

blameworthy, and have since met with uncompromising condemnation from few critics. Thackeray, however, is terribly severe to his brother humourist, so severe indeed that his judgment loses much of its force; he errs in excessive harshness as much as other critics in excessive leniency. To call the creator of Uncle Toby 'a feeble wretch,' 'a coward,' 'a leering satyr,' is to pass far beyond the bounds, not only of generous, but of just, criticism. It was Thackeray's mission, however, to lash fashionable vice, and in his desire to avoid all appearance of condoning the particular class of sin of which Sterne was guilty, he abandoned something of that tender-hearted and compassionate charity, which should be uppermost in the mind of one who passes judgment on a fellow-man. More touching than all Thackeray's hard words is the unconscious condemnation contained in a remark of La Fleur, Sterne's valet, concerning the *fille-de-chambre*, mentioned in *The Sentimental Journey*. 'It was certainly a pity,' said La Fleur, 'she was so pretty and so *petite*.' This little speech, implying as it does all the consequences of such acts of wicked folly, would have made its way to the sensitive heart of Sterne himself more surely than the most bitter denunciations of severe moralists. When an offender such as Sterne is brought to the bar to receive the judgment of posterity, he is entitled to the utmost clemency and mercy which it is within the power of the court to bestow. He brings, indeed, his recommendations to mercy with him. Uncle Toby, Corporal Trim, the dying lieutenant and the desolate Maria, all plead for him—nay, even the imprisoned starling beats his wings against his cage to soften the hearts of Sterne's judges. One who by innocent mirth has lightened countless weary hours, and by tender pathos caused many a delicious tear to flow, has a right to be judged in the spirit of the most comprehensive charity. His frank

and open plea of guilty, and the confiding manner in which he casts himself upon the mercy of the Court, should also count something in his favour. Let us then, in judging Laurence Sterne, give the utmost weight to all there was in him of good, and if we must finally condemn, let us condemn with pitying and affectionate sorrow, and not with harsh reviling and unrelenting scorn.

Sentimentalism (neither sentiment nor sentimentality would exactly express my meaning) has a considerable and, at the same time, a very curious influence upon the feelings and actions of mankind. It makes men sometimes absurd, often illogical, and still more often unjust. The man whose eyes are as dry as the Desert of Sahara to the real griefs and troubles of life, will shed a tear over the sorrows of the heroine of a rubbishy novel; the man whose horizon is bounded by his office counter, and whose heart is as hard as the nether millstone to the misery he meets with every day of his life, feels himself great with heroic aspirations, and glowing with generous impulses, as he witnesses the performance of some second-rate actor. A startling murder committed in the next street, or an accident near home, involving a comparatively small loss of life, excites deeper pity and commiseration than a distant battle in which the slain are counted by thousands, or a still more distant famine whose victims are computed by millions. All this is doubtless illogical and weak, but it is human nature; and the sentimentalism which is at the bottom of these incongruous emotions and disproportionate sympathies, is foremost among the traits in human character which render life better worth living. Sterne possessed this sentimentalism in an exaggerated degree. It has been made a subject of severe censure upon him, that he could weep in public over an imprisoned starling or a dead ass, but could not regulate his private life so as to avoid giving