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LECOUVREUR**

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**EUGÈNE SCRIBE & ERNEST LEGOUVE & THEODORE ELY HAMILTON**

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ADRIENNE LE COUVREUR  
*Actrice du Théâtre François*

*Née à Fines en 1690. Morte à Paris le 20. Mars 1730.*

*Paris, chez la Citoyenne, M. de la Harpe, au Palais de l'Académie, vis-à-vis la Bibliothèque du Roi, et chez la Citoyenne, et chez la Citoyenne.*

Oxford French Series

By AMERICAN SCHOLARS

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# ADRIENNE LECOUVREUR

BY

SCRIBE AND LEGOUVÉ

*EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES*

BY

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## INTRODUCTION

### SCRIBE AND LEGOUVÉ

Augustin Eugène Scribe was born at Paris, December 24th, 1791. He studied law but manifested early in life a strong inclination toward the drama. The first of his plays to be favored with the full approval of the public was *Une nuit de la garde nationale*, written in 1816, in collaboration with Delestre-Poirson. Thereafter, his success was great and continued. He produced plays in rapid succession for two and even three theaters at the same time. Many of them were written jointly with some collaborator. In 1816 appeared also *Le nouveau Pourceaugnac* and *Le solliciteur*, highly praised by Schlegel.

In 1820 Scribe was engaged to write exclusively for a new theater established by his friend Poirson, under the patronage of the Duchesse de Berri. In less than ten years (1821-30) he produced over one hundred plays. Among the best of these are: *Le mariage enfantin*, *Le colonel*, *La loge du portier*, *Le baiser au porteur*, *La reine de seize ans*, *La marraine*, *Le diplomate*, *Le plus beau jour de la vie*, and *Le mariage de raison*.

For the Théâtre-Français he supplied the following plays: *Valérie* (1822), *Le mariage d'argent* (1827), *Bertrand et Raton* (1833), *Une passion secrète* (1834),



*La camaraderie* (1837), *Le verre d'eau* (1840), *Adrienne Lecouvreur* (1849), *Les contes de la reine de Navarre* and *La bataille de dames* (1851), *Mon étoile* (1853), *Feu Lionel* and *Les doigts de fée* (1858). Several of these are still widely known.

*Adrienne Lecouvreur*, which is described elsewhere, was written with Ernest Legouvé (1807-1903) and is a really beautiful play.

*La bataille de dames*, also written with Legouvé, is well known for its rapid action and sprightly dialogue.

Scribe also composed the libretti of the following operas: *La dame blanche* (1825), by Boïeldieu; *La muette de Portici* (1828), *Fra Diavolo* (1830), *Le cheval de bronze* (1835), and others, by Aubert; *Robert le Diable* (1831), *Les Huguenots* (1836), and *Le prophète* (1849), by Meyerbeer.

He wrote a number of novels, among which are *Carlo Broschi*, *Judith*, *Le roi de carreau*, and *Maurice*. Though widely read, they made no great literary mark.

In 1836 the French Academy elected Scribe to membership.

His productivity was enormous. Either alone or in collaboration, he produced over four hundred plays. At least three hundred and fifty of these have been printed separately in various collections of dramas, as *Le théâtre de madame*, *La France dramatique*, *Le magasin théâtral*, and *Le théâtre illustré*. A complete edition of his works has now been published by Calmann-Lévy, Paris.

His many successful plays gave him large financial returns and his wealth increased rapidly. He left the most considerable fortune ever accumulated by any author of France.

He died at Paris on the 20th of February, 1861.

Scribe was not great in a purely literary way. His style is not all that could be desired. Neither was he a profound thinker or psychologist, nor a herald of new ideas. His ideas of morality were those current in his time. His world is that of the materialistic and self-satisfied bourgeoisie of the reign of Louis-Philippe. His shortcomings are manifest and have been severely handled by more than one eminent critic.

It is, nevertheless, undeniable that Scribe was a master at handling the plot and action of a drama. He possessed a most intimate knowledge of the technique of plays and the requirements of the stage. He excelled in the art of maintaining the interest of the spectator by skillful and rapid changes in the situation, by an abundance of action, and by a vivacious and lifelike conversation. He possessed in a very high degree the power to please and entertain an audience and to produce the desired theatrical effect.

When M. Octave Feuillet (1821-1890) succeeded Eugène Scribe as a member of the French Academy, on March 26th, 1863, he said in his address of reception: "Un des arts les plus difficiles dans le domaine de l'invention littéraire, c'est celui de charmer l'imagination sans l'ébranler, de toucher le cœur sans le troubler,

d'amuser les hommes sans les corrompre: ce fut l'art suprême de Scribe."

And in his response to this discourse, M. Vitet (1802-1873) thus eulogized the remarkable inventive genius of Scribe. — "Il y avait chez Scribe une faculté puissante et vraiment supérieure qui lui assurait et qui m'explique cette suprématie sur le théâtre de son temps. C'était un don d'invention dramatique que personne avant lui peut-être n'avait ainsi possédé: le don de découvrir à chaque pas, presque à propos de rien, des combinaisons théâtrales d'un effet neuf et saisissant; et de les découvrir, non pas en germe seulement ou à peine ébauchées, mais en relief, en action, et déjà sur la scène. Pendant le temps qu'il faut à ses confrères pour préparer un plan, il en achève plus de quatre; et jamais il n'achète aux dépens de l'originalité cette fécondité prodigieuse. Ce n'est pas dans un moule banal que ses fictions sont jetées. S'il a ses secrets, ses méthodes, jamais il n'en sert de la même façon. Pas un de ses ouvrages qui n'ait au moins son grain de nouveauté. . . . Scribe avait le génie de l'invention dramatique."

Finally, though Scribe is not generally accorded the rank of a great author, it must be acknowledged that he was one of the world's greatest dramatic entertainers.

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Ernest Legouvé was born at Paris in 1807. His father was Gabriel-Marie-Jean-Baptiste Legouvé (1764-