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MARJORY LITTLE

We are indebted to Dr ETHEL DURIE for the following details of the life and career of the late Dr Marjory Little.

Elaine Marjory Little was born in Brisbane on June 2, 1884. She was the second of four daughters of Dr Joseph Henry Little and Agnes Elizabeth Little. When Marjory was six years old, her mother died. Later Dr Little took his family to England for a time, but returned to continue his practice in Queensland. Marjory attended schools in Brisbane, in England and in Armidale, New South Wales. When she was 21 years of age, a legacy became available which enabled her to enrol as a student at the University of Sydney, where she graduated as Bachelor of Science in 1911, and as Bachelor of Medicine in 1915. As an undergraduate she had been a student at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, and was a junior and later a senior resident medical officer there; she was asked to take over Dr A. H. Tebbutt's position as pathologist when he enlisted in the armed forces. She was retained there until he returned in 1917. She was eager to offer her services to the army, but at that time the Australian Army Medical Services did not admit women doctors to their ranks. However, Dr Little received a letter from Dr Elsie Dalyell, then in England, telling her that bacteriologists were needed in the British Army. Dr Kate Winning, who remembers hearing Dr Little tell the story, writes:

Marjory had a hard job getting permission to secure a passage to England, but eventually got over there by paying her own fare. She offered her services to the War Office and was sent to the Lister Institute where she worked with Miss Harriet Chick. It was suggested that she might be sent to Malta. However, Miss Chick told her that Sir Charles Martin, Director of the Lister Institute, but working in France at that time, badly needed a bacteriologist in his laboratory at Rouen. Miss Chick sent Dr Little to Leishman, then employed at the War Office, who said that there was no accommodation for women in the armed services in France, but that he would see what could be done. The upshot was that on the following Saturday a King's Messenger brought an envelope marked "Secret" to Dr Little's flat. It contained an order for her to report to Martin in Rouen. He had been asked to set up a pathology laboratory in France at his choice of location and had chosen Rouen. Marjory Little worked with him there, and was then sent to Etaples in charge of a laboratory.

To give it its full title, this was the Isolation Hospital Laboratory, at No. 46 Stationary Hospital, British Expeditionary Forces, France. Strictly speaking, this appointment carried the rank of major, but at that time the British Army did not appoint women to ranks above that of captain. Dr Little's rank remained that of captain, but after some time, a "small pay adjustment" was made. The following letter to Sir Charles Martin commending Dr Little's work in France was written in 1919 by her Commanding Officer in France, Colonel S. R. Cummins.

I should like to let you know, in your capacity as Director of the Lister Institute, what a very high opinion I formed of the work of Miss Marjorie Little, M.B. etc., who came to France from the Institute to work in our Army Laboratories. One of the best papers that reached me on influenzal pathology was by Dr Little and Miss Williams, and this will, I



hope, shortly appear as part of a "Green Report" by the M.E.C.' As demobilization advanced, I was greatly hampered by the loss of pathologists from France and I decided to put Dr Little in charge of the Isolation Hospital Laboratory at Etaples; as you know, one of the most important of our laboratories. Here she did splendid work, dealing with specimens not only from No. 46 Stationary Hospital, but also from several other units, and she was always ready to help in any difficulty that arose. At my last visit before leaving France, I found that, in the temporary absence of the pathologist of No. 51 General Hospital, the Venereal Centre at Etaples, she was quietly doing all the Wassermann work and gonorrhoea films, in addition to the work of her own laboratory, and doing them with the greatest efficiency. I was greatly struck by this readiness to undertake work of a kind which might easily have been refused by her on obvious grounds. I write you on the subject as I feel greatly indebted to Dr Little for her really excellent work, and it occurs to me that a record of it may be of some use to her in her career.

Returning to Australia after demobilization, Dr Little worked with Professor Welch at the University of Sydney, and set up in private practice as a pathologist in the basement of "Ardrossan", in Macquarie Street. She moved to a suite in B.M.A. Building when it was built. In this practice she was highly successful, her principal appointments being those of Consulting Haematologist at Sydney Hospital, and later Consulting Pathologist at The Royal North Shore Hospital and also at the Rachel Forster Hospital. She was a member of the British Medical Association and at one time President of the Section of Pathology. In 1935-1936 she was President of the Medical Women's Society of New South Wales. In 1938, she became a Foundation Fellow of The

Royal Australasian College of Physicians and later, in 1956, a Fellow of the Royal College of Pathologists of Australia.

On May 14, 1958, Dr Little delivered the Annual Postgraduate Oration in the Great Hall of the University of Sydney;² so far this is the only time a woman has been invited to give this Oration. Her subject was "Some Pioneer Medical Women of the University". This Oration was highly praised at the time, and later; indeed, it is a very outstanding piece of work. The story is told with authority, earnestness and accuracy; and is enlivened and made most human by delightful and characteristic touches of humour.

Dr Little retired from practice in 1952 at the age of 68; she was to have a long and happy retirement, enjoying the beautiful house and garden at Pymble which she and her sister Cicely had planned together and in which they loved to entertain their many friends and relatives.

These are some of the bare facts of Marjory Little's life and work; she was an outstanding person and it is difficult to describe her adequately; to convey the warmth and charm of her personality; her unflinching interest in people; her utter integrity and her keen yet kindly sense of humour. She liked people and she loved helping them; her friends will recall many instances of this.

Dr Kate Winning writes:

There is a paragraph in Marjory Little's Postgraduate Oration which applies as much to her as to those she mentions in it. The paragraph (pp. 48-49) runs:

The group of women of whom we have been thinking tonight were well aware of the responsibilities they accepted in the demanding profession of medicine. Personal success was associated in their minds with recognition of what such successes might mean, not only to themselves, but to those who were to follow them. That they did not fail has placed all medical women of New South Wales in their debt-- a debt which can best be repaid through the years by the maintenance of the standard they set.

¹ Report on the bacteriology and pathology of 46 fatal cases of influenza, with a note on the preparation of media for the cultivation and study of *B. influenzae* (Heiffer), by E. M. Little and S. E. Williams. (The report and the note together form No. 5 of Studies of Influenza in Hospitals of the British Armies in France, 1918: 88, London, H.M.S.O., 1919.) The group of studies were issued as the Medical Research Committee Special Report Series No. 36.

² Marjory Little, M.B., B.Sc., F.R.A.C.P. (1958), Some pioneer medical women of the University of Sydney. Annual Postgraduate Oration, *Bulletin of the Postgraduate Committee in Medicine, University of Sydney*, 14: 25.