

BERNHARDT A GREAT ACTRESS BUT A POOR SPORT; SKETCH OF HER TEMPESTUOUS CAREER

Madame Sarah Bernhardt, who died in Paris yesterday at 70 years of age, seemed still a girl, and was known to every land as "the world's greatest actress." What descent there might have been to this estimate, and however far her detractors ventured in their attempt to minimize her right to that distinction, the numberless admirers of the "Divine Sarah" remained convinced that never before had the stage produced an actress capable of soaring to such heights in the realm of emotional drama.

The work of Mme. Bernhardt was best where a theme afforded the greatest opportunity for a display of her powerful emotions. At the height of her career this form of acting, based principally on love, hate and jealousy, held the predominant place now dedicated to character delineations, and Bernhardt never was surpassed, her critics say, in this emotional school. Hundreds of parts she either rewrote or created to suit herself, seldom being content to act them as interpreted by others.

Three generations have praised and even worshipped the art of Bernhardt, and hundreds upon thousands of people around the world have thronged to see and marvel at her acting without understanding the French language, which she invariably employed upon the stage. Once in Rio de Janeiro, she was called before the curtain more than 200 times by a wildly enthusiastic audience, and many times, in other parts of the world, she was obliged to answer scores of curtain calls at a single performance.

Life Like a Legend.
The long life-story of Bernhardt is almost legendary. Closely woven with dramatic incident, off as well as on the stage, it was set down by herself in a lengthy volume published many years ago, and as one of her critics has said, "through the pages of the book peers the face of a woman, a little tired, weary of her own reputation, and blessed with more than her share of the vanities of the sex." As she and others have told the story, it is summed up here:

The date of her birth, the record of which was destroyed in the flames of the Commune in Paris, was commonly accepted as October 22, 1845. Her mother was Dutch and Jewish, and her natural father a French official.

As a child Bernhardt spent much of her time with relatives in Paris, and at the age of 12 was sent to the Grand Champ convent, Versailles, where she made her debut in a little miracle play given by the children. Even at this early age, the pale and sickly child is said to have displayed the fits of temper which were characteristic of her stage career.

Too Thin to Act.
After a year or two at the convent, she conceived a passionate desire to become a nun. To this her mother recorded unqualified opposition, and suggested a theatrical career instead. "She's too thin to be an actress," said her god-father. "Let her be a nun."

"I won't be an actress," little Sarah categorically exclaimed. "Rachel is an actress. She came to the convent and walked around the garden, then she had to sit down because she couldn't get her breath. They fetched her something to bring her around but she was so pale, so pale, I was very sorry for her, and the nuns told me that what she was doing was killing her, for she was an actress, and I won't be an actress, I won't."

But fate had determined otherwise, and at the age of 14 Bernhardt was sent to a conservatory. At the end of the first year she won second prize for tragedy. A subscription among the players at the Comedie Francaise enabled her to spend another year at the conservatory, and upon the completion of this she carried off second prize for comedy. Her first public appearance was at the

Comedie Francaise in August, 1862. She took a minor part without any marked success.

Five years later she emerged from laborious obscurity with her first definite success as Cordelia in a French translation of "King Lear," at the Odeon, then as Queen in Victor Hugo's "Ruy Blas," and above all as Zanzett in Francois Coppee's "Le Passant," which she played in 1869.

Then came the Franco-Prussian war. Bernhardt increased her popularity by becoming a war nurse. In 1871 she was made a life member of the Comedie Francaise. She clashed repeatedly with M. Perrin, the manager, over the roles she should take, and once in a fit of pique, fled from the theatre and decided to give up the stage. She plunged into sculpture. Her first piece, "After the Storm,"—finished some years later—won a place in the Salon. She returned to M. Perrin only to break with him again, incurring a forfeit of 4000 pounds, which she paid.

She invaded England, receiving a tremendous ovation, then toured Denmark and Russia. Next she came to America, where her success was instantaneous. She toured the United States and Canada eight times in some 35 years, and appeared several times in the larger cities of South America.

Breaking with the theatrical syndicates, which denied her the use of their theatres when she refused to come to their terms, she was compelled to appear on one of her American tours in tents, convention halls and armories. She vowed never to appear in a theatre again, but on subsequent visits she came to terms with the syndicates.

Visited U. S. A. in 1916.
The great actress was a grandmother when she last appeared in America, and had suffered amputation of her right leg. Upon her arrival in New York, October, 1916, it was evident to the group of friends and admirers who gathered to welcome her that she walked with extreme difficulty.

While playing in New England she contracted a severe cold which prompted her to take a trip south for her health. A few weeks later she underwent an operation for infection of the kidney and although more than 70 years of age, she enjoyed complete recovery and remained in America for several months.

The injury to her knee which compelled the amputation of her leg in 1915 was attributed to many different causes. For years before the amputation the plays in which she appeared were altered to hide the fact that she was able to walk only with great difficulty. The operation was performed in Paris, and upon her recovery she reappeared on the stage and was given the greatest ovation of her career. Her manager announced that henceforth she would interpret only motionless roles.

No Man Her Master.
During the world war Bernhardt made several trips to the French front and gave a number of performances for the soldiers. This, she declared, was the "incomparable event" of her life.

The memoirs of Bernhardt sedulously avoid any mention of her marital experience, and only in the middle of the bulky volume does she mention casually the existence of a son. One of her critics declared that "she never seemed to find the man who could master her."

"There was in her," he continued, "the making of a super-woman, and although she met Victor Hugo and the greatest intellectual potentates of her time, the super-man, who alone could hold her, never entered her life."

Years ago a jealous rival of her theatrical career published a satire entitled "The Story of Sarah Bernhardt," in which the love affairs of the actress, real and alleged, were shamelessly laid bare. Bernhardt resorted to the horse-whip to punish the author.

In 1882 the actress was married to Jacques Darnaud, a handsome Greek who had made a name in the theatrical world through his work in "The Ironmaster." He later took a minor part in one of her plays, but after a year on tour they separated. Later she took him back to her home and nursed him through a fatal siege of consumption.

Mme. Bernhardt's natural son, Maurice, showed no inclination to follow the profession of his mother, and after spending a short time in the French army, he married a Russian princess. She died after bearing him a daughter, and Maurice Bernhardt took a Parisienne as his second wife.

Made Big Fortune.
Many stories have been told of the fabulous sums accruing to the famous actress, especially in America, but authenticated figures show that the gross receipts of each tour were in the neighborhood of \$500,000, of which she usually received fifty per cent. A large part of her earnings was reinvested in theatrical enterprises, and at one time she owned or controlled half a dozen playhouses in Paris.

Of the more than 200 parts Bernhardt essayed during her long stage career, perhaps the boldest experiment of all was the title role in a French production of Hamlet, which met with such unmistakable success that she was prompted to appear again as a man in "L'Aiglon." Her repertory, in addition to the plays mentioned, included "Joan of Arc," "Fedora," "Adrienne Lecouvreur," "Sappho," "Theodora," and "Hernani." Her greatest successes, however, seemed to center in the Hugo and Sardou dramas, both tragedies and comedies. Many of these plays were written around her and "fitted like a glove."

A physical description of Bernhardt is difficult. In her youth she

undoubtedly was what might be called beautiful, although from the French standpoint her alminess was against her. The greatest interest in the actress, aside from her art, was the tenacity with which she clung to her girlish appearance. At 75 she might have passed for a woman of 30, so well had the features of her younger days been preserved.

Not Very Vain.
Bernhardt seems to have had no illusions about her personal appearance. By themselves her features—high cheek bones, aquiline nose and lips parted above an almost masculine chin—were not pleasing, but taken together they comprised the harmony of expression which gave her the title of "The Divine Sarah." She admitted on one occasion that the effect of her long white sheath was by no means pleasant. "In this rig I look like an ant," she said.

Bernhardt was the most famous for her death scenes, but it is doubtful if her breathless, spellbound audiences ever knew that many of them were played while the actress was suffering almost unbearable agonies from her various physical ailments, of which she never was heard to complain.

Patience seemed to have been one of Bernhardt's inborn characteristics. She would spend weeks and even months trying to correct technical faults in some member of her company, and then, if the subject failed to improve, she would explode and have nothing more to do with him, either on or off the stage—not even speaking to him under any circumstances.

She always displayed a keen interest in the heart affairs of her troupe, and delighted in holding a "cupid's court," in her private car, at which she would require aggrieved swains and the objects of their affections to submit their differences—Bernhardt to be the final arbiter.

A Poor Loser.
Another of her pastimes was gambling, although she was a poor loser. She remained jovial and vivacious as long as the game was running in her favor, but the moment the luck changed she became sullen and sarcastic. Her opponents, once they had lost to her, knew that it was gone for good, for she would throw down her cards and leave the game at the first sign of reverses.

A love for strange pets was another of Bernhardt's peculiarities. When she was a little girl she saved her money and bought a goat. She learned to love the animal so much that she wanted to become a goat-herd and cried when her mother ridiculed the idea. During the Franco-Prussian war she raised geese for the soldiers, but grew to care so much for them that she refused to have them killed. Once in London she bought a lion cub, a tiger and two chameleons at an auction sale.

Another time she bought a baby elephant, but it grew itself out of a home. She tried for years to train a dwarf elephant, but never succeeded. The conviviality of the dinner table was another of Bernhardt's delights. She particularly enjoyed a feast at midnight after a performance, when the members of her company were present. She drank in moderation, and seldom touched anything but champagne. She never was known to smoke.

Two of the treasures in her Paris home invariably excited the interest of visitors. One was the skull given her by Victor Hugo, with which he had written an epitaph, verse to the actress, and the other was the coffin in which she occasionally slept. This strange bed, she explained, was padded with "memories of her dead life"—faded rose leaves and letters yellow with age.

Fascinated by Death.
She once expressed a wish that this coffin be her final resting place, and in 1922 the idea was elaborated upon when she bought for \$100 from the French government a little granite island in the Bay of Biscay, not far from her summer home at Belle Ile, where she planned to build a magnificent tomb crowned with a marble statue of herself, the arms outstretched as if beckoning to harassed fishermen imperilled by the storms.

Death had a weird fascination for Bernhardt, and for years she contemplated it with what appeared to be an uncanny humor. The wish she most often expressed was that she might die in the midst of her triumphs. "I shall play until death," she said, "and the death I hope for is the death Sir Henry Irving died." Her English contemporary died on tour, being stricken with apoplexy after a performance in 1905.

Toward the end of 1922, it was thought this desire might shorten her life considerably, for while she was dangerously ill in her Paris home, she pitted her iron will against the physicians and prepared to resume her part in a new play by Sacha Guitry that she was playing in when stricken. She felt the end was near, her sick-room attendants said, and wanted to be acting a leading role when death rang down the curtain.

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MENTION THIS PAPER WHEN WRITING

HARDINGS WILL SPEND EASTER IN AUGUSTA, GEORGIA

ST. AUGUSTINE, Fla., Mar. 27.—President and Mrs. Harding expect to spend Easter in Augusta, Ga. Preliminary arrangements were being made today for the departure of the presidential vacation party from St. Augustine late Saturday after a stay here of a week and for removal Sunday to Augusta.

How long Mr. and Mrs. Harding will stay in Augusta has not been decided, nor have any decisions been reached as to whether other stops are to be made enroute from that city back to Washington.

After a shower last night St. Augustine was bright today with sunshine, an ideal day for golf, and the president planned to take advantage of it.

Members of the party today pointed to the 36 holes of golf played yesterday as proof of statements that the president's physical condition had been greatly improved by the three weeks spent in Florida.

Chairman Lasker of the shipping board who is a member of the presidential party, announced today that he had abandoned, by request of the president, his plans to leave tonight for Washington. The work of the shipping board in preparing the alternate plans for solving the merchant marine problem is progressing satisfactorily, Mr. Lasker said and will be ready for submission to the president early next month.

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