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Heart and Mind

The Journals of André Gide, Vol. III: 1928-1939. Translated from the French and annotated by Justin O'Brien. Secker and Warburg. 30s. net.

The final volume of M. Gide's fascinating Journals is as rich in speculation and intellectual courage as its two forerunners; and it has the added advantage, for the contemporary reader, of using terms of practical reference with which, by virtue of time, he is more likely to be familiar. The Soviet experiment was declaring itself more openly than ever before during this period, and M. Gide's preoccupation with Communist theory was only halted by his observation of Communist practice. Before his visit to Moscow he made a sincere attempt to equate the Manifesto with Christian doctrine. This is not a rare intellectual exercise; but what marked M. Gide's character was his unconditional willingness to confess to his second thoughts and to denounce the authoritarian methods of Soviet government. When he published his second thoughts in 1937 and 1938, he was abused as hysterically by party-liners as formerly he had been praised by them.

M. Gide has always been able to afford a divided mind, according to his unfriendly critics. They overlook the fact that it often is much easier to make up one's mind and to fix one's opinions than to argue the case. M. Gide never has feared to argue the case—and to do so imaginatively, and without hair-splitting. But it would be a mistake to charge him with avoiding an opinion; for he is full of opinions. If he sees a good reason for changing one, however, he does not admit the right of false pride to forbid the change.

Philosophy and the arts—in particular, a philosophy of art which justifies independence of thought and individual freedom of judgment—occupy the greater part of these, as of previous Journals. The intellectual history of a practical artist is charted in detail; and there has been no comparable source-book of the creative conscience at work in our time.

Vol. III

To the Point

The book is rich in his encounters with such men—some of them already legends—as Proust and Paul Valéry; and his descriptions of his musical life as a virtuoso pianist ought to have a permanent interest. But it is as a literary critic, rather than as a political or moral philosopher, that most readers will enjoy his sensitive reactions. Has he not, for example, written the last word on Mr. Aldous Huxley:

Aldous Huxley is very intelligent; but one feels that he met his problems along his way. He did not himself, and painfully, give birth to them.

And he appears to this reviewer to put his finger on the flaw in the art of that fine and justly respected novelist, M. François Mauriac:

The habit of living head-down forces one to see everything upside down. Any effort at righting the inverted image is imputed to pride. As if one could not be modest without bowing double! . . . And nothing is more sincere, most certainly than these pages (Mauriac's Journal). Is not this just what makes them most frightening? . . . that authentically he should pity us for ceasing to know that anguish, for having escaped it, for being happy!

This is a criticism that might well be extended to cover also the novels of Mr. Graham Greene and Georges Bernanos.

As in the previous volumes, Professor Justin O'Brien has provided an adequate and careful translation, in addition to useful footnotes, a glossary of persons and an index of M. Gide's works. The publishers, by their initiative in issuing the Journals in English, have done considerable service to the twin causes of liberal thought and good art.

G. M. T.

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