

TOPICS OF THE TIME

Napoleon's Words.

PERHAPS no man ever put into his habitual speech greater dynamic force than did Napoleon Bonaparte. His words were projectiles. He hurled his sentences as he hurled battalions. If one reads a book touching upon the Napoleonic era, the quotations from Napoleon flash across the page like bolts of lightning. We were particularly struck by this explosive characteristic of Napoleonic speech when reading the volume published by M. Bertin, a few years ago, on the oldest brother of Napoleon, that genial ex-king of Naples and of Spain, who spent so many of his last years as a tree-planting and hospitable New Jersey landholder—a contrast of environment almost as startling as that which illumined the fate of his more famous brother. In reading about the amiable Joseph, now and again one had a sensation as if an earthquake passed under one's feet; it was when some phrase of Napoleon's was quoted.

No one had a keener sense of Napoleon's moral obliquities than Emerson. He eloquently praised him for his clarity of objective vision, directness of purpose, and unequalled energy. He fully appreciated the contradiction in him of remorseless veracity and conscienceless untruth; yet he declared that "every sentence spoken by Napoleon, and every line of his writing," deserved reading.

After all that has been gathered and given to the world of Napoleon's written and spoken words, it is most curious that at this late day, and in America, should now come to light a hitherto only half-printed record of his intimate and unguarded words—a record surely one of the closest and most valuable ever made.

There are certain personalities in which humanity is permanently interested. At one time or another the wave of interest may be high or low; but the current is always moving. Napoleon is one of these personalities. There is a periodicity as to the intensity of the interest; at times it may amount to a popular fad: but there is never a time when the subject does not appeal with full force to all those who are students of human powers displayed on a gigantic scale. The question as to the morality of the man and the justifiableness of his acts, no matter how settled, does not dispose of the subject; for in any case it is a study worthy of absorbed attention. Here was a human force acting on a universal theater, with scarcely any moral restraint. Violent partizanship, either for or against, seems at this distance of time quite out of place.

The cynic may draw from Napoleon's success an excuse for action unrestrained by "a decent re-

spect for the opinions of mankind"; but the moralist can point to his lack of deep moral perception, his colossal and unexampled fall. And all may draw two obvious lessons from his career—one, that his great immediate successes were the legitimate result of an industry well-nigh superhuman; the other, that his permanent successes, those that live after him and are likely longest to live, are those institutions built by him, not on lies, not in a temper of shallow expediency, but upon true insight and everlasting principle.

Quackery.

It is to be hoped that Dr. Mitchell's highly expert exposition of the state of mind of a typical medical charlatan in "The Autobiography of a Quack" will have salutary uses. The author has not dipped his pen in rose-water; the ink is black enough, but none too black for truth. In such a career as he depicts the steps downward, when once begun, are apt to grow longer and swifter to the disastrous end.

It is an interesting psychological phenomenon that the quack both attracts and repels with peculiar force. He draws one man or woman irresistibly; he fills another with contempt and loathing; or the same person he first attracts, then violently repels. It is greatly to be desired that the number should be lessened of those whom he attracts, and increased of those whom he repels. The law does some good in limiting the area of his devastation; but, in such matters especially, the law *alone* must be extremely ineffective. Public opinion is the most powerful weapon for fighting every public ill; and a demonstration in the form of fiction, such as Dr. Mitchell's story, should help to call attention anew to a loudly crying evil, and should be highly useful in making that sort of public opinion which is fatal to all kinds of medical quackery.

It is manifest that in medical matters, as in other fields of knowledge, superstition gives way by very slow degrees before the advance of civilization. It is not conceivable, for instance, that the New York legislature, at the end of the nineteenth century, would do what it did near the beginning of the century, when it authorized the purchase, for one thousand dollars, and the publication of Crous's perfect and infallible remedy and cure for hydrophobia, a prescription which included the pulverized jawbone of a dog, the false tongue of a newly foaled colt, and verdigris from the copper coins of George I or II.¹

But superstition lingers longer, perhaps, in the

¹ See that valuable handbook, "Legal Decisions, Medical," by W. A. Purrington.

domain of healing than in any other, though it takes new shapes of subtlety and masquerades under the latest philosophical nomenclature. A clergyman of our acquaintance, who confessed the other day to the traditional horse-chestnut in the pocket as a cure for rheumatism, illustrated the old-fashioned rather than the new forms of medical superstition. There is, indeed, more of the old still extant than the liberal-minded dream of. We heard lately of certain horrible practices in an American village, which indicate that the belief in vampires can exist in a modern New England country community of white natives! Generally, however, the observer notes that the medical humbugs and superstitions (except among the most densely ignorant) compliment the latest scientific discoveries by a sort of left-handed imitation; if it is not science that the new quackeries thus compliment, then it is the passing psychological or philosophical or therapeutical fad—whatever that fad may be.

A couple of advertisements in papers published in a neighboring State have recently fallen under our notice; both of them are good illustrations of this latter tendency. This particular pair of quacks deal with separate forms of healing without physical means; they are both "divine healers," though one is a "vitalizer" and the other claims a more peculiar divinity; and both are thoroughly self-conscious, thoroughly self-evident, thoroughly vulgar, and portentously and profusely lying charlatans. The very terms of their advertisements should carry the conviction of fraud to any person whose education enables him to spell out the exuberant comicalities with which they proclaim their miraculous powers over "organic" and, indeed, pretty much all sorts of disease. It is not necessary, even, that one should be opposed to the doctrines of faith-healing, mind-healing, and Christian Science in order to comprehend the fraudulent character of these mercenary dealers in sacred phrases, and triflers with human life. And yet these modern gentlemen of the road are, judging from the length of their advertisements, apparently each doing a thriving business, managing to escape prosecution by studied evasion of the statutes.

Society finds it difficult to protect itself by law from such enemies of the public health; but it should not be necessary to appeal to law in order to make the occupation of impostors like these unprofitable in communities well removed from barbarism. A sense of humor, supplementing the common sense of our "plain people," should be as effectual as tar and feathers for deliverance from such blatant scoundrels. Yet we have only to look around to see how charlatanry, in some one or other of its new manifestations, attracts even the cultured; so that one is in danger, in his perplexity, of declaring that "all the world loves" a quack! Why *should* it love a quack? "Why," asked a modern investigator of medical vagaries—"why is our species *always* gullible? Why does it avail itself of every opportunity to make an ass of itself? I do not know. It is one of those mysterious ways in which God works for

his own glory, perhaps, and for the confounding of the wise."

The reason generally given for running after quacks instead of following scientists, in quest of cure, is the fact that the most learned doctors on some points disagree and that medical science is not yet absolutely exact. But in what other branch of human endeavor is lack of absolute knowledge to be bettered by an appeal to absolute ignorance, to say nothing of an appeal to presumable fraud?

In announcing benefactions for the medical branch of Harvard University, President Eliot remarked, last June, that there is to-day no field of human inquiry more sure of beneficent results than the field of medical investigation. Dr. Biggs of the New York Health Department, in his recent address at the City Club of New York, described the lowering of the death-rate, especially in Great Britain and in the city of New York—a process the clear outcome of scientific investigation and experiment, and having as one of its results the lengthening of the average of life, in such conditions as now exist in the chief American city, to the extent of fifteen years. Facts such as this should strengthen the intelligent and unhysterical citizen in his opposition to that dementia which casts conscientious scientific research to the winds, and sets up in its place either conceited and fatuous ignorance or the grossest charlatanry.

"A Voice of Sweetest Tone."

A NEW-ENGLANDER who recently returned from his first visit to the Southern States, when asked what he had found to interest him, replied, "First of all, I have been enjoying the charm of the Southern voice." His acquaintance had been so largely in one region that he did not realize that there was a part of his own country where admirable voices are not the exception, but the rule. At home he had heard occasionally lovely voices, but it was with startling rarity that he had experienced the soft, natural flow of musical speech, which was revealed to him as a general trait of Southerners of either sex. He came back with new pride in the South, and the wish that every man, woman, and child of his acquaintance might be awake to the difference between a good and a bad voice.

Certainly there is no greater difference in the two qualities of anything else, even between good and bad French, and in social accomplishments there is no more desirable endowment or attainment than a beautiful voice. We say attainment as well as endowment, for clearly a fine voice, or, at least, a fine use of the voice, is one of the things that may be attained by early training in childhood, or even by attentiveness in maturer life. Many a lovely voice, once harsh or flat, is but the finished product of art. In this field the will can work wonders. It would, perhaps, be too much to say that the voice is an index of the character—human nature is too complex in its expression to justify hard-and-fast definitions of this sort; but it is certain that the quality of our speech is a potent factor in conveying impressions