

SHERIDAN

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649703968

Sheridan by Mrs. Oliphant

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Cover @ 2017

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MRS. OLIPHANT

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BY

MRS. OLIPHANT

London:

MACMILLAN AND CO.

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NOTE.

THE most important and, on the whole, trustworthy life of Sheridan is that of Moore, published in 1825, nine years after Sheridan's death, and founded upon the fullest information, with the help of all that Sheridan had left behind in the way of papers, and all that the family could furnish—along with Moore's own personal recollections. It is not a very characteristic piece of work, and greatly dissatisfied the friends and lovers of Sheridan; but its authorities are unimpeachable. A previous Memoir by Dr. Watkins, the work of a political opponent and detractor, was without either this kind of authorisation or any grace of personal knowledge, and has fallen into oblivion. Very different is the brief sketch by the well-known Professor Smyth, a most valuable and interesting contribution to the history of Sheridan. It concerns, indeed, only the later part of his life, but it is the most lifelike and, under many aspects, the most touching contemporary portrait that has been made of him. With the professed intention of making up for the absence of character in Moore's *Life*, a small volume of *SHERIDANIANA* was published the year after, which is full of amusing anecdotes, but little, if any, additional information. Other essays on the subject have been many.

Scarcely an edition of Sheridan's plays has been published (and they are numberless) without a biographical notice, good or bad. The most noted of these is perhaps the *Biographical and Critical Sketch* of Leigh Hunt, which does not, however, pretend to any new light, and is entirely unsympathetic. Much more recently a book of personal *Recollections by an Octogenarian* promised to afford new information ; but, except for the froth of certain dubious and not very savoury stories of the Prince Regent period, failed to do so.

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RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN.

CHAPTER I.

HIS YOUTH.

RICHARD BRINSLEY BUTLER SHERIDAN was born in Dublin, in the month of September 1751, of a family which had already acquired some little distinction of a kind quite harmonious with the after fame of him who made its name so familiar to the world. The Sheridans were of that Anglo-Irish type which has given so much instruction and amusement to the world, and which has indeed in its wit and eccentricity so associated itself with the fame of its adopted country, that we might almost say it is from this peculiar variety of the race that we have all taken our idea of the national character. It will be a strange thing to discover, after so many years' identification of the idiosyncrasy as Irish, that in reality it is a hybrid, and not native to the soil. The race of brilliant, witty, improvident, and reckless Irishmen whom we have all been taught to admire, excuse, love, and condemn—the Goldsmiths, the Sheridans, and many more that will occur to the reader—all belong to this mingled blood. Many are more Irish, according to our present