

## Life Under the Five-Year Plan

MOSCOW SKIES. By Maurice Hindus.  
New York: Random House. 1936. \$2.75.

Reviewed by KATHLEEN BARNES

FOR anyone who, like Maurice Hindus, has the capacity to observe and the ability vividly to convey his observations, the life that abounds in a Moscow courtyard or within a single Moscow house offers a rich opportunity. Mr. Hindus has, in addition to these qualities, a comprehensive background knowledge of the U.S.S.R. and from this knowledge has written his first novel—"Moscow Skies."

As befits his subject, he has woven a tale of many strands, profuse in characters, rich in savor, varied in emotion. By the device of using as central character a foreign observer who is quickly drawn into actual participation in the lives of the inhabitants of a single Moscow dwelling-house, he introduces the reader to the city, and then brings him into intimate contact with a varied assortment of the millions who hurry through its streets. The period Mr. Hindus has chosen for his setting is excellent. No more dynamic environment could be

desired than the year 1929-1930—the tense, critical time of the first of the Five-Year Plans. He has selected a group of people, and portrayed their varied emotions, thoughts, and actions, and his depictions are often powerful and moving. Yet somehow when the book comes to an end the reader is left with the feeling that the full possibilities of its subject and setting have not been realized. There is a lack of the unity necessary to fuse the various elements of the story into an artistic whole. That the characters all live in the same house on a street of Moscow in 1929 is not sufficient to effect this.

Through much of the book, the central theme seems to be the interrelations between an individual in his quest for human happiness and a society geared to the remoulding of a civilization. Many of the characters, much of the story, fit

into this pattern. But the whole does not. The central love story, that of Bernard, the American observer, and Anna, wife of an important Party worker and herself an active participant in the Soviet scene, involves the search for human happiness, but fundamentally it has little relation to the time or place in which the two of them are living. As long as this strand of the story is merged with the others, the discrepancy is not obvious, but towards the end, it emerges dominant and the book falls apart.

At times, it might be possible to say that here is a study of the human cost of shaping a new world. On the face of it, the story of Yelena, daughter of disfranchised parents, seeking for some method of participating in the life about her despite the stigma of her social origin, might be considered as part of this human cost. So might that of Volodya, the drunken and unhappy misfit tied to her in a sterile and torturing love. So strongly pictured, however, is their emotional instability, that it seems likely their story would have been just as much one of hysterical search for happiness and peace, without the revolutionary setting.

The emergence of a new life within the country might also have been the central theme. The description of the transformation achieved in the Berezhovo cotton mill is only one of many sections that bear witness to Mr. Hindus's knowledge and understanding of what is being accomplished. But this thread, too, becomes submerged in the power of personal emotion with which the book is charged.

Personal emotion seems to be as near to a keynote for the novel as a whole that can be reached, which is part of the reason for the disappointment with which the final page is turned. Strong and well-portrayed as the emotions may be, they are too little mingled with the other elements of existence to be satisfying.

The reader is inevitably grateful to Mr. Hindus for innumerable scenes and characters. Much of the quality of Moscow is to be found in his novel even though the whole falls short of expectations.

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MAURICE HINDUS

## A Novel of the Madrid Anarchists

SEVEN RED SUNDAYS. By Ramón J. Sender. New York: Liveright. 1936. \$2.50.

Reviewed by THEODORE PURDY, JR.

ORDER is not precisely the mode in Spain at the moment, and it is consequently not surprising to find Señor Sender's novel of the Madrid anarchists and communists both confused in plot and confusing in manner. The many uprisings of Leftist elements against the Moderate Republic were on a smaller scale than the desperate civil war now raging, but they were quite as senselessly cruel, and even less well organized as military operations.



RAMÓN J. SENDER

Bloodshed, bombings, and violence of every sort were daily occurrences in the lives of Señor Sender's heroine, Star García, and her lovers Samar and Villacampa. Their tragic saga, played out against a lurid and fantastic background of revolutionary intrigue, is obviously not likely to suit the taste of the average romantic reader of fiction, but it is nevertheless an extraordinary and unusually interesting piece of work,—a book containing much that seems grotesque nonsense viewed from the safety of our Anglo-Saxon peace and comfort, but also full of unforgettable moments of terror and beauty.

The author's methods are difficult and peculiarly Spanish. At times he uses a devious indirect narrative, some of it couched in extravagant terms of poetic symbolism. A multiplicity of characters and a gruesome humor not unlike that exhibited by some of the great Spanish mystics and painters, further complicate matters. The characters show a curious medieval fervor, a capacity for passing into a sort of cynical ecstasy for the sake of some political or social ideal. Cinemas and subways are mixed in this book with the tortures and faith of the Inquisition, producing a chaotic welter of emotional motives often not too easy to follow. Yet the book is literature, and gives us, in spite of an uneven translation, a vivid impression of these illiterate workmen who are fighting for their dream of a juster society based on living realities. Whatever one's sympathies, this book deals with matters of the greatest importance in sincere and distinguished fashion, and hence should receive the attention of the less frivolous reading public.

# In the Image of Mr. Wells

THE ANATOMY OF FRUSTRATION.

By H. G. Wells. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1936. \$2.

Reviewed by ELMER DAVIS

ONE of Mr. Wells's recurrent pastimes is making a dummy which looks very much (though not exactly) like H. G. Wells, and throwing bricks at it to improve his marksmanship. This time the effigy is named William Burroughs Steele—supposed to be an American scientist and manufacturer who, after early acquiring wealth and fame, became convinced (perhaps from reading Wells) of the urgent necessity of cleaning up the rubbish left by human activity to date, and immediately setting about the organization of a brighter and better world. But since the rubbish, at present, is ubiquitously conspicuous, Steele set himself the task of finding out and writing down how the world got this way, and why the millennium is still deferred.

The analysis of frustration, the failure of humanity to be what it so clearly ought to be, required a summary of virtually all past and present human activity—such a summary as Wells once executed in three fat volumes plus an autobiography. But Steele on whom Wells writes a commentary produced eleven volumes (published at the author's expense?) with more in proof and notes for still others. Perhaps then he is the dream image of the ideal Wells, the Wells who did the job with proper amplitude instead of inexcusably compressing it into a mere couple of million words, with no more than thirty or forty other volumes as documentation. In yet another way Steele is the dream figure, free from inhibitions; keenly conscious of the inexactitude of any statement, he attacked his propositions over and over, restating them from different angles, with different shadings, constantly warning his readers that nothing was quite the truth and that in literature as in science the best that could be hoped for was a series of progressively closer approximations. All working authors feel that way; but the time comes when they must let a statement stand, however unsatisfactory, in order to get the book finished and give the reader something to chew on.

So you can take this as a dream projection; or as Wells's review of his own works to date; or as the statement of a "spokesman" who, like the spokesmen of Presidents and Foreign Offices, can be indorsed if his offerings take well and disavowed if they do not. Wells delights in anticipating criticisms of Wells-Steele; or, if you prefer (even a reviewer catches this habit of qualifying restatement) of the not quite so mature Wells of last

year. "I find something at once heroic and faintly absurd in this volume. . . . The simple reasonableness of his project is only equalled by its colossal impossibility. . . . Here again we catch Steele at his old trick of making controversial statements as if they were obvious truths. His belief that what Steele thinks today, the world will think tomorrow, never fails him." It would seem that Wells saves his clippings.

Wells could not write an uninteresting book if he tried (and sometimes he has tried); but in the content of this brief offering you will find little that is unfamiliar. Man, becoming able to think, is haunted by the certainty of individual extinction, and tries to escape it in all sorts of ways—at first by crude doctrines of individual immortality; then, when these are no longer plausible, by identifying his individual life with something collective of greater longevity—scientific



H. G. WELLS (RIGHT) with Alexander Korda, film producer of Mr. Wells's "Things to Come."

research, the Communist Party, etc. "Is it not possible to reduce an enormous proportion of these divergences to a common denominator?" It is; *vide* the collected works of H. G. Wells, *passim*. The only "comprehensive immortality" is "a thorough-going self-identification with the human will and intelligence considered as a synthesis of the will-drives and the mental-drives of the entire species." Entire? Well, not quite, it appears; in spite of Steele's conviction that all human minds are pretty much alike, and would reach substantially the same conclusions but for bad education and mental laziness; there are some stubbornly obscurant reactionaries who may have to be liquidated before the communion of saints can prevail.

But, human nature being what it is, "man's intentions are one thing, his behavior quite another." The life of con-

scious reason is as yet a mere coat of whitewash over the sepulcher of Grandfather Neanderthal and Great-grandfather Pithecanthropus. Hence a study of the various internal inhibitions which have deferred the realization of the free, scientific, and adventurous society which alone deserves to be called truly human.

About all that is new in this is the chapter on "Frustration Through Loneliness and the Craving for a Lover"—a theme restated by Steele in four variations; which is exegesis, amplification, and qualification of a well known passage in "Experiment in Autobiography." No surprise will be evoked by Steele's tentative conclusion that "strict mating is compatible with the isolated lair but not with an open society. The savage, the small farmer, the small shopkeeper, the conspirator, and the criminal need a concentrated mate;" but the free intellectual ought to be able to take his fun where he finds it and escape the cramping limitations of monogamy. A good many who call themselves intellectuals seem to do so with fair success; but Steele writes of a more sensitive type which wants, alternately, monogamy and promiscuity, and has never learned to combine the best features of both.

A conspicuous instance of such a type will readily occur to readers of "Experiment in Autobiography." But the important thing about that is that Wells really is a specimen of a type, and a superior type; differing from thousands of others only in his greater candor and capacity for analysis. So with Steele. "My own sexual history," he confessed, "has been lamentable"; and therein Wells thinks him representative of his type and time. But what made it lamentable was too much success; Steele always got the women he wanted, and then found that they failed to measure up to his expectations. In the expectations, then, he sought the root of the trouble, and finally thought he had found it. The Persona of the psychoanalysts—what you like to think you are—needs to be complemented by a Lover-Shadow, something external which shall continually reassure you that you really are as good as all that. "The Lover-Shadow is for all practical purposes the Yes-Woman of the Persona," and when every actual woman turns out to be a Persona herself, in need of a Yes-Man, the dew is gone from the rose.

Luckily the Lover-Shadow need not be a sexual companion; it can be the cheering crowd, the consciousness that God is on Our Side, the tail-waving approval of the fireside cat; it might even, one supposes, be the reviewer of your book. So the best we can do, Steele thinks, is to try to generalize the need of the Lover-Shadow as we must generalize the craving for immortality; to outgrow the longing for somebody who will say, "Darling, you're wonderful" as we outgrow the longing for harps, halos, and mansions in