BOOK REVIEWS

The Planting of Civilization in Western Pennsylvania. By Solon J. Buck and Elizabeth Hawthorn Buck. Illustrated from the drawings of Clarence McWilliams & from photographs, contemporary pictures & maps. (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1939. 555 p.)

For the historian of American soil evolution there are few more challenging questions than those suggested a long generation ago by Edward Eggleston in his little volume on the transit of civilization. Most of those questions have never been satisfactorily answered, though they have received perennial consideration since the appearance of Frederick J. Turner's provocative essay convinced his disciples that the significance of the frontier was the central theme of American history. We are still in quest of an understanding of the intricate processes of cultural change. Who are the carriers of ideas and institutions, of skills and attitudes? Is their function purposeful or incidental? How much is the delicate plant of professional competence affected by transplanting from one environment to another less favorable? Are there some social forces so resistant to environmental influences that they operate, for example, in the Ohio valley during the eighteenth century as effectively as they did a century earlier in the lowlands of Scotland and a hundred years before that in the valley of the Rhine? Does civilization actually decline wherever it makes contact with the primitive conditions of the frontier of human settlement?

Such problems of cultural transit have been a primary concern of Solon and Elizabeth Buck in their "reconnaissance" of western Pennsylvania from the period of the coming of the white man to the close of the War of 1812. Recognizing that the development of a society, like that of any living organism, depends not only upon the cultural heritage of the settlers but also upon the physical conditions of their habitat, the authors have described with considerable detail the influence of natural environment and the Indian regime on the first white men, French and English, who found a way through the barrier of the Allegheny Ridge. Western Pennsylvania is defined, somewhat arbitrarily for the purposes of this study, as the counties of Potter, Cameron, Clearfield, Blair, and Bedford and all the area westward within the confines of the state. The story of this region during the conflict between the expanding colonial empires of France and England, and during the troublous days of the
American Revolution, has been often and well told. To the record of those formative years the Bucks have little to add, except a careful sifting of the "seeds of civilization" that were planted in the trans-Allegheny West late in the eighteenth century. The seeds were derived from plants that had matured in western Europe and in the English colonies in America; but the "ripening" had occurred during the seventeenth century, even if the harvest was delayed for a hundred years. It would be appropriate, therefore, to survey conditions in the British Isles and the German provinces before 1700 quite as thoroughly as after that date. Yet the discussion of the cultural heritage of the pioneers is almost entirely concerned with Europe in the eighteenth century and fails to demonstrate clearly what those conditions contributed to the settlement of western Pennsylvania between 1750 and 1815.

For the general reader, as well as for the historian, the most fascinating descriptions are those that portray the development of transportation by road and stream, the burgeoning of commercial and industrial activities out of the agrarian units of a frontier economy, and the slow but steady advance of the church, the school, the newspaper, and the professions behind the thin edge of settlement. Here the reader may watch the carrier of ideas and institutions at work. Here is young John Scull, waiting with his partner at the door of a log house for the arrival of press and type from Philadelphia so that they may begin printing a newspaper, the first west of the Alleghenies. Hugh Henry Brackenridge, native of Scotland and graduate of Princeton, comes to Westmoreland County in 1781 to continue the practice of law and win fame as a writer of heroic verse and satirical prose. John McMillan, Thaddeus Dod, and Joseph Smith bring Presbyterianism into Washington County and lay the foundations of the schools which later become the academies at Canonsburg and Washington. An army commission is responsible for the presence of Dr. Nathaniel Bedford in Pittsburgh shortly after 1770, but he resigns his commission to set up private practice and train a host of young physicians in his office as the years pass. While many of these pioneers of culture received their training either in the older settlements along the Atlantic seaboard or in western Europe, the available data disclose that by 1810 more than half of the Protestant clergy of the region had been educated in western institutions. Not so large, but steadily increasing, was the proportion of western-trained men in the learned professions.

These individual records are but fragments of the panorama revealed in these pages. The minutiae of domestic economy and community living do not obscure the comprehensive theme of social evolution. The professional politi-
cian takes his place beside the merchant capitalist; the schoolmaster, however poorly trained, wields an influence beyond that of the skilled artisan or the unlettered farmer. There is even room for the political theorist or the economist, if he is able to demonstrate in some fashion the utility of his theories. The Bucks believe that few of these pioneers were conscious of their cultural function. But on such a point they must be indulging in the typically American method of guessing, for they present no evidence to prove how much "economic advancement" outweighed "selfless devotion to a cause" in the motivation of westward migration in America.

Within a relatively small region and for a brief period of time, The Planting of Civilization in Western Pennsylvania provides an excellent illustration of American culture in transit. The authors have resisted the temptation to draw exaggerated conclusions from what, at times, seems to be flimsy evidence, yet they have not been blind to the implications of the data they have examined. While they modestly insist that their book is intended for the general reader, they have dipped sufficiently into little-known sources to intrigue the interest of the research historian. Their work places the student of American history more deeply in the debt of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, the Buhl Foundation, and the University of Pittsburgh as sponsors of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey.

Columbia University

John A. Krout


Boys and girls—and doubtless not a few of their elders—will like this story of life and adventure in Western Pennsylvania in the last years of the Revolutionary War. The characters are actual historical figures like Sam Brady, the great Indian scout; the Delaware Indian, Nanowland; the German settler, Henry; the Presbyterian minister, John McMillan; and the Moravian missionary, John Heckewelder. But they will like even more the two young friends who show so many of the characteristics of the young pioneers of this district, the two young heroes of the story, David Ewing and his Irish friend, Pat Shane. They will enjoy the excitement and strategy of frontier wilderness fighting. They will enjoy the account of the long hunt on which David and Pat set out and from which they returned in so resourceful and hardy a way. They will enjoy reading about all the intimate physical background of fron-