

# On the Heroine of *Pride And Prejudice* by Jane Austen

## — Elizabeth Bennet's Self-Education through Her Ordeals

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### INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Elizabeth Bennet is one of the most charming heroines created by Jane Austen. She appears in *Pride And Prejudice* as a bright and brilliant girl. She has good judgement as well as high intelligence, but it does not necessarily follow that she is without drawbacks in her character. As she deepens her understanding of people, her awareness of having these drawbacks increases and in no time she begins to try to improve and educate herself. This self-education is the dominant theme of the novel.

Elizabeth's self-education is advanced both in her inner world and her outer world. She cannot attain a happy marriage until she has undergone a mental conflict in her inner world. Also when she observes the married couples around her, she never fails to entertain a critical opinion of them. In criticizing them she gradually comes to recognize the realities of life. In both worlds she learns about human truths and develops her self-education.

In the present paper we will discuss the following problems: How does Elizabeth

educate herself? What views does the author have on a human activity like self-education? What value can we place on the views of Elizabeth and the author?

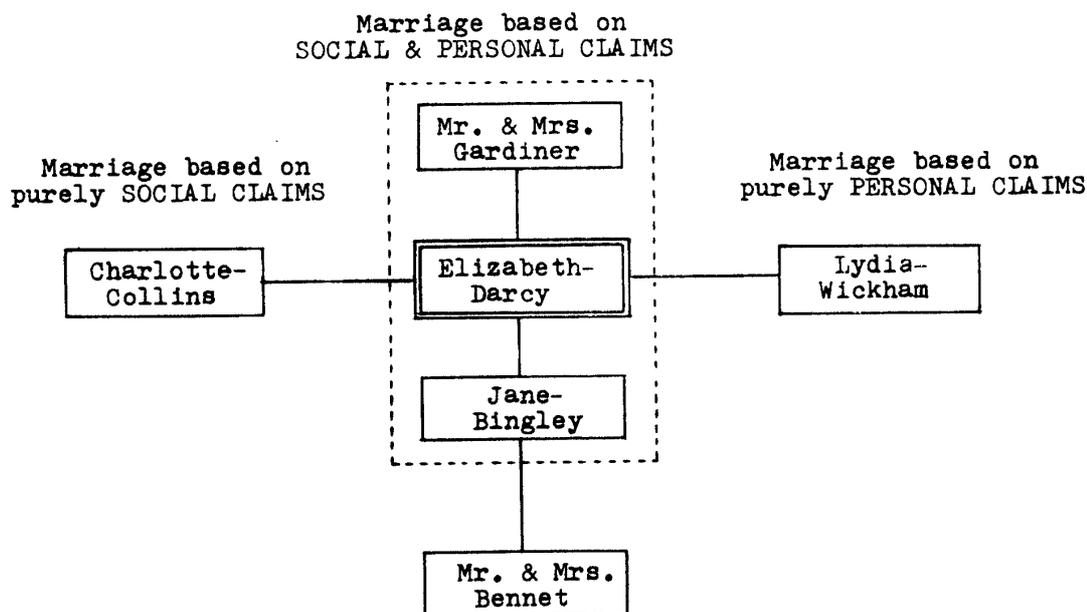
It is no easy matter for us to know ourselves and see the world. There is no doubt whatever of there being difficulties in a process of education. But, despite these difficulties, Elizabeth's efforts, in fact, result in a prodigious success. In this respect Elizabeth Bennet is a good example of those human beings who have improved themselves through suffering hardships.

Moreover, *Pride And Prejudice* is a very entertaining novel, and is full of humour and irony. These elements are so significant that they can not escape being touched on. In them Jane Austen's voices manifest themselves. So, when we find it necessary, the question of humour and irony will be taken up.

### CHAPTER I The Thematic Pattern

The main theme in *Pride And Prejudice* is Elizabeth's self-education. Understanding of the thematic pattern of the work is necessary to understand the author's views on the importance of self-education. In the present chapter, a brief summary of the thematic pattern will be given.

Six main couples appear in the novel. One of them is the Elizabeth-Darcy couple; the others are Charlotte-Collins, Lydia-Wickham, Jane-Bingley, Mr. & Mrs. Gardiner, and Mr. & Mrs. Bennet. According to the special qualities peculiar to each couple we will classify them into various groups. The thematic pattern of *Pride And Prejudice* might be diagrammatically shown as below:



At the centre of the primary sub-pattern stands the Elizabeth-Darcy relationship, far to one side is the Charlotte-Collins couple and at the opposite extreme is the Lydia-Wickham relationship.<sup>1)</sup> The Charlotte-Collins marriage yields to social and economic claims. The Lydia-Wickham couple, in contradistinction, surrenders to personal and emotional claims. The Elizabeth-Darcy relationship, placed between the two couples, has the specific characteristic of reconciling social and personal claims. In Elizabeth's opinion, the Charlotte-Collins and Lydia-Wickham couples are unsuitable and unhappy. And in the author's mind, it is clear that the Elizabeth-Darcy couple is the most suitable one of the three.

However, this primary sub-pattern alone does not allow us to trace Elizabeth's moral development. We cannot fail to be led to discern another pattern latent in her process of self-recognition. This is a secondary sub-pattern, but it is indispensable to a fuller comprehension of the theme of the novel. This secondary sub-pattern is made up of three couples: Mr. & Mrs. Gardiner, Mr. & Mrs. Bennet, and Jane and Bingley. These three couples are situated above or below the Elizabeth-Darcy relationship in the thematic diagram above.

Mr. & Mrs. Gardiner is the sort of couple which makes much of economic power and human personality. In this couple both claims, social and personal, are completely united and properly adjusted. But of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet this is not true; that is to say, Mr. Bennet has a regard for human personality, while his wife has a preference for economic claims, especially with reference to social status. While it is true that this couple is characterized by the two factors, personal and social, neither of them is adjusted properly. This couple may be looked upon as an example of an unsuitable, incomplete couple.

The Jane-Bingley relationship brings both factors into a correct balance, not consciously but spontaneously. In this respect, the Jane-Bingley couple is quite different from the Elizabeth-Darcy, though the two couples are equally happy.

## CHAPTER II

### § 1. The Charlotte-Collins Couple

In the present section, let us examine some qualities peculiar to the Charlotte-Collins couple. As the Bennets have no male successor to the estate, it is to be handed over to Mr. Bennet's cousin, a young rector named William Collins. He calls on the Bennets and stays with them a fortnight, during which he intends to select his wife from among the five daughters of the Bennets. He thinks it

reasonable to single out any one daughter in compensation for the estate which is to be handed over to him. As soon as he realizes that the eldest, Jane, proves of no use to his aim, he proposes to the second daughter, Elizabeth. His proposal, however, is immediately rejected by her. Two days after this rejection, he attempts to court Charlotte Lucas, Elizabeth's intimate friend. This time she comes up to his expectation, for she is willing to accept his hand. When Elizabeth is informed of her friend's acceptance, her astonishment is so great as to almost make her impolite. In spite of Elizabeth's great astonishment, however, Charlotte calmly gives her own ideas about her acceptance of Mr. Collins's proposal, saying :

“...I am not romantic you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home ; and considering Mr. Collins's character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state.”<sup>2)</sup>

She has hoped to gain that comfortable home that most people in the world aspire to. She regards Mr. Collins as a tolerably respectable partner who will surely fulfil her sincere desire.

Charlotte is a sensible, intelligent girl. She tries to draw Mr. Collins's attention to her after she learns that Elizabeth has refused his proposal. She thinks now is the chance. At the dinner party between her family and the Bennets, she is ready to listen to Mr. Collins's speech, because, Elizabeth fancies, she is aware that Elizabeth will feel uncomfortable if she is talked to by him. Elizabeth thanks Charlotte for her apparently kind behaviour. Here the author writes :

...Charlotte's kindness extended farther than Elizabeth had any conception of ; —its object was nothing less, than to secure her (Elizabeth) from any return of Mr. Collins's addresses, by engaging them towards herself. Such was Miss Lucas's scheme...<sup>3)</sup>

Charlotte Lucas's behaviour is, in fact, based upon an effective 'scheme' laid out by herself. Charlotte is well aware that she, with neither beauty nor fortune, will never be allowed a free choice in her life partner. She has already established her own view of marriage, to which she gives the following description :

“...Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance. If the dispositions of the parties are ever so well known to each other, or ever so similar before-hand, it does not advance their felicity in the least. They always continue to grow sufficiently unlike afterwards to have their share of vexation ; and it is better to know as little as possible of defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life.”<sup>4)</sup>

To gain marriage is more important in itself for her than the personality of the man who is 'a mixture of pride and obsequiousness.'<sup>5)</sup> She is convinced that this matrimony will prevent her from facing economic deficiency in her life. The author refers to her prudent, self-interested ideas as follows :

Mr. Collins to be sure was neither sensible nor agreeable ; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband.—Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object ; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. This preservative she had now obtained . . . she felt all the good luck of it.<sup>6)</sup>

She dares to sacrifice every better feeling for her worldly advantage. Therefore in her marriage it seems that her personality will be damaged under the pressure of the economic factors in society.

Support for this impression is found in Elizabeth's anxiety. She fears Charlotte will not be happy in her married life ; in fact she comes to form a decided opinion about Charlotte's marriage.

Charlotte the wife of Mr. Collins, was a most humiliating picture !—And to the pang of a friend disgrading herself and sunk in her esteem, was added the distressing conviction that it was impossible for that friend to be tolerably happy in the lot she had chosen.<sup>7)</sup>

Afterwards Elizabeth visits Charlotte living in marriage with Collins at Hunsford. Then she flatters herself that Charlotte's married life is just the same as she has expected. Mrs. Collins's manners convince her that 'he must be often forgotten.'<sup>8)</sup> But Elizabeth's judgement cannot be regarded as reasonable ; she merely dogmatizes upon Charlotte's married life, after all, other people's happiness cannot be judged by mere appearance.

Reverend Collins is, so to speak, a moonstruck man, and quite often prone to indulge in eccentric behaviour. To Elizabeth he shifts his proposal from Jane without any sense of guilt. The change is made in a moment : 'it was soon done—done while Mrs. Bennet was stirring the fire.'<sup>9)</sup> His absurdity is most conspicuous when he courts Elizabeth :

"My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in his parish. Secondly, that I am convinced it will add very greatly to my happiness ; and thirdly—which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier,

that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady whom I have the honour of calling patroness . . . ”<sup>10)</sup>

He shows unilateral reasons for his marriage, but he never touches on why he must take Elizabeth as his wife. His addresses to Elizabeth, in fact, may have their validity to any girl.<sup>11)</sup> Collins, a fool full of pretentious wit, always bears himself disdainfully in his attempt to strike admiration for him into others. His letters of thanks to Mr. Bennet show his snobbery, in which he makes full use of biblical allusions. It may safely be said that he is one of the most prominently entertaining characters created by Jane Austen. The comical aspects of his character are faithfully reflected in his speech and behaviour.

The appearance of Mr. Collins in *Pride And Prejudice* is of another special significance in addition to adding comical elements to the work. That is his avaricious character; Mr. Collins, who wishes to raise his position and power in society, appears as an incarnation of avarice. The fact that he is avarice incarnate influences the quality of the Charlotte-Collins marriage. Charlotte, as we have observed so far, also insists on social, economic claims. For this reason the Charlotte-Collins couple is a social and material claims-oriented one: Birds of a feather flock together.

Whatever criticisms Elizabeth offers of their matrimony, their married life is carried on unharmed. Realities in life defy her self-conceited opinions. Thus while staying with the Collinses, she faces the fact that a married life can be carried on with recourse to social and economic factors even though man and wife are lacking in better feelings between them. Elizabeth begins to have a vague knowledge of the significance of social and economic factors. She, however, cannot understand it clearly at this stage. She cannot do so until she has improved herself, and comes to be fully conscious of her previous ignorance of economic factors in real life.

## § 2. The Lydia-Wickham Couple

Our task in this section is to discuss the Lydia-Wickham couple which stands at the opposite extreme to the Charlotte-Collins couple in the diagram (CHAPTER I).

Lydia Bennet is the youngest daughter of the Bennets. Her daily business is to flirt with some officers in scarlet uniforms belonging to the regiment in Meryton. When the regiment is moved to Brighton, she is delighted to go and stay there

under the protection of Mrs. Forster, Colonel Forster's wife. Lydia soon comes to have tender relations with George Wickham, a young officer. They have, in fact, been familiar with each other since meeting in Meryton. Soon she elopes with him. But, because the elopement is motivated by their temporary passions, there appears no prospect of marriage in the future.

This surprising event takes place while Elizabeth is travelling in Derbyshire with Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, her uncle and aunt. Though Elizabeth is very much shocked by the news from Jane, she tries to think back over Lydia's behaviour and manners in her everyday life.

... she [Elizabeth] was convinced that Lydia had wanted only encouragement to attach herself to anybody. Sometimes one officer, sometimes another had been her favourite, as their attentions raised them in her opinion. Her affections had been continually fluctuating, but never without an object.<sup>12)</sup>

Lydia's manners are, in fact, fickle and frivolous. Elizabeth now regrets that her family have allowed her younger sister to have her own way in everything. She is a girl of the kind that is interested in nothing but flirtation, especially with officers. Wickham, one of the officers, is a man with handsome features and a pleasing grace which fascinates every woman he meets. It is no wonder that Lydia should be irresistibly attracted by his charm which fascinated even Elizabeth at an earlier stage. Lydia, lost in the rapture of him, decides to make her elopement. She leaves a letter behind when she elopes, which says :

... there is but one man in the world I love, and he is an angel. I should never be happy without him, so think it no harm to be off.<sup>13)</sup>

There are none in her heart except Wickham, who she thinks is an 'angel'. With him she hopes to have freedom and excitement.

What is Wickham's motivation? He is by nature such a man as cannot ignore pecuniary profit. He once came to love another girl and neglect Elizabeth, since the former happened to accept her grandfather's property. He may indeed have some affection for Lydia; but Elizabeth cannot help guessing that there is an ulterior design behind his apparent affection. He practically has to flee from his creditors, for he has a large sum of debts. It is necessary for him to hide himself. Hiding as well as affection is obviously the chief motivation of his elopement. It is an interesting fact that Wickham has two aspects to his character: he sometimes sets more value on the satisfaction of sensual desires than that of economic needs, and at other times the opposite. And he hides the satisfaction of economic

needs—an escape from his debts—behind that of sensual desires when he elopes with Lydia.

In their elopement they both try to escape from social restrictions. To satisfy her personal desires Lydia is so bold in action as to take no consideration of her family, relatives, or the world. Wickham is forced to hide himself from the world because of his debts. He takes care only of himself, and never performs his responsibility to people in the world. Afterwards the two violators, however, are helped into marriage by the people around them.

Their marriage is characteristic in that they choose personal claims before their consideration for society. Therefore, in the thematic pattern, the Lydia-Wickham couple is situated at the opposite extreme to the Charlotte-Collins couple, which we know places more value on social claims than personal ones.

Elizabeth has blamed Charlotte once for her self-interested marriage, and now she is obliged to blame her own sister Lydia for her haphazard one. Elizabeth feels sorry, and gets angry as well. Her thinking is clearly seen in the following passage :

How Wickham and Lydia were to be supported in tolerable independence, she could not imagine. But how little of permanent happiness could belong to a couple who were only brought together because their passions were stronger than their virtue, she could easily conjecture.<sup>14)</sup>

Here in these lines, Austen's view seems to manifest itself. She blames the couple for their lack of 'virtue'. She declares her firm conviction that virtue is the criterion for judging everything. Moreover, Elizabeth's conjecture in respect to the happiness of the Lydia-Wickham couple is afterwards justified by the author.

His affection for her soon sunk into indifference; her's lasted a little longer; . . .<sup>15)</sup>

Jane Austen, it seems, insists that people should not lead an immoderate life overcome by temporary passions, but that they should value the 'virtue' of moderation.

Elizabeth always admires 'virtue', and expects human beings to have it, although she herself also cherishes her own passions. Lydia and Wickham are rich in passionate feelings, but they are highly prompted by temporariness and an indifference to others. Elizabeth learns to know that the selfish way of life in which people show no consideration for society is utterly worthless.

### CHAPTER III The Elizabeth-Darcy Relationship

The purpose of the present chapter is to examine the characteristics of the Elizabeth-Darcy relationship. The author attaches more importance to Elizabeth than to Darcy, therefore we shall focus our attention on Elizabeth.

Elizabeth happens to meet Fitzwilliam Darcy in a ball held in a town near Longbourn. There he at first draws the whole attention of the company because he is a handsome, single man whose income is estimated at ten thousand pounds a year. But he behaves in an arrogant manner, contrary to the expectations of the people. He walks with a swaggering gait here and there, seldom dancing with the ladies. He soon loses public favour, and leaves the people with the decided impression that he is an arrogant man. In spite of Charles Bingley's advice, he does not feel inclined to dance with Elizabeth, who happens to sit behind them. He turns round and looks at her for a moment, and says coldly :

“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...”<sup>16)</sup>

Here he appears to find no charm in her, and is even indifferent to her. No sooner has she heard his cold expression than she fixes the worst opinion of him in her mind : he is a very disagreeable man. His words, sticking in her mind, form her deep-rooted prejudice against him. Her first, distorted impression has its roots deep down in her mind. The further the story advances, the more fixed, it comes to reveal, this impression is rooted there.

The day after the ball, Elizabeth has a visit from Charlotte. They talk together about Darcy's ungentlemanly manners. Charlotte says :

“His pride does not offend *me* so much as pride often does, because there is an excuse for it. One cannot wonder that so very fine a young man, with family, fortune, every thing in his favour, should think highly of himself. If I may so express it, he has a *right* to be proud.”<sup>17)</sup>

In her opinion, ‘he has a *right* to be proud.’ But Elizabeth replies :

“That is very true and I could easily forgive *his* pride, if he had not mortified *mine*.”<sup>18)</sup>

She also admits his ‘*right*’, but ‘*his* pride’ is past her endurance because he has actually insulted her.

Darcy has succeeded to the estate of his father, a lord of the manor. His mother comes from the family of an earl. Thus he rightly belongs among the

upper, well-to-do classes. Elizabeth's family makes a sharp contrast with his in that her father is a small landholder belonging to the middle gentry. And her mother's brother is engaged in commerce in London. She belongs to the class which may be termed semi-gentlemen and semi-tradesmen.

Charlotte belongs to almost the same class as Elizabeth, and that is why they agree in their opinion on his '*right*'. They admit the highness of his family. Elizabeth, however, gets angry about his haughty bearing, especially his insulting remarks. From this time onwards, her antipathy against Darcy deepens increasingly.

While she has a strong aversion to him, he begins to entertain some affectionate feeling towards her. At first he is indifferent to her, but soon he begins to take some peculiar kind of interest in her. It increases, though by degrees, and comes to make him irresistibly attracted by her charm. With reference to the slight change in his sentiment, the author writes :

Mr. Darcy had at first scarcely allowed her to be pretty ; he had looked at her without admiration at the ball ; and when they next met, he looked at her only to criticise. But no sooner had he made it clear to himself and his friends that she had hardly a good feature in her face, than he began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes. To this discovery succeeded some others equally mortifying. Though he had detected with a critical eye 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.<sup>19)</sup>

As is shown above, Darcy declares in public, 'she had hardly a good feature in her face.' Nevertheless, soon afterwards he discovers 'the beautiful expression of her dark eyes,' and cannot help admitting that her figure is 'light and pleasing', and that her manners are of an 'easy playfulness'. The shift of his attitude towards her may be explained this way : the moment we throw away something like a well worn-out suit, we often stop to try it on once more and find how well it fits. Such is the case with Darcy's mental state. Jane Austen thus brings the subtle workings of human heart into bold relief.

Several days after Charlotte's visit, Jane calls at Bingley's house on his sisters' invitation, but she is obliged to be confined to his house by a bad cold. On hearing of her sister's cold, Elizabeth walks to Bingley's house three miles away, and stays there for a few days to take care of her sister. During that time she talks with Bingley, his sisters, and Darcy about one thing or another, when Darcy happens to

touch on his own temper.

“... My temper would perhaps be called resentful.—My good opinion once lost is lost for ever.”<sup>20)</sup>

He has incidentally referred to his own temper, with no particular intent. But Elizabeth has suspected that he is talking to her in particular. This suspicion takes a strong hold on her because her dislike for him has already been deeply rooted in her mind. Note the following dialogue :

“And *your* defect is propensity to hate every body.”

“And yours,” he replied with a smile, “is wilfully to misunderstand them.”<sup>21)</sup>

The conversation foreshadows the deep gulf that is brought about between the two young people.

Elizabeth spends several months without seeing Darcy. In the meantime she makes an acquaintance with a young officer named Wickham. As has been mentioned before, he is a gracious, handsome man who is likely to charm any young girl. Even Elizabeth is fascinated more and more by him every time she sees him in social gatherings here and there. One day when they are conversing together, he basely slanders Darcy. He tells her that Darcy is not righteous nor honest both in word and deed : ‘the world is blinded by his fortune and consequence’.<sup>22)</sup> He even goes to say that he is a victim of Darcy’s distorted character. He tries to make the late Mr. Darcy’s will bear ample witness to the truth of his words, and says to her, “The church *ought* to have been my profession”.<sup>23)</sup> Hearing of Darcy’s injustice Elizabeth is excited to anger, and cries out :

“This is quite shocking!—He deserves to be publicly disgraced.”<sup>24)</sup>

As she listens to his dexterous phraseology, Elizabeth feels more sympathetic towards Wickham, and bears her hatred towards Darcy more than ever. She has already confirmed a strong conviction that Darcy is indeed haughty and arrogant. Now she deepens it, and is absolutely convinced that he is malicious, cold, and cruel. In this connection her words are worth quoting :

“I had not thought Mr. Darcy so bad as this—though I have never liked him, I had not thought so very ill of him—I had supposed him to be despising his fellow-creatures in general, but did not suspect him of descending to such malicious revenge, such injustice, such inhumanity as this!”<sup>25)</sup>

By Wickham’s false statements Elizabeth is prompted to judge that Darcy’s wickedness comes from excessive pride in his family and social standing. And soon

after this judgement she comes to have a great abhorrence of his strong class-consciousness. When she is informed that her dear Wickham is a victim of Darcy's distorted class-consciousness, Darcy begins to bear the characteristics of a deadly enemy in Elizabeth's mind. With Wickham's good looks as a stimulus Elizabeth comes to deepen respect for the personality of individuals. The author's intention from the first seems to be to make Wickham's character relevant to Elizabeth's process of self-improvement.

Afterwards Elizabeth faces Wickham's infidelity, but she realizes her inclination towards him has not been so deep as to be shocked. She confesses her feelings in a letter to her aunt: "handsome young men must have something to live on, as well as the plain."<sup>26)</sup> In the hard school of experience Elizabeth learns that human beings are apt to be influenced by the social and economic factors in the world. And this bitter experience is given to her by Wickham, towards whom she has been more favourably disposed than towards any man hitherto.

During her stay in the Hunsford parsonage, Elizabeth is often invited to Lady Catherine's house with Mr. and Mrs. Collins. This lady is aunt to Darcy, and as haughty as her nephew, so that eventually Elizabeth dislikes her. In the meantime, Darcy visits his aunt with his cousin Colonel Fitzwilliam. Fitzwilliam is a cheerful man who is about thirty years old. He is a younger son of an earl, Darcy's uncle. Elizabeth meets and talks with Fitzwilliam several times, and in due course she comes to be attracted by his fine personality and pleasing manners. Fitzwilliam seems to Elizabeth to have become her new favourite, but even this time her joy vanishes like a bubble. Her hope is dashed into pieces when he remarks on the choice of his life partner:

"... Younger sons cannot marry where they like... Our habits of expence make us too dependant, and there are not many in my rank of life who can afford to marry without some attention to money."<sup>27)</sup>

He means that he ought not to marry a girl who has not much economic power. On hearing this remark, Elizabeth blushes, suspecting that it is directed at herself. At the same time she is surprised to learn that even a man of social position can resort to economic criterion in choosing his life partner and place the same value on monetary matters as Wickham does.

Elizabeth has so far been shown three examples of those who choose their life partners on the basis of their economic power: her intimate friend Charlotte, a fickle man Wickham, and a noble, good-natured man Fitzwilliam.

While Mr. and Mrs. Collins are out at Lady Catherine's invitation, Elizabeth stays at the parsonage alone under the excuse of a headache. Darcy's sudden and unexpected visit astonishes her exceedingly. After inquiring after her health, he walks about in the room without uttering a word for a while. Then he suddenly hurries up to her and says :

“In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you.”<sup>28)</sup>

He offers a proposal of marriage to Elizabeth to her indescribable astonishment. She stares, colours and doubts in silence. She is then driven to anger when he opens up his mind saying that if he marries her he will be compelled to degrade himself by reason of her inferiority and the family obstacles. Elizabeth flatly refuses his proposal, for she has harboured a hostile feeling against him partly because, she believes, he has done an irreparable wrong against Wickham and partly because he has kept Jane and Bingley apart.

When his proposal is scornfully rejected, he betrays his indignant astonishment. His complexion becomes pale with anger, and the distress of his mind is visible in every feature. He cannot see why his hand is so contemptuously scouted. Elizabeth, on the other hand, enraged at his insult, blames him severely for his doing wrong against Wickham and for his attempting to separate Jane from Bingley. He realizes, at length, that he has been grossly misunderstood by her.

The next morning when she is walking, Elizabeth is found out, and handed a letter by Darcy. This letter contains a detailed description of Wickham's character and Darcy's views on the love problem between Bingley and Jane. Here in this letter Darcy tries to prove his integrity; nevertheless, Elizabeth feels inclined to disbelieve his words. With all her incredulity, she reads the letter again and again, thinking back over what has happened so far. While reading, she is compelled to admit that she has been very blind and unreasonably prejudiced, and cries to herself with great regret :

“How despicably have I acted!—I, who have prided myself on my discernment!—I, who have valued myself on my abilities!...”<sup>29)</sup>

She keenly feels that the ‘discernment’ and ‘abilities’, of which she has been very proud, are virtually of no power. She increases her awareness of herself and finally utters :

“... Till this moment, I never knew myself.”<sup>30)</sup>

She cannot help admitting that she has been a prisoner to wrong prepossessions and ignorance and that her reason has failed her. Elizabeth acknowledges her own blindness at this stage, and begins to understand Darcy's character. We may safely say that the author sets up this climax in the middle of the novel, because she thinks the whole of the latter half is necessary for the process by which Elizabeth removes her own faults.

Elizabeth goes on a journey to Derbyshire with Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner. While travelling, she drops in at Pemberley Park, of which Darcy is the owner. There, to her surprise, she happens to meet Darcy, who is not away as she has been informed. He is not what he was: he is gentlemanlike, and his attitude towards her is utterly sincere. He receives her warmly, and is kind enough to show her over the Park. Seeing his attitude, she, aware of some of his true character, comes to have a better opinion of him.

While on the journey, Elizabeth receives a letter from Jane, which says that Lydia has run away with Wickham. Elizabeth, who happens to receive Darcy's call, dares to inform him of the contents of the letter. On disclosing the dishonour of her own family to him, she fears it may be an evil omen to her relations with him. Quite contrary to her expectation, however, he takes the trouble to go to London and offers to undertake all the pecuniary matters by himself. Elizabeth does not become aware of his kindness until she inquires of Mrs. Gardiner about it.

Through these two events Elizabeth comes to be able to see Darcy's character in its proper perspective. The more deeply she acknowledges Darcy's personality, the more ready she is to improve her prejudiced mind. Elizabeth is created by the author as such a girl as is ready to improve herself as soon as she admits her drawbacks.

When Elizabeth sees the very handsome seat and grounds belonging to Darcy, the following words flash into her mind, which are of special importance in respect to her improvement:

...to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!<sup>31)</sup>

What makes her say these words? What is the author's intention in setting up this scene? Elizabeth has held a firm belief that individual personality should be more respected than social standing or economic factors. Apparently she has few worldly desires. Why should Elizabeth, who has seemed to be indifferent to worldly ambitions, show such a feeling as ill becomes her way of thinking? She has learned by recent experiences some lessons on the significance of social, economic

factors. A visit to Pemberley Park, the very symbol of Darcy's social, economic status, seems to have a great impact on her mental attitude. Jane Austen may here intend to suggest that Elizabeth is gradually adapting herself to social and economic elements in the world.

When does Elizabeth reach the full realization of the significance of socio-economic factors? She does not realize it before she is informed that Darcy has, with sincere effort, settled the affairs of the elopement and made happy the family as well as the persons in question. When she takes his entire devotion into account, she feels deeply obliged to him for it, and at the same time she is led to realize the stupendous power of money in the world.

The author sets right Elizabeth's way of thinking little by little. Her prejudice against Darcy is gradually removed. At first the gap between them is deepened by her 'prejudice' and his 'pride'. But as she weakens her 'prejudice' and he amends his 'pride', the distance between them is shortened inch by inch, and finally the large gap which seemed impassable at first is bridged over: both of them can appreciate each other's character at its true value. Jane Austen intends to show this as an ideal type of love. She suggests that people should deepen mutual understanding so that they may gain pure and everlasting love.

On the relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy, Mary Lascelles, one of the most famous students of Jane Austen, makes a penetrating remark:

This pattern is formed by diverging and converging lines, by the movement of the two people who are impelled apart until they reach a climax of mutual hostility, and thereafter bend their courses towards mutual understanding and amity.<sup>32)</sup>

In short, the two persons at first 'diverge' and afterwards 'converge'. On this point the scholar's words are, indeed, proper, but we cannot overlook the words: 'they reach a climax of mutual hostility'. Is this a valid statement? My opinion is different from hers on the precise interpretation of the relation between the heroine and hero, so this point needs to be re-examined.

On Elizabeth's side, it is natural that she should bear 'hostility' against Darcy. His bitter opinion on her at the first ball and haughty manners make her feed a sense of aversion to him. What makes the matter worse, the wrong he did to Wickham and his interference in the love between Jane and Bingley act as a spur to her anger. Thus her mere dislike is exalted into a vehement 'hostility'. In the 'diverging and converging' process her 'prejudice' is manipulated by the author.

Let us direct our attention to Darcy. Unlike the very case of Elizabeth, no 'hostility' against her can be found in his attitude. His indifference to her in the first ball soon changes into a keen and active interest in her; every time he sees her, he takes a stronger interest in her character as well as in her beauty. His favourable sentiment towards her heightens as he sees her, and finally he is enthralled by her charms. Nevertheless, he cannot confess that he conceives an affection for her, for his 'pride', due to a consciousness of belonging to the upper class, is a hindrance to his confession. In the society of the eighteenth or early nineteenth century it may be natural that he should be conscious of a great disparity in social status between the two. For this reason, he tries not to confess to her that he loves her, and lets his mind swing back and forth like a pendulum for several months. Having lost all control over himself, he decides to make a proposal to her.

His proposal, however, is flatly refused by her, and as its consequence, he gets angry at her with his 'pride' severely injured. But his anger cannot be regarded as a hostile feeling against her. If he had had such a feeling, he would not have handed the letter to her to remove her misunderstandings on the day immediately after her rejection. Darcy's letter marks his strong affection for Elizabeth. It is true that he feels Elizabeth is not suitable for him, but this sense of unsuitability must be distinguished from a hostile feeling. It may, therefore, be concluded that Darcy has never experienced any 'hostility' against Elizabeth. In fact, he has long loved her in the bottom of his heart. His keen affection for her comes to awaken in her an everlasting love for him. This is a typical case of the proverb: Love is the loadstone of love.

Elizabeth and Darcy come to get married after appreciating each other's personality. In their marriage, the two values—personal and social claims—are indivisibly united together. The marriage of Elizabeth to Darcy is the happiest one of all, which, Jane Austen believed, approaches the ideal of the perfect marriage.

## CHAPTER IV

### § 1. Mr. & Mrs. Gardiner

The purpose of this section is to analyze the distinctive characteristics of the marriage of Mr. & Mrs. Gardiner and to examine the significance of their appearance in the novel in relation to the Elizabeth-Darcy couple.

The author depicts Mr. Gardiner's character as follows:

Mr. Gardiner was a sensible, gentlemanlike man, greatly superior to his sister as well by nature as education. The Netherfield ladies would have had difficulty in believing that a man who lived by trade, and within view of his own warehouses, could have been so well bred and agreeable.<sup>33)</sup>

He is described as a good-natured merchant who has been well-educated. And Mrs. Gardiner's character is delineated in the same vein :

Mrs. Gardiner, . . . , was an amiable, intelligent, elegant woman, and a great favourite with all her Longbourn nieces.<sup>34)</sup>

She is introduced to us as a woman who is 'intelligent' and 'elegant', and no less unimpeachable than her husband. In a word Mr. & Mrs. Gardiner are well-suited. This couple contributes to the union of Elizabeth and Darcy in three ways. First, Mrs. Gardiner gives Elizabeth some judicious advice regarding her view of Wickham. Her aunt's remarks save her from being blinded by love for him. Mrs. Gardiner's insight proves to be valid, for soon after this advice, Wickam drifts from her niece to another girl. Secondly, there is the obvious importance of the journey Elizabeth makes with Mr. & Mrs. Gardiner : they drop in at Pemberley Park, where Elizabeth happens to meet Darcy, and recognizes his improvement in manners. At this dramatic time, Mr. & Mrs. Gardiner play an important role in bringing Elizabeth and Darcy into closer relations. Thirdly, Mr. Gardiner, in settling the problem of the elopement of Lydia and Wickham, cooperates with Darcy, who offers pecuniary assistance. It follows from this cooperation that Elizabeth develops a good regard for Darcy. For this reason, Mr. Gardiner plays a crucial role in the union of Elizabeth and Darcy.

The second and third contributions are of particular importance : the former helps her to appreciate Darcy's character at its true value, and the latter increases her awareness of his financial ability. Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner appear in the novel as characters who form a bond between Elizabeth and Darcy though they do not consciously intend to. There can be no doubt as to the author's mechanical use of their appearance.

An examination of the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner reveals some interesting points. Mr. Gardiner, who is a tradesman, is described as 'a gentlemanlike man,' and his wife as 'an elegant woman.' This couple has both large wealth and respectability ; that is, this union possesses both social and personal factors. Therefore we may suppose that this couple retains the balance between social power and individual personality, and serves as an example of those who make a proper

adjustment to both social and personal factors. This couple is that of the middle class which was making a gradual rise towards the end of the eighteenth century. In describing this couple, Jane Austen may have intended to present a new type of people and their worth in society.

When we consider Mr. & Mrs. Gardiner in relation to the Elizabeth-Darcy couple, we can safely say that the former couple is deliberately created as to be a good example to the latter. Mr. & Mrs. Gardiner are what an ideal couple ought to be. Therefore this couple, as is shown in the diagram (CHAPTER I), is situated above the Elizabeth-Darcy combination as an example of a suitable marriage. We can say that Jane Austen sets up Mr. & Mrs. Gardiner as a pilot by whom Elizabeth and Darcy are led to an ideal married happiness.

## § 2. Mr. & Mrs. Bennet

In the present section, let us examine Elizabeth's parents, Mr. & Mrs. Bennet. Our task here is to inquire into their character, and focusing our attention on the actual state of their married life, to clarify what qualities they have and what influence they have upon their daughter Elizabeth.

This couple is introduced in the beginning part of the novel as follows :

Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. *Her* mind was less difficult to develope. She was a woman of mean understanding, little 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>35)</sup>

This couple is a very peculiar composite with its members' uniqueness contrasted with each other. The real state of their conjugal life is clearly observed in their dialogue on the first page of the novel. They are talking of a young man of property who is to move to their neighbourhood.

"What is his name?"

"Bingley."

"Is he married or single?"

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

"How so? how can it affect them?"

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

“Is that his design in settling here?”

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

“I see no occasion for that. You and the girls may go, or you may send them by themselves, which perhaps will be still better, for as you are as handsome as any of them, Mr. Bingley might like you the best of the party.”<sup>36)</sup>

Mrs. Bennet insists on the probability of the young man being their son-in-law, while her husband makes fun of her in a sarcastically humorous manner. The above extract is a light, humorous dialogue, but we cannot but observe something inharmonious in it. It seems to come from the difference in character on each side: Mrs. Bennet is such a kind of woman as worries about the trifles in daily life; on the other hand, her husband is such a kind of man as takes pleasure in making sport of his foolish wife. The above dialogue makes us suspect that there is little or no conjugal love. From another point of view, however, this dialogue is of special significance: it precedes all the comical elements that we can easily find in this novel, and at the outset gives us a suggestion that the novel will be not without humour.

Mrs. Bennet is apt to pursue her own thinking, and when her designs turn out in failure, she either gets angry or is nervously ill in bed. She is the kind of woman that cannot control herself. Her comical behaviour manifests itself in her remark about Darcy in the beginning part of the novel: “I quite detest the man.”<sup>37)</sup> When she is still uninformed of the news that Elizabeth has accepted his proposal, she says it once again. But as soon as she knows the news, she exclaims with joy: “Such a charming man!—so handsome! so tall”<sup>38)</sup> Her hatred changes into admiration in a moment. Her sudden change of mind may make the reader burst out into pleasant laughter.

About Mr. Bennet, the author says:

Her [Elizabeth's] father captivated by youth and beauty, and that appearance of good humour, which youth and beauty generally give, had married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind, had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her. Respect, esteem, and confidence, had vanished for ever; and all his views of domestic happiness were overthrown.<sup>39)</sup>

As is described above, he cannot find any marital affection or domestic happiness in his married life. So he indulges himself in reading in his library, and is doomed

to establish an eccentric type of philosophy. This philosophy always leads him to a sarcastic humour directed against the people around him, especially his silly wife. He feels little or no obligation to his wife, disgracefully enough, except for the fact that her ignorance and folly are a never-failing source of amusements for him.

Elizabeth cannot be blind to 'that continual breach of conjugal obligation and decorum,'<sup>40)</sup> as is shown below :

...she [Elizabeth] had never felt so strongly as now, the disadvantages which must attend the children of so unsuitable a marriage, ...<sup>41)</sup>

Elizabeth is unlikely to form from her own parents' life 'a very pleasing picture of conjugal felicity or domestic comfort,'<sup>42)</sup> and she at any rate wishes to avoid a marriage like her parents' matrimony.

Attracted by the woman's youth and beauty, Mr. Bennet married her ; in other words he married her in order to satisfy his own personal feelings. On the other hand, she married him to satisfy her social aspirations. Her family is lower in social status than her husband's, her father being a solicitor, and her brother engaged in trade. On marrying him, she joins a family of the gentry. Thus, this couple is composed of a man disposed to personal feelings and a woman disposed to social aspirations. Indeed both personal and social factors are found in this couple, but the factors are not adjusted to each other at all. Here this couple makes a sharp contrast to Mr. & Mrs. Gardiner. We may safely say that the marriage of Mr. & Mrs. Bennet is regarded as an unsuitable one, and as an example of a failure to adjust both factors. Consequently, this couple stands at the bottom of the diagram (CHAPTER I).

As is shown in the diagram, Mr. & Mrs. Bennet can never adjust the two factors ; nor can the Charlotte-Collins and Lydia-Wickham relationships. We may say that none of these three couples are suitable ones.

### § 3. The Jane-Bingley Couple

In the present section, attention will be paid to what qualities the Jane-Bingley couple has. With respect to Elizabeth's self-education, the appearance of this couple seems to be of particular importance.

To begin with, it is necessary to examine the difference in character between Jane and Elizabeth. In every novel Jane Austen wrote, there appears such a girl as is very intimate with the heroine, and they place every reliance upon each other. In *Pride And Prejudice*, Jane Bennet, the heroine's elder sister, is just such

a one. Elizabeth says to Jane about her character :

“... you are a great deal too apt you know, to like people in general. You never see a fault in any body. All the world are good and agreeable in your eyes. I never heard you speak ill of a human being in my life.”<sup>43)</sup>

In Elizabeth's opinion, her sister is too good-natured to see a fault in anyone. Elizabeth, the author says, also feels :

Jane's feelings, though fervent, were little displayed, and ... there was a constant complacency in her air and manner, not often united with great sensibility.<sup>44)</sup>

Jane hardly reveals her feelings clearly and is likely to be content with almost every thing in her daily life. Jane is a girl with great pliability. By contrast with Jane, Elizabeth, as the author describes, is a girl 'with more quickness of observation and less pliancy of temper than her sister, and with a judgment too unassailed by any attention to herself.'<sup>45)</sup> She is a young woman with great vividness of heart. She may even sometimes be regarded as a self-conceited saucy girl.

Next, let us examine the difference in character between Bingley and Darcy. The author depicts these two persons as follows :

Between him and Darcy there was a very steady friendship, in spite of a great opposition of character.—Bingley was endeared to Darcy by the easiness, openness, ductility of his temper, though no disposition could offer a greater contrast to his own, and though with his own he never appeared dissatisfied. On the strength of Darcy's regard Bingley had the firmest reliance, and of his judgment the highest opinion. In understanding Darcy was the superior. Bingley was by no means deficient, but Darcy was clever. He was at the same time haughty, reserved, and fastidious, and his manners, though well bred, were not inviting. In that respect his friend had greatly the advantage. Bingley was sure of being liked wherever he appeared, Darcy was continually giving offence.<sup>46)</sup>

Bingley is of an easy and open temper, while, on the other hand, Darcy is haughty and fastidious. Let us direct our attention to the words : 'of his [Darcy's] judgment (Bingley had) the highest opinion.' Bingley totally relies upon Darcy's judgement, and follows all his suggestions. He goes to London in order to get Jane out of his thoughts although he is captivated by her charm. It seems to Darcy that she feels no interest in Bingley. Bingley, when advised, is so obedient to Darcy that he leaves the entire problem of his love to him without hesitation. Bingley cannot act on his own judgement. He is, so to speak, at the mercy of Darcy's judgement.

Next, we shall examine the nature of the Jane-Bingley union. Jane is passive and mild, and so she avoids showing her love to Bingley in spite of her attachment to him. And Bingley, as may be expected, does not try to confirm her feelings towards him. Both of them lack in active efforts. They do not worry about their problems, nor form their own judgements upon them. They are united without any effort on either side as if the union were a natural product of time. Their first impression of each other undergoes no change. The union of Jane and Bingley is based on this first impression.

When we compare the nature of the Jane-Bingley relationship with that of the Elizabeth-Darcy relationship, we can point out a very interesting contrast : the latter never get married until they have appreciated each other through their ordeals of love ; while, on the contrary, the former get married without any conscious and active effort. Neither conflict nor appreciation can be found in this couple : in other words, Jane and Bingley have not acquired such appreciation of each other's character as we have seen in the couple of Elizabeth and Darcy. In spite of this sharp contrast between these two couples, they lead an equally happy life. It is noticeable that Jane and Bingley adjust their social and personal claims just as well as Elizabeth and Darcy do. The adjustment of Jane and Bingley, however, is made quite involuntarily. Therefore, in the diagram (CHAPTER I), the Jane-Bingley couple is situated in the same group as the Elizabeth-Darcy couple.

In addition, the improvement of the Elizabeth-Darcy relationship begins in the middle stage of the novel and continues to the last part, but the Jane-Bingley relationship is different in this respect : Jane and Bingley remain what they are from the beginning to the end. They don't have the ability to change themselves that Elizabeth and Darcy show ; that is, they lack in the flexibility to change themselves that Elizabeth and Darcy display.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Elizabeth cannot be persuaded to marry until she has undergone all the conflicts in her inner world. In the struggles to overcome them she learns to know herself and attempts to improve herself. Her outer world, too, offers her plenty of materials for her improvement. She critically observes various married couples, suitable and unsuitable, and gradually comes to see the realities of the world, and forms a guiding idea of her prospective marriage. In the stage preceeding her happy marriage she tries to educate herself : no sooner has she acknowledged her foibles

than she readily sets about the improvement of herself. It might safely be said that Jane Austen highly praises such a sincere attitude as is taken by Elizabeth. Jane Austen, who was bred with little formal schooling, must have believed that self-education is a worth-while activity.

Before she gets married to Darcy, Elizabeth, as the result of the great cultivation of her mind, comes to obtain a deep understanding of the significance of social factors, that is, the realities of life. In the marriage both factors, the social and the personal, are united and adjusted properly in reality. After her marriage she can lead a contented life with her personality unharmed and socially secured.

It goes without saying that it is essential for us to live in harmony with the people among whom we live. The most important thing for us is that we must not sacrifice our own personality in pursuit of the harmony in society.

Elizabeth's philosophy is indeed of a new, worthy type, particularly for someone of her social position in the society of the early nineteenth century. So we might call the heroine of *Pride And Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet, who endeavours to educate herself step by step, a great pilgrim to the full womanhood which Jane Austen cherished as an ideal.

#### NOTES

- 1) M. Marcus mentions the pattern only among these three couples in his "The Major Thematic Pattern in *Pride and Prejudice*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, XVI (1961-1962), pp. 274-279.
- 2) *P. & P.*, I, XXII, 125.  
The above abbreviation stands for Volume I, Chapter XXII, page 125 in *Pride And Prejudice* by Jane Austen. The Oxford Illustrated Jane Austen, ed. R. W. Chapman, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976. All the succeeding quotations from *Pride And Prejudice* will be from this edition.
- 3) *P. & P.*, I, XXII, 121.
- 4) *P. & P.*, I, VI, 23.
- 5) *P. & P.*, I, XV, 70.
- 6) *P. & P.*, I, XXII. 122-123.
- 7) *P. & P.*, I, XXII. 125.
- 8) *P. & P.*, II, V, 157.
- 9) *P. & P.*, I, XV, 71.
- 10) *P. & P.*, I, XIX, 105.
- 11) J. B. Priestley makes an interesting comment: 'his proposal to Elizabeth is a masterpiece of heavy male tactlessness, with every remark he makes calculated to feed her contempt or anger.'; "Feminine Humour" in his *English Humour*, p. 119, New York: Stein and Day, 1976.

- 12) *P. & P.*, III, IV, 280.
- 13) *P. & P.*, III, V, 291.
- 14) *P. & P.*, III, VIII, 312.
- 15) *P. & P.*, III, XIX, 387.
- 16) *P. & P.*, I, III, 12.
- 17) *P. & P.*, I, V, 20.
- 18) *ibid.*
- 19) *P. & P.*, I, VI, 23.
- 20) *P. & P.*, I, XI, 58.
- 21) *ibid.*
- 22) *P. & P.*, I, XVI, 78.
- 23) *P. & P.*, I, XVI, 79.
- 24) *P. & P.*, I, XVI, 80.
- 25) *ibid.*
- 26) *P. & P.*, II, III, 150.
- 27) *P. & P.*, II, X, 183.
- 28) *P. & P.*, II, XI, 189.
- 29) *P. & P.*, II, XIII, 208.
- 30) *ibid.*
- 31) *P. & P.*, III, I, 245.
- 32) Mary Lascelles. *Jane Austen and Her Art*, p. 160, repr. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963  
(First ed. 1939).
- 33) *P. & P.*, II, II, 139.
- 34) *ibid.*
- 35) *P. & P.*, I, I, 5.
- 36) *P. & P.*, I, I, 3-4.
- 37) *P. & P.*, I, III, 13.
- 38) *P. & P.*, III, XVII, 378.
- 39) *P. & P.*, II, XIX, 236.
- 40) *ibid.*
- 41) *ibid.*
- 42) *ibid.*
- 43) *P. & P.*, I, IV, 14.
- 44) *P. & P.*, II, XIII, 208.
- 45) *P. & P.*, I, IV, 15.
- 46) *P. & P.*, I, IV, 16.

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