The ballad of Bunga Bing

R B KHAMBATTA

These two beautifully produced books are a portrayal of the Dublin medical scene in the first half of the century. Both are bound in quarter leather with marbled sides and printed on excellent paper. Daragh Smith's "Ballads" is limited to 300 copies.

The life of Tom Garry as a teacher of anatomy is a fascinating one. A quick look at the frontispiece photograph of Tom Garry on O'Connell Bridge shows that we are going to be regaled with the story of a whimsical, outspoken, stubborn, confident man. I had not heard of Tom Garry before. He taught anatomy at the Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland for almost 50 years. He completed his medical studies but never graduated—it seems that he had an altercation with his examiner in gynaecology about an anatomical detail in the pelvis. Garry was failed and refused to take the examination again. Apart from being a great anatomist, he also had the rare gift of teaching and attracted a multitude of students to his "grinds." He was eccentric but had an understanding of the needs of the students. A very un-Irish part of his character was an almost Attlee-esque parsimony with words combined with wit. I cannot help quoting the delightful encounter with a first year medical student who was performing miserably in a "part examination."

T P Garry: "What's that?"

Student: "Don't know, sir."

TPG: "What is this?"

Student: "Don't know, sir."

TPG: "What is that?" pointing to ceiling.

Student: "Ceiling, sir."

TPG: "What is that?" pointing to floor.

Student: "Floor, sir."

TPG: "What is that?" pointing to door.

Student: "Door."

TPG: "Out."

Like many other great teachers of anatomy (not necessarily great anatomists), he had a whole list of details, questions, and mnemonics to remember anatomical details. The appendix to the book is an amazing list, and most intriguing are the numbers that he assigns to various organs—for example, the stomach has the numeral 2: two openings, two surfaces, two curvatures, two omenta, two major arteries.

Garry's biography is interwoven with the history of the Dublin medical schools and portrays a great teacher at work—brilliant, incisive, dogmatic, confident, yet caring. Daragh Smith's book represents the reverse with life in a medical school—a continual round of hard work, memorising, learning, and seeing suffering, enlivened by surreptitious as well as open fun and games to the point of bawdiness, without lewdness. Daragh Smith sang these ballads but for reasons best known to himself never committed them to print. The life of a medical student has undergone a metamorphosis from that of the 'thirties, and today's student may never know how his forbear lived, studied, drank, and lusted. Eoin O'Brien has lovingly produced these ballads for generations to read. I suppose they enlivened many an endless, tedious hour in the dissecting room. There is very little "medical" about them—except for frequent references to the genitals (Jan van Monster Ball; Bunga Bing) or to sexual lust (Lord Buttocks of Naul; The Sea Baboon). History is not neglected—possibly around 1935—with Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia (Hali Bollock Collector Sellassi). The only reference to the dissecting room is the frontispiece, the title page from Vesalius's *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*. It could have been the "Anatomical Lesson of Dr Nicholas Tulp" by Rembrandt, which is far more expressive.

I hope the Black Cat Press has many copies left of both these

books. They would be excellent recommendations for a present for a colleague who is retiring (he would remember his student days with Daragh Smith, and recall his own teachers with Garry). The student of today would also benefit—he would know that to his forbear, in spite of Osler's injunctions, student life was a mixture of studies and

Detail from the title page of *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, by Andreas Vesalius, used as a frontispiece to *Dissecting Room Ballads*, one of the first two books published at the Black Cat Press and reviewed on this page.

gaiety. He would also know that once upon a time there were great teachers who could teach without a single slide and without quoting references, who were exhibitionists, confident in their knowledge, and who worked hard at imparting it.

A Dublin Anatomist Tom Garry 1884-1963. An Account of the Life of Thomas Peter Garry Tutor and Prosector in Anatomy Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. J D Garry. (Pp 94; IR £30, plus £1 postage to UK.) A limited edition of 300 copies. ISBN 0-948050-01-2.

Dissecting Room Ballads from the Dublin Schools of Medicine Fifty Years Ago. D Smith. (Pp 20; figs; IR £20, plus £1 postage to UK.) A limited edition of 300 copies for subscribers. ISBN 0-948050-00-4.

Both books obtainable only from the Black Cat Press, 9 Clifton Terrace, Monkstown, Co Dublin, Ireland. (Published in 1984.)