



SARAH BERNHARDT, fiery, erratic, full of furies and languors, has been with us of late—an extraordinary woman, a woman whose sins and fancies and wild doings have filled the world with wonder,—and yet a perfect artiste. I know of no woman on the stage to-day who possesses so much of the genuine quality of femininity as does she. Her voice, her motions, her glances, have a delicacy that it were hopeless for anyone to try and imitate. The frame that gives a vehicle to the genius that is within her is slender, her years have grown to be many, and yet the grace within her is still as luminous as it was of old. The quality of femininity is, I take it, the inner essence of womanly charm. It is something that in an ordinary woman we get a revelation of once in a while. There is a look which we call feminine, or a vocal note of tenderness we give the same name to, or an impulsive movement perhaps that comes within the same definition; and when we meet with any of these things our hearts are gladdened. We call them feminine, because they are so subtle and elusive that a man could never hope to achieve anything half so delicate and graceful. In Bernhardt the charms known as the eternal womanly have their very highest development. She is still the exquisite creature she was of old.

By the fury and heat of her temperament Sarah Bernhardt has been bound to a certain class of characters. Her personality is too decidedly poetic to find any real scope in the realistic drama of to-day; but yet the poetry within her has a very Swinburnian quality. It is fleshly and sweet; there is little of the cold and chaste element that fits a woman for classic rôles. You could not understand Bernhardt being very great as *Lady Macbeth*, for instance. Her personality expresses a charm too voluble and wilful to make any impersonation she might give of a plotting, skillful, intellectual woman seem real. Characters of wild impulse and uncontrolled nature are the only ones which could gain any real significance from her donning of them. Therefore, we find a long catalogue of feminine sinners created solely that Sarah might represent them on the stage. Latest of all, she has chosen to play a character founded on that of the Magdalen. In the sacred records of India the story of the Buddha in some respects strongly resembles that of our Saviour. The ethical teachings of Buddhism and Christianity are much the same, and the story of the wanderings of the Buddha with his little band of converts resembles, too, that marvellous story of the springing up of a new world's religion in the old land of Canaan. But in the records of Buddha the Prince who forsok all things to go forth and proclaim the word as it was

revealed to him, there is no statement, I believe, about any woman-sinner who had become a convert as Mary Magdalen was. Armand Silvestre and Eugene Morand adapted such a character from the original in the Holy Scripture and gave us "Izeyl" for Bernhardt to play. It is something on a higher plane of aspiration than anything she has hitherto attempted, and she manages to give a great deal of pathos and beauty to the tale. At first you see her as the wanton, sinful woman, a phase of the



SARAH BERNHARDT.

character which was presented perfectly. Then you see her convicted of her sins through the love with which the holy Prince has inspired her, and gradually the old sinfulness slips away from her and she becomes a martyr in defence of her own honour. Bernhardt was exquisitely poetic all through. The drama that had been made for her was enough to give any woman inspiration, and the clinging grace and pathos of the whole inspiration will always linger in my memory.

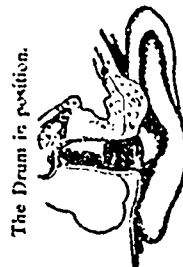
Della Fox is a little woman whose attractions have never been very clear to me. Her stock-in-trade as an actress and a prima donna is complete with a plump figure and an assortment of Bowery slang. Her methods are of the crudest nature, and her voice is a very ordinary affair indeed. She devotes

herself to a continuous endeavour to imitate De Wolf Hopper. It is a funny thing to see a woman unusually petite striving in all things to seem like the tallest comedian on the stage, imitating his vocal eccentricities, his capers, his foolery,—in short, all the tricks whereby he wins the public's laughter. Della Fox, when she travelled as one of Hopper's assistant merrymakers, was, no doubt, cute and pleasing. Since then she has been steadily vulgarising whatever talent she possessed,—never an unduly great endowment,—with the result that her own efforts on the stage are apt to be noisy and tiresome. If she had spent the pains with which she has endeavoured to become hard-looking, loud voiced and mannish, in cultivating some of the feminine graces, she might in time have become a charming enough actress; but at present there is no hope for a genuine career for her.

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In E. H. Sothern we have an actor who has succeeded solely by virtue of the refinement and gentlemanly qualities of his art. Physically he is not gifted with high dramatic powers. He can never hope to be known as a great actor,—he has not the fire of genius, but he has the patience of talent and the splendid spur of ambition. He has endeavoured to succeed by the very best methods, and he has succeeded. You know that, if you go to see one of Sothern's productions, you will find something high-class. So confident has the public grown of this, that it never hesitates over the matter at all, and leaves the choice of the play to the actor altogether. Apart from his refinement and magnetism, Mr. Sothern's chief claim to be an actor of originality lies in the beauty of his love-making. He is as fervent a lover, and as potent a one, as the mind can well imagine. His eyes, his lips, his whole body are gently expressive when he is telling the old, old story on the stage, and they unfaillingly win the women in his audience. When he attempted to represent the *Rudolf Rasendyll* of that amazingly bright novel, "The Prisoner of Zenda," it was natural that he should force the sentimental elements of the man forward at the expense of the heroic and dare-devil characteristics. About Sothern's representation there hung none of those wildly erratic characteristics which made you feel that here was a man who could kill an enemy with impunity or swim a moat to save a friend; but he was the most romantic lover in the world, and no doubt in being this, he wholly satisfied his audiences. The play is a striking and moving one, although I have never found myself able to take Anthony Hope seriously as a romancer. In "The Prisoner of Zenda," with its wars and stratagems and spoils, it seemed to me that he was simply satirising Stanley Weyman and the rest of the respectable group who would revive the historical novel. He is strikingly superior to Weyman and Conan Doyle, simply because of the humour that is in him, and "The Prisoner of Zenda" seemed to me greater as a piece of humour than as a romance. On the stage it is melodrama.

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