

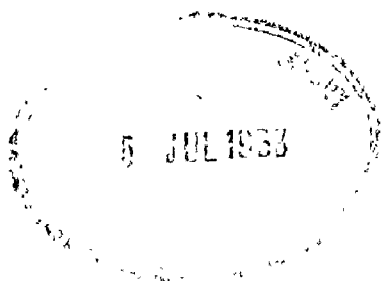
LEONARDO DA VINCI

LEONARDO DA VINCI

BY

CLIFFORD BAX

WITH A FRONTISPIÈCE

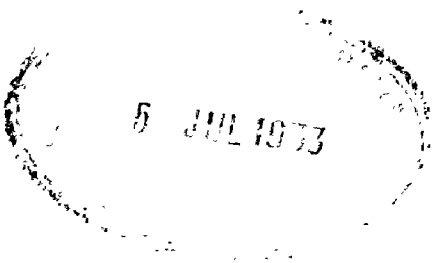


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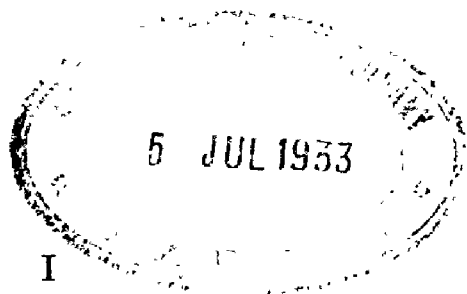
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THE PROBLEM BEFORE US

IN early youth, when we are discovering almost daily a new wonder of art or literature which has been, as it were, awaiting us in this world, a day comes when we first hear the name of Leonardo da Vinci. No sooner do we hear it than we apprehend that he must have been as notable and strange a man as any to whom a woman has ever given birth.

Perhaps we hear that, as a contemporary said, 'in his appearance there was such radiance of beauty that the sight of him made sorrowful hearts glad': perhaps, that with his elegant hands he could buckle up a horse-shoe: perhaps, that he was at once a painter, sculptor, architect, musician, engineer, anatomist, geographer, botanist, astronomer, geologist, chemist and mathematician. Or it

may be that we first meet him in the pages of 'Virginibus Puerisque,' where Robert Louis Stevenson, exalting women at the expense of men, writes gaily: 'It might be very well if the Apollo Belvedere should suddenly glow into life, and step forward from the pedestal with that godlike air of his: but of the misbegotten changelings who call themselves men and prate intolerably over dinner-tables, I never saw one who seemed worthy to inspire love—no, nor read of any—except Leonardo da Vinci and perhaps Goethe in his youth.'

And then, having read of his beauty, his strength, his intellectual range and his almost universal genius, how can we fail to be curious about him and to want to discover his secret, when we learn that, so far as can be divined, he went through his life without a single love affair?

There are three ways in which we can get to know him despite the four hundred and fifty years that separate his life from ours. We can read a part of the bulky literature, in several languages, which has been written

about him. We can look with care and sympathy at the few of his paintings that still exist. We can ponder some of the memoranda which he set down in those of his many Note-books which have in part been published.

Most geniuses of the first order are prolific, throwing forth from themselves, like Nature, the magnificent and the mediocre with unceasing activity, and leaving to critics of a later time the discovery that their mediocre work should be attributed to somebody else. Leonardo, like Thomas Gray, belonged to the smaller group of great artists. He created with hesitation, difficulty and extreme slowness. As a painter he produced little, but everything which he did produce was distinguished and finely done. What, then, remains of his work as a painter? There is (1) a very early *Annunciation*. The experts are not agreed upon its authenticity. If it was painted by Leonardo, he must have done it when he was seventeen. There are (2) an elaborate drawing of an *Adoration of the Magi*, also an early work : (3) a picture of *Saint Anne* : (4) two versions of *The*

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Virgin of the Rocks : (5) a wraith of his large fresco, *The Last Supper* : (6) *La Belle Ferronnière*, which he 'probably drew,' even if he did not paint it : (7) a doubtful *Dionysus* : (8) *Mona Lisa* : and (9) his last work, *St. John the Baptist*. His battle picture, *The Battle of Anghiari*, was never finished, and the cartoon for it is now lost : but the central portion of the design received the royal honour of being freely transcribed by Rubens.

And what were the famous Notebooks? They were not intimate diaries. They were books in which he worked out mathematical calculations, made drawings, occasionally jotted down his domestic accounts, threw out ideas and opinions upon life or painting, and (very rarely, as if in a reverie) wrote a word or two from his heart. Here, in fact, is a brilliant description of these Notebooks. 'Strange machines and implements are drawn lightly over pensive figures. A gipsy captain, Scaramaccia, shows his enormous head with insolent, half-conscious power. The shadowy face of the Angel of the Rocks looks sideways :

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elsewhere is his mysterious lovely hand. There, a white daffodil, bows the dream-holden adoring head of [Saint] Philip, veiled in diaphanéité, sweet as a maid's. There is raised the ravaged defiant head of Judas. And there an insolent young man with a Roman note in him, like Lucius Verus Commodus, is thinking of his gladiators. But Saint John Baptist returns to us, a grave Greek youth, earnest and pure, seated, with long fine flanks and lifted finger. Saint Jerome also comes again, a young athlete now, fitter for his lordly lion. People plough and sow. An arsenal like a terrible hive is filled with straining attendants. Virgins sit under monstrous arum-trees with their dotting unicorns. A woman moves in a car like Beatrice. Landscapes lie lost in cloud and water; strange rock-worlds begin to dissolve into a drift of dreams, tidal waves are scrolling into great crests of immense corollas, a destructive fantasia. Great pieces of beautiful tissue are seen falling in cadence over noble limbs. Lovely fingers are lightly clasped. Glimpses are caught as through a white mist.

Ecstatic dancers move "like a wave of the sea," their thin raiment curling about them at the edges like creaming foam. Naked riders grip with gryphons. A siren vanishing into acanthus clasps a volute,—Leonardo must have been studying the Certosa. A youth gazes into a mirror while beasts devour each other. The head of the Duke [Lodovico Sforza, Duke of Milan] appears and vanishes. Atalante [a famous actor and singer] lifts his eyes. Old men, young men with great curled hair, madonnas, children, girls, dragons, mermaids, horses, kittens, dancers, flying angels, flowers, gipsies, cuirassed ladies, virgins, courtesans, children, fluent veils, mailed girls or boys—strange epheboi for the rites of beauty—mingle together. Dionysus goes beautiful with wreathed brows. Leda's knotted hair, in spirals, bosses, knots, flames and convolutions, on her bent and dreaming head is twined with her creative story. Napes of babies, the tenderest things to draw, throats of old women, the cruellest things to draw—his pencil is sweet as a mediaeval carol for the one, more

branding than Villon's ballade for the other.' Again, a fanciful boy-page 'appears dreaming beside a record of mechanics: a lion's head looks out among the triangles and circles,' and 'across attempted problems in stresses, the words "amantissimo," "amicissimo," will write themselves imperiously, like heavenly hopeless tears.'

The reader will have decided, no doubt, that this passage of melodious and vibrant prose is the handiwork of some one who has been severely disciplined by long practice in the writing of verse. It comes, in fact, from the book to which, of all books about Leonardo, I owe my largest debt; a debt so large that I must pay my tribute to the author without delay. 'Leonardo the Florentine,'¹ by Mrs. Rachel Annand Taylor, is a monumental work which not only assembles nearly all the facts of his life, not only interprets his pictorial work with the enthusiasm of a lover, not only evokes by its inebriating prose magnificent pictures of life in Florence, Milan, Rome and Venice

¹ The Richards Press, 1927. 580 pp. 31s. 6d.

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during the midsummer of the Renaissance, but also, over and over again, condenses into a lovely and incisive phrase the very impressions of Leonardo, the very deductions about him, which a student is likely to form. As I read it, I found that Mrs. Taylor was continually forestalling me, and although at some points we differ in our interpretations of his personality, at others I cannot do better than to quote from her pages.

II

THE FOUR SEASONS OF HIS LIFE

I PROPOSE, then, to give an outline of Leonardo's external life ; to look at his works not as works of art but as projections of his unique personality ; to assemble and comment on some of the opinions contained in his books ; and to offer the reader what I suppose to be the key to his mystery.

It is obviously impossible to present facts about his life. A modern writer can only retell an oft-told tale, and I, in doing so, must ask the reader's indulgence if I write the story as though he knew nothing whatever about it. I would ask him, also, to read it as a juryman listens to a story which counsel unfolds, keeping a sharp lookout for pieces of evidence which, however minute, may help us in the end to diagnose a baffling and intricate soul.

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...ever, that he may not seem a
...we are studying his life-story,
...d to bear in mind some of his
...characteristics. For example, his
...mathematical calculations reveal the
...f a powerful intellect. His draw-
...they are kindly, and all his existing
...proclaim that he was a man of the
...t sensibility. The Notebooks prove
...was intensely aristocratic in his tastes.
...Also contain many drawings of diseased
...ous or mindless people which are done
...a ferocity that provides, in my opinion,
...of our most valuable clues: drawings
...h are so ferocious, indeed, that only un-
...ceptive people could have called them
...rely 'caricatures.' Again, in the Note-
...books we have those rare brief poignant
...phrases which he scribbled down solely to ease
...his heart. There is perhaps nothing more
...'human' in those books than an entry, written
...in another hand, which would mean in English

'My Leonardo, have you not . . .

 O Leonardo, why do you suffer so much?'

THE FOUR SEASONS OF HIS LIFE

If these lines were inserted, as seems likely, by one of his pupils, it is more than possible that the first line should be completed by adding the pupil's name. Finally, Leonardo himself has written upon one page of drawings 'Fioravante, the son of Domenico, who is as loverly toward me as any maid, him I could love'; but we have not divined his secret when we begin to suspect that his nature was homosexual.

For the sake of clarity it may be useful to say at the outset that his life had four phases which bear a marked resemblance to the four seasons of our year. Until he was thirty, he lived in Florence or near it. Then, until he was forty-eight, he lived in Milan. After this, until he was sixty-four, he lived mostly in Rome and Florence. And he spent his last three years, a brief winter time, in France.

III

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH (TO THE AGE OF 30)

LEONARDO was born in 1452, when England was still ravaged by the Wars of the Roses. Lorenzo the Magnificent, Erasmus and Savonarola were his close contemporaries. Michelangelo, Raffaello, Tiziano and Giorgione were born during his early manhood. When he died, Henry the Eighth was a young king; and two years before his death, Martin Luther set a match to the Reformation.

The place of his birth was Vinci, a small hill-town not far from Florence. He was a love-child. His father was a lawyer who came from a long line of lawyers, and his mother was a peasant named Caterina. The father, very soon after his episode with Caterina, married a young woman of good family. Caterina, at

about the same time, married a cowherd of somewhat brutal disposition. Leonardo's father became one of the most prominent lawyers in Florence, and must, therefore, have had brains and pertinacity. For the rest, he is distinguished by his uxoriousness. He married four times—on the last occasion, when he was sixty—and although his first two wives were barren, he begot at least twelve children upon the other two. Caterina, unfortunately, fades out of sight as soon as she has appeared, unless it is to her that Leonardo refers in two frigid entries which he made in his Notebooks when he was more than forty. In one of these notes he recorded that 'Caterina came in July 1493'—came, that is, to live in his house at Milan. In the other he sets down, very precisely, the expenses of this Caterina's funeral. Some writers presume that she was merely a serving-maid: but the unemotional tone of the memoranda does not preclude the possibility that he was writing of his mother. His notes, as we shall see, are often astonishingly arctic: nor should we forget that he was a

natural aristocrat who never behaved obsequiously to any one. On the contrary, he comported himself like an Olympian among the princes and duchesses of his time. It is easy to imagine, therefore, that he might not entirely welcome the reappearance of a peasant-mother. George Meredith, another natural aristocrat, assiduously suppressed the truth that his father was a draper. And then, too, the fact that this Caterina of the Notebooks died so soon after coming to live with him, suggests that she may have been elderly. His mother, when 'Caterina' died, would have been at least sixty.

Naturally enough, we know little about his childhood. In middle age he wrote, in connection with his intense efforts to master the secret of flight, 'I remember that once in my infancy, when I was lying in my cradle, a vulture flew to me and opened my lips with its tail and repeatedly struck me upon my mouth.' Mrs. Taylor makes light of this incredible story, considering it to be merely a playful fancy. Freud, as we should expect, finds in

it the nucleus of an elaborate theory in which the vulture is a symbol of the mother and the strokes of the vulture's tail are fantasy representations of her too lavish kisses. In a monograph so exciting that it well might lure the weariest highbrow from the latest detective story, he proceeds to demonstrate that Leonardo, in his first and most formative years, being over-loved by his mother, began to take an interest in sexuality which even a psychoanalyst would regard as exceptional, and that in time this curiosity about sex became a curiosity about everything and, in due course, absorbed and displaced Leonardo's natural sex-instinct.

At least we know that he lived with his mother until he was five years old, and presumably with the cowherd. His father, not as yet having any other child, then took the little boy to live with him, so that Leonardo passed from the cowherd's cottage to the best house in the town. We must not imagine, of course, that the fact of his being a bastard ever troubled him much, if it troubled him at all.

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The people of that age brought up their legitimate and illegitimate children without marking the distinction, and only in the matter of legal rights was a bastard sometimes at a disadvantage. It does seem, however, that there was one incident in his childhood which cast a long shadow across his life. Perhaps he was locked unjustly into a cupboard or cellar. That would at least explain the words, written many years afterwards, 'If as a child you were put in prison for doing your duty, how will they treat you when you are a man?'

He developed, very early, a marked talent for music, modelling, drawing and arithmetic. He seems, in youth, to have had little Latin and no Greek, but in later life he improved his Latin, principally for the purpose of reading scientific treatises. We also know that he read Ovid with some appreciation and that he was a keen student of Dante's poem, but in general he shows little respect for literature and none for scholarship. Most of us have known men, highly gifted in many directions, who somehow cannot bring themselves to admit the value of

a talent which they do not possess : and I doubt whether any expert would maintain that Leonardo reveals much literary skill. True, we sometimes hear that, in addition to everything else, he was also a poet. Addington Symonds, indeed, presents us with a translation of one chilly sonnet—about the wisdom of willing to do what you can rather than trying to do what you cannot. Later research, however, has traced, or at least attributed, this poem to a city-herald of Florence who died six years before Leonardo was born.

Toward the end of his boyhood he had shown so much aptitude for painting that one day his father set him to decorate a round wooden shield of the kind which was then hung out on the walls of any important house. Leonardo, we read, ‘collected lizards, snakes, crickets, spiders, centipedes, moths, scorpions and bats,’ and having combined and exaggerated the more horrifying characteristics of these creatures, painted on the shield a monster emerging from its den ‘with smoking nostrils and flaming eyes.’ This he ‘placed on a wooden stand

surrounded by a black cloth, the light being so disposed that only the monster was illuminated.' He then invited his father to see the picture. It was so realistic that the lawyer instinctively stepped back in alarm ; but having recovered himself, began to think that the lad's talent might repay cultivation.

Accordingly he showed some of Leonardo's juvenilia to a goldsmith in Florence—a goldsmith who, like many another, was ambitious of becoming a painter and sculptor. This man was the now famous Verrocchio. Recognising at once that Leonardo was an infant prodigy, he agreed to take the youth into his workshop as a pupil, and so it was that Leonardo packed up his belongings and left Vinci and found himself living in Florence. There, in his master's workshop, he mixed with a group of brilliant young painters. Among them was Perugino, then twenty years old and already, no doubt, the manipulator of an astonishingly facile brush. For one reason or another, Leonardo himself could never bring forth a picture without incalculable labour and much

groaning of spirit, and I suspect that an anecdote which occurs in one of the Notebooks again reveals a tendency to scoff at a gift which he did not possess. 'Not infrequently,' he wrote, 'the lust for gold brings even a good master down to the level of a mere craftsman. For example, my comrade and fellow-countryman, Perugino the Florentine, attained to such rapidity of execution that once, when his wife called him to dinner, he replied, "Serve up the soup while I put another saint in." ' We ought not, I fear, to take this anecdote as evidence of a sense of humour. There is no hint of a humorous mind in Leonardo's work ; and when we find him copying into his Notebooks the tedious funny stories of a fifth-rate comic writer, we may surely deduce that he was one of those great men whose notion of humour is not shared by the rest of mankind. In this respect he probably resembled William Wordsworth and Herbert Spencer.

But sensitive he was—deliciously and excruciatingly sensitive—and it is easy to imagine the multitudinously-beautiful impression which

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Florence at its loveliest must have made upon his opening genius. Indeed, we cannot think without envy of the conditions in which he began, at fifteen or sixteen, to work in earnest as a painter. In our time we can know nothing but a last pallid reflection of the experience through which he then passed. And yet, though our schooldays may be the dullest or the most miserable that we ever endure, even now a student of art or music, if he is gifted and enthusiastic, is likely to enjoy during his student-years the longest stretch of happiness which he will ever traverse. He is discovering masterpieces which in some measure time will stale for him. He does not know what his limits are destined to be. He is boundlessly ambitious, buoyantly confident. He feels his talent widening and strengthening within him. If he has actual genius, as Leonardo had, he is probably conscious of it, and even oppressed by it, long before he has developed the skill to make it manifest, long before the world has any means of guessing at what is potentially within him. To the world he may seem to behave

extravagantly and even absurdly. He knows that he is 'a man born to be king,' and he is impatient with a world which, quite naturally, does not instantly divine his kingship. And as likely as not, he will overestimate the potential ability of the young people among whom he moves, assuming that he and they, like a race of enchanters, are about to transform their age.

If it is so now—now when the arts are a mere backwater and casual interest of social life—we can easily apprehend the exhilaration which must have buoyed up a young Florentine painter at the end of the fifteenth century. Wherever he went there were people gaily or superbly dressed ; buildings that were not only magnificent but also new ; and pictures which, now loaded with the admiration of centuries and even hackneyed by reproduction, had either been painted, like the youthful works of Botticelli, only a few years earlier or were actually being then projected on to canvas or wood. Art was not, in those days, a poor relation of industry or science, not a side-issue of life on which the persons who were engaged

upon really important matters might occasionally bestow an indulgent glance. It was not even a 'rage' or a fashion—as it was in London for a few years during 'the Aesthetic Craze.' Art was in the air. The world still wanted it ardently, was still so young as never to have doubted that the arts were desirable. They were, on the contrary, the passion of the aristocracy and the pride of the people. In those days we could not have heard a young man observe of another, 'Yes, I quite like him, but he is rather enthusiastic,' nor, again, would any one have conceived of saying, with Schiller, 'people must be taught that beauty is a necessity.' People had still to discover that it is not, for beauty in the management of external life was demanded as naturally by those men as speed of movement is by ourselves. Writers tend, in a mean or an ugly age or in an age which is highly critical because it is feebly creative, to underline the defects which accompanied any age of beauty that has been much lauded: to assure us, for example, that there was dire squalor in the purlieus of Imperial

Rome, that the classic Athenians were given to sharp practice, that the sanitation of mediaeval cities was lamentable and, in a word, that periods to which for a long while humanity has looked back with envy were not really so delightful as idealists have declared: but the evidence of literature, of architecture and of the relics in museums or galleries, ought to make such writers wonder if they attempt to belittle the great ages only because they cannot believe that life was ever lived more splendidly than they live it themselves. It is possible, on the contrary, to feel certain, not without reason, that we are now incapable even of imagining the intense beauty of external life in classical Athens or in Renaissance Italy.

Every one agrees that the Renaissance was a phase of history in which men were suddenly inspired with a passion for exact knowledge—that is to say, inspired by the scientific spirit. Many people suppose that it was also a period of aesthetic quickening. This may be one of the many misconceptions which solidify into axioms merely because they are repeated

generation after generation. The truth may be that the Renaissance was an awakening of the scientific spirit within a world which was still immersed in art—with the result that art did not really ‘improve’ but only became more scientific. In Leonardo’s boyhood, for instance, foreshortening or ‘perspective’ was still a new excitement—comparable with the briefer excitement caused in the ‘nineties by the invention of motor-cars or in our own day by the domestic application of wireless. The young painters in Verrocchio’s workshop must have discussed, hour after hour, the laws and aesthetic possibilities of perspective ; and unless we realise that it was a discovery which went to their heads, we cannot rightly assess the painting of that time. When, in the National Gallery, we look at Uccello’s battle-picture we must be obtuse indeed if we do not sense the excitement, as of a child, with which he is exploiting the new device ; and probably the rapture which ran through Florence at the setting up of Ghiberti’s ‘Gates of Paradise’ was largely due to his triumphant use of per-

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spective in the seemingly inhospitable medium of bronze. The world, in course of time, became accustomed to correct perspective or anatomy, and took them for granted, and even, a few generations ago, began to affirm that the art of 'the Primitives' was more lovely than that of the Renaissance painters. To-day we value perspective so little that many judicious people would declare that Chinese painting is immeasurably superior to any painting that Europe has produced. I lay some stress upon this suggestion that the Renaissance was a scientific movement operating in a world of art because, if it is true, we might see in a flash exactly what it was that happened to Leonardo. He was, from this point of view, born into an age of art, superbly equipped as an artist. He was born, however, late enough to catch the full impetus of the scientific spirit which made the Renaissance. And just as Shakespeare began by writing his plays entirely in verse but made more and more use of prose as he grew older, so does the scientific spirit steadily gain upon Leonardo. We might say that he

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was born an artist and died a scientist, except that, of course, he always retained, like an inheritance, the artistic powers which he developed in youth. In middle life his pre-occupation with machinery became so intense that sometimes he seems to be straining desperately to get into the Twentieth Century and to witness the full triumph of that scientific and mechanical spirit which broke forth so brilliantly in the Renaissance. Shakespeare anticipated the future of literature by turning from verse to prose. Leonardo anticipated the future of the world by turning from art to science.

The scientific movement was so pronounced that we owe to this period the questionable doctrine, still current when I was an art student twenty-five years ago, that a figure-painter must have an almost medical knowledge of human anatomy. Michelangelo dissected corpses. Leonardo, according to Dr. William Hunter, 'was the best anatomist at that time in the world.' No doubt he believed that he anatomised as an artist. It was probably,

however, the scientist within him who could not be satisfied until he had dissected thirty bodies. That, of course, was an incident of his much later life. Except by an enlightened few, dissection was still regarded, in those days, with superstitious horror and, naturally, there were no facilities for it in Verrocchio's workshop. There, indeed, the students appear to have spent innumerable days in painting drapery-studies—a practice which Leonardo afterwards emphatically disapproved. It was there, too, that he painted, if it is his, the *Annunciation*: and so effectively did he cultivate his talent that when he was twenty the Florentine Guild of Painters enrolled him as a member.

Five years later, in the midst of his easy and interesting life among Verrocchio's pupils, he was startled and shocked by a most unpleasant experience. It was open to any one, in the Florence of that time, to bring any charge whatsoever against any one else. All that the accuser had to do was to write out the charge and to drop the paper into the

'drum'—a kind of letter-box—attached to the City Hall. The grave and reverend signiors would then consider and, if necessary, investigate the charge.

In this manner an anonymous plaintiff accused a certain artists' model of homosexual practices with several persons, among whom the writer mentioned Leonardo. The City Fathers examined and rejected the charge, and when it was repeated, in the summer of the same year, they rejected it again. We shall never know the truth. On the one hand, Leonardo had recently drawn 'a strange image' of Saint John, 'slim, sensuous, with cloudy soft hair, carrying a thin cross and pointing downward'—a drawing which one authority suspects to have been done from the model whose virtue had been questioned. Moreover, soon after this incident Leonardo left Verrocchio's workshop and went to live elsewhere in the city. Again, the City Fathers may quite possibly not have wished either to make trouble with Leonardo's father, the successful notary, or to lose the talents of a

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young painter from whom they were expecting much. At the same time, we must consider, in justice to Leonardo, that the charge was twice rejected, that within a few months both the City Council and certain important Churchmen were giving him commissions, and—much weightier than either of these considerations—that whenever he refers to sexual action, Leonardo expresses himself either austerely or with disgust. Moreover, an affection between young men is always a target for this charge.

We do know that in the same year the City Council commissioned him to paint an altarpiece for one of the chapels in the Old Palace. They had, indeed, so high an opinion of his genius that they cancelled an order for the same work which they had given to the painter Pollaiuolo, who was then forty-seven and presumably at his best. Little knowing that Leonardo had already developed a queer tendency to postpone work indefinitely, they even paid him some money on account. Unless they had no resemblance to any other City Councillors, they must have regretted their rashness,

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for they waited while five years passed, and waited in vain for their picture. They then transferred the commission to Ghirlandaio. He also failed them, and it was painted, in the end, by Filippino Lippi.

Leonardo next figures in an incident which provides an exceedingly valuable clue to his temperament. There had been a serious conspiracy to overthrow Lorenzo de' Medici and his family. The conspirators were caught. They were hanged from the windows of a palace. On a January day in 1479—Leonardo would then be twenty-six—he took a notebook and made a careful drawing of one of the conspirators : nor do I think it is unjustifiable to guess that he took the trouble to witness the execution, for at all times he was curious to watch the effect of violent emotion. In his notebook we see the man's body still dangling from the noose. Against the sketch Leonardo, with the detachment of a botanist, has written : ' Small tan-coloured cap, black satin doublet, lined black jerkin, blue cloak lined with fur of foxes' breasts, and the collar of the cloak

covered with velvet mottled with black and red. Bernardo di Bandini Baroncelli [the name of the specimen]. Black hose.' In itself this note—or rather the manner of it—would have little significance. The times were more violent than ours. Botticelli, who must have had a very gentle nature, was ordered by the Council to make official drawings of all these malefactors after they had been hanged—just as a press-photographer might now be despatched to make a record of some historical event: nor, again, had Leonardo any cause for setting down an emotional or an ethical comment in a book of notes which were meant to be private memoranda. But all through his life he inclined to regard men and women with the eyes of a collector, and for this reason we ought not to ignore the incident.

It is quite clear that by this time he possessed that mysterious gift for extracting the maximum of reputation from a minimum of achievement which, in our day, we associate with so many Irish authors. By the age of twenty-nine he had produced very little important work, but

his fame was considerable. The monks of a rich monastery, undeterred by the experience of the Council a few years earlier, commissioned him to paint a large altar-piece. They were so eager to make sure that the picture should be bright and rich that they actually supplied their painter with two expensive colours—ultramarine and gold. They would have done better to acquaint themselves with Leonardo's opinions. Had they taken this precaution they would probably have heard him say, as he subsequently wrote, that 'bright colours captivate the crowd, but the true artist seeks to delight the judicious rather than the vulgar. His aim and his pride is not to dazzle with colour but to perform a miracle—to use the play of light and shadow in such a manner that things which are really flat [*i.e.* painted representations] shall appear to be round. To sacrifice shadows to mere splendour of colour is to behave like a babbler who cares more for high-sounding language than for the significance of what he is saying.'

What he did with the gold and the ultra-

marine we shall never find out. By this time he had several assistants in his studio—lads whom he appears to have chosen rather for their good looks than for their skill. And the Notebooks prove that his assistants were sometimes light-fingered. What could be more probable than that one of them, seeing that the pigments were left lying about the studio, should have sold them to one of the many Florentine masters who did not feel that bright colours were vulgar? At least Leonardo never gave the monks their picture; and they, like the Councillors before them, had in the end to call upon the ever-ready and trustworthy Filippo Lippi. Hope died slowly in the hearts of these monks. Toward the end of September 1481 they sent Leonardo a cask of red wine which perhaps we might call a ‘refresher’: and their gift affords us our last glimpse of him before he left Florence and emigrated to Milan.

When he left Florence he was thirty. We ought to think of him as a tall, handsome, powerful, intellectual young man, sufficiently affluent to maintain not only his pupils but also

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a small retinue, and to dress, it seems, like an aristocrat. We should think of him, too, as having achieved a high position among the painters of Italy ; and if he had not produced many notable works, we may assume that he already tended, no matter what he was doing, to be thinking about something else. For my own part I see him at this stage as a figure dignified to the point of haughtiness, austere to the point of asceticism, gentle in manner, unquarrelsome, self-sufficient and fully conscious of his exceptional double-equipment as a first-rate artist and a first-rate mechanician.

IV

MATURITY (30-48)

HE remained at Milan for sixteen years. One authority¹ convinced himself that Leonardo, between the springtime of his life in Florence and its summer in Milan, spent a year in the East, working for the Sultan of Syria. The evidence adduced is attractive but flimsy. It consists of two facts, the first, that in his Milanese Notebooks there are many architectural sketches that suggest an Oriental influence; the second, that he wrote a certain letter in which he gave a vivid description of an earthquake that shook Aleppo. The earthquake is historical. Mrs. Taylor, however, believes that Leonardo's description was an effort of imagination, and that if he had sojourned in Syria history would not be silent.

We cannot be quite certain why he left

¹ Jean Paul Richter.

Florence. Possibly his patrons were weary at last of his procrastination. Possibly, though the suggestion may be uncharitable, he preferred the prospect of being indisputably the king of art in Milan to that of competing indefinitely with the other Florentine masters, none of whom was quite so unreliable as he. According to an early biographer, Leonardo had made a silver lyre, shaped like a horse's head, and Lorenzo de' Medici, who had been shrewd enough never to entrust any work to him, decided to send the lyre, by the hand of its artificer, to Lodovico Sforza, Duke of Milan, 'seeing,' adds the old writer, 'that Leonardo played this instrument quite remarkably.' The painter himself, however, writes that he was 'the man whom my Lord the Duke [of Milan] summoned from Florence to execute this his work.' The work to which he refers was the designing and constructing of a colossal equestrian statue. It was to be a monument, twenty-six foot high, to the memory of the Duke's father, and eighty tons of bronze would have been required to cast it.

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Milan was the European gateway into Italy. It never produced a long line of great artists as Florence already had, as Venice very soon would. Indeed, by comparison with the Florentines and the Venetians, the Milanese painters form a mediocre group. The best of them, in fact, are those who imitated and diluted the style of Leonardo.

The Duke, however, had as deep a passion for art as any man ; and no one who reads Mrs. Taylor's book will forget her brilliant evocations of the lovely and magnificent life which was lived in Lodovico's court. The arrival of Leonardo, with his pupils, was therefore a landmark in the annals of Milan. The Duke had captured a first-rate genius, and he knew it. Nevertheless, it was not only as a sculptor, a painter and a musician that Leonardo entered the service of the Duke. Before going, he wrote to Lodovico a letter which a modern biographer has temperately described as 'one of the most remarkable documents that a genius ever composed about his own powers.'¹ What

¹ Gronau.

ought we to deduce from it? Is it wildly vain-glorious? Is it written by a man who is smarting under some recent rebuff to his pride or his vanity or his self-confidence? Even Mrs. Taylor observes that 'if the writer is indeed not more than mortal, we think, there are the characters of megalomania.' Certainly if Mars and Apollo had jointly decided to seek employment from Lodovico, they could not have promised him more.

'Most Illustrious Lord,' runs the letter (here abridged).

'Having now considered the works of those who proclaim themselves to be skilled contrivers of instruments of war, I find that there is nothing new or exceptional in their devices. I will therefore try, without prejudicing any one else, to explain my secrets to your Excellency, and will offer them for your pleasure and approbation.

'I have a method of making bridges that shall be light, strong and easy to transport: others, again, which cannot be destroyed by fire or battle. Also methods of burning or otherwise destroying the bridges of the enemy.

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‘ When a place is besieged I can extract water from the trenches and, in addition to bridges, can construct ladders and covered ways.

‘ I have methods of destroying a besieged fortress, even if it is founded on rock, without resorting to bombardment.

‘ I can make portable mortars, designed to fling a veritable storm of stones and to confuse the enemy by the smoke which they will emit.

‘ In respect of a naval battle, I have many machines most effective both in attack and defence, and vessels which will resist the largest guns.

‘ I am able to lay mines noiselessly, and even, if required, under a trench or a river.

‘ I will also make covered chariots, immune from attack, which will be able to pass into the ranks of the enemy, despite the opposing artillery, and will be indestructible by even the largest body of men. Behind these the infantry could follow unhurt and unhindered.

‘ I will make big guns, mortars and light ordnance not of the common type. In

short, I can contrive various and endless means of both attack and defence.

‘In time of peace I think that I shall be able to give complete satisfaction and to produce work in architecture, alike civic and domestic, that shall equal the work of any one. Moreover, I am able to divert water from one place to another.

‘I can carry out sculpture in marble, bronze or clay, and paint pictures, as well as any other, no matter who he may be.

‘Furthermore, I am ready to undertake the construction of the Bronze Horse which is to be the immortal glory of the prince your father and of the illustrious House of Sforza.

‘And if any of the projects, mentioned above, should seem to be extravagant or impossible, I am prepared to carry out my demonstrations in your park or in any place that may please your Excellency, to whose gracious attention I most humbly recommend myself.’

The writer of such a letter may well be called ‘the Merlin of his age.’ Had Leonardo written it twenty years later he might actually, it seems, have offered the Duke two further offensive instruments, for by that time he had thought

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of poison-gas and had devised a submarine.¹ Apparently, however, he regarded the submarine as a weapon so devilish that he was not prepared to impart his secret.

By 1483 Leonardo was settled in Milan. Already, at the age of thirty-one, he was a master painter, however small his production ; a practical and formidable engineer, however much his projects may have exceeded his powers ; and an honoured companion of great princes and their ladies.

Now—if ever—life may have been congenial to him. The Duke was generous, and Leonardo had, for some years, no financial worries. The Duke was a man of taste, of enthusiasm, of immense resources : and, for a long time, he was patient. Leonardo's life was full. The Notebooks now contain innumerable sketches for the Great Horse : but the reader will not expect to hear that the work proceeded rapidly, and he will be right. This was due in part to temperament, in part to Leonardo's other occu-

¹ So say the authorities : but a plain man will suspect that ' torpedo ' would be the more accurate word.

pations. He wrote, for instance, a Treatise on Painting (not published until 1651). He 'collaborated with Bramante in the masques and shows of the Court, finding *impresse* [emblems] for the crests and sleeves of cavaliers and ladies, designing their tourney-vestment, their girdles and their sword-hilts.' Early in 1489, at the marriage of the Duke's brother, Leonardo presented a masque which, according to a contemporary description, 'was called The Masque of Paradise because, through the art and genius of Leonardo, Paradise, with the seven planets, was shown, the planets being represented by men attired as the poets describe them.' Two years later he stage-managed a tournament, but all that we know about it is that several lacqueys played the parts of savages.

Sometimes, too, he amused the courtiers with ingenious toys, including a 'camera obscura,' though he did not invent this pleasant and magical device. At another time he was decorating the Duchess's bathroom. And he was 'constantly occupied with castle-work, cathe-

dral-work and irrigation.' He was particularly successful in his irrigation schemes, giving 'exact instructions for draining the great marshland' round Milan, and projecting 'a wonderful system of locks to overcome the difficulty of the levels.' In addition to all this, he busied himself with town-planning. The Duke was intent upon providing his city with broader streets and better light. 'Leonardo,' we read, 'made an extensive scheme for him of ten towns with limited populations, too vast a plan, of course, even for a Renaissance potentate. Many of his suggestions are admirable, and he has an advanced sense of hygiene. But, like his canals and churches, his cities became too much like ingenious problems in drawing, cold arrangements in mere convenience. . . . He cannot build a city except as a diagram; he is not human enough to conspire with his kind to create it.' Again, 'when he plans a new town, with a double system of high-level and low-level crossings, by the upper streets no carts or similar objects should move; they are entirely for the use of gentlemen, the defile

of seigneurial life. The *canaille* may swarm in the lower storey, and the sea or the river can wash the town clean.' 'The serene inhumanity of this immense proposal,' comments Mrs. Taylor, 'does not seem to have charmed the Duke who, though nervous; was kindly.'

Now, too, he not only, according to one writer,¹ invented a steam-boat, but occupied himself with his famous and prolonged efforts to construct a flying-machine. 'Dissect the bat,' he wrote, 'study it carefully, and on this model construct the machine.' And again, 'A bird is an instrument that works in accordance with mathematical law, an instrument which it is within the capacity of man to reproduce in all its movements, but not with a corresponding degree of strength, though his reproduction would be deficient only in the power of maintaining equilibrium.' At the apex of his hope he exclaimed, 'The human bird shall take his first flight, filling the world with amazement and all writings with his fame, and bringing eternal glory to the nest from which he sprang.'

¹ Rosenberg.

Perhaps it was the failure of these efforts which caused him to write also, 'The supreme misfortune is when theory outstrips performance.'

And now, too, he begins to anatomise with a will. 'I have dissected more than ten bodies,' he says, 'for the purpose of getting full knowledge about the veins, destroying all other organs, consuming even to the very minutest particles all the flesh which surrounded these veins, without making them bloody except for an insensible sanguification of the capillary veins': and proceeds to suggest that his imaginary interlocutor may be impeded from venturing upon such work 'by the fear of living in the night hours in the company of such quartered and flayed corpses, fearful to look at.' We ought to remember, in passing, that this enthusiastic anatomist was also, if we may judge from the type of face which we associate with his pictures, probably the most fastidious man then breathing. His senses were subtle, but his ever-increasing passion for knowledge had obviously become an irresistible force within him: and if he found a fierce and acrid

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delight in exploring 'the dreadful democracy of the entrails,' here again, in my submission, is one of our clues to understanding him.

It is also during this period that peasants brought him 'a multitude of corals and shells from the mountains of Piacenza.' Few men in those days would have questioned how shells could come to be lying on the tops of mountains, but Leonardo at once perceived in them a proof that at one time the waters had covered the earth. And it is with the same scientific interest that he examined the moon through a magnifying glass which he had fashioned, and arrived at an understanding of the moon's appearance which is surprisingly accurate. He did not anticipate Harvey's discovery (as we sometimes hear), but he did realise that the blood in a living body moves. He did not anticipate the world-shaking pronouncement of Copernicus, who was his junior by one year, but across a page of mathematical notes, now at Windsor, he wrote in bold letters the heretical statement that 'The sun does not move.'

Meanwhile, as the years passed, he worked

intermittently not only upon the Great Horse but also at his most ambitious achievement—*The Last Supper*. After a long time he did manage to make a full-sized clay-model of the Horse, and it was actually set up—a mark of wonder for all Italy. If the mould was never made, if the eighty tons of bronze were never poured into it, the blame lies with politics, not with Leonardo. If, on the other hand, *The Last Supper* began to flake off the wall almost as soon as it was finished, the blame does lie with its creator.

Eight years after his arrival in Milan he had progressed far enough with the Horse to ask a poet to provide an inscription for it. At about the same time, however, he must have suffered a temporary estrangement from the Duke. In July 1489 the Florentine agent in Milan wrote to Lorenzo de' Medici, 'Would your Magnificence be so good as to send one or two qualified artists to Milan, for the Duke, though he gave the commission to Leonardo, does not seem confident that he will be able to complete it.' Lorenzo must have smiled. The Duke's action

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seems to have pricked Leonardo's pride, for on a day of April in the next year the latter noted that he had 'started the horse afresh.'

A few years later, while he was working in his leisurely manner at *The Last Supper*, he was also engaged upon decorating three of the rooms in Lodovico's palace. Once more he worked with extraordinary slowness. On this occasion the Duke quite lost patience with him. It looks as though they had actually a quarrel. The Duke wrote, in a letter, that on June the 8th, 1496, Leonardo had 'made a great uproar.' From all that we know of him it seems likely that Leonardo contributed less to this uproar than the Duke himself. Feeling ran so high that Lodovico made a determined but unsuccessful effort to find out where Perugino then was, with the intention, presumably, of asking him to complete the room-decorations. Again, in the following year, the Duke wrote to his secretary: 'Remind Leonardo the Florentine to finish the work that he has begun in the refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie [*The Last Supper*]. . . . Make arrangements with

him in writing, which he is to sign with his own hand, obliging him to finish the work by a definite date.'

By a stroke of good luck we possess a description, by a contemporary, of Leonardo at work on his big fresco. The well-known story-writer, Matteo Bandello, happened, as a boy, to spend a holiday with his uncle, the head of the monastery. He reports that on Sundays many gentlemen used to come there in order to see how the picture was progressing, and he adds, rather surprisingly, that Leonardo 'was well-pleased that every one who saw his paintings should freely declare an opinion of them.'

'Leonardo,' says the story-writer, 'used to go early in the morning—I myself have more than once seen him do so—and climb the scaffolding (for *The Last Supper* is placed well away from the floor), and there, from sunrise to sunset, forgetting to eat or drink, he would paint without ceasing. On the other hand, he would sometimes spend the next two, three or four days doing nothing to it, but staying for an hour or two each day and just looking

critically at the figures and considering his work. And again I have seen him, if the humour took him so, leave the Corte Vecchio at midday, when he was working there at the clay-model of that stupendous Horse which you know about, and going straight to the monastery, mount the scaffolding, take up his brush, give one or two touches to a figure, and then, quite suddenly, come down again and go off somewhere else.'

When another two years had gone by, an official was able to assure the Duke, at long last, that 'no time will be lost in respect of the Black Chamber' and that 'on Monday the scaffolding will be taken down in the Great Panelled Room. Messer Leonardo promises to complete the work by the end of September' [1498]. The walls of the Panelled Room were decorated with towering trees. In among their interwoven branches ran a pattern of golden cords. The foliage of the trees spread, like an intricate canopy, across the ceiling. Although it must be only a guess, I do not think that we can more naturally explain the

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exasperating slowness with which Leonardo executed his works of art than by supposing that, by this time, he was much more interested in his anatomical, astronomical, mathematical and geological studies: that, in a word, he was undergoing a spiritual revolution and that, just as the caterpillar changes into the butterfly, so was the artist turning—perhaps painfully—into the man of science.

To us in England there is an almost personal interest connected with another of the works which he accomplished during his maturity in Milan. Every one is familiar, or at least acquainted, with the picture which is called *The Virgin of the Rocks*. One version is in the Louvre, another in our National Gallery; and as we study the latter, we are able at last to come into direct touch with Leonardo's powerful and mysterious personality. Those of us who arrive at convictions mainly by intuition or spiritual experience rather than solely by the road of reason are accustomed to the charge that we are merely sentimental or fanciful. Nevertheless, I will admit that I

believe a picture to be more than an object compounded of pigments and canvas or wood : that I believe, as others will if ever the world becomes satisfied that psychometry is a mode of genuine perception, that a painter unconsciously imparts an emanation of himself to the picture which he paints, and that the more intensely he feels while he is at work, the more lastingly will he transmit a ghost of his personality to the materials which he uses. Leonardo, in my view, is still alive in the National Gallery, and in something more than a figurative sense looks out upon us when we contemplate *The Virgin of the Rocks*. Most of the experts, it is true, assure us that the picture was painted almost entirely by his assistants. This, however, was not the view of Anton Springer, who declared (convincingly, to the mind of the present student) that the London picture is 'the product of original and strong inspiration, whilst, owing to its didactic trait, the picture in the Louvre shows signs of being the work of the artist's later years.'

He undertook to paint this picture not for

the Duke but for another body of wealthy monks : but when it was finished, the monks and the painter were unable to agree about the price. ‘ From the document discovered in the archives,’ says Mrs. Taylor, ‘ it is evident that the monks wanted a gilded and carved ancona,¹ that Leonardo himself did the central picture, that the monks, according to the petitioners [Leonardo and his assistant Ambrogio da Predis], had fixed a price that barely covered expenses, and that there was a higher bidder for the picture.’

After some haggling, Leonardo and da Predis appealed to the Duke. The painters wanted a hundred ducats, the monks proposed to pay twenty-five. We have no record of what happened next, but it is easy to guess, for the picture passed very soon into the possession of the French king : and inasmuch as there is a second version of it—the one which in 1787 was brought to England—the experts assume that the monks regretted the upshot of

¹ ‘ A picture or group of pictures with elaborate setting, usually architectural.’ [Webster.]

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their behaviour, if not the behaviour itself, and that our picture was painted to satisfy their claim.

By this time, or shortly afterwards, Lodovico had involved himself in political and financial difficulties. Leonardo seems not at any time to have meddled with politics or to have been interested in them. They were, indeed, the only subject to which he appears to be completely indifferent: but he does twice refer obliquely to the Duke's financial troubles. On one occasion he wrote to the Duke: 'It grieves me that in order to make a livelihood [for his pupils as well as himself] I have had to interrupt my work and to occupy myself with trifles instead of carrying out the task which your Highness imposed upon me. . . . I have had to maintain six men for six months, and have received [from the Ducal exchequer] only fifty ducats.' On another occasion he wrote, in connection with the bronze casting of the equestrian statue, 'I will not speak of the Horse, for I know the times.' Lodovico, when he got this letter, was quite unable to provide

any ducats, but it does him credit that he should have given Leonardo a valuable vineyard instead.

Ruin was rapidly advancing toward Lodovico, that gracious and benevolent despot, when, in 1498, *The Last Supper* was finished : and a disaster in its train was advancing toward Leonardo—a disaster which might have broken the heart of a more passionate or more worldly man or of a man (if my diagnosis be right) who was not, by this time, more deeply concerned with science than with art. Lodovico, hard pressed on all sides by his envious Italian rivals, made the fatal blunder of inviting the French to help him. In 1499 the French army entered Milan. Before long, incited by the splendour of the city and the resources of the dukedom, the invaders turned against Lodovico. In despair he ‘sent his children and his remaining treasure to Innsbrück . . . and rode away, clothed in black, to his one friend the Emperor. He would not now nor afterwards despoil his city to satisfy the Swiss ; nor would he expose it to the

danger of a siege and sack.' In 1500, after a brief and unavailing return to Milan, the Duke was taken prisoner. He asked for nothing except his copy of Dante's poem : and he passed the miserable remainder of his days in a French dungeon.

In 1501 the French were still in occupation at Milan. The Gascon archers, discovering the huge clay-model of the Horse, decided that it would make an ideal target for their shooting-practice. Bit by bit they broke up with their arrows the work upon which Leonardo had bestowed so many hundreds of hours during the years when his power and interest as an artist had been at their strongest. It is for this reason that nothing remains of it but a rumour in history and some light sketches.

Since, too, *The Last Supper* probably showed already to an expert eye that it would soon perish, Leonardo may well have gone away from Milan with a feeling that fate was thwarting him as an artist. The ruin of *The Last Supper*, however, is a remarkable example of irony. He refused to employ the traditional

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method of tempera-painting because it meant that nothing, once painted, could be altered or expunged. 'A painter,' he used to say, 'who has no doubts, will have small success'; and for his vacillations, corrections and extreme slowness, oil was manifestly the only medium. 'It was in vain that experienced masters told him that oil paints were impracticable for use on a damp wall that stood on the verge of a marsh. . . . He mixed his paints in a special way, and prepared the wall by coating it first with clay, varnished and oiled, then with a mixture of mastic, pitch and plaster.'¹ In this way the most scientific of painters foredoomed his most ambitious picture by basing it upon an unsound scientific experiment. In Vasari's time—about forty years later—the fresco was 'a blur.' Another few years passed, and it had become 'a ghost.' The monks of each decade, seeing that it was lost for good, allowed smoke to drift all over it. At one period a door was actually cut through its centre; and Napoleon's soldiers, who used

¹ Merejkowski.

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the room as a stable and a hayloft, threw their missiles at the painted wall : but eventually, in the manner of their kind, ' the restorers were its deadliest foes.'

He comments with characteristic brevity and detachment upon the tragic fall of a patron who had befriended him for sixteen years. ' The Duke,' he wrote, ' has lost his dukedom, his possessions and his liberty, and not one of his undertakings will be completed.' For a time Leonardo remained in Milan, wondering perhaps whether he might find employment with the French. He sent his savings to Florence. Then, accompanied by his pupils, he moved to Venice and stayed there a little while, watching the political sky. After the final eclipse of Lodovico, he left Venice for Mantua, where he made a drawing of the great Isabella d'Este : and it is obvious that a contemporary was right when he reported that ' it is extremely lifelike.' We see, too, that Leonardo stamped an instant and a deep impression upon Mantua. He must have had one of those clear, pleasant but unadaptable

personalities which hypnotise people into fancying that a man's work is even more marvellous than it is : the type of personality, like Rossetti's or Bernard Shaw's, which, while it is present in the world, often evokes a blind idolatry.

When Leonardo returned to Florence, Michelangelo was twenty-four and Raffaello eighteen ; but many of the older painters had died or had become inoperative. Leonardo, if he had not grown tired or contemptuous of painting, might easily have established himself, at the age of nearly fifty, as the leading artist in his native city. Instead of doing so, ' he turned his back on art and devoted himself to his manifold scientific studies, especially to mathematics and to such questions of technical engineering as the regulation of the Arno.'¹

Vainly did even Isabella try to cajole a new picture from him. Her efforts to do so give us a clear glimpse of his life at this time. She asked an intermediary ' whether Leonardo is inclined to paint a picture in our studio. If

¹ Gronau.

he consents, we will leave the subject and the time' (rash lady) 'to his decision. If he is reluctant, try at least to induce him to paint for us a small picture of the Madonna, pious and sweet, as is his style. And ask him also if he will send us a new copy of the drawing which he made of me. His Highness [her husband] has given away the one that we had.'

'Leonardo's life,' replied her correspondent, 'is changeful and uncertain. It is thought that he lives only for the day. Since he has been in Florence, he has worked on one cartoon alone. . . . The study is not yet complete. He has done nothing else except that now and then he touches one or other of the portraits which his two assistants are painting. He is entirely wrapped up in geometry and has no patience for painting.'

The cartoon to which this letter refers was a study for an altar-piece. The monks for whom the work was destined had originally commissioned the faithful Filippino to paint it, but apparently, at the mention of Leonardo's name, he withdrew from the undertaking.

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When the cartoon was finished, 'the room in which it stood was crowded for two days by men and women, old and young, who were amazed at the marvellous work.' By this time, however, we are not surprised to learn that he did not even begin the actual picture or that the monks resorted, as usual, to Filippino Lippi. Filippino began to work upon it, but died, at the age of forty-seven, with his task unfinished, and the picture in the end was completed by the facile, money-loving but ever-ready Perugino.

In the summer of 1501 Leonardo's life swerved in an unexpected direction. As an engineer, not as an artist, he attached himself to a new patron: to a ruthless, evil and fascinating son of the Pope—to Cesare Borgia, the orchid of the Renaissance.

V

BATTLEFIELDS (49-51)

THE Borgias were not Italian. They were descended from the Moors of Castile. Cesare, that unscrupulous rascal—that ‘hell-cat,’ as Symonds calls him—could have achieved nothing or very little if his father had not been Pope. As it was, the Borgias decided that the Pope must recover the papal estates which, in their doctrine, had been granted to the papacy by so remote a person as Constantine the Great. Cesare Borgia set himself to manufacture a great principality by conquest. There is little doubt that he expected to succeed his father, the infamous Alexander the Sixth : and, as every one knows, he drew no line anywhere in the methods by which he sought his goal. At the same time we must remember that he had to work quickly. The papacy was not heredi-

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tary. If he could not found a first-rate principality within a few years, he would have lost his chance : and so, indeed, the matter turned out.

Leonardo's association with this brilliant and terrifying creature was a mere interlude in his career. It lasted about two years : but his elaborate picture of an insignificant skirmish, *The Battle of Anghiari*, which is one of his many vanished works, derived its inspiration from his experience as engineer-in-chief to the Borgias. Moreover, it would be at this time that he first met Macchiavelli—Macchiavelli who was then attached officially to Cesare Borgia and who made Cesare the hero of his greatest work, his treatise upon politics—'The Prince' : a book which, because it exalts success above morality, has made him one of the few score of men whose names have been turned into adjectives. Presumably, too, it must have been Borgia's military campaigns which were in Leonardo's mind when, once more so far in advance of his age, he described war, in his Notebooks, as 'a bestial madness.' Nevertheless, he seized his opportunities of observing and recording, with

his customary detachment, the effect of that bestial madness upon the faces of those who were involved in it.

Cesare obviously realised the military value of Leonardo's genius. For one thing, Leonardo was able to provide him with large-scale maps of those parts of Italy in which Cesare was operating : nor do I think that we can miss the note of admiration which sounds in a free-pass which the young conqueror bestowed upon his middle-aged engineer. In Mrs. Taylor's version it runs as follows :

' To all our lieutenants, castellans, captains, condottiere, officials, soldiers and subjects hereafter cognisant of this decree, we constrain and command that to the bearer, our most excellent and well-beloved servant, architect and engineer-in-chief, Leonardo Vinci (whom we have appointed to inspect strongholds and fortresses in our dominions to the end that according to their need and to his counsel we may be enabled to provide for their necessities), we afford a passage absolutely free from any toll or tax, a friendly welcome both for

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himself and his company, freedom to see, examine and take measurements precisely as he may wish, and for this purpose assistance in men as many as he may desire, and all possible aid, assistance and favour, it being our will that in the carrying out of any works, in our dominions, every engineer will be bound to confer with him and to follow his advice.'

Leonardo evidently worked to the satisfaction of his new patron, but he kept his mind completely aloof from the latter's political machinations. While the man of action was bewitching his enemies to their doom, 'like a basilisk,' said Macchiavelli, 'which entices its victims by the sweetness of its singing,' the man of thought was observing that 'in Romagna they use four-wheeled carts, the front wheels small, the back wheels large; a mistaken construction, for all the weight rests on the front': while Cesare was gathering up the spoil of a fallen city, Leonardo saw only an opportunity of getting from its library a copy of the Codex of Archimedes: and even, it seems, during one of Cesare's battles, Leonardo calmly observed

the flight of some cranes. Similarly, at Siena he made a note of the deep-toned bell which he heard there, and at Urbino—captured by a disgraceful trick—he took out his Notebook and drew a dovecote.

As Freud says, we see in his behaviour—particularly at this period—‘a certain inactivity and indifference,’ a suggestion that he was ‘indifferent to good and evil.’ Cesare Borgia was a man in whom no conscience had ever developed. He killed his brother in order to advance himself. He killed his sister’s husband and—almost certainly—proceeded to commit incest with her. The puzzle for which we shall have to attempt a solution is whether a conscience was also missing from Leonardo, or whether he had a conscience and suffered in silence, or whether he had become so profoundly cynical that he now expected most men to be evil. Perhaps, again, there was yet another cause of his ‘indifference.’

He may not have revolted from the Borgia’s atrocities, but there is no evidence for supposing that, like Macchiavelli, he admired him :

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and when, with the sudden death of Alexander the Sixth, all Cesare's plans and achievements were blotted out by the election of a new Pope, Leonardo must have gone back to Florence with no regret except for the loss of an interesting appointment.

VI

FLORENCE AND MICHELANGELO (51-52)

LEONARDO was now fifty. Despite the fact that he had just come from the employ of a man who might have put Florence in great peril, the city restored his name at once to the Guild of Painters, and almost as soon as he arrived he became indirectly associated with Michelangelo, who was then twenty-six. Before he had joined Cesare Borgia, the Florentine County Council had offered him a large mass of marble, 'badly blocked out aforetime by Master Agostino di Duccio.' Leonardo had refused to work upon it. Michelangelo had accepted it: and now, after two years, had transformed it into his magnificent statue of the young David.

'On January the 25th, 1503, a solemn

conclave of artists resident in Florence met in the Opera del Duomo to decide where the great figure should be placed. Piero di Cosimo, Cosimo Roselli, Botticelli, then a man of sixty-six, Filippino Lippi and Da Vinci were among those present. Francesco Monciatto, a wood-carver, began by advancing the proposition that the statue should be put up before the Duomo, the site proposed for the original work, in fact. Cosimo Roselli and Botticelli supported the proposal. Giuliano di San Gallo then suggested the Loggia dei Lanzi as an alternative, on the ground that the marble had been softened by exposure and might not last. The "Second Herald" objected to this, fearing that ceremonies in the Loggia would be interfered with, and his remarks called Leonardo da Vinci to his feet. Finally, Piero di Cosimo, a man of the soundest common-sense in spite of his reputation for freakishness, with the aid of Salvestro, a jeweller, and Filippino Lippi, carried the proposal—an outcome so typical of a long committee-meeting—that the choice should be left to the

sculptor himself on the ground that "he would know better how it should be." ¹

It is difficult not to suspect that Leonardo had a somewhat lordly and condescending manner, or at least a manner so stoical and 'indifferent' that it seemed condescending to men of warmer blood. At Milan he had worked with Bramante, the first architect of the city. Bramante 'was, like Leonardo, a great personality, a lonely man thrown back upon himself, and it appears that the two great men rather repelled than attracted each other. In the notes of Leonardo we have, so far at least, not found one single word about Bramante, though he carefully wrote down the names of every one with whom he came in contact.' ² It is certain that Michelangelo detested Leonardo, though we do not know in what way the older man had annoyed him. In any description of their famous quarrel, it is Michelangelo who impresses us badly.

¹ E. H. Short, *A History of Sculpture*. This book, published in 1907, is a delightful, simple and contagiously enthusiastic introduction to the art of which it treats.

² Rosenberg.

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Leonardo and a friend, while walking in Florence one day, fell in with a group of acquaintances who were discussing a difficult passage in Dante. Some one asked Leonardo to give his interpretation of the words. At this moment Michelangelo came in sight. Leonardo, probably out of courtesy and possibly in a spirit of peace-making, said, 'Here is Michelangelo. He will explain them.' Michelangelo, with an insolence that was all the viler because he was only half as old as Leonardo, cried out, 'Explain them yourself—you that made the model of a bronze horse and left it unfinished because you couldn't cast it, to your shame be it said!' Leonardo, we read, flushed deeply when he heard this heartless taunt, but made no reply: and Michelangelo stalked away.

Perhaps Michelangelo was merely envious. Perhaps, though, he considered that Leonardo's impressive personality had secured him a reputation in excess even of his ability. How much Leonardo could achieve by sheer personality is revealed to us in an account of his

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ambitious scheme for raising the sunken floor of the Baptistery. 'With such weighty reasons he counselled it, that it appeared possible; although each one of them [the City Fathers], after he had departed, would recognise, when alone by himself, the impossibility of such an undertaking.' The early biographer who tells the story of the quarrel adds that Michelangelo subsequently referred again and again to Leonardo's failure to cast the Horse, and 'would laugh at those Milanese blockheads who had allowed themselves to be caught by Leonardo and to put faith in him.' Leonardo, on his side, made a memorandum which seems clearly to be directed against his young rival. 'O anatomical Painter!' he wrote, 'beware lest the overstrong indication of the bones, sinews and muscles be the cause of your becoming wooden in your painting by your wish to make your nude figures display all their feeling.' Moreover, we must remember, as a possible defence of Michelangelo's anger, that, by common consent of all writers, he felt passionately about the foreign invasion of

Italy and the peril of his own city, and that to him, therefore, Leonardo's 'indifference' may have seemed odious and unpardonable. The impact of these two great artists inevitably recalls that problem of our childhood which required us to describe what would happen 'if an irresistible force met an immovable body.'

In the summer of 1503 the Florentines were besieging Pisa. Leonardo was ordered to investigate the practicability of reducing Pisa by deflecting the river Arno away from the city, and in order that no time might be lost he was driven to Pisa in a coach-and-six. This ingenious and difficult plan was presumably dropped, or we should hear of its completion. In the meanwhile, the Florentine Governor, hoping to fan the martial spirit in his fellow-citizens, commissioned Leonardo and Michelangelo each to paint a battle-picture on opposite walls of a public building. The latter, called away by the Pope, did not advance beyond drawing a preliminary cartoon. Leonardo actually began his painting. Once

again, he insisted upon experimenting. 'He is said to have tried painting in melted wax and then burning it in, after the encaustic methods of the ancients. When this attempt proved a failure, he began to paint in nut oil.' According to Vasari, the plaster used for the ground of his picture was so coarse that the grain of it showed through, an effect which disgusted him so much that he did not continue the work. Benvenuto Cellini, who saw both cartoons, says that Michelangelo's hung in the Palace of the Medici and Leonardo's in the Sala del Papa, and that 'as long as they were there, they formed the art-school of the world.' Certainly, the experts seem to agree that Raffaello studied Leonardo's with advantage. It was known as *The Battle of the Standard*, and Cellini avers that it was 'as divinely wrought as one could possibly imagine.' In order to avoid confusion, it is well to realise that *The Battle of the Standard* was the central portion of *The Battle of Anghiari*.

At the same period, and for long afterwards, in his intermittent way, he was at work upon

the portrait of that Neapolitan lady who is known to the world as Mona Lisa. He seems to have worked upon this picture when the light was waning. Apparently he never considered that he had finished it, but at least he must have parted with the picture, for he bought it back, a few years later, on behalf of the French king, François the First.

The terms in which he recorded the death of his father remind us of the dispassionate entries concerning 'Caterina.' 'At seven o'clock on the 9th of July 1504, Wednesday, died Ser Piero da Vinci, notary at the Palazzo del Podestà, my father, at seven o'clock, being eighty years old and leaving behind him ten male and two female children.' Freud, in the manner of his kind, sees a dark significance in the fact that the hour of death is inadvertently repeated. The repetition is supposed, I gather, to indicate a 'suppressed death-wish,' and possibly it does: for there may well have been a profound disharmony between Leonardo, who never married, who had no children, who loathed the procreative process, and his father,

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who married four times and was so willing an instrument of Nature that he begat twelve children that survived him and who knows how many others that, in the manner of the period, perished in infancy or youth.

His father's death was followed by a lawsuit. The legitimate children attempted to prevent their bastard brother from taking a share of the inheritance. He wrote a number of letters to influential persons, petitioning them to assist him 'because justice is on my side,' but the lawyers naturally dragged out the negotiations as long as possible, and seeing that Leonardo had now gone back to Milan—this time to work for the King of France—the lawsuit involved him in countless journeys from Milan to Florence. His pertinacity in this matter is at variance with his usual 'indifference.' No one has discovered how the lawsuit ended. Perhaps we may guess that at long last Leonardo proved victorious from the fact that in his will he made a generous bequest to these mean and troublesome brothers.

VII

MILAN AND ROME (52-63)

WHEN he returned to Milan he did so by permission of the Florentine government. They stipulated that he must be back in three months. The representative of the French king, however, asked for an extension of leave. The Governor of Florence protested that Leonardo had not only been dilatory in his work for the city but also owed money to it. Leonardo borrowed the money from friends and sent it to Florence. The French were finding him indispensable as a deviser of pageantry, and the French king, Louis the Thirteenth, had been enthusiastic about 'a little picture from the hand of Leonardo which has been recently brought here and which has been considered an excellent work.'¹ It seems evident

¹ The Florentine Secretary at Milan.

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that Leonardo, who could easily have gone home, preferred the admiration of the French to the criticism of the Florentines, an easy supremacy in Milan to the rivalry of his fellow-painters in Florence. The matter was clinched when Louis formally required the Florentine government to let him keep Leonardo, for the Florentines were not sufficiently powerful to risk seriously displeasing the formidable foreigner.

At this period Leonardo made the best friend whom he ever had. A young nobleman named Francesco Melzi, who seems to have been seventeen in 1510, became one of his pupils. This was no freak of fancy. At that time it was as natural for a young aristocrat to take lessons in painting as it would have been, in 1900, for his successor to take riding lessons ; and if we can find no later parallel, it is because, unfortunately, the aristocrat of our day is satisfied to have no particular accomplishments. Melzi, however, proved to be more than a creature of fashion. Although he never achieved high distinction as a painter, he did paint seriously :

and according to Vasari, became an admirable miniaturist. Be that as it may, we know that Leonardo chose his pupils for their comeliness and their manners rather than for their skill, and in Melzi he had found a young man who stayed with him to the end and who remained devoted to his memory. Indeed, nothing could be more significant of Melzi's character and culture than the fact that Leonardo, as we shall see, bequeathed to him the Notebooks which contained so much heretical and 'perilous stuff.' And there is, to my ear, a suggestion of Johnson's affectionate-scolding tone toward Boswell in the words, 'Why in God's name, of all the letters I have written to you, have you never answered one? Now wait till I come, by God, and I shall make you write so much that perhaps you will become sick of it'—an extract, quoted by Mrs. Taylor, from a letter which Leonardo wrote to his new disciple.

At this period, somewhat uneventful in his history, he was still zealously dissecting bodies, but from time to time he would at least glance at the three or four unfinished pictures in his

studio : ‘ the great *Saint Anne* . . . remote and magnificent, a reproach to the pupils who try to complete the colouring. Madonna Lisa hangs there too, destroying Gianpietro’s pretty mincing ladies with a flicker of her lashes. And there glows a sketch of a changed Leda, lovely still, but no more the wild naiad of the Greek river. . . . This new Leda is a Cnidian Venus ; her body is a white amphora of sweet spices ; her oval face and her dreaming eyes are surcharged with the reverie of desire. . . . The beautiful figure must have had a Praxitelean grace : probably it would now have raised a sweet contention as to whether, as a perfect nude, it conquered the sleeping *Venus* of Giorgione.’¹ So great was his prestige as a painter that, as some one has well observed, he ‘ paralysed Milanese painting ’—more completely, even, than Tennyson paralysed mid-Victorian poetry—nor was it for very many years that Milanese painters ceased consciously to imitate him. Every one will recognise the deliquescence of his style in the oversweet work

¹ Mrs. Taylor.

of the once-popular Luini. Sodoma, being more robust, was also a worthier imitator.

It is now too, that, in the course of 'walking the hospitals,' he made certain memoranda which are of some significance. For example, 'Giovannina has a fantastic face : she lives in St. Catherine's Hospital' : and 'Draw the arm of Francesco the miniaturist : it shows so many veins.' On an earlier occasion he had noted that an old man, 'a very few hours before his death, told me that he was more than a hundred years old, and that he felt no discomfort in himself except weakness ; and so, seated on his bed in the hospital of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, with no other movement or any sign of an accident, he passed from this life. And I made an autopsy on him to see the cause of so gentle a death.' 'He found the veins quite desiccated,' says Mrs. Taylor, who also adds, 'Soon after, he dissected a two-year-old child ; and stated an admirable comparison.' Once more I must quote from the same author. The following passage has great value for the particular

assessment of Leonardo's personality which I want, in the end, to put before the reader. 'The grotesques of age he draws at this time,' she observes, 'are peculiarly cruel. They also are often exercises in self-torture; there is a suicidal lust in them. He is like a fading woman, who in the glass twists and exaggerates her mobile face and neck to the finalities of shame in a morbid fit of horror: indeed, his hatred of age'—if it was that—'belongs to his feminine side. All the disgraces of sagging or dried-up flesh are known to him, the hooked nose, the locked toothless mouth, the debasing and brutal folds that ruin the contour and division of neck and chin. Some of these old men are shrewd, some libertine; some have become grossly animal, as though, unleavened by soul, they putrefy; some rage with thrust lip; some seem to wear a lovely oak-chaplet like an obscene ornament.' Their faces remind us, too, of the occasion upon which he invited a number of peasants to his house, gave them food and enough drink to ensure that they should lose their self-consciousness, and then pro-

ceeded to make drawings of their ugly and distorted faces.

By the year 1512 a member of the Medici family, taking the name of Leo the Tenth, had become Pope, and one of the first effects of this change was that the Medici, who had been exiled, returned to rule Florence. The Florentine representative of the family, Giuliano, was already an admirer of Leonardo's versatile genius, and it was at his bidding that Leonardo betook himself from Milan to Rome.

We might have supposed that to a man with his innumerable interests, Rome would have been congenial and exciting, but it is evident that he was not happy during his sojourn there. 'He is,' said Rosenberg, 'the only one of the great artists of the Italian Renaissance to whom Rome seems to have given nothing as regards either substantial goods or artistic inspiration.' He had his triumphs but they were of a trivial kind, not commensurate with his intellectual importance. They were, in fact, connected with ingenious toys. He made, says old Vasari, small animals filled with air,

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which flew about as long as the air blown into them sufficed. On another occasion, he took the intestines of a sheep and expanded them, by the use of bellows, to such a size that they filled the whole room. Again, 'one of the vine-dressers in the Belvedere found a curious lizard, and to this Leonardo fixed wings injected with quicksilver,' so that as the lizard darted hither and thither, the wings flapped. He also provided the creature with horns, artificial eyes and a beard. He then shut it in a box, and when he suddenly released the bizarre little monster, his company backed out of the room in terror.

As a painter he made very little impression on Roman society. Rome and the Pope were enthusiastic about the terrific work of Michelangelo and the flawless work of Raffaello. Leonardo, in a word, was no longer fashionable—so out of fashion, indeed, that even Isabella d'Este, when she was staying in Rome, took no trouble (she who once had taken so much) to secure a painting from him. And although the Pope did ask him to paint a picture, nothing

but disappointment came from the suggestion. Leonardo, we are told, instead of beginning the picture, set about to prepare a varnish for it, compounded of oil and herbs : and the Pope, hearing this, exclaimed, ' Oh, he will do nothing ! He thinks of the end before he has made a beginning.' Raffaello, in spite of his youth, his unprecedented success and the ease, like that of Mozart, with which he produced impeccable masterpieces, was far too gentle and courteous to have behaved offensively to a great artist who was now sixty. Indeed, Raffaello is reported to have painted Leonardo as Plato, and certainly he could not have chosen a better model : but it is obvious that Michelangelo and Isabella would not have failed to tell every one how difficult—to the point of impossibility—it was to get any finished work from Leonardo.

Perhaps, too, his Roman sojourn was even more embittered by the fact that the Pope, who permitted Michelangelo to make anatomical dissections, abruptly put a ban upon those of Leonardo. This was due to

information supplied by a certain German who had worked under Leonardo and had obviously disliked him intensely : but, although there is no evidence to support the guess, it does not seem unlikely that Michelangelo, or his party, did something to strengthen the Pope's decision. Leonardo writes in one of his Notebooks that people have been disseminating ' the usual scandals ' : and how little at ease he found himself in Rome—or, we might say, in the world—is manifest from the words, ' In fine, I come to the conclusion that it is bad if men are hostile and worse if they are friendly.'

With these conditions in mind, it is not surprising to learn that early in 1515 he seems to have been in Milan. The French king, Louis, had died on New Year's Day. The new king, François the First, immediately marched on Milan, defeated the Swiss mercenaries who were defending the city on behalf of Lodovico's son, and entered in triumph. This, it is thought,¹ must have been the occasion upon

¹ *E.g.* by Rosenberg.

which Leonardo constructed the most elaborate and marvellous of his toys : a mechanical lion which paced round the hall and stopped in front of the King, who then saw its breast open and let fall upon the ground a great mass of lilies, the emblem of the Bourbons.

Very soon after this event François engaged him as court painter, and gave him the handsome annuity of seven hundred scudi. He also ratified Lodovico's old present of the vineyard : an incident which happens to provide us with evidence of Leonardo's practical knowledge of wine-growing. We see this in a letter which he wrote to his manager.

‘ The last four bottles,’ he complained, ‘ were not at all up to my expectations, and I have been annoyed about it. If the vines sent from Florence were better cultivated, they would provide this part of Italy with the most beautiful wine, such as Ser Ottavio de' Medici of Florence produces. I have told you already that you must improve the soil by putting broken rubbish or mortar from ruined walls into it. This protects the roots from damp,

and both stem and leaves can thus draw from the air the substance necessary for the perfecting of the grapes. Another great mistake is that nowadays we make wine in open vessels. This causes the essence to evaporate, and nothing remains but a tasteless fluid coloured by the skins and the pips. It is also a mistake not to pour the wine as often as necessary from one cask into another. By neglecting this, it becomes dim and promotes indigestion. If you and the others would follow these directions, we should be able to drink an excellent wine. God be with you.'

Florence, though moderately proud of him, had never sunned his genius or his vanity. Milan, now that it had no Duke and no court that were avid for beauty, could no longer give him the support or the stimulus which he required. Rome, it seems, regarded him as an honourable back-number. He was ageing—prematurely ageing. Indeed, Mrs. Taylor appears to think that a paralysis of his right hand had already begun. He was fortunate, therefore, to find at this moment a new, powerful

and appreciative patron. François, having stamped his seal upon Milan, had of course to go back to Tours and attend to his kingdom. He left Milan at the end of January 1516. He had invited Leonardo to go with him. Leonardo had consented. The pupil who had probably worked with him for the longest period was a young man named Salai. Salai had no stomach for an exile in France—a country which, like the Pope, he would have considered to be barbarous. He stayed behind, and Leonardo seems to have arranged for Salai to superintend the vineyard. Melzi, a much later pupil, took up a very different attitude. ‘Do not ask me to leave you,’ he said, ‘or when I have gone with you, to come back.’ And it was with Melzi and two servants that Leonardo, at the age of sixty-three, left Italy, probably for the first time, certainly for the last. ‘There is,’ says my chief authority, ‘something symbolical in that little group. It is the Renaissance passing from Italy to France.’

VIII

FRANCE (63-67)

THE last phase of his life was short. After living in France for three years, he died : but during those three years he lived in an atmosphere of peace, honour and something like affluence.

The King, whose capital was Tours, not Paris, gave him ample quarters in the Castle of Cloux, near Amboise. Here, although in 1517 his right hand was definitely paralysed, he continued to draw and to write with his left. Once more he planned cities—in a spirit less haughty, perhaps, than of old, for he now suggested that when the court was absent, the country people (presumably the local gentry) might occupy the courtiers' dwellings. Once more he busied himself with canal-projects, including a scheme for joining the Loire with the Saône. At another time he designed a new palace for the

King at Amboise : and again, when Marguerite de Valois paid the King a visit, he devised the masques with which her visit was celebrated. Furthermore, as though to make a beginning of synthesising the miscellaneous observations which he had accumulated in his fifteen Notebooks, he did finish a brief treatise on 'The Flight of Birds.' The King, too, bought the picture of Mona Lisa, paying for it with characteristic generosity : and steadily, slowly and devotedly Leonardo worked upon his last picture—the strange figure, almost an hermaphrodite, which he called *Saint John the Baptist*. The paralysis of his right hand descended upon him while he was at work.

According to Cellini, who subsequently worked in France when the Renaissance had gathered strength there, François thought so highly of his court painter as to say that 'never any man had come into the world who knew so much as Leonardo ; and that not only in matters of sculpture, painting and architecture, but in addition he was a great philosopher.' We have, too, in a letter

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written by the secretary of a French cardinal, a delightful snapshot of the old painter and scientist as he appeared to foreigners at this time, though the secretary supposed him to be older than he was. 'On the 18th of October 1517,' he wrote, 'we went from Tours to Amboise. In one of the suburbs, we went with the cardinal to visit Messer Leonardo Vinci, the Florentine, more than seventy years old, the most excellent painter of the time. He showed his Excellency three pictures : one, drawn from the model, is of a certain Florentine Lady [this picture has not been identified], executed at the request of the late Giuliano de' Medici the Magnificent ; the other of Saint John Baptist, young ; and the third of the Madonna and the Son who rest in the lap of Saint Anne ; all the three very perfect, although from him, since he has been stricken with a certain paralysis of the right hand, no more masterpieces can be expected. He has been the benefactor of a Milanese disciple [Melzi] who works very well. Although the said Messer Leonardo cannot paint

any longer with the suavity (*dolcezza*) which was natural to him, he can still make drawings and teach others. This gentleman has written on anatomy in its relations to painting in an admirable fashion, describing the bones, members, muscles, nerves, veins, joints, intestines—and all that one can study in the body of man or woman—as none has done before him. We have seen it with our eyes : and he told us that he had dissected more than thirty bodies of men and women of all ages. He has also written on the nature of water. With various machines and other things he has filled an infinity of volumes, all written in the vulgar language, which, published, would be of the greatest utility and the greatest charm.’¹

On April the 23rd he made his will. Scholars have expressed great surprise that he should have been so careful to take advantage of all the beauty and dignity with which the Roman Church treats death. He commends his soul to God, to the Virgin Mary, to Saint

¹ Quoted by Mrs. Taylor.

Michael and All Angels, and to the Saints in Paradise, and states that he wishes to be buried in the Church of Saint Florentinus in Amboise—which he calls Ambosa. His body is to be carried there by the Chaplains of this Church, accompanied by the rest of the clergy and by certain other Chaplains and certain monks. Before the funeral three High Masses are to be celebrated in three churches. Sixty poor men are to be paid for carrying torches. A fixed sum is to be given to the poor of two hospitals, and the churches are to receive ‘a lavish donation of thick wax candles.’

He appointed Melzi not only his executor but also his chief heir—‘as a reward for the pleasant services rendered to me in the past.’ He also bequeaths to Melzi, ‘nobleman of Milan,’ his ready money, his apparel, and ‘each and all of my books, as well as the instruments and manuscripts connected with my art and vocation as a painter.’ He gave his vineyard jointly to his old pupil Salai and to a young man who had taken Salai’s place as a personal servant. Finally, he bequeathed,

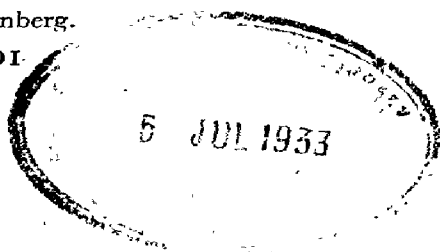
with a charming magnanimity, the sum of four hundred scudi to 'my own brothers living in Florence.' Nine days later—on the 2nd of May—he died, at the age of sixty-seven.

There is little left to say. He was buried, we are told, in the choir of the Church at Amboise, but it is impossible to find his grave. Even 'before 1789 there remained no tombstone of note in the church where Leonardo was buried, and in 1808 the church was demolished. The last tombstones were sold, and the leaden coffins . . . melted down.'¹

Melzi, who afterwards went home to Milan, carefully kept the Notebooks until, in 1568, nearly fifty years later, he also died. His successors, caring little about them, allowed the books to be separated. Some of them passed into the possession of the Ambrosian Library in Milan. A few are in Paris and elsewhere in Milan. Many were bought by Charles the First of England, and are now at Windsor Castle.

In a letter to the legitimate sons of the late

¹ Rosenberg.



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notary, Francesco Melzi wrote : ' I believe that you are informed of the death of Messer Leonardo, your brother, and to me the best of fathers. It would be impossible for me to express the grief which his death has caused me, and so long as I live I shall remain inconsolable, and with good reason, for he showed me daily a warm and sincere love. Every one is grieving for the death of such a man whose like it is not in the power of nature to create again. May Almighty God now give him eternal rest. He departed this life on the 2nd of May, well prepared and with all the rites of the Holy Mother Church.'

IX

THE SECRET

THE reader may have had, probably as a child, a nightmare in which he saw himself, a defenceless and insignificant figure, walking between two files of hungry and furious ogres. That is how I picture myself at the present moment, as I put back upon the shelf those historical volumes to which I am so greatly indebted, and go forth to find, if I can, the secret of Leonardo's nature. I see, first of all, the historians themselves, persons who have much vaster knowledge than I have of Leonardo and of the fifteenth-century world. Next, I see the psychoanalysts who are more ingenious than any detective, more persuasive than any King's Counsel, who can put together the jigsaw puzzle of any personality. Lastly, I see the art-critics to whom inevitably I shall

seem the most infantile of trespassers in their battle-scarred province.

I can speak only as the plainest of plain men. Now, no truly plain man has anything but a profound respect for the learning of historians. Nevertheless, he must occasionally venture upon a judgment. We get through our lives by making provisional judgments ; and if we were to wait until we knew everything ascertainable about a subject, we should never form any opinions at all. Similarly, we plain men may not have made up our minds about the claims of psychoanalysis, but the more we study it the more likely we are to believe that it contains much truth. As for the art-experts, they are a terrifying group : and although I have slipped out the fact that long ago I was an art-student, I realise that a little superficial experience gives me no right to question the pronouncements of men who have devoted their lives to the study of pictures, microscope in hand.

A plain man, however, would not be human if he did not relish the woeful story of Dr. Wilhelm von Bode. Dr. von Bode was an august

personage. In his time he was acknowledged to be one of the most authoritative art-experts in the world. The reader, if old enough, may recall that in 1911 Dr. von Bode discovered in an English studio a bust of a lady—I think it was modelled in wax—and that, announcing it to be a lost work by Leonardo, he carried it off in triumph to Berlin. There, under pressure from the artist who sold it to him, he consented to have the work X-rayed. The X-ray photograph revealed, as the artist in question had foretold, that inside the bust by Leonardo nestled a mid-Victorian waistcoat. This waistcoat had been the property of the artist's father, who was, indeed, the man who had modelled the bust. Now, if no one had discovered the waistcoat, the bust would have been worth a pocketful of rubies and would have received, no doubt, the highest praise from all the art-experts of the world: but the waistcoat reduced its value to almost nothing, and consigned to oblivion this remarkable lost work by Leonardo. Here the plain man, if plain enough, might easily have triumphed. Looking at the

bust he might well have said, ' I cannot see that it is a masterpiece '—and thereby have earned the contemptuous pity of the expert. For indeed there is no wiser story than the Story of the Emperor's Clothes, and it has a constant application to the worlds in which art and literature are assessed. Hardly any one can resist the hypnotism of an immense renown.

However, I propose to ' quote ' from Leonardo's pictures merely as one plain man to another : saying not a word, if I can avoid it, about ' mass,' ' volume,' ' significant form,' ' planes,' ' brushwork,' ' dynamic decomposition,' or anything of the kind, but trying, rather, to extract from the pictures a little news of the man.¹ For in the benighted age when Leonardo was drawing, art had not been driven to sulk in a corner or to devise excuses for its existence. No painter and no poet had become so desiccated that he tried to produce a ' pure ' art, an art, that is, which should be

¹ The best well-illustrated monograph, at a low price, which I could find is *Leonardo da Vinci*, by Adolf Rosenberg, 1903. Frevel & Co.

'pure' from any connection with the rest of life. People delighted in looking at pictures, delighted in their intense colour or their shadow-and-light, and expected a painting to represent or to idealise objects—for example, human faces—which were familiar in the visible world. To them there was something magical in the man who could record with brush or pencil the shapes of the world that pleased or in any way excited him. We forget—every one every day forgets—how different the world was before the invention of photography. In pre-photography ages, the man who wanted a record of any attractive place or person, including himself, had to hire an artist who possessed the requisite magic in his eyes and fingers. For this reason, painters did not have to justify their occupation, did not have to pretend that the interest of a picture consists in the relation of one form to another, and did not need to announce that their work should appeal only to a particular 'sense,' an aesthetic sense which has no connection with the rest of a man's life. The old painters worked for the

whole pleasure-part of their spectator's mind. They expected people to care about the correct representation of the objects painted, and about the attractiveness of a painted landscape when considered simply as a place where the spectator would like to be. When they painted a portrait, they expected their public to approve the likeness and to be interested in the character of the sitter.

It is obvious to the meanest intelligence—that of the plain man—that a painting, if well conceived and executed, can achieve delightful effects which are unobtainable by the best photography, but we cannot imagine the sensation which a photograph would have caused among those fifteenth-century painters who struggled so long to get their perspective right and ‘to make flat objects appear to be round.’ Thus, Leonardo himself says, in his ‘Treatise on Painting’: ‘The first aim of the painter must be to give to the smooth surface of his picture the appearance of a relief standing out from the background. He who surpasses all others in this point deserves to be

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called the greatest.' 'But it is hard for our minds,' Mrs. Taylor rightly observes, 'to realise Leonardo's great originality in art. The soft miracles of his chiaroscuro were an amazement in their time, more astonishing and more delectable than cubist patterns are now. . . . The soft modelling touches of the light . . . and the tender mysticism of the green-lit shadow seemed mere magic to those who had not yet tried to paint the impalpable.' And what should we think when we hear Mr. Roger Fry¹ declare that 'the worst painter of to-day can give to his picture truer perspective and truer light than Giotto could, but this does not make him a better artist. The aesthetic value of a work of art is, in fact, independent of its factual content'? Perhaps, ignoring the second sentence in this quotation, we ought to conclude, quite simply, that Leonardo and some of his contemporaries at last discovered for humanity how a painter could 'make what is flat appear to be round'; that this achievement was a definite milestone in human ad-

¹ In *An Outline of Modern Knowledge*.

vance ; and that ‘ the worst painter of to-day ’ can do what was once so difficult, just as thousands of young men can now construct a wireless apparatus because, a few years ago, the first makers found out how to do so. Indeed, if we want to appreciate Leonardo’s astonishing achievement we can do so very well by listening to Mr. Fry when he says, ‘ A little later, Leonardo began a scientific study of the colour effects of the atmosphere and the principles which govern the changes in the local colour of objects in various situations. In Leonardo’s scientific investigation into the laws of appearance he far outran the practice of his day, and the principles he laid down only found their application to painting in the Impressionist school of the nineteenth century.’

Now that ‘ true light ’ and ‘ true perspective,’ the age-long aim of artists, can be achieved, at least in a high measure, by our worst practitioners, all painters are trying to substitute some new aim for the old one which was reached so long ago as Leonardo’s time. To the plain man, however, they resemble

those elderly women who attempt so frantically and so ineffectually to achieve a second blooming by artificial means. To us it seems clear that painting is played out—that in Europe it reached its highest possible point in the sixteenth century, just as railway engines, we are told, attained their maximum of efficiency about fifty years ago. True, there are still some people, a small band, who care ardently about pictures: but even Mr. Fry admits, with admirable candour, that ‘deeply rooted as is the impulse to painting and sculpture in human nature, it would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that the average adult citizen of to-day would get through life with no appreciable difference if these arts had never come into being.’ It would be no exaggeration: but ‘the average adult citizen’ of yesterday—that is, of three or four centuries ago—would have felt differently about the arts: and the explanation, to the plain man, seems to be clear. The arts, in a word, belong to an earlier phase of human society, to a level of the mind which is now becoming

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archaic. They are vestigial : and those of us who still care more for a picture than for a motor-car, for a book of poems than for a double-barrelled gun, are survivors of a bygone stage in human development.

In this connection Mr. Frank Rutter,¹ without seeing the significance of his quotation, says pertinently : ‘ Sir Francis Galton . . . devoted considerable attention to the power of visualising. . . . As a result of his investigations he discovered the power of visualising to be higher in the female sex than in the male, and somewhat higher in schoolboys than in men, the evidence tending to suggest that a habit of “ hard abstract thinking ” among the middle-aged impaired this faculty of visualisation.’ The thinking need not, perhaps, be uncomfortably hard so long as it is abstract ; and a continual calculation of figures is probably enough to suppress the visualising faculty. This faculty, it seems clear, is uncivilised. To think in pictures or metaphors is barbaric compared with the

¹ *Evolution in Modern Art.*

abstract thinking of a Kant, a Darwin or any Higher Mathematician. Such persons as these, therefore, are likely to lose, or never to possess, an interest in the arts. Darwin, as every schoolgirl knows, became incapable of reading fiction because he could not lose himself in a fantasy : and, as every schoolboy knows, there was an eighteenth-century philosopher who, hearing of Lord Shelburne's collection of Greek and Roman statues, said that he could not understand 'his lordship's interest in those dolls.'

If, then, a visualising mind pertains to that half of the human race which is backward and gradually dying out, we shall easily apprehend the notion that sculpture came to its full moon in ancient Athens, lyrical or narrative poetry in the age of Dante, painting in Renaissance Italy, and poetic drama (now as dead as the archeopteryx) in Shakespeare's lifetime. All these arts, of course, have been practised continuously since they came to their best. Indeed, there will always be atavistic persons who will write poems and paint pictures, just as there

will always be persons, even a thousand years hence, who will not walk under a ladder : but the test of the vitality in any art should be measured by society's active demand for it. In Homer's time, in the time of the Scandinavian skalds and, finally perhaps, in the time of the troubadours and Chaucer, people congregated eagerly to hear a poem and relished the mild hypnotism of metre. Poetry persisted as a live interest a little longer in drama because the visualising faculty had to work less hard in a theatre. As this faculty slowly but steadily declined—being much damaged by the invention of print—people came more and more to prefer to be addressed in words rather than in images, and for this reason they lost the power to be excited first by sculpture, the most objective form of imagery, and then by painting. The next stage in their progress is marked by a preference for speech or literature that is unadorned, unpictorial and unemotional, as we see in the extinction of oratory and in the occultation of poetry by prose.

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We see it even more conspicuously in the brilliant and ingenious efforts of many living people, and among them some professors, to persuade themselves that there is a true and new poetry in the works of certain poets who write so allusively that we must have richly-stored literary memories if we are to catch the meanings that are locked within the lines, and so obscurely that they have to provide their poems with notes and references. The practitioners and the praisers of this school are, in reality, as incapable of writing or appreciating poetry as of performing a savage war-dance. They are too old in mind. They are too far in advance of the poetic phase in human development. Poetry is too simple to satisfy their puzzle-loving mentality.

If we need still further evidence on this point we have only to reflect that the sudden popularity of verse, during the Great War, was manifestly due to the fact that people were then reverting emotionally to a phase more primitive than is now normal : and again, that the writing and relishing of poetry occurs typically

in early youth. It will occur, as the world progresses, at an ever earlier age until, three or four hundred years hence, poetry, like rattles and tooth-corals, will be found only in the State homes for incubated infants. We may say, therefore, that a mediocre engineer is a more advanced type than the best of living poets or painters, just as the dullest Aurignacian was ahead of the brightest Mousterian.

Leonardo, in this respect as in so many others, astonishingly anticipated the future. It is obvious that painting interested him less and less, that in the latter half of his life he was really a man of science, and that if he could have looked forward into the present age he would have wanted much more to know how far our science had advanced than to find out what had happened to painting. Indeed, he may actually have realised that painting had touched its meridian and that science had an indefinitely long course to run. We only want to write or paint well so long as we are not sure that we can do so. If we could be certain of producing a masterpiece whenever we took

up a pen or a brush, we should find as little interest in producing it as a healthy man finds in a walk which, to an invalid, would be a notable event : and Leonardo may have lost interest in art when he found that he could achieve what he wanted.

One of his pupils, it is true, supposed, a little innocently, that Leonardo's hesitancy in painting was due to humility. ' It seemed,' said this pupil, ' that whenever he set himself to paint he was frightened, and he never finished anything which he had begun because he recognised the grandeur of art. He detected faults in works which to other people seemed like miracles ' : an interpretation of his psychology which will not combine with the extremely self-confident note of his letter to Lodovico Sforza. At the same time no one—I appeal to all other plain men—can look at his pictures without perceiving that the painter must have been the most fastidious man of his period : a man, in consequence, who would suffer acutely from all that is crude and ugly in nature and in human behaviour : a man who sought, there-

fore, like many another great genius, to give himself through his work all that he wanted and could not find in the real world. We have only to contemplate the faces—and the hands—in *The Virgin of the Rocks*, *Saint Anne* and *Saint John* to see that he is one of the few painters who have bequeathed to the world an ideal type: a type exceedingly ethereal, lacking in all sensuality, as gentle as Botticelli's type, but wiser and not childlike.

How consciously he was painting his own spiritual likeness, and probably to some extent his physical appearance as it was in youth, we can judge from his own words. 'An artist,' he wrote, 'whose hands are angular and bony is apt to depict people with angular and bony hands; for every man likes the faces and the bodies which resemble his own. The ugly painter will choose ugly models, and *vice versa*. Do not let the men and women whom you paint seem to be your blood-relations whether in beauty or in deformity. This is a fault which attaches to many Italian artists. In painting there is no error more treacherous. I consider

that the temptation arises'—in this we hear the voice of the Platonism which was fashionable in his youth—'from the fact that the soul makes the body which belongs to it. Of old it shaped and fashioned that body in its own likeness ; and now, when again it is called upon to fashion a new body with brushes and paint, it yearns to reproduce the shape in which it has long had its habitation.'

His work, we feel, was an attempt to escape from the obvious and the actual, an attempt, we might say, to escape from what most people regard as real life. In oblique support of our feeling we can cite two significant sayings. In the first he says : ' Observe the tenderness and charm on the faces of men and women as they pass along the shadowed street between the dark walls of houses at twilight or on clouded days. This is the most perfect light ; your shadow, gradually vanishing into the light, will fade like smoke, like a soft music. Remember that between the light and the dark there is something which partakes of both ; luminous shadow or a dusky light. Seek for it, O Painter!

for therein lies the secret of charm—of enchantment.’ In the other he says : ‘ For portraits, have a special studio ; a court, oblong and rectangular, ten *braccia* in width, twenty in length, the walls painted black, with a projecting roof and canvas curtains for the sun. Or, if you haven’t the canvas curtains, paint only in the twilight or when it is clouded and dull. That is the perfect light.’

The reader, if the foregoing pages have been able to hold his attention, will recall that Leonardo extolled light-and-shadow effects at the expense of what he felt to be the vulgarity of bright colour. Ruskin says somewhere that a love of bright colour characterises a young and healthy nation. It is not surprising, therefore, that he should have had an imperfect sympathy with Leonardo, of whom he said, ‘ He debased his finer instincts by caricature ’—a judgment of which I hope to show the superficiality and obtuseness—‘ and remained to the end of his days the slave of an archaic smile ’—a misunderstanding quite extraordinary in so sensitive a man as Ruskin. Still, he may very

well be right when he says that healthy people like bright colours ; and if we associate with Leonardo's preference for a half-light his passion for solitude, we shall probably suspect that he was what Dr. Jung would call an extreme ' introvert ' and also what Dr. Freud would call an extreme ' narcissan.' ' Your strength, O Painter,' he wrote, ' is in solitude. When you are alone, you belong wholly to yourself ; but if you have even one companion, you are only half your own—possibly less than half, if your friend is indiscreet. If you have many friends, you fall more deeply into the same slough. And if you say " I will withdraw myself and practise the contemplation of Nature " you will not succeed, for you will be lending one ear to the challenge of your friends, and since no man can serve two masters you will not do well by your friends and will do worse by your art. . . . Remember, O Painter, that your strength is in solitude.' Little wonder, then, if his paintings are nearly always inspired by an imperative need to escape from reality and the rough grain of life. This feeling is unmistakable in his

loveliest work—*Saint Anne, The Virgin of the Rocks* and *Saint John*. The chief exception is his lost picture, *The Battle of Anghiari*, of which the central event was *The Battle of the Standard*. This portion of the picture, as the reader may remember, was copied—or rather ‘adapted’—by a great painter who had less in common with Leonardo than any painter who ever lived. It was impossible for so powerful a personality as Rubens to make a faithful copy, but from his rendering of *The Battle of the Standard* we can see that for once Leonardo tried to portray only the desperate animalism of fighting men. And that sometimes he could be quaintly simple is shown by his recommendation to all battle-painters to ‘make sure that every inch of level ground is discoloured by blood.’

Indeed, we should always remember his principle that ‘a good painter has two chief objects to paint, man and the intention of man’s soul. The former is easy, the latter is hard—for he has to represent it by the attitudes and movements of the limbs.’ It is characteristic of him, too, that he should also have recom-

mended painters to give special observation to the gestures of dumb people—on the ground that ‘their movements are more spontaneous and therefore more significant.’ From these remarks we see that Leonardo, when he was not rendering a pensive mood, aimed unabashedly at definitely dramatic effects: and for some students there is too much suggestion in *The Last Supper* that many of the disciples are like actors in a theatre so vast that they are forced to play to the gallery. Mr. Berenson calls them ‘gesticulating Italians’—and that is hardly fair: for Italians are gesticulatory by nature, and we have no right to expect Leonardo to have painted a group of reserved British disciples. Nevertheless, I am confident that a great many students will feel that the picture is unquestionably too declamatory. Perhaps they will also feel that it is oppressively mathematical—for instance, that the disciples are too neatly segregated into four groups of three persons in each. Most unprejudiced students will probably surmise that Leonardo did not conceive the picture in a moment of

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inspiration but built it up slowly and upon an intellectual basis. If that be true we can understand why a French critic exclaimed that 'Leonardo can do everything except make us believe that he believed.' The work, in fact, although it was a proud achievement, is a religious picture conceived and executed by a sceptic. The scepticism, or at least the lack of religious feeling, in many among his contemporaries, was merely fashionable and due to the *zeitgeist*. Leonardo's scepticism was the more devastating because it was an effect of his scientific investigations.

When we consider his most popular work, the portrait of Mona Lisa, it is more than ever difficult and more than ever important to look at it, so far as we can, with eyes unprejudiced by its fame, by its too great familiarity and by the sentimental reveries of those who have adored and completely misread it. First, then, let us hear what they say, omitting from their chorus the voice of Walter Pater : his idolatrous contribution to Mona Lisa's renown being too well known to require repetition. Herr Müller,

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in his 'Geschichte der Malerei,' unburdens himself to the following effect: 'What fascinates the spectator is the demoniacal charm of the smile. Hundreds of poets and writers have written about this woman, who now seems to smile upon us seductively and now to stare coldly and lifelessly into space, but nobody has solved the riddle of her smile, nobody has interpreted her thoughts. Everything, even the scenery, is mysterious and dreamlike, trembling as if in the sultriness of sensuality.' Herr Müntz sees in this portrait 'the tenderness and coquetry, the modesty and quiet voluptuousness, the whole mystery of the heart which holds itself aloof, of a brain which reflects, and of a personality who watches itself and yields nothing from herself except radiance.' Signor Angelo Conti, describing his experience as he stood before the picture, tells us that 'the woman smiled with a royal calmness, her instincts of conquest, of ferocity, the entire heredity of the species, the will to seduce and ensnare, the charm of the deceiver, the kindness which conceals a cruel purpose, all that appears

and disappears alternately behind the laughing veil and melts into the poem of her smile. . . . Good and evil, cruel and compassionate, graceful and cat-like—she laughed.’ Even Mrs. Taylor seems to me not to have caught more than half the truth when she speaks of ‘the half-sensual irony with which he imposes his narcissan dream on the equivocal smooth face of the Neapolitan lady.’

This lady became the third wife of a wealthy Florentine merchant. ‘She had one daughter, dead in infancy. . . . Nothing else is known of her.’ But she has become ‘a mythic personality which continues to be discussed as if it were that of a live woman.’ So writes Mrs. Taylor ; but to what she has said, Merejkowski adds that Mona Lisa’s husband was ‘a mediocre personage, of a type to be found in every country and every age ; neither good nor bad,’ and that he ‘understood her essential charm less than the points of his Sicilian cattle or the impost upon raw sheepskins.’ The same writer informs us that Mona Lisa was said to have married solely to please her father : and

concludes with the words: 'Calm, gentle, retiring, pious, charitable to the poor, she was a faithful wife, a good housekeeper, a most tender mother to Dianova, her twelve-year-old step-daughter.' We learn, too, from old Vasari, that in order to paint this portrait, Leonardo employed singers, instrumentalists and jugglers, while his subject was sitting, in order that the liveliness might not evaporate from her expression. One or two critics, indeed, have pertinently suggested that the necessity of providing jugglers is evidence that the lady was of modest intelligence.

There is no arguing, said the Roman, about tastes. When we suspect, however, that a point-of-view about some work of art has been caught, like the influenza, by one writer from another, the length of the literary chain should not impress us. Was there not a generation that regarded the Medicean Venus as the loveliest of all statues and that exhausted itself in praise of Luini, until some person who was immune from hypnotism showed that ninety-nine per cent. of those laudators had merely

been admiring what they had been told to admire? It is, once more, the Story of the Emperor's Clothes : and we should be wise to remember that several persons, very famous in our own day, are probably wearing reputations which are woven of mere publicity. In questions of taste, then, we can do nothing but present the views of those with whom we disagree ; offer, as they do, our own impressions of the work that is under consideration ; and leave time to choose between us.

If the plain blunt man, looking at Mona Lisa, would overcome the humility which is natural to him in the presence of experts, I suggest that he will not admit that there is any great mystery in her face. I suggest, well aware of my heresy, that on a somewhat lower social plane she might be a rapacious landlady at the seaside, hopeful of making a favourable first impression upon her prospective lodger but quite determined that she shall get decidedly the better of the bargain. Here is a merciless face, if ever there was one : a self-satisfied ego : a shrewd and competent manageress, mean

rather than generous, if the world is right in thinking that such thin lips have that significance : a bourgeoisie, not an aristocrat, though the wealth of her husband preserved her hands from becoming coarse : and a woman, judging by the line of her cheeks, who, far from being mysterious and spiritual, was self-indulgent, must have acquitted herself heartily at the table, preferring quantity to quality, and was likely, indeed, to have relished the juggling much more than the music. Here, in short, is the average woman (as the average woman was until lately), practical, intelligent enough to be cunning, a born housewife and, in spite of her history, a born mother of average offspring. Those who agree with this verdict may well wonder why Leonardo, who refused so many commissions, should have spent years in painting the portrait of this woman. There—not in her face—lies a mystery. And any one who has studied the ideal feminine faces—almost angelical, sexless rather than feminine—in Leonardo's imaginative pictures, must recognise at once that Mona Lisa is not of the same

type. In order to guess why he painted her, and in what frame of mind, we ought to consider the significance of the so-called 'caricatures.'

Yet again I must borrow from Mrs. Taylor, but not without exculpating her at once from a possible charge of sharing my view. 'That miraculous draughtsmanship of his,' she writes, 'can ransom most things to the kingdom of beauty. Almost it redeems the grotesques. The theory that these are all due to Leonardo's strenuous exercises in human expression does not seem adequate. . . . After all, the distortions are too fiendish. The fineness of the drawing heightens the savagery of this notation of ugliness: there are ghastly little tricks of adornment in some that look like wicked and ribald jokes. This is no horrified comment on a state of things that reduces humanity to *cagois*, like the grotesques of Callot or Goya. It is no witty satire on human absurdity. . . . No! it is the cynical attack of an anti-social spirit upon a despicable alien kind.'

Anti-social he certainly must have been, for

he was fastidious, hypersensitive and a natural aristocrat : and no man of such fine tempering can be at ease in the world because society is necessarily arranged and conducted in accordance with the tastes of the overwhelming majority, of the average man and woman. But the grotesques reveal that he was more than anti-social. I submit that he was one of those few persons who definitely detest the experience of living. That is a feeling which is incomprehensible to the average man, partly because the average man is sustained by the mere animal instinct to go on living. There can have been few men so highly mentalised as Leonardo : and it is precisely this extreme mentalisation which is most likely to deliver a man, for good or ill, from bondage to an animal instinct. At the same time it is precisely that mentalisation which, though it may turn a man against life, obviously provides him with the means of extracting interest from the spectacle. The typical suicide fears life, and possibly hates it : but, if he was typical, he had not enough intellect to find it interesting. No one can dis-

pute the intense intellectuality of Leonardo. A man of his omnivorous mind may often have been unhappy but could seldom have been bored. He was, in my view, a man who loathed life but found it inexhaustibly interesting : and this view would at least explain his coldness, his 'indifference,' his apparent carelessness about good and evil, his willingness to work for any one—even for Borgia, who certainly might have attacked Florence if his career had not been broken—the absence in him of patriotic feeling, and the distaste which he inspired in some of his great life-loving contemporaries. Men and women were to him mere specimens under the microscope. Perhaps it would not be fanciful even to surmise that his profound passion for dissecting dead bodies was instigated by a grim determination to see the apparatus of life at its most repulsive. In that way he would feed his hatred of living and also temporarily assuage it.

If we still doubt whether this diagnosis of his strange personality is true, we should do well to weigh carefully the significance of a passage

quoted by Solmi. 'Coitus,' wrote Leonardo, 'and everything that has any relation to it, is so disgusting that, if it were not for custom, pretty faces and sensuous dispositions, the human race would soon die out.'

He painted his grave, pensive, idealistic pictures as an escape from a mode of existence which he despised and loathed. He drew the grotesques in order to be avenged upon it. And the picture of Mona Lisa, far from being a portrait of 'the one woman whom he ever loved' (as a few sentimentalists have fancied), is not, in this view, even a portrait of some one whom he admired. On the contrary, it is his 'hymn of hate.' He found in Mona Lisa a clear example of the feminine principle with which he had always been at war. He found in her the animal qualities of womanhood which, combined with a superficial allurements, seemed to him the chief cause of that procreative process which he so fiercely disliked and so vainly deplored. The portrait is his veiled but sardonic apologia for his distaste of that life which women encourage, which Mona

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Lisa so complacently parades : and in spirit he was modern enough to make it possible that he painted this unreflecting and well-pleased woman in order that, by making an image of it, he might expel the distaste of life which had troubled him all his days.

X

PHILOSOPHY AND SEX

BEFORE we attempt to make a spiritual portrait in outline of this many-sided genius, it should be useful and interesting to gather up, as evidence, his views upon various matters. In spite, for example, of Melzi's statement that 'he departed this life well prepared and with all the rites of the Holy Mother Church'—a statement which is unquestionable—he does seem to have been, on balance, what we should call a sceptic. It is noteworthy that Vasari, in the first edition of his life of Leonardo, said plainly, 'He arrived at thought so heretical that he submitted to no religion, thinking it much more adventurous to be a philosopher than a Christian,' and that this phrase was tactfully omitted from the later editions. Leonardo, in all probability, learned to suppress

his religious views. In 1506 his friend Jacopo Andrea of Ferrara was beheaded and quartered at Milan on a charge of heresy : and the fact that Leonardo made most of his memoranda in looking-glass script, which he wrote with his left hand, suggests that he recognised their danger. Moreover, there is no evidence at all to show that he had any instinct to proselytise. He was manifestly a passionate seeker for truth, but he does not seem to have cared a pin whether any one agreed with him or not.

What could better please the anti-spiritualists of our time than the words, ‘ O mathematicians, throw light upon this error ! Spirit exists not without body, and where there is no flesh, nor blood, nerves, tongue, bone and muscle, there can be neither voice nor movement.’¹ Again, no man, convinced that the soul is immortal, would have written, ‘ Every evil leaves a sorrow in the memory except the supreme evil, death, and this destroys memory itself together with life.’ And even our most pugnacious material-

¹ According to Merejkowski, ‘ the next lines are erased.’ If it is so, they were presumably too heretical to be safe.

ists would be satisfied with his observation that 'there is no certainty where we can neither apply any of the mathematical sciences nor any of those which are based upon them.' Then, too, there is a section of his notes which, in Italian, are enticingly termed 'Prophecies,' but which, in English, would be more aptly called 'Riddles' or 'Enigmas': sentences that contain a veiled meaning. One of these consists of the striking phrase, 'In all parts of Europe great nations will bewail the death of one man who died in the East.' The clue to this enigma is found when we realise that it refers to Good Friday. It is hardly the utterance of a devout churchman.

How acute and scientific his mind was we can see in a hundred of the memoranda. He says, for instance, 'The waves of light and sound are governed by the same mechanical law as that governing waves of water: and the angle of incidence equals the angle of reflection.' Perhaps we may pause for a moment to remember that Newton, a hundred and fifty years later, still 'supposed that light was due

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to little corpuscles entering the eye after being shot out by the luminous body' ; and to notice that the writer from whom I have taken this phrase (J. W. N. Sullivan), says also : ' How, in fact, did the notion ever arise that Nature is a vast mathematical machine ? The notion was not part of the orthodox Aristotelianism of the Middle Ages, although it had occurred to certain exceptional minds, such as Roger Bacon and Leonardo da Vinci.' How little he belonged to the Middle Ages, and how fully he deserves his immense reputation as ' The Forerunner ' of modernism, we recognise when we read, ' The man who in an argument adduces authority is not using his intellect but only his memory,' and the even more memorable passage, ' The disciples of Aristotle, men of words and of books, think, because I am not a man of letters as they are, that I am incapable of speaking upon my own subjects. They do not perceive that my matter is to be expounded rather by experience than by words : experience which truly has been the instructress of all those who have written well ; which I will

take for my instructress ; by which, in all cases, I will stand or fall.' He must, too, have come within a hair's-breadth of anticipating Newton when he recorded that 'every weight tends to fall toward the centre by the shortest way.'

Not only in science but also in humanitarianism he was far in advance of his age—and perhaps of the present age. It is surprising enough to hear a fifteenth-century man declare that 'war is a bestial madness.' It is perhaps even more surprising to learn that Leonardo was a vegetarian—apparently for humane reasons. That he was so is proven in a letter written by an Italian who had been travelling in India and who remarks that the Hindus share Messer Leonardo's eccentricity in the matter of diet. It is puzzling indeed that he should have designed atrocious instruments of destruction for the military use of his patrons and have also defended his passion for dissection by comparing it with the wanton destruction of life. But it was so. 'He made,' says Rosenberg, 'a kind of philosophical confession of faith on a sheet of anatomical drawings, now

in Windsor Library. Like all his didactic writings, this (unlike most of his memoranda) was destined for posterity. "And thou, O Man," he wrote, "who through this work of mine learnest to understand the marvellous works of Nature, if thou believest it to be a crime to dissect the human body, consider how infinitely more wicked it is to take the life of a man : and if his outer form appears to be wonderfully made, consider that it is as nothing in comparison with the soul that dwells in this body, for this, whatever it may be, is a thing of God. Let it therefore dwell in His work according to His will and good pleasure, and do not let your anger or your wickedness destroy a life ; for verily, he who does not value life, does not deserve to possess it." 2

Before we could attach importance to the use of the word 'God' we should need to know what meaning it had to Leonardo : and that is a secret which he was very unlikely to give away even in his Notebooks. From what we have learned about the rest of his mind, we might reasonably guess that he had refined the

popular notion of God to a mathematical conception, to a *Primum Mobile*. So again, when he said 'Thou, O God, dost sell unto us all good things at the price of labour,' he was not necessarily thinking anthropomorphically.

The sayings vary from some that seem platitudinous to others which have considerable depth. In the first group I should place the most celebrated—'Mortal beauty perishes, but not art,' and the line 'Where there is most capacity for feeling, there you will find the greatest martyr.' For a place in the latter group I should recommend 'A life well-spent is long,' and 'A vessel of unbaked clay may be remoulded if it is broken, but not one that has already passed through the fire.' A saying of very doubtful validity—one to which, as we might expect, Freud takes exception—is 'We have no right to love or hate anything if we have not acquired a thorough knowledge of its nature,' for, as Freud protests, it is a peculiar human being who can let love or hatred wait upon careful investigation. There is also another memor-

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andum which ought to be painted in letters of gold upon all 'places where they sing,' the delightful remark that 'Music suffers two ills, the one mortal, the other wasting: the former comes at the moment when the music ceases, the latter when it is repeated and thereby made contemptible.' And although it does not startle us, like many half-truths which give certain writers so absurd a reputation for 'brilliance,' there is charm in the reflection that 'As a day well-spent brings happy sleep, so does a well-used life lead on to a happy death.' I am not sure of the group into which we should put the ambiguous aphorism, 'The soul can never be corrupted with the corruption of the body.' If we are thorough-going dualists, we can say that the soul, after death, may soon be cleansed of the corruption which nearly every soul only too obviously contracts from the corruption of the body, but this can hardly have been the meaning of a man who also said, 'The soul desires to dwell in the body because, without the members of that body, it can neither act nor feel.'

Passing now to the agitated problem of Leonardo's sexual life, we can see at once that he was abnormal, but we ought, almost certainly, to perceive also that his very abnormality was of a peculiar kind. The matter probably became a mystery when the Victorians, with what is supposed to be hypocrisy but is really an attractive simplicity, had lost the knowledge that love may be homosexual. Just as to-day an eminent King's Counsel, and a Judge who should be a specialist in the subject, will ignore evidence that a man is homosexual on the ground that he is known to have had sexual relations with women, so would most of the Victorians, finding that Leonardo had no children, no wife and apparently no love-story, have explained his singularity by assuming that his nature was marvellously pure or severely ascetic. They would not, I surmise, have been wholly wrong. There is an unmistakably ascetic note in the phrases 'Intellectual passion drives out sensuality' and 'He who does not curb lustful desires puts himself on a level with the beasts.'

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It is clear, however, that Leonardo was more than simply ascetic. There is, from the point of view which we are considering, immense significance in a fine passage which I will loosen from its setting in Mrs. Taylor's book : ' When his step-brother has a son, Leonardo tells him that he has raised up a new enemy. Indeed, his obscure anger against the life of sense defeats even his artistic fantasy sometimes. He begins to describe an imagined Temple of Venus in the island of Cyprus. You see the great steps mounting a rock to a meadow on the plateau, carven pilasters, water falling from vases of porphyry and serpentine, glimpses of lake and woodland. But you divine something weird, monstrous, solitary, soundless. There are no moaning doves, no chanting choirs, no shed roses, no chryselephantine images with deep eyes smiling under the low-tressed brows. The unconsenting soul of Leonardo suddenly withdraws from the scene : there is an imaginative collapse into the grotesque effect of nightmare, and you are left on a ghastly beach strewn with bones, relics of mariners victimized

by that treacherous shore.' Again, she tells us that he wrote of 'love in its frenzy' as 'a thing so hideous that humanity would cease if the victims could see themselves': and she adds that 'with drawings of horrible anatomical unions, once at least heightened by a cynical trick, he analyses the erotic emotion.' Place on the top of these the superbly aristocratic comment that some men 'are merely passages for food' (and 'fit only to be sewer-cleaners or charcoal-burners'), and we are probably within sight of the truth: that his intellect was incomparably stronger than his instincts, and that, in combination with an extreme fastidiousness, it caused him to loathe the origins of life and, almost as a corollary, the experience of living.

That—in part, at least—appears to have been the conclusion to which Merejkowski came. 'Equally alien to his nature,' says Merejkowski, 'was the passion which most men call love. Just as he ate no meat, because it seemed to him repulsive, so he refrained from women, because all material possession—in marriage or

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outside it—seemed to him coarse. He avoided it as he avoided the shambles.’ Whether he ever brought himself to try the experience we do not know. Perhaps he felt that his anatomical researches had given him that ‘thorough knowledge of its nature’ which would justify him in ‘hating’ it; but it is not unreasonable of a character in Merejkowski’s novel to suspect that ‘he must certainly have embraced a woman at least once, out of mere curiosity.’

No one, I imagine, will deny that he evidently disliked the notion of physical association with a woman, but it would be exceedingly rash to assume that, in consequence, he was an active homosexual. In view of his general direction, it seems at least likely that there was some truth in the accusation which, as we have seen, was brought against him in his early Florentine days. There is, for example, his choice of pupils for their comeliness rather than for their skill as artists: and not one of them achieved a position of any importance in the history of art. There is also the fact, for what it is worth, that here and there his manuscripts

are overwritten with the masculine words 'carissimo' and 'amantissimo': and there is the notable passage, already quoted, about the lad who was as lovely toward him as any maid could be. But homosexuals, as we now know because we have so many examples to study, range from the gross to the ethereal: and we should probably be right if we guessed that, in this matter as in most others, he was chiefly guided by fastidiousness. In fact, when Freud classes him among 'narcissans,' I do not see how we can cavil at the verdict. I think, indeed, that we may justly refine upon it, and suppose that he belonged to the second of the four groups into which Professor Flügel divides 'the Narcissistic Type,' to that, namely, 'in which love is directed to what one was.'

With the exception of *Mona Lisa*, and a drawing of Isabella d'Este which no doubt she wrung from him, the women in his pictures are not sexual. If we look at *The Virgin of the Rocks* and compare her face with the face of the kneeling angel, we shall see that the two have a clear family likeness, the likeness of angels

who are relatives. If, again, we compare them with the face of *Saint John* in the last picture which Leonardo painted, we shall see that after many years the same face haunted his imagination : a face so beautiful, and indicating so rarefied and delicate a nature, that if it resembles the face of Leonardo in early youth, we could readily understand why he was called 'the most beautiful man of his time,' and why Cellini, praising him as Trelawney might have praised Shelley, declared that Leonardo was 'an angel incarnate.' In fairness to the reader I ought to remind him that Freud, whose opinion upon a question of this kind has almost the authority of a papal pronouncement, believes that Leonardo at a very early age, before he left his mother, must have been 'overloved' by her and must have had his sexual curiosity strongly stimulated. And indeed it is more than probable that sexual activity in the cottage of his coarse step-father was not carefully concealed. Freud proceeds to develop the idea that Leonardo became psychically feminised by the devotion of his mother, who is likely enough

not to have been happy with her cowherd, and that his love-nature thus turned toward those of his own sex, but that, owing to an early shock of disgust, his sexual curiosity widened out into that universal curiosity of the intellect which is his most conspicuous feature.

Homosexual love, we must remember, was fairly common in Italy during the Renaissance : not as general, of course, as it had been in ancient Athens, for the sufficient reason, among others, that, in the fifteenth century, women of any social position were better educated and therefore more companionable than the citizen-women of classical Greece. In order, though, to realise the extent to which homosexuality was countenanced in, for instance, the early manhood of Leonardo, we have only to look at a passage in the first secular play (with one possible exception) that was written after the fall of Rome. Poliziano, the best classical scholar of his time and a warm friend of Lorenzo de' Medici, was two years younger than Leonardo. His play about the story of Orpheus and Eurydice (perhaps it resembled

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an opera more nearly than a play) was written when Leonardo was twenty. It was first performed at Mantua in honour of the Mantuan Cardinal, to whom a Latin ode, in the middle of the play, is addressed. Orpheus follows Eurydice into 'the realm of Pluto,' and, in accordance with the old legend, loses her just when they are both about to regain the upper air. At this point the play takes a startling turn. Orpheus, debarred by a Fury from returning to the Underworld, proceeds to elevate the Cardinal of Mantua by thus 'lamenting his lot':

'Where is that woeful song which in mine ears
Might match the pain that my deep hurt has bred?
How shall I ever weep the many tears
Which for a wound so mortal must be shed?
Past all consoling shall I live my years
Till heaven have overwhelmed my living head:
And since my fortune runs to such hard ways,
Henceforth I'll love no woman all my days.

I'll gather those new flowers wherewith we find
The springtime of the better sex is crowned,
When most they are blithe and sportfully inclined.
There may a softer sweeter love be found.

PHILOSOPHY AND SEX

Let no one speak to me of womankind,
She being dead to whom my heart was bound.
Rather, would any know me, let him prove
His worth by saying naught of woman's love.

How wretched is that man whose every mood
Is made by women, be it sad or gay ;
And who, renouncing liberty for good,
Believes their words or trusts the tricks they play !
Lighter than leaves upon the wind, they would
And then would not—a thousand times a day.
If sought, they hide ; if fled, pursue the more ;
And come and go like waves upon the shore.

This, of a truth, was the whole creed of Jove
Who, by this sweet and amorous knot constrained,
Took that delight of Ganymede above
Which Phoebus, here, of Hyacinth obtained :
Hercules fell before this holy love,
Who chained the world and was by Hylas chained :
Wherefore I counsel all that wedded be—
To make divorce, and fly from any she !'

These are the sentiments which, quite intelligibly, infuriate the Bacchantes who, seeing red, avenge their sex by tearing the singer to pieces. There is every reason to suppose that Leonardo was acquainted with Poliziano, and he actually made a drawing of a famous actor

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who played the part of Orpheus. In view of the play's popularity, we may safely assume that Leonardo's contemporaries did not condemn homosexual love with any heartiness, and that Leonardo was probably peculiar only in being so fastidious that (to invert his own phrase) he seldom, if ever, allowed 'sensuality to drive out intellectual passion.'

XI

SUMMARY

EVERY decade produces a new batch of infatuated Leonardists. So desperately do they struggle with their task that one of them, a German, asked Mrs. Taylor if she had observed that all Leonardists in the end go mad—an intimidating suggestion which, fortunately for the world, did not deter her from finishing her book. Well, with so many experts, past and present, in the field, it is highly improbable that a plain man, like the reader or myself, will be able to divine much about Leonardo that has escaped their notice. However, with the evidence which is now before us, we may at least, in a humble spirit, attempt to reconstruct his personality.

Nothing could be more disgraceful, more reprehensible, than to call his father ' a Florentine

Bluebeard.' The lawyer married four times, it is true, but his wives died natural deaths. We are within our speculative rights, I submit, if we assume that he was a lusty man, in both senses of the adjective, and that he transmitted to Leonardo a strong constitution. We may also assume, knowing Leonardo's detestation of sexual action, that he regarded his uxorious father with some disgust. On the other hand, we may deduce from the fact that he was able to live in the style of an aristocrat and to ignore important commissions, that his father financed him handsomely. Moreover, although a professional experience of lawyers may reduce the superstitious awe with which at first we contemplate their intellectual powers, we must admit that Leonardo's father could not have become the chief notary in Florence if he had been a fool. On the contrary, it is only fair to suppose that Leonardo inherited a part of his great brain-power from his legal forebears.

Again, it is a justifiable guess to suppose that the peasant girl with whom the lawyer had a love-affair was physically attractive ; and we

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may therefore attribute to her a great part of Leonardo's beauty. And although he was aware that painters are inclined to paint their own likeness, we must be very innocent if we conclude that he resisted that inclination. If, then, he painted his own likeness, and if he resembled his mother, we can say that Caterina has not disappeared from history so completely as the historians assume : for there would be a ghost of her face in the faces of Leonardo's imaginary women.

The coldness of his temperament is beyond dispute. There is an arctic impersonality in his notes about the dangling conspirator. We feel it again in the entries about his father's death, about Caterina's funeral, and about the miserable fall of his Milanese employer. We deduce it from the fact that he evidently made few friends. Those of whom we hear most were doctors and anatomists. He had no close friendship, it seems, with any first-rate painter. Indeed, there is no evidence that he had even a moderate talent for friendship. His fine manners, his subtlety as a painter and his

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encyclopaedic knowledge inspired adoration in the lad Francesco Melzi : but no one who was so aristocratic, so aloof, so intellectualised and so nearly perfect could possibly have been a magnet for cordial friendships.

His coldness, however, was not the diabolical coldness of an unpleasant schoolboy, of a Cesare Borgia. His temperament was snowy, not icy ; and although his heart was not warm, it was kindly. His vegetarianism is a pointer to that. And again, he was evidently somewhat contemptuous of the Ordinary Person, but he seems to have had no malice toward any one. I do not say 'no malice in his nature,' because the grotesques—and possibly his passion for dissecting—are clear signs of a very peculiar cruelty, a cruelty against humanity in the abstract and against the idealising tendency of his own imagination. The passion behind both the grotesques and his anatomical obsession came from a determination to make himself realise to the full how horrible was the life in which he found himself involved.

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And if he was cold, and perhaps a shade too conscious of his dignity and his intellectual power, he was at least 'too proud to fight,' and, as a rule, too proud to be angry. We shall never know what he really felt when Michelangelo so gratuitously insulted him, but we do know that he made no attempt to retaliate. The Notebooks abound with evidence that he had a veritable complex about ingratitude and envy. Now, warm-hearted people do not trouble themselves about the gratitude of those whom they have tried to help. They are too busy helping some new person to bother about the gratitude of somebody whom they had helped a week earlier. The man, for example, who very seldom gives money to another is the man who remembers whether the recipient has been adequately grateful. And in respect of Leonardo's complex about the envy of others, I cannot help suspecting that it came partly from his self-esteem, a characteristic which boldly parades itself in the letter to Lodovico Sforza. He expected admiration, and not without cause. If any

one showed only a tempered and critical admiration for his work—and that may well have been true of Michelangelo and Bramante—it would have been natural for a man of Leonardo's easy ability to assume that envy alone prevented them from acknowledging his kingship. At least it is certain that men of this type exist to-day.

That he lacked humour appears to me indubitable ; but, unlike most of my fellow-countrymen, I should say that he could manage very well without it. A sense of humour is valuable in two ways. It enables a man to appreciate his place in the scheme of things : and it prevents him from being too grievously hurt by the ugly aspect of life. But philosophy will bring him the first of these benefits ; a sense of beauty will bring him the second : and Leonardo was richly equipped with both these alternatives to the overlauded sense of humour. Those who most need a sense of humour are those to whom the beauty in the world affords no solace or stimulus.

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Cold, humourless, kindly, equable, at odds with life but intensely interested in it, an artist who became a scientist, a man of majestic intellect who could no more help feeling that most of his contemporaries were passion-driven pigmies than Gulliver could help looking down upon the Lilliputians, Leonardo remains at the same time one of the greatest geniuses whom humanity has known and—because of an everlasting civil-warfare between ‘the mind of Archimedes’ and ‘the soul of Praxiteles’—one of the comparatively ineffective. What did he mean, we wonder, when he wrote, ‘While I thought that I was learning how to live, I have been learning how to die’? The phrase, oddly reminiscent of a famous passage in Plato, might have a hundred meanings. Now, Leonardo must often have heard the *Phaedo* discussed by the Platonic enthusiasts who thronged Florence in his early manhood; and nothing in literature could harmonise more perfectly with his temperament than certain passages in that Dialogue. Indeed, they might be entries

in one of his Notebooks. Consider this, for example :

‘ I deem that the true votary of philosophy is likely to be misunderstood by other men ; they do not perceive that he is always pursuing death and dying ; and if this be so, and he has had the desire of death all his life long, why when his time comes should he repine at that which he has been always pursuing and desiring ? ’

And this :

‘ The true philosophers, Simmias, are always occupied in the practice of dying, wherefore also to them least of all men is death terrible. . . . He—the true philosopher—will have a firm conviction that there, and there only, he can find wisdom in her purity.’

And lastly :

‘ It has been proved to us by experience that if we would have pure knowledge of anything, we must be quit of the body—the soul in herself must behold things in themselves : and then we shall attain the wisdom which we desire, and of which we say

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that we are lovers ; not while we live, but after death ; for if while in company with the body, the soul cannot have pure knowledge, one of two things follows—either knowledge is not to be attained at all, or, if at all, after death.’

Speaking against the intellectual tide of our age, I hazard the suggestion that no man could have schooled himself better than Leonardo to enter another state, another ‘world,’ with intelligence untrammelled and undimmed by lingering sensuality, or have better equipped himself for exploring with fascinated interest the new conditions in which he would then find himself. Indeed, Socrates might well have said to him, instead of to Simias and Cebes, ‘Never fear that a soul which has been thus nurtured, and has had these pursuits, will at her departure from the body be scattered and blown away by the winds and be nowhere and nothing.’



5 JUL 1933

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