

New Optional Books

HERE are details of the Readers Union Optional books for November:

A General History of the Sciences

Edited by René Taton

Volume I: Ancient and Medieval Science:
From Prehistory to A.D. 1450.

The November Supplementary Title

'THE history of science is not only a natural and increasingly trod bridge between the two cultures, but is also an integral part of history. In whatever way school and university courses may develop—the present phase being best regarded as experimental—it is predictable that interest in them will increase. Such a change is long overdue: the classification of early cultures by the materials and techniques that they used in making tools; a sudden introduction to the intellectual component of science as part of *The Legacy of Greece*; a reference to the Arabs as custodians of learning during the Dark Ages, with a dash of alchemy thrown in; and finally the Renaissance as far as Newton, and then another gap until the Industrial Revolution—this is at least a recognizable caricature of what many now teaching were themselves taught, with nuclear energy and space travel as more recent fragments of knowledge. The alternative and much more interesting view is that the techniques, knowledge and ideas current at any time are part of the history of man's development.

'The first volume of the *General History of the Sciences*, edited by Professor René Taton, is unique in being compiled by a team of specialists with a general directive not to be too specialized in their use of language. It says much for his perspicacity, and perhaps also for his firmness, that scholarship, narrative and explanation have been so happily combined. One result of this method is that the score or so of contributors give between them a genuinely world view of their subject, such as no one author could compass. Examples are the inclusion of India and China in the Old World, and Mayan civilization in the New. . . .

'Judging from this sample, Professor Taton's *General History* will be influential as well as useful. In the words of the preface, the history of science, "since it impinges on science, philosophy and general history . . . is a powerful means of combating the modern tendency to pigeon-hole all branches of knowledge into separate compartments". It is a means, in particular, by which administrators, trained in arts subjects, may gain an idea of what science is about, and scientists themselves obtain a broader view of their subjects. Professor Taton's injunctions to contributors have been almost uniformly well observed. They avoid both footnotes and attempts to dazzle, leaving the armoury of scholarship to bibliographies. Their book is handsomely produced and illustrated, and the translator, Mr H. A. Pomerans, deserves more than titular mention. If lucidity and interest are as well maintained in later periods, this will indeed be a unique contribution to history.'

The Times Educational Supplement.

552 pages. Plates and diagrams. Bibliographies and Indexes.

Thames & Hudson £6 6s; SFBC 75s, post free

SHAPES AND STORIES

by Geoffrey and Jane Grigson

The November Additional

'SUDDENLY in a jungle far away, which we shall never visit, in Java, India or Africa, a Tiger jumps, a Tiger crashes through the branches and stiff leaves. You don't hear a sound from the breaking leaves or the Tiger, or the Buffalo, which is being killed and eaten. The picture is like a dream, and in dreams things move, and ought to make a noise, and you hear nothing at all.

'In this dream-jungle everything matters: the noiseless light, the colours, the leaves, the trees, the flowers, which are so exact and sharp, they are all as important as the Tiger and the Buffalo.

'Henry Rousseau le douanier, the Excise Man, painter of this jungle, never went out of France. But he used to go into the tall tropical steamy hothouses of the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, and stare at the leaves of unfamiliar plants. He imagined eyes glittering among the leaves, which with flowers and fruit seemed to him to be growing silently around tigers, lions, buffaloes, monkeys, huntsmen, serpent-charmers, girls, owls and birds of paradise. For years he painted such dream-jungles, picture after picture, from 1891 to 1910.

'No one taught Rousseau to paint. He was an ordinary old man in most other ways, he had been a soldier, he gave music lessons, he had worked as an excise-man at one of the gates into Paris, where people paid a duty or tax on the goods they brought in to sell.

'A poet, a painter and his wife, and Rousseau's old landlord bought a grave for him after his death; and the poet, Guillaume Apollinaire, remembering the wonderful silent light in his pictures, wrote a poem to be inscribed on his gravestone:

'Dear Rousseau, listen
We say how do you do
Delaunay, his wife, Mr Queval and I:
Let our things in free at the gate of the sky,
We shall be bringing you brushes, canvases, paints,
And in the real light up there
You shall give all your blessed free hours
To painting (as you painted me once)
The face of the stars.'

John Baker 30s; SFBC 25s, post free

VINTAGE THURBER (in two volumes)

The November Extra

From *Fables for Our Time*:

The Bear Who Let It Alone

IN THE woods of the Far West there once lived a brown bear who could take it or let it alone. He would go into a bar where they sold mead, a fermented drink made of honey, and he would have just two drinks. Then he would put some money on the bar and say, 'See what the bears in the back room will have,' and he would go home. But finally he took to drinking by himself most of the day. He would reel home at night, kick over the umbrella stand, knock down the bridge lamps and ram his elbows through the windows. Then he would collapse on the floor and lie there until he went to sleep. His wife was greatly distressed and his children were very frightened.

At length the bear saw the error of his ways and began to reform. In the end he became a famous teetotaler and a persistent temperance lecturer. He would tell everybody that came to his house about the awful effects of drink, and he would boast about how strong and well he had become since he gave up touching the stuff. To demonstrate this he would stand on his head and on his hands and he would turn cartwheels in the house, kicking over the umbrella stand, knocking down the bridge lamps and ramming his elbows through the windows. Then he would lie down on the floor, tired by his healthful exercise, and go to sleep. His wife was greatly distressed and his children were very frightened.

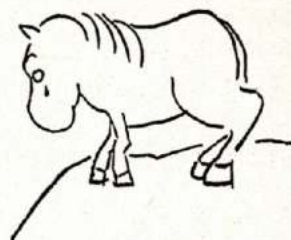
Moral: You might as well fall flat on your face as lean over too far backward.

Volume I: 630 pages. Introduction. Volume II: 550 pages.

Hamish Hamilton 84s (the set);

SFBC 58s (the set), post free

PLEASE ORDER SETS



The Hopeless Quandary.

EGYPT IN COLOUR

Photographs by Roger Wood

Commentary by Margaret S. Drower

The November Special Title

'ONE can . . . take the keenest delight in the glorious colour photographs taken by Roger Wood, here reproduced in a manner which does the greatest credit to the scientific craftsmen employed by the publishers. It is good to be reminded of the truly majestic art which the Egyptians were producing as early as the third century B.C., and to see once again the finest pieces in the Tutankhamen collection glowing in blue and gold. The introduction and the explanatory paragraphs (accompanying each plate) by Margaret S. Drower could not be bettered.'

Illustrated London News.

159 pages. 59 hand-mounted coloured plates.

Thames & Hudson £7 7s; SFBC 98s, post free