

played, was as far as the number of verses were concerned almost a minor role. She had, indeed, very little to say, but she had to remain on the stage while the other actors were speaking. Her role was a silent one to a great extent; but what a charm there was in the way she sat, in the way she let her hand fall! She knows those movements of the arms, those inclinations of the head, those quiverings of the shoulders, those postures of the foot and leg, which turn the first ordinary bit of stuff that comes into a fold of marble in an Eginetan bas-relief.

The brilliancy of Sarah's success in "Ruy Blas" at the Odeon attracted the attention of M. Perrin, who had begun his campaign for the renovation of the hitherto indolent Comedie Francaise. But she did not come to the Comedie Francaise at "one fell swoop," as most of her biographers pretend. It was indeed some time before M. Perrin engaged her, for at that time Sarah had a few fanatical admirers and a great many enemies. The fact is that up to then she had not shown an amount of talent which justified the fuss made about her, and many people were irritated at hearing so much about Sarah Bernhardt. In the press there was a storm of epigrams, and her engagement at the Theatre Francaise remained doubtful. Sarah had already set a large proportion of decent and quiet citizens against her by the eccentricities of her life, which to ordinary people seemed calculated, whereas in reality they were only the explosions of her Bohemian genius. Her lodging was burned down, and the report at once became current that she had set fire to it in order to get talked about. It was about this time, too, that she conceived the idea of having a black ebony coffin in her bedroom, padded with white satin, and even of sleeping in it. You may imagine the thousand and one exaggerations of the idlers of the boulevard. In short, it was thought that the whimsical Sarah was not worthy to become a member of a society of such staid and sober traditions as the Theatre Francaise, a veritable temple of art, in which the actors give themselves the airs of priests and Levites. Alphonse Daudet, the novelist, never wearies of scoffing at the airs of the actors of the Comedie Francaise, "*ils ne jouent pas*," he says; "*ils officient*." ("They do not act; they officiate.") Sarah was not fitted for the Comedie Francaise. She was engaged, however. Then another difficulty arose. She had forgotten that she was bound for another year at the Odeon. The manager of that theatre did not wish to lose her, and claimed a forfeit. The legend says that Sarah, in a high state of superb wrath, stamped on the floor of her salon, and forthwith there sprang up the required number of thousand franc notes, which the manager of the Odeon placed

in his pocket-book with a sigh of regret. Her debut at the Theatre Francaise, in Dumas' "Mlle. de Belle-Isle," was not successful. Then the war broke out around her once more with fresh vigor. In entering the Comedie Francaise Sarah had trodden on the toes of many people. When she first came there she had been ready with her hand; now she was ready with her tongue. That frail and nervous creature, who has taken for her motto "*Quand memo*," tramples with joy and rage on all social conventions, and when once she has fairly started in a fit of anger or a bout of scolding, she is, ungallant as the statement may seem, a perfect demon. She goes ahead as regardless of the blows that she gives as of the blows that she receives. Well, after "Mlle. de Belle-Isle," Sarah tried roles in the ancient and modern repertory, and each role was the occasion of an epic battle in the newspapers. She succeeded fairly in "Phedre," and especially in Voltaire's "Zaire," which was one of her triumphs; but her first really undisputed success was in the role of *Berthe de Savigny*, in Octave Feuillet's "Le Sphinx." After this creation she became the idol of the picked public as well as of the general public. The picked public consists of the "good company," aristocrats and high-born folk, who have a box at the Francaise on Tuesdays regularly all through the season. It is the same public that you find on subscription nights at the opera. Hitherto the *habitués des marais* as they are called, had been rather hostile to, or at least unsympathetic toward, Sarah. Having won them over, her triumph was complete. Henceforward she held the public and the connoisseurs under her spell.

I need not dwell upon her other creations—*Berthe*, in "La Fille de Roland," the wonderful creation of the blind old woman in "Roma Vaincue," *Cherubin* in the "Mariage de Figaro," and *Mrs. Clarkson* in "L'Étrangère." On November 21, 1877, Victor Hugo's famous piece, "Hernani," was revived at the Comedie Francaise, and Sarah Bernhardt's interpretation of *Dona Sol* spread her fame all over Europe; it had already reached America. In *Dona Sol*, and subsequently in *Marie de Neubourg*, the queen in "Ruy Blas," Sarah Bernhardt realized Victor Hugo's ideal; she was a marvel of grace, of tenderness, of living poetry; her voice was music itself. Henceforward no one disputed her glory. Renown proclaimed her to be the greatest actress of the day, and people came from the ends of the earth to see her.

In March, 1878, Sarah Bernhardt was sick for a few days, and her role of *Dona Sol* was played, satisfactorily enough, it is true, by Mlle. Dudley. The