

# JANE AUSTEN SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA

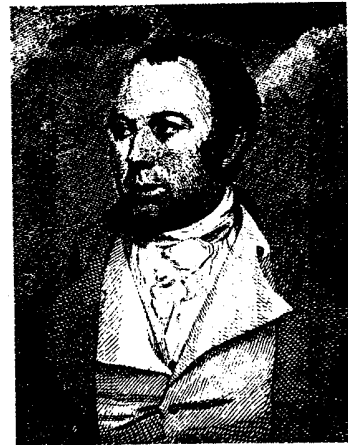
Vancouver Region

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## THE “ADMIRABLE DESIGNER AND ENGRAVER ON WOOD” - Thomas Bewick.

Thomas Bewick, (1753-1828), was born at Cherryburn, on the river Tyne, in Northumberland. His father was a tenant farmer, whose income came also from a small colliery nearby. Thomas, the eldest of eight children, was undistinguished in his school days. Even in early childhood, he showed his intense love of drawing, and love of nature. He drew on the margins of his schoolbooks, on flagstones, the hearth of his home, and the floor of the church porch, which he covered with designs in chalk. He studied inn signs, and the simple prints found in every farm or cottage: sea and land victories, and portraits of famous or notorious persons. He began with pen and blackberry juice, and passed on to paint brush and colours, copying the animal life around him. His works - especially hunting scenes: hunters, horses, dogs in the pack - were sold cheaply to his rustic neighbours to ornament their walls. The love of nature grew - he delighted in the changes in seasons, the feathered visitors, angling and field sports, and the legendary tales and strange characters of his birth-place. These early years had a lasting influence on his work as artist and engraver, and the love of the countryside and his neighbours was a constant source of refreshment during his years of long application to his workbench.

When Bewick was fourteen, he was apprenticed to Ralph Beilby, of a family of artists, engravers, and glass enamellers in nearby Newcastle. The growth of the industrial town provided a source for a great variety of work. The amount of wood engraving in Beilby's workshop was small compared to its general trade in metal engraving: clock faces, coffin plates, stamps, seals, billheads, crests on coffee pots and tea sets, initials on spoons and mottoes on rings, among other things. But Bewick enjoyed working with wood and became successful in that medium. Before the end of his apprenticeship, he won an award from the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, for his book illustrations, foretelling his future reputation in this field.



In the early summer of 1776, when his seven years apprenticeship had been worked out, Bewick set off on a 500-mile walk from Newcastle through the Highlands of Scotland. It was a crucial point in his life. Later, he wrote in his *Memoir*, “I felt just as one may suppose a Bird wou’d feel, upon escaping from its cage. The long restraints of School and business sat heavy on my mind and made me pant for liberty . . . I became like a wild thing, without either fear or foresight.”

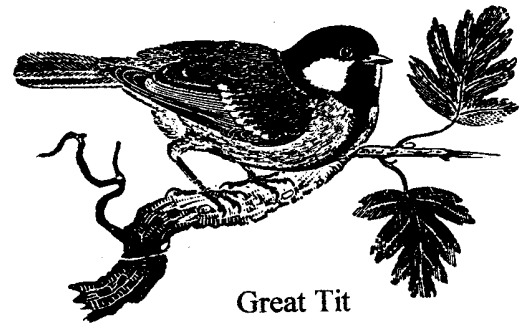
Bewick then made his way to London. He found unlimited work there, and met with great encouragement, but he wrote in later years: "*Notwithstanding my being so situated among my friends, and of being so much gratified in seeing such a variety of excellent performances in every art and science - painting, statuary, engraving, carving, etc. were to be seen every day - yet I did not like London.*" He remained less than a year.

Bewick returned to Newcastle in 1777, and went into partnership with Beilby, a commitment which lasted for twenty years. He was too busy to travel, but enjoyed occasional walking trips and summer holidays at Tynemouth by the sea. He was soon happily married and settled in a small house outside the old town walls, with a familiar view of the open countryside.

These were the years of publication of his celebrated natural history books; first, the *General History of Quadrupeds*, (begun in 1781, with "*a simple desire to improve on the appalling crudity of the illustrations in all but the most expensive books on natural history of the period*"). Generally speaking, those animals familiar to Bewick in their native haunts were admirably rendered; in some cases he could see exotic animals in menageries and private zoos. But where he had to depend on stuffed specimens, as for "Bison" and "Hippopotamus", the drawings are considered poor and suggestive. This may be the reason his next effort was "*History of British Birds.*"

He did not work according to the directions of others, but struck out a path for himself. He determined to copy nature as closely as he could. Bewick's figures appeared strikingly fresh compared to the work of his predecessors and contemporaries. His birds are *alive*; they swing on boughs, they flit rapidly through the air; they seem almost to utter their continuous or intermittent cries. Not only was there truth in outline and animated posture, but the portrayal of the birds' habitat was impressively true to nature. The beautiful water-colour drawings in the British Museum justify that resolve. The book was an instant success, and went into many editions.

Another and perhaps even more popular feature was the "tail-pieces" (Bewick referred to them as "tale-pieces"), portrayed with humour or pathos, with an endeavour to illustrate some truth or point some moral. They repeatedly remind us of human vice and folly, of the perils on life's journey, of the evanescence of our existence. Sometimes these cautionary tales are depicted allegorically, with pride and vanity as a cockerel or peacock; more often the vignettes show a suggestive moment of vice or folly: a blind man and illiterate child fail to follow the right path and stumble into danger. . . . These didactic images are less a true representation of nature (though contemporaries certainly saw them as that) than an imaginative use of it to instruct and inform.



Great Tit



Angler



Dog &amp; Heron



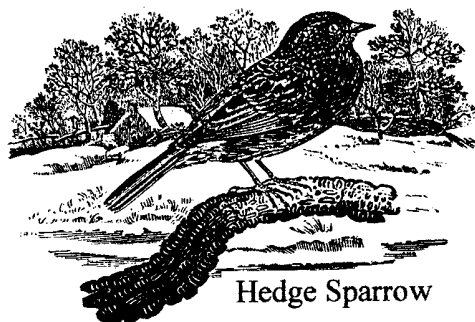
Fieldmouse

James Wilson, in *Blackwood's Magazine*, wrote: "It needs only a glance at the works of Bewick, to convince ourselves with what wonderful felicity the very countenance and air of his animals are marked and distinguished. There is the grave owl, the silly wavering lapwing, the pert jay, the impudent overfed sparrow, the airy lark, the sleepy-headed gourmand duck, the restless titmouse, the insignificant wren, the clean harmless gull, the keen rapacious kite - every one has his character."

Bewick's achievement is even more remarkable in the circumstances of their production - as he wrote in his *Memoir*: "not as part of the general day's work, but in brief times at the end of a long day, often by the light of a candle."

The painter, C.R.Leslie, in *Hand-book for Young Painters*, gave a sincere tribute to Bewick: "While speaking of the English School, I must not omit to notice a truly original genius, who, though not a painter, was an artist of the highest order in his way - Thomas Bewick, the admirable designer and engraver on wood . . . The wood-cuts that illustrate his books of natural history, may be studied with advantage by the most ambitious votary of the highest classes of Art - filled as they are by the truest feeling for Nature, and though often representing the most ordinary objects, yet never, in a single instance, degenerating into commonplace . . . The student of Landscape can never consult the works of Bewick without improvement."

Bewick attained distinction in his art, and at the same time preserved his independence. In the end he acquired a financial competence and an ample reward of fame.



Hedge Sparrow



Farmyard



The Willow Wren

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"Aunt Norris, the Doyenne of 'Mean',  
Has been banished from Mansfield Park's Scene;  
With Maria in tow  
They're both lying low  
And Sir Bertram now feels quite serene."  
Pam Ottridge.

"As Portsmouth was lacking in life's many joys,  
And her home over-run with chaos and noise,  
Fanny said 'Toodle-oo'  
I'm leaving this zoo  
For Mansfield and more mature boys."  
Doris MacKenzie.

**JASNA Vancouver Meeting - March 15, 2008.****Prequels, Sequels, Parallels.**

Phyllis Bottomer, President, opened the meeting (about 30 present), and conducted a short business session. Margaret Savery has resigned as Chair of the Programme Committee, after several years of service. Pam Ottridge will be the Incoming Chair.

Keiko Parker passed around an Easter Card to be sent to John, who is no longer able to attend the meetings. Many members signed it, sending greetings to John.

Keiko is doing some house tidying, and brought along for sale her extra copies of *Persuasions* (\$4 each), and various old Newsletters (60 cents each), for members to help themselves to any of these. Get in touch with Keiko if you would like to have any.

Joan Reynolds brought us up to date on the plans for **Jane Austen Day** next month. The Library will not be open - keep your books another month. Some members will be wearing Regency dress, which will make the scene more festive. Volunteers are needed to come early and remain after the meeting is over, to do some minor chores: spreading tablecloths, putting out the flowers, etc. The caterers will be cleaning up plates and dishes belonging to the Church or our members, as well as their own things.

Two new members in March were Robyn Martin, and Marilyn Williams - we welcome them to our group.

Phyllis gave us some good advice: We remember Jane Austen wrote to her sister Cassandra that "pictures of perfection make me feel sick and wicked". We don't want Jane to *not* like us, so we don't need to feel we must strive to be perfect in this programme.

With this thought in mind, the entertainment began: members spoke on their favourite Jane Austen-inspired novels, from a list given out earlier.

Mary Atkins began, describing *Mrs. Goddard, Mistress of a School*, written by Joan Austen Leigh. The time-span is current with Jane Austen's works. The book is written in an epistolary style, letters exchanged between Mrs. Goddard of Highbury and her sister in London. Another book Mary mentioned was *Jane Fairfax*, by Joan Aitken. This was in the "Prequel" category, starting early in the little girl's life - rather a spoiled child. But she has to wear hand-me-downs, suffers from migraines, and leads a rather ordinary life. A good interesting story.

Joan Reynolds spoke of *Jane Fairfax*, which she found "irritating, gossipy, shallow". It brought in a new set of characters, not discussing much about Emma or Jane Fairfax. Joan called it a good, quick, light read, with some interesting Navy scenes.

Helen Spencer's choice was *Emma in Love*, by Emma Tennant. Isabella Knightley and her family come to live at Hartfield after Mr. Woodhouse's death, with interesting plot elements and interaction of characters.

Irene Howard discussed *Pemberley*, by Emma Tennant. She found it "interesting enough" - Darcy remains dignified and upright, but smiles more; Elizabeth is introspective. The author is inclined to utter rhetorical questions: when Elizabeth looks at the Darcy family portraits, - no heir yet, Tennant writes, "had she given no thought to being the mother of the heir?" The language used contained a lot of "excessively", "monstrously", etc. Irene refused to tell us what happened at the end.

Michelle Siu also read about Emma's life married to Mr. Knightley. The weight of Pemberley-related responsibilities has fallen on Elizabeth's shoulders. She has become like a *Dennis the Menace* character. Michelle found *Emma in Love* plodding, difficult to sympathize with the character.

Elizabeth Walker sent me her notes on her reading, and so I could have something to copy. Here are the books she mentions. *Jane Fairfax*, by Naomi Royde-Smith. Likely out-of-print, as published in 1940. Book Review Digest comments that the book is well researched. It shows Mrs. Campbell struggling to bring up her daughter Euphrasia and foster-daughter Jane Fairfax, and to control the philandering of her husband Col. Campbell. A letter from Mrs. Elton to Mrs. Suckling (the future employer of Jane Fairfax) ends the book.

*Belladonna*, by Charlotte Grey. Lord Barnstaple must get a wife if he is to inherit his uncle's estate. Kate Netley wants a husband to show her erstwhile lover what she thought of him, so proposes to Lord Barnstaple. Then her former lover appears from the past to blackmail her. Everything seems doomed but everything gets settled. I didn't think it very true to the period, as Kate would not have gone alone to Barnstaple's home. The name of Kate has overtones of *Kiss me, Kate*, and *Taming of the Shrew*.

*Speaking of Jane Austen*, by Sheila Kaye-Smith and G.B. Stern. Chapter: "Sometimes one conjectures" - Jane Austen's characters are so alive that they not only live themselves but have enough vitality left over to bring to life those whom they scarcely mention but who never appear on scene, e.g. Mrs. Perry, in *Emma*. Chapter: "Odds and Ends" - G.B. Stern raises some questions such as, why did Mr. Knightley not go to Miss Taylor's wedding? How did it work out for Mr. who had to live at Hartfield and put up with Mr. Woodhouse's worries re health, etc.? She would like to overhear the two sons of John Knightley talk about their grandfather.

**Editor's Note:** I must apologize that these comments (except Elizabeth Walker's) are so poorly passed along to readers - it was very difficult to take notes, and I found I was lagging very badly behind the speakers. I missed the name of the novel or author, or important comments on characters and story lines, and even omitted the name the member reviewing the book.

I found the programme very interesting, and would like to have it done again next year. But next time I would like to be given notes about Title, Author, and Reviewer's names, please. If any of the speakers would like to send me the requisite information and comments about the books they reported this time, I'll print and circulate them next month. - Eileen Sutherland.

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**"Saint" Jane.**

"Consider the most striking literary canonization of our times. Jane Austen has always been esteemed, and F.R. Leavis sanctified her as one of the bearers of the "great tradition", a sort of doctor of his secular church. But in the past fifteen years she has turned into the English novelist, an inescapable part of the public consciousness, more universally present than any other writer bar Shakespeare. Some people think she owes her current prominence to popular fantasies of tight breeches and bosoms heaving beneath Empire-line dresses. This does not seem likely: if that is what people want, they can get it more readily from Georgette Heyer. Another view is that she has benefited from nostalgia for a safer, quieter and more decorous world; but the idea that the world of her novels is cosy and comfortable can hardly survive the reading of them. Most of her modern popularity is the result of her actual merits, and in a broad sense the highbrows and the lower-middlebrows are admiring the same things: well-made plots, perceptive depiction of character and the acute study of social interaction. It is a genuine popular canonization."

From: "Do We Need A Literary Canon?", Richard Jenkins.  
(Thanks to Phyllis Bottomer for sending this excerpt).

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**Mr. Perry's Patients:** J.R.Watson (*Essays in Criticism* 20. 1970.) Review by E. Sutherland.

Jane Austen was amused and interested by a preoccupation with health, in all her novels. In *Emma*, she used it more profitably and more fully than in any other work. Mr. Perry brings into the novel comedy capable of operating on many different levels, from the farcical to the highly serious, from John Abdy's rheumatism, to Mr. Cole's biliousness, to the death of Mrs. Churchill. Mr. Woodhouse's endless fussing is comic, as hypochondria often is; yet ill-health is obviously a condition to be taken seriously, to awaken sympathy and help. One way characters are built up is by the manner in which they react to illness in others - mending Mrs. Bates' spectacles or reassuring Mr. Woodhouse. The good characters realize they have a duty to comfort the fatherless, the widows, and the afflicted.

The episode of the argument about doctors and health resorts between Mr. Woodhouse and his daughter develops into high and illuminating comedy. These are compulsive subjects to them both, and they drift towards a collision course in spite of all efforts to divert them. The scene itself is not very important; one of the reasons why it is comic is that such a trivial subject is given an emphasis out of all proportion to its essential nature. But by the end of the scene we have a much clearer idea than before of the goodness of Mr. Knightley and Emma. We can see something of the difficulties which Emma has in the day-to-day conduct of her life with her father. Isabella, who has escaped to London, can afford to hold her own opinions: Emma, confronted with continuous and relentless demands, has to practise a self-denial which requires her to put her father's comfort before her own, agreeing with him, soothing him, and sheltering him from ideas which would be likely to discompose him. Her success in this is remarkable; her patience monumental.

The same kind of obsession with health matters creates a similar sort of comic scene in connection with the dinner-party visit to Randalls in a snowstorm. Harriet has a sore throat and a fever, and Emma realizes that Mr. Elton is more worried about her catching the infection than about Harriet herself. The conclusion is the proposal, and Emma is undeceived about Mr. Elton. Scott, in his review of *Emma*, pointed out Jane Austen's skill in the use of trivialities; on several occasions in the novels, the plot is forwarded by a cold, a sore throat, a sprained ankle, or some other minor affliction.

The next incident in the plot of *Emma* is the arrival of Jane Fairfax, due to a bad cold. The Bates and Jane Fairfax become another centre which tests the reactions of the people associated with them. When Emma calls on them, her casual approach is indicated by the fact that Mrs. Bates cannot hear her, although Jane Fairfax can make her grandmother hear: "Jane speaks so distinct!" One of the major themes of the novel is the need for Emma to learn to treat the Bates with the same patience, tolerance and respect that she shows to her father.

Jane's health is the object of continual solicitude: Frank Churchill deplores her lack of complexion, Mr. Knightley sends his carriage to take them to the Coles', and he stops Jane singing too long. Ironically, he thus separates Jane from the man she loves, but the reader is meant to see him as essentially thoughtful of others, as contrasted to Frank Churchill, who thinks only of his own pleasure in singing with Jane. Frank's cheerful lack of consideration for others in matters of health is a subtle indication of his character. The reader likes him enough to be glad he marries Jane in the end, and yet we also need to be reminded that he falls far short of Mr. Knightley.



"The little Perrys with a slice of Mrs. Weston's wedding cake..."

Whenever Frank is kind and helpful, he has a personal motive for doing it, and his actions are done with a flourish. When he gets umbrellas for the arrival of the Bates at the Crown, in the hope he can have a minute alone with Jane, Mrs. Elton approves of him - another subtle detail of Jane Austen's malicious irony.

Jane's decline in health, due to the strain of her relationship with Frank, wears her down in the end: "severe headaches, and a nervous fever." This is the serious side of the health motif; the lighter side of the theme is the farcical incident of Harriet saving Mr. Elton's court-plaister.

Mrs. Churchill has been a valuable counterpart to Mr. Woodhouse. She uses her illnesses and nervous crises to thwart Frank every time he wants to live his own life. Mr. Woodhouse is a fusspot about his health fads, but he does not prevent the party at the Coles', the Ball at the Crown, the visits to Randalls and to Donwell, or the trip to Box Hill. In relation to Mrs. Churchill, Mr. Woodhouse is seen as one who could have been much worse.

We must look at Emma in this way as well: she is infuriating in one way, but also good in another way. If her bad side - the spoiled child meddling, matchmaking, and making mistakes - appears at first, the other side later emerges from the serious business of the claims of an ageing father on a daughter's attention, however amusing this may seem. Her treatment of her father is all the more praiseworthy in consideration of the fact that she herself has never suffered any kind of minor ailment or nervous disorder.

The last part of the novel carries on the health theme at a simpler and more facetious level. Mr. Knightley has ridden home from London through the rain. While Mr. Woodhouse is alarmed and anxious, worrying about his health to Mr. Perry, Mr. Knightley is proposing to Emma: "Could [Mr. Woodhouse] have seen the heart, he would have cared little for the lungs."

J.R. Watson considers that Jane Austen makes good use of the theme of health. "It can be funny, yet it also carries important moral distinctions which concern human behaviour." With good examples from the novel, he makes his points clearly and thoughtfully, showing how Jane Austen has used her theme of illness and health to further the reader's knowledge of the characters and to carry on the progress of the plot.

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### **The Routine Social Violence of the Day.**

"Jane Austen . . . is certainly determined to avoid the squalors of contemporary life. . . . She is more reticent on 'such odious subjects' than almost any other writer of her period - Lydia's news in *Pride and Prejudice* that 'a private had been flogged' is almost the only reference I can find to the more brutal aspects of 18<sup>th</sup> century life - which may be one reason why Jane Austen's novels appear so modern in comparison with those of Smollett, for instance, or Fielding, which are definitely dated by their violence. Who would guess while listening to the humane and enlightened talk of Captain Wentworth and Captain Harville and the two Crofts in *Persuasion* that the crews of their ships were sometimes partly, sometimes mainly, recruited by the cudgels of the Press Gang? Who would gather from the harmless sporting activities at Uppercross or Netherfield that poachers caught on those estates were probably transported for life? Who, seeing Mr. Woodhouse's anxiety over the imagined fatigues of his horses, or watching Mrs. Norris alight in all the panoply of conscious virtue to walk up hill and spare 'those noble animals', would realize that at that period cats were skinned alive under the impression that it improved their pelts and that legislation to prevent this atrocity was laughed to scorn in Parliament? - or that cock-fighting and prize-fighting were probably the most popular spectator-sports in 'dear, airy, cheerful, happy-looking Highbury?' " (p.33)

*Talking of Jane Austen: Sheila Kaye-Smith and G.B. Stern (1943).*

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**Regis . . . Regis . . . Regis.**

"In 1789 George III went to Weymouth, where he walked up and down the esplanade addressing surprised passers-by and pronouncing the sands a sight such as he had never so much enjoyed before.

A few days after arriving, he was taken out to sea in a horse-drawn hut: Beale's bathing-machine. He wore a voluminous gown of blue serge, and was attended by bathing women who wore purple sashes inscribed GOD SAVE THE KING in gold. As he stepped into the water, the town band, accommodated in a second bathing machine, struck up the national anthem.

Weymouth, still an invigorating traditional seaside resort and a ferry departure point for the Channel Isles, was an appropriate place for the English king to spend his first seaside holiday. Wyke Regis lay to the west of Weymouth harbour, and Melcombe Regis to the east. The latter was granted a royal charter by Edward I in 1283. Bere Regis, translated as King's Oak in the Blue Guide and into Kingsbere by novelist Thomas Hardy, is a royal forest where King John is said to have owned a castle. Salcombe Regis took the title, perhaps, for no other reason than to distinguish it from the sailing resort.

'A very strange stranger it must be, who does not see charm in the immediate environs of Lyme to make him wish to know it better,' said Jane Austen. 'The bathing was so delightful this morning,' she wrote to her sister, 'that I believe I stayed in rather too long.'

In 1284, Edward I gave Lyme its royal charter, granting to it 'the liberties of a haven and borough,' and on his second marriage, to Princess Margaret, Edward gave her a dowry of the Manor of Lyme, which automatically became a royal borough with the right to add Regis to its name . . .

Today many 'regis' towns are not more than half-forgotten villages: Beeston Regis in Norfolk, Letcombe Regis in Berkshire, Rowley Regis in Staffordshire, and Brompton Regis in Somerset. Houghton Regis in Bedfordshire was used by Bunyan as a model for his House Beautiful, and the Old Court House still stands at Milton Regis in Sittingbourne. Just outside modern Milton Keynes is Grafton Regis, where Edward IV married Elizabeth Woodville.

The most recent of the regis towns is Bognor: in 1928 King George V nearly died of pleurisy and a resultant operation. His convalescence was just outside Bognor. The next year, when he was well again, he granted Bognor the right to be known as Bognor Regis."

"We like to be beside the seaside." Carolyn Scott. *In Britain*, July 1980.

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"I have always admired Mr. Knightley  
For conducting himself so uprightly.  
Now with Emma beside him  
To love and to guide him,  
He might **even** turn out rather sprightly."  
Norah Morrow.

"There once was a lady called Anne  
Whose love was postponed for a span;  
She rescued her friend  
And when it came to the end  
Her love was returned by her man".  
Marg Savery.

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## The Steeles and the Selbys.

In an old copy of the *Times Literary Supplement* [Sept.10, 1964], I found a Letter to the Editor from E.E.Duncan-Jones, University of Birmingham, which discussed the similarities of these two pairs of sisters, and suggested that Jane Austen took her ideas of the Steele sisters from Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*. Duncan-Jones wrote:

"No one can forget the sisters Lucy and Nancy Steele in *Sense and Sensibility*. A devoted reader of *Sir Charles Grandison* will remember the sisters Lucy and Nancy Selby, the heroine's cousins and correspondents, in that novel. Jane Austen was such a devoted reader, according to her nephew, J.E.Austen-Leigh (*Memoir of Jane Austen*): Jane Austen 'remembered every circumstance related' and 'particularly dwelt on what was said and done in the cedar-parlour at Selby House.'

Her interest in the minor figures of the book included even Lucy and Nancy's unimportant brother. (*Letters of Jane Austen*. P.140). She must have known that she was calling the Steele girls after the Selbys; investigation of the likenesses between the two pairs suggest that the Steeles, though they have most thoroughly outgrown their origins, began as caricatures of the Selbys. Both Steeles and Selbys come into the story as cousins of the leading character (Mrs. Jennings, Miss Byron). Neither is shown with parents, both have uncles (Mr. Pratt, Mr. Selby) with whom they stay. The Lucies are prettier, sharper-witted and altogether more important than the Nancies; they make good matches, the Nancies are less marriageable. It is a matter for surprise when Nancy Selby is at last not without a 'humble servant.' (*Grandison* VII IV). Nancy Steele had her hopes of the doctor, though it is known that she never caught him. The Steeles are accomplished toadies; the Selbys pay studied compliments to their social superiors (e.g. *Grandison* VII I). Lucy Selby is a great letter-writer; Lucy Steele's style of letter-writing is shown to us, though admired only by Mrs. Jennings.

Although Richardson approved of his Lucy and Nancy, and thought them 'well acquainted with propriety', a good deal of what they say and write would hardly satisfy Jane Austen's more exacting notions of what was amiable and refined. Much as she and Cassandra delighted in Richardson's creations, it is likely that they often saw them in another light than what Richardson intended; and so it was with Lucy and Nancy Selby.

A hint of the Steeles' origin as a private joke for readers of *Sir Charles Grandison* remains perhaps in *Sense and Sensibility* (VIII Ch.14), where Jane Austen endows them with 'friends' of the name of 'Richardson'. It may be significant that we hear of these at the moment when Nancy Steele is outraging Elinor's nice sense of honour by repeating a conversation between Lucy and Edward heard by 'listening at the door'. Nancy retorts that Lucy has 'never made any bones of hiding in a closet or behind a chimney-board' in order to learn secrets. In Jane Austen's novels only such characters as the Steeles spy and peer. A heroine of Richardson's, even in *High Life*, can spy through a keyhole on a misbehaving maid and not incur her author's disapproval."

-- It makes me want to re-read *Sir Charles Grandison*, and think about these two pairs of sisters.



"Read in order to live."      Gustave Flaubert. (1857)

"The misery of having no time to read a thousand glorious books."      George Gissing (1857-1903).

"Curiously enough, one cannot *read* a book: one can only reread it. A good reader, a major reader, an active and creative reader, is a rereader."

*Lectures on Literature*: Vladimir Nabokov 1980)

### Medical 'Miracle'.

It was on May 14, in 1796, that Edward Jenner, a doctor, inoculated an eight-year-old boy with a vaccine for smallpox. It was the first safe vaccine ever developed, and it was the first time anyone had successfully prevented the infection of any contagious disease. What made it so remarkable was that it was accomplished before the causes of disease were even understood, decades before anyone even knew about the existence of germs.

Jenner was a country doctor. He studied for a few years in a hospital in London, and learned something about the scientific method. Smallpox at the time was the most devastating disease in the world. It caused boils to break out all over the body, and killed about one in four adults who caught it, and one in every three children. It was so contagious, most people who lived in populous areas caught it at some point in their lives.

There were inoculations for smallpox, but they didn't work very well. People who were inoculated could still pass the disease on to others. Some people who were inoculated developed the disease and died from it. Jenner knew that milkmaids who worked in his area almost never caught smallpox, and he figured that they had caught cowpox from the udders of cows and that this infection somehow helped them develop an immunity to smallpox.

He took some of the fluid from a cowpox sore and injected it into the arm of an eight-year-old boy names James Phipps who developed a slight headache and lost his appetite, but that was all. And six weeks later Jenner inoculated the boy with smallpox, and the boy showed no symptoms. He had developed immunity.

At first the Royal Society of London did not believe Edward Jenner, so he published his ideas about inoculation at his own expense in a book which came out in 1798, and was a huge success. The novelist Jane Austen wrote in one of her letters [Note from Marsha Huff: #27, Le Faye Edition, Nov. 20, 1800] that she had been at a dinner party and everyone was talking about the 'Jenner Pamphlet'.

By 1840, the British Government passed a law providing all infants with free smallpox vaccinations - the first free medical service in the history of the country. And today, so far as we know, smallpox only exists in the freezers of laboratories. The last known natural case occurred in 1977 in Somalia.

(Thanks to Mary Atkins for this article).

"Some of the flower seeds are coming up very well, but your mignonette makes a wretched appearance . . . the whole of the shrubbery border will be very gay with pinks and sweet williams . . . The syringas, too, are coming out." Jane Austen to Cassandra, 29 May 1811.

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