

the documentary madness it evinces that the incidents and characters are real in part; and certainly the bulk of it is nothing more than a dilation of common Italian scenes—*raportage*, in short.

As nearly then as we can describe what is essentially formless, it is a report on the effects of lottery-gambling upon the inhabitants of Naples, supported by a set of typical instances, fictitious or otherwise, the whole thrown together without much concern for composition. To this end a slice has been cut out of the Neapolitan population of all such as are addicted to the vice, in order to show its action on successive social layers; and the moral, which is of the negative demoralizing sort dear to the *naturalist*, has been reinforced by an episode which serves loosely as a rallying point for the examples. This expedient distorts the perspective from the very start in admitting no saving or redeeming element. In a word, the book is an "experimental" study of the kind reducible to Zola, with little or no personal interest, in which a decadent individual has been replaced as protagonist by a decadent people.

Naturally the atmosphere is fetid with the effluvia of the wretches pullulating in it, all alike mean, sordid, squalid, animated by a single motive, the basest known—the greed of gain. What little story there is, after hovering for a long time like a buzzard over its victim, pounces at last upon the heroine, a creature too fair and delicate for her fate, who in the universal infection is represented with some mysterious taint of blood. Even here there is no rise to the grandeur of tragedy—nothing but a dull, pitiable collapse. A single breath of passion from the breast of the lover alone stirs this stagnant misery, but too feebly to vitalize the air for a moment.

And the most exasperating thing about the book withal is its wanton perversity. About *naturalism* in the hands of its originators there is a sort of crude elemental dignity, the dignity of brute force, but still tremendous and impressive. Even Zola himself is, in a measure, endurable because of the genius which makes itself heard at intervals in some convulsive, half-stifled cry. But what possible indulgence can be felt for those who set themselves to ape the vices of

Disjecta Membra *

It is too bad that no one should have been willing to assume responsibility for the English of this book, for the author has quite enough to answer for, without having the language of the translator laid to her charge. In justice to her, then, let it be said here, by way of supplement to the title page, that Matilde Serao is an Italian novelist, rated by many as the equal of d'Annunzio, and that in her own language she is reputed to have some kind of a style—a fact which would never be suspected for a moment from the infelicities of this version.

In any style or language, however, the book would still be exasperating. And we must confess that it would have hardly seemed worth our while to rake out the rubbish of this refuse *naturalism*, if it were not for its belated influence on English letters. But with books like "The Octopus" coming into existence, all splashed and blotched with its dregs, we believe that the tendency of such work cannot be too nakedly exposed or too vigorously denounced.

One of the surest symptoms of literary degeneration is the confusion in one piece of writing of several distinct types or forms. Lines of demarcation become obscured or obliterated; and the novel, confounded and crossed with history, journalism, statistics, and what not, issues in some dubious hybrid like *The Land of Cockayne*. The title page to the contrary notwithstanding, it is not a novel—in fact, it is not properly literature at all; it displays neither selection, contrast, relief, nor any other device of art, except a disorderly huddling climax. It is, to be sure, semi-unified by a psychological motive, elucubrated in the airless crannies of the author's brain and imposed upon the action till it has become an obsession. It is just possible that the book might be hazily classified as fiction, tho we shrewdly suspect from

* THE LAND OF COCKAYNE. By Matilde Serao. New York: Harper & Bros. \$1.50.

strength in the hope of concealing their own debility and adding a cubit to their stature? And of such is the modern Italian novel—a mere *pastiche* of that last belated issue of *naturalism*, which, substituting a diseased mind for an unclean body, has got itself, as tho in some broad Rabelaisian jest, the name of “idealism.” So d’Annunzio is ignominiously included in the ranks of this school, as if he were by reason of his vices a native Frenchman. And here, too, belongs *The Land of Cockayne*, with its kind, among the survivals of a bankrupt *naturalism*.

