

of his boyhood. In 1772, aged twenty-one, he eloped with and married the beautiful and sweetly-singing Miss Linley, aged eighteen, on whose account he quarrelled with his father, who was averse to the marriage; and also fought two duels with one of her former admirers. In 1775, at the age of twenty-four, being pressed by circumstances, he entered the arena of literature, and wrote "The Rivals," which will afford delight to every admirer of real comedy as long as the English language shall endure. At the end of the same year, he produced "The Duenna," which Byron affirmed to be the best opera of the age. In 1776 he was proposed by Dr. Johnson and admitted into the Literary Club, and thus became one of that "coterie" which the quaint page of "Boswell's Life of Johnson" has rendered so famous. In 1777, at the age of twenty-six, he composed what Byron called the best comedy in the English language, namely, "The School for Scandal;" and in 1779, what the same great poet and satirist considered the very best farce then extant, namely, "The Critic." In this year, also, he became acquainted with Burke, Fox, and Windham; and the next, entered parliament as member for Stafford, and soon after made his first speech, every word of which, mark you, he first wrote out; "and," says his biographer, "like most of our great orators, he wrote out his speeches, and, *to the last*, spoke from notes." On shewing this maiden effort to a friend, whom he asked, "Was it considered successful?" and on this friend replying in the negative, Sheridan said, "The power is in me, and by God it shall come out." It was in the year 1786, in his thirty-fifth year, that, for five consecutive hours, before an astounded House of Commons, he thundered forth his grand oration against Warren Hastings, "whose impeachment," writes Moore, "afforded one of those precious opportunities, of which, if fortune but rarely offers them to genius, it is genius alone that can triumphantly avail itself." Of this speech Burke said, "It was the most astonishing effort of eloquence, argument, and wit united, of which there was any record or tradition;" and Fox,