

CHARACTERIZATION IN "*QUO VADIS*."

FEW books in modern times have been so frequently noted in favorable criticism as the popular novel which affords a subject for this essay. "*Quo Vadis*" was translated from the Polish by an American writer, Jeremiah Curtin; but the author of the original work bears a name rather uninviting to a tongue not wont to expend its energy on anything more formidable than our plain and simple English. He signs himself Henryk Sienkeiwicz. But to become interested in the story this worthy has given us requires no such effort as the pronunciation of his name. From our first acquaintance with the characters to whom we are introduced, we anxiously follow their every move; as page after page unfolds its secrets to us we become more and more deeply interested in the progress of events; and for this reason we advise the conscientious student not to enter upon a perusal of "*Quo Vadis*" while other more important tasks call for much of his time or his attention, lest pleasing entertainment may lead him to turn a deaf ear to the call of duty.

The novel is of the historical type, the scene being laid in Rome during the reign of Nero, and from it the student may derive a more clear and correct knowledge of the customs and manners of that age than from any text-book on history likely to be placed in his hands. The absolute power of the fickle-minded emperor to pr side justly or unjustly as he chose over the destinies of the individual as well as of the state; the fawning adulation of servile courtiers,

vying with one another in lavishing their flatteries upon the effeminate but brutal Nero, the devotedness of the early Christians secretly meeting in some sequestered nook to hear the "first of the Apostles" preach the faith which unjust laws forbade them openly to practice; all are charmingly interwoven into a very readable tale; all are so graphically set before the reader that any ordinary imagination can without difficulty deck them in the attractive garb of reality.

As a portrayer of character, the author deserves the highest commendation. His descriptions are very realistic, his conversations natural and animated, and as a result we are as well acquainted with all his characters as if we had known them in real life. Let us see what are the striking traits of the personages most prominent in the novel.

Nero is the hinge on which the whole plot turns. "His word is law;" and be that word tyrannical or just, the mandate is invariably and unhesitatingly put into execution. His personal appearance as depicted in "*Quo Vadis*" is likely to excite in the reader but very little envy towards this ruler of the world. "His face was wide; under his lower jaw hung a double chin, by which his mouth, always too near his nose, seemed to touch his nostrils. His bulky neck was protected, as usual, by a silk kerchief, which he arranged from moment to moment with a white and fat hand, grown over with red hair, forming, as it were, bloody stains. Measureless vanity was depicted then, as at all times, on his