stallation of penicillin into the sheath combined with systemic treatment produced a high proportion of movable fingers so long as treatment was started before death of the tendon.

Today one rarely sees severe infection of the fingers or hands, and this is due in large measure to the first-aid now given in factories and elsewhere, together with prompt antibiotic treatment.

Other severe infections admitted from time to time included cavernous sinus thrombosis, large sloughing carbuncles, and anaerobic hand infections from human bites. Such patients often died or suffered amputation, but if they nowadays occur they can usually be quickly and successfully cured—for example, in 1943 a colleague, Dr Valentine, and I reported 32 cases of acute staphylococcal infection of various types: 29 had a positive blood culture, and 19 of them died (over half). When we treated 13 similar cases after penicillin became available, only two patients died, both of whom had a fulminating septicaemia with colony counts of 7000 and 250 staphylococci per cc of blood.

Shortly after the war, Professor Fleming, Professor Christie, and I were invited by the British Council to give lectures in Denmark on the uses of penicillin: it was an unforgettable experience. Fleming was greeted in a manner which I thought was usually reserved for victorious generals and, although not an inspiring speaker, received a tumultuous reception. At that time, Florey's role in adapting penicillin to clinical use was not fully appreciated. In my view, however, their combined work on conquering staphylococcal infection was outstanding. Before their work severe infections were common in Britain—many due to the staphylococcus—and these caused many deaths from bacteraemia against which drugs or surgery had little to offer.

After the discovery of penicillin and other antibiotics the picture altered dramatically (as we have seen). Finally, another important factor is that much postwar surgery would have been impractical—joint replacements, for example, where prevention of infection is vital and its advent so disastrous.

Reading for Pleasure

A favourite score

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Books are my best investment and I never grudge money spent on them. Bacon said that "reading maketh a full man," but, outside that concerned with work, I read purely for pleasure. I am more self-indulgent now than I used to be, and no longer persevere with a book I am not enjoying. I classify myself a middlebrow—although possibly lowbrow in comparison with many of the contributors to this series. Nevertheless, my taste may appeal to some *BMJ* readers. All the books discussed here I rate as "good reads." My brief was books I had enjoyed during the last six months, but I am going to cheat and go back about a year.

Military history

Cecil Woodham Smith's *The Reason Why* came into my hands years ago as a book society choice. I still think it a perfect history book for the general reader, and it started for me a long-lasting and probably permanent interest in military history. Like many others of my generation, I am fascinated by the first world war. My two favourite books on this are Alistair Horne's *The Price of Glory* and Barbara Tuchman's *August 1914* and I reread both this year. *The Price of Glory* is about Verdun, and for me sums up perfectly the nature of the war with its contradictions and the extraordinary endurance and heroism of the soldiers living under appalling conditions. People like myself (who remember him only from the second) may be surprised by Pétain's role as the hero of Verdun in the first world war. Alone among the French generals, he had the total

trust of his men, and saved the day again when the bulk of the French Army mutinied in 1917: strangely, the Germans and British remained unaware of what was happening. Verdun was, literally, a turning point in the war with its famous catch phrase—"ils ne passeront pas"—usually, and wrongly, attributed to Pétain, but in fact said by Nivelle.

Tuchman's book, on the other hand, is about the events which led up to the war and about the first few weeks of the fighting. As most readers will know, the war opened with the fatally altered Schlieffen Plan. Schlieffen had planned a Cannae-like envelopment with his main force on the right, sweeping round to the west of Paris. Schlieffen's last words on his death-bed were "Only make the right wing strong." Unfortunately for the Germans, in 1914 Von Moltke ignored this advice, and August closed with Gallieni falling on the exposed German flank. I have read numerous books about the first world war, but for me, these were the best and the ones I bought for rereading.

Two books about the second world war stand out and both radically altered my view of the war. The first, *Barbarossa* by Alan Clark, is the story of Hitler's war in Russia. This was a titanic conflict, and the descriptions of the huge tank battles and the street fighting (at which the Russian soldiers excelled) are permanently implanted in my memory. The second book is *Bomber* by Len Deighton, and is about Bomber Command—told from both the British and German points of view. Although it is fiction, it has an authentic feel to it despite the fact that Deighton was too young to have fought in the war himself. In the acknowledgments there is a revealing and true story of a briefing in which the assembled air crew cheer the news that they will be flying out accompanied by Stirlings—the point being that the slower and more vulnerable Stirlings would take most of the flak. Bomber crews had a short life expectancy, and knew it.

Over the years, I have read a lot about wars—among those that particularly interest me are the American Civil War, the Indian Mutiny, the Zulu Wars, and Wellington's Peninsular

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campaigns. This past year, I read for the first time some books about the Indian wars in America. There has been a recent upsurge of interest in the plight of the American Indian and this can only be heightened by reading of their long-drawn out and doomed struggle with the white settlers. *War Cries on Horseback* by Stephen Longstreet is an excellent account of this; the author is sympathetic to the Indians, while understanding the aspirations of the settlers. There was no Geneva Convention in this war, and it is difficult to decide which side was the more barbarous. It needs a strong stomach in places, but I found this an enjoyable and interesting book.

I greatly enjoyed two other books about the settling of the American West—both by Dee Brown (who wrote *Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee*). *Ladies of the Wild West* is about the women who set out on the arduous and dangerous journey west to establish homes and raise their families in the new country. These were no helpless Victorian prudes, but tough and independent women of all classes and backgrounds who had to live without most of the props of civilisation. They made their own soap by boiling lye water with grease, but nevertheless insisted on retaining the wildly impractical hoop-skirt and bustle. *The Fetterman Massacre* took place in Wyoming in 1866, when 81 US infantry and cavalymen were ambushed by a combined force of Sioux, Cheyennes, and Arapaho Indians. Dee Brown has a facility for recreating an atmosphere and conveyed vividly to me the fear and tension in the outposts of the US frontier army, which were isolated in hostile country and exposed to the constant threat of Indian attack. Interestingly, several of the officer's wives accompanied their husbands on these hazardous assignments.

Biography

The most enjoyable biography I read this year was *84 Charing Cross Road* by Helene Hanff. It is not really biography at all, but a collection of letters written by the author in New York to an antique book shop in London just after the last war. It is difficult to describe the book's charm, but it is both witty and warm-hearted. James Margach's *The Abuse of Power* is a frank and revealing account of the—usually uneasy—relations between the press and the various prime ministers he knew as a lobby correspondent. As the title indicates, he describes the ways in which several incumbents of the office attempted to manipulate the press. Clem Attlee probably comes out best because he was refreshingly unconcerned by what the press thought or said about him. An interesting if somewhat disturbing book.

Philby by Patrick Seale and Maureen McConville is the story of Britain's most famous traitor, and an analysis of his character and motivation. He apparently now lives in contented retirement in Moscow, where he has a large collection of books and indulges in his hobby of gourmet cooking. This is quite a sympathetic portrait of someone the authors feel was not cut out for the life he adopted. The resulting stress was manifested by bouts of heavy drinking, but, despite this, he never once let his cover slip. *The Reich Marshal* by Leonard Mosley is a biography of Hermann Goering. From wartime I remember Goering as a comic character, but he was certainly not that. Mosley presents a sympathetic portrait which I enjoyed, not only because of Goering's extraordinary life but because it contains a clear description of the early rise of the Nazi party.

I have always envied quick-witted people, and Dorothy Parker was one of the fastest and most devastating. *You Might as Well Live* by John Keats contains numerous examples of her famous wit. Challenged to produce a sentence containing the word "horticulture," she replied without a moment's hesitation: "You can lead a horticulture but you can't make her think." After knowing both fame and fortune, her last years were poverty-stricken and lonely. Perhaps her talent was more destructive than constructive, and I am not sure how many of the present generation have even heard of her.

Thrillers

I read many thrillers and rate highly Dick Francis, with his horseracing backgrounds, Ed McBain and the 87th Precinct, and Sjöwall and Wahloo with Martin Beck of the Stockholm police. I also like Len Deighton's thrillers, although I can't always follow his plots. Raymond Chandler is my favourite writer, and I have read all his books several times. Chandler's Californian settings and characters make compulsive reading, and his books are all so good that it is difficult to choose one. I think I return most often to *The Long Goodbye*. Ross McDonald's Lew Archer novels are also firm favourites, possibly because they are very like Chandler's in style.

Recently I discovered a new writer—Robert B Parker—whose books are also reminiscent of Chandler, but completely modern. *The Godwulf Manuscript* is set in an all-too-plausible American university at a time of student revolt. His detective, Spenser, is a gourmet cook and fitness fanatic with a Marlowe-like talent for wisecracking dialogue. Parker's latest and fourth book, *The Promised Land*, is just as good as his first. Set in Cape Cod, it is about the search for a missing wife and introduces a marvellous character in the shape of a hired thug with moral scruples named Hawk. The book is worth reading for him alone. The outstanding thriller this year for me was *Laidlaw* by William McIlvanney. Laidlaw is a middle-aged policeman, and the book is about his investigation of a singularly sordid crime in Glasgow. The Glasgow background and characters are impeccable and the dialogue so crisp and witty that I found it hard to lay the book down. Strongly recommended.

Scottish castles

My hobby is photographing Scottish castles and this, of course, entails a lot of reading. James Thin of Edinburgh publishes beautiful facsimiles of old Scottish books and I treasure my copy of McGibbon and Ross's *The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland*. First published in 1887-92, it is fascinating to discover in Fife (where I do most of my photography) that many of the houses and castles they describe are still there—often in much the same condition as shown in the fine line drawings in their book. I read two good books this year about mediaeval castles, although both are about English castles. *Life in a Mediaeval Castle* by Joseph and Frances Gies is a delightful description of mediaeval life centered on Chepstow Castle on the Wye, which survives as a relatively unaltered ruin.

The second book, *English Castles* by R Allen Brown, is liberally illustrated with plans and photographs and is full of information. It traces the development of castle architecture from Norman times until the strongly fortified house was made obsolete by the development of cannon. Houses were then designed primarily for comfort. I did not find the text easy to read, but to someone interested in the subject it is well worth making the effort.

Conclusion

I am an avid and fast reader and, like Sir John Walton (26 May 1979), love books for themselves as well as for their content. Sir John did not mention smell, but new books have a smell quite as nice as that of new cars. Through reading one can escape into other times and places, and the book that captures my imagination at a given time is probably determined by the fantasy it generates. Whatever the reason, reading is one of the greatest pleasures in my life. The 20 books mentioned here are the pick of this year's crop, and include some which were reread—a process I generally enjoy just as much as the first reading. I hope some of the score may interest other readers enough to try them for themselves.