

ITALIAN VIGNETTES.

QUIET HOURS IN ROME DURING THE VATICAN COUNCIL.

OUR room in the Albergo Minerva is very fresh and modern-looking. There is nothing in it like anything that Agrippina could ever have set eyes upon except the tripods that hold our basins. Quite an unbeliever's room it is, too, with none of those saints or crucifixes on the wall to which our eyes had become so accustomed in the South. It is the deference of Rome to the unbelieving foreigner, I was saying to myself, when, lo! my wandering eyes espied a cross. It was made by sticking a large black-headed pin in the paper of the wall with a smaller one transversely. It was touching to think that some poor traveller had been driven to this expedient before he could say his prayers.

We were not out of our beds when "Mariannina" came floating up to our window from the court with guitar accompaniment. We had heard it first from the merry wild voices of the Ischiani, and it seemed a greeting.

When will the delusion vanish that some new and strange sensation ought to be felt on waking in Rome for the first time? Whatever one may know about the belittling influence of the modern city, it is the idea of the Rome of antiquity that at a distance is always uppermost in the mind, and to which everything is bound to conform itself. The man who cried Roma—, as we approached the Seven-hilled City, seemed absurd, because he had not a sonorous voice. Nevertheless all looked very grey, chilly and uninspiring.

We were leaving the breakfast-room when a waiter, who had been looking wistfully at

us for a long time, seized the opportunity of doing some little service, and "might he ask the Signorine if they did not remember him in Ischia?" "Ah yes, Pietro, at the *Grande Sentinella*! And how came he here? was he getting on well?" "Not well; he had been nine months in Rome, and had been ill of rheumatism; it was damp and so dull. Ah, Signora, *Roma è morta*." And the poor fellow seemed quite happy at having the privilege of unburdening himself. "Rome is dead." Pietro had not lent brightness to the dull morning. Fitful sunlight was still alternating with showers when we took a carriage and started on our first drive about Rome.

I had not expected much of modern Rome and yet I was disappointed. It is less grand and gloomy than I had imagined. I was surprised to find the houses low and dingy. The narrowness and unattractiveness of the streets did not surprise me. Even the renowned Corso would be a second-rate street in Naples. The people in the streets are a motley and not a striking crowd. I cannot fix upon any distinguishing feature. I look in vain for the handsome, proud, wicked Roman, as well as for the fine physical development which is seen further south. Everybody is commonplace.

I was not in a mood for seeing ruins. We drove on, giving little direction, through the streets without sidewalks, which have been so often described, and through the mean-looking Piazza di Spragua, unredeemed from the commonplace except by its single fountain, round which the water-bearers were gathered with their jars, and its uplook to the Pincian over that magnificent flight of