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.

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

PERCIVAL BAILEY

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3. Ibid., 1886, 6:297-333.
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2) Ibid., 1928, 35(1):691-694 (Guillain).
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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 Noguchi, 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
Portrait, courtesy of Dr. Loyal Davis, Chicago, Illinois. (Painted by Frank Hild, engraved by T. Johnson.)
to learn a daily Bible text and to attend church twice on Sundays, but he made the service less boring by smuggling in a copy of Midshipman Easy, which he read in a dark corner of the pew. During his early years as a student at the University of Pennsylvania, which he entered when he was fifteen, his record was a poor one, for he had an aversion to such subjects as mathematics. He preferred to daydream, write poetry, play billiards, steal peaches and melons from Jersey farmers, and make a general nuisance of himself in the classroom. "You are wanting in nearly all the qualities that go to make a success in medicine," his father, the distinguished Dr. John Kearsley Mitchell, remarked. Weir was enrolled at Jefferson Medical College in 1848, received the M.D. in 1851, and forthwith boarded a clipper ship for Europe. In Paris he did not permit the legendary distractions to encroach on his scholarship, though after his Montmartre ramblings he could not help reminisce that the can-can resembled a "witches' sabbath." The person who influenced him most in Paris was Claude Bernard. "Why think?" Claude Bernard inquired of Mitchell on one occasion. "Exhaust experiment, then think."

On returning to Philadelphia he plunged into research. One of his interests was snake venoms, on which he worked with Hammond and later with W. W. Keen and Simon Flexner. A six-foot rattler once got loose, climbed up the back of the chair on which Mitchell was reading and put its swaying head over his shoulder. Only when the snake touched the hot lamp and drew back in anger could Mitchell leap up and escape.

Soon after the outbreak of the War between the States, Weir Mitchell became "contract surgeon" to a 400-bed hospital in Philadelphia, created for him and Dr. George R. Morehouse by Surgeon General Hammond. This experience was to transform his life. W. W. Keen became an associate. They would go to Gettysburg and bring back carloads of wounded. Together they collected thousands of pages of notes on wounded soldiers, which culminated in a masterpiece on nerve and related injuries (1864) in which the entity known as "causalgia" was given its place in medicine (and more firmly established in a volume in 1872). A soldier in continuous pain, he remarked, becomes a coward, and the strongest man is scarcely less nervous than the most hysterical girl.
Mitchell's eminence in this field stands secure, though priority
goes to Denmark for his description, in 1813, of the excruciating
sequelae suffered by a soldier who had been wounded in the arm
at the storming of Badajoz; the article was entitled: "An example
of symptoms resembling tic douloureux produced by a wound in
the radial nerve."

Another great work by Mitchell, Morehouse and Keen was on
Reflex paralysis . . . (1864). This was the term given to the sudden
motor loss resulting from wounds of the brain, especially the fore-
brain where motor centers, Mitchell and his collaborators reasoned,
surely must control muscles of the opposite side, an observation
anticipating Fritsch and Hitzig's announcement by about five years.

Other important contributions followed: on erythromelalgia
("Weir Mitchell's disease"), postparalytic chorea, and the func-
tions of the cerebellum, in which he supported the view that the
cerebellum augments and reinforces movements. His "rest cure"
for psychoneurosis was the standard therapy for decades, espe-
cially in England. Also in France: On a visit to Paris in his later
years, Mitchell sought out the great Charcot for help without re-
vealing his name. Where was he from? "Philadelphia?" Then, said
Charcot: "You should consult Weir Mitchell; he is the best man
in America for your kind of trouble." Some of Mitchell's ideas
strike knowledgeable psychiatrists today as very sound. But some-
times he resorted to strange diagnostic measures in functional ill-
nesses, and he sometimes performed "miracles." As consultant to a
lady considered sick unto death, he once sent all assistants and at-
tendants out of the room, then soon emerged himself. Asked
whether she had any chance for survival, he remarked: "Yes, she
will be running out of the door inside of two minutes; I set her
sheet on fire. A case of hysteria." His prediction proved correct.

His failure to receive the vacated chair of physiology at Jeffer-
son Medical College (1863 and 1868) and at the University of
Pennsylvania, caused Hammond to write: "I am disgusted with ev-
everything and can only say that it is an honor to be rejected by such
a set of apes!" Mitchell concluded that his Republican beliefs had
cost him the post at Jefferson; the trustees were violently Demo-
cratic.

From the early 1880's Mitchell turned his major efforts to liter-
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ary pursuits: novel, short story, essay, drama and verse. His *Ode
on a Lycian tomb* is said to be the finest elegiac poem written in
America. *Hugh Wynn: free Quaker* (New York, Century, 1879)
was by far his most successful novel, but by no means his best.
To a friend he admitted that "Hugh" was only fair, but stood up
for his *Constance Trescott* which he thought contained the fullest
report of a medical consultation in all literature. *Westmynrs*, a novel
written when he was past eighty, reflects "a most horrible memory"
left upon him shortly after the battle of Gettysburg.

As "the sage," he continued to enjoy the company of brilliant
men. "He was vain, but he had much to be vain about," wrote
Harvey Cushing, after a long evening of Madeira and strong cigars
with him. At eighty-four Mitchell bombarded Osler with ques-
tions about some rare books he was after and some letters of Wil-

William Harvey. Not long afterward he was stricken with influenza,
but took the occasion to read the proof of his dramatic poem, *Bar-
aobas*, when he lapsed into a terminal delirium and found himself
again at Gettysburg, operating on the wounded.

Moffett Field, California
Webb Haymaker

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