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Some aspects of the life and work of Lawrence Sterne

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SOME ASPECTS OF THE LIFE AND WORK OF LAURENCE STERNE

by

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INDEX -- OUTLINE.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Sterne is a Sphinx! This is the common attitude toward the writer of "Tristram Shandy," and is a point of view with which this thesis does not agree, at least in toto. In the study of Sterne certain elements have generally been overlooked or ignored, elements which have a profound influence upon personality itself, and as well, upon personality when expressed in action.

A. Purpose.

It is the purpose of this thesis to bring out these points, although it makes no pretension to a complete explanation of the character of the man, for that, obviously, is impossible.

This paper aims to approach an interpretation of Laurence Sterne in terms of the content and implication of his writings, of his writings in terms of his life and personality, and both, as much as possible, in terms of psychological findings relating to personality. It is quite common, as a method of approach to literature, to consider an artist's writing quite apart from his life and character, to say "We don't care to know what the man was--that which concerns us is what he actually did, from a literary standpoint." But the trouble is that a man cannot do things either in literature or in life, without a background. It is axiomatic that a man cannot express a concept without experiencing it, either imaginatively or physically.

The importance of the relationship between a man and his writing, which importance is great in relation to Sterne and his novels, has been recognized by at least one critic, David Masson, in his "British Novelists and Their Styles," who comes close to keynoting this entire thesis in his statement:

> "It was Wordsworth, I believe, who objected to mixing up the biography of a writer with the criticism of his works. If there is any instance in which one could wish to agree with such a canon, it is certainly that of Sterne. Believing as I do, however, that we ought not to agree with Wordsworth in such a rule, and that the deepest literary criticism is that which connects a man's writings most profoundly and intimately with his personality, conceived comprehensively, and with central accuracy, I can only hope that, if we had the means of investigating Sterne's character more largely and exactly, we should find the man, after all, as good as his genius." [1]

This thesis does not, however, attempt any formal literary criticism, but rather it aims at explaining the personality of the novelist. More psychological material, better techniques of approach, and more data on Laurence Sterne are available today than could be found in 1889, when Masson's statement was written. Undoubtedly, too, he was irritated at Thackeray, who, although his writing in some ways so much resembles that of Sterne, did not hesitate to damn the author of "Tristram Shandy" to the hell of famous renegades of history. By implication, at least, Masson sees in Sterne a real, human person instead of a grinning ghost, sticking its head occasionally from out of the darkness of the eighteenth century.

Priestly also believes that Sterne has been unfairly represented by facile, but unscrupulous, biographers and critics:

> "Sterne is a great temptation to the devotees of the easy and picturesque in biography. His name and his fame have already suffered from them. There is, for example, Thackeray . . . . . whose English Humorists, nevertheless, excellent reading though they are, must be voted a nuisance by everyone with any sense of critical honesty. They throw a false light upon so many eighteenth century men of letters. Thackeray could not resist easy emotional effects in these lectures, and it is perhaps a pity that he did not accept the advice of his club acquaintances and enlist the aid of a piano. Thus, if he had had a little music, it might not then have been necessary to have daubed the portrait of Sterne in such crude colors, to have made of this great stylist and whimsical fellow a raw-head and bloody bones." [2]

There is the assumption to be made, perhaps unnecessarily, although its statement will do no harm, that Sterne was, just as much as anyone in his day or anyone today, a human being. No supernatural machinery motivated his actions, and he can be studied in the same manner as a person today, providing there is sufficient data available. And he can be, and should be, measured against the same standards as other people are. Atmospheric conditions sometimes distort the appearance of a distant landscape; and time, and critics, may distort the reputation of a two-century old author.

B. Technique.

The technique involved in making this study will be mainly genetic. Sterne's life will be surveyed carefully in an attempt to find the elements which contributed to his personality and writing,- other phases of his biography will be ignored as irrelevant. There will be no attempt to

use biography for biography's sake, but where it is used its purpose will be to throw light upon his character development, his early home environment, the influence of his education, and his training afterward. And similarly his writings, both his prose fiction and his letters, will be used in relationship to his life. As much as possible the material used will be from Sterne's pen, although the volume of writing he produced aside from his novels is slight, and most of it refers to the period after "Tristram" was published. The test of his writings as autobiographical references comes in their coherence with other known facts, and their coherence within themselves.

C. Sterne's Writing as source material.

It is obvious that much of the material in "Tristram Shandy" is not autobiographical, but some of it unquestionably is, and the biographers of Sterne have accepted it as being so, which should be sufficient authority for me to do it also. The extent to which "Tristram" is autobiographical may be judged from this statement of Cross, a most scrupulous writer, and probably the most conservative of Sterne's biographers:

> ". . . the question how far "Tristram Shandy" and the "Sentimental Journey" are a rendering of actual incidents in Sterne's personal history must be always present, though it can never be quite answered; for all that a biographer can expect is corroborative evidence here and there from external sources. . . . . He knows that incidents in Sterne's life, all the way from boyhood down to near death, are in Sterne's books; but he knows also that they are entangled with much that is extraneous." [3]

For instance, Cross uses as an autobiographical element the statement made by Walter Shandy as to the education of his son, beginning, "-- Five years with a bib under his chin; ....." which is in book five, chapter forty-two. Again, the use of musical terms in "Tristram" fits very nicely with Sterne's statement in his "Memoirs" that his amusements consisted of "books, painting, fiddling, and shooting," and many other references easily may be found in "Tristram" to bear out this contention. At the end of book four in "Tristram" Sterne makes this statement:

> "And now that you have just got to the end of these four volumes-- the thing I have to ask is, how you feel your heads? my own aches dismally! -- as for your healths, I know, they are much better.--" [4]

This passage from the novel corresponds precisely with letters written by Sterne at the same period, a fact which indicates that this particular section from "Tristram" can be taken as a close picture of his own condition at the time. The same is also true of much material, easily identified upon examination, in book seven in "Tristram," recording his trip to France. And in this section also, more than in any other book in that piece of prose fiction, he "steps upon the stage" himself and talks to his audience. Paul verifies this by saying "Volume seven begins with an account of the malady which took place the same year [as a letter written to Hall Stevenson]." [5]

It is known that some of Sterne's letters were doctored for various purposes: to put Sterne in a better light, to make them read more like what the editor thought they should read, and to conceal, in some cases, the identity of those to whom they were addressed. Most of this promiscuous editing came in the earlier editions and collections of his writing, hence the epistolary material used herein will be chiefly from Melville, who is sufficiently critical minded and versed in the evaluation of material, as evidenced by his numerous other publications, to be quite reliable.

Were it not for the intellectual honesty of Sterne's friends we would have very much less reliable material than we have today, as Fitzgerald indicates in a quotation from a letter written by Lydia Sterne. At the time she was trying to collect her father's letters in order to publish them for the money she could derive from such a venture, Lydia wrote, "If Mr. Wilkes would be so good as to write a few letters in imitation of her father's style, it would do just as well, and she would insert them." [6] Mr. Wilkes refused, and also, apparently, did the other friends of the deceased clergyman.

Cross indicates the changes that had been made in Sterne's letters:

> "The early collections of his letters contain forgeries which must be sifted out. In letters, for the most part, genuine passages have been suppressed and replaced by new ones. Names of correspondents and of persons mentioned within the letters are commonly indicated by an initial or two; and at times there is no clue to them at all, unless one may read a line of stars into a name. In a similar, but not identical fashion, Sterne's correspondence as published

> in later times has been interpolated or modified in phrasing, apparently in order to make out of the humorist a man more reckless in his speech than he really was - to give piquancy, as it were, to his character, as if it needed any." [7]

D. Other Sources of material.

For most of the other materials relating to Sterne I have gone to Melville, Cross, and Sichel, in descending order of their employment, in the absence of primary sources. It is obvious that secondary material must be used when all but a single bit of primary material is more than two thousand miles away. The virtue in the use of Cross is that he, more than other biographers, attempts to place Sterne among his contemporaries, to show him in relation to his times. Melville is particularly valuable because he has published Sterne's letters verbatim, adding little more than connecting links himself, so that the result is that Melville's biography is substantially written by Laurence Sterne, himself. Cross is sparing, almost niggardly in the use of Sterne's letters, except for phrases lifted here and there to fit into his narrative. Sichel, I believe, in spite of his skilful use of fine writing has come nearer to an accurate interpretation of Sterne's attitude than either of the others. Perhaps the biggest objection to Sichel is, that he sometimes allows his pen and his love of words to run away with him.

The psychological and medical background employed in this thesis comes from standard sources. There has been no attempt to follow any one school of psychology; in fact there has been a conscious striving to avoid using psychologi-

cal material carrying the tag of any one particular group. Freud has been totally ignored. Watson has been quoted to the extent of not more than a sentence or two, and McDougall, perhaps psychology's most famous supporter of the instinct school, has been almost totally ignored. It is upon McDougall that Froe's book on Laurence Sterne is chiefly based, and perhaps the outstanding shortcoming of that piece of work is that Froe distorts Sterne in order to fit him into the arbitrary and complex classification which he employs.

As I have said on the second page of this introduction, there will be no formal literary criticism employed in this treatment of Sterne, neither will moral criticism enter. Too much has already been written upon Sterne's morals. Perhaps an expression of Priestly's belief in this matter will suffice.

> "The very people who are always telling us that authors are a set of sad dogs are unconsciously paying a tribute to authorship, for they really imply that they have a higher standard for authors than they have for ordinary men. If not, then they overlook the fact that in the same searching light of publicity the lives of butchers and bakers, (who are not even subject to the same temptations) would seem no better, perhaps worse. What seem little more than amusing weaknesses among our acquaintances are frequently transformed into monstrous vices when they are discovered in a dead author." [8]

E. Further study of Sterne.

And finally certain further research has been suggested by the work on this thesis,- study outside of the scope of this composition but directly bearing upon the interpretation of Sterne. Careful inquiry might be made into the "Journal to

Eliza" to see if the present concept of this particular bit of writing, as having been directed to Eliza for her own intimate perusal, is not naïve. There is certain evidence of re-writing running through the whole of Sterne's work which might point to this intimate Journal as a step beyond the "Sentimental Journey" in the field of sentimentalism. A study might be made to very good advantage as to the degree to which Sterne is being quoted, even today, unconsciously. Investigation might be made into the extent to which later authors such as Bulwer-Lytton and Southey have actually "cribbed" from Sterne, and the extent to which he has influenced novelists of the type of Dickens and his school. A study of Sterne's style and its grammatical and rhetorical characteristics based on some such scientific technique as suggested by Edward L. Thorndike in 1926, might prove very illuminating. And finally, an extremely interesting bit of psychological research might be done in the types of association of thoughts and words found in "Tristram Shandy."

CHAPTER TWO

STERNE AS THE CHILD OF HIS PARENTS.

A. Ancestry.

Tristram once remarked that one's troubles begin a considerable time before one is born. This surely was the case with Laurence Sterne. In order to get a careful picture of the life of Sterne we must start with his ancestors for they contributed to his character, his personality and his physical constitution.

It may have been that Sterne was from old Danish stock, as he records in the tracing of the ancestry of Yorick, who, on many occasions in the narrative is Sterne himself, [9] but as he says, "in nine hundred years, it might possibly have all run out." At any rate, his ancestry traces back to the days of East Anglian yeomen. Many years before Sterne's birth the old family split, one part going to Yorkshire, and the other to Ireland. In the latter branch was John Sterne, Dean of St. Patricks and Bishop of Clogher, an intimate friend of Swift and his Stella. The Yorkshire branch of the family settled down, acquired some property, married advantageously in many cases, but remained in obscurity.

The first person on the Yorkshire side of the family to stand out prominently was Laurence's great-grandfather, Richard, master of Jesus College, Cambridge, friend of Laud, whose chaplain he was when that Puritan-baiter was executed. Later Richard, whose ecclesiastical and political career started with his doctorate dissertation on "the 3600 faults in our printed Bibles," was made Archbishop of York, a position he found quite lucrative.

The next in descent was Simon, Richard's third son and the grandfather of Laurence, who seems to have been distinguished by little but a hot, quixotic temper, like that of his father, and of his son, Jaques, with whom Laurence came into violent contact.

So it may be seen that Laurence Sterne was descended from good, reliable, steady, ecclesiastical stock; three of his forebears having reached considerable prominence and importance in the church. The family traced a long line of English descent with the possibility of Danish blood in the background. Considerable mental ability and financial acumen is shown by this family. No insanity is visible and no abnormal character deviation is present, with the possible exception of the hasty temper which characterizes his grandfather and uncle.

Of Simon Sterne's three sons, the first, Richard, married a country heiress and settled down as a country squire; the third, Jaques, attended the University and entered upon an ecclesiastical career; but the second, Roger, Laurence's father, turned instead to the army, where life was freer and more adventurous.

B. Father.

Roger Sterne seems to have been somewhat of an exception to the family. There is no positive evidence left as to his position in his father's household, but conjectures might be made. The fact that the boy left home at sixteen to seek his fortune in the army might mean friction at home, and dissatisfaction with home environment. Undoubtedly the courses of life taken by his two brothers, were open to Roger. Instead, during the

period of restlessness and desire for independence which characterize adolescence, he joined the army. He was an athletic young fellow, and perhaps the smart uniforms, and the romance of army life appealed to his naïve conception of life. It is evident, from the account of movements of his regiment, that young Roger found action and adventure in the service.

He was a member of Hanaside's regiment, the Thirty-Fourth, or the Cumberland regiment of Foot, as it was variously known, which was recruited in 1702 to fight in the War of the Spanish Succession. One of the crack regiments of the army, it fought in the siege of Barcelona, guarded the Scotch border against a rumored invasion of one of the Pretenders, engaged in garrison duty in the Netherlands, took its part in subduing a Scotch rebellion, stationed itself in Ireland, laid siege in Flanders, and shared in the defense of Gibraltar, all within three decades. This regiment Roger joined in 1708, when he was probably no more than sixteen years old. He soon became an ensign, or lieutenant, which position he held until the time of his death, even though men who enlisted at the time that he did, and later, often rose much above him in rank.

One would expect a young man with the family connections and evidences of ability shown by his brothers, not to stand still in the army. But he did.

A certain amount of evidence can be brought to bear to show that he may have been classifiable in that group of individuals which Myerson calls "the waste basket of psychiatry," in that group called constitutional psychopathic inferiors.

In his "Manual of Psychiatry," Rosanoff has this to say:

> "There is a large group of persons who, though not necessarily suffering from epileptic, psychotic or psychoneurotic symptoms, alcohol or drug addiction, or subnormal intelligence, are nevertheless incapable of attaining a satisfactory adjustment to the average social environment. This group is very heterogeneous, yet there is much evidence, in family and personal histories and in clinical manifestations, to show that the various conditions comprised in it are in some way related to one another and to other neuropathic conditions.
>
> "The maladjustment in these cases seems to arise on a basis of inherent anomalies of judgment, temperament, character, ethical sense, or sexual make-up. ....[10]
>
> "The following varieties of constitutional psychopathic states have been distinguished in the classification adopted by the Surgeon General of the army. It should be understood that most cases represent combinations of two or more of the various traits distinguished in the classification. (1) inadequate personality. (2) Paranoid personality. (3) Emotional instability. (4) Criminalism. (5) Pathological lying. (6) Sexual psychopathy. (7) Nomadism." [11]

Three of these classifications deserve attention in relation to Roger Sterne:

> "Inadequate personality - These patients, either from lack of initiative, ambition, perseverance, or judgment; or through shiftlessness or tactlessness; or a planless, improvident existence, and often in spite of good educational social and economic opportunities, make an egregious failure of everything they attempt. [12]
>
> "Emotional instability - Often the dominant note in the character of psychopath is extreme mobility of the emotions. The subject passes alternately from exuberant joy to boundless desolation, from feverish activity to profound discouragement, from affection to hatred, from the most complete egoism to the most exaggerated generosity and devotion. [13]
>
> "Nomadism - The nomadic tendency is present in most of us in some degree and, as all know, is in certain races so pronounced as to govern their mode of existence and

> social organization. In persons in whom the wandering impulse is much stronger than the average it is still to be judged for practical purposes as being within normal limits, provided it has not the effect of breaking down social adjustmemt, but leads merely to special choice of occupation, as in many cases of explorers, sailors, railroad employees, traveling salesmen, etc." [14]

Roger Sterne was almost quixotic in temperament, as shown in Sterne's account of him in the "Memoirs of the Life and Family of the late Reverend Mr. Laurence Sterne, Written by Himself:"

> "My father was a little smart man, active to the last degree in all exercises, most patient of fatigue and disappointments, of which it pleased God to give him full measure. He was, in his temper, somewhat rapid and hasty, but of a kindly sweet disposition, void of all design, and so innocent in his own intentions that he suspected no one; so that you might have cheated him ten times a day, if nine had not been sufficient for your purpose."

His tendency to nomadism is shown by the records of the regiment to which he belonged. Roger Sterne must have been a misfit in the army. He was a kindly little man, sweet and innocent and guileless -- an "Uncle Toby." He was "most patient of fatigue and disappointments," undynamic and yet not cowardly nor remiss in his duty, else he would have lost his place in this fine regiment. A man of different constitution and of some ambition would soon have showed further advances in the army, even without money, although money in many cases increased a man's rank, at least in those days, regardless of his personal qualifications.

Surely a man of normal emotional stability would not have become involved in such an entirely Shandean episode as that which led to Roger's death.

> "---the regiment was sent to defend Gibraltar, at the siege, where my father was run through the body by Captain Phillips, in a duel (the quarrel began about a goose!) With much difficulty he survived, though with an impaired constitution, which was not able to withstand the hardships it was put to; for he was sent to Jamaica, where he soon fell by the country fever, which took away his senses first, and made a child of him, and then, in a month or two, walking about continually without complaining, till the moment he sat down in an arm-chair, and breathed his last, which was at Port Antonio, on the north of the island."

It may not be without significance that Roger Sterne died the way he did. The country fever "took away his senses first and made a child of him." In other words, the man relapsed into feeble-mindedness just before he died. This narrative is unquestionably quite pathetic, even though Sterne is writing a rapid objective summary of his father's life. Sterne had a great deal of sympathy for his father.

The circumstances of Roger's marriage are quite interesting. Three years after his enlistment-- and still two years before he reached the age of discretion-- he was married to a widow! And probably he had little discretion in the matter, for his son records that she was the daughter of a noted Irish sutler, to whom the young officer owed money. It is sufficient to record these facts without

drawing too many implications from them. The Sterne family felt that Roger had married below his station in life. Paul [15] has this to say about this woman, Agnes Sterne, "That one or both or her own parents were of that nation (Irish) is in the highest degree probable from the Hibernian disposition of her celebrated son."

C. Mother.

Imagine this guileless young man marrying the widow of an army officer, for a woman, to survive in an army, must be at least a little bit hard, and have a shrewd eye for her own welfare. It is evident that Agnes Sterne had these qualities. A number of years older than Roger, she probably had little difficulty in capturing him, especially with her father as his creditor. It is possible that she had visions of this young man coming into wealth, upon the death of some of his well-to-do relatives. Her attitude toward her son when she heard the rumor that he "had married a woman of fortune" shows this. Her whole picture presents a woman who is hard, coarse and unlovable, who married in hope of an easy fortune, and probably vented her disappointment when the money did not appear upon her husband, just as she did later under similar circumstances upon her son, Laurence. Little can be discovered about her family connections and heredity except that she was decidedly middle-class.

To get a picture of the character of Laurie's mother it is best to turn to a letter (reproduced in part in Melville's biography [16]) which Sterne wrote to his uncle, the Reverend Jaques, on the occasion of a quarrel in which the latter attempted to use Agnes Sterne as a weapon against her son:

> "From my father's death to the time I settled in the world, which was eleven years, my mother lived in Ireland, and as during all that time I was not in a condition to furnish her with money I seldom heard from her, and when I did the account I generally had was that, by the help of an embroidery school that she kept, and of the punctual payment of her pension which was twenty pounds a year, she lived well, and would have done so to this hour had not the news that I had married a woman of fortune hastened her over to England.
>
> "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, and in that sort of decency which left it not in our power to give her much; that which 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, twenty pounds a year was more than equal to thirty pounds here, besides the discount of having her pension paid in England where it was not due, and the utter impossibility I was under in making up so many deficiencies.
>
> "I concluded with representing to her the inhumanity of a Mother <u>able</u> to maintain herself, thus forcing herself as a burden upon a Son who was scarce able to support himself without breaking in upon the future support of another person whom she might imagine was much dearer to me.
>
> "In short, I summed up all those arguments with making her a present of twenty guineas ..... but ..... for though she heard me with attention, yet as soon as she had got the money into her pocket, she told me with an air of the utmost insolence, That as for going back to live in Ireland she was determined to show me no

> such sport, that she had found I had married a wife who had brought me a fortune, and she was resolved to enjoy her share of it, and live the rest of her days at her ease at York or Chester."

So she, and her daughter Catherine, lived in England, depending upon Laurence for support, returning thanks for his aid only by asking for more, and complaining because it could not be forthcoming. Sterne offered to set up his sister Catherine as a mantua-maker, but she retorted that "She was the daughter of a gentleman, and she would not disgrace herself but live as such." Again, he offered to get her a place in service to some London peeress, which she scornfully refused.

The extent to which Mrs. Sterne went in her parasitism is well shown in the following excerpt from the same letter.

> "..... when my Mother went to your [Jaques Sterne's] house to complain she could not get a farthing from me, she carried with her Ten guineas in her pocket which I had given her two days before. If she could forget such a sum, I had reason to remember it, for when I gave it I did not leave myself one guinea in the house to befriend my wife, though then within one day of her labour and under apparent necessity of a man-midwife to attend her."

Needless to say, the malicious Dr. Sterne urged Laurence's mother on, and made the most of the unfair light the distorted situation was made to throw upon Sterne's character. Later Dr. Sterne managed to have his nephew's mother imprisoned for debt, expecting thus to force Laurence to reimburse his mother's creditors, which he was unable to do. It is upon this incident that Byron found opportunity to write his epigrammatic comment

that "Sterne preferred whining over a dead ass to relieving the necessities of a living mother." Perhaps the dead ass was more worthy of sympathy.

D. The family and its peregrinations.

Attached to the army as it was, the Sterne family was seldom stationary for any length of time. Children soon came to this pair; seven in all, but no two were born at the same place. No two children were born in the same place; for one was born in Flanders, the next in Ireland, the third at Plymouth, the fourth in the Isle of Wight, the fifth in some Irish barracks, the next at some un-named place, and the last one at Londonderry. The family peregrinations were quite unfavorable to the survival of the children. Life necessarily meant travelling from barrack to barrack, or battle to battle, with all the hardships and privations incident to such life. Present practices in caring for and raising children would suggest that it is a wonder that any of the young Sternes survived at all.

Of the seven, four died before leaving childhood, and a fifth passed away soon after her marriage. There is a pathetic touch of truth applying to the whole of his family in Laurence's comment about one of his sisters, "...she was.... not made to last long, as were most of my father's babes."

It was at Clonmel, in the South of Ireland, November 24, 1713, that Laurence Sterne was born, "a few days after my mother arrived from Dunkirk" as he says in his "Memoirs," and continues..... "My birthday was ominous to my poor father who was, the day of our arrival, with many other

brave officers, broke, and sent adrift into the world with a wife and two children...."

E. Sterne's childhood, and its influence.

As shown previously, the baby was carried back and forth all over Ireland and even on to the Continent, following the army until he was ten years old. The early wandering life of our future author could do little toward the normal development of his personality, although it served as a basis for his later interest in the army life, as shown in the portrayal of Tristram's Uncle Toby. Certainly the vivid uniforms and the bustle and glory of military life made a deep impression upon the mind of the infant Sterne.

Discipline may be strict for the soldier, but it is lax for the child of the soldier; and undesirable mental and emotional effects, as well as unfavorable life habits, could easily arise under such circumstances. In addition to this, consider the type of mother that Laurence had. Surely she would have little interest in, and care for, her children, if her later attitude toward Sterne can be taken as a criterion. Further than this, the circumstances of family life made it impossible for her to take care of her children as she should have even if she had wished to. Laurence Sterne, speaking through his book, as much as puts the responsibility for his character and later life upon his parents. Tristram says in the first chapter of the first book:

"I wish either my father or mother, or indeed both of them, as they were in duty both equally bound to it, had minded what they were about when they begot me; had they duly considered how much depended upon what they were then doing;--that not only the production of a Rational Being was concerned in it, but that possibly the happy formation and temperature of his body, perhaps his genius and the very cast of his mind;--and, for aught they knew to the contrary, even the fortunes of his whole house might take their turn from the humors and dispositions which were then uppermost;--Had they duly weighed and considered all this and proceeded accordingly,--I am verily persuaded I should have made quite a different figure in the world, from that in which the reader is likely to see me.--Believe me, good folks, this is not so inconsiderable a thing as many of you may think it;--you have all, I dare say, heard of the animal spirits, as how they are transfused from father to son, etc. etc.--and a great deal to that purpose;--Well, you may take my word, that nine parts in ten of a man's sense or his nonsense, his successes and miscarriages in this world depend upon their motions and activity, and the different tracks and trains you put them into, so that when they are once set a-going, whether right or wrong, 'tis not a halfpenny matter,--away they go cluttering like hey-go mad; and by treading the same steps over and over again, they presently make a road of it, as plain and as smooth as a garden walk, which, when they are once used to, the Devil himself sometimes shall not be able to drive them off it."

Certainly "the very cast of his mind" depended upon the circumstances of his parents and early training, and Sterne might have made "quite a different figure in the world" with a different up-bringing. It may have been partly his father's spirits and partly his up-bringing which accounted for Laurie's fearlessness in the face of the disease which he quite accurately surmised would be his death.

The dangers to the "psychic" health of an individual arising from such circumstances are pointedly summed up by Frederick Lyman Wells, Chief Psychometrist of the Boston Psychopathic Hospital. In his book, "Mental Adjustments" he says,

> "The worst effects of bad heredity often come from the fact that it also means a bad home environment for the child. The hand that rocks the cradle can also plant the seeds of failure and neurosis. They do not necessarily spring from bad heredity, and they may come upon a good heredity, under a bad environment." [17]

Both the elements of questionable heredity, and unquestionably poor environment operated on Laurence Sterne. He really had no home at all, until the time that he was permanently settled in school, near Halifax, when he was ten years old; and even then it was not home to him, as he was in a strange household, away from his family. Paul says:

> "The material circumstances is [sic] that until he was ten years old the author of Tristram Shandy led a soldier's life -- that his earliest world was the barracks yard, his earliest knowledge feats of arms, and that his earliest steps were made to the sound of fife and drum." [18]

When only a little tot, while his family was staying at Wicklow, he fell headlong into a mill-race and came out unharmed at the other end. With some hostility toward the Irish race present in his attitude, Paul comments: "the country people flocked by hundreds to look at him -- a truly Irish act -- as if there could be anything to see in a child whose sole peculiarity was to have had a

narrow escape." [19] Llewelyn Powys puts a grave, perhaps ironical, interpretation upon this mishap: "Indeed," he says, "one is almost inclined to expect that he owed the peculiar originality of his twisted whimsical mind to nothing else but a blow on the head given him by one of the tumbling fans of the water wheel." [20]. It is extremely doubtful from the scientific point of view whether such an event could produce such desirable results. It would be more likely to produce a violent fear of water.

F. Summary.

So, we can see the back-ground of Laurence Sterne's family and childhood. He came from a good ecclesiastical family in which his father seemed to be an exception to the general character of the group. His mother, the family thought, was a blot on the escutcheon. Roger Sterne was inferior compared with his brothers -- quixotic and nomadic. While his mother brought no known heritable defect into the lineage of Laurence Sterne, her character was such as to provide unfavorable circumstances for his development. Family life in its usual sense, was totally absent, and their constant wandering served only to increase the inauspiciousness of the situation as shown by the high mortality rate in the family. The boy, Laurence, led an entirely undisciplined life until he was sent to school, but on the other hand, he gained some of the attitudes and interests that showed themselves later in his treatment of Uncle Toby and Trim in "Tristram."

CHAPTER THREE

STERNE AS A STUDENT

A. Elementary Schooling.

For Laurence Sterne, the beginning of his formal education came in his tenth year, when he was, by the leave of Roger Sterne's commanding officer, placed in a grammar school near Halifax. Here he could attend to his learning under the surveillance of his Uncle Richard of Woodhouse Hall. Concurrent with this, was the end of the period of informal and desultory education, which came to him while he was following the army.

The importance of the first ten years of a child's life can hardly be overstated. Wells, again, has something to say on the subject of childhood:

> "If Holmes remarked that a boy's education should begin with his grandfather, Freud has said in effect, that it ended with his first trousers. He expresses a proper surprise that for the formation of character, we lay much stress on heredity and the education of later years and relatively little on what happens in the infantile years. In that respect, the child is also the father of the man more intimately than the progenitor indeed. There is a growing conviction that the mental events of infantile life are of far more significance for adult personality than we have supposed, and that they deserve far more care than we have been giving them in proportion to the later years." [21]

In Sterne's case tendencies were started at that time which carried through life, and which interfered with his normal adjustment to school work. What difficulties this boy had in fitting himself into the school routine! He was in a strange situation, separated from his family, and with an uncle

whom he had never met before. Whether or not he got along with this uncle is impossible to tell. Sterne never mentions his uncle anywhere in his writings. Possibly there may have been friction between the two. He was ten years old, several years older than any of the boys in his school and with less training than most of them, having previously learned only to write. The anecdote told about Sterne's writing his name on the newly whitewashed ceiling of the school would tend to show that the freedom of the army life had not completely lost its influence, and certainly would indicate that the future novelist, even at that early age, showed signs of a sense of humor. Fitzgerald, in the "Living Age," presents further evidence on the subject; he had one of Laurence Sterne's school books given to him, and he describes the book and Laurie's notations in it.

> "A more characteristic evidence of the erratic character of the boy could not be imagined. It was a soiled, dirty book, every page scrawled over with writing, sketches, repetitions of his own name and those of his fellows. Everywhere is repeated 'L.S. 1728', the letters being sometimes twisted together in the shape of a monogram. On the title page in faint brown characters, was written in a straggling fashion, the owner's name: 'Lau: Sterne September ye 6, 1725'. Other characteristic markings are names of school fellows, a stave of notes, 'I owe Samuel Thorpe, one half penny, but I will pay him today' and 'labor takes panes'.
>
> "But on nearly every page of this dog-eared volume is displayed some rude drawing or sketch, done after the favorite school boy rules of art. One curious, long-nosed, long-chinned face has written over it, 'This is Lorence' and there is certainly a coarse suggestion of the later chin and nose of the humorist.

> There are ladies' faces, owls, and cocks and hens, etc.: a picture of 'A gentleman' so labeled underneath, and soldiers -- one especially in the curious, sugar loaf cap seen in the picture of the "March to Finchley" with the wig, short-stock gun, and its strap. We find also some female faces, early evidence, perhaps, of our hero's later days." [22]

What are the significant things shown by this book? The boy was careless, inattentive; the school work did not attract him enough to keep his mind busy (he never had much respect for school work anyway). Being older than the rest of the students, he probably had plenty of time to daydream and yet to keep in with the lockstep of school procedure. He had discovered that "labor takes panes" but probably did not labor very hard. His later interest in drawing is shown in his childish self-interest in his sketch of "Lorence." His army life showed itself in the sketch of the soldier in the sugar loaf cap. The bar of music forecasts, perhaps, his later interest in playing the violin. Truly the child is the father to the man.

B. Reactions to schooling as expressed in "Tristram Shandy."

That Laurence Sterne did not approve of the way education was carried on in the England of his day, is evident from an expression of Walter Shandy's, which is quoted by Cross:

> "It was the opinion of Mr. Shandy that the English schoolboy began his studies too late, and was kept at them too long. Listen to the squire as he enumerates to a company

gathered at Shandy Hall the stages that Sterne himself passed through from the cradle to the Bachelor's degree:

'Five years with a bib under his chin;
'Four years in travelling from Christ-cross-row to Malachi;
'A year and a half in learning to write his own name;
'Seven long years and more TYPING it, at Greek and Latin;
'Four years at his probations and his negations-- the fine statue still lying in the middle of the marble block,--and nothing done but his tools sharpened to hew it out:-- 'Tis a piteous delay!...." [23]

Tristram's father had his own ideas as to what education should consist of, which, if carried out today, would result in better control over language than students generally have.

"I am convinced, Yorick, continued my father, half reading and half discoursing, that there is a North-west passage to the intellectual world; and that the soul of man has shorter ways of going to work, in furnishing itself with knowledge and instruction, than we generally take with it,--But, alack! all fields have not a river or a spring running beside them;--every child, Yorick, has not a parent to point it out.

"--The whole entirely depends, added my father, in a low voice, upon the auxiliary verbs, Mr. Yorick.

"Had Yorick trod upon Virgil's snake, he could not have looked more surprised.--I am surprised too, cried my father, observing it,-- and I reckon it as one of the greatest calamities which ever befell the republic of letters,That those who have been entrusted with the education of our children, and whose business it was to open their minds, and stock them early with ideas, in order to set the imagination loose upon them, have made so little use of the auxiliary verbs in doing it, as they have done--So that, except Raymond Lullius, and the elder Pelegrini, the last of which arrived to such perfection in

the use of 'em, with his topics, that, in a few lessons, he could teach a young gentleman to discourse with plausibility upon any subject, pro and con, and to say and write all that could be spoken or written concerning it, without blotting a word, to the admiration of all who beheld him--I should be glad, said Yorick, interrupting my father to be made to comprehend this matter. You shall, said my father.

"The highest stretch of improvement a single word is capable of, is a high metaphor,-- for which, in my opinion, the idea is generally the worse, and not the better;--but be that as it may,--when the mind has done that with it--there is an end,--the mind and the idea are at rest,--until a second idea enters;--and so on.

"Now the use of the Auxiliaries is, at once to set the soul a-going by herself upon the materials as they are brought her; and by the versability of this great engine, round which they are twisted, to open new tracts of enquiry, and make every idea engender millions. ....."

"The verbs auxiliary we are concerned in here, continued my father, are, am; was; have; had; do; did; make; made; suffer; shall; should; will; would; can; could; owe; ought; used, or is wont. --And these varied with tenses, present, past, future, and conjugated with the verb see,--or with these questions added to them; -- Is it? Was it? Will it be? Would it be? May it be? Might it be? And these again put negatively, Is it not? Was it not? Ought it not? Or affirmatively, -- It is; It was; It ought to be. Or chronologically, -- Has it been always? Lately? How long ago?--Or hypothetically, -- If it was? If it was not? What would follow?--If the French should beat the English? If the Sun go out of the Zodiac?" [24]

It is possible also that Walter Shandy's sketch of what a tutor for the young Tristram should be, is a picture of what Laurence's school teacher was, although it is doubtful if much less than a regiment of men could fulfill all the conditions completely.

> "Now as I consider the person who is to be about my son, as the mirror in which he is to view himself from morning to night, and by which he is to adjust his looks, his carriage, and perhaps the inmost sentiments of his heart;--I would have one, Yorick, if possible, polished at all points, fit for my child to look into.--This is very good sense, quoth my uncle Toby to himself.
>
> --There is, continued my father, a certain mien and motion of the body and all its parts, both in acting and speaking, which argues a man well within; and I am not at all surprised that Gregory of Nazianzum, upon observing the hasty and untoward gestures of Julian, should foretell he would one day become an apostate; --or that St. Ambrose should turn his Amanuensis out of doors, because of an indecent motion of his head, which went backwards and forwards like a flail;-- or that Democritus should conceive Protagoras to be a scholar, from seeing him bind up a faggot, and thrusting, as he did it, the small twigs inwards.--There are a thousand unnoticed openings, continued my father, which let a penetrating eye at once into a man's soul and I maintain it, added he, that a man of sense does not lay down his hat in coming into a room,-- or take it up in going out of it, but something escapes, which discovers him.
>
> It is for these reasons, continued my father, that the governor I make choice of shall neither lisp, or squint, or wink, or talk loud, or look fierce, or foolish;--or bite his lips, or grind his teeth, or speak through his nose, or pick it, or blow it with his fingers.--

> He shall neither walk fast,--or slow, or fold his arms, -- for that is laziness;-- or hang them down,-- for that is folly; or hide them in his pocket, for that is nonsense.--
>
> He shall neither strike, or pinch, or tickle, or bite, or cut his nails, or hawk, or spit, or snift, or drum with his feet or fingers in company; .....
>
> I will have him, continued my father, cheerful, facéte, jovial; at the same time, prudent, attentive to business, vigilant, acute, argute, inventive, quick in resolving doubts and speculative questions;-- he shall be wise, and judicious, and learned:--And why not humble, and moderate, and gentle-tempered, and good, said Yorick:--And why not, cried my uncle Toby, free and generous, and bountiful, and brave?" [25]

What was the "residue of learning" resulting from the work in school? It is evident from Tristram Shandy that he received a sufficient grounding in classic literature so that he never forgot it completely. Let Cross testify.

> "Notwithstanding the time spent in scribbling over his copybooks, Sterne then laid the foundation of a ready knowledge of the classical literatures. He learned to read and write Latin with great facility. Nearly all the authors in the usual curriculum of the period, he at some time quoted or referred to, evidently from memory. Horace came into his books perhaps more often than the rest. But Cicero, Pliny, Hesiod, and Isocrates are there also. Three other ancients touched his emotions deeply. It grieved him to think that "poor Ovid" died in exile. In Shandy, he related, as he remembered it from Vergil, the scene in the Elysian Fields where Aeneas meets" the pensive shade of his

> forsaken Dido," and added that she still awakened in him "those affections which were wont to make me mourn for her when I was at school." Uncle Toby's love for the Iliad, as well as for chapbooks in which there were soldiers and adventure and much fighting, is undoubtedly only a reminiscence of Sterne's own passion for them. If we may have it so, the boy purchased with his own pocket money "Guy of Warwick," "Valentine and Orson," "The Seven Champions of Christendom," and handed them round among his school companions. And of the "Iliad," he says: "Was I not as much concerned for the destruction of the Greeks and Trojans as any boy of the whole school? Had I not three strokes of a ferula given me, two on my right hand, and one on my left, for calling Helena a b.... for it? Did any one of you shed more tears for Hector? And when king Priam came to the camp to beg his body, and returned weeping back to Troy without it,-- you know, brother, I could not eat my dinner." [26]

C. Sterne at college.

After Sterne had finished his schooling he did little but "hang around" his cousin's estate, his uncle having died. During this year, Roger Sterne died and the indication was that Laurie would have to go to work with his hands, a prospect which he did not enjoy. His cousin Richard "adopted" him, thus saving the day and, as Sterne says himself in his "Memoirs"....."In the year '32 my cousin sent me to the university where I stayed some time." It happens, according to records at Jesus College, Cambridge, where Sterne was enrolled, that he had made a mistake of one year in the date; it was in 1733 that Sterne was entered as a sizar. Records differ as to the duties of sizars at

the time Sterne went to Cambridge. Cross maintains the older view that sizars were submitted to the task of waiting on tables and doing similar odd jobs around the university. Melville believes that sizarship was merely nominal. At any rate, it was no sop to Sterne's pride that he should enter college on this basis, even though his cousin Richard had advanced him the equivalent of $150 a year toward his expenses. Sterne was grateful to Richard, which sentiment he expresses in these terms: "But for his aid I should have been driven out naked into the world, young as I was, and to have shifted for myself as well as I could," and in reference to his protection and aid, "I chiefly owe what I now am." A reference to his entrance to college and perhaps to Richard Sterne is made in Tristram Shandy, where Tristram recounts that his father entered him at college.

Sterne was twenty years old at the time, three years older than the other students, and consequently he chafed somewhat at the discipline and fretted at the formal subjects which were assigned to him to study. It was under these conditions that he met John Hall, who later hyphenated "Stevenson" to his name upon marriage. He was about six years younger than Sterne and a lusty liver. Together they studied, read chapbooks, waded through French romances and inquired into the deep, dark jokes of the broader French writers. Much of their time they spent under the "tree of

knowledge," an old walnut standing in the yard of the college, but they probably absorbed little logic or metaphysics there. His close association with John Hall led Sterne to go about with a group whose tastes were more expensive than he could afford. Hence Sterne borrowed, and accumulated debts which he found hard to repay later.

Sterne's attitude toward his college studies is reflected in "Tristram" in his satirical attacks upon the intricacies of logic and the implications of theology. He had little use for the medieval schoolmen whom he was forced to study. He, however, while there, came upon Locke's "Essay on Human Understanding" which he quotes a number of times later in his life.

D. His post-collegiate education.

The degree of B.A. was granted to him in 1736 and the degree of M.A. in 1740. Here his formal education ended, but he was to continue with a very informal type of learning, which would prepare him for the writing of "Tristram Shandy." This education consisted, for the most part, of reading, association with Hall-Stevenson and his troop of Demoniacs, painting, hunting, fiddling, farming, writing paragraphs for the papers and, in general, enjoying himself completely.

It is evident that Laurence Sterne had an unusal taste in reading from the works he quotes in "Tristram Shandy"

which, through the industry of Dr. John Ferriar, have to a great extent been documented. Sterne continued his reading of French works, which he had started with Hall-Stevenson under the old tree of knowledge at Cambridge. In addition, he turned also to English writers, and quite probably also to medieval works in church Latin. Nevertheless, Cross does not consider him learned. A parallel may be drawn between Sterne and Horace Walpole, who also turned back to earlier writers, although Horace Walpole's interest was more in the solemn and uncanny aspects of earlier works. Walpole was called a virtuoso; Sterne a mere dabbler. His reading included Rabelais, Beroald de Verville, D'aubigne, Bouchet, Bruscambille, the famous Scarron, Swift, Gabriel John, Burton and the works of Dr. Arbuthnot, and in addition, numerous works on fortifications, medicine and philosophy, all of which show up in "Tristram Shandy." The subject matter of these various books ran all the way from noses to pre-natal christening. It is quite probable that many of these works came from the library of Hall-Stevenson, as the poor parson, Yorick, hardly would be able to purchase all these books on the income from one or two parishes.

Painting also absorbed Laurence Sterne, his schoolboy interest in using the pen and brush having developed. A number of Sterne's water colors and sketches have

survived even to the present time, and in various places throughout England are paintings of Sterne done by artists, famous, infamous, and obscure. Cross [27] includes Thomas Bridges, Christopher Steel, and George Romney among his friends, all of these being skillful and well known painters, at least in his day, and one listed as a master today.

Hunting also took up his time and interest, it being reported in one place that the young parson, on a Sunday morning when his parishioners were waiting for him at the church, took his gun and shot some partridges which had attracted his attention just as he started from the house.

Sterne's adventures in farming were quite unsuccessful as he indicates in a letter [28] to a friend: "I was once such a puppy myself as to pare, and burn, and have my pains and two hundred pounds out of pocket. Curse on farming [he said] I will try if the pen will not succeed better than the spade. The following up of that affair (I mean farming) made me lose my temper, and a carload of turnips was (I thought) very dear at two hundred pounds. In all your operations may your own good sense guide you -- bought experience is the devil." Little more need be said about this!

Sterne also acquired educative experience from the political journalism over which he fought with his uncle. At Crazy Castle, Sterne associated with Hall-Stevenson's friends and there undoubtedly picked up many of the jokes and droll stories he used in "Tristram."

E. Summary.

As we have seen, Laurie's education up to his tenth year was decidedly desultory, and the effects of his free life carried over to the period when he was under a school master at Halifax in the form of day-dreaming, and the escapade of the signature on the ceiling: the daydreaming is attested to by Fitzgerald's statement, the ceiling incident by tradition. Sterne continually rebelled against schooling as it was carried on in his day, but nevertheless gained some classic background and interest, not only in the common schools, but in the university. A strong influence in his later education came through the field of reading, opened by his acquaintance with Hall-Stevenson. Following graduation from college, his life as a parson, with the free time that it allowed him, contributed not a little toward the educative preparation for "Tristram Shandy."

CHAPTER FOUR

STERNE AS A MAN

A. Conflicting explanations of his character.

Who was this man Sterne? What were his qualities? What was his personality like? What were the causes of his unusual, even erratic, behavior? These are the questions which this chapter will attempt to answer. Biographers of the man usually say, "I give it up. The man was a sphinx, and that is all one can say about him."

> "Two methods have been tried to 'explain' him; to find the resolutions of the discords of this Soul.
> "The one method has been to divide Sterne into parts; the man and the author.-- As a man, he was a humbug, a charlatan, a hypocrite, a dirty scoundrel. -- As an author, he had to be split up again, part good, part bad. -- The good part of his books was 'a thing of beauty and a joy forever;' the bad part was to be excised.
> "This is the attitude of Thackeray, Bagehot, and others.
> "But in this way the riddle is not solved.
> "The other method is, to make an attempt to tone down Sterne's blemishes; to ignore them as much as possible; to explain away his lapses; to take the venom out of his sting; to say that we must not be so precise; that we should not wish to understand everything, and ought not to be so concerned about his hidden meanings;-- and that if we insist upon them, the dirt is in ourselves."
> "That this method must needs lead to failure is clear on the face of it. Yet, it has been followed even by such scholars and literati as Melville and Sichel, his two latest biographers. [29]

In his "Laurence Sterne and His Novels Studied in the Light of Modern Psychology" Arie de Froe makes a valiant

attempt to explain Sterne on the basis of the instinctive psychology proposed by William McDougall in his "Outline of Psychology," and his "Introduction to Social Psychology," the symbolism of speech believed in by Freud and his school, and Elinor Glyn's "Philosophy of Love." He has shown considerable cleverness in articulating this material, but his conclusions are to be questioned on the basis of validity. The popular fictions of Elinor Glyn have no place in the serious consideration of sex, nor of anything else pertinent to the interpretation of character. The more esoteric phases of Freud are hardly acceptable to most psychologists and psychiatrists, although some of his postulations are useful to work with. McDougall tends to reduce all activity, both mental and physical, to an instinctive basis. It is not within the province of this composition to work out the controversy as to the relative influence of heredity and environment, instinct and learning, except to say that heredity and instinct have been greatly overworked as explanations, and that simpler, more direct principles have been worked out, which conform better to the principles of parsimony, coherence with known facts, and implication. These principles will be invoked in my treatment.

A few examples of de Froe's treatment of Sterne will be interesting. On page 35, after working out

the two stages of sexual instinct given by McDougall, courtship and consummation, he states:

> "It is remarkable that in those instincts that work in two or more phases, one of them may be more strongly emphasized than the other. In Sterne it was the preparatory stage that had an all-absorbing interest for him. And so it came about that he did not settle down quietly to a happy home life, but that soon after he was married, he experienced, what Shelley has so beautifully called "love's sad satiety." By the unrelenting force of this preparatory stage, he was impelled to go out again to seek fresh adventures, or, as we are accustomed to call it in our every-day language: to flirt."

Froe also considers the food-seeking instinct to be strong in Sterne, picking out fragments from his letters to demonstrate his point. To quote:

> ..."He admonished his wife, when she was coming to France, not to forget her cookery-book.
>
> "'Memorandum: Bring watch-chains, tea-kettle, knives, cookery-book, etc. You will smile at the last article -- so adieu.' [31]
>
> "The times he mentions his invitations to dinners and suppers are numerous; we need only read the letters he wrote from London or Paris to see how he delighted in them. And he seems to have paid due honor to those dinners, for Garrick, his friend, said he thought that Sterne had 'degenerated in London like an ill-transplanted shrub; the incense of the great spoiled his head, as their <u>ragouts</u> had done his stomach.'" [32]

And finally, in line with McDougall, he calls Sterne's drinking of wine a perversion! "His partiality for it may be estimated from the number of times he makes mention of it in his letters; for which see Melville I 100; 321; -- II 32; 40; 49; 102; 190; 267; 268." [33]

Furthermore, de Froe attempts to explain the temperament of Sterne upon the basis of the work of McDougall, and two German professors who have written on the same subject. Sterne was "fickle," de Froe says, and therefore had no control of his constantly alternating desires and longings. For the same reason, it is claimed, he was inconstant in love, amorous of "any woman that 'strikes his fancy.'"

Likewise, he was easily turned from anything at hand, held superficial views and convictions; and with the element of "Sensitiveness" added, was easily turned to sorrow or pleasure, either by his own or others' misfortunes. "His sensitive nature makes him a lover of men and of animals, especially when they are weak, miserable, appealing for sympathy and pity." [34] A "fickle" individual tends toward gambling; a "fickle" memory explains the inconsistencies in the man; a "fickle" attitude in his writing explains the places he "steps upon the stage" himself to talk, instead of letting the narrative run on without digressions. All in all, this "fickleness" concept strongly suggests a modern adaptation of the medieval four humors theory.

I believe that humors and instincts are not the correct explanation of Laurence Sterne's personality. The main solution lies in two qualities which none of his biographers have ignored, but yet, which they have

passed over incidentally, without realizing their significance, because their effects were not easily recognizable on the surface, without being pointed out. One was physiological, being fostered by his constitutional make-up; the other was psychological, being produced by his upbringing and the situations in which he found himself. The first was his tuberculosis, and the second his phantasy-life, or daydreaming.

Before going further in the considerations involved by these two factors it is necessary to limit the field which is to be covered. Nothing but the most incidental consideration will be given here to Sterne - the novelist, Sterne - the husband, or Sterne - the parson. All these unquestionably have bearing upon the situation, but they are arbitrarily to be postponed, in order to clarify and simplify the treatment.

B. Influence of tuberculosis upon character and personality.

Attention has previously been given to the genetic aspects of the future novelist's day-dreaming, but none to the tuberculous taint in his blood. The man had all the characteristic stigmata of tuberculous susceptibility: a narrow chest, sloping shoulders, and a small thorax, as is easily seen in his portraits. The poor living conditions of his childhood have been noted, especially the fact of his extremely poor home life up to his tenth year.

The first specific sign of what was happening in his lungs came in his period of study at college. "One night he was startled out of sleep by a hemorrhage of the lungs, 'bleeding' he says, 'the bed full!'" [35] References thereafter are plentiful. In a letter to Hall Stevenson, et al, written from France in August 1762, he says:

> "--About a week or ten days before my wife arrived at Paris, I had the same accident I had at Cambridge, of breaking a vessel in my lungs. It happened in the night, and I bled the bed full, and finding in the morning I was likely to bleed to death, I sent immediately for a surgeon to bleed me at both arms--this saved me, and with lying speechless three days, I recovered upon my back in bed; the breach healed, and, in a week after, I got out." [36]

And again, in December 1766 he writes:

> "---and now, my dear friend, am I going to York, not for the sake of society-- nor to walk by the side of the muddy Ouse, but to recruit myself of the most violent spitting of blood that ever mortal man experienced; because I had rather die there, (in case 'tis ordained so), than in a post-chaise on the road.--" [37]

Turning now to "Tristram Shandy" we have more evidence of the same sort, Sterne trying to outdistance Death:

> "I had now the whole south of France, from the banks of the Rhone to those of the Garonne to traverse on my mule at my own leisure -- at my own leisure-- for I had left death, the Lord knows-- and he only-- how far behind me-- "I have followed many a man thro' France," quoth he,--"but never at this mettlesome rate." Still he followed--still I fled him--but I fled him cheerfully--still he pursued--but like one who pursued his prey without hope--as he lagged, every step he lost softened his looks--why should I fly him at this rate?" [38]

Again:

> "It is one comfort at least to me, that I lost some four-score ounces of blood this week, in a most uncritical fever which attacked me at the beginning of this chapter, so that I have still some hopes remaining.... [39]

> "...and is it but two months ago, that in a fit of laughter. . . . thou brakest a vessel in thy lungs, whereby, in two hours, thou lost as many quarts of blood; and hadst thou lost as much more, did not the faculty tell thee-- it would have amounted to a gallon? [40]

> "I had got my two dishes of milk coffee (which by the bye, is excellently good for a consumption, but you must boil the milk and coffee together--otherwise, 'tis only coffee and milk)."[41]

Let us turn to some of the phases of personality shown by Sterne at various times. He shows a two-fold --almost dual-- personality, up and down, elated and depressed. His oscillations sometimes are both sudden and rapid, and often shown an "in," then an "out" quality, an introverted, than an extroverted aspect. He shows himself in an elated state:

> "Now I (being very thin) think differently: and that so much of motion is so much of life, and so much of joy--and that to stand still, or get on but slowly, is death and the devil.[42]

> "A sudden impulse comes across me--drop the curtain, Shandy--I drop it--Strike a line here across the paper, Tristram--I strike it--and hey for a new chapter. . . . .--let that be as it will, Sir, I can no more help it than my destiny." [43]

Oscillation shows itself in these two passages, but more in the following:

"O by heavens! cried I--if fickleness is taxable in France--we have nothing to do but to make the best peace with you we can--" [44]

Again, he is seen in a high state of excitement:

"I'm pursued myself like a hundred devils, and shall be overtaken before I can well change horses--for heaven's sake make haste. [45]

"Pray reach me my fool's cap-- I fear you sit upon it madam-- 'tis under the cushion--I'll put it on--

"Bless me! you have had it upon your head this half hour.

"--There then let it stay, with a
Far - ra diddle di
and a fa-ri diddle d
and a high-dum---dyedum
fiddle - - - - dumb - c." [46]

"My mother, you must know-- but I have fifty things more necessary to let you know first-- I have a hundred difficulties which I have promised to clear up and a thousand distresses and domestic misadventures crowding in upon me thick and threefold, one upon the neck of another." [47]

In another place, where he characterizes himself as Yorick, he shows again the character of his temperament:

"With all this sail, poor Yorick carried not one ounce of ballast; he was utterly unpracticed in the world; and at the age of twenty-six, knew just about as well how to steer his course in it as a romping unsuspicious girl of thirteen: So that upon his first setting out, the brisk gale of his spirits, as you will imagine, ran him foul ten times in a day of somebody's tackling; and as the grave and more slow-paced were oftenest in his way,--you may imagine likewise, 'twas with such he generally had the ill luck to get the most entangled. [48]

"But, in plain truth, he was a man unhackneyed and unpracticed in the world, and was altogether as indiscreet and foolish on every other subject of discourse, where policy is wont to impress restraint." [49]

He recognizes the changeable quality of his moods in the following, which incidentally, gives us an interesting picture of the man in his study:

> "I enter upon this part of my story in the most pensive and melancholy frame of mind that ever sympathetic breast was touched with.--My nerves relax as I tell it.--Every line I write, I feel an abatement of the quickness of my pulse, and of that careless alacrity with it, which every day of my life prompts me to say and write a thousand things I should not--And this moment that I last dipped my pen into my ink, I could not help taking notice what a cautious air of sad composure and solemnity there appeared in my manner of doing it.--Lord! how different from the rash jerks and hair-brained squirts thou art wont, Tristram, to transact it with in other humors--dropping thy pen--spurting thy ink about thy table and thy books--as if thy pen and thy ink, thy books and furniture cost thee nothing." [50]

He turns to introspective depression, regretting that with him impulse often over-rules reason:

> "---Inconsistent soul that man is!---languishing under wounds, which he has the power to heal!---his whole life a contradiction to his knowledge!---his reason, that precious gift of God to him--(instead of pouring in oil) serving but to sharpen his sensibilities---to multiply his pain, and render him more melancholy and uneasy under them! ---Poor unhappy creature, that he should do so!---Are not the necessary causes of misery in this life enow, but he must add voluntary ones to his stock of sorrow;--struggle against evils which cannot be avoided, and submit to others, which a tenth part of the trouble they create him would remove from his heart forever? [51]
>
> "What a jovial and merry world would this be, may it please your worships, but for that inextricable labyrinth of debts, cares, woes, want, grief, discontent, melancholy, large jointures, impositions, and lies! [52]
>
> "When one runs over the catalogue of all the cross reckoning and sorrowful items with which the heart of man is overcharged, 'tis wonderful by what hidden resources the mind is enabled to stand out, and bear itself up, as it does, against the impositions laid upon our nature." [53]

And again, on a single page of chapter five of the first volume, he shows his attitude in these words: "This scurvy, disastrous world," then, "this vile, dirty planet of ours," and after that, "I affirm it over again to be one of the vilest worlds that was ever made."

And finally, an example of his ambition, high spirits, and the dynamic hypomanic urge shown so often by consumptives, is found in a spirited passage taken from the first chapter of the seventh book of "Tristram Shandy."

> "No--I think, I said, I would write two volumes every year, providing the vile cough which then tormented me, and which to this hour I dread worse than the devil, would but give me leave--and in another place--(but where, I can't recollect now) . . . . I swore it should be kept a going at that rate these forty years, if it pleased but the fountain of life to bless me so long with health and good spirits.
>
> "Now as for my spirits, little have I to lay to their charge--nay so very little (unless the mounting me upon a long stick and playing the fool with me nineteen hours out of the twenty-four, be accusations) that on the contrary, I have much--much to thank 'em for: cheerily have ye made me tread the path of life with all the burthens of it (except its cares) upon my back; in no one moment of my existence, that I remember, have ye once deserted me, or tinged the objects which came in my way, either with sable, or with a sickly green; in dangers ye gilded my horizon with hope, and when Death himself knocked at my door--ye bad him come again; and in so gay a tone of careless indifference, did ye do it, that he doubted his commission--

"---There must certainly be some mistake in this matter," quoth he . . . .

"Did ever so grave a personage get into so vile a scrape?" quoth Death. "Thou has had a narrow escape, Tristram," said Eugenius, taking hold of my hand as I finished my story--

"But there is no living, Eugenius, replied I, at this rate, for as this[. . . . .] has found out my lodgings--

"---You call him rightly, said Eugenius--for by sin, we are told, he entered the world-- I care not which way he entered, quoth I, provided he be not in such a hurry to take me out with him--for I have forty volumes to write, and forty thousand things to say and do which no body in the world will say and do for me, except thyself; and as thou seest he has got me by the throat (for Eugenius could scarce hear me speak across the table), and that I am no match for him in the open field, had I not better, whilst these few scattered spirits remain, and these two spider legs of mine (holding one of them up to him) are able to support me-- had I not better, Eugenius, fly for my life? It is my advice, my dear Tristram, said Eugenius-- Then, by heaven! I will lead him a dance he little thinks of-- for I will gallop, quoth I, without looking once behind me, to the banks of the Garonne; and if I hear him clattering at my heels-- I'll scamper to mount Vesuvius--from thence to Joppa, and from Joppa to the world's end; where, if he follows me, I pray to God he may break his neck--

--He runs more risk there, said Eugenius, than thou.

"Eugenius' wit and affection brought blood into the cheek from whence it had some months banished-- 'twas a vile moment to bid adieu in; he led me to my chaise--Allons! said I; the post boy gave a crack with his whip--off I went like a cannon, and in half a dozen bounds got into Dover." [54]

This all fits in with a report made by Anita Mühl, the conclusion of which is quoted here with only irrelevant sections omitted.

"Conclusions:

That in tuberculous women there are certain fundamental personality trends which are common to all, no matter what the apparent type of reaction may be.

That they have a two-fold mixed personality which shows strongly marked introverted qualities suggestive of a precox-like [sic] pattern on one hand and extroverted tendencies with a manic-depressive-like swing of greater or less intensity on the other.

That the mixed personality is responsible for an immense mis-use of energy- imprisoning and burying on one side, recklessly expanding on the other, thus having a very small or no surplus for emergencies, either physical or mental.

That the patient may present the most varied picture to the casual observer - gay, sad, suspicious, frank, hypomanic, depressed or shut-in, according to which group of trends is in the ascendancy, extrovert or introvert.

That the common features are inertia, fatigability, oscillating moods, perseveration, irritability, converted sex trends in the form of suicidal trends, depression and abnormal respiratory behavior.

That other very frequent characteristics are ambition, evidence of dissociative trends, memory impairment and day-dreaming.

That the regressive trends are very deeply rooted and are influenced and modified by the patient's suggestibility, feeling of inferiority, and sensitiveness." [55]

It can be seen that many of these characteristics apply to Laurence Sterne, but it must be held in mind that the statement here set forth represents a "perfect clinical picture" of tuberculous cases. In very few instances would all the qualities listed show forth, but many of them are recognizable in Laurence Sterne.

The criticism may arise that this study was made on women, and is therefore inapplicable to men. What differences would be found between men and women? Chiefly those connected with the physiological and psychological aspects of sex. A slightly stronger tendency toward hysteria sometimes might be found in women. Tuberculosis is not a sex-linked disease, and it will be shown later that its effect upon literary composition is identical in both sexes.

Some evidences of the effect of tuberculosis are given by Sands:

> "Tuberculosis of the lungs, consumption, is associated with a peculiar change in the personality of the patient suffering from the disease. The tuberculous patient may have a feeling of well being, or euphoria, which is entirely unjustified by circumstances. The patient is apt to be rather selfish and self-centered. He often makes plans for the future which are obviously unachievable. We have met tuberculosis patients who on the very day of their death, were planning trips to the woods and seashore, were confiding their plans for securing funds of money, etc. They would never admit the seriousness of their ailment. This peculiar euphoria of the tuberculosis patient is a phenomenon which has baffled many a student of medicine." [56]

Wells believes that the euphoria connected with the disease results from specific toxins:

> "If the displaced happiness of tuberculous patients were mainly a compensatory reaction to the gravity of the disease, we should expect chronic diseases in general to show it as fully. More probably the tuberculous poisons themselves have a specific role in this euphoria, like the euphoria of alcoholic intoxication, only less pronounced and more lasting." [57]

In "Genius: Some Revaluations" Jacobson includes a brief treatment of tuberculosis in Laurence Sterne.

> "Of the temperament of Laurence Sterne no better summary can be given than is provided by himself when, after discussing some misfortune, he says, 'But I'll lay a guinea that in half-an-hour I shall be as merry as a monkey, and forget it all.' Sterne came of a short-lived family. His father died in 1731 of 'an impaired constitution.' Most of his brothers and sisters died in early childhood. His own health broke about the time of his first success, when he produced the first two volumes of Tristram Shandy. In 1765 he undertook the "Journey" through France and Italy in a vain attempt to prolong his life. Less than a month after the publishing of the "Sentimental Journey" in February 1768, Sterne died of consumption." [58]

Tuberculosis has had a similar effect upon other authors. The <u>spes phthisica</u> has operated powerfully in the production of work of highest literary merit. Although Jacobson's statement as to his "recipe for producing the highest type of creative mind" is rather strong, it seems to be substantiated elsewhere, as we will show after this quotation:

"Its [tuberculosis's] just vengeance, though terrible enough, is tempered with mercy. A mercy which, by way of compensation for the physical ravages with which we are all so gruesomely familiar, reveals itself in that saving quality, the spes phthisica, a trait which, with its associated general psychic excitation, has not only enabled the individual victims of tuberculosis to bear their burdens of disease most cheerfully, but has been a means of quickening genius, a fact wherefrom have flowed benefits that concern the whole world of intellect. By the spes phthisica is meant the feeling of hopefulness with regard to recovery, accompanied by a singular optimism and buoyancy frequently felt by patients with tuberculosis.

"Now it is entirely conceivable that the by-products are capable of profoundly affecting the mechanism of a creative mind in such a way as to influence markedly their creations. Indeed they are bound to do so, for the spes phthisica, admittedly a result of such by-products, must necessarily affect the whole psychologic switch-boards.

"Were the present writer to give an almost sure recipe for producing the highest type of creative mind, he would postulate an initial spark of genius, plus tuberculosis.

"The layman, unfamiliar with the curious mental trait of consumptives already alluded to, will be apt to reason that such men accomplished great things despite their infirmity....; the physician will find the explanation to be most readily in that characteristic clinical trait of the tuberculous, the spes phthisica. Their lives are shortened physically, but quickened psychically in a ratio inversely as the shortening.

"....Relatively abnormal hopefulness, optimism and buoyancy represent the prevailing psychological phase of tuberculosis. ..... Out of this closely related trinity too, grows the factitious physical energy of the victims. Upon his death bed the consumptive makes plans for twenty years ahead. ... Every practitioner is familiar with the extraordinary trait which enables the advanced consumptive to declare that he feels "bully" when his temperature is 104 degrees which enables him to walk about, to work, and fully to exercise the sexual function.

> "The hectic afflatus of the actively tuberculous creative genius is almost incessant, and he is nearly always astoundingly prolific. The inspiration of the non-phthisical genius is intermittent, his work is more deliberate, he does not burn the candle at both ends. He is normal and works sanely. The wheels are not continually in motion." [59]

C. Tuberculosis and literary men.

Jeannette Marks in "Genius and Disaster" gives us evidence of the operation of spes phthisica upon other literary men of note, so the case of Laurence Sterne can be seen as one of a group of similar cases, not as an isolated instance.

> "The significance of the spes phthisica - the psychical quickening - found in poets and writers of known tuberculous taint requires more than a second thought to comprehend. It would not do, for example, to conclude that the invariable effect of a disease of the body shows itself in mental ways that are equally diseased. With the tuberculous at least such is not the case. In Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' it is doubtful whether the flight of his song and the tumult of wind and leaves would have been so swift without the quickening which Shelley had from tuberculosis. In the case of Emily Brontë, life may have been shortened physically by consumption, but study convinces the reader that psychically in "Wuthering Heights" and in her poems, power and passion were made the greater by the spes phthisica.
>
> Nature is a wise economist and has in view her own disease-compensations. Keats's mother died of tuberculosis, as did also his brother Tom who was nursed by the poet. In two years Keats produced many poems, enough to fill a bulky volume, which will make his name known and loved as long as English poetry is read. Spes Phthisica? Elizabeth Barrett Browning had trouble with the lungs and at the age of thirty-one a hemmorrhage. For a long period Robert Louis Stevenson fought tuberculosis. In his search for health he made the world his debtor by many volumes of the most delightful travels ever written. But biographical study of Stevenson's life

> shows when he was in improved condition his literary output was least. Only one conclusion is possible: that he missed the psychical excitation of disease. In American literary annals Poe, Thoreau, Emerson, and Lanier, are four famous illustrations of the tuberculosis taint. Here are but a few of those many special studies which might be made. The closer the study of the illustration the firmer grows the conviction that however much the physical life may be shortened by tuberculosis, there is acceleration, speeding-up of the mental processes." [60]

Thus we see that tuberculosis accounts for Sterne's "drive," part of his "tone" of writing, some of the hectic qualities in his prose, and the quick and extreme change of his emotion. We may accept the dogma that "Style is the man" insofar as a person's attitude expresses itself in what he writes. Alcohol and narcotics showed themselves in Poe, psychosis expressed itself in Dostoievsky, and tuberculosis demonstrates its presence in Sterne and many others.

Two minor considerations enter here, in connection with his tuberculosis. They will be merely suggested, inasmuch as there is little evidence as to their actual influence.

In a passage in "Tristram" Sterne says: "To this hour art thou not tormented with the vile asthma that thou gottest in skating against the wind in Flanders?" [61] Assuming this to be autobiographical, this would add to his gloominess on occasions, for, as Sands says:

> "Asthma, a disease of the lungs which is characterized by difficulty in breathing, due to changes in lung tissue itself, is often accompanied by nervous symptoms such as anxiety, fear, and a sense of impending death. The asthmatic patients suffer from periodic attacks of difficulty in breathing, and are therefore constantly in dread of impending death." [62]

It might be possible to consider Laurence Sterne a psychopath, but I have steered away from that conclusion because of lack of evidence. To discover accurately whether a mild case of psychosis exists, is the work of a psychiatrist who has the individual under close personal observation, although an acute case might produce some strong evidence, strong enough for "long distance" diagnosis. Sterne seems never to have reached the manic stage of excitement, although as we have seen he showed considerable elation at times; neither did he ever reach a state of extreme depression.*

The manic depressive (or cycloid) characteristics he showed may easily be construed to have had an influence in his writing, as is seen in the following statement.

> "Another abnormal type of personality is that which finds its extreme expressions in the manic-depressive patient of our psychiatric clinics. This is the personality which is subject to marked fluctuations of mood. ..... in the elated phase,

---

* Psychology postulates two general types of personality: schizoid (or schizothymic) and cycloid (or cyclothymic), according to whether the personality possesses those characteristics which, in extreme exaggeration, are found in schizophrenia (dementia praecox) or manic-depressive psychosis. These terms are being used today in place of introversion and extroversion, respectively, as they are more accurately descriptive.

> when there is a free and active flow of associative processes, it may become inventive and original.
>
> One author of exceedingly clever and witty short stories possesses this type of personality. The manic tendency to a rapid stream of verbal imagery is well adapted to the profession of writing so long as the associations are maintained in fairly logical form. Many manic-depressive patients write plays, poems and stories in the ward while in the manic phase, but in these extreme cases the associations are disordered and fragmentary, so that their productions could not be considered to possess any literary merit. [63]

As we have seen in the study of Sterne's consumption, tuberculosis causes some of the characteristics of cycloid personality. We can at least see the contribution of cyclothymia to his writing, without having to approach too near to the imputation of psychosis in his case.

D. Daydreaming and Laurence Sterne.

But to complete the picture, and to get a more thorough insight into Sterne's writing, we must turn to another personality characteristic of the man--to his daydreaming. For the sake of clarity, it must be approached genetically, as was his tuberculosis.

We have seen in the treatment of Sterne's childhood and education excellent opportunities for daydreaming to develop. As we have noted, the boy was sent to school in his tenth year, and at that time the character of his life was changed entirely from freedom to the restraint

of domestic arrangements and school discipline. We have seen also an account of one of Laurence Sterne's books, as given by Fitzgerald, in which objective evidence of day dreaming is set forth, and we have seen conditions in college, his associates, his financial and social condition, and his age in relation to other students, all of which would also contribute to the same tendency toward autistic thinking.

Sichel brings to light further evidence in the "Reverie of the Nuns" [64]. This early composition is contained in a letter written to William Combe and it speaks of a secluded spot where Sterne used to go and dream about life and love.

> "This typical daydream of the sisterhood [says Sichel] is no isolated experience. He twice mentions the place of his vision and 'Cordelia,' his heroine, in his unpublished 'Journal to Eliza,' ... and he represents this nun of his fantasy in at least two of his letters." [65]

Take the following passage as an example of the content of this daydream:

> "So I lean lackadaisically over the gate and look at the passing stream and forgive the spleen, the gout, and the envy of a malicious world. And after having taken a stroll beneath mouldering arches, I summon the sisterhood together, and take the fairest among them, and sit down with her on the stone beneath the bunch of alders, and do-- what, you will say? Why, I examine her gentle heart, and see how it is attuned; I then guess at her wishes, and play with the cross that hangs at her bosom--in short,

> I make love to her. Fie, for shame! Tristram that is not as it ought to be. Now I declare, on the contrary, that is is exactly what it ought to be; for though philosophers may say, among many other foolish things philosophers have said, that a man who is in love is not in his right senses, I do affirm in opposition to all their saws--and see-saws--that he is never in his right senses, or I would say rather in his right sentiments, but when he is pursuing some Dulcinea or other." [66]

Later we see in "The Unknown World: Verses occasioned by hearing a Pass-Bell" evidence of a train of autistic thinking set up by the sound of the bell. In this case Sterne's thoughts do not take an amorous trend, but he is puzzling about heaven, hell and the hereafter. [67] In it he prays that when he leaves "this clay:"

> "How sudden the surprise, how new!
> Let it, my God, be happy too." [68]

Again in his love letters Sterne shows the same daydreaming:

> "Yes! I will steal from the world, and not a babbling tongue shall tell where I am--Echo shall not so much as whisper my hiding-place. Suffer thy imagination to paint it as a little sun-gilt cottage, on the side of a romantic hill--dost thou think I will leave love and friendship behind me? No! they shall be my companions in solitude, for they will sit down and rise up with me in the amiable form of my L.--We will be as merry and as innocent as our first parents in Paradise, before the arch-fiend entered that undescribable scene.
>
> "The kindest affections will have room to shoot and expand in our retirement, and produce such fruit as madness, and envy, and ambition have always killed in the bud.--Let human tempest and hurricane rage at a distance, the desolation is beyond the horizon of peace.--My L. has seen a polyanthus blow in December-- some friendly wall has sheltered it from the biting wind.-- No planetary influence shall reach us, but that

> which presides and cherishes the sweetest flowers.--God preserve us! how delightful this prospect in idea! We will build, and we will plant, in our own way--simplicity shall not be tortured by art--we will learn of Nature how to live--she shall be our alchymist, to mingle all the good of life into one salubrious draught.--The gloomy family of care and distrust shall be banished from our dwelling, guarded by thy kind and tutelar deity--we will sing our choral songs of gratitude, and rejoice to the end of our pilgrimage." [69]

The same detachment from reality, from consideration of the exigencies of everyday life, are seen. Here is the typical Rousseauistic back-to-nature-and-solitude stuff. He is dreaming happily of the heaven he is to acquire with his marriage. If he only had known at that time what marriage was to mean to him!

In "Tristram Shandy" also are evidences of the same tendency, as is seen in the Maria episode. In the "Sentimental Journey" many more evidences are given of the same attitude; for instance, the toying with the young French woman he meets in the inn-yard and his dreams about Janatone (whom he also dreams about in "Tristram").

Finally in his "Journal to Eliza" we find hardly anything but daydreaming about his "Bramine." He is constantly dreaming of her being with him and the pleasures of her company, dreaming of her attitude at being away from him, and dreaming of some future happiness with her in his small curacy at Coxwold.

Now, as for direct reference to daydreaming on the part of Sterne, we have a statement made in "Tristram Shandy" in Book one, Chapter twenty, where he says, "The mind should be accustomed to make wise reflections and draw curious conclusions as it goes along." And this is exactly what Sterne does. Again he makes a direct reference to the fact that his imagination, or his daydreaming, controls his actions and that he feels that their control is often unfavorable in its effect.

> "I said, 'we were not stocks and stones'--'tis very well. I should have added, nor are we angels, I wish we were,--but men clothed with bodies, and governed by our imaginations;--and what a junketing piece of work of it there is, betwixt these and our seven senses, especially some of them, for my own part, I own it, I am ashamed to confess." [70]

And finally, he makes this statement, in which he reveals that he knows he is indulging in daydreaming and realizes its effect:

> "When the precipitancy of a man's wishes hurries on his ideas ninety times faster than the vehicle he rides in--woe be to truth and woe be to the vehicle and its tackling (let 'em be made of what stuff you will) upon which he breathes forth the disappointments of his soul." [71]

Later, in the treatment of Sterne as a husband, we shall consider the elements in his married life that lead to his daydreaming -- his unhappiness with his wife, and its concomitants.

We have had evidence that Sterne did not face reality. His life was difficult for him from the first and so he sought an escape. The result was this daydreaming.

> "When reality becomes unbearable, the individual may attempt to escape from it to an imaginary realm of his own, where he can control the environment. It must be borne in mind, however, that to a certain degree such escape into what is commonly known as "day-dreams" is normal and experienced to some extent by all people. It becomes abnormal when the individual is satisfied merely to dream and when his dreams never result in action." [72]

Daydreaming is excellent exercise for the imagination, for daydreaming is escape through the imagination, and the way to develop a function is to exercise it. As implied in the above quotation, daydreaming is more pleasurable when it is indulged in, than is the reality, for it is the unpleasantness of reality that causes the escape into dreaming.

> "A feeling persisting after the fact, or recovered by mere association, without the presence of the proper stimulus, can sometimes approach the fullness of the real experience; so much so that we are content in many instances with this bare conception, or ideal resuscitation. The recollection of a time of gaiety and excitement, of some interesting conversation or discourse, or of a book that we have read, may give such an amount of feeling of actual experience that we rest satisfied with that, and wish nothing further. On a matter, therefore, where we have a power of restoring mentally the full-toned delight of a real experience it is easy to convert memory into imagination, and to construct future gratification of the same sort, with or without a basis of reality. We speak occasionally of such a one having a strong imagination, when we mean that he can so body forth an ideal pleasure, as to derive from it an entire satisfaction of the want of the moment." [73]

This was Sterne's way out of his difficulties. The satisfaction of his day-dreaming compensated for the unsatisfying things in life. It was an emotional outlet for him. How this escape mechanism is connected to artistic production is shown by Langfield:

> "Emotions are at the root of aesthetic creation, but not as some mysterious driving force that guides the artist in his endeavors, or supplies the energy for his efforts. Nor can it be said that a man is emotional because he is an artist, but rather that he is an artist for the reason that he is emotional, or more explicitly, because his life is full of conflicts, which he is best able to overcome in artistic expression. All that is implied by this statement is that for artistic creation in the strict sense of term, that is to say, production beyond mere hackwork, there must be disturbing problems in the life of the artist. . . .
>
> "There still remains to be explained why the activity does not always end in useless day-dreaming, in which all of us occasionally indulge. To answer this question satisfactorily would be to solve the centuries-old problem of the nature of creative genius." [74]

It is very evident from Sterne's letters and prose fiction that he had enough emotion to produce, his health permitting, much more than he did, although it is probably better for his reputation that he did not produce more. Hypersensitiveness to emotional stimulation seems to be one of the most noticeable, if not the most characteristic, of the qualities of his "Journal."

Adequate motivation, aside from emotion alone, was present in Sterne's life to account for the production of "Tristram" and his other works, as will be shown later.

E. His philosophy of life.

The philosophy of the author of "Tristram Shandy" is closely linked with the physiological and psychological components of personality which are set forth in this chapter. Being tuberculous, he often was elated, and elation is a thing of the heart, and not the head; that is, it is rather an emotional than an intellectual characteristic. He is tender-hearted and sympathetic. "I'll not hurt the poorest jack-ass upon the road," he says. He was a day-dreamer, a castle-builder, and by these signs romantic.

Indeed, Sterne distrusted the head - even his own, which had led him astray so many times. This did not mean that he was a complete skeptic, but only that he thought emotion - the heart - was much more to be depended upon.

> "For my own part I never wonder at any thing;- and so often has my judgment deceived me in my life, that I always suspect it, right or wrong - at least I am seldom hot upon cold subjects. For all this, I reverence truth as much as anybody; and when it has slipped us, if a man will but take me by the hand, and go quietly and search for it, as for a thing we have both lost, and can neither of us do well without,- I'll go to the world's end with him." [75]

"Tristram" contains passage after passage of satire upon reasoning, especially the type of theological dialectic which he found in the early authors he was so fond of reading. Then too, he grew up and made his

preparation for writing during the "Age of Reason" which he apparently heartily detested, even though he was fond of reading and quoting Locke. Shaftesbury probably appealed to him much more than Mandeville did, for he believed that the heart was to be trusted over the head. To him God apparently was not a very important being; there are few signs of his having taken the Deity seriously. Rousseau, born a year before Sterne, apparently had the same general point of view and perhaps they both reacted to the deism of their countries.

It is certain that Sterne knew of Rousseau, whether or not he had ever read any of the French romanticist's books. He draws a direct parallel between himself and the Frenchman in describing his life in the country, and in the same passage also laughs at the idea that he is a philosopher. Certainly he drew up no philosophical code.

> "....for the six months I'm in the country, I'm upon so small a scale, that with all the good temper in the world, I outdo Rousseau, a bar length-- for I keep neither man or boy, or horse, or cow, or dog, or cat, or anything that can eat or drink, except a thin poor piece of Vestal (to keep my fire in), and who has generally as bad an appetite as myself-- but if you think this makes a philosopher of me-- I would not, my good people! give a rush for your judgments." [76]

At least unconsciously Sterne made good use of the two characteristics, tuberculosis and daydreaming, turning them to his advantage more than he could have known. Although he was probably not aware of their qualities as assets, he wrote, in the twenty-ninth chapter of the seventh

book of "Tristram", this:-

> "And this is my usual method of bookkeeping, at least with the disasters of life--making a penny of every one of 'em as they happened to me --."

Merwin, after a study of Sterne, formulated a theory of Sterne's philosophy which is well worth consideration.

> "Sterne failed to take either himself or the world seriously; and that, from our present point of view, is almost an unpardonable fault. If Sterne had formulated his paganism in a system, writing two or three dull serious volumes about it; if, instead of flirting with every pretty woman who came his way, he had simply broken two or three hearts for his own edification, after the manner of Goethe -- if such had been his course, we should find it easier to appreciate him."
>
> "'If by philosophy we mean a theory of life, some sort of principle upon which facts are arranged, then there is no one possessed of reason who has not a philosophy no matter how unconscious of it he may be.' (Huntington) In this sense Sterne had a philosophy, and a very real and consistent one.... namely that the instincts of the human heart are good, and should be deferred to and cultivated.
>
> "Sterne far more than Thackeray, hated the artificialities of civilizations and his philosophy of human conduct is substantially that of Rousseau.
>
> "We find in Sterne's fiction the very embodiment and concrete working out of Rousseau's theory of human conduct." [77]

F. Summary.

We have seen that two elements in the explanation of Sterne's character have generally been neglected in the consideration of the man.

The treatment of him has generally been on the basis of inexplicability, condonation, or instinct, but tuberculosis and daydreaming afford a more satisfactory explanation of his character; the first accounting for his changeable moods, elation and depression, for his high spirited ambition; the second showing his detachment from reality, so easily seen in his work. Spes phthisica operated upon Sterne as it did on many other authors, and the imagination of the daydreamer provided background for some of the finer emotional parts of his work, and this same emotional tone of his imagination was the background for his unconscious Rousseauistic philosophy.

CHAPTER FIVE

STERNE AS A HUSBAND

A. Sterne's courtship.

The consideration of Sterne as a husband has important bearing upon the character of his life and works. Again, this may be approached genetically starting with the wooing of Elizabeth Lumley. Fortunately we have some fine data on this, written by Sterne himself, aside from his prose fiction. It was immediately after his graduation from college that Laurence Sterne met Elizabeth, at York, where Sterne mixed in the society of the northern capital and became well known and popular. Sterne succinctly gives an account of his wooing in his "Memoirs," which he wrote for his daughter.

> ".....at York I became acquainted with your mother, and courted her for two years; she owned she liked me but thought herself not rich enough, or me too poor, to be joined together. She went to her sister's in S--; and I wrote to her often. I believe then she was partly determined to have me, but would not say so. At her return, she fell into a consumption, and one evening that I was sitting by her, with an almost broken heart to see her so ill, she said, "My dear Laurey, I never can be yours, for I verily believe I have not long to live! but I have left you every shilling of my fortune." Upon that she showed me her will. This generosity overpowered me. It pleased God that she recovered, and I married her in the year 1741."

It took him two years to make his conquest, but it seems that Miss Lumley's delay was quite unselfish, even though she was "partly determined" to have him. Her attitude is well indicated by the fact that she promised him her fortune, if she should die.

It has been commented a little satirically that the last two sentences of Sterne's statement were literally true, that "This generosity overpowered me. It pleased God that she recovered" -- but did not please Laurence Sterne, and out of a sense of obligation, if not of gratitude, he married her in the year 1741. As will be seen later, this comment was not far wrong, for in the long run Sterne did not find his marriage to be happy; but it seems to me that the implication of avarice on the young minister's part is a bit unwarranted. We have seen in an earlier quotation from one of his love letters that daydreaming was well established at that time. Sterne painted a picture of idyllic happiness with his bride which he unfortunately never realized.

B. The character of Elizabeth Lumley Sterne.

Sichel points out that Miss Lumley was the "termagant and arrogant cousin of Elizabeth Montagu, 'Queen of the Blue-Stockings'" [78] and then makes this comment:

> "Her earliest grievance was to be found single at an age then perilously near old-maidenhood. She never made the best of Sterne, who afterwards came to contribute real cause for estrangement by his periodical escapes to the warmth of more sentimental companionships. But if her whole life proved a chapter of complaints, she had compensation. Nature had gifted her with a stalwart arm, which she wielded manfully--according to Mrs. Montagu's brother, an 'arm of flesh!'" [79]

Sichel continues:

> "From the moment that Sterne espoused this nettle-bed, Mrs. Montagu herself, despite his errors, espoused his cause. "Madam," he once wrote to her when she begged pardon for a temporary misunderstanding, "injuries come only from the heart. You, I know, never intended one, and so I had nothing to forgive....I have much to thank you for, and am, with a heart full of the highest ideas of yours, you most affectionate cousin." [80]

He probably had a sorry time of it, but kept it well to himself. Meanwhile, Mrs. Sterne grew worse and worse.

> "She grew to be an excitable virago, who as years went by seems even to have taken refuge in drink. If so, it might account for her "madness" and for her prolonged reproaches of abandonment by her kins folk." [81]

It may have been possible that she, as Sichel says, turned to drink, and this was responsible for her insanity which, on this basis, would probably be an alcoholic dementia as well as the paranoia of which we have record. Alcohol has often been known to release psychotic as well as neurotic phenomena.

We have still more testimony from Elizabeth Montagu. We find her characterizing her cousin as "a fretful porcupine, always darting her quills at somebody or something." [82]

Cross also agrees that the marriage was unhappy:

> "The sentimental marriage with Miss Lumley proved, as might have been foretold, uncomfortable to both parties. "Sterne and his Wife," said John Croft, in gathering up local anecdotes, '.....did not gee well together, for she used to say herself, that the largest House in England cou'd not contain them both, on account of their Turmoils and Disputes.'" [83]

John Croft, who generally is hostile to Sterne, would not fail to bring out anything unpleasant about the man, his character or his circumstances. Melville also comes to the conclusion that Sterne and his wife were incompatible:

> "Probably she would have made an excellent mate for the everyday parson, but she had not the qualities to enable her to retain the affection of the volatile 'Yorick.' The difference in their characters alone accounts sufficiently for their disagreement. He was fond of gaiety, loved a jest, was quick in repartee, and revelled in argument; she was merely a good housewife." [84]

If we accept Tristram's portrait of Walter Shandy's wife, we find there also further evidence. He says:

> "--careless about it, as about every thing else in the world which concerned her; --that is, indifferent whether it was done this way or that,--provided it was but done at all,--" [85]

And again, she apparently could not keep up to Sterne's rapid fire imagination. She probably had little interest in what he thought - "she might ask a question," he says.

"It was a consuming vexation to my father, that my mother never asked the meaning of a thing she did not understand.

--That she is not a woman of science, my father would say--is her misfortune--but she might ask a question.

--My mother never did.--In short, she went out of the world at last without knowing whether it turned round, or stood still.--My father had officiously told her above a thousand times which way it was,--but she always forgot.

For these reasons, a discourse seldom went on much further betwixt them, than a proposition,--a reply, and a rejoinder; at the end of which, it generally took breath for a few minutes.....and then went on again." [86]

Substantiating testimony as to their lack of common interests comes from Melville. Even "Tristram," with which Sterne was so bound up, failed to stir her.

"Mrs. Sterne would accompany her husband when he played on his bass-viol, but music seems to have been the only interest they had in common, except their daughter, to whom both were deeply attached. Mrs. Sterne did not care for books, nor is there anything to show that she took the slightest interest in the composition of "Tristram Shandy," or was elated by the great success which followed on its publication. Sterne, indeed, used sometimes to read aloud a few chapters, but it is impossible to resist the inference that he did more so for his own gratification than for hers. The gulf between them which became wider as the years passed, is amusingly described in "Tristram Shandy."

"'Being taken up with the project of knitting my father a pair of large worsted breeches (the thing is common sense), and she not caring to be put out of her way, staid at home at Shandy Hall during the expedition.'" [87]

Froe also has noted the lack of concord between the two. She evidently was jealous as well as incompatible.

> "It would have been difficult, to be sure to find a woman who was qualified to please a man like Sterne for any length of time, and to give him what he wanted. He would have grown tired of any woman, as much so as he did of his wife, of whom he wrote, as we say before: 'sum fatigatus et aegrotus de mea uxore plus quam unquam.' Nevertheless it would seem that Elizabeth Lumley was specially unfit for this task. She was not a woman to give sympathy; she wanted to receive it, and from her letters to Mrs. Montagu we can learn how piqued and angry she was because her husband was feted and she was slighted. - The letters are nothing but long complaints about the way she is neglected by her relations, evincing her envy of the attention paid to her sister, her sister's children and her husband." [88]

Later we see that the novelist's wife deserts him. When he is about to return home from France she stays behind, on the pretext that the climate there is better for her rheumatism. From that time on, Mrs. Sterne shows little of her connection with her husband, except through drawing upon him for large sums of money. It was there in France she spent the rest of her life, happy without him.

C. The effect of her personality upon her husband.

It is very easy to see that Sterne and his wife failed to get along happily. The disparity of their interests is one factor which played an important part in their mutual dissatisfaction. Mrs. Sterne was jealous, and jealousy is not a quality which leads one to indulge self-esteem of the

person who is being looked at with green eyes.

> "Unhappiness may also be due to lack of satisfaction for...instinctive impulses involved in the sentiment of love. The ego instincts may not get adequate gratification. The person concerned will then complain of lack of attention and appreciation, and will feel slighted and ill-used." [89]

It was probably this which resulted in Sterne living, by his own testimony, which will be given in full later, a life of complete celibacy from 1752, the eleventh year of his marriage, onward.

Sterne was an emotional soul, but his emotions were frustrated by this wife of his, who had nothing in common with him. Emotion is dynamic. Once you have an emotion you must do something with it, or it will do something to you--in Sterne's case it was seriously blocked. Wells shows the significance of blocking in the following:

> "If a dead wall of expression is built across the development of the trend, it does not accumulate a great reservoir of energy for us at the proper time; rather it blocks the proper course of a trend which knows how to cut many other channels. It is important, therefore, to have in life some positive influences which will develop a healthy sex consciousness." [90]

Dissatisfaction with certain qualities in his wife would have set up a general inhibiting and blocking "tone" which would mean emotional, if not physical, isolation. The unsatisfied impulse would be weakened and destroyed. We have seen that Sterne was a flirt and a day-dreamer, and conditions at home would lead him back into these trends. "When emotional expression is blocked

in any one region, outlet seems to take place somewhere else." [91]

> "The emotional drainage expresses itself in some form of attitude; by withdrawing or shrinkage from contact with fellow humans of any kind; in drugs or drink; in ruminations, day-dreams and air castles--that is, there is a language outlet." [92]

In Sterne's eminently social soul withdrawal from contact with other people did not take place, neither apparently did he take refuge in drug nor drink. It is probable that his lowered resistance, as it were, to day-dreaming turned him back to this outlet. Another interpretation should also be put upon the last clause of the quotation. The language outlet in Sterne consisted of more than daydreaming. Under the stress of unhappiness combined with his wife's sudden attack of insanity, but with other motives as well as that of escape contributing, he turned to the writing of his first fiction. These other motives will be considered under the head of Sterne as a novelist.

The sex instinct has been generally divided into two aspects: approach and consummation. The element of consummation had been blocked in Sterne by his incompatibility with his wife. The current had taken other channels. It flowed back into the old channel of daydreaming, and started a new rivulet of serious flirtation. Fundamentally, Sterne,

because of the attitude of his wife, had adopted the habit of "stopping short" in the technical sense in which Wells uses it in the following statement:

> "There is a general principle--a phase of the law of inhibition of instinct by habit--that it is bad for any instinct to adopt partial responses which at some point must be frustrated. Such response develops, perhaps, unconsciously, a habit of stopping short, which renders it more difficult when the time comes for the completion of the action. This law has its chief human application in the erotic sphere. Thus it is well known that self indulgence in the more pronounced reactions of flirtation may impair the capacity for the deeper attachments required in marriage, without which one does not make in a wholehearted way the sacrifices that marriages involves. There are bigger fish in the sea than ever were caught, but one does not get big fish if the little ones steal the bait." [93]

Another approach to the same thing is made by Bridges.

> "The instinctive responses or pattern reactions, whether inherited or acquired, undergo continuous change and modification during the lifetime of the individual. The conscious impulses or drives remain, however, very much the same. Modification of the pattern reaction is a matter of the elimination of certain responses and the formation of others. This change takes place, as a rule, in response to the social demand. A more socially desirable or acceptable response is usually substituted for a more primitive one. This process is essentially what is described by the psychoanalysts as 'sublimation'" [94]

D. His "flirtations."

Hence, after Mrs. Sterne had been sent to a hospital for treatment of her attack of paranoia, Sterne's repression broke forth in his famous flirtation with Kitty de Fourmantelle. Too much has been made of this by Sterne's various biographers. The disparity in age between

Kitty and Sterne must be noted. He was forty-six, a "critical age" as Sichel suggests. [95]. He was forty-six; she was not much more than twenty-three. The situation was that of a middle aged man seeking consolation and escape through brief acquaintanceship with a young chorus girl. Sichel says, "Kitty, we may suppose, sympathized with her middle-aged swain as the misunderstood husband with a stricken wife." [96]

How serious was this affair with the young dancer? Hill goes as far as to say, "A brother of Miss de Fourmantelle, had she possessed a brother, would have been justified in administering a horse-whipping." [97] This is an extreme view because, as Melville points out, the same man suggests the invalidity of his statement: "As Mr. Adams Sherman Hill points out in one of the best articles ever written on Sterne, 'the warmth of that gentleman's epistles usually increased or decreased in the ratio of the distance between him and his correspondent.'" [98] To her Sterne addressed a number of letters which seemed somewhat questionable, but:

> "These letters must not be taken too literally, and the protestations of affection should be read in the light of playful philanderings. Most writers on Sterne take it for granted that because Mlle. de Fourmantelle came to London when Sterne was there she did so because he was there. If this was so, then all arguments as to the innocence of their relations fall to the ground; but clearly this was not the case. The girl was a professional singer, who had gone to York to fulfil an engagement;

> and when that engagement was fulfilled, naturally she left York and came to the metropolis to seek further work. It is inconceivable that Sterne would have asked her to convey "My service to your Mama," at the moment she was about to leave her home to follow him; but there is further proof that her coming to London had no connection with Sterne's presence there, for the latter, writing to her on April 1, 1760, begins his letter: "I am truly sorry from your account in your letter to find you do not leave York till the 14th, because it shortens the time I hoped to have stole in your company when you come." Those who read this letter, presently to be printed, with its alternate passages of affection and reference to his social engagements, will realise that it is not a communication from a lover to his mistress. Indeed, fervently as he expresses his desire to see her, when she did arrive in London he could hardly find an hour to visit her." [99]

This statement seems quite conclusive. Now to look at the man's attitude as expressed in his own writing. He does not take these flirtations seriously. They mean little to him but the emotional excitement which they produce. They are soon over. He is fond of "a gentle flame." He has no desire to be burned, much less to be ignited.

> "You can feel!" Aye, so can my cat, when he hears a female caterwauling on the house-top--but caterwauling disgusts me. I had rather raise a gentle flame, than have a different one raised in me." [100]

And again, as he says in another letter, sentiment is all he desires. He considers "love" as a therapeutic agent when it operates in a sentimental way--so he tries to make himself believe that he is in love.

> "I am glad that you are in love-- 'twill cure you at least of the spleen, which has bad effect on both man and woman.-- I myself must ever have some Dulcinea in my head--it harmonises the soul-- and in those cases I first endeavour to make the lady believe so, or rather I begin first to make myself believe that I am in love-- but I carry on my affairs quite in the French way, sentimentally-- 'l'amour' (say they) 'N'est rien sans sentiment.'" [101]

In "Tristram Shandy" he makes a similar statement:

> "--Surely, Madam, a friendship between the two sexes may subsist, and be supported without--Fy! Mr. Shandy:--Without any thing, Madam, but that tender and delicious sentiment, which ever mixes in friendship, where there is a difference of sex." [102]

Froe's testimony is also added to the character of his flirtations. He is no sensual flirt, but a critical one instead.

> "In all Sterne's correspondence--his love-letters included--we search in vain for any symptom of "fancy."--He is never enraptured, it seems, by the beauty of the lady he is courting;--there is no mention whatever of laughing eyes, or sunny locks, of slender waist or lily hands.... his love is a thing apart, different from what we have seen to be its normal nature.
>
> "The strangeness of this feature is still more emphasized by the few instances, where the attractions which the female form has for others are named, but are treated with evident contempt by him." [103]

and further:

> "In one of his letters to Eliza he writes of her portrait, which does not do justice to the beauty of her face, he thinks;--but it is not the effusion of a lover's enthusiasm, but the cold judgment of a dis-interested critic that we find revealed in these words." [104]

We find more testimony to this effect by turning directly to his own letters:

> "That you are graceful, elegant, and desirable, etc. etc.--every common beholder who can stare at you, as a Dutch boor does to the Queen of Sheeba,--can easily find out--but that you are sensible, gentle and tender, and from one end to the other of you full of the sweetest tones and modulations, require a deeper research.--You are a system of harmonic vibrations--the softest and best attuned of all instruments." [105]

> "--I would not give nine pence for the picture of you, the Newnhams have got executed,--It is the resemblance of a conceited, made-up coquette. Your eyes and the shape of your face(the latter the most perfect oval I ever saw) which are perfections that must strike the most indifferent judge, because they are equal to any of God's works in a similar way, and finer than any I beheld in all my travels, are manifestly injured by the affected leer of the one, and strange appearance of the other; owing to the attitude of the head, which is a proof of the artist's, or your friend's false taste." [106]

This was written to Eliza, the most beloved of all his inamorata. A love-letter is usually quite impassioned, but there is little sign of passion here.

It has already been seen that Sterne's affection was blocked at home and therefore was turned elsewhere, in its modified form. Sterne's experiences in his various amours was short-lived in the case of all five of them: Kitty, his "witty widow" Mrs. Ferguson, Mrs. Vesey, Lady Percy and (Mrs.) Eliza Draper. Such brief affection as he shows is not surprising:

> "It is possible that a ready-made sentiment of love may be transferred rather promptly to a new acquaintance. Such a sentiment may have been developed in a previous love affair, or it may have been built up in phantasy and pertain to a wholly fictitious love image.. When a ready-made sentiment is transferred to a person on short acquaintance, the love may be an intense one, but it is likely to be shortlived. The chances of a strange person fitting smoothly and permanently into a previously developed sentiment are relatively small. The person 'falling in love' in this way is not actually facing reality. He is blinded by his own imagination." [107]

It has been seen that the physical attraction of Sterne's women had little interest for him. He was esthetic in his attitude; he wanted to raise a gentle flame and have no other than another gentle flame raised in him. The significance of this attitude is that it places more weight upon the emotional side of erotic feeling than is normal. Wells comments on this situation.

> "Another consideration applies especially in environments which invite the intellectual over-refinement of erotic feelings. Good personalities react to this trend not merely as an instrument of pleasure, nor simply to meet its primary biological purpose, but attach essential values to both phases." [108]

E. The "Chastisement of the grossest Sensualist."

Final evidence as to the character of Sterne's flirtations is given by himself, in the "Journal to Eliza," and also in one of his letters. This evidence is intimately connected with a violent

attack he had one day when he was in London, and this attack, by itself, under some conditions would be conclusive as to sexual misconduct. It is best to reproduce the letter and let it speak for itself.

> "So ill, I could not write a word all this morning--not so much, as Eliza! farewel to thee:--I'm going--am a little better----So shall not depart, as I apprehended--being this morning something better,--and my Symptoms become milder, by a tolerable easy night,--and now, if I have strength and Spirits I have so whimsical a Story to tell you, and as comically disastrous as ever befell one of our family--Shandy's nose--his name--his Sash Window--are fools to it. It will serve at least to amuse you. The Injury I did myself in catching cold upon James's powder, fell, you must know, upon the worst part it could,--the most painful and most dangerous of any in the human Body.--It was on this Crises, I call'd in an able Surgeon and with him an able physician (both my friends) to inspect my disaster--'Tis a venerial case, cried my two Scientifick friends--'Tis impossible, at least to be that, replied I--for I have had no commerce whatever with the Sex--not even with my wife, added I these 15 years--You are ....., however, my good friend said the Surgeon, or there is no such Case in the world.--What the Devil! said I, without knowing Woman--We will not reason more about it, said the Physician, but you must undergo a course of Mercury,--I'll lose my life first, said I,--and trust to Nature, to Time--or at the worst--to Death,--So I put an end with some Indignation to the Conference; and determined to bear all the torment I underwent, and ten times more, rather than submit to be treated as a Sinner, in a point where I had acted like a Saint. Now as the father of mischief would have it, who has no pleasure like that of dishonouring the righteous--it so fell out, that from the moment I dismiss'd my Doctors, my pains began to rage with a violence not to be express'd or supported--every hour became more

> intolerable--I was got to bed--cried out and raved the whole night--and was got up so near dead--That my friends insisted upon my sending again for my Physician and Surgeon--I told them upon the word of a man of strict honour, They were both mistaken as to my case--but tho' they had reason'd wrong--they might act right--but that sharp as my sufferings were, I felt them not so sharp as the Imputation, which a venereal treatment of my case, laid me under.--They answered that these taints of the blood laid dormant 20 years--but that they would not reason with me in a matter wherein I was so delicate--but would do all the office for which they were called in-namely, to put an end to my torment, which otherwise would put an end to me.--and so I have been compelled to surrender myself--and thus, Eliza, is your Yorick, your Bramine--your friend with all his sensibilities, suffering the Chastisement of the grossest Sensualist. --Is it not a most ridiculous Embarrassment, as ever Yorick's Spirit could be involved in--" [109]

This same account recurs without change except for a word left out or inserted occasionally for the sake of rhetoric in a letter to the Earl of Shelburne. The date is given as April 24 in the Journal to Eliza; in the "Earl of Shelburne" letter the date is May 21, 1767.

It is evident that the disease Sterne refers to is syphilis. The treatment for this disease in Sterne's time was mercury, as is indicated below, and as Sterne himself has testified.

> "Mercury was used as far back as 1495. It was rubbed into the skin for skin diseases. Early in the nineteenth century iodides became popular." [110]

The statement of Sterne's surgeon that the disease that he had might lay dormant twenty years is in accord with present medical knowledge. The presence of syphilis in Sterne's blood does not necessarily indicate that it was acquired during coition, because spirochetes pallida may be acquired extra-genitally through any abrasion in the skin, although this manner of infection is rare compared with the usual way. The imputation of misconduct hit Sterne hard--so hard in fact that he resisted treatment because of the stigma attached to the use of mercury, until he suffered too much to resist.

The implication of this letter is conclusively expressed by Melville.

> "There has been much discussion as to whether the relations of the Brahmin and the Brahmine, as they loved to call each other, were innocent or guilty; but there can be no doubt that the intimacy was not carried to the last extreme. 'I have had no commerce whatever with the Sex--not even with my wife--these fifteen years.' Sterne told his physicians shortly after Eliza had returned to India. This in itself would not be conclusive evidence, though there could have been no reason for him to lie to these people; but the fact that he wrote down this conversation in a Journal intended exclusively for the eye of Mrs. Draper makes it certain that his assertion were [sic] accurate, at least so far as he and she was concerned. A man would scarcely trouble falsely to tell his mistress in confidence that he had had no intimacy with her." [111]

Added to this, is the fact that Sterne repeated the statement in another letter. A bit of mathematics will indicate what this means in his life. The date of the letter was 1767, and fifteen years abstinence would mean that Sterne had not engaged in sexual intercourse since 1752, eleven years after he was married. It was in 1759 that Elizabeth Lumley Sterne was sent to the hospital at York, and it was during her stay there that Sterne was engaged in his sentimental flirtation with Kitty. All the other flirtations followed this one; hence Sterne's behavior in his little amours is well defined as being on simply a sentimental "platonic" level.

F. His philosophy of love.

Sterne seems to have indicated his own philosophy of love in his letters and in "Tristram Shandy," although he never brought the material together into an integrated system. This philosophy is on a platonic level. For instance, we have quoted him on page 79 as saying that he would "rather raise a gentle flame than have a different one raised" in him. And again on the same page, he says that "l'amour n'est rien sans sentiment," and that flirtation may exist between the two sexes without anything but "tender and delicious sentiment." It has been noted that the "fleshly"

element was absent in his letters, and later will be quoted a passage in which he states that he wishes one "would light him at the top; for then I should burn down decently to the socket."

He believed there were two kinds of love of which he enjoyed the upper, and loathed the lower.

> "It is a great pity-- but 'tis certain from every day's observation of man, that he may be set on fire like a candle, at either end--provided there is a sufficient wick standing out; if there is not--there's an end of the affair; and if there is--by lighting it at the bottom, as the flame in that case has the misfortune generally to put out itself--there's an end of the affair again.
>
> "For my part, could I always have the ordering of it which way I would be burnt myself,--for I cannot bear the thought of being burnt like a beast--I would oblige a house wife constantly to light me at the top; for then I should burn down decently to the socket." [112]

He restates this in different form:

> "I wish, Yorick, said my father, you had read Plato; for there you would have learnt that there are two Loves--I know there were two Religions, replied Yorick, amongst the ancients--one--for the vulgar, and another for the learned;--but I think one Love might have served both of them very well--
>
> "It could not; replied my father--and for the same reasons: for these Loves, according to Ficinus's comment upon Velasius, the one is rational--
>
> -- the other is natural--

> the first ancient--without mother--where Venus had nothing to do: the second, begotten of Jupiter amd Dione--
>
> --Pray, brother, quoth my uncle Toby, what has a man who believes in God to do with this? My father could not stop to answer, for fear of breaking the thread of his discourse--
>
> This latter, continued he, partakes wholly of the nature of Venus.
>
> The first, which is the golden chain let down from heaven, excites to love heroic, which comprehends in it, and excites to the desire of philosophy and truth--the second, excites to desire, simply--
>
> --I think the procreation of children as beneficial to the world, said Yorick, as the finding out the longitude--" [113]

Love to him is both a pleasure and a trouble. He makes Trim say, "Your honor knows I have neither wife nor child--I can have no sorrows in the world." [114]

He is up and down in his attitude, a reflection of his tuberculosis:

> "Gracious heaven!--but I forget I am a little of her temper myself; for whenever it so falls out, which it sometimes does about the equinoxes, that an earthly goddess is so much this, and that, and t'other, that I cannot eat my breakfast for her--and that she careth not three halfpence whether I eat my breakfast or no--
>
> "-- Curse on her! and so I send her to Tartary, and from Tartary to Terra del Fuego, and so on to the devil: in short, there is not an infernal niche where I do not take her divinityship and stick it.

"But as the heart is tender, and the passions in these tides ebb and flow ten times a minute, I instantly bring her back again; and as I do all things in extremes, I place her in the very centre of the milky-way--

"Brightest of stars! thou wilt shed thy influence too--for at that word I lose all patience--much good may it do him!--By all that is hirsute and ghastly! I cry, taking off my furred cap, and twisting it round my finger--I would not give six-pence for a dozen such!" [115]

He believes in making the best of the thing, although it means trouble any way:

"When a man is hemmed in by two indecorums, and must commit one of 'em--I always observe--let him choose which he will, the world will blame him ..." [116]

"...Love, you see, is not so much a Sentiment as a Situation into which a man enters, as my brother Toby would do, into a corps--no matter whether he loves the service or no--being once in it--he acts as if he did; and takes every step to show himself a man of prowess." [117]

And finally, in one of the most interesting passages in the book, he gives his total reaction.

"Which shows, let your reverences and worships say what you will of it (for as for thinking--all who do think--think pretty much alike both upon it and other matters)--Love is certainly, at least alphabetically speaking, one of the most

A gitating
B ewitching
C onfounded
D evilish affairs of life--the most
E xtravagent
F utilitous
G alligaskinish

H andy-dandyish
I racundulous (there is no K to it) and
L yrical of all human passions; at the same time the most
M isgiving
N innyhammering
O bstipating
P ragmatical
S tridulous
R idiculous--though by the bye the R should have gone first--But in short 'tis of such a nature, as my father once told my uncle Toby upon the close of a long dissertation upon the subject--"You can scarce," said he, "combine two ideas together upon it, brother Toby, without an hypallage"--What's that, cried my uncle Toby.

The cart before the horse, replied my father--
-- And what is he to do there, cried my uncle Toby--

Nothing, quoth my father, but to get in--or let it alone.

Now widow Wadman, as I told you before, would do neither the one or the other.

She stood however ready harnessed and caparisoned at all points, to watch accidents." [118]

G. Summary

To summarize this chapter, Sterne and his wife were incompatible in their relationships, and Mrs. Sterne was anything but a desirable wife for her husband. They had no interests in common and she later deserted him. The repression set up by his life at home turned Sterne to daydreaming and flirting, but it has been seen that Sterne confined himself to flirtation alone, as evidenced by his letter in the "Journal to Eliza." Sterne showed in his

writing that sentiment was all he desired, and his writings show that there was very little of the "fleshly" in his attitude. The fact that Sterne had syphilis did not mean that he had gone beyond the flirtation stage. The letter in which his account of his disease is set forth indicates a long period of total abstinence from intercourse.

A sort of philosophy of love may be drawn from his writings and this, as well, indicates Sterne's whimsical and sentimental, platonic attitude.

CHAPTER SIX

STERNE AS A PARSON

A. Entrance into the ministry.

What was the state of the clergy when Sterne entered it, and why should he take up this vocation instead of another? Perhaps the best way to approach the condition of the clergy at the time is to consider the career of his uncle Jaques who was typical of the worldly man in the church.

He was a pluralist:

> "Having once gained a foothold in the church of York, Dr. Sterne added one dignity to another, never letting slip any that he already had except for something better." [119]

He even engaged in electioneering much like a ward boss today and reached ecclesiastical eminence just short of that of a bishop. He was violent in his persecution of Catholics, and yet his own personal life was none too spotless. The church to him was simply a way to become successful; it was no holy calling.

To enter the ministry was, for Laurence Sterne, merely Hobson's choice. He had been graduated from college with no occupation to look forward to, when his uncle seized upon him as a well educated young man of some brilliancy, who might help him considerably in his political career.

> "Doctor Sterne was a selfish pushing man, and the last person in the world to take under his protection a lame duck." [120]

> "There is no reason to believe that
> Laurence had any wish to take orders,
> but then there is nothing to show that
> he had any leaning to any other profession." [121]

It was through Jaques that Laurence made his start,- he writes in his "Memoirs," "My uncle got me the living of Sutton." The ecclesiastical politician soon made use of the brains of his young nephew by setting him to work writing paragraphs in the newspapers, a task at which Sterne soon rebelled. His opinion of this journalistic work is shown in his statement that his uncle "was a party man." I was not, and detested such dirty work, thinking it beneath me." The fragment of Sterne's journalism which Lewis P. Curtis has exhumed from old files of the "York Courant" would seem to justify Sterne's attitude toward paragraph writing.

B. Sterne in his parish.

During the time that he was engaged in this work, he was also acting as a curate, so that it was not his sole means of support. He, like his uncle, was a pluralist, but in a much smaller way, filling most of his appointments himself. His income at first was about thirty-five pounds a year, shortly it was seventy-five, but it had increased at the time of his marriage to one hundred and fifteen pounds, which was a very good income for a young minister not more than thirty years old, as:

> "The stipend of a Yorkshire curate.....was in 1760, thirty guineas per annum, or twelve shillings a week. The wages of a laborer of the same period were from eight to nine shillings a week." [122]

He evidently had sufficient work to keep him occupied:

> "Of Sterne as a clergyman but little is known, save that he was a busy man. As Prebendary of North Newbald he had to take his turn in the Minster; and when not so engaged he preached every Sunday morning at Sutton, and as a rule walked over to Stillington to take the afternoon service. Probably he did his duty to his parishioners as well as the majority of the parsons of his day, but that is not necessarily according to him high praise, for the clergymen of the Church of England in the 'forties and 'fifties of the eighteenth century were apt to consider they had done all that was demanded of them if they preached regularly and attended the deathbeds of members of their flock. If the Rector of Sutton did more than this, and it is at least probable that he was charitable, let it be counted unto him for righteousness." [123]

As a parson he was usually conscientious as well. Melville says:

> "It is but fair to the great humorist to insist on the fact there has never been put forward the slightest proof that he neglected his clerical duties; at least during the earlier years he was at Sutton." [124]

And Hall Stevenson in his preface to his continuation of the "Sentimental Journey" said:

> "He decently lived a becoming ornament of the church till his Rabelaisian spirit, which issued from the press, immersed him into the gaieties and frivolities of the world."

Sterne apparently was sincere in his vocation, although certain aspects of it aroused his ire tremendously, as we shall see later. He stood up for the dignity of the cloth, quickly resenting any slur that was made in his hearing. Sichel quotes Hall Stevenson to this effect:

> "We see Sterne stickling for his vocation. Everyone recollects the anecdote published by Hall-Stevenson, of his reply to the young blasphemer in the Coney Street coffee-house. Sterne told him of his dog, an excellent pointer, but cursed with one infernal fault: "He never sees a clergyman but he immediately flies at him." "How long may he have had that trick?" asked the coxcomb. "Sir, ever since he was a puppy," rejoined the vicar. Dr. Johnson, who hated Sterne would surely have applauded him here." [125]

In "Tristram Shandy" we have a picture of Yorick carrying on his duties among his parishioners, which portrays his character as well as his activities. It suggests perhaps how he put his sermons together, and in addition may indicate the attitude of his parishioners toward him.

> "In the several sallies about his parish, and in the neighbouring visits to the gentry who lived around him,--you will easily comprehend, that the parson, so appointed, would both hear and see enough to keep his philosophy from rusting. To speak the truth, he never could enter a village, but he caught the attention of both old and young.--Labour stood still as he passed--the bucket hung suspended in the middle of the well,--the spinning-wheel forgot its round,--even chuck-farthing and shuffle-cap themselves stood gaping till he had got out of sight; and as his movement was not of the quickest, he had generally time enough upon his hands to make his

> observations,-- to hear the groans of the serious,--and the laughter of the light-hearted;--all which he bore with excellent tranquillity.--His character was,--he loved a jest in his heart--and as he saw himself in the true point of ridicule, he would say he could not be angry with others for seeing him in a light, in which he so strongly saw himself." [126]
>
> "At different times he would give fifty humorous and apposite reasons for riding a meek spirited jade of a broken-winded horse, preferably to one of mettle;--for on such a one he could sit mechanically, and meditate as delightfully de vanitate mundi et fuga saeculi, as with the advantage of a death's-head before him;--that, in all other exercitations, he could spend his time, as he rode slowly along,--to as much account as in his study;--that he could draw up an argument in his sermon,--or a hole in his breeches, as steadily on the one as in the other;-- that brisk trotting and slow argumentation, like wit and judgment, were two incompatible movements.--But that upon his steed--he could unite and reconcile every thing,--he could compose his sermon,--he could compose his cough,--and, in case nature gave a call that way, he could likewise compose himself to sleep." [127]

Yet Sterne was not happy. It has been shown that his wife was no companion to him and "it is obvious that a man of his intellect can scarcely have found congenial spirits among the country neighbors." [128] as Melville says. But he had consolation in his "books, painting, fiddling and shooting," which, he says in his "Memoirs" "were my amusements."

No fault could be found with Sterne as a parson until about the time he published "Tristram Shandy." He did not even see Hall-Stevenson, whose friendship with him from 1759 on, may be considered as part of the escape mechanism set up in reaction to his wife. Sichel aptly summarizes the period:

> "For 18 years--from 1741 to 1759--Sterne remained obscure, and he remained reputable; of Hall Stevenson for many years he saw nothing. The man who was to forfeit respect in the future was still a credit to his cloth-- 'known for his good life and conversation,' as the sentence ran in the Dean and Chapter's verbose certificate." [129]

After "Tristram Shandy" was published the character of Sterne's life changed. He almost completely gave over his clerical duties, turning his attention to writing, employing a young man to substitute for him in his preaching. Occasionally in London and in France he preached a sermon but these were mostly show-off discourses rather than ones given in the common course of preaching. The minister had turned to a more lucrative vocation; he had withdrawn, as it were, from the clergy, although he never formally took that step.

C. His sermons.

It may be interesting to consider the qualities of Sterne's sermons *per se*, apart from the function they served in preparation for the writing of "Tristram Shandy." Indeed, the sermon on conscience was transferred bodily to "Tristram Shandy," and the evidence is that Sterne was very proud of this particular composition. It has been suggested, in the section from "Tristram," quoted on page 105 how his sermons were composed, but they apparently went on at more than a broken down jog trot, especially considering the

technique they employed. A good sample is the conscience sermon which started in with the trick of partly controverting the text, and then proceeded to explain the contradiction. Numerous unpleasant remarks have been leveled at this particular sermon, but at least one philosopher believed it was the "best that has ever been said on this important subject."

> "But Voltaire, in that article of his "Dictionnaire Philosophique" which deals with the subject, extols the author, and the French Rationalist subscribed for the last installment of Sterne's sermons. He comments on the part concerning conscience as a deceiver. "The best that has ever been said on this important subject," he remarks, "is to be found in the comic book of "Tristram Shandy," written by a clergyman named Sterne. The works of this second 'English Rabelais' [Swift was the first] resemble those little satires of antiquity which held precious essences in their phials....." [130]

What did Sterne himself think about preaching? He believed that sermons should come from the heart instead of from the head,- that they should produce warm light, rather than phosphorescence, as he indicates in the person of Yorick, who is discussing one of his sermons.

> "I have undergone such unspeakable torments, in bringing forth this sermon, quoth Yorick, upon this occasion--that I declare, Didius, I would suffer martyrdom--and if it was possible my horse with me, a thousand times over, before I would sit down and make such another: I was delivered of it at the wrong end of me--it came from my head instead of my heart--and it is for the pain it gave me, both in the writing and the preaching of it, that I revenge myself of it, in this manner--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 beggarly 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, continued Yorick, I had rather direct five words point-blank to the heart.--" [131]

Further evidence comes from Melville, substantiating what is said in "Tristram:"

> "The sermons came all hot from the heart. The others [i.e. the volumes containing 'Tristram Shandy'] came from the head--I am more indifferent about their reception." Many people recognised in them the hall-mark of this sincerity; and, to take one example, Georgina, Countess Cowper, wrote to Mrs. Dawes shortly after the appearance of the first series: "Pray read Yorick's sermons (though you would not read 'Tristram Shandy'). They are more like essays. I like them extremely, and I think he must be a good man." [132]

Sterne was sick of eighteenth century theological intricacies, the minute delving into the more esoteric regions of theological theory, which marked the transition

state between the technical theology presented in the seventeenth century, and the more humanized doctrines held forth in the nineteenth. He believed, as we do today, that such an approach to religion was worthless, except to those occasional monomaniacs who, like Samuel Sewall in our own American literature, carefully noted down the course and points of the weekly sermon. Few of his simple country parishioners had any interest in this sort of theology; what would appeal to them would be rough-and-ready practical religion, and this is what Sterne attempted to give them, and succeeded very well in doing. His sermons are not full of complicated religious arguments; they are simple, direct, touching upon every-day virtues and shortcomings. In a word, they are practical sermons.

D. Sterne and theology.

Sterne's attitude toward theology of his day is well expressed in "Tristram:"

> "--I wish there was not a polemic divine, said Yorick, in the kingdom; --one ounce of practical divinity-- is worth a painted shipload of all their reverences have imported these fifty years." [133]

Following this statement Sterne makes his Uncle Toby ask, "Pray Mr. Yorick, do tell me what a polemic divine is?" Yorick goes on to describe the case of the "Gymnast and Captain Tripet", which is an example of the argument-by-acrobatics which is found in such books as "Aucassin and Nicollette." At the end of this, Sterne writes: "'Good God!' cried Trim, losing his patience,--'one home thrust of a bayonet is worth it all.'-- 'I think so too," replied Yorick.'"

Nor was this the only comment that Sterne made upon the school divinity. In book four, in the material following "Slaukenbergius's Tale" he sets the faculties of the two universities of Strasburg fighting over the phenomenal nose of the stranger, dividing the battle into two camps, the Nosarians and the Antinosarians, who come to no conclusion after arguing on the reality of noses, the power of God in fastening 575-foot-noses on a man's face, and similar ridiculous issues.

Again, in the commentary, writing about the conscience sermon in "Tristram," he has this to say:

> ".....If the clergy of our church, continued my father, addressing himself to Dr. Slop, would take part in what they deliver as deeply as this poor fellow has done,--as their compositions are fine.....I maintain it,--that the eloquence of our pulpits, with such subjects to enflame it, would be a model for the whole world:-- But alas! continued my father, and I own it, Sir, with sorrow, that, like French politicians in this respect, what they gain in the cabinet they lose in the field." [134]

Sterne believed that the clergy in general was insincere. It delved into politics, and when it once was in the pulpit, it handed to its parishioners a mass of unintelligible religious theory, which did little good to the auditors. Its insincerity was of thoughtlessness rather than of malevolence. The state of his parishioners, and probably of most of the church goers of his period as well, is expressed in a letter wherein he wrote:

> "My postillion has set me a-ground for a week, by one of my pistols bursting in his hand, which he taking for granted to be quite shot off--he instantly fell upon his knees and said (our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed be thy Name) at which, like a good Christian, he stopped, not remembering any more of it--the affair was not so bad as he at first thought, for it has only bursten two of his fingers (he says)." [135]

Religion to many of them was something to be used only in an emergency, so the most effective work a parson could do would be to preach, pointedly and interestingly, the homely virtues, and to point out the shortcomings in which all men are involved, such shortcomings as showed themselves in the reaction of the postillion to the exploding pistol.

Perhaps the preacher's most effective way to do this is to draw upon his own experience, enlarge upon it, and draw conclusions from it. There is reason to believe that this is exactly what Sterne did, because the qualities upon which he preached are often present in his own life. We see for instance, the reaction of his conscience, with a bit of Biblical terminology added to make it go down, in the conscience sermon. And in the part of his sermon on Time and Chance, pointed out by Sichel, we see a direct parallel to the course of his life.

> "He shall come into the world with the most unpromising appearance,--shall set forward without fortune, without friends--without talents to procure him either the one or the other. Nevertheless you will see this clouded prospect brighten up insensibly, unaccountably, before him; everything presented in his way shall turn out beyond his expectations;--in spite of that chain of unsurmountable difficulties which first threatened him--time and chance shall open him a way,--a series of successful occurences shall lead him by the hand to the summit of honor and fortune, and, in a word

> without giving him the pains of thinking, or the credit of projecting it, shall place him in safe possession of all that ambition could wish for." [136]

To strengthen the effect of his sermons Sterne sometimes summed them up, and gave his congregation directly, at the end, those conclusions which should be deduced from his preaching, so that they might carry them home and put them into effect. This is easily illustrated by the conclusion to the conscience sermon.

> "I will add no further to the length of this sermon, than by two or three short and independent rules deducible from it.
>
> "First, Whenever a man talks loudly against religion, always suspect that it is not his reason, but his passions, which have got the better of his creed. A bad life and a good belief are disagreeable and troublesome neighbours, and where they separate, depend upon it, 'tis for no other cause but quietness' sake.
>
> "Secondly, when a man, thus represented, tells you in any particular instance,--That such a thing goes against his conscience,--always believe he means exactly the same thing, as when he tells you such a thing goes against his stomach;--a present want of appetite being generally the true cause of both.
>
> "In a word,--trust that man in nothing, who has not a Conscience in every thing.
>
> "And, in your own case, remember this plain distinction, a mistake in which has ruined thousands,--that your conscience is not a law;--No, God and reason made the law, and have placed

> conscience within you to determine;--not, like an Asiatic Cadi, according to the ebbs and flows of his own passions,--but like a British judge in this land of liberty and good sense, who makes no new law, but faithfully declares that law which he knows already written." [137]

It has been implied by Froe and others that Sterne's criticism of the church was a defense mechanism to protect his own shortcomings; and it has been definitely stated that he was irreligious, that he was a jester in the pulpit, throwing his cap at his congregation. Would not it be a better hypothesis to say that Sterne realized that interest was necessary to arouse, to impress, and to teach successfully, those who were not naturally religious cranks? Interest is necessary to attention and attention begets memory. Froe goes to the extent of questioning Sterne's belief entirely, ascribing his practical sermons to an attempt to avoid hyprocrisy, and to hide his "inmost convictions."

> "What were the sermons like, that this priest delivered to his congregation? Of course he could not show in them his real inmost convictions;--if he had done that, he would have been expelled from the church, even in the mid-eighteenth century. Yet he tried to keep, as far as possible, removed from abject hypocrisy. He managed to do this by giving in his sermons dissertations upon human life, its disappointments and miseries, as a remedy against which he preached philanthropy, sentimentality, and kind-heartedness. -- And, as the proper accoutrement of a

> sermon, he uses theological terms: God, his laws and commandments, Saviour, salvation; --but all these remain empty terms." [138]

Is not the evidence previously given strong enough to controvert completely Froe's belief? Melville does not agree with the Dutchman, and Melville is a very careful biographer.

> "If Sterne was a scornful unbeliever surely some trace of this must have crept, sooner or later, into one of his sermons, yet not the most virulent critic has ventured to announce any such discovery. When the Sermons were published in book-form, the reviewers almost without exception praised them highly, and found nothing to blame except the publication in Yorick's name." [139]

Paul subscribes to the belief of Alfred Hedouin whose estimate of Sterne he quotes:

> "Hedouin ranks him among the bold thinkers--Voltaire and Diderot and Rousseau--who waged war in the eighteenth century against tyranny and intolerance: with the difference, that what, he says, especially characterizes Sterne was his religious sentiment." [140]

E. Summary.

It has been seen that Sterne entered the clergy as a "last chance," at a time when the ministry was but another profession, and consequently was employed by his avaricious uncle as a tool in ecclesiastico-political squabbles. As a parson, Sterne was a busy, conscientious, well-to-do young man, a stickler for his profession, and unhappy in his obscurity, until the publication of

"Tristram Shandy," when he turned to a more lucrative vocation and practically gave up his preaching.

His sermons, it has been seen, were simple and direct, from the heart much more than from the head, and much more befitting his congregation than the technical, polemic divinity so often practiced by his co-workers in his vocation. He does not hesitate to satirize theological sophistry, because of its futility as far as right living is concerned. He drew upon his own circumstances for his material, and embellished his work with devices designed to arouse the interest and attention of his congregation. His attitude was not that of covering up any deficiency in his own conviction but instead was practical and sincere, and at a level where it would be most effective.

CHAPTER SEVEN

STERNE AS A NOVELIST.

A. The relationship of "Tristram" to Sterne's life.

In the previous chapters have been seen the birth and the development of various characteristics of Laurence Sterne, and the way in which they operated in his life and upon his personality. These all come together for expression in "Tristram Shandy," because a man must write out of himself and his experiences, imaginary or real.

Writing, like speech, is a matter of complex habits of expression; indeed, a man's style is his habitual way of revealing the ideas he has in his mind, and a man who has not developed high-level, clean-cut, effective individual habits of expression we accuse of having no style at all. A man writes about whatever interests him, whether he writes for an income or for his personal pleasure in composition. A subject repugnant to him will not bring forth his full powers of expression except in attack: a misogynist will not write enthusiastically and thoroughly consistently on the happiness of married life, or the heavenly attributes of the female sex.

So we must expect from Laurence Sterne the expression of those things which please him, consciously in the ideas which he gives expression to, and unconsciously (in the common

[illegible]

[illegible] as a novelist.

A. The relationship of "Trilogy" to [illegible]'s life.

In the previous chapters have been seen the birth and the beginning of various characteristics of Lawrence's genius, and the way in which they operated in his life as upon his personality. It was all some [illegible] for [illegible] "Triloga Energy," because a man must write out of his life and his experiences, imaginary or real.

Writing, like speech, is a matter of complex habit. Of expression, indeed, a man's style is his essential way of [illegible] the [illegible] in his life, and a man who has not developed high-level, clear-cut effective individual habits of expression is [illegible] having no style at all. A man writes about whatever interests him, whether he writes for an income or for his personal pleasure in composition. A subject repugnant to him will not drive forth his full powers of expression another it attract; a mediocrity will not write outstanding-ly [illegible] somewhat [illegible] on the [illegible] of marriage life, or the masculine attributes of the female sex.

So we must expect from Lawrence during the expression of those things which please him, consciously in the ideas which he gives expression to, and unconsciously in the [illegible]

meaning of that word) in the way he treats these ideas, in his attitude toward them.

A person's past experience is the chief determiner of his attitude; whatever gave him pleasure he tends to repeat, and whatever gave him pain or dissatisfaction, he soon abandons, and often forgets. The strength and persistency of an idea in a person's mind is a good index of his reaction to it. And, in this sense we cannot intelligently study a man's writing with the idea of understanding it, without considering his life as well. Hence we shall find in "Tristram Shandy" evidences of Sterne's life and experiences, both objective and subjective. It is in this sense that the currents in Sterne's life which have been considered are brought together in "Tristram."

Previous chapters have unfolded these qualities. We have seen evidences of daydreaming in his schoolbook and his "Reverie of the Nuns." Though it is more apparent in the "Sentimental Journey," and is perhaps the chief quality of his "Journal to Eliza," it is present in "Tristram" in Sterne's toying with the memory of Janatone and the picture of Nannette. Evidences of Sterne's <u>spes phthisica</u> occur throughout the book, and need not be documented here in view of their treatment in an earlier chapter. Mention

has also been made of the spectacular release of energy produced by tuberculosis and its ability to allow the victim to carry on his work in spite of his malady.

Sterne's devotion to art and music is clearly shown in "Tristram." He has the keenness and ability, which the painter soon develops, to select significant detail and by means of this minute, suggestive realism he can say more in a few words than some writers can in a chapter. An actor playing a part in a dramatized "Tristram Shandy" would find his stage directions complete, minute and perfect, in the pages of the book, because of Sterne's remarkable powers of visual memory and representation. An excellent example of this is seen in the following passage:

> "My mother was going very gingerly in the dark along the passage which led to the parlour, as my uncle Toby pronounced the word "wife." -- 'Tis a shrill penetrating sound of itself, and Obadiah had helped it by leaving the door a little a-jar, so that my mother heard enough of it to imagine herself the subject of the conversation; so laying the edge of her finger across her two lips--holding in her breath, and bending her head a little downwards, with a twist of her neck---(not towards the door, but from it, by which means her ear was brought to the chink)---she listened with all her powers: ---the listening slave, with the Goddess of Silence at his back, could not have given a finer thought for an intaglio." [141]

And again, in a much longer passage, but worth reproducing not only for its graphic qualities, but for its high interest in spite of its length:

"---But before the Corporal begins, I must first give you a description of his attitude;-- otherwise he will naturally stand represented, by your imagination, in an uneasy posture, ---stiff,---perpendicular,--dividing the weight of his body equally upon both legs;--his eye fixed, as if on duty;--his look determined,--- clenching the sermon in his left hand, like his firelock.-- In a word, you would be apt to paint Trim, as if he was standing in his platoon ready for action.--His attitude was as unlike all this as you can conceive.

"He stood before them with his body swayed, and bent forwards just so far, as to make an angle of 85 degrees and a half upon the plain of the horizon;---which sound orators, to whom I address this, know very well to be the true persuasive angle of incidence;---in any other angle you may talk and preach;---'tis certain; ---and it is done every day;---but with what effect,---I leave the world to judge! . . . .

"He stood,---for I repeat it, to take the picture of him in at one view, with his body swayed, and somewhat bent forwards,---his right leg from under him, sustaining seven-eighths of his whole weight,---the foot of his left leg, the defect of which was no disadvantage to his attitude, advanced a little,--not laterally, nor forwards, but in a line betwixt them;---his knee bent, but that not violently, ---but so as to fall within the limits of the line of beauty;---and I add, of the line of science too;---for consider, it had one eighth part of his body to bear up;--so that in this case the position of the leg is determined,-- because the foot could be no further advanced, or the knee more bent, than what would allow him, mechanically to receive an eighth part of his whole weight under it, and to carry it too.

"This I recommend to painters:--need I add, ---to orators!---I think not; for unless they practice it,---they must fall upon their noses.

"So much for Corporal Trim's body and legs.--He held the sermon loosely, not carelessly, in his left hand, raised something above his stomach, and detached a little from his breast;---his right arm falling negligently by his side, as nature and the laws of gravity ordered it,---but with the palm of it open and turned toward his audience, ready to aid the sentiment in case it stood in need.

"Corporal Trim's eyes and the muscles of his face were in full harmony with the other parts of him;---he looked frank,---unconstrained, something assured,---but not bordering upon assurance.

"Let not the critic ask how Corporal Trim could come by all this.---I've told him it should be explained;---but so he stood before my father, my uncle Toby, and Dr. Slop,---so swayed his body; so contrasted his limbs, and with such an oratorical sweep throughout the whole figure, ---a statuary might have modeled from it;---nay, I doubt whether the oldest Fellow of a College,---or the Hebrew Professor himself, could have much mended it." [142]

In another place Sterne compares his writing to an artist's composition, judging it by the same criteria as one would a painting, (and incidentally ranking himself high by his scale.) The book contains a multitude of artistic parallels and figures of speech, which time and space forbid quoting here.

Musical allusions are numerous, also, for Sterne approached the violin in the same hobby-horsical spirit that he did the brush. He says:

> "---De gustibus non est disputandum;---that is, there is no disputing against Hobby-Horses; and for my part, I seldom do; nor could I with any sort of grace, had I been an enemy to them at the bottom; for happening, at certain intervals and changes of the moon, to be both fiddler and painter, according as the fly stings:. . ." [143]

To bear this out, he indulges freely in the use of musical terms, for instance:

> "ZOUNDS! ----------
> ----------
> -------Z---ds! cried Phutatorius, partly to himself---and yet high enough to be heard--and what seemed odd, 'twas uttered in a construction of look, and in a tone of voice, somewhat between that of a man in amazement and one in bodily pain.
>
> "One or two who had very nice ears, and could distinguish the expression and mixture of the two tones as plainly as a third or a fifth, or any other chord in music---were the most puzzled and perplexed with it---the concord was good in itself--but then 'twas quite out of the key, and no way applicable to the subject started;---so that with all their knowledge they could not tell what in the world to make of it." [144]

Some evidences have already been given of his wide reading, and his love of classical late-medieval, and early-renaissance writers on theology, philosophy, logic, medicine and military affairs; and Dr. Ferriar has ferreted out many sources in his "Illustrations of Sterns." Sterne mentions, among others, in the course of "Tristram," these names as being among his favorites: Rabelais, Cervantes (he says in one place "By the ashes of my dear Rabelais, and dearest Cervantes"), Burton (two of them: one on melancholy, the other as Dr. Slop, on obstetrics), Filmer, Bishop Hall, Locke, Stevinus, Descartes, Montaigne, Aristotle, and Scarron.

B. The relationship of "Tristram" to his earlier writing.

What was the character of Sterne's writing before he attempted "Tristram Shandy?" The first bits from his pen ~~was~~ were political. Lewis P. Curtis has ferreted out and published in his "Politicks of Laurence Sterne" a small amount of Sterne's political journalism. This small book records the labors of Sterne in getting his Whig candidate for the Parliament of 1741 elected in the face of strong Tory sentiment in the city of York, and the acid, wordy combat with one J[ames] S[cott], in which Sterne shows much wit and dialectic skill. The future author exposes more cleverness than scrupulousness in the letters which he succeeded in getting published in the Tory "York Courant." Sterne's first bit of publication, which resulted from this quarrel, was "Query upon Query," a reprint in the original form of one of his letters to the press, which the editor of the "York Courant" had purposely mangled by excision and manipulation.

This political journalism adds little to an exposition of the development of Sterne as a writer, except to show that, "at the age of twenty-six," young Laurie was competent at the manipulation of the pen, and facile at logic chopping. Its influence upon "Tristram," was slight although it may be considered as part of his training for the novel. One must practice writing in order to learn how to write.

Soon after this Sterne fell in love, and his letters to his future wife are the first bits of writing to show the future stylist in development. There is left, out of what was probably a copious amount of correspondence, only a few of the love letters written to Elizabeth Lumley. These were afterward touched up and rewritten to form part of his "Journal to Eliza," which is probably the reason they survive along with his later writings. Inspection of the one previously quoted, (page 69) shows the same vivacity of expression, the same peculiar punctuation (which has been called "a notation for the ear through the eye"), the same vividness of imagination, and the same degree of elation so often found in "Tristram." After reading Shandy, if one were given this letter without its identifying signature, one surely would say, "This too is Sterne's."

Like his early love letters, his "Reverie of the Nuns" shows itself less in "Tristram," and more in the Eliza letters, into which it also was woven. Its chief quality in relation to "Tristram" is its imagination, and this also is true of his poem, "The Unknown World," which indicates little more than that Sterne could express himself to a limited extent in verse.

Probably the pulpit had an important part in the working up of the novelist's technique. To see this let us

turn to the conscience sermon which he includes in book two of "Tristram" and which he publishes later in his fourth volume of "Sermons" as number twenty-seven. This sermon was written and preached in 1750, before the judges at the Summer Assizes, and consequently will give us an example of the way Sterne wrote ten years before he became a novelist. The two accounts of the sermon are virtually the same, there not being fifty words changed between them, although, of course, as we find the sermon in "Tristram," it is interspersed with the comments of Corporal Trim's audience. By inspection we find in this sermon many of the characteristics which go to make up the individuality of "Tristram Shandy;" indeed, the sermon fits into the novel without any conspicuous signs of poor articulation. It has the same general style; it has the trick of questioning the text; it has the same curious sentence construction; it has the same cesural-controlled cadence; it has the same dramatic quality; it has the same rhetorical skill at catching a subject and expanding and illustrating it; it has the same clever and acute portrayal of human nature.

Sterne's "Political Romance" adds to our exhibits of his preparation for the writing of his novel. This pamphlet was brought out a year before the first two volumes of "Tristram" as a Swiftian rebuttal to one Dr. Topham, preferment-grabber. In this little leaflet we also find

much that shows Sterne was a skillful, mature writer: there is a memorandum much like the marriage settlement in "Tristram;" there is the same type of punctuation, and expression, and emphasis; there is the same indirect nodal progression of the narrative; there is the same presentation of an hypothesis which is interpreted by each present, according to his humor. It is interesting to find here a reference to Gargantua and Pantagruel. We discover also, pointed satire, much more pointed, as a whole, than in "Tristram," and aimed at ecclesiastical matters in a manner more direct than Sterne dared employ in his novel. Trim is in the "Romance," a very different Trim from Uncle Toby's servant. Sterne refers to himself in this little allegory as Lorry Slim, "an unlucky Wight" with a light heart and a thin body, much as he refers to himself in analogous terms as Parson Yorick in "Tristram Shandy."

It may be seen from all this that there was little that was new in "Tristram Shandy." The novel did not burst forth like a miracle from nowhere, with no warning. Sterne had thorough preparation for his work, and enough experience to prepare him to write his novel. For the incidents in "Tristram," he had a basis in his reading and in his imagination, and in addition he had the technical skill in composition before he attempted to

portray the Shandy family. He had all the potential forces stored up waiting for release.

C. The motivation for "Tristram Shandy."

Why did Sterne write "Tristram Shandy," is the next question. A combination of factors made up the motivation. "Major Topham always boasted that he and his family were the indirect cause of Sterne taking to authorship," [145] Fitzgerald said, referring to the fact that the "Political Romance" brought Sterne a great deal of local fame. It happens that about the time Sterne started "Tristram" he had developed animosity toward a certain Dr. Burton, obstetrician, Tory and Catholic, and the middle aged parson felt an urge to attack this individual, who had been obnoxious both to him and his ecclesiastical group. This ill feeling, which prompted Sterne to portray Burton as Dr. Slop in "Tristram," was a contributing element. Melville, in tracing the beginnings of "Tristram," says, "That he had any more serious artistic purpose is a theory that will not hold water. Henry Fielding, desirous originally only to caricature 'Pamela' produced 'Joseph Andrews'. So with Sterne as with Fielding, the hitherto latent genius carried the author far away from the original humble conception; and thus it happened that, instead of an ephemeral work that would have passed into oblivion with 'A Political Romance', the world is richer by a masterpiece." [146]

Sterne has made two statements as to why he wrote "Tristram." They are not the same, yet they are not incompatible. He says, in a letter to Sir W., "I will try if the pen will not succeed better than the spade," [147] which is an allusion to his unprofitable venture into agriculture. And again he writes in a letter to Dr. ..... "I wrote not to be fed, but to be famous." [148] Probably both of these sentences are true. A desire both for fame and for income was probably present in Sterne's mind when he started upon "Tristram."

Froe ascribes the writing of the novel to "his instincts of wonder and construction" which "happened to be so organized that they cooperated in producing a thing of beauty which was largely enjoyed and admired." [149] And in another place he ascribes Sterne's becoming an author to his "self-assertive instinct." Quite recognizable things, these instincts, when they so combine to produce a masterpiece in one man and never apparently chance to do so in another. The element of chance is a little too large here to lend very much support to this shaky and variable theory, although if Froe were not determined to interpret Sterne by the light of instinct alone, more credence might be put in his conclusions.

Finally we come to the releasing cause of Sterne's writing. It has been seen that Sterne's life was very uncongenial in his home, and that his wife was taken to York in 1759, where she was confined in an insane hospital with an attack of paranoia. We have seen also that Sterne sought escape from his unhappy conjugal relationships, and the mental conflict they caused, in daydreaming and in flirtation, for it was during this time that Sterne started his first flirtation with his "Kitty." There is evidence to believe that the first two volumes of "Tristram Shandy" were written then, because in the eighteenth chapter of the first book he makes reference twice to his "dear dear Jenny," whom both Melville and Cross declare to be Kitty. Cross maintains the hypothesis that Sterne inserted this "Jenny" material just as "Tristram Shandy" was about to be published, but what conceivable reason could anyone find for going to the trouble of inserting into a novel after it had been written, such an element? Melville does not believe that the exact dates embracing the writing of "Tristram Shandy" can be set. I, myself, prefer to believe Sterne's own statement in chapter eighteen. The uncongeniality with his wife, her sudden psychosis, and any feeling of guilt which may have attached to his innocent flirtation with Kitty, could be counted upon to set up mental conflict in the mind of any man, to say nothing of the tender

sentimental mind of Laurence Sterne. An escape from conflict is writing, or artistic work of any kind. Langfield has pointed this out in a number of cases, and in an article entitled "The Role of Feeling and Emotion in Aesthetics" he makes this statement: "The experience of artists seems to point to the fact that art productions start with some sort of conflict which cannot be resolved by true action in the so-called world of reality." [150] This is the releasing factor, rather than "an instinct of construction."

D. Sterne's "philosophy of composition."

Sterne consciously or unconsciously had a theory of composition underlying the writing of "Tristram," which through careful reading of the book can be discovered, although until now, apparently nobody has attempted to do it. This philosophy of composition fits in very well with his character, as we have investigated it, and I shall attempt to put it down in his own words, with a running commentary.

The success of his dramatic, yet informal, style in the pulpit probably was the influence which let Sterne to come to the conclusion that:

> "Writing, when properly managed (as you may be sure I think mine is) is but a different name for conversation." [151]

This undoubtedly is one of the most important secrets of Sterne's style, and has been recognized more than once by critics. William Dean Howells felt it, and by it was prompted to write this fine appreciation:

> "Sterne's English is the most natural English that was ever written, or "wrote" as he would have written. It is the very manner of spoken language; it halts; it hesitates; it turns upon itself; it puts the preposition last, where it belongs; it emulates the beauty of a tree or flower rather than the symmetry of animal life; it has no care for antithesis; it balances itself only from the thinker's brain and flies along the swaying thread of sympathy to the reader's mind, where it lights easily, softly, joyously. It abounds in elision, in ellipse, in all the gay informality of graceful talk; for once, and, alas! only for once, the language forgets to be verbiage." [152]

Furthermore, Sterne realized the immense power of suggestion, and apparently knew, or sensed, that his readers had brains and imaginations of their own which could fill in and make vivid the things he only implied.

> "As no one, who knows what he is about in good company would venture to talk all;--- so no author, who understands the just boundaries of decorum and good breeding, would presume to think all: The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding, is to halve the matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn as well as yourself.
>
> "For my own part, I am eternally paying him compliments of this kind, and do all that lies in my power to keep his imagination as busy as my own." [153]

We have seen earlier that Sterne was in the romantic trend of Rousseau, both in attitude and in philosophy, and we find, upon looking into books on the romantic movement, such as Bernbaum's "Selections from the Pre-Romantic Movement," that Sterne is included among the pre-romantics. Hence we are not surprised to see his reaction to the fixed neo-classic rules of writing in the following:

> " . . . right glad I am, that I have begun the history of myself in the way I have done; and that I am able to go on, tracing everything in it, as Horace says, ab Ovo.
>
> "Horace, I know does not recommend this fashion altogether: But that gentleman is speaking only of an epic poem or a tragedy;---(I forget which,)---besides if it was not so, I should beg Mr. Horace's pardon;---for in writing what I have set about, I shall confine myself neither to his rules, nor to any man's rules that ever lived." [154]

And again, in a more spirited passage:

> . . . "The deuce of any other rule have I to govern myself by in this affair---and if I had one---as I do all things out of rule---I would burst and tear it to pieces, and throw it into the fire, when I had done---Am I warm? I am, and the cause demands it---a pretty story! is a man to follow rules---or rules to follow him?" [155]

He again reacts to the rules of the critic and the "connoisseur."

"I'll undertake this moment to prove it to any man in the world, except to a connoisseur:.....the whole set of 'em are so hung round and befetished with the bobs and trinkets of criticism,--or to drop my metaphor, which by the bye is a pity,--for I have fetched it as far as from the coast of Guiney;--their heads, Sir, are stuck so full of rules and compasses, and have that eternal propensity to apply them upon all occasions, that a work of genius had better to go to the devil at once, than stand to be pricked and tortured to death by 'em.

"-- And how did Garrick speak the soliloquy last night,--Oh, against all rule, my Lord, --most ungrammatically! betwixt the substantive and the adjective, which should agree together in number, case, and gender, he made a breach thus,--stopping, as if the point wanted settling;--and betwixt the nominative case, which your lordship knows should govern the verb, he suspended his voice in the epilogue a dozen times three seconds and three fifths by a stop-watch, my Lord, each time.--Admirable grammarian!--but in suspending his voice--was the sense suspended likewise? Did no expression of attitude or countenance fill up the chasm? --Was the eye silent? Did you narrowly look? --I looked only at the stop-watch, my Lord. --Excellent observer!

"And what of this new book the whole world makes such a rout about?--Oh! 'tis out of all plumb, my Lord,--quite an irregular thing! not one of the angles at the four corners was a right angle.--I had my rule and compasses, etc., my Lord, in my pocket.--Excellent critic!

"---And for the epic poem your lordship bid me look at--upon taking the length, breadth, height, and depth of it, and trying them at home upon an exact scale of Bossu's--'tis out, my Lord, in every one of its dimensions.--Admirable connoisseur!"

> "--And did you step in, to take a look at the grand picture in your way back? --'Tis a melancholy daub! my Lord; not one principle of the pyramid in any one group! --and what a price! -- for there is nothing of the colouring of Titian--the expression of Rubens--the grace of Raphael--the purity of Dominichino--the corregioscity of Corregio--the learning of Poussin--the airs of Guido--the taste of the Carrachis--or the grand contour of Angelo.--Grant me patience, just Heaven!-- Of all the cants which are canted in this canting world--though the cant of hypocrites may be the worst--the can of criticism is the most tormenting'." [156]

No further comment on his attitude toward the earlier men of his period need be made. Rousseau could not be more definitive.

Sterne fully appreciated the value of suspense and the use of unexpected turns in a narrative, for which he boldly declares in the first book of "Tristram:"

> "I set no small store by myself upon this very account, that my reader has never yet been able to guess at any thing. And in this, Sir, I am of so nice and singular a humour, that if I thought you was able to form the least judgment of probable conjecture to yourself, of what was to come in the next page,--I would tear it out of my book." [157]

The influence of this attitude upon the English novel was great, according to Lovett:

> "Sterne wrote fiction when the form of the English novel had become somewhat defined by the example of picaresque fiction and the practice of Richardson, Fielding and Smallett. Sterne made it his object, consciously, we must believe it, to smash this stereotype. The biographic novel becomes an absurdity when the hero is not born until the third volume. The chief

> quality of the English novel, that which accounts for its continued vitality, is its flexibility, its lack of definition, its constant escape from fixed convention.
>
> "Just when the novel form might have seemed to be hardening into an established mould, Sterne interrupted the process." [158]

And again Sterne makes the same statement in a slightly more hyperbolic form:

> ".....of all the several ways of beginning a book which are now in practice throughout the known world, I am confident my own way of doing it is the best--I'm sure it is the most religious--for I begin with writing the first sentence--and trusting to Almighty God for the second." [159]

There is very good reason to believe that, even if Sterne did trust God for the second sentence, he soon developed and trusted a sense of organized disorganization, as is evidenced in the care with which he leads up to the scenes in his book. The stage is perfectly set for the Nannette story, the scene is carefully laid for the Ernulphus cursing and, better than anything else, the birth of Tristram is prepared for, and the reader worked to a high pitch of curiosity before the hero makes his bow.

Sterne conceived a great liking for the use of quaint but interesting words, and the variety of his diction is one of the pleasures of reading "Tristram." He says:

> ".....'tis an undercraft of authors to keep up a good understanding amongst words, as politicians do among men--not knowing how near they may be under a necessity of placing them to each other.--" [160]

Yet on the other hand his affection for words was subservient to the pictures he wanted to get across to his readers. He took no delight in using words for their own sake when they would interfere with his narrative; he had a horror of "tall opaque words."

> "I hate set dissertations--and above all things in the world, 'tis one of the silliest things in one of them, to darken your hypothesis by placing a number of tall, opaque words, one before another, in a right line, betwixt your own and your reader's conception." [161]

He had control over his vocabulary, and used his words with artistic care, considering fully their connotations.

> "Now there are such an infinitude of notes, tunes, cants, chants, airs, looks, and accents with which the word fiddlestick may be pronounced in all such causes as this every one of 'em impressing a sense and meaning as different from the other, as dirt from cleanliness--That Casuists (for it is an affair of conscience on that score) reckon up no less than fourteen thousand in which you may do either right or wrong." [162]

We might expect a man of the cycloid type of Sterne to be changeable, and we see this changeable characteristic in his digressions, which allowed him intermissions between parts of his narrative, and permitted him to express his own ideas, to strut upon the stage and cut a few capers,

without danger to his story. These digressions happen not to be anything that Sterne devised by himself for we find them in Tom Jones in which Fielding makes these statements:

> "Reader, take care, I have unadvisedly led thee to the top of as high a hill as Mr. Allworthy's and how to get thee down without breaking thy neck I do not well know. However, let us e'en venture to slide down together; for Miss Bridget rings her bell, and Mr. Allworthy is summoned to breakfast, where I must attend, and, if you please, shall be glad of your company." [163]

> "Reader, I think proper, before we proceed any farther together, to acquaint thee that I intend to digress, through this whole history, as often as I see occasion, of which I am myself a better judge than any pitiful critic whatever; and here I must desire all those critics to mind their own business, and not to intermeddle with affairs or works which no ways concern them; for till they produce the authority by which they are constituted judges, I shall not plead their jurisdiction." [164]

It is probable that Sterne got this trick from his dramatic and realistic contemporary.* Sterne justifies himself in his use of these digressions by saying:

> "When a man is telling a story in the strange way I do mine, he is obliged continually to be going backwards and forwards to keep all tight together in the reader's fancy." [165]

---

* Sturgis Leavitt in an unpublished dissertation (Harvard 1917) suggests Fielding may have derived these qualities from Scarron.

He even goes to the point of diagramming the course of his narrative. He expresses his views further by claiming that his digressions are progressive as well as retrogressive and he manages this tricky composition, even as he claims, better than any other novelist.

> "I was just going, for example, to have given you the great outlines of my uncle Toby's most whimsical character;--when my aunt Dinah and the coachman came across us, and led us a vagary some millions of miles into the very heart of the planetary system; Notwithstanding all this, you perceive that the drawing of my uncle Toby's character went on gently all the time;--not the great contours of it--that was impossible,--but some familiar strokes and faint designations of it, were here and there touched on, as we went along, so that you are much better acquainted with my uncle Toby now than you was before.
>
> "By this contrivance the machinery of my work is of a species by itself; two contrary motions are introduced into it, and reconciled, which were thought to be at variance with each other. In a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive too,--and at the same time.
>
> "This, Sir, is a very different story from that of the earth's moving round her axis, in her diurnal rotation, with her progress in her elliptic orbit which brings about the year, and constitutes that variety and vicissitude of seasons we enjoy;--though I own it suggested the thought,--as I believe the greatest of our boasted improvements and discoveries have come from such trifling hints.
>
> "Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine; --they are the life, the soul of reading!--- take them out of this book, for instance,-- you might as well take the book along with them;-- one cold eternal winter would reign in every page

> of it; restore them to the writer;--he steps forth like a bridegroom,--bids All-hail; brings in variety, and forbids the appetite to fail.
>
> "All the dexterity is in the good cookery and management of them, so as to be not only for the advantages of the reader, but also of the author, whose distress, in this matter, is truly pitiable: For, if he begins a digression,--from that moment, I observe, his whole work stands stock still;--and if he goes on with his main work--then there is an end of his digression.
>
> "--This is vile work.--For which reason, from the beginning of this, you see, I have constructed the main work and the adventitious parts of it with such intersections, and have so complicated and involved the digressive and progressive movements, one wheel within another, that the whole machine, in general, has been kept a-going;--and, what's more, it shall be kept a-going these forty years, if it pleases the fountain of health to bless me so long with life and good spirits." [166]

We have seen that Sterne justified his daydreaming by saying, "The mind should be accustomed to make wise reflections and draw curious conclusions as it goes along." He turns this particular trick of thought to use in "Tristram," as can be seen in the mass of heterogeneous matter he successfully incorporated in that novel. He even admits:

> "Upon looking back from the end of the last chapter, and surveying the texture of what has been wrote, it is necessary, that upon this page, and the three following it, a good quantity of heterogeneous matter be inserted to keep up that just balance between wisdom and folly, without which a book would not hold together a single year; nor is it a poor creeping digression (which but for the name of, a man might as well continue going on in the king's highway) which will do the business--no; if it is to be a digression, it must be a good frisky one, and upon a frisky subject too, where neither the horse or his rider are to be caught, but by rebound." [167]

Humor is part of his creed. He says, "Either laugh with me, or at me, or in short, do anything, only keep your temper." [168] Again he writes this in his book:

> "If 'tis wrote against any thing,--'tis wrote, an' please your worships, against the spleen! in order, by a more frequent and a more convulsive elevation and depression of the diaphragm, and the succussations of the intercostal and abdominal muscles in laughter, to drive the gall and other bitter juices from the gall-bladder, liver, and sweetbread of his majesty's subjects, with all the inimicitious passions which belong to them, down into their duodenums." [169]

He continues with the same idea:

> "Great Apollo! if thou art in a giving humour--give me--I ask no more, but one stroke of native humour, with a single spark of thy own fire along with it--and send Mercury, with the rules and compasses, if he can be spared, with my compliments to--no matter." [170]

And then he prefaces chapter twenty-three, book one, in this way:

> "I have a strong propensity in me to begin this chapter very nonsensically, and I will not baulk my fancy." [171]

Sterne is conscious of his skill as a novelist and expounds upon it in his asides:

> "Attitudes are nothing Madam--'tis the transition from one attitude to another -- like the preparation and resolution of the discord into harmony, which is all in all." [172]

He realizes that he can take old stereotyped ideas and make them fresh and powerful by putting them in the proper setting.

> "--Are we not here now,--and gone in a moment,"--There was nothing in the sentence--'Twas one of your self-evident truths we have the advantage of hearing every day; and if Trim had not trusted more to his hat than his head--he had made no thing at all of it." [173]

He is critical of others' writing. Travel description, he felt, was very poorly done, so he took a plain, which is so hard to write about interestingly, to show how he would handle it. About this plain he built his story of Nannette.

> "...This is most terrible work; judge if I don't manage my plains better.
>
> "...in short, by seizing every handle, of what size or shape soever, which chance held out to be in this journey--I turned my plain into a city--I was always in company, and with great variety too...." [174]

Perhaps this was a back-handed slap at Smallett.

Sterne was not unaware of the power he had over his reader.

> "--But courage! gentle reader!--I scorn it--'tis enough to have thee in my power--but to make use of the advantage which the fortune of the pen has now gained over thee, would be too much.--" [175]

Yet this control over his readers he does use to good advantage. He offers a dedication for sale, he is

determined that the whole world shall read his book, and even predicts that "Tristram Shandy" shall be as widely read as "Pilgrim's Progress." He promises two volumes yearly and builds up a market for them by "sales talk" at the end of each yearly installment. He offers the conscience sermon, he says, so that if the public is interested in his other sermons he can publish them later to good advantage. By his writings he earned about three thousand pounds, an enormous sum for a minister, considering that the ordinary vicar averaged about twelve shillings weekly, about twenty-five pounds a year. And his family, after his death, earned an equal sum by posthumous publication, and the sale of copyrights.

Yet this skillful author sometimes had his troubles in composition, which he did not hesitate to give vent to in his book.

> "I declare, I do not recollect any one opinion or passage of my life where my understanding was more at loss to make ends meet, and torture the chapter I had been writing to the service of the chapter following it, than in the present case; one would think I took pleasure in running into difficulties of this kind, merely to make fresh experiments of getting out of 'em--Inconsiderate soul that thou art! What! are not the unavoidable distresses with which as an author and a man, thou art hemmed in on every side of thee--are they, Tristram, not sufficient, but thou must entangle thyself still more?" [176]

He was even at a loss at times as to how he could go on most effectively, how best to compose his narrative from an artistic point of view!

> "O ye Powers! (for powers ye are, and great ones too)--which enable mortal man to tell a story worth the hearing -- that kindly shew him, where he is to begin it--and where he is to end it--what he is to put into it--and what he is to leave out--how much of it he is to cast into a shade--and whereabouts he is to throw his light!--Ye, who preside over this vast empire of biographical freebooters, and see how many scrapes and plunges your subjects hourly fall into;--will you do one thing?
>
> "I beg and beseech you, (in case you will do nothing better for us) that wherever in any part of your dominions it so falls out, that three several roads meet in one point, as they have done just there--that at least you set up a guide-post in the centre of them, in mere charity, to direct an uncertain devil which of the three he is to take." [177]

Sterne historically goes backward to Ben Jonson for the psychological interpretation of his major characters, and as we have seen, goes forward to the present day for his means of expression. The Shandys are unquestionably "humours" characters. Each one interprets the situation in which he is involved in terms of his own humour, his own interests, his own character! Walter Shandy, whom Sterne probably meant as a caricature of the pedantic theorist,* draws curious conclusions out of everything; Tobias, his brother, is a

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* TS IX:32 "My father, whose way was to force every event in nature into an hypothesis,- by which means, never man crucified Truth at the rate he did,-...."

good-humored characterization of the tender hearted individual and the hobby-rider. Sterne specifically tells his reader that he proposes to use this technique when he says: "To avoid all . . . . errors . . . . I am determined . . . . . to draw my uncle Toby's character from his Hobby-Horse." [178]

E. Summary

It has been seen in this chapter that there is close connection between "Tristram Shandy," and Sterne's earlier work, and that in his serially-published novel he expresses the same qualities of mind and expression he has demonstrated previously. All of the personal characteristics of the man which have been considered in this paper do not, of course, receive full expression in "Tristram," but those not evidencing themselves in that composition tend to appear in the "Sentimental Journey," and the "Journal to Eliza."

Mental conflict, desire for fame and fortune, and the success of the "Political Romance" have been seen as the motivation for "Tristram." And finally, the novelist's theory of composition, and the extent to which it reflected the man himself, have been considered.

SYNOPSIS

SYNOPSIS

In the study of Sterne certain elements of his personality and work have generally been ignored entirely or passed over cursorily, and it has been the purpose of this study to discover, investigate, and point out the elements and their relationship to the man and his work. A fundamental assumption is made, that a man and his writing are closely connected, and the study of one is not complete without the study of the other.

The approach to this study is genetic, making use of as many elements in Sterne's life and work as possible, to show the birth and development of the man and his writings, but a critical eye has been trained on the material used. Sterne's letters, as organized by Lewis Melville, and the novel "Tristram Shandy" have come in for the most frequent quotation and reference.

On his father's side, the novelist sprung from substantial ecclesiastical and squirearchical stock; on his mother's side, little is known. His father showed signs of inferiority, and his mother was a hard unmotherly parent. The boy led an unnatural, careless, nomadic life, the hardships of which are testified to by the appalling mortality rate of the children. But in this decade-long pre-school period young Laurie developed some of his later attitudes and interests.

Like many other men of genius, Sterne did not adjust himself easily to school routine, the cause being his earlier lack of routine and discipline. The first evidences of daydreaming as an escape from unpleasant reality come in this period, as is testified to by one of Sterne's textbooks, preserved by Fitzgerald. He was careless and inattentive, and, being older than his schoolmates had time

to dream without falling behind in his work. And his dissatisfaction with his schoolwork is expressed in "Tristram." Nevertheless, the youth did not entirely fail to profit from his schooling. He developed there a skill at Latin, and a deep interest in, and affection for, the classics.

At college, as it was in his earlier schooling, Sterne was older than his mates, and there he was forced to undergo the pride-reducing duties of the sizar. His introduction to Hall-Stevenson and to French literature came at this period, and he dropped neither of these interests completely to the day of his death. The author's satirical attitude toward medieval logic and hair-splitting theology were crystallized at this period by the necessity of his studying these subjects in preparation for his two degrees. His post-collegiate interests in painting, fiddling, and obscure medieval literature, as well as his experience in writing political invective, must be considered as part of his education preparatory to the writing of "Tristram Shandy."

The personality of the writer of "Tristram" has been puzzling to all those who have interested themselves in the man. Writers have usually either condoned him, or hurled epithets at him, with the exception of Froe, who tried to fit an explanation of the novelist's character into the rigid pattern of instinctive psychology.

It is only within the last few years that attention has been paid to the influence of tuberculosis upon personality, but it is in this influence that lies much of the explanation of Sterne.

Tuberculous stigmata, and direct testimony show that the novelist was afflicted with this disease. The quality of the malady which makes it of importance in the study of a literary artist is the peculiar feeling of well being, and even of elation produced, probably by the toxic by-products of tuberculosis. Its victims work at a high level of activity, and often show marked oscillations of mood. Nor is the influence of tuberculosis upon literature confined to the case of Laurence Sterne alone, for Jeanette Marks has traced the influence of the disease in a number of other cases, those of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Emily Brontë, Shelley, and Stevenson among them.

Another profound influence upon Sterne was his proclivity to daydreaming, which was found evidenced as early as his first years in school, and which consistently showed itself throughout his writings: in the "Reverie of the Nuns," in his love letters, in "Tristram Shandy," in his "Sentimental Journey," and finally in the Eliza Letters. Daydreaming, not carried to excess, may be recommended as excellent exercise for the imagination, but its danger lies in the fact that it is an escape from the realities of life. In Sterne's case dreaming was an outlet, an emotional escape from unpleasant conditions at home.

Tuberculosis and daydreaming led Sterne into a romantic, Rousseauistic philosophy of life, which was intensified by his reaction to the neo-classic attitude in philosophy and theology. It is improbable that Sterne ever rationalized his attitude into a consistent system.

Sterne as a benedict was unhappy. He drifted romantically into marriage with the "termagant and arrogant cousin of Elizabeth Montagu," Elizabeth Lumley, who later was restrained as a probable paranoiac, a condition possibly brought on by alcoholic intemperance. Incompatibility existed between the two, and finally the wife deserted the husband. Sterne's flirtations were an outgrowth of the uncongenial conditions at home, but existing evidence indicates quite conclusively that they were rather indiscreet than immoral, and that his attachments were sentimental and platonic, rather than sensual. His attitude toward love, as expressed in various passages from his writings, is entirely consistent with this view.

For Laurence Sterne, the church was Hobson's choice. Under the patronage of his uncle Jaques, the novelist became first an ecclesiastical journalist, and then a pluralist, which made him a busy man for the many years before he started "Tristram" and virtually gave up his preaching: "he decently lived a becoming ornament of the church till his Rabelaisian spirit, which issued from the press, immersed him into the gaieties and frivolities of the world." He preached simply, "from the heart," and at a level where his sermons would fit his congregation, but he had no use for polemic divines or the more esoteric parts of theology.

As a novelist Sterne expressed the attitudes which appealed to him, and reflected his own life and character. His devotion to art and music appear, and his love for the classics

and the more extravagant medieval writers is in evidence. Political journalism and sermons had an influence in preparing him for the writing of "Tristram." Motivation for the writing of his prose fiction is seen in his dislike for Dr. Burton, in his success with the "Political Romance," and in a desire to escape from the harsh circumstances of life. A well worked out but unorganized theory of composition appears in "Tristram" which is marked especially by the idea that "writing, when properly managed . . . is but a different name for conversation," an idea stylistically and historically significant.

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VALUE	EXTENT READ	CHARACTER
A. Specific	1. Completely, carefully	a. Biographical
B. General	2. Pertinent sections "	b. Criticism of the man.
C. Suggestive	3. Skimmed	c. " of his works.
D. Slight		d. Psychological, medical
		e. Review
		f. Miscellaneous

ABBREVIATIONS USED:

TS - Tristram Shandy
LS - Laurence Sterne
SJ - Sentimental Journey
JE - Journal to Eliza

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