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LEONARDO DA VINCI

FAMOUS FOLK SERIES

(90107)

英文世界名人傳記

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Famous Folk Series
Leonardo Da Vinci

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PREFACE

Every one who studies the life of that great man, Leonardo da Vinci, is greatly indebted to Vasari. In his "Lives of the Painters," this early biographer gives the alluring picture of Leonardo as he appeared to those of his own generation.

Many writers have, in recent years, been inspired to consider the claims of Leonardo to greatness. This Florentine of the fifteenth century is to them an intriguing figure and they would have the world do him the honor which seems his due.

To several of these writers we owe a debt of gratitude. Through them, has been revealed to us a greater insight into the character of Leonardo, a juster appreciation of his art, and a truer estimate of his work as a scientist. Let us then give our heartfelt thanks to Edward McCurdy ("The Mind of Leonardo da Vinci"), to Mrs. Charles W. Heaton and Charles C. Black ("Leonardo da Vinci and His Works"), to Mrs. Rachel A. Taylor ("Leonardo, the Florentine"), to Clifford Bax ("Leonardo"), to Emil Ludwig (in "Genius and Character") and to Thomas Craven (in "Men of Art").

Just before beginning the writing of this sketch, the author had the great privilege of visiting Florence, the scene of Leonardo's early life, Milan where he spent so many busy years and Paris where in the Louve Gallery are so many of his famous pictures.

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LEONARDO DA VINCI

INTRODUCTION

Everyone who loves art feels irresistably¹ drawn towards Italy, for that land has been the home of some of the world's greatest artists. Michael Angelo, Raphael, Titian, are names which everyone venerates.² Upon their works of art, masterpieces of painting and sculpture, rests the fame of these great men.

As an artist, Leonardo da Vinci was as great as the greatest of them, but he has a broader claim to renown than have they. Leonardo was a very great artist but he was also a scientist. Indeed he was perhaps one of the greatest scientists the world has ever known. To the men of his own generation, his investigations and experiments made known countless new laws of nature and art. They marveled not only at his great paintings but also at his great insight into natural laws and his many inventions. But, only to us of a later generation, has been revealed the true greatness of the man.

It is only within comparatively recent years that men have undertaken to study Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks. Scattered among the great libraries of Europe, these famous notebooks attracted little attention until the

¹ irresistably, overpoweringly.

² venerates, reveres.

present century. Then were discovered, hidden behind a system of inverted writing, some of the most remarkable ideas. To the amazement of mankind, it was found that Leonardo, the artist, should quite as properly be called Leonardo, the scientist.

Indeed it would seem that there has been no scientific discovery or invention made since his time, of which he did not dream, for which he did not plan. In his scientific knowledge and foresight he was hundreds of years ahead of the men of his time.

We, of this generation, heartily echo the words of Vasari, his early biographer, "Truly admirable, indeed divinely endowed was Leonardo da Vinci."

CHAPTER I

LEONARDO, A COUNTRY BOY

Not far from Florence where the River Arno winds about among the vine-covered hills of Tuscany,¹ lies the sleepy little village of Vinci. Ancient castles and fortress-like rocks crown the summits of many of the surrounding hills. Little groves of silver-gray olive trees rise from among the fragrant grapevines on the hill-sides. Here and there stands a stately cypress tree, dark against the bright Italian sky.

In this little town of Vinci lived, in the early half of the fifteenth century, a certain Ser Piero—a lawyer and the son and grandson of lawyers. Of him and of his fathers, no one would have heard but for a certain event which happened in 1452. In that year Ser Piero became the father of an illegitimate² baby whom they named Leonardo.

Of Leonardo's mother very little is known. She is said to have been a peasant girl called Caterina. Until he was five years old, she kept her beautiful little son with her. Then she gave him up to his father, Ser Piero. In the meantime, she had married a rough peasant and was, by that time, tied down to the drudgery³ of hard work and poverty.

¹ Tuscany (tūs/kā-nī), an agricultural district of Italy.

² illegitimate, born out of wedlock.

³ drudgery, wearisome and menial toil.

In the same year in which Leonardo was born, Ser Piero married a wife chosen for him by his family. No children were born to him and his wife. They therefore sought out little Leonardo and brought him up in their home as their own son. After the death of his first wife, Ser Piero married again but his second wife was also childless. And so, for twenty-four years, Leonardo was the only child of his father. The loving hopes of his father's family were centered upon him and he received every advantage of culture and education which his father could secure for him.

Leonardo was a beautiful child and loved beauty wherever he found it. He delighted in watching the birds as they rose from the ground or circled in long flight across the bright blue sky. He picked the lovely flowers and studied how they were made. He sang very prettily and learned to play the lute. He adored horses and early learned to ride well.

Whatever his tutors could teach him he learned with eagerness but his curiosity went far beyond such narrow limitations. "In arithmetic," says one of his early biographers, "he often confounded the master who taught him, by his reasonings and by the difficulty of the problems he proposed."

As a little child, Leonardo played in the brilliant sunshine or under the shade of the vines and olive trees. He sniffed with delight the fragrance of the grape and wild rose and almond. As his little legs grew stronger he must have wandered over to play in the river and to watch its dancing waters. Indeed, water seems always to have fascinated Leonardo, and his youthful curiosity may have impelled him to try experiments to study its nature.

As soon as his fingers could grasp a pencil or a piece of chalk, little Leonardo began to make pictures of what he saw. Did he draw pictures of the river, of rocks, of birds and of flowers? Did he try to draw pictures of people? Surely something of the future artist must have shown in these childish sketches, for they delighted Ser Piero.

At what time, Ser Piero moved his family to Florence is not known. When he arrived there, however, he proudly displayed to his friend, Verrocchio,¹ some of his son's drawings and was delighted with the enthusiastic praise of that artist. Indeed, Verrocchio was very glad to welcome this promising youth into his own studio as one of his students and to guide him in the beginning of his artistic career.

¹ Verrocchio (vēr-rōk'kyō), an Italian goldsmith, sculptor and painter.

CHAPTER II

THE FLORENCE OF LEONARDO'S TIME

The Florence with which Leonardo became acquainted in his youth was indeed a city of flower-like beauty. She lay on both sides of the winding Arno surrounded by her strong walls with their eleven convenient city-gates. Beyond the city walls on the gentle slopes of the encircling hills were the pleasant villas,¹ beautiful gardens and rich vineyards. From the top of these hills, could be seen the stately churches and magnificent palaces of Florence, lying a gorgeous picture in ivory, yellow or rosy tints in a setting of green. The shimmering² waters of the Arno flowed through the midst of her and across it stretched quaint bridges bordered with their small shops.

Seventy or more towers on the city wall guarded the city by night and by day. From within the city rose the mighty dome of the Cathedral and beside it, the Campanile,³ that suburb bell tower whose massive proportions had been so skillfully planned that it appears light and graceful.

This beautiful city has had a long and illustrious history. The republic which was established in the thirteenth century had its early beginnings in the eleventh century

¹ villas, country houses of some elegance.

² shimmering, gleaming.

³ Campanile (kām'pā-nō'lā), bell tower

under the rule of the Countess Matilda. That remarkable woman called about her to assist in the government of the city, a group of great nobles, judges and lawyers, who continued to exercise authority in the government after her death at this later time, in the name of the people.

No steady development of republican principles followed this beginning of political freedom. But, in the thirteenth century, the city was divided into two republics. These never, however, developed a really strong position. Their constitution "although of very democratic tendencies, seemed designed to promote civil strife and weaken the central power."

For many years the Florentines continued to try experiments with various systems of government. Unfortunately, they suffered both from the greed of the nobles and from the jealousy and enmity of the neighboring states. But, in spite of these hindrances¹ to good government, in the summer of 1343, the people rose up against a tyrant who had usurped great power. They drove him out, and established a thoroughly democratic and commercial republic.

During the next century or more, the fortunes of the republic of Florence varied. Attacks from without and famines within the city troubled its citizens but the republic survived in spite of all difficulties.

In the early fifteenth century, Giovanni² de Medici³ was elected chief justice of the city. His son, Cosimo de

¹ hindrances, obstacles.

² Giovanni, jo-văn'nee.

³ Medici, mē'dè-chē

Medici, gained much popularity with the people by becoming their leader in opposition to the aristocratic party. Cosimo's son, though he remained a private citizen, succeeded in becoming very powerful in directing the affairs of state. Later, his grandson, Lorenzo, though also remaining a private citizen, became an absolute tyrant. He still maintained the old republican form of government, but he exercised complete control of affairs. His spies were everywhere and speedy vengeance overtook any who dared oppose his schemes.

Lorenzo de Medici was a man of loose morals. He took delight in encouraging the people in indulging in the wildest orgies.¹ Moreover, he arranged endless festivals to keep them well entertained, hoping in that way to make them forgetful of their lost liberties.

In spite of the greatest profligacy,² Lorenzo was, nevertheless, a patron of art and literature. In his palace were entertained many illustrious men. The most famous of these artists, who lived at Lorenzo's expense, was Michael Angelo.

Lorenzo, who was called "The Magnificent," was at the height of his brilliance and power when Leonardo da Vinci came to Florence and entered the studio of Verrocchio.

¹ orgies, revelries.

² profligacy, corruption of morals.

CHAPTER III

LEONARDO, A STUDENT IN FLORENCE

Just how old Leonardo was when he entered the studio of Verrocchio is not known. But the boys of Florence were usually apprenticed to the trades at fourteen. Leonardo would not have been younger than that and it seems likely that he was about that age, when he became an art student.

In Verrocchio's studio, the boy found a very congenial¹ atmosphere. With the other students, he listened with rapt attention to the instruction and criticisms of the master and with them, he tried many sorts of artistic expression.

Verrocchio had had a wide and varied experience in art. He had started his career as a goldsmith. There his artistic ability received such high praise, that he was encouraged to attempt other forms of art expression. He was better known as a sculptor than as a painter and his students were encouraged to do a great deal of modeling in clay.

Young Leonardo was very versatile.² He was not satisfied to devote himself merely to one branch of art. Though his aim was to become a great painter, he gladly seized the opportunity offered at Verrocchio's studio, to learn the art of modeling. While still a youth he

¹ congenial, sympathetic.

² versatile, many-sided.

made in clay "some heads of women that are smiling," and "some heads of boys which possess all appearance of having come from the hand of a master." Vasari tells us that these models in clay were still in existence in his day and that people were still taking plaster casts from them.

Leonardo's interest in art grew until it included architecture. He soon began to design buildings of various sorts.

From art, the young student turned his attention to science. He was the first to urge that the River Arno be made navigable¹ so that boats might travel between Florence and Pisa. He made drawings also of flour-mills and of various other machines which were to be driven by the force of water.

Since it is not likely that Leonardo could have been taught the exact sciences of mathematics, architecture and engineering in Verrocchio's studio, it may be assumed that he studied also with certain other masters then in Florence. Indeed there were in Florence at that time some very famous teachers. One was a very noted teacher of mathematics; another was a famous philosopher; and a third was a noted teacher of mathematics, astronomy, geography and medicine.

Leonardo's eagerness to learn about the operations of nature and his natural love of mathematics would certainly have driven him to these able men for instruction. His later expert knowledge and scientific method of approaching problems of all sorts proves that he had

¹ navigable, deep enough and wide enough to afford passage to vessels.

received scientific training and this was probably in his youth.

An insatiable¹ curiosity drove Leonardo to study all nature so that he might understand the laws which control her and, by endless experiments, he attempted to invent machines which should be able to do some hitherto undreamed-of labor.

One of the things he sought to design was some method of removing mountains. Or, if that seemed too difficult, he proposed to dig tunnels through them so that men might pass easily from one plain to another through the mountains instead of being forced to climb over them. He studied also how harbors might be kept open and their channels kept clean. He devised methods of moving great weights, of drawing water from great depths. "From speculations² of this kind, he gave himself no rest," Vasari tells us.

Though he gradually became so keenly interested in these various scientific speculations, still the greater part of Leonardo's time was probably spent in the studio. And the young artist could scarcely have found a better teacher than the kind-hearted Verrocchio. In his studio, Leonardo had also the inspiring companionship of other young artists, students and guests of Verrocchio. Among them, he must have found most congenial, Perugino,³ a youth of his own age. The latter also became in time a very distinguished artist and was later the teacher of Raphael.

¹ insatiable, incapable of being satisfied.

² speculations, thoughts; theories

³ Perugino, pā'rōō-jē'nō.

Florence is a very beautiful city. No doubt the young art students were urged to contemplate the masterpieces of painting and architecture by which they were surrounded.

Leonardo must have drawn much inspiration from the beautiful buildings of the city. One can imagine him standing for hours at a time in the wonderful Cathedral, studying out the means by which those former artists had achieved so magnificent a building. Did he not stand also before the Campanile absorbed in contemplating its graceful beauty — absorbed quite as much, perhaps, in calculating what proportions were necessary in order to produce such marvelously light and graceful effects? Leonardo must have studied also the fortress-like palaces of Florence — palaces strong enough to withstand a siege and yet decorated in every portion with carvings and paintings.

On bright, warm days or in the early twilight, the youthful artists were accustomed to wander beyond the city walls. Perhaps Leonardo strolled¹ through the lovely gardens or visited the great villas on the hillside; or sat, alone, wrapt in thought, gazing on the fascinating waters of the Arno as they flowed gently towards the sea. Perhaps he planned as he sat there, how these waters might be made more useful to the city by making the river navigable.

Sometimes he wandered, alone, far away from the brilliant city — far into the lonely places where he might study nature undisturbed. He followed the River Arno back along its course and watched with eager eyes the

¹ strolled, walked aimlessly about.