

JANE AUSTEN: PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

(PART 1)

by

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ついて (その1)

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1. THE LIFE OF JANE AUSTEN¹⁾

Jane Austen was born on the 16th of December 1775, at Steventon rectory in the country of Hampshire, and there she spent her childhood and youth. Steventon is a small rural village upon the chalk hills of north Hants with its terrace of finest turf and beautiful hedgeworks situated in a winding valley about seven miles from Basingstoke.

Jane's birth was announced by Mr. Austen in his letter to her aunt, Mrs. Walter, on December 17th, 1775:

...We have now another girl, a present playing for her sister Cassy, and a future companion. She is to be Jenny, and seems to me as if she would be as like Harry as Cassy is to Neddy. Your sister, thank God, is pure well after it. (Jenkins: p. 11)

The Rev. George Austen (1731—1801) was gentle and strongly attached to his family; he occupied himself with the cares of his parish, his farm and his pupils, and left a reputation for scholarship and literary taste. His wife, Cassandra (1739—1827), was a countrywoman and busy gardener with vital energy enough to carry her through long stretches of ill health, and like Mrs. Morland in *Northanger Abbey*, had her time much occupied in lying-in and teaching little ones. They brought up six sons and two daughters.

James (1765—1819), his father's curate and successor, was largely responsible for the formation of Jane's literary tastes and remained, through her life, a kind and excellent parish priest. Edward (1767—1852) took the name of Knight with the estate

left him by his father's cousin and patron, Thomas Knight of Godmersham. Henry (1771–1851), captain of militia, army banker, and 'earnest evangelical', was the only Austen to settle in London, and he continually busied himself about Jane's affairs with her publishers. Cassandra (1773–1845) had never 'a thought concealed from Jane' through life, and at Jane's death felt 'as if she had lost a part of herself'. Francis (1774–1865) and Charles (1779–1852) were both sailors during that glorious period of the British Navy, and their career accounts for Jane's partiality for the Navy, as well as for the readiness and accuracy with which she presented some of her characters.

Little is known of Jane's childhood, but she was sent to the Abbey School at Reading with Cassandra for a year or two, only because she would have been miserable without her sister. Thus, this was not for her study, and except this, she received no regular education. Her estimate of her own literary education was humble enough; she speaks of herself as a woman who 'knows only her mother tongue and read little in that...', in declining a request from James S. Clarke to draw a clergyman, and goes on,

'...A classical education, on at any rate a very extensive acquaintance with literature, ancient and modern, appears to me quite indispensable for the person who would do any justice to your clergyman; and I think I may boast myself to be, with all possible vanity, the most unlearned and unformed female who ever dared to be an authoress.' (A letter to Mr. Clarke Dec. 11 1815) (*Memoir* : p. 122)

But her family was a very bookish one; her father, mother and brothers all loved reading, and she was brought up in this atmosphere. Among her favorite writers, Johnson in prose, Crabbe in verse, and Cowper in both stood high. Scott's poetry gave her great pleasure, but his novels didn't. She read and praised Miss Burney's novels and Miss Edgeworth's; she read Fielding and 'her knowledge of Richardson's works was such as no one is likely again to acquire...' (*Memoir* pp. 89–90) Perhaps even Radcliffe's novels delighted her at some time in her youth. In history she followed the old guides — Goldsmith, Hume and Robertson. She read French with facility, and knew something of Italian. (*Memoir* pp. 88–89)

There was a neighbour, Mrs. Lefroy of Ashe, who — herself a lady of more than usual culture — was fond and proud of Jane and took particular pains to foster her natural gifts. (*Memoir* p. 49) There was, moreover, a cousin Elizabeth, who had finished her studies in Paris before Cassandra and Jane left home for school, and after losing her husband, Count de Feuillide guillotined in French Revolution, married to Henry Austen in 1797. (*Memoir* p. 25) It was probable that Eliza talked of the world outside Steventon and read French and perhaps Italian with Jane and Cassandra, but this is all that is called 'education' of Jane Austen. As a country gentlewoman she was good at needlework, fond of music, drawing and especially of dancing.

It seems rather hard to find out at what age Jane Austen's innate genius for story-telling began to stir. The only definite piece of information is the advice given

by her to a twelve-year-old niece, who says, "If I would take her advice, I should cease writing till I was sixteen; she had herself often wished she had read more and written less in the corresponding years of her life." (Jane Austen and Her Art: p. 8) Her childish tales had amounted to a considerable number by the time she was sixteen. Three volumes of her 'effusions' have survived, of which two have been published. The dates suggest that these belong to the ages between fifteen and eighteen. The volumes contain a large number of pieces, narrative and dramatic, for the most part very short, and they are generally considered to have been intended to be read or enacted in the family circle.

About the composition of the early novels Cassandra left a note as follows:

First Impression (original of *Pride and Prejudice*) begun October 1796, ended August 1797 .

Sense and Sensibility, begun November 1777.

Northanger Abbey, written in 1797 and 1798. (Minor Works opposite p. 242)

But in *Memoir of Jane Austen* it is said about *Sense and Sensibility* that something similar in story and character had been written earlier (than *First Impression*) under the title of *Elinor and Marianne* in letters. Among the completed novels we should take *First Impression* as the first. These three novels had not been successful in publication before she removed to Chawton and revised them.

In November 1800, George Austen decided to resign his post and leave Steventon, and Jane was 'exceedingly unhappy' when she heard what had been resolved upon. Chapman writes :

But it has been noted as significant that there are no letters to Cassandra left between the time of decision and the following January. Letters must have been written, for Cassandra was at Godmersham. That they were destroyed suggests that they were not of the ordinary cheerful kind. Jane's local attachments were of extraordinary strength; they were no small part of her genius. We cannot doubt that the loss of her native country and of the multitude of associations which made up her girlish experience, was exquisitely painful. Her feelings cannot have been less acute than Marianne's on leaving Norland, or Anne's on leaving Kellynch. (*Facts and Problem*: p. 47)

The removal took place in 1801. The years spent in Bath were clouded by Cassandra's tragedy and by Jane's own frustration and blunder at Manydown: Cassandra's fiancé died of yellow fever in the West Indies (Companion p. 11), and Jane changed her mind to turn down the proposal from Harris Bigg-Wither in one night which she had accepted the previous night. Even if the sisters had not had those sorrows, their life in Sidney Terrace and Green Park Buildings might have been drab enough. Their father's powers were failing, and their mother was for some time seriously ill. Their only relations were the Leigh Perrots in Paragon. In February 1805, their father died at Bath and was buried at Walcot Church. The widow and daughters went into lodgings a few months, and then removed to Southampton.

The manuscripts of *The Watsons* and *Lady Susan* are written on paper with

watermarks dated 1803 and 1805 respectively, and these dates may be taken as the time when Jane worked on them.

In 1809, Mr. Knight was able to offer his mother the choice of two houses on his property: one near his usual residence at Godmersham Park in Kent and the other near Chawton House, his occasional residence in Hampshire. The latter was chosen, and in that year they settled themselves at Chawton Cottage with Miss Lloyd, a near connection of them.

Chawton may be called the second, as well as the last, home of Jane Austen; for during the temporary residences of the party at Bath and Southampton, she was only a sojourner in strange land, but here she found a real home amongst her own people. It so happened that during her residence at Chawton circumstances brought several of her brothers and their families within short distance of the house. Chawton must also be considered as the place most closely connected with her career as a writer, for it was there that she wrote in the maturity of her mind, rearranged and prepared for publication of her books. The chronology of the novels which she started at Chawton is fixed by a memorandum made by the author herself:

Mansfield Park, Begun somewhere about Feb 1811. Finished soon after June 1813.

Persuasion, Begun Aug 8th 1815. Finished Aug 6th 1816.

Emma, Begun Jan 21, 1814. Finished March 29, 1815.

Since so much had been previously prepared, once she began to publish, her works came out in quick succession. *Sense and Sensibility* was published in November, 1811, *Pride and Prejudice* in January 1813, *Mansfield Park* in May 1814, *Emma* in December 1815; *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* did not appear till, after her death, 1818. Her first three novels were published by T. Egerton and her last three, by Murray.

Jane Austen lived in entire seclusion from the literary world: neither by correspondence nor by personal intercourse was she known to any contemporary authors. In the autumn of 1815, she nursed her brother Henry in London, when one of the Prince Regent's physicians was aware that she was the author of *Pride and Prejudice* and informed his Royal Highness. Thus *Emma*, which was at that time in the press, was dedicated to the Prince. Perhaps this was the only mark of distinction ever bestowed upon Jane.

Early in the year 1816 some family troubles disturbed the usually tranquil course of Jane Austen's life; and probably the inward malady, which was to prove eventually fatal, was already felt by her. (*Memoir* p 159)

In May 1817 she was persuaded to move to Winchester for the sake of medical advice from Mr. Lyford. Jane and Cassandra took lodgings in College Street. She wrote from there to her nephew Edward Austen, author of the *Memoir* :

There is no better way, my dearest E., of thanking you for your affectionate concern for me during my illness than by telling you myself, as soon as possible, that I continue to get better... Mr. Lyford says he will cure me, and if he fails, I shall draw up a memorial and lay it before the Dean and Chapter, and have no doubt of redress from that pious, learned, and disinterested body... God bless

you, my dear Edward. If ever you are ill, may you be as tenderly nursed as I have been... (May 27, 1817) (*Memoir* 173-4)²⁾

In another letter, written soon after this (May, 1817), she says :

I will only say further that my dearest sister, my tender, watchful, indefatigable nurse, has not been made ill by her exertions. As to what I owe her and the anxious affection of all my beloved family on this occasion, I can only cry over it, and pray God to bless them more and more. (*Memoir* p. 174)

The first importance was human kind for Jane Austen, and in her human world her own family stood foremost. She was by no means confined to its society, but she was never, unless in short visits to her intimate friends, quite separated from her family.

By the end of June, the hope of her recovery was gone, but not with it her cheerfulness and sweetness, it is said. She died at Winchester on the morning of July 18th and was buried on the 24th in the north aisle of the Cathedral.

2. PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Pride and Prejudice was the first novel written by Jane Austen, though not the first to appear in the world. Austen was only twenty-one years old when she wrote the novel although her later revision must be taken into consideration. The original title of the novel was *First Impressions*; the manuscript was offered to Cadell, the London publisher, in November 1797; but the offer was refused by return of post. Before publication she revised to some extent at Chawton, alluding herself to having 'successfully lop't and crop't' *Pride and Prejudice*, and at last it was published by Thomas Egerton of the Military Library in Whitehall. (*Facts and Problems*: p. 154)

2. 1. PRIDE AND PREJUDICE—THE PLOT AND STRUCTURE—

Pride and Prejudice begins with the exhilarating generalization :

'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.' (Chap 1)³⁾

The first scene opens with the dialogue between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, displaying their characteristics fully, and it is known that Mr. Bingley, 'a single man of a good fortune', has taken Netherfield near Longbourn, where they live. The family consists of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet and five daughters; Jane, beautiful and gentle girl; Elizabeth, the heroine and her father's favorite; Lydia, silly and unprincipled; and two others Mary and Kitty, who do not add much to the interest of the story.

In Chapter 3, Mr. Bingley is introduced in the ball scene with his two sisters, Caroline and Mrs. Hurst and his friend Mr. Darcy, the hero, and he is interested in Jane as soon as he sees her. Elizabeth at once becomes 'prejudiced' against Mr. Darcy by the general hauteur of his bearings towards the village girls, and particularly by having overheard herself pronounced by him to be 'tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *him*'. After introducing the chief characters in this dramatic

way, the author delineates the characters of Jane and Elizabeth by their conversation, and then analyzes the characters of Bingley and Darcy in the descriptive sentences. In Chapter 4, the Lucases, especially Charlotte Lucas, the eldest daughter, enters the story. Though Charlotte is one of the secondary people, she not only makes Elizabeth conspicuous, contrasted with her, but also plays an important part in the progress of the story between Darcy and Elizabeth, by marrying to Mr. Collins, connected with Lady Catherine and her nephew Darcy. The author handles her skillfully and in the next chapter prepares for the plot carefully by her words. She and Elizabeth discuss the possibility of Jane's marriage to Bingley, and she says to Elizabeth who admires Jane's 'composure of temper and a uniform cheerfulness':

"...but it is sometimes a disadvantage to be so very guarded. If a woman conceals her affection with the same skill from the object of it, she may lose the opportunity of fixing him; ..." (Chap. 4)

Even Elizabeth, who understands Jane very well, thinks that Jane's affection does not attract attention, so it seems natural to the reader that Darcy misjudges her later and Bingley is moved to follow Darcy's advice. This is one of the careful preparations to give necessity to the process of the story. While Elizabeth is 'occupied in observing Mr. Bingley's attentions to her sister', she becomes 'an object of some interest' of Darcy, who, at their second meeting, finds that her face is 'rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes'. They talk to each other for the first time at the party in Sir Lucas's, and Darcy even requests 'to be allowed the honour of her hands', but she refuses in revenge for his previous impoliteness. In spite of this harsh refusal, he thinks of her with some complacency and remarks his feelings to Miss Bingley who wishes to win the heart of Darcy:

"I had been meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow." (Chap. 4)

With these words of Darcy, we may suppose that Act I of the story is over here.

In Chapter 7, the village of Meryton, part of the elements of the plot, and Mrs. Phillips, an elder sister of Mrs. Bennet are described. Here are also Jane's visit to the Bingleys, her illness and stay with Elizabeth who visits them in order to nurse Jane. In the course of these several chapters the reader is informed that Bingley has a gentle affection for Jane and goodwill for Elizabeth; Miss Bingley is vain and 'engrossed by Darcy'; Darcy is attracted more and more by Elizabeth; and that Elizabeth, indifferent to him, observes these persons, amusing herself. This is one of the delicate scenes in the drama of life. Especially interesting is the conversation among Bingley, Darcy and Elizabeth in Chapter 10, and in the next chapter the misunderstanding for Darcy is more deepened, which is followed by the conversation that seems to be a key to control the development of the plot; they come to talk about pride and vanity, and Darcy says:

'Yes, vanity is a weakness indeed. But pride — where there is a real superiority of mind, pride will be always under good regulation.' (Chap. 11)

Elizabeth turns away to hide a smile and answers Miss Bingley:

'I'm perfectly convinced by it that Mr. Darcy has no defect. He owns it himself without disguise.' (Ibid.)

Then Darcy says to Elizabeth:

'No, I have made no such pretension. I have faults enough, but they are not, I hope, of understanding. My temper I dare not vouch for. — It is, I believe, too little yielding — certainly too little for the convenience of the world. I cannot forget the follies and vices of others so soon as I ought, nor their offences against myself. My feelings are not puffed about with every attempt to move them. My temper would perhaps be called resentful. My good opinion once lost, is lost forever.' (Ibid.)

If Elizabeth listened to his words more frankly, she might notice that he speaks about himself very honestly, but for Elizabeth only the first impression is intensified and thus the underground to believe what Wickham says is laid down.

In Chapter 13 a new character, Mr. Collins, the heir to the Longbourn estates enters with his excessive affectation, proposes to Elizabeth only to fail, and marries Charlotte, while in parallel with these comic scenes, a young militia George Wickham appears, catches Elizabeth's heart and fosters her prejudice for Darcy who refused to present Wickham to the living against his father's will.

The ball at Netherfield involves those various people and their relations are delicate and complicated; and this scene may be regarded as one of the tense moments before the climax. Then it suddenly happens that the Bingleys remove to London, and it gives a grave shock on Jane and her mother who becomes half-sick. Here Act II comes to an end and Act III begins.

Again, the reader meets new characters; Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, uncle and aunt of Bennet girls; and a little later, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Darcy's aunt and Colonel Fitzwilliam, his cousin. Jane is invited to stay in London for diversion by Mrs. Gardiner, while his sister Elizabeth is invited by Charlotte, and stays with her and Mr. Collins. She comes in contact with Lady Catherine who is Collins' patroness, with Darcy and Fitzwilliam who have come to stay at their aunt's. This is a good example of Jane Austen's device in which she makes such a comic character as Collins not only the object of laughter but also the character who contributes to the plot. Now, Colonel Fitzwilliam is also one of the secondary characters, but the author makes him play a very delicate part to progress Darcy's affection for Elizabeth. It is natural that he, very gentle and amiable, should become intimate with Elizabeth, and Darcy finds a possible rival in his consin. This is dramatically described on the scene of assemblies in the Parsonage, and leads to Darcy's visit to Elizabeth in Chapter 32 and his proposal. Elizabeth meets Colonel Fitzwilliam in the park, and learns from him the extent of Darcy's evil influence over his friend, Bingley. Till then she has put the blame of Bingley's desertion upon his sister Caroline; but now Darcy has been the chiel offender.

Now, Act IV seems to open with Darcy's proposal: the author brings this celecrated scene when Elizabeth's prejudice for Darcy has reached its highest on

account of Wickham's malicious slander of him and his wrong to Jane. The arrangement for her refusal is all finished here. Thus the reader is perfectly convinced of her refusal in harsh words.

The next scene is the delivery of a letter into Elizabeth's hand by Darcy himself, and from this moment her prejudice begins to diminish; while Darcy reflects on himself at the accusation by Elizabeth and amends his drawbacks. Her tour to Derbyshire with the Gradiners changes her feelings very much, and there she visits Pemberley where Darcy's estate is situated — and hears Darcy mentioned by his housekeeper to be 'always the sweetest-tempered, most generous-hearted boy in the world.' Indeed, to her astonishment, Darcy appears unexpectedly and bears himself very politely and amiably. This course of events is suddenly interrupted by a startling news of Lydia's elopement with Wickham. As to this event, Jane Austen has prepared carefully in the following way: first, it is before the removal of regiment from Meryton to Brighton that Elizabeth knows Wickham's wickedness, but she does not tell this except to Jane. It is because she cannot persuade the people in Meryton who hate Darcy to convince it without making public what Wickham had planned for Darcy's sister, which she could not endure with. Since Lydia knows nothing about his vice, all that Elizabeth thinks she should do is to beg her father not to allow Lydia to accept the invitation to Brighton from Mrs. Forster. But Mr. Bennet, with his usual indifference to his children, replies: "We shall have no place at Longbourn if Lydia does not go to Brighton," and in this way, the story follows its course with positive necessity to Act V, the conclusion.

In this last part, Elizabeth's growing gratitude and affection for Darcy, the engagement between Jane and Bingley, Darcy's sacrificial act in the elopement, and Lady Catherine's interference which causes an entirely reverse effect are described, and as the result, Darcy's hope is revived and his proposal is accepted by Elizabeth.

Pride and Prejudice has two plots—the main plot and the subplot; the former is the marriage between Darcy and Elizabeth and the latter is the love and marriage between Jane and Bingley, contrasted with the former in its character. The story of Jane and Bingley is related very closely with the main plot with which other secondary people have also close connections contributing to its progress. On the marriages of two couples of lovers which are necessarily accomplished in the end, W. L. Cross comments:

"The marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy is not merely a possible solution of plot, it is as inevitable as the conclusion of a properly constructed syllogism or geometrical demonstration. For a parallel to workmanship of this high order, one can look only to Shakespeare, to such a comedy as 'Much Ado About Nothing'". (Cross: p. 120)

In *Much Ado About Nothing*, the marriage of Beatrice, the heroine, with many characteristics in common with Elizabeth Bennet, and Benedick, the hero to correspond to Darcy, has a very close relation to the marriage of Hero and Claudio, who are Jane and Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice*. The similarity between the two works

suggests Shakespeare's influence upon Jane Austen. Cross says:

No novelist since Fielding had been a master of structure. Fielding constructed the novel after the analogy of the ancient drama. "Pride and Prejudice" has not only the humour of Shakespearian comedy, but also its technique. (p. 119)

The Austens were very fond of reading and they often acted dramas at home when Jane was a girl; she herself wrote some short dramas in her tentatives, and they were of much value as home-recreation. It is not difficult to imagine that she had taken a fancy to the drama and, as she grew, she fostered her sense and technique of drama and made good use of them in writing novels. She sometimes stayed with her brother in London and went to see the plays of Shakespeare. The works of Shakespeare, such as Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, Richard III and so on, are mentioned along with the dramas of the eighteenth century, in the novels by her characters. Henry Crawford's statement about Shakespeare in *Mansfield Park* may be taken as the author's opinion of Shakespeare:

"...But Shakespeare one gets acquainted with without knowing how. It is a part of an Englishman's constitution. His thoughts and beauties are so spread abroad that one touches them every where, one is intimate with him by instinct..." (Chap. 34)

Edwin Muir calls *Pride and Prejudice* "the dramatic novel", and discusses the difference from "the novel of action" as follows:

In this division (that is, in the dramatic novel) the hiatus between the character and plot disappears. The characters are not part of the machinery of the plot; nor is the plot merely a rough framework round the characters. On the contrary both are inseparably knit together. The given qualities of the characters determine the action, and the action in turn progressively changes the characters, and thus everything is borne forward to an end. (Muir : pp 41-2)

It may safely be said that in Jane Austen's novels the dramatic element predominates, and the characters reveal themselves through speech and action, and at the same time they are portrayed in the conversation and judgment of other characters in the story.

[2. 2 PRIDE AND PREJUDICE—THE PEOPLE AND IRONY—will be reported as Part II, in the next issue.]

NOTES

- 1) I owe much of this brief outline of Jane Austen's life to *Memoir of Jane Austen* by J. E. Austen-Leigh and *Jane Austen : Facts and Problems* by R. W. Chapman.
- 2) This letter is slightly different in wording from the one in *Letters*.
- 3) The chapters are numbered consecutively as in most of the popular editions.

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