

pain to those who were dearest to him. Such censure, if not ungenerous, is at least beside the question. Sterne's feelings and emotions were genuine, and that he was capable of them should rather lessen than increase the blame that attaches to his faults. Thackeray treats this side of Sterne's character as though it merely applied to his artistic conceptions, telling the following story in illustration of it:—"Some time since I was in the company of a French actor, who began after dinner, and at his own request, to sing French songs of the sort called *des chansons grivoises*, and which he performed admirably and to the satisfaction of most persons present. Having finished these, he commenced a sentimental ballad: it was so charmingly sung, that it touched all persons present, and especially the singer himself, whose voice trembled, whose eyes filled with emotion, and who was snivelling and weeping quite genuine tears by the time his own ditty was over. I suppose Sterne had this artistic sensibility! All this is undeniably true so far as it goes; Sterne's sensibility was of this sort; but Thackeray's description of it falls so short of the whole truth, that it is perhaps more misleading than falsehood. Sterne's sensibility was not merely, nor even chiefly, 'artistical.' It displayed itself not alone in his writings but in his actions; it resulted from his tender emotional nature, which could not witness or think of distress or suffering, without a reflex being shed—transient perhaps, but still undoubtedly sincere—on his own heart. Thackeray would possibly have called the sensibility displayed in Sterne's affecting account of the forlorn Maria, merely 'artistical.' Let us see how La Fleur, who witnessed the actual transaction, related it, as quoted by Sir Walter Scott. "When we came up to her," said La Fleur, "she was grovelling in the road like an infant, and throwing the dust upon her head—and yet few were more lovely.

Upon Sterne's accosting her with tenderness, and raising her in his arms, she collected herself, and resumed some composure—told him her tale of misery and wept upon his breast. My master sobbed aloud. I saw her gently disengage herself from his arms, and she sung him the service of the Virgin; my poor master covered his face with his hands, and walked by her side to the cottage where she lived; there he talked earnestly to the old woman. Every day while we stayed there I carried them meat and drink from the hotel, and when we departed from Moulins, my master left his blessings and some money with the mother. How much I know not—he always gave more than he could afford.' Such actions as these are prompted by something higher than 'artistical sensibility.' Yet another testimony from La Fleur to Sterne's softness of heart, and overwhelming desire to relieve distress. His remittances were frequently irregular, owing to war, and he had not calculated for the frequent demands upon his charity. 'At many of our stages my master has turned to me with tears in his eyes—"These poor people oppress me, La Fleur; how shall I relieve them?"' It is often the case that those who can least bear to witness the sufferings of others, are themselves among the weakest in resisting temptation. Extreme sensibility almost implies weakness, and Sterne was by no means an exception to the rule. He has himself confided to us, with a candour we cannot commend, some of his flagrant derelictions from the paths of decency and morality. To his criminality in this direction it is not necessary to make any further reference, beyond saying that nothing we have written must be considered as attempting to palliate or soften down the heartlessness and folly of such acts. When we consider his age, his profession, and his family ties, we find it hard, in reading certain passages in *The Sentimental Journey*,