

NEW NOVELS.

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STRAIT IS THE GATE.

"*La Porte Etroite*" is one of the best books M. Gide has written, possibly the best and most sincere of his novels. In much of M. Gide's work one feels uneasily conscious of a factitious element, of something over-ingenious and self-conscious. One book, for instance, leaves a displeasing impression of wilful aridity; another seems perverse and even a little repulsive; another intentionally too slight in matter to display the writer's virtuosity; and in yet another—one thinks of "*Prométhée mal enchainé*"—there seems a too conscious striving for originality. "*La Porte Etroite*" leaves a very different impression, that of a soul's tragedy beautifully modelled into a work of art.

STRAIT IS THE GATE (By André Gide. Translated from the French by Dorothy Bussy. Jarrolds, 7s. 6d. net) is an entirely psychological study, concentrated upon one of those superior but over-sensitive spirits who instinctively draw back from life and common enjoyments, who can realize their natures only through self-sacrifice carried to the last degree of abnegation. The love of Jerome and Alissa is one of those pure, intense, non-physical passions which seem destined to triumph over all obstacles and to make two people completely happy for life. Even the fact that Alissa's younger sister complicated matters by falling in love with the entirely unsuspecting Jerome need not have made more than a temporary unhappiness, had it not been for the peculiar nature of Alissa's mind. With consummate skill M. Gide analyses this aloof mind and shows how its craving for abnegation, for maceration, led it to reject a love it could not conquer, to choose death rather than happiness, for God's sake. There is something bleak in such renunciation which leaves one respectful but unconvinced. Why, one asks, is it "holiness" for Alissa to wear herself to death and to wreck Jerome's life? Why could she not be equally "holy" if she married him and was happy? And was it not a kind of exquisite selfishness to sacrifice Jerome for her own spiritual perfection?

M. Gide naturally makes no effort to answer these questions. His affair is to state the position convincingly (which he has done admirably) and to leave us to meditate upon it. He is perfectly fair to Alissa, enters with delicate tact into her mind, makes us admire her. And yet one suspects a very subtle irony, a very gentle questioning, an implied criticism of Christian self-sacrifice. When Alissa dresses her hair unbecomingly, wears ugly clothes, pretends to like only insipid works of piety, in order to kill her love, one suspects that M. Gide is hinting that the sacrifice is more than the gain; for the last words of Alissa's diary are in fact a cry of despair, a confession of bitter regret. Or are we to see in this the last triumph of the "Imitation of Christ"? In any case, this novel is a sharp contrast to the machine-made works of commoner minds, and will be read with great interest by all who are capable of sympathy with its subject.

The translation has been made with skill and understanding; comparison of the texts shows hardly a flaw, and those one detects could easily be remedied by a careful revision.