

THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON AND THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS AT GHENT IN 1814

AT the beginning of 1814, four countries in Europe and America were waging three distinct wars. Great Britain and France had been continuously at war since May, 1803. In June, 1812, the United States had declared war on Great Britain because of her infringement of neutral rights, and from other motives. And during the same month, Napoleon had begun the invasion of Russia. In October, 1813, Napoleon was decisively defeated at the battle of Leipsic. In April, 1814, the Allies entered Paris, Napoleon abdicated, and two out of the three wars came to an end. The third between Great Britain and the United States went on for another eight months, because Great Britain felt strong and angry and wanted revenge.

The British policy of April, 1814, was "to give Jonathan a good drubbing".¹ Such a policy was naturally popular in England. In June, 1812, the United States had declared war on Great Britain under the impression that Napoleon was winning. Madison admitted in later years that he had put his money on the wrong horse. To the Americans British maritime claims were offensive, British diplomacy irritating. Monroe had suffered much while minister in London. Clay, the champion of the West, was convinced that he could dictate the proper course to the over-wise men of the East, with their commercial ideas. Madison followed the advice of Monroe and Clay, and hoped that by declaring war the United States would smash British pretensions and establish American rights both on sea and land.

Well-equipped historians can always extenuate, and sometimes justify, the errors of statesmen by calling up from the past the errors of previous statesmen. Responsibility can thus be distributed over several generations, and a fair defence can be raised for any given action, whatever be the motive at the time—high-minded foresight, blind fanaticism, pure ignorance, or even deadly

¹ *Wellington Supplementary Despatches* (London, 1862), vol. IX, p. 58.

hatred. Britain wanted revenge in 1814 because the United States had tried to stab her in the back in 1812. The action of the United States in 1812 was due largely to British claims since 1805, and further back to the bad feeling on both sides from 1763 to 1783; and so on till we fetch up at the Pilgrim Fathers in 1620. To sum up the series of mistakes, the historian would have to borrow from mathematics some infernal machine like the "binomial theorem", and would be excluded ever after from polite historical society.

Though the policy of 1814 was as natural and as mistaken as all policies of revenge always have been and always must be, the motive power of the policy was not in the diffused national feeling but in the definite interests of the Canadian fur-traders. The Montreal fur-traders and their London friends had inherited the fur-trading interests which had been in French hands till 1763. They had been disgusted at the Treaty of 1783, with its international boundary line giving the new republic all land to the south of the great lakes and the 49th parallel. They had managed for some years after the treaty to hang on to the trading posts south of the boundary line, which by the treaty should have been at once relinquished. But now in 1814 a new situation had arisen, and it was felt the time had come to rectify the errors of the Treaty of 1783. The boundary line must somehow be pushed south; the hunting grounds must be preserved. The Colonial Office, by deputations, memorials, pamphlets and general pressure, must be made to understand the matter and to act as required. Lord Bathurst, as secretary of state for war and colonies, acted as required. Lord Liverpool, the prime minister, approved as requested. Castlereagh, secretary of state for foreign affairs, then on the Continent, was apparently not consulted. Wellington was ordered to ship his army direct from Bordeaux to America, and a threefold attack was planned. The main advance was to be from Canada in the north. The Eastern coasts were to be raided. New Orleans was to be captured in the south. But *suaviter in modo* was to be combined with *fortiter in re*. While soldiers and sailors administered the drubbing, commissioners were to discuss at Ghent the terms of peace. Goulburn (who had been since 1812 under-secretary at the Colonial Office, and who must have been fully informed as regards fur-trading views) was chosen one of the British commissioners. As the "drubbing" might take some time, the peace discussions need not be unduly hurried.

During the summer of 1814, things went on more or less according to plan. In August, the commissioners met at Ghent,

and the British made proposals as directed in their instructions. The Americans objected, and the early collapse of the negotiations seemed probable. Castlereagh happened to pass through Ghent while the discussion was in progress. He thought the British commissioners too strenuous, told them to await further instructions from London, and advised Liverpool to climb down a little. He then continued his journey to Vienna, leaving American matters to be dealt with hereafter by his colleagues in London.

As Castlereagh had apparently no further influence on American matters for the rest of the war, it is convenient to interpose here two quotations showing how well he understood not only American, but European matters. In 1807, as secretary of state for war and colonies, considering the defence of Canada, he wrote, "Were we to attempt to attack the United States by land their resources would be called forth, as formerly, by every exertion of power."¹ In November, 1814, while at the Congress of Vienna, he wrote:

The great military powers should remember . . . that it is false as an universal principle that nations have a right in all cases to claim additional Territories in compensation for expenses incurred in War and much less under those circumstances which tend to expose the military security of neighbouring and allied States. The peace of the World cannot co-exist with such a doctrine. Besides accession of territory altho' it may satisfy national ambition seldom fails to bring with it burdens and discontents fully equivalent to its resources. With these principles in view, if the allied powers act liberally towards each other and indulgently towards other states they may look forward to crown a glorious War by a solid and lasting Peace, and posterity will revere their names not only for having delivered by their arms the World from a Tyrant and Conqueror, but for having restored by their example and by their influence, the reign of moderation and justice.³

The London colleagues climbed down, reprimanding their commissioners for acting on instructions which did not act, and then awaited trans-atlantic news. During September came the news that Ross had raided Washington, and burnt the public buildings. During October came the news that Prevost had advanced on Plattsburg and retired ignominiously before a very inferior force.

¹ *Castlereagh Papers*, ser. 2, vol. IV, p. 104.

³ F.O. 92 (Nov.-Dec., 1814): enclosure in letter of Nov. 5.

The Plattsburg disaster was annoying, but it had no effect at the moment on British policy. On October 21, Bathurst wrote to Castlereagh telling him that the New Orleans expedition was being pushed on. The Plattsburg disaster, he wrote, "will put the enemy in spirits. The campaign will end in our doing much where we thought we should have done little, and doing nothing where we expected everything." On October 28, however, Liverpool wrote to Castlereagh that "the war with America will probably now be of some duration"; and he wrote on the same day to Wellington, "The last note of the American Plenipotentiaries puts an end I think to any hopes we might have entertained of our being able to bring the war with America at this time to a conclusion."¹

On October 30, Wellington, writing to Bathurst, commented on the Plattsburg disaster:

It is very obvious to me that you must remove Sir G. Prevost. I see he is gone to war about trifles with the General Officers I sent him which are certainly the best of their rank in the Army and his subsequent failure and distresses will be aggravated by that circumstance; and will probably, with the usual fairness of the Publick, be attributed to it.²

An amusing instance of the "war about trifles" in which Prevost had engaged will be found in a general order he issued on August 23. "The Commander of the Forces has observed in the dress of the several officers of corps and departments lately added to this army from that of Field Marshall the Duke of Wellington a fanciful variety inconsistent with the rules of the service. His Excellency deems it expedient to direct, etc., etc."³ In short, Wellington's officers had got very slack during the Peninsular campaign and required smartening up. Prevost's criticisms are fully confirmed by Professor Oman who explains that officers' dress (including his own) was a subject on which Wellington was quite indifferent.⁴

From the above account, it will be seen that up to the end of October the British government showed no intention of changing their American policy. The war would be longer, the cost greater, the parliamentary criticism more severe than originally anticipated, but the policy was unchanged.

¹ *Wellington Supplementary Despatches*, vol. IX, p. 384.

² Bathurst MSS.

³ Kingsford, *History of Canada*, vol. VIII, p. 531.

⁴ Oman, *History of the Peninsular War*.

It was not until November, 1814, that the change took place—as the direct result of advice given by the Duke of Wellington under circumstances which will now be described.

In April, 1814, on the termination of the war with France, Wellington, at the special request of the government,¹ accepted the post of ambassador at Paris. On April 30, he left Toulouse, and on May 4 he arrived in Paris “without notice, in time, in his blue coat, to see the Russian and Prussian guards defile by Louis XVIII.”² After five days in Paris he returned to his army in the south, and then visited Madrid. On June 29 on his way back to England, he again visited Paris, and on that day wrote, “I don’t think matters are in a very satisfactory state here. They appear smooth enough, but I understand there is a good deal of dissatisfaction among all classes; and I believe that the only security the government have is the fear all the other classes have of the military, and of their taking advantage of any disturbance to restore the authority of Bonaparte or of some other military chief.”³

On June 23 he landed in England. During July, he visited Paris, for, on the 14th, Castlereagh wrote from Paris, “The Duke will assist at our conferences whilst his military duties do not call him from Paris”.⁴ At the end of July, Wellington was back in London, but it was not till August 9 that the Prince Regent signed his credentials. He travelled *via* the Netherlands, and did not reach Paris till August 22. On September 30, he wrote to Castlereagh, then in Vienna:

I think we are getting a little unpopular in the town but I don’t think that circumstance is of much importance.⁵

On October 2 he wrote to Bathurst:

There has been some awkwardness in the town within these few days. . . . There have been some instances of ill treatment and rudeness to strangers, particularly the English; principally, I believe, from disbanded officers returned from England and Russia as prisoners of war.”⁶

On October 4 he wrote to Castlereagh that the news of the British capture of Washington had “increased the ill-temper and

¹ *Wellington Supplementary Despatches*, vol. IX, p. 141.

² *Wellington Supplementary Despatches*, vol. IX, p. 64.

³ *Wellington Supplementary Despatches*, vol. IX, p. 145.

⁴ *Wellington Supplementary Despatches*, vol. IX, p. 162.

⁵ *Wellington Supplementary Despatches*, vol. IX, p. 298.

⁶ *Wellington Supplementary Despatches*, vol. IX, p. 301.

rudeness with which in too many instances His Majesty's subjects are treated in this town."¹

On October 17 he wrote to Castlereagh:

There is certainly a good deal of uneasiness in the public mind at Paris, but I cannot discover any ground for it excepting the numbers of ruined and discontented persons there are in the town, who are certainly not discouraged from the execution of any scheme of mischief they may have in contemplation by the advice and example of their superiors. Even the Marshal and those in favour of the King do not scruple to express their dislike of the present system, and the shame they feel at finding themselves in the situation in which they are.²

In spite of the inconveniences mentioned, crowds of English people visited Paris and among others Lord Harrowby, a minister in Liverpool's cabinet. He was in Paris at least a fortnight—from October 12 to October 28. There was also a certain General Macaulay (brother of Zachary Macaulay and uncle of the historian), who had visited Paris in connection with the abolition of the slave trade.

On October 23 Wellington wrote to Liverpool:

General Macaulay will make you acquainted with what he has learnt of the state of Paris in regard to the Bourbons. My former letters and despatches will have shown you what I think on that subject. Without knowing more facts it appears to me that he considers the danger more certain and more likely to occur than I do; that is to say, he believes it certainly will occur within a very short period of time. I think it may occur on any night; but I know of no fact to induce me to believe it is near, excepting the general one of great discontent and almost desperation among a very daring class of men.³

On or about October 25 Macaulay left Paris and returned to London, but did not deliver Wellington's letter till October 30.

On October 31 Macaulay wrote to Liverpool a most alarmist letter⁴ urging the immediate recall of Wellington to England, on the ground that there might be at any moment a rising in Paris, and that Wellington might be arrested or that even "something more dreadful" might occur. Macaulay suggested that, as an

¹ *Wellington Supplementary Despatches*, vol. IX, p. 314.

² *Wellington Supplementary Despatches*, vol. IX, p. 346.

³ *Wellington Supplementary Despatches*, vol. IX, p. 368.

⁴ *Wellington Supplementary Despatches*, vol. IX, p. 401.

excuse for the recall, it might be pretended that Wellington's services were required in connection with the American war. Next morning (November 1) Liverpool saw Macaulay, but thought it better to delay any action till he could see Harrowby, for both Macaulay and Hamilton (the under-secretary at the Foreign Office) had told him that Wellington meant to "open himself thoroughly on the subject to Harrowby."

On November 2 Liverpool wrote to Castlereagh, "You will have heard from many quarters of the combustible state of the interior of France and the expectation which exists of some explosion," and he hopes that there will be no renewal of European War.¹ Of American affairs he says, "I see little prospect of our negotiations at Ghent ending in peace, and I am apprehensive that they will be brought to a conclusion under circumstances which will render it necessary to lay the papers before Parliament and to call for a vote upon them previous to the Christmas recess. Of this, however, I shall probably be enabled to speak more positively some days hence. The continuance of the American war will entail upon us a prodigious expense, much more than we had any idea of," and he goes on to caution Castlereagh against incurring any further financial obligations in Europe. American policy would be discussed at the cabinet meeting the following day.

On November 4 Wellington wrote to Bathurst:

I see that the public are very impatient about the want of success in America, and I expect they will never be quiet until I go there. I think that matters are in such an uncomfortable state here, and they are so little settled in Congress, that you could not spare me out of Europe.²

On November 4 Liverpool wrote to Wellington, telling him he had "communicated all the particulars which have come to my knowledge to the Cabinet, who entirely concur with me in the opinion as to the expediency of your quitting Paris without delay."³

Liverpool then considers three alternative excuses which might be given for his quitting Paris, as the real reason must be necessarily concealed.

The first excuse of recalling him to assist at some important court-martials would be of no use, as it could last for only about a

¹ *Ibid.*

² Wood (ed.), *Select British Documents* (Champlain Society, 1920), vol. I, p. 131.

³ *Wellington Supplementary Despatches*, vol. IX, p. 405.

fortnight. The second excuse is that, while remaining nominally ambassador at Paris, he should be sent to Vienna to help Castle-reagh at the Congress. The third excuse, and the one which Liverpool and his colleagues liked best, was that he should be recalled "to be appointed to the chief command in America, and that you should go out with full powers to make peace or to continue the war, if peace should be found impracticable, with renewed vigour. . . . The more we contemplate the character of the American war, the more satisfied we are of the many inconveniences which may grow out of the continuance of it. We desire to bring it to an honourable conclusion; and this object would, in our judgment, be more likely to be attained by vesting you with double powers than by any other arrangement which could be suggested."

Liverpool offered Wellington the two alternatives of Vienna or America and concluded, "We are ready to place the decision entirely in your hands." "We only request that you will lose no time in leaving Paris."

On the same day (November 4) Bathurst also wrote to Wellington in the same sense.²¹ His letter was a personal appeal:

I must beg you not to allow a sense of military duty to decide your conduct. The question is not whether you ought to accept the command when offered, but whether you think, as a statesman, that under the present circumstances, not of Paris exclusively but of Europe, it is better for the Duke of Wellington to go to Vienna or to America. If you accept the command now, there would arise the great advantage of your being invested with the double character of negotiator and commander-in-chief before the rupture of the existing negotiation. But pray decide (I must repeat) not as a soldier, but as a statesman.

On the same day (November 4) Liverpool wrote to Castle-reagh²² sending a copy of his letter to Wellington:

The point of the Duke of Wellington's quitting Paris being decided, I confess I feel most anxious, under all the circumstances, that he should accept the command in America. . . . He would restore confidence to the Army, place the military operations upon a proper footing, and give us the best chance of peace. I know he is very anxious for the restoration of peace with America if it can be made upon terms at all honourable. It is a material consideration, likewise, that if we shall be disposed for the sake of peace to give up

¹ *Wellington Supplementary Despatches*, vol. IX, p. 416.

² *Wellington Supplementary Despatches*, vol. IX, p. 404.

something of our just pretensions, we can do this more creditably through him than through any other person. . . . His appointment will in itself be sufficient to obviate many difficulties and much embarrassment at home.

Wellington replied as a statesman. He wrote two letters to Liverpool, one on the 7th,¹ immediately on receipt of Liverpool's letter of the 4th, the other two days later, on the 9th,² stating his views more fully. He admits that he is in danger, but he objects to being hustled. "I confess I don't like to depart from Paris, and I wish the government would leave the time and the mode to my own discretion." Vienna is a bad excuse; there is no good reason for going there. The court-martial excuse would be better. He thinks his influence in Paris is becoming of more use to Castlereagh in Vienna, and he should not be withdrawn in a hurry. As regards America, "you cannot at this moment decide upon sending me to America. In case of the occurrence of any thing in Europe, there is nobody but myself in whom either yourselves or the country, or your Allies, would feel any confidence." He then gives his views on the American situation:

I believe there are troops enough there for the defence of Canada for ever, and even for the accomplishment of any reasonable offensive plan that could be formed for the Canadian frontier. . . . That which appears to me to be wanting in America is not a General, or General officers and troops, but a Naval superiority on the Lakes. The question is whether we can acquire this Naval superiority on the Lakes. If we can't, I shall do you but little good in America; and I shall go there only to prove the truth of Prevost's defence, and to sign a peace which might as well be signed now.

His opinion on the Ghent negotiations must be quoted in full:

I confess that I think that you have no right from the state of war to demand any concession of territory from America. Considering everything, it is my opinion that the war has been a most successful one, and highly honourable to the British arms; but from particular circumstances, such as the want of the Naval superiority on the Lakes, you have not been able to carry it into the enemy's territory, notwithstanding your military success, and now undoubted military superiority, and have not even cleared your own territory of the enemy on the point of attack. You cannot then, on any principle of equality in negotiation, claim a cession of territory ex-

¹ *Wellington Supplementary Despatches*, vol. IX, p. 422.

² *Wellington Supplementary Despatches*, vol. IX, p. 424.

cepting in exchange for other advantages which you have in your power.

I put out of the question the possession taken by Sir John Sherbrooke between the Penobscot and Pasamaquoddy Bay. It is evidently only temporary, and till a larger force will drive away the few companies he has left there; and an officer might as well claim sovereignty on the ground on which his piquets stand, or over which his patrols pass.

Then if this reasoning be true why stipulate for the *uti possidetis*? You can get no territory; indeed the state of your military operations, however creditable, does not entitle you to demand any; and you only afford the Americans a popular and creditable ground, which I believe their government are looking for, not to break off the negotiations, but to avoid to make peace. If you had territory, as I hope you soon will have New Orleans, I should prefer to insist upon the cession of that province as a separate article than upon the *uti possidetis* as a principle of negotiation.

On November 8, parliament opened. In the Prince Regent's speech, the capture of Washington and the occupation of Penobscot were referred to as successes, and in spite of the reverse at Plattsburg it was hoped that the ascendancy of the British arms would be established throughout that part of North America. In the debates, apart from the usual opposition criticism and government defence, both Lord Grenville and Baring described the United States as the aggressor in making war on account of impressment after Britain had repealed the orders-in-council. But Grenville deprecated the continuance of the war for revenge, and Baring thought it absurd to break off negotiations on questions of boundaries and "to go on a crusade for the reconquest of America". Baring ridiculed the Penobscot expedition as "the triumph of a regular force over a defenceless village supplied only with two iron guns", and he made comparison between Prevost's failure and that of Burgoyne in 1777.

On November 13, Liverpool replied to Wellington's letters of the 7th and the 9th, which had been communicated to the cabinet.¹ The great object was to get him at once out of Paris. His appointment to the command in America would effect that object. But he would not have to go to America at once. He would be retained in England on account of the winter season, partly on the ground of the state of the negotiations. So he would still be at hand to

¹ *Wellington Supplementary Despatches*, vol. IX, p. 430.

deal with a European explosion. If Wellington can think of any better excuse for leaving Paris than the American command he is free to adopt such excuse, only he must let the government know what it is, so that they can give it out as the reason. "We shall not feel easy till we hear of your having landed at Dover, and in leaving the precise time and mode of departure to your discretion we most earnestly entreat you to return to England with as little delay as possible."

As regards the Ghent negotiations, Liverpool was still awaiting the American project asked for in the British note of October 31, and he assures Wellington that "we shall be disposed to meet your views upon the points upon which the negotiation appears to turn at present."

Wellington, on receipt of Liverpool's letter of the 13th, began preparations for leaving Paris; but the rumour of his departure roused such a sensation that on the 18th he wrote to Liverpool renewing his objections to leaving, and on the 21st Liverpool told him to use his own discretion as to the time and excuse for leaving Paris. Wellington remained in Paris till January 23, 1815, and then left it only to relieve Castlereagh at Vienna, because Castlereagh was badly wanted in England for parliamentary purposes.

Such was the brief but effective appearance of the great Wellington on the obscure stage of the Ghent negotiations. His influence was incidental, almost accidental, in manner, but it was decisive and far-reaching in result. The great object of the British government was to get Wellington out of Paris. For many men of tried valour the situation at Paris would have been too much. But for the Iron Duke with his iron nerves that sort of thing was all in the day's work. He kept his head in Paris. Indeed, he did a good deal more than that. He turned the head of the British government in London from the wrong to the right direction in American policy. Had Wellington, even without leaving Paris, encouraged the British government in their American policy, or merely not discouraged them, they might have moved on to the rupture or the suspension of the negotiations at Ghent. The war might have gone doddering on. Nothing much would have happened presumably in Canada during the winter. Prevost would have been probably relieved by another general, and the army would have waited for further action till the spring of 1815. Meanwhile the New Orleans expedition would have run its course. On January 8, the British attack was disastrously repulsed. On

March 8, the news reached London. On March 1, Napoleon had landed in France, and on the 20th entered the Tuileries in triumph. If, in March, 1815, the American war had still been in progress, what would the British government have done? Surely the British troops would have been at once recalled from America, and peace made with the Americans at a very high—if not at any—price. It is hardly conceivable that Great Britain would have simply marked time in America during the Waterloo campaign, and then, in the autumn of 1815, again resumed the process of “giving Jonathan a good drubbing.”

On November 18, Liverpool wrote to Castlereagh.¹ He was then still hoping that Wellington would leave Paris at once and accept the command in America “if the war continues”. But the policy towards the United States had already changed:

We have under our consideration at present the last American note of their project of treaty, and I think we have determined if all other points can be satisfactorily settled not to continue the war for the purpose of obtaining or securing any acquisition of territory. We have been led to this determination by the consideration of the unsatisfactory state of the negotiations at Vienna, and by that of the alarming situation of the interior of France. We have also been obliged to pay serious attention to the state of our finances, and to the difficulties we shall have in continuing the property tax. Considering the general depression of rents, which, even under any corn law that is likely to meet with the approbation of Parliament, must be expected to take place under such circumstances, it has appeared to us desirable to bring the American war if possible to a conclusion. From what has passed in Parliament on this subject it is quite evident that the continuance of the war upon what is called a new principle would be violently opposed; besides, you are probably aware that it is the Duke of Wellington's opinion that no material military advantage can be expected to be obtained if the war goes on, and he would have great reluctance in undertaking the command unless we made a serious effort first to obtain peace without insisting upon keeping any part of our conquests.

In this detail of motives Liverpool has put his weakest first and his strongest last. Summarizing them in reversed order, they read as follows:—(1) Wellington says our American policy is unsound. (2) Parliament opposes it as “a new principle.” (3) The landlords will object to the renewal of the property tax. (4) There may be

¹ *Wellington Supplementary Despatches*, vol. IX, p. 438.

an explosion any day in Paris. (5) The negotiations at Vienna are unsatisfactory.

As regards the Vienna negotiations, Liverpool had heard nothing recent. In Castlereagh's letters (as printed in the *Correspondence* and in the *Wellington Supplementary Despatches*) there is nothing alarming. On September 19, Castlereagh wrote to Wellington a few words on Holland. On October 1, he wrote a letter on the position of Prussia. On October 9, he tells Wellington, "We are at sea." On the 14th, he writes about "progress we have not made." On the 20th, "We are still at anchor." To Liverpool on October 20, he wrote:¹

We have no progress to report . . . if matters *trainent en longueur* here, it will not be my fault; but if so, my withdrawing might be disadvantageous, and a premature discussion in England prejudicial on either the Continental or American negotiations. I hope, therefore, you will be enabled to keep the discretion in your own hands of not meeting till late in February if general politics render such a measure advisable.

On the 25th, he writes to Wellington on the European balance of power,² remarking that "France need never dread a German league". On the same day Cooke, Castlereagh's under-secretary, wrote gossip letters to Liverpool, saying, "We are still in the dark," and "If I tried to write seriously I could only confuse your lordship."³ His lordship may have been confused, but there was nothing in the negotiations at Vienna to alter his mind on the negotiations at Ghent.

The Paris situation was genuinely alarming, but the point of it, to Liverpool's mind, was the safety of Wellington, whom he was ready to send to America or anywhere to get him out of Paris.

The landlords were a solid force whom Liverpool was bound to respect, but there was nothing new about them. A Tory ministry had always the landlords with them.

So, if this analysis be correct, the chief motive for the change of policy was Wellington's advice, and in a secondary degree the parliamentary expression of opinion. Wellington and parliament both condemned the American policy of the government, and their opinions were expressed simultaneously, but independently.

The change of policy was practically embodied in a note, dated

¹ *Wellington Supplementary Despatches*, vol. IX, p. 362.

² *Wellington Supplementary Despatches*, vol. IX, p. 373.

³ *Wellington Supplementary Despatches*, vol. IX, pp. 373-375.

November 26, from the British to the American commissioners negotiating at Ghent.

The Americans were much pleased, and on November 27, John Quincy Adams recorded in his diary, "All the difficulties to the conclusion of a peace appear to be now so nearly removed that my colleagues all considered it as certain. I think it myself probable." And the probabilities of the cautious J. Q. Adams weighed nearly as much as the certainties of his colleagues. Peace was signed on Christmas Eve, 1814.

It is generally held that the British government made peace with the United States because of (to use Liverpool's words above quoted) "the unsatisfactory state of the negotiations at Vienna". Such a view seems to me seriously incomplete. It ignores the essential unsoundness of the policy of revenge commenced in April, 1814. That policy ran its course, and the further it ran the more unsound it became. The unsoundness did not arise out of Vienna complications. The most perfect harmony at Vienna could not have made it sound. From the Plattsburg disaster the British government learnt that their American policy would be very expensive. Wellington's advice made them drop it altogether.

So they made peace with the United States. Such a peace was obviously a great advantage in European complications, and this idea was much more pleasant to the ministerial mind than any unnecessary recognition of the fact that the abandoned policy should never have been started. Not only was the policy of revenge abandoned, but the fact that it had ever existed was, as far as possible, forgotten, and "Peace with America" loomed larger and larger as a wise achievement and a valuable ministerial asset.

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