Book reviews

S. WEIR MITCHELL, M.D. NEUROLOGIST. *A Medical Biography*. By Richard D. Walter. (Pp. viii + 232; illustrated; \$9.75). Thomas: Springfield. 1970.

Neurology as a clinical specialty had its origins in the second half of the nineteenth century and in each country a group of brilliant men laid its foundations. Thus Germany had Romberg, Erb, and Friedreich; France had Duchenne of Boulogne and Charcot; and Britain had Hughlings Jackson and Gowers, along with many more. In the United States the most outstanding pioneers were Weir Mitchell and William Hammond.

Silas Weir Mitchell (1829-1914) was the son of John Kearsley Mitchell, Professor of the Practice of Medicine in the Jefferson Medical College of Philadelphia, a remarkably talented and versatile man. After his post-graduate European tour Weir returned to Philadelphia where he practised for the rest of his career, but never achieved his ambition of a chair in physiology. From general medicine he turned gradually to neurology and psychiatry and during the war between the states he worked as a 'contract surgeon'. He also undertook a considerable amount of anatomical, physiological, pharmacological, and historical research, as well as becoming a novelist and poet of distinction. His multifarious activities, in fact, gained for him the epithet, 'the most versatile American since Franklin'.

Dr. Walter, Professor of Neurology in the University of California at Los Angeles, has written an excellent account of this great man. Unlike previous biographies, which have concentrated mainly on Mitchell's literary work, this deals more with his contributions to medicine. The bibliography of his medical writings contains 250-odd items and it indicates the diversity of his interests. In addition to many minor achievements, Weir Mitchell's fame rests on his work in four main areas: peripheral nerve injuries, cerebellar physiology, the toxicology of snake venom, and the rest treatment of hysteria. He gave the first account of causalgia and considered the cerebellum to exert an augmenting and reinforcing influence on movements of cerebral origin. Professor Walter considers each of these endeavours in detail and has adopted the useful expedient of giving liberal quotations from the original publications. This can be a tedious technique but in the case of Mitchell it is ideal and necessary, for his style is so lucid and striking. Take for example the description of one of his favourite cases, Mrs. B.: '... She was five feet four, and weighed ninety-four pounds, and had as much figure as a hat rack, and had no more bosom than the average chicken of a boarding house table. Nature had wisely prohibited this being from increasing her breed....' His literary works which give information about their author as well as contemporary medicine are also dealt with.

This book should be an inspiration to the trainee in the neurosciences and an essential work for those who realize that a knowledge of the origins of clinical neurology is important. It can be highly recommended.

EDWIN CLARKE

WILSON'S DISEASE. BIRTH DEFECTS Edited by Daniel Bergsma, I. Herbert Scheinberg and Irmin Sternlieb. (Pp. ii + 138; illustrated; 95s.). Livingstone: Edinburgh. 1968.

Nature's genetic experiments, though frequently unsuccessful, often yield a harvest of information: the more bizarre the experiment the richer the harvest often seems to be. Such has certainly been the case with that rare inherited metabolic disorder, hepatolenticular degeneration, Wilson's disease. Were one to be condemned to suffer degenerative or metabolic disease of the nervous system, Wilson's disease would surely be the condition of choice, it can be cured; of how many nervous diseases can this be claimed?

Wilson's disease has been the subject of two international symposia in the last decade. The proceedings of the first, appropriately held at Wilson's own hospital, were published in 1961 and are now medical history. The second symposium took place in Tokyo in 1966, thus the papers read there, and now published, are unfortunately also somewhat dated. The publishers are not entirely to blame for this delay, since publication took place in April 1968. The volume is well produced, easy to read and with commendably clear diagrams and Tables. Some economy might have been made on the price by omitting unnecessary and sometimes embarrassing photographs and biographies of the authors, while the copper and caeruloplasmin coloured binding does seem to be carrying whimsy a trifle too far.

It is always difficult for a reviewer who has contributed to a symposium to write a completely disinterested criticism, since his own chapter(s) are so manifestly superior to those of his fellow authors. The first thing that must be said about this volume is that, unlike its predecessor, it contains only the formal contributions and has omitted the discussions; the editors are to be congratulated on having taken this stand. Secondly, as in all symposia, the standard varies greatly from author to author both in content and presentation. The first and main section comprising rather more than one third is devoted to 'Copper Metabolism' (as if copper could be metabolized!); in fact, this section discusses copper transport and storage, not even the role of copper in metabolism. This is followed by a short section on genetics and contains a remarkable contribution by Arima and Sano which describes their findings in no less than 151 patients with Wilson's disease known in Japan. There the illness clearly runs a rather different course from that which we are accustomed to see in this country, where hepatic Wilson's disease at the age of 3, 4 or 5 years is virtually unknown: perhaps our paediatricians have not yet been educated up to this diagnosis.

The third section is headed 'Central Nervous System' but three of the four papers deal with the neglected psychiatric aspects of the disease. The fourth section refers to liver pathology and the fifth to renal involvement. The final two sections, and those of most interest to the practising neurologist, deal with diagnosis of the asymptomatic