

medical case histories or a description of different healthcare systems. In a way I felt I was being allowed to share his personal journey through his medical career. His icy detachment from the disasters that can befall neurosurgical cases and his way of dealing with his own ageing by running 25 miles a week resonated with me. Of course he hates doing the exercise but if it has the potential to ward off dementia he will continue to push his leaden and stiff body through its paces.

This book is best for those who are near or in retirement, as one can empathise with the situation the author is facing. He cannot stop working despite ethical concerns with operating in an impoverished Ukraine, or in Nepal operating on patients with misguided families and competitive avaricious neurosurgeons! In a way he probably cannot stop writing about his personal life and medical cases so I suspect further literary revelations will be forthcoming.

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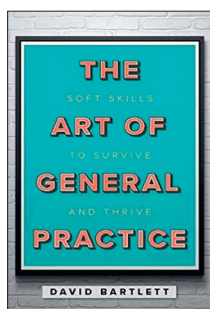
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The Art of General Practice: Soft Skills to Survive and Thrive

David Bartlett

Scion Publishing Ltd, 2018, PB, 126pp, £14.99, 978-1911510192



SOCIAL SKILLS AND FRUITFUL CONSULTATIONS

This little book is well written and has a pleasant, informal style. It is, unashamedly, the thoughts of a GP looking back on a lifetime of general practice. The first part of the book covers what he calls the soft skills, but what could be called the social skills required to make the consultation work most successfully. There were certainly some

suggestions here that I could learn from, such as writing a bereavement letter, but this section might be ideal for a trainer with a trainee facing clinical skills assessment.

Although the author Dr Bartlett was, I suspect, born with excellent social skills, some are less blessed in this regard, or may come from a different culture. For such doctors, this part of the book, with the help of their trainer, may unlock the capacity to have a fruitful consultation and, also important, pass the CSA. As the medical defence societies themselves point out, social skills provide the best protection against litigation and patient complaints. On reading this first section one begins to feel that one is meeting a warm and human doctor.

The second part of the book tries to encourage and enable the career GP to look after themselves. Again, well written, it is full of useful advice. He rightly points to a loss of curiosity and interest in medicine as a warning sign of burnout, and one that should be acted upon. The book ends with a list of useful books to be lent — to the right patient — or to be read by the GP for insight into the new techniques of CBT or mindfulness.

To sum up, a short book from which every GP might learn something.

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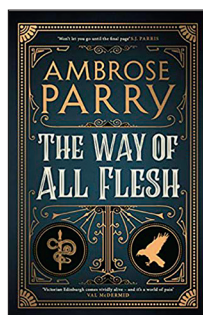
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The Way of All Flesh

Ambrose Parry

Canongate Books, 2018, HB, 416pp, £8.99, 978-1786893789



MURDER, MYSTERY, MEDICINE, AND MELODRAMA

On the first page of this historical mystery, set in the medical world of 1847 Edinburgh, medical student Will Raven discovers a dead prostitute; by page 15 he has been savagely

beaten and scarred for life, and by page 39 he has assisted at the gory interval version of a footling breach. The pace continues as Ambrose Parry (a pseudonym for writer Chris Brookmyre and his anaesthetist wife Marisa Haetzman) pulls no punches in evoking the sights, sounds, smells, social niceties, and dangers of a socially divided Edinburgh.

Raven, a young man with secrets of his own, has a personal reason for investigating the prostitute's suspicious death. He enlists the help of housemaid Sarah; at first the couple appear ill matched, the intelligent Sarah resenting Raven's opportunities for education and advancement that arise simply because of his gender. However, partly due to a series of fortuitous encounters during which they are squeezed together in cupboards and narrow alleys while evading pursuit, they develop a close bond and become a formidable team. The pace of the novel picks up for a gripping, cinematic-style thriller ending.

The medical background to the novel is the birth of anaesthesia and Raven is apprenticed to the eminent obstetrician and anaesthetic pioneer James Simpson (a real character, who devised the eponymous forceps). Parry's descriptions of after-dinner gatherings at Simpson's house where participants, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, test promising new anaesthetic agents on themselves are as amusing as they are plausible. Surgical operations and obstetric procedures are recounted in graphic and accurate detail.

Parry's writing effectively evokes Victorian melodrama and, although solutions to some of the mysteries are flagged rather prominently throughout, and the narrative style sometimes reads as a slightly uneasy mixture of modern vernacular and formal Victorian, this is an enthralling mystery that offers some fascinating glimpses into the world of Victorian medicine.

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