

Book Reviews

ROBERT WEST HOWARD, *The dawnseekers. The first history of American paleontology*, London, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975, 8vo, pp. xv, 314, illus., £3.95.

As a comprehensive approach to the broader historical aspects of American paleontology this book, by a professional writer, is a pioneer endeavour. Beginning in the eighteenth century, the major problem of the early paleontologists, or “dawn-seekers”, was to equate their discoveries of fossil animals with the Biblical account of creation, established in 1650 by Bishop J. Ussher as 10 October 4004 B.C. This book deals with the many richly rewarding excavations in various parts of the United States, and with the men whose enthusiasm, industry and thirst for knowledge, as well as for the elucidation of fossil finds, made these possible. Gradually expeditions gave way to the present U.S. Geological Survey founded in 1879 with its vast contributions to farming and industry, and also to the defeat of the ecclesiastics who could not sustain their tenets against the fossil finders and Charles Darwin.

The story is attractively related, but without textual documentation so that the whereabouts of quotations cannot be discovered; there is, however, a brief bibliography. But Mr. Howard's book is not meant to be an annotated history of the profession of paleontology, nor is it a definitive history. It is “. . . a factual, general-interest report on a neglected lode of important Americana . . .” (p. 295), and as such it can be warmly recommended.

TOM STAMP and CORDELIA STAMP, *William Scoresby, Arctic scientist*, Whitby, Yorks., Caedmon of Whitby Press, 1976, 8vo, pp. xii, 253, illus., £3.50.

The authors have utilized previously unpublished material to produce a penetrating biography of a man whose range of activities was extraordinarily wide. Scoresby (1789–1857) was a whaling captain, Arctic explorer and surveyor, a pioneer Arctic scientist, a physicist who carried out original research on energy, electricity and magnetism, an educationalist and social worker, and a forceful clergyman. All these endeavours he pursued with great industry and devotion, and his multifarious activities are recounted here in detail with liberal use of primary sources. In his journals Scoresby made reference to a number of medical matters but the authors provide no scholarly comment on them. Thus his account of ether being used in Boston in the autumn of 1847 could be of vital importance for the history of general anaesthesia, but the authors neither cite the exact date nor elaborate. Furthermore, there are no precise references to the various documents used, so that much of the biographers' labour has been wasted and others will have to provide the definitive work the publishers claim for Mrs. and Mrs. Stamp.