

Book Reviews

ALEXANDRA OLESON and SANBORN C. BROWN (editors), *The pursuit of knowledge in the early American Republic. American scientific and learned societies from Colonial times to the Civil War*, Baltimore, Md., and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, 8vo, pp. xxv, 327, £13.25.

The editors have had the excellent idea of tracing the growth of science and allied learning in America by studying the origins of learned societies. The eighteen contributions show how social as well as scientific needs determined their foundation and how they were concerned more with the technologies of agriculture and manufacturing than with pure science. Their growth or decline and their inherent problems of organization are considered by the majority of the contributors. The reasons for their failure are of considerable interest, often due to local conditions or ideals, or to feuds. Several authors deal with this aspect, and with the role of societies in the period before the rise of universities when they attempted to provide for the organized pursuit of knowledge in the United States.

The range and variety of activity of these early societies is striking and this book is the first attempt to survey their cultural importance and to assess their attempts to organize and promote research, to improve the practical arts, to disseminate knowledge, and to encourage contacts with Europe. It is a scholarly study of outstanding merit which should now be matched by similar investigations into early European scientific and learned bodies.

DAVID E. STANNARD (editor), *Death in America*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975, 8vo, pp. xv, 159, illus., \$3.95 (paperback).

A group of historians, anthropologists, literary scholars, and art historians contribute eight interdisciplinary essays to the increasingly popular subject of thanatology. They are particularly concerned with attitudes towards death used as a dimension of American culture, and they explore a topic little discussed or studied previously. The period dealt with is 1800 onwards, and the change from acceptance of death to either denial of it or the individual grappling with it on his own is clearly illustrated. Subjects include the Puritan child, pre-Civil War America, consolation literature, the cemetery as cultural institution, Mexican folk culture, the Mormons, and Philippe Ariès on 'The reversal of death'. There is also a bibliographical survey which should have been more detailed. It is good to note that psycho-analytical elucidation of anxieties about death are not accepted.

VICTOR COHN, *Sister Kenny. The woman who challenged the doctors*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1976, 8vo, pp. [x], 302, illus., \$16.50.

The author is a journalist and provides here a detailed and documented account of a shrewd and forceful woman. Elizabeth Kenny (1880–1952) was born in Australia and found fame in America, where her use of a new technique to combat the paralysis of poliomyelitis brought the adulation of grateful patients and the equally fervent opposition of the medical profession. Thus, as well as being an engaging story of Sister Kenny's life, this book also depicts the reaction of physicians to heretical practices and to women in medicine. The style is journalistic and dramatized, but