

legend says that, being asked what she intended to do in life, she said, in a tone of ardent faith: "I wish to become a nun." Then, seeing the astonishment that this avowal had created, she added: "Unless I become an actress."

It was then that it was decided that she should be sent to the Conservatoire, the national school of music, declamation and singing. The instruction at the Conservatoire is gratuitous, but every pupil is bound, when he has completed his studies, to hold himself at the disposal of the Minister of Fine Arts, and to contract, according to his orders, an engagement with one of the theatres that are subventioned by the State—the Opera, Opera Comique, Theatre Francais, or Odeon. The State theatres thus have the pick of the pupils of the Conservatoire. In order to enter the school, each candidate has to pass a preliminary examination. He chooses some pieces which he sings or recites before the jury. The mother of Sarah Bernhardt was unfamiliar with the customs of the Conservatoire. Her daughter could recite Fontaine's fable of the "Deux Pigeons," and she thought that was enough. The young girl—she was then barely 14 years of age—stepped forward before the terrible jury. But she had hardly said:

"*Deux pigeons s'aimaient d'amour tendre,*"

when Anber, who was then director, motioned to her to stop. Then, as Françoise Sarcey relates, he said: "Enough, enough, come here, *petite*." The child approached with a bold and confident air. She was a pale, thin little creature; but her eyes had that limpid and profound green light that characterizes Northern women, and her physiognomy was sparkling with intelligence.

"Your name is Sarah?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"You are a Jewess?"

"By birth, yes, Monsieur. But I have been baptized."

"She has been baptized," said Anber, turning to his colleagues. "It would have been a pity if such a pretty child had not been baptized. She has recited her fable of the 'Deux Pigeons' very nicely. We must admit her."

And so she was admitted to the Conservatoire in 1866; but as all the pupils at the school are day pupils, she continued to live at home with her mother, who, it must be remembered, had had twelve children, and in whose strange life poverty predominated. When Sarah was going to the Conservatoire, her mother used to give her only six sous a day to pay her omnibus. Sarah said nothing, but with a droll instinct of innate luxury she did not take the omni-

bus, but saved up the sous until she had enough to pay for a cab and then she rode up to the Conservatoire in state.

At the Conservatoire Sarah Bernhardt was a pupil of Provost, of Samson and of Beauvallet, all excellent professors of diction. In class, it appears, Sarah had the detestable habit of tearing flowers to pieces and chewing the leaves, a bad sign according to the authorities on such matters, and indicative of a nervous temperament impatient of restraint. After the usual course of study she obtained a second prize in tragedy in 1881, and a second prize for comedy in 1882, and she had, therefore, a right to a debut at the first of the State theatres, the Theatre Francaise.

She made her debut there in "Iphigénie en Aulide" in August, 1882, in conditions that were far from favorable. In those days no such care was spent over debuts as now, and after one or two hurried rehearsals in the *foyer*, or green-room, the newcomer had to appear before the footlights. Very little notice was taken of Sarah's first appearance on that stage, which was to be the scene of her greatest triumphs. No one except the venerable and excellent Mme. Joussain has preserved any very distinct recollection of the event. The debut was a failure. Mme. Joussain alone prophesied a brilliant future for her. Sarcey, most conscientious and most impartial of critics, was attracted by the strange orthography under which she had been pleased to disguise the commonplace name of Bernard. Sarcey, however, did not predict a brilliant future for the *débütante*: he contented himself with remarking some signs of talent.

Sarah did not stay long at the Theatre Francais. She must have been a perfect little demon, angry, impudent, fantastic, of an unbridled tongue and ready to make fun of everybody. Her friends say that the director of the Theatre Francais, M. Thierry, discouraged her and dissuaded her from continuing her debuts at a theatre where she had but little chance of ever distinguishing herself. But there is another story to the effect that the irritable young creature boxed the ears of a senior member of the company. If the ears had been those of a man the matter might have been arranged, but the ears belonged to a person of the sex that never pardons.

From the Theatre Francais she went to the Gymnase, but on the second or third night after her first appearance, she did not come to the theatre at all. Search was made everywhere in vain; the newspapers printed wonderful stories about fabulous engagements in America. Meanwhile, Sarah was eating oranges at Madrid. She had written a letter to M.