

The British Medical Association.

The annual meeting of the British Medical Association was held in Edinburgh in the week succeeding the Medico-Psychological meeting. The meeting was one of the most successful that the B.M.A. has ever held, whether as to numbers of members attending or as to the quantity and importance of the matter discussed. Edinburgh possesses many advantages as a place of meeting. The fame of its great medical school is world-wide, and it is full of ardent workers who are determined to maintain and extend its ancient renown as a centre of medical teaching. The social amenity and the accessibility of the northern capital render it specially attractive to the southron.

Elsewhere we summarise the work done in the psychology section. Much interesting work was done in the section of neurology. A discussion of the treatment of cerebral tumours was introduced by Professor Ferrier; a discussion on the influence of micro-organisms and toxins in the production of diseases of the central and peripheral nervous system was introduced by Dr. Buzzard. Both subjects were very fully discussed.

The meeting of 1898 witnessed also the birth of some new sections. Notable among these is the section of tropical diseases, a class of affections hitherto strangely neglected in England, although so much of our mighty empire lies within the tropics. Many tropical diseases have points of special interest for the neurologist and the alienist, while the labours of Dr. McDowall have familiarised us with the feeling that the ever-present problem of the care of the insane is as pressing in the tropical as in temperate climes.

The Correlation of Sciences in the Investigation of Nervous and Mental Diseases.

In the present number we publish an interesting article by Dr. Ira Van Giesen, Superintendent of the Pathological Institute of the Commission in Lunacy of the State of New York, upon the above subject. The necessity for a many-sided, comprehensive study of insanity is earnestly represented by Dr. Van Giesen. It is very much to the credit of the New York State Lunacy Commission that it has recognised the importance of the collaboration of skilled workers in various

departments of science for the elucidation of the problems of mental and nervous disorders, and has established an adequately equipped institute where the work can be efficiently carried on. Each department of the institute is in charge of a trained investigator, and the whole is under the supervision of a Director. We question very much whether the like of this institute is to be found on the Continent—we refer, of course, only to the special department of work with which it is concerned. As for our own country, it may confidently be stated that we have nothing to compare with it. In London and Edinburgh the pathological laboratories in connection with the asylums are within easy reach of the great hospitals, where correlated branches of work are in vigorous existence; but this is a very different thing from having the several departments in association at a single scientific centre, in charge of officials working under one authority. Several inconveniences must attach to this dissociation of branches of work. Nevertheless we recognise the propriety of an attitude of grateful appreciation in respect to these departures. They certainly constitute a long step in advance of the condition of things obtaining elsewhere in the kingdom. Elsewhere local authorities have provided a mortuary in connection with their asylums, and of late we believe that a room “for the finer histological work”—a phrase somewhat familiar in official reports—has in many instances been added thereto. Im-mured therein the pathologist too often finds himself in need of the sympathy of workers in the sister sciences. Problems arise upon which he would fain have the light of bacteriology, of physiological chemistry, of animal experimentation, and his work must frequently remain stunted for the lack thereof. Such an institute as that now referred to is doubtless a costly undertaking, and could scarcely be expected from any local authorities in this country but the most wealthy, or from combination of the less wealthy. We anticipate that the Hospital for Acute Cases in the West Riding of Yorkshire will be opened shortly, and if, as we believe, there are to be in connection therewith various departments of investigation, this may perhaps with justice be described as the first step in this country in the direction of the ideal institute. Such a departure cannot fail to be watched with the greatest interest by those engaged in the treatment of mental diseases.

In Dr. Van Giesen's brief review of the work of the various departments of investigation at the scientific centre of the New York State Lunacy System we find abundant evidence

of progress, and an instructive illustration of the standpoint of the psychologist of to-day. From psycho-physics and anthropometry to histology and experimental pathology the tendency is constant towards observation and experimentation in contradistinction to speculation. It is no part of our purpose here to criticise the views and suggestions put forward by Dr. Van Giesen on cerebral pathology, but we are unable to pass over his comparison of the nerve-cell to an octopus. The statement is made that the nerve-cell, like the octopus, has power of movement over its "tentacles." To quote Dr. Van Giesen, "this retraction and expansion of the arm of the nerve-cell, in groups, systems, and communities of brain-cells, drawing it in or out of the circuit of transmission of nervous impulse, is the final unveiling of the secret of a whole host of mental phenomena which hitherto have seemed mysterious to the last degree." Again, "These attributes of extension and expansion of the nerve-cell hold one spellbound in the vast flood of light shed upon the explanation of insanity." We are told that among the phenomena to be explained by "retraction and expansion of the tentacles of the nerve-cell octopus" are those of double consciousness, hypnosis, hysteria, and of the "whole great important groups of psychopathic functional diseases;" also the cardinal symptoms of epilepsy in the manifestations of the fit, and some of the violent manifestations of insanity. What may be Dr. Van Giesen's basis for these remarkable statements and hypotheses we know not, but we are certainly impatient to learn upon what evidence they are grounded.

Criminal Evidence.

At last the Evidence in Criminal Cases Bill has become law. It is not necessary to say more of the statute itself here than that it makes every person charged with an offence, and the wife or husband of such person as the case may be, a competent witness for the defence at every stage of the proceedings, under the conditions specified in the Act. The arguments for and against this measure, which we believe to be a pre-eminently salutary one, have been agitated in this country for many years, and are familiar to every educated section of the community. The combatants on both sides will now be content to wait to see their predictions verified, or the reverse, by the event. The great danger against which the judiciary will have to guard