

# The Counterparts of History's Heroines



Mrs. Langtry as Marie Antoinette.



Portrait, from Life, of Marie Antoinette, by Mme. Le Brun.



A Prominent American Actress as Queen Elizabeth.



Queen Elizabeth from the Massard Engraving of the Versailles Portrait.



Nell Gwynn as Seen on the American Stage.



Nell Gwynn from the Historical Drawing by Waddesforde.



A Modern Stage Conception of Joan of Arc.



Joan of Arc before Her Judges, Depicted by Boutet de Monvel.

## Modern Conception of the World's Famous Women

QUEEN MARIE ANTOINETTE was sitting for Madame Lebrun, the famous painter. "Your majesty," declared the painter, "it is well. You have assumed the character of the time. You have adorned yourself as the queen posterity shall honor and admire. Art shall immortalize you as you are."

More than a century after her death an actress attempted to resurrect the queen of France, to portray her as she had appeared to her court and subjects. How she succeeded in the counterfeits may be seen by

a comparison of the queen as shown in Lebrun's painting with Mrs. Langtry in stage costume.

Many other heroines of history have been impersonated on the stage within recent years; it has become the fashion to reenact the romances and tragedies of those whose figures become magnified with the passing of time.

But can women of today assume with fidelity the roles of famous ones who lived in the long-gone past? Is not there always the temptation to idealize, to tamper with the original picture?

It is interesting to see.

features small; her eyes were large and hard; her chin was sharp and determined.

Had Elizabeth possessed the American actress' face she might have been more popular in her day. Miss O'Neill presented a Queen Elizabeth with a full, plump, rosy face—a queen with soft blue eyes, a broad, liberal chin, a generous mouth. Doubtless Miss O'Neill did not achieve the waist line of the historic heroine, for Elizabeth's corsets were said to be wonders. With her hair dressed high, in a mountainous peak surmounted by a jeweled crown, a wide, stiff, ruffled collar about her neck, her waist laced dangerously. Queen Elizabeth must have been a unique figure.

Several characters stand out in history as does the figure of Joan of Arc. In both Marie Antoinette and Queen Elizabeth the human qualities were extremely strong; these qualities were at once their strength and their weakness. But in the little maiden from Domremy it is more the spiritual that transfigured her and made her the marvel of history. Therefore the character of Joan of necessity must be difficult to portray.

Various actresses have tried to portray her, among them Julia Marlowe and Amelia Bingham. Miss Marlowe was the Joan of Domremy, the soft and lovely peasant girl. Miss Bingham essayed to portray the Joan of battle, the mili-

tant leader of the forces of France. It might be invidious to say that Miss Bingham was "too big." Truth to tell, critics remarked her Joan in armor looked more like Minerva sprung from the forehead of Jove than the slight but brave maiden of Orleans.

Basing his conception on historical descriptions of Joan of Arc, De Monvel, a modern painter, drew a picture of the maiden as she stood accused before her judges. Here we see her as historians have described her—a small, fife-limbed, fine-featured, delicate woman; a woman dressed as a peasant boy, her hair cut short about her shoulders. This is the Joan of history. On the stage she is generally shown in a suit of armor, brand new; a helmet and a skirt embroidered with the fleur de lis of France—a big, vigorous Joan, with a full, rosy face and long, flowing hair.

Another favorite heroine of history with modern actresses is that queen actress of her day, gay Nell Gwyn, whom Charles II loved until his death. She was gay; she always laughed; her gift of repartee was so keen that people seldom ventured to say a displeasing thing to her. Sometimes, historians tell us, she swore.

When Henrietta Crossman took the part of Nell critics praised her performances highly. Miss Crossman laughed and danced, and to a

remarkable degree imitated the winsomeness of Nell. Did she laugh as Nell laughed? Did she dance as Nell danced? Was she as fair as Nell?

Nell Gwyn was small and slight—so small, so slight, so merry that to play a serious role was impossible. It was her custom, between acts, or when her dance was over, to leap from the stage and make merry in the boxes.

According to the painter, Nell Gwyn possessed a full face, soft eyes, with a suggestion of merriment even in repose. Her hair was soft and curling. The modern actress who so well counterfeited the favorite of Charles possesses a more angular face, sharper, more brilliant but less merry eyes.

Leaping over the pages of history, many actresses have selected ancient queens and heroines for their roles. Cleopatra, Judith, the Queen of Sheba, Delilah, Sappho, Electra have appeared on the modern stage. Sara Bernhardt essayed many historic roles. As the Queen of the Nile she threw into the character all her passion and mystic temperament.

### SHAW'S IDEA OF CLEOPATRA

Miss Gertrude Elliot gives us a new interpretation of the queen of Egypt. It is Cleopatra as Bernard Shaw imagines her—and most critics agree that Shaw in his conceptions is wrong. Miss Elliot, however, in appearance made an ideal Cleopatra. Her features are fine, her eyes large and dark, her eyebrows heavy—purely Egyptian, one might say. As the queen who brought the riches of Sheba to Solomon, Edith Walker won praise.

Possibly one of the most consummate delineations of an historical heroine was Madame Modjeska's presentation of Mary Stuart. Modjeska impersonated the high-bred, melancholy, lovable queen with such skill that audiences felt that the victim of Queen Elizabeth lived again—only possessing a voice such as Mary never boasted.

Some one has said that historical characters appeal to one more strongly than any born of pure imagination. It is interesting to observe, therefore, how closely art can counterfeit heroines long dead.

TAKE Mrs. Langtry as Marie Antoinette, who was considered one of the loveliest women of her time. So, too, the "Jersey Lily," as she was known in the days when King Edward of England, then prince of Wales, admired her more than any other woman, was heralded as the supreme beauty of her day.

First of all, there was a difference between the temperament of the two beauties. Antoinette was vivacious and capricious; the Langtry resembled the Lily, austere white and reposed.

Her face, it is observed in the picture, is not so fine, so mignonette as that of the French queen's. Her dress lacks the inimitable touch which made Queen Marie conspicuous in the courts. There was always something recherche in the French queen's dress; Mrs. Langtry, in the first point, fails to carry conviction.