

— Genius has been defined, a capacity to excel in whatever one undertakes with all the heart, and those most intimate with Mr. Mitchell pronounce him in this sense a genius. But whatever may have been his general aptitudes, the special bent of his mind was towards financiering. As a financier he showed at his fullest and best.

As a financier, in congress, during the two terms of his service there, his influence was powerful and most salutary in thwarting a quasi-repudiation of the national debt, and measures tending to impair the national credit. Had not President Hayes been counted in, Mr. Mitchell might have been invited to administer the national finances.

No less noteworthy was his service to the school-fund. His giving school-books for a score of years to all Milwaukee children of poor families (a charity which is continued by his son) is much spoken of. This educative help was a trifle to what he rendered by his influence in making the investment of the state school fund more safe.

Mr. Mitchell was for six years president of our Society. In the exercise of his right to do what he would with his own, he was not so munificent to us as we hoped he would be. Nevertheless he gave us more money than has thus far come to us from any other man, and helped us in other ways. It is held by many of his friends that he had in mind large bequests for us and the public, but that his purposes in this regard were changed by a serious disaster near the close of his life.

The railway enterprises, which shared with banking the last third of his life, merely gave new and wider scope for the workings of his financial genius.

In the railway world what did he accomplish? Railroad building in Wisconsin dates from 1849, but fourteen years thereafter its principal lines were bankrupt, fragmentary, and what was worse, "dissevered, discordant, belligerent," and worst of all for Milwaukee, they were on the point of coming under the North Western, which would have sucked the abundance of Wisconsin from every corner between lake and river, and poured it into Chicago, leaving Milwaukee bereaved of the commerce of its own state.