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Andre Gide's Journals, Volume II

THE JOURNALS OF ANDRE GIDE By Andre Gide. Translated and Edited by Justin O'Brien. 457 pp. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. \$6.

By HARVEY BREIT

BETWEEN the publication of his first volume of "The Journals" last year and his second volume this year, André Gide was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Since this distinguished literary prize is given on the basis not of a single book but of a body of work there can be no quarrel with the award, except perhaps as it is belated. How Gide, at 78, reacted to the choice, one cannot know.

In the volume of "The Journals (1914-27)" just published, Gide records an earlier honor: "A letter from Gosse informs that I have been 'unanimously' named an honorary member of the Royal Academy to replace Anatole France." And when, later, in August, 1926, the London Royal Society of Literature requests from him the titles and decorations which should follow his name, Gide makes his classic reply: "Honors began by fleeing me. Later I fled honors. On the list of Honorary Fellows of the Royal Society my name is not to be followed by any title. The F. R. S. L. will only stand out the better."

In reading these chronological

journals one is reminded of the kind of youthful discussions that took place relating to whether man changes or whether he merely takes on various guises. Does Gide change from Volume I to Volume II? How is Gide at 50 different, if at all, from Gide at 30? Growing older (perhaps wiser, perhaps more cowardly), one formulates the question differently.

The reader may take up his positions from at least two vantage points: At a distance and close up. From the former ground the current journals show Gide to be the same. He is still—and one must be grateful for this—the intransigent searcher and researcher, whose goals are true conclusions and knowledge. He continues to remain austere and serious toward art and by maintaining such attitudes, reveals a rare and lonely courage (for there are plenty of face saving lightnesses that Gide might have adapted). He is exact and exacting toward others and even more so, if that is possible, toward himself.

FROM close up, though, the reader will detect changes. Gide is a constant man, but as he grows older he grows wiser (assuredly not an iron rule of growth). There is in the Gide of these journals (from his forty-fifth to his fifty-eighth year) less posturing, less of the engaging but adolescent Julian Sorel. Correlatively, there is a diminution of ecstasy and agony, a finer organization, as it were, between subject and object, a truer proportion between the exterior cause and the interior effect. The sensibility remains complex and susceptible, but is no longer engaged with the superfluous.

The style, too, has grown up. It has become decisive and free of rhetoric, just as the thought has become more precise and leaner. "Preciosity," Gide notes, "begins with useless expense. All our writers of today (I am speaking of the best) are precious. I hope to acquire even more poverty." It is in such ways that the new journals, though they evolve gracefully from the earlier ones, are an advance over them.

The period, of course, contributes decisively to Gide's growth. It is his most fruitful one. In these notebooks he records his unique reading of the Scriptures—which he titles "Numquid et Tu . . . ?"—and which become a creative act in reading, marred neither by dogma nor crude materialistic interpretations. It is in this period of the rat years (following the lean ones: that he writes "Lafcadio's Adventures," "The Pastoral Symphony," "Corydon," "The Counterfeiters," his lectures on Dostoevsky and his

"Travels in the Congo" (an extraordinary travel book that shook the foundations of French empire and shattered the tentacles of the French Companies).

In these journals, too, is recorded the eruption of the First World War. Just before it, Gide writes: "We are getting ready to enter a long tunnel full of blood and darkness." Gide is a patriot. "Why don't we mobilize?" he asks. But he does not exchange his irony for frenzy. "Every moment we delay is that much more advantage for Germany. Perhaps we owe it to the Socialist party to let ourselves be attacked."

OBVIOUSLY the war causes Gide profound anguish, but in spite of the mobilization of the mind that war imposes he manages to resist its hideous alchemy and remains intact. It is this fact, implicit between the lines rather than explicit in them, that is inspiring. There are many sections and fragments, lines and phrases, ruminations and brief pensées, that are wonderful in their own ways too. Among my favorites, of which I list only a few, are the fascinating, too brief meetings with Iroust; an experience with a wounded starling (a truly touching little heroine); the notations on books read and translations worked on; and all of the notes on domestic animals ("This morning I had to go and fetch Toby who ran away yesterday to the Domonts", attracted by their bitch . . . Miquette went along with me, like a legitimate wife going to get her husband at a prostitute's"); a discussion of amour-propre by way of La Rochefoucauld, an examination into the reasons for quoting other authors; a bit on Romain Rolland

("He is an unsophisticated person, but an impassioned unsophisticated person. He early took frankness for virtue, and, since it is somewhat summary, he considered hypocrites those who were less rudimentary than he").

"Enough is too much," wrote William Blake. This reviewer proposes to halt here, though he

has not said enough. After the appearance of Volume I, the criticism he heard most often was that Gide had failed to elaborate certain intriguing points. Such criticism is proper to the reading of a novel but not to "The Journals," which are by their nature fragments and indications, an interrupted series of footnotes to a life. If the life is significant, the footnotes will be, too. In Gide's life, in its development and constancy, in its thought and struggle, there is deep meaning for our age; so in the journals—as illumination of the man of ourselves and of our time.

