

Jane Austen  
**Sense and Sensibility**



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than the fortunes of Jane and Eliza Bennet. That, of the remaining characters, there is certainly none to rival Mr. Bennet, or Lady Catherine de Bourgh, or the ineffable Mr. Collins, of *Pride and Prejudice*, is true; but we confess to a kindness for vulgar matchmaking Mrs. Jennings with her still-room 'parmaceti for an inward bruise' in the shape of a glass of old Constantia; and for the diluted Squire Western, Sir John Middleton, whose horror of being alone carries him to the point of rejoicing in the acquisition of *two* to the population of London. Excellent again are Mr. Palmer and his wife; excellent, in their sordid veracity, the self-seeking figures of the Miss Steeles. But the pearls of the book must be allowed to be that egregious amateur in toothpick-cases, Mr.

Robert Ferrars (with his excursus in chapter xxxvi. on life in a cottage), and the admirably-matched Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood. Miss Austen herself has never done anything better than the inimitable and oft-quoted chapter wherein is debated between the last-named pair the momentous matter of the amount to be devoted to Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters; while the suggestion in chapters xxxiii. and xxxiv. that the owner of Norland was once within some thousands of having to sell out at a loss, deserves to be remembered with that other memorable escape of Sir Roger de Coverley's ancestor, who was only not killed in the civil wars because 'he was sent out of the field upon a private message, the day before the battle of Worcester.'

Of local colouring there is as little in *Sense and Sensibility* as in *Pride and Prejudice*. It is not unlikely that some memories of Steventon may survive in Norland; and it may be noted that there is actually a Barton Place to the north of Exeter, not far from Lord Iddesleigh's well-known seat of Upton Pynes. It is scarcely possible, also, not to believe that, in Mrs. Jennings's description of Delaford—"a nice place, I can tell you; exactly what I call a nice old-fashioned place, full of comforts and conveniences; quite shut in with great garden walls that are covered with the best fruit-trees in the country; and such a mulberry tree in one corner!"—Miss Austen had in mind some real Hampshire or Devonshire country house. In any case, it comes nearer a picture than what we usually

get from her pen. 'Then there is a dovecote, some delightful stew-ponds, and a very pretty canal; and everything, in short, that one could wish for; and, moreover, it is close to the church, and only a quarter of a mile from the turnpike-road, so 'tis never dull, for if you only go and sit up in an old yew arbour behind the house, you may see all the carriages that pass along.' The last lines suggest those quaint 'gazebos' and alcoves, which, in the coaching days, were so often to be found perched at the roadside, where one might sit and watch the Dover or Canterbury stage go whirling by. Of genteel accomplishments there is a touch In the 'landscape in coloured silks' which Charlotte Palmer had worked at school (chap, xxvi.); and of old remedies for the lost art of swooning, in the 'lavender

drops' of chapter xxix. The mention of a dance as a 'little hop' in chapter ix. reads like a premature instance of middle Victorian slang. But nothing is new—even in a novel—and 'hop,' in this sense, is at least as old as *Joseph Andrews*.

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