

quarterly journal, the *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Psychiatrie und psychisch-gerichtliche Medicin*, continues to be carefully edited by Drs. Flemming, Roller, and Heinrich Laehr.

The *Irrenfreund*, under the editorship of Dr. Fr. Koster and Dr. Brosius (the latter the translator of Dr. Conolly's writings into German), is a small monthly sheet, which circulates in Germany a good deal of useful information culled from foreign sources.

A similar publication is the *Correspondenz-Blatt der deutschen Gesellschaft für Psychiatrie und Gerichtliche Psychologie*, edited by Med.-Rath Dr. Kelp, Reg.-Med.-Rath Dr. Eulenberg, Sans.-Rath Dr. Erlenmeyer, Director Dr. Otto.

#### *The Sensorium Commune.*

In a review of Dr. Maudsley's work on the "Physiology and Pathology of Mind," which appeared in the "British Medical Journal," the reviewer, while taking the author gently to task in regard to the sensorium commune, has complacently tumbled into a most strange blunder. So serenely unconscious, however, is he of his plight, that it would be a pity to take any notice of it, were it not that in doing so the opportunity offers itself of quoting some admirable observations by Prochaska. They were published in 1784, and those who read them now will judge whether the eminent physiologist has received all the acknowledgment due to him from subsequent writers.

The reviewer of Dr. Maudsley's book says:—"In the chapter on the sensory centres and sensation the author should have been more explicit as to what he regards as the 'sensorium commune proper,' or centre for the reception of the impressions made upon the nerves of common sensation. Though this is one of the disputed points of cerebral physiology at the present day, and one to which, by his plan, he was peculiarly bound, he evades the discussion of the question, and neither tells us whether he places it in the optic thalamus or in the pons Varolii." The sensorium commune the centre for the nerves of sensation! This is more than strange in a critic, and might have entailed a whipping on a schoolboy. Surely a thought of the meaning of the Latin words might have warned him of his danger. The sensorium commune is the common centre of sensory impressions—the aggregate of the sensory ganglia—not the

centre of common sensation. . But the name has been so long used, and is so well understood by physiological writers, that the reviewer's blunder might pass comprehension were it not evident that he had learned it from Vulpian.

The following extracts, translated from Prochaska's work, entitled "*Commentatio de Functionibus Systematis Nervosi*," and published in 1784, will serve to show what clear ideas he had of the function of the sensorium commune, and to prove to the reviewer and to others who are under a like erroneous impression, that it is wrong to attribute, as is often done, to Dr. Carpenter the first recognition of sensori-motor movements :—

"What is the sensorium commune—what are its functions and its seat? External impressions, which are made upon the sensorial nerves, are propagated rapidly through their whole length to their origin, where, when they have arrived, they are reflected according to a certain law, and pass into certain and corresponding motor nerves, through which, again rapidly propagated even to the muscles, they excite certain and determinate motions. This place, in which, as in a centre, the nerves appropriated to sense as well as motion meet and communicate, and in which the impressions of the sensorial nerves are reflected upon the motor nerves, is called the sensorium commune—a term already received by most physiologists."

After pointing out very clearly that the cerebrum and cerebellum do not enter into the composition of the sensorium commune, which acts independently of them, Prochaska continues thus :

"The reflection of sensorial into motory impressions, which takes place in the sensorium commune, does not obey mere physical laws, where the angle of reflection is equal to the angle of incidence, and where action and reaction are equal, but it follows peculiar laws, written, as it were, by nature in the medullary pulp of the sensorium, which we can only know by their effects, and not discover by our imagination. Nevertheless, a general law, according to which the sensorium commune reflects sensorial into motor impressions, is our preservation; so that certain motory impressions follow external impressions hurtful to the body, producing motions tending to ward off and remove the source of injury; and, on the contrary, internal or motor impressions follow external or sensorial impressions beneficial to us, producing motions calculated to perpetuate that benefit."

He proceeds to enumerate a few out of many examples of such actions—irritation of the nostrils exciting sneezing; irritation of the mucous membrane of the windpipe exciting coughing; the closure of the eyelids when the eye is threatened; and the retraction of the limbs during sleep, when they are slightly pricked or pinched.

“As, therefore, the principal function of the sensorium commune consists in the reflection of sensorial into motor impressions, it is to be observed that this reflection takes place, whether the mind be conscious or unconscious of it. . . . All these actions arise from the organisation and physical laws proper to the sensorium commune, and are, therefore, spontaneous and automatic.”

At the time when Prochaska wrote, the function of the spinal cord as ministering to reflex action had not been specially discriminated, as was afterwards done by Marshall Hall, so that he includes under the sensorium commune the spinal cord. But it is evident that he clearly recognised and illustrated the reflex or automatic action of the lower nervous centres. When we consider, too, the acquired acts, or “secondary automatic” acts, as Hartley designated them, to which the spinal chord ministers, their complex nature and the definite ends which they accomplish, though we may not be disposed to agree with Pflüger that it possesses sensorial functions, we cannot but admit the exceeding difficulty of physiologically discriminating the reflex and the sensori-motor acts. Dr. Carpenter has been most successful in this country in making and illustrating this distinction. But those who are interested in the functions of the nervous centres, and desire to lay the foundations of just conceptions respecting them, should, above all things, study Prochaska’s work, and the works of others who followed him in Germany.

#### *Prosecutions by the Lunacy Commissioners.*

Not a year passes in which the Commissioners in Lunacy do not find themselves compelled to institute prosecutions against persons who have systematically violated the lunacy statutes. It is much to be regretted that medical men should so often be the culprits and the victims. But they have only themselves to blame; they wantonly violate a law most necessary for the protection of the insane, and it is the duty of the Commissioners in Lunacy stringently to enforce the provisions which the Legislature has ordained for the protection