

**HISTORIC DOUBTS  
RELATIVE TO NAPOLEON  
BUONAPARTE, PP. 3-46**

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Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Buonaparte, pp. 3-46 by Richard Whately

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**RICHARD WHATELY**

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Whately, Richard, ed. of Dublin,

## HISTORIC DOUBTS

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*.

The first author who stated fairly the connection between the evidence of testimony and the evidence of experience, was HUME, in his *ESSAY ON MIRACLES*; a work abounding in sources of great use in the conduct of life. — *Edinburgh Rev.* Sept. 1844.

FROM THE ELEVENTH LONDON EDITION.



ANDOVER:  
WARREN F. DRAPER,  
MAIN STREET.  
1874.

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ANDOVER:  
STEREOTYPED BY WARREN F. DRAPER.

W55

## 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*, etc. 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 endeavor 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; including under that title a portion — that which relates to the “laws of evidence”— of what is sometimes treated of under the head of “rhetoric.” But the full and complete accomplishment of such an object would confer on man the unattainable attribute of infallibility.

But the difficulty complained of, he conceives to arise, in many instances, from men's *misstating the grounds of their own conviction*. They are convinced, indeed, and perhaps with very sufficient reasons; 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 any earlier works, the author of the following pages at least has never chanced to meet with any attempt of the kind.<sup>1</sup>

It has been objected, again, by some persons of no great logical accuracy of thought, that as there would not be any *moral blame* imputable to one who should seriously disbelieve, or doubt, the existence of Buonaparte, so neither is a rejection of the Scripture histories to be considered as implying anything morally culpable.

<sup>1</sup> See Elements of Rhetoric, p. 1, ch. II. § 4.



The same objection, such as it is, would apply equally to many of the parables of the New Testament. It might be said, for instance, that, as a woman who should decline taking the trouble of searching for her lost "piece of silver," or a merchant who should neglect making an advantageous purchase of a "goodly pearl," would be guilty of no moral wrong, it must follow that there is nothing morally wrong in neglecting to reclaim a lost sinner, or in rejecting the gospel, etc.

But any man of common sense readily perceives that the force of these parables consists in the circumstance that men do *not* usually show this carelessness about temporal goods; and, therefore, are guilty of gross and culpable *inconsistency* if they are comparatively careless about what is far more important.

So, also, in the present case. If any man's mind were so constituted as to reject the same evidence in *all* matters alike — if, for instance, he really doubted or disbelieved the existence of Buonaparte, and considered the Egyptian pyramids as fabulous, because, forsooth, he had no "experience" of the erection of such huge structures, and *had* experience of travellers telling huge lies, he would be regarded, perhaps, as very silly, or as insane, but not as morally culpable. But if (as is intimated in the concluding sentence of this work) a man is influenced in one case by objections which, in another case, he would deride, then he stands convicted of being unfairly biased by his prejudices.

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.

A Postscript was added to the third edition, which was published soon after the accounts of Buonaparte's death reached us ; and another at the time of the supposed removal of his remains. A third, in reference to more recent occurrences, was added to the ninth edition.

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 confessedly 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 favorable and an unfavorable portrait of almost every eminent man; but amidst all the diversities of coloring, 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