

Editorial

Hibernia

In the Chronicles of Narnia, C.S. Lewis wrote that The White Witch's realm was a place where 'it was always winter but never Christmas'¹. Certainly our winter nights can seem endless, but they do bring their own glory. Our front cover illustrates the Aurora Borealis, photographed recently by Dr Julia Sun at Tromso in Norway. Your editor must be careful with images. Copyright is vital and unforgiving. Also, smarting slightly from a whispered comment recently about having too much Radiology (if that's possible) about the place, I thought I'd publish something different.

"In Science, there is only Physics" proclaimed Ernest Rutherford, "all the rest is stamp collecting." (An irony then that he was awarded his Nobel prize in Chemistry, not Physics.). The Aurora is Physics made magnificent. In Bill Forsythe's glorious cinematic gem, *Local Hero*², Peter Capaldi's hopelessly besotted Danny momentarily diverts his gaze from the ephemeral Marina to look upwards in puzzlement at the effervescent night sky. "It's the Aurora Borealis" purrs Marina, "high energy protons in the upper atmosphere, driven by the solar wind". Danny, transfixed, can only splutter, "You say the darndest things, Marina". Enterprisingly, an Icelandic poet, Einar Benediktsson tried in the early 20th century to actually sell the Aurora (Dr Marianna Garðarsdóttir, personal communication).

For Robert Service's Yukon, it often formed a poetic canvas, such as in *The Shooting of Dan McGrew*³, 'While overhead, green yellow and red, the North lights swept in bars' and perhaps more eerily in *The Cremation of Sam McGee*⁴:

There are strange things done in the midnight sun
By the men who toil for gold;
The Arctic trails have their secret tales
That would make your blood run cold;
The Northern Lights have seen queer sights
But the queerest they ever did see
Was the night on the marge of lake Lebargie
I cremated Sam McGee.

Or did he?

On January 15th, 1742, the great astronomer Edmund Halley died. Other momentous January events⁵ included the surrender of the German Sixth army at Stalingrad (January 31st, 1943) and the publication in *L'Aurore* (January 13th, 1898) of 'J'Accuse' - The Dreyfus Affair. On January 10th, 49 BC, Julius Caesar, returning governor of Cisalpine and Transalpine Gaul, crossed the Rubicon river south of Ravenna, with his intact standing army, blatantly defying the ancient Roman law *Lex Cornelia Majestatis* that forbade such an aggressive act, saying as he did so, "Iacta alea est." (The die is cast). He would end Rome's republic and replace it with his empire. On January 21, 1793, Louis XVI went to the

guillotine, ending his empire and making France a republic. Finally, on January 25th, 1948, Al Capone died of syphilis. A warning to the impregnable, arrogant and unassailable everywhere, he was finally felled by a combination of two other ever present phenomena, one natural and one man made: an infectious disease and The Revenue.

GAME CHANGERS

I'm pleased to announce the inclusion of another new Journal section. Entitled 'Gamechangers', this section is intended to inform the general reader, like me, about selected pivotal medical innovations. I am indebted to Dr Nick Cromie, and his correspondents for distilling this information.

NEW YEAR'S HONOURS LIST

It is my singular pleasure on behalf of the UMJ Board to congratulate my predecessor, Professor Patrick Morrison on his recent CBE award. Patrick has been given this honour for services to Healthcare, specifically Human Genetics. I would dearly love to think that the award was also in large measure a reflection of his assured and progressive editorship of the Ulster Medical Journal. Sadly, for me anyway, I suspect this is not the case.

I'm pleased to include on page 2, a picture of our last UMJ Board meeting in December. It is a privilege, for me, to serve this board. A number of innovations have been approved at that last meeting and I would hope these will declare themselves in 2014. Astute observers will be also be disconcertingly aware of the facial growth adorning my lower dial. This was my dubious and let's be honest, inaccurate contribution to Movember 2013. As the whole enterprise had been for a good cause, it seemed only fair and a further act of charity, for my family at least, to remove it. For now.

The young Robert Louis Stevenson, watching an Edinburgh lamplighter at work, excitedly told his parents that the man was "punching holes in the darkness." So recalling Sarah Williams' comforting words that, we 'have loved the stars too fondly to be fearful of the night'⁶; delight in that majestic winter night sky and look out, as it were, for the 'second star to the right, and then straight on till morning'⁷. A perfect time to send me your good papers.

Pax in Terra and a very Happy New Year

Barry Kelly
Honorary Editor

1. Lewis, C.S. *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*. London: Harper Collins Publishing Ltd; 2000.
2. *Local Hero*. Bill Forsyth (Dir.) Goldcrest films; 1983.
3. Service, R. *The Shooting of Dan McGrew*. *The Best of Robert Service*. London: A&C Black Ltd; 1995.
4. Service, R. *The Cremation of Sam McGee*. *The Best of Robert Service*. London: A&C Black Ltd; 1995.
5. Marsh, W.B. Carrick, B. *Great Stories From History*. Cambridge: Icon Books Ltd; 2005.
6. Williams, S. *Twilight hours: A Legacy Of Verse*. Montana: Kessinger Publishing; 2007.
7. Barrie, J.M. *Peter Pan*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd; 2007.