Foreword

ON THE LAST SUNDAY of the year 1839, Francis C. Sheridan, an elegant young Irishman in the British diplomatic service, set sail with his terrier "Nelly" from Barbados, bound for the Republic of Texas. Her Majesty's ship *Pilot* was sailing from the equable climate of Barbados to what he presumed would be the equally temperate climate of the seaport of Galveston. In his light tropical clothing he was, he felt, properly dressed for the journey. After a few days at sea, an observer who had seen this gentleman embark at Barbados might have found it difficult to recognize him. For a stiff "norther" had welcomed them into the Gulf of Mexico, and he had been obliged to borrow a pair of breeches from the Corporal of Marines, a jacket from the Captain, and gloves from the Master. He was now, he observed in his journal, "in a better condition to combat with the inclemency of the season." Adding a yellow neckcloth of his own to these rough seaman's clothes, Her Majesty's representative made his first appearance before the citizens of the Republic.

Francis Cynric Sheridan, grandson of the famous play-

wright and wit, Richard Brinsley Sheridan,¹ was colonial secretary under Sir Evan John Murray MacGregor, governor of the Windward Islands, stationed in Barbados. His mission in Texas was to contribute the opinion of an eyewitness to larger deliberations going on in London. Lord Palmerston was carefully weighing the pros and cons of recognizing the new Republic—an action he had refused to take in 1838 in response to the application of J. Pinckney Henderson, Texas minister to England and France. On one side, England's commercial interests were urging immediate recognition; on the other, the government felt obliged to satisfy the loudly expressed objections of the English abolitionists. Palmerston wanted all the information about Texas that he could get. The British Foreign Office was in constant communication with Sir Richard Pakenham, British minister at Mexico; Captain Hamilton of the British Navy had visited the Republic and was requested to make a report; and now Sheridan was being sent to make further observations.

After a stay of several months Sheridan dispatched his letter through the proper diplomatic channels to the British Foreign Office for the information of the Prime Minister. The letter, dated July 12, 1840, remains in the government files and has been published by E. D. Adams,

¹ Francis Cynric Sheridan was the third son of Thomas Sheridan, the eldest son of Richard Brinsley Sheridan and Elizabeth Anne Linley. His mother was Caroline Henrietta Callander, daughter of Colonel James Callander (Sir James Campbell) and Lady Elizabeth Helena M'Donnell. See "Sheridan, late of Frampton Court," Burke's *Landed Gentry*, London, 1937, Vol. II.

the American historian, in a volume of British diplomatic correspondence concerning the Republic of Texas. Professor Adams describes the letter as comprehensive, picturesque, and judicial. "If the government," Sheridan wrote, "have it in the remotest contemplation to grant the recognition"—and the whole tenor of his letter implied that it ought to grant it—"it is my humble opinion that a competent person should be at once sent there to examine the Country, make himself acquainted with the character and habits of the people and report thereon." By July of 1840, Palmerston had apparently made up his mind to recognize Texas, and the observations of Sheridan and others influenced him to arrange immediate treaties with the Republic, the first of which, a treaty of commerce and navigation, was signed November 13, 1840. Upon the official recognition in 1842, Captain (later Sir) Charles Elliott was sent to the Republic as British consul general and remained until the Annexation in 1846.

The journal that we have here contains some of the material that Sheridan used for his official report and much colorful detail that he did not use. The report is the document of an astute and observant diplomat, short and to the point; this one, which was never published, is the travel diary of a sophisticated and discerning student of human nature. Although there are easily discoverable similarities to other contemporary accounts written by English visitors to the West and South, Sheridan's journal has qualities which make it quite different from most

of them. There is little of the obtuse condescension, for example, which made Mrs. Trollope's visit to Louisiana and the East so notorious when she published her *Domestic Manners of the Americans* in 1832. It has more humor and less verbosity than Hooten's *St. Louis' Isle, or Texiana*, the account of an Englishman who arrived at Galveston in 1840, just about the time that Sheridan left it; and it reveals more understanding than the observations of Mrs. Houston, who made only brief excursions from the comfortable quarters of her hundred-foot yacht moored in Galveston Harbor during the winter of 1842. In comparison with these observers, Sheridan wrote from a more literary point of view. He had a lively flair for the pictorial and something of the novelist's interest in characterization. His picture of the blanket-coated McKinney, for example, whom he encountered on the steamer bound for Galveston, and of the carelessly dressed set of fellows who met the boat as it dropped anchor off the coast at Velasco ("one gentleman having little more than a pair of earrings & a Bowie knife") are notable for their clarity and economy. These qualities, combined with his romantic preoccupation with the character of Lafitte and his satiric bent, exemplified in his sketch of the ubiquitous land speculator, reveal an attractive and many-sided personality which enlivens the whole account and gives it continuity.

Sheridan appears to have been rather widely read in literature, and his quotations from the older writers—

Homer, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope—and from such contemporaries as Mrs. Hemans, Theodore Hook, and Dickens are generally apposite and unforced. Judging from his social success at Velasco, he must have possessed some of the flamboyance of the Byronic type, though he seems not to have affected the aloofness of this popular contemporary attitude, which he describes with some acerbity in the journal. He is, of course, occasionally patronizing: he laughs at the “Yankee” language and finds amusing the hopeless endeavors of the Texans to breed horses equal to the English racers. At times his attempts at wit seem self-conscious, but the impression that the whole picture leaves is lively and pungent. His criticisms, leavened by a sense of humor, contain little that is exaggerated or distorted. Although it would be pretentious to call his account important as a historical document, it is faithful to the buoyant frontier life he had come to observe—its rawness and its vitality—and the journal retains the freshness of a recent impression.

Sheridan kept his journal in a large ledger-like volume bound in half calf. The earliest entries, in diary form, record something for nearly every day, but shortly after his arrival in Texas, the daily entries are abandoned, and the journal becomes a continuous account of what in his experience he felt was worth recording. The latter half, in fact, seems to be a reconstruction taken from notes made at the time, and written perhaps on shipboard on the return voyage to Barbados. This part of the jour-

nal, therefore, takes on a more formal character, as if the idea of making the account into a book were developing in his mind. Finally, on the last page, a title and whimsical dedication reveal that this had become his intention.

There are several references (scattered mainly through the latter part of the journal) to anecdotes and to quotations from printed sources which do not, unfortunately, appear in the manuscript. It is regrettable that we do not have the set of notes to which these references allude, for Sheridan occasionally brings the reader up to the point and then leaves him dangling. In several instances I have been able to supply what I believe is the exact reference that Sheridan intended to make at these points and have included the material in the notes. In other places—his anecdote of the penchant for practical joking in the Texas Navy, for example—it has been impossible to do this. At these points, the account may seem fragmentary, but this occasional lack of continuity should not be too troublesome.

Sheridan's "Notes on Texas" that follow the body of the journal are largely the transcription of a letter of Samuel May Williams, who had been secretary to Stephen F. Austin and was the business partner of Thomas F. McKinney, the Robert Morris of the Texas Revolution. It was written to Captain Ramsay of the *Pilot*, obviously for Sheridan's use. It is an interesting letter, both as a firsthand account of the Revolution and as a piece of propaganda, for it is an obvious attempt to convince

Sheridan that immediate recognition of the Republic was important to Great Britain. The editorial notes indicate how heavily Sheridan drew upon this letter in writing his official report.

In the appendices, there are several items from the manuscript not immediately connected with the main part of the journal: (1) Sheridan's list of "Barbarian Expressions" that he encountered in Texas; (2) a brief account of obeah superstitions, probably collected in Barbados or Jamaica; (3) a short diary written by Sheridan en route to the British colony of Mauritius, in the Indian Ocean, east of Madagascar. After several years' service in Barbados, Sheridan was appointed treasurer and paymaster general of this British possession and journeyed there via Cape Town, in 1842. Less than two years later, on September 13, 1843,² he died at Port Louis, Mauritius. His promising diplomatic career had come to an end when he was only thirty.

Sheridan's manuscript, which came into the hands of an English bookseller several years ago, was purchased by the University of Texas Library for the Archives Collection. Except for a few obvious slips of the pen which have been silently corrected, it is printed exactly as Sheridan wrote it.

I wish to express my thanks to Miss Winnie Allen and to Mr. Malcolm D. McLean for their critical reading of

² *The Gentleman's Magazine* (XXI [1844], 111) gives the date as November 11, 1843.

my manuscript, and to acknowledge my gratitude to Mr. Herbert Gambrell, whose helpful suggestions I have incorporated in my notes.

WILLIS W. PRATT

Austin, Texas

August 1, 1953