only as a confidential friend, conceived the romantic plan of escorting Miss Linley to a nunnery in France. @@1 After performing this chivalrous duty he returned and fought two duels with Mathews, which made a considerable sensation at the time. The youthful pair had gone through the ceremony of marriage in the course of their flight, but Sheridan chivalrously did not claim his wife, kept the marriage secret, and was sternly denied access to Miss Linley by her father, who did not consider the professionless young man an eligible suitor. Ultimately, after a courtship romantic enough to have satisfied Lydia Languish, they were openly married in April 1773.

Sheridan’s daring start in life after this happy marriage showed a confidence in his genius which was justified by' its success. Although he had no income, and no capital beyond a few thousand pounds brought by his wife, he took a house in Orchard Street, Portman Square, furnished it “ in the most costly style,” and proceeded to return on something like an equal footing the hospitalities of the fashionable world. His wife—“ the celebrated Miss Linley ”—was a most popular singer, but he would not allow her to appear in public. She was to be heard only at private concerts in their own house, and her beauty and accomplishments combined with her husband’s wit to draw crowds of fashionable people to their entertainments. Sheridan’s conduct may have been youthful pride and recklessness, the thoughtless magnificence of a strong and confident nature ; all the same, it answered the purpose of deep-laid and daring policy. When remonstrated with by a friend, and asked how he found the means of supporting such a costly establishment, he is said to have answered— “ My dear friend, it is my means.” And so it proved, for his social standing and popularity helped to get a favour­able start for his first comedy, *The Rivals,* produced at Covent Garden on the 17th January 1775.

*The Rivals* is said to have been not so favourably received on its first night, owing to its length and to the bad playing of the part of Sir Lucius O’Trigger. But the defects were remedied before the second performance, and the piece at once took that place on the stage which it has never lost. It was the last season but one of Garrick’s long career, and the current story preserved by Moore is that the run upon Covent Garden was such as to alarm the veteran of Drury Lane and drive him to extraordinary exertions to counterbalance the attractions of the new play. This seems to be a myth, natural enough in the circumstances, but unfounded in fact, for we have contem­porary testimony @@2 that Drury Lane was never more crowded than during the last years of Garrick’s management, when it was known that he intended to retire from the stage. There were crowded houses at both theatres. Sheridan, though bearing his brilliant success lightly, proceeded at once to take the tide at the flood. *St Patrick's Day, or the Scheming Lieutenant,* a lively farce, written it is said at the request of Clinch, in gratitude for his coming to the rescue of Sir Lucius, was produced in May. In the course of the year, with the assistance of his musical father-in-law, he wrote the comic opera of *The Duenna* ; and by the end of the year, with an eye to the profits of theatrical manage­ment, he was in negotiation with Garrick for the purchase of his share of Drury Lane. *The Duenna* was the great theatrical success of the winter of 1775-76; it ran even longer than *The Beggar's Opera* had done—up to that time the longest run on record. The bargain with Garrick was completed in June 1776. The sum paid for the half-share was £35,000; of this Sheridan contributed £10,000.

None of his letters show where the money came from, and much wonder has been expressed on the subject ; but after all it is not so very mysterious that the most brilliant dramatist of his time, in all the credit of unparalleled success, should have been able to borrow such a sum as this with the best theatrical property to offer as security. There is a tradition that Garrick advanced the money or let it lie at interest ; anyhow, the loan could not have appeared at the time a very risky speculation. Two years afterwards Sheridan and his friends bought the other half of the property for £45,000.

From the first the direction of the theatre would seem to have been mainly in Sheridan’s hands. It was opened under the new management in February 1777, with a purified version of Vanbrugh’s *Relapse,* under the title of *Λ 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. Astonishment has been expressed that he should have fallen back on an old play instead of writing a new one. The fact is quoted among the proofs of his indolence. But the new manager, apart from the engagements of a popular man of fashion, probably found work and worry in his novel task of organization sufficient to leave him little leisure for composition. Vanbrugh’s play was probably chosen for the simple reason that it suited his company. Possibly also he wished to make trial of their powers before entrusting them with a play of his own. *The School for Scandal* was produced little more than two months afterwards. 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’ experience of marriage and town life. The actors who played the brothers Surface had been tried in the *Trip* in opposite characters, Charles playing Townley, while Joseph played Tom Fashion. It looks as if shrewd managerial caution was responsible for the delay quite as much as indolence. The former may at least have been in Sheridan’s mind the plausible excuse for the latter. 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 nobody cares to examine the construction of the comedy except as a matter of critical duty. But a study of the construction brings to light the difficulties that must have worried the author in writing the play, and explains why he was so thankful to have it finished and done with at last. After all, he worried himself in vain, for *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 reflexion “ What is the use of a good plot except to bring in good things ?” The vitality of a play depends mainly on its good things in the way of character, incident, and happy saying, and to a very limited extent on their relevance to any central plan.

@@@1 The letter from Miss Linley to a female friend, giving a minute account of her persecution by Mathews and deliverance by Sheridan, is declared by Mrs Norton to be a “foolish forgery.”—*Macmillan's Magazine,* iii. 178. @@@2 See *Blackwood’s Magazine,* vol. xx. p. 26.