

sure to find pleasant conversation, convinced that such conversation serves to sharpen the intellect, correct the judgment, and is a source of instruction to those who know how to keep it from degenerating into mere babbling." The emperor, meanwhile, never saw him without reproaching him for his idleness, and in 1801 he consented to enter the government's service, becoming envoy, first at Dresden, then at Berlin, where he stayed till 1805. He was next appointed ambassador at St. Petersburg, but before going thither his destination was changed, at the request of the French government, to Paris. Metternich's account of his residence in the French capital, and extracts from letters written there, are by far the most interesting parts of the papers now printed. His judgments, characterizations of the eminent men with whom he came in contact, are all admirable; his judgment of Bonaparte, whom, as he well says, he had better opportunity for knowing than any other person not a Frenchman, is not only sound, but also sharp and clear. The war of 1809 put an end to the ambassador's stay in Paris, but his wife remained, and her letters to her husband, printed in the second volume, have both historical and literary value. To them we are indebted for our knowledge of the singular fact that the negotiations for the hand of Marie Louise were opened by Josephine herself in a long conversation with the Countess of Metternich. But the account here given of

the preliminaries of the marriage is untrustworthy, for the writer ignores the well-known fact of Josephine's ecclesiastical marriage before her coronation.

The remainder of the memoir contains little of general interest except the account of the author's interview with Bonaparte before the battle of Leipzig; and this is not new. In these last pages, too, the reader begins to feel an antipathy for Metternich, which the following volumes can but strengthen. So long as he was contending with the incendiary principles of the French Revolution and the vain projects of the empire, he had a claim upon the reader's sympathy; but here, in the persons of Stein and Arndt, he comes in contact with those feelings of patriotism and moral enthusiasm which he comprehended only enough to hate them with all his soul, and which his later life was to be spent in combating.

To the translation can be given the unusual praise that the book reads as if it had been composed in English, though the English of a very careless writer. But the translator seems to be as ignorant of the history of the period as she is of the geography of the regions mentioned. We have no space here for a list of errata, and must allow two examples to illustrate the whole. The French prince who became Charles X. is called the Count *von* Artois, and the German province of Lausitz, distant five hundred miles from the French border, is described as "Haute and Basse Lusace."

ZOLA'S LAST NOVEL.

IF M. Emile Zola had ever shown a decorous dread of criticism, one would be tempted to think that he had written his too famous, his infamous, *Nana* with the design of giving to the world so dis-

tasteful a book that no right-minded critic could even mention it without being unclean until the even, as Carlyle said of some of Diderot's light-hearted fiction. But a novelist who sells forty

thousand copies of a book before publication can afford to laugh at the critic; and to denounce so popular a writer is something like denouncing the east wind; at least, it is no more efficacious, even if there be no further resemblance. The only critic who has ever, so to speak, drawn blood from Zola is Sainte-Beuve, and he performed this eminently sanitary operation in a letter published in his *Correspondance* (vol. ii., p. 314), which is a beautiful example of the union of severe comment and sugary language. Zola prudently took his revenge only last year, in the criticism of a book that dealt with the manifold improprieties of Sainte-Beuve's life. In this criticism, which appeared in the *Voltaire*, a somewhat ribald sheet in which Nana came out, Zola said that it was always the loose liver who wrote the proper books, while the man whose life was above reproach made up for it by writing novels, or what not, that shocked the prudish rake. This valuable statement of course throws a flood of light on the viciousness of, say, Sir Walter Scott, and, accepting these views as true, we must acknowledge Zola to be a man of more than monastic asceticism.

With his private life we have nothing to do; whatever that may be, his books, and notably his latest one, are more shameless and disgusting than anything in modern literature. Doubtless, M. Zola and his most ardent admirers would agree to this. He knows very well that he secures his readers by covering his pages with so complete an assortment of indecencies that there is almost nothing left for those who come after him. There are, to be sure, plenty of rivals. Two of them, for instance, have joined forces, and under the taking title of *Vices Parisiens* — as if most French novelists wrote only about Parisian virtues — have composed some scenes of fairly vivid nastiness; but they are far from equaling their master; the reader yawns over their labored productions,

as if he were studying a time-table. If, however, any one could beat Zola on his own ground, we should hear very little more about the brood of the Rougon-Macquarts, the Jukes family of France. He knows that he has made a tolerably clean sweep of the gutters, and that he has left nothing for future *chiffonniers*. His position, then, may be held to be secured. He can glow with the infinite satisfaction of knowing that he has disgusted more readers than any man living.

Naturally, the reader will be curious to know what this detestable volume contains. Nothing is so good an advertisement of a book as a warning against its impropriety. The novel takes up Nana, the daughter of Gervaise, the heroine of *L'Assommoir*, and describes her career of vice. The aim of the book, or at least the avowed aim, is to portray the immoralities of the second empire, when, according to Zola, sin was brought into the world, and consequently the time is set at the period of the French Exposition of 1867. Nana herself, it will be remembered, appeared like a rank exhalation in the corruption of *L'Assommoir*, and here she justifies her education. She had already grown tolerably familiar with vicious courses; now she is full-fledged, and is meant for a fair representative of the class to which she belongs. The volume opens with an account of her appearance on the stage, in one of the burlesques that were common at that time, when Offenbach was looked upon as a great musical composer. She cannot sing a note; she knows nothing of acting, but her beauty wins the day, and she is at once successful. Men of fashion go crazy over her, and forthwith she has a much better chance for distinguishing herself than she had before this time, when she was living, so to say, from hand to mouth.

Her first protector is a rich banker, but to follow her in her whole career, through numberless intrigues, at one

time living in luxury and at another flying from the policemen, would be an unsavory task. One of the more striking things depicted in the book is the infatuation of a Count Muffat for her, and this middle-aged and previously venerable person's degradation after he fell into her power, his futile remorse, the sufferings of his powerless pride, are put before the reader with great vividness. The same is true of the fate of the other men: the precocious boy who kills himself because she will not marry him; his brother who robs the military chest to procure money for her ever-hungry purse; the man of good family who walks deliberately to his ruin; the snob who enjoys being mentioned in the papers as one of her victims, — they all appear in the so-called novel, and make at times a really distinct impression. Yet they are but a part of those on Zola's black list: actors, actresses, hair-dressers, servants, the Prince of *Scotland*, as a certain eminent character is called, journalists, — there is no limit to their number. From the first page to the last, there is one perpetual clatter of people: the reader is now in the theatre, gazing at a play, then behind the scenes, or watching a race, or listening to half a dozen people talking; the impression is often vivid, though perhaps more often confused. But these things are all secondary to the heroine herself, with her generous outfit of vices, her always empty purse, her vulgar self-will, her absolute ignorance of anything but her own wants. One sees her squabbles with other women; her ceaseless rapacity, only equaled by her ceaseless extravagance; her contempt for the retinue of men who surround her; and so cleverly is it all done that the reader feels as if the air of the room he sits in were thick with the noxious fumes of sin. What the air of the book is there can be no doubt. A book more redolent of corruption it would be difficult to find; it reeks with every kind of beastly sin.

The hideous mien of vice, too, was never better photographed, — for Zola's art is more like photography than any of the other methods of copying scenes.

Zola's method is a singular one. There is hardly an expression of his own opinion in the whole book. He has no asides for the reader. He expresses no views about the matter before him; he simply takes down the side of the house, — a disorderly house, — and lets the reader see and hear what is going on under its roof. This copying of things is no easier of execution with a pen than with a pencil. There have been some books written that purported to be genuine transcripts of the excesses that gave birth to this novel. The autobiography of our countrywoman, Fanny Lear, was a book of this sort, but no one who read it — and a good many people read it — will remember much about it, except that it was an incoherent mass of bad writing that seemed the work of an author in the New York Ledger, inspired by any one of the spirits who are accustomed to contribute to mundane publications. In fiction, Defoe and Swift are possibly the only other men who have been able to be as circumstantial in their invention; but Defoe leaves between the lines the impression that he was an honest man; Swift alone seems to have thoroughly despised and distrusted human nature. Yet his *sæva indignatio* is something very unlike Zola's delight in what he thinks is a new literary form. The curious residuum of the writer's character, which leaves an impression that we cannot account for by anything he puts down in black and white, is something that we feel with every book, and in the case of Zola it is not of a flattering kind. All laws of art are as dear to him as a synagogue was to a crusader; one can hardly call a man who defiles his readers and besmirches their memory with his obscenities a moralist; and one cannot help feeling that Zola lacks, more than

anything, gentlemanliness. That is the trouble with him; he is irredeemably vulgar.

Of course, according to certain definitions of what constitutes a gentleman, Zola would have had no showing a long time ago. And to define it more precisely would be as hard, to use the old instance, as to define light. The subject he has chosen does not destroy his claim to the title. Swift alone cared to destroy whatever there was tender in human nature, and besides him Zola is the only writer of distinction who deliberately devotes himself to this nauseous task. It is not a figure of speech to call his books nauseous, for they really arouse physical repulsion. Deliberately to close one's eyes to the redeeming side of human nature, while gloating over its acknowledged infirmities, is as inexact as it would be to mistake the verses of a gilded valentine for an adequate and complete picture of life. Yet this is what Zola does. In his eyes, men and women are beasts. There are, of course, frivolity and sensuality in the world, but there are other things, too, though some of them seem to have eluded his observation. He has chosen to devote his great powers to recording the vicious gossip of a corrupt period. His *Nana* he is said to have copied from life; his *Steiner*, the rich Jew banker, is reported to be a once famous man; and doubtless persons familiar with Paris could give the real names of a number of the characters. But is there not something ignoble in his morbid tattle? What are we forced to think of a man who sees nothing else in Paris but certain sins? Do we approve of a man who knows nothing but the scandalous chit-chat of a great city? And such scandal!

He has no scorn for what he describes; he draws his picture with all its revolting details, and lets it make its own impression. So far from having scorn, we feel sure that if he could only get hold of some new lust he would welcome it

as a chance to study a rare disease. Indeed, he calls his novels physiological novels, — pathological would be a better name, — and he boasts that he is striking out in the path that literature must henceforth follow. According to him and to many others, science has come into being, and literature must adapt itself to the new conditions of things. In fact, the recent increased attention that has been devoted to scientific study has proved very confusing to literary men. They did not wish to be left behind composing Pindaric odes, while readers should be studying the forms of water, or ruining their clothes with acids in order to make blue things turn yellow and yellow things turn blue.

Zola may be taken as a specimen of the most advanced type of the pseudo-scientific literary man. Art is to him as obsolete as the notion that the world is flat; what he means to do is to beat the scientific man with his own weapons. For the accomplishment of this purpose, he has composed the history of the depraved Rougon-Macquart family, introducing the last notions on heredity, with pleasing volumes on each separate form of vice, and some promised volumes on the genius of the family: in the *Assommoir* he wrote about alcoholism; in *Nana* he takes up another method of sinning. But, on the whole, he makes a poor showing for literature, or, at least, for its professors. In the first place, he exhibits most unscientific inexactness by overlooking, as I have said, whatever is honorable in human nature; and, in the second place, his grossness, his unflinching prurience, remind one not of those genuine men of science, who examine coldly but thoroughly all the dark shadows of disease, vice, and misery, as unattracted by their charm as they are unrepelled by prejudice, — no, we are not reminded of those, but of men who keep what they call museums of anatomy, sinks of nastiness, which the police suppress as public nuisances. A scientific man, say, a physi-

cian, who should in season and out of season harp on all the horrors he had discovered would certainly not be honored; why it is better for a literary man to be perpetually fingering indelicacy it is hard to see. It is this willful preference of depravity that stamps Zola with the mark of vulgarity.

Of course, many other things have contributed to make Zola what he is. Since what he saw burned itself upon his memory, he early conceived a genuine loathing for the sort of nineteenth-century fairy-land in which most French novelists laid the scene of their stories. The wife, the lover, and the husband, to name them in the order of their relative importance, had long been the only subjects of the novel-writer's art. They lived in a conventional civilization, as artificial, as unlike anything known to man, as, say, Rhodes or Cyprus in one of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays. And, as in those plays, the wife would dress as a page, and go about, and travel by rail, walk all over town, without attracting any more attention than if she had forgotten her parasol. Every one must feel the lack of reality in these French novels. They are often as clever as possible, but they are no more copies of life than are Watteau's pictures. Good taste and classical traditions, between them, crushed a great deal of life out of French literature.

Zola's revolt is but natural, and in certain ways commendable. The exaggerations and pitiable elegance of the romantic writers he brushes away with a sweep of his hand, and he joins with Flaubert in desiring to copy life. Balzac aimed at doing for the second quarter of the century what Zola is doing for the time of the second empire, but the older writer frequently mingled fantastic visions with the results of his observation. Take the little volume, for instance, that contains the *Femme de Trente Ans* and a few short stories, and his faults become apparent. In the

first-named novel, the lover, Lord Grenville, is recalled to a sense of the proprieties of life by the action of the woman he is pursuing, who leads him rather theatrically to the cradle in which her child is lying; immediately the husband returns, Lord Grenville is shuffled into the dressing-room, and she shuts the door upon his aristocratic fingers while getting rid of her husband. She discovers this unfortunate accident only when she again opens the door; she utters a cry; her husband from the next room asks what is the matter; she answers, "Nothing. I've just scratched my hand with a pin." Her husband comes in again; she once more shuts the door, and since Lord Grenville had neglected to pull his hand away, for a second time his fingers are caught. This is a trifling matter, but Zola is unlikely to trip in this way. And as for the episode which describes the way in which this daughter, who had done such good service in the cradle, when she is grown up, falls in love with a red-handed murderer merely on looking at him, and goes off with him at five minutes' notice, one might as well include gnomes among objects to be studied by a class in natural history as take these things for the dimmest reflection of possible facts. Zola writes no such fantastic parodies of life, though he is not above making mistakes, as a writer in the *Nouvelle Revue* has clearly shown in a witty article.

Zola is not without a precedent in French literature. In the last century, at a time when most writers were as far removed from the direct observation of life as any novelist of to-day, Restif de la Bretonne poured forth countless stories, one hundred and forty volumes in all, which are invaluable as documents concerning the way in which people talked, dressed, thought, sinned, repented, in a word, lived, at that time. Just as Zola, as Edmondo de Amicis tells us in his *Notes on Paris*, prepared himself for Nana by attending plays at the first

night of their performance in order to write his early chapters, then went to many races, to describe the scene at the race towards the end of the book, and incorporated in it many anecdotes of Parisian life, so Restif used to collect facts for the base of his stories. Indeed, he went so far in the way of realism as to write about living people, a species of liberty for which he was prosecuted more than once. After all, this is only what Zola has done. Barring Restif's insanity, there is a great likeness between the two writers, who have photographed vice at intervals of a hundred years. Restif knew nothing of the modern scientific treatment of whole families; that is unmistakably Zola's contribution to the delight of readers, but he was one of the very first to record simply what he knew about vice, and his experience was large. He spoke absolutely without reserve, and he maintained that all his work was in the interest of virtue; but this seems to have been one of the wildest of his many delusions. Odious as was much that he wrote, he is invaluable as a chronicler of the last century. He did for it, only less ostentatiously, just what Zola is doing for the present day.

Zola, then, did not invent this naturalism of which he talks so much, nor, indeed, did Restif; for realism, which is the same thing without the indecency, is the very main-stay of the English novel. Compare any novel of Trollope's, for example, with Zola's *Une Page d'Amour*, wherein the young daughter catches cold by opening the window on a rainy day, while her mother has gone out to meet her lover. This is not a simple statement of facts that Zola gives us, but a melodramatic touch that he had already employed in *Madeleine Féral*, and one of a kind that he is always ready to blame in any one else. Trollope's stories run on like a succession of rainy days in a country house, but even Trollope cannot be a thorough-going realist. At some

time or other the writer has to make a choice, to select one of two or more incidents, and thereby he ceases to be an absolute realist. Where Zola differs from other writers is in being frank where they are accustomed to display reserve. As to his selection of subjects and incidents, he is entitled to all the credit he asks. Most writers have more intelligence and knowledge of the world than to suppose it is wholly made up of nastiness, and they avoid or touch lightly the subjects in which Zola revels. Moreover, a number of them would hesitate to traffic on the morbid curiosity of the world about vice, and would be ashamed to pander to lickerish inquisitiveness. Zola has no such hesitation; he laughs at it, as the big boy laughs at the little boy who is averse to swearing, and he brands his opponents as milksops, the evident inference being that he is the only manly writer living.

That the novel does more than undertake to satisfy a low curiosity it would be hard to affirm. In construction it is confused and awkward; an enormous amount of the book is devoted to the account of the performance at the theatre, and of the races, which Zola actually saw, as the world has been informed, and a great deal of space is given to spreading scandal about eminent persons. In his pains to introduce a resemblance to life into his novels, Zola quite leaves the once-dreaded interviewer far behind. He employs similar methods with much more successful result, and he makes no more of reporting vile scandal about living people than he does of referring to unmentionable vices. He thereby prepares himself for giving that last answer of the unsuccessful novelist, "You may not like my novel, but that is your fault, because every word of it is true." M. Zola's collection of facts may be complete and exact, but the way he has put them together is clumsy in the extreme, and the facts themselves are such as no one

really cares for. The book is a tolerably perfect succession of curious incidents, but it hangs fire, so to speak, terribly. There is no trace of wit or humor in the whole book. The writer is exceedingly long-winded; when all is told, one has but a confused memory of the abundant store of iniquity that has been unveiled, and when Zola's recollections of the theatre and the race-course come to an end the heroine takes sick and dies, not in squalor, as some old-fashioned moralists would have ended the book, — supposing, that is, that they had ever begun it, — but in a twelve-franc room at the Grand Hotel. Still, Zola does make a slight concession to the methods of the rest of the world, inasmuch as her death takes place as the crowd is marching by shouting out the cry, "To Berlin!" at the beginning of the last war.

In fact, Zola does well to adopt this new style, — well for himself, that is. When he writes a novel that is something like the conventional story, such as *Une*

Page d'Amour, he is no better than any one else; he simply shows himself worthy of nothing but a very second-rate place among a great many skillful writers; he exhibits no marked virtues, nor yet any marked faults; he is simply a mediocre writer of a wearisome kind of novel. He makes up for this in his other books by cramming his pages with scandal, and calls himself the founder of a new school. But exaggeration and dullness cannot triumph long, although it is very possible that the ultimate effect of his novels on French fiction may be a good one, by making writers study life instead of fantastic problems and fantastic people. But without doubt the true method will be found a good deal this side of his coarseness. That a man, to write transcripts of life, must necessarily be gross will be judged as great an error as to suppose that a man cannot be impressive in his speech without profanity. Imagination and decency are two things that will probably survive even M. Zola's prolonged and repeated attacks.

Thomas Sergeant Perry,

HECTOR BERLIOZ.¹

As announced in the preface to his *Hector Berlioz*, Mr. Apthorp's aim has been "to show what the man was, rather than what he did." The work is practically divided into three parts: first, a Biographical Sketch by the author, principally based upon Berlioz's Autobiography; then follow ten letters written by the master for publication during his professional tour through Germany in 1841-1842; and finally a faithful translation of selections from his three highly original volumes, entitled respectively, *Les Soirées d'Orchestre*,

Les Grotesques de la Musique, and *A Travers Chants*.

Mr. Apthorp has skillfully drawn from a somewhat abundant material only that which shall lend color and form to the characterization of his subject. The book is not a mere conglomeration of odds and ends, having no definite purpose in view, but a finely composed mosaic, each part being carefully fitted to its neighbor, and its separate value and identity made to subserve the general effect, in the excellent portrait of the master thus wrought from the original

¹ *Hector Berlioz*. Selections from his Letters, and *Æsthetic*, Humorous, and Satirical Writings. Translated, and preceded by a Biographical Sketch

of the Author, by WM. F. APTHORP. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1879.