

**IDOLS OF THE FRENCH  
STAGE; IN TWO  
VOLUMES; VOL. II**

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Idols of the French stage; in two volumes; Vol. II by H. Sutherland Edwards

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**H. SUTHERLAND EDWARDS**

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IDOLS OF THE FRENCH  
STAGE.

BY  
H. SUTHERLAND EDWARDS.

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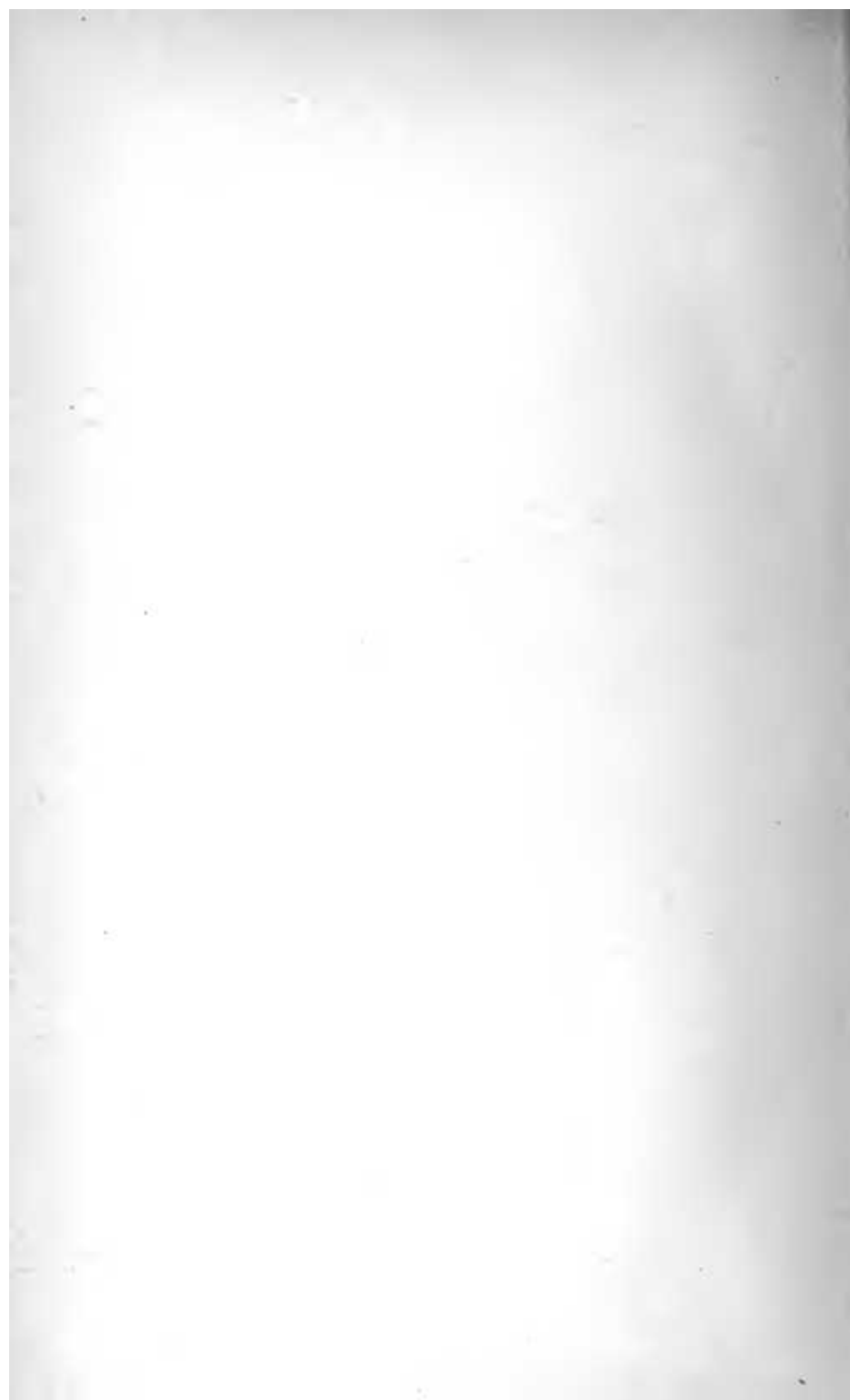
1889.

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## IDOLS OF THE FRENCH STAGE.



### MADELEINE GUIMARD.



MADELEINE GUIMARD, a dancer, who excited as much admiration, and scattered as many fortunes as any woman who ever appeared on the stage, was ugly, thin, of sallow complexion, and marked with the smallpox. Lord Mount-Edgcumbe, in his *Reminiscences*, tells us that when, at an advanced age, she appeared for the second time at the King's (now Her Majesty's) Theatre, she still possessed "grace and gentility," adding that she had never been distinguished by anything more substantial.



Although by no means the last celebrated dancer who appeared on the French stage, she was the last dancer of French origin who acquired celebrity in France. Camargo, one of the most famous of her predecessors, was Spanish by birth; Taglioni, one of the most illustrious of her followers, was Italian. The four members of the Vestris family, who, for about a century, directed the ballet in France, were also Italians (their original name being Vestri), and it would be easy to show that dancing as an art was, like gloves, fans, and other trifling but tasteful things, introduced into France from Italy. Pope Alexander VI. and the Borgias, gave magnificent ballets at a time when the ballet, as a dramatic form, was unknown in France.

According, however, to Castil-Blaze, who has investigated with equal care the history of the ballet and of the opera in France, traces of *divertissements*, more or less in dramatic style, may be found at so early a period as that of King Caribert of Paris. This sovereign had previously cared only for the pleasures of hunting. The chase was his sole amusement, his daily occupation; and, in the pursuit of wild beasts, he quite

neglected his Queen Ingoberge, who remained desolate at home, and enjoyed only an occasional glimpse of her royal husband. In order to keep him near her, Ingoberge had recourse to the charms of music, and instituted concerts at her palace, consisting of hymns, chants, and national songs, such being the only music of that period. Caribert, however, seems to have found these entertainments depressing, and preferred the bugle-call of his huntsmen.

In despair at the little success by which her endeavours had been attended, the Queen now thought that a result might be obtained through entertainments of a lighter and more engaging kind. Dancing and orchestral music she especially counted on; and the King, kindly renouncing his field sports for a few days, found the Queen's new idea so much to his taste that he soon gave up hunting and shooting altogether.

The spirit, however, of the hunter was still strong within the breast of Caribert. Only he had changed the objects of his pursuit. Two sisters, of ravishing beauty, dancing like sylphs, and singing like sirens, now occupied in his heart the

place formerly held by partridges and deer. Méroflède and Morecovère were the mediæval names of the young women who had so completely captivated their prince; and soon Caribert's wife, the too ingenious Ingoberge, saw that the remedy she had contrived was worse than the evil she had sought to avert. Laws in those days were loose, and kings powerful; and before long the singing and the dancing, the talent, the beauty, and the charm of the two sisters, had made such an impression on the happy King of Paris that he married them one after the other.

Towards the end of the fourteenth century, in the year 1393, a masquerade, but not a regular ballet, was given, in which Charles VI. had a narrow escape of his life. The Duchess de Berri had given the ballet in her palace at the Gobelins, at which all the members of her Court were present. Suddenly a party of masks dressed as savages appeared, when the Duke of Orleans, who probably knew already who they were, took up a torch in order to examine them at his ease, and set fire to the linen which, seamed with pitch, covered their corsets. The flames spread