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Paul Morand

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PAUL VALÉRY has written: "It was my idiosyncrasy to love . . . in art only the creative process."<sup>1</sup> This saying might well be inscribed as epigraph upon the last page of André Gide's new novel, Les Faux Monnayeurs, in which Edward who is Gide himself observes similarly: "I make notes day by day of the progress made by my novel in my mind, keeping as it were a sort of diary. Imagine the interest which such a note-book from the pen of Balzac or Dickens would have for us! An account of the pre-natal origins of the novel would be more absorbing perhaps than the novel itself." Although Les Faux Monnayeurs is long—it contains nearly five hundred pages and this is long for a French novel—it is never tiresome. Possibly piqued by recent attacks upon him, it would seem that Gide has, while retaining his more familiar characteristics, made a point in this book of appearing *sauve* and even amusing. The book comprises five or six inter-related plots which far from confusing and tiring the reader are cleverly developed and maintained, thanks to the central character, Gide himself, who with extreme clarity and self-awareness follows step by step the progress of his book, ridiculing its faults—none of which escapes him—and disarming all possible criticism. In the first plot, a young man finds that he is an illegitimate child, and leaves home. His subsequent travels, diversified by many dangers, form a theme upon which have been embroidered the philanderings of a vain, unscrupulous adventurer. By comparison with other portraits in an excellent gallery of contemporaries, the portrait of Lady Griffith, the English *inamorata*, seems lifeless and artificial. To compensate for this disappointment, we have in each of the other situations, one unforgettable caricature: Count de Pas-savant whose artistic tastes and snobbish respect for so-called "advanced" talent, not to mention morals, have placed beyond the pale of society—a composite photograph of two well-known

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Entretiens avec Paul Valéry*, by Frédéric Lefèvre.

Parisians, recognizable to everyone and whom as a matter of fact everyone has recognized; and the old music-teacher, La Pérouse, a touching figure, over whom hovers the genius of Dostoevsky.

Starting from the same point, Valéry and Gide advance toward diametrically opposed solutions of the literary problem. Valéry posits as his goal pure, gratuitous intellectual energy, the gratuitous activity of disinterested mind, indifferent to the very content of its thought and reduced to "the supreme poverty of purposeless power." His theory is explicit in *Une Soirée avec Monsieur Teste*<sup>1</sup> and in *Introduction à la Méthode de Léonard da Vinci*.<sup>2</sup> This ideal activity is in sharp contrast to the ideal passivity with which Gide meets the external world—a world envisaged as a neutral ground where causes are generated and effects derived while the work of art matures as indifferently as a plant. Gide even denies having selected special characters. "I did not seek them," he asserts ruefully; "They happened to be ahead of me in my path, and I followed them." Rather, he followed himself through the labyrinths of his curiosity, a curiosity that has grown stronger each year until it has become identical with human sympathy; though when we consider his refusal to summon a doctor on the occasion of Olivier's suicide, we must admit that this sympathy is tempered by a fair share of prudence. Perhaps it is after all only a kind of scepticism, intelligent, uncourageous, keeping him always, in spite of everything, on the edge of life. Because he has desired above all else plasticity, he has ceased to exist. Once again in *Les Faux Monnayeurs* there is that Gidesque mingling of protestantism and paganism which permeates all his work from *L'Immoraliste* to *L'Enfant Prodigue*. After all we must continue to take Gide as we find him. Even people who appear to themselves extremely unstable never really change. They never rid themselves of their failings—and that is excellent; for when we seek to improve ourselves, we succeed merely in substituting for natural vices artificial virtues. And only what is natural matters.

In *Les Faux Monnayeurs* we have a definition of the ideal novel, . . .

<sup>1</sup> Published in *THE DIAL*, February 1922, under the title, *An Evening with M. Teste*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Note and Digression*, appended to *Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci*, and published in this issue of *THE DIAL*, pages 447-457.