distraction and protection to the former from the arts of Mrs. Clay. "The Bath paper one morning announced the arrival of the Dowager Viscountess Dalrymple and her daughter, the Honourable Miss Carteret, and all the comfort of No. —, Camden Place, was swept away for many days; for the Dalrymples (in Anne's opinion, most unfortunately) were cousins of the Elliots, and the agony was how to introduce themselves properly."

The feat is accomplished, and the Elliots visit in Laura Place, where the Dowager Viscountess has established herself. They have the cards of the Dowager Viscountess Dalrymple and the Honourable Miss Carteret to be arranged wherever they may be most visible, and "our cousins in Laura Place," "our cousins Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret," are talked of to everybody.

While Sir Walter and Elizabeth Elliot are sedulously cultivating their noble cousins, Anne, in broad contrast to her father and sister, is gladly renewing her acquaintance with an old schoolfellow whom she discovers in Bath in reduced circumstances: Mrs. Smith, as Miss Hamilton, had been kind to Anne Elliot, and now it is Anne's turn to repay the kindness. Mrs. Smith is a widow, and poor. She is also for the present a complete cripple from the effects of rheumatic fever, though she is not more than thirty-one years of age. She has come to Bath on account of her lameness, and is living in a humble way near the hot baths. A mutual friend makes Anne acquainted with the position of her former schoolfellow. The first meeting is awkward and painful. Twelve years have changed Anne from the blooming, silent, unformed girl of fifteen, to the elegant little woman of eight-and-twenty; and[Pg 360] twelve years have transformed the fine-looking, well-grown Miss Hamilton, in all the glow of health and confidence of prosperity, into a poor, infirm, helpless widow.

But soon the old interest which the girl-friends had felt in each other, revives. Anne finds Mrs. Smith sensible and agreeable, and has reason to admire in her "that elasticity of spirit, that disposition to be comforted, that power of turning readily from evil to good, and of finding employment out of herself, which is the choicest gift of Heaven."[76]

It is February, a month since Anne had come to Bath. She is eager for news from Uppercross, when a thicker letter than usual is delivered to her from Mary, with Admiral and Mrs. Croft's compliments. The Crofts must be in Bath.

Mary begins in her usual strain, with many grievances, congratulating herself, however, that the holidays are over. She believes no children ever had such long holidays as the young Musgroves have. The carriage has gone that day to bring Louisa and the Harvilles on the following day. Charles and Mary are not invited to dine with them, however, till the day after, and so on, to the close. But Mary has put the letter into an envelope containing as much more writing, which like the typical postscript is the cream of the epistle:—"I have something to communicate that will astonish you not a little. She (Louisa) and the Harvilles came on Tuesday very safely, and in the evening we went to ask how she did; when we were rather surprised not to find Captain Benwick of the party, for he had been invited as well as the Harvilles; and what do you think was the reason? Neither more nor less than his being in love with Louisa, and not choosing to venture to Uppercross till he had had[Pg 361] an answer from Mr. Musgrove; for it was all settled between him and her before she came away, and he had written to her father by Captain Harville. True, upon my honour! Are you not astonished? I shall be surprised at least if you ever received a hint of it, for I never did. Mrs. Musgrove protests solemnly that she knew nothing of the matter. We are all very well pleased, however; for though it is not equal to her marrying Captain Wentworth, it is infinitely better than Charles Hayter; and Mr. Musgrove has written his consent, and Captain Benwick is expected to-day. Mrs. Harville says her husband feels a good deal on his poor sister's account; but, however, Louisa is a great favourite with both. Indeed, Mrs. Harville and I quite agree that we love her the better for having nursed her. Charles wonders what Captain Wentworth will say; but if you remember I never thought him attached to Louisa; I never could see anything of it. And this is the end, you see, of Captain Benwick's being supposed to be an admirer of yours. How Charles could take such a thing into his head was always incomprehensible to me. I hope he will be more agreeable now. Certainly not a great match for Louisa Musgrove, but a million times better than marrying amongst the Hayters."

"Mary need not have feared her sister's being in any degree prepared for the news. She had never in her life been more astonished. Captain Benwick and Louisa Musgrove! It

was almost too wonderful for belief, and it was with the greatest effort that she could remain in the room, preserve an air of calmness, and endure the common questions of the moment."

"In her own room she tried to comprehend it. Well might Charles wonder how Captain Wentworth would feel! Perhaps he had quitted the field, had given Louisa up, had ceased to love, had found he did not love her. She could not endure the idea of treachery or levity, or anything akin to ill-usage between him and his friend."

"Captain Benwick and Louisa Musgrove! The[Pg 362] high-spirited, joyous, talking Louisa Musgrove, and the dejected, thinking, feeling, reading Captain Benwick, seemed each of them everything that would not suit the other. Their minds must be dissimilar! Where could have been the attraction? The answer soon presented itself: it had been in situation. They had been thrown together several weeks; they had been living in the same small family party. Since Henrietta's coming away, they must have been depending almost entirely on each other, and Louisa, just recovering from illness, had been in an interesting state, and Captain Benwick was not inconsolable.

"She saw no reason against their being happy. Louisa had fine naval fervour to begin with, and they would soon grow more alike. He would gain cheerfulness, and she would have to be an enthusiast for Scott and Lord Byron; nay, that was probably learnt already: of course they had fallen in love over poetry. The idea of Louisa Musgrove turned into a person of literary taste and sentimental reflection was amusing, but she had no doubt of its being so. The day at Lyme, the fall from the Cobbe, might influence her health, her nerves, her courage, her character to the end of her life, as thoroughly as it appeared to have influenced her fate."[77]

VI.

Captain Wentworth is on his way to Bath, and the very next time Anne walks out she meets him. "Mr. Elliot was attending his two cousins and Mrs. Clay. They were in Milsom Street. It began to rain, not much, but enough to make shelter desirable for women, and quite enough to make it very desirable for Miss[Pg 363] Elliot to have the advantage of being conveyed home in Lady Dalrymple's carriage, which was seen waiting at a little distance. She, Anne, and Mrs. Clay, therefore, turned into Molland's, while Mr. Elliot stepped to Lady Dalrymple to request her assistance. He soon joined them again, successful, of course: Lady Dalrymple would be most happy to take them home, and would call for them in a few minutes.

"Her ladyship's carriage was a barouche, and did not hold more than four with any comfort. Miss Carteret was with her mother; consequently it was not reasonable to

expect accommodation for all the three Camden Place ladies. There could be no doubt as to Miss Elliot, but it occupied a little time to settle the point of civility between the other two. The rain was a mere trifle, and Anne was most sincere in preferring a walk with Mr. Elliot. But the rain was also a mere trifle to Mrs. Clay; she would hardly allow it even to drop at all, and her boots were so thick—much thicker than Miss Anne's; in short, her civility rendered her quite as anxious to be left to walk with Mr. Elliot as Anne could be, and it was discussed between them with a generosity so polite and so determined, that the others were obliged to settle it for them, Miss Elliot maintaining that Mrs. Clay had a little cold already, and Mr. Elliot deciding on appeal that his cousin Anne's boots were rather the thickest.

"It was fixed, accordingly, that Mrs. Clay should be of the party in the carriage; and they had just reached this point when Anne, as she sat near the window, descried most decidedly and distinctly Captain Wentworth walking down the street.

"Her start was perceptible only to herself; but she instantly felt that she was the greatest simpleton in the[Pg 364] world, the most unaccountable and absurd. For a few minutes she saw nothing before her; it was all confusion. She was lost, and when she had scolded back her senses, she found the others still waiting, and Mr. Elliot (always obliging) just setting off for Union Street on a commission of Mrs. Clay's.

"She now felt a great inclination to go to the outer door. Captain Wentworth must be out of sight. She would see if it rained. She was sent back, however, in a moment by the entrance of Captain Wentworth himself, among a party of gentlemen and ladies, evidently his acquaintance, and whom he must have joined a little below Milsom Street. He was more obviously struck and confused by the sight of her than she had ever observed before. He looked quite red. For the first time since their renewed acquaintance she felt she was betraying the least sensibility of the two. She had the advantage of him in the preparation of the last few moments. All the overpowering, blinding, bewildering, first effects of strong surprise were over with her; still, however, she had enough to feel. It was agitation, pain, pleasure—a something between delight and misery.

"He spoke to her, and then turned away. The character of his manner was embarrassment. She could not have called it either cold, or friendly, or anything so certainly as embarrassed.

"After a short interval, however, he came towards her, and spoke again. Mutual inquiries on common subjects passed, neither of them much the wiser for what they heard, and Anne continuing fully sensible of his being less at ease than formerly. They had, by dint of being so much together, got to speak to each other with a considerable

portion of apparent indifference and calmness, but he could not do it now. Time had changed him, or Louisa had changed him. There was consciousness of some sort or other. He looked very well, not as if he had been suffering either in health or spirits; and he talked of Uppercross, of the Musgroves—nay,[Pg 365] even of Louisa—and had even a momentary look of his own arch significance as he named her; but yet it was Captain Wentworth, not comfortable, not easy, not able to feign that he was.

"It did not surprise but it grieved Anne to observe that Elizabeth would not know him. She saw that he saw Elizabeth; that Elizabeth saw him; that there was complete internal recognition on each side. She was convinced that he was ready to be acknowledged as an acquaintance, expecting it, and she had the pain of seeing her sister turn away with unalterable coldness.

"Lady Dalrymple's carriage, for which Miss Elliot was growing very impatient, now drew up; the servant came in to announce it. It was beginning to rain again, and altogether there was a delay, and a bustle, and a talking which must make all the little crowd in the shop understand that Lady Dalrymple was calling to convey Miss Elliot. At last Miss Elliot and her friend, unattended but by the servant (for there was no cousin returned), were walking off, and Captain Wentworth, watching them, turned again to Anne, and by manner, rather than words, was offering his services to her.

"'I am much obliged to you,' was her answer, 'but I am not going with them. The carriage would not accommodate so many. I walk: I prefer walking.'

"'But it rains.'

"'Oh, very little. Nothing that I regard.'

"After a moment's pause he said, 'Although I came only yesterday, I have equipped myself properly for Bath already, you see'—pointing to a new umbrella. 'I wish you would make use of it, if you are determined to walk, though I think it would be more prudent to let me get you a chair.'

"She was very much obliged to him, but declined it all, repeating her conviction that the rain would come to nothing at present, and adding, 'I am only waiting for Mr. Elliot. He will be here in a moment, I am sure.'

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"She had hardly spoken the words when Mr. Elliot walked in. Captain Wentworth recollected him perfectly. There was no difference between him and the man who had stood on the steps at Lyme, admiring Anne as she passed, except in the air, and look, and manners of the privileged relation and friend. He came in with eagerness, and

appeared to see and think only of her, apologised for his stay, was grieved to have kept her waiting, and anxious to get her away without further loss of time and before the rain increased; and in another moment they walked off together, her arm under his, a gentle and embarrassed glance and a 'Good morning to you' being all that she had time for as she passed away.

"As soon as they were out of sight the ladies and Captain Wentworth's party began talking of them.

"'Mr. Elliot does not dislike his cousin, I fancy.'

"'Oh, no! that is clear enough. One can guess what will happen there. He is always with them; half lives in the family, I believe. What a very good-looking man!'

"'Yes, and Miss Atkinson, who dined with him once at the Wallises, says he is the most agreeable man she ever was in company with.'

"'She is pretty, I think, Anne Elliott, very pretty, when one comes to look at her. It is not the fashion to say so, but I confess I admire her more than her sister.'

"'Oh, so do I.'

"'And so do I. No comparison. But the men are all wild after Miss Elliot. Anne is too delicate for them.'"

A day or two passes without further encounters. Anne longs for a concert patronised by Lady Dalrymple. "Sir Walter, his two daughters, and Mrs. Clay were the earliest of all their party at the Rooms in the evening, and as Lady Dalrymple must be waited for, they took their station by one of the fires in the Octagon Room. But hardly were they so settled, when the door opened[Pg 367] again, and Captain Wentworth walked in alone. Anne was the nearest to him, and making yet a little advance, she instantly spoke. He was preparing only to bow and pass on, but her gentle 'How do you do?' brought him out of the straight line, to stand near her and make inquiries in return, in spite of the formidable father and sister in the background.

"While they were speaking, a whispering between her father and Elizabeth caught her ear. She could not distinguish, but she must guess the subject, and on Captain Wentworth making a distant bow, she comprehended that her father had judged so well as to give him that simple acknowledgment of acquaintance, and she was just in time by a side glance to see a slight curtsey from Elizabeth herself. This, though late and reluctant and ungracious, was yet better than nothing, and her spirits improved.

“After talking, however, of the weather, and Bath, and the concert, their conversation began to flag, and so little was said at last, that she was expecting him to go every moment; but he did not; he seemed in no hurry to leave her; and presently, with renewed spirit, with a little smile, a little glow, he said—

“‘I have hardly seen you since our day at Lyme. I am afraid you must have suffered from the shock, and the more from its not overpowering you at the time.’

“She assured him she had not.

“‘It was a frightful hour,’ said he, ‘a frightful day!’ and he passed his hand across his eyes, as if the remembrance were still too painful; but in a moment, half smiling again, added, ‘The day has produced some effects, however; has had some consequences which must be considered the reverse of frightful. When you had the presence of mind to suggest that Benwick would be the properest person to fetch a surgeon, you could have little idea of his being eventually one of those most concerned in her recovery.’

“‘Certainly, I could have none. But it appears—I[Pg 368] should hope it would be—a very happy match. There are on both sides good principles and good temper.’

“‘Yes,’ said he, looking not exactly forward; ‘but there I think ends the resemblance. With all my soul I wish them happy, and rejoice over every circumstance in favour of it. They have no difficulties to contend with at home, no opposition, no caprice, no delays. The Musgroves are behaving like themselves, most honourable and kindly, only anxious with true parental heart to promote their daughter’s comfort. All this is much, very much in favour of their happiness; more than perhaps——’

“He stopped; a sudden recollection seemed to occur, and to give him some taste of that emotion which was reddening Anne’s cheeks and fixing her eyes on the ground. After clearing his throat, however, he proceeded thus—‘I confess I do think there is a disparity, too great a disparity, and in a point no less essential than mind. I regard Louisa Musgrove as a very amiable, sweet-tempered girl, and not deficient in understanding; but Benwick is something more. He is a clever man, a reading man; and I confess that I do consider his attaching himself to her with some surprise. Had it been the effect of gratitude, had he learnt to love her because he believed her to be preferring him,[78] it would have been another thing. But I have no reason to suppose it so. It seems, on the contrary, to have been a perfectly spontaneous, untaught feeling on his side, and this surprises me. A man like him, in his situation, with a heart pierced, wounded, almost broken! Fanny Harville was a very superior creature, and his attachment to her was indeed attachment. A man does not recover from such a devotion of the heart to such a woman! He ought not; he does not.’

“Either from the consciousness, however, that his friend had recovered, or from some other consciousness, he went no farther; and Anne, who—in spite of the agitated voice in which the latter part had been uttered,[Pg 369] and in spite of all the various noises of the room, the almost ceaseless slam of the door, and ceaseless buzz of persons walking through—had distinguished every word, was struck, gratified, confused, and beginning to breathe very quick, and feel a hundred things in a moment.”

The entrance-door opens again, and “Lady Dalrymple, Lady Dalrymple!” is the welcome sound. Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret, escorted by Mr. Elliot and Colonel Wallis, advance into the room. Anne is included in the group and separated from Captain Wentworth. But she has learnt in the last ten minutes more of his feelings towards Louisa, more of all his feelings, than she dares to think of.

Upon Lady Russell’s appearance, the whole party proceed to go into the concert-room, and be of all the consequence in their power; draw as many eyes, excite as many whispers, and disturb as many people as they can.

“Very, very happy were both Elizabeth and Anne Elliot as they walked in. Elizabeth, arm-in-arm with Miss Carteret, and looking on the broad back of the Dowager Viscountess Dalrymple before her, had nothing to wish for which did not seem within her reach; and Anne—but it would be an insult to the nature of Anne’s felicity to draw any comparison between it and her sister’s—the origin of one all selfish vanity, of the other all generous attachment.

“Anne saw nothing, thought nothing of the brilliancy of the room; the happiness was from within. Her eyes were bright and her cheeks glowed, but she knew nothing about it. His choice of subjects, his expressions, and still more his manner and look, had been such as she could see in only one light. His opinion of Louisa Musgrove’s inferiority—an opinion which he had seemed solicitous to give—his wonder at Captain Benwick, his feelings as to a fresh, strong attachment, sentences begun which he could not finish, his half-averted eyes, and more than half-expressive[Pg 370] glances—all, all declared that he had a heart returning to her at least; that anger, resentment, avoidance were no more, and that they were succeeded, not merely by friendship and regard, but by the tenderness of the past; yes, some share of the tenderness of the past! He must love her.”

Anne Elliot is from first to last full of delicate self-respect and retiring womanliness, yet Jane Austen makes her as incapable of resentful obduracy to Captain Wentworth’s tardy relenting, as of coquettish trifling with his revived affection. Anne is eager and willing to meet his overtures half way, and relieve him of the awkwardness of making

them unsupported. To see her manner quite in the right light, one must remember what she owed him, for the wrong which she had done to both when she gave him up in the past. Her present free forgiveness of his recent avoidance and neglect hardly balances her renunciation of him eight years before.

“The party were divided and disposed of on two contiguous benches: Anne was among those on the foremost, and Mr. Elliot had manœuvred so well, with the assistance of his friend Colonel Wallis, as to have a seat by her. Miss Elliot, surrounded by her cousins, and the principal object of Colonel Wallis’s gallantry, was quite contented.”

Anne has never liked a concert better—at least, during the first act. Towards the close of it, the necessity of explaining the words of an Italian song[79] to Mr. Elliot, brings down upon her rather too many gallant compliments from the gentleman. In the course of his praise, he manages to rouse her curiosity by hinting that he may have had longer acquaintance with her tastes and pursuits than she is aware of. In answer to her questions, he assures her that he has known her by report, long before she came to Bath. He has heard her described by one who knew her intimately. Her person,[Pg 371] disposition, accomplishments, manner, were all familiar to him many years before.

Jane Austen remarks with great truth that no one can withstand the charm of such a mystery. “To have been described, long ago, to a recent acquaintance by nameless people, is irresistible. She wondered and questioned him eagerly, but in vain. He delighted in being asked, but he would not tell.”

Anne can only think of Mr. Wentworth, the former curate of Monksford, in whose company Mr. Elliot may have been, but she does not mention the name.

“The name of Anne Elliot,” said he, “has long had an interesting sound to me. Very long has it possessed a charm over my fancy; and if I dared I would breathe my wishes that the name might never change.”

Before Anne can attempt an answer, she catches the name of Wentworth mentioned by her father in answer to an observation of Lady Dalrymple’s: and from the lady, “A very fine young man, indeed. More air than one often sees in Bath. Irish, I dare say?”

“Anne’s eyes had caught the right direction, and distinguished Captain Wentworth standing among a cluster of men at a little distance. As her eyes fell upon him, his seemed to be withdrawn from her.

“When she could give another glance, he had moved away. He could not have come nearer to her if he would, she was so surrounded and shut in, but she would rather have caught his eye.

“Mr. Elliot’s speech, too, distressed her. She had no longer any inclination to talk to him. She wished him not so near her.

“The first act was over. Now she hoped for some beneficial change; and after a period of nothing-saying amongst the party, some of them did decide on going in quest of tea. Anne was one of the few who did not choose to move. She remained in her seat, and so did Lady Russell, but she had the pleasure of getting rid of Mr. Elliot; and she did not mean, whatever she might feel on Lady Russell’s account, to shrink from[Pg 372] conversation with Captain Wentworth if he gave her opportunity. She was persuaded by Lady Russell’s countenance that she had seen him.

“He did not come, however. The others returned, the room filled again, benches were re-claimed, and re-possessed.

“In re-settling themselves there were many changes, the result of which was favourable for her. Colonel Wallis declined sitting down again, and Mr. Elliot was invited by Elizabeth and Miss Carteret, in a manner not to be refused, to sit between them; and by some other removals, and a little scheming of her own, Anne was enabled to place herself much nearer the end of the bench than she had been before, much more within the reach of a passer-by. She could not do so without comparing herself with Miss Larolles, the inimitable Miss Larolles;[80] but still, she did it, and not with much happier effect, though she found herself at the very end of the bench before the concert closed.

“Such was her situation, with a vacant space at hand, when Captain Wentworth was again in sight. She saw him not far off; he saw her, too, yet he looked grave, and seemed irresolute, and only by very slow degrees came at last near enough to speak to her. She felt that something must be the matter. The difference between his present air and what it had been in the Octagon Room was strikingly great. Why was it? She thought of her father—of Lady Russell. Could there have been any unpleasant glances? He begun by speaking of the concert gravely, more like the Captain Wentworth of Uppercross; owned himself disappointed; had expected better singing; and, in short, must confess that he should not be sorry when it was over. Anne replied, and spoke of the performance so well, yet, in allowance for his feelings, so pleasantly, that his countenance improved, and he replied again, with almost a smile. They talked for a few minutes more; the improvement held: he even looked down[Pg 373] towards the bench, as if he saw a place on it well worth occupying; when, at that moment, a

touch on her shoulder obliged her to turn round. It came from Mr. Elliot. He begged her pardon, but she must be applied to, to explain Italian again. Miss Carteret was very anxious to have a general idea of what was next to be sung. Anne could not refuse, but never had she sacrificed to politeness with a more suffering spirit.

“A few minutes, though as few as possible, were inevitably consumed; and when her own mistress again—when able to turn and look, as she had done before—she found herself accosted by Captain Wentworth in a reserved yet hurried sort of farewell. He must wish her good night; he was going; he should get home as fast as he could.

“‘Is not the song worth staying for?’ said Anne, suddenly struck by an idea which made her yet more anxious to be encouraging.

“‘No!’ he replied, impressively; ‘there is nothing worth my staying for;’ and he was gone directly.

“‘Jealousy of Mr. Elliot.’ It was the only intelligible motive.”

During a call made on her old friend, Mrs. Smith, Anne is enlightened beyond the power of doubt with regard to her cousin, Mr. Elliot’s, unprincipled and heartless character. He was an old friend of the Smiths, and had long ago heard a great deal from Mrs. Smith about Anne Elliot. He helped to ruin Mr. Smith. He forsook the widow in her desolation. He has come to Bath for the purpose of preventing Sir Walter Elliot’s marriage to Mrs. Clay, with the probable loss of his own succession to the baronetcy. His admiration for Anne induces Mr. Elliot to propose to give himself the right of a son-in-law to hinder the consummation of her father’s folly.

Anne can only shudder at what might have been the possibility of such a marriage for her.

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VII.[81]

Anne is just setting out for Lady Russell’s when a knock at the door announces visitors, and Mr. and Mrs. Charles Musgrove are ushered into the room.

Anne is really glad to see them, and the others are not so sorry that they cannot put on a decent air of welcome, considerably increased when it is clear that these their nearest relatives have not arrived with any idea of accommodation in that house.

The young Musgroves are staying for a few days at the “White Hart” with old Mrs. Musgrove, Henrietta, and Captain Harville. The last has business of his own in Bath. Mrs. Musgrove and Henrietta are already come to buy wedding clothes. It was not then

incumbent on every bride, in the rank of Henrietta and Louisa Musgrove, to have her trousseau from London and Paris. Such a place as Bath was sufficient for the requirements of all Somersetshire in that respect.

Anne walks off directly with Charles and Mary to their mother and sister. The enlightenment of Lady Russell is of necessity left for another day. Mr. Elliot's character has a reprieve of twenty-four hours.

Anne finds herself warmly greeted, even affectionately claimed to be with them during their stay, by Mrs. Musgrove and Henrietta, and falls naturally into her wonted ways of attention and assistance. "On Charles leaving them together, Anne was listening to Mrs. Musgrove's history of Louisa, and to Henrietta's of herself; giving opinions on business and recommendations to shops, with intervals of every help which Mary required; from altering her ribbon to settling her accounts, from finding her keys and assorting her trinkets, to trying to convince her she was not ill-used by anybody; while Mary, well amused as she generally[Pg 375] was in her station at a window overlooking the entrance to the Pump-room, could not but have her moments of imagining.

"A morning of thorough confusion was to be expected. A large party in an hotel ensured a quick-changing, unsettled scene. One five minutes brought a note, the next a parcel; and Anne had not been there half an hour when their dining-room, spacious as it was, seemed half-filled. A party of steady old friends were seated round Mrs. Musgrove, and Charles came back with Captains Harville and Wentworth. The appearance of the latter could not be more than the surprise of the moment. It was impossible for her to have forgotten to feel that this arrival of their common friends must be soon bringing them together again. Their last meeting had been most important in opening his feelings; she had derived from it a delightful conviction; but she feared from his looks that the same unfortunate persuasion, which had hastened him away from the Concert-room, still governed. He did not seem to want to be near enough for conversation.

"'Anne,' cried Mary, still at her window, 'there is Mrs. Clay, I am sure, standing under the colonnade, and a gentleman with her. I saw them turn the corner from Bath Street just now. They seem deep in talk. Who is it? Come and tell me. Good heavens! I recollect. It is Mr. Elliot himself.'

"'No,' cried Anne, quickly; 'it cannot be. He was to leave Bath at nine this morning, and does not come back till to-morrow.'

“As she spoke she felt that Captain Wentworth was looking at her, the consciousness of which vexed and embarrassed her, and made her regret that she had said so much, simple as it was.

“Mary, resenting that she should be supposed not to know her own cousin, began talking very warmly about the family features, and protesting still more positively that it was Mr. Elliot, calling again upon Anne to come and look herself; but Anne did not mean to stir, and[Pg 376] tried to be cool and unconcerned. Her distress returned, however, on perceiving smiles and intelligent glances pass between two or three of the lady visitors, as if they believed themselves quite in the secret. It was evident that the report concerning her had spread, and a short pause succeeded, which seemed to ensure that it would now spread further.

“‘Do come, Anne,’ cried Mary—‘come and look yourself. You will be too late if you do not make haste. They are parting—they are shaking hands—he is turning away. Not know Mr. Elliot, indeed! You seem to have forgot all about Lyme.’

“To pacify Mary, and perhaps screen her own embarrassment, Anne did move quietly to the window. She was just in time to ascertain that it really was Mr. Elliot before he disappeared on one side, as Mrs. Clay walked quickly off on the other; and checking the surprise which she could not but feel at such an appearance of friendly conference between two persons of totally opposite interests, she calmly said, ‘Yes, it is Mr. Elliot, certainly. He has changed his hour of going, I suppose, that is all, or I may be mistaken,’ and walked back to her chair recomposed, and with the comfortable hope of having acquitted herself well.

“Captain Wentworth left his seat and walked to the fire-place, probably for the sake of walking away from it soon afterwards, and taking a station, with less barefaced design, by Anne.

“‘You have not been long enough in Bath,’ said he, ‘to enjoy the evening parties of the place.’

“‘Oh, no, the usual character of them has nothing for me. I am no card-player.’

“‘You were not formerly, I know. You did not use to like cards, but time makes many changes.’

“‘I am not yet so much changed,’ cried Anne, and stopped, fearing she hardly knew what misconstruction. After waiting a few moments, he said, and as if it were the result of immediate feeling, ‘It is a period, indeed! Eight years and a half is a period.’

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“Whether he would have proceeded farther was left to Anne’s imagination to ponder over in a calmer hour; for while still hearing the sounds he had uttered, she was startled to other subjects by Henrietta, eager to get out and calling on her companions to lose no time, lest somebody else should come in.

“They were obliged to move. Anne talked of being perfectly ready, and tried to look it; but she felt that could Henrietta have known the regret and reluctance of her heart in quitting the room, she would have found, in all her own sensations for her cousin, in the very security of his affection, wherewith to pity her.”

Their preparations are stopped short; the door is thrown open for Sir Walter and Miss Elliot, whose entrance seems to cause a general chill.

Anne is satisfied with regard to one particular: Captain Wentworth is acknowledged again by each.

Elizabeth is revolving a great measure. She gives her invitations “To-morrow evening, to meet a few friends; no formal party;” and puts down her cards with “Miss Elliot at home,” and a courteous, comprehensive smile for all, and one smile and one card decidedly for Captain Wentworth. Elizabeth has been long enough in Bath to understand the importance in society of a man of such an air and appearance. The cards given, Sir Walter and Elizabeth rise and disappear.

Captain Wentworth has received the card with no more than a polite acknowledgment. Anne cannot think that he will accept such an offering as an atonement for the insolence of the past. He holds the card in his hand as if considering.

“‘Only think of Elizabeth’s including everybody,’ whispers Mary audibly. ‘I do not wonder Captain Wentworth is delighted. He cannot put the card out of his hand.’”

Anne catches his eye, sees his cheeks glow and his mouth form itself into an expression of contempt, and turns away that she may see no more.

The party separates—Anne going with the ladies.[Pg 378] She is begged to return and dine, but her spirits have been too long exerted, she is only fit for home. She promises to be with her friends the whole of the following morning, and closes the fatigues of the day by a toilsome walk to Camden Place.

Anne rouses herself from the never-ending self-questioning, “Will Captain Wentworth come or not?” to let Mrs. Clay know she has been seen with Mr. Elliot three hours after his being supposed to have left Bath. It seems to Anne there is guilt in Mrs. Clay’s face, but the expression clears instantly. “Oh, dear! very true,” exclaims Mrs. Clay. “Only

think, Miss Elliot, to my great surprise I met with Mr. Elliot in Bath Street. I was never more astonished. He turned back and walked with me to the Pump Yard. He had been prevented setting off for Thornbury. He wanted to know how early he might be admitted to-morrow. He was full of 'to-morrow.'"

VIII.

One day only has passed since Anne's conversation with Mrs. Smith, but a keener interest has intervened; she must still defer her visit to Lady Russell. She cannot keep her appointment punctually, however; she is detained by rain. When she reaches the "White Hart" she finds herself neither quite in time, nor the first to arrive.

"The party before her were Mrs. Musgrove talking to Mrs. Croft, and Captain Harville to Captain Wentworth; and she immediately heard that Mary and Henrietta, too impatient to wait, had gone out the moment it had cleared, but would be back again soon, and that the strictest injunctions had been left with Mrs. Musgrove to keep her there till they returned. She had only to submit, and feel herself plunged at once in all the agitation of which she had merely laid her[Pg 379] account of tasting a little before the morning closed. There was no delay, no waste of time. She was deep in the happiness of such misery, or the misery of such happiness, instantly. Two minutes after her entering the room, Captain Wentworth said, 'We will write the letter we were talking of, Harville, now, if you will give me materials.'

"Materials were all at hand on a separate table; he went to it, and merely turning his back on them all, was engrossed with writing.

"Mrs. Musgrove was giving Mrs. Croft the history of her eldest daughter's engagement, and just in that inconvenient tone of voice which was perfectly audible, while it pretended to be in a whisper." The mother finishes with the assertion, "At any rate," said I, "it will be better than a long engagement."

Mrs. Croft chimes in heartily. She would rather have young people settle on a small income at once, and struggle with a few difficulties together, than be involved in a long engagement.

"Oh, dear, Mrs. Croft," cried Mrs. Musgrove, unable to let her finish her speech, "there is nothing I so abominate as a long engagement. It is what I always protested against for my children," with more strong objections to the same effect from both ladies.

Anne found an unexpected interest here. She felt it in its application to herself—felt it in a nervous thrill all over her; and at the same moment that her eyes instinctively glanced towards the distant table, Captain Wentworth's pen ceased to move, his head

was raised, pausing, listening, and he turned round the next instant to give a look—one quick, conscious look—at her.

Captain Harville, who has been hearing nothing, invites Anne to join him. “The window at which he stood was at the other end of the room from where the two ladies were sitting, and though nearer to Captain Wentworth’s table, not very near. ‘Look here,’ said he, unfolding a parcel in his hand, and displaying a small miniature painting; ‘do you know who that is?’

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“‘Certainly: Captain Benwick.’”

He tells her he has been commissioned to get the miniature, which was painted for his sister, re-set for Louisa Musgrove. Anne, while entering into his feelings, so far vindicates Captain Benwick, by asserting the superior fidelity of women. “Oh!” cried Captain Harville, in a tone of strong feeling, “if I could but make you comprehend what a man suffers when he takes a last look at his wife and children, and watches the boat that he has sent them off in as long as it is in sight, and then turns away and says, ‘God knows whether we shall ever meet again!’ And then, if I could convey to you the glow of his soul when he does see them again; when, coming back after a twelve-month’s absence, perhaps, and obliged to put into another port, he calculates how soon it may be possible to get them there, pretending to deceive himself, and saying, ‘They cannot be here till such a day,’ but all the while hoping for them twelve hours sooner, and seeing them arrive at last, as if Heaven had given them wings, by many hours sooner still.

“‘Oh!’ cried Anne, eagerly, ‘I hope I do justice to all that is felt by you, and by those who resemble you. God forbid that I should undervalue the warm and faithful feelings of any of my fellow-creatures! I should deserve utter contempt if I dared to suppose that true attachment and constancy were known only by women. No, I believe you capable of everything great and good in your married lives. I believe you equal to every important exertion, and to every domestic forbearance, so long as—if I may be allowed the expression—so long as you have an object: I mean 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.’

“She could not immediately have uttered another sentence; her heart was too full, her breath too much oppressed.

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“‘You are a good soul!’ cried Captain Harville, putting his hand on her arm quite affectionately. ‘There is no quarrelling with you. And when I think of Benwick, my tongue is tied.’

“Their attention was called towards the others. Mrs. Croft was taking leave.

“‘Here, Frederick, you and I part company, I believe,’ said she. ‘I am going home, and you have an engagement with your friend. To-night we may have the pleasure of all meeting again at your party,’ turning to Anne. ‘We had your sister’s card yesterday, and I understood Frederick had a card, too, though I did not see it; and you are disengaged, Frederick, are you not, as well as ourselves?’

“Captain Wentworth was folding up a letter in great haste, and either could not, or would not, answer fully.

“‘Yes,’ said he, ‘very true. Here we separate; but Harville and I shall soon be after you, that is, Harville, if you are ready—I am, in half a minute. I know you will not be sorry to be off.’

“Mrs. Croft left them, and Captain Wentworth, having sealed his letter with great rapidity, was, indeed, ready, and had even a hurried, agitated air, which showed impatience to be gone. Anne knew not how to understand it. She had the kindest ‘Good morning! God bless you!’ from Captain Harville, but from him not a word nor a look! He had passed out of the room without a look!

“She had only time, however, to move closer to the table where he had been writing, when footsteps were heard entering; the door opened, it was himself. He begged their pardon, but he had forgotten his gloves; and instantly crossing the room to the writing-table, and standing with his back towards Mrs. Musgrove, he drew out a letter from under the scattered papers, placed it before Anne with eyes of glowing entreaty fixed on her, and hastily collecting his gloves, was again out of the room, almost before Mrs. Musgrove was aware of his being in it; the work of an instant!

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“The revolution which one instant had made in Anne was almost beyond expression. The letter, with a direction hardly legible, ‘To Miss A. E——’ was evidently the one which he had been folding so hastily. While supposed to be writing only to Captain Benwick he had been also addressing her! On the contents of that letter depended all which this world could do for her! Anything was possible, anything might be defied rather than suspense. Mrs. Musgrove had little arrangements of her own at her own table; to their protection she must trust, and sinking into the chair which he had

occupied, succeeding to the very spot where he had leaned and written, her eyes devoured the following words:—

"'I can listen no longer in silence. I must speak to you by such means as are within my reach. You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope. Tell me not that I am too late, that such precious feelings are gone for ever. I offer myself to you again, with a heart even more your own than when you almost broke it, eight years and a half ago. Dare not say that man forgets sooner than woman, that his love has an earlier death! I have loved none but you. Unjust I may have been, weak and resentful I have been, but never inconstant. You alone have brought me to Bath. For you alone I think and plan. Have you not seen this? Can you fail to have understood my wishes? I had not waited even these ten days, could I have read your feelings as I think you must have penetrated mine. I can hardly write. I am every instant hearing something which overpowers me. You sink your voice, but I can distinguish the tones of that voice when they would be lost on others. Too good, too excellent creature! You do us justice, indeed. You do believe that there is true attachment and constancy among men. Believe it to be most permanent, most undeviating in F. W.

"'I must go uncertain of my fate, but I shall return hither or follow your party as soon as possible. A word,[Pg 383] a look will be enough to decide whether I enter your father's house this evening or never.'"[82]

Such a letter is not soon to be recovered from. Anne has to plead illness, and is forced to accept her brother-in-law's escort home.

"They were in Union Street, when a quicker step behind, a something of familiar sound, gave her two moments' preparation for the sight of Captain Wentworth. He joined them, but as if irresolute whether to join or pass on, said nothing, only looked. Anne could command herself enough to receive that look and not repulsively. The cheeks which had been pale now glowed, and the movements which had hesitated were decided. He walked by her side. Presently, struck by a sudden thought, Charles said—

"'Captain Wentworth, which way are you going? Only to Gay Street, or farther up the town?'

"'I hardly know,' replied Captain Wentworth, surprised.

"'Are you going as high as Belmont? Are you going near Camden Place? Because if you are, I shall have no scruple in asking you to take my place, and give Anne your arm to her father's door. She is rather done for this morning, and must not go so far without help, and I ought to be at that fellow's in the Market Place. He promised me the sight

of a capital gun he is just going to send off; said he would keep it unpacked to the last possible moment, that I might see it; and if I do not turn back now, I have no chance. By his description it is a good deal like the second-sized[Pg 384] double-barrel of mine which you shot with one day round Winthrop.'[83]

"There could be no objection. There could only be a most proper alacrity, a most obliging compliance for public view; and smiles reined in and spirits dancing in private rapture. In half a minute Charles was at the bottom of Union Street again, and the other two proceeding together; and soon words enough had passed between them to decide their direction towards the comparatively quiet and retired gravel walk, where the power of conversation would make the present hour a blessing indeed, and prepare it for all the immortality which the happiest recollections of their own future life could bestow. There they exchanged again those feelings and those promises which had once before seemed to secure everything, but which had been followed by so many, many years of division and estrangement. There they returned again into the past, more exquisitely happy, perhaps, in their re-union than when it had been first projected; more tender, more tried, more fixed in a knowledge of each other's character, truth, and attachment; more equal to act, more justified in acting. And there, as they slowly paced the gradual ascent, heedless of every group around them, all the little variations of the last week were gone through, and of yesterday and to-day there could scarcely be an end.

"At last Anne was at home again, happier than any one in that house could have conceived.

"The evening came, the drawing-rooms were lighted up, the company assembled. It was but a card party;[Pg 385] it was but a mixture of those who had never met before, and those who had met too often; a commonplace business, too numerous for intimacy, too small for variety; but Anne had never found an evening shorter. Glowing and lovely in sensibility and happiness, and more generally admired than she thought about or cared for, she had cheerful or forbearing feelings for every creature around her; with Captain Wentworth some moments of communication constantly occurring and always the hope of more, and always the knowledge of his being there.

"It was in one of these short meetings, each apparently occupied in admiring a fine display of green-house plants, that she told him, with that candour and fairness to herself and everybody which no passion, and no submission to his influence could warp:

"'I have been thinking over the past, and I must believe that I am right, much as I suffered from it, in being guided by the friend who to me was in the place of a parent.

Do not mistake me, however. I am not saying she did not err in her advice. I mean I was right in submitting to it; and if I mistake not, a strong sense of duty is no bad part of a woman's portion.'[84]

"He looked at her, looked at Lady Russell, and looking again at her, replied as if in cool deliberation, 'Not yet. But there are hopes of her being forgiven in time. But I, too, have been thinking over the past, and a question has suggested itself, whether there may not have been one person more my enemy even than that lady. My own self. Tell me, if when I returned to England in the year 'eight, with a few thousand pounds,[85] and was posted into the *Laconia*, if I had then written to you, would you have answered my letter? Would you, in short, have renewed the engagement then?'

"'Would I?' was all her answer; but the accent was decisive.

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"'Good God!' he cried, 'you would! It is not that I did not think of it, or desire it, as what could alone crown all my other success; but I was proud, too proud to ask again. I did not understand you. Six years of separation and suffering might have been spared. I have been used to the gratification of believing myself to earn every blessing that I enjoyed. I have valued myself on honourable toils and just rewards. Like other great men under reverses,' he added, with a smile, 'I must learn to brook being happier than I deserve.'"

"Who can doubt what followed?" Jane Austen begins the last chapter. Sir Walter made no objection, and Elizabeth did nothing worse than look cold and unconcerned. Captain Wentworth, with five-and-twenty thousand pounds, and as high in his profession as merit and activity could place him, was no longer a nobody.

Among other results of the marriage, Lady Russell learnt to like the man who made Anne Elliot happy. Captain Wentworth became the cordial and helpful friend of Mrs. Smith. Mr. Elliot, who had been playing a deep game, withdrew from Bath, and caused Mrs. Clay to withdraw also. She gave up Sir Walter, for the sake of his heir. It remained doubtful whether her cunning was not more than a match for his, and whether, in losing the chance of becoming the wife of Sir Walter, she might not wheedle the future Sir William into raising her into the position of Lady Elliot.

It would be impertinent to add a word of praise to a novel which—while it is often as penetrating and unerring in discussing the motives, and as richly humorous in dealing with the absurdities and follies of human nature as "Pride and Prejudice" and "Northanger Abbey"—has a gentle grace and a pathetic feeling all its own, so far as Jane Austen's novels are concerned. The last warm words of praise to the gallant

profession to which two of her brothers belonged, is another testimony to her keen family sympathies, as well as to her quick, womanly response to all that was patriotic and heroic.

FOOTNOTES:

[70]Written in 1816, and published after the Author's death.

[71]If Jane Austen's high standing as an artist is granted, what becomes of the heathen saying that "Art has no moral?" Was she simply great in spite of her morals? Again, how shall we dispose of the scornful criticism, which treats the details of domestic life in a novel as twaddle? Jane Austen and twaddle are as far apart as Jane Austen and bombast.

[72]A young Musgrove who had been in the navy, and died abroad.

[73]Anne Elliot's pathetic position is unique, so far as I know, in the literature of Jane Austen's day. The contrast of her faded face and subdued spirit with Henrietta and Louisa Musgrove's fresh bloom and unchecked joyousness, would not be attempted in our day, with the same object in view, by an author who put a supreme value on material advantages, and extolled the attractions of youth beyond all other attractions. No such author—above all in a semi-cynical, semi-sensuous generation—could have anticipated, far less projected, the end of "Persuasion."

[74]In those days no lady was to be found without her small bottle of "smelling salts" or her vinaigrette with aromatic vinegar. Have we fewer headaches now-a-days, or are we more patient in bearing them?

[75]The manner in which the set-aside, quiet woman, who has yet so much more strength and power of resource than the others, comes to the front, whether she will or no, in the moment of trouble, is fine and true to nature.

[76]The perfect simplicity, unaffectedness, and absence of self-consciousness—including any consciousness of merit, displayed in Anne's kindness to her former companion, is very refreshing, after those ostentatious representations of doing good, and of making private stock out of public benevolence, which we are constantly encountering both in real life and in books.

[77]The sudden bestowal of Louisa Musgrove and Captain Benwick on each other is one of the most genuine and delightful surprises of fiction. It is not only a triumphant testimony to how the whole destiny, not merely of one person, but of a group of persons, may be altered by what seems the simplest accident—the turning of a straw; it is one of those bits of warm, homely, human inconsistency which baffle all

anticipation, are worth a hundred bloodless, laboured, logical sequences, but can only be fitly conceived and carried out in a story, by a great artist.

[78]A hint of defence for what might have been his own case.

[79]A familiarity with Italian used to be considered the graceful crown of a woman's accomplishments.

[80]The "rattle" of Madame D'Arblay's novel of "Cecilia."

[81]The two capital chapters, of which the substance is now to be given, were written by Jane Austen to supersede a cancelled chapter in "Persuasion," withdrawn after she had finished the story.

[82]The renewal of the good understanding between Anne and Captain Wentworth was contrived in the cancelled chapter of the story, with much less spirit and feeling—as Jane Austen herself judged rightly—by an accidental interview between the lovers in the Crofts' lodgings; in the course of which Admiral Croft unsuspiciously imposes on his brother-in-law the trying task of conveying to Anne, Admiral and Mrs. Croft's friendly desire not to stand in the way of the arrangements of Mr. Elliot and his cousin on their marriage; on the contrary, the Crofts offer to vacate Kellynch to them if they wish it.

[83]In the intense sense of reality which all Jane Austen's stories give us, we are prompted here to go beyond what the author has chosen to tell us, and speculate how the Musgroves, great and small, received the news—not merely of Captain Wentworth and Anne Elliot's engagement, but what they were sure to hear also, sooner or later, that it was the end of an old attachment, utterly unsuspected by all their friends at Uppercross. Would the Musgroves in their good nature content themselves with thinking the couple had kept their secret well, or would there be a general, slightly indignant sense of having been taken in and humbugged, like, in its degree, to that which Emma Woodhouse experienced when she learnt the long-standing engagement between Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax?

[84]No, indeed, it is her chief treasure.

[85]These were the very different days of frequent naval engagements and much prize money.

Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co., Belle Sauvage Works, London, E.C.

Transcriber's Notes

Punctuation errors have been fixed.

Page 179: “not seen to create” changed to “not seem to create”