

Jane Austen, *Emma* (excerpts)

Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.

She was the youngest of the two daughters of a most affectionate, indulgent father; and had, in consequence of her sister's marriage, been mistress of his house from a very early period. Her mother had died too long ago for her to have more than an indistinct remembrance of her caresses; and her place had been supplied by an excellent woman as governess, who had fallen little short of a mother in affection.

Sixteen years had Miss Taylor been in Mr. Woodhouse's family, less as a governess than a friend, very fond of both daughters, but particularly of Emma. Between them it was more the intimacy of sisters. Even before Miss Taylor had ceased to hold the nominal office of governess, the mildness of her temper had hardly allowed her to impose any restraint; and the shadow of authority being now long passed away, they had been living together as friend and friend very mutually attached, and Emma doing just what she liked; highly esteeming Miss Taylor's judgment, but directed chiefly by her own.

The real evils, indeed, of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself; these were the disadvantages which threatened alloy to her many enjoyments. The danger, however, was at present so unperceived, that they did not by any means rank as misfortunes with her.

(1340/1615 n)

Health

Health has a variety of definitions, which have been used for different purposes over time. Health can be promoted by encouraging healthful activities, such as regular physical exercise and adequate sleep, and by reducing or avoiding unhealthful activities or situations, such as smoking or excessive stress.

The meaning of health has evolved over time. Early definitions of health focused on the theme of the body's ability to function; health was seen as a state of normal function that could be disrupted from time to time by disease. Then, in 1948, in a radical departure from previous definitions, the World Health Organization (WHO) proposed a definition that aimed higher, linking health to well-being, in terms of "physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity".

Just as there was a shift from viewing disease as a state to thinking of it as a process, the same shift happened in definitions of health. Again, the WHO played a leading role when it fostered the development of the health promotion movement in the 1980s. This brought in a new conception of health, not as a state, but in dynamic terms of resiliency, in other words, as "a resource for living". In 1984, WHO revised the definition and said that health is "the extent to which an individual or group is able to realize aspirations and satisfy needs and to change or cope with the environment. Health is a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living; it is a positive concept, emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities."

(1319/1583 n)

Los Angeles – city on the brink

Throughout history, humans have willingly set up home in areas of great danger, knowing that from one day to the next, their civilization or their city could be devastated. Atlantis, Minos, Pompeii; history is full of the legends or stories of cities that have perished. Perhaps, one day, Los Angeles will join the list.

A direct hit by the "Big One" is just one of many potential disasters that could befall L.A. If an earthquake or some other event were to cut off the city's water supplies for more than 24 hours, L.A. would begin to disintegrate. Located on and around a hot coastal plain where it does not often rain, L.A. can only survive thanks to vast aqueduct systems that bring in millions of gallons of water a day from hundreds of miles away. A prolonged power failure, or disruption of gasoline supplies, could be just as devastating.

The dry landscape round L.A. is also particularly susceptible to fire, as was demonstrated in recent years, when uncontrollable bush fires destroyed many luxury homes on the outskirts of the city.

Apart from the fact that there is (as yet) no local volcano on the edge of L.A., and that tornadoes are unknown in this part of the U.S.A., the risk of natural disaster is greater in L.A. than any other U.S. city.

San Francisco, devastated by an earthquake in 1906 and seriously rocked in 1989, is just as much at risk from an earthquake as L.A. - though less at risk from other causes.

In both of California's big cities, schools and workplaces are required to have earthquake emergency procedures, designed to minimize loss of life; and all modern buildings must be built according to strict regulations. When the "Big One" comes, it is sure to do a lot of damage; but when will it come? that's a question to which everyone would like to know the answer!

The American way of eating

Americans did not invent "fast food", any more than they invented cars or television; they were just the first to refine it into an art, and spread the art worldwide.

Before Ronald McDonald was even born, the British were into hot fast food, in the form of fish 'n' chips. Precursors of today's drive-thru, sit-down or carry-out burger restaurants and other fast-food outlets, British fish 'n' chip shops had for many years been offering customers a real meal to eat in the street. In the olden days, people ate fish 'n' chips wrapped in old newspaper, and used their fingers to eat them with.

American-style "fast food" took existing models, and refined them, to create a new style of eating adapted to the high-speed mobile life-styles of the modern age.

Even in the 1960's, steak was still an expensive luxury for most people in Europe; but in America it was already an everyday dish. Furthermore, fast food outlets, offering cheap cooked meals, corresponded ideally to the needs of an increasingly mobile and increasingly busy society.

In the sixties, American lifestyles were far ahead of those of most Europeans; but since then, Europe has caught up. Ronald McDonald's Golden Arches have sprung up in and around virtually every big town and city in Europe, and across much of the rest of the world too; and even such typically "American" styles of fast food, such as Tex-Mex, are following in the international traces of the hamburger franchises, thanks to television and the popularity of American youth culture.

Americans can no doubt be forgiven for saying such things as "It's as American as pizza". Even if this other classic dish is of Mediterranean origin, it is America that has spread its popularity around the world.

(1463/1753 n)