have this completed by the end of November. The problem from the editor's point of view was that in the course of that month, apart from many routine college duties, he had undertaken to chair or attend 12 meetings in Edinburgh and seven in London, to lecture in Nottingham, and to be present at five official dinners and two official luncheons, with speaking commitments at several of these. Fortunately, what seemed to be impossible turned out to be feasible, and the corrected galley proofs were photocopied and all sent off by 30 November. Proofs were corrected in trains, in aeroplanes, in the executive lounge at Heathrow, and at home after dinners or meetings. One unexpected bonus was a journey in a train from Edinburgh to Nottingham which seemed to take in most of England en route and moreover gave added time for proof correcting by breaking down in the Lake District.

Christmas was a joyful one in that there were no proofs to correct, and my wife and I set off on the London College of Physicians' outing to Egypt partly to see the sights, partly to recover and to be able to speak to each other again, and partly so that I could learn about local treatment of tropical diseases. There was, however, one problem looming on the near horizon. Our return to London from Egypt was to be on 19 January, and there was an Edinburgh College of Physicians function in London on the 20th, followed by a journey on the night sleeper to Edinburgh. The publishers had predicted that the page proofs of the entire book would be awaiting the editor's return and indeed they were, a masterly feat of organisation on their part. The authors were not concerned at the page proof stage, but it was necessary to correct all 613 pages between early Saturday morning and Sunday night or the early hours of Monday morning with a few hours of sleep in between.

Although the publisher's house editor was willing to attempt the cross referencing, this did not seem a reasonable proposition to be

carried out by a non-medical graduate, so it was necessary to include this also in the weekend's activity. The complete set of proofs was sent off to the publishers in Sussex on the Monday morning and I immediately flew back to London for a series of meetings. Two weeks later, after yet another visit to London, there was a repeat performance when I came off the night sleeper on the Saturday morning to find the proofs of the index awaiting my attention with a request that it might be sent off on the Monday morning. This was done, and 10 weeks after this the completed book appeared at a reception kindly given by the publishers for those who had participated in its writing and production, together with their suffering spouses. This had been high speed publishing.

Little of the writing of the book was done in the premises of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, whereas this article has been written there in a relatively quiet administrative period in August, but at a time when a new conference centre is being built. The lights in the president's room have been cut off by one set of workmen, the room, in turn, has been isolated from all secretaries by the closure of a corridor at both ends, dust is everywhere, and four fire engines have just arrived because a plumber has set off the fire alarm in error.

We still have our original fire insurance policy for the library. It is with the Sun Fire Office in London and is dated 1763. The annual premium is fourteen shillings and this covers us for £600. Fortunately, our treasurer noticed this some time ago and took appropriate action.

A final word of advice to potential editors is to suggest that two copies of any manuscript should always be kept in different buildings in case of fire.

This paper was written at the request of the editor of the *BMJ*.

A whopping dose

RUTH HOLLAND

A friend of mine—no, let's not be coy about it: my husband once had a job as stage manager in a strip club, for which he had to sign a stripper's contract promising not to sunbathe or wear elastic in his underwear. Later, in a phase of his career which many would envy, he was employed by the Paul Raymond organisation, dividing his time between "Oh! Calcutta!" and "Pyjama Tops," with brief forays into the Raymond Revuebar's festival of erotica. I've just read a book which has given me more shocks than anything that squirmed and grunted through those performances.

Before you rush to get your dirty raincoat and lope off to the nearest bookstall let me tell you that it is not *that* sort of book. It's *Strong Medicine* by Arthur Hailey, and it's about wholesome people with high moral standards. Actually, "shocks" is pitching it a bit strong: "surprises" is more accurate. Having a prejudice against big books (probably the result of long years' toiling on the *BMJ*, where anything worth saying is supposed to be capable of being printed on a flea's teeshirt) I don't read them much, but I'm obviously no great loss to the publishing trade as they sell in tens of thousands, and they seem to be getting bigger and bigger—I saw a man on the train the other day take from his briefcase what I took to be a litre carton of orange juice and start reading it.

I'd always assumed that such portly volumes were thrilling adventure stories, stuffed with lust, death, rape, brutality, and all the other things that make the world go round, but if this one is anything to go by they're quite the opposite. To read it is rather like listening to the conversation of an elderly aunt who has complete and indiscriminate recall of her whole life and tells you exactly what she said to Cousin Ernest in Mr Johnson's living room on the night of 20 January 1935 when Hester had come down from Weybridge and had missed her connection at Waterloo, and. . .

The only defence against such a verbal battery is to nod and smile at suitable intervals and let your mind wander. Or, with a book, to skip. This one had me skipping like St Vitus at his fizziest.

Omitting nothing

When I was at school, teachers were still foolhardy enough to hand out precepts on life and morals and truth and beauty (which shows how old I am). "Art," they said, "is life with the dull bits left out." Arthur Hailey has got news for them: his art is life with the dull bits up front and demanding their rights. Taking his cue from Pooh-Bah he piles on the corroborative detail. This is the end of a honeymoon idyll: "Andrew and Celia were to leave at midday by Bahamas Airways from Rock Sound, connecting at Nassau with a northbound Pan Am flight which would get them to New York that night. They were due in Morristown the following day where, until they found a suitable house, Andrew's apartment on South Street would be home. Celia, who had been living in furnished rooms in Boonton, had already moved out from there, putting some of her things in storage."

Well, if it isn't riveting it is at least to do with our hero and heroine, and of course it's heartening to know that the young couple have ordered their affairs so prudently. The nods get a bit curt, however, and the smiles a bit tight lipped when you are told the names, tastes, style of dress, political affiliations, and domestic arrangements of the most minor characters, who never make it to the main plot but are simply mentioned in passing—somebody's younger sister; somebody else's former boss; a man answering the phone in France. Nobody escapes, they all get pinned down like

beetles in the Natural History Museum. We know, as Keats complained in a different context, their woof and texture.

It's all jolly educational, however, and I now know where the best hotels are in Hawaii, Quito, Washington, and Harlow, what time flight to get from Honolulu to Chicago, how the FDA functions, who won the Derby in 1972, and that "the word demagogue or *dēmagōgos* [was] coined by the Ancient Greeks around the time of Cleon." Gathering this bumper crop of information must take some doing—I wonder if Hailey does it all himself, or is he just the front man for a team of research workers? (One thing got missed: nobody looked at *Private Eye*, or we wouldn't get, on p 423, "Yvonne could scarcely believe it. Was she really in Buckingham Palace?")

Yes, Harlow is correct. The plot concerns the rise and rise of Celia Jordan, who, from being a humble "detail person" (commercial traveller) for a pharmaceutical company, becomes, by dint of just being simply wonderful all the time, its first woman president; and on the way up she establishes a research centre in Harlow.

Naturally, even for this superwoman it takes a few years to reach the top, so every now and then Hailey helpfully gives us a rundown on world events at the time so that we know where we are. "I want to watch the TV news tonight," Andrew told Celia on an evening in August 1965. "There's been rioting and burning in a place called Watts. It's part of Los Angeles.'" Subtlety is not high on this author's list of favourite things, which gives his book the kind of charm found in Hollywood biographies of the famous. You know the form: an angry frock-coated and bewhiskered landlord hammers on his tenant's door shouting, "Beethoven! You owe me six weeks' rent!" and knocks again, bonk-bonk-bonk-bonk. Whereupon Beethoven leaps to his desk and—yes, you've got it—jots down his fifth symphony.

Hail the conquering heroine

To recapitulate on the Harlow theme: Celia persuades a Cambridge don called Martin Peat-Smith to become director of the

institute, and it turns out to be a smart move because Martin falls in love with a girl with big tits and a photographic memory called Yvonne and inspired by this passion he invents a wonder drug, thereby balancing the record of the drug company a bit as it's come up with a couple of duff products—one that causes boneless babies and one that kills people off if they take it with anything else. None of which is Celia's fault, of course, because Celia is Wonderful.

This is another of the surprises. The author, who seems an awfully nice man, has written a personal note to his readers at the beginning of the book more or less saying that Celia is based on his wife. If I was Mrs Hailey I'd thump him, because Celia is a monster: pushy, manipulative, smug, and with all the automatic self assurance of the truly stupid. I wouldn't have believed that an Englishman—which, a further surprise, Hailey turns out to be—could choose such an obnoxious little go-getter as a heroine, except for a satire. (We don't admire ambition: the archetypal hero of English literature is Hamlet, a dithering dreamer who wants nothing more than a quiet life and the occasional chat over a pint with Horatio.) I can't believe that a Cambridge intellectual would refer to "anti-experimental kooks" when he's got loonies, freaks, and fanatics to choose from; I can't believe that a cockney girl talking of her failure to conceive would say: "Me and 'Ank keep tryin'. Lordy, how we try!—some days I'm fair wrung out. But it don't ever click." Least of all can I believe that a hospital doctor and a drug company rep in New Jersey would quote John Heywood at each other—or anybody, anywhere, for that matter (and the same goes for the other Heywood, except perhaps where the Royal Shakespeare Company is rehearsing a feminist/stalinist interpretation of "A Woman Killed With Kindness" with rock music and a multilevel set on three revolves).

In fact I can't believe a word of it, and *Strong Medicine* turns out to be mainly sugar and coloured water. But it slips down quite easily and the side effects are minimal (rolling of the eyes, twitching of the lips, hyperactivity of the chuckle muscle); and after all, the original meaning of placebo is "I will please." No doubt it will.

Strong Medicine. Arthur Hailey. (Pp 430; £9.95.) Michael Joseph/Souvenir Press. 1984.

Nature in Australia

H A F DUDLEY

Colin Wallace's elegantly produced book has obviously been a labour of love for its surgeon author, who has brought to renewed prominence a somewhat neglected figure of Australian discovery during the first decade of the nineteenth century. The title is a little ambiguous: it is not Péron's Australia that we have lost but people (such as the Tasmanian aborigines) and species which were the inheritance of us all. Whether naturalists and anthropologists have also lost out from the obvious lack of attention paid by many to Péron's work is not for me to say. The story told here concentrates on the power of a remarkable Frenchman to pursue his objectives of the study of nature through thick and thin, to overcome difficulties created by inadequate organisation and incompetent leadership, and to display typical gallic élan when it was most needed. The picture of the man is of an obsessive observer—a compulsive abstract empiricist and recorder—possessed perhaps of an imagination that tended to run further than his facts would allow. His discovery of "ritual sites" in the Vasse river area of Western Australia and in Tasmania are examples of his subjective stance, biasing his scientific neutrality; but it is the speculative scientist who may make the most contribution, particularly because enthusiasm is the fellow traveller of speculation and Péron had more than his fair share of both.

This is not a biography but a pastiche. It would be unamiable to criticise the author for his hindsight asides, which tend to distinguish the amateur from the professional historian. I would have

liked to see a more balanced analysis of the exploration of the Australian coastline—after all it was the great age of neo-Australian (I nearly wrote British) effort with Bass and Flinders as its greatest and, dare I say it, most disciplined exponents. But this is a personal and admiring sketch of one man, destined to die in his early 30s of pulmonary tuberculosis. There is a breathless foreword from David Bellamy, which enhances neither his stature nor the provenance of the book. How much better the reader would have been served by a good map of the toing and froing of the ships of the expedition; even such knowledge as I have of the nation of the nadir does not easily permit me to follow their peregrinations or to appreciate the sheer determination of these navigators who would face scurvy, dysentery, unsavoury commanders, and much else beside to achieve geographical and ideological objectives. Mr Wallace's speculations on these matters would have been welcomed, though one wonders if he has a deep appreciation of the eighteenth century pattern of disease. Certainly he has not researched malaria adequately. He might also note that King George Sound in Western Australia faces south and east, not west.

The Lost Australia of François Péron. Colin Wallace. Foreword by David Bellamy. (Pp 165 + bibliography and index; £9.95.) Nottingham Court Press. 1984.