

12. LEONARDO DA VINCI. Uffizi, Florence.

This extraordinary cartoon, which seems to belong to the years round 1500, has in it the materials for a dozen different pictures; that may be the reason for its having remained unfinished. In its present condition, in which, as has been said, the figures emerge as out of a mist, the fine pyramidal composition with the three Kings at the base and the Virgin and Child at the summit has perhaps more effect than it would have if the subsidiary groups—such as the intensely interested spectators on the right, or the riders on fiery horses, not to speak of the battle in the background—had been worked out. No other painter of the same subject has attempted to do more than tell the story, with more or less embroidering of externals. But Leonardo gives us the impression that the subject—like all others that he treated—has been removed from its ordinary significance and absorbed into some larger mystery, of which he alone has the key.