

LEONARDO BIANCHI.

1848-1927.

ON April 13, 1927, there died in Rome, at the age of 80, one who had been an Honorary Member of the Association since 1907. The rare excellency of his contributions to neurology and psychiatry had already been recognized, for in 1896 the Association had elected him a Corresponding Member. Leonardo Bianchi, at the time of his death, had risen to be a Member of the Senate of the Kingdom of Italy, not from personal ambition, but because his presence was required for the solution of many social problems affecting deeply the welfare of his country. It was his high sense of public duty that turned his attention to politics as a possible means to an end, for he saw no other way of bringing about the reform of the legal and administrative side of psychiatry than doing himself what had been vainly expected for many years from the professional politicians.

In his country there was no lack of zeal for research and clinical psychiatry, as the many Italian psychiatric journals testified. The great names of the past had been succeeded by those of as brilliant a band of morphologists, pathologists, neurologists and psychiatrists as could be found anywhere. But the Italian Lunacy Law of 1904, inspired as it was mainly by a regard for the public safety, was having a strangling effect on the early treatment of the mentally afflicted and on the hospitalization of the great provincial asylums. Though several fine municipal psychiatric hospitals and State clinics had been established, the provision for recent cases was quite inadequate, and only dangerous and chronic cases could be admitted to the provincial asylums. An elaborate system of certification, with all its publicity delayed the admission of involuntary patients, and all voluntary patients were certified with the same formalities twenty-four hours after admission. The machinery for the discharge of patients also urgently needed revision, as did the system of inspecting mental institutions.

The Italian Parliament, in Bianchi's opinion, by their failure to ameliorate social conditions adverse to mental hygiene, had encouraged the occurrence of mental deficiency and psychopathic states. Nor was his knowledge of the needs of his country in these respects acquired indirectly: it was the outcome of his

experience as an asylum physician and director of a neurological and psychiatric clinic, and of his close study of the social problems of the day as they affected his patients.

Though many great physicians and university professors have achieved eminence in the political world, there has been no other instance of a man being a university professor, an asylum superintendent and a minister of State at one and the same time.

Leonardo Bianchi, who achieved this, was born on April 5, 1848, at S. Bartolomeo in Galdo. He commenced his medical career at the University of Naples, where, in 1871, he graduated in medicine and surgery. In 1877 he became Privat Docent in Pathology, and was appointed in 1882 Assistant Physician to the Provincial Asylum of Naples.

His career as a teacher dates from 1888, when the University of Palermo made him Professor Extraordinary of Psychiatry a year after his appointment as Medical Director of Palermo Asylum.

In 1888 he commenced his famous research work on the physiology of the frontal lobes, and this and his already considerable contributions to clinical psychiatry led to his return, in 1890, by invitation, to Naples, where he was appointed Professor of Nervous and Mental Diseases in the Royal University and Superintendent of the Provincial Asylum. He took charge of the clinic at Naples and established research laboratories there.

His striking personality, his success as a teacher and his eloquence as a speaker soon brought him recognition as the great master of Italian neuropathology and psychiatry—an eminence he enjoyed for over a quarter of a century. In the political life of his country he was first a deputy, and in 1905 was appointed Secretary of State for Public Instruction. His elevation to the Senate followed, where he continued to press for the modernization of the legal and administrative sides of psychiatry with social reforms for the prevention of all forms of mental disease and degeneracy.

Bianchi very early interested himself in British psychiatry, and is said to have attended more than one meeting of the Association. Some years ago he contributed retrospects and articles to the *Journal of Mental Science*. His researches on the functions of the frontal lobes of the cerebral cortex, his observations on aphasia and his finding of pathogenic organisms in the blood of cases of acute delirium, were well known in this country. But it was not until his *Text-book on Psychiatry* was made available to English readers through its translation in 1906 by Dr. James H. Macdonald that the magnitude of his work, his genius and originality came to be generally appreciated.

His text-book was no mere exposition of the teachings of the day

It was a critical synthesis of all the recent advances made in the subject by the anatomist, histologist, physiologist, bacteriologist, psychologist and sociologist. Every fact was closely scrutinized in the light of his own researches and extensive clinical experience before being included in what was easily the most comprehensive work hitherto published. It revealed a psychiatry which, though Italian, was distinctively Bianchi's. It differed in many respects from Tanzi's psychiatry, translated later by Drs. W. Ford-Robertson and T. C. Mackenzie. Tanzi inclined more to German teachings, with which Bianchi had little or no sympathy.

Bianchi began by laying down fundamental laws governing the evolution of the nervous system and its psychic manifestations, tracing such evolution from the most elementary to the most complex as found in man. Upon his plan of the structure and function of the human brain, supported by his clinical experience, he based his physio-pathological conceptions of mental disorder.

Although Bianchi was essentially a physiological psychologist, he had psychological conceptions of a high order and was by no means what is now known as a "behaviourist" or "objective psychologist." He had no sympathy with *a priori* notions as applied to the problems of mind and matter. In a letter to the writer of this notice he remarks that the hormic teaching of "purposive behaviour transfers us to the nebulous psychology of spiritualism, which is a reversion."

In psychology he must be categorized as a materialistic monist, though he frequently uses the expression "neural energy and its psychic equivalents," which is suggestive of psycho-neural parallelism. To refrain from the language of the latter doctrine is not easy in matters psychological, nor can one always avoid implying belief in "psycho-neural interaction." It would be tedious to be always saying "The neural or physical processes underly thought and feeling resulting in this or that behaviour," though it may express exactly what one means by mind acting on body. Bianchi, however, is quite clear on this matter if his text-book is carefully read. He never refers to mind influencing physical functioning except in his chapter on "Ætiology," and excludes psychogenic factors in the ætiology of mental disorders except as predisposing to the real causes, which are physiogenic.

Thus he teaches that the psychic function is something engrafted upon the great trunk of organic function and affected by all its modifications in health and disease. What is found in the development of the somatic organism is present also, and without substantial difference, in the evolution of the psychic organism or mind. Mind is absolutely dependent upon matter, and only reached

through matter. Obviously Bianchi did not believe in the doctrine of the identity of mind and matter. Mind is a "something," but it arises from the functioning of the brain. In another place he says that intelligence is the consciousness of life, and is manifested through the wonderful mechanism of the nervous system.

This brings us to his beliefs in matters cosmological. He spoke as Maudsley and Huxley did of "life" and "nature." The world for him is not a dead world governed by mechanical or chemical laws. Nature is "beautiful," "generous," and "possessed of infinite resources." Life from the monad to man is a dynamism. "Psychic life commences with very simple and uncertain manifestations, and step by step through progressive assimilation of the forces of Nature it rises to the most potent realization of Nature itself in the forms of thought and consciousness." Huxley expressed similar views.

Bianchi teaches that it is the nervous system which changes cosmic energies into psychic equivalents, *i.e.*, *viâ* neural energy.

Nature to Bianchi was therefore something very powerful and very real. Nature endowed matter with life. Life was not necessarily all psychic—the cosmic forces needed the instrumentality of the nervous system for the evolution of the subjective.

To return to the publication of Bianchi's text-book. In the estimation of many (including that of the writer) Bianchi at once took a place side by side with Maudsley, Clouston and Kraepelin. True, his classification of mental disorders did not find, at that time, much support in this country, but the partial breakdown of Kraepelin's dogmatism on dementia præcox seems likely to bring to Bianchi's views the prominence they deserve. They have the advantage of a physio-pathological basis and suggest a fruitful field for further research. They are not antagonistic to the biogenic causality of Bleuler, and may prove to be its anatomical counterpart. Bianchi's approach to all the problems of psychiatry was essentially biological, which includes the sociological.

In 1922 Bianchi published his book on *The Mechanism of the Brain and the Functions of the Frontal Lobes*, which was based primarily upon the famous experimental researches on the cerebral cortex already stated as having been commenced in 1888. This book affords strong support to his teachings on the physio-pathology of mental disorders, in regard to which the relative degree of disturbance of the sensory and frontal areas of the cortex and the effects of hallucination of the special senses are of fundamental importance.

Bianchi wrote many papers, but few books. His text-book, now a classic, reached its third edition in 1924. It reveals

his antagonism to Freudian doctrines and psycho-analysis. The former he regards as having no foundation, and the latter as a dangerous method of treatment.

Bianchi recognized with Maudsley and Laycock the unconscious working of the mind as the larger psychic field. The "unconscious" is not only the great store-house and workshop of the mind, but is capable of facing new situations by the synthesis of appropriate reactions.

Bianchi always subscribed to the modern view of mental disorders as syndromes, and regarded classification as a necessary evil. His sensory insanity includes many mental disorders regarded by others as clinical entities. He has to admit the clinical existence of manic-depressive insanity and dementia præcox, but is critical in regard to the hypotheses upon which they rest. In his opinion these syndromes only occupy a small area of the whole clinical field.

The last revision of his text-book synchronized with his relinquishment in 1923 of the chair in the University of Naples on reaching the age-limit of 75, when he was made Emeritus Professor. His retirement from active teaching did not lessen his activities, but gave him the opportunity of devoting more of his tireless energy to sociological problems, especially those of eugenics and mental hygiene. Indeed his last published work, in 1925, related to these subjects, and was entitled *Eugenics Igiene Mentale e Profilassi delle Malattie Nervose Mentali*, which still awaits translation into English.

In his farewell address to his students and others he reveals the true secret of his greatness. The subject was "Old Age." Youthful fire and enthusiasm are but preludes to the solidity, strength and experience of maturity and old age, and should not be wasted, but in a good measure preserved for the high purposes of civilization. The rules of psychic life in man are discipline, obedience and devotion to community welfare. His Deity was "Duty": "Let it be your altar and your law."

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