Sterne's sermons - 'that neglected half of Sterne's genius', as Herbert Read called them - number forty-five. They naturally fall into two divisions, namely, those published in his life-time under his supervision, and those published after his death. In the former category are the Volumes I & II (pub. May, 1760) and III & IV (pub. January, 1766); in the latter, Volumes V, VI, & VII (pub. June, 1769). Early in his novel, Sterne incorporated a favourite sermon of his, namely that on Conscience. This is put as parson Yorick's sermon; and corporal Trim reads it to the Shandy brothers. The insertion of the sermon was obviously a feeler the author threw to his readers about the intended publication of his sermons; for Sterne says, after Trim has finished reading the sermon, that in case

"the character of parson Yorick, and this sample of his sermons, is liked, - there are now in the possession of the Shandy family, as many as will make a handsome volume, at the world's service, - and much good may they do it".4

The success of his Shandy (Bks. I & II) prompted the author to bring out his sermons, which were issued, too, as The Sermons of Mr. Yorick. Naturally, Sterne chose the very best in the Volumes, I to IV, which were published in his life-time.

(a) Influences on Sterne:

Hammond, in his study of Sterne's Sermons, has taken great pains to trace Sterne's sources in the sermons and the preponderance of his borrowed material in the posthumous Volumes (V,
VI & VII). Hammond traces parallel, or near-parallel, passages in Sterne and other writers, such as Archbishop Tillotson, Dr. Samuel Clarke, William Wollaston and others, and also John Locke. The extent and nature of Sterne's indebtedness form the subject of Hammond's study. The ground covered by Hammond need not be trodden on again. We should, however, point out here, that it was but natural for Sterne to turn to some of these earlier men in the Church, with whom he felt a kind of intellectual and spiritual affinity. For they were the champions of religious liberalism before Sterne's time. They put greater emphasis on morality and humanity than on faith and dogma. They were guided by reason, which meant lucidity, common sense and practical divinity, and the rejection of scholastic obscurities. Archbishop Tillotson's influence in the 18th century is attested to by Bishop Burnet, who said that Tillotson's sermons were

"the noblest body of sermons that, I hope I may be allowed to say, this nation, or the world, ever saw".

Dean Swift called Tillotson 'that excellent prelate'. Tillotson heads the list of preachers recommended by Addison's Sir Roger for his chaplain to follow. And the good Squire, it may be remembered, insisted on 'practical divinity' and simple language in a preacher. Sterne's sermons, too, we shall see, are distinguished by these two, among other, qualities. Samuel Clarke, moderate Churchman and scholar of the early 18th century, was an eminent representative of religious liberalism in his age. Though he was no deist himself, he emphasized, like the deists, the Law of Nature as the eternal source and fundamental sanction of all morality and religion.

"The Law of Nature" - he said - "is eternal, universal,
and absolutely unchangeable ... The Will of God always determines itself to act according to the eternal Reason of Things ... all rational creatures are obliged to govern themselves in all their actions by the same eternal Rule of Reason".10

Clarke was a prominent rational Christian in the early 18th century, who stressed reason no less than faith. Reason is as much a potent source of morality, as religion.

"Reason, which is the proper nature of man, can never lead man to any thing else than universal love, and benevolence".11

The humanistic basis of Clarke's religious thought must have greatly appealed to Sterne. Sterne salutes him as 'a great reasoner' in one of his sermons, Time and Chance. William Wollaston, a retired Churchman, was one of the protagonists of 'natural religion' in the early 18th century (see ante, Chap. I, pp.1,2). Sterne was not drawn into his deism; but, as a humanist and liberal Churchman, Sterne must have been influenced by Wollaston's ideas of the primacy of man's natural faculties and instincts. (He owns his debt to Wollaston in a footnote, in one of his sermons, Job's Account of Life).

Locke and Sterne. A few words may be said here on Locke's influence on Sterne in the sermons, as this subject has not been sufficiently treated by Hammond. Locke's influence on Sterne in the sermons is not, of course, as marked as it is in his T.S. (see Crap. I on the Technique of T.S.), where there are also references to Locke; nevertheless, it is important. Locke was a secular philosopher, but his religious position is clear. He does not abjure faith, but justifies it with reason. All knowledge is individual perceptive experience; so also our knowledge about God.
... having furnished us with those faculties our minds are endowed with, he (i.e., God) hath not left himself without witness: since we have sense, perception, and reason, and cannot want a clear proof of him, as long as we carry ourselves about us. To show, therefore that we are capable of knowing, i.e., being certain that there is a God, and how we may come by this certainty, I think we need go no further than ourselves, and that undoubted knowledge we have of our own existence.

Locke the rationalist turns his back on theology and dogma; but Locke, the Christian accepts Scriptural revelation. It was here that he provided an inspiration to the liberal Churchmen of the 18th century, who decried both deism and the Methodist enthusiasm.

-- as we have stated earlier (see ante, Chap. II, p. 22) -- Locke regarded morality as a science "capable of demonstration." He did not make morality an appendage of theology, or a mere formula of religion, but related it to conduct. This could not but appeal to Sterne, whose religion -- as we shall see -- had a strong humanistic and moral basis. The importance that Sterne attaches to moral conduct can be seen in his exoneration of the pagans on this ground, though as a Christian preacher he considers their religious belief to be wrong.

"... however defective in their theology and more abstracted points, -- their morality was in no way connected with it. -- There is no need, that the everlasting laws of justice and mercy should be fetched down from above, -- since they can be proved from more obvious mediums."

Sterne's sermons amply bear out his agreement with Locke, that morality, or even religion, is vindicated in earthly conduct. Sterne was a Christian, but his Christianity rested more on the demonstrable truth of moral conduct than on abstract notions of religion. From within the Christian Church, Sterne stood for some kind of a universal, rational-humanistic religion. Here he owed
to Locke, whose philosophy — Sterne pointed out —

"shunning the errors to which other theories of knowledge are exposed ... arrives at all truths accessible to the understanding ... (and is) a sacred philosophy which the world must heed if it is to have a true universal religion, a true science of morals".18

Apart from the general attitude to religion and morality, in some particulars, too, we may trace Sterne's indebtedness to Locke; as, for example, in his (Sterne's) concepts of 'ruling passion', 'mysteries and riddles', and so on. Among one of the causes of error, Locke mentions 'predominant passions or inclinations', which check reason and obscure truth. He calls them also 'appetites and prevailing passions'; these lead us to evil, to error and misery. This concept of 'ruling passion' is used by Sterne in his sermon, The Character of Herod. He draws Herod's character by his 'ruling passion', which he finds to be ambition. This ambition is the all-determining principle of action with Herod, and explains his entire character, his vices and his virtues alike —

"... all the variety of shapes ... we put on, are in truth but so many different attempts to gratify the same governing appetite".21

Thus, Herod's inordinate ambition, or love of power, led him to his acts of cruelty — such as, the murder of his own sons who, he feared, might one day dispossess him. His apparent virtues, like his high bearing, lavish entertainments, were his tricks of ingratiating himself with the Roman Senate, and of currying favours with Emperor Augustus, from whom he derived his power. All his actions, good and bad, tended to the satisfaction of his governing passion — namely, ambition, or love of power. ...
Locke's religious belief clearly points to Sterne's. Though an apostle of reason, Locke believed that most of the world of bodies are

"hid from us, in some things by being too remote, and in others by being too minute ... our reason carries us herein very little beyond particular matter of fact."24

And faith, that is, belief in revelation and in the mysteries of God's ways as recorded in the Scripture, is still more difficult of demonstration. While faith should be reasonable, and not blind, it cannot be fully explained by reason. Locke refers to the need of knowing the boundaries of faith and reason. Though he rejected orthodoxy and tradition, Locke could not abjure faith, as the deists could. This, too, was more or less Sterne's position. The Divine dispensation is mysterious, and is beyond the scope of our reason.

"We live amongst mysteries and riddles, and almost every thing which comes in our way, in one light or other, may be said to baffle our understandings".26

He says, in another sermon, that we are unable to see 'the mysterious workings of providence', and

"to comprehend the whole plan of his infinite wisdom and goodness".27

Elsewhere again, he refers to

"some secret and unseen workings in human affairs, which baffle all our endeavours".28

Our faith and our worship of God should be reasonable, but cannot be limited by the bounds of reason; for, after all, - as Locke points out - our understanding, with all its importance, is not perfect, and it is foolish to expect demonstration in everything. That is preacher Sterne's view too.
We note Sterne's indebtedness to Locke also in his attitude to religious 'enthusiasm'. While Locke did not deny faith, he could not accept what he thought to be absurd forms or manifestations of it. One of these is what is called 'enthusiasm'. This word (derived from the Greek ἐνθεος, i.e., 'full of God') meant a fantastic absorption in a religious idea; it meant a belief in the direct guidance of God by immediate impulses and impressions. Dryden ridiculed enthusiasm in the following words—

"A numerous host of dreaming saints succeed
Of the true old enthusiastic breed".

Locke devotes a whole chapter, in his Essay, to the subject, denouncing enthusiasm as a superstition arising 'from the conceits of a warmed or overweening brain';

"it (enthusiasm) takes away both reason and revelation, and substitutes in the room of them the ungrounded fancies of a man's own brain".

Enthusiasm was condemned in the age of Enlightenment. Addison described it as an 'error' of mistaken devotion, a superstitious folly. Dr. Johnson defined it as 'a vain belief of private revelation', founded 'neither on reason nor on divine revelation, but (arising) ... from the conceits of a warmed or overweening brain' (he is quoting from Locke—see ante). Fielding, through Squire Allworthy, denounces 'enthusiasm' as a state of 'depravity', and equates it to atheism. Sterne attached supreme importance to feeling, both in his secular and religious work; but at the same time, he recognized the need of reason in the guidance of devotion. Divine assistance— he says in the sermon, On Enthusiasm— is needed for making men good; but we should not be passive receivers of His grace, like the 'enthusiasts'. As he puts it—
"the fruits of the spirit are merely the determinations and efforts of our own reason".36

Sterne uses Locke's arguments to denounce 'enthusiasm' as a tendency

"to destroy the reason of the gospel itself, - and render the Christian religion, which consists of sober and consistent doctrines,- the most intoxicated,- the most wild and unintelligible institution that ever was in the world".37

Sterne says, therefore, that his aim is to interpret 'the gospel of Christ' with 'reason and common sense'. This argument is typically Lockean.

(b) Sterne's faith:

Lack of orthodoxy. The 18th century was an age of religious liberalism (see ante, Chap. I, also Chap. II). Sterne was one of its typical representatives. One aspect of this liberalism is revealed in the comparative indifference to rituals and ceremonial aspects of religion, and greater stress on virtue or conduct. This is the guiding 'motif' of Sterne's sermons. His main charge against Roman Catholicism is that, this religion - according to him - puts capital stress on the ceremonies and forms of religion, and disregards conscience (The Abuses of Conscience Considered). The importance to form arises from a certain rigid adherence to tradition, and from indifference to the functions of the heart, and is a potent cause of religious persecution. In Sterne's sermon, Pharisee and Publican in the Temple, the Pharisee, who stands for 'much observance of the law - much abstinence - much prayer', is condemned; for, 'when searched withinside', he will be found 'full of corruption' and all sorts of vices, like pride,
greed, self-love, cruelty, and so on. The Publican stands for simple devotion to God and pure heart. The preacher says that the secondary matters of religion should not predominate over the primary matters. In other words, the form of religion should not be given greater importance than its substance. As Sterne says —

"... the true heat and spirit of devotion is ... lost and extinguished under a cloud of ostentatious ceremonies and gestures".41

The 'ceremonial part' of religion should not be allowed to 'eat away the moral part'. Ceremonialism often breeds hypocrisy and narrow-mindedness. In Joseph Andrews, Fielding makes the good parson Adams say —

"Can any doctrine have a more pernicious influence on society, than a persuasion, that it will be a good plea for the villain at the last day; Lord, it is true I never obeyed one of thy commandments, yet punish me not, for I believe them all?"43

We can best worship God by offering him 'a virtuous and an upright mind'. While, as a member of the established Church, Sterne does not deny the need of ceremony altogether, he puts it in its proper place, that is, next to purification of heart, and to humanity. The rites and ceremonies of religion are but 'Instrumental Duties'; they are means to

"the great end of all religion - which is to purify our hearts - and conquer our passions - and in a word, to make us wiser and better men - better neighbours - better citizens - and better 'servants to God'.45

It is not surprising, therefore, that in Sterne's sermons we rarely find mention of such common topics of Christian clergymen, as Holy Communion, Baptism, festival days, and so on. Regarding festivals, footnotes to two sermons, House of Feasting and House
of Mourning and Pharisee and Publican, indicate that they were 'preached in Lent'. He has another Lenten sermon, Penances, which, however, is an enunciation of the preacher's philosophy of happiness which finds better expression in the House of Feasting sermon. The Penances has little to say on Lent and its ceremonial or doctrinal significance. The Pharisee sermon is itself an indictment of ritualism. Similarly, a foot-note in the sermon, Elijah and the Widow, just mentions that it was 'preached on Good Friday', while its theme is love and charity.

Sterne's unorthodox attitude is also seen in his indifference to theology and doctrinal Christianity, to abstract problems of religion. While as a Christian he brings forth a long list of charges against the pagans, he grants them the right of their moral sense and conduct, which he considers to be more important than 'theology and more abstracted points'. His indifference to theology is also seen in his allowing 'freedom of choice' in the matter of religion. Sterne's religious liberalism can also be seen in his keeping away from the usual themes of doctrinal Christianity, such as original sin, redemption, Resurrection, and so on.

Sterne's liberalism is sometimes carried too far by his critics. Traill, for instance, points out Sterne's indifference to, or ignorance of, Scriptural history, in the sermon, Character of Shimei. That Sterne's interest in religion and Scripture is humanistic, and not scholarly or theological, is clear, and is evident from his exposition of Shimei's conduct towards David, King of Israel. The preacher emphasizes the meanness of Shimei's malicious behaviour towards David. This prompts Traill to observe
that, in his account of Shimei's conduct Sterne betrays ignorance of Scriptural history in taking

"no account of the blood-feud between the house of David and the clan to which the railer (Shimei) belonged."\(^5\)

This criticism is unfair to Sterne; for he does take account of the old clannish enmity of David and the Benjamites (the clan of Shimei). Shimei, in the sermon, curses David in these words -

"Go to, thou man of Belial - thou hast sought blood, - and behold thou art caught in thy own mischief; for now hath the Lord returned upon thee all the blood of Saul and his house".\(^54\)

\(^7\) Saul, the first King of Israel, belonged to the Benjamite clan; i.e., the clan of Shimei. But Sterne's main interest in the sermon is not Scriptural history, but the moral unjustness of injuring a man, who is already in distress. David ran away from Jerusalem at the news of his own son Absalom's conspiracy against him. As he came to Bahurim, Shimei cursed him, and threw stones and dust at him. Shimei might have good clannish reasons for reviling at David; but - Sterne says -

"There is no small degree of malicious craft in fixing upon a season to give a mark of enmity and ill will... Could Shimei possibly have waited for the ebb of David's passions, and till the first great conflict within him (i.e., arising out of his dear son's treachery with him) had been over - then the reproach of being guilty of Saul's blood must have hurt him (i.e., David)."\(^55\)

Sterne pursues this theme - namely, the sin of striking an already stricken man - throughout the sermon. He holds up Shimei as a type of low selfishness, which combines servility with insolence, according as the occasion demands.

Sometimes Sterne reveals his unorthodox attitude in a strange manner, as when he indulges in an occasional freedom with
In the sermon, "Philanthropy Recommended," he says about the lawyer:

"reciting the general heads of our duty to God and man as delivered in the 18th of Leviticus and the 6th of Deuteronomy, - namely - That we should worship the Lord our God with all our hearts, and love our neighbour as ourselves; our blessed Saviour tells him, he had answered right".56

Now, the quotation from the Text (in italics) is from the 19th, not 18th, Chapter of Leviticus; the 18th deals with other matters. Hammond interprets this attitude of Sterne's as one of whimsicality, or a deliberate sense of humour.

"The error", he adds, "was not rectified in any of the later editions which appeared during Yorick's lifetime; its presence is probably best explained by considering it just another manifestation of the preacher's curious sense of humour".57

But Sterne's theme in the sermon, namely, philanthropy and compassion, and particularly the passage of the misquotation, will make it clear that there is no point, or occasion, here for whimsicality or humour. Indeed, the nature of Sterne's humour (see Chap. XII) does not fit in, in any way, in the present context. If the misquotation shows anything, it shows his attitude of indifference to form, or formality, a certain defiance of convention.

**His moderate orthodoxy.** At the same time, Sterne was not a free lance in faith. He was a faithful member of the established Church. Imbuing the moral-humanistic philosophy of his age, he saw an essential connection between humanity and religion. He believed that the aid of religion is necessary for the advancement of humanity. In his important sermon, "Philanthropy Recommended," he reminds us that the way to eternal life is through love of God and love of man, that is, through religion and virtue. In another
important sermon, *Inquiry after Happiness*, he says that happiness — the great end and bliss of life — is unattainable

"without religion and virtue, and the assistance of God's grace and Holy Spirit to direct our lives in the true pursuit of it".59

Fortitude and conquest of pride, which are capital virtues, are best cultivated with the aid of religion. This is the theme of the sermons, *Job's Expostulation with His Wife* and *Humility*. The parallel importance of religion and virtue runs throughout the sermons. Religion and morality are interdependent;

"the duty of social virtues is unquestionable:— but I firmly deny that, therefore religion and morality are independent of each other: they appear so far from it, that I cannot conceive how the one, in the true and meritorious sense of duty, can act without the influence of the other".62

Our 'love and imitation of the goodness' of the Supreme Being begets in us the motive of doing good to others.

Sterne's moderate orthodoxy can be noted in some particulars, too — as, for example, in his faith in Protestantism, in his disapproval of deism on the one hand, and of Methodism on the other. We may deal with them briefly here. Though his approach to religion was not a doctrinaire one, yet as a preacher Sterne could see the special merits of his own religious faith. In his defence of Christianity, in the sermon *National Mercies*, he says that the first and greatest of their 'national deliverances' was the introduction of Christianity in their island; the second was its preservation in face of many attacks of barbarous hordes throughout the ages; and the third was its preservation against its own abuses and corruptions — by which(preservation) he obviously means the rise of Protestantism in the 16th century. In another
sermon, *Advantages of Christianity*, he accepts the traditional view of the unrighteous character of the heathen world, though, as a true humanist, he grants the heathens - as he grants all human beings - essential goodness of heart; this basic good quality, he thinks, their (the heathens') will could not direct to good ends. He finds in the heathens a 'want of disposition to follow the light which God has ever imparted'. He values Christianity above other religions for its being - according to him - the greatest aid to morality. Sterne's Protestantism is seen in his bitter attacks on Popery for its excessive emphasis on rituals and ceremonies and its ethical ideal of asceticism. Roman Catholicism he condemns as an outrage on humanity. Time and again, he refers to the horrors of the Inquisition. In *Job's Account of Life*, he asks us to

"look into the history of the Romish Church and her tyrants (or rather executioners) who seem to take pleasure in the pangs and convulsions of their fellow creatures".  

He calls Romanism 'a false and bloody religion'. He takes the same line against Popery, in the sermon on Conscience. He considers Catholicism as only

"a pecuniary system, well contrived to operate upon men's passions and weakness".  

Such attacks, however, are rather too hard.

Sterne's faithfulness to the Church to which he belonged is seen also in his disapproval of deism and enthusiasm alike. Deism - we have noted earlier - posed a challenge to the established Church in the 18th century. We have noted also, that though it failed as a movement against the Church, it was a great force in that age of Enlightenment, in toning down religious orthodoxy.
and strengthening humanism. Being a man of the Church, Sterne could not accept deism, which denied revelation and the miracles and any special merit of the Christian Church. Though he does not name deism, his dig at it in the sermon, National Mercies, is very clear -

"Nay, possibly, in process of time, they might arrive at greater improvements in religious controversy - when they had given their system of infidelity all the strength it could admit of from reason, they might begin to embellish it with some more sprightly conceits and turns of ridicule".72

Here he was referring to Israel, but meaning England. The deistic criticism of revelation and mysteries is dealt with in these words-

"Some wanton Israelite ... might turn the edge of his wit against types and symbols, and treat all the mysteries of his religion, and every thing that could be said upon so serious a subject with raillery and mirth: he might give vent to a world of pleasantry upon many sacred passages of his law".72

Sterne equates deism to irreligion ("he will thank God he is no deist"). He considers the miracles as examples of God's blessings upon the human acts of charity, which (charity) is the supreme virtue of man. The charity of the Widow of Zarephath, who was herself destitute, to Elijah, was a miracle wrought by God; so was the later restoration of her dead son to life, by the prayer of Elijah. Both these miracles - Sterne says - were

"rewards of that act of piety, wrought by infinite power, and left upon record in scripture, not merely as testimonies of the prophet's divine mission, but likewise as two encouraging instances of God Almighty's blessing upon works of charity and benevolence".75

God's miracles are His seal of approval upon men's acts of charity. In the Sentimental Journey, in a reference to his meeting with Madame de V- in Paris, the author notes, with evident self-satisfaction, how he succeeded in 'unperverting' her, who "was vibrating
betwixt coquetry and deism, and in reawakening her faith in revealed religion; the revealed religion is like the 'outworks' of a citadel, and provides capital defence against impiety and immorality.

In Sterne's opposition to the Methodist 'enthusiasm', we note the same faithfulness to the established Church. Sterne accepts Scriptural revelation, but not the personal revelation of the Methodists. We have said earlier (see ante, pp.120-1), that Sterne condemned 'enthusiasm' as irrational, and as a religious delusion. He ridiculed the Methodists' direct communion with God, without the assistance of the Church, as a mark of *spiritual pride*, which is 'the worst of all prides'. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, describes his great mystic experience in these words -

"I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt that I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death".

The Methodist movement was run on the basis of this individual illumination ("Wesley was Methodism, and Methodism was Wesley"), and was marked by an utter lack of emotional restraint -

"Sobbing, weeping, laughter, hysteria were commonplaces of Methodist fervour - ... the rational attitude, the most fashionable intellectual attitude of the day, was absolutely absent".

In his Discourse concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit, Swift ridicules the enthusiasts' concept of the direct descent of the Holy Spirit into their assemblies in prayer. So Smollett makes fun of the Methodist 'enthusiasm' - their 'reveries for gospel', 'heart-heapings' and 'motions of the spirit', their faith in 'super-visitations'. Religion is not mere sentimental fervour; it should be fortified with reason and common sense.
The humanistic basis of his sermons. The movements of deism and moral philosophy helped in liberalizing religious thought in the 18th century. There was insistence on intellectual, rather than meditative or ceremonial, religion. The moral-humanistic bias of religion can be seen in the recommendation even of books of 'pagan antiquity' to new entrants to the Holy Orders. The character of Sir Roger's parson, we may note, is distinguished by humanity; in thirty years he never asked anything for himself, though he was always 'soliciting' the Squire 'for something in behalf of ... his parishioners'; and since he has been in the parish, there has not been a single law-suit in his area.

One of the lights of the age, Voltaire, interpreted religion in terms of social happiness, moral goodness and virtue —

"The institution of religion exists only to keep mankind in order, and to make men merit the goodness of God by their virtue. Everything in a religion which does not tend towards this goal must be considered foreign or dangerous".85

Sterne expresses this idea beautifully through his Uncle Toby —

"God Almighty is so good and just a governor of the world, that if we have but done our duties in it, it will never be enquired into, whether we have done them in a red coat or a black one".86

Sterne himself says that his sermons

"turn chiefly upon philanthropy, and those kindred virtues to it, upon which hang all the law and the prophets".87

His sermon, Philanthropy, concludes with the observation, that charity is 'the end of the commandment', and that anybody who 'fulfilled it, had fulfilled the law'. Philanthropy is explained as 'universal benevolence'; a fine example of which is presented in the Samaritan's reflections at the sight of the distressed Jew, who was an utter stranger to him —
"I am a stranger to the man; — be it so, — but I am no stranger to his condition — misfortunes are of no particular tribe or nation, but belong to us all, and have a general claim upon us, without distinction of climate, country or religion".90

Asceticism is rejected by Sterne, for it smothers the natural instincts of sympathy and love.

"Nature will have her yearnings for society and friendship; — a good heart wants some object to be kind to — and the best parts of our blood and the purest of our spirits suffer most under the destitution".91

Our heart, like that of the Widow of Zarephath, is 'wrought upon by an unmixed principle of humanity'. Hume had said that humanity is not just a sense of duty or a moral obligation; it is a natural inclination. So Sterne considers 'love, which is the principle of doing good' as a passion natural to the body. This principle, therefore, works even in a so-called hard heart, as of 'Alexander the tyrant of Pheres', who could not help bursting into tears at seeing 'the bare representation of a tragedy'. Religion should feed this innate principle of humanity within us. Ceremony may be, and often is, but simulation. Heart's sympathy, or 'an honest tear' is the true worship of God.

One aspect of Sterne's humanist faith is seen in his recognition of the practical realities in the practice of virtue — realities which arise from the very nature of man, but which are often ignored by conventional or orthodox preachers. Sterne is human enough to take note of the difficulties in the practice of piety, and to excuse the minor faults of an otherwise good character. A man's character — he believed — is not soiled by occasional lapses, which sometimes with the best of will he cannot evade, because he is not a perfect creature —
... the truth and regularity of a character is not, in justice, to be looked upon as broken, from any one single act or omission which may seem a contradiction to it: - the best of men appear sometimes to be strange compounds of contradictory qualities: and were the accidental oversights and folly of the wisest man, - the failings and imperfections of a religious man, - the hasty acts and passionate words of a meek man; - were they to rise up in judgment against them, - and an ill-natured judge be suffered to mark in this manner what has been done amiss, - what character so unexceptionable as to be able to stand before him?"97

A man, through some 'bodily infirmity', or a temperamental defect 'may be subject to inadvertencies ... and unhappy turns of temper';98 he may slip into 'snares he is not always aware of';98 many "he may do/things which are wrong in themselves, and yet be innocent; - at least an object rather to be pitied than censured with severity and ill-will".98

While love of neighbour is enjoined as a great virtue by our preacher, he is bold and honest enough to point out the difficulty in practising it. However we may theorize, we sometimes cannot avoid thinking or speaking ill of our neighbour;

"we are perpetually in such engagements and situations, that 'tis our duties to speak what our opinions are - but God forbid, that this ever should be done, but from its best motive - the sense of what is due to virtue governed by discretion and the utmost fellow-feeling".99

We should observe the spirit of the Law, rather than its letter. Our indifference to this important principle may lead us to a kind of self-deception. Thus, while guarding against the big evils of life, we sometimes easily condone, or are indifferent to, the little ones. A 'little impatience of spirit, under the cross and untoward accidents we meet with' may break our peace and our happiness; and we ignore this, as we do the minor ailments of the body. This negligence may cost us dearly. We note/preacher...
Sterne's recognition of practical realities also in his mention of mundane rewards as one of the incentives to virtue. Charity is a supreme virtue, and brings us real happiness; but at the same time, it may bring worldly gains too — which, at least, should induce us to practise it. Our kindness may be requited one day, when — in this uncertain world — we may need it. We should practise virtue, even for sheer practical considerations:—

"The great instability of temporal affairs, and constant fluctuation of every thing in this world, afford perpetual occasions of taking refuge in such a security".101

Emphasis on the heart. The humanist character of Sterne's sermons is pre-eminently revealed in his perpetual insistence on the qualities of the heart. Sterne believed with the moral philosophers of his age, that the heart is the seat of virtue, as well of understanding (See ante, Chap.II, pp.32-6). The warmed-up heart begets the inclination to virtue —

"... lessons of wisdom have never such power over us, as when they are wrought into the heart, ... we are like iron, and must first be heated before we can be wrought upon".102

That is why Sterne's sermons — as he himself says — "proceed more from the heart than from the head".103 Parson Yorick in the novel says that to preach from the head is but vaunting one's own learning; he would

"rather direct five words point-blank to the heart".104

Religion achieves its great ends — namely, reconciling us to God, and to each other, by working on our feelings; for

"so long as the pre-engagement with our passions subsists, it is not argumentation which can do the business".105
Thus, feeling operates on reason. Feeling is the predominant principle; but it needs also the guidance of reason, to promote virtue; without this guidance, feeling may run riot as in the case of the 'enthusiasts' condemned by Sterne.

Sterne believed in the innate goodness of man.

"... there was a settled principle of humanity and goodness which operated within him, and influenced not only the first impulse of kindness, but the continuation of it ..." 106

Religion should activize this vital innate principle in us. Purity of heart is the essence of religious worship, as of morality. Sterne's charge against Roman Catholicism is that the Catholics emphasize the 'penances and sufferings' more than 'inward purity and integrity of heart'. Conscience and self-enquiry, therefore, become very important with preacher Sterne. Three of his sermons, namely, Self-Knowledge, Self-Examination, The Abuses of Conscience Considered, are entirely devoted to this subject. It is a paradox — he says — that man who, of all creatures, is best fitted for examining his own thoughts and desires does it the least, and plays false with his conscience. We practise self-deception, particularly in matters affecting our self-interest, when we judge of 'that dearest of all parties', namely, self. That is why — Sterne points out — the saints of old used parables, in place of direct preaching, to drive a moral home. The efficacy of their preaching lay in its appeal to the heart.

Sterne's concept of happiness (Chap. IX, sec. b) finds adequate expression in his sermons, adding greatly to their humanistic appeal. Religious liberalism shifted the emphasis from theology and other-worldliness to what was called 'practical
divinity*, and adapted religion to the purposes of secular optimism. The old pagan concept of joy was wedded to the needs of the liberal religion, which glorified man and his existence on earth no less than his destiny in heaven. As a humanist, Sterne conceived religion in terms of the expansion of the human spirit in joy and love. Our religion should foster cheerfulness of spirit, instead of making us gloomy; for God is not only all-merciful, He is 'the fountain of joy'. Sterne's sermons open with the theme of happiness; and in the opening lines he says -

"The great pursuit of man is after happiness: it is the first and strongest desire of his nature".

Then he goes on to explain his concept of happiness. Some seek happiness in the irresponsible gaiety and pleasure of youth, some in display, and some in the hoarding of wealth. The sensualist seeks happiness in the gratification of the senses, the epicure in eating and drinking, the ambitious in the possession of power. But happiness eludes them all. Real happiness, the preacher says, is in 'religion and virtue'. He distinguishes between pleasure, as commonly understood, and happiness. This 'pleasure' means 'the common gratifications of our appetites'. This may lead to happiness, for we always perceive through our senses; but, at the same time, not all pleasures lead to happiness -

"... tho' there can be no happiness without pleasure - yet the converse of the proposition will not hold true."

The preacher, therefore, closes his first sermon with a short sermon upon Solomon's evidence in this case, namely that the right way to happiness is to keep God (i.e., through religion) and keep his commandments (i.e., through virtue). The second sermon, The House of Rejoicing and the House of Mourning Described -
observation upon Solomon’s evidence in this case’, namely that, the right way to happiness is ‘to fear God’ (i.e., through religion) and ‘keep his commandments’ (i.e., through virtue). The second sermon, The House of Feasting and the House of Mourning Described—which, the author says elsewhere, is one of his best, again deals with the theme of happiness. Here he stresses the naturalness and the blessedness of joy. It is the very intention of God, who is himself ‘infinitely happy’ and ‘infinitely kind’, to see us happy. God has, therefore, endowed us with the powers and faculties of enjoyment, and has made plentiful provisions for our happiness on earth. To deny the “pleasures arising from the free and natural exercise of the faculties of the mind and body, to talk them down, is like talking against the frame and mechanism of human nature”. Happiness sustains our life; it is the ‘sunshine and fair weather’ of life. The spirit of joy activates the heart, and prompts fellowship and philanthropy. Moroseness tends to draw us away from virtue.

"If there is an evil in this world, 'tis sorrow and heaviness of heart". In Tristram Shandy, we find the author making fun of Walter Shandy for the latter’s commendation of ‘abstinence’, ‘watchings’, ‘flagellations’, and so on. In the sermon, The Prodigal Son, Sterne boldly and beautifully shifts the emphasis, in the old, well-known Biblical story, from the Christian concept of repentance to the near-pagan concept of the purity of joy and cheerfulness of spirit. The Prodigal Son returns, and the happy father prepares to receive him, with ‘the best robe’ and the best meals. Sterne here refers to the happy effusion of spirits in the father—

"O ye affections! How fondly do you play at cross-purposes with each other? — 'Tis the natural dialogue of
true transport: joy is not methodical; and where an offender, beloved, overcharges itself in the offence, - words are too cold ... When the affections so kindly break loose, Joy, is another name for Religion.127

Sterne is in his elements, when he describes the scene of joy in the returned Prodigal's home. The simple text, for a son who was dead and is alive again, - who was lost and is found (which he quotes also in the sermon), fires his imagination; and this is what he makes of it -

"Gentle spirits, light up the pavillion with a sacred fire; and parental love, and filial piety lead in the mask with riot and wild festivity! - Was it not for this that God gave man music to strike upon the kindly passions; that nature taught the feet to dance to its movements ...?"128

Traill, who thought of this sermon as producing a 'strangely comical effect' on us by the preacher's treatment of the theme of the grand tour in the Prodigal's peregrinations abroad, failed to see this sermon in its true light - namely, as an inspired expression of the author's concept of happiness. In the Sentimental Journey, too - it may be remembered - the author "beheld Religion mixing in the dance" 130 and song of the happy peasant family on Mount Taurira. In Follow Peace, Sterne says that the hymn sung by the Angels at Jesus's birth declared the joy and happy ends of his incarnation, consisting in glory to God and peace upon earth, and good-will towards men; and he adds, significantly -

"It was a wish of happiness to mankind". 131

Thus, Sterne's sermons are not mere 'professional efforts on common sense lines' - as Sir Sidney Lee calls them. They are also something more than mere

"healthy statements of earthly truths ...(which) would
be just as true if there was no religion at all"133
as Bagehot described them. It is idle, again, to underrate them
as Dr. Laird has done - for lacking a sound philosophical or me-
taphysical content. Such critics fail to see in Sterne's sermons
the expression of the religious liberalism of his age, and of the
rich humanism of Sterne himself. Sterne's sermons take ample cog-
nisance of the vital currents of life. Cowper was right, when he
stressed the 'moral' quality of Sterne's sermons, and said that
he(Cowper) knew.

"no writer better qualified to make proselytes to the
cause of virtue than Sterne".135

(c) His sermons as literature:

The literary qualities of Sterne's sermons should pro-
perly come under the head, The Art of Sterne. But we make an ex-
ception in this case, because we feel this discussion is needed
here, so as to bring out fully the distinctive character of St-
erne's sermons.

Simplicity and clarity. Sterne's sermons are distinguished by
a refreshing simplicity and clarity of expression, and their com-
plete freedom from the learned language of theology. Clear and pl-
ain expression was one of the marks of the age of Enlightenment.
This was inevitable, with the decline of scholasticism and with
the humanistic interpretation of religion. Erasmus had ridiculed
the heavy, learned speech of the scholarly preachers -

"These preachers think their preamble(as we may well
term it) to be the most fashionable, when it is far-
thest from the subject they propose to treat of, while
each auditor sits and wonders what they drive at, and
many times mutters out the complaint of Virgil:—

Then out they bring their syllogisms, their majors, their minors, conclusions, corollaries, suppositions, and distinctions, that will sooner terrify the congregation into an amusement, than persuade them into a conviction".136

With the diminishing credit of pedantry and increasing importance of humanity, religious language tended to shed its heaviness, and to approach common speech more and more. We note Addison's preference for a preacher 'rather of plain sense than much learning'.137 Swift advised 'a Young Gentleman lately entered into the Holy Orders' to avoid

"obscure terms which by the women are called hard words and by the better sort of vulgar, fine language".138

John Toland, the well-known deist of the age, was also for easy, clear expression in religious language—

"And except words easy to be understood be uttered, how shall it be known what is spoken?"139

Dr. Johnson, too, believed that the language of a sermon should be 'plain and familiar'. Ornate, scholarly language is but an advertisement of self — says parson Yorick in T.S.:

"To preach, to shew the extent of our reading, or the subtleties of our wit — to parade in the eyes of the vulgar with the beggary accounts of a little learning, tinselled over with a few words which glitter, but convey little light and less warmth — is a dishonest use of the poor single half hour in a week which is put into our hands — 'Tis not preaching the gospel — but ourselves — For my own part, ... I had rather direct five words point-blank to the heart —".141

Words that appeal to the heart must be plain and direct.

Sterne's sermons contain no new ideas, no metaphysical subtleties. Their distinction lies in clothing old ideas in a new garb — that is, in Sterne's words, in 'the novelty of his vehicle'.

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Here is, for example, how he expresses the old idea of man's ful-
filment in service, not in self —

"No one ... who lives in society, can be said to live 
to himself, - he lives to his God, - to his king, and 
his country. - He lives to his family, to his friends, 
to all under his trust, and in a word, he lives to the 
whole race of mankind".145

'True piety' - he says - wants 'not witnesses', and is always 'mo-
st at ease when most private'. Such words have a direct appeal to 
the heart.

The simplicity of Sterne's expression often wears an ea-
sy poetic grace. While, for example, he pleads the naturalness of 
the spirit of joy and the case for happiness in religion, the pr-
eacher warns also, that our enjoyment should not descend into le-
vity by 'a riot of the mind and senses'; for,

"various as our excursions are, - we have still set our 
faces towards Jerusalem".146

When Job fell on evil days, his wife felt sore and advised him to 
curse God for this misfortune. But Job's faith in divine dispensa-
tion remained unshaken. He told his wife —

"... rather may I look up towards that hand which has 
bruised me, - for he maketh sore, and he bindeth up, 
- he woundeth, and his hands make whole; from his bo-
unty only has issued all I had, from his wisdom,- all 
I have lost; for he giveth and he hath taken away".147

The same simple, and beautiful, spirit of submission to the Supre-
me Being is revealed in this prayer to God —

"Grant me, gracious God! to go cheerfully on, the road 
which thou hast marked out; - I wish it neither more 
wide or more smooth: - continue the light of this dim 
taper thou hast put into my hands: - I will kneel upon 
the ground seven times a day, to seek the best track I 
can with it - and having done that, I will trust myself 
and the issue of my journey to thee, who art the foun-
tain of joy, - and will sing songs of comfort as I go 
along".148
Such appeals gain an intensity and a simple grace, by the author's success in transferring his emotional experience—a personal and intimate experience—to us, in language that is melodious, and that throbs with feeling, but at the same time, is kept under artistic restraint.

**Dramatic quality.** In *T.S.*, as Trim finishes his reading of the sermon on Conscience, Walter Shandy comments—

"I like the sermon well, ... 'tis dramatic,— and there is something in that way of writing, when skilfully managed, which catches the attention".149

This dramatic quality consists in the visual presentation of ideas. Sterne visualizes scene and character, as is done in a drama, and thereby makes the Biblical narratives glow with life. His sermons are shorn of abstractions; they are little vignettes of ideas. The idea of vaunted courage, for example, is presented by the picture of 'a Spanish soldier upon an Italian stage—a bladder full of wind'; and that of unostentatious kindness by 'some good Christian giving alms'. Sterne's treatment of the brief Biblical story of the Prodigal Son is an elaboration in pictures. The preacher uses all his dramatic and poetic powers in sketching scenes of the departure of the Prodigal from his father's house, and of his penitent return after a riotous living abroad. As the Prodigal Son is ready to leave, the author shows us

"the camels and asses loaden with his substance ... already on their way:— the prodigal son standing on the foreground, with a forced sedateness, struggling against the fluttering movement of joy, upon his deliverance from restraint:— the elder brother holding his hand, as if unwilling to let it go:— the father, — sad moment! with a firm look, covering a prophetic sentiment, 'that all would not go well with his child', — approaching to embrace him, and bid him adieu".151

Similarly, the scene of the return of the Prodigal, too, is
presented with a lavishness of loving detail. In the sermon, The Rich Man and Lazarus, the author presents parallel pictures of rich and miserable living. His dramatic imagination takes him—and with him, his reader too—to the actual scene of Herod’s cruelty, in the sermon on the subject (The Character of Herod); and we find him appealing to Herod to 'stay thy hands'. Such pictures serve to heighten the appeal to the heart, and to enlarge the humanistic significance of the sermons.

Psychological analysis. Sterne's psychological approach to characters (see Chap. XI—His Art of Characterization) applies to his sermons too. The characters in his sermons are presented with a detailed analysis of their mental states and feelings. The long train of reflections in the mind of the good Samaritan, at the sight of the Jew's distress, is described in the Richardsonian manner of detailed documentation—(we may be allowed to quote from the scene at some length)—

"Good God! What a spectacle of misery do I behold—a man stripped of his raiment—wounded—lying languishing before me upon the ground just ready to expire, without the comfort of a friend to support him in his last agonies, or the prospect of a hand to close his eyes when his pains are over. But perhaps my concern should lessen when I reflect on the relations in which we stand to each other—that he is a Jew and I a Samaritan. But are not we not still both men; partakers of the same nature—and subject to the same evils?—let me change conditions with him for a moment and consider, had his lot befallen me as I journeyed in the way, what measure I should have expected at his hand. But I am a stronger to the man;—be it so, but I am no stranger to his condition—misfortunes are of no particular tribe or nation, but belong to us all, and have a general claim upon us... Besides, though I am a stranger—'tis no fault of his that I do not know him, and therefore unequitable he should suffer by it:—Had I known him, possibly I should have had cause to love and pity him the more— perhaps at this instant that he lies here forsaken, ... a whole virtuous family is joyfully looking for his return..."
Sterne here adds to the old, moral and universal significance of the tale a new element, by individualizing the character of the Samaritan, and grafting into it a psychological interest. The thought and feelings of prophet Elijah, praying to God for restoring to life the dead son of the Widow of Zarephath, are similarly recorded in the manner of a psychologist. Elijah was as much 'zealous for the name and honour of his God' as for the happiness of the destitute widow who had been so kind to him. He was zealous for the vindication of his God's name in the eyes of the unbelievers. He thought of the omnipotence and infinite mercy, of the success of his prayer. He thought that if his prayer was not answered, the unmerited misfortune of the selfless and compassionate widow would be an insult to the cause of charity itself.

(d) Conclusion:

Man and his feeling is the prime concern of Sterne, both as preacher and secular writer. As a preacher, he retouches old material, and invests it with a new moral and humanistic significance. This he does by his stirring appeals to the heart, by dramatic representation of ideas, and by recording minutely the flow of ideas and variations of emotion in the characters. By these devices Sterne brings the old Biblical stories into a closer touch with life.

Sterne's sermons are not only distinguished by the 'novelty of his vehicle' (see ante, p. 139); they bear the impress of the artistic sensibility and the individuality of the author. Herein lies their originality.