

# PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

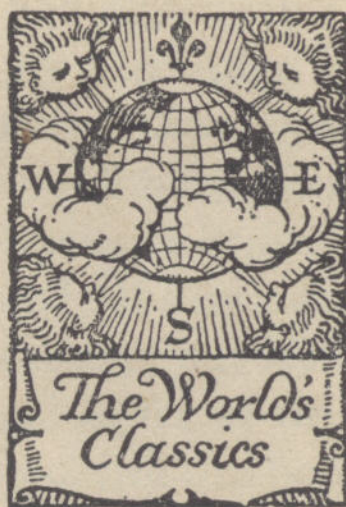
By JANE AUSTEN

(1775 - 1817)

With an Introduction

by

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*Humphrey Milford*

# JANE AUSTEN

*Born* : Steventon, Hants . 16 December 1775.

*Died* : Winchester . . . 18 July 1817.

*'Pride and Prejudice' was first published in 1813. In  
'The World's Classics' it was first published in 1929,  
and reprinted in 1933, 1935 and 1937.*



## INTRODUCTION

JANE AUSTEN was born on 16 December 1775, one of the numerous inhabitants of a small Hampshire rectory. There, between October 1796 and August 1797, it is recorded that she found leisure from domestic employment and social distraction to write a novel in three volumes, which she called *First Impressions*. This was not her first effort; but it was the first which was thought to merit publication. An indulgent or ambitious father, who had already in 1796 encouraged his daughter's talent by permitting her to subscribe her guinea for Miss Burney's *Camilla*, wrote on 1 November 1797 to Cadell the publisher, offering a novel of 'about the length of Miss Burney's *Evelina*'. Mr. Austen seems to have contemplated publication at his own expense, if that should be necessary; but his inquiry received no encouragement, and so far as we learn there was no further attempt to publish this book for more than ten years. We have no letters written by Jane between October 1796 and August 1797. The book is mentioned, in letters of 1799, as having been read by her sister Cassandra and by an intimate friend; and that is all we hear of *First Impressions*.

In 1809 the widowed Mrs. Austen and her two daughters retired from the bustle of Bath and Southampton to the quiet of a village in their own country. At Chawton Cottage they were under the friendly lee of the Great House; for their son and brother Edward had become, by adoption, Austen of Godmersham

Park in Kent and of Chawton Manor in Hampshire. A year or two later he completed his translation by assuming the name of Knight; and there are Knights at Chawton to-day, though not at Godmersham. Edward Austen was good to his mother, and she was able to keep a manservant. The Cottage was lively enough when Edward was in residence at the Great House; and at other times either Cassandra or Jane was often visiting him in Kent, or his younger brother Henry in London; but in general life at Chawton was quiet. The 'Miss Austens' were now, by their own standard, no longer young; and in her correspondence from this date Jane Austen figures more and more as Aunt Jane. The earlier Steventon letters paint a different picture, crowded with youthful gaieties.

We may perhaps ascribe to an increase of leisure and of affluence the renewal, about this time, of Jane's literary activities. There is no reason to suppose her idle in the long interval. The fragment called *The Watsons*—an embryonic *Emma*—was written after, but probably not long after, 1803, and may have been written at Bath or Southampton. In 1803 she actually sold 'a novel in two volumes entitled *Susan*' to a publisher in London, but the expected publication did not follow. In 1809 she wrote (under an assumed name) to inquire the reason, and was told she might have her book back for the price paid, which was £10.

When, about 1810, Jane Austen decided to take the risk of publishing at her own expense, she had three novels in her desk: *First Impressions*, *Sense and*

*Sensibility*, and a duplicate copy of *Susan*. The fortunes of *Susan* I leave to the lucky editor of *Northanger Abbey*; but *First Impressions* and *Sense and Sensibility* must be considered together. We have it on good authority that *Elinor and Marianne* was written before *First Impressions*, but that *Sense and Sensibility* was begun as soon as *First Impressions* was finished. The change from *Elinor and Marianne* to *Sense and Sensibility* must have been radical, for *Elinor and Marianne* was in the form of letters. We do not know when *Sense and Sensibility* was first so named; but since *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* are titles of the same form (and that a novel one), and since the title *Pride and Prejudice* was evidently suggested by the occurrence of that phrase in Miss Burney's *Cecilia*, we may perhaps infer that *Sense and Sensibility* was so named after *First Impressions* had been renamed. But little, if anything, can be built on this. Nor is it safe to build anything on Mr. Austen's statement, in 1797, that the novel he sent to Cadell was about the length of *Evelina*. *Pride and Prejudice* is in fact a good deal shorter than *Evelina*. But Mr. Austen's estimate might well be erroneous; if it was correct, we learn from it no more than we knew from Jane herself, who tells us that she 'lop't and crop't' her manuscript so 'successfully' as to make it (as she believed) rather shorter than *Sense and Sensibility*. This must imply substantial reduction. *Sense and Sensibility* itself was not printed in 1811 exactly as it was left in 1798; for Miss Austen could not in 1798 have written of Mr. Scott as a popular poet. But there is no other evidence of revision.



When Jane Austen, in 1810 or 1811, looked into her desk, what did she find there? Not, I think, the manuscript of *Pride and Prejudice*. For if *Pride and Prejudice* had been ready, she would hardly have staked her all (we may be confident that she could not afford more than one failure) on a book so much less likely to win popular applause. Further it has been (I think) proved that *Pride and Prejudice*, as we have it, was written to the calendars of 1811 and 1812. Since the indications of date are precise and very frequent, this implies that the book was rewritten.

This conclusion, if true, is not unimportant; for it must seriously modify the current notion that *Pride and Prejudice* is the work of a girl of one-and-twenty. Internal evidence seems, on the whole, to favour the view that the book was thoroughly revised when its author was five-and-thirty. It has, indeed, some immaturities; and it has more of the high spirits of the young Jane—conspicuous in *Northanger Abbey* and in early fragments—than we find in the later novels. But it strikes me as, in many ways, the work of matured genius; and the advance, in technique, from *Sense and Sensibility* is marked.

*Sense and Sensibility, a Novel by a Lady*, was published in October 1811, and its success was at once sufficient to justify a second venture. There are very few references in the letters to the production of *Sense and Sensibility*; but those of 1813 are full of allusions to the appearance and reception of *Pride and Prejudice*. Writing to her sister, she announces the arrival of the first copy, her 'own darling child'; confesses that she

thinks Elizabeth 'as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print'; and is willing that her family and friends shall 'hate all the others', if they will like Elizabeth and Darcy. She was rewarded by the delighted approbation of her circle, which was not too narrow to include Warren Hastings. Her fame even spread further—by Henry's indiscretion the secret of authorship was soon no secret—and in May 1813 she hears of people wanting to meet her, and is resigned: 'if I am a wild beast, I cannot help it.'

Of actual self-criticism there is little; we might have known more of the secrets of the workshop if Jane's letters to Henry had been kept. What little there is is playful, yet not without serious intention. She finds the book wanting in relief; it is

'rather too light, and bright, and sparkling; it wants shade; it wants to be stretched out here and there with a long chapter of sense, if it could be had; if not, of solemn specious nonsense'. This, she thinks, would 'bring the reader with increased delight to the playfulness and epigrammatism of the general style'.

Her other comments show an objective attitude to her characters which, again, is not entirely assumed.

'There might as well have been no suppers at Longbourn; but I suppose it was the remains of Mrs. Bennett's old Meryton habits.' She went to an exhibition of pictures in London, and 'was very well pleased—particularly (pray tell Fanny) with a small portrait of Mrs. Bingley, excessively like her. I went in hopes of seeing one of her sister, but there was no Mrs. Darcy. . . . Mrs. Bingley's is exactly herself, size, shaped face, features and sweetness; there never was a greater likeness. She is dressed in a white gown, with green ornaments, which convinces me of what I had

always supposed, that green was a favourite colour with her. I daresay Mrs. D. will be in yellow.'

She was not always so confident. Her favourite niece, the Fanny just mentioned, wrote her a letter purporting (I suppose) to be written by Elizabeth to Georgiana Darcy. Jane acknowledges the joke:

'I am very much obliged to Fanny for her Letter; it made me laugh heartily; but I cannot pretend to answer it. Even had I more time, I should not feel at all sure of the sort of Letter that Miss D. would write.'

It is significant that Jane did not feel called upon to know this young lady any better than Elizabeth herself knew her. Their acquaintance had been slight.

When Jane Austen sat down to write *Mansfield Park*, she foresaw that it would prove 'not half so entertaining' as *Pride and Prejudice*. When *Emma* was ready for publication, she feared it would be judged 'inferior to *Pride and Prejudice* in wit'. *Pride and Prejudice* was the general favourite then, and is the general favourite to-day. There are those who prefer the later novels; and certainly *Pride and Prejudice* has not the satiric intensity of *Mansfield Park*, nor the tenderness of *Persuasion*, nor the perfect grasp and mastery of character and situation which make *Emma* one of the greatest novels in our language. But few will grudge it its popularity; for which we need seek no better reason than that Elizabeth is the most generally acceptable of Jane Austen's heroines. Jane seems to have shared the preference; at least she would have allowed



it to be reasonable. She expected no one but herself to like Emma; Anne was almost too good for her taste; and the others are not in the race. But Elizabeth, as Mr. Collins remarked, is uniformly charming. Criticism has detected a few false notes; but if they are there, we are willing to forget them. Her wit, her courage, her beauty, her sweet and affectionate temper, are unmistakable and irresistible. She is almost always true to form, and always at the top of her form when the occasion demands.

‘I am the happiest creature in the world. Perhaps other people have said so before, but not one with such justice. I am happier even than Jane; she only smiles, I laugh.’

As for the young man who became possessor of all these charms, it has been much debated whether he deserves his luck, and has even been questioned whether he exists to deserve it. This, I think, is excess of scepticism. Compared with the lady he is, of course, a mere silhouette; but I find him credible as far as he goes. What we are told about him, we may believe or not as we choose; his speeches (there are not many of them), his silences, and his shrugs all help, I find, to build up an attractive and convincing sketch.

*Pride and Prejudice* owes its popularity to the magnetism of its central theme, the surprise and delight of which survive many readings, and dispose us to overlook some obvious faults of construction—for the machinery sometimes creaks. But this interest is supported by a whole gallery of admirable minors. The Second Fiddles—Bingley and Jane, Wickham and

Lydia—are engaging in themselves, as well as excellent foils. It is complained that the comic characters are caricature. There is truth in this; certainly Mrs. Bennet is not to be classed with Miss Bates, nor Mr. Collins with Mr. Elton. I concede that there is nothing to be said for Mary Bennet, very little for Kitty (except perhaps when she ‘simpered and smiled, and hoped her turn was coming soon’), and not very much for Lady Catherine. But Mr. Collins is very good in his way—as is proved by his success on the stage—and if Mrs. Bennet sometimes lacks subtlety, she achieves a great comic moment in her breathless hymn on the news of Elizabeth’s engagement. But Mr. Bennet is the masterpiece in this kind. Even his most discerning admirers are, perhaps, hardly aware how few strokes go to make up his portrait. Every stroke tells. It was an ambitious venture to write a book containing two characters who should both dazzle us with their wit. But it is done, and with no trace of effort.

The brief scene in which Mr. Bennet, speaking for once without irony or sarcasm, begs his favourite daughter to think twice before she marries a man whom she cannot respect, is admirable and moving in itself, and invaluable in its contribution to the tone of what would otherwise have been a ‘too sparkling’ conclusion. But who, save Miss Austen, could have divined his last sentence?

‘If any young men come for Mary or Kitty, send them in, for I am quite at leisure.’

R. W. C.

# PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

## CHAPTER I

It is a truth <sup>every one</sup> 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 neighbourhood, 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 <sup>had</sup> told me all about it.'

Mr. Bennet made no answer.

<sup>Demanded</sup> '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.'

<sup>Should</sup> 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?'

<sup>of course</sup> '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 *had* had my share of beauty, but I do not pretend to be any thing 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 neighbourhood.’

‘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 *too* *careless* *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 which ever he chuses 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 humoured as Lydia. But you are always giving *her* the preference.’

(In of prefer)  
Liking of one thing  
better than the other

'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 neighbourhood.'

'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 humour, 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 develope. She was a woman of mean understanding, little intelligent 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. comfort

## 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, *that*

'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.' *remarked*

'But you forget, mama,' said Elizabeth, 'that we shall meet him at the assemblies, and that Mrs. Long has promised to introduce him.' *reminded*

'I do not believe Mrs. Long will do any such thing. She has two neices of her own. She is a selfish, hypocritical woman, and I have no opinion of her.' *an opinion*

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

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

'Don't keep coughing so, Kitty, for heaven's sake! Have a little compassion on my nerves! You tear them to pieces.' *liberty of deciding*

'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. *was*

'When is your next ball to be, Lizzy?' *recollected*

'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.' *that*

'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?' *watchfulness*

'I honour 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 *condescend to lower oneself*



if *we* do not venture, somebody else will; and after all, Mrs. Long and her neices must stand their chance; and therefore, as she will think it an act of kindness, if you decline the office, 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 chuse,' 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 <sup>goodness</sup> 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 any thing. 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 <sup>guessing</sup> conjecturing how soon he would return Mr. Bennet's visit, and determining when they should ask him to dinner.

### CHAPTER III

✓ Not 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 <sup>aimless</sup> 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 <sup>information</sup> intelligence of their neighbour Lady Lucas. Her report was highly favourable. Sir William had been delighted with him. He was quite young, wonderfully handsome, extremely agreeable, and to <sup>above all</sup> 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 dis-  
patched; 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 was obliged to be in town the following day,  
and consequently unable to accept the honour of  
their invitation, &c. Mrs. Bennet was quite discon-  
certed. She could not imagine what business he could  
have in town so soon after his arrival in Hertfordshire;  
and she began to fear that he might be always flying  
about from one place to another, and never settled at  
Netherfield as he ought to be. Lady Lucas quieted  
her fears a little by starting the idea of his being gone  
to London only to get a large party for the ball; and  
a report soon followed that Mr. Bingley was to bring  
twelve ladies and seven gentlemen with him to the  
assembly. The girls grieved over such a number of  
ladies; but were comforted the day before the ball by  
hearing, that instead of twelve, he had brought only  
six with him from London, his five sisters and a  
cousin. And when the party entered the assembly  
room, it consisted of only five altogether; Mr. Bingley,  
his two sisters, the husband of the eldest, and another  
young man.

Mr. Bingley was good looking and gentlemanlike;  
he had a pleasant countenance, and easy, unaffected  
manners. His sisters were fine women, with an air  
of decided fashion. His brother-in-law, Mr. Hurst,  
merely looked the gentleman; but his friend Mr.  
Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine,  
tall person, handsome features, noble mien; and the  
report which was in general circulation within five

outward appearance