

SIR NORMAN McALISTER GREGG



1991 is the centenary of Norman Gregg's birth and the fiftieth anniversary of his epoch-making paper demonstrating the association between congenital cataract and maternal rubella. This paper is reproduced as part of the following series of articles by kind permission of the Royal Australian College of Ophthalmologists.*

Although he would have benefited by the sort of laboratory techniques which are now available, such was Gregg's clinical acumen, much of which was derived from meticulous history taking, that he was able to be the first to recognize that a virus infection in humans could cause an embryopathy. Sir MacFarlane Burnet said that he believed that 'the recognition of the consequences of fetal infection with rubella was the most important contribution ever made to medicine in Australia'.

There was even more to Gregg than being a first-class doctor and a kindly man. His daughter Sheila, a physiotherapist who still lives in Sydney, said that her

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father 'had a good head, a safe pair of hands and a kind heart'; this represents considerable Antipodean understatement! Gregg was both an outstanding scholar and sportsman, graduating from the University of Sydney with first-class honours. He represented his university at swimming, baseball, tennis and cricket. Gregg was also a very good ice-hockey player, and a golfer who subsequently achieved a 'hole in one' on a formidable number of occasions! Gregg achieved particular distinction at cricket and lawn tennis. He represented New South Wales during the golden age of cricket prior to the First World War, and in 1912-13 was fifth in the batting averages for all first-class matches (average 56.00). These averages were headed by such legendary figures as Victor Trumper and Charlie McCartney; the same team included three cricketers who subsequently captained Australia. Had it not been for the First World War, Gregg would almost certainly have played Davis Cup tennis for Australia. Indeed, he was due to play at Wimbledon in 1919 but an appendicectomy precluded this.

The First World War resulted in Gregg's medical training being accelerated and, within days of qualifying, he sailed for England to join the British Expeditionary Force, serving in France for three years and gaining the Military Cross.

The link between maternal rubella and congenital malformations was by no means universally accepted. Indeed, an annotation in the *Lancet* in 1944 was still sceptical about this, but such criticism did not appear to upset Gregg since he took it philosophically and with good humour.

In due course Gregg had a very large number of honours bestowed upon him, including the Charles Mickle Fellowship of the University of Toronto, the James Cook Prize of the Royal Society of New South Wales, the Addingham Medal of the University of Leeds and, in 1953, the first Britannica Australia Award in Medicine, which he shared with Dame Kate Campbell. Although a knighthood was also bestowed upon him, his modesty was such that his elder daughter then working in London knew nothing about it until she saw the announcement in the press.

Despite numerous clinical and university commitments, which made ever-increasing demands on his time, Gregg always seemed to find time for his family, friends and home. His achievements, together with such qualities as natural modesty and gentleness, were appreciated not only by relatives, friends and colleagues but also by his patients.

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