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PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

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CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

THE MODERN STUDENT'S LIBRARY

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

BY
JANE AUSTEN

WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY
WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

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INTRODUCTION

My delight in *Pride and Prejudice* is so manifold that I hardly know how to begin telling it, but I am tempted first to try with my wonder at the constantly increasing fame of the author. Yet her fame seems the least thing in our love of her, our joy in her subtle and beautiful and ever adequate art. It is the dignity and sweetness and brightness of her nature which take us most, and our affection grows in honor of her as we think over the modest facts of her gentle life, which can be told in twenty lines, but never can be told often enough in their full significance.

Unless daily sacrifice this side of martyrdom is a fault there is nothing to blame in the story of Jane Austen's life. Our other idols, literary idols, need veils in their temples where we like them to hide certain traits from us while we worship them, or at best receive from us a piety mixed with our pity; we cannot help knowing they were poor things, though divine. If our human frailties, our vices, our foibles, have a consecration in them it does not keep us from being ashamed, or at best, sorry for them. But this altogether admirable woman, good as she was great, we could offer praise without such reserve, when we joined last year in her apotheosis a century after her death. The defects of her qualities are as few as may be in our mortal conditioning, and they have the charm which she knew how to impart to the faults of her most endearing creations. But to talk of her so seems an offence against the restrained art which knew no excess, and it is like rather noisily boasting of the perfectly ascertained loveliness of characters like Anne Elliott, Emma Woodhouse, Fanny Price, Catherine Morland, and above all Elizabeth Bennet, which each in its sort derived from the character of Jane Austen; for whether she knew it or not she always drew from herself, and gave the creatures she loved the loveliness of her own soul.

It seems impossible that she who is still so freshly young and whose fame now fills the world anew was born a hundred and forty years ago. Her father was rector of the livings of Steventon and Dean, which adjoined each other in the County of Hampshire, and it was at Steventon that she came into the world, the fifth of a good many brothers and sisters. There she grew up through a very glad girlhood in a life rounded to its close by the limits of pleasant countryside in Hants and Kent, and such now shrunken social capitals as Bath and Southampton and Winchester, with a few liberations of days and weeks to London for the pictures and fashions of that faded day. Life in that faded day was less provincial in provincial towns than now, and Jane Austen enjoyed it to the limit of her happy temperament. Against the background of their gayeties and the simpler pleasures of the country, and the joys of a family rich in the dreamings and doings of those many brothers and sisters, with herself first in their incentives, she painted her own portrait in the novels she wrote for twenty years and the letters she was always writing to the end. But in her own time, her star shone so dimly in the literary firmament, that only here and there a telescopic eye distinguished it from the nebulous host and such meteoric lustres as are always winking about the heavens of every time. The greatest and kindest of her contemporaries knew her excellence, and Scott's generous praise confessed her gift finer than his own; but criticism grew slowly to the sense of it. Now, indeed, her public is of a consciousness so intensively pervasive that it seems as if the literary world of her day were filled with her alone, as if she had been really sole in it; but that is a very mistaken idea. She was not alone even in her sort and this renders her work not less but more precious. If she was Shakespearean she was like Shakespeare in being first among her peers, or if peers is saying too much for them, then first among her kind, as he (to whom she has been too largely likened) was among his kind. Nobody begins of himself, and as Shakespeare, who was of his time and of such contemporaries as Jonson, Marlowe, Webster, Greene, Beaumont and Fletcher, began from many forgotten dramatists,

Jane Austen was of such contemporaries as Maria Edgeworth, Frances Burney, Miss Ferrier, Richardson, Mrs. Opie, and began of such masters no longer remembered.

Her own past and her present mirror themselves in the glancing facets of her work, and her art was beyond that of all the other writers of English fiction, with a clear light which has steadily glowed for a hundred years. Her style has the rare distinction of absolute prose, which at times has the anxiety of literary decorum and is stiffened by the formality of the eighteenth century ideals, but is often of the simplicity of the best talk, and always of the naturalness which still freshly charms. It is never of poetic quality, it is the elect speech of life expressing itself without pretending to emotions not felt, but finding human nature sufficient for its highest effects. Her prose is never of rhythmical movement; she kept her dancing for the balls she loved; and her joy in human nature seldom went beyond it to the nature outside of it. Now and then, but seldom and very sparingly, she brings outdoors into her page; she mentions a shrubbery or a plantation, or a very dirty road; there is no parade of mountains or clouds, of forests or meadows; even when she has a party of her people go "exploring," she makes no dramatic use of the scenery, and Box Hill does not share in the evolution of character; at the furthest, as with the woods of Pemberley in *Pride and Prejudice*, she permits herself a restrained topographical statement. There is convincing proof that she is no poet in the few lines which have survived from her very indifferent rhyming, and her favorite poet was George Crabbe, who would have cast his fidelity to life in prose if he could, and confided it to verse because he must. Her admiration for his admirable tales in verse did not stop short of a deliciously playful pretence of passion for the poet himself, whom she avowed her purpose of marrying, without asking whether he had a wife or not already.

Playfulness was the note of her most delightful nature, and in her perpetual irony it gives that prime quality of her talent a charm which satire never has. We have only to call it satire in order to feel its difference from all other irony, and to find in it a sort of protesting pity, a sort of latent will-

ingness that the reader shall come to the rescue against it. To be sure, almost every character in her fiction is more or less a fool, as every one is in life, and if there is not a tacit allowance from the author that she shares the universal folly with the reader, there is a sort of flattering concession that they form together something like the only exceptions to the rule. If he will consent to share the folly constantly bathed in the shimmer of that electrical irony, he cannot refuse her delight in the company of the fools who people her page and seldom fail of some appeal in their moments of sense or even nonsense. There are only a few stark-foolish fools, like first of all Mr. Collins, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, and Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*. Mrs. Norris in *Mansfield Park*, John Thorp and General Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*, Sir Walter Elliott and Mrs. Tom Musgrove in *Persuasion*, John Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, Mrs. Elton in *Emma*, and a few besides, are beyond compassion because they are unkind and not because they are foolish. Even Mrs. Bennet has a redeeming pitiableness, even Mr. Collins entreats our tolerance because he is a sheer donkey and born so. Otherwise the fools are lost to mercy because they are not only foolish but cruel, and selfish and stupid and brutal and mean and vulgar. You cannot wish to save them from their folly, you can only desire them more and more abandoned to it. The worst of them are snobs, and snobs are fools for whom there is no redemption. These stand prominently out, and unjustly characterize the company of the pitiable and even lovable fools whom the reader ought to have it on his conscience to distinguish from them. He ought to remember the kindness of Mr. Woodhouse and his thoughtfulness of others, the good-will of Miss Bates in *Emma*, the blandness of Lady Bertran's selfishness in *Mansfield Park*, the romantic wish to love as well as to be loved of Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, the long endeavor of Lady Russell in *Persuasion* to atone for an act of disastrous meddling, and the suffering of Anne Elliott for yielding to her influence, the girlish pure-heartedness of Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*, and others whom my memory fails of. They are wholly or partly foolish, but they are not voluntarily

molestive or entirely ridiculous; they are of that succession of simpletons who abound in Jane Austen's fiction rather more than others' fiction because she could not help seeing them in her world, where still they did not abound more than elsewhere. She had the fatal gift of observation, which is possibly the rarest gift of all, and where once a foible showed under her eye she could not help noting it to her reader; it did not matter that she loved and honored the character where she found it. In *Pride and Prejudice* the divine Elizabeth herself, whom she values beyond any of her creations, has moments of being quite a fool, and Darcy himself, high-minded and pure-minded, generous and magnanimous, as he was, and worthy of such a girl as Elizabeth was at her best, is in certain junctures a preposterous and all but impossible ass, a self-satisfied meddler and cruelly insensible to the suffering he unselfishly inflicts from respectable motives. Probably they were both quite what their author meant them to be, for she did nothing ignorantly, though for what they were she seems to have thought Elizabeth, much as she loved and admired her, more a fool than Darcy, whom she had too much sense herself to love or admire nearly as much. Perhaps she did not really love or admire him at all, though upon asking one of her most devoted readers I found that among even the wisest young people he was held in an impassioned awe.

Jane Austen was not the most satirical of English novelists; Thackeray perhaps was, and in his several disguises was always trying for the reader's recognition in that quality; but she was so entirely the most ironical, that she might be said to have invented (if any one ever invents anything) that attitude. Her irony indeed broke into satire, into bitter sarcasm, toward the cruel and hopeless fools of her story; but for the others it was caressing to open fondness. They became her joke; a joke that they would have entered into themselves, if that could have been; and her tender amusement at their absurdity may well have come from the life of ingrowing family affection which she led among the brothers and sisters, and progressively nephews and nieces, in the home beloved of her beyond all the other world. It is known how

she lived her whole life among them, how she wrote her wonderfully studied literature and evolved the masterpieces of her beautiful art in the midst of them, and yet always knew how to isolate herself in the gayety which must have teased her so to share it.

The home of the Austens, whether in town or country, was a kingdom of the mind, independent when they would of all the other world, but part of it also when they would in the high and harmless things beyond which great capitals have nothing to offer. They were distinctly and in the best sense gentle, tending in the fondness of later times to gentility, but actually without that taint of conscious superiority which is the most perilous infection of gentle-folk. In this kingdom the second of the two sisters was unquestionably sovereign; her thought was always at work, always at play, and that of the others, especially of her older sister, was always at work and at play with her. Indefinitely early she began to write little stories so constantly among the rest that it might almost be said in cooperation with them; and she made little dramas, comedy tending to farce, which they acted together. At last, when her twenty years were ripe, she wrote a novel which her father thought so good that he offered it, with her proud but somewhat timorous consent, to the most respectable publisher he could think of; but, though he assured the publisher of this fact, Mr. Cadell, with the sometime fatuity of his trade, promptly declined it. Without losing the first post he returned the manuscript, and it was not until seven years later that *Pride and Prejudice* was given to the world by another house. In the meantime *Sense and Sensibility*, "By a Lady," had appeared, and when *Pride and Prejudice* followed from whatever obscure press, it consulted the diffidence of the writer by masking as the work of "the Author of *Sense and Sensibility*."

It is not my wish to follow the succession of the other books, of *Northanger Abbey*, of *Emma*, of *Persuasion*, of *Mansfield Park*, because for one thing I am not sure of it, and for another because I am impatient to talk of the best of them, as I think *Pride and Prejudice*. There I am sure the author would be in agreement with me; but then I should not per-

fectly agree with her about the hero and heroine. Elizabeth Bennet one may entirely love, while one may share her own misgivings as to her wisdom and taste at times, though one grows in regard for her good heart and in respect for her sound mind, not steadily but finally. One shares the author's conviction that she is the most adorable character in her fiction; she will not say in all fiction, but the reader need not share her scruple, and may well challenge other readers to name him any heroine equal to her. When I came to read *Pride and Prejudice* the tenth or fifteenth time at the close of 1917 for the purposes of this Introduction, I found it as fresh as when I read it first in 1889, after long shying off from it. I found it as fresh as at any earlier reading, but I had never realized before the open simplicity of the design, and the young artlessness of its art; so young that every now and then the artist lapsed to the artizan, and frankly operated a scheme which hesitated to operate itself. The quality of the different persons is disclosed from the beginning; the chief personages make no secret of their characteristics, and at their first encounter the history of their love might have been as fitly named *Arrogance and Impertinence* as *Pride and Prejudice*. But arrogance was not the keynote of Darcy's character, and impertinence was only the effect of semi-humorous resentment in Elizabeth; if they are both merely nasty at the first they quickly intimate their real natures, and in the retrospect one begins very soon to guess what they really are. Darcy indeed changes radically from his primary mistakenness, but Elizabeth without ceasing to be impertinent becomes more and more witty in the irony which delights from her to the happy close of their often tumultuous story. Her very fault, if gay pertness is a fault in a pretty girl who is also good, is part of her charm, and is immediately useful in helping the author to keep the whole story within the play of her characteristic irony. This sounds the depths as well as lights the surfaces of the drama, which it never allows to become utter tragedy, though it involves the effect of the passions which conduce to tragedy.

Though so many of us know the story, I might safely tell it again in outline without dulling the interest of those

readers whom I am supposed to be making acquainted with it. But I will not take this shabby chance; I will do nothing worse than deal with the points of the story as they have presented themselves in my own latest reading of it, without trying to give the shape or sequence of a review to my essay. Every scene is full of character if not of incident, and the charm of Elizabeth is full of her sweetness and archness as well as her pertness. Every page of what is so distinctively a "novel of manners" testifies to the fidelity and veracity of the author's observation. The snobbishness of the local society whether in its ruder or finer vulgarity, has earlier recognition in Bingley's sister, who is instinctively jealous of Elizabeth from merely seeing her with Darcy, though their acquaintance begins in mutual repulsion. She sits beside Darcy while he writes, and comments on the symmetry and rapidity of his penmanship, for in that period of social formality he writes in the presence of the family with no more consciousness of being in it than a person takes up a book and begins to read, as often happens in the fiction if not the fact of the time. It happens in almost every novel, but I do not remember any other case of a gentleman lying down on a sofa in the drawing-room and going to sleep, outside of *Pride and Prejudice*; though I am sure the thing may have commonly happened, or Jane Austen would not have had Bingley's brother-in-law do it. People talked with a stilted formality and conversation moved with a high literary gait much beyond the imagination of our easy-going day. But even then it does not seem probable that two girls talked together like Elizabeth and her friend Charlotte Lucas, or that Charlotte should express her low views of matrimony so deliberately as she does. This is for the instruction of the reader, as the burlesque priggishness of Elizabeth's sister Mary is too openly for his diversion.

As for the colloquial or rhetorical languaging of the dialogue throughout, I have noticed in my latest reading of the book that the style is natural when the matter in hand requires the expression of no grand emotion, but that then the author mounts her high horse, and advances at the stately pace which the imitators of the great Doctor Johnson had

set. She ceases to be Jane Austen, demure, ironical, natural, and becomes Fanny Burney after Fanny Burney has learned her lesson in the process of becoming Madame d'Arblay. It is a pity, but it cannot be helped; fortunately the impassioned moments, the didactic moments, in *Pride and Prejudice* are few, as they are in Jane Austen's other stories, where they tend to become constantly fewer. We must always remember that "*P. and P.*" as she likes playfully to call it in the letters to her sister Cassandra, was her first book, which she wonderfully wrote in her twentieth year, and that she was then willingly, almost eagerly, subordinate to the literary mastery of the period in the intensive expression of the first-class emotions. People had then forgotten that passion, or impassioned conviction, expressed itself in poetic but almost never rhetorical terms, and authors with the rare gift of either seeing or hearing their fellow-beings, had not yet learned to report their looks or words as they really saw or heard them. Things went on from bad to worse throughout the long Georgian era, till late in the Victorian time, when fiction had escaped the instruction of the prepotent lexicographer (he never spoke as he wrote himself, however) and let its heroes and heroines utter their most intensive feelings as simply as they had felt. Jane Austen perhaps never unlearned the mistaken lesson which she had learned so painfully as well as with so much pains. But I think that in each successive novel her people employ the high horse less and less in their great emotions and keep the levels of life afoot, the levels which she loved beyond any other when she could consent to be herself or let them be themselves. I venture to think that the playful family spirit may have forgotten itself in the office of criticism, which again I fancy it must often have exercised upon the fiction so mostly created in the family midst with the family privacy. But very possibly I am wrong, though I hate to own it, for I should like to believe that the faults of Jane Austen were always somebody else's faults.

The procession of fools in their delightful variety moves from the start of the story, and the types of vulgarity distinguish themselves from one another, with a loudness in

Elizabeth's aunt Mrs. Phillips which is scarcely even surpassed by that of her sister Lydia, though it attests itself supremely only in that moment when she flings up her window and shouts her hospitable good-will to the militia officers and their attendant young ladies in the street. Fool for fool it is hard to choose between Elizabeth's mother who appears in the earliest scene and her cousin Mr. Collins who comes on soon after the rise of the curtain and recurs again and again on the scene almost to the fall of the curtain. An author who was so faithful to nature could not in mere virtue of her youth be less loyal to convention than have a villain begin his machinations at the outset, but it must be owned that Wickham is very artistically handled, and that this admirably managed scoundrel is eclipsed only by the superior fascination of a fool so incomparable as Mr. Collins, whom nobody who ever knew him can have forgotten, any more than he forgot himself; if he has a blemish it is the ideal perfection of his folly, it is his so unfailingly acting in character. I cannot remember any passages of fiction more richly ridiculous than the rise and progress of his passion for Elizabeth springing instantly from his knowledge of her sister's probable engagement, and then instantly turning from her rejection of him to the comfort of her friend Charlotte Lucas's readily responsive affection. The whole thing is unsurpassed if not unparalleled comedy; there is no passage descriptive or expressive of him which fails the reader's just expectation in his spoken or written word. One abandons oneself to a supreme delight in his love-making, his self-appreciation as a clergyman, his veneration for his noble patroness Lady Catherine de Bourgh, and his deference of all his clerical obligations to his duty to her; it is hard to determine whether he is more characteristic as host or guest or in what point he shines most; but if I must choose I think (though I am not sure) that I enjoy him most when, after Lydia's escapade, he writes to condole with her family and after dwelling upon all the calamitous aspects of the affair, and congratulating himself that Elizabeth's opportune rejection of him saved him any share in their sorrow and disgrace, he advises Lydia's father to "console himself

as much as possible, to throw off his unworthy child from his affection forever, and leave her to reap the fruits of her own heinous offence." His counsel to Elizabeth not to accept Darcy because it must be so distasteful to his aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who has designed him for her daughter, is not wanting, and is supported by the fact that her ladyship has personally assured him that she will never give her consent to the match. "I thought it my duty to give the speediest intelligence of this to my cousin that she and her noble admirer may be aware of what they are about, and not run hastily into a marriage which has not been properly sanctioned." At the same time he declares his joy that "Lydia's sad business has been so well hushed up," but censures her father for receiving her and her husband after they have been married. "It was an encouragement to vice; and had I been rector of Longbourn I should very strenuously have opposed it. You ought certainly to forgive them as a Christian, but never to admit them in your sight, or allow them to be mentioned in your hearing."

Whatever the reader may think of the morality of this I am sure he will agree with me that if her family had refused to see Lydia and her husband when she came home to them married after living with him a fortnight unmarried, we should have missed some of the most characteristic traits of her remarkable nature. There is something absolute in her selfish recklessness, her reckless pursuit of her own pleasure without the least regard not only to others but even to herself. She is no fool, at least not as the other fools are; after her one object in getting a husband at any cost is achieved she behaves with unprincipled devotion to the sole motive of her life: to get everything for herself without the least regret for the ways and means. She has a passion for Wickham, but simply because he contributes to her comfort and enables her to realize her quite childish ideal of worldly importance as a married woman. Otherwise she would not have cared to be married to him; she would have gone on living with him, molested by no regret for herself or thought of others. She is a perfectly probable wonder of india-rubbery unmorality which does not seem abnormal and doubt-

less is not. If she could be ascertained scientifically she would clarify one of the darkest problems of social psychology.

Wickham is equally without a flaw in his make-up, and, as a ruthless and reckless liar through his whole life, as a predatory scoundrel in every motive and every action, formed to win the trust of all who meet him and then to betray it on the first occasion without remorse for any ruin that follows, he is not the monster of iniquity which he appears in this statement, but is quite as normally abnormal as Lydia herself, and is surprising in nothing so much as the perfection of his fitness for her companionship. It must be a question with the witness of their lives which will get the better or the worse of the other in the career which is perfectly studied at the outset in all its suggestions of quite self-satisfied evil.

The mind which could imagine his badness and not overdo his nature in its boundless potentialities of mischief divines the fascination he certainly has for Elizabeth Bennet from their earliest meeting up to the time when she reluctantly yields to the proofs given her of his worthlessness, of his native proclivity to falsehood and his unvarying practice of deceit. But she is only one of those who fall a prey to his frank and winning powers of deceiving and betraying. He invites her to the danger of trusting her romantic prejudice against the man who has vexed her by seeming indifferent to her wit, to her steadfast self-respect, to her beauty and to her resentment of his high-principled but not very well reasoned pride which she takes for mere arrogance and insolence. She is so simple-hearted for all her irony, that she has no doubt of his good faith when he begins with her by telling her of his injured past and accusing the man whose whole family he has cruelly betrayed in every circumstance of their love and trust, and made their future kindness impossible. Yet Elizabeth is not in love with Wickham, as we duly learn, though she remains deceived by him until she tries to do herself the greatest possible harm with the man whom she has always, from the hour of her primal repulsion, been drawn to by those elemental forces which result in love and in spite of the centrifugal chances result in the happy marriages of fiction, if not quite so in-

variably of fact. It must be owned that the author does everything that can be done to make Darcy as acceptable to the reader as he becomes to Elizabeth, after she has succeeded in making all her friends believe she hates if not despises him. She accumulates every virtue upon him; there is not a noble or magnanimous action which she does not make him do, and one can well believe that the family circle of those Austens who assisted at his rehabilitation long before it was made public did not share the imaginable severity of her struggles, in rendering him lovable to the reader. It must have been a Titanic struggle with her to render him meek and modest and forgiving, an eater of humble pie in quantity unknown among heroes, and quite unexampled in the lives of the English gentry. He not only comes to the rescue of the loathsome Lydia, but he yields to the rapacity of Wickham in letting him fix the conditions of marrying her, when she is quite willing to remain his mistress, and, so far as we are told, he never tries to beat him down. The author makes him the scapegoat of the situation; she accumulates on him not the sins but the virtues of his tribe; then she drives him not into the wilderness but into paradise. The miracle is in time for Elizabeth, but it is too late for the reader. So it seems to me, but again when I submitted the case to a younger reader, I was told that I was wrong; that Darcy is perfectly adorable and always was, and that if Elizabeth had not been perverted by Wickham and infected with an all but fatal prejudice she would have known it from the start. Perhaps the elderly reader is not given time to recover from the effect of Darcy's arrogant offer of his love to Elizabeth, his acknowledgment of his contempt for her family, his vaunting confession that he broke off the affair between her sister and Bingley, and did whatever else he could do to outrage her self-respect and wound her feelings, before he begins to show himself in a better light; to bring himself by a *tour de force* to buy off Wickham from Lydia's willing dishonor; to feel the goodness and essential refinement of Elizabeth's uncle, who, although he is in trade, is willing to pay Lydia's ransom from his narrow means and at the cost of his own family; to receive him and his

wife when they happen with Elizabeth at his country seat; to bring his sister to call upon her, and try to make them all his guests; to show her every proof of his regret short of words for his past conduct; to throw off his disguise of pride, and reveal himself in his true character of a gentleman by nature as well as birth, kind, considerate, and even meek at every point where you would have him so. All this is supposed to happen, but life is short, especially for elderly readers, and the art of the author is long in bringing her ends about; she brings them about by very rough magic at times. The surrender of Darcy is effected by main force when he first offers himself, and the struggle is not so hard to have him renew his suit. By that time Elizabeth had worked round to him "when he had become unattainable" and they had reached their common conclusion that they had each thrown a pearl away. Still the affair is obviously operated, and if it had not been for Lydia's elopement and the disgrace which Darcy was obliged to share with Elizabeth, I could not accept the conclusion as inevitable. It is to be allowed that they talk reasonably about the event which shocks everybody but Lydia and Wickham, and it is to be realized that no love affair was ever treated in its minor aspects with so much open good sense.

We cannot refuse any means to the end; we can even rejoice in them with the lovers, for how otherwise could we have had that immortal scene with Lady Catherine de Bourgh when she comes to browbeat Elizabeth at the rumor of her engagement to Darcy, and to bid her forbear all thoughts of it, with outrage which scarcely passes that of his first offer to her? It is a scene which in her ladyship's defeat gives the utmost comfort to the younger reader and compensates the suffering sage for all his doubts. If it is not true to fact it is true to life, and it is triumphantly true to Elizabeth and her inborn ability upon occasion to rout Lady Catherine and every like of her. Better yet it clothes her with final authority to make peace between Darcy and his aunt and to urge his forgiveness when marriage has put her in possession of the field. It is the supreme histrionic scene of the story, but there is another scene more consol-

ing to the experienced reader for the sacrifice he is obliged to make in allowing the author to effect the accepted conclusion. Without their engagement and imminent marriage, how could it be that "Elizabeth's spirits soon rising to playfulness again, she wanted Mr. Darcy to account for his having ever fallen in love with her. 'How could you begin?' said she. 'I can comprehend your going on charmingly, when you had once made a beginning, but what could set you off in the first place? . . . My beauty you had early withstood; and as for my manners, my behavior to you was always at least bordering on the uncivil, and I never spoke to you without rather wishing to give you pain than not. Now be sincere; did you admire me for my impertinence? . . . You may as well call it impertinence at once. . . . In spite of the pains you took to disguise yourself your feelings were always noble and just. . . . There, I have saved you the trouble of accounting for it; and really, all things considered, I begin to think it perfectly reasonable. To be sure you knew no actual good of me, but nobody thinks of that when they fall in love.'"

The rapture of true lovers when they are newly betrothed and they seek each other out in the earliest and least stirring of it in their hearts, is of universal experience, but the wonder is not so much that it here seems recognized for the first time in the history of the passion, as that fiction seems never to have recurred to it. But perhaps it has recurred often and often, and it is only the superlative charm of it in this passage that wins us from other knowledge of it. It is the very heart of Elizabeth Bennet which opens itself in the lively episode, that is to say the heart of Jane Austen, who is almost one with her, and was always writing herself into her, in her irony, her playfulness, her final dignity of heart and mind. The denouement is so unhurried that the reader has as much time as he wants for his pleasure in her character after her rejection of Mr. Collins to Charlotte Lucas's precipitate acceptance of him, but he does not at once reconcile himself to Elizabeth's visiting her friend in fulfillment of a rash promise and an obligation of the author's to bring about her second meeting with Darcy, with his offer

to her and her enlightenment with regard to Wickham, and all the events that roughly contribute to smooth the course of their true love. Her language is never more unnaturally rhetorical than when she rejects Darcy, or her behavior more truly natural than when she breaks down and cries as soon as he leaves her. Without this rather forced series of events we should never have had Lady Catherine de Bourgh, so increasingly precious to the end, with her ideal of herself as a great lady empowered to meddle with everybody's affairs and her goodness to her tenants whom, when she found them hungry and unhappy, she "scolded into harmony and plenty." Elizabeth's self-analysis is always good, and it is a just tribute to her character as she reveals it when Darcy tells her of Wickham's attempted elopement with his innocent young sister when he wishes to make her understand perfectly how mistaken she has been. It is the greatest sacrifice of himself that he can offer, and is far beyond his gentlemanly instinct in bringing the young girl to call upon Elizabeth after their accidental meeting at Pemberley. That is something he owes to himself as a gentleman, but the other is something he owes to her. I can scarcely think of any point where she fails in her claim on our affection, our respect, though she is often mistaken and sometimes absurd. It is no wonder that the author loves her, and cannot think of her but as the finest creature in that world of imagination where she mostly had her own being. There are little incidents which are related to her through her kindly charm, as when the children of her Uncle Gardiner wait for her on the stair when she first comes to his house, and her gratitude to him and her aunt for not being as vulgar as Darcy thinks all her kindred is pathetic. Not everything is so simply contrived, but the things that must be inevitably gain worth at her hands from their necessity, like her telling Darcy of Lydia's elopement, and again her owning her knowledge of his goodness in paying Wickham the price of saving her family from the shame that Lydia would never feel.

The goodness of her own nature comes out in all she says and does to her beloved sister Jane, whose goodness shows the dearer in the flickering irony which Elizabeth cannot

spare her. That most lovable creature always reached a merciful conclusion in any question through her angelic reasonableness; the greatest difficulty she seems ever to have had, after being persuaded to think ill of Darcy by Elizabeth, was learning from her to think well enough of him to believe in her love for him. To be sure, she had undergone much in being taught to believe Wickham a villain; and the changes were almost too great for her constant nature. The affection of these sisters is one of the sweetest things in all fiction, and the art, the truth, of the author in always guarding the soul of Jane from insipidity is miraculous. She is allowed to think and say all the good of everybody without lapsing into fatuous optimism or doubting the keener wisdom of Elizabeth, who loves her even beyond their father. He is always Elizabeth's great friend, her good comrade, whose sarcasm saves her from the silliness of her mother and flatters her with a not too great sense of her equality with himself, but whose foibles she recognizes in the terrible hour when she has to confess the truth of Darcy's cruel arraignment of her family for its vulgarity. It is pathetic to have him own that he has not been all a father should to his varied girls, that he owed something more than he has done even for Lydia, and has not at least tried to keep her from being a worse fool than her mother. We never have enough of him; he is not staled by our foreknowledge of how he will take anything about to happen, but is as freshly delightful at the last when he calls Elizabeth to him to know what right Darcy has to ask for her hand, and to confess that he has already granted it, Darcy being the sort of man he would not think of denying anything he asks. Lydia being married and Jane engaged, and Elizabeth given away, it is with her own joy in him that we hear him charge her to send him any other young men who may be wanting to marry Kitty or Mary, for now he is quite at leisure to see them. We really cannot get enough of his saying that of all his sons-in-law Wickham is his favorite or not want him to keep on saying it always.

Of the younger daughters who remain to him the pedantic Mary is too gross and mere a caricature, such as we do not

remember the author otherwise indulging herself in. Mary must remain what she is, but the hope of the petulant Kitty's becoming less silly under the influence of Jane and Elizabeth does not seem unreasonable. There is no such hope for her mother, but we would not have Mrs. Bennet less perfect a fool than she is to the last. What is most wonderful in her is the perennial youthfulness of her folly. She is never any older than the youngest of her daughters, but it is to be owned for her rapture in Lydia's marriage that it is not greater than in that of Jane and of Elizabeth, though in her mounting satisfaction with their successively mounting wealth and station she tries not to distinguish among them. I am not quite sure that I like her being somewhat quelled by Darcy; but it is inevitable, and it is to be considered that she remains equal to her affectionate and familiar delight in Bingley and Jane; and I think it to Bingley's credit that he does not and could not do anything to snub her overwhelming fondness. This, if there were no other proof of his goodness, would be quite enough. Jane is equal to the even greater task of loving his unkind sisters, though I doubt if Elizabeth ever admitted Miss Bingley's overtures to her friendship after she was married to Darcy. I think there must always have been some flashes of her irony to light up the forgiveness of the friend who meant him for herself, and tried for him through every discouragement.

We must take leave of the whole company of comedians who have been kept from that bleakness of tragedy which is not very common off the stage, though the dramatists would like us to think differently, and are so often asking us to share their tears for it. There is trouble enough in real life, but it is mostly annulled by the use of common sense and patience and kindness even by people who have tried to do themselves mischief. Perhaps something like the oversoul helps the good ending and leaves us quite comfortable if not perfectly contented. We might have wished Wickham punished to the limit of his deserts, but we can manage with the quiet scorn Elizabeth makes him feel when she spares him, and it is her sufficient condemnation of Lydia to have her say that "Lydia is Lydia still."

In her letters the author frankly avowed her doting fondness for Elizabeth, whom with her usual ironical reserves she thought the most adorable creature in the world, and she tenderly preferred *Pride and Prejudice* to her other books. She meant once to call it *First Impressions* but she must have always been glad that she called it *Pride and Prejudice* because that was a far fitter name, and because in her letters to her sister Cassandra she could talk of it, with affectionate mocking, as "*P. and P.*" I take leave to take leave of it as "*P. and P.*," and I shall like my readers the better if they will thus initialize it in their associations with it. I do not believe that Jane Austen would resent the familiarity if she were still alive, as indeed she is, apparently more and more as the years grow into the centuries. I wish we were all worthier her tolerance, but it is my hopeful remembrance of her kindness to others that it is never apportioned among the deserving alone but is bestowed on many as little deserving as ourselves, both in and out of her books.

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS.

January, 1918.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

CHAPTER I

IT is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighborhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

"My dear Mr. Bennet," said his lady to him one day, "have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?"

Mr. Bennet replied that he had not.

"But it is," returned she; "for Mrs. Long has just been here and she told me all about it."

Mr. Bennet made no answer.

"Do not you want to know who has taken it?" cried his wife impatiently.

"You want to tell me and I have no objection to hearing it."

This was invitation enough.

"Why, my dear, you must know, Mrs. Long says that Netherfield is taken by a young man of large fortune from the north of England; that he came down on Monday in a chaise and four to see the place, and was so much delighted with it, that he agreed with Mr. Morris immediately; that he is to take possession before

Michaelmas, and some of his servants are to be in the house by the end of next week."

"What is his name?"

"Bingley."

"Is he married or single?"

"Oh! single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a-year. What a fine thing for our girls!"

"How so? how can it affect them?"

"My dear Mr. Bennet," replied his wife, "how can you be so tiresome! you must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them."

"Is that his design in settling here?"

"Design! nonsense, how can you talk so! But it is very likely that he *may* fall in love with one of them, and therefore you must visit him as soon as he comes."

"I see no occasion for that. You and the girls may go, or you may send them by themselves, which perhaps will be still better, for as you are as handsome as any of them, Mr. Bingley might like you the best of the party."

"My dear, you flatter me. I certainly *have* had my share of beauty, but I do not pretend to be anything extraordinary now. When a woman has five grown-up daughters, she ought to give over thinking of her own beauty."

"In such cases, a woman has not often much beauty to think of."

"But, my dear, you must indeed go and see Mr. Bingley when he comes into the neighborhood."

"It is more than I engage for, I assure you."

"But consider your daughters. Only think what an establishment it would be for one of them. Sir William and Lady Lucas are determined to go, merely on that account, for in general, you know, they visit no new-

comers. Indeed you must go, for it will be impossible for *us* to visit him if you do not."

"You are over-scrupulous, surely. I dare say Mr. Bingley will be very glad to see you; and I will send a few lines by you to assure him of my hearty consent to his marrying whichever he chooses of the girls: though I must throw in a good word for my little Lizzy."

"I desire you will do no such thing. Lizzy is not a bit better than the others; and I am sure she is not half so handsome as Jane, nor half so good-humored as Lydia. But you are always giving *her* the preference."

"They have none of them much to recommend them," replied he; "they are all silly and ignorant, like other girls; but Lizzy has something more of quickness than her sisters."

"Mr. Bennet, how can you abuse your own children in such a way! You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion on my poor nerves."

"You mistake me, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these twenty years at least."

"Ah! you do not know what I suffer."

"But I hope you will get over it, and live to see many young men of four thousand a-year come into the neighborhood."

"It will be no use to us, if twenty such should come, since you will not visit them."

"Depend upon it, my dear, that when there are twenty, I will visit them all."

Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humor, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three-and-twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. *Her* mind was

less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news.

CHAPTER II

MR. BENNET was among the earliest of those who waited on Mr. Bingley. He had always intended to visit him, though to the last always assuring his wife that he should not go; and till the evening after the visit was paid she had no knowledge of it. It was then disclosed in the following manner:—Observing his second daughter employed in trimming a hat, he suddenly addressed her with,

“I hope Mr. Bingley will like it, Lizzy.”

“We are not in a way to know *what* Mr. Bingley likes,” said her mother resentfully, “since we are not to visit.”

“But you forget, mamma,” said Elizabeth, “that we shall meet him at the assemblies, and that Mrs. Long has promised to introduce him.”

“I do not believe Mrs. Long will do any such thing. She has two nieces of her own. She is a selfish, hypocritical woman, and I have no opinion of her.”

“No more have I,” said Mr. Bennet; “and I am glad to find that you do not depend on her serving you.”

Mrs. Bennet deigned not to make any reply, but unable to contain herself, began scolding one of her daughters.

“Don’t keep coughing so, Kitty, for Heaven’s sake! Have a little compassion on my nerves. You tear them to pieces.”

"Kitty has no discretion in her coughs," said her father; "she times them ill."

"I do not cough for my own amusement," replied Kitty fretfully. "When is your next ball to be, Lizzy?"

"To-morrow fortnight."

"Aye, so it is," cried her mother, "and Mrs. Long does not come back till the day before; so it will be impossible for her to introduce him, for she will not know him herself."

"Then, my dear, you may have the advantage of your friend, and introduce Mr. Bingley to *her*."

"Impossible, Mr. Bennet, impossible, when I am not acquainted with him myself; how can you be so teasing?"

"I honor your circumspection. A fortnight's acquaintance is certainly very little. One cannot know what a man really is by the end of a fortnight. But if *we* do not venture somebody else will; and after all, Mrs. Long and her nieces must stand their chance; and, therefore, as she will think it an act of kindness, if you decline the offer, I will take it on myself."

The girls stared at their father. Mrs. Bennet said only, "Nonsense, nonsense!"

"What can be the meaning of that emphatic exclamation?" cried he. "Do you consider the forms of introduction, and the stress that is laid on them, as nonsense? I cannot quite agree with you *there*. What say you, Mary? for you are a young lady of deep reflection, I know, and read great books and make extracts."

Mary wished to say something very sensible, but knew not how.

"While Mary is adjusting her ideas," he continued, "let us return to Mr. Bingley."

"I am sick of Mr. Bingley," cried his wife.

"I am sorry to hear *that*; but why did not you tell

me so before? If I had known as much this morning I certainly would not have called on him. It is very unlucky; but as I have actually paid the visit, we cannot escape the acquaintance now."

The astonishment of the ladies was just what he wished; that of Mrs. Bennet perhaps surpassing the rest; though, when the first tumult of joy was over, she began to declare that it was what she had expected all the while.

"How good it was in you, my dear Mr. Bennet! But I knew I should persuade you at last. I was sure you loved your girls too well to neglect such an acquaintance. Well, how pleased I am! and it is such a good joke, too, that you should have gone this morning and never said a word about it till now."

"Now, Kitty, you may cough as much as you choose," said Mr. Bennet; and, as he spoke, he left the room, fatigued with the raptures of his wife.

"What an excellent father you have, girls!" said she, when the door was shut. "I do not know how you will ever make him amends for his kindness; or me either, for that matter. At our time of life it is not so pleasant, I can tell you, to be making new acquaintance every day; but for your sakes, we would do anything. Lydia, my love, though you *are* the youngest, I dare say Mr. Bingley will dance with you at the next ball."

"Oh!" said Lydia stoutly, "I am not afraid; for though I *am* the youngest, I'm the tallest."

The rest of the evening was spent in conjecturing how soon he would return Mr. Bennet's visit, and determining when they should ask him to dinner.

CHAPTER III

Nor all that Mrs. Bennet, however, with the assistance of her five daughters, could ask on the subject, was sufficient to draw from her husband any satisfactory description of Mr. Bingley. They attacked him in various ways—with barefaced questions, ingenious suppositions, and distant surmises; but he eluded the skill of them all, and they were at last obliged to accept the second-hand intelligence of their neighbor, Lady Lucas. Her report was highly favorable. Sir William had been delighted with him. He was quite young, wonderfully handsome, extremely agreeable, and, to crown the whole, he meant to be at the next assembly with a large party. Nothing could be more delightful! To be fond of dancing was a certain step towards falling in love; and very lively hopes of Mr. Bingley's heart were entertained.

"If I can but see one of my daughters happily settled at Netherfield," said Mrs. Bennet to her husband, "and all the others equally well married, I shall have nothing to wish for."

In a few days Mr. Bingley returned Mr. Bennet's visit, and sat about ten minutes with him in his library. He had entertained hopes of being admitted to a sight of the young ladies, of whose beauty he had heard much; but he saw only the father. The ladies were somewhat more fortunate, for they had the advantage of ascertaining from an upper window that he wore a blue coat, and rode a black horse.

An invitation to dinner was soon afterwards dispatched; and already had Mrs. Bennet planned the courses that were to do credit to her housekeeping, when an answer arrived which deferred it all. Mr. Bingley