3. The Philosophy of His Work — (B) Sentimental Journey

Sterne's faith in feeling finds fuller, and more beautiful, expression in his Sentimental Journey. The S.J. is not an account of men and manners, of places and objects seen. Sterne's is

"a quiet journey of the heart in pursuit of Nature (i.e., the natural feelings and impulses of man), and those affections which arise out of her, which make us love each other, and the world, better than we do".1

Elsewhere, the author speaks of the same design in his Journey, namely,

"to teach us to love the world and our fellow-creatures better than we do — so it (i.e., S.J.) runs most upon those gentler passions and affections, which aid so much to it".2

The S.J. is a study of the heart, which is the guide to virtue, and even to understanding (see ante, Chap. II, pp.34-5). The traveller studies the flow of feelings in the individual human being under the 'different disguises of customs, climates, and religion'.3 He is the 'sentimental traveller', different from other travellers — like the Inquisitive, who are always on the look-out for scraps of knowledge or information, or the Splenetic who, like Smelfungus, are perpetually grumbling at the many inconveniences of travel. The 'sentimental traveller' apprehends all experience by his feeling —

"What a large volume of adventures may be grasped within this little span of life, by him who interests his heart in everything".8

He has a wealth of feeling within him. His heart quickly warms up
to love and pity, and is untouched by any base passion. Even if
some uncharitable feeling comes unto him for a while for some
reason, he quickly conquers it. Thus our traveller reprimands
himself on his unkind feeling towards Monsieur Dessein, with wh-
on he was to negotiate a bargain over the post-chaise.

"... is all this to be lighted up in the heart" - he
says to himself, referring to his ill-feeling - "for
a beggarly account of three or four louis d'ors, wh-
ich is the most I can be over-reach'd in?" 9

It should be remembered here, that in Sterne's time the words
'sentiment' and 'sentimental' denoted a delicate sensibility, a
susceptibility to fine, noble feelings which is denied to coarse
natures, a sense of sympathy which not unfrequently revealed itself
in tears at others' distress (see Chap. XIII - Sentimentalism).
The distinguishing characteristic of the 'sentimental traveller',
thus, is proneness to warm, kindly feelings, which foster universal
fellowship. This will be evident as we enter into the 'senti-
mental' experiences of our traveller.

Arriving at Calais, the author is warmed up by his di-
nner. His kindly feelings for France and her King dispel the ear-
lier spark of displeasure in his mind (caused by the idea of be-
ing robbed by law of his belongings, in case he died in French
territory). A poor monk of the Franciscan order enters his room,
to beg for his convent. He is a figure of sublime entreaty. But
the author is unwilling to give him anything; he tells the monk
rather curtly, that his small purse is for the redress of the po-
or and the destitute. The old monk leaves with serene resignation.
The moment he goes away, the 'sentimental traveller' is smitten
with remorse at his ill-treatment of the monk -
"I have behaved very ill, said I within myself; but I have only just set out upon my travels; and shall learn better manners as I get along".

The author gets into a desobligeant (chaise for one person) in the coach-yard, and begins writing his 'Preface' (to his travel-account). He notes the various kinds of travellers — 'Idle travellers', 'Inquisitive travellers', 'Splenetic travellers', 'Travellers of necessity', and so on. He then notes his own kind — namely, the 'Sentimental traveller'. He discards the utilitarian aims of travel (such as, acquiring of 'knowledge and improvements') for the humanistic one — namely, the study of feelings and the extension of human fellowship. He sees two Englishmen waiting outside, has a word or two with them, and then retires into his room in the hotel. As our traveller bargains with Mons. Dessein for a carriage, he

"felt the rotation of all the movements within me, to which the situation is incident. I looked at Monsieur Dessein through and through, eyed him as he walk'd along in profile, then en face; thought he look'd like a Jew, then a Turk, disliked his wig, cursed him by my gods, wished him at the devil".

But he immediately recovers his happy spirits, and feels ashamed of that spark of 'base passion' within himself. At the remise (coach-house)-door, the 'sentimental traveller' suddenly meets the lady whom he had earlier seen in converse with the begging monk at the yard. Almost instinctively he offers her his hand, which is at once accepted. Dessein leaves to get the right key (to the coach-house); our traveller continues holding the lady's hand and having a silent pleasurable exchange of feelings with her.

There was a simple look of distress about her; the 'sentimental traveller' "felt benevolence for her; and resolv'd some way or other to throw in my mite of courtesy, if not of service."
Dessein comes back with the key, and the monk comes too. There is a reconciliation between the 'sentimental traveller' and the monk, which is sealed by the exchange of snuff-boxes. The author says that even now he treasures the monk's present

"as I would the instrumental parts of my religion, to help my mind on to something better".17

The author thinks of offering the lady a seat in his carriage. A flow of ungenerous ideas at once rise within him; but before he can say anything to her, the lady walks away from him slowly and thoughtfully. A desire to know her name, her family, her place, and her condition, grows within our traveller, but

"a hundred little delicacies stood in the way".18

Meantime, 'A little French debonnaire captain' pops in between the author and the lady, and starts an immediate conversation with her. The author is struck by his easy, intimate manner, and his confidence in dealing with ladies, and contrasts this with his own hesitant approach. The captain leaves as smartly as he had arrived.

Dessein takes the author and the lady to his magazine of chaises. Our traveller selects a one-seater, and gets into it. At the request of Dessein, the lady, too, gets in (obviously, he took them to be man and wife). As Dessein shuts the door of the chaise upon them, the lady says smiling, that it (the situation) is very comic, 'very droll'. The lady, however, soon leaves, at the arrival of her brother, Count de L-. The author quickly finishes his bargain for the coach, and leaves Calais in the afternoon. At this point he makes a few reflections on the nature of a 'sentimental traveller', as different from other kinds of travellers - travellers, for example, like Smelfungus, whose experience is is coloured, or
vitiated, by their own spleen. A 'sentimental traveller', as the author is, on the other hand, is characterized by an active, happy heart, which can transmute all experience into a pleasurable sensation.

Our traveller

At Montriul engages a servant, a smart young boy, on the recommendation of the owner of the hotel. La Fleur, the boy, had little experience of service, but "the festivity of his temper ... supplied all defects". La Fleur at once wins the heart of the 'sentimental traveller'. As he prepares to leave Montriul, the author finds 'half a dozen wenches' come to bid La Fleur adieu. The landlord explains that the young fellow is always in love, and that he is loved 'by all the town'. The author is 'heartily glad of it', for he himself regards love as a noble feeling, that enlarges the heart and activates it to virtue. This leads the author to a little digression on how the vicious Abderites were transformed by the healing touch of love. As he comes out of the hotel, he is surrounded by a crowd of beggars. Instead of being irritated, he warms up in the company of 'the sons and daughters of poverty'. He not only gives them money, he talks to them, studies their individuality, their behaviour and their personality. Near Nampont, on the way to Amiens, La Fleur is thrown off his bidet (post-horse), who would not cross a dead ass lying on the way. The scared horse runs back to Montriul. The author then takes La Fleur in his own carriage, and they reach the post-house at Nampont. At the door of the post-house, they find the owner of the ass mourning for his animal, who had been his constant companion and friend. The author sees in it an example of universal brotherhood -
"Shame on the world! said I to myself; did we love each other, as this poor soul but loved his ass, 'twould be something".24

As he enters Amiens, the author sees the lady, he earlier met at Calais, driving past with her brother, the Count de L-. In the hotel at Amiens, he receives a note from her, requesting him to present an urgent letter personally to Madame B- at Paris. In her note, the Count's sister also requested him to pay a visit to Brussels, her home town, if possible. La Fleur, 'in order to do honour to his master', heartily receives the Count's servant in 'a back parlour in the Auberge'. The Count's servant, too, 'not to be behind-hand in politeness with La Fleur', takes him to his own master's hotel. There in the kitchen, in his happy effusion of spirits, La Fleur "pulled out his fife, and leading off the dance himself with the first note, set the fille de chambre, the maître d'hôtel, the cook, the scullion, and all the household, dogs and cats, besides an old monkey, a-dancing."7

It is a fine little picture of universal fellowship, that is fostered in love and happiness of spirit.

Madame de L- calls La Fleur, who pays her 'a thousand compliments ... on the part of his master'. Asked by the lady if he has brought any letter from his master, La Fleur quickly improvises the answer, that he has left it by mistake on the table, and that he would run back and bring it immediately. Coming back to his master, he reports all this to him. A letter is hastily improvised, at La Fleur's suggestion, on a model furnished by La Fleur himself. The 'sentimental traveller', "to gratify the poor fellow, who stood trembling, for my honour, his own, and the honour of his letter, ... took the cream gently off it, and whipping it up my own way, ... seal'd it up and sent him with it to Madame de L-".28
The next day, the author comes to Paris. From his hotel-room he sees, through the window-glass, 'all the world in yellow, blue, and green, running at the ring of pleasure'—the old with diminished vigour, the young with full energy and gaiety of spirit. After an interesting conversation with the barber, arising out of his wig, our traveller is out on the road at night. A Grisset in her shop, whom he asks the way to the Opera Comique, greatly impresses him by her 'small sweet courtesies'. He has a silent exchange of pleasurable feelings with her, as he feels her pulse and later purchases gloves from her. In the Paris theatre, he is moved by the fine gentlemanliness of an old French officer. While speaking of the power of gestures to convey feeling, and of their 'translation' in words, the author is reminded of his accidental encounter with a lady—the Marquisina di P—at Martini's concert at Milan. The author is surprised to see a large number of dwarfs in Paris, and feels pity for them—'this poor blighted part of my species'. In the theatre, he is sorry to see a dwarf treated with disdain by a tall German blocking his view of the stage; he is very happy when the sentinel, at the call of the kindly French officer, comes to the rescue of the dwarf. In course of his conversation with the author, the old French officer makes an eloquent plea for international understanding and amity.

On his way back from the Opera Comique, the author meets the fille de chambre to Madame R-. He strongly feels 'the conviction of consanguinity' with her; he muses—

"'Tis sweet to feel by what fine-spun threads our affections are drawn together".

Coming back to his hotel, he learns that a police officer had come to enquire about his passport. As the 'sentimental traveller'
says he has no passport, the owner of the hotel retires three steps from him, 'as from an infected person', while La Fleur advances three steps towards his master.

"with that sort of movement which a good soul makes to succour a distress'd one".33

The risks involved in the matter of the passport set the author musing on the Bastille, when he is suddenly interrupted by the cry of a caged starling -

"I can't get out; I can't get out".34

This appeal to his sentiment overthrew all his 'systematic reasonings upon the Bastille'; and he is made to feel the more strongly the horrors of bondage and the blessings of freedom.

The next morning, the 'sentimental traveller' goes to meet Monsieur le Duc de C- at Versailles, for his passport. Failing to meet him, our traveller goes to meet the Count de B--. Seeing a set of Shakespeare's on the Count's table, the 'sentimental traveller' cleverly introduces himself as the countryman of the great dramatist. During their conversation, he skilfully broaches the topic of the passport. The Count hears him with great civility, and assures him of his help. When the author introduces himself as Yorick, the Count is confused between the Yorick, his guest, and the Yorick of Hamlet. The author then explains to him that there are 'two Yoricks' -

"The Yorick your lordship thinks of has been dead and buried eight hundred years ago; he flourish'd in Horwendillius's court; the other Yorick is myself, who have flourish'd, my lord, in no court".35

(Sterne's Sermons were published as the Sermons of Mr. Yorick).

The Count at once puts his Shakespeare into his pocket, and rather
abruptly leaves the room. Alone in the room, and finding nothing to do, the author takes up *Much Ado About Nothing*, which was lying on the Count's table. He transports himself in the world of Benedict and Beatrice. He says that when life's cares and ills press sore upon him, he thus seeks solace in the world of imagination; and he regards imagination as a better refuge than reason. The Count procures the passport for our traveller. Their conversation then turns on the national characteristics of England and France.

Coming back to his hotel in Paris, the 'sentimental traveller' meets the *fille de chambre* (of Madame R-).

"It was a fine still evening in the latter end of the month of May. The crimson window-curtains (which were of the same colour as those of the bed) were drawn close; the sun was setting, and reflected through them so warm a tint into the fair *fille de chambre*'s face, I thought she blushed — the idea of it made me blush myself ... There is a sort of a pleasing half-guilty blush, where the blood is more in fault than the man: 'tis sent impetuous from the heart, and virtue flies after it — not to call it back, but to make the sensation of it more delicious to the nerves — 'tis associated. But I'll not describe it".37

They find themselves in the grip of romantic desire. He, however, succeeds in conquering the Temptation. He remarks that we can deny neither sense nor spirit. Nature has mixed them up so inextricably in us, that we can only "trust the issues" to the 'great Governor of nature' Himself. After the *fille de chambre* leaves, the master of the hotel objects to our traveller's receiving a woman guest in the evening. This objection slightly irritates the author, for, as he says, he committed no sin. The next day, the master of the hotel sends his guest apologies.

La Fleur begs a holiday of his master. He is daintily
dressed, and says he has to meet his girl that day. The author readily grants his prayer.

"The sons and daughters of service part with liberty, but not with nature, in their contracts; they are flesh and blood, and have their little vanities and wishes in the midst of the house of bondage, as well as their task-masters". 39

As La Fleur goes, the author's eyes suddenly fall on the sheet of waste-paper covering his leaf of butter which La Fleur brought from the market. He found in it a Fragment of a story in old French. The Fragment told of a poor Notary, who was driven out of his home by the fury of his wife, 'a little fume of a woman'. It was a windy night, and as the Notary was passing by the sentry on a bridge, his cane accidentally struck against the hat of the sentry, and sent it flying down into the river below. The sentry was furious and levelled his gun at the Notary; but as the gun had to be lighted with a match, and as the sentry had lent his match a little while ago to a poor woman at the other end of the bridge, his blood cooled in the respite; he only took away the Notary's hat. The Notary went on, musing on his manifold ill-luck. He crossed the bridge. While passing along a dark passage, he heard a voice from a room urgently calling for a notary. The Notary entered the room, and saw a poor old man, an ex-soldier, lying in bed, in intense anxiety to have his story recorded. The Notary heard the old man's introduction, with rapt attention. It was a heart-touching story, the old man said; and he invoked the Almighty's grace to

"assist the decaying memory of an old, infirm, and broken-hearted man". 41

But just as the Notary was getting ready to note down the story
of the old man, the Fragment ends. Anxious to recover the other sheets of the story, the author, later, asks La Fleur if he knows about them. La Fleur tells his master that they were wrapped round the stalks of the 'bouquet' he presented to his girl. The 'bouquet', however, cannot be recovered.

One evening, while returning along a dark lane, the author has an interesting experience. He notices two ladies, who

"seem'd to be two upright vestal sisters, unsapp'd by caresses, unbroke in upon by tender salutations".42

A beggar asks charity of them, and even fixes the sum for each—a twelve-sous piece. Continuing his supplication with confidence and fine flattery, he at last succeeds in getting what he wants. The author had earlier seen this very beggar, begging only of ladies, and now realizes that the secret of his success lies in his high skill in flattery. The author observes that human nature and the minutiae of the heart can be studied better in 'single short scenes' than in the mass behaviour of the crowds.

"Nature is shy, and hates to act before spectators; but in such an unobserved corner you sometimes see a single short scene of hers, worth all the sentiments of a dozen French plays compounded together".43

At Paris, the author meets a few people of rank, to whom he was introduced by the Count de B-. Marquis de B— talks of his own chivalry, of English ladies, and of his plan to visit England. The author advises him to stay where he is. The Farmer-General enquires about the taxes in England, which—he says—are considerable.

"If we knew but how to collect them, said I, making him a low bow".44

Madame de Q— impresses him as a wit. Madame de V—, a near-deist,
is deeply impressed by his arguments for revealed religion; and he is soon admitted into her coterie. He soon begins to tire of the sophisticated society of Paris.

Leaving Paris, on his way to Italy, he reaches Moulines. As he travels through the Bourbonnois, 'the sweetest part of France - in the hey-day of the vintage', his spirit wakes up to the happy bounty of Nature. The simple rustics, singing for joy, as they work, kindle the affections of the 'sentimental traveller'. At Moulines, he meets Maria's old mother, and later, Maria. Maria is a very picture of sorrow. Since they met last (ref. to the Maria-Tristram meeting in T.S., IX, 24), she lost her husband, but recovered her wits. She had strayed as far as Rome, travelled alone across the Apennines and over Lombardy, without money. She does not know how she bore all this; she only knows that

"God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb".47

Her hair hangs loose. A 'pale green ribbon' falls across her shoulder to the waist; at the end of it hangs her pipe. Instead of a goat (as in T.S.), she now has a dog, 'kept tied by a string to her girdle'. As the 'sentimental traveller' looks at her dog, she draws him to her with the string, saying -

"Thou shalt not leave me, Sylvio".48

Tears trickle down her cheeks, as she says this. The 'sentimental traveller' wipes them away with his handkerchief, and himself sheds tears too. And as he does this, he feels

"undescribable emotions within me, as I am sure could not be accounted for from any combinations of matter and motion".48

He is 'positive' he has 'a soul'. As he leaves Maria, he invokes God's blessings on her.
Speaking of the ineffable impression of Maria on his mind, the author hails 'Sensibility' as the 'Eternal fountain of our feelings' and the 'great, great SENSORIUM of the world!' This 'Sensibility' is the active principle of sympathy within us, which awakens our kinship with creation. On Mount Taurira, the 'sentimental traveller' receives a most warm and informal welcome in a peasant family. The supper over, the entire family say their Grace in dance and song.

"I beheld Religion mixing in the dance". An 'elevation of spirit' in happiness and love is, according to the author, the best thanksgiving to God.

On the way to Turin, he is held up by a road-block caused by a huge stone. It being 'a wet and tempestuous night', he takes shelter in a roadside inn. Soon after he takes possession of his bed-chamber, a lady — a Piedmontese of about thirty, and her maid — a Lyonoise of twenty, arrive at the inn, and are taken into his room, there being no other bed-chamber in that inn. The room, where they all collect, has two beds side by side; and a third one is in the attached closet. There is fire for warmth near the two beds in the main chamber, but the closet within is damp and cold. When the lady gives a look at the closet, the author gives a cough (for his ill-health). After supper, and after 'a two hours' negotiation', it is settled between the author and the lady, that the maid would occupy the bed in the closet, and they themselves the two beds in the chamber — the author occupying the one next to the fire by right of his earlier admittance. It is decided also, that the maid would fasten up the opening of his bed-curtain by needle and thread, or by corking pins. After he retires to bed, the candle would be extinguished, and he would not
say a word, excepting, of course, his prayer. After he gets into his bed, he continues waking up 'till a full hour after midnight', when at last he says - "O my God!". The lady, who too was awake like him, at once charges him with breach of treaty. The author, however, denies, saying that his words have been those of prayer. In the dispute, two or three corking pins fall to the ground from the curtain. Ready to make a solemn declaration of his sincerity, he stretches his hand out of his bed, by way of an instinctive gesticulation, when suddenly the hand strikes against the maid's hand; for, the maid, on hearing their dispute, silently crept out of her closet into the narrow passage between the two beds in the chamber. With this droll episode - put in as if to restore our emotional balance - the Sentimental Journey, with its predominant appeal to feeling, comes to a close.