

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen  
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo  
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm  
Garnett Engels Byron Schiller  
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka  
Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall  
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis  
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac  
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane  
Burroughs Verne  
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch  
Homer Tolstoy Whitman  
Darwin Thoreau Twain  
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott  
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Harte  
London Descartes Cervantes Wells Hesse  
Poe Aristotle Wells Voltaire Cooke  
Hale James Hastings Shakespeare Chambers Irving  
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**Memoirs of the Life of the Rt.  
Hon. Richard Brinsley Sheridan –  
Volume 01**

Thomas Moore

# Imprint

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## PREFACE.

The first four Chapters of this work were written nearly seven years ago. My task was then suspended during a long absence from England; and it was only in the course of the last year that I applied myself seriously to the completion of it.

To my friend, Mr. Charles Sheridan, whose talents and character reflect honor upon a name, already so distinguished, I am indebted for the chief part of the materials upon which the following Memoirs of his father are founded. I have to thank him, not only for this mark of confidence, but for the delicacy with which, though so deeply interested in the subject of my task, he has refrained from all interference with the execution of it:—neither he, nor any other person, beyond the Printing-office, having ever read a single sentence of the work.

I mention this, in order that the responsibility of any erroneous views or indiscreet disclosures, with which I shall be thought chargeable in the course of these pages, may not be extended to others, but rest solely with myself.

The details of Mr. Sheridan's early life were obligingly communicated to me by his younger sister, Mrs. Lefanu, to whom, and to her highly gifted daughter, I offer my best thanks for the assistance which they have afforded me.

The obligations, of a similar nature, which I owe to the kindness of Mr. William Linley, Doctor Bain, Mr. Burgess, and others, are acknowledged, with due gratitude, in my remarks on their respective communications.



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## CHAPTER I.

### BIRTH AND EDUCATION OF MR. SHERIDAN. — HIS FIRST ATTEMPTS IN LITERATURE.

Richard Brinsley [Footnote: He was christened also by the name of Butler, after the Earl of Lanesborough.] Sheridan was born in the month of September, 1751, at No. 12, Dorset Street, Dublin, and baptized in St. Mary's Church, as appears by the register of the parish, on the fourth of the following month. His grandfather, Dr. Sheridan, and his father, Mr. Thomas Sheridan, have attained a celebrity, independent of that which he has conferred on them, by the friendship and correspondence with which the former was honored by Swift, and the competition and even rivalry which the latter so long maintained with Garrick. His mother, too, was a woman of considerable talents, and affords one of the few instances that have occurred, of a female indebted for a husband to her literature; as it was a pamphlet she wrote concerning the Dublin theatre that first attracted to her the notice of Mr. Thomas Sheridan. Her affecting novel, Sidney Biddulph, could boast among its warm panegyrists Mr. Fox and Lord North; and in the Tale of Nourjahad she has employed the graces of Eastern fiction to inculcate a grave and important moral, — putting on a fairy disguise, like her own Mandane, to deceive her readers into a taste for happiness and virtue. Besides her two plays, *The Discovery* and *The Dupe*, — the former of which Garrick pronounced to be "one of the best comedies he ever read," — she wrote a comedy also, called *The Trip to Bath*, which was never either acted or published, but which has been supposed by some of those sagacious persons, who love to look for flaws in the titles of fame, to have passed, with her other papers, into the possession of her son, and, after a transforming sleep, like that of the chrysalis, in his hands, to have taken wing at length in the brilliant form of *The Rivals*. The literary labors of her husband were less fanciful, but not, perhaps, less useful, and are chiefly upon subjects connected with

education, to the study and profession of which he devoted the latter part of his life. Such dignity, indeed, did his favorite pursuit assume in his own eyes, that he is represented (on the authority, however, of one who was himself a schoolmaster) to have declared, that "he would rather see his two sons at the head of respectable academies, than one of them prime minister of England, and the other at the head of affairs in Ireland."

At the age of seven years, Richard Brinsley Sheridan was, with his elder brother, Charles Francis, placed under the tuition of Mr. Samuel Whyte, of Grafton Street, Dublin,—an amiable and respectable man, who, for near fifty years after, continued at the head of his profession in that metropolis. To remember our school-days with gratitude and pleasure, is a tribute at once to the zeal and gentleness of our master, which none ever deserved more truly from his pupils than Mr. Whyte, and which the writer of these pages, who owes to that excellent person all the instructions in English literature he has ever received, is happy to take this opportunity of paying. The young Sheridans, however, were little more than a year under his care—and it may be consoling to parents who are in the first crisis of impatience, at the sort of hopeless stupidity which some children exhibit, to know, that the dawn of Sheridan's intellect was as dull and unpromising as its meridian day was bright; and that in the year 1759, he who, in less than thirty years afterwards, held senates enchained by his eloquence and audiences fascinated by his wit, was, by common consent both of parent and preceptor, pronounced to be "a most impenetrable dunce."

From Mr. Whyte's school the boys were removed to England, where Mr. and Mrs. Sheridan had lately gone to reside, and in the year 1762 Richard was sent to Harrow—Charles being kept at home as a fitter subject for the instructions of his father, who, by another of those calculations of poor human foresight, which the deity, called *Eventus* by the Romans, takes such wanton pleasure in falsifying, considered his elder son as destined to be the brighter of the two brother stars. At Harrow, Richard was remarkable only as a very idle, careless, but, at the same time, engaging boy, who contrived to win the affection, and even admiration of the whole school, both masters and pupils, by the mere charm of his frank and genial manners, and by the occasional gleams of superior intellect,

which broke through all the indolence and indifference of his character.

Harrow, at this time, possessed some peculiar advantages, of which a youth like Sheridan might have powerfully availed himself. At the head of the school was Doctor Robert Sumner, a man of fine talents, but, unfortunately, one of those who have passed away without leaving any trace behind, except in the admiring recollection of their contemporaries. His taste is said to have been of a purity almost perfect, combining what are seldom seen together, that critical judgment which is alive to the errors of genius, with the warm sensibility that deeply feels its beauties. At the same period, the distinguished scholar, Dr. Parr, who, to the massy erudition of a former age, joined all the free and enlightened intelligence of the present, was one of the under masters of the school; and both he and Dr. Sumner endeavored, by every method they could devise, to awaken in Sheridan a consciousness of those powers which, under all the disadvantages of indolence and carelessness, it was manifest to them that he possessed. But remonstrance and encouragement were equally thrown away upon the good-humored but immovable indifference of their pupil; and though there exist among Mr. Sheridan's papers some curious proofs of an industry in study for which few have ever given him credit, they are probably but the desultory efforts of a later period of his life, to recover the loss of that first precious time, whose susceptibility of instruction, as well as of pleasure, never comes again.

One of the most valuable acquisitions he derived from Harrow was that friendship, which lasted throughout his life, with Dr. Parr,—which mutual admiration very early began, and the "*idem sentire de re publica*" of course not a little strengthened.

As this learned and estimable man has, within the last few weeks, left a void in the world which will not be easily filled up, I feel that it would be unjust to my readers not to give, in his own words, the particulars of Sheridan's school-days, with which he had the kindness to favor me, and to which his name gives an authenticity and interest too valuable on such a subject to be withheld:

"Hatton, August 3, 1818.

"DEAR SIR,

"With the aid of a scribe I sit down to fulfil my promise about Mr. Sheridan. There was little in his boyhood worth communication. He was inferior to many of his school-fellows in the ordinary business of a school, and I do not remember any one instance in which he distinguished himself by Latin or English composition, in prose or verse. [Footnote: It will be seen, however, though Dr. Parr was not aware of the circumstance, that Sheridan did try his talent at English verse before he left Harrow.] Nathaniel Halthed, one of his school-fellows, wrote well in Latin and Greek. Richard Archdall, another school-fellow, excelled in English verse. Richard Sheridan aspired to no rivalry with either of them. He was at the uppermost part of the fifth form, but he never reached the sixth, and, if I mistake not, he had no opportunity of attending the most difficult and the most honorable of school business, when the Greek plays were taught—and it was the custom at Harrow to teach these at least every year. He went through his lessons in Horace, and Virgil, and Homer well enough for a time. But, in the absence of the upper master, Doctor Sumner, it once fell in my way to instruct the two upper forms, and upon calling up Dick Sheridan, I found him not only slovenly in construing, but unusually defective in his Greek grammar. Knowing him to be a clever fellow, I did not fail to probe and to tease him. I stated his case with great good-humor to the upper master, who was one of the best tempered men in the world; and it was agreed between us, that Richard should be called oftener and worked more severely. The varlet was not suffered to stand up in his place; but was summoned to take his station near the master's table, where the voice of no prompter could reach him; and, in this defenceless condition, he was so harassed, that he at last gathered up some grammatical rules, and prepared himself for his lessons. While this tormenting process was inflicted upon him, I now and then upbraided him. But you will take notice that he did not incur any corporal punishment for his idleness: his industry was just sufficient to protect him from disgrace. All the while Sumner and I saw in him vestiges of a superior intellect. His eye, his countenance, his general manner, were striking. His answers to any common question were prompt and acute. We knew the esteem, and even admiration, which, somehow or other, all his school-fellows felt for

him. He was mischievous enough, but his pranks were accompanied by a sort of vivacity and cheerfulness, which delighted Sumner and myself. I had much talk with him about his apple-loft, for the supply of which all the gardens in the neighborhood were taxed, and some of the lower boys were employed to furnish it. I threatened, but without asperity, to trace the depredators, through his associates, up to their leader. He with perfect good-humor set me at defiance, and I never could bring the charge home to him. All boys and all masters were pleased with him. I often praised him as a lad of great talents,—often exhorted him to use them well; but my exhortations were fruitless. I take for granted that his taste was silently improved, and that he knew well the little which he did know. He was removed from school too soon by his father, who was the intimate friend of Sumner, and whom I often met at his house. Sumner had a fine voice, fine ear, fine taste, and, therefore, pronunciation was frequently the favorite subject between him and Tom Sheridan. I was present at many of their discussions and disputes, and sometimes took a very active part in them,—but Richard was not present. The father, you know, was a wrong-headed, whimsical man, and, perhaps, his scanty circumstances were one of the reasons which prevented him from sending Richard to the University. He must have been aware, as Sumner and I were, that Richard's mind was not cast in any ordinary mould. I ought to have told you that Richard, when a boy, was a great reader of English poetry; but his exercises afforded no proof of his proficiency. In truth, he, as a boy, was quite careless about literary fame. I should suppose that his father, without any regular system, polished his taste, and supplied his memory with anecdotes about our best writers in our Augustan age. The grandfather, you know, lived familiarly with Swift. I have heard of him, as an excellent scholar. His boys in Ireland once performed a Greek play, and when Sir William Jones and I were talking over this event, I determined to make the experiment in England. I selected some of my best boys, and they performed the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and the *Trachinians* of Sophocles. I wrote some Greek Iambics to vindicate myself from the imputation of singularity, and grieved I am that I did not keep a copy of them. Milton, you may remember, recommends what I attempted.

"I saw much of Sheridan's father after the death of Sumner, and after my own removal from Harrow to Stanmer. I respected him,— he really liked me, and did me some important services,—but I never met him and Richard together. I often inquired about Richard, and, from the father's answers, found they were not upon good terms,—but neither he nor I ever spoke of his son's talents but in terms of the highest praise." In a subsequent letter Dr. Parr says: "I referred you to a passage in the Gentleman's Magazine, where I am represented as discovering and encouraging in Richard Sheridan those intellectual powers which had not been discovered and encouraged by Sumner. But the statement is incorrect. We both of us discovered talents, which neither of us could bring into action while Sheridan was a school-boy. He gave us few opportunities of praise in the course of his school business, and yet he was well aware that we thought highly of him, and anxiously wished more to be done by him than he was disposed to do.

"I once or twice met his mother,— she was quite celestial. Both her virtues and her genius were highly esteemed by Robert Sumner. I know not whether Tom Sheridan found Richard tractable in the art of speaking,— and, upon such a subject, indolence or indifference would have been resented by the father as crimes quite inexpiable. One of Richard's sisters now and then visited Harrow, and well do I remember that, in the house where I lodged, she triumphantly repeated Dryden's Ode upon St. Cecilia's Day, according to the instruction given to her by her father. Take a sample:

*None* but the brave, *None* but the *brave*, *None* *but* the brave  
deserve the fair.

Whatever may have been the zeal or the proficiency of the sister, naughty Richard, like Gallio, seemed to care naught for these things.

"In the later periods of his life Richard did not cast behind him classical reading. He spoke copiously and powerfully about Cicero. He had read, and he had understood, the four orations of Demosthenes, read and taught in our public schools. He was at home in Virgil and in Horace. I cannot speak positively about Homer,—but I am very sure that he read the Iliad now and then; not as a professed scholar would do, critically, but with all the strong sympathies of a

poet reading a poet. [Footnote: It was not one of the least of the triumphs of Sheridan's talent to have been able to persuade so acute a scholar as Dr. Parr, that the extent of his classical acquirements was so great as is here represented, and to have thus impressed with the idea of his remembering so much, the person who best knew how little he had learned.] Richard did not, and could not forget what he once knew, but his path to knowledge was his own,—his steps were noiseless,—his progress was scarcely felt by himself,—his movements were rapid but irregular.

"Let me assure you that Richard, when a boy, was by no means vicious. The sources of his infirmities were a scanty and precarious allowance from the father, the want of a regular plan for some profession, and, above all, the act of throwing him upon the town, when he ought to have been pursuing his studies at the University. He would have done little among mathematicians at Cambridge;—he would have been a rake, or an idler, or a trifler, at Dublin;—but I am inclined to think that at Oxford he would have become an excellent scholar.

"I have now told you all that I know, and it amounts to very little. I am very solicitous for justice to be done to Robert Sumner. He is one of the six or seven persons among my own acquaintance whose taste I am accustomed to consider perfect, and, were he living, his admiration...." [Footnote: The remainder of the letter relates to other subjects.]

During the greater part of Richard's stay at Harrow his father had been compelled, by the embarrassment of his affairs, to reside with the remainder of the family in France, and it was at Blois, in the September of 1766, that Mrs. Sheridan died—leaving behind her that best kind of fame, which results from a life of usefulness and purity, and which it requires not the aid of art or eloquence to blazon. She appears to have been one of those rare women, who, united to men of more pretensions, but less real intellect than themselves, meekly conceal this superiority even from their own hearts, and pass their lives without remonstrance or murmur, in gently endeavoring to repair those evils which the indiscretion or vanity of their partners has brought upon them.

As a supplement to the interesting communication of Dr. Parr, I shall here subjoin an extract from a letter which the eldest sister of Sheridan, Mrs. E. Lefanu, wrote a few months after his death to Mrs. Sheridan, in consequence of a wish expressed by the latter that Mrs. Lefanu would communicate such particulars as she remembered of his early days. It will show, too, the feeling which his natural good qualities, in spite of the errors by which they were obscured and weakened, kept alive to the last, in the hearts of those connected with him, that sort of retrospective affection, which, when those whom we have loved become altered, whether in mind or person, brings the recollection of what they once were, to mingle with and soften our impression of what they are.

After giving an account of the residence of the family in France, she continues: "We returned to England, when I may say I first became acquainted with my brother—for faint and imperfect were my recollections of him, as might be expected from my age. I saw him; and my childish attachment revived with double force. He was handsome, not merely in the eyes of a partial sister, but generally allowed to be so. His cheeks had the glow of health; his eyes,—the finest in the world,— the brilliancy of genius, and were soft as a tender and affectionate heart could render them. The same playful fancy, the same sterling and innoxious wit, that was shown afterwards in his writings, cheered and delighted the family circle. I admired—I almost adored him. I would most willingly have sacrificed my life for him, as I, in some measure, proved to him at Bath, where we resided for some time, and where events that you must have heard of engaged him in a duel. My father's displeasure threatened to involve me in the denunciations against him, for committing what he considered as a crime. Yet I risked everything, and in the event was made happy by obtaining forgiveness for my brother.... You may perceive, dear sister, that very little indeed have I to say on a subject so near your heart, and near mine also. That for years I lost sight of a brother whom I loved with unabated affection—a love that neither absence nor neglect could chill—I always consider as a great misfortune."

On his leaving Harrow, where he continued till near his eighteenth year, he was brought home by his father, who, with the elder son, Charles, had lately returned from France, and taken a house in

London. Here the two brothers for some time received private tuition from Mr. Lewis Kerr, an Irish gentleman, who had formerly practised as a physician, but having, by loss of health, been obliged to give up his profession, supported himself by giving lessons in Latin and Mathematics. They attended also the fencing and riding schools of Mr. Angelo, and received instructions from their father in English grammar and oratory. Of this advantage, however, it is probable, only the elder son availed himself, as Richard, who seems to have been determined to owe all his excellence to nature alone, was found as impracticable a pupil at home as at school. But, however inattentive to his studies he may have been at Harrow, it appears, from one of the letters of his school-fellow, Mr. Halhed, that in poetry, which is usually the first exercise in which these young athleteæ of intellect try their strength, he had already distinguished himself; and, in conjunction with his friend Halhed, had translated the seventh Idyl, and many of the lesser poems of Theocritus. This literary partnership was resumed soon after their departure from Harrow. In the year 1770, when Halhed was at Oxford, and Sheridan residing with his father at Bath, they entered into a correspondence, (of which, unluckily, only Halhed's share remains,) and, with all the hope and spirit of young adventurers, began and prosecuted a variety of works together, of which none but their translation of Aristaenetus ever saw the light.

There is something in the alliance between these boys peculiarly interesting. Their united ages, as Halhed boasts in one of his letters, did not amount to thirty-eight. They were both abounding in wit and spirits, and as sanguine as the consciousness of talent and youth could make them; both inspired with a taste for pleasure, and thrown upon their own resources for the means of gratifying it; both carelessly embarking, without rivalry or reserve, their venture of fame in the same bottom, and both, as Halhed discovered at last, passionately in love with the same woman.

It would have given me great pleasure to have been enabled to enliven my pages with even a few extracts from that portion of their correspondence, which, as I have just mentioned, has fallen into my hands. There is in the letters of Mr. Halhed a fresh youthfulness of style, and an unaffected vivacity of thought, which I question whether even his witty correspondent could have surpassed. As I

do not, however, feel authorized to lay these letters before the world, I must only avail myself of the aid which their contents supply towards tracing the progress of his literary partnership with Sheridan, and throwing light on a period so full of interest in the life of the latter.

Their first joint production was a farce, or rather play, in three acts, called "Jupiter," written in imitation of the burletta of Midas, whose popularity seems to have tempted into its wake a number of these musical parodies upon heathen fable. The amour of Jupiter with *Major Amphitryon's* wife, and *Sir Richard Ixion's* courtship of Juno, who substitutes *Miss Peggy Nubilis* in her place, form the subject of this ludicrous little drama, of which Halhed furnished the burlesque scenes,—while the form of a rehearsal, into which the whole is thrown, and which, as an anticipation of "The Critic" is highly curious, was suggested and managed entirely by Sheridan. The following extracts will give some idea of the humor of this trifle; and in the character of Simile the reader will at once discover a sort of dim and shadowy pre-existence of Puff:—

"*Simile*. Sir, you are very ignorant on the subject,—it is the method most in vogue.

"*O'Cul*. What! to make the music first, and then make the sense to it afterwards!

"*Sim*. Just so.

"*Monop*. What Mr. Simile says is very true, gentlemen; and there is nothing surprising in it, if we consider now the general method of writing *plays to scenes*.

"*O'Cul*. Writing *plays to scenes!*—Oh, you are joking.

"*Monop*. Not I, upon my word. Mr. Simile knows that I have frequently a complete set of scenes from Italy, and then I have nothing to do but to get some ingenious hand to write a play to them.

"*Sim*. I am your witness, Sir. Gentlemen, you perceive you know nothing about these matters.

"*O'Cul*. Why, Mr. Simile, I don't pretend to know much relating to these affairs, but what I think is this, that in this method, according to your principles, you must often commit blunders.