

## André Gide's New Novel Is In the Great Tradition

"The Counterfeiters" Resumes the Creative and Panoramic Method of Balzac and Tolstoy

THE COUNTERFEITERS. By André Gide. Translated from the French by Dorothy Bussy. 35 pp. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. \$3.

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

UNLIKE Anatole France, Gourmont and Proust, André Gide has not been given by intelligent Americans the recognition which his great talents deserve. It is to be hoped that with this magnificent book, "The Counterfeiters," he will come more into his own, as Thomas Mann has come into his own over here with the publication of "The Magic Mountain." For out of a fair familiarity with recent French literature, I can think of no fiction since Proust which offers as much, which means as much, as this present novel of Gide's.

In an age of experimentation Gide has produced a novel which is original without being experimental, which is large without being unwieldy, and which is intellectual without being dialectic. It was his ambition in "The Counterfeiters," an ambition in which he has succeeded, "to purge the novel of all those elements which do not belong specifically to the novel." His book has no secondary aims whatsoever; it tells the story of a dozen inter-playing lives. But besides purging it of all excesses, he has written it as, in a significant sense, no other novel has altogether been written. He has rejected the kind of reality achieved by established schools of writing—by realists, by naturalists, by students of maîtres. What all novelists do unconsciously to a certain degree, Gide has done deliberately to the ultimate degree; he has discarded "the real world" for "the representation of it which we make to ourselves." With Gide it has not been merely the inevitable question of a writer's "interpretation." Gide's characters are alive in a living world, never for an instant abstractions in an abstract world, yet Gide has virtually dispensed with the materialistic. He has found neither need nor place in "The Counterfeiters" for backgrounds of any kind, for surfaces, for sensory impressions, for telling trivialities which give life an "air of naturalness." The people of "The Counterfeiters" lead neither the customary inner nor the customary outer lives. We are shown them growing through their experiences with and influence upon one another; the rest, unimportant by comparison, is left to our imagination. For "The Counterfeiters," in a word, is a novel of the development of related lives. Some of these lives grow, others decline, while two or three of the characters in the book act as catalysts.

It is not possible to summarize "The Counterfeiters" with any accuracy. Its chief characters are young fellows who react upon one another and who, each one, come into contact with some one older. Bernard Profitendieu, talented at the start but unformed, leaves his family on learning he is illegitimate, and gains stability and self-understanding through loving a woman and serving as secretary to the novelist Edouard. In Edouard we have something of Gide himself, from the literary standpoint at least, as well as an uncle who shyly and sensitively loves his nephew, Olivier. Olivier, who is Bernard's chum as well, comes into contact with another novelist, the sophisticated pervert Passavant, is greatly influenced by him, and only saves himself in time. Olivier's older brother, Vincent, extremely capable but even more weak, goes to pieces at the hands of Passavant and his mistress, and ends by going mad.

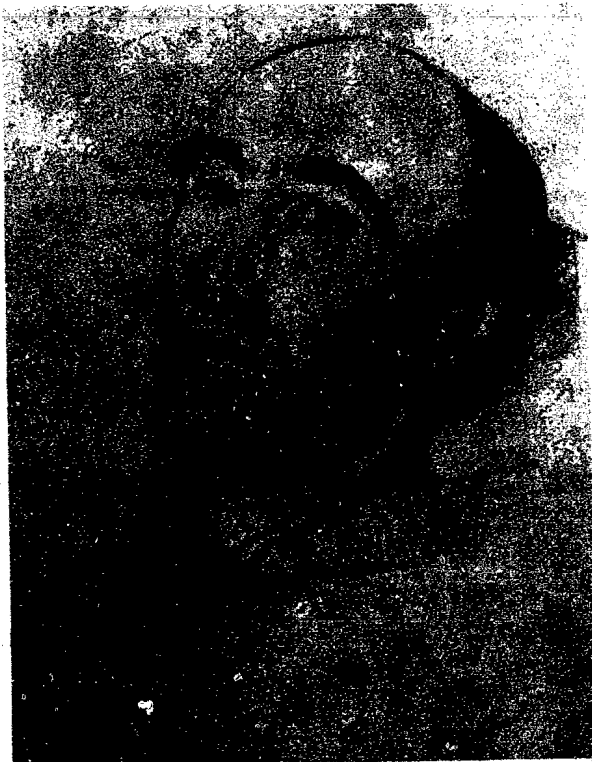
Olivier's younger brother, George, falls in with the rascally nephew of a greater rascal, and his course in unwholesome worldliness is only ended by a shocking episode which culminates the chief subplot of the story—the terrible and unforgettable tale of Boris and his grandfather.

And these people live vividly, significantly, as people. Bernard, Olivier, Vincent, George, fed by life and passing under the influences of Edouard, Passavant, Lillian, Gherdaniol, grow through mental and moral upheavals and move on toward their destinies. Gide is not the old-fashioned novelist who ties up their lives in permanent knots at the end of his story; but he is no mere spectator; he is a creator and an artist, and if they do not reach their final destinies, he lets us see, at least, something of what they may be. For "The Counterfeiters" is a superbly rounded novel with a beginning and a conclusion. From a masterly introduction of its characters one after another in a beautifully patterned sequence, through a long series of scenes which never confuse us, no matter how many lives must be kept in sight, it proceeds to a point where its own interests are exhausted and where its characters stand on new thresholds of activity—the exact point at which it should end.

"The Counterfeiters" restores the novel to us in all its creative freshness. It is an advance, but a logical advance, in the great tradition; it throws out the photographic and observational method extending from Flaubert to Joyce, to resume the creative and panoramic method

André Gide.

From "The Portrait Drawings of William Rothenstein" (The Viking Press).



of Balzac and Tolstoy. What fascination there is to most of these characters, and what a world they form! One can hardly forget the meeting of Edouard and Olivier at the railway station, the return of Passavant, Lillian and Vincent from Rambouillet, the Argonaut's dinner, the suicide of Boris. Yet "The Counterfeiters" belongs to the

great tradition in a new way, and one distinction must be made. It has not universal qualities; it is, after all, a kind of intellectualist's novel. For it presupposes that the reader will bring to it an imaginative and mental equipment that will do very much work of their own, rather than directly inciting us as

say, "Père Goriot," incites us; and its characters are too complexly alive to have the immediate memorableness of a Goriot. Like Hamlet, "The Counterfeiters" was made for rereading, and nobody can get all the rich compensations of its art and the vivid excitement of its reality by reading it once. For never in all his career has Gide had so much to give.