OBITUARY


On certain aspects of the physiology of the eye v. Tschermak may be ranked as the greatest living authority, in particular on such abstruse problems as torsion and its perspective distortion of an after-image following movements of the eye, and perhaps more so on space perception; it is therefore of value to have, within the span of two hundred odd pages, a concise summary of present day knowledge of these aspects of physiological optics. The book also contains disquisitions on other branches of the subject: visual acuity, adaptation, after-images and colour vision including colour-blindness. In these last-mentioned sections the author seems not to have been able to draw to any great extent on the wealth of material in the British and American literature of the past ten to fifteen years (Hecht, for example, is barely mentioned; Hartline not at all); the book is thus very little more than a restatement of the author's earlier contributions to Bethe's Handbook. Valuable as these contributions were at the time, their main use now is as a source of references to the classical work and it may be that the author has been unwise in attempting to abridge them so as to bring them within the compass of this small book. If, instead, he had expanded his treatises on the eye movements and space perception and had provided also a thoroughgoing analysis of image-formation by the eye and its aberrations, the book would have been transformed into one of real value for the modern reader; as it is, the abbreviated accounts of these subjects are very difficult indeed to understand. The book contains references only to the author's earlier reviews on physiological optics to which the reader is referred for individual references to the literature.

OBITUARY

HENRY SMITH, C.I.E., Lieut.-Col., I.M.S., ret.

The death of Lieut.-Col. Henry Smith in Ireland was announced in March, 1948. He was 91 years of age and few of his contemporaries can now be left alive. Smith received his medical education in Ireland and qualified M.D., M.Ch., in 1888.

In the early years of the present century the name of "Jullundur" Smith was on all ophthalmological lips. His enormous experience in cases of cataract in India led him to devise the intracapsular operation of extraction and in this he did pioneer work.
The advantages to the Indian peasant were obvious:— only one stay in hospital, one operation, no return for needling; and with so many illiterate patients, a glass for general use could be ordered almost as soon as the eye was white. In successful cases the surgeon was relieved of the bugbear of tags of capsule left to be incarcerated in the healing wound. Loss of vitreous was the item around which most of the criticism of this new operation centred.

Smith made a large section in the corneo-scleral junction; he cut no conjunctival flap; he performed a large iridectomy and delivered the lens by pressure on the lower part of the cornea with the blunt tip of a strabismus hook. The suspensory ligament was ruptured in the first place and the lens either "tumbled" or pushed straight out. In Smith's hands the results were good. He always insisted on the importance of having a properly trained assistant and spent much time and trouble in training his own.

Outside India the ophthalmological fraternity was critical of the operation. Surgeons in England, in particular, were concerned at the large loss of vitreous that sometimes occurred. When the writer first went to Moorfields as a clinical assistant he got the impression that the intracapsular operation was considered unjustifiable in view of the grave risks involved.

Smith was quite unperturbed by this criticism and went on with his work. He introduced a hook for the lens delivery in certain cases, published many papers in the Lancet, Ind. Med. Gaz., and Brit. Med. Jt., and summed up his experiences in a monograph on the treatment of cataract.

As time went by modifications were made in the operation, notably that of Barraquer, of Barcelona, who employed a suction pump for the lens delivery and nowadays the operation of intracapsular extraction is performed all over the world. The credit of this must go in the first place to Henry Smith for his pioneer work.

After leaving Jullundur, Smith worked as Civil Surgeon at Amritsar until he retired from the service and came to live at first at Sidcup, and later in Ireland.

The writer remembers Smith visiting Moorfields about forty years ago. He was a large man, with a massive head and not very approachable to juniors. Of our contemporaries who visited India to work with Smith we recall Basil Lang, who was greatly impressed by his stay at Amritsar.