

Book review

Syphilis and the Eye. A monograph service of the *Survey of Ophthalmology*. Edited by BERNARD SCHWARTZ, Professor of Ophthalmology, Tufts-New England Medical Center, Boston. (Eight contributors.) 1970. Pp. 140, 19 figs. Williams and Wilkins, Baltimore. (£9)

Because the quantity of literature produced in most subjects is large and increasing year by year, it is of more than conventional importance that the title of a scientific work should give a precise indication of the contents. However, this reasonable convention has not been followed in the preparation of this book.

It was published to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the discovery by Douglas Argyll Robertson of the pupillary reactions that have been named after him. Apart from a brief introduction, all the text has been published previously in the journal *Survey of Ophthalmology*, vol. 14 (1969), which presumably accounts for the fact that it starts on a page numbered 159. There are thus 140 pages of text, 100 of them devoted to a critical and authoritative survey by Irene Loewenfeld of the literature on the Argyll Robertson pupil; this is detailed, readable, and interesting. Much information is presented clearly in tabular form. The latter half of the volume consists of a list of 2,433 publications, on pages that are not numbered, that are relevant to the Argyll Robertson pupil reaction. An obituary of Douglas Argyll Robertson is reprinted, as is that author's article 'Four cases of spinal myosis'. C. Wilbur Rucker reviews the knowledge of pupillary reactions in Argyll Robertson's time.

Some general material is included, no doubt in an attempt to justify the wide scope of the title. Thus

there is a section on the treatment of syphilis which includes a mention of persisting treponeme-like forms; a problem which is also considered briefly by Lawton Smith in his article on 'The Current Status of Ocular Syphilis'. Lawton Smith mentions the report from Johns Hopkins Hospital of positive infectivity tests in the rabbit following inoculation with material obtained from a newborn congenitally syphilitic infant who had died after very full treatment with penicillin. There is little correlation between these articles. Thus Golden and Thompson, in the section entitled 'Implications of Spiral Forms in the Eye', state that the working hypothesis in their laboratory is that the spiral forms are frequently true treponemes, but probably not *T. pallidum*. They postulate that the forms may result from circulating 'latent' forms of normal treponemes comparable with the 'L' forms of bacteria. These authors do not refer to the clear evidence that at least some of the spiral forms are virulent *T. pallidum*. Despite recent work, this article repeats the statement that treponemes do not apparently cross the placenta until after about the eighteenth week of pregnancy.

Some of the terms used in this book are unfortunate or open to question. These include 'aqueous treponeme', 'Hexheimer reaction', 'lues cerebri'. It is interesting to see that there is confusion between the terms 'cases' and 'patients' in this monograph, but not in Argyll Robertson's paper of 1869.

This book certainly does not cover the very wide scope indicated by its title. The section on the Argyll Robertson pupil is well worth having, but £9 is a high price to pay for it.

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ROBERTSON, ARGYLL (1869) *Edinb. med. J.*, **14**, 696 and **15**, 487 (Reprinted in *Med. Classics* (1937), **1**, 851)