

JANE AUSTEN

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

With an Introduction  
and Contemporary Criticism

Edited by JOSEPH PEARCE

IGNATIUS PRESS    SAN FRANCISCO

Cover art:  
Henry Glindoni, *Flirtation*.  
Haynes Fine Art Gallery, Broadway, Worcester, Great Britain.

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ISBN 978-1-58617-263-3  
Library of Congress Control Number 2008926774  
Printed in the United States of America ©

Tradition is the extension of Democracy through time; it is the proxy of the dead and the enfranchisement of the unborn.

*Tradition may be defined as the extension of the franchise. Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death. Democracy tells us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our groom; tradition asks us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our father. I, at any rate, cannot separate the two ideas of democracy and tradition.*

—G. K. Chesterton

Ignatius Critical Editions—Tradition-Oriented Criticism  
for a new generation

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## INTRODUCTION

Christopher Blum  
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"Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance" (see p. 24). This grim doctrine, espoused by Charlotte Lucas in one of the opening chapters of *Pride and Prejudice*, serves as a foil to the good sense and earnest helpfulness of the heroine, Elizabeth Bennet. It is true amiability, and neither a comfortable situation nor romantic attraction alone, that Eliza sees as providing perfection in a match. To her, the process of choosing a husband is one of coming to "understand his character", for it is the man's character—together with that of his wife—that ensures the marriage's success or failure. Although Jane Austen herself never married, she plainly understood that marriage and family were the essential framework of the moral life. And it is indeed because of its creator's moral vision, and not merely for its fairytalelike ending, that *Pride and Prejudice* is a work of such rare loveliness. As with each of Jane Austen's novels, it is a probing reflection upon love, marriage, family, and the search for stability and goodness in community. The love of Miss Bennet and Mr. Darcy grows in the rich soil of family and social life, and, in turn, provides for the continuance and perfection of their families and even of England. Not lacking social commentary, *Pride and Prejudice* stands apart from Austen's other novels for its sustained and focused consideration of the moral development of its heroine and hero. Herein lies this novel's claim to our attentive reading and rereading. Seemingly inexhaustible in its capacity to delight generation after generation of readers, *Pride and Prejudice* also instructs, by depicting for us the happiness that is possible in married life with the integrity, the proportion,

and the graciousness that any work of art must have if it is to be truly beautiful.

### “Rather Too Light, and Bright, and Sparkling”

Upon the novel's publication, Jane Austen and her family staged a reading of it for their own enjoyment and that of a friendly neighbor. Reflecting upon the experience in a letter to her sister Cassandra, Austen avowed that she was “satisfied enough”, but had nevertheless found it “rather too light, and bright, and sparkling”. “It wants shade”, she explained; “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, about something unconnected with the story . . . anything that would form a contrast, and bring the reader with increased delight to the playfulness and epigrammatism of the general style.” She was perhaps partially in jest: “I doubt your quite agreeing with me here. I know your starched notions.”<sup>1</sup> Yet Austen was a sufficiently accomplished writer to know when she had succeeded in a particular vein. *Pride and Prejudice* is almost universally the first of her novels to become a favorite to readers, and not only because its plot is accessible and timeless. The prose is so immediately engaging, and the wit so pungent, that its title is almost a byword for perfection. This artfulness is the novel's chief weakness. For many seem able to read it and delight in it without gaining much of a sense of its author's convictions or her purposes beyond mere amusement. And a different sort of reader is reluctant even to begin the novel for fear that its popularity must be a sign of shallowness. What needs to be vindicated against both misconceptions is the status of *Pride and Prejudice* as the type of book that can be regarded as an old and valued friend. If we are able to perceive the essential rectitude of Austen's moral vision, then we will be amply fortified in our determination to make

<sup>1</sup>Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, February 4, 1813, in R. W. Chapman, ed., *Jane Austen's Selected Letters, 1796-1817*, reissue with a new introduction by Marilyn Butler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 134.

regular visits to Longbourn, Netherfield, Rosings, and Pemberley.

It must, however, be admitted that we are not to look to Jane Austen's novels for a fully developed or systematic moral philosophy. They are, after all, works of the imagination, and like any great piece of music, or poetry, or even painting, her novels help us to pursue the good not by teaching us exactly in what it consists, but by revealing to us that the rational and virtuous life is the most attractive and, indeed, the only happy life. What we need to see is not the presence of precise definitions or the solution to difficult questions, but instead the grand and noble truth that virtue is its own reward and brings in its train, so far as this mortal life affords, all other subordinate goods in their proper measure. A novelist, then, would be trustworthy to the extent that his mind conforms to the first truths of the moral life: that the soul is better than the body, that the will is a rational appetite, that the individual is made for and perfected by society. Jane Austen is, of course, more than merely trustworthy; she is a woman of right judgment. A careful and faithful observer of human action, she communicates to us in her novels the result of a lifelong reflection upon character. If we looked to her only to affirm virtuous behavior and to condemn viciousness, then we might as well read a catechism or a morality play. What she provides is still more precious, if less obviously necessary, for she shows us that virtue, while difficult, is eminently desirable.

It is helpful in appreciating Jane Austen's moral vision to compare her description of character to Aristotle's. Let us consider their two heroes: Mr. Darcy and the great-souled man of the fourth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The initial resemblance is striking. Mr. Darcy unites the advantages of birth and wealth to those of person and bearing. From the first impression he gives of his “fine, tall person, handsome features, [and] noble mien” (see p. 10) to Mrs. Gardiner's later observation that there is “something a little stately in him” (see p. 251), Mr. Darcy conforms at least outwardly to Aristotle's portrait of magnanimity: “A slow step is thought proper to the

great-souled man, a deep voice, and a level utterance."<sup>2</sup> Yet the inner cause of this outward propriety is, for Aristotle, a refined cast of mind: "The man who takes few things seriously is not likely to be hurried." The great-souled man attends only to matters of the highest importance, to public affairs in which he might gain great honor by being of the greatest service. That Darcy has not yet attained such perfection we are warned just after we meet him. The narrator allows him to be "clever" but "at the same time haughty, reserved, and fastidious" (see p. 16). Reserve is certainly compatible with magnanimity, which consists chiefly in a kind of self-possession that has the unintended consequence of causing the magnanimous man to be thought "disdainful". Aristotle is, however, keen to specify that he is not in fact disdainful, but is instead "unassuming" toward his inferiors and forgiving toward those who have wronged him.<sup>3</sup> That Mr. Darcy is called "haughty" and "fastidious", then, assures us that he does not possess the virtue. And his admission that his "temper would perhaps be called resentful" and that his "good opinion once lost is lost forever" (see p. 61), suffices to prove that, at the story's commencement, he is a hero with a potentially tragic flaw.

From the horrid specter of a life of bitterness and scorn Mr. Darcy is saved, of course, by his love for Miss Bennet. The great crisis of his initial proposal to Elizabeth causes him to interrogate his own behavior and motives, and to find himself wanting. His confidence that she would accept him had been blind; her refusal was little short of a revelation. "By you," he later tells her, "I was properly humbled" (see p. 360). There is something almost Pauline about his conversion. Scales fall from his eyes, and he is transformed into a model of civility and patience. The difference, before and after, would seem to be that Darcy learned that he owed the world far more than the

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle *Ethics* 4.3.1125a12. This and all subsequent references to Aristotle are taken from the Oxford translation in the *Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941). Here "great-souled" has been substituted for "proud" as being a more literal rendering of *megalopsychos*.

<sup>3</sup> See *Ethics* 4.3.1124a19, 4.3.1124b18, and 4.3.1125a3.

preservation of his exterior dignity. Both in his speech and in his bearing, the gentleman was obliged to consider his audience, and to know that reserve and frankness, while good in their places, both need to be moderated by the higher good of charity, or, in Austen's parlance, amiability. This transformation of Darcy is a leaving behind of the self that is accomplished by and through love; his change of heart is doubtless why *Pride and Prejudice* is found compelling by so many men. For however poorly we male readers may stand in for Darcy, we can very readily imagine a face "rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes" (see p. 24) and, like him, fall in love with Eliza. Somewhere inside every male heart is a chivalrous desire to lay down his life for his beloved lady. The male reader, therefore, has a kind of conatural knowledge of the source of Darcy's transformation; we sense the essential accuracy of Austen's portrayal of his soul and therefore accept Darcy as a true image of at least certain aspects of the pursuit of moral perfection.

In one of the earliest published appreciations of Austen's novels, Richard Whately, an Oxford don and an accomplished student of Aristotle, described them as "being a kind of fictitious biography". Their great merit and usefulness, he explained, is that "they present us . . . with the general, instead of the particular,—the probable, instead of the true; and, by leaving out those accidental irregularities, and exceptions to general rules, which constitute the many improbabilities of real narrative, present us with a clear and abstracted view of the general rules themselves." In sum, the characteristic excellence of her novels is that they "concentrate, as it were, into a small compass, the net result of wide experience".<sup>4</sup> Almost two centuries later, we can add to Whately's appreciation the conviction that the experiences upon which Jane Austen reflected were capable of shedding accurate and true light upon the search for the

<sup>4</sup> Richard Whately's review of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, *Quarterly Review* (1821), reprinted in B. C. Southam, ed., *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1968), p. 93.

good. In other words, Austen herself—and what is known of her life witnesses to this truth—lived and loved the good life as understood by the great Classical and Christian tradition of the West. In her novels, we see her “taking delight in good disposition and noble actions”. And even though she does not write about the lives of saints, we are confident that she enables and encourages her readers to “rejoice and love and hate aright”.<sup>5</sup>

#### “Pictures of Perfection . . . Make Me Sick & Wicked”

Few novelists can match the purity and integrity of Jane Austen’s moral vision. With a small number of exceptions—and Mrs. Musgrove’s “large, fat sighings” head the list—she offers judgments of actions and character to which even a Jansenist could give assent. Yet she is not widely thought of as a moralist because her judgments rarely intrude upon the reader’s delight. There are doubtless a variety of reasons for the understated quality of her moral reflections. One may be the ambivalence of the kind of Anglicanism in which she lived and moved. The early Oxford years of John Henry Newman, who took his rooms there just six weeks prior to Austen’s death, testify to the muted quality of much contemporary Anglicanism. When Newman and his friends took to popularizing the lives of the saints, they were viewed as suspicious innovators. So when Austen allows that “pictures of perfection . . . make me sick & wicked”, we may be able to perceive a certain influence of Protestantism upon her mind.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, Aristotle, among many others, judged that those who speak well tend “rather to understate the truth; for this seems in better taste, because exaggerations are wearisome”.<sup>7</sup> Economy in speech, moreover, better suits the true purpose of rhetoric, which is to clear away obstacles that obscure truth’s ability to convince

<sup>5</sup> See Aristotle *Politics* 8.5.1340a16–19.

<sup>6</sup> Austen to Fanny Knight, March 23, 1817, in Chapman, *Selected Letters*, p. 198.

<sup>7</sup> See *Ethics* 4.7.1127b7 and 1127.b30.

with its own proper light.<sup>8</sup> At first glance, *Pride and Prejudice* may not seem to be the novel in which Austen best shows her understatement; Miss Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy, after all, have seen so many spotlights as to risk becoming caricatures. Yet if we consider the supporting role of Mrs. Gardiner, we will see some of Austen’s most deft writing. Here is a portrait of an “amiable, intelligent, elegant woman” (see p. 141), crucial to the verisimilitude and moral of the novel, but easily overlooked or underestimated.

Her role within the innermost action of the story proves Mrs. Gardiner’s importance. She is the confidante of Elizabeth’s regard for Mr. Wickham; she consoles first Jane and then Lizzy for their disappointments; she is the agent of Elizabeth’s chance meeting with Darcy at Pemberley; together with her husband, she enjoys the enduring regard of the Darcys after their marriage. The contrast with Mrs. Bennet could not be more complete. Their mother cannot be relied upon or confided in by her two eldest daughters; she very nearly frustrates their happiness; she even seems to bear the chief burden of the blame for her own failed marriage and for the inadequate moral formation of her younger daughters. Indeed, when Mr. Darcy allows himself to declare to Elizabeth, “You cannot have been always at Longbourn” (see p. 181), the reader knows that he is perplexed by the contrast between Elizabeth and her mother, and that the ready answer to his difficulty is that, in addition to favoring her father, she has, with Jane, “frequently been staying” with her aunt Gardiner “in town” (see p. 141).

Austen employs a play of light against dark in the contrasting portraits of Mrs. Gardiner and Mrs. Bennet. She often bids us to attend to their different modes of speech. Mrs. Bennet is effusive, indiscreet, awkward, and loud. She declares and declaims in public, in front of servants, and in the town of Meryton what would better have been kept quiet. Mrs. Gardiner, on the other hand, chooses moments when she and Elizabeth can be alone for their weightier conversations. She calls

<sup>8</sup> See Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1.1.1355a21–23.

upon Elizabeth to employ more precision in her use of language, criticizing the expression "violently in love" as "so hackneyed, so doubtful, so indefinite" (see p. 142). And, most importantly, her discretion and judgment lead her to restrain her speech at appropriate times. After their second visit to Pemberley, she and Elizabeth "talked of [Darcy's] sister, his friends, his house, his fruit, of every thing but of himself" (see pp. 264–65). Elizabeth longed to publish her newfound regard for Mr. Darcy, and Mrs. Gardiner was curious to know of it, yet neither would prematurely open such a delicate and difficult subject.

As an exemplary wife, an aunt valued for her wisdom, and a mother of four happy children, Mrs. Gardiner is a picture of feminine excellence. We are even given hints of her elegance when we are told that she wishes to see Pemberley not because it is a "fine house richly furnished", but because she knows that "the grounds are delightful" (see p. 237). Much like Fanny Price and Anne Elliot, Mrs. Gardiner would seem to prefer the country to the city, the beauty of God's creation to man's; Pemberley she would see because it had "some of the finest woods in the country" (see p. 237). The added fact that she is "not a great walker" (see p. 247) only adds to her delicacy. Mrs. Bennet, we may presume, shares her youngest daughter's height and "high animal spirits" (see p. 48). And where Mrs. Bennet sees life almost exclusively in terms of pleasures and the money that provides for them, Mrs. Gardiner approaches life as a moral phenomenon. Thus her early conversation with Elizabeth about Mr. Wickham shows her considering marriage as a lifelong covenant uniting two hearts and creating a family. Mr. Wickham's lack of wherewithal is a barrier to his marrying Elizabeth not because the young bride would be lacking in baubles, but because their situation in life would not be suitable for a gentleman's daughter: "You must not disappoint your father" (see p. 146). Elizabeth, more romantic than her aunt, taxes her then and later with a too-worldly prudence. Yet the reader is confident that Mrs. Gardiner's understanding of marriage is far higher and more complete than that of

Charlotte Lucas, and our regard for her is vindicated by the terms in which she later commends Mr. Darcy's character: "His understanding and opinions all please me; he wants nothing but a little more liveliness, and *that*, if he marry *prudently*, his wife may teach him" (see p. 318). Like Jane Austen her creator—also an aunt who valued her nieces—Mrs. Gardiner affirmed the role of the passions in human life, but still more strongly affirmed their subordination to and perfection by reason.

### "He Is Perfectly Amiable"

As undoubtedly necessary as was her aunt's influence upon the development of her character, it could not suffice to guarantee Elizabeth's permanent happiness. For this no parent or elder or governess of any kind would do. Elizabeth, like every other person, must grow into adulthood and owe her happiness, if she were to attain it, to the choices of her own will and to the influence upon her of that true friend upon whom she could rely implicitly, her husband. To our jaded and unromantic world, that Elizabeth should find herself by losing herself in her love for Mr. Darcy is old-fashioned and constricting. She must be reinterpreted, like every other heroine in Austen's novels, and become a strong-willed woman, an independently minded woman, a feminist.<sup>9</sup> It is a sad distortion of the novelist's mind to reduce her conception of humanity to that of a struggle between the sexes. For while she might have agreed with Mary Wollstonecraft in finding Rousseau's depiction of womankind demeaning and inaccurate, her mind was more at one with Louis de Bonald's observations that marriage had "under the influence of Christianity, received all of its dignity and sweetness" and that "woman is the natural friend of man".<sup>10</sup> It is the surpassing sweetness of the friendship that grows between

<sup>9</sup>For a summary of this line of interpretation of Jane Austen's novels, see Peter Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>10</sup>Bonald, *Pensées sur divers sujets* [1817], *Oeuvres de M. de Bonald* (Bruxelles: Société Nationale pour la propagation des bons livres, 1845), VI: 69.



Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy that makes *Pride and Prejudice* such a hopeful and beautiful story about human nature. That we are, as a race and as individuals, redeemed by love was a truth known and cherished by its author.

Elizabeth Bennet, too, understands that her future happiness must rest in large part upon the character of her husband. Thus she early disagrees with Charlotte Lucas's pinched and narrow view of marriage, and she hopes that her sister Jane will succeed to "all the felicity which a marriage of true affection could bestow" (see p. 102). The quality that a good husband must have is plain to her: amiability. The dilemma for her, and, by implication, for mankind in general, is to distinguish between the appearance of amiability and its actual presence.<sup>11</sup> From the point of view of the heroine, *Pride and Prejudice* is a story of willful self-deception ceding place to right judgment. Trusting in the quickness of her own wit—a wit that must have been uneven because it was inherited from her flawed father—Elizabeth is all too readily moved by the pleasing manners and "captivating softness" (see p. 182) of Mr. Wickham. Her pride had been piqued by Darcy's refusal to ask her to dance at the Meryton assembly, and she acted upon her bruised passions to the point of being unreasoning. In spite of holding better principles, she "had never felt a wish of enquiring" as to Mr. Wickham's "real character" (see p. 205). And the further reason, she realized only after having read Mr. Darcy's letter, was that "his countenance, voice, and manner, had established him at once in the possession of every virtue" (see p. 205).

It is wonderful indeed that *Pride and Prejudice* should not be a story of love at first sight, or even second or third sight. Jane Austen's doctrine is evident: the choice of a spouse should repose upon a true knowledge of his character, a knowledge gained by the experience of his having performed good and reasonable actions that prove his self-command and virtue. In

<sup>11</sup> See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2d ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), pp. 241–42.

Mr. Darcy's case, there are a variety of signs for Elizabeth to see. First is his letter, the very gravity of which tells in favor of his character, in spite of the bitterness in tone that he later regretted. And, as Elizabeth herself allows, "the adieu is charity itself" (see p. 359). Then there is the testimony of Pemberley: the refined tastefulness of the furnishing, the loyalty of the housekeeper, the proof of his fraternal care for his sister's comfort, the good reputation he enjoys in the surrounding country. What the improvement of his manners toward Elizabeth and the Gardiners leaves undone, his chivalrous deeds on behalf of Lydia complete. Elizabeth's reaction to her aunt's narrative of his dealings in London discloses her final change of heart: "For herself she was humbled; but she was proud of him. Proud that in a cause of compassion and honour, he had been able to get the better of himself" (see pp. 319–20). Their later discussion of their surprise reunion at Pemberley only confirms the nature of their mutual regard. Elizabeth confessed that her "conscience" told her that she deserved "no extraordinary politeness" (see p. 360) from him; Darcy replied that he had wished to prove that her "reproofs had been attended to" (see p. 361). Each had learned to see the other as a source of moral improvement, and from this mutual admiration grew love.

The consonance of Jane Austen's vision of marriage and Aristotle's doctrine on the role of friendship in the moral life is perfect. One of the most surprising and important aspects of Aristotle's discussion of friendship is his contention that the good man "needs" virtuous friends, in order to contemplate his friends' virtuous actions, to be improved by their example, and to share with them the pursuit of the good life.<sup>12</sup> Jane Austen's heroine comes to regard her possible match with Mr. Darcy in the same light, musing regretfully at a moment when she thinks it impossible that their "union . . . must have been to the advantage of both; by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened, his manners improved, and from

<sup>12</sup> See *Ethics* 9.9.1170a2–3, 9.9.1170a11, and 9.9.1170b10, and also *Ethics* 9.12.1172a12.

his judgment, information, and knowledge of the world, she must have received benefit of greater importance" (see p. 305). When she later assures her worrying father that Mr. Darcy is "perfectly amiable", she receives in turn from him a mournful testimony to the same truth, in the form of a solemn injunction: "My child, let me not have the grief of seeing *you* unable to respect your partner in life" (see p. 367). The Bennets themselves had married poorly, and Elizabeth had suffered the mortification of witnessing "the impropriety of her father's behaviour as a husband" (see p. 233). The risk of a poor marriage was high and the consequences grave: nothing less than the dissolution of society. Thanks to a kind Providence, the two eldest Miss Bennets would marry well, but their youngest sister's ugly fall from grace proved their own parents' faulty relationship to be a tragedy affecting more than one generation.

Few readers of *Pride and Prejudice* have doubted its beauty. To give an account, however, of exactly what that beauty consists in is a task rendered difficult by the changes in our language since Jane Austen's day. She was able to assume that her audience would understand her when she portrayed in her heroines and heroes the high ideal of gentlemanly and ladylike behavior. To her eyes, which perceived moral beauty as readily as physical, to be upright, dignified, and decorous was to be beautiful.<sup>13</sup> In this way of thinking, as in so many other ways, Austen was, as Alasdair MacIntyre has contended, "the last great representative of the classical tradition of the virtues".<sup>14</sup> When we read her novels attentively, we are introduced to a way of thinking that more closely accords with our nature than it does with the modes of thought we have inherited from the recent past. We learn to use the language of character more carefully and more accurately. We learn to distinguish more subtle shades of virtue and vice. And, perhaps most importantly, we learn about the qualities of soul

<sup>13</sup> The ideal is neatly expressed in Saint Thomas Aquinas's treatment of the virtue of *honestas*. See *Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 145.

<sup>14</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 243.

that are required for a happy marriage. To read and to reread her novels, therefore, is no vain exercise in nostalgia; it is, rather, an important means of healing our minds from the wounds that the modern world has caused. Can we not see in her tremendous popularity the great need of this dying modern civilization for witnesses who testify that there is indeed such a thing as human happiness? Jane Austen is loved, and loved widely and deeply, because her own love for the good and her faith in God's Providence are infectious. To read—and to reread—her stories is to nourish the virtue of hope.

The Text of  
PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

## Volume I

### 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 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 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<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>2</sup> and some of his servants are to be in the house by the end of next week."

"What is his name?"

"Bingley."

<sup>1</sup> *chaise and four*: four-wheeled closed carriage.

<sup>2</sup> *Michaelmas*: September 29, the feast of St. Michael.

"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<sup>3</sup> 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 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,<sup>4</sup> 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."<sup>5</sup>

"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 which ever

<sup>3</sup> *design*: reason or deliberate purpose.

<sup>4</sup> *engage for*: enter into a contract to do.

<sup>5</sup> *impossible for us to visit him, if you do not*: Ladies could not visit unmarried men without first being introduced by a third party (often a male relation).

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."

"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,<sup>6</sup> 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 develop.<sup>7</sup> She was a woman of mean<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> *quick parts*: abilities and talents.

<sup>7</sup> *develop*: understand or comprehend.

<sup>8</sup> *mean*: inferior or poor in quality.

## 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,<sup>1</sup> 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, mama," said Elizabeth, "that we shall meet him at the assemblies,<sup>2</sup> 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."

<sup>1</sup> *trimming a hat*: decorating and embellishing.

<sup>2</sup> *assemblies*: public balls.

"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 honour your circumspection.<sup>3</sup> 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 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,<sup>4</sup> 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."<sup>5</sup>

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

<sup>3</sup> *circumspection*: caution or prudence.

<sup>4</sup> *forms of introduction*: elaborate, hierarchical rules of etiquette.

<sup>5</sup> *extracts*: short passages drawn from a book, often copied into a commonplace book (a notebook to compile knowledge).

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 amend 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 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 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<sup>1</sup> 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 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 was obliged to be in town the following day, and consequently unable to accept the honour of their invitation, &c. Mrs. Bennet was quite disconcerted. She could not imagine what business he could have in town so soon after his arrival in Hertfordshire; and she began to fear

<sup>1</sup> *intelligence*: news or information.