our knowledge been described before. We assume, however, that the aetiological basis proposed for single capillaries is applicable. The aetiology of the myopathic fibres found in case 1 is unknown as is the case in many of the previously described patients with centralised capillaries. Dystrophin and chromosomal studies should be undertaken in all cases with unexplained myopathic features in an attempt to explain the male preponderance.

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Silas Weir Mitchell (1829–1914)

Born in Philadelphia in 1829, this distinguished American was the seventh physician in three generations. Webb Haymaker recounts¹ his smuggling *Midshipman Easy* into a dark corner of a church pew to lessen the boredom of his rather puritanical upbringing. His early university career in Philadelphia was poor indeed. His preference for daydreaming, writing poetry and billiards prompted his father, Dr John Kearsley Mitchell to remark “You are wanting in nearly all the qualities that go to make a success in medicine.” Nonetheless, he enrolled at Jefferson Medical College in 1848, qualifying MD in 1851. He boarded a ship for Europe and in Paris fell under the spell of Claude Bernard who probably sowed the seeds of his lifelong sense of scientific enquiry. Returning to Philadelphia he investigated the effects of snake venom. Haymaker records how he nearly lost his life when a six foot rattler climbed on his chair, poised at his shoulder and was only distracted when inadvertently it touched the hot lamp and withdrew, allowing Mitchell to leap up and escape.

During the American civil war he was seconded with Dr G Morehouse to a purpose built 400 bed neurological hospital on Christian Street, Philadelphia. Dr WW Keen was an associate. Together they collected “cartloads of wounded soldiers” from Gettysburg, attended to their wounds and prepared “thousands of pages of notes” on their injuries, culminating in several classic books and papers.^{2,3} At the suggestion of

Professor Robley Dunglison he applied the term *causalgia* to the consequences of partial nerve injury.

In “Reflex Paralysis”⁴ he described the sudden weakness of the limbs on the side opposite to forebrain injury, thus anticipating the lateralisation of motor function by Fritsch and Hitzig by five years. He studied post-paralytic chorea, erythromelalgia (Weir Mitchell’s disease) and deduced that the cerebellum augments and reinforces movement. He advocated the rest cure for psychoneurosis, but at times was less than orthodox. Attending a lady, “sick unto death” he dismissed his assistants from the room and then soon left himself. Asked of her chances of survival he remarked “Yes she will run out of the door in two minutes; I set her sheets on fire. A case of hysteria”. His prediction proved correct.

In the 1880s he turned to literature and published several novels, drama and verse. He died of influenza in his 85th year. Harvey Cushing summed him up: “He was vain, but had much to be vain about”.

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