

## A Book of the Week.

ZOLA'S "ROME."\*

THERE is but the slightest thread of story in Zola's last novel. Even that slight thread, however, contrives to be so revolting and disagreeable that it had far better been left out altogether. Setting aside this disagreeable incident, the book itself is a stupendous work of erudition, enlightened by picturesque description and acute perception with regard to the political feelings in Italy at the present time.

Pierre Froment, the hero priest of the novel "Lourdes," which Zola published two years ago, has written a book entitled "Rome Nouvelle." This work has been condemned by the Congregation of the Index, and Pierre Froment is in despair, for he believed that he had truly set forth the inward aspirations of Leo XIII. himself. He cannot understand why his honest ideal of Catholic Socialism should have fallen under ecclesiastical censure, and he betakes himself to Rome to vindicate his book, confident that all the Cardinals and the Holy Father himself will at once do him justice, when they understand his aim and purpose in writing "New Rome." The whole of one large closely printed (far too closely printed) volume is taken up with the relation of his futile efforts and his constant disappointments. While the weary days pass he spends his time in visiting the principal sights of the city, and it is certain that as a guide book to Rome this novel will rank with Madame de Staël's "Corinne," Hawthorne's "Transformations," and Hare's "Walks," and even Messrs. Murray and Baedeker will have to look to their laurels, for Zola has a great gift of descriptive writing, and a flexible use of his own language, and the scenery in and around the Eternal City, the ruins, picture galleries, the Vatican, and the historical villas are so graphically described, that a tourist may dispense with any other guide in his peregrinations. No doubt many earnest Roman Catholics will be very indignant with the author for his drastic judgments on the ways and customs of the political religious life of "The Black World," as the Vatican circle is called in Rome, and without doubt we may expect during the next week a plethora of books, articles, and pamphlets protesting against his views. But setting aside all doctrinal matters, the sketch the French author gives of the Pope himself is not devoid of sympathy and appreciation, while the grand figure of the lofty-minded Cardinal Boccanera is full of pathos and grandeur. Besides the Papal world of Cardinals, Monseigneurs, and minor clerics, Pierre Froment sees also something of "The White World," or the party attached to the King's Court, and gains glimpses of those who have even more Socialistic sympathies. One of the best scenes in the book describes the old hero, Prada, who is paralysed and cannot move, but who sits at his attic window contemplating the magnificent panorama of Rome that lies before him, and dreaming and speculating as to the future of Italy—the country that he so passionately loves, and for which he has sacrificed so much. Meanwhile his only son spends all his time gambling on the Bourse, and losing money over large building specula-

tions, which have ruined so many of the greatest families of Rome. The description of these large, half-built, deserted buildings, alongside of the triumphs of ancient and mediæval architecture, is full of power, and worthy careful reading.

To turn to the story for a moment, everyone who reads it will, I think, frankly acknowledge that Zola cannot describe a lady, or even most remotely give an idea of the feelings and impulses of a good and pure woman. The loves of Prince Dario and the Countess Prada, from first to last, are tainted, and not even this arch-apostle of the modern French realistic school has more outraged the dignity of love than in the atrocious death scene that ends the lives of these disagreeable lovers. This scene must inevitably disgust all wholesome-minded women and men, but as a guide book to Rome, and as a clever record of the state of strained relations between the black and the white world of politics in Italy the book will have some permanent historical value. As a whole, it is not so interesting as "Lourdes" and "Dr. Pascal," though the character of Pierre Froment himself, with his devoted love for the poor and hungry and disappointed ones of the world, is sympathetic. There is one fine scene when the humble-minded priest pleads to the Holy Father for the outcasts and waifs of the world, and implores him to use his influence on their behalf, and leave aside the schemes for retrieving the temporal power of the Papacy.

As literature, the book will disappoint many critics. It is too long, and too analytical; and accurate and powerful as are many of the descriptions of Rome, yet they lack the subtle charm that, for instance, George Meredith in English, and Pierre Loti in French, give to their poetic pictures of landscape. It is doubtful if the publication of "Rome" will aid the author to obtain his coveted election to the Academy. It is to be suspected that the want of artistic proportion in his works, as much as the revolting coarseness of his earlier books, has excluded him hitherto from election. Nevertheless, in these days Monsieur Zola is an influence to be reckoned with in the world, and his great erudition, persevering labour, and genius, makes the reading of his books a painful experience. Roman Catholic women may perhaps be congratulated in this case in being protected by their "Index," which prohibited the reading of Pierre Froment's "New Rome," and is certain to forbid the perusal of a page of Monsieur Zola's.

A. M. G.

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 Bookland.
 

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"A Son of the Forge," Nunquam's successful novel, is to be published immediately by A. D. Innes & Co.

Mr. Havelock Ellis has translated for the "Savoy" an article by Lombroso on "A Mad Saint," a poor demented Italian woman, who sees visions and dreams dreams. Three or four centuries ago, says Lombroso, she would have attracted followers, founded monasteries, carried away crowds; she would have become a historical event. At the end of the article is the fatuous saying, so characteristic of Lombroso, "The germ of holiness; as well as that of genius, must be sought among the insane."

\* "Rome," par Emile Zola. 3f. 50c. (Charpentier. Paris, 1896.)  
 "Rome," by Emile Zola. Translated by Ernest Vizetelly. 3s. 6d. (Chatto & Windus. London, 1896.)

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