BOOK REVIEWS


This rather unusual book is written with the object of presenting the viewpoint of the ophthalmologist to help physicians in the diagnosis and management of eye disease. Contents include a chapter on methods of examination, the diagnosis and management of injuries, the diagnosis and management of the red eye, medical ophthalmology, neuro-ophthalmology, glaucoma, strabismus, uveitis, degenerative diseases, and developmental abnormalities. There follows a series of chapters, each a self-contained essay, with such titles as "The meaning of eye symptoms", "The value of consultation and referral", and "Blindness is preventable".

With the exception of one or two diagrams the book is profusely illustrated by excellent black and white photographs, many of those of external conditions being of outstandingly high quality. The fundus photographs are also good, but possibly might be of less value than paintings to a reader not too familiar with ophthalmoscopic appearances.

All the ordinary eye conditions and some rarities are described, the author clearly relishing his task and conveying his enthusiasm. There is much sound common sense in such matters as the desirability of testing the visual acuity in cases of eye injury and the condemnation of restrictive advice to young myopes. Much attention is given to the high incidence of unsuspected glaucoma, and although the description of primary glaucoma appears to confuse the open-angle and closed-angle types, this is probably deliberate, since the author's main purpose is to indicate the best means of detection, and obviously leaves the academic classification to the ophthalmologist to whom he hopes the case will be referred. The reviewer cannot altogether agree, however, with the complete omission of closed-angle glaucoma from the chapter on glaucoma, acute glaucoma being separately described in the chapter on the red eye. The last chapter in the book seems inappropriate in a work designed for physicians since it is obviously intended to be read by the lay public.

There is a useful glossary of ophthalmic terms.


This is a very interesting book. A great deal of thought has gone into what work to include (and what to omit), and the author has allowed his selection to be governed by topics to which he himself has made not inconsiderable contributions. The style is never dull, and when one reads about the eye shouting to the brain (p. 113) the latter roars for joy.

The line drawings are good, the other figures adequate. The nearly faultless bibliography is very useful. The subject matter covers no more and no less than the title indicates: photo-chemistry, electrical retinal activity, central visual pathways, subjective experiments, quantitative aspects of the visual threshold, and colour vision.

The present reviewer welcomes finding unpublished work referred to in this book: not everyone can write several papers on the same experimental result, and the author has rightly seen fit to tie in loose ends and so to improve the fabric as a whole. But if the fabric is good this does not mean to say that there are not numerous thick threads in some places, and thin patches in others. For though the restraint and good sense in the selection of topics is welcome, a lack of balance shows up now and then within each topic. Thus, where the author discusses controversial points or experiments approached by
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various workers from different directions respectively, the reader will look in vain for an indication that the author’s point of view is not unique in claiming serious consideration. Though sincere, this attitude has blinded the author in isolated instances to the existence of arguments demonstrably in advance of his own, and may even lead one to wonder whether his razor-sharp acumen does not sometimes turn a little blunt (e.g., on pp. 155 and 183). These and other points, however, fail to detract from the essential merit of this book. They even fulfil a useful function in that the very good parts appear to be the more attractive. Consequently this book can be recommended to the reader looking, not for an objective review, but for an original and highly stimulating account of an able worker’s thoughts on his trade.


Those interested in this subject will be familiar with the quite outstanding monograph “La vision nocturne et ses troubles” published in Paris in 1950 under the auspices of the French Ophthalmological Society. Its main authors were Jayle and Ourgaud and it was reviewed in this Journal (Brit. J. Ophthal., 1951, 35, 184). The work here considered is a very much abridged version of this monograph, translated by Baisinger and Holmes and brought up to date by reference to papers published in the last decade. A comparison of the two books is perhaps inevitable and it can only be said that condensation (to less than half the length) has not improved presentation. Apart from being written in English, the new work, although comprehensive, is less readable and less interesting than the old, lacking, as it seems to, much of the balance and some of the critical discussion so ably provided in the longer version.

This is not to say that it is without value—far from it. In compared passages all the essential information and important references of the old are given in the new, and the book will be found excellent for the research worker who wishes a review article, and most useful by those interested in the practical problems of vision at dim illumination and by clinicians interested in the effects of ocular and systemic disease on mesopic or scotopic vision. A drawback will be found in that, for practically all work published before 1950, although the author’s name and date are of course given, the reader must consult the French monograph for references. The work of the last decade is adequately documented but over this period some of the papers quoted in the text are omitted in the reference list.

The main virtue of this abridged presentation is that it makes accessible, in English, at least the meat of its illustrious French ancestor. For those who like their flesh dressed, for the student who wishes to refer to original work, and for those who read French, and for interest as well as for instruction, this volume can be no more than complementary to Jayle and Ourgaud’s original monograph.


The study of the functional and dynamic structures of tissues (long known for, example, in bone) is a relatively recent development in ocular anatomy, a study in which the names of Vogelsang, Rohen, and Kokott are prominently associated. It deals with such problems as the arrangement of the constituent fibres in the cornea and sclera in relation to the strains and stresses imposed upon them, or the architecture of the uveal tissue in respect of its mechanical functions. Clinical problems such as the development of myopia and detachment of the retina are related to these considerations, which also have an impact on surgical procedures such as cataract extraction and corneal grafting. This small volume provides a summary of the present state of knowledge of a subject that has hitherto excited little attention but is certainly interesting and suggestive.

The excellent book on radiological diagnosis in ophthalmology published in Paris in 1955 has now become available in an English translation by G. Z. Carter under the editorship of Conrad Berens. The translation is good and sufficiently free to be eminently readable. This is probably the result of the excellent knowledge of English possessed by Hartmann and that of French possessed by the translator and the editor. Moreover, the illustrations, so necessary in a book of this type, are beautifully sharp and clear. An enthusiastic review of the French volume will be found in the British Journal of Ophthalmology (1956), 40, 191.

NOTES

OPHTHALMOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

Annual Congress, 1960

The 80th annual congress was held in London at the Royal Society of Medicine from March 31 to April 2, under the presidency of Mr. R. C. Davenport. Over 300 members and their guests attended, including a number of distinguished foreign visitors.

The meeting opened with a discussion on "The Problem of the Visually Defective Infant".

Mr. F. W. Law first considered the initial problem which arises with the question of whether an infant can see or not; for it is usually difficult to examine the infant's fundus fully, unless a general anaesthetic is given, and even then it is not possible to be dogmatic about sight unless there is a definite and gross fundus lesion.

In addition to the actual vision there is the question of associated mental defect, which may mask the signs of sight in an infant. It has been found that if an infant without sight is brought up in a normal family atmosphere, among normal sighted companions, that the ordinary landmarks of infant progress are reached at the usual time.

A long-term survey and follow-up has shown that, of all the patients seen in one surgeon's Out-Patient Clinic at Moorfields Eye Hospital in City Road in a year, only about one child is proved to be blind from birth.

Dr. Donald MacKeith emphasized that the sensory capacity in an infant is judged largely by what an infant does, and it must be remembered that behaviour may be affected and blindness mimicked by any weak link in the chain—sensation, perception, thinking and feeling, motor activity.

Examination of the degree of partial blindness in infants may be made more difficult by associated intellectual handicap. Of older blind children 25 per cent. are ineducable; perhaps another 25 per cent. educationally subnormal.

The doll's eye phenomenon, which is manifest in the first week of life, is shown by holding up an infant and gently turning it round one way, when the eyes will turn away from the direction of motion. In later weeks the eyes turn towards the direction of motion. If an older child has the early eye-sign, then this may be regarded as due to poor vision.

The emotional disturbance shown by parents of blind children is preventable if we take proper steps from the first suspicion of blindness. The child can then have the best chance of good personality-development by growing in a warm family atmosphere.

It is important for a baby to be able to keep in touch with its parent visually and aurally. If there is a visual defect then the aural route is more important and therefore the parent must talk and make noises for the infant to know of her presence.

It has been shown that babies brought up in an Institution are late in developing.