Vol. II- The Saturday Review 29 may 1948 p 31

Belles-Lettres.

What one might call the autobiographies of the spirit play a unique role in world literature. By-products often of more conventional artistic activity, such personal records as the "Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini" and John Bunyan's "Grace Abounding" unconsciously express the conflicts, the aspirations, the philosophy of the intellectual of the period. The Italian Renaissance overflows from the lusty pages of Cellini's story; in "Grace Abounding" the religious fervor of the seventeenth-century Protestant still shines at its purest. Two poles of thought in the America of the nineteenth century speak through Emerson's "Journals" and "The Education of Henry Adams." So for our own times we have, in "The Letters of T. E. Lawrence," for instance, and in André Gide's "Journals" and the "Diaries" of Franz Kafka, both discussed below, portraits of today's suffering, alienated intellectual.

Voice of Western Protestant Conscience

THE JOURNALS OF ANDRE GIDE. Volume II: 1914–1927. Translated from the French and Annotated by Justice O'Brien. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1948. 462 pp. $6.

Reviewed by MAXWELL GEISMAR

THE FIRST volume of André Gide's "Journals" to be published in the United States covered the years from 1889 to 1913, and contained the record of Gide's youth and literary apprenticeship. The present volume continues the story from 1914 to 1927. The fascinating record of the French and European literary scene during this period is matched again by the story of Gide's literary development, his personal conflicts, and his domestic existence. A third volume of the "Journals," to be published before 1950, will complete the project.

Meanwhile the two volumes already available, brilliantly edited and handsomely printed, are surely an achievement in themselves. These "Journals" are remarkable and wonderful books to which no reviewer with a sense of perspective can hope to do justice. They were entered upon by Gide almost as a diversion, and carried forward as a form of literary discipline. But the "Journals" also became a source of salvation to Gide, or at least a method of preserving his sanity. They contain as much of the artist's heart and mind as we have any right to expect, and they will probably stand as his most complete and enduring work.

Perhaps indeed the "Journals"—informal in tone, irregular in context, a skilful and absorbing mixture of portraits and places, of drawing-room gossip and metaphysical speculation, of remarkable passages of literary criticism and moral scrutiny, of lyrical outbursts and personal revelation—will be considered as the only books of Gide which completely represent him. For this is a very complex personality, full of scruples and modesty, tormented, evasive, and oblique, as well as singularly penetrating and sincere, and in the second volume of the "Journals" we see Gide playing at least four or five roles. He is the Parisian, or European, literary man, editor of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, a powerful influence, friend of Paul Bourget, Jean Cocteau, Proust, Leon Blum, Walter Rathenau, and innumerable other celebrities. He is an established novelist, dramatist, poet and critic, translator of Conrad and Whitman and many other artists of his time, a classical scholar, a leader of the modernists.

But he is the solitary artist, too, distrustful of what he has achieved, conscious not only of having been misrepresented in the public eye but of having misrepresented himself, the prey of religious doubts, the victim of sensual impulses, the disturbed student as well as the acknowledged master of his craft. And how full these pages are of relapses and self-reproach, of prayers and promises, of illness and anxiety as well as of "the most abominable desires" and penances! Yet consider Gide's actual output during these years: "Lafcadio's Adventures," "Corydon," "If It Die . . ." and "The Counterfeiters" among his other stories and plays, essays, introductions, translations, and lectures. He has been excoriating himself not for not doing enough, but for not doing more. Moreover, his sexual conflicts were as violent as ever at the age of fifty, and as painful. Cuverville, where Gide also played the role of country gentleman, and pruned the trees, and studied the birds, and entertained the neighbors, often seems like an estate of the damned.

Probably Gide still remains one of the last great voices of the Western European Protestant conscience. This is essentially a religious mind without a religious framework. Like Rilke, or Kafka, too, Gide is an almost classic example of the modern genius, that is to say, of excessive sensibility, of introspection and subjectivity, of talent that has been cut off from many of its natural sources and activities. One notices his disdain for politics, his final indifference to the First World War or the issues of the Peace, his belated and rather naive concern with the revolutionary social forces of his time, or of his own country. (In this sense, even the issue of homosexuality, to which Gide devoted such a large part of his career, and so much compassion, analytical force, and moral fervor, takes on an historical significance.) It may take another epoch of blood and tyranny before we again reach such flowering of individualism.

André Gide's historical moment may have passed. But his justification seems clear in the eyes of the God whom he finally placed as the object, and not the cause, of human progress. He accepted his final role, too, and he gave to it all his intensity, his marvelous curiosity, his power and humility. The tone of the "Journals" is often ironical or entertaining, sometimes theatrical, but that is the real story they tell, and that is why, probably before any other work of Gide's, they will become part of the historical record. Mr. O'Brien's translation seems to me, an outlander, a first-rate job.

Maxwell Geismar is the author of "The Last of the Provincials: The American Novel 1915-1925," the second in a series of such studies on the leading American novelists from the Civil War to the present time.