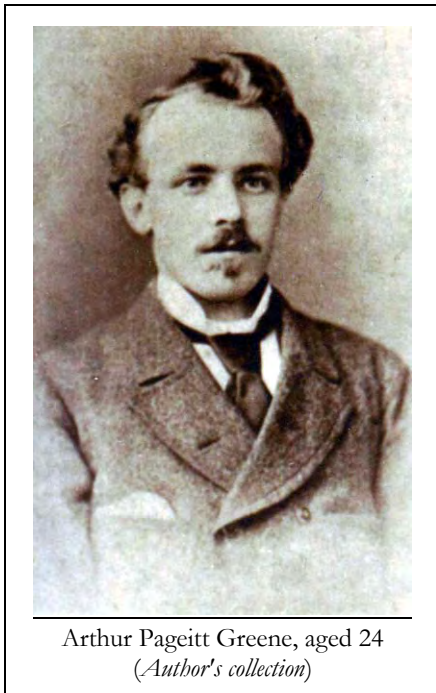


## Arthur Pageitt Greene (1848-1933): A rural doctor in Argentina

By Susan Wilkinson (1)

### Abstract

*Comparatively little is known of the Irish doctors who settled in the rural areas of Argentina. In that milieu doctors battled not only disease but the people's faith in the efficacy of local healers and in their priests, whose word, even in medical matters, frequently overrode those of the doctor. Arthur Greene was a Protestant who left Ireland for Argentina in 1872 when he was twenty-four, having qualified in Surgery and Medicine in two of the best medical schools in Europe: the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland and the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh. This article describes Arthur Greene's years in Argentina, where he practiced in Mercedes in the province of Buenos Aires, from 1874 to his death in 1933, the politics of the country which sometimes affected his movements, his attitude to curanderos (faith healers), his relationship to local priests and his medical accomplishments. (2)*



### Family background and medical education

Arthur Pageitt Greene, the sixth of seven boys, was born in 1848 on a family farm in the village of Kilkea, County Kildare. When he was two months old, his father leased a three-hundred-acre farm called Cruisetown near the town of Nobber in County Meath, where his youngest brother Godfrey was born.

His mother, who was of Welsh ancestry, belonged to a dissenting sect called Separatism,

so called because it had separated from the Established (Anglican) Church of Ireland. Like Quakers and other dissenters, Separatists abhorred any form of dogma or religious ritual. They met weekly on Sunday mornings, not in a church or chapel, but in rented rooms in Dublin. Arthur and his brothers were educated at schools owned and run by schoolmasters who followed their mother's religion. Separatism, which advocated simplicity in all things, was a way of life and thought, and in his childhood and early adolescent years in Ireland it was an inseparable part of Arthur's life. Until he went to Argentina he had never once seen the inside of a church.

Arthur's father was the seventh son in a family of thirteen, and Arthur's youngest brother was therefore the seventh son of a seventh son. As such, he was deemed by the local population to be invested with powers of healing the disease called 'The King's Evil', or scrofula. (3)

One of Arthur's earliest memories was of a man infected by the disease, his face and neck suppurating in a mass of sores, being brought to his brother Godfrey, then a mere baby, in the hopes that the touch of the infant's hands would effect a cure. To the end of his life, Arthur remained sceptical of faith healers.

Of his many first cousins, three, Robert, Samuel, and Jones Greene, would also settle in Argentina, Robert becoming a doctor. Their

mother, Anne Irwin, was a granddaughter of Jones William Irwin of Streamstown, County Sligo, whose house was famous for hospitality to itinerant musicians. Jones Irwin's own father, Colonel John Irwin, was a patron of the famous blind harpist, Turlough O'Carolan, who, in 1713, dedicated a ballad, 'Colonel John Irwin', to him. (4) The harpist, Arthur O'Neill, also blind since childhood and one the last of the traditional bard harpists, records a visit to Jones Irwin's house in 1759 in his memoirs.

*I am totally at a loss how to describe this gentleman's uncommon manner of living at his own house and among his tenantry. This gentleman had an ample fortune and was passionately fond of music. He had four sons and three daughters who were all proficient; no instrument was unknown to them. There was at one time a meeting in his house of forty-six musicians who played in the following order: the three Miss Irwins at the piano; myself at the harp; six gentlemen, flutes; two gentlemen, violoncellos; ten common pipers; twenty gentlemen, fiddlers; four gentlemen, clarionets. At the hour this hospitable gentleman's customary meeting was finished, some guests contiguous to their places went away, but those who lived some miles off remained, and in order to accommodate them Mr and Mrs Irwin lay on chairs in the parlour. For my part, I never spent a more agreeable night ... (5)*

When they were sixteen and fifteen respectively, Arthur's two oldest brothers, John and Thomas, entered the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin, medicine and surgery then being separate disciplines. The Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland was ranked as one of the most enlightened medical schools in Europe, requiring of its students a greater range of knowledge than did most other institutions in Europe. Thomas qualified first, in 1862, obtaining his Letters Testimonial, at eighteen years of age. John obtained his Letters Testimonial a year later. (6)

In 1865, when Arthur was seventeen and beginning his own studies at the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin, Thomas accepted a post as surgeon to the Welsh colony in Patagonia and sailed with the colonists on the *Mimosa* (Wilkinson 2007: 141-143). It was Thomas's decision to go to South America that changed

the destinies of Arthur and his brothers. By then both his parents had died; his father when Arthur was ten, having been gored by a bull on his land, his mother of an unknown illness, possibly cancer, when Arthur was fourteen, leaving Arthur and his brothers, in effect, orphaned and entirely reliant upon one another. Where one brother decided to go, the others would follow.

Arthur obtained his Letters Testimonial at the Royal College of Surgeons in 1870, when he was twenty-two, and obtained his diploma in Medicine at the Royal College of Medicine in Edinburgh in 1872, when he was twenty-four. By then all five of his brothers (an older brother who had been of poor health had died in his early twenties) and his three first cousins, Robert, Samuel, and Jones Greene, were living in Argentina, some two hundred miles southeast of Buenos Aires where the broad estuary of the River Plate meets the sea and the land forms a vast peninsula called *El Rincón del Tuyú* where his brother Thomas had re-located after leaving Patagonia. Visits to patients were on horseback, sometimes a distance of half a day's ride. Thomas's living conditions were rough in the extreme, his house a mere shack that was thatched with bulrushes. This was where Arthur and his brothers and first cousins first lived upon their arrival in Argentina. Herbert Gibson, owner of a vast *estancia* in the area, the *Estancia de los Yngleses*, described it in the *estancia* diary after a visit in 1887.

*It is a cold little wooden house. ... The wind blew chillily through the inch boards. It was freezing hard outside. The rats were running under us and over us all night. Not a tree around the wretched wooden buildings, not a flower. I never saw such a dreary forsaken wilderness in my life. (7)*

Arthur joined them, arriving in Argentina in 1872. As he could not practice medicine until he had validated his diploma and mastered Spanish, accompanied by his younger brother, he rented land on the *Estancia de los Yngleses*, on which, with his brother Godfrey, he proceeded to keep sheep as well as minister to the sick when required to do so.

### The Tuyú

In 1874, when Arthur arrived in Argentina, many towns outside the main cities were isolated pockets of scattered population - Spanish, French, Basque, Irish and, increasingly, Italian. Travel was by passenger coach, ox cart and by horseback along deeply rutted tracks and, in some areas, by rail. Distance was calculated in leagues, one league being approximately three miles or seven kilometres. Crime was a fact of life, and most citizens, including doctors, carried a firearm for protection. Politics were violent, the leaders often resorting to force in order to gain or retain power. It was unwise, as Arthur was to discover, to ally oneself to one party for fear that the other would retaliate if it gained power.

The Tuyú, from an Indian word meaning ‘mud’ or ‘clay’, is an area of immense lakes, abundant pasture lands, marshes and, during the nineteenth century, of dense *montes* or woods of indigenous trees. The largest *monte* - Montes Grandes - was fifty miles long and from twelve to fifteen wide. The areas of scattered population were referred to as *partidos*, or districts, such as the *partido* de Monsalvo, now known as Maipú, and the *partido* de Ajó, originally named *Rincón del Tuyú*, which became the town of General Lavalle in 1891.

The rural population had greater faith in *curanderos* than in doctors (Garcerón 1988: 22). (8) One well-known *médica-curandera* was an old woman who lived in the Montes del Tordillo in the Tuyú. Probably born in the last years of the eighteenth century or beginning of the nineteenth, her real name is unknown. She was known only as ‘*La médica del Pabilo*’, or simply *La Pabilo*, the Wick of a Candle. *La Pabilo* ‘cured’ by putting her saliva, green from continually sipping mate, on the wick of a candle and placing the saliva-soaked burnt wick on the affected part. If the patient’s ailment was cured it was attributed to *La Pabilo* (Velázquez 1987: 88). (9)

*A comisario of the partido, wishing to know if his wife was encinta, sent a soldier to La Pabilo with a bottle of her urine to be examined by her. On the*

*way, the soldier fell from his horse, the cork came out of the bottle and the liquid was lost. In fear of the comisario, the soldier substituted other liquid of the same nature, corked the bottle and brought it to La Pabilo. After a long examination lasting several hours, she announced to the soldier that the urine was that of a person encinta for three months. The poor man nearly died of fright, threw away his sword and cap and cleared out to some distant place, believing himself to be bewitched, for he never doubted the decision of La Pabilo. (10)*

The wildness of the area, the vast distances, the enormous skies and the *lagunas* that proliferated with hundreds of species of birds had a euphoric affect on the young twenty-four-year-old doctor from Ireland unconcerned with creature comforts who thought that, perhaps, he might remain in the Tuyú for the rest of his life. It was not to be. In 1874 a revolution broke out between Bartolomé Mitre and Nicolás Avellaneda for the presidency that was fought in the district of Ajó by Mitre and Valentín Alsina, in which Mitre lost (Rock 1985: 130-131).

*Sometime in the month of August of 1874 ... a small body of Alsinistas took possession the town and camped in the plaza, but when the Mitrista party had collected sufficient men, they, the Mitristas, attacked them. The Alsinistas made no resistance and cleared out, and neither side lost a single man in these encounters. The Mitristas held the town until the arrival of General Mitre. The great majority of the inhabitants of all the partidos around were Mitristas and very soon he had assembled twelve hundred men, not soldiers of course, and only armed with facones (knives) and lances made of long canes with the blade of a shears for shearing sheep fastened at the end.*

*Some of the troops had declared for Mitre, but the bulk of the army joined the Alsinistas. I was too short a time in the country to understand the politics of either side, but, from listening to the encomiums poured on General Mitre by all my friends and, I suppose, influenced by that Irish failing of being ‘agin’ the government’, sympathised with the Mitristas. Mitre remained in General Lavalle for six weeks waiting for a consignment of arms, munitions, etc. from his friends in Buenos Ayres, and I think that this was the chief cause of*

*his defeat as it gave time for Alsina to make preparations. (11)*

Arthur had shown sympathy for Mitre, to the extent of contemplating offering his services as surgeon to the army until he was warned that to do so might affect his revalidation should Mitre lose, and on Mitre's defeat he was ordered to leave the district.

*Some few months after peace was established I received a notice from the juez de paz (juez de paz) to present myself at the juzgado on a certain day. I went accordingly and found that the local priest and the apothecary had also been ordered to appear. The juez de paz was a gallego (Galician). Before the revolution he had been an employee in the tienda, and he had more than once served behind the counter. He was not a bad lot. The government had to appoint him as there was no Alsinista in the partido who could read or write.*

*He called me up first and said that he regretted to inform me that he had received orders from Buenos Ayres to dismiss everyone who had shown sympathy to the Mitristas. He also told me that as I was not yet qualified to practice, I could not do so in the partido of Ajó. By acting so, they probably thought that they were doing me an injury. But on the contrary, they were doing me a service as, if not forced to leave, I would probably vegetate there for many years and never revalidate my diplomas. Now I would go to Buenos Ayres, qualify in the university and return to practice in the town of General Lavalle. The priest and the apothecary were called up next and dismissed in the same way. They made a clean sweep. (12)*

### **Revalidation and betrothal**

By the mid-nineteenth century foreign-born doctors in Argentina were required to revalidate their medical diplomas at the Department of Medicine at University of Buenos Aires in a three-day *viva voce* examination before a committee of doctors. They were required to have fluency in Spanish, and so on arrival doctors often practised in rural communities, as Arthur did, or took lessons in Spanish until they acquired the required level of fluency.

*On the first day the candidate had to perform two operations on the cadaver. There was a table on*

*which were laid all the instruments which were purposely mixed up together. If he performed the operation to the satisfaction of the professor, he was given another to do. If he performed that one well also he was said to have passed in Operations. If he failed in one he was put back six months until he could present himself again.*

*The second day's examination consisted of the diagnosis (at the bedside) and treatment of two medical and two surgical cases. If he did those to the satisfaction of the professor the candidate on the third day gave a viva voce examination to thirteen professors (on different subjects such as Anatomy, Physiology, Botany, Chemistry, Surgery, Medicine, etc.). Should he come out well from this ordeal he was qualified to practice in the Argentine Republic and entitled also to practice in the Republic of Uruguay. (13)*

It was in Buenos Aires that Arthur met his future wife, Maria Elena Latham. Her father, Austin Latham, was born in Liverpool of a Roman Catholic family. Like his brother, Wilfrid, he was educated at the well-known Catholic boys' private school, Ampleforth, and later in Paris. When he was twenty-two, in 1851, he joined Wilfrid in Argentina. Wilfrid Latham had become a wealthy landowner and breeder of merino sheep; he was one of the founders of the *Sociedad Rural Argentina* and author of a book, *The States of the River Plate; their industries and commerce*, published in London in 1866 (Hanon 2005: 497-498). Together, they formed an import-export business, Latham & Co. When Austin Latham was twenty-six, he married Jane Dowdall whose father, George Dowdall, born in Newry, County Down, was one of the most powerful merchants in Buenos Aires and owned a large *saladero* (meat salting plant) described by William MacCann in his *Two Thousand Miles Ride Through the Argentine Provinces*. George Dowdall was one of the founding members of the Buenos Aires stock exchange and the British Medical Dispensary which became the British Hospital and subscribed to the Irish Relief Fund, administered by Father Fahy for the victims of the disastrous potato famine in Ireland (Hanon 2005: 282). Austin Latham died when he was

thirty-four of tuberculosis of the spine, Maria Latham being just seven years old.

Arthur and Maria Latham married in January 1877, the marriage being conducted by Father, later Monsignor, Dillon, as Maria Latham was a Roman Catholic. By this time, following a six-month spell as a junior doctor in the town of Lobos in the province of Buenos Aires in 1876, Arthur was established in the city of Mercedes in the same province.

### Mercedes

Mercedes, one hundred kilometres west of Buenos Aires, was established as a garrison fort against indigenous attack in 1752, when it was known as la Guardia de Luxán or la Guardia de Luján. By 1780 it had evolved as a town for settlement and was re-named Villa de Mercedes, after the Virgin of La Merced. The population was small and the sick sought the skills of *curanderos*.

With the creation of the *Protomedicato* in 1780 under County Clare-born Dr Michael O’Gorman (1736 -1819) four years after the creation of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata at Buenos Aires in 1776, medicine began to be put on a scientific footing with the eventual founding of a medical school and regulation of those practicing healing. (14)

Under the *Protomedicato*, *curanderos* were also required to obtain permission to practice healing. On 16 August 1780, an order sent to all local *alcaldes* (mayors) stipulated that no one could practice *cirugía, farmacia ni flebotomía* (surgery, pharmacy or phlebotomy) without the authority of the *Protomedicato*. Anyone doing so was fined twenty-five pesos if he was Spanish, and one hundred lashes if he was *indio* or *mestizo*. A letter from the local *Juez de Paz, comisario* or priest to the effect that the *curandero* in question had good results in healing, had saved a person from dying and that the potions administered had been of beneficial effect was sufficient for the applicant to be given the title of *médico-curandero* (Garcerón 1988: 19).

The first medical men in Villa de Mercedes, from 1779 until almost the middle of the nineteenth century were *médico-curanderos*,

registered by the *Protomedicato*. They treated ailments empirically: by blistering, applying plasters and poultices and phlebotomy, commonly known as ‘blood-letting’. As the population increased, many of whom were Irish, Spanish and Italian immigrants, scientifically-trained physicians began to replace the *médico-curanderos*, and by 1854 there were European-trained doctors established in Villa de Mercedes, the first being a surgeon from Spain, Francisco Lozano of Castile, whose permission to practice medicine in 1781 in the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata read: *Aprobado por el Real Protomedicato Matritenci, refrendado por el señor Protomedicato de Buen Ayre y de Don Miguel O’Gorman* (Garcerón 1988: 21).

In 1865 Mercedes was designated a city. In the cholera epidemic of 1868, according to parish records, almost twelve hundred people were known to have died. Many more were uncounted since their relatives buried them secretly at night in order to avoid isolation (Garcerón 1988: 301).

In February of 1870 the first hospital of twelve beds was established in a house which was soon found to be too small for the numbers needing hospital care. That same year, in December, land was given by the municipality of the city to build a larger hospital. In September of the following year, 1871, through donations from local landowners which included Irish-born *estanciero* (rancher) Nicholas Lowe, (15) taxes from the National Lottery and a 1% loan from the Banco Popular, the Hospital de Caridad was inaugurated. It was staffed by two doctors practicing in Mercedes - Drs. Eugenio Hernández and Francisco Sebastián Bianchi - and by the Sisters of Charity. It was the second hospital in the province and a model for others later established, functioning until 1947. The early cases were those of typhus, knife wounds, tuberculosis, heart disease and various forms of cancer. For the first nine years there was no women’s ward (Garcerón 1988: 42-45).

*At this time [1876] none of the streets of Mercedes were paved. In summer the dust was considerable, while in winter the mud abounded. The houses were of brick and of only one storey with flat roofs,*

*Spanish style. There were civil and criminal courts, courts of appeal, also a large national school with small municipal schools in the chacras and quintas. The only railway was the Western which belonged to the province. There was a hospital with fifty beds besides an operating theatre and other departments. The largest estancia was that of Don Saturnino Unzué, but there were several others such as those of Don Pedro Frías and Mr. Nicholas Lowe.*  
(16)

Some three years after Arthur's arrival, 1879, the number of doctors practising in Mercedes had increased and, along with Arthur, they gave their services to the Hospital de Caridad free of charge, rotating month by month. As well as Mercedes, the hospital served the outlying areas around Suipacha, Carmen de Areco, San Antonio de Areco, San Andrés de Giles (popularly known as Giles) and Navarro whose municipalities contributed to its upkeep. In 1880 it was used for the soldiers wounded in General Julio A. Roca's campaign to eliminate the indigenous people from the Pampas and, for a time, renamed the Hospital Militar (Garcerón 1988: 48).

Arthur was born in an age when faith in non-medical healing in rural areas, both in Ireland and in Argentina, was stronger than confidence in scientifically-trained physicians. Many would consult a doctor as a last resort, sometimes when all hope for recovery had passed and when other methods had failed. It is worth quoting here an excerpt from the late British medical historian, Roy Porter.

*Professional medical men, and a tiny number of women, comprised only the tip of the healing iceberg. From peasants to princes, people had views and practices of their own in health, sickness and remedies. Across vast tracts of Europe and its overseas empires, professional help might be far distant, but disease was always lurking. ... Ordinary people mainly treated themselves, at least in the first instance. There was nothing new about this in the eighteenth century, but better survival of records allows us more of a glimpse of the 'medicine without doctors' which was a necessity for many and a preference for some.*

*Religious healing continued to be practised, and not only by so-called ignorant peasants. Healing and holiness still criss-crossed. In Europe and Latin America, the Catholic Church upheld familiar healing rituals: holy water and wells, shrines, saints' relics, processions and pilgrimages. Even in Protestant nations where such 'superstitions' were censured, seventh sons of seventh sons ... might claim miracle cures, while Bourbon and Stuart monarchs flaunted their 'divine right' powers by touching for the 'king's evil' (scrofula). ... At his coronation in 1722, Louis XV touched more than 2000 scrofula victims, and as late as the Bourbon restoration in 1815 touching was revived in hopes of strengthening the monarchy if not of healing the sick. Charles X gave the last performance on 31 May 1825.*

*Diaries and letters show that when people fell sick, they often framed their own diagnoses, helping them to make their next decision: whether to summon professional help. Many had recourse to folk healers. 'I would rather have the advice or take physick from an experienced old woman that had been at many sick people's bedsides,' Thomas Hobbes avowed, 'than from the learnedst but unexperienced physician'. ... The eighteenth century has been dubbed the golden age of quackery. With the rise of a literate public eager to exercise its judgement and consumer power, demand welled up for all sorts of healing, and the more the state and the medical authorities tried to clamp down on them, the greater their popularity (Porter 1998: 281-283).*

Arthur Greene was a man of science in an age of ignorance and superstition, an agnostic dissenter in an atmosphere of strong Catholicism, both in the country of his birth and in his adopted land. He was respectful of the consolation they gave to the dying. Furthermore, his five daughters were baptised in that faith, his wife being a devout Roman Catholic. But he frequently found himself at odds with the parish priests who exerted much influence on the sick as well as the healthy and strongly opposed their involvement in medical matters.

*Cases of smallpox were always cropping up in Mercedes. An Italian doctor asked me to accompany him to the quintas (farms) in*

*consultation to a very bad case of this disease. I went with him and found a child of three or four years already in a hopeless state. We had the other children brought in. The doctor then asked the mother if the child and the other children had been vaccinated and asked what doctor had vaccinated them. 'No doctor,' she said. 'The priest has done it with holy water.' Well, the child died and the doctor vaccinated the others next day. One of them developed the disease and died of it. The vaccination had come too late to save it.*

*Not long afterwards I saw another case of the same kind when I was asked to see a sick child in a hotel in the town. The child was an infant of about eight or nine months, well nourished and breast-fed. The disease was of the confluent kind, and there was no hope for the child. It died on the following day. I asked the mother (a Basque) if the child had been vaccinated. She said that the cura párroco of the town where she lived (some leagues distant from Mercedes) had vaccinated the child and all her other children with holy water. I told her some of the things I thought about that priest and advised her to send at once for all her children and have them properly vaccinated. She sent for them at once, and they were brought to Mercedes by their father. Some were quite grown up. I vaccinated them all. Fortunately none of the others contracted the disease.*

*It cannot be wondered that smallpox was at that time almost endemic in this province if the priests - Basque, French, Spanish as well as Irish - have taken vaccinations into their hands using what they call holy water. They tell the people that vaccination has something to do with the devil and to protect their flocks inject them with holy water. It is disheartening to think that in this day men of such ignorance have such influence. (17)*

In 1886 Arthur and his young family temporarily left Mercedes for Buenos Aires where Arthur was appointed Chief Medical Officer and Director of the British Hospital in 1889 until 1895.

*The medical board of the British Hospital was at that time composed of Dr John MacDonald, Dr. L. Colbourne, Dr. A. Leeson (when in Buenos Aires), Dr. Peacan and two other doctors whose names escape me. Shortly after my arrival I was*

*invited to join this board and of course accepted. There were but two doctors in daily attendance, a physician and a surgeon. There was also a house surgeon who lived in the hospital. The visiting staff had to be qualified in the Argentine, but the residents could be qualified in England. In case of necessity or for consultation any of the medical board might be called on.*

*At the end of 1889 Dr. Colbourne sold off all his effects and returned to England with his family. Before leaving the Argentine he proposed me to the committee of the hospital to fill his place there, and I was offered the position of Chief Medical Officer and Director. There was no remuneration attached to this position, but there was a certain amount of responsibility as all complaints of whatsoever nature were made to me. The Resident Medical Officer was a Dr. John O'Connor. (18)*

Arthur returned to Mercedes in 1895. In February of that year there was another outbreak of cholera in Mercedes. Two people contracted it; one died. A few days later a guard at the prison died. A week later there were three more suspected cases. It spread beyond the limits of the city to the outlying farms, and cases were reported in other parts of the province. A *lazareto* was established, as was the custom, close to the cemetery on the outskirts of the city and the sick were nursed by nuns (*las Hermanas del Colegio San Antonio*). Water was ordered to be boiled. Polluted wells were filled in. Schools were closed. All large social gatherings were forbidden. Disinfectant was sent by train from the city of La Plata. The epidemic was contained and in contrast to the epidemic of 1868 when over fifteen hundred died in Mercedes alone, which did not take into account the numbers buried secretly at night, there were less than twenty fatalities (Garcerón 1988: 53-54).

The Hospital de Caridad was too small for the medical needs of a population that was increasing rapidly. Medicine had made great advances since it was founded and a new century demanded new innovations. In 1902 Nicholas Lowe died and bequeathed a large legacy to the hospital of which he had been one of the chief benefactors during his lifetime. His legacy, with other donations, enabled the

hospital to be extended and modernised. An outpatients department, X-ray unit, maternity ward and tuberculosis sanatorium were built. In 1904, when he was fifty-six, Arthur Greene was appointed Director.

As well as the hospital, Mercedes itself had grown. The main streets were paved. Electric lighting was beginning to replace kerosene lamps. Three railway lines converged there. Towns like Salto, Luján, Suipacha, Gowling, etc., set in rich farming land had also grown, due in large part to Irish immigration.

Arthur's family had also grown. He and his wife had four daughters: Maria Elena, Anita Jane, Alice, and Ethel; and a son: Arthur Latham Greene. His third-born daughter, Amy, and his second-born son, Austin Pageitt, died in infancy. As was prevalent in many Catholic-Protestant, or 'mixed', marriages, their daughters were baptised as Catholics and their sons as Protestants. They lived in a large house in the centre of Mercedes that had a walled garden at the back where, being passionately fond of animals, Arthur and his family kept a variety of pets and birds. It broke his heart when a pet dog developed rabies and he had to destroy it.

*We had one year in Mercedes almost an epidemic of rabies amongst dogs. Our house dog - an old fox terrier - was one of these. He was a tame old dog and never aggressive.*

*Early one morning I was woken with the news that he had rabies. I dressed quickly and went into the garden. I was told that he had killed all the ducks and most of the hens in the yard, that he had bitten one of the carriage horses, and had done his best to bite the cook. (Fortunately her dress reached to the ground, so he only tore it.) He then ran into the street through a wicket in the large gate and bit a boy on the leg, then ran up the street. I took a small bore rifle and ran to the window of my room which looked onto the street he had taken. I saw him about half a square away. I fired at him and must have wounded him as he turned and ran back into the yard through the wicket and crouched down under the horses' manger. I went into the yard and, taking perfect*

*aim, killed him with one shot. The bullet hit him between the eyes.*

*We were all very sad as we had reared him from a pup, but with rabies there can be no trifling. The boy he bit was a son of a neighbour and I had to send him to Buenos Ayres to the anti-rabies institute for treatment. He received the injections, but after a few days the doctor of the institution sent him back saying that as he had been bitten through the trousers the bite was not dangerous.*

*The treatment, even if used immediately after being bitten, is not always successful. When I practised in Buenos Ayres an employee of Cranwell's botica in Calle Reconquista, (19) on entering one morning passed his hand over the back of a large black cat which was sitting on the counter in its favourite place. This morning it turned round and bit the young man on the back of his hand. The bite bled a little, but was not very painful. On the advice of a doctor who had entered the pharmacy just then, the young man went to the institute and placed himself under the care of the doctor in charge. He received two injections daily for a week or ten days, and one daily for a further period. He was then declared free from danger.*

*For sixty days he appeared quite well, and the matter was quite forgotten. But one morning at the pharmacy he complained of itchiness at the site of the bite. He returned to the institute and explained what he felt to the doctor who advised him to stay there and gave him a room. On the second day he developed hidrofobia and died three days later. He was English and a strong healthy man of about twenty-five years of age. I may mention that the cat after biting him jumped off the counter, ran into the street and was not seen again.*

*It is considered that the bite of a rabid cat is more dangerous than the bite of a dog and that the bite of a rabid wolf or fox is the most dangerous of all.*  
(20)

### Retirement and upheaval

On October 1916, Arthur Pageitt Greene, aged sixty-eight, retired from medicine and left Mercedes for Buenos Aires from where he ultimately went with his family to England.

Greene wrote this memoir of his life in Argentina when he was living with his family in



the house he had bought in the south of England - in the quiet town of Bromley in Kent. He wrote about the diseases and treatments prevalent in the nineteenth century. He wrote about the changes he had witnessed during his years in Argentina: in the Tuyú, Lobos, in Mercedes and in Buenos Aires. He also wrote about his marriage and births of his children. He wrote of violent crimes and revolutions prevalent in his day, of diseases and the ravages of smallpox, and of his final years in Mercedes before retirement from medicine.

In writing his reminiscences in the suburban comfort of Bromley he became nostalgic for the land in which he had spent three quarters of his life and despite the fact that his son and daughters were settled in England he returned to Argentina, sailing from London on 29 September 1923 on the *Hardwicke Grange*. He died ten years later, on 11 May 1933 in Buenos Aires from complications of pneumonia. His wife died a year later in England. On his death his memoirs passed to his oldest daughter, Maria Elena. After her death they were sent for safe keeping with the Greene family archives in Kilkea, County Kildare and a copy was kept in Argentina by Carmen Greene de Lombardini, the youngest daughter of Arthur's oldest brother, John.

Arthur Pageitt Greene is listed in Eduardo Coghlan's definitive book on the Irish who emigrated to Argentina in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, *Los Irlandeses en la Argentina, su actuación y descendencia* (Coghlan 1987: 492). A chapter on him appears in the history of medicine and the doctors of Mercedes, *Médicos mercedinos* by Dr Ignacio V. Garcerón, who wrote of him thus:

*A man of great intelligence and culture, his standing as an accomplished doctor was recognized by all. He was a man whom other doctors would consult. He never refused an opinion drawn from his considerable knowledge of medicine. He was a good surgeon, but where he stood out was in clinical*

*medicine. This required a vast knowledge of pathology which was not a specialty at that time ... A professional respected by his colleagues who held him in great esteem, he never created resentment among his peers or distanced himself from anything that might provoke confrontation. In general, he was a man of the highest character, treating his patients with courtesy and good manners. He was especially very kind to children. ... His departure was greatly lamented by all the population regardless of class as they were losing a great doctor, a friend and a benefactor of the poor* (Garcerón 1988: 79). (21)

Arthur's brother, Thomas, having lived and practiced in Uruguay after leaving Argentina in 1869, returned to Ireland upon retirement from medicine, where he died in 1922. On a visit to Ireland in 1872, the year of Arthur's arrival in Argentina, he had met and married Lucy Day whose brother was a Church of Ireland clergyman in the parish of Stradbally, County Kildare, whose son was the Irish-born British poet laureate, Cecil Day Lewis. (22)

Arthur's oldest brother John practiced first in Salto in the province of Buenos Aires where he donated land for the building of the first hospital there, and later in Lincoln in the same province. During Arthur's absences from Mercedes, he sometimes took over Arthur's practice as *locum*. He bought a large tract of land in Vedia, near the town of Junín in the same province, where an unpaved street, Calle Juan Samuel Greene, is named after him. Some of his medical artefacts were donated to the museum in Vedia established in the old railway house.

Arthur's cousin Robert Greene took over Thomas's practice in the Tuyú, and later practiced in Carmen de Areco. His descendents live in Spain, Argentina, and Chile.

Susan Wilkinson

## Notes

1. The author is a descendent of Arthur Pageitt Greene, and is editing his memoirs for publication.

2. I wish to acknowledge the help of Mary O'Doherty, Senior Librarian, Special Collections and Archives of the Mercer Library at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland for archival information on Arthur Greene's and his brothers' medical education; and Dr Ignacio V. Garcerón of Mercedes in the Province of Buenos Aires, retired physician and author of *Médicos mercedinos*, for his kind hospitality on my first visit to Mercedes and for the insight he gave me on Arthur Greene's life and times as a doctor in Mercedes.
3. Tuberculosis of the lymph glands, once held to be curable by royal touch.
4. The old Gaelic patronage system whereby bards or musicians were supported by wealthy noblemen was then in its last days.
5. This account of the famous gathering of musicians at Streamstown is documented in 'Harp Festivals and Harp Societies' in *A History of Irish Music* by William H. Grattan Flood, published by Browne & Nolan, Dublin, 1906. The same musical event is also mentioned in *Between the Jigs and the Reels* by Caoimhín MacAoidh, Drumlin Publications, 1994.
6. *Minute Book of the Court of Examiners 1858-1864*. Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland Archives..
7. This entry was kindly transcribed and sent to me by Sra. Minnie Magrane de Boote, whose husband is one of the present owners of the *Estancia de los Yngleses*.
8. Original: *Sabemos que el curanderismo tenía muy fieles y desconfiaban de los auténticos médicos*.
9. Original: *La imaginación popular ha aureolado a la milagrosa médica de los Montes del Tordillo con un halo de omnisciencia u omnipotencia espiritual. Ella era el tribunal de última instancia, en cuanto a enfermedades se refiriera. Los que los médicos desahuciaban, ella curaba. Se le guardaba cierto respeto que podría llamarse místico. Curaba la graciada o energúmena mujer, con mechones de pabulo empapados en su saliva; tomaba constantemente mate amargo, lo que, como consecuencia químicamente natural, debía dar la insalivación de coloración verdosa. Era tanta su fama, que a su casa llegaron desde el paisano ignorante y humilde, hasta hombres de bastante ilustración, de holgada posición pecuniaria y relacionadas con altas personalidades científicas*.
10. Arthur Greene, Memoirs (unpublished).
11. Arthur Greene, Memoirs.
12. Arthur Greene, Memoirs..
13. Arthur Greene, Memoirs.
14. A *Protomédico* was the Royal physician, appointed by the Emperor. The *Tribunal del Protomedicato* was the office or medical board of the Royal Physician. Since Michael O'Gorman lived through all eleven viceroys of the thirty-four-year duration of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, he was the only *Protomédico* there.
15. Nicholas Lowe was born in Ireland in 1827, in Granard, County Cork. He arrived in Argentina in 1849, living first in Lobos before settling in Mercedes where, with his brother Richard, he established a large *estancia*, *Altamira*, and was director of the Banco de la Provincia and founder of the *Sociedad Rural* of Mercedes..
16. Arthur Greene, Memoirs.
17. Arthur Greene, Memoirs.
18. Arthur Greene, Memoirs. It is interesting that three of the doctors at the British Hospital were Irish. Dr Arthur Leeson's medical career is documented by Edward Walsh in this issue of *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America*. Dr Luke Peacan was born in Galway in 1851 and studied medicine in London. Dr John O'Connor was born in Carrick-on-Shannon in County Leitrim in 1863, studied medicine at Trinity College Dublin and arrived in Buenos Aires in 1890. Ultimately, he became head physician at the British Hospital where he worked from 1890 to 1927..

19. The renowned apothecary shop on Calle Reconquista, universally known as ‘Cranwell’s *botica*’ or, simply, ‘Cranwell’s’, was established by Irish-born Edmund Cranwell. Edmund Cranwell was born in Carlow, and apprenticed in the renowned Apothecaries Hall in Dublin. His brother, William, established the first apothecary shop in Montevideo.

20. Arthur Greene, *Memoirs*.

21. Original: *Hombre de una inteligencia muy clara, de gran cultura, prevalecieron sus condiciones de eximio médico. Fue un hombre de consulta, nunca las rebuyo, poniendo en las mismas sus amplios conocimientos, que no eran pocos. Ejercicio sobre todo clínica médica, aunque incursión en cirugía cuando las circunstancias lo llevaban a ello. Fue un buen cirujano, pero donde mas se destacó fue en clínica médica. Esta fue la mas necesaria en estos sitios, pues el medico debía tener vastos conocimientos en la patología ya que en esta época no se podía hacer una especialidad, porque la gente no estaban educada para ello y esa enseñanza costo muchos esfuerzos. Profesional respetado por sus colegas, los cuales le tenían gran estima. No creo resentimiento entre sus pares y se alejo de todo aquello que pudiese provocar resquemores, es decir, que no solamente era un señor en su porte, sino en su persona toda, por eso sobresalió dentro de la sociedad donde el se desplazo. En general era de muy buen carácter, tratando a sus enfermos con paciencia, con buenos modales. Con los niños era muy cariñoso. ... Su alejamiento fue muy lamentado por toda la población sin distinción de clases, porque con su retiro perdían a un gran medico, a un excelente amigo, a un benefactor de los pobres.*

22. Cecil Day Lewis’s youngest son is the actor, Daniel Day Lewis.

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