PIERRE MARIE (1853–1940)

PIERRE MARIE was born into a wealthy bourgeois family of Paris. He first studied law but soon turned to medicine. At the age of twenty-five (1878) he became interne in the hospitals of Paris. In this role he profited particularly from his contact with Charcot, then at the height of his career. Marie's thesis for the M.D. (1883) carried a graphic description of the tremor observed in the extended arms and fingers in persons with Graves' disease—a phenomenon he had begun to study while a medical student. He was appointed chef de clinique and chef de laboratoire under Charcot, and in 1889 became médecin des hôpitaux and professeur agrégé. During this period he gave his famous lectures on diseases of the spinal cord.1 Eruptive fevers (measles, scarlatina, smallpox), he stated in these lectures, commonly have sequelae of neural origin. Smallpox may, during the convalescent period, give rise to symptoms of "insulae sclerosis" (multiple sclerosis): "tremor in the limbs with more or less paresis, disorder of the speech which becomes slow and scanning, nystagmus and in short all the characteristic symptoms of insular sclerosis may exist. . . . The symptoms may continue, and confirmed insular sclerosis occurs." Marie's observations thus fall in line with a current concept that multiple sclerosis may be due to the action of a "slow" virus.

Marie published numerous classical descriptions of new clinical entities which he not only isolated but christened: progressive muscular atrophy (with Charcot) in 1886,2 acromegaly in 1886,3 hypertrophic osteoarthropathy in 1890,4 cerebellar heredoataxia in 1893,4 spondylosis rhizomélique in 1898.6 This period of sustained creative activity gave him an international reputation.

In 1897 he transferred his activities to the Hospice de Bicêtre and established there a neurological service which attracted pupils from all over the world. During the ten years he remained there he became interested in the problems of aphasia, and his documentation of the subject (reported in detail in the thesis of Moutier) was the basis of a devastating critique on the previous work.7 Not only did he attack the ideas of Broca, using as the provocative title for his paper "The third left frontal convolution has no spe-
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cial role in the function of language," but he even examined
 Broca's original specimen to prove how erroneous was his observation.
 and in the process swept away many old prejudices. In his fond-
 ness for controversy, Marie drew in Babinski and the Dejerines,
 setting neurologists at each other's doctrines so that they took sides
 and debated vigorously. Marie's work on aphasia was extended
 later by his pupil, Charles Foix. In 1907, in the midst of the con-
 troversy over aphasia, Marie took the chair of pathological anat-
omy in the faculty. Here he did much to improve the teaching but added little to the subject itself. Again his work was continued by a brilliant pupil, Gustave Rousset, when the latter succeeded Dejerine to the chair of clinical neurology at the Salpêtrière.

At sixty-five years Marie finally assumed the chair of neurology which had been created for Charcot and occupied since his tenure by Raymond, Brissaud and Dejerine. This was in 1918 toward the end of a destructive war. There were no longer the facilities or the means to continue the painstaking laboratory studies of the Dejerine school, nor did Marie's interests incline him in that direction. In collaboration with Meige, Foix, Chatelin and Boussier he published interesting studies of the neurological lesions caused by the war, but his great productive period was over.

In October 1921, I entered his clinic as foreign assistant, too late to feel the full impact of his creative personality. I remember him as a dignified old gentleman, who came regularly about 10:00 A.M. to the little building called the Pavillon de la Grille where patients were brought to him for examination. Only rarely did he enter the wards and never the laboratory, for he was very sensitive to formalin and would look at fixed brains only through a window, and there dictate his description. He was at his best in clinical consultation, in which his discussions were short and pithy. His teaching seems always to have been simple, clear, plain exposition. He was very kind to me and courteous to everyone, including the patients. His agréé at that time was Foix, a brilliant lecturer, whose early death was a great loss to French neurology.

By 1925 Marie withdrew from his professorship and retired to his estate on the Côte d'Azur, taking his leisure seriously. He returned to Paris rarely except to attend meetings of the Comité de Direction of the Revue neurologique, which he and Brissaud had founded in 1893 and of which he was very proud. His later years were saddened by the loss of his daughter, wife and only son from infectious diseases. After several months of painful illness—from an abdominal condition for which de Martel had operated—he, too, died.

Pierre Marie's influence in the Parisian medical world was immense. His great wealth made him independent; his honesty made him respected; his innate courtesy and dignity made him friends and disarmed his oppo-
and disarmed his opponents; and his creative intelligence spread his reputation throughout the world. He is a good example of the best in French medicine.

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References


WEIR MITCHELL (1829–1914)

In his prime, Silas Weir Mitchell, of Scottish origin, was a tall, slim, alert man with deeply chiselled features and an expression denoting clear aims. All this and his long, narrow face, abundant grey forelocks, chin whiskers, and moustache, caused some people of the day to liken him to "Uncle Sam." The grey cap he wore and the long grey cape which hung from his shoulders made him a familiar figure. His erudition and versatility brought him friends by the score, among them William Osler, Oliver Wendell Holmes, William James, Walt Whitman, and Andrew Carnegie. He made a point of cultivating younger men in whom he sensed the spark of brilliance: John Shaw Billings and Hideyo No- guchi, to mention only two. W. W. Keen wrote of Mitchell, "Never have I known so original, suggestive, and fertile a mind. I often called him a yeasty man... An hour in his office set my own mind in a turmoil so that I could hardly sleep." Yet this "most versatile American since Franklin" was never in a hurry.

Weir Mitchell was born in Philadelphia in surroundings of culture, the seventh physician in three generations. He was required