

AN INTIMATE STUDY OF Lillian Russell THE WOMAN



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BY IDAH McGLONE GIBSON.

It is probable that Lillian Russell is known by face and fame to more men, women, and children than any other woman in the United States today. She has been on the stage thirty years, and during that time has had more stories told and written of her than any other American actress. Indeed, with the exception of former President Roosevelt, possibly no other individual, either man or woman, has occupied so large a space in the newspapers. In the largest compilation in this country of playbills, clippings, autograph letters, and photographs about the people of the stage, Lillian Russell's name, like that of Abu Ben Adhem in the poem, "leads all the rest."

Lillian Russell unquestionably is the beauty of this age. For thirty years she has been the standard to which all other beautiful women have been compared, and for thirty years almost every week some one has been hailed as the second Lillian Russell—thousands of these "seconds" have dropped out of sight, but "The American beauty" has bloomed to greater perfection as the years rolled on.

It is impossible for Miss Russell to go into public places often. She is so well known from her pictures that she is always subjected to the comment and inquisitive gaze of every one about her. This was illustrated recently at a clubhouse in Chicago, where Miss Russell was dining with some friends. She sat at a table by one of the windows looking toward the lake, and during the dinner nine-tenths of the people who were there made an excuse to walk around the veranda to gaze at her. When she left the table she was obliged to walk between two solid ranks of curious women, who stood about her motor until she drove away. Every woman wanted to see Miss Russell at close range and decide for herself if she is as beautiful as reported.

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Beauty in Way a Handicap.

Every one who knows Lillian Russell intimately is her friend and admirer, and any one of her intimates will tell you that in some ways her beauty has been a handicap to her as a singer and an actress, because for some peculiar reason no one will give a beautiful woman credit for brains and Miss Russell's mind compares favorably with her pulchritude.

It is probable that her girlish loveliness secured her a hearing with Tony Pastor when she ran away from her mother's apartment and applied for a place on the bills at his music hall; her melodious voice, however, made her immediately one of its best drawing cards.

The unique combination of superlative beauty, splendid voice, enthusiasm, and freshness of youth, artistic temperament, and a large bump of common sense is responsible for Lillian Russell's success; the

beauty for which she is famous never would have compensated it alone.

Her professional career reads like a fairy tale. For twenty years she was the idol of the comic opera world when there was real comic opera upon the American stage, and all this time the people who write stories of the stage were predicting that soon she would be superseded by some other prima donna. In 1896 an enthusiastic critic in the middle west said of her when she appeared in his town as "The American Beauty": "Can any one solve the charm of Lillian? What is there about this fascinating woman who holds the audience as it were in a spell? Beautiful, yes; Father Time himself seems to have fallen a victim to her seductive charms. He has passed her by, nor even touched ever so lightly those bewitching lips that can smile a man to heaven or perdition; those dimples that grow more enticing as the years go round; those languorous eyes with their unfathomable velvet depths that have an added luster—forsooth, she is in every way more deliciously charming than ever."

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Throne Her for the Occupying.

And in 1897 Nym Crydale, the then caustic New York dramatic writer, wrote: "Few women have received the popular worship in the same degree as Lillian Russell. It can hardly be said that she erected an ivory throne of her own and occupied it; she found it erected at her professional birth and discovered with placid surprise that she was seated on it. 'Stay there and permit us to look at you,' was what the mob shouted at her. Lillian Russell, in her early career was as nearly ideal as nature could make her. To the average eye she was unadulterated loveliness. It was the abeyant girliness, the blossomy promise of a summer of womanhood. She did not do anything; she just was, with a filling prophecy of function. Her face was the most valuable trade mark in the business."

Sounds like a requiem, does it not? Well, Miss Russell was not ready to have the flowers of friends sent to her professional obsequies just then, and in 1898 the New York Sun, which had contained her first notice, from which Miss Russell declares that she

first realized she perhaps had more than her share of good looks, said: "Lillian Russell certainly is a radiant creature. She is the most beautiful woman known to the stage of this or any other country. She is the one woman who does not rail at Mother Age and Father Time; she defies both, and does it with a laugh on her pretty lips. She refuses to grow old, and as a result keeps her hold on the public's fickle heart. For more than twenty years she has been a New York favorite, and promises to be a favorite for the next twenty years."

When she sang in the winter garden at Berlin she was accorded an ovation. Then came the wonderful engagement at Weber & Fields', during which it was quite as necessary for the out-of-town guest to see Lillian Russell at "the little music hall" as to see Grant's tomb or the Metropolitan museum.

Ability as Actress Stands the Test.

At the end of the engagement at Weber & Fields' Miss Russell's voice showed the strain of constant singing in the smoke-filled atmosphere of the music hall. It was thought that this woman, of whom every one said she held her place upon the stage because of her beauty, showed that she could act comedy with a nerve and humorous touch, which brought her admiration in spoils to see Lady Teazle. Since then she has been a money-making star in straight comedy all over the country. This, of course, is well known to any one who is at all interested in the annals of the theater and makes her the best known woman in America today.

There is another side of Lillian Russell, however, which is not known except to her most intimate friends. In these days when every possible personal story is pounced upon by the press agent and the theatrical interviewer to make a newspaper reader's holiday, of course the woman who is most written about has the most lied told about her. Most likely if all the people who "have shook the hand that shook the hand of Sullivan" were stood up beside those who claim to know Lillian Russell intimately, and, in proof, relate some episode in which they and the actress figured, the Russell contingent would outnumber the others ten to one.

During the last of Miss Russell's engagement at Weber & Fields' I used to drop in at her dressing room often, and sometimes I would stand in the foyer as the people went out and listen to their comments upon the show and the players. One evening I was



PHOTO BY MATZEN

LILLIAN RUSSELL'S YOUTH

attracted to a great big chap who was shouldering his way through the crowd. He was a typical Third Avenue bruiser and masher—good looking in purely animal way. Hanging on his arm was a little mouse-like woman, wizened and colorless, and as she came near me I heard her say in rather a wistful voice, "Miss Russell is beautiful."

There was an assenting grunt from the man at her side. Then her eyes brightened as she snuggled up a little close and chirped, "And to think you gave her up for me."

Some Men Just Can't Help It.

"I am sorry I was late, dear," said a man near me in the hotel corridor, as he met a young woman who evidently had been waiting for him long. "I have been riding with Miss Russell. I did not want to, but just could not get out of it. You know that I would rather be with—" and they trailed out of my hearing. I really had to smile, for the man had just come down in the elevator with Miss Russell and myself.

I presume there are more doddering old men who claim to have been Miss Russell's first sweetheart "when we were boys and girls together" than there are members at the "I Knew Her When club."

Women have told me that they know Lillian Russell intimately, that she is at least 60 years old, has been married from six to eight times, and is a grandmother—all of which is absolutely untrue. To settle the question of Miss Russell's marriages here and now, one might say that her first husband was John Brahm, her second and the father of her only child, Dorothy, was Edward Solomon; her third, with whom she lived only a short time, was John Chatterton, known to the stage as Sig. Perugini.

I do not think there is any woman who cares less for the speech of people than Lillian Russell. She has often said, "What any one says of me cannot make me any different than I am. They cannot add one day to my age, nor give nor take away an extra husband. It is not Lillian Russell about whom they

are talking, and of whom they know nothing, but of the woman they think is Lillian Russell."

One evening in New York I sat behind a rather convivial theater party. Beside me was a well set up elderly man, with clear, fresh complexion and white hair. As Miss Russell came on the stage to sing one of the men in the party in front of us made some flippant remark about the actress' supposedly Bohemian habits. The comment was so loud that we could not help hearing it, and when he had finished the gentleman who sat beside me bent forward and touched the speaker on the shoulder.

Beauty Itself Confutes Slander.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I would like to tell you that everything you have said about Miss Russell is untrue. Any woman who can show such elevated beauty, such splendid health, clear voice, bright eyes, and other evidences of a sane normal life confutes such comment as yours the moment you look at her." Gentlemen and William Muldoon, whose bushiness, as you know, is that of patching up the physiques of broken down and worn out humanity. That woman before you is the best example of the highest type of physical American womanhood I have ever seen; she must have lived and been living according to the laws of health. I do not know Miss Russell and have never spoken to her, but I cannot allow these untruths of nature and natural laws to go unanswered."

Miss Russell is a great devotee of the pagan philosopher, Marcus Aurelius, and she puts his teachings into every day of her life. No one is more charitable than she to the members of her own profession. While in Chicago the last time she declined a business engagement that might have meant much to her to go to one of the hospitals where a sick friend was lying. "I would not disappoint one who was sick for anything, and I told him I would go to see him this afternoon," she said. Within an hour afterward she gave her manager a check for \$30 to send to a negro servant who had been in her family and who now was in want.

These incidents are only a few of those which Lillian Russell's friends tell whenever her name is mentioned. She is a woman of big brain and broad charity. I never have heard her say an unkind thing of any one in the many years I have known her; I never have known her to turn down a real appeal for help; I never have known her to attempt anything that she did not carry forward with success, because she works hard at anything she undertakes. She will be able to tell a great many interesting things to women in regard to conserving beauty, as she is a womanly woman as well as the most beautiful woman I ever have known.



ONLY ONE OF THE FAVORITE OLD TIME PICTURES



LILLIAN RUSSELL AT 18



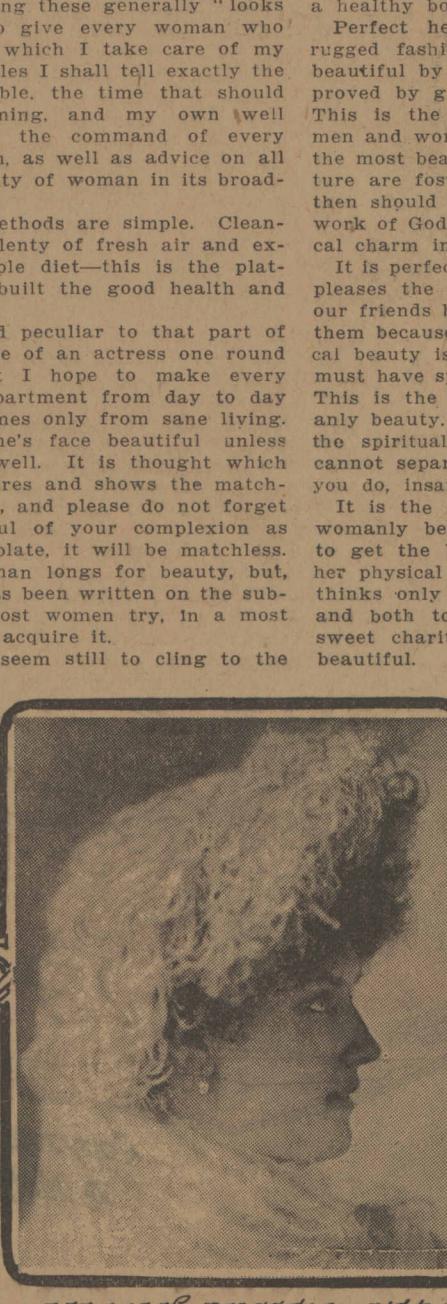
LILLIAN RUSSELL AT 19



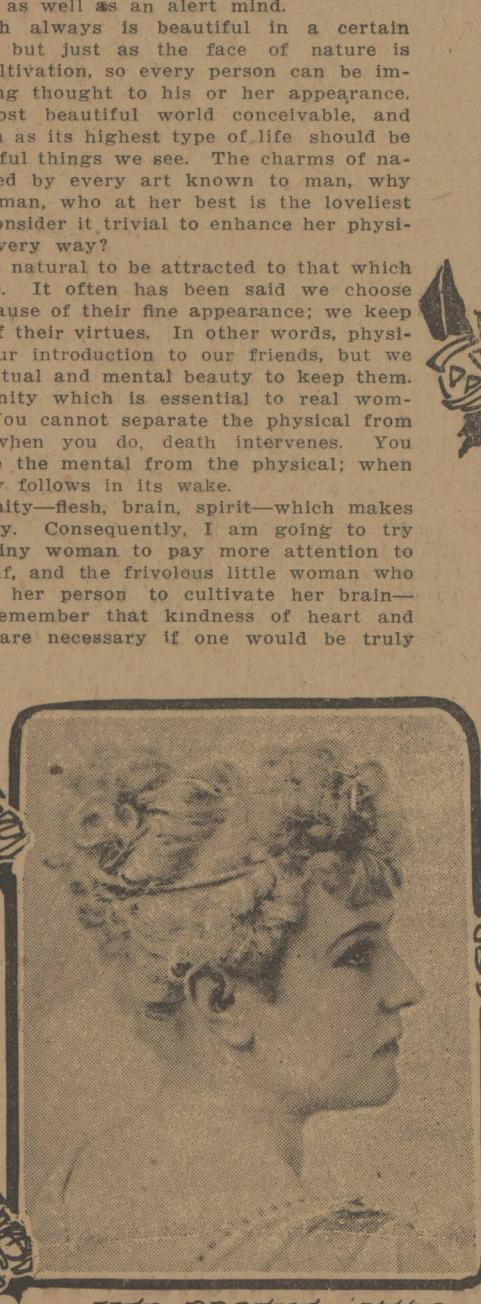
LILLIAN RUSSELL AT 20



LILLIAN RUSSELL AT 22



LILLIAN RUSSELL AT 24



HIS PROFILE AT 28



LILLIAN RUSSELL AT 30