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Wellington

WATERLOO
AND THE FORTUNES OF PEACE
1814–1852



RORY MUIR

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CHAPTER ONE

CELEBRATIONS AND DIPLOMACY (April 1814–March 1815)

THE LONG WAR was finally over. The battle of Toulouse had been fought on 10 April 1814, and two days later Wellington had learnt of Napoleon's abdication. It took another week before Soult submitted to the new French government, but there was no further fighting, except for a pointless and costly sortie by the garrison of Bayonne on 14 April. On 21 April, before Wellington had even begun to think about his future, Sir Charles Stewart arrived from Paris carrying a letter from Castlereagh offering him the Paris embassy, 'if you have no other object immediately in view, repose after such exertions being in itself a very natural one'. Castlereagh argued that Wellington's authority and prestige would give Britain added influence in France and in the affairs of the Continent as a whole. There would be no need to take up the position for some time but it would be helpful if he could come up to Paris for talks fairly soon.¹

Wellington was genuinely surprised by the offer, replying that he was 'very much obliged and flattered by your thinking of me for a situation for which I should never have thought myself qualified'. This was unduly modest; he had been at the centre of diplomatic negotiations with Spain and Portugal for the last five years, and before that in India, while it was common at the time for important diplomatic positions to be filled by soldiers. Despite his protest he had no hesitation in accepting, explaining to Henry that 'I must serve the public in some manner or other'.²

He left Toulouse at the end of April and arrived in Paris on 4 May. Castlereagh, seeing him for the first time in five years, commented: 'He looks perfectly well, and does not show the effects of his campaigns as much as I expected in his countenance.' He was immediately the centre of attention. Byron's friend, John Cam Hobhouse, a radical with no sympathy for Wellington's politics, was in Paris at the time and admits: 'I felt, for my own part, an insatiable desire to see him, and ran many chances of being kicked and trampled down to get near our great man. Two Englishmen near me showed as much

eagerness as myself to approach him, and one of them as he passed by me said, "Oh, for God's sake, let me see him! – I know you will excuse me, sir, for this; but I must see him!" Nor was the excitement limited to British visitors; when Wellington went to the opera with Castlereagh and his party, he 'was in plain clothes, without any decoration to attract notice, and sat in the back of the box; but he was almost immediately recognised by someone in the pit, and a voice cried out, "*Vellington*." The cry was taken up by others, and at last the whole pit rose, and turning to the box, called out "*Vive Vellington!*" nor would they be satisfied till he stood up and bowed to them, when he was cheered and applauded.³

Wellington spent barely a week in Paris, discussing the peace settlement and the affairs of Spain and Portugal with Castlereagh, and making arrangements with the French authorities for the British cavalry to march from Toulouse to the Channel Ports – the infantry would ship home from Bordeaux. He also met the Emperor Alexander of Russia and Metternich who, possibly prejudiced by Castlereagh, enthused to his wife that Wellington was 'Austrian in his soul'.⁴

And it was in Paris too that he learnt that the British government had marked his most recent victories and the coming of peace with another, final, step in the peerage of the United Kingdom; on 3 May 1814 he had been made Duke of Wellington. He at once wrote thanking the Prime Minister in suitable terms and stressing his pleasure that his principal lieutenants Hope, Graham, Cotton, Hill and Beresford had been raised to the peerage at the same time. While military honours always meant more to Wellington than civil distinctions, he was not indifferent to this latest reward for service, and mixing in Paris with the princes, rulers and statesmen of Europe, he would have been conscious of the importance of rank in an aristocratic age and society. The famously nonchalant announcement of the news to Henry in a postscript – 'I believe I forgot to tell you I was made a Duke' – came almost a fortnight later when, on signing a letter on other questions, Wellington realised that it had hitherto been overlooked. Still, not many men *would* overlook such an honour, certainly not Lord Wellesley for whom the comparison with his own despised Irish marquessate must have been both inescapable and unbearable.⁵

The subject that dominated Wellington's discussions with Castlereagh in Paris was the state of Spain, where unfolding events would have a significant effect on Wellington's reputation at home, and sow the seeds for much subsequent radical criticism. When Ferdinand had been released by the French on 24 March 1814 he had proceeded to Valencia amidst acclamations of joy. He did not fail to notice that the *liberales* and their constitution of 1812 were unpopular in the country. At Valencia on 16 April General Elio had publicly declared his determination, and that of the army, to uphold the King in the

unrestricted exercise of his powers. And at the same time, Ferdinand received a 'Manifesto of the Persians' signed by ninety-six 'servile' members of the Cortes condemning the constitution.⁶ This was enough to overcome Ferdinand's habitual caution. On 4 May he issued a proclamation abolishing the constitution including freedom of the press, and declaring acts of the Cortes void; and a week later on the night of 10 May, Elio's troops occupied Madrid and arrested many leading *liberales*.

Henry Wellesley was careful to avoid any involvement in Ferdinand's coup. He had no love for the *liberales*, but believed that they had strong support in parts of the country and in some sections of the army, and feared that direct action might precipitate a revolution. Ferdinand ignored his warning and did not inform him of his intentions. Wellington had no prior knowledge of the coup at all, and once it had happened, his main concern, shared by Castlereagh, was the danger of civil war. There were rumours that the Third and Fourth Spanish armies, which were in France under Wellington's command, favoured the *liberales* and were preparing to act in their support. With Castlereagh's approval, Wellington proposed to attempt to nip this problem in the bud, and then go on to Madrid 'in order to try whether I cannot prevail upon all parties to be more moderate, and to adopt a constitution more likely to be practicable and to contribute to the peace and happiness of the nation.'⁷

Travelling south, Wellington was reassured to find no signs of impending civil war: the Spanish generals had been anxious not to commit themselves prematurely rather than actively opposing the King. He went on and reached Madrid on 24 May. His first impression was: 'Nothing can be more popular than the King and his measures, as far as they have gone to overthrow the Constitution. The imprisonment of the *Liberales* is thought by some, I believe with justice, unnecessary, and it is certainly highly impolitic; but it is liked by the people at large.' However, the King had failed to follow up his 'great act of vigor' by establishing any new system of government.⁸ Wellington urged the King to honour his promise to prepare and issue a new constitution, and warned him that the arrests would provoke widespread criticism, especially in England. He even presented the King with a lengthy memorandum – characteristically forthright and lucid – arguing that Britain not France was the ally vital for Spain's future, and warning that British help, including loans and the arrears of the subsidy, would depend on a relaxation of his measures against his domestic opponents.⁹

Privately Wellington told Castlereagh that while the King and his ministers had been 'very civil' to him, he thought that they looked to France and did not depend much on a close alliance with Britain.¹⁰ This proved a little too pessimistic. Within a few months Henry Wellesley had negotiated an important treaty with Spain, but the two countries were on diverging paths with little

legacy of goodwill on either side from the struggle against Napoleon. While Spain attempted to return to eighteenth-century absolutist government, in Britain an increasingly vocal, liberal and confident public emerged, which not only condemned Ferdinand's political oppression at home, but was morally outraged that Spain had not abandoned the slave trade. When Wellington was the guest of honour at a Guildhall dinner in London in July, only three months after the war had ended, the Lord Mayor warned him that any attempt to toast the King of Spain would either be positively refused or 'at least received with so much disgust as to render it very disagreeable to me and to every well wisher to the Spanish government'.¹¹

Wellington's mission to Madrid is significant for the insight it provided into his political outlook: his dislike of the unbridled absolutism espoused by many of Ferdinand's supporters was as strong as his irritation with the ideologically driven folly of the *liberales* when they had been in power in 1813. The lack of moderation and tolerance appalled him, especially as he believed it was bound to lead to a reaction. Many values that were taken for granted in a British context were in question in Spain, so that Wellington was reduced to instructing the Minister of War on the importance of the rule of law and the separation of the judicial and executive branches of government, so that consequently captain generals should not interfere in the proceedings of the law courts. Above all Wellington upheld the importance of the army standing aloof from politics and accepting its subordination to the government of the day, which in turn refrained from using the army, or its patronage, to pursue the interest of a political faction or party. The rejection of these values contributed greatly to Spain's misfortunes over the next century and a half.¹²

However, Wellington received little credit for these views at home and he was often accused of having tolerated, if not actively supported, Ferdinand's coup, while the faults of the Spanish *liberales* were ignored by a public which knew little of their actual conduct but found their rhetoric appealing. There was a particularly unpleasant element to an article in *The Times* in November which, in the course of defending Henry Wellesley, condemned Wellington for accepting honours from Ferdinand at a time when the leaders of the Cortes who originally proposed the honours 'had been carried from their homes to dungeons'. The chronology on which the charge depended was hopelessly inaccurate, but that hardly mattered for any refutation would simply give the accusations added life. Wellington could point out that he had offended the editor of *The Times* by refusing to accept a friend of Mr Walter's as a chaplain. But that was not the whole story: Mr Walter's nomination had come via Benjamin Sydenham, and Lord Wellesley had a long-standing and close connection with *The Times*. 'I cannot drive from my mind that this paragraph comes from Apsley House [Lord Wellesley's residence],' Wellington told Pole. 'There is in it

such a knowledge of facts connected with Henry's transactions in Spain, & with the cause of his stay at Madrid after he had obtained leave of absence, which can be got only from his family . . . God forgive me if I am wrong; and indeed the idea of such a thing is painful enough to carry with it its own punishment.' Lord Wellesley's bile could be contained no longer, and he had revenged himself for Wellington's success. It would take some years for the brothers to be reconciled.¹³

After a fortnight in Madrid Wellington turned his face towards England, pausing for a few days at Bordeaux to farewell the proud army that he had led for the past five years, and which was already being broken up and sent in all directions. He left Bordeaux on 15 June and landed at Dover early on the morning of 23 June. It was less than six years since his last homecoming in the autumn of 1808. Then he had been at the centre of the storm over the Convention of Cintra, lampooned in the prints, and execrated by the press, the lightning rod for the nation's disappointment. Now the mood of the country was completely different, drunk with excitement and pleasure at the rapid end of a war that had lasted for so long and which, only two years before, had seemed interminable. At that moment even the Whigs and radicals were delighted with the peace, and for a brief period Wellington was celebrated as a national hero on all sides, without any dissenting voice making itself heard.

After a clamorous early-morning reception at Dover, Wellington reached London that afternoon, and found Kitty and the boys (Arthur, Lord Douro was now seven; Charles, six) at 4 Hamilton Place, just off Park Lane and around the corner from Apsley House. A crowd gathered by the street, cheering in the hope that Wellington would come to the window, but he had already slipped out the back and gone to visit his mother in Upper Brook Street.¹⁴ The Prince Regent and the allied sovereigns and dignitaries, who were nearing the end of their visit to England, had gone down to Portsmouth for a naval review, and on the following day, 24 June, Wellington followed them. Here he was greeted by rapturous crowds who took the horses from his carriage and drew it to the Regent's abode. 'When he went in,' a newspaper reported, 'the voices of a gladdened public resounded from the streets and ramparts; and, after the lapse of a few minutes, his Grace, the Duke of Wellington appeared publicly on the balcony and bowed repeatedly. He looked well, and showed strongly his feelings at what he heard and saw. He wore his British uniform, with several orders.'¹⁵ After weeks of cheering foreign leaders, the public was eager to celebrate Britain's own hero.

On Tuesday 28 June, Wellington took his seat in the House of Lords with the Lord Chancellor, Lord Eldon, commenting that never before had a man risen through every step in the peerage, with each step commemorating a separate

and worthy triumph. It was an occasion of dignity and state. A large crowd including many members of the Commons had assembled to watch, while the peers' benches were unusually crowded. Both the Duchess of Wellington and the Countess of Mornington (Wellington's mother) were present, and saw Wellington enter the House soon after three o'clock preceded by the Duke of Norfolk, Earl Marshal of England, Sir Isaac Heard, Garter King-at-Arms and Sir Thomas Tyrwhit, Usher of the Black Rod, and with the Dukes of Richmond and Somerset accompanying him as his supporters. His patents of creation were then severally read – which took 'a considerable time' – before the usual oaths were administered, he signed his name and took his seat. The Lord Chancellor then addressed him to convey the Thanks of the House which had been voted the previous evening and Wellington replied with a suitable, and therefore not strictly accurate, speech in which he paid tribute to the unwavering support he had received from the government, the ample resources entrusted to him, and the 'cordial assistance' he had received from 'the gallant officers who shared my campaigns'. After a few minutes in which he was congratulated by many of the peers he retired to unrobe and returned dressed in his field marshal's uniform with all his decorations, and the House proceeded to consider a petition from the Roman Catholics of England, and the Treaty of Peace with France.¹⁶

In May the Prince Regent had informed Parliament of Wellington's elevation to a dukedom and asked it for a grant to enable him to support the honour. The ministers, working from precedents, proposed £300,000 in addition to the £100,000 already granted. This ran into opposition of an unexpected kind. Samuel Whitbread, the most radical of the leading Whigs, who had often been scathing in his criticism of Wellington and the Peninsular commitment, now declared that 'there was no man so wicked, so stupid, or so envious, as to venture to detract from the glory of the Duke of Wellington'. And George Ponsonby, the leader of the Whigs in the Commons, went further and proposed that the new grant be raised to £400,000. A somewhat bemused Chancellor of the Exchequer agreed and the vote was passed without dissent.¹⁷

On 1 July Wellington personally thanked the Commons, being received with immense enthusiasm and continued acclamation. That night there was a grand masked ball held in his honour at Burlington House attended by all the *haut ton* and some of the more fashionable and daring of the *demi-monde* safe behind dominoes (masks). Byron was there, looking 'very well' in the becoming, if incongruous, costume of a monk, while Hobhouse wore his Albanian costume. Supper was held in a temporary room which sat 1,700 persons with ease, and looking back over a long life Hobhouse declared that it was 'the most magnificent thing of the kind ever seen'. Wellington was reported to be 'in great good humour . . . and not squeezed to death'.¹⁸

A week later came a national service of thanksgiving at St Paul's Cathedral. This was a state occasion on the grandest scale, with a cavalcade of the members of the Commons, the Lords, foreign ambassadors and other dignitaries, mostly in full dress, proceeding through the streets. Soon after eleven o'clock a salute of twenty-one guns announced the departure of the Prince Regent from Carlton House. Wellington accompanied the Prince in his carriage, but not even the presence of the hero of the hour could prevent the crowds from hissing the Regent, for his continuing unpopularity had sharpened in recent months because of an escalation of the long-standing feud with his wife, and the headstrong behaviour of his daughter.¹⁹

The Regent arrived at the cathedral at about noon, and Wellington walked on his right hand carrying the Sword of State. The service lasted several hours and the artist Joseph Farington recorded that the sermon lasted for thirty-five minutes, but not anything that it contained. He was more interested in observing the dignitaries who were present, and his long list includes Lord Wellesley, Wilberforce, Whitbread, Canning and Picton as well as most of the Cabinet. He also had time to observe that 'the Gold or Gilt service of Plate on the Communion Table was very splendid, and the whole scene [was] magnificent'.²⁰ When the service was over and the Almighty had been thanked for his discernment in favouring the British cause, the cathedral slowly emptied and the Regent and many of those present returned to Carlton House.

Two days later Wellington's old enemies in the Corporation of the City of London gave him a splendid dinner at the Guildhall and presented him 'with a sword of exquisite workmanship'. Many dignitaries were present and the galleries were crowded with ladies so it is perhaps not surprising that Charles Abbot found it 'very noisy'. Amid the multitude of guests Wellington spotted a face he had not seen in fifteen years: the Captain Eastwick who had carried him from Madras to Fort William so expeditiously in May 1798. Wellington drank a glass of wine with him, and reminded him of a favourite saying to slow sailors: 'What is the delay, you lubber? Are you cutting sticks with a wooden hatchet?'²¹

The celebrations continued all through July and into August with many smaller events filling the intervals between the grand occasions. For example, a dinner was given for Wellington on 11 July by 'the gentlemen of India' with Warren Hastings, then seventy-two and in frail health, in the chair. Naturally Wellington was praised as 'our own Indian-taught general', and it is clear that he retained a warm sense of friendship for many of his old comrades in India, not least for John Malcolm who was in London at the time, and was deputy chairman of the dinner.²² The culmination of the festivities came on 21 July when the Prince Regent gave a superb fête in the gardens of Carlton House in Wellington's honour. Mrs Calvert, who was present, noted with pleasure: 'The Duke of Wellington was there – just the same good-humoured, unaffected

creature he ever was. He met me very kindly, enquiring after Felix [her son, an officer who had been ADC to Sir Thomas Graham].²³

The pace slackened after the fête and Wellington was able to get out of London. Yet even here he was the centre of attention and on display, with crowds following him, cheering and calling out blessings. At Salisbury the enthusiasm was overwhelming, and the crowd pressed close so that Wellington's arms were 'almost pulled off in the eagerness of the people to shake hands with him!' Yet Wellington was not annoyed by the incident; indeed he treated it 'with the most perfect good humour'. And this seems to have been typical of his attitude towards all the celebrations and pomp of these weeks; there is no evidence that he viewed them with disdain or cynicism, while his one recorded comment suggests that he felt a good deal of relish in the pleasure of the moment, without taking it too seriously. As he was escorting Lady Shelley from their box at the Opera one night the crowd parted before them with the greatest respect, and Wellington remarked 'in the gayest tone: "It's a fine thing to be a great man, is it not?"'²⁴

Lady Shelley was one of the new friends Wellington made in these weeks who would have an important place in his life over the next few years. She was twenty-seven, married, and with a family. Her husband Sir John Shelley was three years younger than Wellington and had served in the army in his youth and in Parliament in 1806, but was best known for his connections with Carlton House and the Turf. Lady Bessborough thought that he seemed a good-natured fool rather than a rogue, although not everyone agreed. Gossip accused them both of blatantly pursuing Wellington in London and later, in Paris, in 1815. If so, they were certainly not alone, and Wellington enjoyed Lady Shelley's company more than most, for she was lively and vivacious, and her flattery was sufficiently subtle to appeal.²⁵

If only Kitty, the Duchess of Wellington, had possessed the nerve and zest for society of Lady Shelley! But at forty-two Kitty had long since lost her youthful vivacity without gaining any compensating self-assurance. Five years of independently managing her own household and affairs had done nothing to strengthen her confidence or resilience; she still shrank from high society and was liable to be thrown into a panic by trivialities. Her health and spirits were not robust. It is possible that she was battling clinical depression; certainly she spent far too much time dwelling on her own failings. She was happiest in the country, staying in or near Tunbridge Wells, and devoting herself to her two boys and to Gerald, Henry Wellesley's son.²⁶

The long separation had seen no diminution of Kitty's affection for Wellington; he may even have been easier to love *in absentia*. But nor did it diminish the fatal ineptitude and over-eagerness with which she expressed her feeling. For example in the autumn of 1813 she learnt that Wellington was

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suffering from rheumatism and lumbago while campaigning in the Pyrenees, and asked John Malcolm to get her some Cazaputta oil for her to send him. There was nothing wrong with this, but her comments in a subsequent letter on the subject are all too revealing: 'Thank you, my dear Sir, for your efforts to get me the Cazaputta oil. I hope you may succeed, for though Lord W. is considerably better and will probably receive my offering with scorn, yet it may be of use to him, as those who have once severely suffered from rheumatism are liable to a return.' But if she expected Wellington to receive the oil with scorn, why put everyone to considerable trouble and expense by sending it? And above all, why thus confide in his old friend?²⁷

Her reaction to his wound at Orthez was relatively restrained: 'His contusion was, thank God, nothing of consequence, though more than enough to electrify me. I have always seen him in my mind protected by a transparent, impenetrable, adamantine Shield, and settled that he could not be *even touched*; so precious a life, so invaluable – surely the almighty hand of God will protect him.' And in her quiet way she exulted in his victories and in the honours they brought. In August 1813 she was disappointed that victory in the battle of the Pyrenees had not been followed by some 'distinguished mark of approbation', even though it was less than a year since Wellington had been made a marquess, and a few weeks since he had been promoted to field marshal. It is hard to imagine that Kitty had any real desire to be a duchess, for nothing about such eminence suited her, but the thought had stirred and as the months that followed brought tidings of fresh victories, it did not disappear. In March 1814 she confided to Malcolm that she was impatient: 'This Dukedom is such a time a-coming.'²⁸

After the war was over Wellington wrote to Kitty from Madrid announcing that he had accepted Castlereagh's offer of the Paris embassy and asking if she would like to accompany him or stay at home. By the standards of the day he was being more than commonly fair in giving her a perfectly free choice, but that very fairness must have wounded her; how she would have welcomed a warm expression of his desire that she should come, or even a confident anticipation that she would! However, she was not well suited to the role of an ambassador's wife who, especially in Paris in 1814, needed to be a hostess on a grand scale and to cut a figure in society, and both he and she knew it. Nonetheless she accepted without hesitation, and she was right to do so. Staying at home would have marked a public separation and would have been tantamount to an open admission that the marriage was all but over. Kitty was not ready for that, and whatever Wellington's feelings may have been, he would not force the issue.²⁹

With the end of the season, and fashionable society heading out of London for the country, it was time for Wellington to leave for Paris to take up his new position. He travelled through Belgium which, under the peace settlement, had

been united with the Netherlands. Britain viewed the new country as an essential bulwark against renewed French expansion, and had championed its interests in the peace negotiations. She had returned to it the fabulously wealthy Dutch East Indies, and while she retained the poor but strategically important Cape of Good Hope, she paid £2 million in compensation, on condition that this money be spent building fortresses in southern Belgium. The threat of invasion from the Low Countries had haunted British strategic policy for centuries, and experience of Napoleon's naval building programme at Antwerp only sharpened the concern. The small British army taken to Holland by Sir Thomas Graham at the beginning of 1813 had not been withdrawn, although its command was about to be given to the young Hereditary Prince of Orange (son of the ruling Prince of Orange), Wellington's former ADC. The extent of British interest in the Netherlands aroused some jealousy in both Russia and Prussia, but the greatest resentment was naturally felt in France where the loss of Belgium was felt keenly as a blow to national pride and a breach of the doctrine of 'natural frontiers'. The situation was not helped by the fact that many Belgians, especially in the southern, French-speaking part of the country, regarded themselves as French and disliked their incorporation in the United Netherlands.

Wellington's visit was intended to be an affirmation of British support for the Netherlands in the wake of the breakdown of the proposed marriage between Princess Charlotte and the Hereditary Prince of Orange; and it gave him the opportunity to tour the Belgian frontier and advise both governments on the construction of the 'barrier fortresses'. He did not have time to inspect the whole frontier but noted that the west, and in particular the centre between Mons and Namur, were the most vulnerable points. Considering possible lines an invading French army might take, he identified a number of positions in which it might be checked, including 'the entrance of the *forêt de Soignes* by the high road which leads to Brussels' – a position which he himself would successfully defend less than twelve months later.³⁰ This possibility was in no one's mind in 1814, but even without it Wellington was convinced that his visit had been worthwhile. 'Whatever may be the military consequences of our tour,' he told Bathurst, 'we have made noise enough in the country, and the people are convinced of our intention to defend it.'³¹

Wellington reached Paris on 22 August and on the very next day, even before he had formally presented his credentials, he raised the issue of the slave trade with Talleyrand. In the peace settlement the French, under pressure from Castlereagh, had agreed to abolish the trade within five years, but this had not satisfied Wilberforce and other campaigners, and their protests gained wide support from the press and public. The British government was shaken by the strength of this reaction, and instructed Wellington to endeavour to persuade