therapy played an important part in treatment. With his strong German accent which he never lost, Guttman provoked surprise and, sometimes, amusement. He had a particular talent for being able to cajole or bully patients—and health administrators and anyone else who put red tape in his way. Some resented his authoritarian manner, but most, if sometimes grudgingly, came to love and revere him. One among many firm stands that he took was when the administration tried to change the name of Stoke Mandeville. He also stood out for the interests of the future development of the centre, and above all for the sake of its patients.

During the postwar period many men and women with spinal cord injuries were still receiving hospital treatment, and the initiation of sport spread quickly from Stoke Mandeville to other spinal units. Various sports were adapted for people who used wheelchairs, and it was soon evident that sport could restore lost

confidence and the will to re-enter society and competitive employment. The Paralympics were another of Dr Guttman's visions, and from a small band of ex-members of the armed forces the sports movement for the paralysed grew into a worldwide organisation.

Dr Guttman received a knighthood, and was delighted when HRH Prince Charles became patron of the British Paraplegic Sports Society and attended his 80th birthday party.

The hope that the spinal injuries unit engendered was nothing short of life giving. This book says this (as do most of his patients from the early days) and in my view deserves to be read widely.

The Spirit of Stoke Mandeville. The Story of Sir Ludwig Guttman. S Goodman. (Pp 192; figs; £10.95.) London: Collins, 1986. ISBN 0-00-217341-7.

Sightless and suffering

PATRICK TREVOR-ROPER

On 25 May 1978 Hughes de Montalembert was accosted by two black intruders, high on drugs, in his house in Greenwich Village. He was stripped naked; then, fearing castration, was attacking the fiercer intruder with a poker when the other responded by throwing burning liquid into his eyes, which he "recognised as acid." Although in great pain and nearly blind, he spent an hour trying to contact the police. There followed two anguished months in hospital; then world wanderings in search of surgery and solace.

Hughes de Montalembert.

This appalling story has the quality of a nightmare. For the author was an artist, with a highly wrought mind already steeped in voodoo and supernatural cults. As in a nightmare, fact is at the mercy of fantasy, and the narrative constantly loses itself in his distraught speculation. Not surprisingly, therefore, the flow of his ideas is often confusing and needs to be swallowed with a lot of reservations. Many of his descriptions are hard to tally with our knowledge of how doctors normally behave in hospitals in Britain. For instance, did a head of the ophthalmology department really "stick her finger into his eye" without apology and, with evident disgust, tell the intern to "clear up the garbage"? And did a young doctor then ask him to share a joint on the balcony, while he

continued to look lovingly at a boy whose hand he was holding? And was he really left to walk unattended around the wards, crashing into patients with their intravenous drips, dislocating the tubes? And did 200 Australian doctors really rush from their congress hoping to treat a sculptor when they heard that he was famous?

After a while his doctor said, "Your eyes are not doing well. The tissues are dissolving, and I fear perforation. I must perform an ablation of the left eye," denying the patient's assertion that he could see light. Nevertheless, his (separated) wife called in a famous New York doctor, who declared that the only chance was to go to the Barraquer Clinic in Spain for an odontokeratoprosthesis. So, after a further visit to a "cabalistic divinator" (he had already consulted the priests of Fa in Africa, the geomancers of I Ching in Asia, and so on), he is off to Acapulco (?) for a breather before facing the journey to Barcelona. The operation at the much publicised Barraquer Clinic will cost US \$12 000, but money never seems to be a problem. In the end, after more frustrating delays, the only surgery that they performed was to open up the eyelids. He returns to a rehabilitation centre in New York named the Lighthouse—highly regarded for its efficiency and understanding—but, like every previous institution, it is here castigated and made to seem like a nineteenth century workhouse. And so it goes on, until he ends up on an Indonesian island, teaching blind children and apparently at peace.

The bones of his story are clearly correct, but as the fever and defiance mounted my doubts and reservations increased, and the whole picture became rather suspect. Perhaps even the police were excused for their initial scepticism, insisting on an anal examination and suspecting a background of homosexuality, drugs, or vengeance. But de Montalembert's courage and spirit are clearly indomitable, his imagination rich with ideas, symbols, and imagery. His triumph over the loss of his most precious faculty is unquestionable. If only he had been a little less angry and aggressive, a little more convincing in his story, and less exorbitant in his fantasies, my admiration would have been unalloyed.

His handsome face gazes at us from the bookjacket, with its upper part concealed by a large stainless steel shield which he wears constantly, presumably to advertise his predicament and defiance, but perhaps also to conceal the bitterness that lies beneath.

Eclipse: An Autobiography. H de Montalembert. (Pp 258; £9.95.) London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986. ISBN 0-340-39158-8.