Bonapartism and French liberalism.

The historical importance which Mr. H. A. L. Fisher, in his essays on "Bonapartism" (Oxford Clarendon Press), attributes to Napoleon's conversations at St. Helena, raises questions of great interest. He believes that Napoleon felt the need of harmonizing his life with the "requirements of French liberalism," and, to this end, spoke of himself as the representative of the ideas of 1789. This contention Napoleon sought to substantiate by dictating, in 1820, a constitution for the hypothetical reign of Napoleon II., which should include liberties never conceded by him — liberty of the press, freedom from administrative tyranny, and parliamentary control. He argued that the Empire had always meant peace, although in the search for a firm basis of peace he had continually been baffled by the English. In the single essay where this matter is discussed, Mr. Fisher has not given himself room enough to offer adequate evidence of the influence of these conversations upon the public opinion of

France. He mentions merely the fact that the journalist Armand Carrel was persuaded by them that Napoleon was a liberal. He appears also to believe that Louis Napoleon's book on "Napoleonic Ideas," published in 1839, had some influence in propagating the legend. In a later lecture on the downfall of the Second Empire, he remarks that Napoleon III., in making the concessions which opened the way for the Liberal Empire, was moved, partly at least, by the feeling that he must be consistent with what he had set forth as the Napoleonic system. The other lectures in the volume, covering the important phases of the subject to the final ruin of Bonapartism in 1870, are vigorous and suggestive in grasp of matter and style of treatment. This is especially true of the first, which shows wherein the Revolutionary movement was simply a persistence of political habits formed under the Old Régime, and how these tendencies smoothed the road of the master. But Mr. Fisher is mistaken in the view that even the early assemblies contented themselves with fixing the general principles of a legislative measure, leaving to the executive the duty of providing detailed regulations for their application. One looks through the columns of Duvergier in vain for evidence of this practice, and discovers, on the contrary, that the Constituent assembly, for example, was constantly encroaching upon executive functions, instead of abandoning any of its proper work to the executive.