

PHRYNETTE MARRIED

Austen has a peculiar way of treating women as responsible beings. That's not the way at all. I daresay he can't help it, being an Englishman, but there is nothing more trying to a woman's nerves than to be perpetually taken *au sérieux*. It makes even the simple utterance of yes or no a very weighty affair, if she knows that her "yes" will be instantly taken for an assent, her "no" for a negation. With Austen I have a funny new feeling of being taken at my word. For instance, when he asked me if I did not mind his joining the Ritchies on that tiger-hunting expedition in India, I said "no." (It is not polite to deprive anyone of his pleasure. We had both promised to go, but at that time the twins were not in course of construction.) I said "no," but naturally I meant "yes." This is how I said it :

"No, dear, I don't mind, if you think you'd like to go."

I knew he'd like to go, but I naturally expected him to say he did not, if only for the sake of politeness. But English people (some of them) seem to place truth before politeness, and Austen said :

"Yes, I would, if my dear little girl is sure she won't feel lonely ; but I am sure she won't, now the twins are here."

And so, you see, my retreat was cut off. After that I could not very well tell him that I would give twenty twins for one Austen. Some men, of whom he is one, expect a woman to be a mother first and a wife afterwards—in feelings, I mean. Well, I am not. I could do without children, but I could not do without a husband.