performance (2nd of May 1775) of Lawrence Clinch, who had succeeded as Sir Lucius. In November 1775, with the assistance of his father-in-law, he produced the comic opera of *The Duenna,* which was played 75 times at Covent Garden during that season. Sheridan now began to negotiate with Garrick for the purchase of his share of Drury Lane, and the bargain was completed in June 1776. The sum paid by Sheridan and his partners, Thomas Linley and Dr Ford, for the half-share was £35,000; of this Sheridan contributed £10,000. The money was raised on mortgage, Sheridan contributing only £1300 in cash.@@1 Two years afterwards Sheridan and his friends bought the other half of the property for £35,000.

From the first the direction of the theatre would seem to have been mainly in the hands of Sheridan, who derived very material assistance from his wife. In February 1777 he produced his version of Vanbrugh’s *Relapse,* under the title of *A* *Trip to Scarborough.* This is printed among Sheridan’s works, but he has no more title to the authorship than Colley Cibber to that of *Richard III.* His chief task was to remove indecencies; he added very little to the dialogue. *The School for Scandal* was produced on the 8th of May 1777. Mrs Abington, who had played Miss Hoyden in the *Trip,* played Lady Teazle, who may be regarded as a Miss Hoyden developed by six months’ experi- ence of marriage and town life. The lord chamberlain refused to license the play, and was only persuaded on grounds of personal friendship with Sheridan to alter his decision. There are tales of the haste with which the conclusion of *The School for Scandal* was written, of a stratagem by which the last act was got out of him by the anxious company, and of the fervent “ Amen ” written on the last page of the copy by the prompter, in response to the author’s “Finished at last, thank God!” But, although the conception was thus hurriedly completed, we know from Sheridan’s sister that the idea of a “ scandalous college ” had occurred to him five years before in connexion with his own experiences at Bath. His difficulty was to find a story sufficiently dramatic in its incidents to form a subject for the machinations of the character-slayers. He seems to have tried more than one plot, and in the end to have desperately forced two separate conceptions together. The dialogue is so brilliant throughout, and the auction scene and the screen scene so effective, that the construction of the comedy meets with little criticism. *The School for Scandal,* though it has not the unity of *The Rivals,* nor the same wealth of broadly humorous incident, is universally regarded as Sheridan’s masterpiece. He might have settled the doubts and worries of authorship with Puff’s reflection: “ What is the use of a good plot except to bring in good things ?”

Sheridan’s farce, *The Critic,* was produced on the 29th of October 1779, *The School for Scandal* meantime continuing to draw larger houses than any other play every time it was put on the stage. In *The Critic* the laughable infirmities of all classes connected with the stage—authors, actors, patrons and audience—are touched off with the lightest of hands; the fun is directed, not at individuals, but at absurdities that grow out of the circumstances of the stage as naturally and inevitably as weeds in a garden. It seems that he had accumu­lated notes for another comedy to be called *Affectation,* but his only dramatic composition during the remaining thirty-six years of his life was *Pizarro,* produced in 1799—a tragedy in which he made liberal use of some of the arts ridiculed in the person of Mr Puff. He also revised for the stage Benjamin Thompson’s translation, *The Stranger,* of Kotzebue’s *Menschen- hass und Reue.*

He entered parliament for Stafford in 1780, as the friend and ally of Charles James Fox. Apparently he owed his election for Stafford to substantial arguments. He is said to have paid the burgesses five guineas each for the honour of representing them, beside gifts in dinners and ale to the non-voting part of the community, for their interest and applause. His first speech in parliament was to defend himself against the charge of bribery,

and was well received. He spoke little for a time and chiefly on financial questions, but soon took a place among the best speakers in the House. Congress recognized his services in opposing the war in America by offering him a gift of £20,000 which, however, he refused. Under the wing of Fox he filled subordinate offices in the short-lived ministries of 1782 and 1783. He was under-secretary for foreign affairs in the Rockingham ministry, and a secretary of the treasury in the Coalition ministry. In debate he had the keenest of eyes for the weak places in an opponent’s argument, and the happy art of putting them in an irresistibly ludicrous light without losing his good temper or his presence of mind. In those heated days of parliamentary strife he was almost the only man of mark that was never called out, and yet he had no match in the weapon of ridicule.

Sheridan found his great opportunity in the impeachment of Warren Hastings. His speeches in that proceeding were by the unanimous acknowledgment of his contemporaries among the greatest delivered in that generation of great orators. The first was on the 7th of February 1787, on the charges brought against Hastings with regard to the begums or princesses of Oude. Sheridan spoke for more than five hours, and the effect of his oratory was such that it was unanimously agreed to adjourn and postpone the final decision till the House should be in a calmer mood. Of this, and of his last great speech on the subject in 1794, only brief abstracts have been preserved; but with the second, the four days’ speech delivered in his capacity of manager of the trial, in Westminster Hall, on the occasion so brilliantly described by Macaulay, posterity has been more fortunate. Gurney’s verbatim reports of the speeches on both sides at the trial were published at Sir G. Cornewall Lewis’s instigation in 1859, and from them we are able to form an idea of Sheridan’s power as an orator. There are passages here and there of gaudy rhetoric, loose ornament and declamatory hyperbole; but the strong common sense, close argumentative force and masterly presentation of telling facts enable us to understand the impression produced by the speech at the time.

From the time of the break-up of the Whig party on the secession of Burke he was more or less an “ independent member,” and his isolation was complete after the death of Fox. When Burke denounced the French Revolution, Sheridan joined with Fox in vindicating the principle of non-intervention. He maintained that the French people should be allowed to settle their constitution and manage their affairs in their own way. But when the republic was succeeded by the empire, and it became apparent that France under Napoleon would interfere with the affairs of its neighbours, he employed his eloquence in denouncing Napoleon and urging the prosecution of the war. One of his most celebrated speeches was delivered in support of strong measures against the mutineers at the Nore. He was one of the few members who actively opposed the union of the English and Irish parliaments. When the Whigs came into power in 1806 Sheridan was appointed treasurer of the navy, and became a member of the Privy Council. After Fox’s death he succeeded his chief in the representation of Westminster, and aspired to succeed him as leader of the party, but this claim was not allowed, and thenceforward Sheridan fought for his own hand. When the prince became regent in 1811 Sheridan’s private influence with him helped to exclude the Whigs from power. Throughout his parliamentary career Sheridan was one of the boon companions of the prince, and his champion in parliament in some dubious matters of payment of debts. But he always resented any imputation that he was the prince’s confidential adviser or mouthpiece. A certain proud and sensitive independence was one of the most marked features in Sheridan’s parliamentary career. After a coolness arose between him and his Whig allies he refused a place for his son from the government, lest there should be any suspicion in the public mind that his support had been bought.

His last years were harassed by debt and disappointment. He sat in parliament for Westminster in 1806-1807. At the general election of 1807 he stood again for Westminster and was defeated, but was returned as member for Ilchester, at

@@@1 For the elucidation of these transactions, see Brander Matthews’s edition (1885) of *Sheridan's Comedies* (pp. 29-31).