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Mona Lisa

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Tapestries at Eastnor

sky or in the foreground, could be so regarded. Afterwards, a narrow band of flowers ran round the edge, with banderoles containing inscriptions. By the 17th century, the border had become an

important feature of the design, often representing, as in the Eastnor panels, a broad and ornamental framework, beyond which the scene was viewed as through an aperture.

A PICTURE BY FERDINAND BOL BY C. J. HOLMES

FERDINAND BOL in his signed and dated works is hardly ever more than a mediocrity, and as a rule is one of the dullest of Dutch painters. Yet in the days between 1631 and 1640, when he was Rembrandt's pupil, Bol seemed to have caught the secret of his master's style more fully than any other. Their works in etching and in painting may still be confounded; indeed, the most searching criticism of Rembrandt may sometimes hesitate to say exactly where the master's work ends and the pupil's begins. The most recent and striking proofs of this confusion is furnished, of course, by the famous portrait of Elizabeth Bas in the Rijks Museum. Dr. Bredius dates this picture 1640, when Bol leaves Rembrandt to start on an independent career. The interesting little portrait from the Marquis of Lothian's collection, now belonging to Mr. R. C. Witt, must date a year or two later [PLATE]. Though the model is not one of Rembrandt's models, the influence of Rembrandt is still paramount in the general design, in the scheme of rich crimson and dark brown, and in the dress with its broad-brimmed hat and feather, and, above all, to the painter's eye, in certain passages of handling. This is notably

the case in the treatment of the slashed sleeves at the shoulder, where the material appearing through the openings in the crimson dress is put in with broad touches of black and white, with a certainty and richness of pigment which Rembrandt himself could not have surpassed.

Those who know the picture only through the reproduction published by the Arundel Club will have missed much of its quality; for there the modelling of the cheek, and in particular the drawing of the ear, have been entirely lost. The flesh tones, it is true, have not even in the original quite the luminosity and palpitation which we find in Rembrandt at this time. The modelling is that of a sound craftsman rather than of a great painter, but it is still far removed from the polished inanity to which Bol afterwards sank. Like so many other pupils of great men, his talent flames up for a moment when he is under the immediate inspiration of his master. When that inspiration is removed the fire burns out almost at once. Mr. Witt's picture deserves a record, as it is one of the few works that Bol produced in the brief period before he forgot all he had learned from Rembrandt: before the reflection of his teacher's genius fades and becomes indistinguishable.

MONA LISA BY LIONEL CUST

THERE seems to be some need of an apology for mentioning once more in *The Burlington Magazine* this world-famous picture. Famous as it was before, the ravishment of *Mona Lisa* and subsequent restitution to the Louvre, a squalid story in itself, brought the picture into the domain of the cheap and shallow journalist ready to make copy for business purposes of any information good or bad, true or false, which might help to keep the subject alive in public curiosity. Let it be conceded that this portrait had been invested with an aureole of exaggerated brilliance by certain distinguished literary characters of the 19th century. In the case of works of art undue laudation sometimes brings reaction in its train. Even Raphael's *Madonna del San Sisto* has been reviled as a piece of shoddy commercialism. There is no particular skill demanded in taking shots at a masterpiece, the very eminence of which makes it an easy object to hit.

There are surely many persons who have at first felt some disappointment when they first came before *Mona Lisa* in the Salon Carré at the Louvre, and learnt that this was the famous portrait, which to Walter Pater was "the head upon which all the ends of the world are come", "this beauty into which the soul with all its maladies has past!", "the embodiment of the old fancy, the symbol of the modern idea". Even Robert Browning felt so cold before this portrait that he was ready to assume that the painting in the Louvre was a copy. It is possible, however, to feel unmoved by a work of art and yet confident of its greatness. For more than four centuries *Mona Lisa* has smiled upon the world, and no person has penetrated the secret of that smile. Copies innumerable have been taken of her face, but no painter has succeeded in doing more than make a mere transcription.

The publicity attached to the theft of *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre led to further literary activity on the part of earnest young students eager to make

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their own reputation by destroying that of some famous work of art. At the same time there emerged from retirement in many hiding-places copy after copy of the famous picture, some of which had, at some period of their existence, played a part in masquerade as the original work of Leonardo. Among the latest writers to enter the field are M. Coppier in “Les Arts”, for January, 1914, who seeks to prove that the portrait in the Louvre may be by Leonardo, but cannot represent Lisa Gherardini, the wife of Francesco del Giocondo, and now Mr. John R. Eyre,¹ who seeks to prove that two versions of *Mona Lisa* must exist, and that one of these is identical with a portrait lately discovered at Isleworth, and now apparently added to the increasing number of doubtful old masters in the Museum at Boston, U.S.A.

As Mr. Eyre is audacious enough to reproduce this Isleworth version and the Louvre portrait side by side, it is not necessary to follow him in his arguments or the impossible task of proving that the Isleworth picture is an original work by Leonardo da Vinci. The two portraits, in spite of extremely bad printing, tell their own story, each quite clearly enough, even in photographic reproductions, and the Isleworth version does not call for any closer examination.

Mr. Eyre, however, has done some service in collecting together the evidence relating to *Mona Lisa*, including M. Coppier's article, though he tries without success to manipulate this evidence so as to establish his own point of view. Like other writers on art, especially German students, he states a hypothesis, or more than one, and then becomes so enamoured of it that he is convinced that it is true, so that he is ready to construct a whole edifice of argument upon it regardless of the hopeless instability of the foundations on which it depends for support.

It is a singular and unfortunate fact that so much of what we know about the lives of certain individuals of the highest eminence in history is based upon tradition, and not on established fact. Dante, Shakespeare, Christopher Columbus, to mention a few instances, are mainly known to us by tradition, and there is nothing exceptional in finding that tradition in the case of a famous artist like Leonardo da Vinci is very vulnerable to the assaults of documentary research. M. Salomon Reinach has remarked with reference to the portrait of *Mona Lisa* that there is very scanty proof that the famous portrait in the Louvre is the actual portrait of the wife of Francesco del Giocondo, painted by Leonardo, but it does not follow that absence of proof is sufficient to establish a negative. The deficiency is supplied by tradition, which must be accepted for what it is

¹ *Monograph on Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa"*, by John R. Eyre. London (Grevel & Co.), 1915.

worth. All the artillery of modern criticism has failed to dislodge the four great works by Leonardo, which are among the great treasures of the French nation. In spite of these attacks there is still every reason to believe that three of these famous paintings, the *Virgin and Child with S. Anne*, *S. John the Baptist*, and *Mona Lisa*, are the three actual paintings which the Cardinal of Aragon saw in Leonardo's house at Cloux, near Amboise, in October, 1517. No other version of any one of these three paintings has succeeded in establishing any claim to being even a replica from the hand of Leonardo himself. In the case of *The Virgin of the Rocks* the controversy raged round the authenticity of the version in the National Gallery rather than of that in the Louvre. Recent documentary evidence shows that Leonardo was probably responsible for both versions, but whereas the painting in the Louvre has still to prove its claim to be the work of Leonardo himself, it is now certain that that in the National Gallery was the work of Leonardo, assisted perhaps by Ambrogio de Predis.

Posterity has but scanty opportunities for penetrating into the intimacy of a painter's workshop. Had Leonardo been a Benvenuto Cellini we might know much more about his work in every branch of the arts. Really great artists are not interested in their own personality; they aspire to be judged by their works and not by their lives. It is upon hearsay and gossip, therefore, that personal information about Raphael, Michelangelo, Leonardo and other great artists mainly depends. A certain amount of this hearsay evidence takes a more solid form in tradition, and thus affords a firmer basis for research. In our own time gossip or hearsay is so quickly registered in print that its value and authenticity are seldom put to the test; but *littera scripta manet*, and an untruth, once it is put into print, in most instances finds someone ready to accept and repeat it as a statement of fact.

The debt owed by posterity to Giorgio Vasari can never be repaid adequately; it is sometimes not recognized at all, when his shortcomings receive greater attention than his whole marvellous achievement. Vasari was an assiduous collector of gossip, especially about contemporary artists, and gossip was no more to be trusted in Florence than it is at this day in Piccadilly, Broadway, or the Champs Elysées. Contemporary gossip is, however, always interesting, even when spiced by scandal or personal animosity, or traceable to the sociable *ennui* of a lady's boudoir or a club smoking room. It is to Vasari that we owe much of our knowledge about the life of Leonardo da Vinci, and, even if he can be convicted of recording impossible statements, it must be remembered that Vasari was born in the lifetime of Leonardo, that he was on intimate terms

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with Michelangelo, Leonardo's great rival, and that many persons were still alive and able to give Vasari information about an artist of such repute as Leonardo. It must also be remembered that the account given by Vasari of Leonardo, in the first edition of the “Lives of the Painters” in 1550, was revised in his second edition in 1568, showing that it received special attention from the author. Possibly the second edition of Leonardo's life contained more actual gossip than the first, and that Vasari was crammed by his friends with *molte novelle e infinite bugie*. Vasari's account of Leonardo da Vinci is in itself so valuable a historical document, that it is possible to excise all that is mere gossip—for instance, in the case of *Mona Lisa*, about the lady's love of music, or the painter's treatment of her eyebrows—without

affecting the value of the whole. The main facts, as collected by Vasari, remain without dispute, and the existing works, which have been ascribed by generations to Leonardo, still remain unshaken in this attribution. Further documentary research is more likely to result in the restoration to Leonardo of other paintings, in which he is now denied a share, even if it should be proved that in most cases, perhaps in every case, the painting was finished by an assistant, Melzi, Salaino, or de Predis. Whenever *Mona Lisa* shall re-appear to smile upon her votaries in Paris, let her be accepted as the harbinger of a new era of criticism, when it shall be a nobler duty to maintain and add to the worth of a great work of art, than to undermine and belittle it, after it has survived the vicissitudes of so many generations.

REVIEWS

DIE SALZBURGER MALEREI des frühen Mittelalters, 2^{er} Th ; GEORG SWARZENSKI ; Tafelb. (457 Abbild. auf 135 Lichtdrucktaf.), M 96 ; Textb., M 54. Leipzig (Hiersemann).

The scope of the work, which is the result of ten years' study on the part of the author, comprises introductory chapters on the beginnings of the painter's art in Salzburg in the Carolingian period ; the succeeding interval down to the appearance of the Romanesque style ; the zenith of the Romanesque period ; the succeeding style ; and lastly the works and schools of the neighbouring provinces in the 12th century. Supplementary chapters deal respectively with the title-pages and verses occurring in early manuscripts ; the Salzburg calendar of the 11th and 12th centuries, and comparative tables, ending with five indexes. The text is contained in one volume, the other being a portfolio of 135 collotype plates of no less than 457 subjects. Of these last only three depict wall-paintings, all the rest being occupied with illuminated books. The wall-paintings consist of two standing figures of saints under an arcade, from the parish church of Mariawörth, and a fragment of a *Nativity* from Pürgg. Naturally these subjects, from their scale and their monumental character, are of the greatest interest from the architectural standpoint, and yet they scarcely differ at all in treatment from the miniature works of the same period. They exhibit the same physical features, viz., the almond-shaped eyes and large pupils, the exaggerated hands and feet, especially the feet, and the same mannerisms of drapery with broad parallel folds, accompanied by a capricious little floating tail of skirt or mantle. Certain peculiarities, however, strikingly dissimilar from conventional treatment, occasionally occur, as for instance in a miniature of the *Martyrdom of S. Andrew* (pl. 62, No. 200) from an illuminated MS. from the nunnery of S. Erentrud at Munich. In this instance the saint is represented, not crucified on the usual cross saltire, but in the act of

being bound with thick ropes to a Latin cross. His facial type, by the way, assimilates very closely to the features traditionally assigned to S. Peter. Another miniature (pl. 62, 199) from the same book depicts the favourite subject of S. Martin dividing his cloak, but the saint, curiously enough, is clad in civilian dress, and, except that the incident itself is unmistakable, there is a complete absence of the usual indications of the military status of the holy catechumen. Two pages, depicting the seasons (pl. 7), from copies of Bede in the Imperial Library at Vienna and at Munich respectively, in spite of the difference of subject, are, both in drawing and in general composition, strikingly similar to the famous embroidery roll commonly called the Bayeux tapestry. Again, some pages from a Bible in the university at Erlangen (pls. 40 and 49) afford the closest parallel to the arrangement of the so-called medallion windows of early 13th-century date, of which those surrounding the Trinity Chapel at Canterbury Cathedral are perhaps the best known examples in our own country. Instances like these emphasize in a peculiarly interesting way the correlation of the decorative arts in the middle ages. A curious case of literalness is that of a miniature for a book of the gospels, depicting the visit of the Maries with spices to the sepulchre (Pl. 18; no. 58) in which one of the holy women is represented in the act of incensing the empty tomb with a chained censer just such as would be used liturgically in contemporary Christian worship. Of course it goes without saying that however clear the collotype reproductions, the rich effect of the gold and colour, which constitute the greatest share of the charm of mediæval illustration, especially those belonging to the earlier periods covered by the book under notice, is necessarily absent from black-and-white renderings. The effect is one which no letter-press, however detailed and lucid, can avail to convey