

**Belles Lettres.** *André Gide and Sir James M. Barrie form an interesting study in reputations. In Gide's life and work the harshness of Languedoc and the strict Protestantism of his father struggled with the lush warmth of Normandy and his own ardent nature. Although Barrie's core was hard Scots, it was the delights of literary London rather than the Presbyterian Scotland of his father that molded him. Gide's lonely and bitter struggle to shape his life according to his need led him on a crooked path from delicate symbolism through the Marxism of the '30's; and the intensity of that inner conflict, written out in words, will ensure his reputation. Barrie, on the other hand, wrote "I fancy I try to create an artificial world to myself because the one I really inhabit—becomes too sombre. How doggedly my pen searches for gaiety." Barrie is seldom read, now. Yet what a delightful man he was!*

### Frightful Heart Beat

THE JOURNALS OF ANDRÉ GIDE. Volume I: 1889-1913. Translated from the French, with an Introduction and Notes, by Justin O'Brien. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1947. 380 pp. \$5.

Reviewed by MAXWELL GEISMAR

THIS authoritative and intelligent edition of André Gide's early journals is a happy literary event. Gide began to write his journals at the age of twenty; the complete French text runs to over thirteen hundred pages. Volume I of the American edition carries him from the start of his career to the edge of the First World War—which is, incidentally, hardly mentioned.

The present volume also includes the first of Gide's impressions and portraits of a whole gallery of European celebrities from d'Annunzio and Maeterlinck to Wilde, Rodin and Degas. The scene shifts from Paris to St. Germain to Rome, Tunis, and Seville. As Mr. O'Brien says in his introduction, however, the early years of Gide's journals are concerned principally with himself and are devoted "to self-scrutiny and dreams, to philosophic hesitations and emotional unrest."

This covers the years from 1889 to 1900 very well, though it is almost impossible to convey the nature of that remarkable "self-scrutiny" and those singular "hesitations" of Gide. The next period in the journals, from 1901 to 1906, perhaps the most interesting and illuminating section of the book, deals mainly with the emotional crisis which is at the center of Gide's career. "Since 25 October 1901, the day on which I finished 'L'Immoraliste,' I have not seriously worked," Gide wrote in 1904. And for all his reticence (this is a journal, not a diary), one can hardly avoid the refrain which fills these pages—the "frightful insomnia," the fear of "all

manifestations of life," the continual struggle against "the breaking up and scattering of my thought."

"Will nothing calm the frightful beating of my heart?" Gide wrote a year later at Cuverville, his country estate. "I wander like a madman amidst this peace as arid to me as the desert." The devout Protestant education of Gide's youth was surely a factor in the crisis of his maturity. ("O my Lord, let this too narrow ethic burst. . .") The austere literary career, without favor and without honors, which he had chosen for himself was another. "I am the one who created this silence around me." The homosexual impulse of his temperament which Gide the moralist, had to recognize publicly, was still another—he already believed himself to be "completely virgin and utterly depraved."

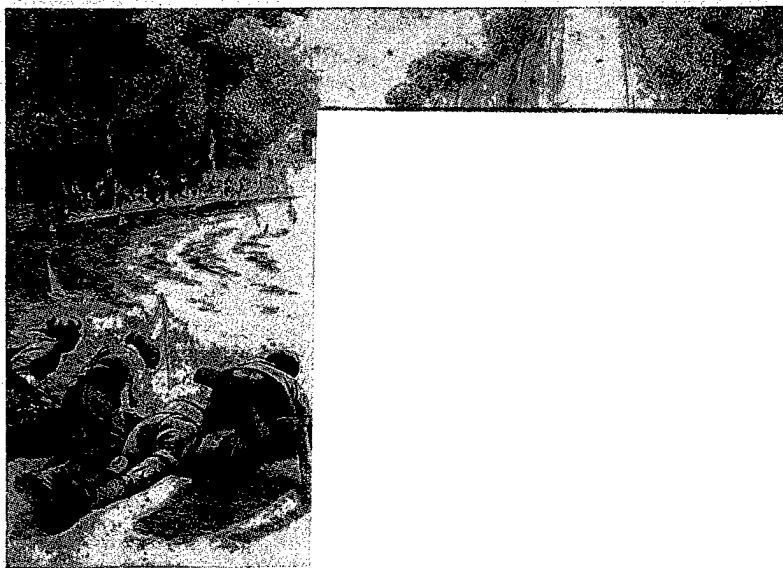
In any event, it was also this central emotional conflict, this wound, if you like, and this frightful beating of the heart, which contributed to Gide's stature as an artist, which allowed him to escape from the vanity

of a Stendhal or the petulance of a Flaubert, and which, in a literary tradition marked by a lack of heart, and particularly so in such later representatives as Aragon or Sartre, placed Gide, probably alone among the French moderns, in the class of Proust.

For what one realizes again in the first volume of the "Journals" is the circumspect and limited nature of Gide's own early life. There was not only the constraint of his religious education; there was his almost completely sheltered upbringing with his mother and his aunts, his "two properties in Normandy," his garden, his piano playing, and, of course, those interminable and utterly trivial family dinners.

Perhaps this explains the early Gide's aversion to the social question. "Oh, if politics did not bend all his thoughts, what a keen critic he would be!" the young author cried with respect to Léon Blum, who, in fact, as soon as he came to represent a party and not a temperament, ceased to interest Gide. In a sense, many of Gide's original conflicts represent the moral dilemmas of the leisure class. Probably even his first direct experience with social injustice, in the French colonies, reflects his youthful penchant for the unique or the exotic; very early in these pages he notices the tall Negroes of the Sudan, with their little sprigs of white flowers, "of fragrant jasmine, which intoxicates them."

His excursions to the "dens" of Paris or Tunis were rather cursory, then, his visions "of rape, of murder, of abominable passions" were a little abstract, while, as in the similar case of Proust, almost his only contact with the masses was through those



eccentric but essentially faithful and loyal family retainers, nurses, cooks, gardeners. A reference to one of Gide's early admirations, Dostoievsky's "A Raw Youth," will show how far removed Gide was from suffering humanity. He had to constrain himself indeed, as Mr. O'Brien notes, in order to cast off restraints. And yet, at the conclusion of the years of moral and emotional upheaval which are recorded so eloquently in this "Journal," the remarkable thing is that he did, and that he was able to assimilate the madness and reason which are, as Gide says, the two poles of art.

Very likely Gide is still primarily an "intellectual," a moral philosopher in the tradition of Montaigne rather than a natural novelist or playwright.

He is a dramatist of ideas—but what a dramatist!—whose concern is for thought "as a living, suffering thing," but who brings to his own thought all the resources of a rich and complex temperament — all "my unrest, my curiosity, my rapture."

There are many other excellent things in Volume I of "The Journals of André Gide," particularly the studies of contemporary personalities, esthetic trends, and philosophic movements which begin to appear in the years from 1907 to 1913—that whole glittering, entertaining, and illuminating panorama of French culture in the opening years of the new century. If the search for truth is more important than its possession, as Gide believes, and God consists in "becoming," his own career is a testimony to his faith—I have hardly had a chance to mention Mr. O'Brien's translation, which is first rate.