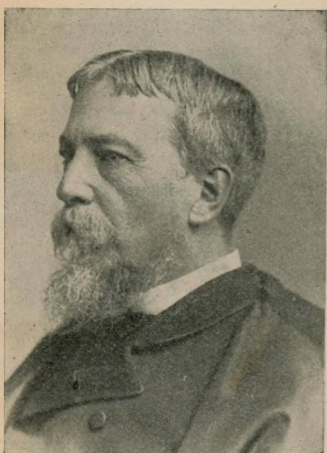


PHYSICIAN AND NOVELIST

SILAS WEIR MITCHELL

Seldom does a man combine successfully two professions. Mediocrity in both, or failure in one, are usually the result of such an attempt. Especially is this true when two such widely separated provinces as science and literature are concerned. Yet that it is possible to be at the same time a distinguished physician and a prominent author is proved by the work of Silas Weir Mitchell.

Born in Philadelphia in 1829, he received his education in the grammar school of that city, and entered the University of Pennsylvania. He had always



Silas Weir Mitchell

leaned toward the medical profession, and after leaving the University of Pennsylvania (from which, because of illness in his senior year he did not graduate), he entered Jefferson Medical College.

He graduated from the medical college in 1850, and began practice in his native city. He worked first of all upon snake poisons, and later upon nervous affections. He built up a large practice and his work as a physiologist and especially as a neurologist attracted universal attention.

Not only as a physician but as a writer has Dr. Mitchell attained prominence. It is interesting to note how the scientist has influenced the writer. The "Doctor and Patient" essays, and the "Autobiography of a Quack" could of course

have been written only by one who knew from personal experience the tragedy and comedy of the medical profession. But in his novels like "Hugh Wynne, Free Quaker," in his sketches, like "Characteristics" he shows a penetration into the human character which belongs exclusively to the physician. His work is psychologically correct. He shows his keen knowledge of human nature in such sentences as these: "People who despair easily do not fall into the clutches of this intense craving for some practical means of relief where none can be. It is the hopeful, the resolute, and such as are educated by success who suffer thus." His poems, too—the "Lincoln" sonnet for example—show the clear exact craftsmanship of the scientist.

His success in the one line has by no means lessened his ability in the other. Indeed, it may be said that if he were not so great a physician, he would not be so great a novelist and poet.—Alfred Joyce Kilmer.