

The Auto and America

COMBUSTION ON WHEELS. By David L. Cohn. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1944. 267 pp., and Ind. \$2.75.

Reviewed by PHIL STONG

THIS excellent "Informal History of the Automobile Age" comes at an appropriate time on two counts; the Great Automobile Recess gives the author an opportunity to appraise a completed cycle of sorts; the book appears almost precisely on the Golden Wedding Anniversary of the American people and the American auto. No one knows how the function of the automobile may be altered when passenger cars go on the line again—Mr. Cohn is concerned only with the social influence of the passenger car. Altered not too drastically, one imagines. There will probably be an enormous increase in accidents because of new drivers and relaxed speed limits, but, as the author points out, there has been no fundamental alteration in auto function since the self-starter in 1912.

There have been great changes in the appearance of cars, improvement in rubber and gasoline and some other materials, but anyone who could drive a 1912 car could learn to drive the latest model in fifteen minutes. He could also fix it as well as he did the 1912 car since, as Mr. Cohn observes, the average citizen's method of fixing a motor is to raise the hood, gaze at the whole affair sadly, poke it with a screwdriver two or three times, and then get back in and drive off.

The book begins with the high sassiety days of the auto in the late nineties, when it was not certain that the auto might not finally be electric or steam, rather than gasoline, propelled. There is a good deal of fun with the Newport goings-on and with a Mrs. Fish, who ran over the same unfortunate colored man three times in thirty seconds because she couldn't manage to remember which way to push the stick on her simple electric. The victim was not so badly hurt that he couldn't run, and Mrs. Fish never touched the car again.

Mr. Cohn then goes into the beginnings of popular cars; the hot opposition of the general public, which couldn't afford a car, and especially of the farmer whose horses were frightened and chickens destroyed by the new monster. The coming of the cheap car, however, placated the public and produced such figures as Durant and Ford, whose histories are neatly condensed here. It also produced a flock of fly-by-night companies and others who had honorable histories

but were unable to face the competition of mass production, and have disappeared.

There is no doubt that the auto and its little brother, the bicycle, each had a great share in saving the country from severe hard times, but at some cost. The auto broke more men than it made, among the leaders in the industry, but it furnished millions of people with employment at a time when employment was badly needed and Ford, despite his paternalism and occasional cockeyed ideas, did save thousands of people from distress in generous fashion. Most people would rather have lots of food and no liquor than the reverse, though there are exceptions.

The chapter about the effect on farm life is either too much or too little, though well conceived for what it is, and accurate enough. There was a time when the farmer's family circle, with an occasional "Literary Society" meeting at the country school, or a church affair, was sufficient to the average grain-and-stock farmer, at least. In spite of the regional novelists of the sheep-dip drinking school, reasonably good farmers have generally had an adequate social life—autos and movies have not made them more contented or essentially more sophisticated. They have always had plenty of



—From the book.

"Combustion on Wheels."

sophistication of their own kind. The omission here is the effect on the farmer socially of the farm motor machines.

The chapters on crime and the auto, the auto as an aid to immorality are interesting and those on instalment buying, and the great American tendency represented by the phrase, "Fill 'Er Up," the insurance swindles that have been worked out, the need for compulsory insurance laws, come along more or less as appendices to Mr. Cohn's fine general study.

As The Camera Sees Him

WINSTON CHURCHILL IN THE MIRROR. His Life in Pictures and Story. By Rene Kraus. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc. 1944. 232 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

THIS is an appealing and impressive book. Any book in which Winston Churchill figures is appealing and impressive. There are public men, like Gladstone, who would become boring in two hundred pages of pictures and caricature: there are others, like Theodore Roosevelt, who would become exhausting. But this book is likable from the moment young Winston becomes a dashing gentleman cadet, and impressive from the time he is made First Lord of the Admiralty. The man always had charm and picturesqueness, while year by year he took on a weight which by 1940 had become great enough to tip the balance of the world.

Mr. Kraus has cast his net wide, not hesitating to use pictures which are remarkably bad from an artistic point of view if they have historical

interest. He begins with family portraits, of course: Jennie Jerome, Lord Randolph Churchill, and Winston in sailor hat or Eton jacket. Later come pictures of the Indian and South African period. One of the best (a fancy drawing) shows Winston, escaping from Pretoria, spending a day hiding in a South African woods with a vulture keeping him jealous company. Then in 1901 we have his political debut: *Punch* showing him, with the shade of his father at his elbow, reviving "a certain splendid memory" as he first addresses the House of Commons. From that point forward the man appears in an increasing number of guises and situations. Here he is as Home Secretary, inspecting the Bristol police; here as a student pilot at the Salisbury Plain flying school (for he did as much as anyone else to make Britain a power in the air); here leading British marines in 1914 in the streets of Antwerp; and here as Lloyd George's Minister of Munitions, speaking from a platform decorated with huge shells.

But it is Winston Churchill in his latest phase, one of the world's three

great leaders in the battle for the survival of civilization, which makes this book most worth while. Glimpses of that sturdy figure and massive head, like the sound of that throaty, growling, truculent voice, have lifted the heart and nerved the arm of his people throughout this appalling conflict. It is good to see him with dock workers and generals, in Iceland and at Quebec, looking across the desert at El Alamein and the rubble in Malta, conferring with Stalin and with Chiang Kai-shek. There are delightful pictures, like Churchill giving a little Canadian girl a cigar-band; poignant pictures, like Churchill thanking a crowd of those merchant seamen who have made such sacrifices in this war; reassuring pictures like Churchill intent over a map with Marshall, Eisenhower, Montgomery, Cunningham, and Tedder. Mr. Kraus's text is (in its unambitious way) good. But it is the pictures that count. Long may the great leader live to have them taken, and long may he be (as in so many here) the center of trusting, admiring, affectionate throngs!

**FRASER YOUNG'S
LITERARY CRYPT: No. 73**

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle.

IF YOU ARE STUCK: The clue below the cryptogram will give you the definition of one word. Answer to No. 73 will be found in the next issue.

KBCFHAXLCM, DCKP EK
LFGQFH, AFWCDLP EK
DBFGP XENWX; KBCFHAXLCM
R L C S L O C H D X , X E
A C X P C H D N C X L F A K E B
C H D B G P C P N A F , G B F
N H L G M M V F H E N D L H E P P E
O H E R .

—QEWPGCBF.—WG LFHBCGAF.

CLUE: The fifteenth word means
UNKINDNESS, UNFRIENDLI-
NESS.

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 72
TWILIGHT, ASCENDING SLOW-
LY FROM THE EAST, EN-
TWINED IN DUSKIER WREATHS
HER BRAIDED LOCKS O'ER THE
FAIR FRONT AND RADIANT
EYES OF DAY.

—P. B. SHELLEY.

—ALASTOR.

Pioneer Women on Trek

WESTWARD THE WOMEN. By
Nancy Wilson Ross. New York: Al-
fred A. Knopf. 1944. 199 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by ELIZABETH K. P. STOKES

WHAT makes this book real is the evidence Miss Ross includes in these poignant stories of women who risked everything for the great Western adventure of the human spirit that occasionally rebelled. The world, then and since then, was full of heroines but heroines did not make a world. World War II must show that the flesh is both strong and weak and the limit of endurance a set limit. How many tortuous hours it took to break the pioneer women was a prodigious amount of hours but an actuality. How many world wars it will take to reach the limit of human endurance is already beginning to be seen.

We have been encouraged to think of the pioneer women riding in the covered wagons, as sister to the Goddess of Liberty, torches in hand. And as you read this stirring account, they become, name by name, victorious through strength of purpose. But Miss Ross with her patient research tells the larger story of what the women endured who were not always submissive:

Sometimes women grew desperate on the trail and set fire to their wagons, struck their children, threatened to kill themselves rather than endure another hour of heat, flies, dirt, dust, weariness, lack of water, lost cattle, sick babies, and a receding horizon.

Whatever reputation the American woman has acquired as the protected, pampered, but dominant domestic partner certainly has accrued in a short space of American history. Miss Ross in her story of the pioneer women who meekly followed their men through every kind of heartbreaking hardship recounts such a tale of knuckling under that today's attitude of encouraging deference may be reaction from those terrible times. In the West the desire for the franchise, for equal rights, for medical education for women, for recognition in missionary crusades, resulted no doubt from the revolt of the human spirit to ordeals of the covered wagon migration. "Never again" has a familiar ring even today.

This dramatic, intimate, and moving story Miss Ross has culled from old diaries, letters, and histories of the West and Northwest. The daily life of some of the women on the march is described vividly. The missionary spirit sent off many of the first pio-

neers. They were bent upon converting the Indians to Christianity. Their worst fears were realized. Not only were the Indians heathen but they were found sorely unwashed and unsanitary; even "good" Indians harbored the vermin.

"But there are no simple explanations for the mighty forces that set a



—Marcus Blechman

Nancy Wilson Ross

whole people in motion," writes Miss Ross.

The intimate, heroic, sordid, and glorious saga of the women of the covered-wagon trains moving Westward will never lend itself to ready phrasing. . . . Such women as Mary Walker, Eliza Spalding, Narcissa Whitman, Sister Aloysia, Abigail Duniway, and Bethenia Owens do not yield to anonymity: Many of them have left a record that will happily preserve them from such a fate.

Apparently Miss Ross believes that the story of women's participation in American life has not reached what she would consider a worthy solution. She warns against satisfaction with the path of least resistance in our times. . . . "Freedom of action in the democratic sense carries responsibility. American women, who won their freedom so short a time before the great universal light of freedom seemed about to flicker and go out over the surface of the earth, must now work to keep that light alive."

The story of "Westward the Women," factual, interesting, and a piercing reminder of tragedy in our world today, shows our heroic forebears, within human limits, giving no quarter to any path of least resistance.