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# SIX IN ONE

THE RUSSELL READER. Edited by Leonard Russell.  
(Cassell. 25s.)

By H. E. BATES

THE American idea of packing half a dozen novels, abridged or dehydrated, into one over-fat container is not one that appeals to me; nor, I think, to any loving reader.

Mr. Leonard Russell, whose amusing skill as editor of "The Saturday Book" has already made him an assured, expert harvester, has had a much better idea. "The Russell Reader" is a large solid haystack of a book, handsomely built, into which the most discriminating reader can cut and come again without any misgiving that the attractive exterior conceals, as so often happens in haystacks, an ashy useless heart.

The secret behind this handsome bargain piece lies in the fact that as Literary Editor of this journal Mr. Russell not only "reads, reads in, or looks at, thousands of new books a year," but that he enjoys it so much that he vows it to be the most exciting job in London. As if this were not enough, he also reads books privately, for pure pleasure, in his spare time. He is in fact a loving reader. In consequence "The Russell Reader" is not really garnered from the wide fields of professional editorship; it is a highly personal selection from Mr. Russell's private acres.

Another secret of good anthologies being contrast, Mr. Russell has been astute enough to let each of his six books shine, both in length and quality, against the other: the velvety ease of Virginia Woolf's "Flush" against the brittle, shining French polish of Louise de Vilmorin's "Madame de"; the abrasive, tin-tacky quality of Kingsley Aml's "Lucky Jim" against the suave light wit of Evelyn Waugh's "Scott-King's Modern Europe"; the disarming narrative simplicity of "The Borrowers," Mary Norton's little-known but delightful piece of fancy that the editor backs to enter the heaven of children's classics side by side with "Alice" and "The Wind in the Willows," against the sheer dazzling deftness of another unjustly obscure work, Roy Fuller's "The Second Curtain," in many ways the best value in the volume.

"Madame de" is a fascinating oddity from France (translated by Duff Cooper and written by a countess encouraged to try her hand at writing by André Malraux) which few of you will have come across: a *conte*, an artificial fairy-tale of adventures with a pair of diamond earrings, that is as smooth, iridescent and unliving as mother-of-pearl. Pertinently Mr. Russell asks what Maupassant would have made of it. I can only think he would have treated it with an acetylene savagery; and after savagery, tenderness. It is not within Louise de Vilmorin's capacity to do either, but in its impeccable glitter the book has the oddest power of fascination.

As to "Scott-King's Modern Europe" Mr. Russell suggests that it is a far better book than the more celebrated "The Loved One," and I warmly agree. In "The

Loved One" the sneer turns suddenly sour on its creator and it is not possible to escape the impression, I think, that it is a far more devastating portrait of the satirist than of the satirised. "Scott-King's Modern Europe," on the other hand, is done with a certain quipping geniality that I find wears supremely well, convinces and finishes dryly, like good sherry.

"Flush," as its author's distaste for it implied, is, it seems to me, a dullish work, reminding me so much of a piece of purple velvet from which the gloss has worn. You feel, I think, that somehow the stars were not auspicious when Virginia Woolf took it up as relaxation—like throwing stones against a wall.

By contrast Roy Fuller, better known as a poet than a novelist, a state of affairs that as the Irish girl said of another circumstance ought to be remedied in a single night, clearly began "The Second Curtain" when all his stars stood high and handsomely in position. It is an extraordinarily good piece in the Graham Greene *genre*. Indeed Mr. Russell claims it, by no means extravagantly either, to be even better.

I will not give away the secret of Miss Mary Norton's enchanting "The Borrowers"; and I prefer to say no more of "Lucky Jim" than that it produces in me much the same effect as washing my face with sandpaper. I cannot conclude, however, without a word about the book's illustrators, Leonard Rosoman, Lynton Lamb, Ironicus, Robin Jacques, Ferelith Eccles-Williams, and Heather Standring. Mr. Russell, who happens to like pictures as well as books, could hardly have chosen them more happily.

## —NEW—

WINTER QUARTERS. By Alf  
THE NAKED HILL. By Gert  
12s. 6d.)

BITTER VICTORY. By René H  
THE COTTON PICKERS. By E

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MR. DUGGAN'S lean prose tells a leathery, wind-beaten story. Camul and Acco are minor Gallic noblemen in the southernmost of Caesar's three parts. They fall foul of the Gravesian Goddess that rules their sheltered valley; and for everyone's peace of mind they leave, in blue trousers and red cloaks, to join the Julian cavalry. They campaign against the Germans and take part in that massacre of nearly half a million tribespeople which Caesar, you remember, was so bland about. Then, by easy stages, still searching for a land where the Goddess has no power, to Rome; and thence, with Marcus Crassus's ill-conceived expedition, to plunder Seleucia only to find, after a soft winter at Antioch, that the