Book reviews

Reading Aids for the Partially Sighted: A Systematic Classification and Procedure for Prescribing. LOUISE L. SLOAN. 1977. Pp. 150, figs., tables, refs. Williams & Wilkins, Baltimore (\$11.95)

The study of motivation is properly the territory of the psychologist. Every ophthalmologist and every low-vision practitioner must have pondered on how 2 patients presenting clinically very similarly can differ in their response to loss of vision—one coping well, maintaining many, if not all, his activities, the other losing mobility, employment, and often nearly all pleasure in life. What is an inconvenient impairment in some produces a major disability in others.

The management of the patient with a visual disability is a relatively new subspecialty, and many different disciplines are contributing to it. The selection of suitable appliances may be in the hands of ophthalmologists or ophthalmic opticians or dispensing opticians according to local circumstances. Dr Louise Sloan is unique among practitioners in being a psychologist. This background has affected her complete approach to the subject. Starting by listening and watching, she avoided the trap of 'knowing better' and giving patients sophisticated and unmanageable solutions to straightforward problems. Dr Sloan became one of the great innovators of the American low-vision field by the simple expedient of finding out what the patient could cope with and then supplying it, and if no such device existed she persuaded someone to produce it. Stand magnifiers, little used previously, have, due entirely to her influence, taken the proper important place in the armamentarium. Normal testing equipment did not suit her either, and she developed her own systems based on newsprint size. Her influence is clearly discernible in low-vision clinics throughout the USA and further afield too.

Dr Sloan has now produced a book that describes reading aids, suggests a systematic classification of them, and outlines a procedure for prescribing. The book is described in the preface as a 'simple introductory text', and in Chapter 2, 'Non-technical explanation of basic optical principles', Dr Sloan achieves the astonishing feat of making optics readable, comprehensible, and even enjoyable. This chapter appears to be an improved version of half of a previous manual, *Recommended Aids for the Partially Sighted*, first published in 1966, and while the genealogy of the remainder is fairly clear it has been revised, updated, and expanded.

Reluctantly one must take issue with Dr Sloan on some points. With no formal training in ophthalmology or optometry she feels subjective refraction to be sufficient. Few children of 5 to 8 years (the optimum time of first referral to a low-vision clinic) can give a reliable subjective response, nor do they normally hold reading material at 40 cm, yet Dr Sloan bases all calculations on this +2.50 as 'the conventional reading distance'. It is,

however, refreshing to find near-vision ranges recorded metrically; it certainly makes the sums easier, as British authorities have long known. Further, Dr Sloan produces a compelling argument for all measurements of power to be in dioptres or equivalent. Later in the book she suggests that there should be standardisation of terminology and testing equipment and nominates the Lighthouse for the Blind in New York to organise this—based, of course, on her own system. Such rationalisation would be a great advantage, but this reader would prefer an international organisation modelled, perhaps, on the Comité International de l'Eclairage, and not restricted to any one system.

A definitive statement from Dr Sloan was long overdue. This book competently and readably settles the account.

JANET SILVER

The Miracle of Vision. By ARTHUR S. FREESE. 1977. Pp. 181, figs., refs. Harper & Row, London (£4.50)

The title and blurbs prepared one for yet another journalistic foray, with sensational 'break-throughs' and other vulgarities to which booklets explaining medicine for lay audiences are prone. The word 'miracle' does indeed keep turning up. There is the usual pious insistence, on 'eye care', implying that our eyes, like teeth, can well be destroyed by inattention and have survived the millennia of neglect only by (yet another) miracle. But otherwise the book is factually sound and admirably restrained. It includes a lot of enjoyable titbits—about our natural 48-hour circadian cycle and our extraretinal light responses, how congenitally blind girls start menstruating earlier, and so on. It is readable, lively, accurate, and brief, and is in fact about the best layman's book on ophthalmology that I have encountered.

P. D. TREVOR-ROPER

Current Diagnosis and Management of Chorio-retinal Diseases. Edited by F. A. L'ESPERANCE. 1977. Pp. 573, figs., refs. C. V. Mosby, St. Louis (Henry Kimpton, London) (£50.80)

In the autumn of 1975 the International Photocoagulation Congress met in New York. This book is a record of the papers delivered, but it is much more than a mere transcription. Each paper has been carefully prepared for publication and stands as an authoritative statement of the views of the contributor on his particular subject at the time of the congress.

The book covers the diagnostic and clinical aspects of those fundus diseases customarily treated by photocoagulation, as well as the technical and practical aspects of treatment. The text of 560 pages is profusely illustrated, particularly from histological preparations and retinal photographs including fluorescein angiography. It is