

Editorial

The Quick and The Dead

Humanity's accomplishments are many and varied, but one of mankind's most visceral drives, it would seem, is that for violence, war and the gratuitous felling and dismemberment of one's fellows. The meaningless and pernicious banality of a single unknown death has been movingly described by Wilfred Owen:

If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues¹,

The polar opposite, Medicine (*Primum non nocere* - First, do no harm), paradoxically, learned much, and in the case of surgery, probably almost everything, from conflict and war. Surgeons such as Ambroise Paré, Dominique Jean Larrey, William Beatty and Archibald McIndoe improved the lot of those for whom they cared, and left a legacy for those that would follow. So much has been written about The Great War, that it is difficult to imagine a perspective that might provide a fresh insight into the carnage. Professor Hedley-Whyte's historical review, 'Blood and War' achieves just that, and explores the relationship between the two, and the life-giving restorative of blood transfusions: liquid life among the haemorrhaging dead. The Journal wishes to thank Harvard University, the Rockefeller University, Johns Hopkins University, the Library of Congress, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Imperial War Museum for the hard work of their archivists and curators of art, as well as the trustees of the Evergreen Museum affiliated with Johns Hopkins University.

In Greek mythology, Death is personified as Thanatos, the twin brother of Hypnos, and the gods, respectively, of death

and sleep. In her paper on Thanatophoric dysplasia, Dr Donnelly discusses the prevalence of this and other skeletal dysplasias in Northern Ireland. This range of disease too, spans the bridge between the living and the dead.

But is everything living or dead? Well, not quite. Vacillating between the two states is deoxyribonucleic acid, eternally reproducing but neither quick nor dead. In her masterful review, 'The Anatomy of a Chromosome,' Dr Stewart expounds on what can on occasion, seem that most non-intuitive of subjects. Read the review, and then turn to the proceedings of the Irish Society of Human Genetics. Hopefully it will have proved a personal enigma machine, decoding the code. It worked for me.

I am pleased to report the introduction of a new section entitled, "So you want to be a..". The Journal envisages this as a shop window, considering, issue by issue, a series of potential career pathways for the medical student or junior doctor. I am most grateful to Professor Peter Maxwell for providing the inaugural piece, on a career in Nephrology.

The Journal has also decided to embrace social networking sites, and now has accounts on Twitter (UMJ_Belfast) and Facebook. This initiative has been the result of Mary Crickard, our hard-working subeditor. My thanks to her. Please explore these new options, and let me have your verdict.

Barry Kelly
Honorary Editor

REFERENCES

1. Owens W. Dulce et Decorum Est. *The Oxford Book of War Poetry*. Oxford University Press; 1984: 188-9.