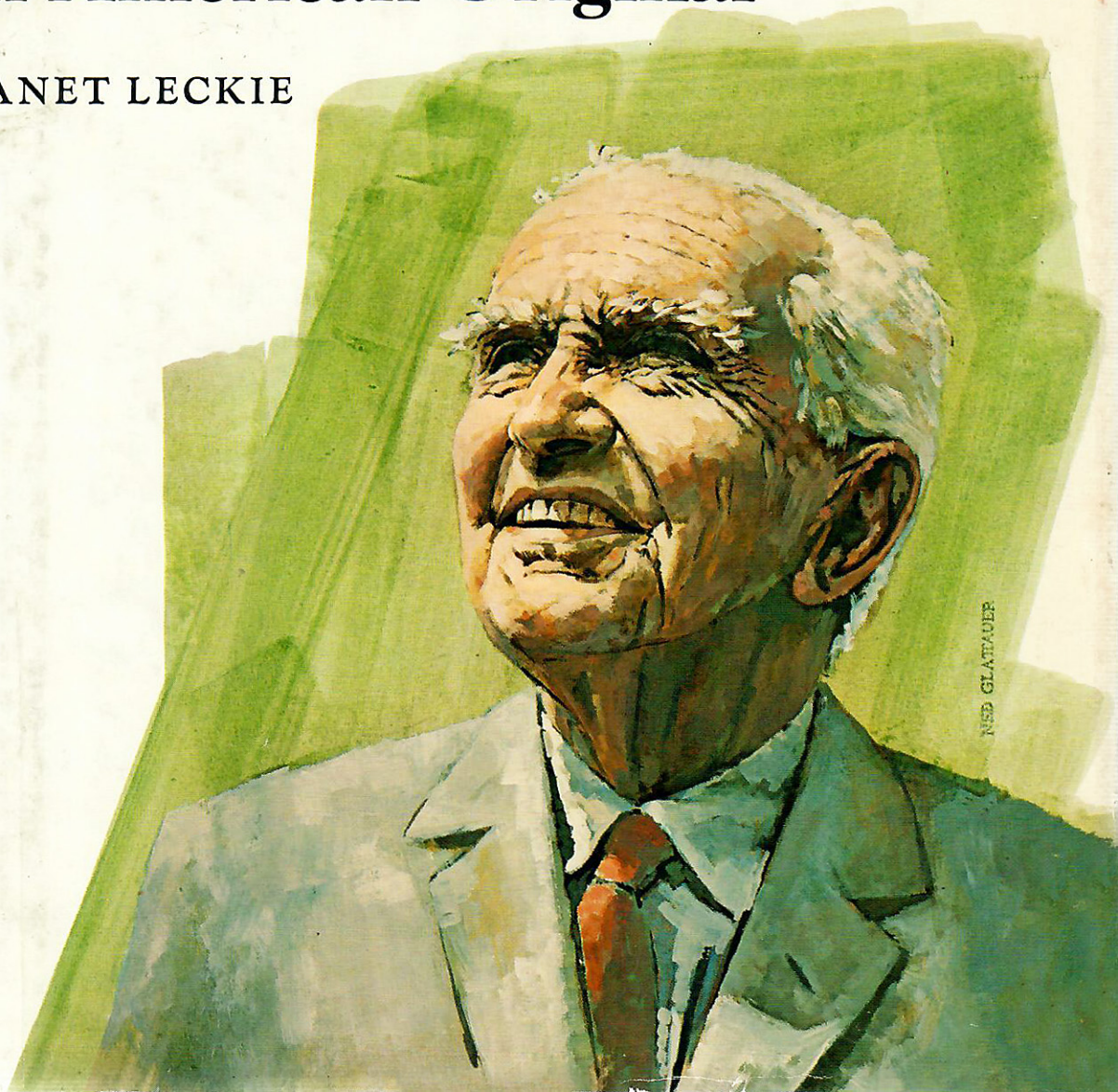


A TALENT FOR LIVING

The Story of Henry Sell,
An American Original

by JANET LECKIE



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A TALENT FOR LIVING:
THE STORY OF HENRY SELL,
AN AMERICAN ORIGINAL

Henry Sell

Janet Leckie
Dillon Colorado

1970

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A Review by John Blades

A Compleat Doer

A TALENT FOR LIVING by Janet Leckie, Hawthorn, 278 pages, \$12.95.

● "I AM FOR THE doer and all out for the doer who does," Henry Sell once told a New Yorker interviewer. It's the kind of Longfellowian slogan that would make a fine epitaph for Sell himself. In this genial, abundantly illustrated biography, Sell emerges as a compleat doer. Tho his name has never become a household word [except, perhaps, in the most chic households], Sell has rubbed elbows with many of this century's legendary figures. He is an archetype *bon vivant* who set a dizzying pace in a variety of roles: As the first book editor of the Chicago Daily News, he published and helped publicize the early writings of Ben Hecht, Sherwood Anderson, Carl Sandburg and many others; as editor of Harper's Bazaar, he transformed a "scrawny, undernourished spinster" into a grand dame of high fashion, while tossing many a lavish wingding for his boss, William Randolph Hearst; as a hyperactive, peregrinating press agent, he smoothed the feathers of the shrewish Elizabeth Arden and tooted the horn for the Waldorf Hotel and Alsatian wines, among other clients.

Yet this is not exclusively the story of one more literary person. Sell was also a Wall Street strategist who dropped a small fortune in the Great Crash. He later recouped his losses by peddling vitamins [one satisfied customer: H. L. Mencken], marketing high-nutrient liver pate and breadsticks, and packaging rations for submarine crews during World War II, with a brief time-out as a special assistant to the secretary of agriculture. After his success as a food and vitamin magnate, Sell detoured back into journalism, becoming editor of Town & Country when most men his age [60] were heading out to pasture. "I miss the press card," he explained. Now 80, Sell is still going like 60 as Town & Country's editor-at-large.

● THESE ARE THE main biographical ingredients in a book that is as smooth and as palatable as a souffle. In a way, it is less a biography than a hagiography. Author Janet Leckie, a long-time friend of Sell and an associate of his in the food and vitamin business, doesn't attempt to disguise her admiration for her subject, so we get a portrait that is pretty soft Sell: If he had a bad side—if he ever snapped at his wife, crabbed at a subordinate or entertained an unselfish thought—we never hear about it. But why be fussy? Miss Leckie does know how to write, Sell is worth writing about—an interesting man who lived in interesting times—and the book is worth reading.