CHAPTER I

1. The Period — (A) Deism

Two important movements in the 18th century world of English thought were related to deism, and the development of moral philosophy. They were not entirely separate movements, but were interrelated, as religion and morality must be. In fact, deism is one important manifestation of the new cult of moral thought, that, beginning earlier, became a strong influence in the 18th century. A consideration of deism, as well as of the moral philosophy of the 18th century is essential to an understanding of Sterne's thought.

(a) The concept of deism:

Deism has been defined as 'natural religion', as opposed to revealed religion. Deism is the interpretation of Christian religion by the light of natural reason and individual conscience, rather than by revelation and Scripture. Not Divinity, but morality is the foundation of religion; and that religion is natural religion. Wollaston says —

"The foundation of religion lies in that difference between the acts of men, which distinguishes them into good, evil, and indifferent ... If there be moral good and evil, distinguished as before, there is religion; and such as may most properly be styled natural ... By religion I mean nothing else but an obligation to do what ought not to be omitted, and to forbear what ought not to be done".1

'Natural' means 'rational', or 'reasonable', that is, possessing the quality that distinguishes man from brutes. Reason is the 'uppermost faculty' of human beings, and is 'of a commanding
"To be governed by reason is the general law imposed by the Author of nature upon them (i.e., human beings), whose uppermost faculty is reason".4

Divine laws, therefore, are the dictates of reason. Reason is the only way to truth. To a human being

"nothing can be right that interferes with reason, and nothing can interfere with truth but it must interfere with reason. Such a harmony there is between them. For whatever is known to be true, reason either finds it, or allows it to be such. . . . certainly to obey the law, which the Author of his being has given him, is religion: and to obey the law, which He has given or revealed to him by making it to result from the right use of his own natural faculties, must be to him his natural religion".5

Happiness, or 'the consciousness of anything agreeable', abets 'the cause of truth', and is allied to it. Natural religion, thus, may be said to be

"grounded upon this triple and strict alliance of truth, happiness and reason . . . its truest definition is, The pursuit of happiness by the practice of reason and truth".8

And this 'religion of nature' the deists considered to be 'an absolutely perfect religion'; they believed that "external Revelation can neither add to, nor take from, its perfection". The emphasis of deism is on simple faith in God, and on the practice of virtue. Deism seeks vindication of religion in humanism, and marks the complete rejection of tradition in the sphere of religion, in the age of Enlightenment.

(b) Its growth:

Deism has its roots in the Renaissance, in Renaissance humanism. The Renaissance resolved the medieval dualism between the Creator and His creation (i.e., nature), and sought to
re-establish the pagan purity, and even Divinity, in nature. The humanism of Renaissance is based on this faith in God's creation.

"The Renaissance strove for a religion of affirmation of the world and of the intellect, - a religion which conceded to both their specific value, and which found the real proof and seal of Divinity not in the degradation and destruction of the world and the human intellect, but in their exaltation."

The Middle Ages had regarded this world as the habitation of the Devil, and, therefore, impure and sinful, and stressed the need of supernatural assistance for the real perfection of nature.

The Middle Ages emphasized the fulfilment of nature or human intellect in Grace. Medieval theology, which governed medieval philosophical thought, accepted human reason, or natural law, only as the servant of revelation or Divine law. The Renaissance controverts this medieval position. Christian dogma was not repudiated, but subjected to humanistic interpretation. The emphasis shifted from scholasticism and theology to the humanity of Christ.

The Renaissance plea for tolerance must also have influenced deistic thought. The interest in toleration was not merely an intellectual or philosophical one, but it was dictated by humanistic considerations. It was a natural reaction to the tyranny of the orthodox and militant Church against heretics, and to the conflicts of the two Christian faiths, namely, the old Catholicism and the new Protestantism. We find Sir Thomas More making a fervent plea for religious tolerance in his Utopia. In More's ideal commonwealth there are 'diverse kinds of religion', and of concepts of God and His worship. Though - More says - one religion alone (obviously meaning Christianity) is true and would "at the last issue out and come to light", yet there is 'full liberty and
choice' in faith, guaranteed by King Utopus, who prohibits violence and religious conflicts. Not only co-existence of all faiths, but some other articles of deistic faith, as later propounded by Lord Herbert of Cherbury, had been, in a way, anticipated by More in his *Utopia* - such as, reward of virtue and punishment of vice, expiation of crime by repentance, emphasis on duties. More, however, has faith in miracles, and also in priesthood; but his priests are of "exceeding holiness, and therefore very few".

Renaissance humanism received a check in the Reformation. The Reformation served to whip up religious enthusiasm and interest in the Scripture, and thus to weaken the Renaissance ideal of religious universalism - an ideal which put humanity above everything. But while humanism could not triumph over its religious opposition, its ideals were kept alive. Of the factors responsible for the revival of humanism, the following may be noted as important, and also relevant to our purpose; for they explain not only the rise of deism in the 18th century, but also the very basis of the moral thought of the age of Enlightenment.

First, the Renaissance veneration for nature is strengthened by the great advances of the physical sciences in the 17th century in the work of Galileo, Kepler and Newton. The grand scheme of nature was revealed to man; it vindicated the greatness of its Creator. Following Newton, Addison regarded this infinite space, or Nature, as 'the Sensorium of the Godhead'. Later, Wollaston, a protagonist of deism, put the idea more clearly in these words -

"The frame and constitution of the world, the astonishing magnificence of it, the various phenomena and kinds of beings ... do all shew that there is some Almighty designer".
Voltaire called God the 'Eternal Geometer'. The restoration of the glory of nature weakened dogma and fostered humanism. This prepared the way for deism.

The second factor which contributed to the revival of humanism was the rise of the Cambridge Platonists in the 17th century. The Cambridge school, following Hugh Grotius of Holland, stood for reason and humanity. The Cambridge movement arose as a reaction to the 'selfish' system of Hobbes. Hobbes conceived the basic nature of man as vicious and selfish;

"in the nature of man" - Hobbes said - "we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory. ... during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war and such a war, as is of every man, against every man".

Hobbes found the fundamental characteristic of human nature in the impulse towards self-preservation, or egoism. The moral impulse, he believed, was extraneous to man's inner nature and arose from the social institution. The institution of the commonwealth is necessary for

"getting themselves(i.e., men) out from that miserable condition of war, which is necessarily consequent ... to the natural passions of men".

Hobbes based all action to the motive of self-love, to the egoistic instinct of self-preservation. The 'egoism' of Hobbes was challenged by the Cambridge Platonists, who stressed the moral impulse in man. Kindness and the practice of virtue are, therefore, the essentials of religion. Sympathy and universal love, not dogma, lead one to God. According to Whichcote, "Universal charity is a thing final in religion". Henry More likewise believed that the highest devotion comes from 'the noblest and
most generous spirit'. The Cambridge Platonists pleaded for a reasonable, as opposed to enthusiastic, approach to religion. While they accept the Scripture, they oppose blind conformity and superstitious faith. Whichcote said -

"God is the most knowable of anything in the world ... Our reason is not confounded by our religion, but awakened, excited, employed, directed, and improved".24

Whichcote saw in the Scripture's way of religious persuasion 'evidence of reason', and said -

"That which has not reason in it, or for it, is man's superstition, and not religion of God's making".25

It is easy to see that this 'reason', which co-exists with faith in Scriptural authority (defining religion in terms of supernatural revelation), is not the 'reason' of Locke, or of the deists, who deny revelation. However, the idea of reasonableness in religion helped deism. Moreover, by holding conduct above creed, Cambridge Platonism greatly helped in humanizing religion. It accelerated the tendency to define religion in moral terms, to put up the ethical above the supernatural. It thus pre-eminently served the cause of deism. Pope aptly expressed the current idea, when he said -

"In Faith and Hope the world will disagree, But all mankind's concern is Charity".26

Addison, in a comparative estimate of faith and morality, gives the higher place to the latter. Though faith and morality are equally important, morality - he holds - "has the pre-eminence in several respects". Addison says that "infidelity is not of so malignant a nature as immorality", and that "the rule of morality is much more certain than that of faith".27

The third important factor for the rise of deism is
the enthronement of reason in all fields of enquiry. This led to an examination of faith by the light of reason and common sense, and not by the learned and complicated formulae of theology. Hobbes's scepticism about religion is revealed in his definition of it as "Fear of power invisible, feigned by the mind or imagined from tales publicly allowed". Dryden said -

"Faith is not built on disquisitions vain; The things we must believe are few and plain".29

Locke's work (Essay concerning Human Understanding, as well as Reasonableness of Christianity) was of paramount importance in the enlistment of reason to the cause of faith. Locke does not reject faith, but accepts it as an intellectual conviction. While he does not deny revelation, as the deists do, he turns his back on theology and dogma. Locke holds that even the original Revelation must pass through the test of reason for acceptance. He says -

"Faith can never convince us of anything that contradicts our knowledge. Because, though faith is founded on the testimony of God (who cannot lie) revealing any proposition to us; yet we cannot have an assurance of the truth of its being a divine revelation greater than our own knowledge ... the whole strength of the certainty depends upon our knowledge that God revealed it ..."30

Revelation must be tested by reason, by the 'light within' us; for, "God when he makes the prophet does not unmake the man ... When he illuminates the mind with supernatural light, he does not extinguish that which is natural".31

The deists, as we shall see, put capital stress on this natural reason. In his Reasonableness of Christianity Locke emphasized the original simplicity of the Christian religion, as against supernaturalism and the scholastic obscurities, which only made the religion distant and difficult for the common man.

"This is a religion" - he pointed out - "suited to
vulgar capacities and the state of mankind in this world, destined to labour and travail. The writers and wranglers in religion fill it with niceties, and dress it up with notions; which they make necessary and fundamental parts of it; as if there were no way into the Church, but through the Academy or Lyceum. The bulk of mankind have not leisure for learning and logic, and superfine distinctions of the Schools".32

The deists are greatly indebted to Locke for his insistence on natural reason in the understanding of religion, and for his repudiation of scholasticism. Addison stressed the importance of both reason and revelation, in religion -

"Reason as well as Revelation assures us, that he(God) cannot be absent from us, notwithstanding he is undiscovered by us".33

Pope, the apostle of reason, followed Locke in the de-mystification of religion, which(religion) - Pope pointed out - "the good, untaught, will find"; such a one 'will find', because he "looks thro' Nature, up to Nature's God". We have come close to deism.

(c) The deistic position:

Lord Herbert of Cherbury, elder brother of the Caroline poet George Herbert, is known as the father of deism. It was he who first formulated the five fundamental principles of deism in his De Veritate(1624), and later in his De Religione Laici(1645).

Lord Herbert's line of argument is as follows. The variety of religions, each 'divinely ordained', and their exclusiveness, are intriguing to the lay man, Herbert's 'Wayfarer', who is crossed between faith and reason, and loses himself in the complicated controversies and religious formulae of diverse faiths.

"Many faiths or religions, clearly, exist or once existed in various countries and ages, and certainly there is not one of them that the lawgivers have not pronounced to be as it were divinely ordained; so that
the Wayfarer finds one in Europe, another in Africa, and in Asia, ... Asia boasts its extraordinary philosophers, apostles, and teachers; Africa its penetrating geniuses and exalted theologians ... Europe its own illustrious and distinguished spirits. 36

The 'Wayfarer', therefore, should

"first search out doctrines which are analogous to the internal faculties, and afterwards those about which there is most agreement." 37

These common principles - Lord Herbert says - are - (i) belief in the Supreme Being and (ii) in His worship, (iii) the practice of virtue as the chief form of divine worship, (iv) expiation of crime by penitence, and (v) rewards and punishments after death. Though Lord Herbert did not deny Scriptural revelation outright, he did enough to discredit it;

"mankind" - he said - "is given complete liberty regarding Faith about the past, and regarding doctrines proceeding from such Faith." 39

His prime emphasis is on virtue, not on any formulae of worship -

"by virtue is God so well worshipped that I have called that religion the best which is best squared to its rule". 40

Divine providence is universal, and

"no individual religion or faith, however broad, so defends it as to praise it for looking to the welfare of all mankind". 41

We have to go, therefore, to the five common notions, that is, for universal religion. This religion is natural to man, and makes for unity among mankind;

"it lays the foundation of a general harmony ... there is the greatest dispute, to this day, about the propositions of historical faith upheld and strengthened by the varying authority of diverse churches". 42

Though Dryden, in his Religio Laici (1682), refers to the 'principles of natural worship' with obvious disapproval, we
do not find the name of any deist, after Lord Herbert, till late in the century. Dryden believed that natural religion, instead of being antecedent to revealed religion, was derived from it—

"the principles of natural worship are only the faint remnants or dying flames of revealed religion in the posterity of Noah".43

Dryden's antipathy to deism was obviously caused by the deistic rejection of any particular Church, as advocated in the Five Principles of Lord Herbert. Dryden notwithstanding, the deistic movement made headway. It found a formidable champion in John Toland.

In his Christianity not Mysterious(1696), Toland applies Locke's dictum of judgment by reason—

"Reason is the only foundation of all certitude".44

This reason is innate in man. By 'reason' Toland meant the natural faculty in us of 'forming various ideas or perceptions of things', of desiring the good and disliking the evil. He also calls it 'Common Sense or Reason in general'. Toland set himself against scholasticism and authority. The common man can understand the simple gospel of Christ, but not the learned jargon of the Divinity schools. Toland puts the simple 'plain paths of reason' above 'the insuperable labyrinths of the Fathers'.

"The uncorrupted doctrines of Christianity are not above their(i.e., the common people's) reach or comprehension, but the gibberish of your Divinity schools they understand not".47

Here Toland is almost echoing Locke (see pp.7-8 ante). By his natural power of perception, or of forming ideas, every man can understand sufficiently the simple truths of religion. Toland, however, goes beyond Locke in extending the claims of reason to
Scriptural truths. Though he emphasized a reasonable, as opposed to superstitious, approach to religion, Locke could not deny Scriptural revelation. He admitted that there were certain things "wherein we have very imperfect notions, or none at all and other things, of whose past, present, or future existence, by the natural use of our faculties, we can have no knowledge at all; these ...(are) above reason ... since God, in giving us the light of reason, has not thereby tied up his own hands from affording us, when he thinks fit, the light of revelation in any of those matters wherein our natural faculties are able to give a probable determination; revelation, where God has been pleased to give it, must carry it against the probable conjectures of reason".48

Locke thus holds to reason and faith both. But Toland declares, in clear terms, the supremacy of the former over the latter. If any doctrine of the Gospel be contrary to reason, or 'common sense', it should be rejected; for we can have no idea about it, as we have no idea of 'a ball' which is said to be 'black and white and black at once'. And when we have no idea about a thing, it is but "lost labour to us to trouble ourselves about it". Thus the so-called mysteries can no more give us the right idea about God than a prayer delivered in an unknown language can excite devotion in us. Toland denies Scriptural revelation, though he does not openly say so. He says -

"Not the bare Authority of him that speaks, but the clear conception I form of what he says, is the ground of my persuasion".51

A contradiction in nature cannot be righted even by Omnipotence. Those who believe that 'Omnipotency' can do all things, including even unnatural things, only "impose upon themselves and others". To Toland, therefore, the concept of mystery in religion is wrong. To call something a mystery on the ground that we have no
adequate idea of its properties, or its essence, is a mistake. We do not call, for example, a table, or water, a mystery, on the ground that its essential properties, or essence, is unknown to us. Toland says that we must distinguish between the 'nominal essence' and the 'real essence' of a thing. We need not concern ourselves with the 'real essence' of the Divine Being. It is enough that we comprehend His 'nominal essence', that is, His attributes - like His Goodness, His Mercy, His Justice, and so on - attributes that prompt our religious and moral acts; Toland's main contention, therefore, is that "there is no mystery in Christianity, or the most perfect religion"; which is to say, that if anything which is contradictory to natural reason, or the laws of nature, be made an article of faith, that would not be the true Word of God or true religion. Needless to say, this view of religion would be shocking to the followers of the Christian Church, who derive their faith from Divine revelation and from the supernatural powers and miracles of Jesus Christ.

The same emphasis on reason is seen in Anthony Collins. Collins pleaded that we should accept and follow only those principles of religion, of which we are convinced by our individual reason. He adds -

"Nothing can tend more to the true honour of the clergy than that they should have full liberty, that is, that they should be under no impediments in their enquiries after truth".56

Truth, thus gained by free enquiry, is "like light to the eye". Free enquiry is not only the right means to religious truth, but has a larger cultural and humanistic significance.

"The advantage of free debate to society is infinite. It is not only the way to true religion, and to true
peace, but the way to knowledge and arts, which are the foundations of politeness, order, happiness, and prosperity".58

Collins ridiculed the belief in the literal fulfilment of the prophesies; they have, according to him, only an allegorical meaning; they are "fulfilled in a secondary, or typical, or mystical, or allegorical sense". Collins rejects the authority of the New Testament, and accepts the prophesies in the Old Testament as the sole proof of Christianity; he says boldly that "if these proofs are invalid, then is Christianity false". This virtually corrodes the very foundation of the distinctive Christian faith, as derived from the New Testament.

Thomas Woolston, another well-known deist of the early 18th century, denies the literal truth of the Miracles, in his Discourse on the Miracles of Our Saviour. He wants to show that the so-called Miracles of Jesus are absurd, and are no proof of his divine authority —

"the Miracles of healing all manner of bodily diseases, which Jesus was justly famed for, are none of the proper Miracles of the Messiah, neither are they so much as a good proof of his divine authority to found a religion ... the literal history of many of the Miracles of Jesus, as recorded by the Evangelists, does imply absurdities, improbabilities, and incredibilities; consequently they, either in whole or in part, were never wrought, as they are commonly believed now-a-days".67

To believe in the literal truth of the Miracles of Jesus is to

"take him for a conjuror, a sorcerer and a wizard, rather than the Messiah and the Prophet of the Most High God".62

The Miracles, therefore, are to be taken in their mystical or spiritual sense. Woolston is very positive that

"the only way of proving his (Jesus's) Messiahship ... (is) by the allegorical interpretation of the Law and the Prophets".63
The bodily diseases, said to have been cured by Jesus, "were no other than Figures of the spiritual infirmities of the soul that are to be cured by him". Christ's Miracles are, therefore, to be accepted only for their moral significance, as showing, 'besides his greatness of power', his 'goodness, kindness and love to mankind'.

In Tindal (Christianity as Old as the Creation) we note the same deistic repudiation of Scriptural authority and tradition, emphasis on reason and the natural faculty of man and on morality and duties. Tindal stresses the universality of religion. God intended His Laws to be known to all mankind, and has given man the means of knowing them. These means are the natural faculties of man—those faculties, that is, "by which men are distinguished from brutes". God has given men this 'Light of their Understanding' to help them "discover what makes for the good of their souls". Tindal also calls this the 'Light of Nature', which, "like that of the Sun, is universal", and would disperse all the 'mists and fogs' of false belief, unless men deliberately "shut the eyes of their understanding or suffer others to blind them". Tindal held that man's social inclinations are natural, and that his natural faculties are intended to advance fellowship and 'mutual benevolence'. "True religion", therefore,

"is a constant disposition of mind to do all the good we can; and thereby render ourselves acceptable to God in answering the End of his Creation".

From all these principles Tindal deduces the universality of religion, rejecting any special form of it.

"Will any affirm, that the nature of God is not eternally the same? Or that the nature of man is changed?"
Or that the relations God and man stand in to one another, are not always the same?"71
The religion of nature is 'absolutely perfect'; and "external Revelation can neither add to, nor take from, its perfection"; for the Law of Nature is immutable. This Law, which means 'Universal Reason and Equity' is "the Candle of our Maker, lighted up in every breast, to guide, and shine perpetually". It is the 'invisible Fountain within' - the source of all religion and morality. True Christianity must be this universal and natural religion, and so is as old as creation. Obviously, this is entirely different from the Christian faith, resting on revelation and the miracles of the Holy Text.

(d) Its failure as a movement:

With all its good points, the deistic movement could not succeed. The reasons are simple. For one thing, deism posed a challenge to the Christian Church, by disowning revelation and Scriptural authority. The society was not prepared to submit to that challenge to the established Church. However pious the intention of the deists might be, 'natural religion' tended to supplant the Christian Church, by making "every man ... his own priest, his own temple", and rejecting the priesthood of Christ. No wonder, Warburton considered Collins and Tindal as 'the terror' of 'this age'. The Church found very able champions in Joseph Butler, the famous author of the Analogy of Religion (1736), and in William Warburton, author of The Divine Legation of Moses (1737–41). John Stuart Mill tells us how Butler's Analogy influenced his father, James Mill, and turned his mind away from
Butler sought to knock the bottom out of the deistic thesis, by suggesting that Christianity was but 'the republication of natural religion'. While not opposing natural religion as such, Butler sought its vindication in Christianity. Christianity, he points out,

"instructs mankind in the moral system of the world ... And, which is very material, it teaches natural religion in its genuine simplicity; free from those superstitions with which it is totally corrupted, and under which it was in a manner lost".

Natural religion, thus, far from being incompatible with the special Christian faith, is vindicated by it.

"Revelation is further an authoritative publication of natural religion, and so affords the evidence of testimony for the truth of it".

The miracles and prophesies in the Scripture - Butler pointed out - have a universal and moral significance; they

"were intended to prove a particular dispensation of Providence, the redemption of the world by the Messiah; but this does not hinder, but that they may also prove God's general providence over the world as our moral Governor and Judge. And they evidently do prove it".

Religion has both an internal and external character; the latter, that is, revealed religion, "is as real a part of religion, of true religion, as the former" (i.e., natural religion). A more orthodox defender of the Church, Bishop Warburton equated deism to infidelity. He regarded the deists as

"the despisers of the Master whom I serve, and as the implacable enemies of that Order to which I have the honour to belong".

The advocates of the established Church also denied the innateness of the moral sense, which is emphasized by the deists. As William Law put it -
"the state of nature must differ all over the world, and in every age of the world, just as the light, and advantages, have differed in the several parts, and ages of the world." 81

Our moral sense, Law pointed out, is awakened not by 'natural reason', but by 'external means'. We know the 'right and wrong founded in the nature of things' not by the so-called inward light,

"but by such external means, as people are taught articulate language, civility, politeness, or any other rules of civil life". 81

Therefore, to affirm that mankind, all over the world, and 'at all times', can receive 'the same sufficient, perfect light of nature', is to affirm that they can receive 'the same perfect, unerring education'. Warburton admits an innate moral sense - 'an instinctive approbation of right and abhorrence of wrong'; but, by itself, it is inadequate as a foundation of morality.

It is necessary to combine it with the 'reasoning faculty', which, according to Warburton, improves upon the dictates of the moral sense and prevents it from being capricious in its operations. There is still something wanting "whereon to establish the morality, properly so called, of actions". And that is God's Will, which - Warburton thinks - is the principal source of morality. "Morality is founded on Will", that is, on Scriptural revelation, and does not grow of itself within the human mind.

Deism also met opposition in rather an unexpected quarter. The deistic concept of natural reason (Tindal's 'Light of Nature' - see p. 14 ante) rested on an assumption of the basic intellectual nature of man. This was disputed by the moral philosophers, who held that the basic nature of man was not rationalistic, but emotive. Appetites and passions, not philosophical
understanding of the infinite goodness of God, are the first source of religious ideas, as of all other ideas. Religious beliefs are the outcome of hope and fear, not of thinking. As Hume says in his *Natural History of Religion*...

"... in order to carry men's intention beyond the present course of things, or lead them into any inference concerning invisible intelligent power, they must be actuated by some passion which prompts their thought and reflection... But what passion shall we here have recourse to, for explaining an effect of such mighty consequence?... No passions... but the ordinary affections of human life; the anxious concern for happiness, the dread of future misery, the terror of death, the thirst of revenge, the appetite for food and other necessaries. Agitated by hopes and fears of this nature, especially the latter, men scrutinize, with a trembling curiosity, the course of future causes, and... see the first obscure traces of divinity."84

We thus see that deism met substantial opposition at many points.

(e) Its contribution:

Though deism failed as a movement against faith, it eminently succeeded as a moral force. Deism toned down religious orthodoxy. It served the cause of religion, by seeking to rid it of bigotry and superstition. Woolston noted one good result of the deistic controversy

"in the almost cure of a most malignant distemper called bigotry, which has been the bane of human society, and in times past more destructive of the world than either war or pestilence".85

Most of the enlightened minds of the age were sympathizers of deism, though they did not disown the established religion. As Root points out -

"The creed of deism or natural religion was that to which, so men thought, one is inevitably driven by innate human reason; its articles - a God who is
seen in nature and is nature's 'first cause'; charity and justice as the most acceptable worship; a future life of rewards and punishments — are those which are common to all respectable religions the world over. Christian revelation constitutes, no doubt, a desirable supplement to natural religion, but one will emphasize its reasonableness rather than its supernatural character.\(^86\)

The deists, we have noted, put prime emphasis on duties, which they considered as divine commands. They regarded morality as even antecedent to religion.

"Is it not a great mistake to think that the obligation of moral duties does solely depend upon the revelation of God's Will made to us in the Holy Scriptures?"\(^87\)

We need not necessarily be religious, in order to be moral. Crusoe was a faithful Christian, who converted his servant to his own religion. Even so, he believed that moral qualities are independent of religion. God bestows upon all — Christians and others —

"the same powers, the same reason, the same affections, the same sentiments of kindness and obligation ... the same sense of gratitude, sincerity, fidelity, and all the capacities of doing good and receiving good; and when He pleases to offer to them (i.e., non-Christians) occasions of exerting these, they are as ready, nay, more ready, to apply them to the right uses for which they were bestowed, than we are".\(^88\)

The deists discarded the concept of original sin ("We lie under no necessary fate of sinning"). Man's instinct and natural reason — the deists held — lead to love and kindness. This ethical aspect of deistic thought, where it meets the moral philosophy of the age, considerably influenced the enlightened minds of the century, which put supreme emphasis on humanity and valued religion chiefly as an aid to humanity. They reconciled humanism and faith. It may be noted that Addison, while he holds to his faith and owes allegiance to 'our National Church', gives at the same time a pre-eminent place to 'morality, or natural religion', or
what he calls 'the practical part of religion'. Fielding, who gently ridicules both the deistic view of philosopher Square and the religiosity of parson Thwackum in Tom Jones, says - at another place - through his favourite character, the good parson Adams in Joseph Andrews -

"...a virtuous and good Turk or heathen are more acceptable in the sight of their Creator, than a vicious and wicked Christian, though his faith was as perfectly orthodox as St. Paul's himself".92

One of Sterne's important sermons, that on Conscience, which he also incorporates into his novel (T.S., Bk.II, Ch.17), closes with an exhortation to follow conscience and the Scripture alike -

"God and reason made the law, and has placed Conscience within you to determine, - not like an Asiatic Cadi according to the ebbs and flows of his own passions; - but like a British judge in this land of liberty, who makes no new law, - but faithfully declares that glorious law which he finds already written".93

Voltaire, in tracing the greatest common factor in all religions, found it in God, and uprightness -

"Well, to what dogma do all minds agree? to the worship of a God and to integrity. All the philosophers of the world who have had a religion have said in all time - 'There is a God, and one must be just'. There, then, is the universal religion established in all time and throughout mankind".94

Here Voltaire was voicing the enlightened opinion of his age.

Deism rekindled interest in humanity, which is the keynote of 18th century literature, and whose most inspired spokesman in English fiction was Laurence Sterne. Deism restored a positive faith in life, by making humanity the foundation of religion, as of morality. It restored faith in the innate goodness of man, by upholding his natural reason above the Scripture. It helped restore a happy view of life. Wollaston conceived of happiness ('the consciousness of any thing agreeable') as an
inseparable ally of truth, and as the 'end of society and laws'.

And Tindal regarded happiness as a divine dispensation. Deism helped in making religion a cheerful thing. Addison considered the end of virtue to be happiness on earth and hereafter. So Steele - "There is no real life but cheerful life". Spleen, or ill-humour is the disease of life; and its remedy is laughter and cheerfulness of spirit. Asceticism, as an ethical ideal, was discredited in the 18th century (see chap.II). The healthy relish for life, and the positive view of morality, that we see in Fielding, the supreme emphasis on good spirits and humanity that we see in Sterne, would not have been possible without the work of the deists.