

the White House which will look beyond the Mall for guidance. When the yawn has duly stretched itself and legislative lassitude in turn becomes irksome we may turn again to some dominating personality who will coerce Congress to carry out the policies proclaimed in the campaign. Cleveland's intermediate attitude belongs to an older time which is not likely to come again.

~~THOMAS RAIN POWELL~~

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## The Ecstasy That Refrains

*Strait Is the Gate.* By André Gide. Authorized translation by Dorothy Bussy. Alfred A. Knopf. \$2.50.

ANDRÉ GIDE is one of the most important figures in French letters. By many he is even regarded as the greatest contemporary *proseur*, and "Strait Is the Gate" is an extremely beautiful book. It is high time that he should be given to American readers, and his publishers deserve gratitude for having presented him in an accomplished translation. But one wonders if in performing an introduction it was necessary so completely to misrepresent him. "'Strait Is the Gate,' in its study of French puritanism, will be a revelation to those who imagine that this malady of the soul is peculiar to the Anglo-Saxon world," says the jacket and the effect is immediately and no doubt intentionally to connect him and his book with the satiric studies of narrow-mindedness so popular with us today. Nothing could give a more false idea. In the first place, the author achieves a complete imaginative identification of himself with his characters, and, in the second place, the "puritanism" concerned is about as much like what ordinarily goes by that name here as Blaise Pascal is like John Roach Straton. Doubtless the publishers, with the sale of the book in mind, hardly dared say, "This is a passionately mystical book about a young woman who died an old maid, rejecting her lover because she was afraid that their love would come between her and her love of God, and because she preferred the ecstasy of renunciation to the ecstasy of fulfilment." Yet this would be the simplest and truest description. The girl's attitude is not one which is congenial to our time, but it is not, and Mr. Gide well knows that it is not, either hard, barren, or ridiculous. Some of the greatest men of all time have assumed it, and if the result of the passionate battle which we Americans are waging against spiritual narrowness is that we cannot accept a beautiful and profound presentation of a very important attitude except as a sort of foreign supplement to our anti-puritan fulminations, then we have become very provincial indeed in our efforts to escape provinciality.

It is true enough that a temperament like Gide's is to us unfamiliar and completely exotic. The peculiar character of his emotional susceptibility is strange. In America there is never, for example, any doubt as to whether or not a man is religious. We are really familiar with only three types: the Sunday school superintendent, the Babbitt who considers Jesus an effective business partner, and the rationalist or materialist; we do not know the type which is, indistinguishably, either a diabolist or a saint—a state of spiritual intoxication not very different from, and connected with, the intoxication of the senses. We cannot conceive, for example, of Mr. Mencken's suddenly turning Catholic, whereas that is exactly the sort of thing which is constantly happening among the Latins; Huysmans and Papini slip into the fold of the church and change the *modus operandi* of their spiritual life without greatly changing its emotional character. To understand Gide it is necessary to understand this temperament, for there is something of it in him. He is in search of the completest possible emotional realization of life but he is not sure how to attain it. He speaks in one of his books of an ideal of life in the annihilation of all which is not "sensation and fervor"; he speaks even of "sensual ecstasy," but he is perplexed by the question whether that is not best obtained through renunciation rather than through indulgence. In "La Tentative Amoureuse" he says of a