Robert Ingleton Stirling, “R. I.” to so many, died in Edinburgh on October 29, 1970, aged seventy-four. Born to the manse in Edinburgh on July 15, 1896, he learned early the ideals that ruled his life.

His entry into medicine was delayed by the first world war. He was commissioned into the Machine Gun Corps and commanded and fought with an independent unit. He remained interested in the care of wounded ex-servicemen, and during the second world war was orthopaedic surgeon to Scottish Command.

He graduated in 1924. He gained a blue for hockey and was always interested in sport. Woe betide his house surgeon if he could not immediately give him on arrival at a hospital the latest score in the current Test series. He excelled at golf and each year represented the
Scottish Colleges. He was a man of the mountains and the outdoors, and the Cuillin of Skye was his haven for many years, but he loved all Scotland. Travelling with him anywhere in Britain, but particularly in Scotland, was fascinating, for one was regaled with endless tales and legends of the country travelled through. He was an immensely cultured man. He used to read far into the night and the diversity and extent of his reading was extraordinary. He could talk well on almost any subject.

His bent was surgery and he became a clinical tutor to W. J. Stuart at the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh. Stuart was a gentle, quiet and compassionate surgeon. The two men were in many ways similar and Stirling acquired an admiration and devotion for his chief. In 1929 he was awarded a Travelling Fellowship of the English College of Surgeons which allowed him to visit the United States of America, Canada and Europe. This confirmed for him his decision to specialise in orthopaedics, not easy in Edinburgh at that time when specialisation (in surgery) was regarded as unnecessary or worse. During his travels in the United States he met many orthopaedic surgeons and developed a special and long-lasting friendship with Steindler and Hoke.

Back in Edinburgh, he was appointed an assistant surgeon to the Royal Hospital for Sick Children and began an association with W. A. Cochrane, the first orthopaedic surgeon in Edinburgh. Cochrane had an immense enthusiasm for the care of the crippled child. He had already started peripheral clinics, and plans for what was to become the Princess Margaret Rose Orthopaedic Hospital were already on the drawing board. The concept conceived by Robert Jones and developed at Oswestry was to be brought north. The orthopaedic hospital was on the edge of the city, surrounded by trees, facing south over the Pentland Hills, and is perhaps the loveliest site of any orthopaedic hospital in Britain. It has now grown to nearly 300 beds. It was the great love of Stirling's life. Though he had done so much to create it and though he worked in it throughout his professional career, when the time came for younger men to come to his hospital he was open to discussion and gentle argument; and though a traditionalist and conservative to the depths of his nature, he was prepared to see radical changes in his hospital and in his concept of orthopaedics if one could argue to his satisfaction that it was necessary. The esteem in which he was held by his colleagues was reflected in his election as Vice-President of the British Orthopaedic Association in 1961.

The clinic system from which crippled children would be supervised was developed over south-east Scotland. Cochrane, Stirling and their colleagues tirelessly travelled over the many counties brought into their ambit. At one time ninety-five clinics were in being in southern Scotland. With the disappearance of tuberculosis, poliomyelitis, rickets and many other crippling diseases of children and the shortening of hospital stay, the function of the Princess Margaret Rose Orthopaedic Hospital had to change. It is a tribute to the planners that this hospital, the last but perhaps the best designed of the long-stay orthopaedic hospitals, was found to lend itself to adaptation in a quite remarkable way.

One of Stirling's earliest appointments was that of surgeon in charge of accident services in Fife, north across the Firth of Forth from Edinburgh. Unique in his contract was the proviso that if the ferry to Fife was unable to sail because of storm or darkness he was permitted to cross the Forth railway bridge on foot. To his dismay the occasion was never to come. For the sick his time and patience were endless. He was never seen to be hurried or irritated. No one was ever turned away from his clinics; in consequence these were very prolonged. The last ferry from Fife to Edinburgh at 11 p.m. was repeatedly held up to wait to take him back to Edinburgh: on three occasions it even returned to the quay when his well known car appeared in view.

The essence of "R. I." was happiness. He had the capacity for a great, continuing but quiet happiness. He was humorous, a marvellous raconteur. Some of his happiest times were spent with the Monks of St Giles, an Edinburgh society which dines in monks' habit on beer and sausages, regaling each other with tales and humorous verse. He was in all ways
a gentle man aware of the human dignity of his patients, even the most fractious or the poorest. He understood human dignity in its proper sense; he had so much of it himself.

To watch Stirling with children was entrancing. He had a special magic with children, a rapport tantalising to try and understand, impossible to emulate. In his early years he wrote a book of fairy stories.

Shortly after his retirement and to the great delight of his friends he married. In Wyn he found a completion to his life, a fulfilment of his happiness. He had seemed a convinced bachelor: in reality he was an idealist who was prepared to wait. Those of us who have been privileged to know both of them together know that he, always a happy man, was now wholly content.

Soon after this happiness, tragedy struck and he had to lose a leg at the hip. Having all his life persuaded the crippled that disablement was not a disability, as one might expect he learnt to walk on a Canadian limb without fuss. He became a nimble septuagenarian, drove his car, became an enthusiastic gardener and attended public dinners. His patients loved him because he so obviously cared, his friends and colleagues are grateful to have known him.

J. I. P. J.
W. I. P.