

Jane Austen Society of North America

VANCOUVER REGION - NEWSLETTER NO. TWENTY-ONE - FEBRUARY 1988

ACCIDENTS & ILLNESSES

"It is always best in these cases to have a surgeon's opinion without loss of time". (Sand.)

Two of our members suffered from unfortunate encounters with automobiles in recent months. Fred Braches' cuts and abrasions have healed, he has abandoned his sling, and is back at his usual activities, one of which is providing the labels for all the Canadian mailings. Viviane McCladland is out of the hospital and has "graduated" to a walker. We are glad to hear that they are both convalescing apace, and we wish them well.

The automobile age does not have a monopoly on accidents. Horses and carriages were responsible for many unfortunate incidents. A very dear friend of Jane Austen, Mrs. Lefroy, was killed when she was thrown off her horse; and Jane Cooper Williams, a cousin, was killed when she was thrown from her carriage following a collision with another vehicle.

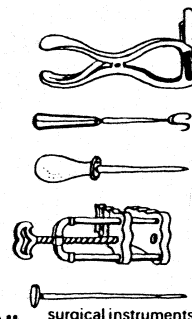
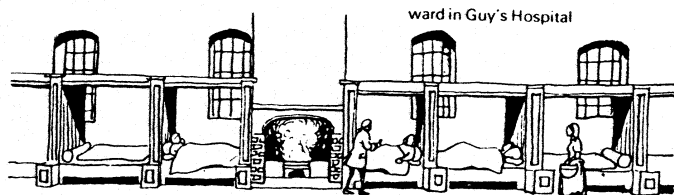
These sad occurrences may have been one of the reasons why Jane Austen did not often use the plot device of carriage accidents. Only in Jane Austen's last book, Sanditon, does a character suffer a carriage accident: the novel begins with a Gentleman and a Lady travelling up a very rough lane; their carriage was overturned, and the Gentleman sprained his foot. This accident led to their acquaintance with Mr. Heywood and his daughter, the heroine of the novel.

Jane Austen also seldom dwells on ill health. The illness of Marianne Dashwood is the only incident where a major character suffers a serious illness. Marianne, already weakened by sorrow, sleepless nights and little appetite, got wet on one of her long solitary walks in the shrubbery, caught a violent cold with a bad cough, sore throat and fever. This worsened over the next few days, and she suffered greatly from pain and delirium, and was near death, before a turning point was reached and she slowly recovered.

Tom Bertram, in Mansfield Park, also caused his family great anxiety. "A neglected fall, and a good deal of drinking, had brought on a fever", and later, "strong hectic symptoms". A comforting fact was that "the family were not consumptive", and careful nursing by his brother Edmund led to his eventual recovery.

Two very bad colds are important incidents in the novels. Jane Bennet,

getting thoroughly soaked (in accordance with her mother's plan), caught a "violent feverish cold" with a painful headache which lasted several days, and provided a valid opportunity for Elizabeth and Darcy to become better acquainted. The illness of Harriet Smith - she was "very feverish and had a bad sore throat...a most severe cold indeed" -



provides Emma with the opposite opportunity: embarrassed by her mistaken ideas about Mr. Elton, Emma is relieved to be able to keep away from Harriet for nearly a week.

Gout is another common affliction, attacking several characters, but which Jane Austen seems inclined to take rather lightly. Mr. Allen goes to Bath "for the benefit of a gouty constitution", and General Tilney is there "to drink the waters", presumably for the same reason. Mr. Norris, Dr. Grant and Admiral Croft are others who had "gouty complaints" and tried Bath for a cure. Mr. Watson suffered from gout, but must also have had a more severe illness, as Jane Austen planned that he would die in a year or two, if she had completed the novel. Mrs. Churchill, also was more dangerously ill than people realized: after years of manipulating her family by her attacks of ill health, she had "a sudden seizure" and "the great Mrs. Churchill was no more".

When it would add nothing to the story, Jane Austen doesn't bother to specify the nature of an illness or cause of death - and the state of medical knowledge at the time was such that in most cases nobody could give a firm diagnosis. Mr. Dashwood, the father of Elinor and Marianne, and his uncle both died "within a year". Emma Watson's uncle and Mr. Norris also died from no specified cause; although one can imagine that Mrs. Norris would have driven her husband mad, that is seldom a cause of death.

Fanny Price and Jane Fairfax are both "sickly" without being really ill. We learn in due course that Jane's problem is what today we would call "stress", brought on by the secret engagement and Frank's lack of understanding. Fanny's debility is more complex - in lots of ways she reminds me of Mary Musgrove, "often a little unwell", with her headache and weariness magnified in her own mind by a lack of attention from others. Mrs. Bennet, so often prostrate with "nerves", is another in this condition, and Mr. Woodhouse is the classic hypochondriac.

Mrs. Smith, Anne Elliot's friend in Persuasion, had a "severe rheumatic fever", which left her crippled and bedridden, but improving in health. Dr. Grant's apoplexy, however, brought on by "three great institutionary dinners in one week", couldn't be cured. There was also no cure for the unfortunate young woman in Colonel Brandon's story, who died of malnutrition, neglect and consumption.

Accidents in the novels are also few and seldom dwelt upon at length. Marianne, running down a hill, fell and sprained her ankle, and was romantically rescued by someone who looked every inch the hero. Jane Fairfax nearly fell from a boat at Weymouth and almost drowned, but she was saved by the quick action of Mr. Dixon, which roused in Emma very improper ideas about them.

Admiral Croft very often overturned his gig and tossed out his wife, but Mrs. Croft made "nothing of it". A foreshadowing of the accident which formed such an important incident in Persuasion was the bad fall of the older Musgrove boy: "His collar-bone was found to be dislocated, and such injury received in the back, as roused the most alarming ideas", but the family was soon "in tolerable ease of mind".

Louisa's fall on the Cobb at Lyme is much more serious. "There was no wound, no blood, no visible bruise; but her eyes were closed, she breathed not, her face was like death". This is strong language for Jane Austen, but by the next page, although the situation is still quite as serious, the delightful irony has returned: "The report of the accident had spread...and many were collected near them...to enjoy the sight of a dead young lady, nay, two dead young ladies, for

it proved twice as fine as the first report". Louisa recovers, as Marianne does, because these novels are comedies, and anguish and pain have no lengthy place in them.

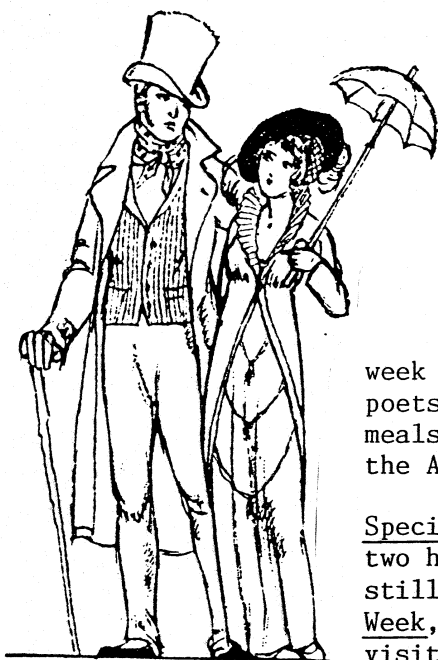
Sanditon is in the same tradition. Although the story opens with a carriage accident, and seems to be about ill health, real and imaginary, the tone is still light and ironic: "Why, what should we do with a Doctor here? It would be only encouraging our Servants and the Poor to fancy themselves ill, if there was a Doctor at hand".

Jane Austen may have used illnesses and accidents to help delineate character or to further the plots of her novels, but she had no intention of wallowing in aches and pains or pathetic descriptions of wasting diseases. She was more concerned with "counteracting the sweets of poetical despondence, and meaning to have spring again".

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COURSES AND STUDY/TOURS

"...determined to enter on a course of serious study" (S&S)



History of Fashion - Ivan Sayers is giving another series of lectures on the development of fashion, with slides, fashion plates and actual costumes. The first session deals with the time of Jane Austen. Vancouver Vocational Institute, 250 W. Pender St., beginning Wed., Feb. 24, 6:30 p.m. \$6.00 per session. Drop-ins welcome.

Oxford & the Lakes Travel Study - although the pre-departure lectures have already started, there are still a few places open on this two-week programme focusing on Jane Austen and the Romantic poets. \$2,880, includes airfare, accommodation, most meals, special tours and lectures. For information, call the Alumni Relations Office, SFU. April 9-23, 1988.

Special Interest & Hobby Holidays in Britain is offering two holidays that may be of interest for members who are still looking for something for this summer. A Jane Austen Week, beginning June 25, is described: "Among the places visited during this week will be Bath, Lyme Regis, Chawton, Steventon and Winchester, to see the houses, churches, streets and scenery familiar to Jane Austen and known to us through her novels and biographies. There will also be time for walks and shopping (both occupations she delighted in) and for informal readings and discussions in the evenings. This is a chance not only to learn more of her works but to live through many of the experiences that inspired her to write". (Full board, £ 214). Around Historic Bath, beginning July 2, is described: "This week is designed to show guests both the city of Bath and its surrounding area. The city itself, famous both for its Roman remains and for its beautiful 18th century architecture, offers much to the visitor. The programme will offer you the opportunity of seeing such places as the Pump Room and the Crescent, and of wandering along the narrow alleyways of the old town. Excursions to Bristol and the South Cotswolds will be

included as well as to Glastonbury, with its legendary Tor, and Wells, famous for its splendid cathedral". (Full board, £194). For information, call me. (988-0479).

Study Jane Austen in Bath - This programme has been arranged for next year, Mar.30 - Apr.3, 1989. Details from Dr. Rowena Fowler, Dept. of Extra-Mural Studies, University of Bristol, Bristol, BS8 1HR, England. (I have sent away for brochures, and will give you details at a later date).

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WHAT'S IN A NAME? - Rebuttal by Keiko Parker.

Elizabeth by any other name is just as bright or vain as Jane Austen would have her.

In response to Dianne Kerr's article on names in Jane Austen's novels [see Newsletter No. 20, November, 1987] - especially the name of Jane - may I venture the opinion that her names do not carry any special meaning and that neither Jane Bennet nor Jane Fairfax, much less Jane Watson, can be said to possess the author's alter ego.

It would be too obvious to use the name Jane even if Jane Austen had wanted all her characteristic traits embodied in the person of either Jane Bennet or Jane Fairfax. I believe that when a writer creates a character who is an extension of himself or herself in a novel, he or she is more likely to choose a name that is very different from his or her own.

Jane Austen was probably much like the best of Elizabeth Bennet - of bright personality, keenness of mind, and endowed with the ability to laugh at herself and others. To those who must connect Jane Austen characters to any names in JA's own life, I should observe that JA used her sister Cassandra's middle name Elizabeth at least three times: as Elizabeth Bennet in P&P, as Elizabeth Elliot in Pers., (definitely not a sympathetic character), and as Elizabeth Watson (a person of pathetic disorganization) - not to mention such minor characters as Elizabeth Brandon in S&S and Elizabeth Martin in Emma.

And so are we to connect names such as Elizabeth or Jane in the JA novels to the real-life JA or Cassandra, or for that matter are we to associate any masculine names such as Henry (Woodhouse, Tilney and Crawford), George (Knightley and Wickham), William (Elliot, Collins and Price), John (Knightley, Thorpe and Willoughby), and Charles (Bingley, Musgrove and Hayter), to George Austen, JA's father and brother, and her brothers Henry, Francis William and Charles John? I doubt that we should attempt any such connections.

And here I come to the very issue I would like to bring up in appreciation of JA's genius - that her skill in character delineation is such that we are able to establish immediately a clear image of her characters. As Janeites we could never confuse:

Elizabeth Bennet and Elizabeth Elliot,
Jane Bennet and Jane Fairfax,
George Knightley and George Wickham,
Charles Musgrove and Charles Hayter (in the same novel, yet! but then they
are cousins and likely named after the same person),
Eleanor Tilney and Elinor Dashwood,
Mary Bennet, Mary Musgrove (née Elliot) and Mary Crawford, or
John Knightley, John Dashwood and John Thorpe.

Need I cite further names? The point is surely that any character in the novel must be clearly established in the reader's mind. I do not think we should read further significance into names beyond the simple one of identification.

There are two more issues to consider. The first is that in the 18th and 19th centuries it was probably not the custom to use the variety of names that we employ in the 20th century. (One recalls the famous composer Johann Sebastian Bach, who had at least three Johanns among his twenty offspring - Johann Gottfried Bernhard, Johann Christoph Friedrich, and Johann Christian. The name Johann sometimes came from the child's Godfather, as well as Bach himself, an obligation one could not neglect in those days.)

This brings us to my next consideration, and it is that JA was somewhat "hampered" by a tradition which prevailed more strongly in her era than in ours. I refer to naming children after one's parents and close relations such as a brother or a sister. This resulted in an element of duplication of names in JA's novels as illustrated in the case of John Knightley's children, Henry, John, Isabella, George and Emma - a microcosm of the Knightley-Woodhouse clan in the novel! In Vol.1, Ch. 9 of Emma, Mr. Woodhouse explains to Harriet thus: "Henry is a fine boy... Henry is the eldest, he was named after me, not after his father. John, the second, is named after his father. Some people are surprised, I believe, that the eldest was not, but Isabella would have him called Henry".

And then see how cleverly JA uses the duplication of names only a few chapters later (V.1, Ch.12). Our heroine, the grown-up Emma, in the half-jesting injunction to her eight-month-old namesake niece tells her: "Little Emma, grow up a better woman than your aunt". It is interesting that in this simple sentence JA reveals to us the better side of Emma - her willingness to do justice to Mr. Knightley after their disagreements over Harriet Smith and Robert Martin - even though she thinks that "As far as good intentions went", they "were both right". Emma knows that she is not perfect, and moreover wants Mr. Knightley to know that she knows. Paragraphs of explanation on the author's part would not have done justice to what Emma felt on this occasion so effectively as this short sentence.

We rejoice in the fact that JA's writing skill was so great that we Janeites are never in danger of confusing Elizabeth Bennet with Elizabeth Elliot nor Jane Bennet with Jane Fairfax - or indeed with Jane Austen.

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QUOTATION OF THE MONTH

"In point of composition...his letter does not seem defective". (P&P)

"I am thinking of starting a new collection, not stamps, or birds' eggs or anything common like that, but a new and original collection - of letters that my guests have written to me on their departure, called by some people 'bread-and-butter letters' and, by the erudite, 'Collinses'. I had tried hard to find out the origin of the latter name and have been told that it is derived from Mr. Collins, in Pride & Prejudice, because that gentleman made a point of writing a letter of thanks immediately after his visit, and also warned his host on departure that he would speedily receive this mark of his gratitude - his host, mark you, not his hostess to whom we moderns address our thank-you letters. When Mr. Collins' epistle arrived it was perhaps a trifle over-done, 'as if he had been a guest for a twelve-month instead of only a few days'. But then Mr. Collins had a flair for flattery, and his expressions of gratitude sometimes made his enemies dub him fulsome".

From - Achachlacher, by Emma Menzies.

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A SMALL CHALLENGE ARISING FROM NORTHANGER ABBEY - Dianne Kerr.

On first reading Northanger Abbey, at the point - "...Catherine was so hopeful a scholar that...she voluntarily rejected the whole city of Bath, as unworthy to make part of a landscape. Delighted with her progress, and fearful of wearying her with too much wisdom at once, Henry suffered the subject to decline..." - I thought to myself: How bizarre! Can this be real? I sense already that Henry Tilney will turn out to be the hero; can heroes be so absurd?

But on second reading, I thought to myself, with much humility: How dull-witted I am! I didn't get it! This is the point at which Henry must be supposed to be thinking to himself: Good Grief! The lovely and charming Miss Morland is indeed tractable and educable - she not only GETS the point, she SITS on it. Hereafter I must moderate my Absolutes with some Relatives.

Which brings up the Challenge: whom is JA really making fun of at this point? She is not really mocking Catherine's ingenuous artlessness (pun appropriate). Is she not really taking something of a poke at Gilpin on the Picturesque?

This puzzles me because it seems that everyone who has ever taken a hand at writing extensively on JA makes certain to mention Gilpin on the Picturesque as one of the powerful formative influences. A mentor whom JA admired.

For instance, my copy of NA is prefaced with a Biographical Notice of the Author (sic), (uncredited, but presumably written by JA's brother Henry), which reads in part: "At a very early age she became enamoured of Gilpin on the Picturesque; and she seldom changed her opinions either on books or men".

And in Persuasions, No.7, Kathleen Glancy observes: "[Catherine's] voluntary rejection...echoes one of the writers on the picturesque, which suggests that she has understood Henry's explanations very well". Glancy's point is that Henry could educate Catherine if he so chose.

Gilpin can be found in the Index of every book on JA. The above examples are sufficient evidence of the seemingly general opinion that JA admired Gilpin. But can this be so? Are we to take at face value Henry's being: "Delighted with her progress, and fearful of wearying her with too much wisdom at once"? If JA admires Gilpin, we are.

Elizabeth Jenkins, in Jane Austen (1938), identifies the man as a Thomas Gilpin who published in 1792 works entitled: Picturesque Beauty, Picturesque Landscaping, and Sketching Landscape. She points out that Gilpin's tenets are favourably presented in S&S. But doesn't Elinor smilingly tell her sister that not everyone shares Marianne's passion for a dirty lane? Does JA really mean us to take Elinor for a "stick-in-the-mud" so to speak? If JA admires Gilpin, she does.

Jenkins also quotes Gilpin: "England...[has] picturesque beauty...[for] the large number of its Gothic ruins..." Do we take JA at face value in the History of England where she credits Henry VIII, as the perpetrator of these, with being: "...of infinite use to the Landscape of England..."? If JA admires Gilpin, we do.

Christopher Gillie, in A Preface to Jane Austen (1974), on the other hand, identifies the man as a William Gilpin, who published, also in 1792, works on picturesque beauty, including one entitled, Three Essays, in which he states that: "Nature is always great in design...but is seldom correct in composition..."

Gillie admittedly has a neat explanation for this, but can we not imagine JA doubling with laughter at the idea of Nature as an "incorrect composer"?

It seems to me that we are NOT to take Henry Tilney for a pompous pedant; NOT to take Elinor Dashwood for an uncultivated philistine; NOT to take Henry VIII for a Landscape Architect.

It seems to me that JA is joshing Gilpin (whichever) at every turn.

Correction or affirmation invited.

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MORE NOTES ON SECRET ENGAGEMENTS - Diana Birchall, JASNA Southwest, California.

"...all the arguers clean missed the vital point! What made the Fairfax/Churchill engagement wrong and the Woodhouse/Knightley engagement not wrong is, perfectly simply, that Frank Churchill, being the ward of the Churchills and owing them his duty and obedience, did not have the right to propose marriage to anyone without consulting them first. Whereas Mr. Knightley, an older man and his own master, with his own fortune, is in an entirely different position: he is under no obligation to consult anyone but himself. It follows, then, that Emma committed no wrongdoing in accepting his perfectly proper proposal, conditional on her father's approval (which they did delay seeking because of Mr. Woodhouse's temperament). But Jane Fairfax accepted an unsanctioned, improper proposal that she knew Frank Churchill had no right to make. He did not even know if he could support her if they married (what if the Churchills cut him off?).

It's not necessary to sift through quotes and arguments. Jane Austen, as always, had a perfectly straightforward system of moral logic. It is merely amusing to note that we are so out of touch with this in the 20th century that it no longer appears perfectly obvious to us at first glance! Now the defense rests..."

[Rebuttal, anyone?]

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AFTER LIGHTS OUT, SMYTHE WOULD
TAP OUT A CHAPTER OF "PRIDE AND
PREJUDICE" IN MORSE CODE FOR
THE LADS IN DORMITORY 'K'....

VANCOUVER CONFERENCE SURPLUS

"Do not we rather surpass your expectations? (Emma)"

The final disposition of the surplus resulting from the Conference in 1986 in Vancouver has now been arranged.

Essay contests have been arranged at both the University of British Columbia and at Simon Fraser University for the best essay on the subject of Jane Austen, her life, works or closely related social history, written by an undergraduate student, with a prize of \$100.00. The English Departments of the universities will arrange to publicize, adjudicate and award the prize for these essays, and our Society will be given a copy of the winning essay. We shall probably ask the student winner to attend one of our meetings and read his or her essay.

The Vancouver Public Library has prepared a list of books which they intend to purchase with our donation. These include editions of JA's works to replace worn copies; critical studies of JA's writings, both for the central library and branches; recent biographies; Large-Print editions; and Audio-Visual material. The books will have a book-plate acknowledging JASNA Vancouver as the donor of each of these new books. Watch for them at your local library or ask to have them sent there.

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A JANE AUSTEN DAY - MARCH 12, 1988

"I had quite depended on meeting you there" (S&S)

Our plans have almost been completed for the "Jane Austen Day" next month. to be held at Brock House, 3875 Point Grey Road, 9:45 to 3:00. Lectures will include: "The Seducers in JA's Novels" by Dr. Christine Liotta; a slide/lecture on the architecture of Bath, by Abraham Rogatnik; "Dress in JA's Time" by Ivan Sayers; "Life in the British Navy During the Napoleonic Wars" (speaker not yet confirmed); and Sea Shanties, sung by Mike Absalom. Lunch, served by the Brock House Restaurant, will be included. Cost: \$25.00 per person. All members and guests welcome. Plan to come and bring a friend. Mark your calendar now.

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"There was a good deal of wet, damp, cheerless weather - there always is in February, you know". But "after rather a long interval" we may find "it cleared; the wind changed into a softer quarter; the clouds were carried off; the sun appeared; it was summer again". (Emma)

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