

Sara Bernhardt's Former Visits to Omaha

(Continued)



Mrs. Bernhardt and M. Coquelin at dinner in their private car—Photographed exclusively for the Bee.

SARA BERNHARDT—like whom there probably never was another—is to be at the Brandeis next Sunday night. It is announced as "positively her last appearance," and in this case there does not appear to be much chance to discount the announcement. Mrs. Bernhardt has, up to this time, succeeded most admirably in defeating the natural enmities of Time, and has laughed or scorned away all his assaults that make the ordinary woman old when she tells only a fairly long tale of years. Madame Sara is now, as for two generations almost, in a class peculiarly alone, not only as an actress, but as a woman. Expending boundless energy in her arduous profession since very young womanhood—studying like a fiend and acting like an angel; directing, managing, passing artistic judgment on each smallest detail; living to the highest limit the few hours of daylight she has been willing to enjoy, and burning the candle without stint when not sleeping, she is reported to be still the embodiment of high-power acting, graceful, virginal, unassuming of self, incomparable in her technique.

Fifth Time Here.
This will be the fifth appearance of the really great Frenchwoman in Omaha. She came first in the '90s, appearing at the old Boyd Opera house. Her second appearance was at the new Boyd in the season of '99-1900. She appeared in the new Boyd again on February 5, 1901, when she presented "La Tosca," the play in which Sardou has "played on all the keys of human passion," as The Bee critic wrote at that time. Her last stop in Omaha was on February 27, 1906, when she played "Camille" at the Auditorium. In The Bee it was set forth frankly that this was Mrs. Bernhardt's "first farewell" visit to Omaha, and now she is to give her last farewell. "L'Aiglon" will be the play at the Brandeis.

At her last performance in Omaha the peerless exponent of the dramatic art was greeted by an audience described as "the largest ever assembled in Omaha to witness a dramatic performance."
Since she is to be seen in Omaha for the last time, something of Bernhardt's antecedents and career will be of interest. She was born in Paris in October, 1844, and lacks but little of touching the Biblical timeline of life. She is a Jewess, as history sets it down, of French and Dutch parentage. The French element in her makeup would account for her tremendous temperament, and her wearing qualities, and power of application, might be attributed to the Teutonic ancestor. By her father's wish, Rosine (her baptismal name) was baptized and brought up in the Christian faith, receiving her education in a convent. Her cleverness was a thing of early growth, for at 14 she entered the Paris conservatory. Shortly she had gained prizes for both tragedy and comedy, and in 1863, at 19, made her debut at the Theatre Francaise. She became discouraged in degree, because she thought her merit was not sufficiently recognized, and undertook burlesque for a while. That she had real genius began to appear when she undertook parts at the Odeon, in 1867, and the Theatre Francaise recalled her in 1872. She achieved some triumphs and became a regular member of the company, enlarging her repertoire steadily.

First Visit to America.
Her first London appearance was in 1878, and she won her way brilliantly among the British lovers of the drama. Then her temperament boiled over and she severed her connection with the premier French playhouse. The courts made her pay \$20,000 for breach of contract—and Bernhardt soon after undertook her first trip to the United States, gathering in the amount of the fine and some street car fares besides. She was received with acclaim, and became enthusiastic over the American people. Russia and other European countries then had opportunity to see her in various roles, and in 1882 she committed matrimony, the chosen mate being Jacques Damais, a Greek. He held her attention only until the next year, when they separated.

Photographed by The Bee.
Mrs. Bernhardt soon after this acquired a theater of her own and produced successfully several plays, among them being "L'Aiglon," her role for Omaha. In 1900 Bernhardt became associated with Constant Coquelin, the leading comedian of France, and he was with her when she appeared in Omaha in 1901. At that period of her career the great artist was cherishing a hatred of the camera, but The Bee was able to present an excellent picture of herself and Coquelin at dinner in their private car. The taking of this picture was the result of an earlier successful attempt to photograph her when she was driving away from the depot, and when she imagined she had defeated the aim of the photographer. Froods of the first picture were shown. Mrs. Bernhardt and she was pleased to express her delight. "You make me cheeks so full; I like it," she said, and then consented to let the second picture be taken.
Bernhardt was 67 at that time, and perhaps had a very natural fear the camera might make her appear as growing old;

yet here she is back, at 67, lively and ambitious, and reported to be acquitting herself with at least considerable of her old magnificence still attaching. On the occasion of her visit to Omaha in 1901 The Bee wrote of her:
"The gracious Sara is surrounded by an army of servants so solicitous of their mistress's welfare that they have led the world to believe she is a woman whom years of hard work have developed into a termagant. More youthful in appearance and actions than many women less than half her age, it is impossible to explain why Bernhardt avoids the photographer, unless it be the realization that other women who are approaching three-score years will be grieved at seeing how successful a sister has been in warding off all traces of old age and in renewing her youth as the years go by."

Easy to Understand.
For the benefit of those who have never seen Bernhardt on the stage it may be well to recall some of the comment on her appearance here in "La Tosca." The Bee said in its headlines, "Words not a necessity. The universal tongue of art proves to be sufficient interpretation." It was also noted that society people were conspicuous by their absence, the audience being made up mainly of "people who love art for art's sake, and who were attracted by the artistic merits of the stars and the performance rather than by mere curiosity." The play was given, as are all of Bernhardt's productions, "with a fidelity to artistic verities that most effectually supplies to the imagination what the understanding may lack of knowledge of the spoken lines. It is in this attention to the minutest parts of the production and the infinitude of detail in expression that have gained for Mrs. Bernhardt the title of divine."

On the occasion of Bernhardt's appearance at the Auditorium February 27, 1906, she enacted the role of Marguerite Gauthier. The place was unsuited for such a performance, but the demand for seats had been so great that the managers of the event decided no theater would serve. Next day The Bee said:
"The audience was cosmopolitan in a large degree, that is, it was gathered from five states and many cities. People came from as far away in Nebraska as McCook, Yankton and Sioux Falls were represented. Sioux City and Des Moines marked the Iowa limits. Missouri was represented by delegations from Rock-wood and towns between here and there, while some Kansans could not wait for the performance to be given at Kansas City and came to Omaha. Lincoln sent up about 200 of its elite."

Of the performance itself and the central figure The Bee critic wrote:
"One has difficulty in reconciling the inexcusable fact of her birth in 1844 with the appearance of Mrs. Bernhardt in the character of a girl in her twenties. She has the grace, the suppleness, the ringing laughter, the merry voice and the sensuous, seductive way of the woman who is just beginning to taste the joys of living, rather than the look of one who has told three score years of active, soul-testing life."

Critic a Prophet.
Something of prophecy attaches to the comment of the critic at that time, when he said:
"Sara Bernhardt is being advertised as on her farewell tour. That seems like a press agent's trick, for naught apparent to the eye suggests thought that she will yet again visit the country that not only shows her with the warmest of praises for her work as an artist, but which also rewards with those golden tokens of appreciation so essentially necessary to a true art. Bernhardt will come back, for she is greater than Paris or New York, or any one city in the world. She is a true world-artist, and needs the world as much as the world needs her."
And back she has come, with her power but little impaired, according to the press, and Bernhardt is Bernhardt, and she enjoys life and giving joy by her great endowments and through her perfected art.

Facts About Tour.
George H. Murray, who is making the advance arrangements for her tour, was in Omaha during the week and furnished some very interesting facts concerning the present tour of the United States. Mr. Murray said:
"At 67 she discounts the vitality, nervous energy and strength of any woman of 30, as the present tour, which began in Chicago on October 21, will attest. She gave thirteen performances the first week and fourteen the second, with changes of play at each performance, and this following a

journey of 4,300 miles from Paris, France, to Chicago, via New York direct. For this visit she simply depleted her theater and storehouse in Paris, which was equivalent to eighteen baggage cars and which I passed at the port of Chicago and gave the government a bond of \$30,000 that everything would be returned to France at the conclusion of the tour.
"Her entire company has been brought, also her own physician, personal manager, secretary, English tutor and an array of maids and men servants, to say nothing of her pets, of which Peter Pan, a Blenheim spaniel, is the favorite. Madame's season calls for 300 performances in the United States and Canada and with a guarantee that in no event she receive less than \$1,200 for each performance for herself, alone, all other expenses being defrayed by her five years' experience. Boston leads in the matter of receipts, where the gross ran as high as \$30,000 in the week at the Boston theater for ten performances. New York paid \$20,000 for five weeks; Chicago, \$25,000 for two weeks; Philadelphia, Washington, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, St. Louis, New Orleans, Los Angeles and San Francisco were simply capacity. Some of these cities during the tour of five years ago, were Kansas City, one night, \$10,000; Omaha, one night, \$7,300. The St. Paul, University of California, \$3,000. The wonderful tent was used in Dallas, to \$12,000, and again on the Lake Front, Chicago, when she gave a benefit to the San Francisco fire sufferers, which netted \$17,000. Only this season, in Newark, N. J., she contributed \$1,300 to the families of the factory girls who lost their lives in that terrible fire."
"Mrs. Bernhardt is now on her way east, where she intends to repeat in New York, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington and Baltimore. At Coronado she celebrated the 300th performance by giving her company a magnificent dinner. San Francisco was all agog to pay her homage and to show their deep appreciation of her generosity five years ago, when she contributed so lavishly to the sufferers."
"Bernhardt has many roles, 'Camille,' 'La Tosca,' 'Madame X,' and 'Sister Beatrice' being great favorites. Of poets she admires Rostand the most. Of authors, Sardou. She is not only an actress, but a painter, sculptor, dramatist, author and litterateur, and has refused the Legion of Honor unless presented on certain grounds. Even 7,000 miles from home, she finds time to direct her theater in Paris, also her estates on the Island of Belle, off the French coast; follows the French styles and keeps in touch all over the world. A woman who has played in every country on the globe and always in her own tongue, and who has met more of the world's distinguished men and women, including sovereigns, than any woman in the world, and now, in the autumn of her career, she brings the art of a lifetime to your very doors to fire hearts and souls with the



Mrs. Bernhardt in 1911.

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