

The Love Letters of SARAH BERNHARDT to Victorien Sardou

Sarah's Philosophy of Love and Marriage Was Based on Fickleness-- "the Ideal Thing Is a Heart Like a Portable Electric Lamp."



We had a terrible scene in the place. Men love to make scenes in public when they are with a celebrity. That is why, contrary to feminine custom, I reserve mine for indoors.

By DORIAN HOPE.

It is to be remarked that when a woman has nothing to say she generally requires many pages for saying it. In the case of Sarah Bernhardt's letters, I am quoting only the better passages.

She was not always grammatical. She attempted very intricate constructions at times, evidently influenced by certain books that she had just closed. Then she mixed up her subjunctives, began conjugating like a child and, becoming aware, in the very midst of the "superb" sentence, that it was wrong, she would, in obvious confusion, upset pots and pans, write the finishing words illegibly in order that the reader might attribute her lapses to great hurry, and scampers off, half abashed!

Some of Sarah's ideas of marriage are reflected in the following two letters:

Dear Little Boy,

"We came on here yesterday, taking a few rooms with big windows and several pairs of gold candlesticks on each mantle-piece. We went into Monte Carlo last night and

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got in this morning long after dawn. "We sat in the Casino an hour or two and then went to see a play in English, which, considering that it was English, was not so bad. The audience was made up of Americans chiefly, and was, considering that they were Americans, fairly well-behaved."

"The French, of course, are the most beautifully-mannered people in the world, everywhere; I see it more clearly the longer I live. The French are the most courteous people in the world, and as I once told thee, if anyone denied the fact in my presence I would not hesitate to spit in his face."

"I forget who was the author of the little play; some unknown. Of course, it was nothing beside a play of Oscar Wilde, but there was some charming dialogue. Until the English along expressions were explained to me, of course, I missed a full appreciation of it."

"You're pulling my leg," says the Duchess to the butler, who informs her that cucumbers encourage beauty. "No, milady," he answers; "only admiring it!"

"Of course, the Duchess fell in love with the butler on account of his unbecoming, and they were married, as usual, though whether it was a temporary appointment or a permanent commission, the terms of the closing sentences did not make it clear."

Married to be Popular.

"I always swore that if I ever married it would be simply to make myself more popular with all men; for I was never blind to the fact that men like a woman for being another man's property."

"Marriage has its drawbacks and hindrances, to be sure, but even with drawbacks and hindrances one can often accomplish much."

"I once was on close terms with a man with a wooden leg; he walked at some disadvantage, but he kissed and hugged exquisitely!"

"I feel today that I cannot wait to be back there with thee. Give my place to no one while I am absent; if thou dost, then prepare for a murder in Paris."

"Murder is the only mentionable sin—certainly the only sin to which the ten commandments have reference—of which I have not already been several times guilty."

"Then next week!"

"SARAH."

Jealousy Means Physical Love.

"Dear Love—Thy friend came to

see me this afternoon, presenting thy letter. It was kind of thee to put me in communication with so charming a person; I would like to decorate my house with him for a season. I would like to have men of that sort sent to my house on approval from time to time."

"Thou art so kind and unselfish in the things like that! I must say that if thou wert in countries where I knew all the wonderful women, I would not give thee one word to any of them!"

"I rather dislike that sort of generosity in a way, for it shows an absolute absence of jealousy; jealousy is an unmistakable sign of a love that is merely physical; that is just the love that I appreciate most, and so, it looks as if I may not have it from thee."

"I can not say that I could ever be brought to prefer a spiritual love, the love that is commonly called 'spiritual.' In preference to a purely physical love."

"The physical love is probably more genuine; it is based upon the visible; upon the things that we may see and analyze; it is grounded, whereas, as far as we know, the spiritual love is a temple built upon sand; we cannot see any foundation, and are likely to awaken and find our structure gone with less notice given than when the physical love departs!"

"But I have no lengthy letter today; I just want to tell thee that Monsieur . . . called; I did my best to entertain him, and for thy sake he as comme il faut as was practicable, although I did not go so far as to run the risk of being mis-

From Sarah Bernhardt:

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"Jealousy is an unmistakable sign of a love that is merely physical. The physical love is probably more genuine."

"If there is anything on earth which a woman of the later manner holds in horror it is a man who is too advancing. We would rather do the advancing ourselves."

"Love still unites men, but only scandals and panics can unite two women."

"The ideal thing is to have a heart like a portable electric lamp. Attach it anywhere you want light and there is a current."

"A woman who can talk well without opening her mouth too wide is really the ideal type."

"Woman's mission is simply to have children, and be as beautiful and charming as she can."

taken for a lady.

"He was extremely solicitous and almost offered me his hand in marriage before he shook it in introduction. If there is anything on earth which a woman of the later manner holds in horror, it is a man who is too advancing; we would rather do the advancing ourselves!"

"I once had a friend very like Monsieur . . .; he proposed to me

over our first glass of vermouth in the most unpunctual surroundings in the world, and at the most unreasonable hour. He was not, however, unworthy of consideration, and I would probably have married him if he had not proposed. . . ."

"We had a terrible scene in the place. Men love to make scenes in public when they are with a celebrity. That is why, contrary to feminine

custom, I reserve mine for indoors."

"SARAH."

A Philosophy of Fickleness.

Sarah once told me that her two greatest loves had been for Pierre Berton and Victorien Sardou. She added that there had been many others as well; that women could love any number of times; that she would pity the smallness of the woman's nature who could love only once, and consider her a disgrace to the sex!

My own idea is that she loved many another quite as wildly as she did Sardou. Her love was for a moment's duration, and dependent upon her mood at that time. Her ability to love wonderfully depended upon whether she had slept well the night before, just as often does one's ability to talk wonderfully. In the following sayings her philosophy is laid bare, and the reader comes face to face with the real Sarah, for whom yellow was yellow one day, and white another, green another, and possibly yellow again a month later.

She always had an inordinate love for Russians.

"They often sounded like my ideal long before I even saw them; their names were so inspiring and unpronounceable. I love talking with the unpronounceable; it is a tremendous temptation; it is like eating the indigestible," she said.

Not only the letters to Sardou, but those to Berton, and those to other close friends, have come into its angles. I venture to give characteristic extracts from some of them all. These sparkling aphorisms too proclaim the extent to which she shared Oscar Wilde's views in summing men and women, divorce, love, jealousy, suicide, etc.

"An untroubled priest and a broken heart have far better returns in a box office than all the legend and history of the world, be they the ruins of Rome or the heads of the Borgias."

"Love united David and Jonathan. Love still unites me, I believe; but only scandals and panics can unite two women."

"Tolerance and compassion are the supreme virtues, for without them no virtue can be permanent and counted as an asset to one's character."

"The big, loud-voiced love that the books tell us about is not the best thing to have in a household at all. It is too like a volcano, throwing up bad words, with the good, forever in eruption. The most peaceful homes are run without it."

Love "Left Me a Ruin."

"I loved once, and it left me a ruin. It was years outgrowing and, even yet, it comes back in an occasional break of the voice, or in a limp, or in a lapse of memory. They say that the person who goes through life loving is more unfortunate still. It binds you, takes a mortgage on your liberty and your peace of mind, and bids you walk in low places."

"The ideal thing to have is a heart like a portable electric lamp. Attach it somewhere, anywhere you want light, and there is a current. Then read, write, sew, play, or do the other things; in short, do what you want, and as long as you want, but when you have had enough, be free to declare yourself and pick up your bed and walk and move with the world and not rest at anchor, so to speak. Love does anchor you, there is no doubt about that, and it puts all manner of little boats around

"Great Men Suffer More From Their Little Friends Than From Their Great Enemies"—"Laws and Hearts Are Made To Be Broken."

you to watch you and see that you do not quit the port. When you finish what you have to do, detach the lamp and go on until you feel like doing the same thing again; then attach it to the first current you find, and keep going on, doing the same thing at your will."

"He who first praises a book becomes next in merit to the author. He is the only Englishman whom I would ever have considered marrying, and that is only because I have found out that he is not English."

Women should be allowed to change their husbands just as often as they please.

Cold Soup and False Teeth.

"I can survive anything except cold soup and Dubussy's music; and there are two other things, too, which I do not believe I could survive: kissing, or being kissed, by a man who had false teeth, and being too often mistaken for a lady."

"Men hate scenes; that is why I always make them in public places. Scenes are as essential to the progress of love as are wars to the progress of civilization."

"Future is often only the name that men give to women's pasts. 'Someone has said that Americans have too many commas in their letters. I do not know anything about that, but I have often remarked that they had far too few periods in their conversation!'"

"A woman who can talk well without opening her mouth too wide is really the ideal type."

"Good women look forward to their pasts and bad women look back upon their future. That is the only difference between good and bad women."

"In all the arts, in literature, perhaps more than any other, great men suffer from their little friends."

"Men never analyze women—they take them just as they find them; but they do not leave them so."

"Beauty and brains rarely, if ever, frequent the same place."

"If a woman who is beautiful begins to cultivate her intellect, her dimples soon become crow's feet, and even her laughter after that leaves lines in its passage."

"A beautiful woman should only be considered for her purely decorative value."

"Hearts Made to be Broken."

"Men are seldom gods among themselves; to make one's self felt as a force among one's own sex is for the few; but there was never a man yet who was not several times a god among women! The feeling that one can dominate another person is a powerful sensation; the desire even to do it is so splendid an ambition that it alone makes one's desires realizable."

"Comment is far too numerous and abundant in the matter of the arts,

nowadays. A thing as delicate as the arts should not be touched upon but lightly, as we would touch the exquisite bloom of some exotic flower. We should talk less about art and try to create more. If there were not so many self-styled critics in the world, or, in fact, no critics at all, the world that is made up of artists would be far better off. Critics have been a long time being brought to see the wisdom of a great man's statement, who said that the first duty of an art critic was to keep his mouth shut, and that, until it had been found out what his second duty was, he should live in retirement, removed from those whom his presence might unbalance."

"Laws and hearts are made but to be broken."

"Women are not good for many things. Woman's mission is simply to have children and be as beautiful and as charming as she can. To these all things may be added, but they are the two important things, and the things which constitute her fortune; when she goes beyond this and puts her foot into other things, she invariably makes a fool of herself and lessens all her chances."

"The highest form of friendship does not exist between man and woman, but between man and man. David said to Jonathan: 'Thy love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women.' A love as wholesome and abiding as this, perhaps, never once existed between a man and his wife!"

"All women who love men out of the ordinary are jealous, if they are really in love."

"Oscar Wilde is so perfected in the art of saying beautiful things that he does not mean, that I find it difficult to believe that he is not one of my compatriots."

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