BOOK REVIEWS

With Rifle & Plow; Stories of the Western Pennsylvania Frontier. By J. E. Wright, Elisabeth M. Sellers, and Jeanette C. Shirk. (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1938. 212 p. Illustrations, map.)

This book, written for readers of junior high-school age, should serve admirably the purpose of popularizing the history of western Pennsylvania. Though the stories are cast in fictionalized form, with the characters holding conversations that no shorthand writer took down, the facts and most of the characters are historical, and the fictionalized aspects will serve to make the factual material more vivid and interesting to young readers. Thus the treatment of the fur trade is not a discussion but a story about the "King of the Traders," George Croghan; and information on settlement and land problems is centered around a celebrated fist-fight to determine the ownership of a tract of land in Greene County.

Though stories in the book cover the period from the beginning of white penetration to 1794, the main emphasis is on warlike events—the French and Indian War, Pontiac's War, the Revolution, Indian raids, and the Whiskey Rebellion. In fact, the reader may feel that there is too much rifle and too little plow to justify the co-ordination in the title. When the companion volume, Pioneer Life in Western Pennsylvania, has been published, the two together should give a more balanced picture of frontier existence than does With Rifle and Plow alone. Spirited illustrations by Alexander Ross and endpaper-maps showing the trails into the region as well as its geographic features add much to the interest and value of the book.

Washington, D. C.                Elizabeth Hawthorn Buck


From Promethean dawn to air-raid blackouts, the story of man's awe-full then familiar trafficking with the gods of light and power has been so inti-
mate a part of all other history that the far-reaching effects of those viscous globs which, on August 27, 1859, floated atop the water of a well in northwestern Pennsylvania are not to be put into words. It was such a little while ago; and the chronological vantage suffices with its assurance that Colonel E. L. Drake "had ushered in a new industry which provided the world with a cheap, safe, and efficient illuminant...[and] on the eve of a mighty industrial expansion, Drake had opened up a source of unexcelled lubricating oil, an item of utmost importance to the Machine Age." A reliable, detailed, and documented history of the genesis of the petroleum industry has been needed, and is now provided.

Pittsburgh had an important part in the development of that industry. (For that matter, petroleum from Oil Creek was sold in Pittsburgh, as medicine, as early as 1790; and in 1850 Samuel Kier was bringing to the Point oil skimmed from Tarentum wells, to be sold as illuminant.) The navigation facilities of Oil Creek and the Allegheny River enabled Pittsburgh to become the earliest important refining center; a Pittsburgher was first to visit Europe to introduce the uses of petroleum; and astute brokers of this city were the first to promote an "Oil Ring"! Professor Giddens has of course focused his account upon an area northward: the land cupped between French Creek, the Allegheny, and the commonwealth boundary.

Preliminary chapters sketch colonial mentions of petroleum and the introduction of "Oyl Creek" upon maps; experiments, in our first "age of invention," with new illuminants; and the organization of the earliest oil companies. Drake's triumph at Titusville in drilling the first successful oil well was not a "discovery," to be sure, but a momentous demonstration that petroleum could be secured in abundance, and the first man-made tapping of the vast subterranean deposits in the Oil Creek basin.

The narrative carries forward to 1870, when the daily production of the Pennsylvania field averaged over 13,000 barrels, when at least $200,000,000 was invested in the business—spanning a decade wherein drama, social change, industrial transformations, and personal triumphs and tragedies had been writ in oil. Professor Giddens describes the rise of Pithole and other boom towns, sudden and elemental as though by a spark setting a flare; the frenetic methods of transporting oil to market; and offers much corporate and financial history. The author's research has been exemplary; the writing is diligent, refined, with no sputter and few flashes: altogether, a smooth performance which admits of no knocks.

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