

which are permeated with hostility towards the Soviet Union. . . . Even in the section on post-war literature, which the author does his best to declare is in "decline", the factual material he uses turns against him. He has to mention Panova's works, which contain "an excellent study of characters, full of warm humour and psychological insight" (p. 431), the success of Fadeev's *The Young Guard*, the merits of Pavlenko's *Happiness*, and Fedin's novels.

At the end of the book Slonim expresses his belief in the great future of Russian literature. In so doing however, he tries to set himself up as a prophet preaching in the wilderness. The blinkers of his anti-Soviet conceptions hide from him what the factual material in his book proves: where he sees a wilderness, there rises the graceful but solid building of Soviet literature.

A. BRUKHANSKY.

ON POSITIVE HEROES

The Positive Hero in Russian Literature.
Rufus W. Mathewson, Jr. (Columbia University Press. 364 pp. 48/-.)

BY the "positive hero" Professor Mathewson means the hero of a work whose primary intention is to answer the question in the title of Chernyshevsky's novel *What is to be Done*? Such a novelist conceives art as having the purpose to assist the political and social advance of the people, and in his "positive hero" he seeks to embody those moral qualities which the people's cause demands of the individual.

Professor Mathewson finds the origins of the ideal of the "positive hero" and of the associated conception of literature in the theories of Belinsky, Dobrolyubov and Chernyshevsky, to each of whom he devotes a chapter. He then traces a continuity between their ideas and those of Lenin, whom he considers to have impoverished the humanism still surviving in Marxism by his narrow and rigid edict that literature must serve the revolution. First exemplified in Gorki's *Mother*, the deliberate subordination of literature to political exigency has reached its climax in the machine-made heroes of the Soviet novel and in the theory of socialist realism as expounded by Zhdanov, with which Professor Mathewson closes his study.

With this advance and triumph of the "positive hero" Professor Mathewson contrasts the work of the classical novelists, who, he says, "anchored their concept of character in the timeless biological cycle of human life. . . ." Between the art which expresses that vision of man and the propaganda which would enforce a rigid code of political virtue there is complete incompatibility. We must choose

between them; and in the author's opinion we must commit ourselves "to the proposition that one of the distinguishing marks of man's humanity is his fallibility, that weakness, compromise and defeat are elements of all men's lives, and that a novelist's failure to say so represents a degrading kind of falsification".

But it is also falsification to say nothing of men's strength, resolution and triumphs. The flaw in Professor Mathewson's method is that he studies a movement in literature apart from a movement in society which prepared and achieved the victory of the socialist revolution and has advanced to the building of socialist society. The history of Russian literature over the last 100 years is not one of successive defeats of the imaginative artist by the dehumanised revolutionary. It is a history of conflict within art itself between the old and the new in an era of revolution; and the new is more living than the old.

Professor Mathewson writes in defence of imaginative literature against soulless propaganda. But could a literature be imaginative which anchored its concepts "in the timeless biological cycle of human life" and explored human fallibility and weakness when humanity is from day to day enlarging its power to change itself and the world?

The socialist revolution sets men free to use that power; and the development in literature which Professor Mathewson describes as the emergence of the "positive hero" is part of that revolution. There have been admitted weaknesses in the theory and practice of socialist realism; but the new movement in literature must be judged not by whether it recognises man's eternal fallibility, but by its imaginative vision of man's power and responsibility in a new time.

ALICK WEST.

A WEIRD BOOK

Early Soviet Writers. Vyacheslav Zavalishin.
(Published for the Research Program on the USSR by Frederik A. Praeger, New York, and in the UK by Atlantic Books. 394 pp. 65/-.)

THIS book is weird. It gives one the uncanny effect of looking in a cracked mirror. Everything that is worst, most obtuse, most insensitive, most arbitrary, most suspicious in hostile Soviet criticism of Soviet writers is here repeated in exact reverse. Where harsh or anxious Soviet administrators, jealous Soviet literary cliques or just simply mediocre critics have delved into a Soviet author's works and come up with undigested gob-bets as proofs of that author's "unreliability" or "unhealthy" tendency, the writer of this book waves the same bits and pieces triumphantly as "proof" of the same anti-Sovietism, differing only in

that where they seek to blame he of course finds grounds, equally flimsy or the result of total failure in comprehension, to praise.

Examples of the method are where Zoshchenko's brilliant and witty early sketches of the little man bewildered in a changing society are exalted as portrayals of the sufferings of humanity under Socialism; where the ironically observed and vividly laconic realism of a Babel soldier acclaiming in one cry: "Pickles and world revolution!" or of a Babel Cossack wearing a cast-off bowler hat cheering on Voroshilov and Budyenny in silver-piped trousers becomes transmuted to proof that a disillusioned Babel was denouncing in veiled fashion the restoration of class distinctions; where Leonov's realistic portrayal of characters and events becomes a deliberate rejection of "Utopian" myth tantamount almost to rebellion against Soviet power; where Mayakovsky's suicide has nothing whatsoever to do with overwork, unrequited love or the pestering of the rival "leftist" literary cliques that so badgered him towards the close of his life but becomes testimony to a final and solemn repudiation of Communism.

Certainly the young Russian of the revolution inherited a mystic mishmash of writers irreconcilably opposed to it and favouring symbolism or even monarchism. Certainly the tensions and strains, outside and inside, to which Soviet society has been subjected in its development have included writers (and by no means Jewish writers only) among their casualties, at times quite unjustly. Certainly in the Soviet Union even good writers, as they have got old, have sometimes written more flatly and less brightly than in the heyday of their youth (a phenomenon, unless I mistake me, not wholly unknown in other countries).

By assembling all these categories, by adding fantastic distortions in the manner I have instanced, by almost totally ignoring meritorious writers (e.g. Fadeev, Tikhonov, Fedin, Sholokhov) whose political attitude or literary achievement is less easy to distort, or remarking (quite untruthfully) that their work belongs to a different period, the author contrives to give an unrelieved picture of an entire intellectual generation outwardly or inwardly opposed to the régime, the whole lot of them sooner or later corrupted, sycophantic or shot, sometimes all three. There is an enormous number of writers listed in this (in any case) indigestible compilation, and I do not pretend to know enough about the period to be able to assert that anything like all that is said about all of them is wrong. I do know quite enough about it, the works quoted, the authors (some of whom, both among those now dead and those still living, have been and are personal friends) to be able to testify that the total impression

conveyed is utterly misleading. If the author of this book believes what he has written he must be the biggest ass on earth. All we are told of him is that he was born in the Soviet Union, graduated at Leningrad University, worked in the USSR as a journalist and scenario-writer, left the USSR (in an unmentioned manner) in 1942 (that is the period of the gravest military danger for the Soviet people) and, it seems, has not returned. It appears that "the preparation and publication of this study [save the mark—I.M.] were made possible by a grant from the Research Program on the USSR (East European Fund, Inc.)" and that the work is No. 20 in the series of studies of the Research Program on the USSR and No. 66 of Praeger publications in Russian History and World Communism. *Sancta simplicitas!* If this is the sort of scholarship the younger generation in the USA is being nourished on, God save its sanity and the rest of the world from the future consequences of its ignorance.

IVOR MONTAGU.

A NAÏVE RECAP

The Russian Revolution. Alan Moorehead. (Collins with Hamish Hamilton. 320 pp. 30/-)

IT was rather hard on Mr. Moorehead—an experienced journalist on the Conservative side, at home and abroad, a vivid writer of front-line messages during the war and historical "reconstructions" since—to offer him the assignment of a book on the Russian revolution, when on his own admission he had no "specialised knowledge of Russia or the revolution" (whether he knows any Russian is not clear, but not a single work in Russian is mentioned in his bibliography).

But the editors of *Life Magazine* wanted a book which would fill out the somewhat scanty results of research at a Roman Catholic university in the USA on the 1914-18 records of the German Foreign Ministry, and offered him the assignment. He decided to make use of "sources such as are available in any good library", and by an unhappy chance (apart from Lenin's letters to his family and John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook The World*) hit upon only such sources as would serve the purpose of challenging "the orthodox Communist attitude towards Lenin and the revolution".

The result is a piece of vivid journalism almost wholly unconnected with history (except for some dates).

The Czar is presented as a good and gentle creature, remote, perhaps, and therefore too devoted to the principle of autocracy—without any sign that Mr. Moorehead knows of the existence of innumerable marginal notes, letters and diary entries by the Czar, or memoirs of his high-placed contemporaries, revealing