

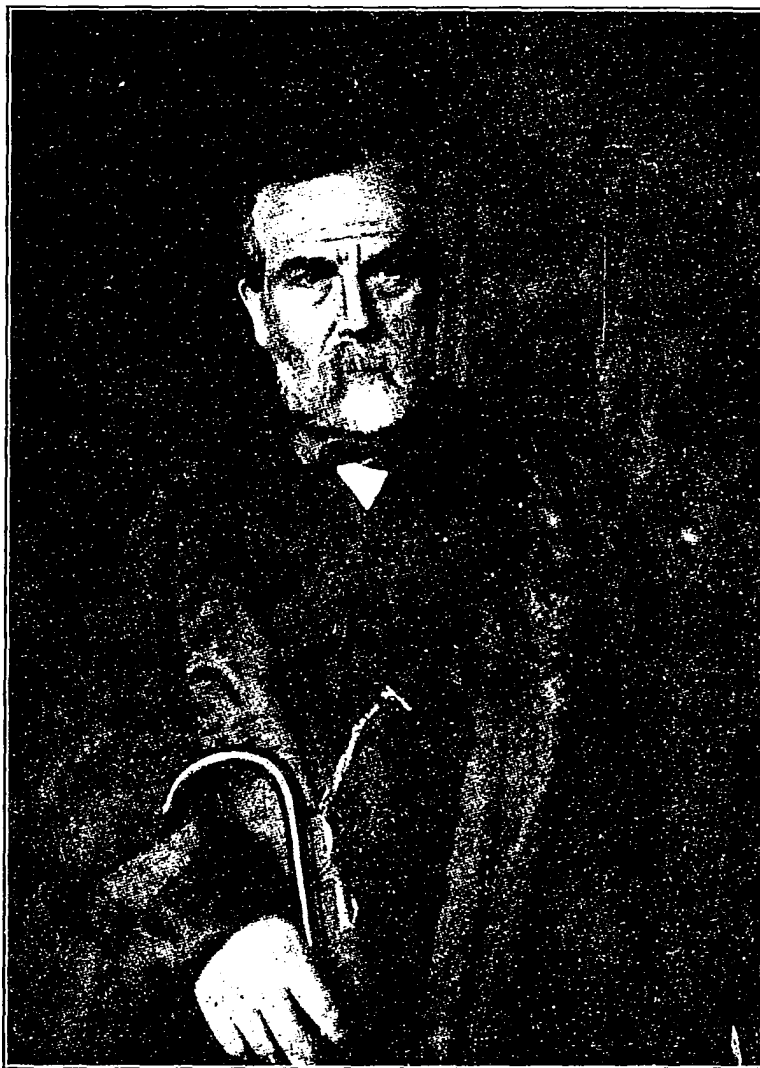
SACHA GUITRY'S GREATEST PLAY AND LUCIEN GUITRY'S GREATEST PART

"Pasteur" is a Dramatic Biography of the Great French Scientist

SACHA GUITRY has grown up. This enfant terrible of the French stage, this bad boy of the Boulevards, who has written a whole series of clever plays, piquant plays, perverse plays, but always original and popular plays, has now dared to write an austere drama on the subject of the great scientist, Pasteur. This play is not concerned with women. Guitry has taken a severe subject, a subject more than severe—scientific. He has abandoned his sly theatrical tricks; he has written a great dramatic biography. Instead of playing the leading rôle, as he usually does in his own plays, he has assigned the part of Pasteur to no less a personage than Sacha's distinguished father, the great actor Lucien Guitry.

Adolphe Brisson, dramatic critic of the *Temps*, greets with enthusiasm this new expression of the supple and versatile talent of Sacha Guitry. It was an event, says M. Brisson, especially significant in the present confusion of the theater. It is, in Paris, a time of artistic anarchy. Pornography reigns there and frivolity tinctures all the plays. "In dramatizing with respect the most unflinching of the great figures of France, in tracing, on the day following a monstrous struggle, a portrait of a great friend of humanity, he has comforted us and consoled us. Everything helped to make a triumph of this 'Pasteur.'"

"It is not a drama, it is a biography in dialog, a series of episodes borrowed from the history of the great man, which, taken together, create a portrait. . . . Sacha Guitry has attempted not to write anything that was not exact and rigorously controlled. He has used a very sure guide and drawn five images from that fine book of René Valéry-Radot. The first evokes Pasteur in 1870, on the eve of the Franco-



THE GREAT FATHER OF A GREAT SON

Here is Lucien Guitry's portrait of Pasteur in the biographical drama of that name written by his son, the versatile Sacha.

Prussian conflict. He is working among his students and is preparing a lesson, while from the street resounds the cries of war. Perhaps he seems here a trifle too calm. I doubt very much that in the face of such an imminent peril this ardent patriot could keep so much serenity."

Talk of war runs from lip to lip. Some of the young students slip out. Pasteur closes the door and, as the curtain descends, he begins his lecture: "Our greatest enemy, the microbe—"

The second act is placed in the Academy of Medicine, and shows the great scientist absolutely fearless in battle. The battle is the brilliant strategy of argument, the assault by logic, the advance by finesse of phrase and force of definition. Pasteur battles against the forces of jealousy and tries to capture the trenches of ignorance. In a scene which might be so technical as to be incomprehensible to the general public, Sacha Guitry has revealed his true mastery of the theater. He shows us Pasteur in the act of explaining his recent discoveries.

"He is speaking directly to the audience. His opponents, placed here and there in the audience, interrupt him aggressively. Thus the audience has the illusion not only of being present but of actually taking part in the scene. We become interested in the discussion taking place in our midst, in this discussion which would distract us if it took place on the stage. This is an ingenious application, most opportune and appropriate to the subject, of the method of M. Gemier."

The following scenes reproduce the memorable moments in the career of the savant—the homages, the compensations, the honors, which come to him from all sides. His simplicity remains unaltered. He scarcely leaves his laboratory—the paradise of his laborious life. One of the most impressive scenes, according to Henry Bidou, of

the *Journal des Débats*, is the inoculation by Pasteur of the little Alsatian boy with the anti-rabies vaccine, used for the first time now upon a human being. The problem confronting the great scientist, who weighs the value of his own life of sixty-three years against that of the nine-year-old gamin, is eloquently set forth by Sacha Guitry and acted splendidly by his father Lucien. Another interesting feature, according to a writer in *L'Illustration*, is the manner in which Pasteur is shown gradually growing gray-haired under the strain of his unceasing researches. "Pasteur," the same authority asserts, is a unique example of the collaboration in the history of the theater. This collaboration of father and son is without precedent, especially in the fact that it is the son who wrote the piece and the father who interprets it.

This unusual play strikes the editor of the *Villager* (Katonah, N. Y.) as a peculiarly French achievement.

"The biographical drama, unrolling itself as story rather than drama, tapestry rather than picture, we tend to think of as exclusively a Latin taste, the peculiar expression of a culture nourished on the legends of a Charlemagne or a Don Quixote; yet if Shakespeare had not formed the habit of his hand under the rich and easy flow of the historic play, who knows but *Coriolanus* would have been as correct and lifeless as anything Ben Jonson ever wrote? Nevertheless there is no arguing ourselves into the belief that a drama such as M. Guitry's could intrigue, as our French friends say, a Broadway audience; we here at home have not yet been required to give anything to a play save the price of our ticket, and it takes both knowledge of the past and pride in it to support plays which are set in the past. And as for dramatizing the life of a man who may have been known in the flesh to at least a third of the audience, none but France would attempt it. France has a clear eye,

and the heroes we acclaim only to-morrow she dares to recognize to-day."

A further remarkable coincidence in the production of "Pasteur" at the Vaudeville lies in the fact that the play marks both the greatest achievement of Sacha Guitry as a dramatist and of Lucien Guitry as an actor. At least, this is the opinion of the correspondent of the *Christian Science Monitor*, who notes:

"M. Sacha Guitry has succeeded once again, and this time he has acquired by his success the definite recognition of true art-lovers. He has ranked himself as far above the majority of dramatists of the day, by writing a noble play, the interest of which is sustained by no fictitious methods, such as pretty women, fine dresses or a sensational love intrigue. The cast of 'Pasteur' is exclusively masculine; there is not a word about love in the whole play. Having freed himself from all the frivolous and vain attributes of dramatic art which he has so often wielded with that ability which won him much success, M. Sacha Guitry has produced a work which is sober, direct, but withal intensely human and alive. . . .

"Sacha Guitry has tried to communicate to the public his admiration for Pasteur, both as a great and as a kind man. He has succeeded. Some may, however, criticize this last work of his as lacking in personality, which in his case is perhaps one of the most personal writers of the day. Yet in this play he seems to have been almost excessively scrupulous in effacing himself behind his hero and his chief interpreter, who is no other than M. Lucien Guitry, his father.

"Never, in all his career as an actor, has M. Lucien Guitry risen to such artistic comprehension as in his personification of Pasteur. He reveals an incomparable talent in this rôle, which he acts with an art which is sober, true and profoundly stirring. In the last act, especially, where Pasteur receives the homage of President Carnot, Lucien Guitry's representation is a masterpiece in expression."