

NAPOLEON: THE LAST PHASE

beyond humanity, then Napoleon was assuredly great. Besides that indefinable spark which we call genius, he represents a combination of intellect and energy which has never perhaps been equalled, never, certainly, surpassed. He carried human faculty to the farthest point of which we have accurate knowledge. Alexander is a remote prodigy, too remote for precise comparison. To Cæsar the same objection is applicable. Homer and Shakespeare are impersonal names. Besides, we need for comparison men of action and business. Of all these great figures, it may be said that we do not know enough. But Napoleon lived under the modern microscope. Under the fiercest glare of scrutiny he enlarged indefinitely the limits of human conception and human possibility. Till he had lived, no one could realise that there could be so stupendous a combination of military and civil genius, such comprehension of view united to such grasp of detail, such prodigious vitality of body and mind. "He contracts history," said Madame d'Houdetot, "and expands imagination." "He has thrown a doubt," said Lord Dudley, "on all past glory; he has made all future renown impossible." This is hyperbole, but with a substance of truth. No name represents so completely and conspicuously dominion, splendour, and catastrophe. He raised himself by the use, and ruined himself by the abuse, of superhuman faculties. He was wrecked by the extravagance of his own genius. No less powers than those which had effected his rise could have achieved his fall.