

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

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Mr. Cohn has attempted to be objective and has obviously researched his subject extensively.

There is no doubt that Sister Kenny's successes were in part due to her therapeutic aggressiveness, but her relatively simple methods have, nevertheless, proved effective in the reduction of paralysis and contractures and are certainly preferable to the previous custom of immobilization. As a balanced survey of a remarkable woman crusader and for insights into American medicine in the 1940s, this book can be warmly recommended.

JEAN DONNISON, *Midwives and medical men. A history of inter-professional rivalries and women's rights*, London, Heinemann, 1977, 8vo, pp. vi, 250, illus., £6.50.

At the present time the profession of midwife is becoming obsolete, especially in the United States, a diminution of usefulness which began in the seventeenth century. Prior to that, child-birth had been strictly a woman's business, but gradually male attendants displaced her and in the mid-nineteenth century the female monopoly seemed to be set for extinction. However, in the second half of the century there was a revival of the midwife, and today there are indications that she may again play a more important role. This is due partly to feminist agitation and the benefits of home delivery, but the psychological advantages said to accrue for the baby cannot be taken seriously.

This scholarly book, which derives from a thesis compiled by a teacher of social administration, surveys the changing scene chronologically, ending with the Midwives Act of 1902 and valuable 'Conclusions', which include a discussion of present-day problems. Accounts of situations in continental countries would have added depth and perspective and increased the worth of the book without adding greatly to its size. Nevertheless, the work will be of considerable interest to a wide circle of individuals involved with obstetrics, as well as to the historian of medicine.

ALFRED DOUGLAS, *Extra-sensory powers. A century of psychical research*, London, Gollancz, 1976, 8vo, pp. 392, illus., £6.95.

The evidence put forward so far in support of extra-sensory perception is as extensive as it is varied, and the author, a writer, presents a survey of it in a clear, objective and well-documented manner.

The first part deals with 'The dawn of psychical research', beginning with the Ancient World and including Greatrakes, Swedenborg, Wesley, and Mesmer. The spiritualistic movement emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century, and in the 1870s organized studies led to the foundation in 1882 of the Society for Psychical Research in London. The second part describes the various mediums and the major investigations carried out on them. Finally there is the beginning of the era of psychical research in the laboratory, the most famous being experimentalist J. B. Rhine at Duke University, whose work is being carefully assessed by Dr. S. Mauskopf, not referred to here. The book closes with 'Present trends in para-psychology'.

Mr. Douglas has presented a complex subject lucidly and without bias. His survey