

OF BOOKS, MEN
and THINGS

A BOOK of unusual merit off the presses today is Andre Gide's, "Congo," an advance copy of which I have had on my desk a week without having had chance to more than glance at it.

Gide is best known in the United States as a novelist and ranks among the first five or six in France today. His "Adventures of Lofacadio, has had some circulation in Bayonne during the past year and has gained widespread commendation everywhere.

The new volume reveals Gide in the light of an explorer and scientist and the few pages I have read indicate an unusual power of observation combined with an ability to present facts graphically.

Gide is much concerned with the French and Belgian colonial government in west Africa and indeed it appears from his book as though someone should be. While not as brutal and extreme as our own treatment of the American Indians, the Europeans in Africa are exploiting the natives to no small degree if Gide is to be believed; and he is a reliable man.

Trader Horn, who by the way is in New York again and very tired of it, hinted at some of the abuses in his first volume. The trouble seems to be that the Europeans in Africa can no more resist plundering the natives than Americans and Europeans have been able to stop plundering elsewhere.

The difference between the American and African situation seems to be this, that whereas in America the native Indians were hunted out and exterminated, or exterminated by more peaceful means, the natives in Africa seem to flourish and increase.

The day may come in Africa, as indeed it may in Asia, when the natives will be powerful enough to turn on their oppressors and make them pay for all they have taken. But that day is still far distant.

Incidentally all the explorers and traders from Captain Swift to Trader Horn have realized that Africa is a land of great natural resources, the top soil of which has not been tapped.

In the future the cry to young Americans may be, "Go East, young man, go East.—S. D. G.

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Bayonne N.J.
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It is a depressing picture that Gide draws of the natives in Africa and a serious indictment of both the Belgian and the much-vaunted French colonial systems. Above all he condemns the terrorist policy prevalent in certain sections and finds that the natives respond as much to kindness as they cool to abuse.

This journal of Gide's is not the most connected volume possible. It neglects scientific certainties of terrain, geology, statistics and customs for the more personal details of native life. Yet what it loses it seeks to gain by intimacy and since supplementary knowledge may be had from almost any scientific work on the Congo the loss is not great.—S. D. G.

"TRAVELS in the Congo," by Andre Gide (Alfred A. Knopf) is such an important book that I shall make no attempt to cover it in one column, nor indeed have I the inclination to do so. Of the many books I have read this year I do not know another, with the exception of Abbe Dimnet's, that has the charm of this one.

It is an account in the form of a journal of the travels of the author, Gide, and his young companion, Marc Allegret, through more than 2,000 miles of the French and Belgian Congo by water. So intimate is it that one parts with sorrow from Gide, Marc, Adoum and even their pet sloth at the end of the volume.

But there is more than charm to the book. Gide, who is one of the foremost living novelists allowed little to escape his observing eyes in his travels in this land of the blacks and what he had to say is worth listening to. Unbiased and with an open mind, Gide left Brazzaville on the west coast pleasure bent to visit friends far in the interior.

He wrote what he saw, what he did and what he felt and almost unconsciously he built one of the strongest cases for the natives that has ever been put into print. Whereas the colonists declared the natives treacherous, ungrateful, immoral and stupid, he found the reverse true and concluded that their own avarice had blinded the colonists.

There were exceptions of course. In the interior he found one doctor devoting his life to curing elephantiasis among certain tribes while the missions of Catholic Fathers he found based foremost on medical lines. But on the whole he discovered the native cheated of his birthright, abused, neglected and abandoned. He found them in some parts forced to pay twice what white men pay for things and everywhere he found their lot genuinely miserable.