Comment

Phaeochromocytoma is a rare but potentially curable cause of hypertension. It may mimic a variety of diseases, and the diagnosis relies on clinical suspicion leading to specific investigations. The earliest report of acute thyroid swelling associated with a phaeochromocytoma was in 1938,¹ though the diagnosis of an adrenal chromaffin tumour was made only at necropsy. In 1947 Bauer and Belt described paroxysmal hypertension with concomitant thyroid swelling due to phaeochromocytoma of the right adrenal, which was cured by adrenalectomy.² Further evidence came from an experimental study on the action of noradrenaline in man, when thyroid swelling was observed in two volunteers given intravenous infusions of 30 mg synthetic 1-noradrenaline/min, though no swelling was seen with infusions of adrenaline.³ It seems that phaeochromocytomas secreting predominantly noradrenaline could cause thyroid swelling as in this patient. How this is mediated is not clear, though Rein *et al* reported in 1932 that thyroid blood flow is reduced when the carotid sinus nerve is cut and is greatly increased when the nerve is stimulated.⁴ It has been postulated² that a sudden rise in blood pressure due to inappropriate release of noradrenaline might increase thyroid blood flow via the carotid sinus nerve, producing a visible or palpable thyroid swelling.

One of us had previously seen a 58 year old man with a right adrenal phaeochromocytoma whose symptoms included inter-

mittent headache, palpitations, and neck swelling, all of which resolved after the adrenal tumour was removed. This experience prompted an early suspicion of a phaeochromocytoma in the case reported here, leading to early diagnosis and surgical cure. We think that any patient with a history of intermittent neck swelling should be carefully assessed for the presence of a phaeochromocytoma.

We thank Dr A W Stott, biochemistry department, Scarborough Hospital, for carrying out the metanephrine estimations.

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Reading for Pleasure

The second fifteen

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Firstly, a word in explanation of my title. This is the second paper that I have written in this series, and it represents my more youthful taste. It does not reflect on the authors.

G A Henty was one of the authors whom I read most avidly as a boy. Nowadays he is enjoying something of a vogue on the BBC and in the papers. If we are to believe them Henty's historical settings were accurate but his characters were rather wooden. I was quite unaware of this and read every Henty that I could get hold of with the utmost pleasure. All his books followed a similar pattern—the hero was an officer or at least of officer material and took part in the principal battles of the campaign that the author was dealing with. Needless to say he survived every danger to the end. This may have given a rather erroneous view of the hazards of a military life. Nevertheless, I owe Henty an immense debt for awakening my interest in military history. In particular, I recall *With Lee in Virginia*, which gave me a lifelong liking for the American civil war.

Naturally enough school stories formed a large part of what I read. Talbot Baines Read is an author who wrote what is probably the finest school story ever penned, *The Fifth Form at St Dominics*. It has set the pattern of school stories ever since it first appeared 100 years ago. It deals with life in an English public school in Victorian times: a splendid set of characters ranging from fags to sixth formers take part in a series of adventures ranging over the whole spectrum of school activities—classwork, games, scholarships, etc. It is still in print and I have reread it several times with enjoyment.

And now I come to what is frankly a cry for help. Can any reader lend me a copy of *Mobsley's Mohicans*? I read this school story 60 years ago and have been looking for a copy ever since without success. It is (I think) by Harold Avery and deals with the adventures of Mobsley and his friends at an English boarding school, culminating in a fight with a burglar. My memories of this book, even after 60 years, are vivid, and it deserves to be reprinted.

I have often noticed that I tend to prefer the earlier works of an author. One author who well illustrates this is Rider Haggard. I have read almost all his books, but none has given me as much pleasure as *King Solomon's Mines*. The writer recounts the adventures of a small party of Englishmen in pursuit of treasure in Africa. I shall not say more lest I spoil it for those who may not have read it. I have reread it many times and it still retains its freshness and excitement.

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Conan Doyle's historical novels

I come now to Conan Doyle, who has probably given me more pleasure than any other writer. I loved his Sherlock Holmes stories and in fact liked all his books, but it was his historical novels that gave me the greatest pleasure. I found *Micah Clarke* quite superlative. It deals with the adventures of a Roundhead's son, Micah, in the Monmouth rebellion in the west country. Despite the outcome of the rebellion Micah comes back safe and sound. So likewise does Decimus Saxon—a soldier of fortune worthy to rank with Rittmaster Dugald Dalgetty. I have reread *Micah Clarke* a score or so of times and it does not pall. The same holds good for almost all Conan Doyle's novels except for *The White Company* and *Sir Nigel*, which presents far too romanticised a version of mediaeval society to carry conviction.

Robert Louis Stevenson—what pleasure he has given me. I have read nearly everything that he wrote, but it was his earlier novels such as *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* that I especially liked. In *Kidnapped* we follow the adventurous journeys of David Balfour in the highlands shortly after the 1745 uprising. It is an exceptionally vivid narrative, and who can ever forget the fight in the round house or broiling on top of a great rock when pursued by the redcoats in sweltering heat? Like all good books it is as fresh today as when I first read it almost 60 years ago.

A writer who gave me great pleasure in my teens was Jeffrey Farnol. I think I must have read everything that he wrote. I liked them all, be they the Corinthian novels that made his name or the later Jasper Shrigg ones in which Shrigg (a Bow Street runner) brought a variety of villains to book. I especially liked his early stories such as *The Broad Highway* and *The Amateur Gentleman*. These tales deal with the adventures and misadventures of young men in the time of the Corinthians and have a freshness and charm that the years cannot alter. In fact, they seem to exist (at least to me) in the loveliness of an eternal English June morning. If you have not read him try these two.

Another writer who I discovered in my teens was John Buchan. I liked his historical novels such as *Salute to Adventurers*, but it was his earlier books like *Prester John* and *Greenmantle* that gave me most pleasure. In *Greenmantle* we follow the adventures of Richard Hannay across Europe in the first world war to Turkey. Considering when it was written there is a quite amazing absence of bitterness and a most surprising objectivity in it. I can strongly recommend it.

In my previous article I concluded by saying how much illustrations added to pleasure of reading. One example that springs to mind is Dornford Yates. It was through the pages of *The Windsor* magazine that I first made his acquaintance. My interest in him was thanks to the skill of Norah Schlegell, whose apt illustrations of the Berry stories first caught my eye. I did not like the Berry stories much. My memories are of the intensely irritating habit that Berry's friends had of laughing helplessly at his behaviour and wit, which were those of an outsize oaf. I was, however, entranced by Yates's series of stories of Continental motoring, and I still recall with pleasure the stalwart performances of the two cars "Ping" and "Pong."

But it was his series of stories such as *Blind Corner* and *Perishable Goods* in which his hero Mansell and others rescued fair ladies from a variety of Austrian castles that captivated me. Have I ever enjoyed books more? His splendid heroes, entrancing heroines, and crafty villains such as Rose Noble held me in thrall. Mercifully I read them when I was too young to realise how impossible his characters were and what a snob the author was. His books do not reread at all well except for the excellent descriptions of woods, streams, and the countryside.

J M Barrie, though largely forgotten these days, was very much to the fore when I was in my teens. I loved *My Lady Nicotine*, which started me on my career as a pipe smoker. But it was when I was given a collected edition of his plays (in 1929) that he exercised his magic on me. I loved them all; they did not strike me as sentimental and I enjoyed the whole lot. I

have reread them and have enjoyed them, though I do find some of them a trifle on the sentimental side. Anyway, why not give him a try. Make a start with *Quality Street*, about the love of a young schoolmistress for an Army surgeon in the Napoleonic wars, and if you like it read the others.

The Honeysuckle and the Bee is a book of reminiscences by Sir J Squire written (I think) in 1938. Finding London in the height of summer very trying, the author decided to repeat a journey that he had made on foot to Blundells School in Tiverton. The book describes his adventures and reminiscences on the way. It is a lovely book and is well worth reading.

Introduction to the Army

So far I have omitted James Grant, but I hasten to rectify this as he was one of the most formative influences on my youthful tastes. Grant was a Victorian novelist, who had served as an Army officer, and his novels were largely devoted to military subjects. I came across him at the age of 13 and for the next three years read everything of his that I could get hold of. How well I remember *Philip Rollo*, which is an account of the siege of Stralsound in the thirty years' war. But it was *The Romance of War*—Grant's best known novel—that I especially delighted in. It deals with the adventures of a young officer in a highland regiment in the peninsular war. It's full of adventures, a tragic love affair, and a most dastardly villain called Cifuentes. Thanks to Grant I early made up my mind to lead a military life.

I have not mentioned a word about poetry. It did play and continues to play an important part in my enjoyment, but it is a subject that will have to be dealt with on a future occasion. Meanwhile, I hope that this brief incursion into the past will awaken some pleasant memories in older readers and stimulate some of the younger to read what has given me so much pleasure.

A patient once placed two tablets on my desk and said that they had been "right through him." The obvious explanation was that they had been overcompressed in the manufacturing process. Is this so and is this patient's experience uncommon?

All drugs marketed in the United Kingdom must have a product licence. The information required to support a licence application includes details of the manufacturing process and evidence that the formulation is satisfactory. This will include the results of in vitro disintegration tests. The manufacturer is also required to specify the tests that will be carried out for routine quality control to ensure batch to batch reproducibility. The medicines inspectorate of the Department of Health and Social Security ensures that manufacturers comply with the conditions of a licence by visiting manufacturers' premises and by selective random sampling of products. Products for use in National Health Service hospitals pass through an additional quality control system to ensure that they are of an acceptable standard, but this does not apply to products sold in retail pharmacies. Some batch to batch variation is inevitable and some batches may fall below the disintegration standards required for the product licence. I do not know how commonly this occurs, but the experience of hospital quality control laboratories suggests that it could be a problem with products from some companies. It is, however, unlikely that batch to batch variation would result in total failure of a product to disintegrate, as appears to have occurred in this case. Failure to disintegrate could, however, occur if the drug had been stored under unsuitable conditions or kept beyond its expiry date. Wax Matrix slow release preparations such as Slow-K can appear to pass "straight through" because the ghost tablet cores which have lost their potassium are passed in the stools.—LINDA BEELEY, director, drug and therapeutics unit, Birmingham.