

ested not so much in the great figures in America's military and political history as in the people who made countless tiny revolutions "so little noticed because they touched Americans everywhere and every day." "Their names," he says, "were not embalmed in the titles of treaties or epoch-making legislation. Their banner was the American Standard of Living." In 160 pages of duotone portraits and brief captions, we get an album of the people who, for better or worse, created the modern American society. All of the familiar faces, such as Thomas Edison and Cyrus McCormick, are there. In addition, we get to see Jesse Nichols, who invented the shopping center; Alexander Stewart, who built the first department store; Lewis Tappan, who thought up the idea of credit ratings; and Herman Hollerith, whom we have to thank for the punch card.

The captions are particularly fine. In fewer than 100 words, I got a fascinating history of the development of Sears, Roebuck from a mail-order watch-repair company to a multimillion-dollar corporation, and learned that Roebuck wound up an employee of his own company, working in the publicity department. Good caption writing is one of the neglected arts of publishing, and it is a delight to see that there are a few who still know how to do it.

THE publishing industry's equivalent of the Bicentennial stuffed pillow with "Hello to Mom from Mount Vernon" stitched across the top is Hans Holzer's *Spirits of '76* (Bobbs-Merrill, \$7.95). Holzer is a harmless enough scrivener who has made quite a good thing out of merchandising the occult. No matter what you're looking for, whether it's Camelot or a cuff link, a long-lost brother or the Ghost of Christmas Past, Holzer and his little band of psychic soldiers will scratch it up for you. This time, he is off on a tour of the historic sites with a lady swami named Irene, who turns out to be a veritable truffle-hound when it comes to sniffing out psychic phenomena. My favorite was their visit to the Michie Tavern in Virginia, where Irene's great sensitivity could still detect the vibrations of either the strains of the first waltz danced in America or the aftereffects of an illicit affair between Thomas Jefferson and a local lady named Mrs. John Walker. Irene wasn't sure which. If this sort of thing is your dish of tea, I suppose you will shudder appropriately. If not, you'll just squirm.

A happier development in Bicentennial publishing has been the reissuing of standard works in new editions. Two of the most enjoyable are the *Life of George Washington*, by Washington Irving (Sleepy Hollow Restorations, \$19.95), and *The Spirit of 'Seventy-Six*, edited by Henry Steele Commager and Richard B. Morris (Harper & Row, \$25). Irving had looked on the completion of his massive five-volume biography of Washington in 1859 as the "crowning effort" of his literary career. The original work has been condensed into a single volume that captures Irving's original warm-hearted and affectionate portrait of his greatest hero. *The Spirit of 'Seventy-Six* (originally published in 1958) is, quite simply, the best thing of its kind ever done. Commager and Morris have created a massive anthology of the letters, diaries, speeches, and writings of the men on both sides of the Revolution. Arranged chronologically, and with an excellent short preface to each section, *Spirit* tells the story of the Revolution according to the men who were there. ©

Two in the End Zone

Sports in America

by James Michener

Random House, 466 pp., \$12.50

The Joy of Sports

by Michael Novak

Basic Books, 357 pp., \$10.95

Reviewed by George Plimpton

JAMES MICHENER and Michael Novak, the eminent author and distinguished social philosopher respectively, turn out to be men obsessed by sports—to a degree that puzzles even themselves. Michener admits that despite his better judgment he could never feel comfortable in the presence of Bennett Cerf, his publisher at Random House, because he knew Cerf to be a detested Yankee fan. Novak drives his wife to torment by creeping out to the garage with a plate of dinner to listen to a broadcast of a distant baseball game on the car radio. Two books have emerged from these passions—Michener's *Sports in America* and Novak's *The Joy of Sports*.

Their tours of self-education are quite different: Michener moves through the great subcontinent of American sport, his notebook at hand, with the assiduous care of a John Gunther. An enormous labor. The chapter headings suggest the range and the tone of his approach—"Sports and Upward Escalation," "Women in Sports," "Children in Sports," "Sports and Health," "Government Control," and so on. His interviewees range from horseplayers to retired athletes to directors of university athletic programs. The text abounds with charts, cartoons to rest the eye, graphs, statistics (one learns that a man mowing a lawn by power expends 250 calories an hour; by hand, 270)—the guiding criteria of all this being that sports should be fun, health-enhancing, and obligated to provide public entertainment. The health criterion is paramount, Michener's great antagonist being flag. He ends a chapter on horseplayers by mourning that such people derive very few health benefits from their pursuits ("They get little fresh air . . . they rarely move about").

Michael Novak's is a different sort of journey: an attempt to discover the root of his own passion and to learn what it is that makes the American, especially the male, behave with such lunatic susceptibility when it comes to sports. Novak's conclusion is that sports provide a sort of civil religion that is very high on the scale of human requirements. Spectators do not go to sports events, or watch them on television, simply to be entertained—they are driven to them by a natural impulse that is radically religious, "an impetus for freedom, a respect for ritual limits, a zest for symbolic meaning, and

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The Summer Arts

a longing for perfection." He sees sports as liturgies (though without dogmatic creed), so that going to a stadium is "half like going to a political rally, half like going to church."

He goes on. Sports are far more serious in the culture than even the dramatic arts—a contention that Novak illustrates by comparing the involvement of spirit while watching football on TV with the relaxed stupor induced by the average dramatic program. Michener does not think losing can be compared to death; Novak does. Sports, Novak suggests, are much closer to the primal mysteries of youth and aging, fortune and misfortune, perfection and decay, strategy and contingency—providing, at the least, a pagan sense of godliness. Great athletes become "priests." After they become superstars they do not quite belong to themselves. "Great passions are involved in them." Indeed, sports are rituals that concern the very survival of humanity on this planet.

THE crescendo of encomiums continues. Indeed, we are told that "participation in sports is a foretaste of the eschaton." (So *that's* what the hereafter is all about—a softball game on the fields of the Lord.)

As one who is also a passionate sports follower (and softball player), and who writes often on the subject of sports, I read all this with increasing excitement. I have always felt a twinge of weakness about being moved by what happens when adults compete at children's games.

What a pleasure to read Novak on football: "He who has not drunk deep of the virtues of football has missed one of the closest brushes with transcendence that humans are allowed."

Very heady and comforting stuff. Indeed, I was tempted to rush with the news to my father, who for as long as I can remember has studiously disdained the sports section of the newspaper as a "waste of time." He wonders when I am going to move on with my writing to more Serious Things. My goodness: Novak refers to those who have contempt for sports as a "danger to the human race . . . drones in the honeycomb" (though I think I can resist pressing this view on Father).

Alas, Novak turns out to have very little enthusiasm or admiration for the sportswriters of the day—with the exception of Roger Kahn, who writes regularly for *Esquire*. Novak complains that sportswriters either do not like their subject or feel that their function is to prick the bubble of illusion surrounding sport. This bothered me until I read that Novak himself has a predilection for the sort of exuberant sports journalism that was typical of the twenties and thirties—the "hot" sportswriting, overflowing with elation and headline prose, which today is found only in high school newspapers. He would (as they do) substitute colorful words for the mundane—"turf" for "field," "ripped" for "ran," "smash" for "hit" ("the noise of clashing shoulderpads cries out for onomatopoeia")—accepting, or perhaps "cleaving himself to" would be more appropriate, the theory that a correlative exists between the spirit of an event and how it should be described. "Sportswriting, matching its subject, must . . . reflect enthusiasm."

Sportswriting of this sort, of course, is very much out of

fashion (Novak blames it on the intimidation of television), but frankly I would hope it is out of *date* as well. To support his preference, Novak reprints the text of what he calls "the most influential sports story in our nation's history"—Grantland Rice's familiar text on the 1924 Notre Dame–Army game, which starts: "Outlined against a blue-gray October sky, the Four Horsemen rode again. . . ." However memorable, it is surprising how quaint and overwritten, rather like a hurried piece of pastoral Kipling, the story appears on rereading. Novak defends it mightily: how precise the words "blue-gray" are to anyone who has seen an Indiana autumnal sky (forgetting that the game was played in New York City's Polo Grounds). He answers Red Smith's perky query ("I wonder what angle Granny watched the game from if he could see them outlined against the blue-gray October sky") by suggesting that the answer is obvious: Rice indeed imagined himself down on the field, flat on his back, and then pulled his vision back ("like a camera on a Good-year blimp") and looked once again.

An attachment to the unabashed exuberance of the twenties is very much the tone of Novak's book, and a proper reflection of its title. Present-day sportswriters are by no means the only people letting down the side by not caring enough. Novak feels a commingling of despair and anguish for Howard Cosell, for thinking of sports as an escape; for the University of Chicago, for giving up intercollegiate sports and suffering a "kind of stuffiness and arrogance" as a result; for the Ivy Leagues, for their false mockery of how much sports do in fact mean to them.

Not surprisingly, Novak ends his book with a chapter on "Reforms"—most of them calculated to widen the eye in astonishment. "More is not better" is his refrain: cut down the size of the NFL, shorten the season, knock off the Game of the Week; establish limits to broadcaster's logorrhea; reduce the degree of specialization in sports; set voluntary limits to the salaries of coaches and players.

All of this is controversial enough. But to disagree with Novak is not to suggest any lack of admiration for the quality of his views, or for the vigor with which he offers them. He has produced an enormously entertaining and thought-provoking volume—surprisingly so, since literary attempts to explain common pleasures invariably seem to go awry (Max Eastman's *Enjoyment of Humor*—"we must understand that all words beginning with *w* are funny . . .").

At the very least, with his lofty diagnosis of our passions, Novak has assuaged the guilty feelings of those who begin to fidget at the dinner table, heads nodding helplessly, the thread of the conversation lost to the knowledge that an NBA playoff game is just about to begin on television in the library. *The Joy of Sports* offers a brilliant analysis of what ails such people.

I once felt guilty going out to the ball park on a Tuesday afternoon. But the theory that play, not work, civilizes men and women is enervating to say the least. I can feel smug and sanctimonious settling into my seat, notepads left at home. In fact, this is the last review I'll ever write. Thanks to Mr. Novak, I've got my priorities all evened out. "Play is reality . . . work is diversion and escape." If I find Mr. Novak sitting next to me out at the ball park, I intend to remark to him as follows: "I much prefer your Ethic to the Protestant Work." I hope he'll think to invite me home to dinner. I wonder, should the need be apparent, if he'll let me borrow a pair of shoes. ©

Easy Reading, Woody to Wodehouse



by William Cole

I'VE never quite understood why we're supposed to read fluff in the summer. Do brains fry in the heat? But if "light reading" means something not physically difficult to carry, well, okay. I'll go along. Here's some reading that is easily carried—a personal choice of good things observed recently in bookstores, and things to come up during the summer. Most are trade books, some are mass-market. (You never know what you'll find at your local newsdealer; mine seems to have nothing but gothics, thrillers, crockpot cookbooks, and such tasty titles as *Hot, Used Thighs*—no, I didn't make that up—and *Jet Set Orgy*.)

Without Feathers, by Woody Allen (Warner Books, \$1.95). Essays and plays by the finest humorist since Robert Benchley.

Robert Altman's Nashville (Bantam, \$2.25). Script, photos, lyrics from the great movie.

American Review 24 (Bantam, \$2.45). One of the best issues yet of Theodore Solotaroff's magazine/book of new writing. Long piece by Norman Mailer on Henry Miller, and a first-rate story of Bronx Irish-Americans by Charles Simmons.

Humboldt's Gift, by Saul Bellow (Avon, \$1.95, September). The richest and best novel of 1975.

The Great Train Robbery, by Michael Crichton (Bantam, \$1.95). A breezy thriller with a side dish of manners and mores of Victorian England.

Through Fields of Clover and *Mrs. Wallop*, by Peter DeVries (Popular Library, \$1.50 and \$1.25 respectively). A couple of swatches of yarn from our funniest novelist.

Ragtime, by E. L. Doctorow (Bantam, \$2.25, August). Bantam paid almost two million bucks for this, and they're going to break their necks to get it back. You'll hear about it.

Leaving Cheyenne, by Larry McMurtry (Popular Library, \$1.25). Two men and a woman in pre-World War II Texas. Funny and moving.

Eight of Nancy Mitford's books about upper-class English are coming out from Popular Library, two novels per volume at \$1.95 each. Start with *The Pursuit of Love* and *Love in a Cold Climate*. Giggles with the aristocrats.

A Dance to the Music of Time, by Anthony Powell (Popular Library, 4 vols., \$2.50 each). The first eight books (two to a volume) of Powell's twelve-book magnum opus will come out during the course of the summer. You can get yourself deeply involved in this longest novel of all time. Postwar England, a huge cast of characters.

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, by Hunter S. Thomp-

son (Popular Library, \$1.75). Two really disgusting druggies (when they're not drunk) in dreadful Vegas. Outrageous, funny, revealing.

Leave It to Psmith, by P. G. Wodehouse, with an introduction by Wilfrid Sheed (Vintage, \$1.95). I can't resist recommending this classic even though it was published last year. It has one of the great opening lines in all literature:

At the open window of the great library of Blandings Castle, drooping like a wet sock, as was his habit when he had nothing to prop his spine against, the Earl of Emsworth, that amiable and boneheaded peer, stood gazing out over his domain.

Penguin books have always been foremost among quality paperbacks, and you can always find something you want to read among their displays. The good news is that you can, in the next few months, expect to see more and more Penguins in the bookstores. Penguin Books in England has recently purchased our Viking Press, and they have merged editorial and sales forces and are expanding the American paperback operations. I had a talk recently with Richard Seaver, the American publisher, editor, and translator who has been appointed editorial director of Penguin in New York. Plans are for 250 titles a year. They will be "trade" books, which are sold in bookstores, rather than "mass market" paperbacks, which you'll find on the newsstands and in air terminals and supermarkets. Penguins will come in all formats and prices: expensive art books, mysteries, popular novels, poetry—you name it. By their spines ye shall know them: classics, black; modern classics, gray; Pelicans (serious nonfiction), blue; crime, green; novels, orange; *und so weiter*. Eventually, Penguin will have a backlist of some 2,000 books in print, making it one of the real biggies—along with Anchor and Vintage. (Penguin England now has about 4,500 titles in print.) Right now Penguin prints about one-fifth of its books here, the rest in England, but eventually it'll split the job fifty-fifty.

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