Book reviews

The Life and Times of Dr. William MacKenzie, Founder of the Glasgow Eye Infirmary. By A. M. WRIGHT THOMSON. 1973. Pp. 132, figs. University Press, Glasgow. (£2.50)

This book anticipates by a short time the 150th anniversary of the Glasgow Eye Infirmary, which was founded in 1824 by a remarkable man—William MacKenzie. He was born in the Parish of Glasgow in 1791; his father, a deeply religious man, decided at an early stage that his son should become a Minister of the Church of Scotland, and to this end he left school at the unusual age of 12 years to study Arts at Glasgow University and thereafter to enter the Faculty of Divinity, but it is evident that his scientific leanings were apparent even then because he became worried about the biblical version of the creation which was certainly not a matter for doubt in Presbyterian circles of those (or even more recent) days, and at the age of 19 years he commenced the study of Medicine. He chose, however, to pursue this end on an academic basis by remaining within the University instead of taking the more usual course at that time of becoming an apprentice to an established medical practitioner when the training would have been largely of a practical nature.

There is little doubt, however, that the early training of William MacKenzie was of immense benefit to ophthalmology when, in the course of a European tour, he came under the influence of Georg Josef Beer in Vienna in 1817; it seems that this meeting determined his future career as an ophthalmic surgeon with an inevitably academic bias.

He returned to Glasgow a year later and within a relatively short time (1824) was instrumental in the founding of the Glasgow Eye Infirmary which has had a distinguished and important role in the care of eye diseases in Scotland until it was tragically disrupted in recent times by a devastating fire. Within a few years (1830) MacKenzie produced his book—‘Practical Treatise on the Diseases of the Eye’—which reached its fourth edition by 1854, and was recognized for its true worth far from Glasgow with a German edition 1832 and a French edition in 1844. This is a remarkable book which illustrates very clearly the outstanding powers of observation and intuitive deduction of its author, particularly when regard is taken of the limited means available for the examination of the eye at the time of its production; the ophthalmoscope (an indispensable tool of the modern ophthalmologist) was only in the early stages of its development 20 years after the appearance of the treatise.

This is a fascinating account of a man who left a deep imprint on ophthalmological thought in the last century with so many original observations such as the first proper description of sympathetic ophthalmitis. The writer, who has a long association with ophthalmology in Glasgow and the West of Scotland, is to be congratulated on producing such an excellent book which places in a true perspective the importance of the knowledge which was accumulated under difficult conditions and which formed the foundation of our present sophisticated outlook on so many problems.

Kenneth Wybar

Handbook of Ocular Therapeutics and Pharmacology. By P. P. ELLIS and D. L. SMITH. 4th ed., 1973. Pp. 262, bibl. Mosby, St Louis; Kimpton, London (£6.65)

This is a book which can be recommended without qualification to all ophthalmologists. Its stated purpose is to present in concise form basic considerations of current ocular therapy and pharmacology and these aims are more than realized, for the book is not only concise and easy to read but remarkably comprehensive in its coverage.