

**HISTORIC DOUBTS  
RELATIVE TO NAPOLEON  
BUONAPARTE**

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Historic doubts relative to Napoleon Buonaparte by Richard Whately

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**RICHARD WHATELY**

**HISTORIC DOUBTS  
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HISTORIC  
D O U B T S

RELATIVE TO

NAPOLEON BUONAPARTE.



"Is not the same reason available in theology and in politics?....  
Will you follow truth but to a certain point?"

*Burke's Vindication of Natural Society.*

*W. D. Hop. Writ. by*

SEVENTH EDITION.

LONDON:  
B. FELLOWES, LUDGATE STREET.

1841.

*93. c. 9*

## P R E F A C E.

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SEVERAL of the readers of this little work have derived much amusement from the mistakes of others respecting its nature and object. It has been by some represented as a serious attempt to inculcate universal scepticism; while others have considered it as a jeu d'esprit, &c. The Author does not however design to entertain his readers with accounts of the mistakes which have arisen respecting it; because many of them, he is convinced, would be received with incredulity; and he could not, without an indelicate exposure of individuals, verify his anecdotes.

But some sensible readers have complained of the difficulty of determining *what* they are to believe. Of the existence of Buonaparte, indeed, they remained fully convinced; nor, if it were left doubtful, would any important results ensue; but if they can give no *satisfactory reason* for their conviction, how can they know, it is asked, that they may not be mistaken as to other points of greater consequence, on which they are no less fully convinced, but on which all men are not agreed? The Author has accordingly been solicited to endeavour to frame some canons which may furnish a standard for determining what evidence is to be received. This he

conceives to be impracticable, except to that extent to which it is accomplished by a sound system of logic. The full accomplishment of it, indeed, would confer on man the unattainable attribute of infallibility.

But the difficulty complained of he conceives to arise from their *misstating the grounds of their own conviction*. They are convinced, indeed, and perhaps with very sufficient reason; but they imagine this reason to be a different one from what it is. The evidence to which they have assented is applied to their minds in a different manner from that in which they believe it is—and suppose it ought to be—applied. And when challenged to defend and justify their own belief, they feel at a loss, because they are attempting to maintain a position which is not in fact that in which their force lies.

For a development of the nature, the consequences, and the remedies of this mistake, the reader is referred to "*Hinds on Inspiration*," pp. 30—46. If such a development is to be found in other books, the Author of the following pages at least has never chanced to meet with any attempt of the kind.

It is only necessary to add, that as this work first appeared in the year 1819, many things are spoken of in the present tense to which the past would now be applicable.

The Postscript was added to the third edition, which was published soon after the accounts of Buonaparte's death reached us.

## HISTORIC DOUBTS

RELATIVE TO

## NAPOLEON BUONAPARTE.

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LONG as the public attention has been occupied by the extraordinary Personage from whose ambition we are supposed to have so narrowly escaped, the subject seems to have lost scarcely anything of its interest. We are still occupied in recounting the exploits, discussing the character, inquiring into the present situation, and even conjecturing as to the future prospects of Napoleon Buonaparte.

Nor is this at all to be wondered at, if we consider the very extraordinary nature of those exploits, and of that character; their greatness and extensive importance, as well as the unexampled strangeness of the events, and also, that strong additional stimulant, the mysterious uncertainty that hangs over the character of the man. If it



be doubtful whether any history (exclusive of such as is avowedly fabulous) ever attributed to its hero such a series of wonderful achievements compressed into so small a space of time, it is certain that to no one were ever assigned so many dissimilar characters.

It is true, indeed, that party prejudices have drawn a favourable and an unfavourable portrait of almost every eminent man ; but amidst all the diversities of colouring, something of the same general outline is always distinguishable. And even the virtues in the one description bear some resemblance to the vices of another : rashness, for instance, will be called courage, or courage, rashness ; heroic firmness, and obstinate pride, will correspond in the two opposite descriptions ; and in some leading features, both will agree. Neither the friends nor the enemies of Philip of Macedon, or of Julius Cæsar, ever questioned their **COURAGE** or their **MILITARY SKILL**.

With Buonaparte, however, it has been otherwise. This obscure Corsican adventurer, a man, according to some, of extraordinary talents and courage, according to others, of very moderate abilities and a rank coward, advanced rapidly in the French army, obtained a high command, gained a series of important victories, and, elated by success, embarked in an expedition against

Egypt; which was planned and conducted, according to some, with the most consummate skill, according to others, with the utmost wildness and folly: he was unsuccessful however; and leaving the army of Egypt in a very distressed situation, he returned to France, and found the nation, or at least the army, so favourably disposed towards him, that he was enabled, with the utmost ease, to overthrow the existing government, and obtain for himself the supreme power; at first under the modest appellation of Consul, but afterwards with the more sounding title of Emperor. While in possession of this power, he overthrew the most powerful coalitions of the other European states against him; and though driven from the sea by the British fleets, overran nearly the whole continent, triumphant; finishing a war, not unfrequently, in a single campaign, he entered the capitals of most of the hostile potentates, deposed and created kings at his pleasure, and appeared the virtual sovereign of the chief part of the continent, from the frontiers of Spain to those of Russia. Even those countries we find him invading with prodigious armies, defeating their forces, penetrating to their capitals, and threatening their total subjugation. But at Moscow his progress is stopped: a winter of unusual severity, cooperating with the efforts of the Russians, to-

tally destroys his enormous host ; and the German sovereigns throw off the yoke, and combine to oppose him. He raises another vast army, which is also ruined at Leipsic ; and again another, with which, like a second Antæus, he for some time maintains himself in France ; but is finally defeated, deposed, and banished to the island of Elba, of which the sovereignty is conferred on him. Thence he returns, in about nine months, at the head of 600 men, to attempt the deposition of King Louis, who had been peaceably recalled ; the French nation declare in his favour, and he is reinstated without a struggle. He raises another great army to oppose the allied powers, which is totally defeated at Waterloo : he is a second time deposed, surrenders to the British, and is placed in confinement at the island of St. Helena. Such is the outline of the eventful history presented to us ; in the detail of which, however, there is almost every conceivable variety of statement ; while the motives and conduct of the chief actor are involved in still greater doubt, and the subject of still more eager controversy.

In the midst of these controversies, the preliminary question, concerning the *existence* of this extraordinary personage, seems never to have occurred to any one as a matter of doubt ; and to show even the smallest hesitation in admitting it,