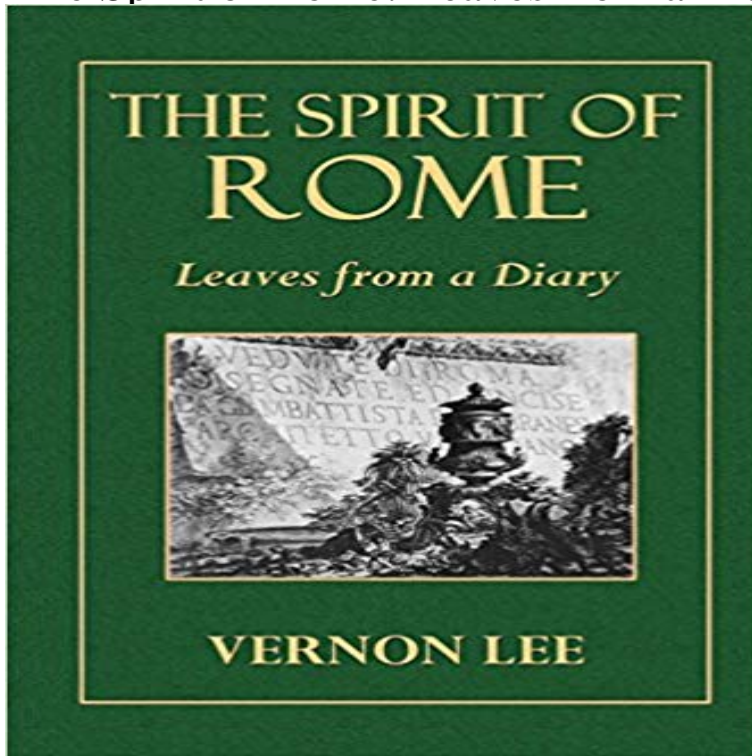


The Spirit of Rome: Leaves from a Diary



MY mind seems like an old blotting-book, full of fragments of sentences, of words suggesting something, which refuses to absorb any more ink. Candidly does Vernon Lee speak of the blurred, disjointed, smudgy scraps raked together from an unsavory old note-book, and here rather patronizingly flung to the educated public. Hangers-on of the pre-Raphaelites in the 1870s might have pretended to care for such stuff: it will interest no human being now alive. We could wish that the book had never reached us from the publishing office, for pleasant memories of the writers past work linger with many a student, and it is difficult to speak strongly against a writer who has given pleasure and instruction in the past. Still more difficult is it to believe that Vernon Lee kept such note-books. Save for an occasional happy glimpse of scenery, there is nothing of the spirit of Rome in these pages, which are possessed instead by the spirit of nastiness. Sluttish, frowsy, lousy, lousiness, are among the writers favorite words, used, we suppose, to give forcefulness to the stuff. Take a sample of her elegance in proof that we do not exaggerate: Tatters, squalor, with that abundant animal strength and beauty of these people; one feels that they have been eating and drinking, and befouling the earth and the streets with the excrement of themselves and their lives &c. Of the pictures in the Sixtine we are told of thighs and shoulders hitting one as it were in the eye. Here is a forceful description of the late Pope: The Papal procession, white robes, gold candlesticks, a wizen old priest swaying, all pale with sea-sickness... and dabbing about benedictions to the right and left. E con cio basta! Circumstances compel us to notice the book; candor constrains us to condemn it: but in charity we will hope that the gentle hand of oblivion may speedily pass over it, leaving the writer where she stood before in the estimation of her many

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