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M. ANDRÉ GIDE.

LA SYMPHONIE PASTORALE. Par ANDRÉ GIDE. (Paris: Nouvelle Revue Française. 4f. 86c.)

M. André Gide is the author of books which attracted attention by their intellectual subtlety, originality of theme, and elegance of style. "Le Prométhée mal-enchaîné," a translation of which was reviewed here last year, is not at all the best specimen of M. Gide's art. It contains most of the faults with which he has been charged: slightness of impulse, over-elaboration of minor themes, a subtlety which verges on incoherence and sometimes reaches it, a curiously arid style. It is not easy to say exactly what M. Gide "stands for"; he is not one of those persons who can be conveniently ticketed. Intellectual scepticism and dilettantism are among his dominating qualities. In a general way he may be said to belong to that genial band of sceptics of whom the most illustrious are Renan, M. France, and Remy de Gourmont. He is not exactly their disciple, but he is of their company. Somebody once familiarly called him "un type dans le genre de Candide," but the garden he cultivates is his own, though the soil be a little rebellious and the vegetation singular and capricious. In fact, we may say that the agonies of doubt are among M. Gide's chief diversions. His extreme scepticism and his curiosity have led him to tolerate many of the odd experiments of the "rive gauche." For a time he even smiled upon M. Jean Cocteau and took a mild if unconvinced interest in the vagaries of "Dada." His attitude towards these peculiarities was not unlike that of Baudelaire towards the African fetish: "Prenez garde! Si c'était le vrai dieu!" Extreme doubt, as usual, verging on extreme credulity.

M. Gide has always kept a jealous eye on his intellectual freedom. He may have coquetted with literary heresies; he may have half-acquiesced in many contradictory schools, but actually he has never belonged to any but the school of André Gide. When he chooses—and he sometimes does choose—he can show plainly that he possesses abundantly the French prose writer's gift of *clarté*; he can be irritatingly, and we dare to say foolishly, obscure. When one has a naturally pure style, it is foolish to torture it into obscurity for the enjoyment of a clique; but M. Gide is not the only modern writer who has a disproportionate respect for cliques merely because they have taken up a novelty. Fortunately "La Symphonie Pastorale," though its theme and characters may seem remote from M. Gide's usual speculations, is written in a clear unaffected style which gives the reader great pleasure. A foreigner is a poor judge of French style, and has to remember Chateaubriand's derisive scorn of the English and Germans who thought themselves fully competent in this delicate matter. But even a foreigner cannot help feeling that there is artistry of style in this book. It is personal, but pure and correct. It is very different from the slightly tumid speech employed by many French novelists for the sake of effect; it has no purple passages; it has no emphasis. If it has any affectations, it must be confessed that they are hard to find. There is none of M. de Rénier's elegant virtuosity which makes one exclaim with Hamlet, "Words! Words! Words!"; nor has it those charming little grimaces which M. France excuses by

saying they are natural to him. Yet there is no injustice in saying that M. Gide is inferior to the two writers we have named both in personality and in style. His very sobriety and correctness seem a little unnatural, and his prose is curiously dry, like the poetry of M. Duhamel. Mr. Sturge Moore once said that extreme simplicity was often a sign of literary decadence: M. Gide's book brings the remark back to one's mind.

The chief characters of "La Symphonie Pastorale" are a Swiss Protestant clergyman, his wife and son, and a poor blind girl—characters which might occupy the most tiresome of works of fiction designed for pious edification. M. Gide seems to have made a bet with himself that he would compose a work of intellectual merits from these unpromising elements. His clergyman is charming—a pious, enlightened, and simple man, whose Christianity is that of the Gospels done without the modification of St. Paul. He argues with pleasant simplicity that the Gospels tell men what they ought to do, and St. Paul tells them what they ought not to do; and our clergyman disliked any form of condemnation. Without knowing it he, like M. Gide, is a disciple of Renan. It was therefore quite natural that he should take into his home a blind, half-idiotic girl, whose only relative was dead, though, as he ruefully admits later, he determined on this course simply because his mind was occupied with the parable of the lost sheep, not reflecting what he would do with the girl in the future nor that the chief care of her would fall on his wife. A doctor friend who knew something of psychology informs him of the latest methods of educating the blind. Astonishing results are obtained, and provide M. Gide with some admirable scenes. Here, however, singular complications ensue. The girl falls in love with the clergyman; the clergyman's son falls in love with the girl; and, quite innocently, quite without knowing it, the clergyman himself is also falling in love with her. This, as the maid-servant says, is a pretty kettle of fish! Moreover, the position is further complicated by the religious education which the good pastor had given his pupil. Pitying her blindness, desiring to keep her ignorant of evil, he had let her read nothing but the Gospels, which he had interpreted for her in his own extremely idealistic way. But after years of saying that "love" is the divine mover of the universe, that religion may be looked on as means of attaining happiness, he finds it very awkward to explain to the girl that she must not "love" him, especially when he has his own weakness to struggle against. This interesting position

is solved in a rather artificial and arbitrary way. An operation—thought of strangely late—restores the girl's sight. With her sight her character changes. She finds that she really loves the son, and that moreover she cannot endure the misery of the clergyman's wife, who had perceived the whole situation naturally before anyone else had thought of it. The girl is converted to the stern and Pauline creed of the son. And then she commits suicide. The unhappy pastor endures two griefs—her death, and the apostasy of his son who says rather cruelly: "Mon père, il ne s'agit pas que je vous accuse; mais c'est l'exemple de votre erreur qui m'a guidé."

What deductions does M. Gide wish us to make from his little story? What are we to think of this naïf simplicity? He gives us no indication; he has obliterated himself and let his characters act and speak only. M. Gide

Procureur of Judaea. M. Gide waves a deprecating hand and murmurs: "What is truth?"

Are we to conclude that he thinks the idea of Christ are dangerous? Does he want to bring from us an admission that they must be tempered or disfigured before they are safe? It seems unlikely. And we are a little annoyed with his detachment, as we are sometimes with Maupassant. We want to say to him: "Yes, you have told your story admirably; we understand it and your characters. But what do you think about them yourself? What do you want us to think? Do you admire them? Do you despise them? Do you pity them? Come, tell us the truth!" But to this imaginary question the imaginary answer presents itself; like the