E. H. Derrick, Describer of Q Fever

A bit over 30 years ago, an account of the infectious disease later to be named Q fever entered the medical literature in an apparently routine report under the title “A Hitherto Undescribed Type of Fever Occurring in Brisbane” (1). One year later a full description of Q fever (2) appeared in The Medical Journal of Australia. This paper (see p. 945 in this issue) became a historic document of infectious disease (3), and insured for its author, Edward Holbrook Derrick, a reputation which was further heightened by his subsequent research.

In July 1967 Dr. Derrick retired from the post of Director of the Queensland Institute of Medical Research. In honor of his fruitful career, the December 9, 1967, number of The Medical Journal of Australia has been issued as an E. H. Derrick Festschrift. In its first paper, Sir Macfarlane Burnet tells of his work in the identification of Coxiella burneti as the causative organism; he traces the evolution of names for this disease—from “abattoir's fever” to Queensland rickettsial fever to query fever to Q fever (see p. 933 and p. 925 in this issue of the ANNALS). The second paper, by R. L. Doherty, outlines Dr. Derrick's career, reviews in detail his other contributions in infectious disease and pathology (including identification of Leptospira pomona as cause of a disease among dairy farmers in southeast Queensland), and lists Dr. Derrick's 104 publications from 1922 to 1967. D. W. Johnson assesses Dr. Derrick as “man and scientist,” and B. P. Marmion surveys the development of vaccines for Q fever from 1957 to today. Not the least of the notable papers are the two on asthma by Dr. Derrick himself that exemplify his continuing work “in retirement.” This Festschrift issue will be of interest to medical historians, students of infectious disease, and anyone who enjoys seeing how a major contribution to clinical medicine can be made without an electron microscope, a digital computer, or a project grant running into six figures.

E. J. H.

REFERENCES