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# Belles-Lettres.

The novel critics whose lives and works are discussed in the first four reviews printed below clearly belong among the favorites of contemporary literary critics. William Shakespeare, whose career has already been the topic of fifteen books during the past twelve months, now evokes one more: Donald J. Stauffer's "Shakespeare's World of Images." André Gide, who has occasioned six recent volumes, has two new titles in the stalls, fresh translations of his "School for Wives: Robert and Genevieve" and "Corydon." "W. B. Yeats: Man and Poet," by A. Norman Jeffares, and "The Golden Nightingale," by the indelible Professor Stauffer, are being joined by Hall and Steinmann's collection of criticism, "The Permanence of Yeats," which will be reviewed here shortly. Some four late Mark Twain volumes now have a companion in Dixon Wecter's edition of "The Love Letters of Mark Twain."

## ← Saturday Review of Literature 28 Janvier 1950 Normal & Abnormal Confessions

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES: ROBERT; AND GENEVIEVE. By André Gide. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 241 pp. \$2.75.

CORYDON. By André Gide. New York: Farrar, Straus & Co. 230 pp. \$2.75.

By MORRIS BISHOP

THE chances of publishing bring us a pair of strange bedfellows: "The School for Wives" and "Corydon," which one might term "The School for Unhusbands." The first part of "Corydon" ap-

peared, in a private edition of a dozen copies, in 1911. Gide was restrained by his friends from publishing the book openly until 1924. It then caused the expected scandal; it ensured Gide's exclusion from consideration for the Académie Française, even for the Legion of Honor. He has nothing but the Nobel Prize.

"Corydon" is a tract in defense of homosexuality. Gide couches it in the form of four dialogues. He supposes that he calls upon Corydon, a homosexual friend, that he presents the arguments of conventional morality as Corydon develops his troubling thesis. The dialogue is unfair, for Gide's "I" is an offensive imbecile, while Corydon has all the learning, wit, and courtesy. In the end, defeated, "without saying a word except 'goodbye,' I took my hat and left, convinced that in certain circumstances silence was the best reply."

To prove that love of male for male is normal, Gide adduces many examples from the behavior of insects, birds, domestic animals:

Taking the word "voice" in its most metaphorical sense, I will still deny that [Nature] says to the male: "fecundate!" and to the female: "discriminate!" It simply says to both sexes: enjoy! It is the voice of the glands which demands satisfaction, the organs which crave employment—organs which have been formed in accordance with the requirements of their precise function, but which are guided by the sole need of pleasure. Nothing more . . . It is not always assured that the male will choose the female and achieve fecundation . . . The surplus of males is compensation for the imprecision of the instinct . . .

He comes then to humanity:

Homosexuality in both sexes is more naive and spontaneous than heterosex-



André Gide: "Desire rarely acquires precision on its own account. . ."

uality . . . Desire rarely acquires pre-  
 the assistance of experience. Homo-  
 sexual love may be as pure and chaste  
 as heterosexual love. I maintain that  
 the peace of the home, the honor of  
 the woman, the dignity of the family  
 and the health of man and wife were  
 more effectively safeguarded by the  
 Greek way of life than by our own.

The criticism of the scientific basis  
 of Gide's argument demands special  
 competence. The publishers have wisely  
 called in Professor Frank Beach, of  
 Yale, who is both biologist and psy-  
 chologist, to provide a commentary.  
 Professor Beach grants that Gide's  
 major thesis has been sustained by  
 science: homosexual activities are not  
 biologically abnormal and unnatural.  
 However, "it does not necessarily fol-  
 low that the behavior is socially de-  
 sirable." He makes some sharp  
 criticisms of Gide's reasoning and  
 conclusions. (For a much more ex-  
 tended critique of Gide's theories, one  
 may see Ramón Fernandez's "André  
 Gide," Paris 1931.)

We who are not psychobiologists  
 must be content with unscientific im-  
 pressions. My chief impression, as I  
 read the book again after twenty-five  
 years, is that it is strangely anodyne.  
 I am willing to accept all Gide's  
 zoology, without seeing that the habits  
 of cockchafers and goats prove much  
 about the behavior of my friends. I  
 can accept all his picture of Greek  
 homosexuality, without comprehending  
 how it provides any pattern for  
 social life in these years. Homosexu-  
 ality is certainly a constantly occur-  
 ring phenomenon in animal life, in-  
 cluding human life. Then what is all  
 the fuss about?

The fuss is merely about the fact  
 that Gide dared to say in public what  
 everybody knew. To do so required  
 courage. (Unless it was exhibitionism;  
*on aime mieux dire du mal de soi-  
 même que de n'en point parler*, said  
 La Rochefoucauld.) Gide brought  
 upon himself the inevitable abuse be-  
 cause he felt it his duty to tell all the  
 truth. In the introduction written for  
 this present edition he says: "Cory-  
 don" remains in my opinion the most  
 important of my books . . . My great-  
 est merit lies in having written this  
 book and in daring to publish it to-  
 day."

Such an affirmation seems to me  
 amazing. As literature, "Corydon"  
 hardly exists. As a sociological  
 pamphlet, it deserves much com-  
 mendation, but I cannot believe that  
 it has had any great social effect, nor  
 that it will have. I doubt if the propo-  
 sition of homosexuality to heterosexu-  
 ality in France has increased since its  
 publication in 1924. "Corydon" has  
 certainly helped to bring social toler-  
 ance and understanding to homo-

sexuals, but "Corydon" is only a  
 phenomenon of changing  
 not a cause. Opinion changed at the  
 same rate in America and England  
 without benefit of "Corydon."

"The School for Wives." I should  
 guess, will outlast (though not out-  
 sell) "Corydon." Gide imagines the  
 confession of a wife who has married  
 a sanctimonious, puritan Catholic, not  
 hypocritical but self-deceiving, seek-  
 ing constantly his own advantage un-  
 der the guise of altruism. "Robert  
 imagines that he really has the senti-  
 ments that he expresses. And I think  
 that even in the long run he actually  
 does have them, that they come at his  
 call—the finest, the most generous, the



—From "The Long Way Home."

most noble, always exactly those that  
 it is proper—those that it is advan-  
 tageous—to have." Gradually the  
 wife ripens in understanding, pene-  
 trates to the noisome core of her hus-  
 band's character.

To this confession Gide adds the  
 counter-confession of the husband,  
 wherein all the acts are revalued ac-  
 cording to his system of ideas. (In-  
 cidentally, there is a curious delineation  
 of the Book-of-the-Month Club.)  
 Finally, Gide gives us the confession  
 of the daughter.

The analyses of the characters in-  
 volved are very shrewd and delicate,  
 very rewarding. But the device of re-  
 telling the same story from three  
 points of view is inevitably an awk-  
 ward one. The reader, knowing all  
 at the end of Part One, must twice  
 turn back to watch the digging up and  
 reinterment of characters. The de-  
 vice is a tour de force, with all the  
 disadvantages of a tour de force.

The reader may admire Gide's in-  
 telligence while remaining unmoved  
 by his story. It is somehow bleak,  
 pale. As in most of Gide's fiction, the  
 story is a fable, conceived to illustrate  
 a moral proposition, and the charac-  
 ters have the air of personalized ab-  
 stractions, without the rich inconse-  
 quentialities of life.

The translation of "The School for  
 Wives," by Dorothy Bussy, is admi-  
 rable in every way. The translation of  
 "Corydon," while accurate enough,  
 misses all the cadence and beauty of  
 Gide's famous style.

lives in essence in his poetry.

Professor Stauffer makes no attempt  
 to do this. There is a subtitle to "The  
 Golden Nightingale"—"Essays on  
 Some Principles of Poetry in the Ly-  
 rics of William Butler Yeats," and in  
 the chapter called "The Progress of  
 a Poet" he announces that he has dis-  
 regarded biography and secondary  
 sources and has concentrated on  
 Yeats's own writing. "I have held in  
 the main to his critical essays and to  
 the lyric poems of his artistic maturity."  
 Though the principles he has  
 evolved would be useful in the study  
 of many poets, he draws all his ex-  
 amples from the work of Yeats, whom  
 he believes, as does the present writer,  
 to be the greatest poet of his time.

Professor Stauffer states he was  
 first attracted towards Yeats's poetry  
 because of two qualities: his philo-  
 sophical force and his humor. A sense  
 of man's limitations, Professor Stauffer  
 conceives, is inherent in humor. With  
 this I disagree: a sense of man's  
 limitations is inherent in any high  
 literary talent, but it is not necessarily  
 a part of humor.