

# JANE AUSTEN SOCIETY of NORTH AMERICA

## VANCOUVER REGION NEWSLETTER No.34 May 1991

### MR. RUSHWORTH'S DIVORCE - E.Sutherland

*So ended a marriage...*

"Mr. Rushworth had no difficulty in procuring a divorce..." Here Jane Austen is not writing within her own experience, and she passes the situation off as a simple and immediate conclusion. Divorce was possible, to a man in Mr. Rushworth's position, only by a private Act of Parliament (from 1670 to 1857). It was not common, and was a slow, cumbersome and costly procedure, and thus available only to the members of the upper classes.

Divorce law in Western Europe since the Middle Ages had been dependent upon the Roman Catholic view that marriages were indissoluble. Only with the gradual secularization of institutions did obtaining a divorce become possible under certain circumstances.

The only ground for a divorce was adultery, and a successful civil action had to be obtained against the accomplice in adultery. The usual term was "actions for criminal conversation" (commonly abbreviated in gossip letters to "crim.cons"). Since a wife was legally the husband's property, the suit was virtually one of trespass on the part of the wife's lover. The wife had no equivalent property rights in her husband; she had no grounds for a suit against any woman who was his lover.

A successful suit would result in monetary damages awarded to the husband. If the lover's name was unknown, or if he were dead or living beyond the jurisdiction of English law, a prosecution was impossible. The sums usually awarded by the courts between 1770 and 1850 were from £500 to £2000; the more "honour" the husband was deemed to have lost, and the happier the marriage had previously been, the higher the amount. In some cases, when the husband had clearly contributed to the marriage breakdown by neglect or abuse ("stupidity" would not count), damages might be purely nominal. The status and income of the defendant also contributed to the assessing of damages. Since the process was so expensive, a large award for damages, if they could be paid by the defendant, partially offset the cost of the divorce.

A second essential preliminary to a private divorce petition to Parliament was a decree of separation *a mensa et thoro* ("from bed and board") granted by an ecclesiastical court for adultery.

A divorce was even more difficult for a woman to obtain, since the husband had to be proved guilty not just of adultery, but of "aggravated adultery" - including such circumstances as bigamy, incest or sodomy. In the period from 1770 to 1820, only 138 divorces were granted, and only one was obtained by a woman.

Marriage and divorce laws in Scotland were different from those in England. Elopements and subsequent marriages at Gretna Green are well known - Lydia Bennet and Wickham were at first thought to be heading there. But divorces in Scotland were also possible - divorce had been available on the grounds of adultery or desertion since the 16th century, for women as well as men. Most Scottish courts, however, insisted on some sort of Scottish connection - if one or both of the parties had been born or lived in Scotland, or if the adultery had been committed there.

Parliamentary divorces began to increase markedly after about 1770. This increase was widely deplored, and the House of Lords attempted to curtail the numbers by legislating against the remarriage after divorce of an adulterous couple. In some cases the Lords felt that the adulterous wife was rewarded for her misconduct: she got rid of a husband she disliked and was able to marry the man she loved. Bills passed by the Lords in 1770 and 1779 were defeated in the House of Commons, but restrictive clauses were regularly proposed. Some peers, however, argued that if a divorced woman - almost always of the upper classes - was not allowed to remarry, she had no means of supporting herself, having no money and no training for a career.

In 1810, a Standing Order of the House of Lords (not needing the consent of the Commons) required that "future divorce statutes should contain a clause expressly forbidding remarriage of a guilty wife and her accomplice in adultery" [Putting Asunder, Roderick Phillips].

The Rushworth divorce took place before this enactment. Mansfield Park was written in 1811-13, but the events of the story took place a few years before that, probably about 1807-8. Maria Rushworth "was not to be prevailed on to leave Mr. Crawford. She hoped to marry him..." In the case of the wronged husband, "He was released from the engagement to be mortified and unhappy, till some other pretty girl could attract him into matrimony again..."

Jane Austen foresees for Henry Crawford "no small portion of vexation and regret". Like Willoughby, "that he was forever inconsolable - that he fled from society, or contracted an habitual gloom of temper, or died of a broken heart - must not be depended on, for he did neither. He lived to exert, and frequently to enjoy himself".

As for Maria, she "had destroyed her own character" and, in "an establishment being formed" for her and Mrs. Norris, "their tempers became their mutual punishment".

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#### BOOK REVIEW - Barbara Peacock.

##### Mrs. Hurst Dancing and Other Scenes from Regency Life 1812-1823

Watercolours by Diana Sperling, text by Gordon Murray, Forward by Elizabeth Longford.

A friend of mine recently lent me this book which depicts - mostly by means of illustrations - life in Sussex, England. Diana Sperling illustrated this book between the ages of 17 and 20. The drawings are lively and most amusing, and there is a small amount of description. The family owned three hunters and three donkeys, and according to the illustrator someone was always falling off one or the other of these animals. There was also a pack of hounds, so the family must have been quite rich, as in those days it was a considerable expense. In spite of this good social standing, however, it appears that Diana and her sisters did things like papering the rooms (wallpaper had just become available and fashionable), walking out to visit neighbours over muddy fields, carrying their shoes in little bags, and preparing and serving picnics. Their life showed a very free and easy atmosphere, even extending to feeding the dog tidbits at meal times.

Apparently Diana was married at the age of 21, and after that there were no more drawings and paintings!

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CHILDBIRTH AND INFANT MORTALITY - Kathleen Glancy

*... a still-born son...*

In that quotation from Sir Walter Elliot's entry in the Baronetage is the only overt reference Jane Austen makes in her works to the fact that not all babies lived. The ironic reference to Mrs. Morland's failure to die giving birth to Catherine, as the mothers of heroines in Gothic novels usually did, is the sole acknowledgement that not all mothers did either.

We know from the Letters that JA was very well aware of the hazards of pregnancy, however, and when we consider that she was writing for her contemporaries, and could not have foreseen she would be read by people who have grown up in an environment where childbirth is seldom fatal, I think there are a number of points in the family histories in some of the novels which would have said more to a reader in the early 1800s than immediately strikes the modern reader.

Take Emma. What did Mrs. Woodhouse die of? She was still a young woman, clearly. Emma was still very small, and cannot remember her. In addition, there is a 7-year age gap between Isabella and Emma. To the modern reader that says, "spacing the family". I submit that to one of Jane's contemporaries that would have said, "lost several babies between the two surviving ones, and probably did not herself survive her last childbed". Would it be too fanciful to suggest that Mr. Woodhouse's aversion to marriage for any young woman he is fond of springs from a fear of what Kipling calls the almost inevitable consequences of marriage?

Then there was the first Mrs. Weston. She cannot have died in childbirth, as her illness was lingering, but Frank was still only a baby when she died - it could well have been an infection picked up from the unwashed hands of her medical attendant that started her on the road to the grave. No wonder the reference to the second Mrs. Weston being in danger is intended quite seriously. She cannot have been put *in loco parentis* to Mr. Woodhouse's motherless girls if she was a very young girl, and by the time of Emma she must be at least in the very late 30s or early 40s - not the ideal age for a first baby even today, though today an older mother is not likely to die. Mrs. Weston is in very real danger, and not only Mr. Woodhouse is genuinely concerned for her and relieved by her safety.

There is another instance of covert reference to obstetric difficulties - in P&P. There is an 11-year gap between the two surviving children of Lady Anne Darcy, and she too died when her younger child was quite small. It seems probable that that would have said to our 19th century reader, "a lot of miscarriages, which undermined her health". I fix on miscarriages rather than stillbirths or offspring who only lived a short time, because either of the latter would have impinged more strongly on the consciousness of her son, who by his own account thought of himself as an only child for many years. He would quite possibly not have been aware of pregnancies ending in miscarriages.

It is easy to see how a series of raised and dashed hopes could cause parents who were basically good people to spoil rotten the one precious, handsome, healthy, intelligent survivor - especially when he was a male survivor. Lady Anne could at least feel superior to her sister Lady Catherine de Bourgh, whose only success was a weakly female. Given Lady Catherine's good health, I suspect she did not conceive again after Anne, either from a tilted womb, an infection of the Fallopian Tubes courtesy of her doctor, or some other reason like her not liking the experience of having Anne, at either end of it, and banishing Sir Lewis from her bed.

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DARWINS AND WOODHOUSES

Barbara Peacock enjoyed reading Period Piece: A Cambridge Childhood by Gwen Raverat, and sent this excerpt about the Darwin and Wedgwood families - the "Aunt Etty" is Henrietta Darwin (1843-1927), the eldest daughter of Charles Darwin.

Every time I re-read Emma I see more clearly that we must be somehow related to the Knightleys of Donwell Abbey; both dear Mr. Knightley and Mr. John Knightley seem so familiar and cousinly. Surely no one, who had not Darwin or Wedgwood blood in their veins, could be as cross as Mr. John Knightley was, when he had to turn out to dine at the Westons'. "The folly of not allowing people to be comfortable at home! And the folly of people's not staying comfortably at home when they can!" - it might be Uncle Frank himself speaking. But it is obvious, too, that there is some strain of the Woodhouses of Hartfield in us, of Mr. Woodhouse in particular. There was a kind of sympathetic gloating in the Darwin voices, when they said, for instance, to one of us children: "And have you got a bad sore throat, my poor cat?" which filled me with horror and shame. It was exactly the voice in which Mr. Woodhouse must have spoken of "Poor Miss Taylor". But it had one good effect: it quite cured us of enjoying ill health. I denied having a sore throat at all if I possibly could.

I have been told that when Aunt Etty was thirteen the doctor recommended, after she had a "low fever", that she should have breakfast in bed for a time. She never got up to breakfast again in all her life. I admit that I know none of the facts, but I cannot think it good mothering on the part of my grandmother to have allowed a child to slip into such habits.

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WHIP-CRACK AWAY - Kathleen Glancy

"And what is fifty miles of good road? Little more than half a day's journey. Yes, I call it a very easy distance". (Mr. Darcy)

"We expect him tomorrow". (Mrs. Reynolds)

"Why did he thus come a day before he was expected?" (Elizabeth)

Why indeed? There is only one explanation. I'm sure Darcy never drove recklessly, but it rather looks as if he liked to drive fast. In his curricule, probably, if necessary leaving the luggage and the house guests to proceed at a more leisurely pace. He has something of a habit of turning up unexpectedly early - he does it at Ramsgate, too. It is to be hoped Elizabeth is not nervous of being driven at speed - but I suspect she would rather enjoy it.

It does make me wonder what would happen if Darcy was ever in the neighbourhood of Highbury and happened to get into a narrow road behind the Woodhouse coach, whose owner was on one of his infrequent excursions, and whose coachman is forbidden to go above walking pace ever.

I know why Darcy doesn't arrive early at Rosings. He and Colonel Fitzwilliam spent the journey there telling each other it would be rude to arrive early, they really should rest the horses, and oh look, there is a very convenient inn, why don't we stop for some refreshments.

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ARMA VIRUMQUE CANO (with apologies to Virgil) by Dianne Kerr

London's National Portrait Gallery is chronologically arranged, more or less. And in the room containing Cassandra's "portrait" of her sister Jane (1775-1817), we also find the following:

James Watt (1738-1819), inventor of the Condensing Steam Engine  
 Joseph Black (1728-1799), discoverer of Carbon Dioxide  
 Josiah Wedgwood (1730-1795), creator of Queen's and Jasper Wares  
 Sir Humphrey Davy (1778-1829), isolator of seven different Elements  
 Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), discoverer of Oxygen  
 Edward Jenner (1749-1823), inventor of Vaccination against Smallpox  
 Sir William Herschel (1738-1822), astronomer who discovered Uranus in 1781  
 George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824), poet of the inimitable Don Juan  
 William Blake (1757-1827), poet, painter, printer and wood-cutter  
 Joseph Mallord W. Turner (1775-1851), landscape painter  
 John Constable (1776-1837), more of the same  
 William Pitt the Younger (1759-1806), Chancellor of the Exchequer at age 23,  
     Prime Minister at 24, and hailed as the saviour of Europe in 1793 and  
     1798...and who amended the government of Canada by the Constitutional  
     Act of 1791  
 and more, and more.

You can't help thinking, What good fortune all these men enjoy - "attendant lords to swell the scene" in the place where Jane Austen rules as Queen. But another thought intrudes: this room seems in one way quite different from all others in the National Portrait Gallery. These portraits do not hang because their subjects are Henry R., or Elizabeth R., or Charles R.; they are not here simply because their subjects were rich patrons of a particular painter; they are not here simply because they were rich enough to have themselves painted. They all FORCED their way in, by brain-power, just as Austen did. But why so many...crowding the years of the eighteenth century? And in so many fields: Astronomy, Art, History, Prose, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Politics, Medicine, Poetry, Geography, and so on. What can it mean? Dr. Johnson (in his Preface to Shakespeare, 1765) writes that: "Confidence is the common consequence of success." Can confidence be "catching"? Could there have been some sort of creative virus in the eighteenth century air?

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RED OR WHITE - Kathleen Glancy

"Both changed colour, one looked white, the other red", quoted one intended-for-schools publication of Pride and Prejudice among the questions at the back, and went on to ask, "Which turned white, and which red?"

Rather a tough one for the kiddies. It can be deduced from the facts that Darcy turns pale with anger, on Elizabeth's refusal of his first proposal, and blushes red with confusion when they meet at Pemberley. Seeing Wickham, for the first time since Wickham tried to tap him for more money and soon after the aborted elopement, is likelier to have inspired anger than confusion in Darcy.

So Wickham went red. Why, one wonders? Not for shame, as he doesn't seem to know what that is. Not from fear - then he'd have gone white, too. From temper, probably - here he is with a new start and the hope of finding a local heiress and here is Darcy who may thwart him with a timely word of warning --- unless, of course, he got his story in first...

Hmm. I am moved to wonder whether Darcy dropped a word or two, in the strictest confidence and with the utmost discretion, in the ear of Mary King's uncle.

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## HESTER BATEMAN: SILVERSMITH - E.Sutherland

It was not easy, but it was possible, to become a "self-made" man in Jane Austen's time - from obscurity to affluence by one's own efforts. But for a woman to attain a similar success was almost unbelievable.

Hester Bateman, now referred to as "Queen of the Silversmiths", was one such woman. The date of her birth is unknown, she remained illiterate all her life, but at her death she passed on to her son a flourishing, respected business known as the House of Bateman, Silversmiths.



Almost nothing is known of Hester's early life. Parish records give her baptism in March 1709 at St. James, Clerkenwell, the third child of Thomas Needham and his third wife Ann. Hester probably had literally no education; all business papers in her later life were signed simply with a cross, and the added "Hester Bateman - her mark" in another handwriting. She and John Bateman had a son, also John, born in 1730, and were married two years later. In the marriage licence, John Bateman is described as a Gold Chain Maker. In other later documents he is called a Wire Drawer, a Watch Chain Maker, and a Goldsmith. He was never apprenticed to any of these trades, and never belonged to one of the guilds, or City Livery Companies. He no doubt had some training in all these crafts, and made silver articles as an out-worker for master craftsmen. The Goldsmiths' Company - which included silversmiths - jealously guarded their reputation and standards, and no one could set up in business for himself in the City of London except as a licenced Freeman of the Company.

Hester and John had five more children, two daughters and three more sons. By 1740 they had prospered enough to become tenants in a tradesmen's neighbourhood in Cripplegate. A few years later, they moved to St. Luke's parish, Middlesex, just outside the City boundaries. The street they lived on for the rest of Hester's life, Bunhill Row, was one of dignified Georgian houses owned by prosperous tradesmen and craftsmen.

Eventually, workshops were built behind three adjoining houses for the Bateman business. As the sons grew old enough, each was apprenticed and later joined the family business. Hester attended to the household and assisted her husband in his workshop, learning to use his tools.

An article of silver was made by hand-raising: a flat sheet of silver was joined at the edges into a cylinder around a wooden block. With a mallet and hammer, it was molded by beating into the desired shape. Then all the hammer marks had to be smoothed off by further beating until it was perfectly smooth. Finally the surface was burnished with a piece of steel with a wooden handle. The hand-burnishing was usually done by women, and this is no doubt the way Hester first learned the "feel" of the metal.

In 1760, John Bateman died of consumption. In his will he specifically bequeathed all his craftsman's tools to Hester, evidence of his confidence in her skill, and she showed her courage and ability by taking over immediately. She proved John's will the very day of his death - most unusual haste, but necessary for the required money to carry on the business. It was the custom for a widow who had lived with her husband for at least seven years, to be accepted as a craftswoman in her own right, to enable her to carry on her husband's business. In Hester's case this was no mere formality: she knew her craft well. As assistants she had one son, John,

fully trained, another, Peter, in the final stages of his apprenticeship, and an apprentice working out his time. Hester Bateman registered her own mark at Goldsmiths' Hall.

It was both a good time and a bad time to be a silversmith. The governments of both Walpole and Pitt encouraged trade; the increasing prosperity of the middle class led to demands for silver articles formerly reserved for the aristocracy; the fashionable and formal drinking of tea required tea pots, urns, cream jugs and sugar bowls, as well as trays, cutlery and dishes. On the other hand, the lucrative trade of silversmith was over-full of practitioners - there were two others nearby in Bunhill Row. At this time, also, Sheffield Plate had been invented and was becoming popular. (Silver was fused to copper and then rolled into sheets: the finished metal could be worked like silver, could scarcely be distinguished from sterling silver, and yet was comparatively cheap). The greatest disadvantage of all was that Hester was a woman, attempting to control a business when women were generally not accepted in power.

For the first few years after her husband's death, Hester Bateman merely tried to keep the business going, keeping contacts in the trade, and turning out objects commissioned by other silversmiths. Her work, however, of the finest quality, gradually brought her more orders and clients of her own. Her registered punch-mark, the script HB, became well known as a sign of excellent workmanship.



Hester concentrated on fine small domestic pieces for the homes of the prosperous middle classes. The simple delicate beauty of form in the pieces she designed showed her innate sense of good taste, as well as her practicality - the sparing decoration of beading or thread lines, rather than the ornate Baroque of her competitors, enabled her to keep her costs low without forfeiting quality. The tiny bead edge emphasizing the form of most of her pieces is a well recognized characteristic of Bateman silver, giving the articles unstated elegance and delicacy.

In the last two decades of the century, two of Hester's sons died, but two grandsons finished their apprenticeships and joined the firm. In 1790, at the age of 81, Hester retired. She did not live long afterwards, dying suddenly in 1794.

Hester Bateman left a prosperous, well-regulated business to her descendants, who continued to produce the high quality, beautifully designed and crafted articles of Bateman silver. Jane Austen would have known their worth - two elegant teaspoons in the collection at Chawton Cottage have been identified by their marks as Hester Bateman's work.

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#### LIBRARY ADDITIONS

Our Vancouver JASNA library has been able to purchase the following books, part of the donation by Donna Prince, in memory of her cousin Beverley Renton Cross:

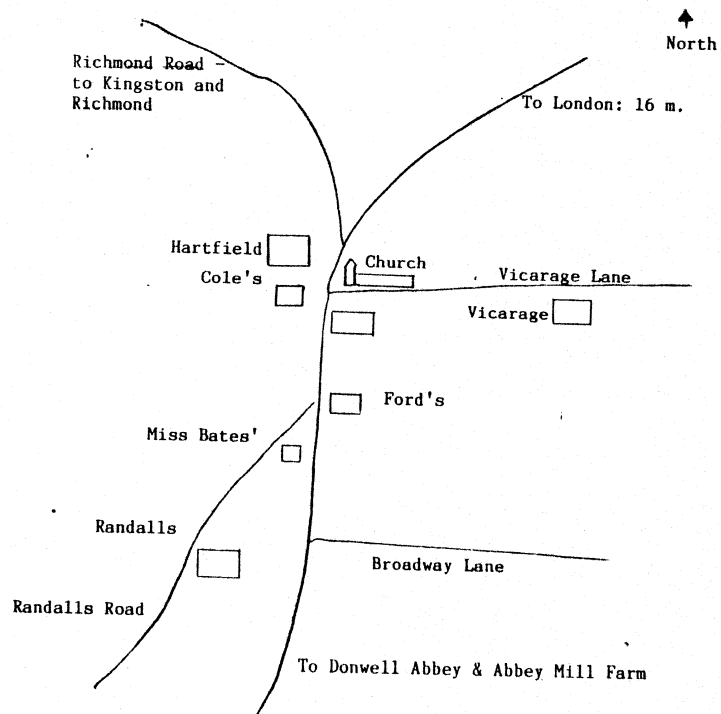
Jane Austen and Her World: Marghanita Laski; A Goodly Heritage: George Tucker; Jane Austen: Elizabeth Jenkins; Speaking of Jane Austen: Sheila Kaye-Smith and G.B.Stern; Jane Austen's England: Maggie Lane; and A Charming Place, Bath in the Life and Times of Jane Austen: Maggie Lane.

If there are any special books you would like to have in the library, please let me know.

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## HIGHBURY

The next time you are reading Emma - in preparation for the Conference in Ottawa - you might like to see if you agree with this map of the village of Highbury.



[Map from the Video: Backgrounds to Jane Austen, by Raymond G. Malbone]

## PROGRAMMES

We now have an active and enthusiastic Programme Committee: Esther Birney, Irene Howard, Margaret Howell and Viviane McClelland. They are busy planning interesting meetings for the Fall season. They have lots of ideas for readings, talks and discussions, but if you would like to make comments or suggestions, please contact one of them.

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## ENTERTAINING AND EDUCATIONAL - by Dianne Kerr

Not to pick a fight. Everyone will have his own favourite(s). Mine personally was the February 23rd reading from Emma by Mavis Jones, Mary Anderson and Margaret Howell. Evidently those three are closet hams: they read like the Barrymores. I can still guffaw thinking of the three of them; but more than that, I actually learned something. I have always sort of sped through that scene between Emma and Harriet wherein the "treasures" are at last opened to view for the putative edification of Miss Woodhouse. It's embarrassing. Couldn't Harriet have had at least ONE thing of some material value in her mementoes box? But as Mary read Harriet, in that whining, childish, pathetically eager falsetto --- it all became clear. That IS the whole point. I had forgotten that when you are 17 you do think: "HE touched the back of my right hand; it was only for a moment, but that is a sacred spot; I'll never wash that hand again." Evidently, I was already too old when I first read Emma. Now that scene makes perfect sense. For putting it into correct perspective, thank you, Readers!

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## THE HOPES OF HOPETOUN - Kathleen Glancy .

*But yet the son was to come...This event had at last been despaired of...*

Hopetoun House is a stately home near the small town of South Queensferry, close to Edinburgh. It is the seat of the Marquess of Linlithgow, whose family name is Hope. The family began their rise to prominence as mere baronets, became Earls of Hopetoun in the reign of Queen Anne, and were only elevated to be Marquesses in this century, after the then Earl had served as Viceroy of India. When I visited Hopetoun I bought the souvenir booklet showing pictures and recounting the history of the place, and was at once struck by two branches of the family tree of the Hopes.

Sir John Hope, the first baronet, an able lawyer who rose to be Lord Advocate of Scotland, was married to a lady called Elizabeth Bennet.

Their descendant, the 3rd Earl, had six daughters. As he had made the mistake of being born into a family who did not become peers until after the Union of the Crowns, this meant he was succeeded by his half-brother. (Older Scottish peerages could be inherited by women; on the Union of the Crowns and the removal of the monarch to normal residence in England, however, all new peers were created in London and were subject to the less liberal English law).

It is very tempting to believe that Jane Austen somehow knew all this. Indeed, there is a very good chance she did know of the 3rd Earl's problem. He was 34 when she was born, his daughters would be her contemporaries, and it would not be wonderful if, when they came to London in succession to be presented at Court, the society pages of the newspapers made some passing mention of the Earl's bevy of daughters and heirlessness. I can see no feasible way in which she would have learned the name of his ancestress, however, and sonlessness was not a problem unique to the Hopes.

It is a curious case of Nature imitating - or in this case preceding, since the first Lady Hope and all six of the 3rd Earl's daughters existed before P&P was written - Art.

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## FORTUNES

In the Diary of Sir Joseph Farington, October 1, 1802:

[The wife of the painter David] *has of her own fortune an Income which is called £1000 a year.*

In Emma (V.II, ch.4):

*The charming Augusta Hawkins...was in possession of an independent fortune, of so many thousands as would always be called ten.*

I wonder if this was a common expression of the time.

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STRAWBERRY PICNIC - at Donwell Abbey, when the local strawberries are ripe.

YOU WILL BE INVITED

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(This review has been excerpted from Letter From Chicago, the JASNA ILLINOIS Newsletter)

On first reflection, one might not see very much relation between the works of Jane Austen and the great mystery writer Dorothy L. Sayers, apart from the fact that both were English female authors who wittily described an ordered world, now vanished. Catherine Kenney's thoughtful study of Sayers' work, The Remarkable Case of Dorothy L. Sayers, is of peculiar interest to Janeites because she establishes the parallels and similarities between Sayers and Austen in a most persuasive way. It is a special luxury to those familiar with Austen's works, to find so many references that hold meaning for us: Kenney inhabits our world, so to speak. She believes that Sayers worked "in the tradition of the 18th and 19th century English novels", and that Jane Austen is "the English novelist whose sensibility seems closest to (Sayers') own." Sayers was not merely a mystery story writer, practitioner of a lowly sub-genre, but a great novelist in her own right....

Austen's wit is revived in Sayers, who rejoiced in being able "to view the whole world mirthfully." (How like Elizabeth Bennet, 'Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies do divert me, I own...'). Kenney believes that Sayers' "deft manipulation of dialogue recalls the repartee in Congreve, Austen and Wilde." Her books qualify as comedies of manners, but she lived in the world more than Austen did. One of the first women awarded degrees by Oxford, in the period between the two world wars. she worked in an advertising agency, taught in Paris, knew the publishing world and (unlike Jane Austen) had love affairs, gave birth to an illegitimate child, and was married. Kenney remarks that, "in a nation poised on the point of rending social change, Sayers gathers all England together for one long, last family portrait." And, "There is about these books the illusion of an unspoiled Eden, an evocation of the pastoral Albion of history and legend." The same might be said of Austen's books.

Putting Sayers into an Austenian frame of reference does not begin to suggest all that Kenney has done in this erudite and entertaining study, but it does make The Remarkable Case of Dorothy L. Sayers a particularly rewarding pleasure, rich in meaning for Janeites.

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AGONY COLUMN: LOST - One LADY - by Dianne Kerr.

Anthologies of English Literature published on this continent in the early 1940s and 1950s all have this same thing to say about William Cowper: "...he began The Task at the suggestion of a friend, Lady Austen, who knew that he would be less melancholy if he engaged in some regular work. So she gave him his task: to write a poem about a parlor sofa..." (The phrasing is so uniform, that one must suspect one source, from which all the rest uncritically copied). None tells who Lady Austen was. Do any of our readers know?

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This Newsletter, the publication of the Vancouver Region of the Jane Austen Society of North America, comes out four times a year: February, May, August and November. All submissions on the subject of Jane Austen, her life, her works and her times, are welcome. Mail to the Editor: Eileen Sutherland, 4169 Lions Ave., North Vancouver, B.C. V7R 3S2.