BOOK REVIEW


This encyclopedia of Medicine and Surgery, two volumes of which are devoted to ophthalmology, is designed on a large scale and covers 27 different subjects.

The ophthalmological section has 41 contributors, chosen for their special knowledge of each subject. Although theoretically ideal, such a division of labour inevitably produces unnecessary duplication and unevenness of style.

The first difficulty in reviewing these volumes is to decide for whom they have been written. The contributions, though up-to-date, are hardly sufficiently detailed for the practising ophthalmologist and yet are too detailed for the general practitioner. Probably the work would appeal most to the student of ophthalmology, and for him it would provide a useful introduction to the subject.

The material is presented in a straightforward manner with good descriptions of symptomatology and diagnosis. Treatment is discussed only in general terms in most of the sections, and little detail, particularly of operative procedure, is included. Useful bibliographies are given at the end of each chapter.

Chapters on the radiography of the skull and orbit and on medico-legal ophthalmology are included.

The books are very well printed on good quality paper, and the reproduction of the illustrations is excellent, but unfortunately many of the photographs show too little detail to be of value.

A loose-leaf format has been chosen so that new material can be added subsequently. Again an excellent idea in theory, but necessitating heavy covers with a spring back, which combined with the large size (13 x 12 in.) and great weight (12 lb.) make the volumes very unwieldy and tiring to handle.

OBITUARY

Gabriel-Pierre Sourdille, 1901–1956

Gabriel Sourdille’s output of work was so prodigious that his friends often wondered how long he could keep up the pace. When the news of his rapid end came through, they thought he must have been smitten by coronary thrombosis, that bane of overburdened doctors. In fact his death arose from a malady of unknown origin. As the years pass on, those who cherish Gabriel’s memory may perhaps find some consolation in the thought that our grievous loss probably could not have been averted by curbing his activity or by any other expedient; but at this stage one can only feel dismay coupled with profound sympathy for those who have most reason for grief.

Gabriel-Pierre Sourdille was born at Nantes in 1901, the son of Gilbert Sourdille, sometime Professor of Clinical Ophthalmology and Director of the Nantes School of Medicine. He went to school in Nantes, and stayed there for preliminary medical studies. Then followed 10 years of hard apprenticeship in Paris, during which his Doctor of Medicine thesis won the silver medal award. He filled various resident posts, and was inspired by Professor Clovis Vincent to delve deep into the problems of neuro-ophthalmology. The technique of cataract extraction constantly interested him, and he
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revelled in the intricacies of glaucoma pathology. As one of the foremost exponents of corneal grafting, he visited the U.S.A. and Canada in 1947 and in 1949 to discuss the work. He and his friend Paufique stimulated each other to advance the technique in this most delicate branch of surgery, and on one memorable occasion in Nantes Sourdille was able to stage a surgical programme attended by many of the highest grafting experts from Europe and the U.S.A. His eminence in this field was achieved by enthusiasm together with zealous attention to surgical detail. Furthermore his photographic skill furnished magnificent illustrations for the talks which he gave at congresses.

In 1937, a few years after he had returned from Paris, he became Professor of Clinical Ophthalmology at the Nantes Medical School. Naturally the war interrupted many of his researches, and for years he had to work under terrible conditions, but his fertility of invention was never quenched. After the war he contributed first-rate papers at congresses held in Belgium, Great Britain, Egypt, Greece, Italy, South America, Spain, Tunis, and Yugoslavia. His links with Greece were strengthened by a lasting friendship
with his former pupil Charamis of Athens. At the glaucoma discussion during the International Congress of Ophthalmology held in New York 2 years ago he delivered one of the opening papers, and he participated in the Glaucoma Symposium over which Sir Stewart Duke-Elder presided at Sainte Marguerite, Canada, in September, 1954.

As a surgeon he was swift, gentle, and dexterous, capable of doing a dozen major operations, including corneal grafts, scleral resections, and cataract extractions without evincing fatigue. His routine examinations would often continue until 10 or 11 o'clock at night. He has been known to drive himself through the night from Paris in the midst of the French Society meeting, get through a mass of operative and consulting work, and then drive back to Paris in time for the rest of the congress, still smiling and full of energy. Early in his career he set himself to enunciate clearly, so that his discourses were supremely easy to understand, even by foreigners knowing little French. He was small but powerful, abundantly endowed with the resilience of the Breton. He would never have been able to fulfill his programme. It is remarkable that, side by side with all his original observations and day-to-day practice, he contrived to do so much teaching as well as university and municipal administration. He was also a tremendously keen sailor, and presided over the Cercle Nautique at La Baule.

Many distinctions were conferred upon Sourdille by his compatriots and by other countries. As the full list of these honours can be found in French journals, it need not here be repeated, but our special gratitude for his goodwill towards Great Britain must now be emphasized. In 1946, when the flow of ophthalmologists across each other's frontiers was resumed after long stoppage by war, Gabriel could speak very little English, although he could read our language with ease. Within the next few years he trained himself to talk fluently, and was one of the most popular visitors at the Ophthalmological Society of the United Kingdom and at the Oxford Congress. He loved to dwell upon the close affinity of race and custom between Bretons and Cornish people, and one of his endearing hobbies was to assemble different editions of The Pickwick Papers. Many of us can recall with gratitude his hospitality at Nantes and La Baule, and he was freely at the disposal of visitors, whether singly or in groups, who came to watch his brilliant surgery.

The menhirs and cromlechs of Brittany, together with many other historical signposts, point to eras of civilization emerging long before the Roman legions came to this part of France. Gabriel was deeply imbued with all these traditions of the province, and his pride in being a Frenchman was not in the least incompatible with a particular reverence for Brittany. Moreover he did most strikingly exemplify the closeness of family ties in France. At the French Ophthalmological Society Congress in 1948, he played a main part in the Rapport about corneal grafts. There sat his father at the front of the great auditorium, listening with proud intentness. At the end of his discourse Gabriel's first action, after stepping down from the platform, was to exchange salutations with his father. It all happened quickly and without ostentation, but it symbolized his filial allegiance. To his son and three daughters, and most of all to his wife, who so devotedly identified herself with all his interests, the readers of this journal extend sincere sympathy. They will remember Gabriel Sourdille not only for his eminence in ophthalmology, but also by reason of his courage, versatility, and genius for friendship.

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