broke thy head for liking his father to a singing-man of Windsor," and how, after goodwife Keech, the butcher’s wife, had come in to borrow vinegar for a dish of prawns and Sir John had asked for some prawns, he had told her —delicious flattery—not to be so familiar with such poor people; and had ended by borrowing thirty shillings. One might almost imagine that the dame worked herself up into these rages, excusable as they are, merely in order that Falstaff might cajole her out of them again, as he always does. When she says that she will have to pawn her plate and the tapestry of her dining-chambers to provide him with more money, it is with characteristic impudence that he consoles her by saying that there is nothing like plain glassware and cheap water-colour hangings. And when the poor soul hesitates, the astute old sponger immediately stands upon his dignity and waves the whole matter aside, at which she capitulates and would pawn her very gown that he might have the money. But the “poor soul” slipped into the last sentence without permission and has no right to be there, for though she was scandalously plucked, she received as much as she gave; she had the company of the famous Sir John Falstaff, and though it is an excellent thing to have one’s bills paid, to keep one’s plate and tapestries from the pawnshop, to be accounted respectable and stand well with Master Tisick, the deputy, and Master
Dumb, the minister, it is even better to have the company, in his hours of glorious ease, of Sir John Falstaff. That this is not merely our opinion, born of hero-worship and a safe distance that keeps plate and tapestry intact, but her opinion too, is proved by her own testimony: "Well, fare thee well: I have known thee these twenty-nine years, come peascod time; but an honester and truer-hearted man,—well, fare thee well." Falstaff is neither honest nor true-hearted, as she has known to her cost, but he has her admiration and affection, and so she uses the words of praise that come most easily to her tongue. It is she, of course, who rings down the curtain upon this companion of princes, this erstwhile emperor of Cockaigne, in a speech that is famous, and well deserves to be, for it has all the tragi-comedy of this life blended together, with exquisite art, in its seemingly natural artless progress: "'A made a fine end, and went away, an it had been any christom child: 'a parted even just between twelve and one, even at the turning o' the tide: for after I saw him fumble with the sheets, and play with flowers, and smile upon his fingers' ends, I knew there was but one way; for his nose was as sharp as a pen, and 'a babbled of green fields."

All these figures about Falstaff, comic as they are in themselves, chiefly serve as foils to him; they are the grotesque landscape lit up by the summer lightning of
his wit and humour. Not one is a better foil than Justice Shallow. Except in years, he is everything that Falstaff is not. When they made Sir John, the gods dipped their hands deep in the stuff of creation, so that he overflows with everything that a man could have, short of virtue; he is a liberal helping of humanity; immense in body, "larding the lean earth" as he goes his way upon it; brimmed with energy, in spite of his years and bulk; crammed with experience and master of almost every occasion that comes his way; overflowing with wit and humour; bursting with good spirits and laughter; he is an alderman's feast of a man. Shallow, his contemporary, is the shadow of a lenten breakfast, who, even in his youth, was "like a man made after supper of a cheese-paring," a forked radish, with a head fantastically carved upon it with a knife, and now that his wisp of a carcass and his wisp of a mind have entered into their winter, there is hardly anything left of him but a few bones, a mouthful of silly phrases, and an idea or two, kept together only by his notion of his own importance. He has little to say, being as feeble in mind as in body, but being the greatest man in the district, and feeling that he ought to be saying something all the time, he repeats himself over and over again, without paying much attention to the person to whom he is talking, in a manner peculiar to half-witted self-important old men. This fussy
empty mode of speech has never been caught so well as it is in Shallow: "Come on, come on, come on, sir; give me your hand, sir; give me your hand, sir; an early stirrer, by the Rood." These accents may be overheard any day in the smoking room of almost any club. After hearing Shallow talk, Falstaff, the clear-sighted old rascal, exclaims: "Lord, Lord, how subject we old men are to this vice of lying." That wild youth of his, to which Shallow so often refers, to the admiration of Silence, is entirely imaginary; Falstaff remembers him and tells us how "a came ever in the rearward of the fashion; and sung those tunes to the overscutch'd huswives that he heard the carmen whistle, and sware they were his Fancies or his Good-nights," and you could have thrust him and all his apparel into an eel-skin, the case of a treble hautboy was a mansion to him. We can see him, pinched and rural and for ever behind the fashion, palely trembling on the edge of debauchery. And now fifty years have ripened these shadowy adventures into a kind of reality, and as he drags his old bones along by the side of Falstaff's heaving mountain of flesh, and hears his "We have heard the chimes at midnight, Master Shallow," he warms into reminiscence, and spectral wine and women and cudgel-play and all the wild nights of youth come to life. And Master Silence, for the thousandth time, hears the tale again (he knows it well—"That's fifty-
five years ago," he prompts), and fixes his bucolic gaze, in which awe, envy, fear, and admiration are mingled, upon this rollicking head of the family. Even that unknown idol, goodman Puff of Barson, probably could not show such a past.

Silence is one of those characters (Slender and Sir Andrew Aguecheek are two others) that only Shakespeare could bring on the stage and leave us convinced of their reality. As Hazlitt has remarked: "In point of understanding and attainments, Shallow sinks low enough; and yet his cousin Silence is a foil to him; he is the shadow of a shade, glimmers on the very edge of downright imbecility, and totters on the brink of nothing." Revolving round the great roaring sun of Falstaff, we discover, in the far outer spaces, this dim fantastic planet of a Shallow, and yet this poor cinder in the darkness has its satellite, Silence, its faint little moon. So slight is Silence's demand upon life that he can bask even in the meagre bleak sunshine of his cousin, the Justice, and hear things even in this orchard that add colour to his dreams. Nay, when there has been an unusually liberal allowance of sack at supper, in honour of the great Sir John's presence, he can not only sit in the garden with the rest but can break into song without encouragement, lifting his faint voice like some roistering sparrow, some care-riveted sprawling field-mouse. Should
Falstaff, with ironic appraisement, declare that he had not thought Master Silence had been a man of such mettle, he can reply "Who, I? I have been merry twice and once ere now," and thus flash a light upon his Sahara of an existence through which has trickled a tiny wasted brook of sack and song. Poor Silence!—we leave him, drowned by the last bumper, stunned by the fiery rhetoric of Pistol, asleep under the apple trees. He is not carried to the triumph in London, and so, at least, is saved a night in the Fleet. Shallow kept that adventure to himself, and perhaps it was worth all the thousand pounds he lost to Sir John when he returned to amaze Cousin Silence again over the pippins and caraways in Glostershire.

Into these grotesques, these dim rural shades, Shakespeare has breathed the life that he could spare for all his creatures. No one but him could have written that dialogue between Shallow and Silence when we first meet them, that dialogue which Hazlitt and others have so rightly singled out for praise, a passage of talk so ludicrous and yet so commonplace, so characteristic of the speakers and yet so touched with universality. The fussy, vain, trivial, prattling Justice, determined to talk and yet not able to keep to one point for two sentences together, never forgetting, whatever he is saying, his own importance, the figure he cuts in the eyes of his companion;
and Silence, so proud of being where he is and of talking so familiarly to his great relative, so foolish and simple; and both of them, in their vanity and simplicity, so very human that their silly talk lights up, for a moment, the whole strange business of this life:

SHALLOW. Certain, 'tis certain; very sure, very sure: death, as the Psalmist saith, is certain to all; all shall die. How a good yoke of bullocks at Stamford fair?

SILENCE. Truly, cousin, I was not there.

SHALLOW. Death is certain. Is old Double of your town living yet?

SILENCE. Dead, sir.

SHALLOW. Jesu, Jesu, dead!—'a drew a good bow; and dead!—'a shot a fine shoot: John o' Gaunt loved him well, and betted much money on his head. Dead!—'a would have clapped i' the clout at twelve score; and carried you a forehand shaft a fourteen and fourteen and a half, that it would have done a man's heart good to see. How a score of ewes now?

SILENCE. Thereafter as they be: a score of good ewes may be worth ten pounds.

SHALLOW. And is old Double dead?

Let us leave the two old men, nodding and talking, creasing their wintry faces in the sunshine. They have said everything, foolish as they are. Even old Double, who shot a fine shoot and was loved by John o' Gaunt, is dead, and a score of good ewes may be worth ten pounds, 'and death is certain. This is the world's news, and this
is the world's history, and all the philosophers have told
us little more.

2

As a purely literary figure that has seized hold upon
men's imagination, aroused their curiosity and won their
affection, Falstaff has only two rivals or superiors, namely,
Hamlet, the great figure of tragedy, and Don Quixote,
the great figure of ironic tragi-comedy or romance; and
in his own sphere of the comic, he has no rival. So much
has been written about him that any new study cannot
be simply an essay in interpretation, a lightning sketch
portrait, as the other chapters of this volume are, but
must inevitably be a criticism of previous interpretations.
The best of these are Maurice Morgann's Essay on the
Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff and The Rejection
of Falstaff in Mr. A. C. Bradley's Oxford Lectures on
Poetry. The worst are everywhere. Among com-
mentators of any importance, the account of Falstaff by
Gervinus, who does not appear to have had a glimmer of
humour and should have kept out of the fat knight's
company, must take one of the highest places as a monu-
ment of obtuseness and critical density. It is Gervinus
who tells us, while shaking his head over Falstaff's in-
corrigible coarseness and lewdness, that the little page
was given to him in order that the tenderly nurtured
lady might have a refining influence, instead of which—alas!—he is himself corrupted. Gervinus, too, is one of those simple souls who imagine that Falstaff’s moments of “sighing and grief” are moments of real repentance, that the knight would be good if he could but is somewhat weak-willed and easily led astray. Why persons who are willing to admit that Falstaff is a great humorist should insist upon taking every remark he makes as a serious literal statement is a mystery. But equally strange is the fact that the persons who are always proclaiming Shakespeare’s genius as a dramatic artist are more often than not the very persons who are always discovering his personal opinions in the mouths of his characters. If we read through the various interpretations and appreciations we shall find there are at least half-a-dozen different Falstaffs, ranging from the bloated buffoon to a kind of comic philosopher who, as it were, evolves his sack and sugar from his inner consciousness. But these are not, of course, creatures of any substance but only shadows thrown on the minds of different critics by the single figure of the play, who exists for us only in so many pages of dialogue and a few, probably traditional, stage directions. And we can probably clear away a good many common misconceptions if we begin by seeing Falstaff against the background of the play, as one out of many characters who
The English Comic Characters

has, whether he likes it or not, to play his part in the action.

Shakespeare had the broad lines of the two parts of Henry IV. laid down for him by history, supported by tradition. Prince Hal had to have bad companions. Such companions had to be amusing in order that the scenes in which they figured should be welcome as comic relief to the severely historical world of court and camp, statecraft and strategy, in which the main action should go forward. If they should have a leader who would prove himself to be a comic figure of the first order, so much the better for the play. So Falstaff comes into being. But Shakespeare, most modern critics argue, having once conceived the knight, worked only too well, with the result that this comic character is, as it were, too big to be squeezed back again into the plot. He has to be cast off with the rest of the bad companions, once Henry is king, so that at the end of the play, when we see him—and his followers hurried off to the Fleet at Henry's express command, we are left in doubt and dismay, our sympathies go out not to the newly crowned "hero" but to the old rascal, so ruthlessly toppled out of his dreams, whom one critic at least, Hazlitt, has frankly called "the better man." All this is so familiar that there is no need to dwell upon it. If Shakespeare put forward Prinice Hal as a conventional "hero," whose
every action we are intended to applaud, he appears to have muddled his work. Either Falstaff should have been less fascinating or Henry should have acted differently. But all this is assuming what we have no right to assume, namely, that Shakespeare expected us to "take sides" and that the play ended in one of those reconciliations that suddenly transform this world into a paradise of poetic justice. Actually what Shakespeare did do was to show us what happened, a very different thing. And what happened is exactly what does happen in this world, a planet in which Shakespeare was interested to the exclusion of any interest in more distant and nebulous realms. It is on record that a young man led a wild life and then suddenly found himself called upon to hold an extremely responsible position, which he proceeded to do with all the ruthless fervour of the converted. You cannot be King of England and also second-in-command of the Boar’s Head Tavern, Eastcheap. If you are to be King, to shoulder enormous responsibilities, to talk weightily of honour on all public occasions, then Falstaff, delightful Falstaff, who happens to be the avowed enemy of all responsibilities, to whom honour is but one of many targets, must go. When we see him in the new and searching light of such responsibilities, of such notions as honour, he will appear so monstrous that not only shall we be not reluctant to let him go, driving him,
away freely, we may be suddenly resentful, apparently angry at his presumption but really angry at the thought of what appears to us our former weakness, and so not only do we tell him to remove himself from our presence, but in a later flash of resentment we order him to the Fleet.

It has been said, more than once, that Shakespeare, realising that his Falstaff of the First Part is too engaging and that we must be ready to approve his final rejection, deliberately blackens him in the Second Part. This is a mistake. Absurd as it is to act the magistrate with this great comic figure, drawing up a list of his misdemeanours in the order of their importance, we have only to think of the action of the two parts to realise that there is nothing in the theory. Falstaff's gravest offence is probably the one which first shows him in action, the highway robbery. What Shakespeare did do, towards the end of the Second Part, was to emphasise the fact that Falstaff as a companion and confidant of a serious ruler was impossible, a fact that was obvious throughout but perhaps needed to be emphasised in order that the issue should be clear. When Pistol rushes in with the great news and Falstaff talks as if the realm were already in his pocket, it is plain that disaster is imminent. Henry has to choose between kingship and Falstaff, and being, at heart, a very ambitious young man, he naturally chooses
the former. It is inevitable, and, as we know, something like it actually happened. His conduct at the conclusion of the play is perfectly natural. Being a converted rake, very conscious of his improvement, it is natural that he should talk like a prig. He never was at any time a gentleman. His terms too, to Falstaff, are not too severe: Falstaff is banished from his presence, on a pension, until he has reformed, when he may expect advancement. The last painful stroke, coming suddenly out of the blue, the order to imprison Falstaff and his company in the Fleet, is probably partly the expression of a sudden resentment and partly the result of a desire to add force to his speech to the bewildered knight. Shakespeare—it cannot be repeated too often—shows us what happened, what was inevitable under such circumstances and with such characters, and leaves the situation to make its own impression. And our attitude towards it is determined by our cast of mind. This is why the critics have differed so widely. If we are romantic Hotspurs or solemn Lancasters, we shall rejoice that the air is now cleared of its Falstaffian malodours, that honour and responsibility and the like have now the stage to themselves. Behind the bent, receding back of Sir John, we shall read a little moral lesson, as Gervinus does. If, on the other hand, we delight in sack and sugar, mirth and ease, and revel in the unfamiliar sense
of freedom that is the very atmosphere of Falstaff, compared with which the world into which Henry enters, the world of statecraft and battle, is something forbiddingly angular and hard, then the end of the play will leave us resentful or depressed, as if we had been present at a piece of rank injustice. And if we can enter, with sympathy, into both worlds, but find ourselves torn between them, knowing that they are incompatible, that we cannot have our cake and eat it, then we shall be neither complacent nor resentful but will find ourselves at once quickened, by our dramatic sympathy, and yet thoughtful, dubious, touched by the old irony of things.

Like most really great figures and great works of art, Falstaff has an equally successful appeal on many different levels. That is why there are so many Falstaffs, all heartily praised as great comic characters. As our sense of humour and character mellows and grows more subtle, so too the Falstaff to whom we inevitably return changes with us; we begin with a bloated old buffoon, whose gluttony, cowardice, lying are on such a colossal scale that we cannot help being amused by them; we end with the comic genius, busy dramatising himself, as it were, that may be discovered in the pages of Morgann and Mr. A. C. Bradley. *Don Quixote has had a similar history, for he too can be enjoyed at all levels and changes with the reader. That is why discussions of such things
as Falstaff's apparent cowardice and love of boasting, though both interesting and amusing, are not really important. If we think that real cowardice and boasting are much funnier than pretended cowardice and boasting, if, in short, we prefer a real butt to an apparent one, then we shall continue to say that Falstaff is simply a coward and a boaster. His character is, as it were, a test of our sense of humour. Actually if he had been nothing more than what is discovered in him by somewhat naïve critics, most of us would have tired of him long ago: a fatter Parolles, a Bobadil with wit, could never have exercised such dominion over us. Thus the Falstaff of the stage is only the creature of the first level, and this is why he has ceased to interest many persons who find him enchanting in the library. Mr. A. B. Walkley, for example, discussing bores on the stage, has not hesitated to include Falstaff amongst them. He is one of our greatest English masterpieces of wit and humour and human character, Mr. Walkley remarks, but only "to read, to imagine in one's mind's eye, to turn over on one's tongue; but on the stage his eternal paunch gets in the way. His wheezings and puffings, his gurgling potations, and all the 'business' that actors think indispensable to a grossly fat man are to me mere ugliness and the occasion of ennui." This confession by a dramatic critic, who is not grinding the axe of any particular theory of character.
but is merely examining his reactions in the theatre, is valuable because it proves that once we have passed the stage at which Falstaff is a mere butt and have recognised that he is a great humorist, then a naïve presentation of the character, designed to appeal to those who see nothing but the fat buffoon in him, is not only not acceptable but definitely irritating or fatiguing, a dull travesty of a remarkable personage, as if—let us say—Dr. Johnson should be played by a circus clown. Nevertheless Falstaff owes his predominant position among comic figures to the fact that in him there meet the clown that delights the crowd, who love a person to laugh at; and the subtle character that engages the philosopher, who loves a person to laugh with. The first is a tribute to Shakespeare as a writer for his own theatre, the second is a tribute to his power of subtle characterisation, and the whole figure, displaying so many facets as the lights of different intelligences flash upon him and never failing to win your laughter and applause whatever your idea of the comic may be, is an example of his creator’s amazing dramatic genius. He sets Falstaff walking and talking down the centuries, and though they may be ages of reason or ages of romance, they call for the biggest armchair, place him in their midst, and will not let him go.

We have said that the two most important interpretations of Falstaff’s character are those by Maurice Morganin
and Mr. A. C. Bradley, and from each of these critics we can take a key that will unlock one part of the secret. Morgann, who throughout concentrates upon the incongruities to be found in Falstaff’s character, tells us what Falstaff is, and, in part, why we find him so fascinating: “He is a man at once young and old, enterprising and fat, a dupe and a wit, harmless and wicked, weak in principle and resolute by constitution, cowardly in appearance and brave in reality, a knave without malice, a liar without deceit, and a knight, a gentleman, and a soldier, without either dignity, decency, or honour.” Mr. Bradley tells us what Falstaff does: “The bliss of freedom gained in humour is the essence of Falstaff. His humour is not directed only or chiefly against obvious absurdities; he is the enemy of everything that would interfere with his ease, and therefore of anything serious, and especially of everything respectable and moral. For these things impose limits and obligations, and make us, the subjects of old father antic the law, and the categorical imperative, and our station and its duties, and conscience, and reputation, and other people’s opinions, and all sorts of nuisances. I say he is therefore their enemy; but I do him wrong; to say that he is their enemy implies that he regards them as serious and recognises their power, when in truth he refuses to recognise them at all. They are to him absurd; and to reduce a thing *ad absurdum*
is to reduce it to nothing and to walk about free and rejoicing.” The two together, incongruity and freedom, give us the secret of Falstaff, and indeed of the comic world in which he is the largest and most notable figure. If we want any further explanation of his power of delighting, with a few exceptions, all those with whom he comes into contact, we may find it in his own words: “Men of all sorts take a pride to gird at me: the brain of this foolish-compounded clay, man, is not able to invent any thing that tends to laughter, more than I invent or is invented on me: I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men.” And these words of his are still sounding in our ears when he furnishes us with an example of his power, for in the conversation that follows with the Chief Justice, the very embodiment of all the things that Falstaff will not recognise, we can watch the severity of that official gradually thaw, in spite of the impudence of Falstaff’s humour, and can hear his speeches catching something of the tone of Falstaff’s until he quits the stage in high good humour with himself as a wit, a weakness of judges from that day to this. The only persons that Falstaff cannot conquer are those who are cold, severe, and obtuse, liking wit not at all, not even in themselves, such as the young Prince John of Lancaster, one of Falstaff’s most notable failures—“Good faith, this same young sober-
blooded boy doth not love me; nor a man cannot make him laugh.” Falstaff himself has no illusions about his power.

There is no mystery, as some critics would have us suppose, about the appeal of such comic characters as Falstaff. Their crimes and vices, such as they are (and they are never very grave), have little or no effect upon us; they are so distant from us that we can regard them without moral indignation; it is not our sack they drink nor our money they borrow or steal or “convey”; it is no more possible to work ourselves up into a state of moral indignation over them than it is for us to grow angry at the thought of all the bandits existing in the remoter provinces of China, or tearful over the sexual laxity of the aborigines. On the other hand, though such fellows do not borrow our money and get drunk in our houses, so that their little weaknesses do not trouble us, it is for us, in the last resort, that these amusing rascals go through their various antics; their depredations are distant in time and space, but their jokes are here and now. Thus we can afford to be indulgent and to encourage them. It is often forgotten that Falstaff, after all, stands for something that is good in itself. He is the embodiment of masculine comradeship, ease, and merriment. He turns the whole world into the smoking-room of a club. He is the supreme example of the clubbable man. That word brings Dr. Johnson to our minds, and Dr. Johnson
was a moralist by nature, and a somewhat severe moralist, but he loved company and ease and mirth, loved them all the more because there was in him a decided streak of melancholy and despondency. He does not understand Falstaff, but how he enjoys him, in spite of himself—"But Falstaff unimitated, unimitable Falstaff, how shall I describe thee?" he begins, throwing his judicial manner, the wig and robes of his office as a critic, to the winds. It is the clubbable man in him that is responding to the immortal master of the revels, the patron saint of all who love to assemble a few choice spirits, golden lads, shut the doors upon gravity and decorum, duty, and responsibility, and fleet the time in unbuttoned ease. All this is very masculine, and we have no reason to be surprised that women do not take kindly to Falstaff, however lively their sense of humour, for it is not only that he seems to them a gross old man, but that they suspect in him, and suspect rightly, their arch-enemy who would, if he had his way, undermine all their good work. What is he but that old rascal whose conversation, which John, in his tiresome way, finds so fascinating, keeps a husband from his hearth and bed, night after night at the club? He is the wild-bird crying outside the domestic cage, the siren-song from the convivial circle, the tavern and the club. And just as women, however he may stir their laughter, cannot help dis-
liking him, so men, unless they are completely ossified by rules and regulations, cannot help liking him, personifying as he does the supreme satisfaction of an impulse that cannot be denied without pain and loss.

We see the scenes that Falstaff dominates and makes his own against an ideal background for them, a world of statecraft and war, policy and cabals, of men whose armour seems to have grown upon them like a skin, so angular and stiff, so lacking in spontaneity are most of these barons. After spending some time in the company of these personages, we return to Falstaff with a glorious sense of freedom and spontaneity; the natural man is loose again; it is as if we ourselves had suddenly doffed our armour. And that indeed is what we have done, for we have doffed the armour of duties and obligations and rights and responsibilities. All the secret fears, the reservations, the conflicts are suddenly dropped from our minds and we can step out as free as the wind. We can loll unbuttoned, with the world no longer pressing down our Atlas shoulders, but now our footstool or, if necessary, our football. This is the influence of Falstaff who has conjured all existence into matter for a jest. All the common standards disappear at one wave of his hand; no chain can be forged for him; not even the bonds of the flesh can confine him because with him, they are not bonds but either something to be enjoyed, with
such enormous gusto that cups of sack and capons seem alone worth living for, or something that is easily transformed, by an amazingly adroit wit, into yet another joke. Thus, to take a simple example, Falstaff's enormous girth troubles him not at all; it becomes his ally; he uses it to gain a humorous superiority over smaller persons, such as Prince Hal and Poins and Justice Shallow, who are tailor's-yards, bow-cases, men made out of a cheese-paring; and he also uses it as fresh matter on which to exercise his humorous fancy, so that when he is with the tiny page he can say "I do here walk before thee like a sow that hath overwhelm'd all her litter but one." But so confident is he in his unmatched powers that not only can he turn every occasion into a jest, but he can and does deliberately complicate matters, contrive that things shall be almost as bad as they can for him, knowing that he can escape in triumph, dissolving everything into laughter. Compared with him, we are all slaves. Out of his incongruous self and the incongruity that he is quick to perceive everywhere, he has contrived to build up a kingdom of his own, a Cloud-Cuckooodom, that exists in its own right and has its own consistency. There, all the restraints of this life are only so many little playthings; old father antic the law is our butt; we have no secrets and can never be disillusioned; we are the triumphant supper-party behind the scenes of
life; the curse of Adam has been blown away. Throned in this kingdom, Falstaff is seemingly invulnerable; what would be weaknesses to other men become sources of strength to him; every predicament, every crisis, is but the beginning of a fresh triumph; every arrow shot from the bow of circumstance he catches in his hand and suddenly twists into some ludicrous shape, only to waken more laughter; he has frankly entertained the animal in himself, banishing the solemn dreams of our species in order to do so, and now, behold, the animal is no longer there—for he is throned like a god, enjoying a freedom, a dominion over the sad necessities, compared with which our common existence is a term in the galleys. What does it matter that he is old and fat and ever thirsty and reduced to begging from old women, that his name is tarnished and his reputation an evil odour among the godly? He has escaped from the machinery of our moral and social order, does not obey or even recognise its rules, but has long since passed into his own kingdom, there attended by a host of fiery, nimble, and delectable shapes, born of fancy and sack. All our criticism passes him by. And so inward and searching is his humour, his mind so free from all common subterfuges and disguises, that however we may point to his devotion to sack, his great belly, his ancient lechery, his gross, palpable, open lies, we cannot laugh at him because he has every-
where forestalled us, pointed the way, and laughed first himself, so that willy-nilly we are compelled to laugh with him and thus enter his own kingdom. He seems to have accepted all the facts, he has not buried away a single impulse, and would appear to have achieved what all men wish to achieve, a synthesis, and so become master of life. Small wonder that he seems invulnerable.

So far we have only considered the two parts of *Henry IV.*, but there is another play to be considered, *Henry V.* And it is what we hear of Falstaff in *Henry V.*, when we learn that he is nearing his end mainly because “the King hath run bad humours on the knight” and “his heart is fracted and corroborate,” it is this and not the end of *Henry IV.* that largely determines our attitude of sympathy towards Falstaff and resentment against Henry. And this tells us why Falstaff was not invulnerable, why his kingdom suddenly wasted away like some cloud-city in the sunset. The usual explanation is that Falstaff, as Dowden puts it, “endeavours to corruscate away the realities of life,” but that hard fact was too much for him in the end. Now this is true in essence, but it is a thought too sweeping and is liable to give a wrong impression. If Falstaff answered in every single particular to the description we have already given of him, if he were exactly what he imagined himself to be, no such disaster could have taken place. What is the worst
he has to face? Prince Hal, who has been one of his companions for some years, though obviously for only a comparatively short period of Falstaff's life, is now king, but, instead of loading his old friend with honours and allowing him to do what he pleases, he banishes him on a small allowance and tells him to reform himself. The imprisonment in the Fleet is obviously only temporary. It is all very disappointing, but, after all, it is only one joke in a series of such things that we have agreed to call life; Falstaff has weathered and contrived to enjoy worse storms than this; if the King has turned virtuous, so much the worse for him; there are other good fellows in the world, and there are still cups of sack and capons. In short, Falstaff has lost a boon-companion and, with him, a number of expectations that he has humour enough not to worry about, and he has gained an allowance. He enjoyed life when the prince was still in the nursery and can enjoy it again now that he is in the council-chamber. Why, then, this utter collapse? Why has the apparently invulnerable system of our comic philosopher crumbled to dust at the touch of this single stroke of ill fortune? The answer, of course, is to be found in Pistol's remark that "his heart is fracted and corroborate." Falstaff has been doing something he has had no right to do, something for which his humour has failed to provide, he has long been feeling a very genuine
affection for Henry. He loves the man. And now he is utterly repudiated, spoken to with cold contempt, and though he could have laughed away his ruined hopes, the thousand pounds he owes to Shallow, and the rest, this he cannot laugh away and all is in the dust. Life has only laughed once at Master Falstaff, without his bidding, but it has laughed last, and now his mouth is choked with ashes. Just as there fell upon Siegfried, bathing in the dragon’s blood, a single leaf that left him vulnerable, so too there fell upon Falstaff this love of his for the prince, and through that vulnerable mark the arrow shot home that sent him shaking to his bed, to fumble with the sheets, babble of green fields, and make an end of it all. That Falstaff’s kingdom, in which he walked free as air, was an illusion cannot be denied; the cold daylight had to stream some time through those rich painted tapestries of his mind, but it would have been well if the first rent could have been made by some other hand and not by that of the one man he really loved. But so it was, and so, of course, it was bound to be; no other hand could have scattered his kingdom; this comic hero, like so many heroes of epic and tragedy, was betrayed by his heart, the last incongruous and ironic stroke in his life and the only one that mastered him. Henry went forward to Agincourt and became a popular hero, a figure for patriots in a noisy mood. Falstaff,
who had the larger heart and the better mind, went forward into immortality and has since gained undreamed-of honours, presiding in spirit wherever there have been boon companions, ease and laughter. He was rejected once, but he has never been rejected again. Whenever the choice spirits of this world have put the day's work out of their minds and have seated themselves at the table of goodfellowship and humour, there has been an honoured place at the board for Sir John Falstaff, in whose gigantic shadow we can laugh at this life and laugh at ourselves, and so, divinely careless, sit like gods for an hour.
PARSON ADAMS

THE real hero of Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* is Mr. Abraham Adams. Everybody knows how this story was begun as a burlesque of Richardson’s *Pamela*, Joseph being the brother of Pamela and footman to Lady Booby, who pursues him in much the same way that her nephew, Mr. B., pursues Pamela; and how the burlesque was dropped, though not entirely, after the first few chapters. Joseph begins by being a stick with which Fielding could beat Richardson, and even when the parody comes to an end and the real story begins, Joseph, though nominally the hero, still remains a stick. It is his friend, mentor, and companion of his travels, Parson Adams, who occupies the middle of the stage. His entrance upon the scene, with some assistance from Mrs. Slipslop and a few minor personages, sets the tale in motion. He is at once a notable comic character and a heroic figure, and he differs from most other comic characters of his stature in being not fundamentally absurd but only absurd in certain situations. He is not a conscious humorist, and, indeed, has practically no
sense of humour; with a sense of humour he would be less innocent, more suspicious of his fellow-creatures, and would contrive to keep out of the hundred-and-one scrapes into which he falls so easily. He appears at first to be one of those comic figures who are mere butts, targets for the jests of their authors. We see him land into misadventure after misadventure; never was there a more undignified priest; he wanders from inn to inn without the means to pay his bills; he is beaten and cudgelled, swindled and mocked, through chapter after chapter; he is drenched with pigs' blood and other unsavoury liquids, trampled in the mire of a pigsty, brought to bed (innocently, we must confess) with Mrs. Slipslop: there is no end to the indignities he is made to suffer. Yet he is no mere butt. Though we see how his innocence brings about one ludicrous mishap after another, we not only like him more and more, we also respect him more and more. Even during a first reading of the story, he soon towers above all the other characters and lays a successful claim to the greater part of our attention; and once we know the book, we await his appearance with impatience. He is of the comic-heroic brood of Don Quixote, whose innocent eyes and much-belaboured carcases seem to us, after a time, a mute but terrible comment upon a world that took them so lightly. It is easy to conceive such figures, but it is difficult to give
them life, to make them real and personal; and it is not
the least of Fielding’s triumphs that Parson Adams, as
Mr. Saintsbury once remarked, “is a good deal more
real than half the parsons who preached last Sunday, and
a good deal more personal.”

Few humorous characters have been so heartily praised
as Parson Adams; critic after critic has added to the
chorus of praise, and his various oddities, his absent-
mindedness and innocent vanity, have been noted in a
score of famous volumes. When Fielding formally
introduces Mr. Abraham Adams to us at the beginning
of Joseph Andrews, we are told that he was an excellent
scholar, master of several ancient and modern tongues,
that “he had applied many years to the most severe study,
and had treasured up a fund of learning rarely to be met
with in a university”; and further, that he was “a man
of good sense, good parts, and good nature; but was at
the same time as entirely ignorant of the ways of the
world as an infant just entered into it could possibly be.”
He was generous, friendly, and brave, to an excess, and
very simple, absent-minded, and unsuspecting. Further,
he lived in a remote country curacy, with a wife and six
children, on “a handsome income of twenty-three pounds
a-year.” Here, it seems, is a figure very familiar in
comic literature, that of the absent-minded scholar, the
innocent pedant, who formed a stock subject for jokes.
in Ancient Greece and is still to be found, putting his umbrella to bed and then standing in the hall himself, in the comic papers. But Fielding takes this stock figure, breathes life into it, sets it in motion, and gives it an individuality. He sends him wandering down that old road which is the very backbone of great comic literature, that road which has seen so many glorious innocents and their happy folly, and brings him into adventure after adventure. With a bagful of sermons and nine shillings and threepence-halfpenny in his pocket, Adams arrives, it will be remembered, at the inn where Joseph Andrews, who has been robbed and wounded, is lying in bed. The good man is on his way to London to publish three volumes of his sermons, out of which he hopes, in his innocence, to make a considerable sum of money. After paying for Joseph as well as himself, he finds he has very little money left and determines to borrow three guineas from the landlord—"on ample security."! The latter is agreeable and only wishes to see the security:

Upon which Adams, pointing to his saddle-bag, told him, with a face and voice full of solemnity, "that there were in that bag no less than nine volumes of manuscript sermons, as well worth a hundred pounds as a shilling was worth twelve-pence, and that he would deposit one of the volumes in his hands by way of pledge; not doubting but that he would have the honesty to return it on his repayment of the money; for otherwise he must
be a very great loser, seeing that every volume would at least bring him ten pounds, as he had been informed by a neighbouring clergyman in the country; for,” said he, “as to my own part, having never yet dealt in printing, I do not pretend to ascertain the exact value of such things.”

The landlord, however, finds the sermons no better security than Master Dombledom found Bardolph, and so he refuses the loan. After this disappointment, poor Adams has a further one, for he is given to understand by Parson Barnabas and his friend, the bookseller, that sermons, unless of heterodox tendency, are a drug on the market. This expert opinion, however, does not entirely destroy his faith, and he is only prevented from setting out for London by the unwelcome discovery, made by Joseph, that the nine volumes of sermons have been left behind at home, Mrs. Adams having packed shirts and other useful articles in their stead. There is nothing for it but to return home with Joseph, having one horse and one shilling between them. After some further adventures, at the very next inn at which he and Joseph, who have now joined Mrs. Slipslop’s party, put up, the impulsive Adams, having struck the surly innkeeper, who will not allow his wife to attend to Joseph’s bad leg, begins that free fight in which a pan full of hogs’ blood plays such a prominent part. A little later, after
a great struggle, he rescues Fanny from the hands of a ravisher, and then both of them, having been discovered by a gang of villagers, are hauled before the justice, only to be released after a most amusing examination. Early the next morning, while sitting before the fire in a tavern, they hear the voice of Joseph, whom Adams contrived to lose before he met with Fanny, singing a song, and this is the great moment when Fanny faints and Adams, in his agitation, hurls his beloved Aeschylus into the fire. Penniless and with the lovely Fanny a temptation to every lustful fox-hunting lord of the manor they are likely to encounter, Adams and his two young friends set out for home, only to fall into mishap after mishap, and have adventures too numerous and complicated to be chronicled in this place.

Some characters are best discussed and others are best shown in action, and Adams being one of the latter it is more profitable to show him in relation to his experiences than merely to talk about him. His adventures, though for the most part ludicrous, are of various kinds. Some, the most superficial, come very near to the rough-and-tumble affairs, the horse-play and practical jokes, in which Smollett delighted and in which Fielding only took moderate pleasure. Even the lightest have some relation to character. Quite early in the narrative, for example, there is an account of how Adams, walking by
himself in the dark, wades through a pond because he has failed to look over a hedge and notice that there is a footpath that would have taken him round; and how that, even then, when he is wet through, he sits down on a stile to read his Aeschylus and never notices, until a passer-by, replying to his question, points it out to him, that there is an inn a few yards away. There is, of course, nothing very subtle about this, which shows us the absent-minded scholar of comic tradition. On the same level, though rather more diverting, is that episode towards the end of the book, that chapter of accidents at night which is one of the stock pieces of comic business in picaresque literature. Adams, Joseph, and Fanny are staying at Lady Booby's, and another guest, one Beau Didapper, who has conceived a passion for Fanny, resolves to visit her bedroom in the dead of night. Unfortunately, it is Mrs. Slipslop and not Fanny that he visits. Adams, hearing the noise and suspecting a rape, rushes in, and in the darkness imagines Slipslop to be the man and the little Beau" to be the woman. The latter escapes and Adams grapples with Slipslop, only to be discovered, in a very compromising situation, by the whole household. Explanations follow, and the good parson marches off to his bedroom, but instead of turning to the right he turns to the left, unknowingly enters Fanny's bedroom and actually gets into the same bed without disturbing"
Parson Adams

her (she is thoroughly exhausted by her adventures of the previous night), and without discovering the mistake himself. There he is found early next morning by Joseph, whose faith in the good man is put to a very severe test. Such chapters of accidents are very familiar to students of the picaresque, and all that need be said of this one is that there is some slight relation to character in it (for Adams' first action is the result of his impulsive gallantry and his second the result of his absent-mindedness), but that it is not enough to make the episode anything more than a piece of comic business of a very familiar type. Smollett could bustle through such rough-and-tumble business just as well, if not better (for he enjoyed it more); but when we come to some of the other incidents in which Adams figures we leave Smollett far behind; we come, indeed, to the great Fielding.

In his Preface to Joseph Andrews (a little essay that is full of meat) Fielding gives us his view of the ridiculous and also mentions the character of Adams, but unfortunately he does not bring the two together. We are told that the only source of the true ridiculous is affectation, and that affectation proceeds from one of two causes, vanity or hypocrisy. We are also told, at the end of the Preface, that Adams is "the most glaring" character in the book, one not to be found "in any book now extant," "a character of perfect simplicity,"
whose "goodness of heart will recommend him to the
good-natured"; and so forth. There is nothing here
about affectation, that only source of the true ridiculous,
nothing here about vanity and hypocrisy; and yet Adams
is clearly the chief comic figure in the book. The fact
is, of course, that Adams, in Fielding's view, stands
outside the true ridiculous, which is something nearer to
satire or burlesque than it is to our later view of humour.
Adams is a comic-heroic figure; he is not only extremely
lovable, but also, in the last resort, he commands our
respect. The moralities in the book, you may say, are
in his keeping, and despite his eccentricities they could
not be in better hands. When Lady Booby, who is
nearly all-powerful in her own village, tells him that he
must not publish the banns between Joseph and Fanny,
he defies her; and afterwards becomes even more heroic
by giving the same answer to his wife. When the hunting
squire persuades him to accept hospitality and then en-
courages the rest of the company to play tricks on the
poor bedraggled parson, Adams, after submitting for a
time with great good humour, stands up and rebukes the
company manfully. The speech is entirely in character
and has one or two passages that are half-comical, half-
pathetic, as, for example, when Adams exclaims:

"... My appearance might very well persuade
you that your invitation was an act of charity, though in
realogy we were very well provided; yes, sir, if we had
had an hundred miles to travel, we had sufficient to bear
our expenses in a noble manner." (At which words he
produced the half-guinea which was found in the basket.)
"I do not show you this out of ostentation of riches, but
to convince you I speak truth."

There is all the speaker's innocence in that "ostentation
of riches." But the whole speech, which is far too long
to be quoted here, is a fine, sturdy rebuke, and not all the
reek and muck of horse-ponds and pigsties, the sight of
torn cassocks and dirty night-caps, can take away the
essential dignity and manliness of him that made it. He
is the Church Militant.

But this is not the reason why we like him so well;
nor was it Fielding's reason. Fielding, as Raleigh once
pointed out, is, like most men of his time, a moralist,
you might call him a romantic moralist, for he makes it
his business to stress the fact that there is nothing so good
in the world as a good will; "goodness of heart," to
use his own phrase, is opposed to the formal compliance
with a moral code. "Against the pedantry of the formal
moralist," Raleigh remarked, "Fielding delights to hurl
his satire. He can clear away in a moment all the
'splendid rubbish' that covers up a character, and expose
its inherent rottenness or meanness. He never tires of
showing how a base-minded man may cover himself
with formal righteousness, and how a scapegrace may be good at heart.” Over and above his obvious qualities as a story-teller, it is this ever-present contrast between native impulse towards good and mere conformity to the prevailing code, along with his profound knowledge of human nature, his delight in the pursuit of vanity and in the little ironies of life, that gives Fielding’s work that massiveness and intellectual strength which is more obvious on the third or fourth time of reading than it is on the first. And it might be added that just because he is a part of this massive intellectual structure, Adams is a great character, but not, strictly speaking, a great comic character; for the greatest comic characters are engendered during a moral holiday, they soar above such matters as vanity and affectation and the complication of motives, and Fielding never took a moral holiday and had too much solid prose in his composition ever to rise into the realm of pure fantasy and absurdity. He took care, of course, to dower Adams with that “goodness of heart” in full measure, and having done this, he did not scruple to laugh at his little vanities and affectations. Adams himself is a moralist whose heart often says one thing while his code says another, but unlike most of Fielding’s personages, while his code is sound, his heart is even sounder, so that any difference between the two only makes plain some weakness or other in the ethics.
that Adams preaches so energetically at various moments in the narrative. His little vanities, inevitable in so warm-hearted a man as this, are so innocent that, led by Fielding, we laugh at them only as we might laugh at the antics of a child, and we love him no less, perhaps even more, on their account; yet beneath our author’s ironic presentment of such things there is to be discovered a certain note of warning that might be interpreted in some such words as these: Here, in this creature, as innocent as a child, pure in heart and flawless in his motives, there is still the weakness of our erring humanity; elaborate self-deception and vanity; and as for you, now priding yourself on your superior sagacity, examine your heart to discover whether there is that in you which will reduce your affectation and restless vanity to nothing but food for easy, kindly laughter; and if not.... And the author’s irony plays about this grotesque but lovable figure, so untiring in its charity, like harmless summer lightning, illuminating but not striking it, secure as it is in the sanctuary of the good will.

With this figure in our memory, we may turn back to the narrative, examine this episode or that, and discover how admirably Fielding has done his work. How excellent are some of the single remarks, such things as this:

Delicacy had now overspread the hemisphere, when Fanny whispered Joseph that she begged to rest herself
a little; for that she was so tired she could walk no farther. Joseph immediately prevailed with Parson Adams, who was as brisk as a bee, to stop. He had no sooner seated himself than he lamented the loss of his dear Aeschylus; but was a little comforted when reminded that, if he had it in his possession, he could not see to read.

Who could forget, having once read, that description of Adams at Wilson’s house, when the latter relates his mournful history, and particularly enlarges on the subject of vanity—“that worst of passions”?

My second remark was (Wilson is speaking), that vanity is the worst of passions, and more apt to contaminate the mind than any other: for as selfishness is much more general than we please to allow it, so it is natural to hate and envy those who stand between us and the good we desire. Now, in lust and ambition, these are few; and even in avarice we find many who are no obstacles to our pursuits; but the vain man seeks pre-eminence; and everything which is excellent or praiseworthy in another renders him the mark of his antipathy.—Adams now began to fumble in his pockets, and soon cried out, “O la! I have it not about me.”—Upon this the gentleman asking him what he was searching for, he said he searched after a sermon, which he thought his masterpiece, against vanity. “Fie upon it, fie upon it!” cries he, “why do I ever leave that sermon out of my pocket? I wish it was within five miles; I would willingly fetch it to read it you.”—The gentleman answered there was no need, for he was cured of the passion. “And for that
very reason,” quoth Adams, “I would read it, for I am confident you would admire it: indeed, I have never been a greater enemy to any passion than that silly one of vanity.”

This fine satirical stroke, which has often been commented upon, really cuts with a double edge, for while it is amusing enough that Adams should be vain enough to walk ten miles merely that his companion should admire his denunciation of vanity, it is perhaps even more entertaining that this little display, at which, we are told, Wilson merely smiled, should come on top of the latter’s remark that vanity is the worst of passions. The fact is, of course, that vanity is not the worst of passions, and Wilson ought to have found food for thought in this little incident and his attitude towards it, thought that might have led him to reconsider his ethical system. An equally entertaining scene is to be found in the eighth chapter of the third book, a chapter that Fielding, very characteristically, labels Which some readers will think too short, others too long. Adams and his two young friends have arrived at an ale-house, and after a rather meagre supper of bread and cheese and ale, the parson expressed great contempt for the folly of mankind, who sacrificed their hopes of heaven to the acquisition of vast wealth, since so much comfort was to be found in the humblest state and the lowest provision. A fellow
traveller, a grave man, smoking his pipe by the fire, immediately agrees and begins an attack upon riches that arouses Adams to great enthusiasm. The two moralists then take turn and turn about denouncing the love of money and avowing their contempt for gold until a late hour. At last, the stranger, a priest of the Church of Rome in the dress of a layman, asks Adams to lend him eighteenpence to pay his reckoning. The good man promises to divide all the money he has about him, half a guinea, with his companion, but discovers, after some search, that his pocket has been picked and that he is now penniless:

"Bless me!" cried Adams. "I have certainly lost it; I can never have spent it. Sir, as I am a Christian, I had a whole half-guinea in my pocket this morning, and have not now a single halfpenny of it left. Sure the devil must have taken it from me!"—"Sir," answered the priest, smiling, "you need make no excuses; if you are not willing to lend me the money, I am contented."—"Sir," cries Adams, "if I had the greatest sum in the world—ay, if I had ten pounds about me—I would bestow it all to rescue any Christian from distress. I am more vexed at my loss on your account than my own. Was there ever anything so unlucky? Because I have no money in my pocket, I shall be suspected to be no Christian. . . ."

After some further talk, the stranger decides to leave at once, and calling for the landlord, explains the position
to him. The landlord, making the best of a bad business, agrees to let his reckoning stand as a loan, and the stranger quickly disappears into the night:

He was no sooner gone than the host fell a-shaking his head, and declared, if he had suspected the fellow had no money, he would not have drawn him a single drop of drink, saying he despaired of ever seeing his face again for that he looked like a confounded rogue. "Rabbit the fellow," cries he, "I thought, by his talking so much about riches, that he had a hundred pounds at least in his pocket."

At this, we are told, Adams, equally penniless, reproached the speaker for suspicions that were not becoming a Christian, and then retired to bed and fell asleep without considering how his own interview with the landlord would fall out in the morning.

There is a capital scene that takes place on the very next day, a scene in which Adams shows himself to be a true friend and a good Christian but nevertheless a very tactless companion. Fanny has been kidnapped from the inn, and Joseph and Adams, after a tremendous struggle, have been tied to the bedposts. Joseph is in despair and loudly bewails the loss of his mistress. Adams, very sore and ruffled, sitting with his back to his companion because they have been tied that way, endeavours to comfort him, points out that it is the business of a
man and a Christian to summon Reason to his aid, and so forth. He goes on:

"Be comforted, therefore, child; I say be comforted. It is true you have lost the prettiest, kindest, loveliest, sweetest young woman, one with whom you might have expected to have lived in happiness, virtue, and innocence; by whom you might have promised yourself many little darlings, who would have been the delight of your youth and the comfort of your age. You have not only lost her, but have reason to fear the utmost violence which lust and power can inflict upon her. Now, indeed, you may easily raise ideas of horror."

Joseph, as well he might, breaks in upon this discourse with a cry of despair; but Adams bids him remember that he is a Christian, that no accident happens to us without the divine permission, and that it is the duty of a man and a Christian to submit. He then proceeds to give reasons why we have no right to complain against our destiny, and excellent reasons they are too. But when he has reached his "Thirdly" and is going forward magnificently, poor Joseph, whom Fielding has suddenly dowered with life, breaks in once more only to say what poor stricken humanity has always said to the easy philosopher whose relish for his dialectic has got the upper hand of his dismay at the situation:

"Oh, sir!" cried Joseph, "all this is very true, and very fine, and I could hear you all day if I was not so
grieved at heart as now I am."—"Would you take physic," says Adams, "when you are well, and refuse it when you are sick? Is not comfort to be administered to the afflicted, and not to those who rejoice or those who are at ease?"—"Oh! you have not spoken one word of comfort to me yet!" returned Joseph.—"No!" cries Adams; "what am I then doing? what can I say to comfort you?"—"O tell me," cried Joseph, "that Fanny will escape back to my arms, that they shall again enclose that lovely creature, with all her sweetness, all her untainted innocence about her!"

In the end, Adams, by sheer force of character, does succeed in quieting his companion; but actually the latter's first cry is unanswerable except by a counter-cry, somewhat louder. There is the whole history of religions and philosophies in this little piece of dialogue.

Later in the story, in the parson's house, Joseph shows great impatience to be married because he feels that he will never have an easy moment till Fanny is absolutely his; and Adams takes it upon himself to rebuke the lover in measured terms for this impatience. He begins with a little dissertation on marriage and then goes on to attack fear as a want of confidence in that Power in which we should alone put our trust. Further, he points out, all passions are criminal in their excess, and even love itself, if it is not subservient to our duty, may render us blind to it. Feeling the pulpit stairs beneath his feet, he proceeds:
You are too much inclined to passion, child, and have set your affection so absolutely on this young woman, that, if God required her at your hands, I fear you would reluctantly part with her. Now, believe me, no Christian ought so to set his heart on any person or thing in this world, but that, whenever it shall be required or taken from him in any manner by Divine Providence, he may be able peaceably, quietly, and contentedly to resign it.”

Unfortunately for the success of this homily, at this very moment a person rushes into the room to inform Adams that his youngest son is drowned. In a flash, the easy moralist has disappeared and the parent has taken his place:

He stood silent a moment, and soon began to stamp about the room and deplore his loss with the bitterest agony.

The rôles are now reversed.

Joseph, who was overwhelmed with concern likewise, recovered himself sufficiently to endeavour to comfort the parson; in which attempt he used many arguments that he had at several times remembered out of his own discourses, both in private and public (for he was a great enemy to the passions, and preached nothing more than the conquest of them by reason and grace), but he was not at leisure now to hearken to his advice. “Child, child,” said he, “do not go about impossibilities. Had it been any other of my children, I could have borne it with patience; but my little prattler, the darling and comfort of my old age,—the little wretch, to be snatched
out of life just at his entrance into it; the sweetest, best-tempered boy, who never did a thing to offend me. . . . "

The good man is now inconsolable and dwells pitifully on the virtues of his lost child. A few minutes later, however, the boy himself appears, wet through, for though he had indeed fallen into the water, he had been rescued by a certain pedlar. The joy of Adams, we are told, is now as extravagant as his grief had been; he kisses the boy a thousand times and dances about the room in an ecstasy of relief. Unfortunately, when all the rejoicing is at an end, he sees fit to resume the part of moralist and adviser, and actually begins once more to tell Joseph that he must not give way too much to his passions if he wishes to be happy. This is too much, even for the faithful Joseph, who points out that it is easier to give advice than to act upon it. At this, Adams, in danger of losing his authority, replies that Joseph is ignorant of the tenderness of fatherly affection, that the loss of a child is one of those great trials where our grief may be allowed to become immoderate; and when Joseph counters by declaring that the loss of a well-beloved mistress may equal that of a well-beloved child, Adams, driven into a corner, strikes out boldly:

"Yes, but such love (of a wife) is foolishness and wrong in itself, and ought to be conquered," answered Adams; "it savours too much of the flesh."—"Sure, sir," says
Joseph, "it is not sinful to love my wife, no, not even to doat on her to distraction!"—"Indeed but it is," says Adams. "Every man ought to love his wife, no doubt; we are commanded to do so; but we ought to love her with moderation and discretion."—"I am afraid I shall be guilty of some sin in spite of all my endeavours," says Joseph; "for I shall love without any moderation, I am sure."—"You talk foolishly and childishly," cried Adams.

And now all would be well, only that man has a tangle of relationships, and Adams in playing the father and the mentor has forgotten that he is also a husband and that his good lady is present:

"Indeed," says Mrs. Adams, who had listened to the latter part of their conversation, "you talk more foolishly yourself. I hope, my dear, you will never preach any such doctrines as that husbands can love their wives too well. If I knew you had such a sermon in the house, I am sure I would burn it; and I declare, if I had not been convinced you had loved me as well as you could, I can answer for myself, I should have hated and despised you. Marry come up! Fine doctrine indeed! A wife hath a right to insist on her husband's loving her as much as ever he can; and he is a sinful villain who doth not. Doth he not promise to love her, and to comfort her, and to cherish her, and all that? I am sure I remember it all as well as if I had repeated it over but yesterday, and shall never forget it. Besides, I am certain you do not preach as you practise; for you have been, a loving and cherishing husband to me, that's the truth.
on 't; and why you should endeavour to put such wicked nonsense into this young man's head I cannot devise. . . ."

We shall do well to let the lady (who has not finished yet) have the last word; and take our leave of our friend Adams, and his old wig, his nightcap and torn cassock, his Aeschylus, his bleak ethics and his brave, warm heart, standing like many another philosopher before an indignant woman with his fine theories crashing about him. "I am certain you do not preach as you practise": she has said the last word; he, almost alone of these characters, preaches well but practises even better; and "the parsons who preached last Sunday" will have done well if they have done half the good that brave old Adams, sitting bewildered in a ditch or fighting in an inn-parlour, has contrived to do amidst the laughter of six generations.
THE BROTHERS SHANDY.

THOUGH it would be difficult to commend My Uncle Toby either too often or too heartily, nevertheless some of the praise he has received might, in all justice, have been diverted to his neglected brother Walter. The bright regimentals have caught many an eye that has allowed the domestic philosopher, in his old wig and dusty coat, to pass unremarked. Toby, it is true, is set against the better background; he it is who brings us to the campaigns in Flanders, to the more amiable and diverting warfare on the bowling-green, and to the last and, we fear, most faint-hearted siege of all, that of the Widow Wadman; whereas Mr. Shandy, with his more abstruse concerns, only leads us to Slawkenbergius on Noses and other choke-pears. Toby appeals to the eye; we can see him, parading for the Wadman campaign, in his great ramallie-wig, tarnished gold-laced hat and huge cockade of flimsy taffeta, in his blue and gold coat (that "had become so miserably too strait for him ") and red plush breeches; he cuts a fine figure in the imagination, limping past to the widow's or conducting
one of his dream-sieges from the sentry-box or puffing at his pipe, his red beaming foolish face all aglow, at his brother's fireside. Such little pictures do not easily fade out of the memory, and Toby lives on for us long after we have closed and put away the volume that contains him, so that at will we can recapture his acquaintance and never find it more than a step or so to his bowling-green and mimic battlements. In his simplicity, kindness, and innocent enthusiasm, in his warm humanity, he is a more lovable figure than his brother; Sterne sees to it that we shall fall in love with him, and, indeed, sometimes goes too far in sentiment, dropping too much sugar in Toby's pot. There is, for example, that famous anecdote about Toby and the fly:

—Go—says he, one day at dinner, to an overgrown one which had buzzed about his nose, and tormented him cruelly all dinner-time,—and which after infinite attempts, he had caught at last, as it flew by him;—I'll not hurt thee, says my uncle Toby, rising from his chair, and going across the room, with the fly in his hand,—I'll not hurt a hair of thy head:—Go, says he, lifting up the sash, and opening his hand as he spoke, to let it escape;—go, poor devil, get thee gone, why should I hurt thee?—This world surely is wide enough to hold both thee and me.

which has been admired times without number, and by some very good judges. Even Coleridge, who has some
very brilliant critical passages on Sterne buried away among his notes and fragments of lectures, calls it a "beautiful passage." But while the incident is very artfully related, it is catch-penny, with an appeal that is too gross; we can see Sterne bowing and smirking in the background and then passing round the hat into which we are asked to drop a tear of sensibility. Nevertheless, in spite of such doses of sweet melted butter, Toby remains the more lovable of the two. Yet as a comic figure his more irascible brother is equally successful. Side by side, on their own hearth, there is nothing to choose between them, and indeed it is the conjunction and the contrast that are so piquant. The Shandy family, with its several retainers, Trim, Obadiah, Susannah, with Dr. Slop and Yorick in attendance, is best enjoyed as a group, in which each figure stands out in exquisite relief.

The head of the family, Mr. Walter Shandy (My Father), we are told, was originally a Turkey merchant, but when the story opens he has left off business and has retired to his family estate in the country. He is extremely regular in matters both of business and pleasure (and no one who has ever read the opening chapters of *Tristram Shandy* is likely to forget the fact), somewhat short-tempered and rough-tongued, but at heart very kind and generous. Like many retired men of business, both in that century and this, having made his fortune by using
his common-sense, having depended for so many years upon the fact that two and two make four, he has now given common-sense a holiday and passes his time trying to discover if two and two will possibly make five. He is that very familiar eighteenth-century figure, the amateur philosopher, a collector of the antiques and curios of intellectual theory, a connoisseur of finely spun dialectic and debate. He has reached the stage that most men with brains arrive at during their third year at the university, the stage of the prize essay paradox, when far-fetched and elaborate theories are inevitably preferred to simple ones, when the more subtle reasoning is always the more acceptable, when nothing is simplified except the few things in this life that never should be simplified. The mind, delighted with its discovery that it can move at all, jumps and skips about all day: the intellect sows its wild oats. Most intelligent men pass through this stage at some time or other, usually early in life, but some, like Samuel Butler, another retired man of affairs, arrive at it late and then never leave it; they are brilliant undergraduates for the rest of their days. Mr. Shandy, who is not unlike Butler, except that his devotion to ideas is perhaps more selfless than Butler's was, is really a brilliant third-year man and should be writing prize essays instead of trying, with a notable lack of success, to lure his incurious family into debate.
The English Comic Characters

Having fallen into this state of mind rather late in life, he is in full possession of all the symptoms. Sterne knew what he was about when he made Mr. Shandy a retired merchant, for many years of money-making are apt to leave a man intellectually innocent, so that when he quits his counting-house for the last time he is just as likely to make the delightful discovery that there are such things as paradoxes in the world as he is to reveal to himself the charms of gardening. At this very moment, buried away in snug and bookish villas, there are probably a few score Mr. Shandies, bent on proving that a gravel soil is necessary to produce great genius, that all our political progress is the work of the ten lost tribes, that the Arabs first invented sin, that the world will not be saved until all the red-haired have vanished from its surface. Such persons are not scholars, even in their retirement, but they contrive to amass a great quantity of odd scraps of learning, they come to their books, which are for the most part curious out-of-the-way volumes, with a certain freshness and innocence and so tend to believe in them whole-heartedly. Tristram Shandy, wishing to emphasise his father's native gifts as an orator and dialectician, seems to underestimate Mr. Shandy's learning, for he remarks:

And yet, 'tis strange, he had never read Cicero, nor Quintilian de Oratore, nor Isocrates, nor Aristotle, nor
Longinus amongst the ancients;—nor Vossius, nor Scioppius, nor Ramus, nor Farnaby amongst the moderns;—and what is more astonishing, he had never in his whole life the least light or spark of subtlety struck into his mind, by one single lecture upon Crackenthorpe or Burgersdicius, or any Dutch logician or commentator;—he knew not so much as in what the difference of an argument *ad ignorantiam* and an argument *ad hominem* consisted; so that I well remember, when he went up along with me to enter my name at Jesus College in . . .—it was a matter of just wonder with my worthy tutor, and two or three fellows of that learned society,—that a man who knew not so much as the names of his tools, should be able to work after that fashion with them.

Mr. Shandy has more learning than one would gather from this passage, for he bolsters up his odd theories with a multitude of instances and examples. Moreover, we are told that he once wrote a Life of Socrates. The Shandean system is the familiar one of intellectual crankishness, which holds that the fate of humanity depends upon its taking some curious little step, such as contriving that children shall be born into the world feet first; which believes that its own particular crotchet, such as Mr. Shandy’s "magic bias of Christian names," will save the world. The amateur scientists and philosophers of the eighteenth century undoubtedly did their share of crotcheteering and were never at a loss for a panacea, but
they were a mere handful when compared with their descendants, the crotcheteers of our time, which is the very age that Mr. Shandy should have chosen to live in. With us, I have no doubt, he would have been completely happy. But he is at Shandy Hall, with his wife and brother Toby for company, and he has trials even beyond the lot of most philosophers.

The greatest of his trials arises from the fact that he is a philosopher, a logician, an orator, without an audience. Small wonder that he is so irritable, for never was a born debater so unfortunately placed. His wife and his brother are entirely devoid of intellectual curiosity. He has, as Coleridge pointed out, "a craving for sympathy in exact proportion to the oddity and unsympathisability of what he proposes," his oddest theories, like lame children, being the dearest to him; and further, like so many of us, he does not desire either total and final disagreement or immediate acquiescence on the part of his audience; he wishes to be disagreed with at first so that he may have some opportunity of displaying his powers of debate and persuasion, which will in the end inevitably bring his audience into agreement with him. Tristram, after presenting us with that delightful specimen of the argument *ad hominem* of his father's on the subject of names ("Your son,—your dear son,—from whose sweet and open temper you have so much to expect.—Your Billy,“
Sir!—would you, for the world, have called him Judas?"), remarks:

But, indeed, to speak of my father as he was; he was certainly irresistible; both in his orations and disputations;—he was born an orator;—θεοδίδακτος. Persuasion hung upon his lips, and the elements of Logic and Rhetoric were so blended up in him,—and, withal, he had so shrewd a guess at the weaknesses and passions of his respondent,—that Nature might have stood up and said,—"This man is eloquent."—In short, whether he was on the weak or the strong side of the question, 'twas hazardous in either case to attack him.

But such talkers, whose powers of persuasion dance attendance upon their vanity, do not merely want to drive certain conclusions into their listeners' heads; they are not bagmen or politicians, they are artists, whose fantastic theories only increase the difficulty and delight of their elaborate justifications and defences, and like all artists, unless they have a public worthy of their art, they are nothing. Mr. Shandy's irritation is not, on the whole, due to the fact that he cannot gain his point and compel submission to his crotchets, but is the result of his knowledge that all the subtle reasoning, all the tricks of debate, by means of which he could, in more knowledgeable company, win assent to his most ridiculous theories, are wasted on his audience. And as these theories have for the most part been chosen to demonstrate
his skill, being difficult to prove, he has all the more reason to be annoyed that such skill should be thrown away: he is like a perspiring juggler before a company of the blind. His naïve intellectual vanity, the mark of his kind everywhere, remains unsatisfied.

It is hard to determine, from his point of view, which is the more unsatisfactory listener, his wife or his brother. Mrs. Shandy, that excellent woman, has not an idea in her head; she has a few convictions, which she does not allow any argument to disturb, but for the rest, like a good wife, she is ready to agree with anything her strange husband may say, so that either he meets with stubborn opposition that no amount of talk can break down, or he meets with immediate and uncomprehending acquiescence. When it is a practical question, such as the employment of Dr. Slop in place of the usual old midwife, a step that Mr. Shandy is prepared to defend with the utmost subtlety, she is simply not to be moved:

Amongst the many and excellent reasons, with which my father had urged my mother to accept of Dr. Slop's assistance preferably to that of the old woman,—there was one of a very singular nature; which, when he had done arguing the matter with her as a Christian, and came to argue it over again with her as a philosopher, he had put his whole strength to, depending indeed upon it as his sheet-anchor.—It failed him; tho' from no defect in the argument itself; but that, do what he could,
he was not able for his soul to make her comprehend the
drift of it.—Cursed luck!—said he to himself, one after-
noon, as he walked out of the room, after he had been
stating it for an hour and a half to her, to no manner of
purpose;—cursed luck!—said he, biting his lips as he
shut the door,—for a man to be master of one of the
‘finest’ chains of reasoning in nature,—and have a wife
at the same time with such a headpiece, that he cannot
hang up a single inference within side of it, to save his
soul from destruction. . . .

When other matters, of less immediate concern to herself,
are discussed, she simply hastens to agree and so deprives
her husband of that mimic warfare in which he delights.
There never was a human being with less intellectual
curiosity:

It was a consuming vexation to my father, that my
mother never asked the meaning of a thing she did not
understand.
—That she is not a woman of science, my father would
say—is her misfortune—but she might ask a question.—
My mother never did.—In short, she went out of the
world at last without knowing whether it turned round,
or stood still.—My father had officiously told her above
a thousand times which way it was,—but she always
forgot.

For these reasons, a discourse seldom went on much
further betwixt them, than a proposition,—a reply, and
a rejoinder; at the end of which, it generally took
breath for a few minutes (as in the affair of the breeches),
and then went on again. . . .
Certainly that curtain dialogue on the subject of Tris-tram’s breeching shows Mrs. Shandy to be not merely an unphilosophical hearer but one of those very amiable but irritating conversationalists who are nothing more than echoes. No doubt there are husbands who would regard such extreme complaisance on the part of a wife with something like envy, but actually one does not need to be a Mr. Shandy to find it particularly annoying, dealing sudden death to all conversation:

We should begin, said my father, turning himself half round in bed, and shifting his pillow a little towards my mother’s, as he opened the debate.—We should begin to think, Mrs. Shandy, of putting this boy into breeches.—

We should so,—said my mother.—We defer it, my dear, quoth my father, shamefully.—

I think we do, Mr. Shandy,—said my mother.

—Not but the child looks extremely well, said my father, in his vests and tunics.—

—He does look very well in them,—replied my mother.—

And for that reason it would be almost a sin, added my father, to take him out of ’em.—

—It would be so,—said my mother :—But indeed he is growing a very tall lad,—rejoined my father.

—He is very tall for his age, indeed, said my mother.—

—I can not (making two syllables of it) imagine, quoth my father,—who the deuce he takes after.—

I cannot conceive, for my life,—said my mother.—

Humph!—said my father...
The Brothers Shandy

and so on to the end of the chapter. In this dialogue, and indeed in all the passages of talk between Mr. and Mrs. Shandy, there is a closeness and an economy under the apparent carelessness of the writer, who contrives to bring forward (as Coleridge noted) "those minutiae of thought and feeling which appear trifles, yet have an importance for the moment" with the minimum expenditure of words, that give a new turn to narration and begin a new chapter in the history of the English novel.

But Mr. Shandy is no better off with his brother Toby as an audience. Toby is not entirely barren of ideas, but he has no more intellectual curiosity than Mrs. Shandy, and he is probably still more irritating because he has a trick of showing some gleam of interest in his brother's speculations and then, when the latter, delighted at such interest, warms to his work, of suddenly blotting out this gleam, promptly shutting off, as it were, his curiosity; so that by the time Mr. Shandy is at the height of his peroration, Toby's mind is once more a blank and he is quietly whistling Lillabulero. Poor Mr. Shandy has been led within sight of the Promised Land only to be whisked away again into the wilderness. That was a great moment for our philosopher when, after the arrival of Dr. Slop and Obadiah, he and Toby had waited downstairs for what seemed to them an age
but what was actually two hours and ten minutes. Mr. Shandy, hoping against hope that there might be here an opportunity for "a metaphysical dissertation upon the subject of duration and its simple modes," remarked: "I know not how it happens, but it seems an age." He knew very well how it happened and was determined that Toby should share his knowledge. But Toby, for once, displayed an interest that should have pleased him, but actually did nothing of the kind because it looked as if it would rob him of any chance of explaining the matter:

"'Tis owing entirely, quoth my uncle Toby, to the succession of our ideas.

My father, who had an itch, in common with all philosophers, of reasoning upon everything which happened, and accounting for it too—proposed infinite pleasure to himself in this, of the succession of ideas, and had not the least apprehension of having it snatched out of his hands by my uncle Toby, who (honest man!) generally took every thing as it happened;—and who, of all things in the world, troubled his brain least with abstruse thinking;—the ideas of time and space—or how we came by those ideas—or of what stuff they were made—or whether they were born with us—or we picked them up afterwards as we went along—or whether we did it in frocks—or not till we had got into breeches—with a thousand other inquiries and disputes about Infinity, Prescience, Liberty, Necessity, and so forth, upon whose desperate and unconquerable theories
so many fine heads have been turned and cracked—never did my uncle Toby's the least injury at all; my father knew it—and was no less surprised than he was disappointed, with my uncle's fortuitous solution.

Do you understand the theory of that affair? replied my father.

'Not I, quoth my uncle.

—But you have some ideas, said my father, of what you talk about?—

No more than my horse, replied my uncle Toby.

And then all Mr. Shandy's attempts to explain come to nothing in face of this cheerful ignorance; Toby remains quietly impervious to ideas, and only expresses his bewilderment and indifference until his brother happens, unluckily for him, to mention "a regular succession of ideas of one sort and another, which follow each other in train just like——" Then Toby, preparing to mount his hobby-horse, his mind aroused at last, cuts in with "A train of artillery," and is promptly snubbed for his pains. It is unfortunate for Mr. Shandy's oratory that Toby takes everything literally and relates all he hears to his own experience, chiefly military, so that either it means nothing and leaves him blankly puffing his pipe or whistling, or it starts a train of thought of his own, which he never fails to pursue. There is a memorable little chapter that records how Mr. Shandy, after flinging himself down on his bed in despair at the news that
Tristram’s nose had been crushed by Dr. Slop (long noses being one of Mr. Shandy’s crotchets, as the reader learns to his cost), has the misfortune to voice that despair metaphorically to Toby:

Did ever man, brother Toby, cried my father, raising himself upon his elbow, and turning himself round to the opposite side of the bed, where my uncle Toby was sitting in his old fringed chair, with his chin resting upon his crutch—did ever a poor unfortunate man, brother Toby, cried my father, receive so many lashes?

—The most I ever saw given, quoth my uncle Toby (ringing the bell at the bed’s head for Trim), was to a grenadier, I think in Mackay’s regiment.

—Had my uncle Toby shot a bullet through my father’s heart, he could not have fallen down with his nose upon the quilt more suddenly.

Bless me! said my uncle Toby...

There is perhaps nothing richer in the whole book than the scene that follows, in which Trim appears and talks of his brother Tom, who was tortured upon the rack for nothing but marrying a Jew’s widow who sold sausages; and Uncle Toby rewards his corporal with a pension for his long service and goodness of heart; and Mr. Shandy, in a Socratic posture, holding fast his forefinger between his finger and thumb, discourses on Man and his Destiny with Toby, seated in his old fringed chair, valanced around with parti-coloured worsted bobs; and the two lovable creatures go downstairs, discussing
The Brothers Shandy

the name Trismegistus, and Toby catches Mr. Shandy on the shinbone with his crutch and Mr. Shandy forgets his pain in the double success of his repartees; and they arrive at the bottom in time to ask Susannah how her mistress does, and are snubbed, and shake their heads together, the married man remarking how all the women in a household give themselves airs when the mistress is brought to bed, the bachelor pointing out that "'Tis we who sink an inch lower.—If I meet but a woman with child—I do it." And so the scepticism and restless intellectual vanity of the one, and the innocence and simple faith of the other, in the face of these mysteries of birth and sex and death, run together and forget their differences in a concerted head-shaking.

It surprises no one to learn that a great many of Mr. Shandy's intellectual whimsies were borrowed by Sterne from Burton and other old authors. Mr. Shandy was quite capable of filching them himself. On the other hand, we have to make a distinct effort to realise that a number of Uncle Toby's most characteristic remarks are also plagiarisms. Thus, when Mr. Shandy is worrying himself and his brother on the subject of "the various accounts which learned men of different kinds of knowledge have given the world of the causes of the short and long noses," and Toby replies: "There is no cause but one why one man's nose is longer than another's, but
because God pleases to have it so”; this is not only Grangousier’s solution, as Mr. Shandy points out, but his identical remark. And yet, so strong is the spell of Sterne’s characterisation, all these things are to us Toby’s own, falling from his lips as naturally as the “Good morning” fell from ours at breakfast time. Everything he says and does is in character, and when we have met him once or twice, not all the plagiarism in the world could viscerate him or even steal a breath from his rich individuality. Mr. Shandy is an equally triumphant creation, but he is not presented in the same way that Toby is and is hardly so firmly seated, as a figure, in our imagination; we know how he thinks and talks, but for the rest, he is somewhat shadowy and not easily called to mind. Toby is as solid and unmistakable as a hill. At any moment, we can see him in his faded regimentals, with his lame leg and crutch, very complacently smoking his pipe by the fire. Though we are given much less of his talk than of Mr. Shandy’s, we know more about him; we know how he was wounded during the siege of Namur, how he retired on half-pay, attended by Corporal Trim, to a small house near Shandy Hall, how he first mounted his hobby-horse, his enthusiasm for fortifications and sieges, and how it ran away with him. He is more concretely presented, and has also a larger background, so that he soon becomes a more familiar
personage than his brother. As we have seen, he is the simplest of mortals, and, indeed, one step further along the path of simplicity and he would be tumbling into idiocy. As it is, he is only saved by his manliness and faith. He has known terrible things, and was among the cannon when his brother, bold in speculation, was among his ledgers, but his innocent faith in God and his fellow-men has never been shaken, and now that he is in retirement, now that he has known the worst and left it behind, his faith never will be shaken. We cannot appreciate him to the full unless we see him against his background, and remember that, in his time, he has been as bold in face of the enemy as his brother, with his odd theories, is now in face of common-sense and the arguments of opposing theorists. Just as Sterne knew what he was about when he made Mr. Shandy a retired merchant, so too he made no mistake when he made this unsophisticated, kindly, generous, childlike soul, Uncle Toby, a retired army officer. The army has sent out into the civilian world a host of Uncle Tobies (bating a few eccentricities), men who have known bloodshed and horror and yet are as simple as children. Nor is this very surprising. A soldier’s life is a sheltered life, more so, in some respects, than that of many a maiden lady living in retirement at a watering-place. It shuts a man off from all manner of problems and temptations, frees
him from so many snares, closes so many paths to dis-
honour; and yet it asks, in return, for nothing more
than the observance of a few simple loyalties. It demands
obedience and courage and tends to foster the spirit of
happy comradeship; it keeps alive the boy in a man and
protects him against a thousand meannesses. A soldier
is frequently a child who has seen some of the most
terrible sights the world has to show, and yet remains a
child; and it is probably this curious combination of
strength, courage, and innocence that has made the soldier
irresistible in love, for no combination of qualities in a
man could be more attractive to the average woman.

Sterne had not spent his earliest years wandering from
camp to camp for nothing: he knew his men. Both
Toby and Corporal Trim, though they are both strongly
individualised characters, are typical retired soldiers.
They have few ideas and a very narrow range of interests
but have a fund of reminiscence. Having served in the
same company, they have a kind of common stock of
memories, and Trim not only attends Toby as valet,
groom, barber, cook, sempster, and nurse, he also serves
as a memory, to which Toby can appeal when in doubt.

"Was it Mackay’s regiment, quoth my uncle, where
the poor grenadier was so unmercifully whipped at Bruges
about the ducats?—O Christ!—he was innocent!"

cried Trim, with a deep sigh.—And he was whipped,
may it please your honour, almost to death's door.—They had better have shot him outright, as he begged, and he had gone directly to heaven, for he was as innocent as your honour.—I thank thee, Trim, quoth my uncle Toby.” Literature is filled with old soldiers, but there is nothing better than this Trim. He has that curious sententiousness, that punctiliousness, that love of unnecessary detail in his recitals, that curious mixture of servility and impudence, under which there is a genuine, even intense devotion, which mark the type anywhere and everywhere. He is always on hand, and in spite of his seeming deference, his “may it please your honour,” his “by your leave,” he cannot be prevented from breaking into the conversation; and as he has an even more literal mind than his master, his interventions produce some ludicrous results. He it was who, when Mr. Shandy was discussing the teaching of grammar and, in particular, the use of the auxiliaries, pointed out that “The Danes, an’ please your honour, who were on the left at the siege of Limerick, were all auxiliaries.” But he is a very useful fellow, and worth a few liberties, for there is nothing he cannot do, from collecting the material for a miniature siege to devising a campaign against the heart of a widow. ‘Nothing could be more pleasant than the sight of these two simple, battered warriors, master and man, when they are together,
Each would be lost without the other. Their memories, coming together, strike fire from one another:

—For my own part, Trim, though I can see little or no difference betwixt my nephew’s being called Tristram or Trismegistus—yet as the thing sits so near my brother’s heart, Trim—I would freely have given a hundred pounds rather than that it should have happened.—A hundred pounds, an’ please your honour! replied Trim, —I would not give a cherry-stone to boot.—Nor would I, Trim, upon my own account, quoth my uncle Toby—but my brother, whom there is no arguing with in this case—maintains that a great deal more depends, Trim, upon Christian names, than what ignorant people imagine—for he says there never was a great or heroic action performed since the world began by one called Tristram—nay, he will have it, Trim, that a man can neither be learned, or wise, or brave.—’Tis all fancy, an’ please your honour—I fought just as well, replied the corporal, when the regiment called me Trim, as when they called me James Butler.—And for my own part, said my uncle Toby, though I should blush to boast of myself, Trim—yet had my name been Alexander, I could have done no more at Namur than my duty.—Bless your honour! cried Trim, advancing three steps as he spoke, does a man think of his Christian name when he goes upon the attack?—Or when he stands in the trench, Trim? cried my uncle Toby, looking firm.—Or when he enters a breach? said Trim, pushing in between two chairs.—Or forces the lines? cried my uncle, rising up, and pushing his crutch like a pike.—Or facing a platoon? cried Trim, presenting his stick like a firelock.—Or when he marches
up the glacis? cried my uncle Toby, looking warm and setting his foot upon his stool.—

Toby is naively proud of Trim's accomplishments ("He can read it, quoth my uncle Toby, as well as I can.—Trim, I assure you, was the best scholar in my company, and should have had the next halberd, but for the poor fellow's misfortune"), and is always ready to show him off to the company, Trim himself being by no means unwilling, whether it is matter of reading a sermon, going through the catechism, or doing his drill. Both Trim and his master, taken together, are at their best in that story of Le Fever, when the very sight of these two brave old simpletons, conspiring together to do good, though it could not save their fellow soldier, is a tonic to the reader.

Toby belongs to a class of characters made up of people who, strictly considered, can be set apart from the ordinary comic personages; they are lovable characters, who steal our affections as children steal them, and at whose vagaries and innocent preoccupations we smile just as we smile at those of children. It is more than likely that there is something of the child in all the comic figures that are not merely satirical sketches. Even in Falstaff, who, to speak truly, is little better than one of the wicked, there is a child, greedy for sensation, clamouring for notice, a thoughtless, incorrigible, adorable child,
hidden away somewhere, and it is this child we are willing to indulge, and it is for his sake that we forgive the old ruffian in whose heart he still lives on, forgive him so much and so often. But in Uncle Toby, and in all the figures that his influence has probably called into existence, the child predominates. We never lose sight of him, prancing on his hobby-horse. Sterne makes such great play with this hobby-horse that it is almost impossible to think of Toby apart from his fortifications and sieges. We are told, with a wealth of crafty detail, how it all began when Toby was still laid up with his wound, and how, with Trim’s invaluable assistance, a bookish interest was gradually transformed into a glorious game. If there is any reader who is unfortunate enough to be unacquainted with Toby’s hobby, he must be satisfied in this place with the briefest description. Toby and Trim took the plan of any fortified town invested by Marlborough and the Allies, enlarged it upon a scale to the exact size of the bowling-green, and then, by means of pack-thread and piquets driven into the earth, transferred the lines from the paper to the ground. Toby would then determine “the depths and slopes of the ditches,—the talus of the glacis, and the precise height of the several banquets, parapets, etc.,” and set Trim to work upon constructing the miniature fortification. This done, the two enthusiasts, following the latest news
from the front, would solemnly invest the place and conduct the siege, step by step, with the Allies. By what astonishing shifts and devices, such as the use of mutilated jack-boots and two Turkish pipes, the bowling-green was gradually brought nearer and nearer to the likeness of a battlefield, there is no space here to tell; the reader must learn these things for himself and they will repay his study. It is sufficient to say that both master and man are whole-hearted in their devotion to this unusual pastime, that nothing is spared (not even the window cords in Mr. Shandy's house, as Tristram learned to his cost when the window came crashing down at a very awkward moment) if it will serve the besiegers, that their thoughts never stray very far away from their fortifications. Never were there such enthusiasts.

It is an old trick to make your comic figure the victim of a ruling passion, a man of one idea, with a mind like a jack-in-the-box, responding only when a certain spring is touched, a creature somewhere half-way between reason and unreason, at once mad enough and sane enough to be a fit target for laughter. The more ridiculous his ruling passion happens to be, the more ridiculous he himself becomes. Such figures, with their catchwords and mechanical gestures, too unreasonable to be taken seriously and not mad enough to be pitied or feared,
have always been part of the humorist's stock-in-trade; there is always one of these personages on hand when the occasion demands a little comic relief. They neither ask for nor obtain our sympathy; they perform their tricks, and after being given a round of contemptuous laughter, they are hurried off the scene and out of our imagination. At their best, they belong to satirical literature. But while Toby has a ruling passion (if ever a man had), there is a gulf between him and the type of character we have just noticed. Sterne realised that once you have made a character lovable, his devotion to some absurdity or other can still be amusing in the old way, but something new has been added. Now that we are in sympathy with him, and probably regard him with affection, we can take pleasure in his pleasure; something of his excitement and delight is communicated to us; no longer are we entirely detached, coldly watching him making a fool of himself, for he is beginning to make a fool of us, a happy fool, like himself. We are still a little detached, can still laugh at him because he is so hobby-ridden and one-idea'd, but something sympathetic, friendly, affectionate is burgeoning in our amusement. Just as happy lovers and friends always laugh at one another because, in some odd fashion, they have discovered the innocence and childishness of each other, so too it is the child in our comic figure that we have stumbled
upon, and we watch him mounting his hobby-horse as we watch a child at play. Bless him, he shall have his sieges and fortifications! There never was a story or drama in which every man (including the author) was more "in his humour" than he is in *Tristram Shandy*, and yet we are worlds away from Jonson and the older satirical humorists. Sterne took good care to make Uncle Toby lovable first and eccentric afterwards, so that we follow his every movement with interest and affection. When Trim discovers that the bowling-green will make an excellent setting for mimic warfare, or that jack-boots, cut down, will serve as tolerable siege guns, and Toby is delighted, then we too, while we are laughing at them for being a pair of great children, are also delighted in our heart of hearts and would add a half-crown or so to Toby's guinea if we could only reach out to the hand of the ingenious Trim. The delight of the enthusiast is infectious, and nothing warms the heart more than the spectacle, so rare in recent fiction, of innocent pleasure, the romping and posturing, the absurdities and sudden splendours of that gleeful child which the passage of time and all the world's terrors and cruelties do not always succeed in killing. Fortunately too, though perhaps it was cunning rather than luck on Sterne's part, it happens that this absorbing pastime of Toby's has something childlike in its very composition, for what is it but
a happy make-believe, an attempt to mimic, on a tiny scale, something that in itself is far removed from play, colossal, terrible, what is it but a rather more ingenious and adult affair of toy forts and tin soldiers? It happens too that Sterne has made Uncle Toby the most, perhaps the only, sexually modest person in the book. Being Sterne, of course, he has to use this modesty as the spring-board for half a hundred plunges into rather tiresome, sniggering innuendo; nevertheless, he did well to make Toby modest, both from his point of view and ours (the more we study this “dull fellow”—as Goldsmith, most unluckily, called him—the more we appreciate his infinite adroitness), if only because it would be difficult for a Captain Toby Shandy who was well versed and curious in love to enter our imagination as a great lovable child. The bloom would be gone; and Toby, robbed of the bloom and flush of the innocent child in him, would not have successfully besieged so many hearts and have withstood so long the saps and mines and assaulting regiments of Time.

For the benefits of the ordinary reader and not the student of literary curiosities, there is no novel of the first or even second rank that stands more in need of careful editing (not Bowdlerising) than this *Tristram Shandy*. The occasional indecencies in the narrative proper are apt to prove somewhat tiresome, particularly *
because their success depends not on the reader’s frank acceptance of the facts of our physical life but on his (and more often her) half-shocked, half-delighted prurient; but it is not the indecencies that prevent the work from making its widest appeal and that are therefore ready for pruning; it is the tedious by-play, the wearisome digressions, the pseudo-learning, which drive us out of the company of the Shandy family and give us little or nothing in return for our exile, that should be ruthlessly cut out in any edition intended for the casual reader. These useless chapters clog the reader’s progress through the narrative, and, unless he happens to be both imaginative and patient, they stand in the way of his appreciating the Shandy family, particularly its humours as a group, as it was meant to be appreciated. As a group, it is conceived and presented with exquisite tact. There is a perfect balance between satire and sentiment. We have already noticed how the Shandies, as we may call them, are at odds and cross-purposes intellectually; a conversation can go forward among them without any single person in it understanding, or having the least desire to understand, what the other persons are talking about; each follows his own nose and takes care that his mind keeps all its doors and windows closed. Such a notable want of intellectual sympathy and understanding, such a slavish devotion, on every hand, to a certain fixed set
of ideas, such a rigid determination to shut out all thought that appears in a new form, deal death to philosophies and sciences and all reasonable intercourse and call up a horrible vision of humanity as a set of puppets worked on the wires of a few instincts. A satirist, loathing his species, could have taken such tragi-comical little creatures, each in the separate mechanical box of his mind, and made out of them a scene or narrative that would have jangled the nerves of a dozen generations. Sterne, however, having shown us this want of even the most ordinary intellectual sympathy, preserves the balance by emphasising what we might call the emotional kinship of his people. If the Shandies cannot share one another's thoughts, they can share one another's feelings. Any little crisis finds them, so to speak, in one another's arms, and produces a fine crop of tears and handshakes and "God bless you's." In short, their hearts are in the right place. Even we, who are content with fewer tears and handshakings, would be rather taken aback at the bleak satire of the narrative, when carefully considered, if the unity in feeling, the mutual trust and affection, of the Shandies were not so broadly and so often emphasised. It says something for the relative importance of wits, which are always at cross-purposes in this narrative, and hearts, which never fail to beat in unison here, that we carry away from Shandy Hall a picture of human happiness,
and so gradually realise that these odd lovable creatures, the prancing philosopher, the simple Captain, and the rest, for all their bickering and their whimsies, have somehow stumbled upon the secret of the happy life.
MR. COLLINS

JANE AUSTEN only once achieved poetry, and that was when, in her early days, she created Mr. Collins. To many readers, particularly those who prefer the later Jane to the earlier, Mr. Collins is merely one figure in a notable gallery of comic figures, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, Sir Walter Elliot, Mrs. Norris, Mr. Woodhouse, Miss Bates; he falls into his place in this delicious company, and there is no more to be said about him. But he has always seemed to me an Austen character who stood by himself, a creature of larger stature than the rest, or one who is presented to us, shall we say, with an extra dimension. The later Jane, working more closely, tightening her grip upon the reins, could not have created him. Two comparisons will serve to point the difference. Sir Walter Elliot, for example, is good, a stiff but very effective little sketch (there is certainly not enough of him), and his few snatches of talk have a fine savour, the very accents of bland self-approval; but he is not limned with any gusto; his creator does not love him (and I do not mean approve of him, of course) suffi-