QUOTATIONS

THE PRESIDENT AND THE FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

WE have, for the past three weeks, called attention to the failure of the federal Food and Drugs Act, under the interpretation recently given it by the Supreme Court, to protect the public against loss, both in health and pocket, from lying claims regarding the curative effects of nostrums. As soon as the new interpretation became public, some of the more progressive members of Congress began to plan for getting an amendment to the pure food law that would specifically prohibit untruthful claims for therapeutic effects of drugs. President Taft, on June 21, took official cognizance of the blow that the Supreme Court decision had dealt the Food and Drugs Act by sending a special message to congress urging the very amendments that are needed to restore that law to its previous efficiency. Said the President:

> An evil which menaces the general health of the people strikes at the life of the nation. In my opinion . . . the sale of drugs under knowingly false claims as to their effect in disease constitutes an evil and warrants me in calling the matter to the attention of the Congress.
>
> Fraudulent misrepresentations of the curative value of nostrums not only operate to defraud purchasers, but are a distinct menace to the public health. There are none so credulous as sufferers from disease. The need is urgent for legislation which will prevent the raising of false hopes of speedy cures of serious ailments by misstatements of the fact as to worthless mixtures on which the sick will rely while their diseases progress unchecked.

To meet the objection that has been raised in some quarters that the curative effect of nostrums is a matter of opinion and not of fact and that the opinion will vary both as regards the so-called schools of medicine and also as to individuals of the same school, Mr. Taft says:

> No physician of standing in his profession, no matter to what school of medicine he may belong, entertains the slightest idea that any of these preparations will work the wonders promised on the labels.

And further:

> Of course, as pointed out by the Supreme Court, any attempt to legislate against mere expressions of opinion would be abortive; nevertheless, if knowingly false misstatements of fact as to the effect of the preparations be provided against, the greater part of the evil will be subject to control.

That the amendment suggested by the President will be fought by the "patent medicine" interests is to be expected. The Proprietary Association, as recently as June 17, sent out a letter purporting to give "the legal aspect of the Johnson case." The gist of the letter is contained in the following sentence that appears in it:

> As there is no science in therapeutics, the practise of medicine being based on opinion and not on definite scientific facts—any statement concerning the curative properties of any drug, chemical or medicine, is largely a "matter of opinion." . . .

In the opinion of the Proprietary Association—in other words, in the opinion of "patent medicine" makers—"the effect of the decision of the Supreme Court does not change or weaken the Food and Drugs Act in any particular."

President Taft, as evidenced by his special message, disagrees with the "patent medicine" men, for in his message he says:

> I fear that if no remedial legislation be granted at this session the good which has already been accomplished in regard to these nostrums will be undone, and the people of the country will be deprived of a powerful safeguard against dangerous fraud.

We believe that the restrictions the President would have placed on the nostrum business are more likely to meet with public approval than the "wide-open" policy advocated by the makers of "patent medicines." Amend the act!—*Journal of the American Medical Association.*

SCIENTIFIC JOURNALS AND ARTICLES

THE *Journal of Experimental Zoology* for July contains two articles: "Assortative Mating, Variability and Inheritance of Size, in the Conjugation of Paramecium," by H. S.

Jennings, and "The Reproduction of Paramæcium Aurelia in a 'Constant' Culture Medium of Beef Extract," by Lorande L. Woodruff and George A. Baitsell.

The contents of the last issue of the *Philippine Journal of Science* in the section devoted to chemical and geological sciences and the industries contains articles as follows: "Philippine Firewood," by Alvin J. Cox; "Quinine Esters of Phenylarsinic Acid Derivatives," by K. J. Oechslin; "The Mechanical Analysis of Soil," by Wallace E. Pratt; "The Economic Possibilities of the Mangrove Swamps of the Philippines," by Robert R. Williams.

SCIENTIFIC BOOKS

Reptiles of the World. By Raymond Ditmars. New York, Sturgis & Walton Company. 1910. Pp. xi + 373; 89 plates, 1 colored.

Of the numerous popular books on natural history that have appeared recently, few probably meet a greater need than this comprehensive work on the reptiles of the world. It is thus fortunate that Mr. Ditmars has undertaken the task, for his long connection with the New York Zoological Park has given him familiarity with living examples of a large number of forms and a knowledge of the information desired by the class of people who will presumably find most use for the book.

The limits of one volume do not, of course, permit a full treatment of the subject, but, as a rule, the author has used good judgment in the selection of material. All of the large groups are defined, down to and including the families, and the more important genera and species are described. The less important families, *i. e.*, those of less general interest, are given but a brief description, the less important genera and species are omitted, and genera that contain a large number of closely similar species, *e. g.*, the Anoles and Sceloperi, are given a rather full description supplemented by a short account of a few of the better known forms. The book is thus not burdened with details.

The descriptions are brief, couched in non-technical terms, and admirably supplemented by excellent illustrations from photographs, mostly of living animals. It is refreshing to find the habits so fully discussed. They are given nearly as much space as the descriptions (in some cases more), and even when it has been necessary to treat a group very briefly the general habits are often given. The range is outlined in each case, and about as fully as one can expect in such a work.

It is not easy to criticize the book when one keeps in mind its aim "to give in a popular manner a general survey of the reptiles of the world." Thus, while the lack of detail in many places and the too brief and general descriptions will be regretted by scientists, they can not be condemned, for they are unavoidable defects in a book of this kind. However, the author makes the further statement that "while the manner aims to be popular . . . it is at the same time, the writer hopes, everywhere in accord with the latest results of the scientific study of the subject," and there will be differences of opinion on this point.

In the first place, it is to be regretted that a more recent nomenclature has not been used. It goes without saying that a book of this kind can not give space to nomenclatural disputes, and it may even be admitted that it may profitably retain names that have been replaced, if the new names have not as yet become well established in the literature. But it seems to the reviewer that nothing is to be gained by adhering to old names when the new ones have become reasonably well known (*e. g.*, *Lacertilia* for *Sauria*, *Ophidia* for *Serpentes*, *Eutænia* for *Thamnophis*), and particularly in a book that aims to present the subject, no matter how popularly, in its present stage.

Another criticism that may be made is that relatively too much space is given to the habits of captive specimens. The habits in captivity furnish only a general clue to the habits in nature, and, as a rule, the activities of a captive animal are only a small part of the normal activities. Thus one may deter-