Sweden is afflicted with many of the social problems we have in Britain—in particular, alcohol and drug abuse, and violence among young people. I was amazed and saddened by the many skid-row drunks in the streets of Stockholm and its suburbs. Even more upsetting is the apparent youth of the drunks; people in their 20s may be seen in the streets drinking cheap wine and begging for money to buy more. Heroin abuse is also a big problem, and newspaper reports of young addicts being found dead in public toilets are frequent. As in other capitals, mugging is common, and Stockholm subways are best avoided at night. The Swedes have tried to improve matters by providing at huge cost good rehabilitation facilities for alcoholics and drug addicts. So far they have failed to identify the underlying causes of these social problems and prevent them.

Government interference in everyday matters is greater, I believe, than we in Britain would find acceptable. For example, it is now a criminal offence for a parent or teacher to inflict corporal punishment on a child—even a smack. Professional boxing has been outlawed on the grounds that it is dangerous and has promoted violence in some people who have watched it. The sale of alcohol other than very weak beer is tightly controlled, and in the suburb where I lived there was only one officially approved drinks store for 70 000 people. This was an inconvenience for most people and in no way restricted the supply available to alcohol abusers. Road safety laws sensibly demand the wearing of seat belts, but measures like the compulsory use of lights on vehicles during the day and the obligation to fit electric wipers to headlamps seem ridiculous. Although

well intentioned, these laws are clumsy and have had no effect on the problems of child abuse, violence, alcoholism, and road accidents; and yet the inconveniences caused to the general public are considerable.

I was impressed with the constructive use made of leisure time in Sweden, and all age groups seem to participate in activities like running, orienteering, volleyball, and water sports. Most companies provide sporting facilities for employees. Weekends in the countryside are popular, either camping or at lakeside cottages, which are understandably prized possessions. The "right of everyman" is an ancient Swedish decree that the general public can have free access to walk and pitch camp anywhere except within 100 m of someone's permanent home. Such opportunities for recreation are the luxuries of a beautiful country where the population is small and space is plentiful.

In conclusion, for me the elective period was an opportunity to work on a project which interested me and to plan and take responsibility for my own efforts. Going abroad anywhere adds new dimensions to an elective period and in particular one benefits by getting to know and appreciate from the inside another country and its people. This in itself is a worthwhile objective, but in addition time abroad provides you with a new perspective from which to consider the strengths and weaknesses of life in your own country. Now that competition and career structures dictate that many medical graduates will never have an opportunity later to step off their particular career treadmill and experience travel and research we must defend the place of the elective in the medical curriculum.

Reading for Pleasure

Time for a little something

CHARLES B WILSON

I enjoy reading so much that I thought I would increase the pleasure by taking a rapid-reading course. But it was not for me: I read fairly rapidly anyway, and if a subject is read to be studied one reads slowly, and if one reads for the beauty and style of the writing, why race through it—when a pause now and then, a reverie, a chuckle, or a flash of admiration is called for, to be lingered over and enjoyed? A suitable place, whether it be a comfortable bed, a reclining chair with a good lamp, or a favourite nook in the garden, adds to the pleasure. Taking books on holiday is acceptable, but taking a book to read while mackerel fishing is looked on askance by purist fishermen. Better to give oneself up to the seductive pleasure of the lapping waves, the peep of the oystercatchers, the sight of the sails of other boats, or the receding shoreline. We are blessed with one of the best county libraries in our local market town. They have two grand facilities: one is a computer-like box from which you may select any book in the county, and it will be available within the week; the second is a weekly travelling service which stops 50 yards from our gate.

Family and friends

When one is young, the arrival of a puppy—or, in our case, a mongoose brought home from Malaya—in the family starts off a whole train of books to read. It is quite a wrench to give up stories like the *William* books, the Dr Dolittle series, or *Thick of the Fray at Zeebrugge*, and to start reading grown-up books. Our families have a great influence here. Sir Hugh Clifford, a friend of my parents, wrote never-to-be-forgotten stories of the Sakai in the Malayan jungles; E M Delafeld, and Percy French (a friend of my grandparents) are other names that spring to mind. My Belfast grandfather, with whom we stayed while our parents were abroad, was an ex-covenanter who became a Presbyterian minister, and he used to take me round to hear famous preachers. One I can never forget was the Reverend St John Irvine, who gave an inspiring sermon to a packed congregation. He was a man who would stop in the middle of reading the lesson to tell an anecdote, and have us smiling if not laughing. I was sure that God, if not my grandfather, would strike him dead. But he enthralled even my grandfather. He wrote a lovely book called *My Lady of the Chimney Corner*—a tribute only a son could write to his mother.

Much later, I went to SA (Nazi storm troops) rallies in Germany, and heard the harsh voice of Hitler. There was no doubt about his control over his audience. I never read any of his speeches,

and I wonder what they were like in print. After seeing Hitler, I visited Madame Tussaud's and noticed that they had got his eyes the wrong colour. I pointed this out to them, and got a gratuitous lecture on the scrupulous trouble they took to get the small details right. I pointed out that the eyes were still the wrong colour. A few weeks later, I received a courteous letter from Madame Tussaud's thanking me and admitting that they were wrong.

During a sojourn in St Patrick's Hospital, when I was a student having a cartilage removed, a patient was admitted to the bed next to mine. He had been having a few jars on the Saturday night and on his way home had slipped and broken his leg. He was not found till Monday. He was very quiet for a few days till the shock and his leg had been treated, and then he blossomed forth as a natural loquacious philosopher. His thoughts about many subjects cascaded forth in the rich Elizabethan style that one seems to find only in Dublin. His diatribe about newspapers was typical: "Why did one read secondhand thoughts by second-rate people who were educated in second-rate institutions, when the Almighty had given us better brains, and why did we not use them," and so on. One day the matron and sister came fussing in, tried to make us lie at attention, emptied ashtrays, and rearranged flowers, saying we were having an important visitor—Maurice Walsh, the author. I immediately knew then who the broken-legged patient was in the next bed. "You are Thomsheen James in person," I said. He answered, "Mr Walsh makes up the most terrible things; but he is the most kindly, gentle creature that God put on this earth." And in walked the man himself. From his deerstalker hat, to his Donegal tweed suit with the heather in the buttonhole, his brogues and blackthorn stick, the very epitome of a Gaelic gentleman. I had already read his book of short stories about our hero, called *Thomasheen James* and some others, but this meeting spurred me on to read the rest. Marvellous stories of the glens of Scotland from books such as *The Key Above the Door* and *The Gentleman in Grey*.

At Trinity we had our fair share of a scratching of authors. Be they textbook writers, such as W R Fearon on biochemistry and Joe Biggar on bacteriology, or authors such as Gabriel Fielding with his sympathetic view of Dublin student life in *Through Streets Broad and Narrow*. Maybe he should have given up medicine and concentrated on writing, as did Richard Leach with his acting and peripatetic writing. Derek Llewellyn Jones cut his teeth as radio doctor in Malaya, and how very good his homilies were. He has done very well with his book *Woman*; Harry Craig, too, has succeeded with his book *Waterloo*. Myles Na Gopaleen is a name not so familiar to the English ear, but his articles in the *Irish Times* were always read with relish by aficionados, who could never forget his long puns and the stories of the "cousin the medical student up in the digs. . . ."

Brendan Behan was a man bursting out of himself with words. At one meeting in the bar of the Bailey in Dublin, where he had his two protectors—ex-boxers with white rain-coats and slouch hats—to keep him off the drink, I told him a few stories from Singapore, and one of these appears in *Brendan Behan's Island*. I never did find out if his story was true that, on leaving a Stephen's Green nursing home, after having a drink and diabetic problem sorted out, he went up to a jarvie's horse and said:—"Horse, have you got the drinking diabetes?"—and, to save the life of the horse, he gave him all his diabetic tablets.

Authors in Singapore

In Singapore one meets many authors. Some have stayed for short spells and some for longer. One somewhat lonely person briefly passing through was the Dowager Duchess of Westminster. When I met such a person I used to lend them a book by an American doctor called Loomis, *In a Chinese Garden*. In it there is a gravestone with the words "It is later than you might think," and, how this epitaph affected the lives of three people who took its message to heart. The duchess's book, *Grace and Favours*, shows that money and privilege do not necessarily

bring happiness, and I was pleased that her lecture tour in Australia on "My three most memorable rooms" was a success.

Another writer of great interest is John Le Carré. His account of the trials and tribulations he has had with various press agents, publishers, and film producers, makes one realise that one can be a well-educated, Foreign Office trained, intelligent individual, and still be led to the slaughter. He told me, that if I ever got round to writing, he would pass me on to his agent, who, he says, is a gem without price. His second wife, my wife, and myself had lunch together in Singapore, after which we had planned to visit the bird park, the house of jade (mainly quartz), and the orchids at the botanical gardens. The conversation was so good, however, that a quick tea and a quick look at the orchids were all we managed before the tropical night was upon us, with its mystical languor. I did not like *The Naive and Sentimental Lover*, but his other books have gripped me. How well he writes and how quickly he can create an atmosphere.

Another good friend is Dennis Bloodworth, an *Observer* correspondent, who writes a bit like John Le Carré, and brings in his extensive knowledge of the East. What an author can do with a small suggestion is well brought out in *Cross Talk*, his latest book. He wrote the *Chinese Machiavelli* with his wife, Ching Ping, and it gave me insight into the intricacies of Chinese thought. Gavin Young, also of the *Observer*, writes beautiful travel books with outstanding photographs. His *Return to the Marshes* is a fine example. He spends six months exploring some exotic place and then six months writing it up. To complete a trio of correspondents, Ian Ward of the *Daily Telegraph* is threatening to write a book. He is a man of integrity with abundant common sense. One can believe what he writes, which makes his reports the more interesting. As sporting correspondents go, will we ever see the equal of Neville Cardus and Henry Longhurst? I was able to help Henry when he came to Singapore to cover the first Singapore Open, and in the *Sunday Times* the next week, he started off his column by saying that he had been looked after by an Irish doctor indistinguishable from Bob Hope.

Another good friend from Singapore—Arthur Lim, an ophthalmic surgeon—had the good idea of choosing half-a-dozen world authorities, and half-a-dozen operations and getting them to describe and photograph their techniques. And so, with an Australian surgeon, he has produced a memorable book. How well it was produced in Singapore can be judged only by examining it. I mention this for various reasons. First of all a book is enhanced by its feel and appearance. The Folio books are lovely—not only to feel and admire, but to read. It is getting more and more expensive to produce books, and we must be very careful not to price ourselves out of business. A friend of mine returned to Singapore with the manuscript of a book which he had been unable to get printed in England—because it showed what certain unions were up to, and what the consequences of their actions were likely to be. He is having the book published and printed in Singapore. Talk about censorship in reverse. My latest collection of books include *Sea and Coastal Birds* and *Marshland and Freshwater Birds*, both by Jiri Felix, printed in Czechoslovakia; *Birds of Sea and Coast* by Lars Jonson, printed in Portugal; *Hamlyn Book of Garden Ideas* and the *Book of Creative Crafts*, printed in Italy.

I could not do without an atlas and have the Reader's Digest ones of Great Britain and the world. I also have the *Record Atlas* given to me by George Philip. (We were discussing some geographical questions and I won a wager of a bottle of champagne to one of his atlases.)

After visiting a patient in the Cathay Hotel, Singapore, once, I was given a book called *The Truth of the River Kwai*, and was amazed to find in it the adventures of a friend of mine, "Pel" Hooper of the Singapore Harbour Board—including some of his drawings of a junk in which he very nearly escaped from Java to Ceylon. He had buried the drawings in earthenware jars, and left them in the Siamese jungles near the famous bridge. At the end of the war a Mr McCloud, now a minister in a New York church, went back, dug up the pictures and notes, and

wrote a book on them, never bothering to find out if the people he wrote about were still alive.

To get back to genuine authors again, while swapping reminiscences with Somerset Maugham after dinner one night, I mentioned a few peculiar happenings that had occurred in Singapore. Some were so amazing that I was questioned as to their veracity by some of the listeners. Dr Maugham said that of course they were true, and if only he could have imagined events such as those he could have written many more stories.

I have read a great many books on hypnosis, and when the authors are friends I find them even more interesting. John Hartland is the doyen of British hypnotists, and his book is a must. Dr Manny Bernstein, of London and Perth, Western Australia, and Dr Chong Tong Mun, of Singapore, stamp their

personalities on their books. Geoff Graham of Newcastle said he was going to write a book on hypnotherapy, but I am still waiting for this. His skill with dynamic hypnotherapy is difficult to equal. Milton Erickson and L Cron of America, and Ainslie Meares of Australia, have to be read and digested, and books like *The Primal Scream* by Arthur Janov, and the writing of Thomas Szasz, Jock Young, Wilhelm Reich, Sydney Cohen, and R D Laing should be read, but only the relevant bits believed and remembered.

I have tried to show how external affairs change and influence one's reading, and how we should always be ready to react to these changes. Recently, two retired doctors have told me that now that they have time to stop and cogitate they have a better understanding of the practice of medicine than ever before.

MATERIA NON MEDICA

ABCD

A junction on the A59 Clitheroe bypass on a dry but windy October Saturday seemed an unlikely place and time for a medical meeting, but this was the recent rendezvous of ABCD—the Association of British Cycling Doctors. Some 20 of us, ranging from final-year student to a doctor five years off retirement, took part in a 10-mile time trial and a social run the following day. Most had proper time-trialling machines, while others, like me, were riding touring bikes. Our clothing, too, presented an interesting range from racing vest and close-fitting shorts through to one of our number whose immaculate brown tweed jacket and plus-tuos were set off by a rose in his buttonhole. The side road looked chaotic as bikes were unloaded, pumped, adjusted, and ridden, but order gradually emerged as riders were despatched at one-minute intervals, and all too soon it was my turn. The next minute was like waiting for the final membership viva, but with both feet strapped firmly into toeclips and the bike held by our "pusher off," there was no honourable avenue of escape. The last five seconds were counted down and at "Go" I was launched on to the bypass. The outward half was uneventful and I reached the turn feeling very comfortable. Coming back into the wind was less pleasant. I was immediately passed by the man who had started a minute later. I seemed to be shifting my whole vital capacity every second, with noises to match. There was an inner siren call to sit up and coast home, but gradually the pain eased and with the wind now over my right shoulder I began to catch my erstwhile passer. Another, minor, crisis as I mistook an earlier signpost for the finishing point, but then another half mile and I was relieved to bellow my number dyspneumotaxically as I passed the real finish. Recovery, over tea and biscuits generously dispensed by the organiser's wife, was marred by the discovery that my time was 13 seconds over the half hour. It didn't matter that all the times were slow nor even that there were a few slower than me. I had caught the time-trialling virus. Already I had mentally consigned the mudguards to a shelf and bought some sprint wheels and tubular tyres. I was hooked, and it had all been as easy as ABC . . . D.—S FREEDMAN (consultant physician, Enfield).

Parameters of affluence

Holidaying in southern Spain this summer my travels included trips into the grape growing areas of the mountains. On the narrow winding roads on the hillsides one often had view of many vineyards. Outside most of the farmhouses there were large wooden frames into which the grapes were stacked. Closer observation of the houses and frames revealed an interesting correlation. The affluence of the tenant seemed to be assessable by just counting the frames. Two frames usually meant small house, a fine upstanding mule, and a small downtreading wife. They shared the picking of the grapes and the man did the stacking. Four frames meant a larger house and a three wheeler pick-up as well as a mule. Six frames warranted a four wheel pick-up, a small car, and a tractor rather than a mule.

Thus in southern Spanish country districts affluence was measured by grape frames. On returning to north Oxfordshire country districts

I wondered how one could do a similar assessment. Wives seem upright, mules are non-existent. Cars seem two a penny or at least two a house.

Then one morning driving to some of the villages I noticed an odd fact. The number of dustbins at the gates varied. There I had the affluent assessment factor. Small hardworking families had one dustbin; larger houses such as subsidised three-bedroomed council houses had two dustbins or perhaps one dustbin and a black plastic bag. More affluent houses with the business executive had two dustbins and a black bag. The manor house used two or three dustbins!

There must be a moral somewhere. The more we have the more we throw away. Spanish villages had few dustbins and their affluence was measured by the grape storage units. Oxfordshire villages don't grow grapes but for them affluence means rubbish. A "give away" government would seem to govern a "throw away" society.—W D A BIRCH (general practitioner, Islip, Oxfordshire).

To market

Looking back, it already seems unreal, though I still have the receipts to prove that it happened. I remember following my family as they dodged through a dim cavern full of cars and noise, up a wet concrete staircase, along a brick passageway and then—scuttling past a glimpse of daylight—into a bright colossal barn full of women and merchandise. My wife slid out a wire trolley the size of a haywain. With experienced glee my children swung aboard as outriggers, and the whole caravan headed for the groceries.

Food was stacked row on row, yard after yard. Meat came in polythene with little computerised figures. Toilet rolls beyond number were randomly piled in hoppers big as grain elevators. Somewhere there were loudspeakers, suave with cryptic messages, and on a dais a uniformed overseer sent her uniformed lieutenants on forays into the crowd. In this aseptic warehouse everything gleamed, including the floor—except where clothes were sold: here we walked on wide strips of carpet which were, I suppose, the result of a study of sales psychology. How the psychologist must have been fascinated by our primitive avian urge to fill the trolley's gaping mouth.

All the denizens of this Asimov fantasy were in a trance. They walked slowly forwards with their heads pointing to one side, frowning in concentration as they studied labels, yet magically avoiding collisions between their mammoth vehicles. Eye-to-eye contact was taboo, even when the preoccupied masses pressed towards the cash registers, which were operated by humanoids with lowered eyes intent on price tags and machine keys. Only when I paused at the separate kiosks selling liquor and cigarettes did I meet an unforced smile.

Burdened and bankrupt, I returned to the multistorey car park. My wife tells me that a supermarket is cheap, hygienic, and less tiring than a day's dealing with a series of old-fashioned shopkeepers. For me, back at work, even the antenatal clinic seems cosy by comparison.—JAMES OWEN DRIFE (senior lecturer in obstetrics and gynaecology, Bristol).