

O. Wilde — 593

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Sketches Of Wilde

OSCAR WILDE. By Andre Gide. Translated from the French by Bernard Frechtman. 46 pp. New York: Philosophical Library. \$2.75.

Reviewed by

KATE TRIMBLE SHARER

WARN THE reader at once: this is neither a biography of Wilde nor a study of his works; it is the simple assembling of two sketches which have not even the merit of being new, but which the growing public of the great Irish poet has not known where to find. . . I present both of them without changing a word in their text, though at least on one point my opinion has been deeply modified. It seems to me today that in my first essay I spoke of Oscar Wilde's work, and particularly his plays, with undue severity. . . the most curious, the most significant and . . . the newest things in the contemporary theatre."

It was to Andre Gide that Wilde made his now-famous statement: "I have put all my genius into my life; I have put only my talents into my works," so that when Wilde's friends and admirers had need to rally round him in his downfall, it was the man, not only the artist whom Gide sought to commend.

Maccauley, you remember, was the one who in Byron's case held up to public gaze the smug, hypocritical, puritanical British virtue in its spasmodic aspect, and in Wilde's case the same spasm became convulsive almost to the point of catalepsy. Andre Gide—incidentally now one of the foremost men of letters alive and winner of the Nobel Prize for lit-



ANDRE GIDE

Famous French writer and Nobel prize-winner whose sketches of Oscar Wilde have been published in the first authorized American translation.

erature—had been one of Wilde's fervent admirers. "You listen with your eyes," Wilde told him, adding that the reason the streams so loved Narcissus was that the water was reflected in the gaze of the beautiful youth; so that loyalty and affection motivated Gide's defence at the last. This volume of brief sketches bears the subtitle: "In Memoriam. (Reminiscences.) De Profundis." And the de profundis shadow slants across the memories, for when Wilde fled to France, and once during his stay in Algiers, there were contacts with Gide. . . conversations are highlighted, and marvellous reading they make. "When in times gone by, I used to meet Verlaine, I didn't blush for him. I was rich, joyful, covered with glory, but I felt that to be seen near him did me honor even when Verlaine was drunk." This was said in gentle rebuke when Gide had probably evinced some squeamishness to being seen with Wilde at the boulevard cafes. . . "My recollection here becomes abominably painful. . ."

This is the first authorized American translation of Gide's sketches of Oscar Wilde and the pictures of the poet in his prime made a glittering scene in the panorama of letters at the end of the nineteenth century. The cruelty of Wilde's persecution is not glossed over, and the aspect of the downfall is one of compassion, of honesty and of vivid reality.

This book will be in demand by all readers of both Wilde and Gide.