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The attached cutting is taken from to-day's issue of the "Morning Post."

HUMANITY ON ICE.

LES CAVES DU VATICAN. By André Gide. Nouvelle Revue Française, Paris. 7frs. 50.

A new edition of "Les Caves du Vatican" is to be welcomed, since M. André Gide's work has a place in modern literature entirely apart, and it is to be hoped that "Le Prométhée mal Enchaîné" will also be reissued. M. Gide describes both these works as "soties," and the definition of the "sotie" is a dramatic *genre*, popular in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, in which all the characters are supposed to be mad: its key-note, in a word, is the idea that the world is the kingdom of madness.

The glorification of human nature is certainly not M. Gide's intention. He excels in describing those little humiliating discomforts which degrade the nobility of man. The description of poor pious Amédée Fleurissoire's journey to Rome is almost Homeric in its account of battles with *punaises*, fleas, and mosquitoes. What traveller has not switched on the light, roused by the hideous ping of the mosquito?

Yes, the mosquito was there, sitting quietly inside the mosquito curtain at the very top. Though he was rather short-sighted, Amédée could make it out quite clearly, ridiculously thin and long, balanced on four of its feet, with another pair of long legs curled up behind, a picture of insolence. Amédée stood upright on the bed. But how was he to crush the insect against the yielding muslin? . . . No matter. He slapped at it with the palm of his hand, so hard and so suddenly that he thought he had torn the curtain. Certainly he must have killed the mosquito. He looked everywhere for its corpse, saw nothing, but felt a new bite under his knee.

There is something very cold and merciless in M. Gide's satire; yet the reader cannot help feeling sorry for his more foolish characters. The plot centres round an ingenious fraud. A band of swindlers collect money from the pious by a cock-and-bull story to the effect that Pope Leo XIII. has been kidnapped by the Freemasons, and that while his Holiness is languishing in the cellars of the Vatican or in the castle of Sant Angelo, an impostor is sitting in the place of God's Vicegerent here on earth. They demand from the faithful funds for the Crusade for the deliverance of the Pope.

Poor Amédée sets out all by himself to Rome to deliver the Pope, and, after unspeakable misadventures, is the victim of an experiment. Lafcadio, M. Gide's hero, pushes him out of a moving train, partly to see what it is like to commit a murder, partly to puzzle the police with an absolutely motiveless crime. It cannot be said that Lafcadio as a hero is a great success, since he enlists no sympathy, yet M. Gide's failure in this matter is perhaps a triumph, since the essence of his philosophy is the unlovable nature of humanity at its best.

In any case he works up the secret plot against the Pope to bewildering heights and makes the most of every situation as it arises, but why he ends on a note that is both sensual and sentimental is a problem. The sentiment seems to kill the philosophy of all that has preceded. M. Gide's style is extraordinarily clever in its deliberate employment of solecisms to attract attention.

Behind the scenes there is an arch-villain called Protos, who has divided mankind into two classes: the "subtles" and the "crustacea." The "subtle" is a man who changed his appearance as occasion demands, while the "crustacea" are always the same. That change of appearance is all a philosophy. After all in very truth the scoundrel is the man who is never the same two days running, who adapts his code of life to circumstances and who because he is unscrupulous is a very chameleon.

The great beauty of "Les Caves du Vatican" is that it brings back the reader to ordinary morality quite reconciled to its boredom. Humanity is heir to much humiliation; murder and other abominations may suggest a cheerful reaction, but in truth the only possible rule of conduct was discovered many generations ago and clone offers to the unwilling pilgrim a reasonable path.

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