

## André Gide

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES. By ANDRÉ GIDE.  
New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1929. \$2.

Reviewed by ABEL CHEVALLEY

IN a delightful booklet called "Caractères," now as rare as a first Folio, André Gide once wrote: "Each new book of mine is a reaction against the mere amateurs of the one before. . . ." At the risk of betraying an inveterate amateurishness, I find Gide's last book, "The School for Wives," admirable as the one before, "The Counterfeiters," though entirely different. If this statement could possibly have a share in causing Gide's next "réaction," it is with a light heart that I would bear my tiny bit of responsibility.

The great success of "The School for Wives" is due partly to its reactive quality. "The Counterfeiters" was a triumph of intricacy, disconnection, and reconnection. "The School for Wives" is a marvel of simplicity and economy. In "The Counterfeiters," Gide had, as he told me, to gather his strength and take a fresh "élan" at every turn of the road. He constantly shifted his point of view. Or, rather, his characters led, and he followed. In the Diary of the counterfeiters, we have a full record of that mental hurdle race, inside a labyrinth.

"The School for Wives" is of a quite different type, perfect unity, classical continuity, two characters only, a man and his wife, both of them coherent and static, one single observer and recorder, the wife, one single record, the wife's diary, the style a miracle of directness and simplicity: not one "difficult" word in the whole volume.

It is as if Gide had wanted to convince the admirers of his "The Counterfeiters" that they admired its defects, not its merits, and that he was able to wield the simplest as well as the most complicated instruments of mental analysis.

The first part of Eveline's Diary in "The School for Wives" is written just before her marriage, the second twenty years after. The purity and gravity of her young love, the intensity of her devotion, are expressed in a liquid and transparent language. She is one of those cultivated, highly conscientious, and somewhat inartistic girls who unfold their intense and secret life in Gide's works. The sense of beauty which they radiate translates itself into their conduct, their way of being, not their manner of writing, painting, dressing, or singing. Eveline begins to discover the clay feet of her idol just before she gets married to the idealized fool who becomes her husband. Eveline's second diary, beginning after twenty years of marriage, when she is on the point of leaving her husband, contains pages which for candid emotion and sheer poignancy are unforgettable. Nothing can be more commonplace than Eveline's story of disillusion, despair, and sacrifice, nothing more exquisitely expressive and *nuancé* than the progress of her disenchantment, more pathetically concise than the end of the drama. The whole story is told in less than 16,000 words. Truly, all great art is omission.



Some of Gide's recent books, "The Counterfeiters," for instance, and also "Lafcadio's Adventures," had led his admirers too far in their opinion on his real share in the government of modern noveldom, at least in France. Both books contain something like a tentative theory of the novel. Both are, to a certain extent, regarded as samples of a new conception of mental and effective activity and of a new manner of applying and displaying that view of life in the art of fiction. This is not the place to enter into details. But the character of pure gratuitousness is the supreme achievement of all human acts, and its culmination in Lafcadio's crime were not without tempting some amateurs into premature conclusions. Others may have hailed rather irrelevantly "The Counterfeiters" with its fold-upon-fold construction, circumvolutive progress, coiling rhythm and movements, brain-like texture, as a sort of round Japanese box of art and psychology, containing in the last of its concentric recesses the secret of Psyche and the truth of fiction. It was only a fiction of truth. "Each new book of mine is a reaction against the amateurs of my preceding work," says Gide in "Characters." And he adds: "That sort of round-about turn is to teach them that if they applaud me, it must be for the right reason. They must take each of my books for what it really is: a work of art."

Of art . . . but not of propaganda, even artistic. That aspect of Gide is too often neglected. You

will find many others in the books of general information on the contemporary novel mentioned in my recent foreign letter to the *Saturday Review*, but none more important.

If you want to understand Gide, read Lalou's chapter on him (it is one of the best in his book) and Bernard Fay's sketch of his career. You will then realize the intense admiration he excites and the extraordinary power he wields. But if you want not only to understand, but also to "over-stand" him, to look at him from a point of vantage, he and he alone is able to supply you with the necessary platform. There is no help, no remedy. You must read his whole works. He is not definable in sections. He is too big, too great, too complex.

From one point of view, perhaps, he might be effectually schematized, that of comparative literature, and comparative psychology. But that is a subject which does not lend itself to generalizations, simplifications, current journalism. And this is a review, not a lecture.

In brief, let it be recorded that no estimation of the novel of our times can be attempted without first an estimation of the comparative share of Marcel Proust and André Gide in its development. And in brief, let it be remembered that Marcel Proust, indifferent to *morality* started from *mentality*, made immense discoveries, and died in his labyrinth at the moment he was issuing from it into the open world. Gide was born and remained a Moralist (though he wrote "Immoraliste"), traveled early to the world of pure and independent psychology, did not stay there, and has since returned to his tormented quest of an integral life.

Of these two men, the greater analyst was perhaps the narrower artist. Gide is more complete, a richer asset in the books of humanity.

## A Villon in Small-Clothes

THE VIRTUE OF THIS JEST. By JAMES STUART MONTGOMERY. New York: Greenberg. 1929. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GARRETT MATTINGLY

FOR the innocent Victorians (of whom the gentle Austin Dobson must have been the last) the chief charm of the reign of George II lay in its flowered satins and flowery manners, its leisure and its letters, its dashing Jacobites and romantic highwaymen; the tougher minds of our avowedly hard-boiled era when they yearn, as in print they often do, for a return to classicism and the eighteenth century, think rather, with perhaps an equal if inverted romanticism, of hard polished wit and hard polished manners, of a vigorous realism in action and in fiction, of "no demn'd sentimental nonsense" about life, and a full blooded, if not infrequently foul-mouthed, relish of its grosser aspects. For both these tastes, assuming, and I think correctly, that the unashamed romanticist who wants a thumping, swashbuckling tale of love and loyalty and a little killing for his money still buys books, though the hard boiled cynical realist may write reviews, Mr. Montgomery has prepared a decoction compounded equally for low comedy and high intrigue.

Against the background of mid-eighteenth century London, and making a skilful use of the abundant literature of roguery and low life which the period offers, he sets a hero who schemes now for sixpences and now for a kingdom, and leads you unsuspecting from the mood of "Peregrine Pickle" and "The Life and Death of Jonathan Wilde the Great" to that of "Wha's for Bonnie Charlie" and a generous longing to strike one blow for the king over the water. Yet in his most full-blooded scenes of low life, the author, remembering the ladies, will roar you as gently as any sucking dove, and in the highest flights of his romantic fancy he does not forget to let you see that he has had his tongue in his cheek all the time.

At the outset, the adventures of Nicholas Swayne, Grub street hack and laureat of vagabondia, are pure picaresque. How his mother procured him a start in life, how he failed as a barber's apprentice and succeeded as a scout for a Fleet parson and a come-on man in an eighteenth century variant of the badger game, how he acquired a mistress, a large assortment of disreputable acquaintances, and a taste for the lower forms of literature,—all these things are related with a gusto that disguises their erudition, and garnished with tid-bits from the whole book shelf of roguery from Harman's "Caveat" and Greene's "Coney Catchers" to the "Newgate Cal-

endar" and the writings of Justice Fielding. But before the reader can tire of such lively sociology, Nicholas, who has more of the poet in him than a mere talent for rhymes, tries his hand at politics, and passes from a Jacobite pamphleteer to the organizer of a conspiracy to seize, with an army of vagabonds, the City and the Tower, while Prince Charlie marches from Derby. The transition from the grotesque to high romance and thence to tragedy is skilfully managed; the end is surprising; the whole is as deftly written and amusing a literary entertainment as you are likely to meet among this year's books.

## Evil and Black Magic

THE HALF PINT FLASK. By DuBOISE HEYWARD. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1929.

Reviewed by R. EMMET KENNEDY

ASIDE from the remarkable economy of words and deft handling of subject matter, "The Half Pint Flask" has a Poe-like atmosphere of mystery and suspense that is quite impressive. The tale itself is little more than a simple incident: one which the indiscriminating craftsman might look upon as a commonplace happening of slight importance and of no great dramatic interest. But Mr. Heyward's subtle sense of values discerned its possibilities. Due to his fine understanding of the psychology of the primitive negroes of his section of the country, he has written a tale of unusual force and vitality.

In a simple, straightforward manner, without any unnecessary argument or rhetorical discussion not bearing on the main idea of the story, he shows the disastrous effect of conjuring on the consciousness of a white man who has taken a flask from a grave in a negro burying-ground. By their concentrated mental efforts, the outraged negroes, through their knowledge of the occult and ready practice of black magic, succeed in reducing the man to a state of abject terror and helplessness. The reader is strangely impressed by the startling reality of the power of evil and by the vivid way Mr. Heyward reveals the heathen characteristics of the uneducated negro, so naturally a part of his primitive soul.

No matter how devout the negro may be in his religious belief, superstition plays an important part in all matters of the spirit. The impulse that answers to the call of Christianity by day responds with the same willingness to the practice of sorcery by night. Witchcraft has been his natural right through centuries of African inheritance; and racial instincts do not pass away in several generations. Small wonder then, to see the credulous reader close the book, feeling that there may be a vestige of truth in this strange, exciting tale.

Stuart P. Sherman

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a theory it had obvious inconsistencies. His teaching probably suffered from it: it was fine, but not (incredible as it seems) regarded as thrilling. His best, or, certainly, his most ripened energies, went into his writing, and this was addressed away from Illinois entirely, and carried no more democracy out of Urbana than he brought into it. He wrote for his old masters, for the institutions he attacked. He began in his middle period that public concern with what Americans were thinking and feeling and writing which set him apart from his fellow professors of English, yet it was what the new intellectuals, whose meeting place was New York, were about in their nefarious realisms that stirred him to criticism, and he lashed them with what he learned at Harvard, not with anything drawn from the soil of the Middle West.

It was a growing realization of maladjustment, I think, that brought him to New York. Why be an oracle of the cornbelt when the cornbelt did not concern him, did not enter into his thinking except as a symbol of protest, or into his life except as a place where one could live cheaply and in secure independence! Why write from Urbana when only the academic read him! Yet it was not to write for democracy that he gave up his job of teaching the democracy in Illinois to edit a literary review in New York, for the democracy do not read literary reviews, even when included in papers of hundreds of thousands in circulation. It is even doubtful whether as many people read Sherman when he took the editorship of *Books* of the New York *Herald Tribune* as in the *Atlantic Monthly* where he had been publishing pretty steadily. It is



doubtful whether his actual readers were more than doubled or tripled over the clientèle of the old *Nation*, no one of whom willingly missed one of his written words. It was not quantity he sought, nor quality in the usual sense, it was a *different* audience, an audience still intellectual but no longer academic—most of all no longer specialized in teaching or literary scholarship, or class conscious in their cultivation. Obscure instincts (for I do not find them clearly expressed) may have led him toward a city home and a metropolitan audience as a response to the new city consciousness of American culture. He had gone to Urbana as Emerson had gone to Concord; he came out, as Emerson might well have done also, following the line of new energies leading toward cosmopolitan, half alien New York.

Unfortunately this change—so good and so inevitable for the Emersonian scholar—carried obligations with it that Sherman may have foreseen but scarcely could have estimated. He had got clear at last of that reverence for his masters which is an academic vice as well as a human virtue, and was particularly difficult for him to escape because they, for him, were not merely knowledge personified, but the classic restraint, the ideal of intellectual control, which he as a romantic had to acquire before he could be strong as a critic and with his own strength. He broke with his allies over the question of the end (not the nature) of culture, almost at the moment of his decision. Emerson won him utterly from Harvard at last.

Yet one does not submit to twenty-five years of academic duty, nor live for the same period in a small town in an agricultural university, without penalties as well as compensations. Literature, for Sherman, was alive or it was nothing. His strong moral bent, far from limiting his sympathies as his "anti-puritan" enemies believed, had made him carry his study of standard literature far beyond its esthetic values into the complex of life of which it had once been a part. But in strictly contemporary literature he was often estopped. It was not that his judgments upon it were wrong. I think that he was sometimes more right in Urbana than when he came to New York. Yet criticism—whether sympathetic or unsympathetic—no matter how right in principle, must be familiar with the texture of life behind, or be only abstractly useful in handling contemporary literature. And there were difficulties in Sherman's approach to contemporary life. For the study of Ford or Collins or Wordsworth or Arnold he was well and painfully equipped to discover the historical mind or mood or circumstance which determined the quality of excellence, and better equipped than most of his colleagues to relate the literature of the past to the life of the present. But in his own day and circumstance Sherman was handicapped. He had lived a scholar's life. The new American literature toward which his interest was increasingly drawn was not scholar's literature. On the contrary, it was prevailingly a literature of a new megalopolitan society, industrialized, in part alien, and apparently quite foreign to the American tradition. Its faults were obvious to a competent critic, and he could satirize them ruthlessly—but what it meant, where it was going—these books of Dreiser, Anderson, Cather; poems of Masters, Frost, and Lindsay—such questions forced upon the conscientious scholar the same knowledge not only of text but of sources and influences that he had labored for in his study of writing already historical. These sources and influences were largely outside of Urbana, largely outside of his personal experience, and the authors were less known to him than Arnold and Emerson, Shakespeare and Wordsworth. His ideals of scholarship required of him a new and difficult preparation, this time a preparation not all to be made in books. He realized that any literature must be interpreted with danger, and preached with uncertainty to living minds, by those who themselves are ignorant or disdainful of the cells in which the new blood is flowing. And so Sherman girded up his loins to acquire a new scholarship, in order that he might make the use he longed to make of his laborious study of the past. When he said in response to inquiries as to why he was going, this is what he meant by his ironic "New York needs me" by way of reply.

He came to New York, therefore, neither to escape the "democracy" of the West, nor to encounter the "democracy" of journalism, but rather, as a student, to establish living contacts with con-

temporary literature and with men and women and the typical life from which the new books were springing. As a critic and writer he came in order to reach a wider and more various range of adult minds.

He softened, he humanized, his scope increased, his depths seemed to shallow. The essays he wrote for *Books* are of an extraordinarily high level of excellence. No one of them, I think, equals the best of his earlier work. What is more important, they are different. They are better described as appreciations, interpretations, than as criticisms. They represent a first-class mind at work upon the study of his contemporaries. Only where he writes of the past do the conclusions seem clean-cut and final, the philosophy of criticism sure.

It was an undertaking as arduous as it was creditable in a man already gone into the mid-forties. The pace he set for himself was too swift. The tension of writing, always once, and sometimes twice, a week, with the preparation he thought requisite, was too great. It cut him off from contacts in New York which might have shortened his time of adjustment. It forced the use of critical opinion left over from his earlier phases which did not belong in what was essentially a period of study. If he could have followed the practice of canny professors who ask for an immediate sabbatical as part of the inducement to take on a new job, the results might have been different. But with no real rest as a preparation for what was to prove a mighty task, he plunged into the business of weekly journalism. A tremendous worker, so that the mere record of his labor for three decades appals or depresses the student or writer who reads these volumes, Sherman tried to study the active world as he had studied the passive world of the past, and report upon it professionally in essays any one of which would have exhausted the scholarship of an ordinary man's month. It killed him. If he had not drowned from heart failure, he would have presumably died suddenly in his bed or at his desk. It killed him, but it was really the magnificent effort of thirty years to make himself worthy of an Emersonian task that was responsible for his lamentable death. He had fought out his energies getting ready for his greatest battle, used, with a scholar's conscience, his last vitality in storing and clearing his mind so that when the moment came for final synthesis he should be ready.

I think that he was nearly ready when he died. I think that Sherman's best decade was ahead of him. Wherever and however that decade might have been spent, he was equipped as no other mind in America was equipped to be the scholar as Emerson defined him—

He is to find consolation in exercising the highest function of human nature. He is one who raises himself from private considerations, and breathes and lives on public and illustrious thoughts. . . . He is to resist the vulgar prosperity that retrogrades ever into barbarism. . . . The study of letters shall no longer be a name for pity, for doubt, and for sensual indulgence.

If these passages ring too loud as is the way of Emerson out of his context, and are a bit rhetorical for the lean, ironic scholar with the romantic's soul that we knew, they are just and applicable nevertheless.

He died in a great cause, but nevertheless self-defeated. For his own welfare he put off too long that search for happiness and a personal philosophy of which he writes so poignantly in his journal and letters in the last year. He had lived, or tried to live, in two worlds, that was the trouble, and for twenty-five years he had been at odds with both. Circumstance and his New England heritage placed him in the academic society, a society still Federal and aristocratic in its ideals, and now Germanic in its insistence upon scientific ends. There he was perforce radical and caustic, but at heavy costs to himself, since his rôle of crusader kept him on the periphery of university action and away from personal contact with the traffickers in university thought. And yet his fiery rage against the evils of academic institutionalism, plus his strenuous duties as a teacher and administrator, and his still more strenuous labors as a scholar, kept him for twenty years away from that other and broader society where the spirit of the adults whom he had taught in their youth was undergoing such rapid and such violent changes. There (Emersonian that he was) he longed to be. To that audience he longed to speak direct, but must first conclude his private wars,

sharpen his weapons until they could prevail, and know his own mind, both as scholar and as American, both as critic and philosopher.

I say that he was self-defeated because it is clear also that he never won through to the solid footholds of the men with whom he certainly ranked himself. He did not reach the steady insistence upon doctrine of a Babbitt, the philosophic consistency of a More, the complete articulateness of that real conservative, H. L. Mencken, chiefly because he was more ambitious than any of them and set his goal higher. Nor did he ever attain that suavity of literary style which reflects the serene balance of a Montaigne, an Emerson, or a Goethe. His letters are better reading than his essays, which to the end betray the 'nineties (his youth) in their too careful phrasing, and succeed not as wholes but by brilliant flashes of perception and critical *aperçus* not to be forgotten. I do not say that he was defeated in his achievements, and I do not believe it. Nevertheless, I regard Stuart Sherman as more than the fine critic, the influential teacher, the redoubtable antagonist which he certainly was. I regard him as a great man who lacked only a parasang or two of the journey to reach his height.

As it was, his writing will be assimilated into the minds of his generation and be more valuable in its metabolism than in its own texture. As a critique on academicism, as a defense of the true democracy of culture, his ideas are explicit enough, but as a critical philosophy they had only half emerged, were only half articulate, and must live on in other men. Instinctive and just as were his sympathies with the modern spirit, he never made the generalization which would have given unity to his whole career, and explained his long confusion of friends and foes. Among all the philosophies he wrestled with there is little mention of the philosophy of science, and it was never made clear to him that the mechanistic materialism which, from the safe haven of Urbana, he attacked in Dreiser and the realists, had a true relation to the faith in fact and measurement upon which the academic scholarship he attacked so bitterly ultimately rested. He fought the pedants with their own weapons, but when he turned to the extra-mural world he encountered this same materialism, now vital and productive because it inspired the most vigorous energies of an epoch. Against its living strength, the abstract humanism of More and Babbitt seemed of no avail, and so at last he broke with them; broke also with his own earlier dogmatism, where in fine wrath he had opposed order to disorder, as if the naughty child of modernism could be reformed by an hour with Milton and Aristotle. Studying the child, he began to love it; saw that it had idealisms of its own, found its materialism more engaging than the professors', realized that every generation makes its amendments to the eternal laws, and that often the amendments are as essential to a true understanding as the laws. But he was confused at the end by the contradictions of modernism as he had been confused at the beginning by the obstinacy of scholarship in defeating its own true ends of culture. There are indications in his last letters and journals that he was coming at last to understand the nature of that pseudo-science which made materialists of a whole generation. But there was no time, no reserves of strength left. He died just short of synthesis.

He was the last banner bearer of that romantic American idealism which looked beyond the Alleghenies toward a new world in the Middle West. No one will try that again! He was a dramatic figure in the difficult transition from the old confident Emersonism that took so much for granted, to the future of an industrialized country which will have to build a new idealism on a disillusioning past. The next leader of his persuasion will be urban, scientific, realistic (though not a materialist) and will speak for an America that Sherman, like the rest of us, was just beginning to comprehend. He will not leave Concord too late, for he will never live in Concord, and that will be his loss, but a gain for the better understanding of an age where a philosopher can no longer afford to neglect what is happening beyond his navel. And yet in essentials he must stand where Sherman stood or something that seems to us indispensable for the good life will have died in the American tradition. We shall have become the merely busy animals that today we often seem.