LAURENCE STERNE.

BY WALTER TOWNSEND.

' Be to his virtues very kind,
And to his faults a little blind.'

OPINIONS differ as to whether the nineteenth century is distinguished above the eighteenth for a more earnest and widely diffused religious spirit. There can however be no doubt that the ministers and exponents of religion in our day are infinitely more worthy of the cause they represent than were their predecessors of a hundred years ago. It is fortunately no longer possible for a clergyman's sermons to owe their success to the fact that their author was also the author of *Tristram Shandy*. The clergy of the present day, whether in England or the Colonies, never forget the purpose to which they have dedicated their lives ; they are ministers of religion, and nothing else, and as a class they nobly uphold their calling by the example they set of private virtue and heroic self-sacrifice to duty. But in Sterne's time things were very different ; pluralism and simony were rampant, and in most cases self-interest

rather than any inward prompting determined a man in choosing the Church as a profession. Parsons of the eighteenth century may be broadly divided into three classes. First, the fox-hunting, port wine drinking, farming parson ; the 'Squire-rector,' who would perhaps have made a worthy country gentleman, but that he happened, as ill luck had it, to be a younger son, and was, therefore, driven to take the family-living. He would read a marriage or funeral service with his surplice thrown over his hunting costume, and after a jovial dinner with his brother the Squire, would subside under the table in common with the majority of the guests, without exciting either surprise or censure. Secondly, there was the poor, humbly-born curate, without friends or interest, whom love of learning had drawn from his country grammar school to the University, and who had taken orders as the only means of providing himself with bread. Of this class