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CRITICAL REVIEW

... DEVOTED TO ...

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CONTRIBUTORS

Mme la COMTESSE R. DE COURSON

MM. PAUL BOURGET

Membre de l'Institut

JULES CLARETIE

Membre de l'Institut

FRANÇOIS COPPÉE

Membre de l'Institut

GUSTAVE LARROUMET

Membre de l'Institut

JULES LEFEBVRE

Membre de l'Institut

HENRI ROUJON

Directeur des Beaux-Arts, Membre de l'Institut

VICOMTE MELCHIOR DE VOGUÉ

Membre de l'Institut

ALFRED CAPUS

CAMILLE CHEVILLAR

COQUELIN CADET

LOUIS DE FOURCAUD

ALFRED HERLÉ

JAMES HUNEKER

J. K. HUYSMANS

VINCENT D'INDY

ALFRED KALISCH

PRINCE B. KARAGEORGEVITCH

ARTHUR LAWRENCE

CHARLES MÀLHERBE

ERNEST NEWMAN

CÂTULLE MENDÈS

Dr. E. MÈNE

GEORGES DE PEYREBRUNE

TONY ROBERT-FLEURY

AUGUSTE RÔDIN

J. H. ROSNY

JOHN F. RUNCIMAN

LITTÉRATURE

Zola Idealist

BY

ERNEST NEWMAN

Everybody who reads Zola's last book, *Vérité*, will agree upon one point at least, that it is inordinately long. It is defaced by a considerable amount of repetition that might easily have been avoided; probably we shall be correct in assuming that the book did not receive the author's final revision, and that had it done so the texture would have been tightened and improved. But upon no other point in connection with the book will the world be unanimous in its judgment. Frenchmen will be mainly for, or against it according to their political and social and religious opinions; on the other hand there is much in it that will fail to get quite home to the consciousness of the foreigner. In many parts of it the personages and the colour are so entirely local that they can hardly carry conviction to men of other nationalities, brought up among other types of social government. Thus many of the episodes connected with the trials of the Jew Simon must certainly appear to the average Englishman, beyond the bounds of the possible or even of the probable. It is not that the judicial systems of the two countries differ so much in form; but that the animating spirit seems at times so different. Now and again, in Zola's accounts of the two trials, one would be tempted to say, off-hand, that the thing as he narrates it would be impossible in any civilised country; it savours almost, at moments, of comic opera. We know, unfortunately, from that very Dreyfus case on which Zola has founded his novel, to what depths of folly, conscious and unconscious, the human race can fall in a sudden crisis that unnerves all but the strongest and sanest. Nevertheless — though it seems a paradox — we do not like our fiction to be stranger than the truth; many things that seemed incredible in the actual Dreyfus trial seem still more incredible, so to speak, in the fictitious trial of Zola's Simon.