

**ENGLISH MEN OF  
LETTERS; STERNE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649712175

English Men of Letters; Sterne by Henry Duff Traill & John Morley

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**HENRY DUFF TRAILL & JOHN MORLEY**

**ENGLISH MEN OF  
LETTERS; STERNE**



# English Men of Letters

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY

STERNE



*St. James  
- Town*

AN

# STERNE

H. entry  
D. wife  
BY  
TRAILL

London:  
MACMILLAN AND CO.  
1882.

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9.2.1882

## PREFATORY NOTE.

THE materials for a biography of Sterne are by no means abundant. Of the earlier years of his life, the only existing record is that preserved in the brief autobiographical memoir which, a few months before his death, he composed, in the usual quaint *staccato* style of his familiar correspondence, for the benefit of his daughter. Of his childhood ; of his school days ; of his life at Cambridge, and in his Yorkshire Vicarage ; of his whole history in fact, up to the age of forty-six, we know nothing more than he has there jotted down. He attained that age in the year 1759 ; and at this date begins that series of his *Letters*, from which, for those who have the patience to sort them out of the chronological confusion in which his daughter and editress involved them, there is no doubt a good deal to be learnt. These letters, however, which extend down to 1768, the year of the writer's death, contain pretty nearly all the contemporary material that we have to depend on. Freely as Sterne mixed in the best literary society, there is singularly little to be gathered about him, even in the way of chance allusion and anecdote, from the memoirs and *ana* of his time. Of the many friends who would have been competent to write his biography while the facts were yet fresh, but one, John Wilkes, ever entertained—if he did seriously entertain—the idea of performing this pious work ; and

he, in spite of the entreaties of Sterne's widow and daughter, then in straitened circumstances, left unredeemed his promise to do so. The brief memoir by Sir Walter Scott, which is prefixed to many popular editions of *Tristram Shandy* and the *Sentimental Journey*, sets out the so-called autobiography in full, but for the rest is mainly critical; Thackeray's well-known lecture-essay is almost wholly so; and nothing, worthy to be dignified by the name of a *Life of Sterne*, seems ever to have been published, until the appearance of Mr. Percy Fitzgerald's two stout volumes, under this title, some eighteen years ago. Of this work it is hardly too much to say, that it contains (no doubt with the admixture of a good deal of superfluous matter) nearly all the information as to the facts of Sterne's life that is now ever likely to be recovered. The evidence for certain of its statements of fact is not as thoroughly sifted as it might have been; and with some of its criticism I at least am unable to agree. But no one interested in the subject of this memoir can be insensible of his obligations to Mr. Fitzgerald, for the fruitful diligence with which he has laboured in a too long neglected field.

H. D. T.

BICKLEY, *May*, 1882.



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# STERNE.

## CHAPTER I.

### BIRTH, PARENTAGE, AND EARLY YEARS.

(1713—1724.)

TOWARDS the close of the month of November, 1713, one of the last of the English regiments which had been detained in Flanders to supervise the execution of the treaty of Utrecht, arrived at Clonmel from Dunkirk. The day after its arrival the regiment was disbanded; and yet a few days later, on the 24th of the month, the wife of one of its subalterns gave birth to a son. The child who thus early displayed the perversity of his humour by so inopportune an appearance was LAURENCE STERNE. "My birthday," he says in the slipshod, loosely-strung notes by which he has been somewhat grandiloquently said to have "anticipated the labours" of the biographer—"my birthday was ominous to my poor father, who was the day after our arrival, with many other brave officers, broke and sent adrift into the wide world with a wife and two children."

Roger Sterne, however, now late ensign of the 34th or Chudleigh's regiment of foot, was after all in less evil

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