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Two Moods of Andre Gide

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TWO SYMPHONIES.
By André Gide . . . *New York: Alfred A. Knopf . . . $2.50.*

Reviewed by
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Isabelle
Sympth. Pastorale

WHEN "Isabelle," the first of these "Two Symphonies," was printed in 1911, Gide had published already "The Immoralist" and "Strait Is the Gate," and yet most critics dismissed it as a work of transition. This much-abused word falls flat when applied to a Gide, for this indefatigable explorer of techniques and themes is always on the alert, forever changing the perspectives of contemporary fiction. What the critics knew was that something "different" had appeared, and they lazily proceeded to conceal themselves in a misty tautology. Separated by a score of years from the publication date of "Isabelle," one can now see this "narrative" as an isolated achievement, complete and vibrant.

It is a mystery story, somewhat similar to but of course more coherent and subtle than Mrs. Radcliffe's classics. It takes place in an antique setting: chateau almost in ruins, shady gardens, creaking gates and doors; mysterious, lunatic tenants, a murder and a beautiful lady in exile. While "preparing a thesis on the chronology of Bossuet's sermons," a bold student is forced into this castle and is soon engulfed by its dark intrigue. His findings make the story, and to re-tell them is to spoil the dénouement. Gide has given us a very refined "hair raiser," free from melodramatic accidents and supernatural silliness. Written retrospectively, the story begins after everything has taken place. The demon of curiosity spurs on the hero into his detective work: gradually the fibers appear, and then the texture, and then the design on it. Even the vocabulary, deliberately archaic, has been synchronized to the gray atmosphere and the foggy characters, lending the whole, what Jacques Riviere termed a "sweet heaviness."

Symph.-Faith

The second story in the volume, "The Pastoral Symphony," is a modern version of the dangerous parable of the lost sheep. An elderly Protestant pastor finds a destitute, ignorant blind girl (Gertrude) and takes her home with him. The pastor's wife, kept busy by five other children, is not at all pleased with this new responsibility. Gertrude is not only blind, but has no knowledge whatsoever of language, manners or cleanliness. Perhaps the very difficulty of the task stimulates the good

in front of him Condillac's
e, and he decides to infuse
ıd sentiments. It is a tedious
process of assimilation and
ut at last Gertrude wins
reness, and becomes a ra-
nless in her blindness. How-
ugly the pastor falls in love
, and he engages in a duel of
s eldest son Jacques, a theo-
t who has won part of her

affections, wishes to marry her. "Now an instinct as sure as the voice of conscience warned me that this marriage must be prevented," says the pastor to himself in typically Gidean language—an instinct as sure as the voice of conscience! And he goes on, searching the gospels, searching "in vain for commands, threats, prohibitions. . . . All of these come from St. Paul. And it is precisely because they are not to be found in the words of Christ that Jacques is disturbed. Souls like his think themselves lost as soon as they are deprived of their props, their handrails, their fences. And besides, they cannot endure others to enjoy a liberty they have resigned, and want to obtain by compulsion what would readily be granted by love." Therein lies the culminating movement of this perilous "Symphony": St. Paul and Christ, Christianity and Christ, challenge each other, wage open war as love disintegrates into atoms, into what Lalou has so happily termed "the polygamy of sentiments."

After a successful operation, Gertrude wins her eyesight, witnessing then more clearly the ugliness of human events. Jacques and his father only bring her unhappiness with their love, and after trying to commit suicide, she dies in a quandary of ambiguities. Two religious attitudes failed, St. Paul and Christ failed, the heart and the mind and the Gospels failed—the "angels" sank into the abyss of sin. . . . "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

Gide has attained in this novel what one of his earlier characters desired most: "the greatest transparency, the suppression of opacity." It is a most exciting experience to follow one after another these two very different "Symphonies," for one enjoys Gide in two different moods, always surprising and challenging. The phantoms from the old castle, projected through the consciously archaic and hazy language of "Isabelle," linger awhile as one enters the tormenting drama of the fervently warm, limpid "Pastoral Symphony."

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