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Review.

Rome. By EMILE ZOLA. Paris: Charpentier.

THIS is the second book of the trilogy which M. Zola is known to be writing—*Lourdes*, *Rome*, *Paris*—to deal with aspects of modern faith. Those of us who had the patience to wade through the almost interminable pages of the first book will remember that it dealt with the so-called miracles and faith-cures of the priesthood at the little town in the Pyrenees. “*Rome*” continues the story, if that term can be used. The young abbé, Pierre, who visited *Lourdes*, has written a book, “*La Rome Nouvelle*.” In this he tries to free faith and dogma from the accretions with which twenty centuries of councils and bulls have surrounded them. The attempt is approved, and the book is commended by a French cardinal and a French count, a leader of the new Catholic-Socialist working-men’s party, the identity of each of whom is easily guessed. The young priest is filled with a radiant hope that his book will help to reconcile the old doctrines of Rome with the eager, restless spirit of to-day. Unfortunately, and much to his innocent surprise, it is viewed with disfavour at headquarters, and even threatened with inclusion in the dreaded “*Index*.” Pierre goes to Rome to seek an audience of the Holy Father. After heart-sickening delays and numberless intrigues, he gains a hearing, but to no purpose. The book is forbidden, and the young abbé bows beneath the yoke.

Such is the thread of the main story, but it really plays a very unimportant part in the whole construction of the book, which is not so much a novel, in the usual acceptance of the term, as a literary guide-book to Rome. Some see in the troubles of the abbé a fragment of autobiography. Pierre, whose book has been put on the *Index*, is Zola. He it is who industriously visits all the show-places of the great city, and describes them with a wealth of technicality and a microscopic minuteness of detail. He it is who weaves the recollections of ancient history into the actualities of to-day, and sees in the Pope an embodiment of the defeated desire to wield the sceptre of Augustus, to continue the Church as the succession of the empire. It is Zola in person who vainly solicits an audience, and who is reduced to catch shadowy glimpses of the frail white figure walking in the Vatican gardens, and who at the same time notes on his shirt-cuff the technical names of Italian carriages. This may or may not be, but it is as certain as it is natural that M. Zola has transferred many of his own experiences and ideas into the record of his young priest.

All who have visited Rome know that one of the greatest difficulties towards properly understanding the city is that its interests, its aspects, are so many and varied. This has made itself felt in M. Zola’s book. It is a succession of magic-lantern slides, and the story of Pierre is simply the commentary of the lecturer who explains the pictures, only it must be admitted that he is often confused and loses himself. For this reason the book would not have the smallest interest for anyone outside two classes—those who know the city and like to see their knowledge revived, and those who wish to learn the impressions of a great French author regarding the probable influence and power of ecclesiastical Rome. To the ordinary novel-reader the great, tedious guide-book and catalogue—for it is nothing more—would prove a burden to the flesh. M. Zola, probably to counteract this, has introduced somewhat of a love-story which has no real connection whatever with the book itself. *Benedetta*, niece of Cardinal *Boccanera*, of a family devoted to the papacy, has

married Count Prada, of a royalist family. It was hoped that this marriage would draw the white and black worlds, the temporal and spiritual powers, closer together. It turns out badly. Each side wishes a divorce. Benedetta loves her cousin Dario, and will marry him when the divorce is granted. But it is fated that the marriage will never be, for the Jesuits, not wishing Cardinal Boccanera to be a candidate for the tiara, send him some poisoned figs, which Dario eats by mistake and dies. In the death-room Zola gives us in his characteristic style what might be termed a scene of pathetic filth, where Benedetta and Dario die in each other's arms.

Even this, however, does not prevent the book, as we have said, from being intolerably dull to the general reader. At the same time Zola's descriptions of the Papal court, and his forecasts of the Papal power, the sketches of different cardinals, and the effect on the young and ardent mind of Pierre caused by the hollow intrigue and jealousy of ecclesiastical circles in Rome, are very interesting, and not without their lessons. The descriptions of ancient Rome are disappointing. Zola is more of an observer than a reader. One can readily detect misapprehensions in his ideas of Augustus and the Rome of the emperors. Cicero is not named once, and Virgil never appears. Evidently the Abbé Pierre has not read Livy, let alone Grote and Niebuhr. History is not Zola's *métier*. One is surprised that so shrewd a man should have left the hard track of the present, and floundered about in what to him is evidently the marsh of the bygone past.

The finest piece of pure narrative in the book is the description of Pierre's interview with the Pope. He is brought in secretly—almost smuggled, in fact, in the evening. He sees the Pope at home, *le pape intime*, as the French say, in an old white cassock stained with snuff, slowly sipping his *siróp* drop by drop, as he talks to the young priest like any old bourgeois tradesman taking his rest after his day's work is done. What a contrast with another scene which Zola describes, and of which we translate a part! It occurs after the Pope has celebrated a mass before a pilgrimage :

“A signal was given : Leo XIII. hastened to come down from his throne to take his place in the procession and get back to his rooms. The Swiss guards tried hard to keep the crowd back and the passage clear. But at the sight of the departure of His Holiness, a thrill of despair had arisen, as if the gates of heaven had suddenly been shut in the faces of those who had not been able to approach them. What a frightful deception, to have had God visible and to lose him, before gaining salvation just by touching him ! The crush was so terrible that the most extraordinary confusion reigned, and swept away the Swiss guards. Women were seen to cast themselves behind the Pope, drag themselves at full length over the marble squares, kiss his footmarks, and drink in the dust of his steps. A tall dark lady shrieked and fainted ; two gentlemen of the committee held her, in the nervous attack which convulsed her, so that she could not hurt herself. Another, stout and fair, devoured and frantically mangled with her lips one of the arms of the armchair on which the poor frail elbow of the old man had rested. Others noticed her, and fought for the place, glueing their lips to the two arms, to the wood and the velvet, their bodies shaken by deep sobs. Force was necessary to drag them from it.”

What an astonishing, a terrible description ! Surely idolatry is not dead when such an explosion of religious frenzy leads to scenes like this ! At that rate, Reunion is ridiculous. There is little need to talk about the “Corybantic Christianity” of the Salvation Army when Mænds of this description exist. We do not want to be inoculated with delirium.

But in Pierre's interview with the Pope he is quite another person. He talks quietly to Pierre, and in simple surroundings. The room was

bare ; there was nothing but three armchairs and four or five chairs recovered with silk to fill the vast space, which was covered by a carpet already very old and worn. A bed disappeared in the distance. There were the chests, the famous chests, which are said to contain, under a triple lock, all the Peter's pence which these pilgrimages bring to Rome. Leo persuades him to submit.

We do not think, by the way, that the Pope will feel flattered if ever he reads M. Zola's description of his person. Perhaps we may trace a little of the pique of a rejected candidate for an audience under the lines which describe Leo XIII., amongst other things, as "simian"! Even realistic novelists have their feelings, we suppose.

But there is no reason to suppose that Zola has allowed anything personal to bias his discussion of ecclesiastical Rome and her probable influence. He is too shrewd a man for that, and writes with restraint and great apparent fairness. Nevertheless—or perhaps we should say consequently—his book is a scathing indictment of Rome's system. Pierre went to Rome to try and revive his faith ; it was strangled instead. We see the dull obstinacy which incessantly leads the Romish Church, in the long-run, to a retreat before the progress of science, instead of the open-minded and honest welcoming of new light shed on an old and intrinsically unalterable truth. We see the deceit and hatred which lead different orders in the ecclesiastical body to an intestine warfare amongst themselves. We see the stealthy underhand working of the Jesuit, always aiming at more power—for his order in the first place, for his Church in the second. We see noble aspirations remorselessly stifled, and dictation substituted for an intelligent devotion. We see policemen in cassocks, jealous of their narrow regulations, and eager to arrest intelligent inquirers. A lurid light rests over the whole uneasy scene.

The book, of course, has met with attacks from the quarter whence they might be expected. But they can be narrowed down to one point—the question of its accuracy or otherwise on matters of fact. There is no complication, no side-issue. As we have said before, the book is not a novel, and so no questions can arise similar to those which have rendered the reading of some of the author's former works impossible in Christian families. Not that we should say that even "Rome" is suitable for the general reader ; to begin with, he would not care for it. But it remains a colossal monument of formidable qualities of work, of assimilation, of shrewd and serious reflections on men and things. And as such, it is a strong attack on the Church of Rome.

Short Notices.

Records of the Life of Stevenson Arthur Blackwood, K.C.B. Edited by his WIFE. Pp. 595. Price 12s. Hodder and Stoughton.

THIS very handsome memorial contains a most interesting record of a very powerful and striking personality. Sir Arthur Blackwood was for many years a leader of all that was good on the Evangelical side of National Christianity. He was a cadet of the family of the Marquis of Dufferin. His religious convictions were finally fixed by the ministrations of the celebrated Miss Marsh in 1856, and from that day to his death he was an earnest and devoted Christian, using his social gifts,