

Oxford French Series

By AMERICAN SCHOLARS

GENERAL EDITOR: RAYMOND WEEKS, Ph.D.

PROFESSOR OF ROMANCE LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

LES FEMMES FORTES

BY

VICTORIEN SARDOU

EDITED BY

ALBERT COHN McMASTER, A.M.

INSTRUCTOR IN DARTMOUTH COLLEGE

AND

FRANCIS B. BARTON

DOCTEUR DE L'UNIVERSITÉ DE PARIS

INSTRUCTOR IN WILLIAMS COLLEGE

NEW YORK

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

AMERICAN BRANCH: 35 WEST 32ND STREET

LONDON, TORONTO, MELBOURNE & BOMBAY

HUMPHREY MILFORD

1913

All rights reserved

Copyright, 1913
BY OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
AMERICAN BRANCH

PREFACE

LES FEMMES FORTES, played for the first time on December 31, 1860, at the "Théâtre du Vaudeville," in Paris, is remarkably well adapted to usage in both colleges and schools for either boys or girls. In the first place, it is one of Sardou's most typical plays and about the only one which can be given *in toto* — without a single cut in the text. Secondly, it deals with a subject which is bound to interest the American student, treating, as it does, of a comparison of French and American customs and education, and with an American as the hero. Thirdly, the dialogue is extremely witty throughout the play, and contains a large and particularly practical vocabulary.

The text used in this edition is that of 1865.

The editors wish to express their sincerest thanks for the valuable assistance rendered them by Professors Adolphe Cohn and Raymond Weeks of Columbia University.

INTRODUCTION

IF popularity with the theater-going public were a criterion of literary excellence; if crowded houses and the plaudits of the pit were synonymous with a true appreciation of an author's dramatic and literary talent; if the end of the playwright's art were to amuse and interest the audience of the day, without thought for that of the morrow; then Victorien Sardou (1831-1908)¹ would be ranked with Augier and Dumas fils as one of the leading dramatists of the last half of the nineteenth century. For the "noise" of his successes has been enormous. From the day when, after the disappointing failure of the *Taverne des Etudiants* at the Odéon (1854) and the discouraging rebuffs received at the hands of various directors of Parisian theaters, Mlle. Déjazet opened wide to him the doors of her popular playhouse, he has never failed to interest and entertain a constantly increasing public. *Les Pattes de Mouche* (1861) — presented in English under the title of *A Scrap of Paper* — one of the cleverest bits of skilfully manipulated intrigue that have appeared in the last half-century,

¹ Bibliography: Brander Matthews, *French Dramatists* (1881); René Doumic, *Portraits d'Ecrivains*, I (1902); A. Wolff, *Sardou et l'Oncle Sam*; L. Petit de Julleville, *Le Théâtre en France*; G. Pellissier, *Le Mouvement Littéraire au XIXe Siècle* (pp. 376-377).

established his reputation as a master of stagecraft. *Rabagas* (1872), with its allusions to prominent political figures and to contemporary events, gave rise to tumultuous scenes and sharp polemics, which were forgotten in the mad laughter of *Divorçons* (1880). *La Tosca* (1887), *Cléopâtre* (1889), *Gismondo* (1894), written especially for Sarah Bernhardt, permitted that incomparable artist, then at the height of her career, to display to advantage her wonderful talents. Not only were translations of his Parisian successes produced in our theaters, but several of his plays were intended primarily for the English-speaking public. *L'Oncle Sam* (1875) interested New York, while *Robespierre* (1902) and *Dante* (1903), written for Sir Henry Irving and first played in English, furnished that actor with two of his best rôles.

The diversity of Sardou's work is remarkable, and the facility with which he passes from one *genre* to another almost disconcerting. Besides the comedies (*La Famille Benoiton* [1865], *Nos Bons Villageois* [1866], etc.), in which he gained his early reputation, we have from his pen historical dramas (*Patrie*, *La Haine*), political satire (*Rabagas*), judicial drama (*Ferréol*), problem plays (*Odette*, *Georgette*), vaudevilles (*Divorçons*, *Les Femmes Fortes*), melodrama (*Les Diables Noirs*), spectacles (*Les Merveilleuses*), and even operas and operettas.

The versatility of Sardou is seen not only in the different sorts of plays that he has written, but it also makes itself felt within the limits of a single production. The greater part of his comedies, upon which, notwithstand-

ing the many excellent scenes in his dramas — Pellissier considers *Patrie* to be one of the finest of contemporary literature — his reputation is likely to rest, consist of a mingling of comedy and drama, the first two acts being devoted to a diverting presentation of the characters and *milieu* of the play, and the third and fourth to the development of a melodramatic plot, often stirring or pathetic. The fifth act unravels the intrigue and explains everything. . . .

In this juxtaposition of two distinct *genres* lies one of the most original traits of Sardou's theater and one of its greatest defects. For the fusion of the two elements is seldom complete. The *drame*, however excellent it may be in itself, is frequently out of harmony with what has preceded. The personages delineated in the first two acts seem incapable of the passions and ideas assigned to them in the third and fourth, and the action is hardly characteristic of the society in which it is supposed to take place. All of this gives one the impression that the author was not equal to the task which he had imposed upon himself, that, having reached a certain stage in his story, he found himself unable to proceed and now was forced to resort to the questionable aid of a borrowed drama in order to finish his play. Nor is the word "borrowed" a misnomer, for Sardou's plots are rarely of his own invention. Like other even more distinguished dramatists, he does not scruple to make use of whatever material falls under his hands. A striking example of this appropriation of ideas belong-

ing to others — which some critics have not hesitated to call plagiarism — is found in *Fernande*, the entire plot of which, almost to the details, comes from the story of *Madame de la Pommeraye* and *Le Marquis des Arcis* in Diderot's *Jacques le Fataliste*.

But if the more melodramatic episodes and the unity of composition in Sardou's plays leave much to be desired, the comedy element is the work of a master. Sardou has been able to seize and convert into animated if not living scenes the foible, the fad, or the fashion of the day. He divined, as it were, what interested the public and placed it before them, emphasizing — a bit too strongly perhaps, but with sure touch — those aspects of the picture which could produce a smile or carry a shaft of satire. Thus we find in his plays all the eccentric individuals, all the more or less long-lived fashions, customs, and ideas that have followed each other in France from the decline of the Second Empire to the triumph of cosmopolitan Paris of today. The glittering tinsel of the later sixties, the political aspirations of the bourgeoisie of the infant republic, the agitation for civil marriage, the question of divorce, the invasion of American ideas of feminine education, the breaking down of the old aristocracy and the rise of the hierarchy of wealth, these and many other questions that interested the playgoers of the time are portrayed with great detail and accuracy in the work of Sardou. It is no mere exposition of ideas, nor a simple parade of cranks and dandies, it is a living *tableau de*

genre, complete in every sense, even to the language, even to trifles of stage setting, even to the dress and mannerisms of the characters. To be sure, the people that enliven these scenes are usually exaggerated and the picture is often the broadest caricature (*L'Oncle Sam*), yet the main outlines remain after all sufficiently exact for one to obtain a notion, at least, of the eccentricities of his predecessors. Perhaps the critic of the future will refuse to grant to Sardou a place in the history of the literature of the last half of the nineteenth century, but the historian of that epoch surely will not pass him by.

Above all else, Sardou is an incomparable *metteur en scène*. Both by nature and by training he was fitted to seek out the dramatic in life. At the very outset of his career he devoted himself to the study of the methods of that other master of stagecraft, Eugène Scribe. After reading the first act of one of the latter's comedies, he would construct, from the information contained in it, a play of his own and then compare his version with the original. In this way he taught himself to draw the greatest possible advantages from the situations with which he had to deal. Moreover, Sardou was a born *homme de théâtre*. He tells us himself that he saw everything through the eyes of the stage manager. In a beautiful landscape, in conversations indulged in or overheard, in the latest crime or the most recent scandal, he neither saw nor heard anything but the dramatic, that which could be adapted to the exigencies of the theater.

The results of this training are seen in all of Sardou's work. He knows every trick, every bit of stage business that can enhance the vividness of the picture. Not an entrance, not an exit but serves a distinct purpose; not a detail in the setting but adds something to the exposition of the plot. There are no long monologues explaining what has already happened, the preplot is disposed of by casual remarks of the characters that fit so naturally into the dialogue that the spectator finds himself informed of everything without realizing how nor when. The author's artificiality and lack of profound insight into human character are forgotten in the presence of the consummate art of the master of dramatic technique. It is only when the curtain has fallen and the spectator, on his homeward way, begins to ponder on the meaning of it all, that he begins to realize that he has been imposed upon, that he has been made to accept as real that which was only the shadow of reality.

Sardou's stagecraft is best seen in some of his *vaude villes* or farces. Here the intrigue is often so flimsy that a mere word would suffice to explain everything, but somehow or other the author contrives to prevent any one from pronouncing this word. In speaking of the *Pattes de Mouche*, perhaps the cleverest of Sardou's farces, René Doumic says: "Never has been more strictly applied the famous definition, which has it that art consists of making something out of nothing." And this is true. There is no plot, no description of customs nor of character, no real action, nothing but the hurry-

scurrying of a dozen people without personality or interest of their own, to prevent a certain letter from falling into the hands of the person for whom it was not intended. And yet, with such skill does Sardou direct the antics of these marionettes that the piece is interesting, amusing, and withal one of his most successful productions.

Notwithstanding his ability to depict the social life of his time, notwithstanding his knowledge of the technical side of his art, critics are loath to concede that Sardou is a real artist. The highest aim of the dramatist should be to hold the mirror up to nature, to create characters that live, that are of flesh and blood like ourselves, whose joys and sorrows, passions and desires, merits and shortcomings, are those which are common to all mankind. In this Sardou has failed.

It has been said of Scribe that, having written four hundred plays, he was successful in not creating a single character, a single personage sufficiently individual to be remembered. The same might almost be said of Sardou. Seeking in life only the theatrical, seeing in the passions, vices, and whims of humanity only so many means for entertaining an audience, he could not be expected to create living personalities. He beheld only the superficial; he did not go beneath the surface to ascertain the hidden motives of the external actions that he was so quick to note and so adept in portraying. Hence he gives us not characters but silhouettes, personages without soul, without life, that amuse for the moment and are then forgotten.

Nevertheless, Sardou is likely to be long popular on the stage; those faults which mar his work from a literary standpoint are less serious on the other side of the footlights. There he is always amusing, always interesting. The hearty laugh of his ingenious *vaudevilles*, such as *Divorçons*, *Les Pattes de Mouche*, or *Les Femmes Fortes*, will echo in many a crowded hall for years to come. It may even be, as Petit de Julleville predicted, that playwrights of the future, in search of ideas, of scenic effects, of methods of dramatic construction, will draw from his work, without acknowledging it and perhaps without knowing it.

WILLIAMSTOWN, MASS.

February 28, 1913.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	V
LES FEMMES FORTES	I
PERSONNAGES	2
ACTE PREMIER	3
ACTE DEUXIÈME	54
ACTE TROISIÈME	102
NOTES	175
VOCABULARY	187

LES FEMMES FORTES

PERSONNAGES

QUENTIN.....	MM. NUMA
JONATHAN.....	FÉLIX
TOUPART.....	CHAUMONT
LAZAROWITCH.....	MUNIÉ
LACHAPELLE	BOISSELOT
CLAIRE.....	MMES FARGUEIL
MME TOUPART.....	GUILLEMIN
MME LAHORIE.....	JANE ESSLER
DEBORAH	ALEXIS
GABRIELLE	BLANCHE PIERSON
JENNY	SIMON
JEAN	M. ROGER

Le 1^{er} acte à Paris, le 2^e et le 3^e à Marville, près du Havre

LES FEMMES FORTES

ACTE PREMIER

[*Un salon. — Trois portes au fond. — A gauche, un bureau. — Au-dessus, deux vases. — Une fenêtre. — A droite, une cheminée avec deux vases, pendule. — Un guéridon, chaises, etc.*]

SCÈNE PREMIÈRE

GABRIELLE, JENNY

[*Gabrielle regarde par la fenêtre; Jenny assise, lit un roman.*]

GABRIELLE

Ah! que ce n'est pas beau, les hauteurs de Chail-
lot,¹ quand on les admire tous les jours depuis l'âge
de raison! . . . Je ne vois que le Champ de Mars qui
poudroie, la Seine qui verdoie,² et personne qui se
noie! Jenny!

5

JENNY

Quoi?

GABRIELLE [*descendant en scène*]

Tu t'ennuies, n'est-ce pas?

JENNY [*jetant le livre*]

Oh! oui! . . . La jolie existence que nous menons depuis que papa est parti pour New-York! Père dénaturé, qui n'a pas voulu nous emmener! . . .

GABRIELLE

Ah! Dieu! ¹ . . . voyager! . . . Changer de place,
5 être secouée, ballottée et faire naufrage, quel bonheur! . . . Au moins cela changerait l'heure des repas!

JENNY [*soupirant*]

Si seulement on avait le droit de rêver à son aise!

GABRIELLE

Oui, c'est bon pour toi, qui passes ta journée à lire les romans. Mais moi, il faut que je m'agite, que
10 je me déplace, que je coure. . . . [*allant et venant*]
Je suis ici comme une lionne en cage, je voudrais égratigner quelqu'un, et je sais bien qui!

JENNY

Et moi aussi. C'est mademoiselle Claire. [*Elle se lève.*]

GABRIELLE

15 Voilà une compagnie que papa avait bien besoin de nous donner avant son départ! ²