

Kenneth Burke

## A REVIEWER'S NOTEBOOK.

How pleasant are those books of literary odds and ends that appear in such numbers in France, those miscellanies in which, at the end of the year, the journeyman letters-gatherer gathers together the happiest pieces of his recent work, essays, reviews, snatches of dialogue, aphorisms, a few good paragraphs, jottings from a notebook, and puts them forth under some such title as "Promenades littéraires," "Épilogues," "Fragments intimes"! It would certainly be impertinent to speak of André Gide as a journeyman of letters: his work is too personal, his general ideas are at the same time too much his own. I am simply noting the first thought that comes into my mind as I glance through those two volumes of his, now fifteen or twenty years old, "Prétextes" and "Nouveaux Prétextes." My second is to ask why it is that André Gide himself is not more widely known. He is spoken of as "obscure" even in France. Of his work nothing, I think, has been translated into English but his recollections of Oscar Wilde (published in this country) and "Le Prométhée mal enchaîné," and the only study of him that I have seen is a brief essay by Edmund Gosse (virtually a long review of one of his novels). Think of the attention that Remy de Gourmont's writings have received of late years! But there is much that is accidental in these matters (and a degree of the intentional that is not always to the credit of the enthusiasts); besides, André Gide is far from prolific, far from pretentious, somewhat difficult in style, and a little "too Protestant" (his own phrase). One hears him described as Emersonian, a serious imputation in these days—but in what sense deserved? Does it go with the rumour that has reached us of his having appeared lately as an apologist for Dadaism? What chiefly strikes one in these two early books, still so well regarded that new editions of them were issued during the war, is the charming way in which he presents certain large, and perhaps largely traditional, ideas. Then, of course, they contain much of a personal interest, good talk, echoes of old and famous but still vital controversies, recollections of literary friends and the like.

<sup>1</sup> "The Slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919." Elias Heifetz. New York: Thomas Seltzer.