ity remains, however, in spite of expectations having had to be modified by the financial restrictions of the last two or three years. The necessity for new hospital facilities in Oxford was officially accepted in 1964. The increasing local population, more specialisation within medicine, the need for a larger medical school, and inadequate resources for the care of patients at the infirmary made the need obvious. More beds and more specialist departments were eagerly awaited, and from about 1973 developments at the infirmary itself were slowed, if not halted. It was therefore particularly frustrating that about two years ago the increase expected in the regional budget to allow the John Radcliffe Hospital to be opened, while maintaining most of the existing beds in the area hospitals, did not materialise. This economy has brought an immense amount of administrative work to a relatively small group of doctors and administrators charged with the task of effecting what has come to be known as "level transfer"—namely, that the new hospital might open only if there were no increase in the number of beds or facilities. Even allowing for this condition, the additional annual revenue needed is said to be in the region of £750 000. It might be asked why, with modern designs and techniques, it should cost so much more to do the same task in a new building.

To open the John Radcliffe phase 2—at which about 80-85% of admissions will be acute—has therefore meant planning the closure of other hospitals in the area. Such closures have been resisted, sometimes vigorously and usually with the support of the local community health council. It is greatly to the credit of

the working party, and others who have been reorganising the local hospital services, that ways have been found to assuage both annoyed medical staff, whose departmental plans have been curtailed, and some local communities, who understandably have felt more concerned about social services and care of the aged than what they incorrectly see as an expensive "scientific" hospital and medical school.

The administrative changes brought about by the introduction of the National Health Service in 1948 made the Radcliffe Infirmary part of the "United Oxford Hospitals," and the more recent reorganisation, which incorporated it into the less sympathetically sounding "area health authority (teaching)," are now followed by an appreciable change in its clinical responsibilities for the people of Oxford. At one stage in planning the new hospital services—in about 1972—the infirmary was to be closed as a hospital. Economic factors mainly—but perhaps also a less easily defined feeling among those who might have been required to supervise its closure—put an end to this plan. The Radcliffe Infirmary will continue, I hope without some of its older "temporary" buildings, as an important hospital in the area but will be occupied mainly by patients undergoing elective care, many of them elderly. May its reputation continue to prosper.

The views expressed here are personal: the historical facts have been gleaned from two books which I have enjoyed reading again—*The Radcliffe Infirmary* by A G Gibson (1926), Oxford University Press; and *A Short History of the Radcliffe Infirmary* by A H T Robb-Smith (1970), Church Army Press.

Reading for Pleasure

Other people's lives

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Sometimes the effluent of directives, circulars, and discussion papers threatens to swamp us all. It is then that we should gratefully take Dr Johnson's advice: "A man ought to read just as inclination leads him, for what he reads as a task will do him little good." For me, those inclinations lead to biography. It is not that I dislike fiction: it is more that I am fascinated by how real people are driven by compassion, humour, good luck, excitement, ambition, or even sheer lust for power. There is much to be enjoyed in a well-written life, be it of statesman or politician, saint or sinner.

Inclination for biography

By their very nature contemporary political autobiographies are vulnerable. Statesmen write their memoirs in old age, when time and partiality may cloud the issues and judgments of earlier days. Politicians often write their memoirs when the complacent

euphoria of power softens self-criticism, or when the rancour of electoral defeat hardens bias.

While listening to Harold Macmillan on the eve of his 85th birthday in conversation with Robert McKenzie recently, I was reminded of my enjoyment of his five-volume autobiography, which is refreshingly free from these pitfalls. These memoirs are written in the grand style in which the formative influences of his literary background are clearly evident. He points out the difficulties of contemporary reporting by aptly quoting Horace Walpole's complaint: "It is one of the bad effects of living in one's own time that one never knows the truth of it till one is dead." To read these five books in sequence would be a major undertaking, but taken piecemeal there is much to relish. A debater may savour Mr Macmillan's urbane riposte to Khrushchev's interruptions at the United Nations; a historian may dissect his analysis of world crises; and even an apprehensive speaker may gain comfort that the Prime Minister could not face lunch before Parliamentary questions.

My first introduction to the late Sir Alan Herbert's poetic talent was a solemn recitation of his "Lines on a Book Borrowed from the Ship's Doctor" by a distinguished professor of obstetrics at a rugby club dinner some 25 years ago. Since then I have enjoyed his less salacious verse, and his autobiography, *APH—His Life and Times*, is sheer delight. This entertaining story was written to celebrate his 80th birthday and reflects his talents as poet, playwright, lawyer, humorist, waterman, theatrical producer, and Member of Parliament. In this last

role he achieved popular fame as the vociferous Independent MP for Oxford University who, by a combination of boldness, impudence, and talent, brought much-needed common-sense changes into the law of the land. APH was a prolific author and wrote piquantly about politics and the law in such books as *Uncommon Law* (1927), *The Ayes Have It* (1937), *Independent Member* (1950), and *Wigs at Work* (1966). He was very much a House of Commons man but few MPs could have written more graciously of the Lords than APH did in his musical *Big Ben*:

While the Commons must bray like an ass every day
To appease their electoral hordes,
We don't say a thing till we've something to say
There's a lot to be said for the Lords.

Unfortunately, those who undertake memorable journeys seldom recount their achievements in matching prose. The yards of spurned travelogues on our library shelves testify to this. Patrick Leigh Fermor succeeds brilliantly where others have failed. His remarkable new book *A Time of Gifts* tells of a journey from Holland, into the heart of Europe, down the Danube, and across the Balkans before the boundaries of old Europe had to be redrawn by the savagery of Hitler's war. This was the Europe of battlements and barbicans, deposed dukes and swineherds, cobbled streets, and postage stamps. He savours the scenes and sights with undisguised relish. When he visited the Spanish Riding School in Vienna, for example: "They moved with grace and precision about the glaucous concavity of the school: caracoling across the raked and muffling tan, rhythmically changing step, passaging, advancing as though double-jointed, flicking out their forelegs as straight as match-sticks, slewing over the manège in side-stepped hesitation waltzes, pawing the air as they backed slowly on their haunches and taking to the air at last like Pegasus and seeming to remain there for long moments of suspension and stasis. Except when a recondite feat evoked a crackle of applause, the sequence unfolded in a stilly hush." *A Time of Gifts* is not only an autobiographical journey: it is a perceptive adventure undertaken to shake off the constraints of middle-class convention. Perhaps it succeeds, because this is the type of pilgrimage we should all like to undertake, but dare not.

Journey companions

For me, Kingsley Amis has always been a reliable companion on long rail and air journeys with *Ending-up*, *The Riverside Villas Murder*, and *I Like it Here* taking pride of place. It was something of a surprise, therefore, to discover that he has recently undertaken two new ventures—a biography of Rudyard Kipling, and the compilation of the *New Oxford Book of Light Verse*. When we lived in Sussex, our Sunday afternoon walks often took us past Batemans, Kipling's house, near Rottingdean, and it always seemed incongruous that this rather gloomy house in its typically English setting should have been the home of one whose fame was the direct result of his stories from India at the turn of the century. Kipling left India at the age of 24 but, in spite of his extensive travels, remained intensely English. Undoubtedly, most of his best work was derived from material gleaned in India during his youth and his obvious talent did not fulfil its potential in later years. I enjoyed this book, which is well researched and lavishly illustrated. As a biography, however, I found it disappointing because at the end I knew little more of the character of a shy patriot whose imaginative storytelling has never been surpassed. Amis spends much time scrutinising Kipling's style, examining his technique, and exposing his literary weaknesses, rather than telling us of the man himself. I imagine that this is inevitable when one professional storyteller seeks to tell the tale of another.

In his introduction to *The New Oxford Book of Light Verse*, published at the end of 1978, Kingsley Amis seeks to explain his definition of light verse and contrasts his selections with those of W H Auden (who compiled the first anthology in 1938). Those expecting to find selections from our younger poets will be disappointed. Of recent verse, Amis complains, "You can't rhyme and scan with reference to, in relation to, alongside what does neither." Nevertheless, his catholic selection will appeal to most and I hope will entertain everyone. Those men who still regard the flood of women entrants to medical schools with slight circumspection might bear in mind A D Godley's views on "Women's Degrees" written very many years ago.

A tangled web indeed we weave
When Adam grants degrees to Eve:
And much I doubt, had Eve first had 'em,
If she'd have done as much for Adam.

Grace and gossip

As an unashamed cricket enthusiast, I will read almost anything published on cricket. During the early part of this fearful winter, a hundred years after his medical qualification, I have been reading Dr W G Grace's autobiography, which was first published in 1898. From 1860 until the end of the century this bearded giant dominated English cricket and saw it transformed from a casual village-green pastime to a highly organised professional sport. Who else could have achieved such fame for notices outside grounds to read "Admission 6d. If Dr Grace plays, Admission 1s." It is said that WG never broke the rules, but I suspect him of being the grandfather of Stephen Potter. It is sad that many of the current cricket books, supposedly written by players, are so obviously "ghosted" by journalists. Rumour has it that WG employed one of his old friends to write his autobiography; I do not really doubt this, for the doctor was not renowned for his academic achievements. Nevertheless, it is fun to go back to those sepia photographs, drooping moustaches, ties belted round the waist, and shirt sleeves buttoned at the wrist. I am told that now Mr Packer's cricketers wear luminous pink or lilac. Perhaps my daughters will be attracted to take up the game.

What am I reading this week? Well, there are two paperbacks by my bedside. One is Saul Bellow's *To Jerusalem and Back*. Some years ago when I read *The Adventures of Augie March* and *Henderson the Rain King* I should never have thought that Saul Bellow would win the Nobel Prize for literature. I must confess that, to some extent, this has stimulated me to read this recent book (originally serialised in the *New Yorker*). The Middle-East problem is still with us, and this sensitively written book seeks to describe contemporary Jewish life in Israel. Bellow's writing is as fresh as crisp spring lettuce, and gossips such as those with Ephraim Mizrahi, the barber, and Weisgal, the fund raiser, are retailed with candour and wit. In a journey of four months, conversations with many people, and a deal of self-musing, Bellow tells us much of the country and culture that he so clearly loves.

My other bedside book is Peter Ustinov's *Dear Me*—which needs fewer explanations. Scarcely a week goes by without one or other of our "personalities" having a book published. Clearly, there is a ready market for this type of publication. Nevertheless, *Dear Me* is in a class of its own and those who have enjoyed Ustinov as a raconteur will be well pleased with this book, which is written with style and humour. My local bookseller tells me that it will soon be challenging James Herriot and David Niven in the popularity stakes. Ustinov's stories are superb; I doubt if there is more than a grain of truth in many of them—but who cares?