

JANE AUSTEN

(*At Chawton and Winchester*).

By the Editor.

CHAWTON lies little more than a mile beyond Alton. Though so near a town, it is a rural retired village; even thatch hangs low over window and door, and roses and jessamine cover the cottage walls.

Where is "The Cottage" where the Austen's lived? Almost any house we have passed is inviting enough, but we go on until we come to the last, and, at a first glance, the least attractive dwelling in the whole village. A second view is reassuring. There are out-buildings to the right, and what may well have been pleasant gardens behind.

This is the house which Mr. Knight, Jane Austen's second brother, fitted up for his mother and sisters when he came into possession of Chawton Park, sparing no pains to make it a suitable residence for the ladies.

Quite the brightest picture we have of family life in the cottage is of that winter's evening, in 1813, when *Pride and Prejudice* came down from the publishers, and the ladies "set-at-it," the mother being reader, and a visitor who was not in the secret playing impartial critic. Cassandra Austen was not there, to which fact we owe the letter which tells the news:—

"I hope ... my dear Cassandra, that you will be ready to hear from me again on Sunday, for I feel that I must write to you to-day. I want to tell you that I have got my own darling child from London. ... Miss B. dined with us on the very day of the book's coming, and in the evening we fairly set at it, and read half the first Vol., when, prefacing that, having intelligence from Henry that such a work would soon appear, we had desired him to send it whenever it came out, and I believe it passed with her unsuspected. She was amused, poor soul! *That* she could not help, you know, with two such people to lead the way, but she really does seem to admire Elizabeth. I must confess that I think her as delightful a
[p 927]

creature as ever appeared in print, and how I shall ever be able to tolerate those who do not like *her* at least, I do not know."

Again, to Cassandra, a week later:—

"Our second evening's reading to Miss B. had not pleased me so well, but I believe something must be attributed to my mother's too rapid way of getting on: though she perfectly understands the characters herself, she cannot speak as they ought. Upon the whole, however, I am quite vain enough and well satisfied enough."

Here is a delicious picture,—the mother reading away too eagerly to do justice to the dialogue, though she "perfectly understands" the characters, and the mingled chagrin and glee with which the author watches her mother's eagerness and half resents her impatience! Then, too, the decorous old lady might well consider that to *talk* the talk of her daughters, people would border too nearly on play-acting to be becoming in her.

From 1809 to 1817, cheery life went on in the cottage, the mother, terse of speech and keen of wit, sitting by in the serenity of cherished age. As for the principal figure, there she sits in the morning sunshine at that little mahogany desk to which the world owes a good deal. Always fastidiously neat in her person, her contemporaries thought her a little old-fashioned, both she and her sister taking to caps before either their looks or their years demanded that

ensign of middle life. But if Jane Austen looked at all as her sister's sketch exhibits her, the little quaintnesses she indulged in must have been bewitching. What could be more charming than the coquettish modest little cap whose border meets the band that confines her brown hair, leaving a few natural curls to stray over the full ample forehead? We notice the delicately pencilled brows, and the "mild eyes,"—large, well-set hazel eyes, the well-cut nose, the sensitive, reflective mouth, and the shapely head carried on that beautiful pillar of a throat with the soft muslin which covers her bosom gathered about it in a frill! Yet, attractive as she was, Jane Austen was not a beauty; and, of the two, her sister was considered the more regularly handsome; but Jane Austen was tall and slender, light of step, and sweet of voice, a winning woman who drew the children about her by the magic of her love.

[p 928]

Meanwhile, there she sits, scribbling away in the clear open characters proper to a candid nature, on small sheets of paper which may be whipped out of sight under the blotting paper should a visitor, or even a servant enter the room, for her writing was kept an open secret. The whole of her literary work saw the light at Chawton; and though *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, were written at Steventon, it was at The Cottage that the MSS. were revised and the works seen through the press. How keen the whole family, the Austens and the Knights, were about a new book of "Jane's" it is easy to imagine, and how the author enjoyed the family praise and laughed gaily at her own "vanity."

But she amazes Sir Walter Scott: "The big Bow-Wow strain I can do myself like any now going; but the exquisite touch which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting from the truth of the description and the sentiment is denied to me." She did not live to garner this whole sheaf of generous praise; but every now and then, nephew or brothers would carry to The Cottage an exquisite bit of *appreciative* commendation, picked up in the big world; the Press too, though slow to find her out, did not stint its praises, and at last came a notice in the *Quarterly Review*, from the pen of Whately, so discriminating and at the same time so warmly eulogistic that scarcely a merit was left for future critics to discern. But this, like Sir Walter's praise came too late to raise a flutter of gladness in The Cottage. A little praise, a little approval, however, went a long way with this simple, sunny nature, and, no doubt, many a burst of merry raillery at her own "vanity" amused the affectionate hearts that had been gladdened by hearing her praises.

We know all about the reading of *Pride and Prejudice*, and upon four such great occasions The Cottage was a scene of glee, Cassandra, we will hope, assisting at the other three. But only four times was The Cottage *en fête* with the arrival of the new books from the publishers. *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* were not brought out until after the author's death, and these, did Cassandra Austen hide away, each as it came, because the sight of a new book of Jane's would be too much

[p 929]

for her mother, and read it furtively in the bedroom the sisters had shared, her sobs most uncontrollable over the drollest bits!

In 1817, family troubles fell on the household; whatever these were, they seem to have taken most hold upon Jane, the sunniest, most sympathetic of them all; and she, hitherto so full of gay vigour, began to lie about upon chairs. By and by, the sisters went to Winchester, and the mother sat alone and waited. There was a Mr. Lyford there, a medical man of reputation, who

would, surely, be able to do something for her, so Jane was persuaded to put herself under his care.

“Our lodgings are very comfortable,” she writes to her nephew “E”: “we have a neat little drawing-room with a bow-window overlooking Dr. Gabell’s garden.” Friends were very kind; Mr. Lyford was encouraging; and the May of 1817 wore on, and the June.

On the 27th of May, she writes to her “dearest E.” cheery words in a feeble hand: “Mr. Lyford says he will cure me, and if he fails, I shall draw up a memorial and lay it before the Dean and Chapter, and have no doubt of redress from that pious, learned and disinterested body.” Poor little joke! hardly to be read presently for tears.

The nursing was shared by the Steventon sister-in-law, the mother of her “dearest E.” Two of the brothers, clergymen, were at hand to minister to her. The brothers and their wives, the nephews and nieces, came and went with heavy hearts; they were all so proud of her, so adoringly fond of her! Her sweetness of temper never failed; she is grateful for every small service, watchful and considerate for her nurses, when a feeble flutter of strength allows, playful to the last. Kept in the peace of God, she comes to want “nothing but death.” These were her last words; and, in the morning of July 18th, she died. On the 24th, she was buried in Winchester Cathedral. [sic] in a spot almost opposite to the tomb of William of Wykeham, [sic] She was not old, only forty-two; still a young woman in her looks and in her sweet gaiety of heart; and life was so full of promise and interest to her; and of the present joy of great family love!

Cassandra, her truly widowed sister, returned to The Cottage where the light was gone out, and to the mother, waiting, with the patience of the old. Her time should have come before

[p 930]

Jane’s; she was already seventy-eight, but the Leighs were a long-lived family, and she lingered on for ten more years. Sons and daughters and a troop of grand-children gathered round her, but the last strong link to life was broken when Jane went to her rest. Continual pain was borne during the last years with “characteristic cheerfulness.” But living was a weariness, and she was heard to say, “I almost think, sometimes, that God Almighty has forgotten me; but I dare say He will come for me in His own good time.” She died in 1827, in her eighty-eighth year.

In a half-hidden corner of the churchyard—two minutes’ walk from The Cottage, and within the enclosures of the House,—are two weather-stained headstones, standing side by side. The first is to the memory of Cassandra Austen, who died in 1827, aged 87 years: the second, to that of Cassandra Elizabeth Austen, who died in 1845, aged 72 years. Think of the second Cassandra living on in The Cottage for nearly a score of years, bereft of the bright complement to her own life and of the pious charge of her mother! The beautiful elder sister, who attracted to herself the devoted love of the bright little girl, three years her junior, who had a story of a lover who went to the West Indies and died, instead of coming home with provision to marry upon; but whose life-long lover was the sweet sister who surrounded her to the last with deference and romantic interest,—think of her, a solitary woman of threescore and ten, living in the old haunts, cherishing the old, uninterrupted love which bound her to her gifted sisters!

But we are contemplating the end while The Cottage is yet astir. The ladies were diligent needlewomen; sewed for themselves and for the poor folk of the parish, and, we may suppose,

for the nephews and nieces who came so fast that their mothers could not keep pace with them in the matter of clothing; shirts were *made* not bought in those days, and there were no sewing machines. What “stitcheries” there would be at The Cottage when nephews and nieces, home for the holidays, crowded in, and the brothers hung about the ladies’ chairs, making themselves useful, and quips and cranks and impromptu nonsense verses went round. A never-ending fairy tale, begun for the children but just as delightful to their elders, whiled away the short winter’s afternoon.

[p 931]

Miss Austen worked beautifully and spent much time in sewing, and, says her nephew, “some of her merriest talk was over clothes which she and her companions were making.” She excelled indeed in every kind of handiwork she attempted; and, in the evenings, when music and games took the place of work, “none of us could throw spilikins in so perfect a circle, or take them off with so steady a hand,” and her performances with the cup and ball were marvellous. The one used at Chawton was an easy one, and she has been known to catch it on the point a hundred times in succession till her hand was weary. Who does not see the scene? The eager glee of the little nieces who glory in their Aunt, and from the noisier boys, “Ninety-seven! Ninety-eight! Ninety-nine! Well done, Aunt Jane! Keep it up! Keep it up!”

It is noteworthy how the effort after perfection appears in whatever Jane Austen attempts, in the purity and finish of her literary style, as in the perfect circle of her spilikins, and her dainty stitching.

Let us try to picture The Cottage as it was a hundred years ago. We see a pleasant, long, low room with latticed windows looking out over a smooth-shaven lawn (did the gardeners of the House attend to it?), backed by, note of distinction, a *shrubbery!* and the shrubbery walks are by no means to be forgotten in considering the advantages of The Cottage. When Mr. Knight gave this home to his mother, he took much pains to make it a fitting abode for the ladies of his family. He added rooms so that there were always spare bedrooms for nieces and nephews; planted, to screen the house from the road; above all, having much taste and skill in the matter, he devised a shrubbery which should afford the ladies space for sheltered exercise. This shrubbery offers a graceful explanation of a curious circumstance. The reader of *Mansfield Park* is a little bored by references to “shrubberies.” Her uncle sends Fanny Price to cool her red eyes in the sheltered shrubbery walks when she declines her would-be lover. The Grants must needs set up a shrubbery—unheard of piece of ostentation for a parsonage. The Rushforth’s are advised by all means to include a shrubbery in their improvements; the shrubbery at Sotherton comes under notice; and in this same shrubbery Crawford assures his friend that a [p 932]

shrubbery would give the house at Thornton-Lacey an air of much distinction. You are inclined to ask, Why all this glorification of shrubberies? And here is the answer: *Mansfield Park* was the first new work Miss Austen took in hand at Chawton; and the sister choses [sic] this delicate way of letting her brother know that she values this addition to the family comfort which his thoughtful care had contrived. Doubtless, as he had a taste for ornamental gardening, it was the one thing about “The Cottage” in which he took delight. He is to be seen at “The House,” a full length portrait, in a red hunting coat, a handsome, genial, good tempered squire; whom it is easy to imagine chuckling over these by-the-way indications that “Sister Jane” liked that shrubbery at The Cottage!

And what a comfort must it have been to Sister Jane, this sheltered walk which she could pace in all weathers, be it remembered that she had no study, never a den which she could call her own; every page was written in the sitting-room, in the presence of one or all of the ladies of the family; even her bedroom was shared with her sister Cassandra. Is there any doubt at all but that her scenes were laid, her plots contrived, her sprightly conversations rehearsed in these shrubby walks, where we may imagine she took the comfort of telling herself the story out loud, and then ran in to write it all down at that little mahogany desk, one of the most valued of the souvenirs still preserved in the family. Doubtless those straggling laurels heard bit by bit the adventures of Fanny Price, Emma Woodhouse, and Anne Elliott, before ever they were told to other ears, even to those of the sympathizing sister. But, of an evening, when the day's work was done, and the family of "The House" away in Kent, did the two sisters never do themselves up in shawls and stroll arm in arm up and down these quiet walks, Jane retailing her story, and the calmer, more reticent Cassandra—an authority on matters of love—throwing out suggestions which should reduce Miss Austen's well-behaved heroines to even more trim propriety.

It was in the sitting-room that the family life was for the most part carried on; an uninviting room to modern eyes, with high straight-backed arm chairs, but never a lounge, for the Miss Austens were brought up in a school that allowed of

[p 933]

no lounging; provided by nature with a back-bone, what further support could men and women crave, unless, poor souls, they were aged or very ailing! There would be oak corner cupboards with old china, family heirlooms, not treasures picked up at sales. Among the family portraits on the walls would hang Miss Cassandra Austen's drawings, for she was a spirited artist, and to her we owe the best existing portrait of her sister.

A meagre carpet, in keeping with the stiff spare chairs, would add to the propriety of the apartment if not to its comfort. There was a pianoforte, for Jane practised daily, chiefly before breakfast that she might not disturb the rest of the party, and in the evening she would sing, to her own accompaniment simple old songs, the words and airs of which, alike forgotten now, linger in the memory of her nephew with the tones of his aunt's sweet voice.

Then there was a single sofa in the room, a hard angular sofa, softened now to us by a tender memory of Jane Austen. During the last few failing months of her life she would make herself a sort of couch with two or three chairs, and declare that, that suited her better than the sofa which she never used; her preference for the chairs might have passed in the family had it not been for the childish persistence of a little niece, who found out, that, if grandmother thought Aunt Jane wished to rest on the sofa, she would not lie down as much as was good for her; so the aged mother rested as usual and doubtless thought it an odd whim of Jane's to prefer those chairs!

Having thus paid her our respects in due form, we will hazard a closer look at the crisp, neat old lady sitting bolt-upright in the snuggest corner of the sitting-room, happy in a new employment: "My mother is very well, and finds great amusement in glove knitting, and at present wants no other work," writes Jane to her sister Cassandra: but she is not too busy to observe all that goes forward in the room; and now and then her lips unclose to drop a remark of epigrammatic terseness and point. Her sayings are worth saving up in the family: this is one; when, as a child, Cassandra was sent to a boarding school at Reading, it was necessary that Jane

should go too; not that she was old enough to learn much,
[p 934]

but because she would pine without her sister: "If Cassandra were going to have her head cut off, Jane would insist on sharing her fate," said the mother. This, too, is probably hers: "Cassandra has the *merit* of having her temper always under command, but Jane has the *happiness* of a temper that requires no control."

Nothing is told us of the mother's looks, perhaps, because the father, Mr. George Austen, had a reputation in that particular. The "handsome Proctor," he was called during his year of office at Oxford; and at Bath, where he spent the last four years of his life, people would turn to look at the venerable man with "fine features and abundance of snow-white hair." That he came of a notably handsome and distinguished-looking family, portraits on the walls of "The House" testify. But, though the father was a scholar, able to prepare his sons for the University, is it not to the mother (of the family of Leighs of Warwickshire) that we owe Miss Austen? Brains, and the feelings of a gentlewoman, she derived no doubt from both parents; but the "fine observation, grace, delicate wit, pure moral feeling," the nice sense of propriety, what may be called the social rectitude, the humour and the strong common sense which distinguish Miss Austen's productions, are, one cannot help surmising her inheritance as her mother's daughter.

We can be certain only of the piano and the sofa; for the rest, the room must be a "fancy piece"; but such a room in such a house would have been furnished as we describe a hundred years ago, and the Austen ladies were neither luxurious, nor modern, in their fancies. And the ladies themselves—what would not one give to peep in upon them in the midst of their morning employments!

But we are in danger of forgetting those of "The House" in the associations of "The Cottage." True, it was in The Cottage that Miss Austen hived her honey, but had she not gathered it first in the wider field over the way? Always carefully on her guard against what she called "any invasion of the social proprieties," and having too much imagination to make slavish copies of the people she met, there is yet no doubt that in the house of a country gentleman, visited by the "county people" of the neighbourhood she collected much

[p 935]

of her material. "You are now," she writes to a niece who was following suit and writing a novel, "you are now collecting your people delightfully, getting them exactly into such a spot as is the delight of my life. Three or four families in a country village is the very thing to work on." Give her the families of the squire and the parson, one or two visitors, and a neighbouring family or two within a drive, and Miss Austen will carry you through three volumes of never-flagging interest and amusement. This is the sort of *set* that she lived amongst every day of her life; she could describe their homes and their habits, interests, manners, subjects of conversation. She knew just the sort of excrescences that grow out of a life where there is little rubbing down; but she does not exaggerate; you rarely get a caricature, however amusing; the restraints of birth and breeding are present to her people, and you know just how far they will go. Mrs. Norris contrives to be mean, spiteful, selfish, fussy, officious, a tiresome woman, to the last degree of tiresomeness; and yet, she is a gentlewoman. Talking of gentlewomen, could there be a more charming touch-and-go sketch than that of Mrs. Grant,—simple and unassuming, courteous and kindly, attentive to the tastes of her *bon vivant* of a husband,

rejoicing in her sister's good looks because she had never been a beauty herself, coming and going in the most natural, easy way, and carrying about with her everywhere an atmosphere of tact and good breeding!

Miss Austen may give you a gentleman a little prosy and pedantic, but his gentlemanlike habits and feelings, his power of behaving well in an emergency, fill you with the respect due to such a character in real life. When she comes to paint an English gentleman as he ought to be, and as she knows him very well, though she delights in her people, her Edmund Bertram and her Mr. Knightly, she says, "They are very far from being what I know English gentlemen often are." We have not to inquire far for the "English gentlemen" she has in her mind's eye; her five brothers offered her delightfully varying types, and perhaps it is because she found so much to admire and enjoy in them that we hear of no tenderer tie. The people at her dinner parties talk of improvements on their own or their neighbours' places, of fine timber, *shrubberies*, family livings, cadets in the Navy, chances of promotion, of

[p 936]

their hunters, their wall fruit: how often has Miss Austen shared in such talk?

Her very love for the country is the taste of a person accustomed to luxurious country living, to "turf and shrubs and all the sweets of pleasure grounds." It is of these things she writes, and not, by preference, of the wilder aspects of uncultivated Nature.

"I am so glad to see the evergreens thrive: The evergreen! How beautiful, how wonderful, how welcome the evergreen! When one thinks of it, how astonishing a variety of Nature!" You may go through a whole novel and never find any of her people—so far as country scenes go—outside of their own grounds or those of their neighbours, though, within those pleasant precincts, they talk very prettily about the beauties of Nature.

If by any chance they go further afield, it is as persons seated in a carriage, content to get passing glimpses of the country. Thus, the Mansfield party, on their way to Sotherton, when they gain the summit of a long hill, come upon "a fine burst of country." That is all; but anyone familiar with the neighbourhood of Chawton is pretty sure that the hill must be the Hanger, most likely, that branch of Gilbert White's which is known as the Worldham Hanger, where the road creeps between high banks up the back of a long hill, and then, all at once, the chalk breaks off in a sudden, steep escarpment, and you have before you, indeed, a fine "burst of country," the great basin of the Bagshot Sands, including Woolmer Forest.

When the party reaches Sotherton, on the other hand, the author dallies pleasantly over its "bowling green and terrace," its "turf and shrubs," its "planted wood of about two acres, chiefly of larch and laurel," and a dozen other appurtenances of a country mansion.

It is true that the discriminating love of fine scenery is an acquired taste, and that in Miss Austen's day, this taste was less cultivated than it is with ourselves. Therefore, so far from impugning her likings all this only shows that Miss Austen was a country gentlewoman, accustomed to mix exclusively in the best society of a good neighbourhood, that her tastes, interests, and sympathies were those of the people

[p 937]

she mixed with, and that she describes the life of the English country gentry of her day so inimitably, because it was the life, and the only life, she knew really well.

Her father's position, a rector, and, practically, "squarson" of the neighbouring village of Steventon, assured her position during his lifetime; but it is only as an appendage of Chawton

House that the Cottage came within the pale of county society; and therefore, her close intercourse with the "House" deserves notice, if only as it affects the character of her work.

Chawton is an early Elizabethan house, with weather-worn front of a fine mellow grey. The approach is striking: a straight drive falls from the gate and then rises in a gentle swell to the broad steps of the entrance. Fanny Price is made to say "she can never look at Sotherton" (an Elizabethan house) "without a feeling of respect"; and really fine is the effect of the great square mullioned windows, the projecting bows and gabled roofs of Chawton, with the church rising from a group of magnificent elms, on the right, and, on the left, park-like meadows sprinkled with timber.

Perhaps the reader wonders, as we did, how came the Austens to be connected with Chawton, a property for centuries in the possession of "Knights." But the Knights and the Austens were nearly connected; which accounts for the fact that Jane Austen's second brother, Edward, did not grow up with the rest of the Austen family, having been, as a child, adopted by his cousin, Mr. Knight, of Godmersham Park in Kent, and Chawton House in Hampshire. Eventually, he inherited his cousin's property, taking with it the name of Knight, and his early labour of love, was, as we have seen, to fit The Cottage for the habitation of his mother and sisters.

Jane and this brother, less well-known to her than the others, soon became close allies, his mirth and fun, his genial kindness, and a sweetness of disposition like her own, attracting his sister's love very strongly both to Mr. Knight himself and to his children. Chawton would seem to have been the gathering place for the clan. James, the eldest brother, had already succeeded his father as Rector of Steventon, a family living, which was within an easy drive. He was the father of her "dearest E." who writes the Memoir, and of the two little nieces who followed their aunt about as children, and, as they

[p 938]

grew up only found the more reason for loving her. Then, the brilliant third brother, Henry, the rolling stone of the family, who became a clergyman in middle life, appears to have, at any rate, taken duty at Chawton; and the two sailor-brothers, Charles and Francis—both of whom lived to be Admirals, and, Sir Francis, Senior Admiral of the Fleet—when not upon the high seas, would they not spend somewhat of their time here, amongst their people. By the way, it is interesting to note that the only indirect allusion we get to the Napoleonic wars is in that delightful gathering of sailor-men she gives us, in Milsom Street, and in various lodgings in Bath. (*Mansfield Park*). May we not look for her own sailor brothers among these breezy, simple and accomplished officers?

It is in The House we must lodge the brothers and their wives and children, and there we must picture the family gatherings, and therefore, the most lively interests of Miss Austen's life. And, even when the Knight family were away, would not the Austen ladies make use of the sunny gardens of the House?

Here are wide, undulating lawns, with groups of fine trees, so placed that, for morning sun, and mid-day sun, and the hot glare of the afternoon, there is shade and coolness; and where, no doubt, then as now, the ladies of the family sat and worked, while the gentlemen went and came, or stayed to talk or read. And what talk there must have been on that lawn where Jane Austen was only the *most brilliant!*

We are not surprised to hear that "the family talk had abundance of spirit and vivacity,

and was never troubled by disagreement, even in little matters.”

What a kitchen garden for a Sunday afternoon stroll! We see the sprightly ladies tripping down the broad green alley, carpeted with softest turf, which leads through the whole length of the garden, the gentlemen not too far off to share in the talk. The flower borders of to-day might well have been there a hundred years ago; and, as they walk and talk, one takes a great sunflower by the head and gazes into its brown tubes, and idle fingers “pop” the buds of the fuchsia which grows so freely out of doors here and in Sussex. Behind the flower beds are the espaliers, in the spring a glory of white and pink where the bees go in and out with stir of business and hum of delight. At the top of the long green alley there is a
[p 939]

shaded bench, and there they sit and talk, and look down a pleasant vista arched over here and there and breaking at last into a glorious view of the open. The talk is of how the apples are setting, or how the saucy blackbirds make free with the cherries; then the ladies will see if the peaches are ripening and what show of fruit there is on the Moss-park apricock this year, and the party moves on to the high south wall, and are at last fetched in by the bell for afternoon service; for, then as now, they were a family of reverent observances. They have not far to go, for Chawton is a family living, and the village church stands amid great elms within the home enclosure.

But here there is a change; house and lawn, shrubberies and sweet kitchen garden, the elms and the firs, may very well be as Jane Austen saw them; but the pretty church, with its crocketed pinnacles draped with ivy, is new, the church in which the Austens worshipped having been burnt. The church is new, but not so the churchyard; here is a group of five immemorial elms of great girth and height, and, in their shade, a rustic seat tempting to the meditative mood. Did the sprightly Aunt Jane, adored of whole tribes of nephews and nieces, come here to think the deeper thoughts whose fruit appeared in the sweet unselfishness of her life, and the quietly trustful temper in which she passed away? Not unlikely, for she lived so much amongst her people that she had few opportunities of being alone; but who can doubt that the spiritual life was duly nourished in one who could write under pressure of family troubles, “But I am getting too near complaint; it has been the appointment of God, however secondary causes may have operated.”

Chawton is not large enough to afford the huge state apartments and immense galleries of an Elizabethan mansion; but it is a beautiful home, the more home-like that it is not too magnificent. We picture quaint Austen children of a former generation flitting about the great hall, staircase, and delightful roomy corridor, all of dark oak; nor is it difficult to imagine the Austen elders holding gay talk in the beautiful oak-panelled rooms, hung with family portraits.