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70

Isabelle

Symph. Past.

### Reality Smashes the Dream in Andre Gide's 'Two Symphonies'

"TWO SYMPHONIES," by Andre Gide; Knopf, \$2.50.

Reviewed by MAGDELEIN C. HUTCHISON.

THE two narratives, "Isabelle," and "The Pastoral Symphony," which have just been translated from the French and published under the title "Two Symphonies," were written many years ago, when their author, Andre Gide, was at his best. Unhappily, Gide is known in this country only by his last book, "The Counterfeiters," which is in every way inferior to his older productions.

The "Two Symphonies" give a different and much better idea of Gide, for they illustrate, especially the second one, Gide's particular qualities and his most interesting characteristics: his art of telling a simple story in an original way, of finding the approach to it through various and devious sidetracks, somewhat in the manner of Michael Arlen, even if on all other points, these two writers are as far from each other as well can be.

These two stories also show Gide as a creator of characters, unique in his way. There is no doubt that his characters are very much alive, but not realistic in the way we are accustomed to think; they are not exposed to public view in their entirety, and the minutest folds of their hearts opened up for us to gaze at with a magnifying glass; the author is reserved about them; he seems to hesitate to probe too far; he respects the mystery which surrounds every human being and thereby attains another sort of realism which is far more subtle, if less obvious, than the realism of a Balzac or a Zola.

The story of Isabelle is told by a young man, Gerard, who goes to pay

a visit to the countryplace of her parents. She is not there herself, in fact she does not quite appear until the last chapter, but the romantic tragedy of her life is revealed little by little through her son, a boy six or seven years old, through his tutor, through the gardener and various other persons. From these conversations and a fleeting view of Isabelle, Gerard of course falls in love with her, or rather with the dream which she has evoked in his imagination.

Only when she appears herself does reality destroy the dream. His was not a passionate love, which physical contact might have ruined; it was much more subtle than that; nor was it sentimental, either; it was mostly intellectual, or rather a mixture of all these elements. The last page, which analyzes the feelings of the man before the faded flower of his dream, and the emptiness left by its absence, shows the most acute observation.

This idea must be of special interest to Andre Gide, for it is again the subject of "The Pastoral Symphony," even though it does not seem so at first. A blind girl, Gertrude, is removed from her sordid surroundings by a minister who takes her to his home and undertakes to bring life into her dormant soul and mind. In spite of the antagonism of his wife, he teaches her to speak, to read, to play the organ, reveals to her all that is beautiful in the world, and keeps from her carefully all ugly and unpleasant things.

It is only nature that she should fall in love with the man through whom all her knowledge has come. It is perhaps natural also that he should

fall in love with his own creation, like a sculptor with his statue, and he does, unconsciously. His wife, however, and his son Jacques, who is also in love with Gertrude, cannot help realizing the situation, but are unable to speak, for Gertrude, protected from all idea of wrong and of sin, does not understand at all.

A consultation of doctors which leads to an operation on the girl's eyes and restores her sight to her brings about a total change. Here again we find a human being confronted by the contrast between dream and reality, and, of course, as we expected, the sight of human faces and the revelation of their feelings through their expressions reveal to Gertrude in a minute more than she had ever vaguely felt and apprehended during her blinded years.

She also understands at the same time that it was Jacques she was really in love with, not his father, and all seems in perfect shape for a happy ending. But Mr. Gide is neither as optimistic nor as simple as that. The consequences of these events prevent things from following their natural course, and lead to a quite unexpected climax. It seems far-fetched in a way, but an all's-well-that-ends-well ending would certainly have classified this narrative as a nice short story, instead of which it is an intensely dramatic, pulsating slice of life.

Andre Gide has a fine quality of terseness. His books are usually short; not one word is superfluous; the result is that the interest does not flag a moment, and that reading a book like the "Two Symphonies" is like a short but perfect walk in the most delightful country from which one comes back stimulated but not tired.

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