Even at this early age, she had been on the point of mar­riage with Mr Long, an old gentleman of considerable for- tune in Wiltshire ; but, on her secretly representing to him, that she never could be happy as his wife, he generously took upon himself the whole blame of breaking off the al­liance, and even indemnified the father by settling L.3000 upon his daughter. Mr Sheridan, who owed to this liber­ality not only the possession of the woman he loved, but the means of supporting her during the first years of their mar­riage, uniformly spoke of Mr Long with all the kindness and respect which such a disinterested character merited. Meanwhile, in love, as in all besides, the power of a mind like Sheridan’s made itself felt through all obstacles ; and he won the entire affections of the Syren, though the num­ber and wealth of his rivals, amongst whom were a brother and friend, the ambitious views of the father, and the temp­tations to which she was hourly exposed, kept his fears and jealousies continually on the watch. But, whilst this was the case, a new and unexpected difficulty awaited him.

Captain Mathews, a married man, and intimate with Miss Linley’s family, had for some time harassed her with those discreditable addresses, which it is equally painful to disclose and intolerable to endure. To the threat of self- destruction, he is said to have added the still more unman­ly menace of ruining her reputation, if he could not un­dermine her virtue. Terrified by his perseverance, she confided her distresses to Sheridan, who lost no time in expostulating with him upon the cruelty, libertinism, and hopelessness of his pursuit. Such a remonstrance, how­ever, was but little calculated to conciliate the forbearance of this professed man of gallantry ; so that, early in 1772, Miss Linley adopted the resolution of flying to France, and taking refuge in a convent. At this time Sheridan was little more than twenty, and Miss Linley just entering her eighteenth year. Landing at Dunkirk, they proceeded to Lisle, where they procured an apartment in a convent, with the intention of remaining there until Sheridan should have the means of supporting her as his wife. On the first dis­covery of the elopement, Mathews busied himself making inquiries into the affair. During the four or five weeks that the young couple «’ere absent, he never ceased to haunt the Sheridan family with all sorts of exaggerated rumours ; and at length, urged on by the restlessness of revenge, he inserted a violent and inflammatory advertise­ment in the Bath Chronicle, in which he publicly posted Mr Sheridan as a scoundrel and a liar. The consequences of this were such as might have been expected. The party now returned from the Continent, and, without loss of time, Sheridan called out Mathews. His second on the occasion was Mr Ewart, and the particulars of the duel, which was fought with swords, are stated by himself in a letter addressed to Captain Knight, the second of Mathews. From this it appears that Mathews, being worsted, was ob­liged to beg his life ; after which he signed an ample apo­logy, in which he retracted the expressions he had made use of, as “ the effects of passion and misrepresentation,” and begged pardon for his advertisement in the Bath Chro­nicle.

With the odour of this transaction fresh about him, Mr Mathews retired to his estate in Wales, and there found himself universally shunned. An apology may be, accord­ing to circumstances, either the noblest effort of manliness, or the last resource of fear ; and, from the reception which this gentleman everywhere experienced, it is evident that to the latter class of cases his late retraction had been re­ferred. In this crisis, a Mr Barnett, who had but lately come to reside in his neighbourhood, took upon himself the duty of urging a second meeting with Sheridan, as the only means of removing the stigma left by the first; offering, at the same time, to be the bearer of the challenge. This offer was accepted, and the parties met at Kingsdown, where

a desperate encounter ensued, in which Mr Sheridan’s sword was broken, and himself severely wounded. A narrative of this affair, drawn up by Mr Barnett, and sanctioned by the concurrence of Captain Paumier (Sheridan’s friend) in the truth of its material facts, was soon afterwards published ; whilst the comments which Sheridan thought it necessary to make have been found in an unfinished state amongst his papers. As soon as Sheridan was sufficiently recovered of his wounds, bis father sent him to pass some months at Waltham Abbey, Essex, where he continued, with but **a** few short intervals of absence, from August or September

1772, till the spring of the following year.

During this period, he evinced considerable industry, particularly in an abstract which he made of the History of England, and in a collection of remarks on Sir William Temple’s works, especially his essay on Popular Discon­tents, on which his observations are tasteful and just. Still his situation was at this lime singularly perplexing. He had won the heart, and even the hand, of the woman he loved, yet saw his hopes of possessing her farther off than ever. He had twice risked his life against an unworthy antagonist, yet found the vindication of his honour incom­plete. He felt within himself all the proud consciousness of genius, yet, thrown upon the world without a profession, he looked in vain for a channel through which to direct its energies. Even the precarious hope which his father’s favour held out had been purchased by an act of duplicity, which his conscience condemned ; for he not only had pro­mised that he would instantly abandon the pursuit, but had even taken an oath that he would never marry Miss Linley. To a mind so young and so ardent, the pressure of these various anxieties must, of course, have been great ; in fact they could only have been adequately described by him who felt them ; and there still exist some letters, written by him during this time, which betray a sadness and despondency, sometimes breaking out into aspirings of ambition, some­times rising even into a tone of cheerfulness, that ill con­cealed the melancholy underneath. But it was impossible that Sheridan could be always under a cloud. Misunder­standings there no doubt were, arising probably from those paroxysms of jealousy into which he must have been con­tinually thrown ; but reconcilement was with no great dif­ficulty effected ; and at length Mr Linley, convinced that it was impossible to keep them much longer asunder, con­sented to their union, which took place on the 13th of April

1773.

A few weeks previous to his marriage, Sheridan had been entered a student of the Middle Temple. It was not to be expected, however, that talents like his would submit to toil for the distant and dearly-earned emoluments which a life of labour in this profession might secure ; nor, indeed, did his circumstances admit of any such patient speculation. A part of the sum which Mr Long had settled upon Miss Linley, and occasional assistance from her father, were now the only resources left him, besides his own talents. Mrs Sheridan’s celebrity as a singer was a ready source of wealth, and offers of the most advantageous kind were pressed upon them by the managers of concerts, both in town and coun­try. But her husband at once rejected all thoughts of al­lowing her to re-appear in public, and, instead of profiting by the display of his wife’s talents, adopted the manlier re­solution of seeking independence by his own. How de­cided his mind was upon the subject, appears by a letter written to Mr Linley about a month after the marriage. At East Burnham, whence this letter is dated, they were no«· living in a small cottage, to which they had retired im­mediately on their marriage; and to it they often looked back with a sigh, in after times, when they were more prosper­ous and less happy. Towards winter they went to lodge for a short time with Storace, the intimate friend of Mr Linley, and in the following year attained that first step