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The Restless Mind

Vol II

The Journals of André Gide.
Volume Two (1914-1927). Translated by Justin O'Brien, Secker and Warburg. 30s. net.
André Gide. By Klaus Mann. Dennis Dobson. 15s. net.

SO far as the translation of his books is concerned, M. Gide certainly has come into his own since the end of the war. His Nobel Prize, doubtless, has assisted the latter-day dissemination of his ideas. But it is difficult to pin down M. Gide to an arbitrary set of ideas. This second volume of his Journals—the first was published about six months ago, and reviewed in this newspaper—is a brilliant revelation of a brilliant mind. Indeed, his mind is best compared to a diamond. As it turns this way and that, new colours and different symmetries of light are thrown off. His intelligence is restless, unsatisfied and untiring. The years 1914-1927 show the writer in his middle life, searching for a faith on which to found, and by which to co-ordinate, a progressive succession of ideas. We have good reason to be grateful that he never found it. Later, he came dangerously close to believing in the idealistic equation of Russian Communism and Christianity; but a visit to Soviet Russia, and his own unshakable integrity, aborted a myth that could have been his undoing as a caustic thinker.

The second volume of his Journals moves more rapidly than the first from idea to idea. Music, the implications of war and pacificism, the question of national characteristics, portraits of great contemporaries crowd from his pen like a huge throng emerging through a small gate. There is hardly a page that fails to set the mind in motion of one topic or another. As in the first volume, M. Gide's accounts of his travels are done with sensitive wonder and close observation. This is a big book in every way: it is a generous bay window opening on to one of the most original minds of our time. The third, and final, volume undoubtedly will complete one of the most ambitious, far-sighted and valuable publishing ventures since the end of the war. Professor Justin O'Brien, as editor and translator, is unobtrusive, subtle and helpful.

Herr Mann, a son of the German novelist, is a close friend of M. Gide. His biography contains a good deal of information which hitherto has not been available; but its airy style is not the best tool for the job. Nevertheless, the study will be useful to anybody approaching its subject for the first time, for it provides a step-by-step analysis of M. Gide's formal development and production.