

## MADAME RÉJANE.

**I**T is scarcely surprising that those who think of Gabrielle Réjane think of her, instinctively and enthusiastically, as *Madame Sans-Gêne*. Those who have followed her career with any care can, of course, place upon the walls of their mind's gallery a series of exquisite images. One will insist that she was most attractive, most wayward, most winsome, in that "Vie à Deux" which tempted Miss Rehan to rival her with "Love in Tandem." Another will insist that the artist was never more enchanting than in the fair effronteries of "Ma Cousine." A third will esteem her most excellent as an Aristophanic Athenian, while a fourth will insist that she is the truest interpreter of Ibsen, and succeeded with *Nora* of the "Doll's Home" where others failed. But it is more than probable that each of these champions of some particular creation of the many that belong to Madame Réjane's fantastic history would admit that their thoughts first turn, when they hear her name, to her conception of *Madame Sans-Gêne* as her greatest triumph, her rarest achievement, the chief of all those enterprises in dainty insolence, in impertinence, in captivating womanhood, which are so intimately associated with her genius.

The reason for this is simple enough. *Madame Sans-Gêne* is not merely the latest, but it also happens to be the best, of Madame Réjane's experiments. It is also one of the most difficult. "Madame Sans-Gêne," the play, is one of the worst, as it is one of the most recent, examples of the stage mechanics of Sardou, which consist in snatching an advantage from a fashion or a fancy of the hour, and making a particular part written for a particular actress stand out against a series of venerable situations and perverted history. If M. Sardou ever had in any serious sense a formula of the drama, the wind has carried it away long ago. No question of art is associated with such plays as "Thermidor," "Gismonda," or "Madame Sans-Gêne."

Madame Réjane triumphs in spite of, not because of, the play. The mysterious Napoleonic revival which has interested two worlds is hav-

ing some admirable results in history and in art. If it has produced much that is good, it has happily produced little that is so poor as "Madame Sans-Gêne." But the genius of Madame Réjane is great enough to overcome the ineptitudes of the piece. The obviousness of its evolution, the ostentation of its machinery, were forgotten, and so far forgiven, in the rapture aroused by this artist's adorable presentation.

Madame Réjane is an actress endowed with many qualities: she has charm, vivacity, grace—even the grace to be ungracious; she can dominate a very marked personality, and keep it in subservience to the part which she creates; she has playfulness, pathos, tenderness, humor—she has even a degree of passion compatible with the ascendancy of the playful, the pathetic, the tender, and the humorous qualities. Just as much of the tragic tone as it is permitted to the Comic Muse to mingle with her mood of laughter and her mood of tears—just so much Madame Réjane may claim to include among her gifts.

But to my mind, if I were to cast about for a word to characterize this artist's most conspicuous quality, I should say that her greatest merit and her greatest gift is her wit. One associates perhaps too persistently the idea of wit with the spoken word, with the written phrase: but there is a wit, too, in the histrionic art (though, indeed, it is none too often to be found among its professors); and with that wit Madame Réjane is rarely and richly endowed. The quality which we find in the letters of a Madame de Sévigné, in the recorded phrases of a Lady Holland or a Mrs. Thrale, finds its expression with Madame Réjane in a certain subtlety of simplicity, a certain discretion of daring, a certain airiness, daintiness, lightly soaring insolence, which is to the acted part what wit is to the well-turned phrase. It is this quality which is essentially the charm of her *Madame Sans-Gêne*; it is this quality which allies itself to all her other fine and varied talents as an actress, and makes her what she is—a woman, in her own way of work, without a superior, and almost without a peer.

*Justin Huntly McCarthy.*





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MME. RÉJANE.