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Review
1950

Gide on Love and Life

OF M. GIDE:— The current vogue of Andre Gide is bringing to the fore all his work. There are reprints such as the recent book from Knopf, THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES, ROBERT & GENEVIEVE (\$3), three short novels under one cover; and such as CORYDON (Farrar-Straus, \$2.75), which has heretofore never been translated into English, and now appears with a commentary on one of the dialogues by Prof. Frank A. Beach. CORYDON is a sequence of dialogues seeking to present a justification for the homosexual life.

THE KINSEY REPORT has made it amply clear that a majority of people have at some time or other had homosexual experience, and the mass of information now available on the subject suggests that homosexual inclination is a part of so-called normal experience.

THIS BEING SO, M. Gide's CORYDON, which was doubtless a minor sensation when it appeared, leaves a great deal to be desired. Prof. Beach's comments on the second dialogue set forth some of the errors in perspective and fact which Gide sets down in this particular dialogue, which presents an ingenious but not quite correct "justification" for a way of life which Gide himself has written at somewhat more effective length in other books. Prof. Beach concedes that such activities are not "biologically abnormal and unnatural," but he nevertheless takes apart Gide's "justification" and demonstrates that Gide's theoretical analysis is not sound.

CORYDON IS A curious book. Gide has gone on record, quite possibly because of the importance of the book's subject to him personally, as calling this his most important book. Unfortunately, it has neither weight nor stature. It belongs with FRUITS OF THE EARTH as one of the least of Gide's considerable works. And readers who expect to find in it anything at all sensational will be disappointed; the book is written in a series of dialogues in the Greek manner, its cogence is superficial, and for the most part the book is candidly boring.

Capt. Tinsas - M. Gide - CDR

CORYDON. By Andre Gide. Translated from the French by Hugh Gibb. With comments by Frank Beach. 220 pp. New York: Farrar, Straus & Co. \$2.75.

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES, ROBERT and GENEVIEVE, or THE UNFINISHED CONFIDENCE. By Andre Gide. Translated from the French by Dorothy Bussy. 241 pp. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. \$2.75.

By GERALD SYKES

IN 1911, when he was already a rising star in the French literary firmament, and when his thinking had been influenced by two Americans—the poet Walt Whitman and the sociologist Lester Ward—Gide published "Corydon" anonymously and almost secretly. It was not until 1924 that he acknowledged and offered for sale this fictitious dialogue dealing with homosexuality which, today, seems rather old-fashioned and ill-considered.

In a preface recently written for this first edition in English he declares roundly: "Corydon" remains in my opinion the most important of my books." Its double thesis, briefly, is (1) that homosexuality is not abnormal or unnatural and (2) that humanity has attained its highest moments when homosexuality has been tolerated.

In support of his first proposition Gide brings forward biological data that are later evaluated in an appendix by Dr. Frank Beach of Yale, who is known for his research in psychology and biology. Dr. Beach sustains Gide with the flat statement: "People who say that homosexual activities are biologically abnormal and unnatural are wrong" but goes on to correct Gide on many important points.

For obvious reasons no scientist is brought in to evaluate Gide's second proposition, that civilization benefits by toleration of "the love that dares not speak its name." One's reaction

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to this revolutionary idea must depend upon one's own nature; it will no doubt disgust many and delight a few.

"Corydon" is "slanted," rather than characterized by that excellent balance that is to be found in much of Gide's other writing. His inference, for example, that Greek greatness rested upon pederasty seems highly questionable. More than one culture has tolerated such practices but it has been of relatively low quality. And nowhere in his book does Gide consider the point stressed by so many scientific observers that homosexuality is usually to be equated with emotional immaturity.

Proust has done more to plead its cause than is done here by the much too subjective proposal that we return to certain Greek customs. And nowhere is Gide's peculiar blind spot about woman, which is noted by Dr. Beach, more evident than when he appears to consign her to the kitchen or the pedestal. This blind spot is plainly discernible in "The School for Wives" and its sequels. For while these three interwoven novelettes portray a French upper middle-class family with particular sympathy for the mother and the daughter, one looks in vain for the eternal feminine in any of its primordial vigor.

ONE gets instead well-bred stories about well-bred people—pale, delicate stories, with an exquisite, water-color grace, which not only underestimate the power of woman but seem unaware such a power exists.

If "The School for Wives" fails as a treatment of the problems of modern woman—which appears to be its purpose—it nevertheless remains a delightful esthetic experience. It is told with a Haydn-like elegance, and should have a touristic appeal for those Americans who enjoy a peep into a French home.