

THE PASSING SHOW

When Homer wished for a tongue of iron and a throat of brass that he might tell the ships and the number of them that came from distant Argos, he should have saved time and eloquence and merely wished to be an advance man. Advance men can talk till the town clock stops, till the cows come home, till the grass on your grave grows green. And of all advance men I never met no one who could out-talk Mr. Lawrence Marston, the husband and playwright of Lillian Lewis. A good share of his conversation Mr. Marston devoted to Cleopatra, and to clearing Cleopatra's record, which latter was kind and considerate of him. Mr. Marston is very sure that Antony and Cleopatra were married. I think he even has theories as to who performed the ceremony and knows who were the bridesmaids and best men. "Of course she was married to Antony," quoth he. "Why, just think how that affair would have hurt her social standing in Egypt if she had not been!" Truly. Then Mr. Marston thinks that Cleopatra was married to Julius Caesar also, despite the fact that Julius was no longer young and had a wife in Rome. When humbly asked as to whether this much married queen were Pompey's wife also, Mr. Marston hedged and said he thought that little story about Pompey and the languid lily of the Nile was all gossip. And the numerous slave stories he is sure were all slander. He thinks, too, that Cleopatra was very domestic, that she used to butter Antony's toast and patch his tunic and darn the stockings of the numerous little Antonys.

I feel that I am not at all able to do justice to Lillian Lewis as the Egyptian Lotus bud. I shall see her in my dreams, that coy, kittenish matron, bunched up on a moth-eaten tiger stroking Mark Antony's double chin. I never saw a less regal figure and carriage. I have seen waiters in restaurants who were ten times more queenly. Her movements were exactly like those of the women who give you Turkish baths in Chicago. And ah! the giddy manner in which she buckled on his armor and the fulsome way in which she gurgled,

But, since my lord
Antony again, I will be Cleopatra."

I suppose that is what the learned Malaprop of the *Evening News* would call "cloyish abandon." And the queer little motions she made when she put that imaginary snake in her bosom, it was so suggestive of flesh. And her resounding faint when she saw a vision of *Mark Antony* in his cunning little pink wedding tunic being married to *Octavia*.

There was just good thing about Lillian Lewis' *Cleopatra*, and that was that, as hunger makes one dream of banquets, it recalled the only Cleopatra on earth worth the seeing, the royal Egyptian of Sarah Bernhardt. I could see it all again, that royal creature with the face of flame, every inch a queen and always a woman. The bewildering reality of that first scene with *Mark Antony* in which her caresses are few, fitful, unexpected, light as air and hot as fire. The regal queenliness with which she sends him from, her back to Rome, when she touches his sword with her lips and invokes the god of victory, and

one feels that in her veins there flows the blood of a hundred centuries of kings. And the restlessness of her when he is gone. How she beats the heated pillows with feverish impatience and strains her eyes out across the glowing desert and the sleepy Nile. The madness of her fury when the messenger delivers his news, how her face became famished and hungry and her eyes burned like a tiger's and her very flesh seemed to cleave to her bones. How, but bah! it is not possible to describe it. It was like the lightning which flashes and terrifies and is gone. Through it all she keeps doing little things that you do not expect to see on the stage, things that make you feel within yourself how she loves and how she hates. She gives you those moments of absolute reality of experience, of positive knowledge that are the test of all great art. The thing itself is in her, the absolute quality that all books write of, all songs sing of, all men dream of, that only one in hundreds ever knows or realizes. It leaps up and strikes you between the eyes, makes you hold your breath and tremble. And this reminds me of what Plutarch says, that Cleopatra's chiefest charm was not in her beautiful face, nor her keen wit, nor her wealth of wisdom, but "in the immensity of what she had to give," in her versatility, her intensity, her sensitiveness to every emotion, her whole luxuriant personality.

I wish it had been Sardou's Cleopatra that Miss Lewis played, for, compared to Shakespeare's it is cheap and tawdry, it has less beauty to mar, less dignity to lose. There have been innumerable attempts to dramatize that greatest love story of the ages. They began with Virgil, who tried to do it in that dramatic fourth book of the *Eneid* in the person of the *infelix Dido*. Since then poets and dramatists and novelists galore have struggled with it. But among them all the great William is the only man who has made a possible character of the Egyptian queen. Some wise men say, indeed, that he had a living model for it, and that his Cleopatra "with Phœbus' armorous pinches black and wrinkled deep in time" was none other than the Dark Lady of the Sonnets. The more one reads the Sonnets the more probable that seems, and yet I think he was great enough to have done it without a model. He had no model for Caesar or Brutus or Antony and certainly none for Juliet. His mind worked independently of any romances or tragedies in his own life. It, in itself, had loved all loves, suffered all sorrow, known all tragedies. I sometimes think that if there is anything in the theory of re-incarnation he must have been them all, Troilus, Antony, Romeo, Hamlet. No personal experience in fog-clouded England, no love in dusky Elizabethian London could have brought to him the sun and languor of the south, the beauty and luxury and abundant life of the lotus land. It was amusing even while it was painful to see the childish way in which they played with his great purposes and mangled his great art the other night. "Father, forgive them, for they knew not what they did." The gleeful, irresponsible way in which they went through that first scene where Antony is down in Egypt kissing away kingdoms and provinces. But Cleopatra was one woman of the ages, one unique product of the centuries, she had more than mortal resources and the love she inspired was almost more than mortal.

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No ordinary woman could be expected to enact it. As Antony said, if she would set a limit to the love she made men feel she "must needs find out new heaven, new earth." Well, she found them. She was more than a woman, she was a realization of things dreamed. As that shrewd philosopher, Enobarbus, said to Antony when a repentent mood was on him,
"O, sir, you had them left unseen
A wonderful piece of work,
Which not to have seen blest withal
Would have discredited your travel"
To know Cleopatra was then a sort of finishing touch to a great man's education. If a man was to be traveled and experienced he must see her, as today, he must see the pyramids. All the greatest Romans took post graduate work in Egypt.

The finest drinking scene in literature was cut out the other night, while a dozen trivial scenes were left in. The talk about the serpents of Egypt which takes place between *Lepidus* and *Antony* Miss Lewis and her versatile

husband saw fit to have spoken by *Lepidus* and *Enobarbus*. Now the only purpose of that scene is to recall to *Antony* Egypt and that one queen of serpents, recall them until he drinks and drinks again, till his foot steps are unsteady and he finally goes out flushed and reeling, leaning on the steady arm of *Caesar*, the beginning to the end. They failed utterly to bring out the meaning of that scene where the fight is declared by sea, where the gods have first mad he whom they would destroy and *Antony* cries "By sea, by sea!"
I wonder if any other poet could have given to *Antony* the dignity and majesty that *Shakespeare* gives him in defeat. After *Actium*, when *Antony* meets the queen he says,
"O whither hast thou led me, Egypt?
Thy full supremacy thou knewest,
And that thy beck might from the bidding of the Gods
Command me."
It is said with a simplicity and pathos that dignify even its weakness. And O, the

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