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THE LATER GIDE

By Eugène Vinaver

The Journals of André Gide. Translated from the French and Annotated by Justin O'Brien. Vol. III. Secker and Warburg. Pp. xx+350. 30s.

The third volume of Professor O'Brien's translation brings the English edition of Gide's Journals up to the year 1939. It may be because the period covered by this volume (1928-1939) is so relevant to present-day problems in politics and literature that it makes even more interesting reading than the first two. Gide's reactions to the world in which he lived seem to have grown in scope as time went on. Italian Fascism, Russian Communism, problems of colonial administration, the Civil War in Spain, and finally the Munich crisis all come within his field of interest and elicit more fundamental observations than did any of the earlier events.

The Journals are, of course, concerned with Gide's thoughts, not with events; but the depth of some of his reflections is such as to make the book appear as a record of the inner history of pre-war years. "And suddenly I wondered what kept me from being happy. . . . Nothing but phantoms, I told myself, stand in the way; my happiness is prevented only by the shadows they cast. Am I unable to brush them aside? To forget for a time my grief, the Spanish massacres, the anguish weighing over Europe? . . . I was not able to do so." There is besides in these pages unique material for the study of Gide's own evolution as a thinker and writer. This, for instance, written in June, 1931: "Evolution of my thought? Without a Christian formation (or deformation) there would perhaps have been no evolution at all. What made it so slow and difficult was the sentimental attachment to what I could not cast off without regret. Even to-day I still have a sort of nostalgia for that mystical and ardent climate in which my being was then inflamed. . . . Oh, how easy it would be for me, even

to-day, to write emotional remarks on this subject that my reason would disown to-morrow! It is illusion that permits the lyricism of childhood. My whole effort has been to achieve myself a happiness that could do without being illusory." This is perhaps the simplest and sanest definition ever given of Gide's creative effort; and it is one which may serve as an explanation of the inherent incompleteness of each single work of his.

Still more revealing is this entry dated July 19, 1932: "Each of my books up to now has been the exploitation of an uncertainty." And it is not only Gide that one discovers in the Journals. Other great writers, dead and living, appear in clear outline, each thrown into relief by a brief but penetrating flash of light. Professor O'Brien's admirable index will henceforth enable critics to profit by this immense store of literary wisdom; and it will no longer be possible to venture a judgment on any great problem of European literature without first discovering what Gide thought about it. Altogether there is so much to be thankful for that one is willing to forget the occasional clumsiness of the translation—a contrast to Gide's own incisive style—and a few inevitable Americanisms.

The latest volume of the "Standard Edition" of Gide's works—**Fruits of the Earth**, translated by Dorothy Bussy (Secker and Warburg, pp. 256, 9s. 6d.), is free from these defects. It adds to the series what Gide himself has described as "a manual of escape and liberation"—a famous book which exercised a profound influence on French writers of the first quarter of our century. The volume also contains a translation of "Les Nouvelles Nourritures" ("Later Fruits of the Earth"), the first French edition of which appeared in 1935. There can be no better initiation into the author's thought than the reading of these two fragments of lyrical prose divided by 38 years of reflection.

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