towards independence, a house to themselves. During the summer of 1774, they passed some time at Mr Canning’s and Lord Coventry’s ; but so little did these visits interfere with the literary industry of Mr Sheridan, that he had not only at that time finished his play of the Rivals, but was on the point of “ sending a book to press.”

On the l7th of January 1775, the comedy of the Rivals was brought out at Covent Garden. This play failed on its first representation, chiefly owing to the bad acting of Mr Lee in Sir Lucius O’Trigger. Another actor was, how­ever, substituted in his stead, and the play being lightened of this and some other incumbrances, rose at once in pub­lic favour and patronage. The best comment on this live­ly play is to be found in the many smiling faces that are lighted up whenever it appears. With much less wit, it exhibits more humour than the School for Scandal, and the dialogue is more natural, as coming nearer the current of ordinary conversation. The characters, however, are not such as occur very commonly in the world, and for our knowledge of them we are indebted to their confessions rather than to their actions. Lydia Languish, in proclaim­ing the extravagance of her own romantic notions, pre­pares us for events much more ludicrous and eccentric than those in which she is concerned ; in the composition of Sir Lucius O’Trigger, his love of fighting is the only charac­teristic strongly brought out ; and the wayward, captious jealousy of Falkland, though so highly coloured in his own representation, is productive of nothing answerable to such an announcement. The character of Sir Anthony Absolute is perhaps the best sustained and most natural of any, and the scenes between him and Captain Absolute are genuinely dramatic. Mrs Malaprop’s mistakes have often been ob­jected as improbable from a woman in her rank of life ; but though some of them are extravagant and farcical, they are almost all amusing ; and the luckiness of her simile, “ as headstrong as an *allegory* on the banks of the Nile,” has been acknowledged by all whose taste is not too refined to be moved by the genuine comic.

Mr Sheridan now employed the summer recess in writing the Duenna, whilst his father-in-law, Mr Linley, assisted in selecting and composing the music for it. In hands so will­ing, the work made speedy progress, and, on the 21 st Novem­ber, the Duenna was performed at Covent Garden. The run of this opera has, we believe, no parallel in the annals of the drama. The Beggar’s Opera had a career of sixty-three nights ; but the Duenna, more fortunate, was acted no less than seventy-five times during the season, the only inter­missions being a few days at Christmas, and the Fridays in every week. In order to counteract this great success of the rival house, Garrick found it necessary to bring for­ward all the weight of his best characters ; and he had even recourse to the expedient of playing off the mother against the son, by reviving Mrs Frances Sheridan’s comedy of the Discovery, and acting the leading character in it himself. The Duenna, in fact, is one of the very few operas in our language which combine the merits of legitimate comedy with the attractions of poetry and song. The “ sovereign of the soul," as Gray calls music, always loses by being made exclusive sovereign ; and the division of her empire with poetry and wit, as in the instance of the Duenna, doubles her real power. The intrigue of this piece is constructed and managed with considerable adroitness, having just ma­terial enough to form three acts, without being encumbered by too much intricacy, or weakened by too much exten­sion. And as to the wit of the dialogue, except in one or two instances, it is of that accessible kind which lies near the surface, and which, as it is produced without effort, may be enjoyed without wonder.

Towards the close of the year 1775, Garrick intending to part with his moiety of the patent of Drury lame theatre, and retire from the stage, Mr Sheridan made him an offer

as purchaser, and eventually became patentee and manager. The progress of the negociation cannot be better related than in some of Sheridan’s own letters, addressed to Mr Linley, which Mr Moore has printed. It appears, indeed, that the contract was perfected in June 1776 ; and in a paper drawn up by Mr Sheridan many years afterwards, the shares of the respective purchasers are thus stated, viz. Mr Sheri­dan, two fourteenths of the whole, L.10,000 ; Mr Linley, the same, L.10,000 ; and Dr Ford, three fourteenths, L.15,000. Whence Mr Sheridan’s supply came, or to whom he was indebted for this seasonable aid, has never been known. Not even to Mr Linley, whilst entering into all other details, does he hint at the fountain-head from which it was to come ; and, indeed, there was something mysterious about all his acquisitions, whether in love or in learning, in wit or in wealth. Finally, in reference to this subject, the first contribution which the new manager furnished to the stock of the theatre was an alteration of Vanburgh’s comedy, the Relapse, which was brought out on the 24th of February 1777, under the title of a Trip to Scarborough.

Mr Sheridan was now approaching the summit of his dramatic fame. He had already produced the best opera in the language, and there now remained for him the glory of writing also the best comedy. As this is a species of composition which, more perhaps than any other, seems to require a knowledge of human nature and the world, it is not a little extraordinary that nearly all our first-rate co­medies should have been the productions of very young men. Those of Congreve were all written before he was five-and-twenty. Farquhar produced the Constant Couple in his two-and-twentieth year, and died at thirty. Vanburgh was a young ensign when he sketched out the Relapse and the Provoked Wife ; and Sheridan crowned his reputation with the School for Scandal at six-and-twenty. And it is still more remarkable to find, as in the instance before us, that works, which we might suppose to have been the off­spring of a careless but vigorous fancy, should, on the con­trary, have been the slow result of many doubtful experi­ments, gradually unfolding beauties unseen even by him who produced them, and at length arriving step by step at per­fection. That the School for Scandal was produced by this tardy process, is evident from the sketches of its plan and dialogue which Mr Moore has produced, and which serve to throw a remarkable light on the first slow workings of genius, out of which its finest transmutations arise. The reader who may feel curious on this subject is referred to Mr Moore’s clear and masterly exposition. Suffice it to mention, that there are two distinct sketches, in the second of which particularly, is shown the condensing process which his wit must have gone through before it attained its present proof and flavour. There appear also to have been originally two plots, which the author incorporated into one ; yet, even in the details of the new plan, considerable alterations were subsequently made, entire scenes suppressed or transposed, and the dialogue of some completely rewritten.

This play was produced on the 8th of May 1777, and its success was decided and triumphant. Indeed, long after its first uninterrupted run, it continued to be played regularly two or three times a week ; and on comparing the receipts of the first twelve nights with those of a later period, it will appear how little the attraction of the piece had abated by repetition. The beauties of this comedy are so universally known, that it cannot be necessary to dwell upon them. With but little interest in the plot, no very profound or in­genious development of character, and a group of person­ages, not one of whom has any legitimate claims upon either our affection or esteem, it yet, by the admirable skill with which its materials are managed, the happy contrivance of the situations, that perpetual play of wit which never tires, and a finish almost faultless, it unites the suffrages at once of the refined and the simple, and is not less successful in