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## IS IT A SLANDER?

### A Gide Translation with a Tainted Theme.

A valuable opportunity of making the acquaintance, in English, of André Gide is offered by the publication of "The Counterfeiters" (Knopf, 10s. 6d.), a translation of his novel "Les Faux-Monnayeurs."

It is strange how incurious the English reading public is about modern French literature. It keeps more or less in touch with new German literature, but of French it knows practically nothing, and seems not to care either. Whether this is any great loss, "The Counterfeiters" helps us to decide, for Gide ranks with Proust among the big French moderns.

I, reading him here for the first time, should answer the question with a No. The novel is prolix and raggedly constructed, the characters arouse only a tepid interest; their ideas about life and art are "smart" without being important, and, when critically considered—this is the principal reason for my "No"—the moral atmosphere of the book is extremely disagreeable to English taste. The fact that I read it—all of it, lengthy as it is—with considerable interest was due partly to its good, clear prose and partly to this naive pleasure which comes of being in a strange country in the company of people whose conduct astonishes.

### WASTING THE READER'S TIME.

As to its prolixity this effect naturally follows M. Gide's refusal to select and arrange. For instance, he speaks of something being "inexplicable," and then adds: "(I confess I don't like the word 'inexplicable,' and use it only because I am momentarily at a loss.)" This is an impudent waste of the reader's time: his business was to find the word he wanted. So with the construction: sometimes M. Gide is telling the story, at others it is told by Edouard's diary, but as Gide and Edouard take exactly the same point of view about everything, the device only delays and confuses. Gide follows this method quite deliberately. This, he tells us, is what the novel should be. He boasts of having no idea where his characters are leading the story. He exclaims and laments over their conduct. How foolish this pose, when in blunt truth he has invented, and directs, the show like any other novelist!

Finally, there is the business of the moral atmosphere, most important of all the reasons why the modern French novel, if this represents it truly, cannot ever be acceptable here.

One need not claim any moral superiority; it is enough to say that to the average English mind the relationship that exists between some of Gide's characters—a relationship that is coolly treated as a tolerable and even laudable thing—is so horrible that interest in them is obliterated by disgust. We wonder amazingly whether the whole work is not a slander upon a nation.

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