know one or even more meanings of such words; but he is less likely to recognise the value that such words take on in different contexts. For example, "as" has six different meanings signifying at least four different logical categories: because, when, while, in the same way, in accordance with what, considered as; and "once" may mean: for one time, only, at some indefinite time, if, as soon as, at all, not even for one time. The students' mistakes often show a strong bias towards one particular meaning of a word to the exclusion of the other meanings.

Content and aims of a reading course

It might be relevant to list the skills of a reading programme. Many parallels can be drawn between the writing and reading processes if we consider the former as the selection and coherent organisation of experience so as to report, explain, and evaluate, and the latter as recognising and judging the organisation and purpose of this selected body of facts, ideas, and opinions. The ultimate skill—comprehending and handling of intellectual material—may be broken down into various components, which become pedagogically useful if we can devise valid exercises through which to reach these component skills. These exercises then have to be ordered into a teaching sequence—stepping stones towards the ultimate skill.

The following is a somewhat random list of study skills which should help the student learn to read—to read to learn: recognising important details; identifying unrelated details; locating key words and informational clues; outlining single paragraphs; determining conceptual paragraphs; grasping the rhetorical function of a paragraph; finding the main idea of a paragraph; determining relationships between paragraphs; finding the main idea of larger selections; locating topic sentences and sentences or phrases containing supporting information and ideas; deter-

mining the relevance and accuracy of information; identifying the author's viewpoint; realising the author's purposes in individual sections and the whole article; seeing the relation between the purposes; classifying the author's statements by degrees of certainty (use of different tenses); finding possible implications; detecting fallacies in logic; finding overgeneralisations, distortions, omissions; summarising single paragraphs and larger units of material; and recognising the significance of the content as a whole.

If we manage to teach our students to recognise these types of information and perform these skills, they will gain a more thorough and more rapid comprehension of a piece of scientific writing and come closer to understanding the language used as the writer intended it to be understood.

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Reading for Pleasure

Celtic and non-Celtic nostalgia

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Environment has a considerable effect on reading habits. Crime writers evidently profit from the tendency of others to pack a few thrillers in their holiday baggage. Two events have influenced my reading in the past year. The first was that the farmhouse in Wales where my mother had lived for 95 years was sold and I had to move out books dating from my schooldays. The other was that, after living in England for nearly 40 years, I bought a house in Wales. I hope to use this periodically and I wanted to furnish it with a modest collection of books, both for my benefit and that of friends who may use it. The school books went in, together with a selection from my home in England.

Return to Wales

Just as books have a flavour of their own, so do houses. The farm where I was brought up was on a high plateau with the moors rising gently behind. Though I loved the song of the curlew, I disliked the driving rain and the drizzle. So in choosing a new home I went for softness and I now have a house in the valley below, on the banks of the Teifi, where the sun shines more often. To me the Teifi is the finest river in Wales and no other shows so many changes of character. One of its habits is to carve out enormous wide, still, and deep pools when it changes direction. These look like small lakes and they are given individual names. In other places, where it flows slowly, it has gouged out deep canyons with sheer sides in the rocks. In summer, the stream is confined to this narrow channel and the water is so still and black and deep that as a child I readily believed that its depth under the bridge at Henllan was immeasurable.

I have reread two books on life in this part of Wales at the turn of the century—and it had not changed much in my childhood. Both were identified as gems by that perspicacious writer on country matters, Maurice Wiggin in the *Sunday Times*. The first was *Welsh Country Upbringing* by D Parry-Jones

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(Batsford), who was brought up on a neighbouring farm. I remember his father as a towering bearded figure in my childhood, and he had the most highly polished brown leather leggings and boots that I have ever known. I hope that prejudice in favour of books about people I know does not entirely explain my liking for this one. The other was *Give Me Yesterday* by James Williams (Gwasg Gomer), who was brought up further down the Teifi valley. These books bring out the friendliness and comradeship of life in rural Wales in those days and the absence of class strife. Though there was a certain difference in status between the farmers and those in the "small houses," they spoke the same language with the same accent and their children all went to the same schools. This was a happy contrast to life in some English villages. In Ronald Blythe's *Akenfield*, a splendid portrait of a Suffolk village, some of the hostility between the farmers and the labourers comes through. In Suffolk, the farms were much larger than in Wales and the farmers were more prosperous and sent their sons to public schools.

Among my school books was a volume of Dafydd ap Gwilym, the great romantic poet of the fourteenth century. I found the language to be rather less difficult than Chaucer and, with the help of pencilled marginal notes from schooldays, I was able to get considerable enjoyment in small doses. Dafydd's mother lived a little up river and, according to legend, she was courted by Gwilym from north Cardiganshire. When she was found to be pregnant she was turned out of the house and made her way to an uncle in Glamorganshire. Gwilym heard of her plight and followed. On the way, on a night of rain and hail and under a bush, she gave birth to a son. Next day they reached Llandaff where they were married, but she died on the same day and Dafydd was christened on his mother's coffin. When he matured as a poet he travelled around the courts of the Welsh princes, and George Borrow considered him to be the greatest poetical genius to have appeared in Europe since the revival of literature. He is buried in the grounds of the abbey at Strata Florida, higher up the valley, where the Teifi runs through the Red Bog of Tregaron, now a sanctuary for rare plants.

I consider myself lucky to be able to read Welsh poetry. The language has changed less than English, so I can enjoy some of the early poets. One of the most haunting poems I know was written in the ninth century about the devastation of the hall of Cynddylan, prince of Powys:

Stafell Gynddylan ys tywyll heno,
Heb dân, heb wely;
Wylaf wers, tawaf wedy.

"Cynddylan's hall is dark tonight, without fire, without bed; I weep awhile and then am still."

I also enjoy the lyric poems of this century and Wales still seems to have more poets per head of population than any other nation. In contrast, Welsh prose is rather thin but we have the glories of Bishop Morgan's 1588 translation of the Bible. The 1620 revision is still used and it is just as magnificent as King James's version. Only recently have we had a new Welsh translation—of the New Testament only. It sounds and reads very well and it is less likely to arouse hostility than the various modern English versions.

The argument how long Welsh will survive continues. In 1852, Matthew Arnold prophesied that it would be effaced. He regarded this as desirable, as many insensitive people do today. Educationalists did their worst for decades, but in the East industrialisation succeeded where they failed. In the rural West the language flourished, but it now seems in danger. Half the farms in my part of Wales are now occupied by the English, whereas there were none before the war. I get a little comfort from scanning the faces on television from Cardiff Arms Park and see so many singing the national anthem in Welsh. But at the same time I realise that a widespread facility in reciting the Te Deum did not do much to keep Latin as a living language. A language will survive only as long as boys and girls make love in

it and bring up their children to speak it. Teaching in school is of secondary importance.

Between sleeps

My nostalgia has not been entirely Celtic. An overnight stay in Knutsford, where Mrs Gaskell lived for many years, made me reread *Cranford*. This was a set book at school. It wasn't a favourite with robust boys, but in my case its charming flavour lingered on. Mrs Gaskell seems to be a Jane Austen with rather more sentiment and less satirical bite. The Royal George Hotel and King Street on a snowy winter's night still conveyed a great deal of the atmosphere of the days when the dear ladies of *Cranford* were living their lives of elegant economy.

As a rule, I do not do so much rereading and I always regret getting through so few books in a year. Time is swallowed up by the never-ending battle to keep up to date in my specialty and a recently acquired tendency to get enmeshed in crossword puzzles. I also drop off to sleep too often. This is not a sign of senility but a problem that I have had from my teens. I seem to have the most ravel-free sleeves for miles around. Another problem is that the better the book, the longer I make it last. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* was such a treat that I cut down my daily ration and made it last a month. As I do most of my reading in bed, having got in some sleep beforehand, I am often pestered to put the light out. So short stories are convenient and I can point out how near to the end I am. An omnibus volume of Damon Runyon is a delight and I never tire of his language and the innocence with which he clothes the nefarious activities of his guys and dolls. Other good bedside short stories are those of Saki and Roald Dahl, both with a nice touch of the macabre.

But the best bedside book of the past year has been *The New Oxford Book of Light Verse*. There are enjoyable poems by people I had never heard of, like W M Praed, and it made me realise that perhaps I should have spent more time reading what Byron wrote instead of all those romantic biographies about him and his circle. It also taught me that before Marx had reached Highgate cemetery, Ebenezer Elliott had written:

"What is a communist? One who has yearnings
For equal division of unequal earnings;
Idler or bungler, or both, he is willing
To fork out his penny and pocket my shilling."

Perhaps the most disappointing book I have read recently was Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*: a worthy subject, but to me a muddy canvas.

I must not forget that weekly treat, the arrival of the *BMJ*, a splendid balance of material to interest such a wide range of medical readers, but with enough space to print a good number of original papers.

Is mefenamic acid of any value in treating menorrhagia?

Mefenamic acid is a prostaglandin-synthetase inhibitor used in treating primary dysmenorrhoea. It reduced significantly excessive menstrual blood loss in six patients with dysfunctional uterine bleeding and in one patient with an intrauterine device.¹ Other anecdotal reports suggest that this effect occurs with other prostaglandin-synthetase inhibitors.^{2,3}

¹ Anderson, A B M, et al, *Lancet*, 1976, **1**, 774.

² Dickey, R P, *Postgraduate Medicine*, 1976, **60**, 183.

³ Kapadia, L, and Elder, M G, *Lancet*, 1978, **1**, 348.

Is whooping-cough vaccination contraindicated in a child whose elder siblings have each had a single febrile convulsion?

The fact that a child's two elder siblings had a febrile convulsion is no contraindication to whooping-cough immunisation. It is irrelevant.