

DISAPPEARANCE OF RECALLS THEFT OF

Leonardo's Painting Is Regarded as the Finest in the World

By JAMES A. EDGERTON.

THE disappearance of the famous "Mona Lisa" of Leonardo da Vinci from the Louvre, at Paris, is the latest and greatest wonder in the world of art. This great painting, also known as "La Gioconda," has been pronounced by many the finest in the world. It certainly stands in a list of the world's half dozen greatest paintings and in popular regard perhaps ranks second only to the "Sistine Madonna" by Raphael. Some think "The Last Supper," also by Da Vinci, greater than "Mona Lisa," but this sort of comparison is fruitless, as the two paintings are quite different in subject and treatment. Walter Pater pronounced "La Gioconda" as "in the truest sense Leonardo's masterpiece."

The painting is a portrait of Madonna Lisa del Giocondo, third wife of Francesco del Giocondo of Florence, both of whom would have been forgotten centuries ago but for the genius of Leonardo. It is said that the painter worked at this masterpiece four years and then pronounced it unfinished. To keep the haunting smile on the subject's face he had music and jesters in the studio. As we now know it the painting has lost some of the exquisite lines and hues it had on leaving Da Vinci's hand, since it has faded through the centuries and has been retouched. Yet even in this imperfect state it has charmed the world.

Leonardo da Vinci was born in 1452, the natural son of a Florentine notary and a peasant woman. He was celebrated not only as a painter, but as a sculptor, architect, engineer and scientist. He engaged in various engineering and architectural works, divided his time between Milan, Venice and Florence and toward the end of his life was attached to the court of the king of France, where he died. Outside of his many paintings he did much in sculpture, little of which survives. He also accomplished many works in the line of engineering and architecture, these being his chief vocations. In science he was in advance of his age, being especially versed in anatomy. As an artist he was a contemporary—and in some senses a competitor—of Michelangelo and a teacher of Raphael, Fra Bartolommeo and others almost as illustrious. His schools at Milan, Florence and elsewhere were the beginning of a new era in Italian art. He was great not only as a producer, but as an inspirer of others. By many he is regarded as the most universal genius of the renaissance period.

In person Leonardo was handsome, with a fine face, great physical strength and charm of manner. Among his other accomplishments he was a musician. His "Mona Lisa" was painted about 1505, when he was more than fifty years old. It was bought by the king of France and has since been the property of the French nation and in more recent years the pride and the greatest ornament of the Louvre, where it has been admired by millions from generation to generation.

Every one is familiar with the painting or with prints of it. Perhaps more copies, photographs, engravings and other reproductions have been made of this than of any other painting in the world. One of the proofs of its quality is that the artistic and popular verdict on it agree. Usually the common herd is enraptured with things that the art critics pronounce daubs, and the art critics are enchanted with some impressionistic thing that is a blank to the man on the street. But "Mona Lisa" is so supremely great that it levels all ranks and compels praise from artist and layman alike.

The face, with its dewy eyes and faint smile, contains everything that charms us in womanhood. It is spiritual, yet has touches of the "earthly," alluring and still elevated and sweet. The charm is one that eludes analysis, as is the case with all that is finest not only in painting, music and poetry, but in nature. The effect is wonderfully heightened by an almost weird background of rocks and streams. This and the sphinxlike expression of the face give a mystical element to the picture that has perhaps proved its greatest charm. But I am not enough of a highbrow in art to trust myself to describe it and reproduce the estimate of Walter Pater in one of the finest pieces of writing in English literature.

"We all know," he says, "the face and hands of the figure, set in its marble chair in that circle of fantastic rocks, as in some faint light under sea. Perhaps of all ancient pictures time has chilled it least."

He then goes on to describe the painting as a creation of the artist's brain and soul rather than a portrait of a flesh and blood person. Its infinite appeal is greater than could have come from any physical likeness, but rather arises from an indefinable something not subject to decay, something carrying a breath from the eternal country. To return to Pater:

"The presence that thus rises so strangely beside the waters is expressive of what in the ways of a thousand years men had come to desire. Here is the head upon which all the ends of the world are

THE "MONA LISA" FAMOUS GAINSBOROUGH

"Duchess of Devonshire" Was Returned After Quarter of a Century

come," and the eyelids are a little weary. It is a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions. Set it for a moment beside one of those white Greek goddesses or beautiful women of antiquity, and how would they be troubled by this beauty, into which the soul with all its maladies has passed! All the thoughts and experience of the world have etched and molded there, in that which they have of power to refine and make expressive the outward form, the animalism of Greece, the lust of Rome, the reverie of the middle ages, with its spiritual ambition and imaginative loves, the return of the pagan world, the sins of the Borgias.

She is older than the rocks among which she sits. Like the vampire, she has been dead many times and learned the secrets of the grave, and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her, and trafficked for strange webs with eastern merchants, and as Leda was the mother of Helen of Troy, and as St. Anne the mother of Mary, and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes and lives only in the delicacy with which it has molded the changing lineaments and tinged the eyelids and the hands.

The loss of this picture is regarded by the French as a national calamity. To them it is not only priceless, but a part of their very life. It has been reported, and is probably true, that the French government once refused an offer of \$5,000,000 for the painting.



THE "MONA LISA."

Upon its disappearance the Louvre was closed for several days, a large force of police was set to work searching every nook and cranny of the great building, and sixty detectives were started working on the outside.

One of the theories of the authorities was that the thief was a young man who was known to have become enamored of the painting and who had visited it at intervals for several months, sitting before it with a rapt expression for hours together. They believe that he fell in love with the face, as painters have been known to become enamored of their own works, and grew insane upon the subject, his mania finally prompting the crime.

So much were people affected by this masterpiece that some shed tears at sight of it. Not a few letters have been received at the Louvre addressed to "Mona Lisa" and expressing love to her as to a living person.

That the deed was the work of some deranged person seems almost certain for the reason that the picture could not be disposed of and hence would be without value to the thief. A painting is only valuable when shown. If the criminal could dispose of it to a private collector—and it cannot be conceived that any thief would dare to offer it for sale or that any collector would be so foolish or depraved as to buy it—such collector would not dare exhibit it for fear of detection. While there are many copies of the painting that the average man could hardly detect from the original, there are always those who can distinguish, and now that the whole world is on the lookout for the picture every copy will be subjected to closer inspection. Moreover, an old master is chiefly valuable because it is an original, and to be able to refer to it as such and to know in his heart that the claim is true constitute its chief value to the collector; hence insanity of one form or another is the only rational explanation

of the act. That goes, paradox and all.

An interesting fact in this connection is that several months ago it was reported in the public prints that "Mona Lisa" had been stolen and a copy substituted in its place. This was afterward denied, but the disappearance now makes it seem a strange coincidence, almost a prophecy.

There is one other possible explanation. It is notorious that in Europe the trade of making fake "old masters" flourishes apace, chiefly for the purpose of gulling American millionaires. These copies are properly aged by processes that the fakers know and are then sold for fabulous prices to those who have more money than expert knowledge or perhaps real appreciation of "old masters." To do this work fakers have to possess originals in order that the copy may be as nearly perfect as possible. Sometimes these imitations are so close that they fool even the experts.

Some such an organization of fakers may have taken the "Mona Lisa" for copying purposes, expecting afterward to return the original or a clever duplicate for a ransom. This would be so hazardous a game, however, that even a league of criminals would hardly run the risk.

Many pictures have been stolen in the past, but none even approaching the value of "Mona Lisa." The most famous case in modern times was the theft of Gainsborough's famous portrait of the "Duchess of Devonshire." The "electioneer duchess" she was called, having been active in her husband's political canvasses. This painting was missing nearly a quarter of a century and was finally returned through the instrumentality of the late Pat Sheedy, the "square" gambler. Sheedy's version of the affair was that the thief was Adam Worth, whom Sheedy regarded as the greatest criminal of the last century. The painting was originally stolen to be used in an

Masculine Dress Reform.
The Men's Dress Reform society has been founded in Berlin, with the object of bringing masculine attire to a higher hygienic standard. The society protests against the "air tight armor plating" of the starched shirtfront, the cast iron rule of black frock coats for weddings and funerals alike and the general system of dress which involves the wearing of many tight fitting garments, each overlapping the other. The society is greatly in favor of knee breeches for everyday wear in place of the conventional trousers, which, its members declare, require great skill in cutting and are a source of considerable trouble to the wearer. Stiff collars and cuffs are also taboo.

The Battle of New Orleans.
It has been proposed that the centennial of the battle of New Orleans, Jan. 8, 1815, should be celebrated in grand style and that the United States government as its contribution to the undertaking should appropriate sufficient money to build a magnificent road for automobiles and other vehicles from Detroit on the lakes, where the ignominious surrender of General Hull, with 10,000 United States troops, made the most humiliating event in the history of that war, to New Orleans, where the only real victory and glory for the national arms were won.

A King's Private Directory.
Great is the part which the humble card index system plays in the social life of King George of England. People presented to him are invariably astonished and flattered to find that he knows all about them, their family and their achievements. He puts some kindly question that shows intimate

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MINOR BROWN,
White Mills, Pa.

FOR COUNTY COMMISSIONER.
I hereby announce myself as a candidate for the nomination for the office of County Commissioner subject to the decision of the Republican voters at the coming primaries.
EARL ROCKWELL,
Lake Ariel, Pa.

knowledge. The explanation lies in the card index. Nobody has access to the king without an appointment or an invitation, so that he has always time to consult the private directory and to know precisely what the person he is going to meet has done.

Drink Traffic in France.
France is well supplied with places for the sale of drink. We read in a Paris newspaper that there is one drinking place for every eighty persons—in other words, for every thirty men. In certain departments we find one "debit" for every thirty-six persons, and in the Pas de Calais there is one for every fifteen inhabitants, which, in other words, means a drink shop for every seven men. In Paris there are 30,000 such places, in London 5,800, Edinburgh 340 and Moscow 314.—London Globe.

A Moving Land.
One of the broad slopes of Mont Grignon, France, is reported to have become detached from its foundations and to have moved over a distance of nearly a quarter of a mile, carrying with it the soil, meadows and woods and covering up in its passage roads and bridges that stood in the way. A chestnut grove has traveled 500 feet without suffering any apparent damage, but many small lakes have been formed by the damming of the waters.—Scientific American.

Wilson—Didn't either parent want the child?
Dodd—No; the cook promised to stay with the smaller family.—Brooklyn Life.

"Crooked weights and measures have been used since the year 830 B. C." "What makes you so positive of the date?" "That's when weights and measures were invented."—Birmingham Age-Herald.

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