

Cleopatra Gets the Benefit of the Doubt

By JULIUS MORITZEN.

AN outstanding point in Georg Brandes's "Cajus Julius Caesar" is the famous Danish critic's wonderful picture of the women of that day. The doors of the Roman household are flung wide open, and with that penetrative analytical skill which to-day marks Brandes as almost alone in his particular field he searches out the nooks and corners and brings into the light new knowledge of the men and women of Rome and the lands that Julius Caesar laid captive. The panorama that he unfolds furnishes an aggregation of lovely femininity, side by side of which we find cruelty, treacherousness, infidelity, such as this age cannot conceive.

It is perhaps true that other writers have concerned themselves with Roman society under Julius Caesar. But it is not given to every but and out historian to invest his work with such picturesqueness as Brandes has succeeded in throwing around the characters after the lapse of more than nineteen centuries. Herein lies his fascination as a writer of historical events. Caesar's relations with Cleopatra alone make a chapter of unsurpassed virility.

"During the later years of his life," says Brandes, "Cleopatra meant to him what Aspasias was to Pericles: an object for his love and a scandal in the eyes of the envious."

Divorce Evil of the Day.

Of the many women whose names are associated with Caesar's only very few present a clear cut picture, declares Brandes. In comparison with the men of the time little is known about the women. The historians of antiquity were not interested in the sentimental side of existence. And yet the Danish critic found plenty of material for his molding. Take the following, for instance: "While it was said that during a full 500 years no divorce had taken place in Rome, in the period that now occupies us a whim, a quarrel, a love affair, in particular political interests, sufficed to dissolve the marriage pact. The inclination to look on marriage as merely formal grew constantly. They tell of a lady who in the early years of the empire had eight husbands in the course of five years. The disposition to make changes quickly is evidenced by the actions of another lady who brought it up to twenty-three marriages, and her twenty-third husband had in her his twenty-first wife.

"In former years the head of the family possessed unlimited power over every member, not only over the slaves but what we may term as all belonging to the household. Life and death were in his hand. The husband ruled absolutely over his wife's person and property.

"But that time was now long past. Woman had obtained rights and had freed first her person and then her property from the domination of her husband. Right of inheritance was now hers, so that she could dispose at will over property left her. She had even succeeded in having set aside those laws that in former times were decreed against luxury in dress and expensive jewels.

"Jestingly, the Roman women of Caesar's time were referred to as the 'rulers of the masters of the world.' Where they possessed fortunes they kept their money affairs in good order, had as managers lawyers, who, if necessary, instituted lawsuits on their account. Should the husband happen to get in money difficulties it was no rare thing for him to borrow of his better half, who made him pay high interest. Furthermore, it was not an exceptional thing for the handsome lawyer to become the lady's best friend.

"In the circus the women sat among the men. The same was the case in the theaters, but here they liked to occupy the upper rows where they could be best observed. They went there perhaps more for the purpose to be seen than themselves see. There they were sitting in their handsomest costumes with their most attractive coiffure. They arrived either on foot or were carried there in their sedan chairs. We find from a somewhat later period Ovid's description of the kind of flirtation that could take place on such an occasion.

The Play and Poetry.

The Roman women, in contrast to those of Greece, at the performance of some play could complacently witness some rather bold comedies. The clever, intellectual among these ladies sometimes gathered around them an entire court of admirers who followed them about. Now and then they would compose verses, but these were dilettantish. Neither a Sappho nor a Corinna sprang from Roman soil as in the case of Hellas."

Georg Brandes Finds That She Was the Victim of Envious Tongues and That Apparently She Was a Woman of Great Merit

The relations of Caesar to his wives, Cornelia, Pompeia and Calpurnia, and also Cleopatra, as well as those other women who entered into his life, naturally leads us to expect that here would be a field where Brandes would give special evidence of his skill as a writer of great historical happenings. Nor does the reader suffer any disappointment on that score. Roman society, luxurious and corrupt, the good and the bad in that age of stirring conquest Brandes visualizes so that it appears as if that company of actors on the stage of life stood before us in the flesh.

Brandes candidly admits that it is extremely difficult to know the real truth with regard to Caesar's relationship to the women mentioned by the writers of antiquity. It is a domain where the loosest gossip assumes gigantic proportions when it concerns an individual whose name constantly occurs and recurs in the present and the past.

"Of great weight, however, are two facts," asserts Brandes. "The first is that Suetonius was not a contemporary but, in the capacity of private secretary to Hadrian and rummaging through the libraries, published his imperial biographies around 120, according to our time of reckoning. The contemporary who is the richest source for information is Cicero, who, in spite of all his flattery, constantly proved hostile to Caesar.

"The second important fact is that all judgment about Caesar that has reached us from the past necessarily has had to pass through the period of Augustus and during this passage received impressions of a very peculiar kind.

"Augustus owed everything to Caesar, but we understand human nature very little if we think that it was a necessity or a pleasure for Augustus to hear Caesar praised. In that respect he was totally different from Napoleon III, who, notwithstanding his many shortcomings, lived and breathed in the remembrance of Napoleon I., and at no time expressed the least doubt of the greatness of the founder of the dynasty."

Cleopatra and Eunoe.

Among the many women who entered into Caesar's life two queens occupy unique positions. It is true that almost nothing is known about one of these, Eunoe of Mauritania. "But about the other one," comments Brandes, "we know a great deal, especially since among the many women of Caesar's acquaintance she alone captivated him to such a degree that she influenced his political program; that for her sake he committed the only consequential political-strategic folly in his whole life; his long stay in Egypt which came to cost him so dearly. On her account he challenged at last, unwisely, the public opinion of Rome; something that contributed toward the feeding of the last conspiracy against him.

"Cleopatra was a fateful element in Caesar's life. Her father, Ptolemy Auletes, did not enjoy a good reputation. Cicero says about him in his second speech, 'De lege agraria' that neither through his descent or by his mode of thinking did he carry the royal stamp. But Cicero fails to add how much Rome contributed toward the debasement of this monarch. It is simply fabulous how the Romans utilized his misfortunes through extortions, and thereby compelled him to practice extortion on his own people.

"In this parent Cleopatra saw no worthy prototype, and the events experienced by her in her childhood could only teach her to be on her guard and make the best possible use of her abilities. The events of that time did not inspire her with confidence in human kind or give her any illusions as to what life in general could promise her. She was the issue of a marriage between brother and sister, such as was customary in the case of the Egyptian-Macedonian royal house. Her mother was also called Cleopatra. Following the execution of the sister, Berenike, the succession was so arranged in her father's will that Cleopatra as the oldest of the surviving children should marry the oldest of her two brothers, both of whom were named Ptolemy, and that after her father's death she should ascend the throne together with her brother and husband.

Married Young Brother.

"Cleopatra was 11 years old when her father fled to Rome, 14 when he was brought back and triumphed over her older sister. She was 17 years old when she became queen and was married to her nine-year-old brother.

"Appian relates that Marcus Antonius, who years later should occupy so big a place in her history, was struck with her beauty when as general of Gabinus's cavalry for the first time he saw the fourteen-year-old princess. Altogether she greatly impressed every Roman with whom she came in contact. When the oldest son of Pompeius and Mucia, Cneius Pompeius, in the year 49, came to Alexandria to hasten the war preparations of his father against Caesar, Cleopatra is said to have won him completely."

The reign of the seventeen-year-old queen and nine-year-old king was short. The leading men of the country took the boy's part, since it was much easier to control him than

Cleopatra, and, says Brandes, "they finally accused her of attempting to expel her brother from the throne. Organizing a military and plebeian rebellion against her, they succeeded in having her driven from the capital.

"But she by no means gave up her cause, but gathered an army near the border between Egypt and Arabia which was ready to meet the forces of her brother, equipped by his guardian and Prime Minister Pothinos, and commanded by the daring and dangerous Egyptian general, Achilles. The encounter between the two armies was prevented because great events in the Roman Empire gave all something else to think about."

The Arrival of Caesar.

It is necessary to touch only briefly on Caesar's arrival before Alexandria in its bearing on the meeting with Cleopatra which subsequently proved so fatal to his fortunes. After his defeat at Farsalos, Pompeius fled to Egypt, where, as the former protector and friend of Ptolemy Auletes, he expected to get a good reception; perhaps even hoped to obtain military aid to continue his warfare against Caesar. Egypt, out of consideration for her own security, had heretofore remained neutral during the civil war. After due consideration the Egyptian Government concluded it would be best to have Pompeius killed on his arrival.

"A few days after the murder Caesar's fleet cast anchor before Alexandria," Brandes writes. "While yet on board he received the head of Pompeius and his signet ring. He had the head buried, and erected over it a small temple consecrated to Nemesis. The signet ring he sent to Rome in witness of his opponent's death and his own supremacy.

"But Caesar did not leave Alexandria when he learned of Pompeius's death. He had not come to Egypt merely for the purpose of pursuing a beaten enemy."

Brandes then enumerates a number of reasons for Caesar's stay, among them his need for money, his desire to maintain his political prestige; this and much more he makes mention of in his book about the civil war. But there is one reason that he does not speak of, his wish to make the acquaintance of Cleopatra, of whose cleverness and beauty rumor had told him a great deal. And there is ground for the belief that some time before she had sent a messenger to him to enlist his aid.

Summoned by Caesar.

"On the advice of Pothinos the young king went to see Caesar, but left his forces at Pelusium, under the command of Achilles," Brandes continues. "But Pothinos only sent word to Cleopatra that Caesar commanded her to send home her troops. Cunningly he withheld the further command that she should come to Caesar in person. Cleopatra stayed where she was; she only obeyed the order she received. . . . Surprised that she remained away, Caesar sent her a direct message. Cleopatra then learned that once before he had demanded her presence and that Pothinos had taken care that she should not know of it.

"Cleopatra realized fully that since the attempt to prevent her meeting with Caesar had proved unsuccessful her enemies would not hesitate to use violence to gain their end. She likewise felt that her life was a stake should she show herself openly in Alexandria, where sales were all around, and whose task it would be to make known her coming. Should she go to the city overland the outposts of the Egyptian army would take her prisoner. She therefore went aboard a small boat near Pelusium, disguised and accompanied by a single friend, the Sicilian Apollodoros.

Carried in a Bag.

"Late that evening she was unnoticed—passing among the ships that filled the harbor—the stairway leading to the winter palace occupied by Caesar. Her companion placed her in one of the many colored bags that travelers at that time carried for the purpose of their bed covering and rugs. The bag was laced together with straps, and, putting the load on his back,



GEORG BRANDES

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