Paharia land). We saw two children recover from hemiplegias, one secondary to cerebral malaria and the other to rheumatic heart disease. Osteomyelitis and tuberculosis were also rife.

We were sad when we left Hiranpur. After eight weeks we felt we belonged to one area of India and had made genuine friends. The train to Calcutta left at 1 00 am and the journey was, as expected, eventful, for we had to share our wooden bunks with packages, sacks of cement, and several Indians.

The humidity of Calcutta hit us like a heavy overcoat. Poverty existed here that we had not believed possible. Against every wall were lean-to hovels made of sticks and sacks under which whole families lived. Among this in Khali Ghat was Mother Teresa's home for the care of the dying. The calm sisters caring for the thin, starved patients seemed to shut all suffering outside the severe atmosphere. Rickshaws in Calcutta are pulled not by animals or bicycles but by barefoot men (fig 2). The moral dilemma arose whether we should provide them with some kind of livelihood and allow ourselves to be carried by another human being or whether we should walk.

We queued for several hours to obtain a visitor's permit to Darjeeling, but it was well worth it. The toy train rambled slowly along the single track and even more slowly when it started to climb through the Himalayan foothills. Countless

twists and loop-backs later, we were still travelling no faster than walking pace. The views into the tea-bush-clad valleys below and the towering mountains above were fantastic. People started looking more Tibetan as we passed through every village.

We could not leave India without visiting the South, where a totally different culture exists. This was reflected in many ways, even table manners. In the North it is regarded as the height of indecency for food to reach beyond the interphalangeal joint, whereas in the South food up to the elbow indicates enjoyment. The people were darker, healthier, and spoke yet more languages. We also had to see the Taj Mahal. Despite all expectations, its imposing architecture and immaculately detailed inlay took our breath away.

We thank everyone who made this trip financially possible and particularly Dr Stuart Tanner for his enthusiastic help over the project; and Bryan, Helen, and Surunjan for their teaching in Hiranpur. We will never forget what we learned socially, economically, and practically from the Indians. They are a delightful and welcoming people. But, as Churchill said in 1931, our experiences in 1978 brought home to us that: "India is a geographical term, it is no more a united nation than the equator."

Reading for Pleasure

So many books, so little time

PATRICIA NORTON

Why read, if not for pleasure? For information, I suppose, and instruction, and to keep up with one's subject; and in the near future it looks as if these purposes will be served not by the printed word but by the television screen and the latest computer technology. Browsing through learned journals in libraries may become even less popular than it is at present.

I find this prospect immensely depressing. I no longer, as I did when younger, suffer from print hunger—an urge to read anything printed lying around, coupled with an irrational dread of being without anything to read so that I always took (and still take) far more books on a holiday than I could possibly want. But I need to handle a book to get full enjoyment from it, rather than hear it from a disembodied voice on the radio—though hearing it read aloud in a family circle is different. I like watching the television news, but it does not take the place, for me, of the newspaper; and I save up newspapers—at least for a few weeks—if I cannot read one on a particular day, in the hope that I shall catch up.

But, in spite of my enjoyment of the printed word, I do not regard myself as widely read, at least by comparison with many of my contemporaries. The huge gaps in my reading are partly the consequence of combining family life with a job, so that for at least 10 years most of my reading was of children's books, aloud. That was certainly a pleasure; I could read aloud *The Tailor of Gloucester* to the end of time. But by the time I came back to reading to and for myself I found that my capacity for it

had diminished. I could no longer rush through a book and remember it. Lack of practice slows down one's reading power as it does everything else.

So what, now that I am two-thirds retired and in theory have all the time I want, do I find myself reading? All the time I want? I still have an inhibition about reading for pleasure in the morning—or even in the afternoon, except on Sunday—unless I am on holiday. Newspapers do not fall under this puritanical ban, though I read them nearly as much for pleasure as for information, enjoying reviews of things I know I shall never read, see, or listen to.

Lloyd George and all that

With too many books thus chasing too little time for reading them, I find I tend to concentrate on biographies and memoirs. This year, for instance, I have read with great pleasure the second volume of John Grigg's life of *Lloyd George*, which covers the constitutional crisis of 1910 brought about by the House of Lords veto of the 1909 budget (this is the clearest account of that crisis I have read) and the National Insurance Act of 1911. This measure has had a particular interest for me: because since 1942, when the report of the British Medical Association's medical planning commission was published, I have written about health-service matters; and also because I remember my uncle, who practised in Oxford, telling me nearly 50 years ago how unpopular for a time he was with his colleagues after he had announced at a BMA meeting, called to oppose the Act, that as it was now the law of the land he felt unable to take part in what would have amounted to a strike by

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the medical profession. Arguing about sixpences, he felt, was beneath its dignity.

Lloyd George's National Insurance Act was not the sole begetter of the National Health Service, whose origins went back even farther. But he himself saw clearly that his measure was not finite. John Grigg tells us that in March 1911 he wrote to his private secretary:

Insurance necessarily temporary expedient. At no distant date hope State will acknowledge full responsibility in the matter of making provision for sickness breakdown and unemployment. It really does so now through Poor Law, but conditions under which this system has hitherto worked have been so harsh and humiliating that working class pride revolts against accepting so degrading and doubtful a boon.

Could there be a clearer prophecy of the introduction of a national health service?

Honest biography

An honest biographer gives us the warts and all of his subject. Anyone writing his or her own memoirs can be selective or not as he pleases. So, however entertaining, they should be read with the reservation that one is hearing only one part of the story. Nevertheless, I find myself won over by Cecil Beaton's diaries, two volumes of which I have recently been reading. I cannot altogether understand why I enjoy them so much since, apart from the excellent travel sections, they are mainly about people I have never met and would never be likely to meet. Partly, I suppose, the enjoyment springs from the voyeur instinct in all of us, from the peep into the lives of people in the news—be they statesmen, actors, or film stars. But mainly, I think, I find the Beaton diaries entertaining because he has sewn a marvellous piece of embroidery on the cloth of my lifetime, beautifully stitched and in perfectly chosen colours.

I cannot these days read about a new subject—new to me, I mean—although I can watch with enjoyment when it is explained and illustrated on television. On the other hand, I like a new approach to a familiar one. So I welcomed Professor W J M Mackenzie's book *Power and Responsibility in Health Care: the National Health Service as a political institution*. I knew it would be questioning and analytical about Health Service matters that are normally taken for granted. I knew, also, that the results of his probe would be presented lucidly and entertainingly. If, at the end, one is left slightly disappointed, with a "so what?" feeling, at least the way there has been highly enjoyable.

I used to read poetry, contemporary poets as well as those in the anthologies. Now I read very little of the poetry published today, and when I do read poetry, usually in the night when sleep has fled, I find myself turning to old favourites like Coleridge

and Keats, to refresh my memory of poems learnt by heart long ago, though sometimes, too, to the poets of the first half of this century. Having been to last year's London performance of *The Family Reunion* by T S Eliot I read the play straight through to savour again its telling phrases of the horrors of family life.

Nor do I often read modern fiction, except the stories printed in the *New Yorker*, my usual bedtime reading. It is lack of time that prevents me because there are several modern novelists whose books I enjoy. But the other day, having seen the highly, and rightly, praised film version of *The Europeans* by Henry James, I read the novel again to confirm how faithful the film is to the original. I found the novel as enjoyable to read a second time as I had on first reading, 10 or 15 years ago. It has the James subtlety, the unspelt-out relationships, without the circumlocutions of style that often make his later novels hard work.

But my long-term reading at present is Proust, in the translation by C K Scott Moncrieff. Years ago I read the first part of *Swann's Way*, and decided that because Proust, like Henry James, needed at least a solid, undisturbed hour's reading at a time to get anywhere with him, he should be left for retirement. So here I am, just at the end of *The Guermites Way*, often in need of a guide to the cast and to the chronology, submerged at times in the long Proustian sentences, which makes James's seem straightforward, but completely involved in the narrator's life and feelings, in his relationships with his family, his friends, and the society around him.

I knew that, besides all this, I should find wonderful passages of prose-poetry, as in the description of the church porch at Balbec. But no one had ever told me that Proust could be so funny. Françoise, the family servant, whom no one dared summon until well after she had finished her own mid-day meal, is, as she mutters her grievances, one of the great comic characters of literature. Then there is the psychiatrist's examination of the narrator's sick grandmother; his introduction to the Princesse de Parme, who, as he slowly advanced across the room, was holding on to a social smile, "like the note of a tuning-fork"; the account of his attempt to be introduced to Albertine and her friends—there are many similarly delicious scenes.

But already Proust had sensed in these girls the intimations of old age:

As on a plant whose flowers open at different seasons, I had seen, expressed in the form of old ladies on this Balbec shore, those shrivelled seed-pods, those flabby tubers which my friends would one day be.

As I approach the end of my biblically allotted span of years I think that, of the two, I shall settle for the shrivelled seed-pod. But I hope I live long enough to read the remaining four volumes.

Do exercises to re-establish the bulk and function of muscles that lie under excessive subcutaneous fat increase fat absorption?

Physical training increases work capacity and efficiency.¹ This increase in fitness is primarily due to local changes in the metabolism and capilarity of the exercised muscles rather than to general effects on heart and lungs, since training one set of muscles does not increase the efficiency of exercise with a different set of muscles in the same person.² Exercise in obese people who have a flabby abdominal wall may improve the tone of the abdominal muscle and reduce the apparent size of their paunch. Since physical activity increases energy expenditure exercise can also help obese people to lose fat provided that they do not increase food intake to match their extra output of energy. The energy cost of the sort of exercise programme that obese patients can be persuaded to adopt, however, does not account for many extra calories a day: perhaps 300 kcal (1.2 MJ) is a realistic target.³ There is no evidence that exercise specifically causes loss of

subcutaneous fat overlying the exercised muscle; indeed, surgery is the only reliable method to cause "spot reduction" of local deposits of unwanted fat.

¹ Taylor, R, and Jones, N L, *European Journal of Cardiology*, 1979, 9, 53.

² Fentem, P H, *British Medical Journal*, 1978, 2, 429.

³ Garrow, J S, *Energy Balance and Obesity in Man*. Amsterdam, Elsevier, 1978.

Correction

First-aid treatment for an acute coronary thrombosis occurring at home

The answer to this Any Question (15 December, p 1565) should read "coronary dilators with an antiplatelet aggregating action such as dipyridamole. . ."