

POST
FEB 2 1929

M. Gide Revives A Victorian Wife

Poor Valentine's' Disillusionment Is Pitiful but
It Seems Dated

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES. By
Andre Gide. Knopf. \$2.

Reviewed by Louis Sherwin

WHEN you consider that (1) Andre Gide, for all his high accomplishment, is no great shakes at doing women and that

(2) He has told his tale by means of that laziest and sloppiest of all literary devices, the diary and

(3) This is a book that five out of every ten million discontented American wives either have written or are at present writing—

"The School for Wives" is a surprisingly readable piece of work.

My first sensation, when I realized what the good master was driving at, was one of acute and shocked disbelief. "Surely, surely he is not telling the one about the adoring woman who realizes that her husband is a prig and an exhibitionist over again?"

But that, fellow countrymen and Bostonians, is exactly what M. Gide has done. The good old yarn so dear to the Victorians of every land and every tongue. What should a wife and mother do when she realizes her house is built upon a LIE?

For a while you feel as though you had let yourself be trapped into reading one of the drooling, impermeable romans of M. Paul Bourget. Or perhaps snoozing through a well-whiskered problem play of Dumas, fils.

But any such sensations are mercifully brief. The book itself has not many more than a hundred pages and some of those are quite blank.

If conjecture is allowed, I imagine that what happened is something like this:

M. Gide wrote the thing way back in the nineties, about the time when he was writing very serious, very French and not very amusing dramatic criticism. Having written it he discovered it was of an obsolete model—Model T, if you like. Having a sneaking affection for his be-bustled and be-furbelowed heroine, he did not have the heart to burn her, but chucked her into the old trunk that is such a necessary part of any writing gentleman's furniture. There she lay, forgotten, for more than a quarter of a century.

179

Years, as we say in Hollywood, passed. The heroine's creator wrote a Successful Novel and became Famous with American editor clamoring for his MSS. Came a demand from the Forum for a short serial from the Master's Pen. The Master had no short serial on tap and all the ideas he had for novels were too good to be wasted on short serials. So he rumaged through the old trunk and dug out the disillusioned and lugubrious Valentine. Hm! Not so good . . . but . . . but . . . well, after all, not so bad . . . and for America—

So the Master stripped the furbelows from Valentine's clothes and the bustle from her *derriere*, made a few changes of idiom so that she might talk in the language of this century . . . and there you are.

As I remarked before, the result, in its artless way, is quite readable. And, having been obliged to lock horns several times of late with lazy but frascible translators overaddicted to neologisms, I take great pleasure in congratulating M. Gide on Dorothy Bussy, who renders him into such smooth, lucid and graceful English.

For all that, *cher Maitre*, your Valentine gives us a sad pain in the neck.

Sept. 1929