

anything that "represents social distinction, the division of labor, the making of wealth. . . ." Not surprisingly, the modern sectarians view as most threatening those risks associated with or produced by Big Business. A modern society needs both supporters and critics of its major institutions, the authors conclude, but they are wary of the growing power of the "border" in recent decades. The unrestrained quest for a hazard-free environment may lead, for instance, to critical, even life-threatening, shortages of energy and to even larger state organizations charged with securing and maintaining the perfect, prophylactic society.

LETTERS TO A YOUNG DOCTOR. By Richard Selzer. Touchstone, 1983. 205 pp. \$5.95

A practicing general surgeon in New Haven and a member of the Yale Medical School faculty, Selzer writes here, as in his three previous books, with almost priestly reverence for the healing arts of medicine. The 23 essays, most anecdotal, mingle practical advice (about comfortable surgical footwear, the ideal size and lighting of an operating room) with musings of a more esoteric, even mystical, nature: "When the incision is made, the surgeon . . . shrinks to accommodate the dimensions of this unexplored place." Selzer has no patience with notions of surgery as a depersonalized procedure. Just before an operation, he writes, a patient "feels himself to be alone in a green and clanking place where there are no windows and he cannot see the sky. Let him look into your eyes for whatever distance and space he can find there." Throughout these essays, Selzer reminds his readers that no amount of technology can replace the physician's touch as the supreme medical instrument.



ROMAN WOMEN: Their History and Habits. By J.P.V.D. Balsdon. Barnes & Noble, 1983. 351 pp. \$6.95

In 1962, Balsdon, an Oxford classicist, advanced the frontiers of Roman social history with his authoritative survey of more than 1,000 years (753 B.C.—A.D. 337) of women's life in the ancient state. That this reissue shows signs of age makes it, in a way, more interesting. Dated, for example, is Balsdon's fascination with dress, coiffure, and the ways of *noble* women, such as Brutus's wife Porcia and Nero's mother Agrippina. Today's historians of women, by contrast, are likely to devote more attention to such matters as education, work, and contraception. When he wrote his book, Balsdon relied more than he now might on literary and historical sources—all written by men. He is aware of the pitfalls: "Always, be it noticed, in the ancient sources, it was the wife who was in danger of getting on her husband's nerves. You might think there were no irritating husbands." By his own admission, well-born Roman women "distinguished . . . by their high moral integrity . . . were perhaps just a little dull." Less virtuous women—such as Messalina, who publicly married a lover while her husband, Emperor Claudius, was away on imperial business—tend to reinvigorate Balsdon's curiosity.