The New York Times Book Review
SEPTEMBER 14, 1947 Copyright, 1947, by The New York Times Company. SECTION 7

GIDE, MANY-SIDED MAN OF LETTERS

Penetrating, Acerb and Self-Revealing, His Journal Makes Absorbing Reading

THE JOURNALS OF ANDRE GIDE. Translated from the French, with an introduction and notes by Justin O'Brien. 380 pp. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. $5.

By HARVEY BREIT

FOR over half a century in France literary war has been waged around the tall, gaunt figure of André Gide—now 78 years old. His novels outraged critics; his criticism outraged novelists; and his ideas outraged both. Many of the younger French writers, though, followed him; many of the best writers of other countries were influenced by him; and the various and variously inspired literary movements claimed him. There were factions: for Gide and against Gide. His conception of the "gratuitous act" became for a time a slogan and a password.

But for American readers, for the American reading public, this war was shadow-play. Except for an élite whose literary orientation was primarily European, Gide's art was overlooked—or, when read at all, missed. Conceivably, with certain justification: the most famous books, "The Counterfeiters," "The Immoralist," "Lafcadio's Adventures," compromise the spectator rather than make compromises with him, and establish a perverse, complex and confessional atmosphere. And though this "disagreeableness" is textural (if not altogether extrinsic), it sufficed to make Gide an "inaccessible" author.

Now, with the publication for the first time in English of "The Journals of André Gide," those intrinsic Gidean qualities—an artistic sensibility of the highest order, an intellectuality and catholicity of taste that is yet minutely discriminating, an unceasingly vigilant search for a "true" morality, a sense of human existence as a superb adventure—those qualities that were so elusive in his art become accessible on every page of the Journals to any reader who cares to make them so.

IT is our good fortune that Gide found writing difficult, that his philosophy and temper were so anti-*laissez faire*. "The need that makes me write these notes," he records, "has nothing spontaneous, nothing irresistible about it. I have never enjoyed *writing rapidly*. That's why I want to force myself to do so." And yet one may question this explanation as the whole one. Is there not in Gide an "elective affinity" for the Journal? He has used the device in his creative work: Edouard's Journal is among the most rewarding sections of "The Counterfeiters." In his use of it here, one feels that Gide realizes his truest self. In it he need no longer bother with constructions of constructions (of plot, of character), but can attend, without intervention of the craftsman, those ideas and people and things that most immediately confront him. Though for most writers such freedom may prove a handicap, for Gide (whose absorption and radiation frequency is extremely high) it proves a real advantage.

The current volume, dated 1889-1913, has been translated with great distinction by Justin O'Brien, and is the first of three volumes that will bring the Journals up to 1939. It is all that a Journal should be: often thoughtful and intimate, just as often bored and gossipy, or sombre, or amused, or detached, or vivacious; instinctively well-paced (in the modulations of short and long passages and shifts of key); a mirror reflecting impeccably the artistic milieu of a stimulating period. And underneath it all, like a ground bass supporting the variations above, is a superior intelligence.

Sir William Rothenstein.

Andre Gide at the End of World War I.

Gide's trips to Africa and Italy are recorded: descriptions of the desert, sinister cafés, Arab [illegible] and rites, of Italian cities, streets, museums. There are the famous, who become a little more vivid and dimensional through Gide's sights: Wilde, Claudel, d'Annunzio, Hofmannsthal, Degas, Maillol, Peguy, Bloy, the Goncourt brothers. The death of Charles-Louis Philippe in 1909 (a reportage that is transformed by Gide's affection into a stunning novella) is first rate; so are the meetings with the old piano teacher, Papa La Pérouse. The naturalist passages are revelatory, and Gide's rejection of Fabre's jokes at the expense of Darwin is heartening at the same time that it is an able demonstration of his skill and knowledge [illegible]

Though there is overwhelming evidence in the Journal of Gide's love for his fellow, the sentiment never blocks incisive observation and decisive wit:

> Gourmont has published in the Ermitage of 15 July some new "Pas sur le sable." ["Footprints in the Sand."] He certainly hasn't very beautiful feet. "There are certain things one must have the courage *not* to write," says the first of his aphorisms; this first ought to spare us many others.

> This morning Léon Blum reads me the first act of his play (La Colère). Today Molière takes his revenge for the fact that Blum has always preferred Marivaux to him.

Or this, the first appearance in the Journal of Paul Valéry: "I have the greatest affection for him; it takes everything he says to diminish it. He is one of my best friends; if he were deaf and dumb I could not want a better one."

THERE is another kind of humor in Gide—a naive bravado related to the Stendhalian ésprit that is the nearest thing in writing we have to the opera *buffa* aside. The temper is found most cleanly in a series of counsels to himself. This one is titled "Means of enticement and instigation to work."

> Intellectual means:
> (a) The idea of imminent death.
> (b) Emulation; precise consciousness of one's period and of the production of others.
> (c) Artificial sense of one's age; emulation through comparison with the biographies of great men.
> (d) Contemplation of the hard work of the poor * * *
> (e) Comparison of today's work with yesterday's * * *
> (f) Reading of second-rate or definitely bad works; recognize the enemy and exaggerate the danger. Let your hatred of them urge you to work. (Powerful means, but more dangerous than emulation.)

Or this stream of imperatives:

> I should aim to be clumsy only when I wish to be. *I must learn to keep silent.* * * * To have more mobile eyes and a less mobile face. To keep a straight face when I make a joke. Not to applaud every joke made by others. Not to show the same colorless geniality toward everyone. * * * Especially never to praise two people in the same way, but rather to keep toward each individual a distinct manner from which I would never deviate without intending to.

And this, in a blacker vein:

> My mind is becoming voluptuously impious and pagan. I must stress this tendency. I could see the readings I should indulge in: Stendhal, the eighteenth-century Encyclopedia, Swift, Condillac * * * to dry up my heart (sear is a better word; everything is mildewed in my heart). Then the vigorous writers and especially the most virile: Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Rabelais * * * these are the ones I must read. * * * And don't worry about the rest. There is enough possibility of tears in my soul to irrigate thirty books.

The reader will (Continued on Page 57)

Many-Sided Man of Letters

(Continued from Page 1)

note without envy the division in Gide between a voluptuous and an ascetic self; it haunted Gide's conscience and chafed his flesh. He formulates it tersely: "No one more than I has longed for rest, nor has loved unrest more." But the same reader will envy and even be awed by the equilibrium Gide managed in spite of, or because of, this division, the amount of work he did, the source of which is to be found in his method of relaxing—not by a cessation of activity but by changing over activities:

Seven thirty: bath, reading of Souday's article on A. S.
Eight thirty: breakfast.
Nine: piano—First Bach-Liszt Prelude for organ.
Ten to eleven: letters to Rilke and Eugène Rouart.
Eleven o'clock to twelve: walk, then cleaning up my notes on "The Possessed."
Lunch.
One o'clock: study of piano.
Two to three: reading of "Clayhanger."

This particular day does not include the hundreds of other activities and interests in Gide's daily life: the concerts, theatres, exhibitions, friends, the Nouvelle Revue Française (which he had founded in 1909 and which for thirty years decisively influenced literary taste in Europe and America), the work in translations (of German and English works into French), the political involvements and juridical obligations, the scientific pursuits, the fame—as the greatest living literary figure of France—that he had to contend with.

These multiple activities and the books he wrote so slowly never distracted him from his main object: the fate of the individual. "The only drama that really interests me," he wrote, "and that I should always be willing to depict anew, is the debate of the individual with whatever keeps him from being authentic."

This is Gide's war: a war for an authentic life, and he has fought it steadily, unflinchingly and wholly, on literary, psychological, moral and political levels. That he has not spared himself is a fundamental reason for the greatness of the Journals.

947.