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## A French Novelist Penetrates Africa

TRAVELS IN THE CONGO—By Andre Gide; Alfred A. Knopf, New York; \$5.

On July 21 while nearing the western coast of Africa on the "Asise," Andre Gide started keeping a diary in which he noted peculiarities of the people he met and of new scenes as the ship touched at various points on the coast before arriving at Brazzaville, on the Congo River. This practice he maintained more or less intermittently until the fourteenth of the following May, when the party, consisting of two white men and from 60 to 80 porters, arrived at Douala on the border of Nigeria. They had completed a great circle, whose farthest western point was Rafai in the Belgian Congo, and northern point, Lake Chad.

One of his first observations on the character of the natives as seen through the eyes of their rulers is, "The less intelligent the white man is, the more stupid he thinks the black." He finds a succession of villages along the road, where crops of ceareas, rice, millet, maize, castor oil, cotton, taro, oil palms and bananas are grown; but points out that these are only the mask of prosperity, for the people are not of high grade. They have been subjected only two years before that they lived in the bush, and the older among them will not let themselves be tamed. There are large quantities of children about, and some of them, when they see the motor approaching, sit or lie down in the middle of the road.

### Monotony Depressing.

At Bambari he sees a dance given by the Dakpas in which 28 little boy dancers, painted white from head to foot, and wearing spiked helmets, dance gravely in Indian file to the sound of 23 earthen or wooden trumpets. On December 9, having arrived at Bossoum, he gives the sum of his impressions of the journey as follows: "The absence of individuality, of individualization—the impossibility of differentiating—which depressed me so much at the beginning of my journey, is what I suffer from too in the

landscape. From one end of the horizon to the other, wherever my eye settles, there is not a single point to which I wish to go. But how pure the air is! How beautiful the light!"

While ascending the Logone River in whale boats, crafts about 40 feet long, made of plates of sheet iron and with a roofing of mats arranged arch-wise in the middle, Gide notes that there is nearly 40 degrees difference of the shade temperature between day and night. The natives light fires at night and use blankets, but their toll in the hot sun in the daytime taxes many and pneumonia is frequent among them. Later he notes that the thermometer registers 109 degrees under the veranda, and 113 degrees in the village of Mala in the afternoon. This was on March 19. The last stage of the journey is overland to Yaounde, where they take a train to Douala where a ship is about to sail for France.

### Comparison With His Fiction.

While Gide was in the bush he received word that his novel "Les Faux-Monnayeurs" was published. This book has been translated into English as "The Counterfeiters," and has become widely known, partly because so many have claimed that it is so modern in its psychological ramifications that they did not understand it. Another novel, "Lafcadio's Adventures," originally "The Vatican Swindle," a farcical story of adventure, has also been translated and published over here. To one who has read his brilliant novels, this book of travel may not prove to be up to expectations. In the first place, it is a matter-of-fact, day-to-day record such as any merchant, in the Congo on business, might have kept in his travels. The notes appear to have been left as originally made, and not worked over and expanded into a running narrative. Neither the natives nor the country appear to be interesting. Gide, of course, is above the devices of false coloring, romanticizing and suppressing or derogating practiced by some travel writers. All the country he passed through was under control of the government, the natives in touch with civilization were engaged in primitive industry under French direction. As Gide had no contacts other than those of the tourist, he keeps something of the tourist viewpoint. As a trained observer, he sets down the significant facts, and spends less time than the reader wishes in telling what he thinks about them.

A. H.