

own professional lights, the Los Angeles police department was unattuned to the ghetto's impatience with the white man's law; led by an able but ailing and headstrong chief, the department's attention to slum relations had been, to say the least, relaxed. Above all, in the seething mass there was a mobile group of Negro youth, often living in degraded conditions, lacking authoritative and responsible parents, jobless (the unemployment rate among Negro males in Watts has at times reached 40 per cent), and feeling hopelessly trapped.

These circumstances had stripped Watts of its tenuous allegiance to middle-class standards and values, leaving its young vagrants resentful and filled with fierce, ambivalent racial pride. Thus could an arrest, when complicated by resistance, touch off violence as disproportionate as the cataclysm of 1914-18 was to the murder of an archduke.

These are the all too familiar generalizations, no doubt as applicable to Detroit now as to Los Angeles then, if in smaller degree. But Robert Conot—and it is the great strength of his book—does not deal in abstractions. *Rivers of Blood, Years of Darkness* is almost extravagantly detailed, skillfully juxtaposing dozens of vignettes and case histories of individual rioters with the unfolding rebellion.

And it coheres, for as an underlying theme Conot adopts the Moynihan theory: that the emasculative stamp of slavery still lies on the Negro family, etched more deeply by discrimination, and now reinforced by obtuse welfare regulations. The case histories confirm this. They thread a predictable way through third- and fourth-generation illegitimacy and paternal desertion to the almost inescapable beginnings in the South. (Of the adults arrested during the riots, 60 per cent or more had been born in Southern states; of the juveniles, only 26 per cent came from unbroken homes.) Such evidence is to a Southerner deeply painful, yet it is indisputable.

Fred Powledge's complementary sub-

ject in *Black Power—White Resistance* is how this monstrous alienation occurred. He traces the ebb of that time of hope when nonviolent demonstrations brought the white South into a real if brief clash with its conscience. He argues that the legal revolution (epitomized by the 1964 Civil Rights Act and previous examples of voluntary desegregation) offered the semblance of liberation without its core. To knock Jim Crow off the fence was exhilarating; but gradually it was realized that, as some had said all along, old Jim was only a front man for deeper, less tractable economic and social ills.

This disillusionment may best be traced, perhaps, in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's abandonment of compassionate, responsible idealism and its succumbing to Stokely Carmichael and the egregious Rap ("spell it any way you want to, honky") Brown.

Mr. Powledge is at his best as a reporter. His almost lyrical evocation of the Albany (Georgia) demonstrations, his shrewd exploration of the "style" of Atlanta's Mayor William Hartsfield are classic.

Despite much fine reporting, *Black Power—White Resistance* is flawed in parts by the glibness endemic in metropolitan journalism when it turns, in lordly condescension, to the Great Out Back, and especially the South. Inevitably traveling connoisseurs of crisis representing the major networks and the big newspapers see stable communities only in moments of agony—when the obvious is heightened, the subtle concealed.

No one who has watched a city wallow in indecision over a minor urban project (let alone a big one) could ever again believe the "power structure" myth so wholeheartedly as Mr. Powledge. Moreover, people who must for good or ill coexist 365 days a year do not confront each other every morning with racing hearts and manifestoes. They are not, in Mr. Powledge's curiously esthetic concept, "pure" in their rituals of social change, and it hardly occurs to them that they should be. Since his reporting is so good, and his argument in the main sound, I wish he had submitted his manuscript to a friendly bout with an *avocatus diaboli*—maybe one of his old Chapel Hill sociology professors, who would have hissed some of the more sophomoric generalizations out of the room in short order.

I have no doubt that the "power structures" of Atlanta and Dallas, such as they are, are duly tintured with cynicism, as Mr. Powledge argues. But it seems like muddled logic to scorn them for changing bad racial habits for professedly expedient reasons. Why not? If the righteous always wore their righteousness like a badge, and if good men

did not do evil as often as evil men do good, we should live a beatified existence. But what a bore it would be.

In spite of minor flaws, both these books are vivid and responsible. The citizen who bases his view of the racial crisis on a careful reading of them will not go far wrong. It is, however, striking that both Conot and Powledge believe that some "black power"—some actual control of city apparatuses by Negroes—is inevitable. Conot's vision of an America relentlessly drifting into two separate cities, one affluent, white, and middle class, the other poor, black, and slum-ridden, is frightening.

Perhaps, after all, the iron law of ghettoization will prove as illusory as most iron laws concocted by social determinists. It would be comforting but dangerous to believe so. Our best hope, these two books suggest, is to make the great try at regeneration that will remold the dispossessed and rootless into members of a stable urban society. Either do that, or make ready for unthinkable alienation—perhaps for what Joseph Alsop recently called "a continent-wide South Africa."

Echoes from Sinai

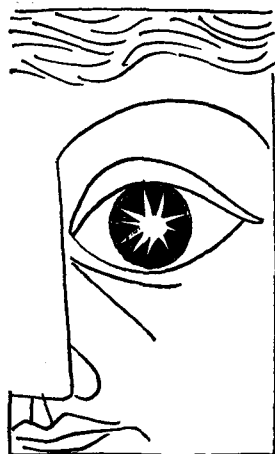
Strike Zion!, by William Stevenson (Bantam. 142 pp. Paperback, 95¢); **Six Days in June: Israel's Fight for Survival**, by Robert J. Donovan and the staff of the Los Angeles Times (Signet. 160 pp. Paperback, 75¢), and **Lightning Out of Israel: The Six-Day War in the Middle East**, by the Associated Press (Prentice-Hall. 159 pp. \$4.95), include photographs and first-person narratives in their accounts of the recent conflict. Geoffrey Godsell is a Middle East authority for the Christian Science Monitor.

By GEOFFREY GODSELL

THESE three books are remarkable feats of journalism and publishing. The two paperbacks were out barely a month after the six-day war in the Middle East was over. The third, the Associated Press's record of the hostilities, took longer to produce; this doubtless played some part in making it in many ways the best of the three, and justifies the publisher's calling it a commemorative edition. Its color photographs are particularly impressive.

But all three books remain journalism rather than history. And, as their titles imply, they relate the story more or less from the Israeli viewpoint. The Arabs, of course, are partly to blame for that, quite irrespective of the merits of one

(Continued on page 36)



Literary Sea Chest

Nabokov: His Life in Art, by Andrew Field (Little, Brown, 397 pp. \$8.95), attempts to examine the novelist's entire literary output during the past half-century. Gerald Kersh's most recent novel was "The Angel and the Cuckoo."

By GERALD KERSH

GOSSIP apart, a writer's life in art is about all the life he ever lives worth mentioning. In the last analysis the best biographies of men of letters are seldom much more than "critical narratives," such as this study of Nabokov is intended to be. A traveling salesman, or a legman on a tabloid, sees more of life at first hand than a Balzac, if he only knew it. By the time that Andrew Jonathan, the "reader to be" to whom, among others, this book is dedicated, is old enough to settle down to it, there will probably be a mass of relevant anecdote to spice it for him which it is neither expedient nor discreet to put out in Nabokov's lifetime.

The literary coyoteries may worry his bones as vogues change, but I don't believe that they will demolish Vladimir Nabokov. There is something purely timeless about *Pnin*, and about *Lolita*, which for all we know may be the Great American Novel. Andrew Field's will not be the last book to be written about him. Meanwhile a work like this has its functions; it does its subject no great harm, will be rewarding to its author, and is likely to be of some comfort to a considerable body of readers who get more spiritual nourishment out of their reading if they can supplement simple enjoyment with a plump capsule of reassuring critical evaluation.

Mr. Field worked hard on this book—there's no getting away from it. In his introductory chapter, "In Place of a Foreword," which is rather charmingly reminiscent both of a boy teaching his grandmother to suck eggs and of a spieler selling lanolin on an Atlantic City boardwalk, he tells of his travails in locating all Nabokov's published writings:

... as I dipped into newspapers, journals, and almanacs gathered from six major libraries around the world, I soon realized that the Rowohlt bibliography was anything but complete, and so I went through almost every journal and

almanac published in the emigration and approximately three decades of newspapers on microfilm and pages too brown and brittle to turn quickly without seriously damaging them; every page had to be examined closely for that little poem or book review that might be stuck in a corner. Because at this writing there are probably not ten people who have read even eighty per cent of what Nabokov has written, *Nabokov: His Life in Art* is ... a sea chest containing excerpts from and allusions to hundreds of valuable and precious documents, forgotten or completely unknown ...

In other words, newsprint is friable; and Field, going out to find everything a vigorous and dedicated creative writer put out in the course of fifty years or so, had to dig for it.

But I am by no means sure that Vladimir Nabokov will be altogether grateful to him for his labor, any more than Gogol would have been to the busybody who discovered an unburned copy of *Hans Küchelgarten*. Nabokov chooses to remember nothing of *A Verse Brochure*, privately printed in St. Petersburg in 1914, except that it was in a violet paper cover and bore a motto from *Romeo and Juliet*. "Barring the discovery of an old family album or trunkful of papers somewhere in Leningrad," it is lost, Mr. Field says. Mercifully so, I venture to add; for there never was a man of sensibility but suffered pangs of shame sharp as physical agony at the laying bare of his first work. He put into it everything he had that was good, true, and beautiful, and it came out slush.

NABOKOV, who started young and whose youthful output of poetical stuff was large, may yet have occasion to lie squirming with his head under a cushion at what they are apt to unearth and confront him with. In his last chapter, "In Place of a Bibliography," Mr. Field says:

... The complete works of Vladimir Nabokov (with the exception of letters) would, if collected, comprise something between thirty and thirty-five ample volumes. And, if such a

Complete Works were to be published with facing English or Russian texts where necessary, the project would grow to well over fifty volumes. Although such a project would require at least a decade and many tens of thousands of dollars to complete, I view it as an urgently needed scholarly undertaking awaiting one of our more ambitious university presses ...

Which would hint that Vladimir Nabokov is already earmarked as a potential host for an entire literary flea circus, complete with side shows—*Evenings with Nabokov*, *In the Footsteps of Nabokov*, *Nabokoviana*, *I Was Nabokov's Aunt*, and all that—and because I love and respect him as an artist, I protest that it is a little too early for this kind of thing. It puts him into a false perspective, it hammers him into the mean mold of compulsory reading, and is likely to kill him before his time. Give the man a chance to finish his work, at least, before you make a career of him.

Nabokov: His Life in Art is painstakingly dovetailed. Andrew Field intended it to be something brand new in the way of criticism:

The book starts in the middle and moves steadily forward and backward, in chapters that are parabolic, to the middle again in the third from last chapter; it ends, in a manner of speaking, in the middle yet again—but quite a different middle. In short, I have treated Nabokov's novels, poems, stories, plays, and essays as characters in a novel ...

This, undoubtedly, is quite cute, and no end of a novelty; and yet it makes irritating reading.

The thing at the end, "In Place of an Index," is not an index at all. It is "purposely abbreviated and meant for the use of re-readers only"—for the book "is sufficiently completed so that serious and amusing distortions will result from spot-reading it. We 'read' novels," says Mr. Field, "(or we are supposed to) but we spot-read or 'use' criticism, and usefulness by itself, important though it is, ought not to be cultivated as an ultimate purpose or value in literature or literary criticism."

So he, with a waggish schoolteacher's mild malice aforethought, sacrifices some of the potential usefulness of his work to a scarcely justifiable literary pretension. The reader who has paid \$8.95 for a book of this kind and feels that he is entitled to adequate documentation is likely to regard *Nabokov: His Life in Art* as something of a flirtatious impertinence, the work of a remarkably clever young man who, for all his protestations, likes the sound of his own voice rather better than the one he raises it in praise of, and so, by vanity, defeats his own avowed object.

