

The Signatures of Napoleon (with Portraits).

FROM 1785 TO 1821.

(Born 15th August, 1769: died 5th May, 1821).

By J. HOLT SCHOOLING.



THE first Napoleon was a remarkable man, and did many remarkable acts: some of the most extraordinary of these remain to posterity in the form of his signatures.

During many years a man may collect many things of different kinds, while, if he specialize his energy, he may collect a great many things of one kind. From a large

Fig. 1.—As a Cadet in 1785. Age 16.

collection of handwritings which I possess, I have selected the accompanying autographs of Napoleon, and have arranged them in chronological order. Some of these specimens are individually remarkable, and if viewed as a series extending over thirty-six years of Napoleon's life, they may be regarded as a collection which is probably unique.

Let us look at these black and white tracings of Napoleon's hand-gesture, which he permanently recorded when he wrote his signatures: they are interesting as curiosities, and their interest will be increased for such readers as may consider that handwriting is one form of personal gesture by which a good deal of a man's individuality is expressed. The facsimiles here shown have been reduced to three-quarters of the linear dimensions of the originals.

The first signature was written in 1785 by young Buonaparte—he had not then altered the Italian form of spelling his name—when



BUONAPARTE IN 1793. AGE 24.



GENERAL BUONAPARTE IN 1795. AGE 26.
From a Drawing by J. Guerin.

a cadet in the Paris Military School; the second and third (Figs. 2 and 3) when an officer of Artillery, and the fourth as Captain

Fig. 2.—Officier d'Artillerie, 1792. Age 23.

in 1793. Before the close of that year Buonaparte was a General—at twenty-four years of age.

Little of Napoleon's immense will-power is shown in the first signature, although the

Fig. 3.—Artillery Officer in 1793. Age 24.

emphasis of its strokes shows force of character even at age 16. In the next three signatures the *active* force of his will begins to assert itself, noticeably in Fig. 4, with its upward movement, and its heavy, outstretching final stroke.

Fig. 4.—Captain in 1793. Age 24.



EARLY IN 1796. AGE 26.
Painted at Milan, by Appiani.

In Figs. 5, 6, and 7 we have signatures of Napoleon as General Buonaparte, and the growing power and force of the man are matched by the increasing vehemence and activity of his writing. The double *B* of Fig. 7, and the excessive heaviness of the

Fig. 5.—As General, 1795. Age 26.

under-line, are truly significant, when we note that these imperious strokes were written by a young man in his twenty-seventh year.

In February, 1796, Napoleon was appointed General-in-Chief of the army in Italy, and he signed "Buonaparte" up to the 29th of that month. From Nice, on the 28th of March, 1796, he wrote to the Executive Directory in Paris, informing them that he had taken command of the army, and he signed as in Fig. 8—without the *u*—*aa* alteration generally adopted by Napoleon from that time.

Fig. 9 is the signature of a letter reporting the Battle of Montenotté, and the next was appended to his proclamation at Milan,



EARLY IN 1796. AGE 26.
From Life, by C. Vernet.

Fig. 6.—Le général Buonaparte. 1795. Age 26.

on the 20th May, 1796: "Soldiers, you have precipitated yourselves like a torrent from the top of the Apennines—Milan is yours!"

Fig. 7.—As General. A double *B*. 1796. Age 26.

(translation). The ascendant direction of Napoleon's signatures is here very marked, and from this time they increase in reckless-

Fig. 8.—March 28, 1796. Age 26.

ness of gesture until they reach their limit; and then we shall see how this terrific force of will and reckless action die away in the weakness of defeat and ruin.

Fig. 9.—April 14, 1796. Age 26.

From Egypt, Napoleon wrote Figs. 11 and 12; the latter as First Consul, and Consul for Life of the Republic of France. The

Fig. 10.—At Milan, May 20, 1796. Age 26.

outward, aggressive-looking thrusts, which are seen in these specimens, are present in many of the signatures of those men whom Napoleon selected for his generals. This No. 12 is a striking example.

The address, of which Fig. 13 is a facsimile, was written by Napoleon, the messenger was intercepted by Nelson, and Fig. 14 shows the latter's indorsement—"found on the person of the Courier." This was written by Lord Nelson with his left hand.

The letter to which Figs. 13 and 14 relate is

so interesting that it is worth quoting in full; here is a translation of it:—

Cairo, 7th Thermidor [i.e., July 25th, 1798].

You will see by the public papers the account of the battles and conquest of Egypt, which has been sufficiently disputed to add a leaf to the military glory of this army. Egypt is the richest country on the face of the earth for corn, rice, vegetables, and meats.

Fig. 11.—In Egypt, 1798. Age 28.

Barbarism is at its height. There is no money, not even to pay the troops. I expect to be in France in two months. I trust my interests to you. I have many, many domestic annoyances, for the veil is completely raised; you alone on earth remain to me; your friendship is very dear to me; nothing more is wanting to make me a misanthrope but to lose it, and to see you betray me. It is my unhappy lot to entertain in my heart every feeling at once for one single person. You understand me.

Make arrangements that I may have some country place on my arrival, either near Paris or in Burgundy.

Fig. 12.—As First Consul, 1798. Bonaparte Age 28.

I count upon passing the winter and burying myself there. I am sick of human nature; I require solitude and isolation; pomp wearies me; all feeling is withered up; glory is insipid; at the age of twenty-nine I have exhausted everything; there is nothing left for me but to become a thorough egotist. I reckon upon keeping my house; never will I surrender it to anyone. I have only wherewith to live! Farewell, my only friend. I have never been unjust to you; you owe me this justice in spite of the wish of my heart to be so. You understand me!

This remarkable letter contains 266 words, among which are twelve *I*'s, nine *me*'s, seven

Fig. 13.—From a letter addressed by Napoleon to his brother, July 25, 1798. Age 29. *Au citoyen Joseph Bonaparte, député au Conseil des 500, Paris.* [See Fig. 14.] Vol. x.—67.

found on the
person of the
Courier,

Fig. 14.—[See Fig. 13.] Nelson intercepted the letter, and endorsed it with his left hand. Found on the person of the Courier.

my's, and one *myself*; twenty-nine "personal" words, which amount to nearly 11 per cent. of the 266 words which compose the letter. We may suspect that already—at age twenty-nine—Napoleon had "become a thorough egotist." Another interesting feature of this letter which Nelson captured is



NAPOLEON AS FIRST CONSUL IN 1799. AGE 30.

the droop of the handwriting across the page, especially where Napoleon wrote, "I am sick of human nature," etc. As we shall see later on, this droop of handwriting below the horizontal level from which each line of writing starts is thoroughly in accord with the physical action of depression and weariness.

But here come some good examples of the utter recklessness and the extraordinary will-force of this man. Look at Fig. 15; it is

Fig. 15.—At St. Cloud, as Emperor, May 25, 1804. Age 34.

one of Napoleon's first signatures as Emperor—he was then thirty-four years old. Fig. 16 was written in the same year, 1804. The

Fig. 16.—As Emperor, 1804. Age 35.



IN JUNE 1800. NAPOLEON AT MOUNT ST. BERNARD. AGE 29.
A Photograph from the Original Painting by David.

next facsimile (Fig. 17) is a copy of the Emperor's signature on his instructions to General Massena, who had command of 50,000 men in Italy, and the letter ends: "Gain me victories" (translation). We are almost reminded (in a minor key) of the

Fig. 17.—". . . Gain me victories.—Napoleon."
September 18, 1805. Age 36.

Yankee who said to his son: "Git dollars! Git 'em honestly if you can, but if not, Git dollars!"—but for the impossibility of crediting with any scruple a man who could make such a signature as Fig. 17.

We often unconsciously betray ourselves in our trivial actions, and Napoleon has well earned his character as an utterly unscrupulous man by these hand-gestures he has left behind him. "Gain me victories!" Yes! And at any cost, gain ME victories!—reads this message to those who have studied men's written-gesture.

The next signature (Fig. 18) is positively rampant, and is accompanied by another of these cruel and fierce pen-thrusts. It was written immediately after Napoleon's victory at Austerlitz.

The "mounting" movement so strongly shown by Fig. 18 may often be seen in the handwriting of ambitious and eager men. An ardent and active man shows this peculiarity in his writing, perhaps unconsciously, probably because ardour, activity,

ambition, and their allied qualities are usually accompanied by a plentiful store of nerve-force; and plenty of nerve-force causes a

Fig. 18.—Written immediately after his victory at Austerlitz,
December 3, 1805. Age 36.

man to perform all his acts in a buoyant and expansive fashion: he readily, and without conscious effort, expends the extra nerve-force which is needed, in order—for example—to continually thrust his pen upward and further away from his body than is really necessary to the act of writing.

After the campaign of 1806, Napoleon often signed only the first letters of his name, to be later on reduced to merely the initial *N*.



A REPRESENTATION OF THE CORONATION OF NAPOLEON AS EMPEROR IN 1804. AGE 35.

We see this abbreviation in Figs. 19 and 20; while at Berlin, in 1806 (Fig. 21), the signature was slightly fuller—another ferocious final stroke. Thirteen days before this

Fig. 19.—In 1806. *Nap.* Age 35.

signature was written at Berlin, its writer had won the Battle of Jena, and had thus justified his arrogant boast to lay Prussia at his feet.

It was at Berlin, where the signature in Fig. 21 was written, that Napoleon did one

Fig. 20. At Potsdam, October 26, 1806. *Nap.* Age 37.

of the very few acts of generosity which can be traced to him. The Prince of Hatzfeld, continuing to live in Berlin under Napoleon's protection, corresponded, nevertheless, with Hohenlohe, then in the field and opposed to Napoleon, and Hatzfeld sent information of

the state and movements of the French army. One of his letters to Hohenlohe fell into the hands of the French; the Prince was arrested; his wife gained access to Napoleon, and, ignorant of her husband's treachery, spoke with the boldness of innocence in his favour. The Emperor handed to her Prince Hatzfeld's letter, and, confounded by the clearness of the evidence against her husband, the Princess fell on her knees in silence. "Put the paper in the fire, madam," said Napoleon, "and there will then be no proof." It is, of course,

Fig. 21.—At Berlin, October 29, 1806. Age 37.

impossible to say to what extent Napoleon was guided in this action by his susceptibility to female influences, but let us give him the benefit of the doubt, and ascribe the act to a sudden impulse of generous feeling.

At this time—when the French were at Berlin—perhaps no part of Buonaparte's conduct created more general disgust than his meanness in robbing the funeral monument of Frederick the Great of his sword and



THE EMPEROR IN 1805. AGE 36.
From the Original Painting by Gerard.

orders. These unworthy trophies he sent to Paris, along with the best statues and pictures of the galleries of Berlin and Potsdam—conduct which may be described as house-breaking and robbery, glorified under the name of war.

The signature in Fig. 22 was written at the close of the 1806 campaign, and that of Fig. 23 early in 1807.

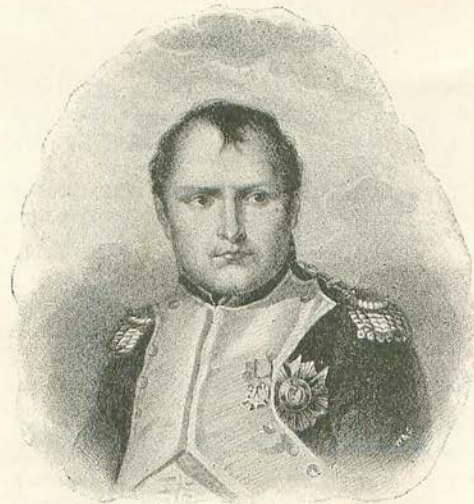
Fig. 22.—End of 1806. Age 37.

At this date—January, 1807—Napoleon had just been illustrating his entire unscrupulousness by making use of a forged letter. He authorized the circulation of an

Fig. 23.—Written at Varsovie. Napoleon. January 27, 1807.
Age 37.

appeal to the Poles which bore the forged signature of the venerated Polish general, Kosciusko. "Dear countrymen and friends," said the forged proclamation, "arise! The Great Nation is before you—Napoleon expects, and Kosciusko calls on you. We are under the Ægis of the Monarch who vanquishes difficulties as if by miracles, and the re-animation of Poland is too glorious an achievement not to have been reserved for him by the Eternal." This forged appeal to the Poles for their assistance against Russia deceived many of those to whom it was addressed, and very soon after it was issued two Polish officers who had joined Napoleon's army sent from Berlin another proclamation, which commenced: "Poles! Napoleon—the Great, the Invincible—enters Poland with an army of 300,000 men. Without wishing to fathom the mystery of his views, let us strive to merit his magnanimity. 'I will see (*he has said to us*) whether you deserve to be a nation!' Your avenger, your restorer is here" Thus did the great Napoleon trick the Poles into the belief that he had come to restore them. It is strange, indeed, that any one could ever have felt any confidence

in a man with a face like this 1806 portrait, for example, which shows Napoleon as he looked a little while before he wrote the original of Fig. 23. Indeed, all the portraits of him



IN 1806. AGE 37.
Engraved by J. Thomson, from an Original Painting as Emperor of the French and King of Italy.



NAPOLEON IN 1807. AGE 38.

which may be considered likenesses suggest a powerful and dangerous member of the actively aggressive criminal class, whom one would probably fight shy of if it were possible to meet him nowadays as one's *vis-à-vis* inside a London omnibus.

Now comes the first of Napoleon's terrific *N*'s (Fig. 24), which he used as a signature ;



Fig. 24.—From the Imperial camp at Tilsit. *N.* June 22, 1807. Age 37.

it was written nine days after he had defeated the Russians at Friedland. The signature given in Fig. 25 was written at Madrid in 1808. Napoleon had transferred his attention to Spain, and had placed his brother Joseph on the Spanish throne. There was no pretence of justice in the action, which

was followed by the long and cruel war which ended in Napoleon's downfall. Are not these two *N*'s



Fig. 25.—At Madrid. *N.* December 7, 1808. Age 39.

suggestive of the violent and aggressive force of their writer?

On the 18th of April, 1809, Napoleon wrote to Marshal Massena as follows: "Activity, activity, celerity: I commend myself to you" (translation). In Fig. 26 we have his signature to this letter.

From the Imperial camp at Ratisbon on the 24th of April, 1809, the Emperor addressed a proclamation to the army, ending thus: "Before a month has elapsed, I shall be at Vienna" (translation)—a facsimile of the signature is given in Fig. 27. The extraordinary forcefulness of the man is there; look, too,

at its eager, upward direction, and at the



Fig. 26.—" . . . Activity, activity, celerity: I commend myself to you.—Napoleon." April 18, 1809. Age 39.

tell-tale final stroke again. Fig. 28 was written by this marvellous man *at* Vienna; he got there with his army in less than three



Fig. 27.—" . . . Before a month has elapsed, I shall be at Vienna.—Napoleon." April 24, 1809, from the camp at Ratisbon. Age 39.

weeks out of the month he allowed himself. Notice the exultant movement this specimen shows.

If we turn back to the first page of this article, and glance over the signatures from

Fig. 1 to this Fig. 28, we can scarcely fail to notice one very prominent trait in them—the great activity of the hand-movement which formed them, a quality which is particularly well shown in Fig. 28.

Fig. 28.—At Vienna. *N.* May 13, 1809. Age 39.

In fact, if I were asked to describe in one word the most salient quality of Napoleon's handwriting, I would say—activity. This is not merely the activity of an ordinarily energetic man, but it is a restless, impetuous sort of brain excitation which caused this hand—now dead for seventy-five years—to make these extraordinary and unique movements which have been left outside death, and which remain to testify to the possession by Napoleon, in a supreme degree, of the quality he so much valued. And, side by side with this activity, another trait is hardly less plain—the reckless, unscrupulous, unrestrained nature of the man who wrote the signatures.



AT THE TIME OF THE RUSSIAN CAMPAIGN IN 1812. AGE 43.
From the Painting by Charlet, "En Bivouac."

Rarely do we find activity such as this, and rarely do we find such

recklessness: still

more rarely do we find these two qualities, both highly developed, combined in the nature of one man. But when we do find such a combination, we may look for a man with criminal propensities of the first water, and with the active power to make himself a common danger to society. Fortunately for society, such a combination seldom exists: we may find the criminal propensity without the active power, or we may find the active

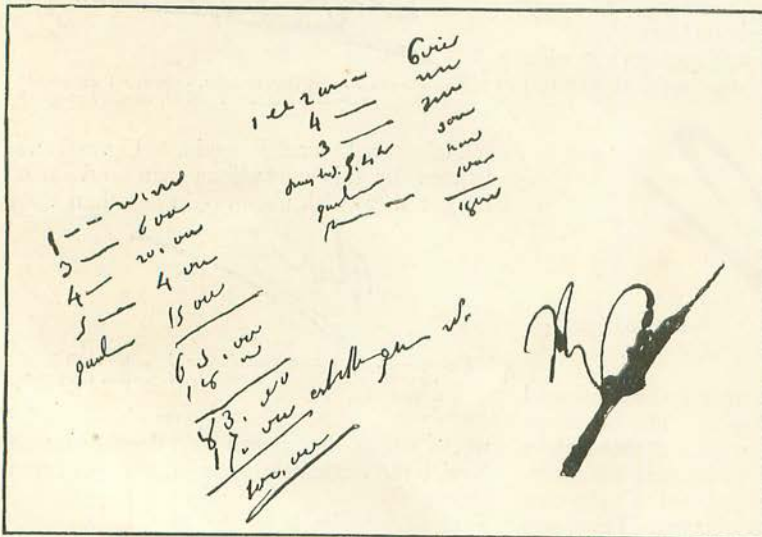


Fig. 29.—The adding-up of an army-corps, signed *N.*, all written by Napoleon just before his march on Moscow, 1812. Age 43.

power without the criminal propensity—rarely does Nature combine the two in one man to the degree in which Napoleon possessed both qualities.

Fig. 29 was written just before Napoleon's march on Moscow, in the autumn of 1812. With a fierce recklessness—akin to that which led him to disregard the lives of his devoted soldiers—he has here jotted down some of their numbers. The figures on the left relate to infantry, those on the right to cavalry, thus:—

Infantry.		Cavalry.
20,000	.....	6,000
6,000	.....	4,000
20,000	.....	2,000
4,000	.....	3,000
15,000	.....	2,000
—	.....	1,000
65,000		18,000

He combined the two totals, and to their sum ("83,000") Napoleon added "17,000 artillery," making up a grand total of "100,000" men for this one army corps. And what a reckless and exultant "N" is this one which sets the stamp upon this piece of paper! It is the gesture of a man who is mad with the passion of an ambition which takes no count of cost. One hundred thousand lives—most of which became deaths during the subsequent retreat from Moscow—are here dashed down with pen and ink like so many worthless counters at a game of cards!

In September, 1812, Napoleon entered Moscow as a conqueror—to leave it, soon after, under circumstances which cost him nearly half a million of soldiers' lives, and went far to break his power. Figs. 30, 31,

Fig. 30.—Entering Moscow, September 12, 1812. Age 43.

and 32 were written when entering or at Moscow, and the ascendant movement of Fig. 30 is striking. This is

Fig. 31.—Written at 3 a.m. on September 21st, 1812. Age 43.

in strong contrast with Fig. 33, written when in retreat from the burning city,

Fig. 32.—Napoleon. September 21, 1812. Age 43.

and at a time when even Napoleon must have felt the gravity of such a retreat during a Russian winter. However, he left his soldiers

Fig. 33.—The retreat from Moscow. N. October 6, 1812. Age 43.

two months later, to live or die as they could manage, and went to Paris to get together more men to fight for him and to supply his hungry love of power.

The illustration in Fig. 34 shows Napoleon's signature twice scratched out by him and written a third time. It was written at Dresden, and General Pelet has recorded that the Emperor meditated some time before sending the orders to which this signature was appended.



AS A PRISONER IN JULY, 1815. AGE 45.
The Portrait of Napoleon on board the "Bellerophon."
Painted by Sir Ch. Eastlake, R.A.

Fig. 34.—*Napoleon*. Scratched out twice, and written a third time. Dresden, October 1, 1813. Age 44.

Now comes the most remarkable signature that Napoleon ever wrote. Whether you view it merely as a signature, or, looking more closely, as a human gesture, Fig. 35

Fig. 35.—*N*. Written at Erfurt, October 23, 1813. Age 44.

is extraordinary among an extraordinary series. The man had just been disastrously beaten at Leipsic—a fatal battle—and he re-crossed the Rhine with only 70,000 of the 350,000 fresh victims he had got together after his Russian disaster. The rage and fury shown in Fig. 35 can scarcely be overlooked: Napoleon appears to have crushed down on the paper and splintered the pen he used.

The *N* shown in Fig. 36 was written after the allied forces had at last succeeded in

Fig. 36.—*N*. Written at Fontainebleau, April 4, 1814. Age 44.

taking possession of Paris, and Napoleon's downfall had commenced. The following signatures are in marked contrast with those

Fig. 37.—A scrawled *Napoleon*. Written at Elba, September 9, 1814. Age 45.

written at the height of his power—they are all less forceful, and some are significantly weak. Look, for example, at Fig. 37, which

was written at Elba after Napoleon had abdicated—its droop is at once seen. And in Fig. 38 we have his signature after Waterloo had been won by Wellington, and when even Napoleon knew he was at last beaten. The letter from which Fig. 38 has been copied was written by Napoleon to the Prince

Fig. 38.—*Napoleon*. Written on the day before he surrendered himself to the captain of the *Bellerophon*, July 14, 1815. Age 45.

Regent of England on the day before he surrendered himself to the captain of the *Bellerophon*. There is here no ascendant angle of forty-five degrees or more, but the

Fig. 39.—Written at St. Helena, December 11, 1816. Age 47. This is Napoleon's first signature in the island.

signature drops below the level from which the *N* starts.

The three remaining signatures, Figs. 39, 40, and 41, were all written at St. Helena. Contrast them with those which came earlier

Fig. 40.—At St. Helena, 1818. Age 49.

in this series. The comparison is very suggestive of Napoleon's broken power. Fig. 41 is a facsimile of the concluding sentence



AT ST. HELENA IN 1819. AGE 50.

of Napoleon's will—"ceci est mon testament écrit tout entier de ma propre main. — Napoleon"—and was written by him twenty days before his death. Nearly every word droops below its starting level, and the bold, aggressive strokes of the signature have vanished, even the underline does not extend beyond the final *n*

of "Napoleon." How different are these

*Ceci est mon testament
écrit tout entier de
ma propre main
Napoléon*

Fig. 41.—(Translation) "... this is my will, entirely written with my own hand.—Napoleon." St. Helena, April 15, 1821. Age 51.

NOTE.—I thank Mr. William Tegg for permission to reproduce some facsimiles published by him twenty years ago, and also Mr. Samuel Davey, of 47, Great Russell Street, W.C., for an extended permission to reproduce from my *Handwriting and Expression* (Kegan, Paul & Co., 1892) some of Napoleon's signatures which Mr. Davey lent me for the illustration of that work. Also, I refer readers who may like to know more about the *rationalité* of this study to my paper on "Written Gesture" in the *Nineteenth Century* for March of this year.—J. H. S.



NAPOLEON DEAD.

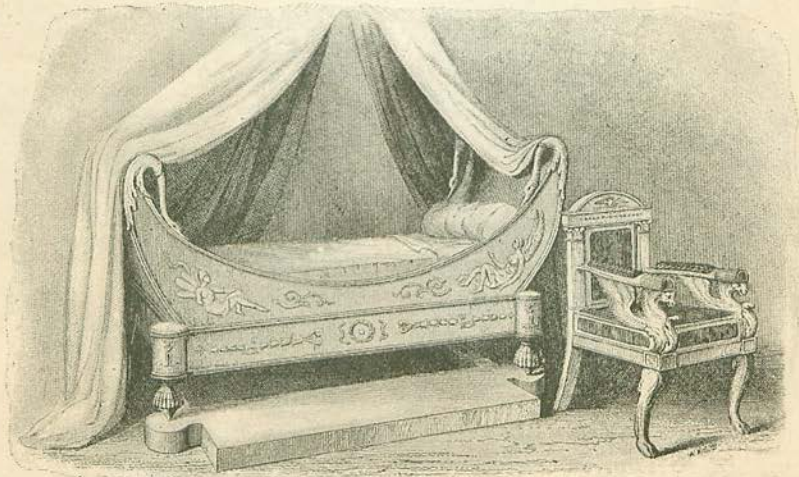
Engraved by W. Humphreys, from a Drawing made at St. Helena by Captain Marryat, C.B., an hour after the Emperor's death, 5th May, 1821. Age 51-52.

later signatures from those written when this man was conquering all Europe, no matter at what cost of human lives!

It would be rash to say that signatures alone supply adequate material from which to diagnose character; it would be equally rash to deny that sig-

natures are often very expressive of characteristic traits—the present series can scarcely fail to impress us with the truth of the theory that handwriting is a recorded tracing of our gesture, which is, moreover, highly expressive of our individual peculiarities.

The temperate and scientific treatment which this study has lately received in France and England has done much to counteract the injurious effects of a sufficiently widespread charlatanism, and of superficial treatment by its too enthusiastic supporters.



NAPOLEON'S BED AND CHAIR.