The Listener's Book Cl

The Journals of André Gide, Vol. II. Secker and Warburg. 30s.

André Gide and the Crisis of Modern Thought. By Klaus Mann. Dobson. 15s.

'A MAN'S LIFE of any worth' said Keats 'is a continual allegory'. In the thronged but balanced triptych of the allegory of André Gide's life, the second volume of the *Journal* forms the middle panel. He has embalmed the last relics of his past in *Strait is the Gate*, a sacrifice rewarded by *The Vatican Swindle*, his first major work that is wholly created. He has survived the temptation of conversion—'it was not communion with the Eucharist, but communion with Claudel that attracted me'. And now, as he moves through a vigil of sterility and '*inquiétude*' towards the great novel he has promised to his maturity, the war intervenes. How like the autumn of 1939 it is! There is a thunderstorm like a bombardment; there are long days of exquisite sunlight; and 'the air is full of a loathsome horror'. 'A writer's duty during a war is to abstain from writing', Gide told a friend at this time. For eighteen months, working at a relief organisation for Belgian refugees, he performs this duty; and in 1916 breaks away from the war's unmanageable stupidity to cultivate his garden at Cuverville. He writes his Memoirs, followed by *Numquid et tu . . . .?* (a dialogue, here incorporated in the *Journal*, with a God who is neither Protestant nor Catholic) and *Pastoral Symphony*. His journal does not always hide, as he fears, his 'heart's secret occupations'. Between the lines we may read the cataclysms of joy and rebirth that underlie *The Counterfeiters*. This, his masterwork, he finishes on the eve of his departure to the Congo, and leaves, with his autobiography, to explode behind him. And we quit him soon after his return, fearing the barren old age which, to him, has never come; awaiting, though he does not know it, his astonishing second youth of the 1930's, which has lasted till the present day.

'Do not, I beg you', Gide has asked his readers, 'be in such a hurry to understand me'. For a leisurely and pleasurable understanding of Gide none of his works is more suited than the *Journal*. More even than *The Counterfeiters*, it is the book into which he has 'put everything'. It is for the young and those who wish to remain young, for the happy and those who wish to be happy, for all who, in the endless struggle between freedom and authority are on the side of freedom—freedom with self-discipline. And as an opportunity for day-to-day association with genius in process of creation it stands, otherwise alone, with Keats' *Letters* and Flaubert's *Correspondence*.

Next to Proust Gide is the most important French prose writer of the twentieth century, and the most rewarding to the English reader. Thanks to Mme. Dorothy Bussy and Mr. O'Brien he is also, next to Proust, the best translated. Mr. O'Brien is not perfect. He sometimes sidesteps difficulties by reversing the miracle at Cana, giving water for wine, replacing vintage French with average English. There are a few (not many) hideous Americanisms, such as 'dunked' (for *trempé*), 'right now' (*dès à présent*), 'any which way' (*au hasard*), which could have been removed by lending the manuscript to any intelligent English friend. It would be utterly impossible to reproduce the exquisitely natural 'placing' of Gide's word-order, unexampled in French prose since the seventeenth century. But his purity, ease and dignity are in understanding hands. Mr. O'Brien even brings out qualities which an English reader, dazzled with his own pleasure, may easily overlook in the original French: its incisiveness, humour and occasional *âpreté*. This is, on the whole, a worthy and responsible translation: a French classic has become an English classic. And Mr. O'Brien's elaborate annotation and indexing have put Gide studies on a new footing.

Danger, Mann at Work! Some such signpost will have to be erected by Gide's definitive biographer (it is excellent news that he is likely to be Mr. O'Brien himself) as he drives his permanent way past Herr Mann's unseemly peepshow. This book is malevolent, hypocritical, superficial, intermittently perspicacious, execrably written and—indispensable. It recalls, in all these qualities, the fungoid crop of souvenirs that appeared overnight on the tomb of D. H. Lawrence. It is the Disappointed Friend's libel: 'Job as I Knew Him', by a Comforter. Perspicacious it is—the remarks on Gide's rediscovery of the *sotie* and the light thrown thereby on *The Vatican Swindle* are, with many others, valid and valuable. It is indispensable—Herr Mann's personal reminiscences of Gide, decanted into a short essay and purified of their scum of malicious subjectivity, would have done him credit. The account of Gide's activities during the German Occupation, a quieter but not less glorious resistance than that of the young existentialists, is equally worth having. What will Gide himself have thought of this, his first biography since L. P. Quint's in 1932? Perhaps, with the less ignoble, twenty-years-past attacks of Massis and Du Bos in mind, he will tell us in some future volume of his journal. 'Klaus Mann' he will write 'has succeeded in forgetting me': and, with some sorrow but no anger, he will proceed to touch Herr Mann with the delicately sensitised barge-pole which his pen becomes on such occasions.