

Their inward life up to this period, passed in the quiet country parsonage, may or may not have been happy : we know little of the circumstances attending it, and still less of the character, tastes and disposition of Mrs. Sterne, so that we are hardly qualified to say whether she was likely to make Sterne happy. It is rarely, however, that such estrangements take place late in life, without being led up to by long years of mutual want of sympathy and dwindling of affection, although they may be precipitated, and apparently caused by subsequent acts of folly on one side or the other. Sterne's brilliant reception in London society rendered intolerable to him the resumption of his former quiet life, but it cannot have changed his nature; and it is but too likely that during the twenty years of his life at Sutton, he had given his wife abundant cause for complaint. Be this as it may, it is certain that from this time his conduct to her was selfish and heartless; he chose in his actions not only to ignore the fact that he was a clergyman, but also the fact that he was a husband. But it must not be forgotten that the adulation which was so freely bestowed on the author of *Tristram Shandy* might well have turned a stronger head than Yorick's. Gray, writing in June, 1760, says: 'Tristram Shandy is still a greater object of admiration—the man as well as the book. One is invited to dinner, when he dines, a fortnight before.' Boswell records that Johnson, illustrating the hospitality of London, said: 'Nay, sir, any man who has a name or has the power of pleasing, will be generally invited in London. The man Sterne, I am told, has engagements for three months.' The Earl of Falconberg testified his gratitude to the man whose writings had made his lordship laugh, by presenting Sterne to the living of Coxwold, which was situated in convenient proximity to Sutton. Such was the reception ac-

corded to him by the great; flattered and fawned upon on all sides, he plunged eagerly into the vortex of dissipation and pleasure. He remained in London until the summer of 1761, totally oblivious of his wife, his letters abounding in descriptions of court and fashionable life. Among his published letters, written during this year, there are none to his wife, but in a letter to his friend, Mr. Croft, we meet with this passage: 'Mrs. Sterne says her purse is light: will you, dear sir, be so good as to pay her ten guineas? and I will reckon with you when I shall have the pleasure of meeting you,' and in a postscript to another letter, 'Pray, when you have read this, send the news to Mrs. Sterne.' The correspondence between husband and wife can hardly, therefore, have been frequent. In the latter half of 1761, Sterne, as we have said, left London, and went to reside at his new living of Coxwold, which in his memoirs he calls 'a sweet retirement in comparison of Sutton.' His real feelings with regard to any retirement 'in comparison of London,' are feelingly expressed in the following extract from a letter written towards the end of 1761: 'I rejoice you are in London. Rest you there in peace; here 'tis the devil. You was a good prophet. I wish myself back again, as you told me I should. * * * Oh Lord! now are you going to Ranelagh to-night, and I am sitting sorrowful as the prophet was, when the voice cried out to him and said, "What doest thou here, Elijah?"' His wife and daughter resided with him here, and in a letter written almost at the same time as the one from which we have just quoted, and whose sincerity we rather doubt, it being evidently designed to impress the recipient with the idea of rural felicity and perfect contentment, he says: 'My Lydia helps to copy for me, and my wife knits, and listens as I read her chapters.' Their life at Coxwold can hardly have been of this idyllic nature, and a passage in