MONA LISA'S SISTERS

PORTRAITS OF SPLENDID "NEW WOMEN" ARE WORTH MILLIONS.

AND GUN MEN ARE THEIR HUMBLE MODERN KNIGHTS.

First New Women of Renaissance Live in World's Memory and Admiration—Their Portraits, Greatest of Art Treasures, Must Be Guarded Day and Night by Army of Custodians to Prevent Another Theft Such as That of the "Mona Lisa"—Women Who Were Admitted by Men as Equals.

Laura de Dianti.

The Duchesse Anne Was the First Woman to Wear a Bang.

Naples Would Have Voted for that Wonderful Queen Jeanne, Whose Memory Still Lives.

The True Portrait of the Belle Ferronnière.

Jeanne of Arragon, Who Invented Modern Society. And One of First Most Notable Emancipators of Her Sex.

BY STERLING HEILIG.

PARIS, May 15.—(Special Correspondence)—Ferocious mastiff dogs lurk by night in the Palace of Versailles. Slender police-dogs with tiger-teeth patrol the Palace of the Louvre beside their masters.

Gun-men with automatic-firers in their clothes—they look like tourists, but they are quick wrestlers and smashers—hang about the old royal apartments, audience chambers, and parade halls, one-time filled with dawdling courtiers and lovely women. By day, tourists of the world now loiter through. The old palaces are picture-galleries of the Republic.

In the silent halls, the tourists see the splendid women of the past smile down upon them. Do they realize that they still have defenders like the knights of old, prepared to fight for them? They are the modest gun-men of no birth, who mingle with the throng, who glide with cat-like step into the empty corridors. They are the men with mastiff dogs by night, the grim patrols of the French state, prepared to fall on the next ravishers of Mona Lisa's sisters.

In these days of desperate bandits like Bonnot and subtle sneaks like the Burglar of the Louvre, the immense value attached to many portraits are a continual source of danger for them. A Velasquez has fetched $400,000, a Rembrandt $500,000. There are Leonardos, Titians and Raphaels that would sell as dearly. The riches of the Louvre are calculated at a billion dollars; but no one has estimated the collective value of portraits in the various state palaces—and in particular Versailles. Formerly, they were looked on as beautiful and sacred objects. Now, they are things of value, like gold and jewels. So the French state has told its guardians to shoot.

Founders of Equal Rights.

Calmly, the splendid women of the past smile down upon their humble modern knights. They seem to know that times have changed. They ought to. They began to change them.

Women of the present, undisputedly man's equal, look back with admiration and humility on the strong spirits who won the first battles for you, centuries ago!

In an epoch of drudges and dolls, they became men's peers by charm and intelligence. They created a new type—which has remained the modern—the ideal of woman, beautiful, learned, virtuous, artistic, pleasant-spoken, and interesting herself with competence and authority in all the things of life.

What a splendid creature was the famous Jeanne of Arragon. Her portrait by Raphael is one of those strange works which fascinate. Once seen, it is never forgotten.

Jeanne, at 10 years of age, knew everything, except arms, that a well-instructed youth of the time should know. She also danced, played ravishingly on lute and clavicord, and explained Cicero and Virgil. At 15, as wife of Prince Ascanio Colonna, she took possession of the old palace like a flood of sunlight.

In this fortress of the Colonna, her first care was to make them give her a tower of her own, which she called her "grotto"—as we would say today, her reception-room. There she massed antiques, jewels, paintings, tapestries, bric-a-brac. She employed artists and gave them fanciful subjects. Some of them are now in the Louvre, descended from the collection of Cardinal Richelieu. One is "The Triumph of Mercury and Comus," the god of elegance, and shows the ideals—new to her time—working in the mind of this charming New Woman.

On the banks of a river, among bosquets and arbors, a gallant society or Court of Politeness—gracious dames and courteous cavaliers—chat in groups, listen to songs, or compose verses. A breath of ambrosia perfumes the air. It is the world of those first old manuals of the Art of Living—oftenest written by women—which were soon to begin appearing, a sort of Arcadia, where business is put aside and where they give themselves up in peace and fine leisure to the perfecting of social life; a world which has the charm of a Dialogue of Plato.

Only more so—because women had become the chiefs and leaders. Jeanne was one of the very first and most notable of the true emancipators of her sex.

There were others. If, in those days, they had our practice of the referendum, a popular vote of Europe would have divided the palm of feminine perfection among the 20 foremost of a hundred such beautiful, witty and learned New Women.

Venice would have elected Catherine Corano, august widow of the last of the Lustignans, who having given a kingdom to her country, lived in majestic retirement at Cyprus. Naples would have voted for that wonderful Queen Jeanne, whose memory still lived. Rome would have pronounced for the blonde Farnese, and Urbino for Laura de Dianti, whose portrait by Titian has never been called popularly by any other name than "La Bella."

They are symbols of a privileged moment in the history of humanity. They signify a new and charming thing—the enthroning of feminine royalty in the modern world. Because, if woman occupies such a considerable place in Renaissance painting, it is because she came suddenly to hold it, really, in society.

Awakening of Woman.

The Renaissance was the first great century of women. Held for so long in an inferior condition, she took her revenge at last and passed to the front row. She freed herself, became a person having her own independent existence.

This transformation had the great consequence of making social life possible. "Society," that is, an ensemble of distinguished people of a locality uniting for a disinterested cause, not by reasons of family or business, but to form a common fund of their intelligence, a special intercourse distinct from the affections of the heart, and which alone gives "politeness"; that particular convention which permits polite people to meet on a footing of momentary equality—business man and scientist, soldier and man of letters, artist and millionaire—under the witty patronage of a few elect women—the social circle of this kind is the creature of the French and Italian Renaissance. The Middle Ages had at once exalted and cursed women; even idolizing her, it put her outside of nature—no society would have been possible with the Beatrice of Dante.

Yet some of these first New Women had terrible old possibilities lingering in them. In the Louvre, sister portraits to the stolen Mona Lisa, hang two other works by Leonardo, deemed almost equally priceless—and both bearing the same name. Which was the true "Belle Ferronniere?" Is it she whose two eyes follow the tourist, no matter where he may stand? Its marvel is the profound glance, as Mona Lisa's marvel was her smile. Or is it the tragic profile, iron and marble?

King Francis I—Finally Victim of Belle Ferronnière—Showing Emperor Charles V. Around the Palace.

Neither portrait smiles. The vengeance of the "Belle Ferronniere" on King Francis I seems already to glow in each. Doubtless at the moment Leonardo da Vinci painted her, she was deep in it. Brought to France by the art-loving King, one of the great Italian's first works was to portray the siren—while looking about her for the most horrible revenge imaginable. She latest royal caprice. The King called her his favorite—the rich, cultivated and strong-souled woman whom he had ruthlessly separated from her family. And she pretended to accept the situation; did not want to kill him at once—but first gave him years of agony!

It is history. At that time, in Europe, every one dreaded a mysterious malady that had suddenly appeared, and never pardoned. Its poison was slow, implacable, making sores like cancer; a poison so strong and subtle that a touch of the lips of an afflicted one might give it.

One day the Belle Ferronniere slipped out of the palace, in disguise, to seek a thing she wanted. She was gone two hours. When she returned she had what she went out for—the fatal poison was on her, in her, and about her! Then the beautiful woman watched, with joy, for its first signs. "Let my beauty perish," was her meditation, "if I can but make him take the virus!" It was all about her; and the King of France, calling on her constantly, was bound to take it up, who knows, by kissing her hand, or eating a peach that she had pared? But, note, it was not a poison from a bottle—which she could be accused of purposely administering. Also, it was slow!

Delights in Cruel Vengeance.

She delighted cruelly when the first sores seared him. "They are nothing," said the Belle Ferronniere. "They are nothing," echoed the frightened doctors; and they ordered sweat baths. Later, King Francis never appeared without gloves. The amount of drugs they made him take was awful. In time his face came to be made up with flesh-colored patches. For eight years the proud King dragged his wretched body, in pain and disgust, through a pretense of royal routine. Courtiers kept a respectful distance. Palace servants buried his discarded clothes and linen. Surrounded by sham devotion, he was a pariah in his own court. Only one person dared to take his hand—the beautiful woman whom he had so wronged, who had thus revenged herself, who risked nothing, for she had the poison in her. When its ravages showed on her, the King burst into tears. "What, you, too?" he cried. "Had I not done you enough harm?" Now she disappears from view; but one stormy afternoon, at Rambouillet, when the King was at his last extremity, a lady came to see him. What passed, no one knows; but, finally, the King was heard to give a great cry. Hastening, his doctors found him dead. "He had a shock," the lady said; and it was obvious. White-faced and robed in black, they let her pass. It was the Belle Ferronniere. What had she told old King Francis? None cared. All rejoiced round young King Henri.

And she remains mysterious to this day. Which is her portrait? Both are priceless works of Leonardo. No historic character is more authentic. Ye ask any Frenchman, and he will tell you that the Belle Ferronniere, whose real name was Ferron, is that sister-portrait of Mona Lisa which is labeled Lucrezia Crivelli—an Italian woman who was never in France. The true portrait of the Belle Ferronniere—that of the ancient catalogues and still labeled "formerly known as the Belle Ferronniere"—is the tragic profile by Leonardo, white and black, that hangs across the hall, a somber enigma.

All Leonardo's works are mysterious and subject to astonishing adventures. A sort of fate seems to hang over them. There are 2000 authentic Rubens. There are 600 authentic Rembrandts. There are 200 authentic Titiens. But of Leonardo da Vinci there exists only a dozen paintings.

The Louvre possesses half of them, and this helps to give their fabulous value. Leonardo da Vinci was not only a painter, he was a sculptor, engineer, architect, naturalist, musician, chemist and aviator. In his paintings, which were for him a pastime, he accumulated a prodigious number of experiments and researches, and it was his extraordinary activity which worked against them. Pope Julius II. ordered a portrait from him, and Leonardo began by studying a new varnish. "Good," said the pope, "he is commencing at the wrong end. I will never have my picture!"

Leonardo dropped most of his paintings before they were finished. Others fell into ruin while he interrupted work on them, like the celebrated fresco of the battle of Anghiari, which, half completed, scaled and broke during Leonardo's lifetime, and is known only by the sketch of Rubens.

The Belle Ferronniere remained 150 years in the Chateau of Fontainebleau, from the reign of Francis I to the reign of Louis XIV. There, while it hung in the golden room beside the Mona Lisa, it was particularly noticed by Buckingham, the famous English ambassador in Dumas' "Three Guardsmen." Visiting the chateau with Rubens, he expressed a desire to purchase the painting. Perhaps he hoped it would be offered him as a gift; but the French king found the suggestion indiscreet, and had both portraits taken down and hidden. Louis XIII. knew better how to defend his pictures than did the present republic.

Women of Renaissance.

Yet if he saved the Belle Ferronniere and Mona Lisa, he allowed Leonardo's "Leda" to be sacrificed. The delightful painting shook the moral scruples of Surintendent Sublet de Noyers, who started to destroy it. He was stopped by a courageous young maid of honor of the court, who dragged the mutilated and scorched canvas from the open grate fire, where Sublet had thrown it.

The new Women of the Renaissance often stirred up such admiration and devotion to their sisters of a later day. But see how, in two different generations, the simple needs of the heart cry out above culture, fashion, art and elegant society, even when the great souls of the heroines had thought to still them.

The marriage of Anne de Bourbon and the Duc de Longueville—she young, gracious and illustrious, he the handsomest man of his age—set the royal town of Fontainebleau en fete. The importance of the parties made their union of public import. The ambassadors of four powers were present. The King protected the marriage of his kinswoman. A hundred girls in white escorted the bride and 50 chevaliers in armor supported the groom. The poets replaced modern reporters, and instead of photographers, there were the court painters, whose portraits remain.

Yet Anne, it was known, had previously loved and parted with an earlier fiance, noble youth, but young-

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