

# **Pride and Prejudice**

by Jane Austen

## **Introduction**

This, Jane Austen's best-known novel, was written between 1796 and 1797, and was called "First Impressions." Revised in 1811, it was published two years later by the same Mr. Egerton, of the Military Library, Whitehall, who had brought out "Sense and Sensibility." Like its predecessor, and like "Northanger Abbey," it was written at Steventon Rectory, and it is generally regarded not only as its author's most popular but as her most representative achievement. Wickham, the all-conquering young lady-killer of the story, is a favourite character of the novelist. He figures as Willoughby in "Sense and Sensibility," as Crawford in "Mansfield Park," as Churchill in "Emma," and--to a certain extent--as Wentworth in "Persuasion." Another characteristic feature of "Pride and Prejudice" is Wickham's unprepared attachment to Lydia Bennet, resembling as it does Robert Ferrars' startling engagement to Lucy Steele in "Sense and Sensibility," Frank Churchill's secret understanding with Jane Fairfax in "Emma," and Captain Benwick's sudden and unexpected union with Louisa Musgrove in "Persuasion."

### **I.--A Society Ball at Longbourn**

All Longbourn was agape with excitement when it became known that Netherfield Park, the great place of the neighbourhood, was let to a rich and handsome young bachelor called Bingley, and that Mr. Bingley and his party were to attend the forthcoming ball at the Assembly Rooms.

Nowhere did the news create more interest and rouse greater hopes than in the household of the Bennets, the chief inhabitants of Longbourn; for Mr. Bennet--who 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--was the father of five unmarried daughters; while Mrs. Bennet--a still handsome woman, of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper--made the business of her life getting her daughters married, and its solace visiting and news.

The evening fixed for the ball came round at last; and when the Netherfield party entered the Assembly Rooms it was found to consist of five persons altogether--Mr. Bingley, his two sisters, the husband of the elder, and another young man.

Mr. Bingley was good-looking and gentleman-like; 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 minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year. He was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening, till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was found to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased.

Mr. Bingley had soon made himself acquainted with all the principal people in the room. He was lively and unreserved, danced every dance, was angry that the ball closed so early, and talked of giving one himself at Netherfield. What a contrast between him and his friend! Mr. Darcy danced only once with Mrs. Hurst, and once with Miss Bingley, and declined being introduced to any other lady.

It so happened that Elizabeth, the second eldest of the Bennet girls, had been obliged, by the scarcity of

gentlemen, to sit down for two dances; and during part of that time Mr. Darcy had been standing near enough for her to overhear a conversation between him and Mr. Bingley, who came from the dance for a few minutes.

"Come, Darcy," said he, "I must have you dance. I hate to see you standing about by yourself in this stupid manner. You had much better dance."

"I certainly shall not. You know how I detest it, unless I am particularly acquainted with my partner" At such an assembly as this it would be insupportable. Your sisters are engaged, and there is not another woman in the room whom it would not be a punishment to me to stand up with."

"I would not be so fastidious as you are," cried Bingley, "for a kingdom! Upon my honour, I never met with so many pleasant girls in my life as I have this evening, and there are several of them, you see, uncommonly pretty."

"*You* are dancing with the only handsome girl in the room," said Mr. Darcy, looking at the eldest Miss Bennet.

"Oh, she is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld! But there is one of her sisters sitting down just behind you who is very pretty, and I dare say very agreeable. Do let me ask my partner to introduce you."

"Which do you mean?" And turning round, he looked for a moment at Elizabeth, till, catching her eye, he withdrew his own, and coldly said: "She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt *me*; and I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men; You had better return to your partner and enjoy her smiles, for you are wasting your time with me."

Mr. Bingley followed his advice. Mr. Darcy walked off; and Elizabeth remained, with no very cordial feelings towards him. She told the story, however, with great spirit among her friends, for she had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in anything ridiculous.

## **II--The Bennet Girls and their Lovers**

Despite its rather unpromising commencement the course of a few days placed the acquaintance of the Bennets with the Bingleys on a footing approaching friendship; and soon matters began to stand somewhat as follow. It was obvious that Charles Bingley and Jane Bennet were mutually attracted, and this despite the latter's outward composure, which, like her amiability of manner and charity of view, was apt to mislead the superficial observer. On the other hand, while the Bingley ladies expressed themselves as willing to know the two elder Miss Bennets and pronounced Jane "a sweet girl," they found the other females of the family impossible. Mrs. Bennet was intolerably stupid and tedious; Mary, who, being the only plain member of her family, piqued herself on the extent of her reading and the solidity of her reflections, was a platitudinous moralist; while Lydia and Kitty were loud, silly, giggling girls, who spent all their time in running after men. As for Mr. Darcy, the indifference he at first felt to Elizabeth Bennet was gradually converted into a sort of guarded interest. Originally he had scarcely allowed her to be pretty, but now he admired the beautiful expression of her dark eyes. To this discovery succeeded some others equally mortifying. Though he had detected more than one failure of perfect symmetry in her form, he was forced to acknowledge her figure to be light and pleasing; and in spite of his asserting that her manners were not those of the fashionable world, he was caught by their easy playfulness. He began to wish to know more of her, and, as a step towards conversing with her himself, attended to her conversation with others, while, since both he and she were of a satirical turn, they soon began to exchange little rallying, challenging speeches, so that Caroline Bingley, who was

openly angling for Darcy herself, said to him one night: "How long has Miss Elizabeth Bennet been such a favourite? And pray when am I to wish you joy?" To which remarks he merely replied: "That is exactly the question which I expected you to ask. A lady's imagination is very rapid; it jumps from admiration to love, from love to matrimony, in a moment. I knew you would be wishing me joy."

Meantime, the friendship subsisting between the two families was advanced by a visit of some days paid by the two Bennet sisters to the Bingleys, at whose house Jane, thanks to her mother's scheming, was laid up with a bad cold. On this occasion Jane was coddled and made much of by her dear friends Caroline and Mrs. Hurst; but Elizabeth was now reckoned too attractive by one sister, and condemned as too sharp-tongued by both.

"Eliza Bennet," said Miss Bingley, when the door was closed on her, "is one of those young ladies who seek to recommend themselves to the other sex by undervaluing their own; and with many men, I dare say, it succeeds. But in my opinion it is a very mean art."

"Undoubtedly," replied Darcy, to whom this remark was chiefly addressed, "there is meanness in *all* the arts which ladies sometimes condescend to employ for captivation. Whatever bears affinity to cunning is despicable."

Miss Bingley was not so entirely satisfied with this reply as to continue the subject.

Nevertheless, Darcy's growing attachment to Eliza was little dreamt of by that young lady. Indeed, her prejudice against him was strengthened by her pleasant intercourse with a handsome and agreeable young man called Wickham, an officer of the militia regiment quartered at Meryton, the nearest town to Longbourn. He told her how he was the son of a trusted steward of Darcy's father, and had been left by the old gentleman to his heir's liberality and care, and how Darcy had absolutely disregarded his father's wishes, and had treated his protégé in cruel and unfeeling fashion.

On the top of this disclosure, and just at it seemed certain that Bingley was on the point of proposing to Jane, the whole Netherfield party suddenly abandoned Hertfordshire and returned to town, partly, as Elizabeth could not help thinking, in consequence of the behaviour of her family at a ball given at Netherfield Park, where it appeared to her that, had they made an agreement to expose themselves as much as they could during the evening, they could not have played their parts with more spirit or finer success.

### **III.--Elizabeth Rejects the Rector**

About this time the Rev. Mr. Collins, heir-presumptive to Longbourn, came on a visit to the Bennets. He was a tall, heavy-looking young man of five-and-twenty. His air was grave and stately, and his manners were very formal. He was a strange mixture of pomposity, servility, and self-importance, a creature most abjectly, yet most amusingly, devoid of anything like tact, taste, or humour.

Being ready to make the Bennet girls every possible amends for the unwilling injury he must eventually do them, he thought first of all of offering himself to Jane; but hearing that her affections were pre-engaged, he had only to change from Jane to Elizabeth. It was soon done--done while Mrs. Bennet was stirring the fire. His proposal he made to the younger lady in a long, set speech, in which he explained, first of all, his general reasons for marrying, and then his reasons for directing his matrimonial views to Longbourn, finally assuring her that on the subject of the small portion she would bring him no ungenerous reproach should ever pass his lips when they were married.

It was absolutely necessary to interrupt him then, so Elizabeth told him he was too hasty, thanked him

for his proposals, and declined them.

"I am not now to learn," replied Mr. Collins, with a formal wave of the hand, "that it is usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man whom they secretly mean to accept, when he first applies for their favour; and that sometimes the refusal is repeated a second, or even a third, time. I am, therefore, by no means discouraged by what you have said, and shall hope to lead you to the altar ere long."

"Upon my word, sir," cried Elizabeth, "your hope is rather an extraordinary one after my declaration! I do assure you that I am not one of those young ladies (if such young ladies there are) who are so daring as to risk their happiness on the chance of being asked a second time. I am perfectly serious in my refusal. You could not make *me* happy; and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who would make *you* so. Nay; were your friend, Lady Catherine, to know me, I am persuaded she would find me in every respect ill qualified for the situation."

"Were it certain that Lady Catherine would think so----" said Mr. Collins, very gravely. "But I cannot imagine that her ladyship would at all disapprove of you. And you may be certain that when I have the honour of seeing her again, I shall speak in the highest terms of your modesty, economy, and other amiable qualifications."

Twice more was Mr. Collins refused, and even then he would not take "No" for an answer.

"You must give me leave to flatter myself, my dear cousin," said he, "that your refusals of my addresses are merely words, of course. My reasons for believing it are chiefly these. It does not appear to me that my hand is unworthy your acceptance, or that the establishment I can offer would be any other than highly desirable. My situation in life, my connections with the family of De Bourgh, and my relationship to your own, are circumstances highly in my favour; and you should take it into further consideration that, in spite of your manifold attractions, it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made to you. Your portion is unhappily so small that it will, in all likelihood, undo the effects of your loveliness and amiable qualifications. As I must, therefore, conclude that you are not serious in your rejection of me, I shall choose to attribute it to your wish of increasing my love by suspense, according to the usual practice of elegant females."

"I do assure you, sir," said Elizabeth, "that I have no pretensions whatever to that kind of elegance which consists in tormenting a respectable man. I would rather be paid the compliment of being believed sincere. I thank you again and again for the honour you have done me in your proposals, but to accept them is absolutely impossible. My feelings in every respect forbid it. Can I speak plainer? Do not consider me now as an elegant female intending to plague you, but as a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart."

"You are uniformly charming," said he, with an air of awkward gallantry; "and I am persuaded that, when sanctioned by the express authority of both your excellent parents, my proposals will be acceptable."

#### **IV.--Darcy Loves and Loses**

Rejected by Elizabeth, to the great satisfaction of her father and to the great indignation of her mother, the rector of Hunsford lost no time in betaking himself to Elizabeth's dearest friend, Charlotte Lucas, who, being a girl with unromantic, not to say prosaic, views of marriage, readily accepted and married him, thereby moving to further disgust and anger poor Mrs. Bennet, who was already wondering and repining at Mr. Bingley's returning no more into Hertfordshire. Jane suffered in silence, and despite

Elizabeth's efforts to point out the duplicity of Caroline Bingley, was inclined to believe the protestations that the latter made in her letters from London of Bingley's growing attachment to Darcy's sister Georgiana.

Mr. Bennet treated the matter in his customary ironical way.

"So, Lizzy," said he, one day, "your sister is crossed in love, I find. I congratulate her. Next to being married, a girl likes to be crossed in love a little now and then. It is something to think of, and gives her a sort of distinction among her companions. When is your turn to come? You will hardly bear to be long outdone by Jane. Now is your time. Here are officers enough at Meryton to disappoint all the young ladies in the country. Let Wickham be your man. He is a pleasant fellow, and would jilt you creditably."

"Thank you, sir, but a less agreeable man would satisfy me. We must not all expect Jane's good fortune."

"True," said Mr. Bennet; "but it is a comfort to think that, whatever of that kind may befall you, you have a mother who will always make the most of it."

As it turned out, Wickham, though he had not arrived at an intimacy which enabled him to *jilt* Elizabeth, yet most certainly transferred his attentions very shortly from her to a Miss King, who, by the death of her grandfather, had come into £10,000. Elizabeth, however, was quite heartwhole; and she and her former admirer parted on friendly terms when she left Longbourn to pay her promised visit to Mr. and Mrs. Collins at Hunsford.

There she found Charlotte, managing her home and her husband with considerable discretion: and, as the rectory adjoined Rosings Park, the seat of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, the patroness of the living, she was introduced to that lady, in whom she could discover nothing but an insolent aristocratic woman, who dictated to everyone about her, meddled in everybody's business, aimed at marrying her sickly daughter to Darcy, and was, needless to say, slavishly adored by Mr. Collins.

In the third week of her visit Mr. Darcy and his cousin, Colonel Fitzwilliam, came down to see their aunt, and thus--to Elizabeth's indifference--an acquaintance was renewed which Darcy soon seemed to show a real desire to take up again. He sought her society at Rosings Park, he called familiarly at the rectory, he waylaid her in her favourite walk; and all the time, in all his intercourse with her, he revealed such a mixture of interest and constraint as demonstrated only too clearly that some internal struggle was going on within him.

Mrs. Collins began to hope for her friend; but Elizabeth, who had received from Colonel Fitzwilliam ample confirmation of her suspicion that it was Darcy who had persuaded Bingley to give up Jane, was now only more incensed against the man who had broken her sister's peace of mind.

On the very evening of the day on which she had extracted this piece of information from his cousin, Darcy, knowing her to be alone, called at the rectory, and, after a silence of several minutes, came towards her in an agitated manner.

"In vain have I struggled," he said. "It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you."

Elizabeth's astonishment was beyond expression. She stared, coloured, doubted, and was silent. This he considered sufficient encouragement; and the avowal of all that he felt, and had long felt, for her immediately followed. He spoke well; but there were feelings besides those of the heart to be detailed. His sense of her inferiority, of marriage with her being a degradation, of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit. In truth, it was already

lost, for though Elizabeth could not be insensible to the compliment of such a man's affection, her intentions did not vary for an instant. Accusing him of having ruined, perhaps for ever, the happiness of her sister Jane, and of having blighted the career of his former friend Wickham, she reproached him with the uncivil style of his declaration, and gave him her answer in the words:

"You could not have made me the offer of your hand in any possible way that would have tempted me to accept it."

Soon after, Darcy took his leave; but the next day he accosted Elizabeth in the park, and handed her a letter, which he begged her to read. She read it, and had the mortification to discover not only that Darcy made some scathing but perfectly justifiable comments on the objectionable members of her family, but that he was able to clear himself of both the charges she had brought against him. He maintained that in separating Bingley from Jane he had not the slightest notion that he was doing the latter any injury, since he never credited her with any strong attachment to his friend; and he assured Elizabeth that, though Wickham had always been an idle and dissipated person, he had more than fulfilled his father's intentions to him, and that Wickham had repaid him for his generosity by trying to elope with his young sister Georgiana, a girl of fifteen.

When Elizabeth returned to Longbourn, she found it a relief to tell Jane of Darcy's proposal, and of his revelation of Wickham's real character; but she thought it best to suppress every particular of the letter in which Jane herself was concerned.

## V.--An Elopement

Some two months later Elizabeth went on a tour in Derbyshire with her maternal uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner. The latter had lived for some years at a town called Lambton, and wished to revisit her old friends there; and as Pemberley--Mr. Darcy's seat--was only five miles off, and was a show-place, the Gardiners determined to see it, though their niece was reluctant to accompany them until she had learned that its owner was not at home. As they were being shown over the place, Elizabeth could not help reflecting that she might have been mistress of it, and she listened with surprise as the old housekeeper told them that she should never meet with a better master, that she had never had a cross word from him in her life, that as a child he was always the sweetest-tempered, most generous-hearted boy in the world, and that there was not one of his tenants or servants but would testify to his excellent qualities as a landlord and a master.

As they were walking across the lawn the owner of Pemberley himself suddenly came forward from the road, and as if to justify the praises of his housekeeper, and to show that he had taken to heart Elizabeth's former complaints of his behaviour, proceeded to treat the Gardiner party with the greatest civility, and even cordiality. He introduced his sister to them, asked them to dinner, invited Mr. Gardiner to fish at Pemberley as often as he chose, and, in answer to a spiteful remark of Miss Bingley's to the effect that he had thought Elizabeth pretty at one time, made the crushing reply:

"Yes, but that was only when I first knew her; for it is many months since I have considered her as one of the handsomest women of my acquaintance."

But just when Elizabeth's growing esteem and gratitude might have deepened into affection for Darcy, circumstances were communicated to her in a letter from Jane which seemed to render it in the highest degree improbable that so proud and fastidious a man as he would ever make any further advances. Lydia, who had got herself invited by some friends to Brighton in order to be near the militia regiment which had been transferred there from Meryton, had eloped with Wickham, and the pair, instead of

going to Scotland to be married, appeared--though their whereabouts could not yet be discovered--to be living together in London unmarried.

Darcy seemed to be staggered when he heard the news, and instantly acquiesced in the immediate return of the Gardiner party to Longbourn. They found on their arrival that Mr. Bennet was searching for his daughter in London, where Mr. Gardiner agreed to go to consult with him.

"Oh, my dear brother," said Mrs. Bennet, on hearing this, "that is exactly what I could most wish for! And now do, when you get to town, find them out wherever they may be; and if they are not married already, *make* them marry. And as for wedding clothes, do not let them wait for that; but tell Lydia she shall have as much money as she chooses to buy them after they are married. And, above all things, keep Mr. Bennet from fighting. Tell him what a dreadful state I am in--that I am frightened out of my wits, and have such tremblings, such flutterings all over me; such spasms in my side, and pains in my head, and such beatings at my heart that I can get no rest by day nor by night. And tell my dear Lydia not to give any directions about her clothes till she has seen me, for she does not know which are the best warehouses. Oh, brother, how kind you are! I know you will contrive it all."

Mr. Collins improved the occasion by writing a letter of condolence, in which he assured the distressed father that the death of Lydia would have been a blessing in comparison with her elopement. But, unfortunately, much of this instruction was wasted, the distress of the Bennets proving less irremediable than their cousin had anticipated or their neighbours feared--for, thanks, as it seemed, to the investigations and to the generosity of Mr. Gardiner, the eloping couple were discovered, and it was made worth Wickham's while to marry Lydia. Longbourn society bore the good news with decent philosophy, though, to be sure, it would have been more for the advantage of conversation had Miss Lydia Bennet come upon the town.

## VI.--Three Bennet Weddings

After arrangements had been made for Wickham's entering the regulars and joining a regiment at Newcastle, his marriage with Lydia took place, and the young couple were received at Longbourn. Their assurance was quite reassuring.

"Well, mamma," said Lydia, "and what do you think of my husband? Is not he a charming man? I am sure my sisters must all envy me. I only hope they may have half my good luck. They must all go to Brighton. That is the place to get husbands. What a pity it is, mamma, we did not all go!"

"Very true. And if I had my will we should. But, my dear Lydia, I don't at all like your going such a way off. Must it be so?"

"Oh, Lord, yes! There is nothing in that. I shall like it of all things. You and papa and my sisters must come down and see us. We shall be at Newcastle all the winter; and I dare say there will be some balls, and I will take care to get good partners for them all."

"I should like it beyond anything!" said her mother.

"And then, when you go away, you may leave one or two of my sisters behind you; and I dare say I shall get husbands for them before the winter is over."

"I thank you for my share of the favour," said Elizabeth; "but I do not particularly like your way of getting husbands!"

Indeed, from some remark which Lydia let slip about Darcy being at the wedding, Elizabeth soon began to think that it was only due to outside efforts that Mrs. Wickham had succeeded in getting *her*

own husband.

An application for information which she made to her Aunt Gardiner confirmed this suspicion. Darcy, it seems, had hurried up to London immediately on hearing of the elopement; and he it was who, thanks to his knowledge of Wickham's previous history, found out where Lydia and he were lodging, and by dint of paying his debts to the tune of a thousand pounds, buying his commission, and settling another thousand pounds on Lydia, persuaded him to make her an honest woman. That is to say, thought Elizabeth, Darcy had met, frequently met, reasoned with, persuaded, and finally bribed the man whom he always most wished to avoid, and whose very name it was punishment to him to pronounce. Meantime, Bingley, accompanied by Darcy, made his reappearance at Netherfield Park and at the Bennets'; and Elizabeth had the mortification of seeing her mother welcome the former with the greatest effusiveness, and treat the latter coldly and almost resentfully. "Any friend of Mr. Bingley's will always be welcome here, to be sure; but else I must say that I hate the very sight of him," said Mrs. Bennet, as she watched the two men approaching the house to pay their first visit.

Despite, however, rather than by reason of, this surfeit of amiability on the part of the mother, the lovers quickly came to an understanding, and this, strangely enough, in the absence of Darcy, who had gone up to town. It was in Darcy's absence, also, that Lady Catherine de Bourgh came over to Longbourn, and helped to bring about what she most ardently wished to prevent by making an unsuccessful demand on Elizabeth that she should promise not to accept Darcy for a husband, and by then reporting to him that Elizabeth had refused to give such a promise. The natural result followed. Elizabeth mustered up courage one day to thank Darcy for all he had done for Lydia; and this subject soon led *him* to affirm that in that matter he had thought only of Elizabeth, and to renew--and to renew successfully--his former proposals of marriage. When Mrs. Bennet first heard the great news she sat quite still, and unable to utter a syllable; and at first even Jane and her father were almost incredulous of the engagement, because they had seen practically nothing of the courtship. But in the end they were all convinced, and Mr. Bennet's decisive comment was: "I admire all my three sons-in-law highly. Wickham, perhaps, is my favourite; but I think I shall like *your* husband quite as well as Jane's. If any young men come for Mary or Kitty, send them in, for I am quite at leisure."

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