

**SARAH BERNHARDT: A  
BIOGRAPHICAL AND  
CRITICAL SKETCH**

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Sarah Bernhardt: A Biographical and Critical Sketch by Austin Brereton

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ELECTRIC PHOTO-ENG. CO. STONEY.

From a Photograph by Nadar, Paris.

MADAME SARAH BERNHARDT.

# SARAH BERNHARDT

A Biographical and Critical Sketch

BY

Austin Brereton

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## PREFACE.

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*My object in issuing this memoir has been twofold. In the first place, there is a natural desire on the part of the public to learn something of the career of every artist who visits this country. That desire is intensified when the artist is so illustrious as Sarah Bernhardt. Her name, at least, is familiar to the play-goers of Australia, although she has not yet acted here. But her achievements are not so well-known. She is the heroine of a thousand and one anecdotes, some of them questionable, few of them true. It is no secret that, at one time, in order to familiarise herself with the idea of death, she adopted the gruesome plan of sleeping in a coffin. As to her stage-life, however, but scant information has, as yet, been published. The biographical dictionaries contain but superficial accounts of the greatest French actress since the days of the "divine Rachel." Hitherto, no fair, unprejudiced, and, so far as may be, comprehensive memoir of this famous player, has been penned. In making the attempt to supply this*



*want, my path has been beset with difficulties which, I am vain enough to think, have been surmounted. When, in 1883, I had the honour of sketching the life of Henry Irving, prior to his first visit to America, abundance of material was at my command. The difficulty then was not so much what should go into the book but what should be left out of it. Moreover, if there was any doubt as to a date, if any statement of fact wanted amplification, the actor-manager was at hand to supply the requisite information. In the present case, the difficulty has been reversed. There is no book, no magazine, no newspaper, within my knowledge, in which an exhaustive article on the accomplishments of Sarah Bernhardt is to be found. The Public Library here, thanks to the never-failing courtesy of Mr. Robert C. Walker, has been ransacked, but without avail. In anticipation of Madame Bernhardt's visit, I sent to London some months ago for anything that could possibly be of use to me in the writing of a memoir, but to no purpose. Fortunately, my own dramatic library, and my personal experience of the stage, have enabled me, as I hope, to relate, clearly and concisely, the histrionic career of the noted tragédienne.*

*My second object in writing this memoir was born of the wish to pay a tribute, not, I trust, entirely unworthy, to the genius of an actress who has afforded me, in common with many others, profound pleasure. In the pursuit of my duties as a dramatic critic in London,*

*it was my good fortune to witness the most important events of the Stage during several notable years. Treasured in my mind is the recollection of Sarah Bernhardt in the majority of her foremost characters. I have seen her in "Phèdre," in "Adrienne Lecoureur," in "Frou-Frou," in "La Dame aux Camélias," in "Fédora," in "Théodora;" also, in Lady Macbeth and other characters. It will thus be gathered that I have not written about her in ignorance. In some cases, I have relied upon the judgment of others, and, where an opinion is quoted, care has been taken to verify the expression. My work has been a labour of love. No pains have been spared in order to obtain correctness as regards facts.*

*I am particularly proud of the illustrations which accompany the memoir. They mark, as I venture to think, a decided advance upon anything that has yet been done in Australia in a cheap publication. They have been selected with the view of giving strangers to the art of this incomparable actress an idea of her appearance at various times and in different dresses. The portraits of Madame Bernhardt, as she appears in her studio, and as she is seen in "Ruy Blas"—one of her earliest successes—were taken, in Paris, in 1879; that of her in "Le Passant" was made, a year or two later, in London; while that of her as Théodora was done, recently, in New York. The frontispiece represents the gifted actress as she now is.*

*It is from one of the last photographs of her. For the use of this photograph, and that of the actress as Théodora, I am indebted to the courtesy of a friend. At some pecuniary risk, I have had the pictures separately printed, on the best paper obtainable, in preference to having them worked-in with the text, more justice being thus done to the engravers and printers, as well as to the original.*

*In conclusion, I may add that those who seek for any gossip concerning the domestic affairs of the actress, will not find it here. I hold it an impertinence for any individual to attempt to pry into the private life of an artist. On the other hand, those who are desirous of reading an honest account of her stage-career, will not, I trust, be altogether disappointed in this biographical and critical sketch.*

*A. B.*

*Lavender Bay, Sydney.*

*19th May, 1891.*