

Extract from

# " THE SCOTSMAN "

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313  
Vol II

## Self-Portrait

THE JOURNALS OF ANDRE GIDE. Vol. II.  
1914-1927. Translated by Justin O'Brien.  
(30s. Secker & Warburg.) ANDRE GIDE.  
By Klaus Mann. (15s. Dobson.)

"Nothing gained if I am to note here only things of importance. I must make up my mind to write everything in this notebook. I must force myself to write anything whatever." When the reader comes across such a statement in Gide's *Journal* he may be tempted to ask, "Why? For whom?"

It would be wrong to accuse M. Gide of more self-seeking than most diarists, for his is a highly complex personality in which even apparent vanity may well be only a part of the general urge to sincerity. He is, indeed, his own most severe critic in the actual writing of his *Journal*. Time and again he comments (to himself or for our benefit?) on the unsatisfactory nature of some of his thoughts and the expression of them. But he continues, for continuity is of the essence of his task: "Some people work over themselves to obtain the unity of their person. I let myself go."

And yet he does not let himself go at all. He is too much accustomed to writing for an audience not to care what the effects on others may be of his self-imposed task of, within limits, thinking aloud. "If these notebooks should come to light, later on, how many will they repel, even then! But what affection I feel for him who, despite them, or through them, will still want to remain my friend!"

### Gosse and Proust

This second volume (there is a third to follow) carries us through the years of the First World War, but the war itself hardly ever comes into the foreground after the shock of its first impact. The more memorable passages are a meeting with Sir Edmund Gosse, a conversation with Proust, various references to works in progress at the time, particularly "Corydon" and "Les Faux-Monnayeurs," and the odd, almost constant preoccupation with piano practice. "Practised the piano on an average of three hours a day; perfected especially the 'Eritana' and the 'Lavapiés' of Albéniz, which I play by heart and in the right tempo—on condition that no one is there to hear me."

The general reader unfamiliar with Gide's work as a whole will find much that is helpful in Klaus Mann's study. Mr Mann warns us (and it is a warning which finds support in the *Journal* itself) that Gide "must not be identified with any of his books. As a complex whole and an organic entirety, his writings express his being; but each individual work discloses only aspects and potentialities of his character and his message."

Mr Mann has much to say of the individual works by way of exposition and criticism, but it is the *Journal* itself which he singles out for greatest praise. He regards it as "not inferior to Montaigne's 'Essays' or to Goethe's 'Conversations with Eckermann.'" That may seem a somewhat extravagant claim; a later remark surely strikes the balance better and at once reveals both the weakness and the strength of the main work under review. "If it is true," says Mr Mann, "that André Gide's *Journal* would be less attractive and less important if his other writings did not exist, it is also true that his work would be fragmentary without his diary." English readers are becoming increasingly indebted to Mr Justin O'Brien for making it easy for them to judge of the truth of that statement.