

Picture Books. *When Life first assaulted the newsstands of America fifteen years ago and began its sky-rocketing rise in circulation, there was much shaking of heads. It was predicted that we would become a nation of page-flippers, attentive only to momentary visual impact. In this there was some justice, but the Cassandras failed to appreciate the power of pictorial techniques to stimulate and complement more traditional avenues of communication. This week come three further additions to a remarkable postwar library of picture books that already includes such excellent achievements as Roger Butterfield's "The American Past" [SRL Oct. 25, 1947] and Marshall B. Davidson's "Life in America" [SRL Nov. 3]. "Life's Picture History of Western Man" (reviewed below) traces the development of our civilization. "The Presidency" gives visual substance to forty-one Presidential elections. "Year," in the 1951 edition, continues its annual pictorial summing-up.*

Recording Human Progress

LIFE'S PICTURE HISTORY OF WESTERN MAN. By the Editors of Life, New York: Time Inc. Distributed by Simon & Schuster. 306 pp. \$10.

By CRANE BRINTON

IT IS strange that American publishers have hitherto failed to make available for a wide public the resources for a really first-rate illustrated history that modern techniques of reproduction make possible. Our current textbooks of history are abundantly and often very well illustrated, and they have given up the practice of using later and often fanciful paintings and drawings of historic events in favor of the use of strictly contemporaneous materials. But their paper is rarely good enough for first-class work, and their format is too small for the best results. For the general reader in English-speaking lands there has been nothing that can touch the admirably illustrated German "Propyläen Weltgeschichte" issued in the period between the wars.

This gap has now been filled by "Life's Picture History of Western Man." The page is big enough for the effective reproduction even of the old maps and woodcuts. The editors have been generous with space, giving a whole page of color to great paintings, and never crowding their materials. The color is generally excellent, almost up to the best German work. Captions are clear and focus on the

picture. The illustrations range widely over the whole field of human activity the "New History" has to cover—the fine arts, science and invention, literature and philosophy, costume, exploration, caricature, and much else. There is a commendable lack of the crowded and usually meaningless battle scenes and remote views of cities that often clutter such books.

The book has its origin in a series of illustrated articles on the great periods of Western history from the Middle Ages on, which began in *Life* in 1947. These articles have been expanded, new illustrations added, new writing done, and the whole series knit together into a whole. After a very brief setting of the stage from the ancient civilization of the Mediterranean nine chapters take the story down to the Age of Revolutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A chapter by John Knox Jessup on the American Idea, not among the original magazine articles, brings the book to an end. The editors disclaim any intention of writing a systematic textbook, with all the names and dates such a book requires even in these days. Actually, a careful reader who has absorbed the contents of this book should be able to come off pretty well even in a conventional quiz on the history of Western civilization.

The important question, of course, is what will the absorption of this book do to him, how will it influence his attitudes toward the problems of today? A good many American liberals and intellectuals fear Henry Luce's teams bearing gifts, sumptuous though they be. They need not worry unduly about this book. Exposure to these admirable works of art can

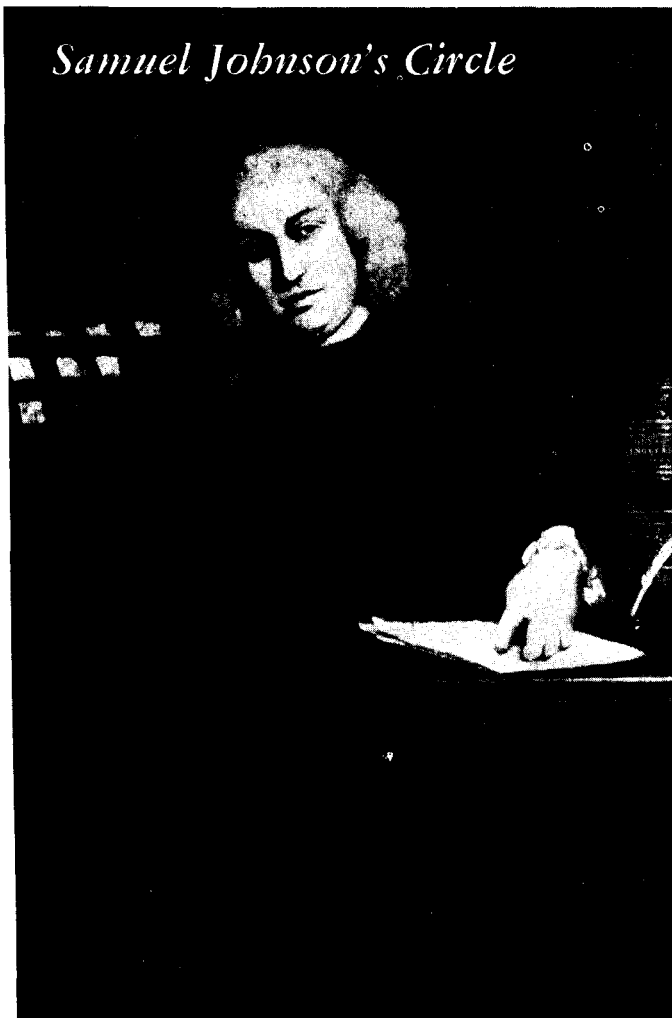
certainly not injure taste; there is nothing beyond a Boucher nude, a few illustrations from an eighteenth-century edition of "Candide," and the like to corrupt morals in the narrow sense. But how about morals in their wider and truer sense where they melt into politics and a man's whole attitude toward the universe? Will the unwary reader of this book be trapped into some new and un-American faith in a miscalled "American Century"?

There probably isn't much use in a reviewer who has already committed himself to some participation in the making of this book (in a chapter on the Age of Revolutions) trying to persuade reluctant American intellectuals that this product of the Luce workshops is soundly Jeffersonian and Jacksonian — with no doubt a dash of John Adams and Alexander Hamilton. Yet up to the last chapter the wholly innocent reader — and there won't be many coming at this book with minds quite like Locke's blank sheet — will learn that the medieval serfs were pretty poorly housed and fed, that the medieval upper classes were proud and haughty, that out of the matrix of late medieval trade and craft industry came our modern economic organization, that the French Revolution broke out in one of the most prosperous and advanced, not in the most ground-down, of countries. He will learn, in short, if he does go beyond the fascinating immediate details pictured for him, what most of us have learned in our formal courses in Western civilization. He will not find Machiavelli, nor Aquinas, nor Marx — nor even W. G. Sumner — dictating the value-judgments of the book.

Perhaps he will discern a certain suggestion of the nineteenth-century American historian Bancroft. Yet the careful reader of the final chapter will find but a chastened form of the great American Manifest Destiny. What the innocent would learn is that the United States and Russia are leading rival coalitions today, and that our coalition stands for all sorts of concrete ways of doing things on this earth which bear a striking resemblance to what Western man has approved in the last two thousand years, and that the Russian coalition stands for something much less like this Western tradition, that in the balance we are right and they are wrong. To this conclusion, as the book points out, "even" artists and intellectuals in America have come. As Mr. Jessup puts it in his concluding word, "All the civilization, the truths, the promises recited in this book are at stake. America is a part of this civilization — the critical and saving part."

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Samuel Johnson's Circle



—National Portrait Gallery, London.

The famous Johnson portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds.



Hogarth depicts Johnson and Boswell returning from a night . . .



—Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

. . . on the town—and with next day's hangover.



—Illustrations from "Life's Picture History of Western Man."

—New York Public Library.

Hogarth painting of David Garrick (as Richard III), whom Johnson called "the first man in the world for sprightly conversation."

The Winners and Also-Rans

THE PRESIDENCY: A Pictorial History of Presidential Elections from Washington to Truman. By Stefan Lorant. New York: The Macmillan Co. 775 pp. \$15.

By JOHN D. HICKS

"AND WHAT is the use of a book," thought Alice, "without pictures or conversations?" So the author of this pictorial history of the American Presidency quotes Lewis Carroll's famous heroine. No doubt Alice would have liked this book, although the conversations are lacking, and some of the pictures reproduce such mundane things as tabulations of votes, items clipped from newspapers, front pages of broadsides, and manuscript letters and speeches of Presidents. But pictures do abound, on an average of perhaps two to the page. Printed on gloss paper, in double columns, "The Presidency" has the same eye appeal that we have come to associate with our illustrated magazines, and with a steadily increasing number of books, particularly books of popular history. Some queries inevitably arise. Are Americans in general no longer able or willing to read without "visual aids"? Or, do books such as these expand the number of readers to include a clientele never tapped before? There must be some explanation for the fact that picture books, although twice as expensive as ordinary books, do sell.

The plan of the book is simple — each Presidential campaign and election gets a chapter. There are thus forty-one chapters, not counting the "Prologue to 1952," which is thought-

fully printed after the Index, preparatory to extensive revision in 1953. Each chapter, except the Prologue, opens with a full-page picture of the successful candidate. Then follow smaller likenesses of the current "Veep" and the also-rans, pictures of campaign crowds and incidents, and, most interesting of all, cartoons galore. The selection of cartoons is unimpeachable. These illustrations, taken together, tell the story of American political opinion from the nation's beginnings to the present time. And they reveal, incidentally, that few twentieth-century cartoonists can hold a candle to Thomas Nast.

The pictures presented in this book show admirably the development of photography in the United States. The same cannot be said, however, of portrait painting, for the author uses portraits only when he cannot get photographs. Nor is his use of paintings always ideal. George Washington, for example, who sat for nearly every artist of his time, gets three Gilbert Stuarts, when one would have been enough. Undoubtedly Gilbert Stuart painted the first President as he should have looked, but no other artist ever made him look that way. Also, now and then the author's preference for photographs over paintings produces minor anachronisms. He has dug up many interesting old daguerreotypes, but it is hardly fair to Andrew Jackson as President to portray him as he was photographed just before his death, eight years after leaving the Presidency.

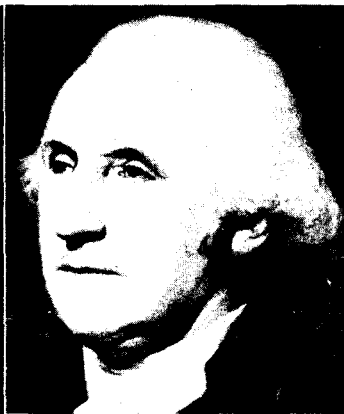
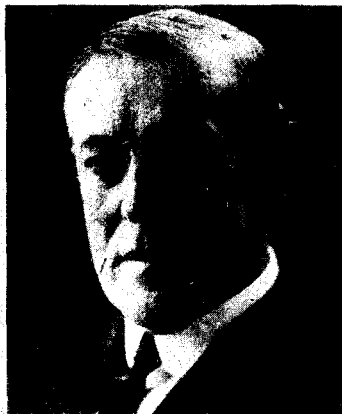
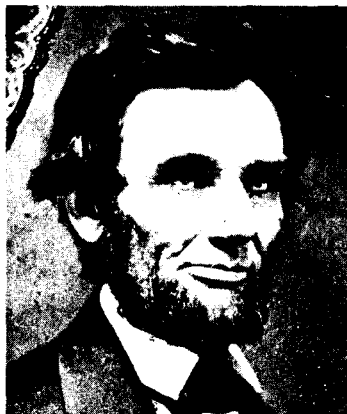
While the advance in the art of photography is striking, political leaders who are not photogenic must wish for the good old days when one sat for a daguerreotype in his Sunday best and had his head propped straight in an iron brace for a time exposure. During the middle decades of the century the work of Mathew B. Brady

dominates the pages, as well it should. One thing we can be sure of about a Brady picture — he did as well by a subject as he could. And Brady's best was completely authentic: the man really looked like that. The candid camera shots of recent times can do terrible things to a man's dignity, as when the photographer presents the rear view of Governor Dewey making a campaign speech in 1948, or the side view of the same candidate in the campaign, shaking hands with a well-wisher. Franklin D. Roosevelt, happily for him, always seemed to have the knack of appearing just the way he should before the camera, and President Truman, with apparently minimum equipment from the photographer's point of view, comes off surprisingly well.

This is a picture book with a gloss of reading material, not the reverse. But there is a brief synopsis of each Presidency and a fairly adequate story of each campaign. The text is by no means as complete as Stanwood's "History of the Presidency," but it includes campaigns since 1912, it is far more readable, and it is usually accurate. Inevitably there is the occasional slip, as when the author makes the entire Electoral College assemble in New York to vote for Washington in 1789, although the Constitution required the electors to "meet in their respective states." There are also some unfortunate omissions. LaFollette is polished off in 1924 with one small picture and two short paragraphs, although he furnished about all the life there was to that deadly campaign. There is a table for each election showing the electoral vote and, wherever possible, the popular vote also of the various candidates. One might wish for maps that would show the sectional distribution of votes, but one has no right to expect everything in a single book.

On the whole, this is an impressive performance, and the author deserves well of his fellow citizens.

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—C. S. German.

—Charles Willson Peale.

Lincoln, Roosevelt, Wilson, Washington—"story of American political opinion."