

Mrs. Kennedy remarks that *Pride and Prejudice* was produced in the first spring of Austen's powers. It contains all her fresh exhilaration, vitality and high spirits. They impart to it a quality which makes very many of her readers to choose it as their favourite. The book lives, and moves in the character of Elizabeth Bennet the heroine of the novel. Remove her, and it would be a reduced to a dull story of fools and snobs.

Of all the heroines Jane Austen liked Elizabeth most. She once wrote to her niece Cassandra: 'I must confess that I think her as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print'. Even a fastidious critic like Saintsbury speaks of her charms. R. L. Stevenson was so enthusiastic about her that he said he wanted to 'go down on his knees' whenever she spoke. Elizabeth is endowed with a unusual vigour of the mind and various qualities of mind and heart. It is therefore, not unlikely that Austen created her almost exactly in her own image.

Elizabeth is certainly not as beautiful as Jane is, still she is graceful and charming. She is endowed with a beauty which is not so much physical as intellectual. Her most fascinating features are her eyes. It has to be noted that the enchantment of Darcy began with his discovery of her fine eyes. Her physical and mental liveliness makes her fine eyes. Her physical and mental liveliness makes her a delightfully original character. Her sudden appearance of Netherfield Park is hot and dusty after a lonely walk from Longbourn is one good instance of the unconventionality to which her physical vitality leads her.

The most remarkable quality of Elizabeth's character is her wit and vivacity. She had been bestowed with a rare intelligence by her creator. She is a keen observer of men and manners, nothing escapes her attention, 'It is not alone,' says Prof. Dobson, 'that



she is personally attractive or, rather she has exceptional charm but she is ~~in~~ intellectually engaging as well. Her high spirited wit, her perfect command of epigrammatic expression, her ready gift of repartee and above all her admirable faculty for taking care of herself — these things would be enough to secure admiration without the good sense and good feelings which are the basis of her character? To give all illustration, to bear testimony of her rare wit and intelligence we may quote the following dialogue: 'Certainly, replied Elizabeth, "There are such people but I hope I am not one of them. I hope I never ridicule what is wise or good. Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies do divert me, I own and laugh at them whenever I can. But these I suppose, are precisely what you are without"?' There is no doubt that Elizabeth's wit, besides being refined and subtle, never overruns directions.

She is gifted with an unflinching and irrepressible sense of humour. So, she is proof against the consuming melancholy of those who have a morbid temperament. It is because of this bubbling sense of wit and humour that she is not depressed and embittered by Darcy's scornful reference to her moderately good looks. She is able to treat it as a good joke and have a hearty laugh over it in the company of his friends. There runs a strain of innocent raillery in all her conversation. Incurable humorous, unsparing critic and no respecter of persons, her shafts of wit are aimed indiscriminately. She is capable of laughing as much at herself as at others. She loves Jane dearly but does not spare her from her raillery. She cannot help laughing even in the most seriously serious situations of life. When Elizabeth gives the hints of her engagement to Darcy, Jane incredulously exclaims, "But are you forgive the question — are you



quite certain that you can be happy with him?" And Elizabeth with cool and delightful irony replies, "There can be no doubt of that. It is settled between us already that we are to be the happiest couple in the world". Later Darcy's opinion, "she is just tolerable but not handsome enough to tempt him", changes by and by. He begins to perceive beauty in a 'pair of fine eyes' that Elizabeth possessed.

Though Elizabeth is witty and clear sighted, she has one failing. This her predisposition to be carried away by her own impressions and her readiness to believe in these impressions. This explains her early prejudices against Darcy. If her useful keenness of mind had not been blunted by her own prejudice, it is inconceivable how she could have allowed herself to be misled by the superficial gallantry of Wickham. Elizabeth almost meets Wickham halfway and almost suggests to him to tell her those very things that she would like to hear to the disadvantage of Darcy. Indeed the predisposition to readily believe what it suits her to believe is the one weakness of her character.

Elizabeth is the pivotal character of the novel. Her relations with Darcy form the main focus of the novel. The story is told from the point of view of Elizabeth who thus becomes a sort of mirror character. He is primarily interested in her affairs, awareness of others' affairs is really a sharing of her awareness of them. We see other characters and situations created by them as they impinge upon Elizabeth the marriage of Miss Lucas, the distress of Jane, the elopement of Lydia, the activities of the Gardiners. Secondly, the dominant position of Elizabeth and Darcy is secured by the fact that they have a complete self awareness. They are differentiated from other characters in this respect. Her prejudice to Darcy creates all kinds of complications are ultimately resolved by her knowledge of things. She progresses from

ignorance to knowledge and this is the basic theme of the novel.

Kennedy has pointed out that to create an entirely charming girl is one of the rarest achievements in fiction very few novelists have done it. Only Tolstoy could create a charming girl, Natasha. It is one of the hardest things for a writer to catch the lovely spring of the heroine's prime. That Jane Austen should have caught it at the age of twenty one is one of the most amazing feats of literature, it is what has made Pride and Prejudice so popular. Elizabeth, with her sassy wit, her lovely humour, her warm heart, her stout spirit, her loyalty, her gaiety and her sense is one of the most endearing characters not only in Austen's novels but in all fiction. She is a delightful character, also a favourite of the novelists who wrote in a letter to Cassandra Austen: "I must confess that I think Elizabeth is as delightful a creature as ever appeared in it."