2. His Personality

Sterne once said that the originality of his book (T.S.) lay in that, it resembled the author. To one of his critics, who had advised him to restrain his gay wit and to write more grave­ly as became a clergyman, he replied -

"... to be serious (if I can), I will use all reasonable caution, - only with this caution along with it, not to spoil my book, that is, the air and originality of it, which must resemble the author".1

Sterne's personality provides clues to many ideas in his work, as with many other writers - particularly those, whose work is characterized by what is called the subjective note. His characters, again, both in his T.S. and S.J., draw their life and vitality from their creator's warm humanity and humour. An analysis of certain traits of our author's character and personality is, therefore, necessary for an understanding of his work.

(a) Qualities of heart: feeling, sensitivity:

Sterne the man has had no want of detractors. Charges of insincerity have been levelled at him. They relate mainly to his dealings with his mother and wife. His contemporary Horace Walpole, referring to the well-known scene of the dead ass in Sentimental Journey, and to the author's sentiment of sympathy, said -

"A dead ass was more important to him than a living mother".2

Later, Byron, repeating the charge, called Sterne a 'dog'; 'villain', 'hypocrite', and so on, adding - honestly enough - that
he himself was 'no better'. The Victorians, particularly, were very hard on Sterne. Chief among them was the great Thackeray. The main point in Thackeray's attack was the insincerity of Sterne. Though Thackeray notes also the genuineness of Sterne's feeling in a few passages of Tristram Shandy and in his letters to his daughter, yet his general attitude is one of bitter indictment of the man Sterne. Sterne becomes a 'coward', a 'wretched worn-out old scamp' for his amorous weaknesses; he becomes 'vain', 'wicked', 'false', and so on; there is 'a hint, as of an impure presence' in his work. The question of indecency in Sterne's work has been discussed later — Chap. XII, secs. (b) (iii) and (c). Leslie Stephen also called Sterne 'a consummate sneak', and his sentiment 'a mere luxury indulged in for its own sake'. One good reason for the last century's prejudice against Sterne might be that the Victorian age was, on the whole, an age of order, and had a natural antipathy to one, who is distinguished by his scorn of rules. The Victorian temperament was also averse to the cult of sentiment, of which Sterne was the high-priest in the English novel of the previous century.

To-day we are in a better position to judge the man Sterne, both for the comparative freedom of the modern enquiring spirit, and also for greater availability of material about him (as, for example, the discovery, towards the close of the last century, of Sterne's letter to his uncle Dr. Jaques Sterne — a letter which is a clear statement of our author's position about his relationship with his mother).

Sterne has been accused of unkindness, of the denial
of charity and kindness of heart (see ante, pp. 31-2) — that is, those qualities which he so much values in his work. As regards his relationship with his mother, the facts that we have now come to know from his letter to his uncle, as well as from his little autobiographical fragment, are as follows. After the death of her husband, who was a poor soldier and bore many hardships in life, Mrs. Sterne lived in Ireland for some years. The son, Laurence, was then growing into youth, and receiving education by the kindness of 'my cousin Sterne, of Elvington', who "became a father to me, and sent me to the University". Sterne graduated from Cambridge, and entered the Church (1736). Later, he took his M.A. degree (1740), and married (1741). Sterne's mother now came to England, with a mind to settle in her son's family. She had been so long maintaining herself and a daughter, Catherine, in Ireland with her husband's little pension and by keeping an embroidery school. When she came to England, her son explained to her his poor condition — his meagre income from the Church, and responsibilities as a husband, and requested her to go back to her place in Ireland.

"I convinced her, that besides the interest of my wife's fortune, I had then but a bare hundred pounds a year, out of which my ill health obliged me to keep a curate, that we had moreover ourselves to keep, ... that what we could spare, she should as certainly receive in Ireland as here; that the place she had left was a cheap country — her native one, and where she was sensible 20 pounds a year was more than equal to 30 here, besides the discount of having her pension paid in England, where it was not due, and the utter impossibility I was under of making up so many deficiencies". 14

But she would not return. She settled at Chester with her daughter; and Sterne continued to help them out of his own small income.
"Yet still we were weak enough to do it for five years together, tho' I own, not without continual remonstrances on my side, as well as perpetual clamours on theirs". 15

Sterne soon incurred the displeasure of his uncle Dr. Jacques Sterne, Precentor and pluralist politician in the Church, for refusing to toe his party-line and to "write paragraphs in the newspapers" for him. Politics and party spirit did not much appeal to Sterne. 16 He refers to a Parliamentary election at York as "the great confusion of the election, which I hate". We may also note his condemnation of party spirit, in one of his sermons, namely, Thirtieth of January 17. Dr. Sterne now became a bitter enemy to his nephew, and played the discontented mother up against her son. That the story of Laurence's ill-treatment of his mother took well, can be seen from Horace Walpole's report, quoted already (see ante, p. 51). However, Sterne's letter to his uncle, which came to public light as late as 1892 (see ante, p. 52) reveals our author's character to-day in a clearer light than in which some of his detractors saw him before.

We may now examine Sterne's attitude towards his wife. Their married life was not a very happy one. There is a line in Tristram Shandy, which may be a hint to this none-too-happy relationship between them. Referring to the word 'wife', the author, as narrator Tristram, comments -

"'Tis a shrill penetrating sound of itself". 19

The Notary's wife, in the Sentimental Journey, is 'a little fume of a woman'. These hints may not have any significance for the author's personal life; but, that Sterne's wife was not of a very likable nature is borne out by the report of her own cousin, and
well-wisher of the family, the eminent Mrs. Montagu. Mrs. Montagu said —

"Mrs. Sterne is a woman of great integrity and has many virtues, but they stand like quills upon the fretful porcupine, ready to go forth in sharp arrows on the least supposed offence ... the only way to avoid a quarrel with her is to keep a due distance".21

In the next century, Nathaniel Hawthorne, on looking at a portrait of Mrs. Sterne, said that her face bespoke a haughty spirit. Faces may be deceptive, and impressions wrong; but there is little reason to disbelieve the direct evidence of Mrs. Montagu.

It is very likely that Sterne's association with other women aggravated her spleen. For Sterne had a romantic disposition, and was somewhat like his La Fleur, who was 'always in love'. That the amorous sentiment by itself is not an evil one is admitted even by Swift, who says, in an essay —

"... a little grain of romance is no small ingredient to preserve and exalt the dignity of human nature, without which it is apt to degenerate into everything that is sordid, vicious and low".24

But Sterne's 'grain of romance' was rather a big one; for he was a man of highly impressionable and sentimental nature. Whatever it be, the marital relations between Mr. and Mrs. Sterne were not happy. But the important thing to note is that this unhappy relationship did not create any malignity of spirit in him, or vitiate his outlook towards her. Just before his leaving for France to regain his badly broken health (January, 1762), Sterne left with Mrs. Montagu a Memorandum addressed to his wife; for he feared he might not live to come back. This Memorandum, which he also called his 'Will', is a significant document. It reveals the character of the man, the sincerity of his feeling. He gave his 'all
to his wife and daughter, fixing the sum for each. But "if my
Lydia(daughter) should marry" - he carefully points out to his
wife -

"I charge you, - I charge you over again,(that you
may remember it the more ...) - That under no delu-
sive prospect, or promise from any one, you leave
yourself dependent; reserve enough for your comfort
- or let her wait your death".26

The Memorandum, written under the shadow of death, rings with
a note of true tenderness and sincerity.

Sterne's concern for his wife is also revealed in oth-
er documents, written in happier circumstances. He is in France,
and Mrs. and Miss Sterne are to come from England to join him.
From Paris he writes to his wife -

"... you will find good tea upon the road from York to
Dover - only bring a little to carry you from Calais
to Paris. Give the custom-house officers what I told
you ... See that they do not give you a bad vehicle
when a better mm is in the yard; but you will look
sharp. Drink small Rhenish to keep you cool(that is,
if you like it). Live well, and deny yourselves no-
thing your hearts wish".27

In the summer of 1764, when Sterne returned to Paris after a long
tour with wife and daughter in South France, Mrs.Sterne went to
Montauban with her daughter, to whom Sterne wrote -

"If your mother's rheumatism continues, and she choos-
es to go to Bagnieres, - tell her not to be stopped
for want of money, for my purse shall be as open as
my heart".28

He left Paris in May, 1764 for England; Mrs.Sterne preferred to
stay on in France with her daughter, much against his will. He
wrote to his daughter -

"I acquiesced in your staying in France - likewise it
was your mother's wish - but I must tell you both,
that ... I should have wished you both to return with
me".29
Though Sterne was not in affluent circumstances, he took good care to see that his wife had no difficulty about money while in France. We find repeated evidence of his solicitation for her in this matter. Sterne came again to France in October, 1765, and after a tour through France and Italy, returned to England in June, 1766, while his wife continued to remain in France. From England he wrote to Panchaud, his banker -

"Mrs. S(terne) writes me word, she wants fifty pounds - which I desire you will let her have ... I have such an entire confidence in my wife, that she spends as little as she can, tho' she is confined to no particular sum - her expenses will not exceed three hundred pounds a year, unless by ill health, or a journey - and I am very willing she should have it - and you may rely, in case it ever happens that she should draw for fifty or a hundred pounds extraordinary, that it and every demand shall be punctually paid - and with proper thanks; and for this the whole Shandean family are ready to stand security ..."31

Mrs. and Miss Sterne returned to England in October, 1767, when Laurence Sterne, now in a hopeless state of health, was writing his Sentimental Journey at Coxwold. Soon afterwards, Mrs. Sterne again wanted to go, and settle permanently in France. He fixed on her three hundred guineas a year; in addition, he decided to sell a part of his estate at Coxwold, in order to purchase an annuity in France of two thousand pounds for Lydia. In a letter to a friend about this time, he writes that he has declined the lucrative offer of 'a living of three hundred and fifty pounds a year in Surrey', and 'great offers too in Ireland', because his wife and daughter would not "accompany me thither".

"I live for the sake of my girl, and with her sweet light burthen in my arms, I could get up fast the hill of preferment, if I chose it - but without my Lydia, if a mitre was offered me, it would sit uneasy upon my brow. Mrs. S---'s health is unsupportable in England. She must return to France, and justice..."
and humanity forbid me to oppose it ...""33

There is a fine touch of pathos in his final parting from his daughter -

"My heart bleeds, L—e, when I think of parting with my child - 'twill be like the separation of soul and body - and equal to nothing but what passes at that tremendous moment; ... You will laugh at my weakness - but I cannot help it - for she is a dear disinterested girl. As a proof of it - when she left Coxwold, and I bade her adieu, I pulled out my purse and offered her ten guineas for her private pleasures - her answer was pretty, and affected me too much: 'No, my dear papa, our expenses of coming from France may have straitened you - I would rather put an hundred guineas in your pocket than take ten out of it'. I burst into tears".34

Even Thackeray, forgetting awhile his sharp criticism of Sterne the man and author, admits his 'artless, kind, affectionate' nature in his relations with his daughter, his 'genuine love and kindness' in 'a hundred pages in his writings'; Thackeray notes also Sterne's liberality with his money.

A few words may be said here about Sterne's character as a clergyman. It is true that Sterne was anything but a grave clergyman. Gravity was foreign to his nature. He wore his natural gaiety of spirit even on his cassock. Once an orthodox clergyman is said to have taken exception to his frequent indulgence in wit. He told Sterne - "You are always letting puns ... it deserves punishment"; "that is" - Sterne replied - "- as the pun is meant". Sterne's continued ill-health, frequent trips to London, continental travels, intimate attachment to secular society - all this did not fit in very well with his clerical duties and decorum. But Sterne's conduct should be judged in the context of his times. In his day, the life of the clergy was a little freer than in the next century. As Plumb says -
"There is a worldiness, almost a venality, about eighteenth century prelates, which no amount of apologetics can conceal ... The agricultural prosperity brought leisure to the parish priests, for their clerical duties were light ... Time hung heavy on their hands. Some took to drink, some to fox-hunting, some to local government, some to learning".38

Archbishop Drummond of York, Sterne's 'good prelate, ... one of our most refined wits and the most of a gentleman of our order', kept a 'festive board of urbanity divine' where "champaigne (was) wit, and champaigne wine, the oxygen of which, however, he could restrain, as by a magic wand, within the due longitude and latitude of the Holy Land".40

The Bishop of Cork and Ross (who made Sterne 'great offers in Ireland') was described by Mrs. Elizabeth Garter as 'perfectly anti-sublime a dignitary'. John Croft, a contemporary of Sterne's and younger brother of Sterne's friend Stephen Croft, the Squire of Stillington, reporting one of the 'many idle tales' current about Sterne, says that once he (Sterne) "left his flock that was waiting for him in the Church, in the lurch", in order to shoot partridges. This belief in Sterne's indifference to his pastoral duties has persisted even in modern times. In a brief comparative notice of Sterne and Swift as clergymen, Desmond MacCarthy finds an enormous difference between the seriousness with which these two 18th century divines took their calling. There is an airy, not to say worldly, elegance about Sterne's sermons, which bridges the gap between the clerical and secular writer. The Christianity Sterne preached was at bottom that of Uncle Toby, and it was doubtless also in this spirit Sterne went about (whenever he did) pastoral duties, dispensing among his flock a whimsical sympathy and an intermittent charity".44

The content of Sterne's sermons will be discussed in a later chapter. MacCarthy's comparison of Sterne's Christianity with
Uncle Toby's is apt, but not his remark on the 'whimsical' nature of their Christianity or humanity. There was nothing of the 'whimsical' in Toby's charity or kindheartedness. Even if we say that Toby's hobby-horse of the bowling-green has an element of the 'whimsical' in it, we can never hold that this whimsicality attaches to his religious and humanistic faith (see analysis of Toby's character, in Chap.XI). Toby's charity was perennial, not 'intermittent'. Sterne of real life might not have been as charitable as Uncle Toby in fiction, or as Dean Swift in real life; but his charity was governed by a fixed principle, a firm positive faith (see Chap.VII on Sterne's Sermons), and was not just 'whimsical', as MacCarthy makes out.

On the other hand, there are reasons to believe that Sterne was not, after all, so indifferent a clergyman, as he has been supposed to be. There is an interesting piece of documentary evidence recently discovered by Canon Ollard - which throws a new light on Sterne as a clergyman. Examining the diocesan records, Ollard found out a collection of Sterne's answers to a questionnaire sent out by the Archbishop of York in 1743 to all clergymen in his diocese. He(Ollard) examines Sterne's reply to the ninth question - namely,

"I catechise every Sunday in my Church during Lent, but explain our religion to the children and servants of my parishioners in my own house every Sunday night during Lent, from six o'clock till nine. I mention the length of time as my reason for not doing it in Church".45

Canon Ollard observes that this

"shows Sterne sufficiently zealous to hold a three-hour instruction or confirmation class in his vicarage on the six Sunday evenings in Lent. In all the hundreds of returns which Mr. Walker and I have
From Sterne's other replies, Ollard finds him at least "up to the average of the country clergy of the time in giving his flock opportunities of Holy Communion, and above that of a good many".

To the suggestion that Sterne might be lying, Ollard says - and rightly - that it was not possible for Sterne, whose parish was so near York, to deceive the Archbishop.

There are some fine little examples of Sterne's sincerity of feeling, and of his benevolence. The parsonage of Sutton was burnt down by the carelessness of his curate, putting Sterne to a loss of about three hundred and fifty pounds. The poor curate fled, with his family, for fear. Mentioning the incident to a friend, Sterne writes -

"The poor man with his wife took the wings of the next morning, and fled away - this has given me real vexation, for so much was my pity and esteem for him, that as soon as I heard of this disaster, I sent to desire he would come and take up his abode with me till another habitation was ready to receive him - but he was gone - and, as I am told, through fear of my persecution. Heavens! how little did he know of me to suppose I was among the number of those wretches that heap misfortune upon misfortune - and when the load is almost insupportable, still to add to the weight! God, who reads my heart, knows it to be true - that I wish rather to share, than to increase the burden of the miserable - to dry up, instead of adding a single drop to the stream of sorrow".

It may be noted here, that on the same grounds Sterne condemns Shimei's ill-conduct towards David, in one of his sermons, namely, The Character of Shimei.

Indeed, there are good reasons to believe that Sterne's feeling, which is woven so deep into his work, was genuine. He was greatly sensitive to human suffering. There is a significant line...
in *Sentimental Journey*, where the 'sentimental traveller' says that his valet's calling himself a servant "disarms me at once of the powers of a master". In *Tristram Shandy*, Trim is more a friend to his master Toby than a servant. Trim is, indeed, a very part of his master's being. The servants of the Shandy household - Susannah, Obadiah, and others - have as much human dignity as their master Walter Shandy. This uniform warmth of feeling towards the 'lower' classes, the complete absence of the attitude of authority, is typical of Sterne. It bespeaks the warm, active heart of the man - a heart that sorrowed at suffering as easily and as often as it warmed up in amorous sentiment.

**Sensitivity.** Such a man was bound to be sensitive. Sterne's nature was impulsive.

"I generally act from the first impulse" - he said as the 'sentimental traveller'. And again -

"impulses ... generally do determine me".

Dependence on the impulse may deceive us sometimes, but it does not debase our spirit. Sterne believed that 'a fund of honest cullibility in man' was a virtue. Sterne's sensitivity was at once a weakness and a strength to him. The weakness made him often the sport of every impulse, that is, when feeling filled his whole being and got over his reason. And he was conscious of it -

"as I know this weakness, I always suffer my judgment to draw back something on that very account".

This weakness is seen, for example, in his many unwise amours. He might philosophize on it as author; but romantic philandering and love are not exactly equivalent terms. The strength of his sensitivity lay in the fact, that it kept alive his 'Sensibility',
which was a source of his humanism (see Chap. XIII on Sentimentalism), and of his creative power as an artist. After describing the famous incident of Uncle Toby and the fly that disturbed him at dinner (Toby catching the fly and letting it go, saying that the world was 'wide enough to hold both thee and me'), Tristram says that this happened when he (Tristram) was ten years old, and that this example of his uncle Toby's sat firmly imprinted in his mind—

"I often think that I owe one half of my philanthropy to that one accidental impression".54

Here Sterne, as narrator Tristram, has spoken his character. As an author, again, Sterne drew upon his feelings, as few authors have done. While writing his Sentimental Journey, he told a friend that he had "worn out both his spirits and body" with the work, adding that

"an author must feel himself, or his reader will not—but I have torn my whole frame into pieces by my feelings".55

Sterne's nerves, unlike Gibbon's, were 'tremblingly alive'.

In his sensitivity, Sterne reminds us of Rousseau. Rousseau was extremely sensitive to impressions—

"my heart, roaming from object to object, minglees and identifies itself with those which soothe it, wraps itself up in charming fancies, and is intoxicated with delicious sensations".57

There is a vital difference, however, between the two personalities. Rousseau's instinct was individualistic, and sought its fulfilment in loneliness and in Nature. Sterne's instinct, however, occasionally recognizing the bliss of solitude, fulfilled itself in society, in company, from which Rousseau recoiled.

Company and friendship were essential for working up Sterne's
mind and heart. He told Miss Lumley, who was soon to be his wife, how he valued 'love and friendship' as his 'companions in solitude', and how "The kindest affections will have room to shoot and expand in our retirement".59

Human companionship and affections must grace his solitude. The bliss of human fellowship forms the very core of Sterne's philosophy (see Chap. VIII on Sterne's Humanity). This is revealed throughout his work, but perhaps most beautifully in a passage from one of his sermons, *The Levite and His Concubine* — "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. Let the torpid monk seek heaven comfortless and alone — God speed him! for my own part, I fear, I should never so find the way: let me be wise and religious — but let me be Man: wherever thy Providence places me, or whatever be the road I take to get to thee — give me some companion in my journey, be it only to remark to, how our shadows lengthen as the sun goes down; — to whom I may say, How fresh is the face of nature! How sweet the flowers of the field! How delicious are these fruits!"60

Sterne believed that social intercourse improved our character, by softening its angularities, much as the repeated shaking of rough pebbles in a bag will gradually make them round and smooth. Rousseau's extreme sensibility and unwisdom in worldly affairs made him unhappy and a misfit in society. David Hume, who knew Rousseau intimately, said that his(Rousseau's) extreme sensibility(rising 'to a pitch beyond what I have seen any example of') gave him(Rousseau) 'a more acute feeling of pain than of pleasure' — "He is like a man who were stript not only of his clothes but of his skin, and turned out in that situation to combat with the rude and boisterous elements, such as perpetually disturb this lower world".62
Sterne, when he shot into fame as an author, was a social success - which Rousseau could never be, with his greater reputation as an author and thinker.

(b) Wit and sense of humour:

Sterne’s success in London, as author, was as sudden as it was phenomenal. When he first came to London from York, early March 1760, his first instalment of *Shandy* (Bks. I & II), published at York, had been in the market for two months. But this cannot fully account for the rage he became in the city, there where/were more eminent writers than Sterne. Within a few days of his arrival in London, he writes to a friend, with evident self-satisfaction -

“I have the greatest honours paid to me and most civilities shewn me ... and am engaged already to ten Noblemen and men of fashion to dine. Mr. Garrick pays me all and more honour than I could look for”.

He says, in another letter, how he is honoured by the visits of ‘the greatest company’ ‘From morning to night’. And he dines with great people, too -

“I dined these two days with two ladies of the Bed-chamber; then with Lord Rockingham, Lord Edgecomb, Lord Winchelsea, Lord Littleton, a Bishop, etc. etc.”

He assures his friend that "Tristram is the fashion". He becomes acquainted with the Duke of York, and sups with him. The fact that Sterne was ‘the fashion’ is corroborated by other accounts.

Scholar-poet Gray wrote to his friend, Dr. Wharton -

“The town are reading the K. of Prussia’s poetry ... *Tristram Shandy* is still a greater object of admiration, the man as well as the book. One is invited to dinner where he dines, a fortnight beforehand. His portrait is done by Reynolds, and now engraving. Dodsley gives £ 700 for a second edition (of *T.S.*, Bks. I & II) and two new volumes not yet written".
The topmost painters of England, Joshua Reynolds and Hogarth, drew his portrait and scenes from his work respectively. Sterne's sudden rise to fame was talked about in the Johnson circle, where the great Doctor, with all his aversion for the free-spirited Sterne, corrected Goldsmith who had described our author as 'a very dull fellow'—

"Johnson. 'The man, Sterne, I have been told, has had engagements for three months'. Goldsmith. 'And a very dull fellow'. Johnson. 'Why, no, Sir'".70

Even Thackeray says that "fashion adored Sterne". So in Paris. Within a few days of his arrival in this great city, Sterne writes to his friend, the renowned Garrick, "of the unexpected honours I have met with here". He tells Garrick—

"Tristram was almost as much known here as in London, at least among your men of condition and learning".73

Mr. Pelletiere (the Advocate-General) undertakes to help him in the affair of the passport (without which he came to France), and "the Baron d'Holbach has offered any security for the inoffensiveness of my behaviour in France".74

Diderot, the chief of the Encyclopaedists, becomes his friend, and Sterne undertakes to get him important books from England. The Count de Bissie honours him, and the Duke of Orleans includes his portrait in his (the Duke's) collection.

It is natural to suppose that the author's personality, and not merely the appeal of his work, brought him this quick, and rather unusual, social success; for Sterne had a fund of ready wit, which was subtle and incisive, but devoid of malignity. Sterne's wit had not the heavy strength of Dr. Johnson's, but it made up by its sharpness. Sterne was at his best when he shot his wit to vindicate his self-respect. The Duke
of Newcastle, it is said, was one day disparaging, in Sterne’s presence, the lack of business acumen in men of genius. Sterne told him -

"They are not incapable, my Lord Duke, but above it; a sprightly generous horse is able to carry a packsaddle as well as an ass, but he is too good to be put to the drudgery".78

In the Sentimental Journey, there is a passing mention of the author’s meeting with the French Farmer-General in Paris. The great dignitary referred to the taxes being very considerable in England; the Englishman’s retort was as subtle as it was quick -

"If we knew but how to collect them, said I, making a low bow".79

The implied reference to the tyranny of the French tax-collectors (working under the Farmer-General himself) is as apt as incisive. The same subtlety of wit is revealed in his reply to the 'kindly old French officer', who in a passing fit of racial vanity, aroused by a French guard’s doing justice to a distressed dwarf among the audience in the Opera Comique, had told the author that this would not happen in England. Pat came the reply -

"In England, dear Sir, ... we sit all at our ease".81

Sterne's wit was marked by intellectual refinement. In a letter to a friend, Mr. Woodhouse, he relates his conversation with a sensible friend of mine. That friend,

"with whom, not long ago, I spent some hours in conversation, met an apothecary (an acquaintance of ours). The latter asked him how he did? why, ill, very ill. I have been Sterne, who has given me such a dose of Attic salt, that I am in a fever. Attic salt, Sir, Attic salt! I have Glauber salt - I have Epsom salt in my shop, etc. Oh! I suppose 'tis some French salt - I wonder you would trust his report of the medicine, he cares not what he takes himself. I fancy I see you smile".82
The apothecary's ignorance of the real meaning of 'Epson salt' is finely, and gently, ridiculed. Sterne's wit and sense of humour kept up his spirits in many an odd and difficult situation. He describes in good humour a story of considerable harassment of his own, during his French travels -

"I had hired a chaise and a horse to go about seven miles into the country, but, Shandean-like, did not take notice that the horse was almost dead when I took him. Before I got halfway the poor animal dropp'd down dead - so I was forced to appear before the police, and began to tell my story in French, which was, that the poor beast had to do with a worse beast than himself, namely his master, who had driven him all the day before ... and that he had neither had corn, or hay, therefore I was not to pay for the horse - but I might as well have whistled, as have spoke French, and I believe my Latin was equal to my uncle Toby's Lillabullero - being not understood because of its purity, but by dint of words I forced my judge to do me justice - no common thing by the way in France".

Life had many stings for him, as for others; but Sterne loved life too much to complain of its ills.

(c) Qualities of spirit - defiance of suffering; attitude to death:

Sterne's cheerful spirits were combined with an inner strength of mind; they rested on a firm base of fortitude. This is revealed in his non-chalant, noble defiance of suffering - both mental and physical. His firmness and happiness of spirit can be seen in his attitude of playfulness with his critics - an attitude that is in striking contrast with the angry attitude of some eminent authors. Even the tolerant Addison called his critics 'sons of Momus'. Swift likewise ridiculed the 'Moderns' as the protege of Momus. And Fielding sent his 'barking critics' to
he called them 'odious vermin', abject slaves of vice, and so on. But Sterne enjoyed his critics as much as he enjoyed life.

"I shall be attacked and pelted" - he wrote to Stephen Croft, the Squire of Stillington - "either from cellars or garrets, write what I will - and besides, must expect to have a party against me of many hundreds - who either do not - or will not laugh. 'Tis enough if I divide the world; - at least I will rest contented with it".88

From London he wrote about the reception of his newly published Shandy (Bks. I & II) in his usual comic vein -

"One half of the town abuse my book as bitterly, as the other cry it up to the skies - the best is, they abuse and buy it, and at such a rate, that we are going on with a second edition, as fast as possible".89

Sterne's playful defiance of critics may also be seen in Tristram Shandy itself (II,2 / III,12 / VI,38).

His gay defiance of physical suffering is an important feature of Sterne's character. A victim of consumption, he was continually ailing from his youth. He refers to his 'breaking a vessel in my lungs' while at Cambridge, and later. As narrator Tristram, he refers to 'these two spider legs of mine', and to his 'vile cough'. There were occasional aggravations of his deadly disease, accompanied by haemorrhage. But nothing could affect his ever-cheerful spirits. Sterne even wrested from his ill-health materials for humour. He refers to many struggles with death as 'pinching bouts'. He describes one of his physical breakdowns in these words -

"... my prospects were many storeys higher, for I was all that time, as I thought, journeying on to the other world".93

Declaring his distrust of 'physicians' and his faith in 'Dame Nature', he says -
"I begin to have a kind of enthusiasm now in her fav­­our, and in my own, that one or two more escapes will make me believe that I shall leave you all at last by translation, and not by fair death".93

Sterne beautifully uses the word 'translation' here, in the Biblical sense of going to heaven without death. He accommodated himself to the 'periodical returns' of 'health and sickness', "only taking care, whatever befalls me in this silly world - not to lose my temper by it. This I believe ... to be the truest philosophy - for this we must be indebted to ourselves, but not to our fortunes".94

Both Smollett and Sterne travelled through France and Italy, and left accounts of their travels (Smollett, Travels through France and Italy, 1766; Sterne, Sentimental Journey, 1768). Smollett perpetually complains of discomfort. At Montpellier, he finds 'Cheval Blanc' ('counted the best auberge in the place') 'a most wretched hovel, the habitation of darkness, dirt and imposition'. He is very bitter at the high charges in the hotels. Smollett is very hard on the Frenchmen, whose 'attitudes' - according to him - are 'affected, unnatural, and desultory'. He finds them lacking in 'sense', 'sentiment', 'discretion'. Indeed, Smollett projects the gloom of his mind on whatever he sees during his travels. It is different with Sterne. He, too, had much cause many for irritation, on account of the inconveniences of travel (such as, 'downright overthrows, stops, and delays', and so on), but he takes all discomfort in good cheer. His carriage broke on the way, and he was stranded, with wife and daughter, for quite some time — "Our luggage weighed ten quintals - 'twas the fair of Baucaire - all the world was going, or returning - we were ask'd by every soul who pass'd by us, if we were going to the fair of Baucaire. No wonder, quoth I, we have goods enough! vous avez raison, mes amis (i,e., 'my friends, you are right')".99
The difference between the two temperaments - Smollett's and Sterne's - is evident. No wonder, Sterne, as the 'sentimental traveller', made fun of Smollett, the 'spleenetic traveller'; he called him Smelfungus, who had

"a sad tale of sorrowful adventures ... to tell ... he had been flay'd alive, and bedevil'd, and used worse than St. Bartholomew, at every stage he had come at. I'll tell it, cried Smelfungus, to the world. You had better tell it, said I, to your physician".100

In *Tristram Shandy*, traveller Tristram says that he is 'heartily glad' that his post-chaise is 'all broke to pieces',

"for now I can go directly by water to Avignon".101

He then muses on the pleasure of a boat-journey 'down the rapid Rhone'. Sterne was not merely indulging a conceit, but he was speaking his character, when he said he wanted his daughter to grow like him

"in her contempt of small dangers, and fighting against the apprehensions of them, which is better still".102

There is a little passage in *T.S.*, where the narrator speaks of his unhappy experiences with post-chaises, and with a particular postillion. Its significance lies not in the information it gives, but in its revealing the fine spirits of narrator Tristram, that is, Sterne himself. Tristram finds that something or other is always going wrong with the post-chaise -

"A French postillion has always to alight before he has got three hundred yards out of town. What's wrong now? - Diable! - a rope's broke! - a knot has slipt! - a staple's drawn! - a bolt's to whittle! - a *ring* tag, a rag, a jag, a strap, a buckle, or a buckle's tongue, want altering. How true as all this is, I never think myself impowered to excommunicate thereupon either the post-chaise, or its driver - ... but I take the matter coolly before me, and consider, that some tag, or rag, or jag, or bolt, or buckle, or buckle's tongue,
will ever be a wanting, or want altering, travel where I will - so I never chaff, but take the good and the bad as they fall in my road, and get on:—Do so, my lad! said I; he had lost five minutes already, in alighting in order to get at a luncheon of black bread, which he had crammed into the chaise-pocket, and was remounted, and going leisurely on, to relish it the better. 103

The traveller is pressed for time, and shows the postillion a 'four-and-twenty sous piece'; the lad grins in joy, and

"behind his sooty muzzle discovered such a pearly row of teeth, that Sovereignty would have pawned her jewels for them". 104

Life never lost its charms for Sterne. There is something beautiful in his capacity to transmute suffering into joy.

Under the very shadow of death, Sterne, as Tristram, sings this invocation to his spirits—

"... in dangers ye gilded my horizon with hope, and when Death himself knocked at my door - ye bade him come again; and in so gay a tone of careless indifference, did ye do it, that he doubted of his commission". 105

Tristram conceives his flight from Death in terms of a comic game with him. During one of his serious fits of illness, Sterne wrote to an esteemed friend—

"Illness, my Lord, has occasioned my silence. Death knocked at my door, but I would not admit him - the call was both unexpected and unpleasant - and I am seriously worn down to a shadow - and still very weak; - but weak as I am, I have as whimsical a story to tell you as ever befell one of my family". 107

The 'whimsical story', referred to here, relates to that of Toby's amours (T.S., Bks.VIII & IX), which he was writing at the time. On his way from London to Coxwold (in 1767), he was on the very brink of collapse. From Newark, where he rested on the way, he scribbled a few lines to his friend Hall-Stevenson. He describes how he could not sit up in the chaise, and had to lie down in the
bottom of the chaise 'like a bale of cadaverous goods consigned
to Pluto and company'; he refers to his serious illness as 'some
derangement' pressing 'hard upon this machine', adding, with his
never-failing confidence and good humour, that "it will not be
overset this bout".

Philosophy teaches us how to be prepared for death; but
Sterne loved life too much to think seriously of death. The mora-
list will tell us, as Dr. Johnson did, that a constant contemplati-
on of death is a virtue, a corrective to the many ills of life;
it is the 'universal medicine of the mind'.

"The disturbances of our happiness in this world are
our desires, our griefs, and our fears, and to all th-
ese the consideration of mortality is a certain and
adequate remedy".111

Dr. Johnson's attitude to death is moralistic, while Sterne's is
artistic. Sterne's attitude to death reveals his Renaissance sym-
pathies, his passionate love of life - life that exists in the
incessant flow of feelings and sensations. He would say with Mon-
taigne that

"If we have not known how to live, it is injustice to
teach us how to die".112

It is necessary to bear in mind this important aspect
of Sterne's personality; for it helps us understand that his co-
mic gaiety in the novel(T.S.) is no mere froth on the surface,
but is based on an inner strength of spirit, a firm positive fa-
ith in life. It is unfortunate that Traill, who considered Sterne
a person of 'effeminate sensibilities', and even a modern critic
like Jefferson, who described Sterne as 'emotionally unstable',
failed to take note of this vital aspect of our author's perso-
nality.
(d) **Love; laughter; lightness:**

Sterne's strong susceptibility to the amorous sentiment is amply revealed in his letters to some of his friends among the fair sex, such as, Catherine de Pourmantel ('Kitty'), Eliza Draper, Lady Percy, Mrs. H., and so on. We do not have, however, any of their letters to him. We are told, that after his death, many of his papers were burnt, "amongst which were a large parcel of letters of love and gallantry" from ladies of high rank. He writes to 'Kitty' that he loves her 'to distraction', and will love her 'to eternity'. He tells Lady Percy -

"O my dear lady - what a dishclout of a soul hast thou made of me? ... Does it give you pleasure to make me more unhappy - or does it add to your triumph, that your eyes and lips have turned a man into a fool, whom the rest of the town is courting as a wit?"

His letters to Eliza Draper (the Eliza episode has been treated separately - see Chap. XIII on Sentimentalism) are unworthy of him, or - for that matter - of any man. Thackeray was not wholly unjustified in his indictment of Sterne on this ground (he called Sterne 'The coward', blasphemous, 'the wretched worn-out old scamp', and so on). Sterne's amorous impulse often made a captive of his reason.

At the same time, it is necessary to bear in mind that Sterne's amorous sentiment is saved from grossness, by a certain redemptive quality; for Sterne, though he was a man of the world, occasionally sought refuge in loneliness and in dreams. This faculty of dreaming he hails as the

"Sweet pliability of man's spirit, that can at once surrender itself to illusions, which cheat expectation and sorrow of their weary moments!"
He even tells us that this reliance on dreams is often a better
refuge than reason. This imagination fed his love too. In the
forests near Coxwold there were ruins of a medieval abbey, where Sterne would sometimes retire to indulge his reveries—

"... my love and my devotion are ever taking me and leading me gently by the hand to these delicious mansions of our long-lost Sisters".125

His imagination particularly evoked the spirit of one, whom he called Cordelia, and whose idealized memory sometimes acted as a soothing influence on his troubled mind. He thus consoles himself and his dear Eliza, during their separation—

"all our portion is evil now, and all our hours grief; I look forwards towards the Elysium we so often and rapturously talk'd of. Cordelia's spirit will fly to tell thee ...".126

It is this touch of dreaminess in his love, that sometimes made him conceive his romantic associations even in terms of parent-daughter relationship. Thus the 'dear, dear Jenny' in his novel for once becomes to the narrator his child. In the Sentimental Journey, the author's compassion for Maria of Moulines is mixed up with a strong element of romantic attachment towards her. She has already with her his handkerchief marked with S.(for Shandy romantic, or Sterne). The author notes the feminine appeal of her figure—

"Maria, though not tall, was nevertheless of the first order of fine forms. ...so much was there about her of all that the heart wishes, or the eye looks for in woman ...".128

The author sits close by her side; and as Maria's tears trickle down her cheeks, he wipes them with his handkerchief. He walks arm in arm with her, as she goes back home. Even so, Maria becomes 'unto me as a daughter'. Here too, his love is half sense, half fancy.
We shall be unjust to Sterne — as Thackeray and even
some later critics, like Traill and Aiken Work have been — if
we fail to note this ethereal element in his love — an element
which makes his love not mere desire for possession, but also
approval of the beautiful and the good.

Laughter; lightness. Like his Yorick in the novel, Sterne "lo-
vved a jest in his heart"; and rather freely scattered 'his wit
and his humour, — his gibes and his jests about him'. Gravity,
or the affectation of it, was foreign to his nature. He regarded
gravity as 'an errant scoundrel', and said that 'the very
essence' of it was 'design, and consequently deceit'. We have
noted how his ever-cheerful spirits triumphed over his many wo-
rries of life. He calls this gaiety of spirits his 'Shandyism'
or 'Shandeism'. 'True Shandyism' — he says — sustains life and
makes it cheerful. Life, with its burden of miseries, would be
intolerable for him

"if God ... had not poured forth the spirit of Shande-
ism into me, which will not suffer me to think two
moments upon any grave subject".

From Paris he wrote to Garrick how he would "Shandy it away" du-
ring his stay in the city, talking 'more nonsense' than ever, and
to all sorts of people'. This gay freedom of spirits, no doubt,
betrayed a lack of worldly wisdom. There is some truth in Fiel-
ding's precept, that our virtues "must be shown artfully". It
was here that Sterne was found sadly wanting. He himself admits
it, but with no regrets. He says how he has his moments of de-
pression,

"and yet, in half an hour's time, I'll lay a guinea,
I shall be as merry as a monkey — and as mischievous
too, and forget it all".
As the 'sentimental traveller', he would not even worry over his wanting a passport, even when he is already in Paris and is reminded of it. He asks himself what it is — 'folly, or nonchalance, or philosophy, or pertinacity' — that prevents his taking the matter seriously. He toys with the idea of captivity, with the terrors of the Bastille. This 'contempt of small dangers, and fighting against the apprehensions of them' sprang from his perennial buoyancy of spirits, from his rich relish for living.

Sterne's easy informality, his freedom from reserve, arose out of his aversion to ceremony, his non-conformity to tradition. In his art (in the novel), this attitude is reflected in his defiance of the set rules of construction, and recourse to a new technique. Sterne's informality, by cutting across all barriers of race or rank, was also a vital aid to his humanity. Tristram Shandy, 'Gentleman', joins the rustic dance and song with gay abandon, and feels the bliss of heaven in it. At Lyons, he offers a macaroon to the donkey that has strayed to his hotel-door, and engages in a silent loving communion with him. The 'sentimental traveller' feels the warmth of the good Grisset's heart through her pulse in her shop, and says that he does not care if 'all the world saw me feel it'. The same informality is seen in his behaviour at his farmer-host's table. It may be noted that Sterne's indictment of Roman Catholicism/falls severely on their ceremonialism. Form, or ceremony, tends to eat up substance, and is often a cover for coldness or hypocrisy.

Thus, Sterne's gaiety, or lightness (informality), should not be taken as mere frivolity or whimsicality. It is rather
an expression of his open-mindedness, of his active warm heart, of his self-confidence and his faith in the primacy of feeling.

(e) Conclusion:

Movement is the essence of Sterne's personality. He loved man. Sterne did not deny the human body and the truth of the senses. He was tolerant of human frailties. In the scene of corporal Trim's oration (on Bobby's death) to the servants of the Shandy household, the author says -

"Now I love you for this - and 'tis this delicious mixture within you which makes you dear creatures what you are".150

Sterne loved mankind for this 'delicious mixture' in them of sympathy and self-interest, of love and desire. Man's passion is as real as his spirit. Sterne's personality best revealed itself in society. His wit, at once festive and sharp, his never-failing sense of humour, his sentiments of friendship and love, amply reveal the social cast of his personality.

And yet Sterne's personality had an inner basis in dreams, in an inner longing for loneliness, though it (longing) is but occasionally revealed. We find him harking back to it in critical moments - as, for example, in his reference to his dreams of Cordelia in the Journal to Eliza (see ante, p.75), when his infatuation for Eliza broke him up completely. Even on less serious occasions, we find him pining for solitude, for a quiet retreat.

"Crowded towns, and busy societies, may delight the unthinking and the gay - but solitude is the best nurse of wisdom".151

His portrait of Amandus-Amanda in Tristram Shandy (VII.31) is as beautiful as the Nannette scene (T.S., VII.45). These two pictures
supplement each other. The former is conjured up from fancy, from his world of dreams; the other is sketched from his life's experience, and is set with people and sounds. Tristram's joy in one is in contemplation (His visit to the Tomb of Amandus and Amanda is purely visionary); that in the other is in participation in lively company (the scene of the rustic dance and song, in which the central figure is Wannette, the 'sun-burnt daughter of Labour'). These two pictures represent the two aspects of the author's personality.

But movement was the stronger element in it. Life, scenes, people delighted him. Sterne's humorous reference to the ideas of motion and rest, in T.S. (VII, 13), is significant. Bishop Hall, being corpulent, considered motion a curse; but, for the lean Sterne, motion is life and joy, and rest death; -

"... so much of motion, is so much of life, and so much of joy - ... to stand still, or get on but slowly, is death and the devil -".154

Sterne's affluent energy of life animates his books.