3. The Philosophy of His Work — (E) Love; Happiness

(a) Love:

The 18th century moral philosophers - we have noted - stressed the innate goodness in man. In the human breast there is an inherent generous tendency, which fulfils itself - as Fielding points out -

"by contributing to the happiness of others. ... in this gratification alone, as in friendship, in parental and filial affection, as indeed in general philanthropy, there is a great and exquisite delight".

This disposition is called love. Though this 'pure love' can exist independently of the amorous passion, it is not only not vitiated by the latter, but is often sustained by it.

Though Plato ruled out earthly love, the amorous passion had a place in ancient Greek literature - as can be seen from the Hector-Andromache episode. In the Symposium Diotima says that love is a 'great spirit'.

"Spirits are many in number and of many kinds; one of them is Love".

Love draws us to the Beautiful, that is, to the Good. It is a divine quality. The ancient Jews stressed the exalting, divine character of love; but at the same time, they did not ignore human love. In the Song of Solomon, love is conceived as possession of being -

"I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine ..."

"... I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me. Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages".

\[\text{\textcopyright} \text{\textcopyright}\]
Let us get up early to the vineyards ... there will I give thee my loves

Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death"4

Dryden points out that love, in the sense of a romantic, tender passion, had no place in Greek tragedy -

"for love-scenes, you will find few among them, their tragic poets dealt not with that soft passion but with lust, cruelty, revenge, ambition, and those bloody actions they produced ... leaving love untouched, whose gentleness would have tempered them, (and) which is the most frequent of all the passions".5

Their comedies may have 'a scene or two of tenderness', but the lovers "say little", for it was considered rather improper or unnatural to talk love. But we find there many 'other concerns of lovers, as jealousies, complaints, contrivances, and the like', in which they (lovers) were very vocal, by way of exhibiting their love. This cold attitude to love, or the tender passion, persisted later too.

The medieval attitude to love was one of distrust. The Christian ideal of asceticism ruled medieval moral thought.

"The sexual relation was an obligation, subject to the laws of contract and physical pleasure: it must not involve emotion".7

Walter Shandy, the principal comic figure in T.S., echoes this view of love, through a couplet composed by him in his Life of Socrates -

"A Devil 'tis - and mischief such doth work
As never yet did Pagan, Jew, or Turk".8

In late Middle Age, amorous passion, however, finds expression in Dante. Dante considers love as a noble passion. His Beatrice is to him 'the clue leading from Hell to Paradise'. With Petrarch,
however, love is 'a passionate reality', that brings not 'joy',
but 'agony'; but he could not accept this reality

"until, after Laura's death, he could receive her back
as a ghost, as the purified figure of a dream".10

In the Renaissance, we find Montaigne disapproving of romantic love. He distinguishes friendship and love of woman. The former soothes, the latter burns. The one(friendship) is constant and

"hath no pricking or stinging in it"11, while the other('affection toward women') is waverling, and raises 'mad desire'. The one increases joy, while the other is worn out in enjoyment. The 'myriad-minded' Shakespeare, of course, knew the value of romantic love, as can be seen in his mature comedies; but Spenser, in his Faerie Queene, had to thrust in his concept of chastity to his pictures of beauty. His leading virtue is holiness; and his love is sanctified by the Platonic ideal.

Dr. Johnson subscribed to the traditional view of love, which he regarded as an unwholesome passion -

"... in love, as in every other passion of which hope is the essence, we ought always to remember the uncertainty of events. There is, indeed, nothing that so much seduces reason from vigilance, as the thought of passing life with an amiable woman".13

Smollett, probably due to his splenetic disposition, did not have much faith in the fair sex; for even the gentle and loving Lydia, in Humphry Clinker, is made to condemn the women. She has found - she says - 'our sex in general' ensnaring the men-folk by unfair tricks, and also lacking constancy more than men. Even so, we notice a definite change, in the attitude to the amorous passion, in the 18th century, with the rise of the cult of feeling. Hume considered sexual passion to be not only natural, but
conducive to humanity, and so ethically and morally wholesome. Referring to the 'affection betwixt the sexes', he says that this passion inflames

"every other principle of affection, ...raising a stronger love from beauty, wit, kindness, than what would otherwise flow from them. Were there an universal love among all human creatures, it would appear after the same manner".15

The 18th century subscribed to the Renaissance faith in nature, or natural impulse. And love - as Voltaire pointed out -

"is the stuff of nature brodered by nature".16

One, who is incapable of love, lacks human qualities. Such a one was the young Blifil(in Tom Jones) - odious, ambitious and hypocrirical, on whom

"The charms of Sophia had not made the least impression".17

We are told, that there was 'not the least tincture' of the amorous sentiment 'in his whole composition'. The Puritan Richardson justifies love by moral considerations. He agrees with his correspondent, Miss Mulso, that 'true love', like 'true friendship', must have 'virtue for its basis'. Such love/exists either 'between persons of the same sex', or where 'the dross of the passion' has been 'purified by the union of minds in matrimony'. Even then, we note that Pamela's reward of her virtue is brought about by the glory of her love, while its(love's) defilement is the greatest tragedy, brought home to us by the self-sacrifice of Clarissa. Gibbon, in his Autobiography, highly commends the amorous passion -

"I understand by this passion the union of desire, friendship, and tenderness, which is inflamed by a single female, which prefers her to the rest of her sex, and which seeks her possession as the supreme or the sole happiness of our being".20
Speaking of himself, of an early disappointment in love caused by his father's disapproval of the union, Gibbon says that in spite of it (disapproval) he was rather proud that he could once feel 'such a pure and exalted sentiment'.

**Love in Sterne.** Sterne the humanist naturally considers love as life's supreme glory -

"I call not love a misfortune, from a persuasion, that a man's heart is ever the better for it". 22

Love awakens our humanity; and its empire extends to the whole universe - 'from heaven to earth, and even to the depths of the sea'. The healing touch of love transformed the vicious and splenetic Abderites into a people of universal good-will and refinement -

"Friendship and virtue met together and kiss'd each other in the street, the golden age returned, and hung over the town of Abdera". 23

Traveller Tristram regarded the Tomb of the Two Lovers (Amandus and Amanda) not only as the most important relic of antiquity at Lyons, but as valuable as a holy shrine.

The essential connection between love and humanity is always stressed in Sterne's characters. The beautiful and amorous ('A daughter of Eve') Mrs. Wadman has her prime virtue in 'Humanity'. Corporal Trim, whose character is distinguished by fine human qualities, is a lover too. Indeed, it was the story of his own amours that awakened the tender passion in his master Toby, and made him (Toby) take this sentiment seriously -

"I thought love had been a joyous thing, quoth my uncle Toby
'Tis the most serious thing, an' please your honour... that is in the world". 27
Trim, however, is more skilful in the practical affairs of love than his master. Trim's brother Tom was a lover too; the story of his suffering (for love) comes incidentally in the story of Toby's amours, but it is significant. It may be noted that Tom's suffering is also referred to in the interspersed comments of Trim reading the Conscience sermon to the Shandy brothers. Walter and Dr. Slop's Shandy's inanity to the tender passion is held up to ridicule by the novelist. In the Sentimental Journey, the jolly good La Fleur is an incorrigible lover; and so is his master, the 'sentimental traveller' himself:

"and I hope I shall go on so till I die, being firmly persuaded, that if I ever I do a mean action, it must be in some interval betwixt one passion and another: whilst this interregnum lasts, I always perceive my heart locked up, I can scarce find in it to give Misery a sixpence; and therefore I always get out of it as fast as I can, and the moment I am rekindled, I am all generosity and good-will again".

It is this amorous sensibility that gives grace to some of Sterne's minor characters, like the grisset, Madame de L-, the fille de chambre in S.J., and Mrs. Bridget, the fair Beguine, Tom and the Jewish widow, and so on, in T.S.

Love is not an abstract idea, nor a mere physical sensation; it is a spiritual experience. As the 'sentimental traveller' shares in the sorrow of Maria of Moulins, his sympathy and love for her attain a sublimation, and he feels strongly he has 'a soul'. As he sits down by her side for the Maria scene in S.J., see ante, Chap. VI, p. 111, he wipes her tears with his handkerchief; then he steeps

"it in my own, and then in hers, and then in mine, and then I wiped hers again".

\"and I hope I shall go on so till I die, being firmly persuaded, that if I ever I do a mean action, it must be in some interval betwixt one passion and another: whilst this interregnum lasts, I always perceive my heart locked up, I can scarce find in it to give Misery a sixpence; and therefore I always get out of it as fast as I can, and the moment I am rekindled, I am all generosity and good-will again\".

It is this amorous sensibility that gives grace to some of Sterne's minor characters, like the grisset, Madame de L-, the fille de chambre in S.J., and Mrs. Bridget, the fair Beguine, Tom and the Jewish widow, and so on, in T.S.

Love is not an abstract idea, nor a mere physical sensation; it is a spiritual experience. As the 'sentimental traveller' shares in the sorrow of Maria of Moulins, his sympathy and love for her attain a sublimation, and he feels strongly he has 'a soul'. As he sits down by her side for the Maria scene in S.J., see ante, Chap. VI, p. 111, he wipes her tears with his handkerchief; then he steeps

"it in my own, and then in hers, and then in mine, and then I wiped hers again\".
A little later, they walk arm in arm and enter Moulines together.

John Cowper Powys says that "sex enters here". Obviously, Powys uses the word 'sex' here in its usual derogatory sense. But is the appeal of the Maria scene in S.J. really sensual? If so, why should the 'sentimental traveller' feel so strongly that he has 'a soul'; and why, again, should he invoke the solemn blessings of God upon her, and hail 'Sensibility' - which made him feel so warmly towards the poor girl - as an active and wholesome principle of universal sympathy? Love's redeeming power derives from its spiritual essence. The 'world seen through the eyes of love' - says Virginia Woolf, while recording Lily Briscoe's impressions of the Ramsays - is an 'unreal but penetrating and exciting universe'.

Love is a 'moral delight'. Sterne maintains 'all misogynists to be bastards'. Love begets sympathy, as well as bravery. Pity is "akin to love, - and bravery no alien to it". Love is a sign of manliness, for it implies a capacity for self-abnegation. It begets self-respect; for one who cannot love another hates oneself as well - as did Walter Shandy who, while uttering curses on love, would curse himself too. Love is an antidote to spiritual misery, for it cures the spleen which - Sterne says -

"has a bad effect on both man and woman". Love - he reminded a friend -

"harmonizes the soul".

Obviously, Sterne considered that love false, which is not associated with a genuine warmth of heart, comradeship and selflessness. He approvingly quotes the French proverb -

"l'amour n'est rien sans sentiment" (that is, "love is nothing without sentiment").
It may be remembered here, that 'sentiment' in Sterne's day denoted a noble or refined feeling – see Chap.XIII on Sentimentalism.

Being a humanist and a believer in the 'sensational' philosophy of Locke, Sterne could not deny the senses. Locke, denying innate ideas, traced all knowledge or feeling ultimately to 'sensation' or perceptive experience. He thus found for knowledge a basis in man's nature itself, working by the operation of the senses. Love is a feeling, or sensation, called up by the operation of the senses upon objects. Love is not mere 'sentiment'.

"We are not stocks and stones" – Trim reminds us – "... nor are we angels, I wish we were, but men clothed with bodies, and governed by our imaginations; and what a junketing piece of work of it there is, betwixt these and our seven senses ... I am ashamed to confess".42

He adds that, of all the senses the eye has 'the quickest commerce with the soul'. Sterne was not unaware of the risks of the association of sense and virtue. It is Nature's ordination – he says – that love and desire are entangled in the human breast.

Love, which is the first principle of existence, and which "replenishes the earth ... (and) keeps peace in the world"44, is realized through sense-perception. If virtue is sometimes imperilled in it, that is inevitable. The Stoics and the ascetics would deny the body, and subject the flesh to mortification. Not so Sterne. He did not believe in the Pythagorean concept of the mind's conquest of the evils of the body – with its passions and sense-temptations; he did not believe in the body being a handicap to self-realization. He ridicules the Pythagorean belief as...
'their getting out of the body, in order to think well'. To him,

"Reason is, half of it, Sense; and the measure of heaven itself is but the measure of our present appetites and concoctions".46

The 'sentimental traveller', after his 'conquest' of the Temptation, to which he had almost capitulated, muses in these memorable words -

"If Nature has so wove her web of kindness that some threads of love and desire are entangled with the piece, must the whole web be rent in drawing them out? Whip me such stoics, great Governor of nature! ... Wherever thy providence shall place me for the trials of my virtue, whatever is my danger, whatever is my situation, let me feel the movements which rise out of it, and which belong to me as a man - and if I govern them as a good one, I will trust the issues to thy justice: for thou hast made us, and not we ourselves".47

It is a beautiful, inspired assertion of faith in life, in the holiness of feeling and natural instinct.

(b) Happiness:

Love leads to, and is vindicated in, happiness. Happiness implies agreeable emotions, or gratification of the mind. The desire for it is natural to man; and it directs his will and conduct throughout his life. True pleasure is not mere sensual enjoyment. It is an inward joy, felt by the satisfaction of the natural impulses or feelings, which Sterne, with the Renaissance thinkers and the moral philosophers of his own age, believed, always tended to the good, because of the basic goodness of man's nature. The disposition to be pleased, as well as the power to please others, is to the humanists the capital virtue.

The concept of happiness has its roots in Epicurus, though the idea is older than Epicurus. Robert Burton refers to
"Tiresias the prophet's counsel to Menippus that travelled all the world over, even down to hell itself, to seek content, and ... to be merry".48

The positive character and importance of happiness, however, came with Epicurus - arising as a reaction to the religious concepts and practices of his day, to the superstitious fears of unseen powers in this world and of torments in the next. Epicurus emphasized the incorruptibility and the blessedness of nature. Epicureanism was also a reaction to Stoicism, which considered virtue and pleasure as essential opposites. To Epicurus, happiness, or freedom from suffering and cares, is the end of virtue; happiness and virtue are inseparable -

"It is not possible to live pleasantly without living wisely and honourably and justly, nor is it possible to live wisely and honourably and justly without living pleasantly".49

The distinctive quality of the philosophy of happiness lies in its independence of intellectual precepts or dogma, and in its complete reliance on humanistic faith. It stresses the sanctity of human relationships, of universal fellowship and love. Diogenes, the famous Epicurean philosopher, says that

"all the earth is the one native land of all men, and the world but one home".50

And Epicurus:

"Vain is the discourse of that philosopher by which no human suffering is healed: just as there is no profit in medical advice which does not cast out the diseases of the body, so is there no profit of philosophy unless it casts out the diseases of the soul".51

Thus, Epicurean 'pleasure' cannot be equated to sensuality, which meaning later attached to the word. When Renaissance thinking discarded medieval asceticism, and re-established man's glory in nature, in participation in the life of this world, it put great
emphasis on happiness and gaiety, on the sanctity of man's natural impulse. In a hearty ridicule of the repression of natural instincts, Rabelais admits in his Abbey of Thélème not only women, but only those that are 'fair, well-featured, and of a sweet disposition'; and the men he would admit must be 'comely, personable and well-conditioned'. Free contacts were allowed between men and women in the Abbey, where they lived 'not in laws, statutes, or rules, but according to their own free will and pleasure'. The sovereign cure for all ills is merriment. Rabelais's comic masterpiece, therefore, aims

"To inspire with mirth the hearts of those that moan,
And change to laughter the afflictive groan:
For laughter is man's property alone." 54

Virtue subsists in 'pleasure'. Montaigne quotes from a Senecan Epistle, which says that the 'lovers of pleasure' are really 'lovers of honesty and justice', and they have 'all sorts of virtue'. 55

Religious liberalism in the 18th century discarded the gloomy view of religion for the cheerful. 'Good humour' was recommended by the moral philosophers as 'the best foundation of piety and true religion'. Shaftesbury refers to the saying of an ancient sage

"That humour was the only test of gravity, and gravity of humour. For a subject which would not bear riallery was suspicious; and a jest which would not bear serious examination was certainly false wit". 57

Good humour, or pleasantry, exposes imposture, and is a vital aid to virtue and wisdom. God created man to be happy, for He himself lives in infinite happiness. As Addison says, through his Cato -
"If there's a power above us
... he must delight in virtue,
And that which he delights in, must be happy".58

The importance of cheerfulness, as an instrument, and the end, of virtue, is repeatedly stressed in the Spectator papers. Robert Burton had held melancholy to be the greatest curse in life, and cheerfulness the supreme blessing. His very object in writing his Anatomy - he said - was to "drive away melancholy"; and it is this that leads him to analyze the various causes and manifestations of melancholy. Locke considered happiness, or 'a perception of delight', as a divine gift. This 'perception of delight' activizes our spirit; our faculties, without that element of joy, would "remain wholly idle and unemployed by us".61

Good humour and faith in happiness sustain humanity.

Sterne's emphasis on happiness. The promotion of happiness Sterne put up as the very aim of his novel. In the very brief letter to Mr. Pitt, dedicating his Tristram Shandy (Bks. I & II), he says that he wrote his work with the firm conviction that

"every time a man smiles, - but much more so, when he laughs, it adds something to this Fragment of Life".62

Later, in the novel, he says that if it is written against anything, it is written 'against the spleen'. Book IV closes with another fine declaration of his 'motif'. 'True Shandyism' - he says -

"opens the heart and lungs, and ... makes the wheel of life run long and cheerfully round".64

In his sermon, Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath, Sterne calls Epicurus 'the wisest man', who maintained

"that the best way of enlarging human happiness was by a communication of it to others".65
In Walter Shandy, our author laughs at learned folly, in Dr. Slop at the pretensions to scientific learning and blind conformity to tradition and religious dogma. Like Democritus of another age, who — Burton says — burst out laughing at the vices of the people of Abdera, Sterne shoots his irrepressible gaiety at such human frailties as tend to make our life gloomy by smothering the active principle of the heart.

Sterne measures the truth and value of experience in terms of an inner awakening in happiness and love —

"I pity the man who can travel from Dan to Beersheba, and cry, 'Tis all barren. And so it is; and so is all the world to him, who will not cultivate the fruits it offers. ... was I in a desert, I would find out wherewith in it to call forth my affections".67

By our soul's enlargement, we establish easy kinship with creation. Max Happiness — as we have pointed out — is not just gratification of the senses, though it is realized through the medium of the senses. It is a spiritual experience. Despite its sensory basis, happiness — as Powys points out —

"is not a feverish pleasure. It is a peaceful rapture ... (The) living soul in us lives on the nourishment of little, simple sensations".69

Pleasure becomes happiness by the addition of the 'spiritual' quality, that is, when

"the idea of quality, the idea of something mental and emotional, of something intellectual and what used to be called 'spiritual', is added in it, to the mere sensual feeling".70

Sterne, who was charmed by the beautiful Mrs. Vesey, described her as 'a system of harmonic vibrations'. The beggar, in S.J., who said to a lady in Paris street —

"My fair charitable ... what is it but your goodness, and humanity which makes your bright eyes so sweet"?71.
might have said so in sheer flattery, and for selfish reasons, but he voiced the real sentiments of the author. Tristram's sensation of joy, arising out of his participation in the rustic dance with Wannette and others, is associated with these reflections —

"Why could not a man sit down in the lap of content here — and dance and sing, and say his prayers, and go to heaven with this nut-brown maid?"73

The same association of joy and religion is seen in the Grace scene in S.x., and in the scene of the Prodigal's return in the sermon, The Prodigal Son. So Sterne's happiness is an inner awakening in spirit, stirred not by contemplation, but by participation in life, by apprehension of life through feeling and the senses — particularly, as he says through his corporal Trim, through the sense of sight.

The theme of happiness figures prominently in his sermons (see ante, Chap.VII, pp.134-7). Sterne's business as a preacher leads him to locate happiness in religion and virtue. He or nourishment calls for the control of joy by reason and virtue, without which joy shall sink into levity. Joyfulness is not 'intemperance and excess'. In his earnest prayer for a kingdom of 'hearty laughing subjects', in the novel, Sterne does not forget to mention the need of 'virtue' and 'reason' to guide their gaiety. Real happiness — he says elsewhere — is in the moderation of our desire, and 'in the testimony of a good conscience'. Thus joy, with Sterne, is not irresponsible gaiety, but a happiness of soul, supplied by the senses and nourished by virtue and wisdom. It comes to us with the activation of our heart in benevolent instinct.