

**S. Weir Mitchell, physician, man of science, man of letters, man of affairs /  
by Charles W. Burr, delivered before the College of Physicians of  
Philadelphia, November 19, 1919.**

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THE S. WEIR MITCHELL ORATION

College of Physicians of Philadelphia

1919

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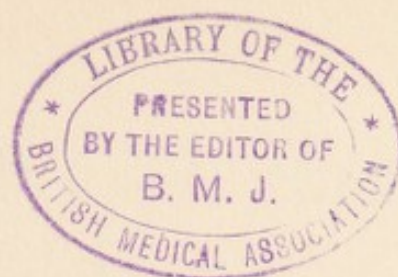
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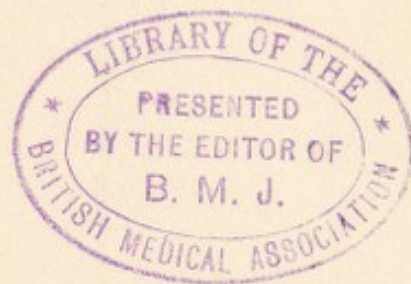
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# THE S. WEIR MITCHELL ORATION

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S. WEIR MITCHELL

PHYSICIAN  
MAN OF SCIENCE  
MAN OF LETTERS  
MAN OF AFFAIRS



BY

CHARLES W. BURR, M.D.

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Delivered before the College of Physicians of Philadelphia  
November 19, 1919

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PUBLISHED BY THE COLLEGE  
1920



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THE WEIR MITCHELL ORATION was established by the College of Physicians of Philadelphia in an amendment to the Ordinances and By-Laws adopted December 2, 1914:

“This triennial Oration shall have for its subject the life and work of Weir Mitchell in their various aspects, or the relation of the physician to public life, or the physician in science and letters, or broad considerations of psychiatry and neurology, or surgery and military surgery in relation to morbid conditions and wounds and injuries of the brain and nervous system, or of scientific research, or medical books and libraries, or medical history and biography, and shall be, so far as possible, of general as well as professional interest.”





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## S. WEIR MITCHELL

PHYSICIAN, MAN OF SCIENCE, MAN OF LETTERS,  
MAN OF AFFAIRS.

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THOUGH the College founded the Weir Mitchell oration December 2, 1914, within a few days of five years ago, this is the first address given under the terms of the resolution. The explanation of the delay is simple. Though the United States for three long, dismal years was held back from the performance of its duty by a timorous administration, reeking with inefficiency, pretending to be saturated with idealism, taking advice from idols of the parlor socialists, flirting with real socialists, striving to lead the people away from their strong and healthy belief in Americanism to the worship of the false god Internationalism, and having at its head a President who was slow to learn that worse things may come to a country than war and that upholding national honor is nobler than maintaining a disgraceful peace, individual Americans were doing their duty; many Fellows of this College, many men from all parts of the country, were already giving themselves up to the great task in hand and, for that reason, a speaker could not be had. Men of worth were doing, not talking, and even those of us, like myself,



left at home had little time to think of the dead. The World War is over, another has replaced it, has come partly in consequence of it, and the curtain of futurity, ever retreating but never rising, hides an unending succession of tomorrows. But whatever the future may contain for us, we may safely, for a moment, forget the present sickness of the world and go back to old habits, one of the best of which is the study of the lives of the illustrious dead.

It was very properly decided that the first oration should be devoted to a study of Weir Mitchell himself, and the College has conferred upon me the honor of making it. I wish now, at the beginning, to thank the Fellows for the opportunity they have given me to speak concerning one of the two men who did more to influence my intellectual life during my later adolescence than all others. To Weir Mitchell and William Osler I owe a debt. These two men opened for me, as for many others—rather they showed us how to open for ourselves—the gate that bars the way to fruitful study, ignorance of scientific method. They had sympathy with our desire to learn how to satisfy intellectual curiosity. Above all, they taught us the paramount necessity of intellectual honesty. I can give no higher praise than this. I purpose to speak of Mitchell as physician, man of science, man of letters, man of affairs. I do not purpose, nor can it be done in the short time at my disposal, to give a detailed biography of the man. Indeed, biography, as a rule, is a sorry business, unless written by someone who knows the real soul of the man, and then usually favoring prejudice prevents clear seeing. I had no such close personal relations with Weir Mitchell. I was too much his junior to write his biography from my personal knowledge. Of his youth I know little, mere shreds and patches of half-remembered stories, and for this I am sorry, because early in adolescence there appear signs,



marks and tokens, had we only the eyes to perceive them and the knowledge to comprehend, from which we could prophesy with certainty, barring disease and accident, the boy's whole mental and moral future. The story of the boyhood of a man like Mitchell, written by a real psychologist, a real student of behavior, would be a valuable contribution to our slight knowledge of mental development in the individual. A thousand such would be of incalculable value. As I have said, I know little of Mitchell's boyhood, but when his autobiography is published, in his officially written life, there will be revealed how it impressed him years after, when he had attained middle life or early old age. Such impressions are never accurate. A man sees his boyhood through a mist; it may be roseate or somber-hued, but always it is there, the mist of memory falsified. One thing is certain, he was not precocious, but slowly and steadily grew to maturity, nor did he stop then, but continued to grow through the later years. His intellectual horizon continued to broaden after the period in which in most men the mind is fixed, set, crystallized, brittle. This characteristic, as well as endurance, which causes the mind to continue bright, active, alert and willing and able to accept new ideas until a very advanced age, is, I think, more common among men of affairs, doers, than among pure thinkers. Many great statesmen have lived long, most great poets die at an earlier age. Those whose only ability is to talk do not, for some mysterious reason, as a rule, attain great age. In that the gods are kind to us. Mitchell was not one of those children who startle by their brilliancy and make the wise old family doctor fear for the future, knowing full well such brilliancy more often portends a mental smash-up and moral degradation in adolescence than fruitful genius. That he was an imaginative child there is no doubt. Let me tell a story that



reveals it. When about seven years old he told his mother he had just seen a golden chariot with horses and trappings. She, not realizing that he, like all imaginative children, had in very truth seen a vision, seen by the physical eye the thing he dreamed of, chided him for untruthfulness. He felt the injustice of the charge, never forgot the incident, and years later, during his professional life, many times warned parents to be careful, when their children related such things, not to mistake richness of imagination for poverty of the moral sense.

Mitchell was fortunate in heritage and environment, in nature and nurture. The first is the more vital, because good inheritance may, and often does—we see it daily—overcome the evil of bad environment. He came of a high class, intellectual and scholarly family. His father was not only a distinguished physician but a man of science. He himself passed all his youth in an atmosphere of books, and, as a boy, he had that best education, hearing his elders converse on things worth talking of. He was, I am told, a bookish boy and early showed a love for poetry. He belonged to a generation in which it was the custom to read the Bible, and he was unconsciously but profoundly influenced in his literary style, years after, by the reading. Of course, today we have progressed so far that reading the Bible, like reading history, reading anything older than the twentieth century, is regarded as a waste of time. Our problems, the moderns tell us, are all new; our world is new; old times can teach us naught. But old proverbs continue true, and if pride goeth before destruction, ignorance causeth destruction.

I suspect that environment had a large influence in leading Mitchell into medicine. His father, being a physician, could help him materially. He had lived all his life in a medical atmosphere, and I am inclined to believe that had not these external things



existed his inclination toward literature would have proved stronger than that toward science and he would have been purely a man of letters. The two have much in common. Art and science are not as unlike as they seem: both require of their disciples imagination; science demands also compelling curiosity to learn causes. Literature is the study of the adventures of the human soul; science the study of the adventures of the universe and the why of things. At all events, whether it was the pull from within or from without that controlled him, after ending his collegiate studies at the University of Pennsylvania he entered Jefferson Medical College and graduated in 1851. Early in his medical career he showed he was being driven by influences within himself toward scientific investigation.

His early professional life was not all beer and skittles; it was a period of hard, grinding work and heavy responsibilities. Mr. Talcott Williams tells us that, in the autobiography, it is recorded "that in the ten years after he began the practice of medicine his receipts in practice were only a thousand dollars, and in that year he had suddenly thrown upon him the responsibility of caring for his father's family and was approaching his own marriage." But his nature asserted itself. He was not content to be merely an every-day doctor, mechanically, routinely, without mental interest, dealing out pills and potions. The scientific instinct ruled him. In 1853 he was elected to membership in the Academy of Natural Sciences, and two years later was placed upon the Library Committee. In 1858 a biological section of the Academy was instituted on the petition of Mitchell, Leidy, J. A. Meigs, Hammond, Hays and others. At the first meeting Mitchell presented the first paper on "Blood Crystals of the Sturgeon." Years after, when the whole biological point of view of men of



science had changed mightily, Mitchell's interest in the subject came to the front again, and he furthered the great work of Reichert on the crystallography of hemoglobin. He was one of the founders of the Pathological Society of Philadelphia, the nursery of men of science ever since, for there the young may, unhampered by the aged, discuss the newest thing and prove it true or false. The first meeting was in 1857, and again he presented the first paper. From the time of his graduation until 1863, which was a turning-point in his career, for then he assumed charge of an Army Hospital for Nervous Diseases, he had written twenty-two scientific papers, none of them being clinical, but all in the domain of physiology, pharmacology and toxicology. During a part of this time he was lecturer upon physiology in the Philadelphia Association for Medical Instruction, an organization for extramural teaching. He wrote on arrow and ordeal poison and on snake venom, was the first to describe the chiasm between the laryngeal nerves in turtles and observed the almost total immunity of pigeons against opium. The most valuable contribution he made previous to his war work was his monograph on the venom of the rattlesnake, published in 1860 in the Smithsonian Contributions. In speaking of it, Dr. William H. Welch said at the Mitchell memorial meeting, held in this hall, that investigation of snake venom held Mitchell's attention off and on for a half-century, one of the results, the first demonstration by Mitchell and Reichert, in 1883, of the so-called toxic albumins, to which class belong not only the snake venoms but also certain plant, and especially bacterial poisons, being epochal. He further said the later classical researches of Flexner and Noguchi owed their inception to the inspiration and support of Mitchell, aided by grants from the Carnegie Institution.

The Civil War gave Mitchell opportunity to study nervous



diseases on a large scale, and he seized it. He, Moorehouse and Keen studied in the military hospital many cases of all kinds of injuries of nerves received in battle. The material was such as only a great war can give, and he used it for the book, *Gunshot Wounds and Other Injuries of Nerves*, published in 1864. The work brought him scientific reputation, because it was a great book and solved not a few problems in neurology; in fact, no really important new clinical contribution to the symptomatology of disease of the peripheral nervous system has been made by anyone since, though much has been discovered concerning causation; our point of view as to disease in general has greatly changed, and surgical advance has tremendously improved treatment.

Among his minor discoveries were the cremasteric reflex and the disease erythromelalgia. His work on the relation of eye-strain to headache was of great practical value. In consequence of it many a victim of headache, unable to work and suffering from intense nervousness, has been relieved. A pair of spectacles has even cured a family quarrel and reunited man and wife. Unfortunately, as often happens, the medical faddist took up the matter and claimed to cure all kinds of illnesses by putting on glasses. Great harm followed. He studied the eye, not only in its therapeutic relation, but also was among the first of the American physicians to point out the great diagnostic importance of ophthalmoscopic examination in studying diseases of the brain.

His great popular reputation rested on the rest cure. In a little book, entitled *Fat and Blood*, he taught that tired nerves, states of nervous irritability, suspiciousness short of real delusions, terrible haunting ideas which terrify the victims, can often be cured by rest, isolation, massage, milk diet and the rest. He had the glimmering of an idea, which he could never prove, because chemistry



was not far enough advanced, that milk does good in these patients not only because it is easily digested, but because it in some way alters the chemistry of the body. The future chemistry will probably prove the correctness of his guess.

There was at first much opposition among physicians to the rest cure, especially from those whose temperament compels them always to be in opposition. We all know such people, by sad personal acquaintance; they are the type whose mental reflex is always "No," and who having once said the word, stubbornly persist in their opposition. They are the men who, when St. Peter meets them at the gates of Heaven on resurrection day, will hesitate, so fixed is their habit of opposition, to accept his kindly invitation to enter. Happily, no injury will be done, rather poetic justice, for they deserve to go to the other place. Some physicians, I fear envy influenced their subconscious minds, said it was unprofessional for a physician to write in language the common people could understand, because it was advertising himself, and he might thereby obtain a patient, and to have patients is wicked, because it means success. Others, horribly suspicious of the morality of their fellows, claimed that massage was immoral. The treatment finally, however, became too popular, and incompetent physicians used it on patients who needed a work cure, not a rest cure. Nevertheless, it still has, and will continue to have, a very important and useful place in therapeutics. It has brought back to healthy life many a nerve-wracked, brain-weary invalid.

A literary friend, one whose business is book-writing, said, in speaking to me about this address, "Of course you will only talk about the medical side of Dr. Mitchell's life," his tone implying that a mere medico was incompetent to speak on such a great matter as literature. In a sense, my friend was right. It would



be presumptuous for me, a man without technical training, to pretend to be a serious critic of modes and methods, and to claim to be competent to speak with authority. I disdain to indulge in another kind of criticism, or investigation, though a certain type of professor of literature, thinking he is very scientific and being proud thereof, confines his attention to it. I mean the man who, lacking the art sense, as some are born color-blind, neglects the living soul of literature, dissects its dead body, its mere material and studies its mechanism as a mechanic examines a machine. This kind of man is illustrated by the teacher who gave to one of his post-graduate students in English literature, as the subject for her thesis, "The Adjectives of Color and Sound in Shelley's Poetry." The dear, innocent seeker after a Doctor of Philosophy degree, dug and dug and dug, and catalogued, and wore out etymological dictionaries, and thought she was learning literature, but failed to see, so plainly was it before her, the very essence of the thing. Very soon, instead of finishing her thesis, she became, in consequence of her work, my patient; and after rest had cured her fatigue, a course in real literature, and I prescribed it, helped to make her a healthy woman, with an entirely different notion about the study of literature. The professor lost a pupil and a school for girls got a very good teacher, who is still without the Ph.D. degree. I wish such professors could all be compelled to sit at the feet of Quiller Couch, or else become professors of linguistics, a perfectly proper and useful science, but having nothing to do with literature. Again usurping the critic's seat, I had intended, in speaking of Mitchell's poetry, to say a few words about what is called, in free translation from the French, free verse, but recent events make me abstain, because I do not desire still further to disturb the already much perturbed emotions of the ladies who are



carrying on the propaganda in its favor with a somewhat unnecessary violence of verbal and lachrymal effort. May I be permitted to say, however, that some of us (Mitchell was of the number) enjoy the other forms of poetry more. Mitchell did not use free verse, but then he was a minor poet, a poet of occasion, and he never rose to those great heights of passion or reached the arcanum of philosophy which can only be written about in broken prose. Seriously, poetic prose, with a cadence running through it, was not discovered only the other day and will continue to be written for a long while to come. But may we not ask the present-day leaders among the "free versers" to teach the less distinguished practitioners of the school to realize that thought is of some little value in writing, that noise, even musical noise, is not all there is in poetry. But, putting aside matters which only a few have a right to speak about, there are other aspects than the technical from which anyone who reads has a right to judge literature, to be a critic, because, after all, men of letters exist to give pleasure to the rest of us. They are our servants, not our masters, and we have a right to say whether we are pleased or displeased, and why: and this is criticism.

We physicians are prone to boast about the number of our fellows who have achieved fame in literature. Really, if we throw out the men who studied medicine by accident and soon deserted it, the number is surprisingly small. In America, Holmes, who really ceased practice early, though he continued to teach anatomy, and did it, I am told, charmingly but not ultrascientifically, and Mitchell, who practised until the end, are the only two great examples, though there have been many minor lights who got much pleasure out of letters. The number of American physicians possessing the genius for appreciation of literature is large; the



number endowed with the genius of accomplishment small. This is curiously interesting, for if the ability to write were an acquirable faculty, dependent upon favorable circumstances and mere technical knowledge of people, the catalogue of men of letters would be full of the names of physicians, for no other class has the opportunity to see man in his nakedness, his strength and weakness, his ability to endure to the end, his frailty from the beginning, the play of motives in conduct and the variability of the moral sense. Every chief and every assistant in every hospital sees daily all the tragedy and not a little of the comedy of human behavior, but few perceive. This is the great reason so few medical men have attained high rank in literature. Furthermore, physicians have an unsuspected handicap. Their very knowledge of humanity, strange as it at first sight seems, limits them. Almost inevitably, when writing, they hold a clinic on good souls or bad; they cannot forget they are physicians; they are too painfully accurate in detail; they are too learned. Too much technical learning is a bad thing in literature. Had Shakespeare been learned in the schools he would not have been Shakespeare, but Bacon or some other of the same ilk. Mitchell wrote, not because his profession gave him large opportunity to study character, but because he was born with the faculty to perceive and sympathetically to understand, apart from professional knowledge, and because he had the "urge" to accomplish. It is a great pity that more American physicians do not have literary instinct, because, even if they never wrote novels, drama or poetry, it would add to the interest and hence the value of their professional writings, as it did in Mitchell's case. All through the formative period of his medical life his professional reading was confined to the writings of English, the few Americans who were then writing, and French



authors. Those men all believed that care in the use of words and clarity of expression are important in science; that science should be literature. Yesterday, as time counts in the lives of nations, we drifted away from such beliefs; tomorrow we may drift back. I fear, in any event, we will drift. I cannot hope we will knowingly wisely guide our course. The German men of science are largely responsible for our fall. One of the evil effects of German influence has been to make many of the younger Americans think a slovenly style, bad grammar and carelessness in the use of words, prove profundity of thought and a mind so active that it cannot be orderly.

I know not whether as a child, he, like so many imaginative children, wrote novels and plays to the astonishment of wondering parents, who so often think a mere outburst means that out of their loins has sprung a genius, only later to see the celestial fire burn out and leave behind the dead ashes of a very ordinary mind. I suspect he did, but in him the fire burnt on. When he felt the first impulse to literature, I also do not know, but he relates the following about his first work that brought pay. He says: "I never can resist telling a story. While this subject" (a discussion about amputation stumps) "was occupying my mind, a friend came in one evening and in our talk said, 'How much of a man would have to be lost in order that he should lose any portion of his sense of individuality?' This odd remark haunted me, and after he left I sat up most of the night manufacturing my first story, *The Case of George Dedlow, Related by Himself*. In this tale my man had lost all four limbs. I left this tale in the hands of a delightful lady, now long dead, the sister of Horace Howard Furness. Then I forgot it. Dr. Furness, her father, much amused, sent it to Mr. Hale, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*. To my surprise, I received



about three months afterward a proof and a welcome check for \$85, my first literary earning, and certainly not a contribution on my part, because I had nothing to do with the disposal of the paper, and had not authorized its being put into print. This story has had a dreadful number of successors, the product of my lengthening summer leisure. Some of them you may have read to your cost. The unfortunate George Dedlow's sad account of himself proved so convincing that people raised money to help him and visited the stump hospital to see him. If I may judge it by one of its effects, George Dedlow must have seemed very real. At the close of my story, he—a limbless torso—is carried to a spiritualist meeting, where the spirits call up his lost legs and he capers about for a glorious minute. The spiritualist journals seized on this as a new proof of the verity of their belief. Imagine that!"

He tells us somewhere that Oliver Wendell Holmes advised him not to go seriously into literature until his professional position was established, telling him if he did it would injure him as a physician, because people would say he had lost interest in his medical work. It is a curious fact that little-minded people are of fixed opinion that no one can have mind enough to do more than one thing. It is partly the result of unconscious envy and of the desire to deceive themselves into believing that no one can have more ability than they possess. The result of Holmes's advice was that Mitchell's first novel, *Hephzibah Guinness*, was not published until 1880. He was then fifty years old.

The medical man, the neurologist, shows little in his novels, save in the professional care, the clinical accuracy of description of certain bad, really diseased characters. *Constance Trescot* is the one in which most clearly the professional hand of the curer of sick minds is evident. The others could have been written—



I am speaking only of his novels—by a man not a physician. I think his talent was for simple stories of common life rather than for analyzing the deep complexities of humanity, and this notwithstanding the fact that for many years he was busy constantly in solving and trying to solve the most complex problems in the lives of many people. In *Hugh Wynne* he reached high-water mark. It is no common book, but a real romance, which holds the attention of the young, and in the work of attempting to Americanize the Americans going on today, much good would result if every boy of foreign parentage were given the book to read. Every youth would read it with pleasure and get his profit unconsciously. Such reading would teach true patriotism and would overcome much of the unwise psychology and sociology imbibed from the silly people who call themselves “the intellectuals.” After *Hugh Wynne* I like best *When All the Woods Are Green* and *The Adventures of François*. *John Serwood, Iron Master*, is a remarkable book for any man to write when eighty-one years old.

Certain of his writings are a connecting link between science and literature. His literary instinct, quite as much as his scientific curiosity, led him to be interested in a group of subjects which are partly medical, but yet appeal to the romantic and poetic side of man. Hence, his papers on double personality, sleep and the strange things happening then, and the like. Such matters are not yet really within the domain of systematized knowledge, which is science, but appeal to the love of the mysterious within all of us.

Why has no medical man of letters ever succeeded in depicting the physician? None so far as I know has made a great attempt, and the lesser efforts have been mere literary thumb-nail sketches. I suppose the explanation is that no one can objectify his own class.



A physician trying to analyze physicians is like a man writing his autobiography or painting his own picture looking in a mirror. Prejudice makes him see what he wants to see. Mitchell regarded George Eliot's "Dr. Lydgate" as the best-described physician in modern English literature. I fear he was right. Why I say fear, those of you who have read *Middlemarch* will understand, and if any of you are so modern as not to have read it, I advise you to do so at once. George Eliot's contemporaries came nowhere near her in picturing the physician. Even the great master, Dickens, many of whose characters have become types, known everywhere, to describe different sorts of men, failed to picture the physician. Nowhere on his great canvases, filled to the very edge with men and women of so many kinds, does a physician occupy the foreground. His doctors are either mere caricatures or silly, sentimental, goody-goody men.

Mitchell had the gift of writing poetry for occasions, and in those poems his sense of real humor often appears. The man who can hold the attention of the overfed at a banquet while reading verse must be a real poet, and Mitchell was always able to do that. As pure poetry, I suppose, the "Ode on a Lycian Tomb" is his highest attainment. Personally, I like best to read his short descriptive poems of outdoors, his descriptions of lakes and rivers, mountains, storms and such primitive things. He loved outdoors, and wrote lovingly.

I must pass over his plays, confessing incompetence to judge.

Weir Mitchell had in smaller degree, and with a smaller stage to play on, smaller and fewer opportunities to act, the same zest for doing useful things characteristic of Benjamin Franklin. His most important public position was that of trustee of the University of Pennsylvania. He held the position for thirty-five years,



and retired only when he had attained an age at which most men have long before, not only become food for worms, but part of the wind-blown and water-carried matter of the world. He had a share in the wonderful new birth of the University of Pennsylvania, carried on under the guidance of Dr. William Pepper. Though he was most active in the committee on the medical school, he was much interested in the work of all the departments. During his later life he saw the development of that feeling of dissatisfaction and unrest shown by teachers of a certain type and ending in the organized movement throughout the country for what they called the defence of freedom of academic teaching. Really no one in America ever thought of restraining the professorial tongue, whatever might be its vaporings, but these misguided gentlemen were determined to be martyrs and had a mental twist and very bad manners. Mitchell did not take the movement very seriously: indeed, did not take it seriously at all. So few people holding responsible professorial positions, or, for that matter, minor teaching positions, took it seriously, partly, doubtless, because of the support it received from the parlor socialists and the sensational newspapers, much impotent rage arose within the hearts of the pedagogic knights fighting windmills of their own creation. The world has had such serious things to think about, and such important things to do in the last few years, and is so busy now saving these gentlemen from being hanged at the lamp-post by the real bolsheviks, that the movement has died a natural death and has not even had the ceremony of a formal burial. I speak of it because it was an incident, though a minor one, in the history of collegiate education which came somewhat into Mitchell's life.

He was for many years the guiding spirit of the Orthopædic Hospital and Infirmary for Nervous Diseases. He found it a mere



dispensary; he left it a large and useful hospital. He studied in his clinics there patients who taught him much, and all his assistants, who worked with him, had a rare opportunity to learn not only medical facts but methods of clinical study: above all, how to examine patients. He was always interested in physical therapy, and several modes of treatment, such as massage, baths, the use of electricity, were introduced to the American profession or rescued from the charlatans by him while working there. Even at death his influence did not cease, for, through a magnificent gift from his long time and deeply devoted friends, Mr. and Mrs. Walter G. Ladd, added to by contributions, large and small, from people of all ranks in the financial scale, who loved him much and who wished to show respect to his memory, the out-patient department was given a well-equipped building of its own, separate and apart from the main hospital building.

He was for years an active member of the Philadelphia Library and was a revivifying influence.

He was the first president of the Franklin Inn, a little club where men who love the humanities meet and talk, and used, in the wicked pre-prohibition days, even to drink a little—not too much, just enough. Originally it was intended for men who live by books, authors, and their enemies, the publishers; but once in a while they, by gross favoritism, let down the bars and admit to membership mere book-lovers.

Mitchell did more for this College than any other man of his day and generation. He was elected to fellowship in 1856, and only one Fellow elected in the same year (Dr. J. Cheston Morris) survived him. He served as president from 1886 until 1889 and again from 1892 until 1895. From the time of his election to fellowship until his death his interest in this old society, with its traditions,



its history, its wonderful library, one of the great medical libraries of the world, its sometimes too great conservatism, never flagged. His activity in increasing its usefulness was continuous. Through his efforts, and at the beginning his alone, were we enabled to leave the old barn at the corner of Thirteenth and Locust Streets and build this magnificent building. The proposal met with great opposition from a small group of timorous, fearsome and somewhat obstinate, but well-intentioned fellows, whose sincerity made their opposition the more difficult to overcome. Everywhere and always there are good men who are temperamentally against all change, all progress, all improvement, but I think dear old Philadelphians are greater sinners in this respect than any other group of mortals anywhere within reach of the sun's rays on this or any other planet. The College contained several. They said such a mass of books could not be moved, that Twenty-second Street could not be reached conveniently, and that we would be bankrupted. When Dr. Mitchell induced his friend Mr. Andrew Carnegie to give us a very magnificent sum of money for building, they said he was a multimillionaire, therefore wicked, and that we would be copartners in his sins if we accepted his tainted money. Remember all this happened at the time the foul-mouthed and vile-natured "muck-rakers" were in the ascendant throughout the country and had led honest and well-meaning but unintelligent people to have a false viewpoint about good morals. Finally, however, Mitchell overcame all opposition, and the result is a monument to his diplomacy, his untiring industry and his farsightedness.

Mitchell was from the first interested in the movement for instituting schools for training nurses. In his early medical life religious sisters were the only women who knew anything about nursing, and they, of course, had no systematic training. In most



hospitals the work was done by orderlies, often drunken, or by incompetent women. He had a large part in changing things and starting schools for nurses, until now some of us fear that possibly nurses may sometimes imagine they know more than doctors. Indeed, patients sometimes quote to me the medical opinions of nurses, but since, according to the new philosophy, no one is to have authority on any matter, especially not the specially trained, and no one is to be subordinate but everybody equal, this is to be expected.

One of the most important public questions he was interested in was animal experimentation. For years he fought to protect mankind from the assaults of fanatics. Some years ago a movement was started to protect animals from cruelty. It was an admirable idea and received well-deserved sympathy and encouragement. But soon men and women of a certain twist of mind came to regard animals as having rights equal if not superior to men and women. Becoming obsessed with the idea that physicians in general, and physiologists in particular, were by nature cruel, they soon determined to stop all experiments on animals. I should have stated first that sometime previous to this, very rapid increase in interest in physiology had begun and that this science depends fundamentally on animal experimentation. The antivivisectionists, as they call themselves, would have none of it, and becoming a well-organized and wealthy body have continued a crusade to stop all use of animals in scientific study. In addition to the zoöphilists, that large body of people, the intelligent public, who use as their life proverb, "Where there is smoke there must be fire," which though true in physics is not true in life, accepted the untruthful statements of the crusaders and increased the difficulty of having things done wisely. Mitchell and other



men tried reasoning with these people. It was shown that thousands of children were snatched from death by the antitoxin treatment of diphtheria, the discovery and development of which depended wholly upon animal experiment. It was no use. The reply was, the doctors were lying about the results, and some disciples of the cult even said that it is wrong to kill a dog or other animal even if thereby human lives are saved. Veterinary physiologists showed that animal experimentation saved the lives of thousands of cattle, sheep and pigs. The reply was the same, "It is wrong to experiment on animals." How long it will be before the matter is settled no man knows, but fanaticism never finally wins. Historians of the distant future, however, when man has become a reasoning animal, will read with interest tinged with pity the emotional statements of the zoöphilists. Meanwhile, knowledge is delayed and mankind and animalkind alike suffer. There is hope that the tremendous good resulting from animal experimentation, as shown by the medical experience of the war just over, the young lives saved, the agonies of pain escaped, may so influence public opinion that eccentric people will have little influence on politicians, most of whom have had sons or brothers or themselves have been in the war. They have seen and have lived the realities of life. They will act accordingly.

He was a director of the Real Estate Trust Company, and when through the dishonesty of a trusted official that institution came to wreck, he, as was natural, acted the gentleman's part according to the gentleman's code.

Dr. Mitchell's industry was prodigious. Think of the variety of his vocations and avocations! His practice was very large, and one requiring not only much thought but also much diplomacy. Prescribing medicine was the smaller and, of course, the easier



part. Teaching people how to live was the more important, required more skill and was the more difficult, because many patients want physicians to give them a physic which will, in some mysterious way, enable them to break nature's laws without paying nature's debt, not realizing nature is an inexorable task-mistress. It is true that for many years before his death he took long holidays from professional work, but earlier there was a long stretch of years when holidays were few and short. Physicians consider themselves very busy and very unusual if they do only this one thing—acquire a large and lucrative practice. But in his life it was only a part. In addition to private practice he, throughout his life, was a hospital physician. To him, as to every wise physician, the hospital was a post-graduate school, where he was always taking new courses. He spent a great deal of time in the work of the numerous public bodies he was a member of. Hours that most men spend in pure idleness or in silly kinds of amusement, he passed in scientific or other work. Time left over in this busy life he gave to literature, his works numbering upward of twenty-five titles, of which fifteen were longer or shorter novels. There are many whose sole business is literature, the sum of whose work is not larger. Finally, with all this work, he found time to play, to get out in the woods and fish, in a real way commune with nature, and to enjoy the society of men and women. Indeed, he found a great deal of time for social life, for he was instinctively a social animal and very gregarious. He was not one of those silent, brooding thinkers who live alone and within themselves, and then give to a surprised world their work, but a man requiring human companionship.

One secret of his having accomplished so much was very simple. He early learned the lesson that the mind is best rested not by doing



nothing but by changing its occupation. Of course, everyone cannot take this prescription, for there are many whose minds are so little that they cannot find a multitude of interests, and hence can only rest by idleness; but many have large areas of mind, unknown to themselves, which could be worked productively if only a chance were given. Few men, even among those to whom nature has given the best mental machine, work unintermittently to full capacity. Some geniuses are able to do creative work only in irregularly recurring periods, the rest of the time doing nothing. We little people are all prone to follow the law of the labor union in mental work and only do as much, usually it is as little, as we must.

Destiny prevented Dr. Mitchell from becoming a teacher. This was a misfortune, not to him, but to the young men who studied medicine in Philadelphia during his working life, because it so greatly restricted his opportunity for personally influencing younger men. No man was kinder to young men whom he thought worthy of kindness. He was a mental stimulant to every young man of intelligent ambition with whom he came in contact. He awakened intellectual industry, encouraged ambition and was helpful in all the ways that youth needs help. Now, as things were, the only young medical men who met him were his own assistants and the young instructors in the medical school. Had he been a teacher, and hence thrown with hundreds of young men, the lives of many would have been altered, not only for their own good, but for the betterment of the world.

Mitchell belonged to the mid-Victorian period, much abused today by the disciples of the new philosophy, by the people who think the world has changed, and who flatter themselves that they have had a large influence in making the leopard change its spots.



They may have whitewashed it: some of us think they are black-washing it, but hope the first storm, the storm about to burst upon us now, will clean the wash off. His racial inheritance was British: his intellectual environment Victorian. He was influenced in literature by Wordsworth and Tennyson, and in some degree by Browning, by Scott and Thackeray and Dickens; in science by Darwin and the rationalistic naturalists; in medicine by that great group of English and French physicians who founded modern clinical medicine, who laid such stress on morbid anatomy and who founded rational therapeutics. Classical literature and thought played little part in his development.

He had all the terrible vices of the Victorians, those monstrous qualities that make the "uplifter," himself going, with a speed he knows not of, straight to the world's waste-basket of discarded notions, whine with impotent rage whenever he hears them spoken of. He did not believe in the racial and mental equality of men. He did not believe that all men can take education. He believed in democracy, the democracy of our fathers, whose wisdom founded representative government, but not in the rule of Demos. He distrusted Demos for its lack of intelligence, its emotionalism, its childish trust in every loud-mouthed political mountebank who pays himself high wages in good coin, and his follower, in promises bright as the rainbow and as unsubstantial; and because of its blood-lust, when its passions are aroused by those who call themselves the people's friends. He believed in government by law and not by men, by duly elected assemblies and not by momentary noisy heroes. He did not often talk on things political, but I remember well his deep, but quietly expressed, emotion, when that chief of wordmongers, W. J. Bryan, ran for President: he who afterward, for our sins, was visited upon us as Secretary of State



and settled affairs of great pith and moment in his intervals of leisure from his more serious work of appearing on the Chautauqua circuit between the yodlers and the fiddlers.

He was fond of the forms and ceremonies of social life. It was he, for example, who was primarily responsible for the use of these not very comfortable gowns inflicted on the officers at the meetings of this society. He even believed that young people should say "Sir" to their elders, and I must confess, to my shame be it spoken, that when I was a man in middle life I called him "Sir" spontaneously, unconsciously, reflexly. But then my reflexes were firmly fixed before the new freedom was thought of; when we poor slaves, unconscious of our slavery, were taught, and believed the lesson, that he most respects himself who respects others.

He, like so many of the Victorians, indeed we find the quality rather common in all ages, realized his own worth and was very proud of it. Indeed, the little-minded dwellers in a one dimensional universe, those little souls who pass their lives within an intellectual world encompassed by the boundaries of a point and have no conception of a larger world without, leading their selfish, useless lives and denying the existence of a great outside world, inhabited by larger minds, accused him, when they could find no other fault, with vanity. In truth he was vain. I will go further, he was very vain. But it was a vanity that injured no man, in no way lessened his acts of kindness to others, in no way limited his good works. If the mental monads, his critics, had done one-tenth his work we would have forgiven them ten times his vanity.

A story told relates how another man had to confess sharing possession of this vice when speaking of Mitchell's vanity. Mr. Carnegie and Professor Blank were paying Mitchell a visit. Mitchell had been talking about himself, and when he left the



room for a minute Mr. Carnegie said, "He's got a pretty good opinion of himself." Whereupon the other, with a quizzing look and speaking slowly, said, "Do not you think that most men who do things think well of themselves?" Then Carnegie, after a moment, "Yes, I guess we do. Anyhow it is a human failing." It is the most human failing, and not to be counted against men who do things, but only against those who do naught in life but hunt for faults in their betters.

A story that Sir William, then Dr. Osler, told at the great banquet in New York given in his honor just before he left this country to go to Oxford, illustrates the importance of things social, of knowledge of how to behave, from the point of view of a Victorian. "Now," said Osler, "the authorities of the University of Pennsylvania, when they were considering my name for the professorship of clinical medicine, were easily able to find out about my intelligence, my learning and such things. But they, being wise men, wanted to know what manner of man I was: was I 'to the manner born?' They solved it thus. Dr. Mitchell gave me a luncheon. For dessert there was cherry pie, and, remember this, for it is the point, the pie contained the stones. The question was: Did I know what to do with the stones? I did." Ladies and gentlemen, the examination was more important than shows on the face of it.

The importance of manners from the point of view of the Victorians is well illustrated in an incident in my own life in which Mitchell had a part. When I was a very young man, he sent me one day to examine a patient for him. I, being modest, bashful, shy, was rather overawed when he told me that the patient was a very important old lady, rather irascible, very formal, and that I must remember my manners and make a good impression, because



if I did she could and would be of great professional assistance to me; whereas if I offended her, she would forever use her tongue to my injury. After this sermon I was pretty well scared and approached her trembling within, blushing without, and with stammering speech. Her greeting was not cordial. At first I thought she was vexed that having sent for the great man his jackal had come. Soon I felt it was more personal than that, that it was something in me had annoyed her. I went home crest-fallen and sad. Next day, when I reported to Dr. Mitchell, he met me with the glimmer of a smile, and handing me a letter said, "Burr, read that." It ran: "Dear Silas! Never send that young man, reeking with tobacco smoke, to see me again." I stopped daytime smoking. The incident had a real Sunday-school-story ending. A year later I met the old lady socially and told her what a good turn she had done me. We became friends and she blew my horn until her death.

He did not believe that the man behind the gun is of any importance compared with the man who plans the gun. He believed in personalities and was himself a personality. He, being old-fashioned, did not believe in the identity of the sexes, and so far from believing in their equality, failed completely to comprehend how, under the mathematics of the new psychology, unlike things can be measured by the same units. This, of course, is a trifling detail we have gotten rid of by the simple process of putting it to one side. His opinion on the woman question is shown in the following quotation:

"What I shall have to say in these pages will trench but little on the mooted ground of the differences between men and women. I take women as they are to my experience. For me the grave significance of sexual difference controls the whole question, and,



if I say little of it in words, I cannot exclude it from my thought of them and their difficulties. The woman's desire to be on a level of competition with man and to assume his duties is, I am sure, making mischief, for it is my belief that no length of generations of change in her education and modes of activity will ever really alter characteristics. She is physiologically other than the man. I am concerned with her now as she is, only desiring to help her in my small way to be in wiser and more healthful fashion what I believe her Maker meant her to be, and to teach her how not to be that with which physiological construction and the strong ordeals of her sexual life threaten her as no contingencies of man's career threaten in like measure or like number the feeblest of the masculine sex." This is science, wisdom and, of course, therefore, truth.

Mitchell never retired from active life. He was spared that long period of partial physical death which sometimes precedes mental death: he was spared the very much more horrible and distressing thing that is the fate of many men, a long prodromal time of mental decay preceding the last blow of all which gives a tardy release from living. He endured to the end: his final illness was short. He almost had the thing all men should pray for, instead of praying to be spared from, a sudden death. The words he used in his address at the Centennial Celebration of this College in 1887 are appropriate to himself. He said: "As earnestly as our first President, I pray with him that all who sit around me, and all who are to come, do publicly and privately serve their generation." He, with great ability leading to great results, served his generation.













