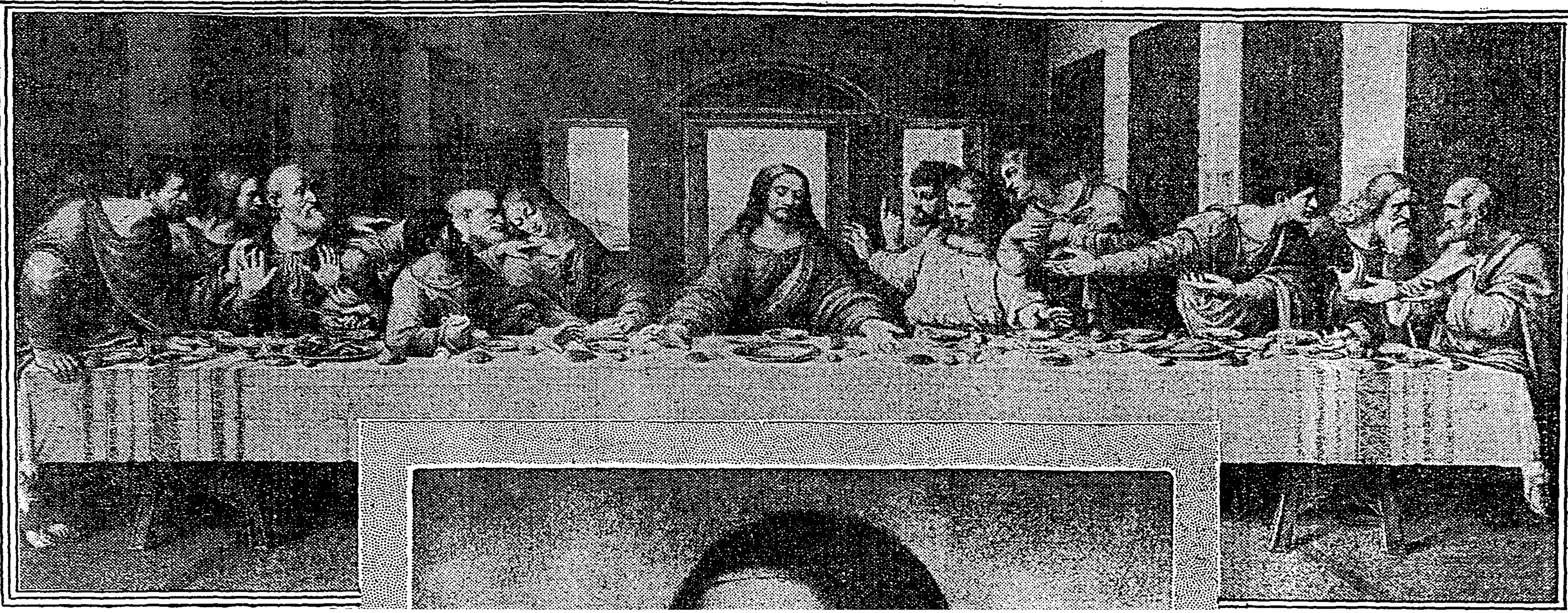
FAMOUS WORKS OF ART THAT HAVE BEEN STOLEN

Disappearance of the "Mona Lisa" from the Louvre Climax of Long Series of Thefts.

WHOEVER it was who stole Leonardo da Vinci's "Gioconda" or "Mona Lisa" from the Louvre is sure of a place in history when his name comes out. He is sure of an extraordinary place, too. It is not possible to locate the General who fought the greatest battle since the world was made, or the statesman who framed the greatest law, or the author who wrote the greatest book; but it will always be possible henceforth to locate the thief who committed the greatest theft.

A robber might steal a hundred million dollars and be sure of an exalted place in the newspapers and his name be sure of recollection for fifty or seventy-five years. Then he would be forgotten. It is not possible to think of anything like this theft unless it were conceivable that a man could steal Stonehenge or Cleopatra's needle.

For more than two hundred years Col. Blood's attempt to steal the English Crown Jewels has held the foreground as the greatest theft ever imagined by man.



The Last Supper, One of da Vinci's Most Famous Works.
With Permission of the Berlin Photographic Co., N.Y.

Monaca di Leonardo, in Pitti Gallery, Florence.

Mona Lisa, Which Has Disappeared from the Louvre.

Litti Dona Litti, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

But even if it had succeeded it would have paled into insignificance beside this one.

Now that this incredible robbery of one of the world's treasures has been accomplished, everybody is asking how such a thing is possible. But it is not only possible; it is easy. The Louvre has been robbed repeatedly—not, of course, of anything so valuable as "La Gioconda," but of art objects whose value was not small. These repeated robberies have taught the guardians of the Louvre nothing. Not long ago a NEW YORK TIMES man, passing through a gallery of priceless paintings there, noticed that there was not a watchman or official of any sort in sight between him and the door. A few men, sketching at the far end of the gallery and so wrapped up in their work that they saw nothing of the presence of a stranger, were the only persons there. There was nothing to prevent him, had he been so minded, from making his selection in a leisurely fashion from any number of small paintings before him, putting some of them under his coat, and strolling out with them to his carriage. The same idea undoubtedly occurs to every observant man who enters the Louvre. The astonishing thing is that it should never before have occurred to a thief.

The assumption is general that such a robbery must have been committed at night. The fact is, however, that art thefts, which are by no means so uncommon as might be supposed, are usually committed in broad daylight.

Robberies in the Louvre became so common that at one time the Minister of Fine Arts directed that a corps of fox terriers, specially trained in the barking department, should be employed to aid the watchman at night. The robberies went on, though, and it is easy to conjecture why—because they occurred in the daytime.

The stealing of a two-foot marble statuette of the goddess Isis was one of the most incomprehensible robberies in the Louvre's long list. What anybody could want with it was a mystery, yet it was stolen. A more easily explicable robbery from the Louvre was that of a number of miniatures from the Lenoir collection, and another was that of a quantity of gold coins forming a historic series from the reign of Philip of Valois to that of Charles X. This crime was evidently committed by one of the curious monomaniacs who collect coins or stamps. It was, however, not at the Louvre, but at the museum at Amiens.

Only a few years ago two statues were stolen from the Louvre in broad day. One of them was that of Isis, already mentioned. Another, smaller in size, disappeared on the same day, and before sunset an attempt was made to open the case containing a most precious collection of ancient French Crown Jewels. It failed only because the false key used by the robbers broke and part of it stuck in the lock.

This gang of thieves was captured about a year later, and their confession gives an indication of the ease with which art galleries may be and are plundered. Two of the gang entered the Louvre wearing immense fur overcoats, while a third stood at the door to give the alarm in case any keeper should wander in—an improbable event. When there was nobody in sight—except, perhaps, a few sketching artists, who are not to be counted—one of the thieves picked out the statue he wanted, put it under his fur coat, and walked out.

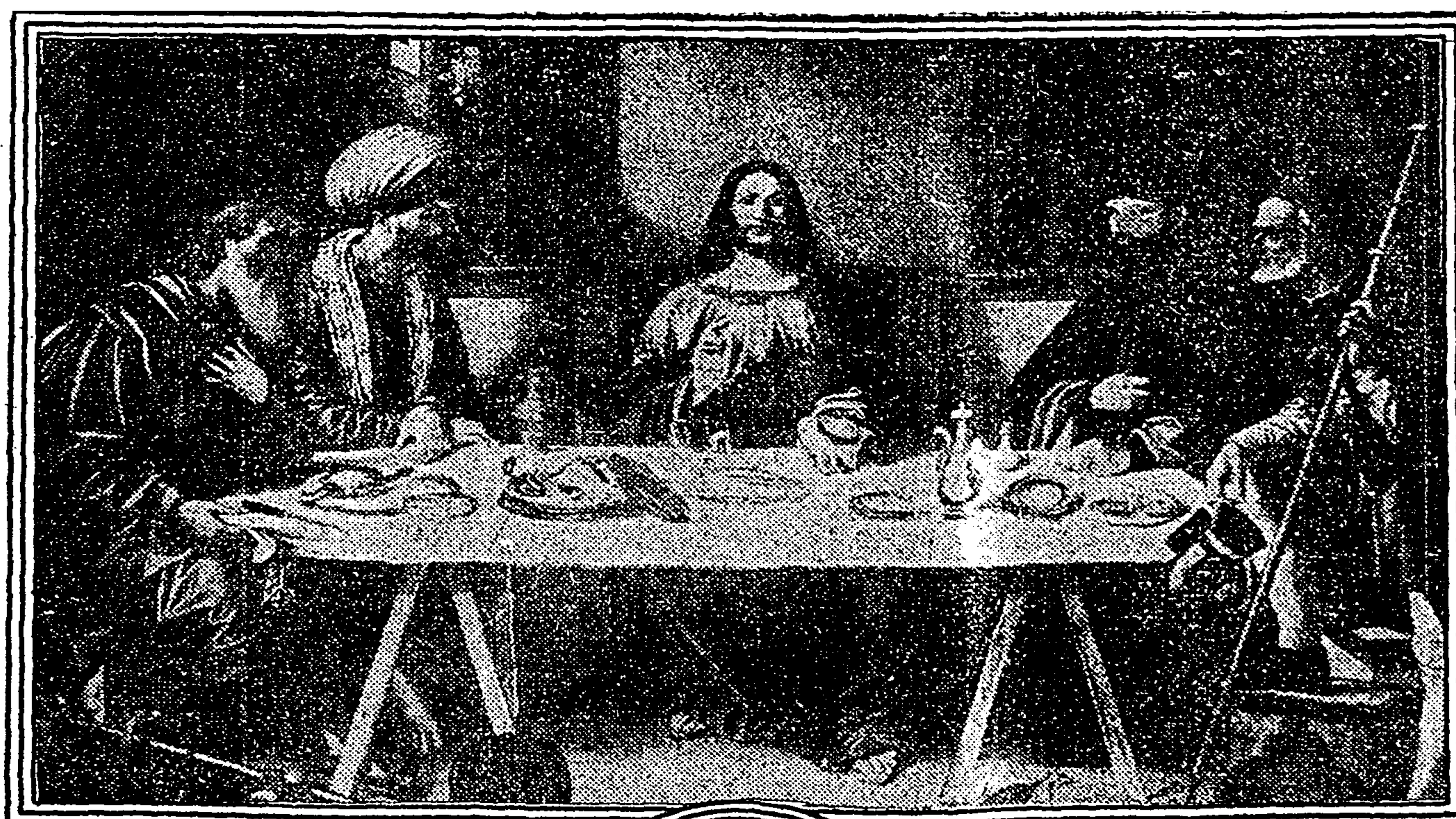
In this way they stole Isis. Later in the day they returned and picked out the other statue. This time there was a keeper there, but he was asleep. They had hired a small shop near by, where they intended to sell objects stolen from the Louvre, but the hue and cry raised by the newspapers compelled them to relinquish the project.

Thefts of great paintings are common enough, though this is the first case on record where one of the great glories of the world's history has been stolen. Stealing the "Mona Lisa" is almost like stealing the "Battle of Waterloo," the "Florentine Republic," or the "Discovery of the Pacific Ocean."

The most remarkable case in recent history is the theft of the Gainsborough "Duchess of Devonshire" by Adam Wirth, an American crook, whose underworld name was "Harry Raymond." Wirth, who until now held the record as the man who had "pulled off" the biggest theft since Blood's, was one of these bright and shallow youths seen hanging around city street corners, who don't want to work and congregate in gangs. "Rowdies" we call them, and are disposed to look with a lenient eye on them when they terrorize a street car or Subway train, thinking it the mere exuberance of youth.

Wirth was graduated from the street corner gang to the society of professional crooks, as most "rowdies" do, and rose to the head of his profession. In 1870 he was famous as the leader of a crowd which had robbed a bank in Wall Street in broad daylight. He became an international crook, the leader of gangs in London, Constantinople, Chicago, and New York. Once in Chicago he did a good turn for Pat Sheedy, and, strange and Rupert-of-Hentzauish as it may seem, Sheedy turned up in Constantinople at "the psychological moment," just in time to rescue Wirth as he was about to get in serious trouble as a result of his arrest after heading his gang of outlaws there.

"Raymond's" theft of the Gainsborough was not only the climax of his career, but came near being the ruin of it. He could not sell the stolen painting anywhere. The picture dealers with whom he



The Last Supper by da Vinci in Museum at Florence.

negotiated were shy. At last, many years after the theft, and when "Raymond" was almost penniless, he turned in his distress to his old friend Pat Sheedy. Sheedy returned the picture to the Agnews in 1901 and got $5,000 for Wirth. J. Pierpont Morgan later paid the Agnews $150,000 for the painting. The sale was made in 1909, and Wirth died the following year. Sheedy survived his history-making appearance in the rôle of "fence" just eight years.

Only last year two paintings by Van Dyck were reported to have been stolen from a private gallery in Germany. A Boston man is said to have bought them, or one of them, for the insignificant price of $40, though the pictures are valued at $125,000. One of them is a portrait of the tenth Earl of the Percy line, a boy of 16. In December of last year Earl Percy, an aid to the Governor General of Canada, learned that this family portrait had been seen in a Philadelphia art exhibition, and hurried to this country to recover it, but was too late. It had been transferred to Washington. Earl Percy followed the

Leonardo da Vinci.

trail there, but if he found the painting he never revealed the fact.

The Gainsborough stolen by "Harry Raymond" is not the only case of the kind in which J. Pierpont Morgan figures, although that work was the most famous ever stolen, and the American millionaire has never had a chance to appear in as big a case. However, he achieved a great deal of fame of a certain sort in connection with the theft of the Cope of Ascoli. This mantle was the cope of Pope Nicholas IV., and was famous among ecclesiastical embroideries. It was a magnificent specimen of silken and gold-threaded English embroidery on linen. Mr. Morgan bought it in 1904 and lent it to the South Kensington Museum in London.

Here it was recognized by an Italian priest as having been stolen a year before from the Cathedral at Ascoli. Mr. Morgan, learning the facts, made a present of his purchase to the Italian Government. He refused all compensation, but the Government struck a gold medal bearing his head and a record of the circumstances. Only one copy of the medal was made, and that was presented to the American, who also received a high Italian order.

The supposed thief, Rocchigliani, hanged himself, leaving a note saying that he was not guilty. As he left $3,000, and as he was penniless until the time of the stealing of the cope, nobody took much stock in his pathetic disclaimer.

One of Ruben's masterpieces, "The Visitation," which had been supposed to have been burned in a fire at the Antwerp Cathedral, was really stolen, and was discovered about sixteen years ago through a lawsuit at Rheims. A miracle-working picture of the Madonna was stolen by a Russian peasant and his wife from the Kazan Cathedral; a portrait of Saskia, believed to be by Rembrandt, was stolen from Vantine's in this city while it was awaiting a verdict from the Art Committee of the Union League Club as to whether it was worthy of being shown among the club's exhibitions, and Van Dyck's "Descent from the Cross" was mysteriously stolen from the cathedral at Courtral, but eventually recovered.

None of these thefts, however, compare for a moment with the great robbery of all time, the theft of the "Mona Lisa."

Probably more ingenuity of a purposeless kind has been expended on Mona Lisa than on any other incarnated problem of history, except Shakespeare and Bacon. People of the Frank Harris type, who are not satisfied with an enigma and insist on preparing a solution which suits their romantic taste and then swearing by it, declare that Leonardo was in love with Mona Lisa. But he wasn't, so far as any record shows; in fact, he never cared anything for women except as sitters or problems, and if Mona Lisa fascinated him it was because she was such a good subject for his brush.

It does not fall to the lot of every good-looking woman to become a historic character simply because her picture is painted, and Mona Lisa has a right to congratulate herself on a place in the world's records that is almost unique. She never did anything to earn her fame except to sit to Leonardo. She was the third wife of a Florentine gentleman named Francesco di Bartolommeo di Zanobi del Giocondo, who, like all the other members of his family, was a patron of art. One day it occurred to him that he would like to have his pretty wife's picture painted, and he commissioned Leonardo to do the work. Leonardo began the task, was fascinated with it, spent four years on it, left it unfinished, and made himself and the young woman famous for all time.

"Mona" is a contraction of "Madonna." Lisa must have been a courageous young woman and devoid of superstition, for Giocondo had buried two wives in four years before he married her. She was a Neapolitan girl and probably about 20 years old when she was married. When Leonardo began his masterpiece she was 30.

"Never did any other artist," says Pierre de Corley, "so reproduce the very essence of woman. There is tenderness and there is coquetry; there is modesty and there is hidden passion; all the mystery of a heart that is in reserve; of a brain that reflects; of a person who guards her own individuality and only sheds its radiance on others.

"Mona Lisa is thirty. Her charms have blossomed out. Her serene beauty, the reflection of her strong, cheerful nature, is chaste and tempting at once. Kind, with a spice of malice; proud, but with

Priceless Picture Mystified and Inspired Lovers of Art Since da Vinci Painted It.

a touch of wise condescension to her admirers. Sure of herself and of her power, she shows them her forehead, the temples throbbing with eager thought; her eyes, that sparkle with subtle raillery, her delicate curved lips, with their scornful and voluptuous smile; the firm outline of her bosom; the exquisite oval of her face, her patrician hands lying restfully before her. She shows them her whole self, in fact."

About thirty years after Leonardo's death Giorgio Vasari wrote his biography; and said he: "He who would know to what point nature may be imitated can easily discover it by considering this head, in which Leonardo has represented the smallest details with an extreme subtlety. The eyes have the light and moisture to be seen in a living person; they are circled with reddish and leaden shadows, of perfect truthfulness; the lashes fringing them are painted with excessive delicacy. The eyebrows, the way in which they spring from the flesh, their varying thickness, the manner in which they curve according to the pores of the skin, could not have been rendered in a manner more natural. The mouth, its opening, its corners, where the vermilion of the lips fades into the flesh of the cheeks—this is not painting, it is real flesh. The tentative observer can almost see the artery throb in the hollow of the throat; it must be acknowledged, in fact, that the execution of this picture is enough to make the greatest artist in the world draw back at the mere idea of attempting to imitate it."

So wrote Vasari a quarter of a century later. He had the advantage of seeing it before the well-meaning Goths got to work on it. Yet even he, writing only fifty years or so after the portrait had been painted, lamented its ruin. In 1550, about forty-three years after it had been painted, it had already begun to fade, and Vasari saw it in 1566.

In 1652 some royal, noble or clerical vandal wanted a door in the wall on which the portrait was, and ordered it cut through, sacrificing a part of the composition itself. Later the place in which it was kept was used as a prison, and still later as a stable. We regard ourselves as barbarians in our treatment of art objects, but the much-lauded ages that went before us do not seem to have been much more careful. On one occasion the room was totally submerged by a flood, picture and all. While nature and neglect were doing their worst with the painting, well-meaning and blunder-headed man was doing his part; he was trying to "restore" it. Generation after generation of these honest-intentioned idiots spread varnish on the work, "so that," as Richard Muther says, "at the present day we depend entirely upon copies and engravings to give us even a vague and shadowy idea of Leonardo's masterpiece."

And now, to crown its cruel history, it has been stolen.

The most important works of Leonardo no longer survive, except "Mona Lisa" and "The Last Supper." Even in Leonardo's lifetime his equestrian statue of Francesco Sforza was destroyed, and only a couple of statuettes, one in Berlin and the other in the Edouard Andre collection in Paris, remain to give a faint idea of the original work. Many of the works by him recorded by contemporary writers have vanished utterly. "We know nothing," says Dr. Muther, "of the cartoon of Adam and Eve, extolled by Vasari as one of the principal of Leonardo's important works; nor of the 'ghastly shield' with its head of Medusa, which he wrought for a peasant; nor of "The Nativity," which Lodovico Sforza presented to the Emperor Maximilian; nor of that ducal family group which he painted in the refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie, over against "The Last Supper;" nor of the portraits of the Milanese Phrynes and Aspasias, so enthusiastically praised by the older writers.

The man who created the stolen work

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FAMOUS WORKS OF ART THAT HAVE BEEN STOLEN

(Continued from Page 1.)

was one of the most remarkable geniuses who ever lived. Like Bacon, he "took all knowledge to be his province;" but the Admirable Crichton was an apprentice compared to him. He was not only a painter, but a poet; not only a poet, but a philosopher; not only a philosopher, but an inventor; not only an inventor, but a theologian; not only a theologian, but a botanist; not only a botanist, but a scientist, and so on, almost to the end of the list of human endeavor, and he excelled in everything.

With all this, he was a man of the world, a joker, a humorist, a "good fellow." The man who painted "The Last Supper" was probably an agnostic, and at any rate he was a heretic. He was a boon companion, a good story teller, and a hit with the fair sex. Late in life he drew a picture of himself, which shows a kindly, genial face and a mouth and eyes full of humor. It is probably correct, since another picture of him drawn by a contemporary and reproduced in this issue, shows much the same character.

Leonardo of Vinci was an illegitimate child. His mother was a laughing sixteen-year-old barmaid in a roadhouse between Florence and Pisa when her charms attracted Piero di Ser Antonio, a sprightly youngster, destined by his family to a big career in Florence. Piero was willing to marry her, but his family would not hear of such a mésalliance; they bought off Catarina's parents and married her to an old man named Accatabriga di Piero del Vacca.

However, after Piero had married a woman in his own walk of life, his family did the right thing by Leonardo; they brought him up on even terms with Piero's legitimate children, and he seems to have suffered not in the least by his father's fault. His bent toward art was discovered early, and his father's family not only encouraged it, but put him in the way of becoming the famous artist he afterward came to be. He was one of the few great men in history who had no handicaps in early life, and whose career was one uninterrupted success from boyhood to old age.

He was, however, a self-taught man, and to the end of his life he could not spell correctly and his grammar was of the poorest. That did not prevent him from becoming a remarkable poet; in fact, Eugen Muntz does not hesitate to say of one of the passages in his "Trattatodell' Arte della Pittura" that "in movement, warmth, and audacity it rivals Virgil's famous description of a storm," or that in his poetic description of the deluge "he compels us to think of Shakespeare and Dante."

From poetry Leonardo was willing to descend to fabulism, and his fables are second only to Aesop's. The famous fable of the moth and the candle is his. From that he rose—or fell, it all depends on whether you take the fifteenth or the twentieth century view of it—to physical science, and designed a flying machine. He made discoveries in botany which were worked out later by Linnaeus; he promulgated a theory of animal life long before Darwin, and he made discoveries in hydraulics which paved the way for the nineteenth century.

The painter of "The Last Supper" antedated Martin Luther, and in his day it was not popular, fashionable, or even safe to say anything against the current religion. He never was in danger of the stake, but he shaved it pretty closely.

The Church in his day taught that the world was between five and six thousand years old, but Leonardo counted in advance of Darwin by hundreds of thousands of years. He declared that the visible action of the Po upon the valley through which it ran must have required 2,000 centuries, and he speaks of the invention of astrology as having occurred 57,000 years before the Trojan war. He asks the question whether Noah's deluge was universal or not and answers:

"We read in the Bible that the deulge was caused by forty days and forty nights of rain, and that the mass of water rose ten cubits above the highest mountain in the world. If this really took place and the rain was universal it must have covered our globe, which has the form of a sphere. Now, the surface of a sphere is at every point equally distant from the centre; in these conditions it was impossible for the water to run away, for water can only flow downward. How, then, could the water of this tremendous deluge run away, if it is shown that it could not move? And if it did flow away, how did it begin to move, if it did not move upward? Here we have no natural explanation; we must either take refuge in the supposition of a miracle or declare that the water evaporated in the heat of the sun."

He published a book of "Enigmas," in which his heterodoxy becomes even more apparent. Take, for instance, a few chosen at random:

"Who are those who believe in the Son, but only build churches to the Mother? The Christians.

"What mean the lamentations that take place among all the great nations of Europe over the death of a single man slain in the East? Good Friday.

"Who are those who, being dead, provide food after a thousand years for many who live? The monks, who live upon the saints so long dead.

"What are the false coins which help those to triumph who spend them? The monks, who, spending nothing or less, receive great riches and give Paradise."

He was the first artist who dared to make the Christ a human being. He refused to put nimbi and halos around his Biblical characters, and he dared to paint the infant Jesus teasing a cat and the Virgin sitting in the lap of her mother and playing. In philosophy, Muntz says, he was something of a transcendentalist: he wrote a book on philosophy. Says Seailles: "In Leonardo's science mind is not annihilated by matter. It seeks and finds mind in matter. Translated into modern language, Leonardo's creed might be summed up thus: Mechanism implies dynamics. All movement, finally analyzed, will be seen to have its origin in spiritual activity."

There is a tradition that he was converted to Mohammedanism, but it rests chiefly on the fact that he certainly went to the East and was for some time in the employ of a Sultan. It is noted that in a marginal note to a landscape drawing in 1473 Leonardo wrote in the Oriental way, from right to left. In some of his writings he describes the Island of Cyprus, the Bridge of Pera, and the eruption of Aetna. In the Codex Atlanticus there are enumerated various works which he performed for the Khédive in Egypt. But though Leonardo doubtless served Sultan Kait Bey, he is plainly too much of an agnostic to have ever taken the Mohammedan or any other religion seriously.

He did, however, believe in God, but apparently only as Matthew Arnold and Herbert Spencer believe in Him; that is, as "the power not ourselves that makes for righteousness," or as "the infinite and eternal energy from which all things proceed." This understood, it is easy to see why he could paint the "Last Supper" in a way to bring out all the human characteristics of that great event without a tinge of superstition or even of tradition. He took as the keynote Jesus's saying, "One of you shall betray me," and made the picture a dramatic one of human life and not anything mystic or supernatural.

That such a man as this should have been a humorist, a buffoon, and a practical joker seems incredible, but buffoonery was a part of Leonardo's many-sided character. Take, for instance, this story, told by Vasari:

"One day the vine dresser of the Belvedere found a very curious lizard, and for this creature Leonardo constructed wings made from the skins of other animals for the purpose; into these wings he put quicksilver, so that when the animal walked the wings moved also with a tremulous motion. He even made eyes, horns, and a beard for the creature, which he tamed and kept in a case; he would then show it to any friend who came to visit him, and all who saw it ran away terrified."

We should think so.

"He more than once," pursues old Vasari, "caused the intestines of a sheep to be scraped and cleaned until they were brought into such a state of tenuity that they could be held in the hollow of the hand; having placed them in a neighboring chamber, he brought a blacksmith's bellows, to which he made fast one end of the intestines, and then he would blow into them until he caused them to fill the whole room, which was a large one, in so much that whoever might be therein was obliged to take refuge in a corner."

Surely they were great practical jokers in the Middle Ages. Like many another thing of that time, it is a lost art.

Mrs. Charles W. Heaton, in a sketch of Leonardo published some thirty years ago, brings out a similar feature of his character in illustrating something she has to say about his genius as a caricaturist—for this man who could paint world masterpieces could also turn aside to make daffodils, and enjoyed doing it.

"One of the strangest contradictions in his character," she says, "was his love of caricature. He, the priest of ideal beauty, seems to have been a worshipper of ideal ugliness. Numerous are the caricatures that he has left us in which some peculiar deformity of feature is exaggerated with comical effect.

"Indeed, such was his appreciation of the grotesque in the human countenance that if he saw any one of remarkable ugliness or peculiarity of visage he could not rest satisfied until by some means or other he had recorded the impression produced upon him. Leonardo would frequently invite peasants and rustic clowns to dine with him, and keeping them in roars of laughter with all sorts of buffoonery he would carefully meanwhile note their gestures in their boisterous mirth, and afterward, retiring into his room, would transfer their contorted faces to paper."

It must have been something of a humorist who could rely on getting that effect. What a picture!—the courted society man, the most prominent person in whatever court he was attending, equally at home in any rough gathering and evidently—if this story, first told by Lomazzo, is true—the comic story-teller and head of the table in both. Surely Leonardo was a man of many sides.

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