

## A Cooke's tour

Alistair Cooke. *Six Men*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977. 205 pp. Illus. US\$8.95.

In this work Cooke treats us with a dual view of the subjects: what they appeared to the public to be in their various capacities and what the inner men were as he came to know them personally. So we meet the much harassed Chaplin, the prince charming, Edward VIII, whose abdication shocked the British Empire and which was followed by thirty-five years of enforced exile, the much maligned Mencken, the Presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson and particularly his U.N. activities, and the tough guy of the movies, Humphrey Bogart. We must not forget the dual picture we get of the author.

But what of Russell? Cooke styles him as the lord of reason. True enough. It is known that Russell read Cooke's columns regularly, but there is little evidence here that this author read Russell save for *Autobiography* and Ronald Clark's biography.

What is of prime interest is the fact that Cooke gives us a detailed account of a 1950 train trip he took with Russell from New York to Washington. Russell had invited him to accompany him.

We are treated with Russell's typical, trenchant comments about H.G. Wells, Bernard Shaw, Tennyson, Browning, Gladstone and Lenin. As to the last mentioned, Russell said "I think he was the most evil man--and certainly one of the most imperturbable--I ever met." As to all the comments, Cooke says "... it was clear, he was much more interested in the private whimsies of the great", even as Cooke is throughout this volume.

One of the amusing scenes depicted is the rapid reading by Russell of the paperback detective stories he had purchased at Penn Station before their departure. "He was a page reader. It could not have been more than fifteen minutes later when he dropped the first book on

the floor and started on a second one."

We also read of Russell's address at one of the annual forums of the *New York Herald Tribune* and his appearance at a Parliamentary election rally in Glasgow, both of which Cooke attended.

The author does not allow the opportunity to pass to comment on Russell's sexual adventures. "His 'need of women' was abiding until God knows what age, and he was the first to admit it."

In sum, Cooke says: "For he was at once a first-class intellect, a man of unyielding, if cantankerous, honesty, and the possessor of one of the master styles of the English language." "He grew increasingly frail, but he was never senile...."

It is not recommended that one be a page reader of this book, except in spots.

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