(UFA) of linoleic and arachidonic (LA:AA) type underlying the disease,^{8,9} though clusters in families are more pronounced than generally believed. The anomaly described by Thompson can be rectified by prolonged treatment with γ -linolenate.¹⁰

(5) Every mother of a patient with MS shows a minor (intermediate) deviation from normal¹¹ and most first daughters of patients show it too (slow with LA, fast with AA in the E-UFA test). Such women we have called "red circles": they never develop MS themselves but are capable of bearing children with the defect, which may result in MS when they grow up.

(6) On the other hand, a woman who is not a "red circle" cannot bear a child who will develop MS even should she have the misfortune to marry a husband who develops the disease. Testing such women eliminates much scarcely concealed anxiety. If, however, a woman is a "red circle" then her children should all be tested in early life.

(7) Myelin is laid down with maturity from about midfetal life until 5 years of age and thereafter with diminishing vigour until about 16 years. Later in life turnover is much less, though some is believed to go on until later decades. Hence if we are to prevent the defect that leads to the laying down of MS-susceptible myelin, it should be detected as early as possible and corrected so that normal, non-susceptible myelin is laid down from the rectified surfaces of oligodendroglial cells.¹² In this way the disease may be prevented before a cure (or the cause or causes) are known. Once faulty myelin has been laid down the problem is intractable and is in some ways similar to that of phenylketonuria.

Testing young children (in the first few months of life) who are near relatives of a sufferer from MS is therefore of paramount

importance. Large-scale testing has been made much easier by the development of automatic machines in East and West Germany, France, England, and America—though there are attendant dangers in the unskilled preparation of red blood cells. Children thus found to have the defect may well be prevented from developing MS—a possibility that could antedate a cure for the disease. A moderate sum of money wisely spent on work directed to such a goal is likely to yield results of much greater benefit to the health and economy of the community than are large sums spent on the intellectually exciting elucidation of molecular mechanisms. With the recent American and Italian¹³ confirmations of the validity of the E-UFA test, the onus for exploring methods of preventing MS lies with the DHSS.

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Reading for Pleasure

Confessions of a book-drunk

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I remember a conversation long ago with a then up-and-coming young academic—now replete with honours, a knighthood, and, most important, a good beat on the Tay—in which he called to mind one man's version of reading for pleasure. It was, in that heyday of science, the chance to retire to bed with a heap of journals and get the opportunity to mull over the advance of science both in general and in your own specialty. An odd attitude, maybe, but one which fulfilled him and he regarded as pleasurable. Which leads me on to say "What is reading for pleasure?" How do we allot the pleasure-pain principle, because if one allows the former one must admit that there is a certain amount of the latter—namely reading for pain, or, put another way, for duty? I am uncertain about such a dichotomy because on the whole all my reading is a pleasure because I enjoy virtually anything that is constructively written and, moreover,

if it is not I take a sadistic pleasure in destroying and sometimes rewriting it. The word workaholic is popular these days—I've encountered it this week in *The Motor*, the *Financial Times*, and the *Observer* (where did it originate because I remember being accused by my first assistant of being one at least eight years ago?)—but I suppose I'm really a biblioholic. That is different from a bibliophile and merely means that I cannot resist reading everything that swims across my line of vision—the cereal packets at breakfast, the comics on my patients' lockers, the papers my fellow travellers in the tube dangle tantalisingly near me, the correspondence on the desks of others. As to the last, an ability to read upside down and back to front is useful if one is up for an interview or in any way trying to outsmart the opposition.

My biblioholic status makes me very unsystematic and a poor contributor to this column. I am amazed by and put to shame because of the erudition and determination of my fellow contributors who have read everything of *this*, kept up to date with the important contributions of *that*, and generally make me feel that I am a slow reader struggling unsuccessfully to keep up with the pace set by all these literati who masquerade as doctors. There is system in their reading—the English novel, the Russian heavies, the pursuit of hobbies, or the acquisition of recondite knowledge. By contrast, I plough along

like the book-drunk I am, knocking into everything in my path and then spinning off at a tangent to take up some new interest. Until a year ago I used to put some order into my book affairs by reading about reading through the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *Higher Education Supplement*. When they went into limbo (never, maybe, to emerge?) I should have, if I was well organised, started a subscription to the *New York Review of Books*, which my expert friends tell me is as good or better, but nine months later I am still thinking about it. Meanwhile, two substitutes for *TLS* have taken off in this country and, though I've noted their existence, I've even forgotten how to set about getting them—obviously I possess a death wish about system in relation to the written word and thus I'm a no hoper.

Journals for pleasure

How, then, has my random pleasure been over the past six months? First, just a word or two about journals. I read *Nature* and *New Scientist* both for pleasure and in the conviction that they are good for me. I realise that my approach is quite uncritical and often ill informed. Even so, in the one I find such good editorial style that it is a pleasure to wander into geology, astrophysics, or virtually anything else even if it is scientifically way beyond my ken. In the other, I see ourselves as others see us which is always refreshing; *New Scientist* is often (though I would hasten to add not always) superficial but at the same time effectively interpretative to a wider audience than the specialist in any subject. Though I sometimes get irritated with its skimming over a subject that I know about (as others will doubtless do with things they know about), there is always something that delights—perhaps particularly enthuses a surgeon, whose closeness to practical things makes him sib to the engineers and applied scientists who figure prominently in the *New Scientist* pages. One particular contribution that I found interesting recently was from Professor Jim Blacklock, who, though visiting professor of engineering and cybernetics at the University of Reading, is a man who has been an independent researcher throughout most of his life. Without the private means of an eighteenth-century dilettante I didn't think such things existed, but they do. Among many crisp pieces of advice which I cherish was one not to try and keep up with the literature but instead to make it—a view which will forever after absolve me from the sin of failing to make comprehensive reference quotations.

While on this subject I have to confess that, though I would like to be able to say that I still read *New Society* for the insight it might give me at the other clinical interface—that between my work as a doctor and the society and people in which I pursue my task—I have, after ten years, had to drop it. I'm a little uncertain why because I did enjoy it—pressure of other things, of course, but that it has fallen to the bottom of my order of priorities and eventually been cast off may reflect more my inability now to relate to the problems and issues it attacks. Certainly it is a pity because it was an effective corrective to arid deductive science and preserves a healthy radicalism which is all too rare in our society.

And so to books. I'm spavined by the fact that recent writers in this series have mentioned much of what I've read or, more commonly, wished to read but failed to do so. Some repetition appears almost inevitable unless I focus down on just three volumes, which I shall try and do. It is not difficult because that is about all I've read. The first is Dick Francis's *Risk*—a paperback purchased as Sam Shuster reminded us, because they travel. The story is good if slightly implausible in detail—an accountant with a horsy sideline who is Mr Valiant for Truth, bludgeoned and kidnapped so his crooked partner can get away with financial murder for friends and accomplices. A good, tense plot with some nice twists, but the reason I believe that I and my like are avid Francis readers is that we are comfortable in the scenes and people he portrays. It is not so much that they are mostly in the upper middle class arena

where we like to see ourselves, but rather that for doctors and others the books describe professionals at work. My accountant will probably say that Francis's hero is not as sharply drawn as he should be, much as I might say the same if, as I suppose may happen, one of Francis's heroes is a surgeon who is also a good steeplechaser. Nevertheless, there is the smell of the professional about Dick Francis's work and I really believe that given a week or two as my first assistant he would put across a nearly credible rendering of the surgical life. Francis has smoothly taken over a slot in my reading vacated by that literary traitor Len Deighton, whose novels used to transmit the same casual but subtle professional attitude, plus aphorisms I could use in my clinical practice (such as any good lie contains an element of the truth). Deighton is now obsessed by the history of war and seems no longer interested in his original vein.

Writing of war, my second read for pleasure has been the Folio edition of Napier's *Peninsular Campaigns*. A gift it was and such a gift because in addition to the interest in it that I have it is an atavistic pleasure to handle a quality production. No doubt the cynic would say I am confusing the medium with the message but again I do not see a conflict here—good craftsmanship in words is supplemented by good workmanship in print and binding. Though paperbacks are much of my life, I derive a sensual delight from handling a good book and reading perfect print. I have criticised Deighton for desertion, but I can understand his fascination with war—the apotheosis and the nadir of human activity that it presents. I have been a glutton for the secondary sources of Wellingtonia for many years and I found it refreshing if slightly sad to read Napier's first hand, clear but stilted account; to savour his attitude of “dulce et decorum est, pro patria mori” and to recognise that men of his calibre had the certainty and the rectitude of their position and attitudes which resemble those of my surgical colleagues. Such days of confidence are gone; in some ways good, in others bad because without confidence—in the past, the present, and the future—what hope have we for stability of our society?

Continental contribution

Last and by no means least another gift: *Claude Bernard and Animal Chemistry* by Frederic Holmes. This is, as my young staff would say about references to the literature more than five years ago, an old book (it was published in 1974) but one which is giving me great and continuous pleasure. We know too little in this country about Bernard, his life and times, and indeed in our preoccupation with our own mainly physical scientists of note have neglected the enormous contribution of the Germans and French in the first half of the nineteenth century through Liebig, Dumas, Magendie, and others to biological and biochemical science. Holmes is a professional historian: not only does he redress the balance of ideas but he provides also an object lesson in how documentary history should be tackled. True, we must rely on the written word because there is precious little in the way of what one might call positive oral tradition—that is, the deliberate attempt to transmit experience by word of mouth from one generation to the next. But here is history at its best, giving one an insight into the misty but sometimes banal world in which ideas first dimly perceived, shimmer, come into focus, and then finally assume concrete form as part of the house of knowledge. My only regret is that Holmes tells me I shall never be a medical historian much though I should like to write the definitive account of surgery over the past century or craft the alternative biography of Syme or Lister. To undertake historical research and description is as much a profession or a craft as my own limited practical skills in surgery: the fruit of a lifetime, not to be acquired at a moment's notice as so many of those who approach retirement think they might. However, no matter: to read the work of a professional is enough. I shall go on hoping to do so with the limited objective that I can incorporate what I read into my interpretation of reality.