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Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo  
Defoe Abbot Stoker Wilde Carroll Christie Maupassant Byron Molière Grimm  
Garnett Engels Schiller Hawthorne Smith Kafka  
Goethe Dostoyevsky Kipling Doyle Hall  
Baum Cotton Henry Flaubert Turgenev Balzac Willis  
Leslie Dumas Stockton Vatsyayana Crane  
Burroughs Verne  
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch  
Homer Tolstoy Whitman Twain Scott  
Darwin Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Harte  
Potter Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Hesse  
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**Memoirs of the Life of the Rt.  
Hon. Richard Brinsley Sheridan**

**Volume 2**

Thomas Moore

# Imprint

This book is part of TREDITION CLASSICS

Author: Thomas Moore

Cover design: Buchgut, Berlin - Germany

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg - Germany

ISBN: 978-3-8424-3180-5

[www.tredition.com](http://www.tredition.com)

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MEMOIRS  
OF THE  
LIFE OF THE RT. HON.  
RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN  
BY THOMAS MOORE  
IN TWO VOLUMES  
VOL. II.

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# MEMOIRS OF THE LIFE OF THE RIGHT HONORABLE RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN.

## CHAPTER I.

### IMPEACHMENT OF MR. HASTINGS.

The motion of Mr. Burke on the 10th of May, 1787, "That Warren Hastings, Esq., be impeached," having been carried without a division, Mr. Sheridan was appointed one of the Managers, "to make good the Articles" of the Impeachment, and, on the 3d of June in the following year, brought forward the same Charge in Westminster Hall which he had already enforced with such wonderful talent in the House of Commons.

To be called upon for a second great effort of eloquence, on a subject of which all the facts and the bearings remained the same, was, it must be acknowledged, no ordinary trial to even the most fertile genius; and Mr. Fox, it is said, hopeless of any second flight ever rising to the grand elevation of the first, advised that the former Speech should be, with very little change, repeated. But such a plan, however welcome it might be to the indolence of his friend, would have looked too like an acknowledgment of exhaustion on the subject to be submitted to by one so justly confident in the resources both of his reason and fancy. Accordingly, he had the glory of again opening, in the very same field, a new and abundant spring of eloquence, which, during four days, diffused its enchantment among an assembly of the most illustrious persons of the land, and of which Mr. Burke pronounced at its conclusion, that "of all the various species of oratory, of every kind of eloquence that had been heard, either in ancient or modern times; whatever the acuteness of the bar, the dignity of the senate, or the morality of the pulpit could furnish, had not been equal to what that House had that day heard in Westminster Hall. No holy religionist, no man of any description as a literary character, could have come up, in the one instance, to

the pure sentiments of morality, or in the other, to the variety of knowledge, force of imagination, propriety and vivacity of allusion, beauty and elegance of diction, and strength of expression, to which they had that day listened. From poetry up to eloquence there was not a species of composition of which a complete and perfect specimen might not have been culled, from one part or the other of the speech to which he alluded, and which, he was persuaded, had left too strong an impression on the minds of that House to be easily obliterated."

As some atonement to the world for the loss of the Speech in the House of Commons, this second master-piece of eloquence on the same subject has been preserved to us in a Report, from the shorthand notes of Mr. Gurney, which was for some time in the possession of the late Duke of Norfolk, but was afterwards restored to Mr. Sheridan, and is now in my hands.

In order to enable the reader fully to understand the extracts from this Report which I am about to give, it will be necessary to detail briefly the history of the transaction, on which the charge brought forward in the Speech was founded.

Among the native Princes who, on the transfer of the sceptre of Tamerlane to the East India Company, became tributaries or rather slaves to that Honorable body, none seems to have been treated with more capricious cruelty than Cheyte Sing, the Rajah of Benares. In defiance of a solemn treaty, entered into between him and the government of Mr. Hastings, by which it was stipulated that, besides his fixed tribute, no further demands, of any kind, should be made upon him, new exactions were every year enforced;—while the humble remonstrances of the Rajah against such gross injustice were not only treated with slight, but punished by arbitrary and enormous fines. Even the proffer of bribe succeeded only in being accepted [Footnote: This was the transaction that formed one of the principal grounds of the Seventh Charge brought forward in the House of Commons by Mr. Sheridan. The suspicious circumstances attending this present are thus summed up by Mr. Mill: "At first, perfect concealment of the transaction—such measures, however, taken as may, if afterwards necessary, appear to imply a design of future disclosure;—when concealment becomes difficult and haz-

ardous, then disclosure made." — *History of British India.*] — the exactions which it was intended to avert being continued as rigorously as before. At length, in the year 1781, Mr. Hastings, who invariably, among the objects of his government, placed the interests of Leadenhall Street first on the list, and those of justice and humanity *longo intervallo* after, — finding the treasury of the Company in a very exhausted state, resolved to sacrifice this unlucky Rajah to their replenishment; and having as a preliminary step, imposed upon him a mulct of £500,000, set out immediately for his capital, Benares, to compel the payment of it. Here, after rejecting with insult the suppliant advances of the Prince, he put him under arrest, and imprisoned him in his own palace. This violation of the rights and the roof of their sovereign drove the people of the whole province into a sudden burst of rebellion, of which Mr. Hastings himself was near being the victim. The usual triumph, however, of might over right ensued; the Rajah's castle was plundered of all its treasures, and his mother, who had taken refuge in the fort, and only surrendered it on the express stipulation that she and the other princesses should pass out safe from the dishonor of search, was, in violation of this condition, and at the base suggestion of Mr. Hastings himself, [Footnote: In his letter to the Commanding Officer at Bidgegur. The following are the terms in which he conveys the hint: "I apprehend that she will contrive to defraud the captors of a considerable part of the booty, by being suffered to retire *without examination*. But this is your consideration, and not mine. I should be very sorry that your officers and soldiers lost any part of the reward to which they are so well entitled; but I cannot make any objection, as you must be the best judge of the expediency of the *promised* indulgence to the Rannee."] rudely examined and despoiled of all her effects. The Governor-General, however, in this one instance, incurred the full odium of iniquity without reaping any of its reward. The treasures found in the castle of the Rajah were inconsiderable, and the soldiers, who had shown themselves so docile in receiving the lessons of plunder, were found inflexibly obstinate in refusing to admit their instructor to a share. Disappointed, therefore, in the primary object of his expedition, the Governor-General looked round for some richer harvest of rapine, and the Begums of Oude presented themselves as the most convenient victims. These Princesses, the mother and grandmother of the reigning Nabob of Oude, had been

left by the late sovereign in possession of certain government-estates, or jaghires, as well as of all the treasure that was in his hands at the time of his death, and which the orientalized imaginations of the English exaggerated to an enormous sum. The present Nabob had evidently looked with an eye of cupidity on this wealth, and had been guilty of some acts of extortion towards his female relatives, in consequence of which the English government had interfered between them,—and had even guaranteed to the mother of the Nabob the safe possession of her property, without any further encroachment whatever. Guarantees and treaties, however, were but cobwebs in the way of Mr. Hastings; and on his failure at Benares, he lost no time in concluding an agreement with the Nabob, by which (in consideration of certain measures of relief to his dominions) this Prince was bound to plunder his mother and grandmother of all their property, and place it at the disposal of the Governor-General. In order to give a color of justice to this proceeding, it was [Footnote: "It was the practice of Mr. Hastings (says Burke, in his fine speech on Mr. Pitt's India Bill, March 22, 1786) to examine the country, and wherever he found money to affix guilt. A more dreadful fault could not be alleged against a native than that he was rich."] pretended that these Princesses had taken advantage of the late insurrection at Benares, to excite a similar spirit of revolt in Oude against the reigning Nabob and the English government. As Law is but too often, in such cases, the ready accomplice of Tyranny, the services of the Chief Justice, Sir Elijah Impey, were called in to sustain the accusations; and the wretched mockery was exhibited of a Judge travelling about in search of evidence, [Footnote: This journey of the Chief Justice in search of evidence is thus happily described by Sheridan in the Speech:—"When, on the 28th of November, he was busied at Lucknow on that honorable business, and when, three days after, he was found at Chunar, at the distance of 200 miles, still searching for affidavits, and, like Hamlet's ghost, exclaiming, 'Swear,' his progress on that occasion was so whimsically rapid, compared with the gravity of his employ, that an observer would be tempted to quote again from the same scene, 'Ha! Old Truepenny, canst thou mole so fast i' the ground?' Here, however, the comparison ceased; for, when Sir Elijah made his visit to Lucknow 'to whet the almost blunted purpose' of the Nabob, his lan-

guage was wholly different from that of the poet—for it would have been totally against his purpose to have said,

Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive  
Against thy mother aught." ] for the express purpose of proving a charge, upon which judgment had been pronounced and punishment decreed already.

The Nabob himself, though sufficiently ready to make the wealth of those venerable ladies occasionally minister to his wants, yet shrunk back, with natural reluctance, from the summary task now imposed upon him; and it was not till after repeated and peremptory remonstrances from Mr. Hastings, that he could be induced to put himself at the head of a body of English troops, and take possession, by unresisted force, of the town and palace of these Princesses. As the treasure, however, was still secure in the apartments of the women,—that circle, within which even the spirit of English rapine did not venture,—an expedient was adopted to get over this inconvenient delicacy. Two aged eunuchs of high rank and distinction, the confidential agents of the Begums, were thrown into prison, and subjected to a course of starvation and torture, by which it was hoped that the feelings of their mistresses might be worked upon, and a more speedy surrender of their treasure wrung from them. The plan succeeded:—upwards of 500,000 l. was procured to recruit the finances of the Company; and thus, according to the usual course of British power in India, rapacity but levied its contributions in one quarter, to enable war to pursue its desolating career in another.

To crown all, one of the chief articles of the treaty, by which the Nabob was reluctantly induced to concur in these atrocious measures, was, as soon as the object had been gained, infringed by Mr. Hastings, who, in a letter to his colleagues in the government, honestly confesses that the concession of that article was only a fraudulent artifice of diplomacy, and never intended to be carried into effect.

Such is an outline of the case, which, with all its aggravating details, Mr. Sheridan had to state in these two memorable Speeches;

and it was certainly most fortunate for the display of his peculiar powers, that this should be the Charge confided to his management. For, not only was it the strongest, and susceptible of the highest charge of coloring, but it had also the advantage of grouping together all the principal delinquents of the trial, and affording a gradation of hue, from the showy and prominent enormities of the Governor-General and Sir Elijah Impey in the front of the picture, to the subordinate and half-tint iniquity of the Middletons and Bristows in the back-ground.

Mr. Burke, it appears, had at first reserved this grand part in the drama of the Impeachment for himself; but, finding that Sheridan had also fixed his mind upon it, he, without hesitation, resigned it into his hands; thus proving the sincerity of his zeal in the cause, [Footnote: Of the lengths to which this zeal could sometimes carry his fancy and language, rather, perhaps, than his actual feelings, the following anecdote is a remarkable proof. On one of the days of the trial, Lord — —, who was then a boy, having been introduced by a relative into the Manager's box, Burke said to him, "I am glad to see you here—I shall be still gladder to see you there—(pointing to the Peers' seats) I hope you will be *in at the death*—I should like to *blood* you."] by sacrificing even the vanity of talent to its success.

The following letters from him, relative to the Impeachment, will be read with interest. The first is addressed to Mrs. Sheridan, and was written, I think, early in the proceedings; the second is to Sheridan himself:—

"MADAM,

"I am sure you will have the goodness to excuse the liberty I take with you, when you consider the interest which I have and which the Public have (the said Public being, at least, half an inch a taller person than I am) in the use of Mr. Sheridan's abilities. I know that his mind is seldom unemployed; but then, like all such great and vigorous minds, it takes an eagle flight by itself, and we can hardly bring it to rustle along the ground, with us birds of meaner wing, in coveys. I only beg that you will prevail on Mr. Sheridan to be with us *this day*, at half after three, in the Committee. Mr. Wombell, the Paymaster of Oude, is to be examined there *to-day*. Oude is Mr.

Sheridan's particular province; and I do most seriously ask that he would favor us with his assistance. What will come of the examination I know not; but, without him, I do not expect a great deal from it; with him, I fancy we may get out something material. Once more let me entreat your interest with Mr. Sheridan and your forgiveness for being troublesome to you, and do me the justice to believe me, with the most sincere respect,

"Madam, your most obedient

"and faithful humble Servant,

"*Thursday, 9 o' clock.*

**"EDM. BURKE."**

**"MY DEAR SIR,**

"You have only to wish to be excused to succeed in your wishes; for, indeed, he must be a great enemy to himself who can consent, on account of a momentary ill-humor, to keep himself at a distance from you.

"Well, all will turn out right,—and half of you, or a quarter, is worth five other men. I think that this cause, which was originally yours, will be recognized by you, and that you will again possess yourself of it. The owner's mark is on it, and all our docking and cropping cannot hinder its being known and cherished by its original master. My most humble respects to Mrs. Sheridan. I am happy to find that she takes in good part the liberty I presumed to take with her. Grey has done much and will do every thing. It is a pity that he is not always toned to the full extent of his talents.

"Most truly yours,

"*Monday.*

**"EDM. BURKE."**

"I feel a little sickish at the approaching day. I have read much—too much, perhaps,—and, in truth, am but poorly prepared. Many things, too, have broken in upon me." [Footnote: For this letter, as well as some other valuable communications, I am indebted to the

kindness of Mr. Burgess,—the Solicitor and friend of Sheridan during the last twenty years of his life.]

Though a Report, however accurate, must always do injustice to that effective kind of oratory which is intended rather to be heard than read, and, though frequently, the passages that most roused and interested the hearer, are those that seem afterwards the tritest and least animated to the reader, [Footnote: The converse assertion is almost equally true. Mr. Fox used to ask of a printed speech, "Does it read well?" and, if answered in the affirmative, said, "Then it was a bad speech."] yet, with all this disadvantage, the celebrated oration in question so well sustains its reputation in the perusal, that it would be injustice, having an authentic Report in my possession, not to produce some specimens of its style and spirit.

In the course of his exordium, after dwelling upon the great importance of the inquiry in which they were engaged, and disclaiming for himself and his brother-managers any feeling of personal malice against the defendant, or any motive but that of retrieving the honor of the British name in India, and bringing down punishment upon those whose inhumanity and injustice had disgraced it,—he thus proceeds to conciliate the Court by a warm tribute to the purity of English justice:—

"However, when I have said this, I trust Your Lordships will not believe that, because something is necessary to retrieve the British character, we call for an example to be made, without due and solid proof of the guilt of the person whom we pursue:—no, my Lords, we know well that it is the glory of this Constitution, that not the general fame or character of any man—not the weight or power of any prosecutor—no plea of moral or political expediency—not even the secret consciousness of guilt, which may live in the bosom of the Judge, can justify any British Court in passing any sentence, to touch a hair of the head, or an atom in any respect, of the property, of the fame, of the liberty of the poorest or meanest subject that breathes the air of this just and free land. We know, my Lords, that there can be no legal guilt without legal proof, and that the rule which defines the evidence is as much the law of the land as that which creates the crime. It is upon that ground we mean to stand."

Among those ready equivocations and disavowals, to which Mr. Hastings had recourse upon every emergency, and in which practice seems to have rendered him as shameless as expert, the step which he took with regard to his own defence during the trial was not the least remarkable for promptness and audacity. He had, at the commencement of the prosecution, delivered at the bar of the House of Commons, as his own, a written refutation of the charges then pending against him in that House, declaring at the same time, that "if truth could tend to convict him, he was content to be, himself, the channel to convey it." Afterwards, however, on finding that he had committed himself rather imprudently in this defence, he came forward to disclaim it at the bar of the House of Lords, and brought his friend Major Scott to prove that it had been drawn up by Messrs. Shore, Middleton, &c. &c. — that he himself had not even seen it, and therefore ought not to be held accountable for its contents. In adverting to this extraordinary evasion, Mr. Sheridan thus shrewdly and playfully exposes all the persons concerned in it:—

"Major Scott comes to your bar—describes the shortness of time—represents Mr. Hastings as it were *contracting for* a character—putting his memory *into commission*—making *departments* for his conscience. A number of friends meet together, and he, knowing (no doubt) that the accusation of the Commons had been drawn up by a Committee, thought it necessary, as a point of punctilio, to answer it by a Committee also. One furnishes the raw material of fact, the second spins the argument, and the third twines up the conclusion; while Mr. Hastings, with a master's eye, is cheering and looking over this loom. He says to one, 'You have got my good faith in your hands—*you*, my veracity to manage. Mr. Shore, I hope you will make me a good financier—Mr. Middleton, you have my humanity in commission.'—When it is done, he brings it to the House of Commons, and says, 'I was equal to the task. I knew the difficulties, but I scorn them: here is the truth, and if the truth will convict me, I am content myself to be the channel of it.' His friends hold up their heads, and say, 'What noble magnanimity! This must be the effect of conscious and real innocence.' Well, it is so received, it is so argued upon,—but it fails of its effect.

"Then says Mr. Hastings,—'That my defence! no, mere journeyman-work,—good enough for the Commons, but not fit for Your

Lordships' consideration.' He then calls upon his Counsel to save him:—'I fear none of my accusers' witnesses—I know some of them well—I know the weakness of their memory, and the strength of their attachment—I fear no testimony but my own—save me from the peril of my own panegyric—preserve me from that, and I shall be safe.' Then is this plea brought to Your Lordships' bar, and Major Scott gravely asserts,—that Mr. Hastings did, at the bar of the House of Commons, vouch for facts of which he was ignorant, and for arguments which he had never read.

"After such an attempt, we certainly are left in doubt to decide, to *which* set of his friends Mr. Hastings is least obliged, those who assisted him in making his defence, or those who advised him to deny it."

He thus describes the feelings of the people of the East with respect to the unapproachable sanctity of their Zenanas:—

"It is too much, I am afraid, the case, that persons, used to European manners, do not take up these sort of considerations at first with the seriousness that is necessary. For Your Lordships cannot even learn the right nature of those people's feelings and prejudices from any history of other Mahometan countries,—not even from that of the Turks, for they are a mean and degraded race in comparison with many of these great families, who, inheriting from their Persian ancestors, preserve a purer style of prejudice and a loftier superstition. Women there are not as in Turkey—they neither go to the mosque nor to the bath—it is not the thin veil alone that hides them—but in the inmost recesses of their Zenana they are kept from public view by those revered and protected walls, which, as Mr. Hastings and Sir Elijah Impey admit, are held sacred even by the ruffian hand of war or by the more uncourteous hand of the law. But, in this situation, they are not confined from a mean and selfish policy of man—not from a coarse and sensual jealousy—enshrined rather than immured, their habitation and retreat is a sanctuary, not a prison—their jealousy is their own—a jealousy of their own honor, that leads them to regard liberty as a degradation, and the gaze of even admiring eyes as inexpiable pollution to the purity of their fame and the sanctity of their honor.

"Such being the general opinion (or prejudices, let them be called) of this country, Your Lordships will find, that whatever treasures were given or lodged in a Zenana of this description must, upon the evidence of the thing itself, be placed beyond the reach of resumption. To dispute with the Counsel about the original right to those treasures—to talk of a title to them by the Mahometan law!—their title to them is the title of a Saint to the relics upon an altar, placed there by Piety, [Footnote: This metaphor was rather roughly handled afterwards (1794) by Mr. Law, one of the adverse Counsel, who asked, how could the Begum be considered as "a Saint," or how were the camels, which formed part of the treasure, to be "placed upon the altar?" Sheridan, in reply, said, "It was the first time in his life he had ever heard of *special pleading* on a *metaphor*, or a *bill of indictment* against a trope. But such was the turn of the learned Counsel's mind, that, when he attempted to be humorous, no jest could be found, and, when serious, no fact was visible."] guarded by holy Superstition, and to be snatched from thence only by Sacrilege."

In showing that the Nabob was driven to this robbery of his relatives by other considerations than those of the pretended rebellion, which was afterwards conjured up by Mr. Hastings to justify it, he says,—

"The fact is, that through all his defences—through all his various false suggestions—through all these various rebellions and disaffections, Mr. Hastings never once lets go this plea—of extinguishable right in the Nabob. He constantly represents the seizing the treasures as a resumption of a right which he could not part with;—as if there were literally something in the Koran, that made it criminal in a true Mussulman to keep his engagements with his relations, and impious in a son to abstain from plundering his mother. I do gravely assure your Lordships that there is no such doctrine in the Koran, and no such principle makes a part in the civil or municipal jurisprudence of that country. Even after these Princesses had been endeavoring to dethrone the Nabob and to extirpate the English, the only plea the Nabob ever makes, is his right under the Mahometan law; and the truth is, he appears never to have heard any other reason, and I pledge myself to make it appear to Your Lordships, however extraordinary it may be, that not only had the Nabob never

heard of the rebellion till the moment of seizing the palace, but, still further, that he never heard of it at all—that this extraordinary rebellion, which was as notorious as the rebellion of 1745 in London, was carefully concealed from those two parties—the Begums who plotted it, and the Nabob who was to be the victim of it.

"The existence of this rebellion was not the secret, but the notoriety of it was the secret; it was a rebellion which had for its object the destruction of no human creature but those who planned it;—it was a rebellion which, according to Mr. Middleton's expression, no man, either horse or foot, ever marched to quell. The Chief Justice was the only man who took the field against it,—the force against which it was raised, instantly withdrew to give it elbow-room,—and, even then, it was a rebellion which perversely showed itself in acts of hospitality to the Nabob whom it was to dethrone, and to the English whom it was to extirpate;—it was a rebellion plotted by two feeble old women, headed by two eunuchs, and suppressed by an affidavit."

The acceptance, or rather exaction, of the private present of £100,000 is thus animadverted upon:

"My Lords, such was the distressed situation of the Nabob about a twelvemonth before Mr. Hastings met him at Chunar. It was a twelvemonth, I say, after this miserable scene—a mighty period in the progress of British rapacity—it was (if the Counsel will) after some natural calamities had aided the superior vigor of British violence and rapacity—it was after the country had felt other calamities besides the English—it was after the angry dispensations of Providence had, with a progressive severity of chastisement, visited the land with a famine one year, and with a Col. Hannay the next—it was after he, this Hannay, had returned to retrace the steps of his former ravages—it was after he and his voracious crew had come to plunder ruins which himself had made, and to glean from desolation the little that famine had spared, or rapine overlooked;—*then* it was that this miserable bankrupt prince marching through his country, besieged by the clamors of his starving subjects, who cried to him for protection through their cages—meeting the curses of some of his subjects, and the prayers of others—with famine at his heels, and reproach following him,—then it was that this Prince is repre-