These are the bare facts of his career, but what of the man himself? He was a very warm hearted and sincere person of a most friendly nature whom patients and staff could instinctively trust. He had a great sense of puckish humour with an immense number of stories suitable for the occasion. Such a man, whose company one could always enjoy, gathered many friends at home and abroad. One American colleague described him as a great ambassador for British ophthalmology. Still maintaining some old-fashioned methods, he had a great deal of knowledge and commonsense, which he passed on in full measure to the many trainee surgeons who passed through his hands.

A gentleman in the truest sense, he will be sorely missed by his many friends and will leave a gap in British ophthalmology which will be hard to fill.

To his widow, Sylvia, his three daughters and grand-daughter, and to his doctor brother, Charles, we extend our sincerest sympathy in the loss of such a fine man.

Derrick Tilton Vail, 1898–1973

One of the outstanding ophthalmologists of our generation, Derrick Vail, died quietly in his sleep in London during the night of April 18 to 19, 1973. His loss will be deplored in every country in the world, not least Britain, for none had a larger circle of admiring and devoted friends.

The middle of five children of an American ophthalmologist of the same name who was professor and chairman of the Department of Ophthalmology at the Cincinnati Medical College, Derrick junior had a happy childhood, learning wood-carving and to play the violin at the age of 8—accomplishments which he maintained throughout his life. Entering Yale in 1915, where he won an oar for participating in a famous rowing victory, he graduated in 1919 and entered the Harvard Medical School to graduate in 1923; during this time there occurred the most important event in his life, marrying one of the most delightful women in the world—Elizabeth, universally affectionately known as Bebe. After a residency of 16 months in the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, he went with his father to Sir Henry Holland's hospital in Shikarpur in India where he learned cataract surgery: on one day he performed 98 operations, to his great regret not reaching his century because the light gave out. Returning to Cincinnati in 1925, he worked with his father. Having visited Oxford to study for—and obtain—the D.O., he succeeded his father in the Chair at Cincinnati in 1937. After a long interval on war service he was offered, and accepted, the Chair of Ophthalmology at the Northwestern University in Chicago. Here he was an active and stimulating teacher and rapidly acquired a practice larger than the family practice in Cincinnati. In 1965 he retired and became Emeritus Professor, taking long holidays on his secluded Canadian island, Desbarats, in Lake Huron. Although he maintained many of his activities, his later years were clouded by one serious illness after another.

The ophthalmologists of Great Britain came to know Derrick best during the second world war. In 1942 he was appointed senior ophthalmic consultant to the U.S. Army in the European theatre and immediately came to England and thereafter went to Europe. During his stay in England he participated wholeheartedly in ophthalmic life, touring American and British hospitals, and with

DERRICK VAIL
(Taken in 1948)

his usual drive and ability organizing his specialty in the American army and maintaining their instruction by holding regular meetings of his American "Eye Club". Returning to America in 1944, he became Chief Consultant in Ophthalmology in the Surgeon General's office and subsequently chief of the ophthalmic division of the Veterans' Administration. For his war services his country awarded him the Bronze Star and the Legion of Merit, France the Medaille de Reconnaissance, and Belgium the Order of the Crown.

In American ophthalmology Derrick was one of the most active, enthusiastic, and popular participants, but his greatest contribution was the part he played in making the *American Journal of Ophthalmology* the most widely read in the world. Apart from writing more than 100 clinical papers, he first became associated with the journal in 1925 and assumed the editorship in 1940, becoming Editor Emeritus 25 years later, to be succeeded by Frank Newell. He also edited the *Year Book of Ophthalmology* (1949–59). In both of these his crisp, sometimes critical, but always wise editorial comments revealed his wide reading and sound clinical judgement. Under his editorship and largely due to his influence, the *American Journal* flourished exceedingly, its circulation increasing from about 1,000 to ten times that figure.

For his unique contributions to every aspect of ophthalmological life, Derrick received every honour it was possible for him to win. He was Chairman of the Section of Ophthalmology of the American Medical Association (1946–47), receiving the Prize Medal in Ophthalmology (1952), President of the American Academy of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology (1951–52), of the American Board of Ophthalmology (1954), and the American Ophthalmological Society (1958–59); he gave the de Schweinitz Lecture (1945), the Proctor Lecture (1947), the Montgomery Lecture in Dublin (1952), the Doyne Lecture in Oxford (1957), and received the Leslie Dana Gold Medal of the National Society for the Prevention of Blindness (1959), the Howe Medal (1960), and the first award of the Pan-American Association of Ophthalmology (1971). He was made an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of England (1950) and was one of the four Honorary Members of the Ophthalmological Society of the United Kingdom. Most important of all, he was unanimously elected President of the International Council of Ophthalmology (1962–66), the first American to obtain this post which he occupied with his usual energy and distinction. Perhaps as satisfying to him was the special issue of the *American Journal* contributed in his honour in 1966 by his many professional friends and admirers.

But all these honours are as nothing compared with the personality of the man himself, for his professional excellence, his force of character, his unreserved intolerance of pretension, and his characteristic of giving himself to his friends, coupled with a rare humour and an immense appreciation of the joys of life, made him unique. Apart from ophthalmology, his wide culture and scholarly attainment (he was, for example, an authority on Boswellian literature) made his company a joy. And to this richness, both professionally and socially in many lands, the charm of his wife, Bebe, contributed not a little.

The blank left by the death of Derrick, certainly in Britain as in America, is enormous and will be difficult to fill. Our sincerest sympathy goes to Bebe in her loss. Derrick had four children. The eldest, Derrick, born during his father's medical school days, became a pilot in the Royal Canadian Air Force before America entered the war, and was lost when returning to England from a raid on the Continent in 1942; David, who was an eminent psychiatrist, died recently after a prolonged illness; there remain the beautiful and vivacious Ann, now Mrs. Roberts, and the youngest, Peter, a successful chemical engineer. Our thoughts go out to those who survive in sadness at Derrick's death; but we have had an abundance of joy in his life.

STEWART DUKE-ELDER