

pieces. And the book ends on a crescendo, narrating what happens in a mob gathered for a Hollywood premiere, a picture of an American Walpurgis Eve that must make anyone who reads it feel that he was there, too, and remember it as vividly.

*George Milburn is the author of "Catalogue" and several books of short stories.*

## Mexico from Two Points of View

AN EYE-WITNESS OF MEXICO. By R. H. K. Marett. New York: Oxford University Press. 1939. \$3.

Reviewed by ERNEST GRUENING

MR. MARETT is a detached and cultured Britisher whose seven years in Mexico was spent variously as business man—in railroading, mining, and oil—as a correspondent, and as amateur archeologist. In addition, he fell in love with and married a Mexican girl—one of the *ancien régime*. These varied approaches give his observations parallax; his loss of employment through oil expropriations has not warped his perspective. Indeed, he is at considerable pains to make the reader aware of his possible conditioning. The result is a personal narrative which reflects the intellectual honesty and broad sympathies of the author, whose interest in the Mexican scene had led him earlier to publish a useful handbook entitled "Archeological Tours from Mexico City." As an employee of the once British-owned Mexicano Railroad, Mr. Marett notes the record 11¾ per cent stock dividend paid in 1880 and contrasts these halcyon capitalist days with the present "exploitation" of "that involuntary philanthropist, the British investor." But at the same time he realizes that in that era the humble Mexican was an outcast in his own land and was employed only "at meager wages in jobs of the lowest category."

Mr. Marett's most valuable eye-witnessing is the account of the sweeping land expropriations in the cotton-growing region of "La Laguna." His judgment, formed as a reporter for the London *Times*, is that while the experiment is not entirely without hopeful features, especially in the field of education, the land divisions were carried out too hastily, that skilled organization was lacking, that government funds supplied to the new peon landholders were inadequate, and that these shortcomings, coupled with general mismanagement, are likely to destroy the productiveness of this region, and with it the program of social and economic emancipation for its agricultural workers. It is regrettable that this study of so important a phase of Cardenas's agrarianism is not more complete.

If it cannot be said that this is an important contribution to the swelling literature on Mexico, it is well written, readable, and honest.

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## Quakers in Russia

WE DIDN'T ASK UTOPIA: A Quaker Family in Soviet Russia. By Harry and Rebecca Timbres. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1939. \$2.50.

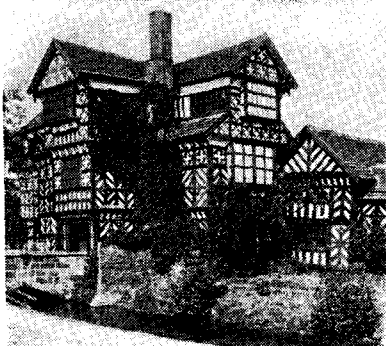
Reviewed by DAVID H. POPPER

NO, Harry and Rebecca Timbres didn't ask for Utopia, and they didn't find it. Unlike Eugene Lyons, who approached the promised land as an enthusiastic believer and was progressively disillusioned, they went to the Soviet Union with full knowledge of the difficulties they were certain to encounter. They had done famine relief work there in 1922, and Harry had passed through in 1930, during an interlude in his five years of public health work in India. By every material standard, they found, the country's growth had been enormous. But there was far more to be done; and with that admirable strain of practical idealism which characterizes so many American Quakers they determined to devote their skill and energies to the advancement of the great social experiment with which their sympathies lay.

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Obstacles arose on every hand. Dr. Harry Timbres offered the Soviets the benefit of his experience and training in the control of malaria, but Moscow officialdom seemed none too eager for the gift. It took seven weeks of frenzied wire-pulling for him to secure a Soviet passport, and more than three months for Rebecca and the two little girls to overcome sufficient red tape to join him in October 1936. True pioneers, the family found work in the medical establishment of a remote new settlement on the Volga, where important paper and pulp industries were being established. Both adults worked on the same basis as the natives, while the children attended the local schools. For months they could not succeed in living on their salaries. They shared bad housing and the shortage of food and every variety of consumer's goods with their colleagues; and participated in the trade union democracy and the simple kindnesses and pleasures of the locality almost as if they had been there from the beginning.

And then, eleven months after his arrival, Dr. Harry was fatally stricken with typhus and the adventure ended—to be recorded only in the memory of his associates and in the collection of letters and excerpts from the family journal which make up this book. It is an intensely human document, containing many a laugh and many a tear and above all the ring of absolute honesty. The Timbres family were not disappointed or frustrated by the restraining hand of the Communist dictatorship because it never touched them at a vital spot. They found it easy to accept the official explanation of the great purge and to welcome the new Soviet constitution as an epochal document without inquiring into the discrepancy between pronouncement and practice. If objective criticism in the sphere of political philosophy was stifled, that was not important. What really mattered was the extension of democratic participation in industrial and local affairs and the rapid work of construction and improvement all over the country. As long as these continued, the Timbres could not lose their faith in socialism.

It may be that this view is correct, that we struggle unduly over political shibboleths instead of striving for concrete, immediate improvement. That, it would appear, is how the Russians themselves feel as they judge their government by its accomplishments. But whether you sympathize with the actions of that government or not, you will not fail to be deeply stirred by this day-to-day description of the development of a people. You will acquire what Walter Duranty, in his brief introduction, thinks Harry Timbres would want to give you: "kinder and deeper understanding of the USSR, apart from power and politics, in terms of human hope and work, in order to make tomorrow more happy, bright, and wholesome than today."

## Year of Tension

THE WORLD OVER: 1938. Edited by Joseph Hilton Smyth and Charles Angoff. A Living Age annual. New York: Harrison-Hilton Books, Inc., 1939. \$4.

Reviewed by CHARLES MCD. PUCKETTE

THE world's events are put into differing time capsules; the radio commentator does the high spots of the last few hours, the newspaper records the day, the news-magazine the week, the annual volume the year, and eventually the historian deals with the generation, century, or era. The annual volume has long been with us. Originally it was formal and stodgy. More recently the news-magazine style has been employed with varying success. Now comes the first of a projected series of annual volumes which tells the happenings of the year by nations, first in news bulletin style in chronological order, and then in an interpretive summary. Mr. Smyth, who is editor of the *Living Age*, and Mr. Angoff, contributing editor of the *North American Review*, are the joint authors.

The survey characterizes 1938 as "the year of tension"—so too is 1939, unless it should turn out to be something worse. The authors undertake to cover "political and economic developments as well as happenings of a broader cultural import." This last ingredient seems to be present only in small quantity, though it may be answered that 1938 was a bad year for things of cultural import. The value of the book, the authors think, may lie in the service it will render (if war comes) in giving to the historian the "nature of the civilization that provoked it as well as the imponderable values that were at stake or were sacrificed."

The book divides itself into two parts much as does a newspaper. The chronological review month by month in the back is the news—brief, bulletin-like paragraphs country by country. The first, or interpretive section, corresponds to the editorials, though it by no means reflects decided policies or views. The prevailing tone of such comment as takes on any point of view is on the moderately liberal side on issues such as Hagueism, Nazism, and race prejudice. The interpretations show an agreeable degree of fairness even on our national politics.

Compilers of such digests always are faced by a dilemma. How shall they tell their story? The chronological style is easy, though in a year in which the outstanding events were international, to give the narrative by countries is to invite repetition under the different headings. The authors have met this as well as could be done; in the Czecho-Slovakian crisis the main story, in the interpretive section particularly, is told under the heading Great Britain as an appeasement to the reader.

Despite the overshadowing importance of European affairs in 1938, one feels that