

one of Sterne's letters foreshadows the growing desire to live apart from him, which led his wife to seize the first reasonable opportunity of separation. 'Else,' he says, 'she declares herself happier without me; but not in any anger is this declaration made, but in pure, sober, good sense, built on sound experience. She hopes you will be able to strike a bargain for me before this time twelve-month, to lead a bear round Europe; and from this hope from you, I verily believe that you are so high in her favour at present.' From this it would appear probable, that Sterne's journey to France, in the following year (1762), was brought about as much at his wife's instigation as by his own desire, and it is even possible that Mrs. Sterne prompted it, with the design of carrying out the separation she evidently wished for. Sterne preceded his family to Paris, arriving there himself in January, 1762, and remaining alone until July, in which month his wife and daughter joined him. The letters written by Sterne to his wife from Paris, having reference to her journey there, are moderately, if not warmly, affectionate, and it is evident that there was, as yet, no open breach between them. Indeed his wife seems throughout, to have acted with great forbearance and good sense; she lived with him until she found an opportunity of escape without scandal, but the opportunity once found, she showed great determination in not letting it slip. It is not even ascertained that there was ever any actual quarrel between them; it is only certain that Sterne pressed her to return to England with him, but on one pretext or another she refused, and remained to superintend the education of her daughter in a French convent. It cannot be said that Sterne objected very strenuously to this arrangement; he of course shared his wife's desire to avoid scandal, and he had, moreover, a genuine wish for his daughter to live with him, but upon the whole, it is but too probable

that he was rather rejoiced than grieved to be rid of his wife. In his letters he thus refers to the separation: 'My wife returns to Toulouse, and purposes to spend the summer at Bag-nières. I, on the contrary, go and visit my wife, the church in Yorkshire. We all live the longer, at least the happier, for having things our own way. This is my conjugal maxim.' And again: 'I told Mrs. Sterne that I should set out for England very soon; but as she chooses to remain in France for two or three years, I have no objection, except that I wish my girl in England.' Doubtless, Sterne in his heart did not feel any great sorrow at the removal of a restraint which left him free to indulge to the full his predilections for sentimental intrigues, and Platonic friendships. It is melancholy to reflect on such an end to a union which had lasted more than twenty years, and which was inspired at the outset by true affection on both sides. As we have said hardly enough is known of Sterne's earlier married life to apportion accurately the blame of this unhappy estrangement; but from what we do know of his later life, it is tolerably certain that Thackeray summed up the case justly when he said: 'Whether husband or wife had most of the *patience d'un ange* may be uncertain; but there can be little doubt which needed it most.'

The world has always been lenient to sinners of Sterne's type. The man who is described as 'no man's enemy except his own,' generally contrives to be the most deadly enemy to all who love or trust him, but he almost universally meets with pity and sympathy rather than with aversion. It is only when a man dares, like Shelley, to sin in a thoroughly unconventional and unfashionable manner, that the world discovers that his sin is of so deep a dye as to be past all forgiveness. Sterne's faults and follies were eminently fashionable; they were regarded in his own day as hardly