

As far as I can work it out, the only lasting benefit to the world that came out of World War 1 was the invention of the sanitary towel. My wife thinks this opening sentence is improper, but despite that, I should mention that other inventions due to WW1 included: flamethrowers, tanks, poison gas, oh, and mechanised death. Now, that *is* improper.

August has the centenary of WW1's commencement. We won't be celebrating it, however. First, the start of a war is not for celebrating; second, there are some seriously tragic centenaries over the next four years to commemorate, so we need to pace ourselves; third, the remembrance season has been wisely set to a more sombre time of year (which will be absolutely observed).

In 1914 international politics were based on balance of power policies. The trouble with this particular power is that it was measured in testosterone. Let's face it, such a war does not happen by the mere stupidity of a so-called "spark" at Sarajevo. Too many people - men - were looking for excuses to turn rattling sabres into unbridled ambition. Nonetheless, do not judge them too harshly, as they were a product of their time. Perhaps we could see all this as the birth-pangs of a new world that would see equality and egalitarianism emerge, slowly and painfully, to indicate that we are indeed all equal in the sight of God.

Jesus warned Peter (who had just cut off someone's ear) that they who take the sword will perish by the sword. Conversely, on another occasion Jesus had told Lazarus's sister, Mary, that she had taken the better part: that is, she had sat at his feet and listened.

Prophetic, then, that French nurses of WW1, in applying absorbent cellulose bandages to wounded soldiers found, in the healing of others, comfort for themselves (from whence came the sanitary towels). A lesson for all ages, too: bringing good into a fallen world will also benefit ourselves, for what is good is of God. Oestrogen in the mess of WW1 helped us to a better world - but the other inventions remain...

For the time being, as we sun-bathe, enjoy the holiday month and this beautiful part of the world, we might be that bit more thankful for it if we ponder how easily these benefits could evaporate from our lives if history were to repeat itself - which, of course, it does. So, a bit more healing, a bit more sitting, a bit more listening.