

**CHARACTERISTICS OF THE
DUKE OF WELLINGTON,
APART FROM HIS
MILITARY TALENTS**

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Characteristics of the Duke of Wellington, Apart from His Military Talents by Thomas Philip De Grey

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THOMAS PHILIP DE GREY

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INTRODUCTION.

It may be thought, and not unreasonably, that another work relating to the illustrious Duke of Wellington is unnecessary ; more especially from one who had no professional or private connexion with him ; because all the events of his public career, and, indeed, most things connected with his private life, have been already collected and laid before the world.

The press has teemed with his Memoirs in every guise and in every form, and they have been published at a cost calculated to bring them within the reach of almost the poorest reader ; and if the following sheets professed to be merely a general memoir of his *military* and *political* life, or a series of anecdotes, however interesting and well-authenticated, they would, indeed, be superfluous.

But it has appeared to the writer that it would be an act of justice to the memory of that great man, and might be of service to his surviving fellow-countrymen, to put together in a more condensed form some observations upon his private feelings and principles, as forming a beautiful and touching part of his character, apart from his public and professional position, which is already before the world.

It may be fairly said, that no man's character was ever subjected to so severe an ordeal *during his life* as the Duke of Wellington's.

The *actions* of many former great men have been published during their lives ; but it has been left to after ages and subsequent elucidations to explain the *motives* which led to them. Many a hero has received the plaudits of his contemporaries, whose glory was perhaps accidental, or whose success arose from unforeseen and fortuitous circumstances, which were untold at the time, and the concealment of which might have been dictated by sound and honest policy.

But here every deed, and the ground upon which it was founded, are shown at the same time.

Nothing but the most entire confidence in the honesty and integrity of every public act of his life, could ever have made a man consent to the exposition and publication of all his motives, feelings, views, and wishes, which are laid open in the wonderful collection of these Dispatches. *He* had that confidence. *He* knew that not one word would be found in them of which he need to feel ashamed ; and from them alone, sanctioned as they have been by his own supervision, every argument and every deduction in the following pages will be drawn.

Brought forward in early life into a position of eminence, and invested with an extent of authority during all his Indian campaigns which would have been apt to turn the head of most men, he seems, as we find by all his correspondence of that period, to have shown the same equanimity, the same patience under disappointment, and the same forbearance towards those whose faults or failings had a tendency to thwart his own more enlarged and energetic views, which we find him to preserve to the end of his glorious career.

It was, in fact, a remarkable feature in his remarkable life. Gifted by nature, as he seems to have been, beyond the ordinary run of mankind, with forethought, and a power of looking, not merely at the events passing under his eyes at the moment, but at almost every possible contingency which might befall him, he never seems to testify impatience at finding that others were not equally apt and ready; or, at least, he never suffered his consciousness of it to affect his conduct towards them.

Another striking feature was his remarkable placability. Those who saw him only at a distance, deemed him cold and austere. He has been called the "Iron Duke," whom nothing could move; and it was said that, though he acquired the *esteem* and *respect* of all, he gained the *affection* of few. To a certain extent, as regards the world at large, this might be true. He was, no doubt, too cautious a man to lay himself open in ordinary conversation to every one who might wish to engage his attention, and afterwards to boast that he had been "in the confidence of the Duke;" and his habit of forming his own opinions, and acting upon them, without consulting others in the early stages, or divulging his intentions in the more advanced parts of his undertakings, no doubt gave an idea to casual observers that it was not in his nature to have friendly and confidential intercourse with any one.

It is true, therefore, that he had few intimates, but all who did enjoy that happiness entertained the warmest feelings of affection and regard towards him.

He was, no doubt, stern and inflexible in the performance of his own duty, and in exacting from others the due performance of what belonged to them. Unfortunately, he often had too much cause for apparent

severity. The British army had never been assembled in such numbers, and, in fact, had never seen service upon such a scale; and no doubt there were many individuals of all ranks utterly unfit for the duties now imposed upon them. Numberless instances may be selected in the pages of his correspondence, of conduct which, in any other military nation, would have been followed by severe punishment, or instant expulsion from the service, which he, in the kindest and most forbearing manner, notices with merely expressing a hope that the honour, the good sense (?), and the gentlemanly feelings of the delinquent will prevent a repetition! In his confirmation of the sentences of courts-martial, or in his comments upon the proceedings of the court, and in his answers to letters (which we do not see, but the nature of which we may fairly conjecture from the tone of his reply), his language is always firm and unyielding; but we find many in which, though his sense of duty compels him to give a reprimand, or to convey an unpleasant communication, it is obvious that he does it with reluctance, and with an anxious wish to hurt the *private* feelings of the person as little as possible.

The caution and apparent coldness to which allusion has already been made, was an essential part of his character; and, perhaps, it is not too much to say that the eminent success of some of his great military measures may be mainly attributed to it. Secrecy—absolute secrecy—in the midst of thousands, including, of course, many who must be *personally* engaged, was not to be looked for: but he preserved a nearer approach to it than any other man. His officers might deem him close, and some of them might feel that he did not show them the confidence to which they might think they were

entitled ; but he acted upon principle. He knew by experience that every gossiping letter from the army to friends in England was very speedily communicated to the newspapers, who made use of this limited information as best suited their own political objects, and generally distorted the facts. He might occasionally feel nettled at the malignant and violent party-feelings so displayed, or the unjust and ungenerous comments passed upon himself (though that was the part respecting which he felt the least anxiety) ; but he knew that during many years of the war, the principal part (indeed, at times, the whole) of the information respecting the strength and disposition of his force was conveyed to the French army, solely by the circuitous channel of the English newspapers.

His forgiveness of positive injustice to himself is also a remarkable feature in his character. We do not here allude to the noble disregard which he showed to the ignorance, the vanity, and the presumption of many individuals at home, in different high assemblies, whether in the Houses of Parliament, or the Common Council of the City of London : that was the natural and instinctive disregard which the magnanimous Newfoundland shows to the snarling cur ; and he might have a fair reliance upon the returning sense of justice from the majority of his fellow-countrymen when the first effect was passed. But we allude more especially to the way in which he overlooks the unceasing attempts of so many members both of the Spanish and Portuguese Governments, to injure him in the estimation of their respective nations, which he had no means of repelling or explaining ; which were creating hourly dangers to the gallant men under his command ; and which, with a weaker-minded or more petulant man, must have inevitably made him throw up

the cause for which he was making such marked and extraordinary efforts.

The buoyancy of his hopes and expectations was another most remarkable characteristic. Oppressed as he was (more especially during the first years of the Peninsular war) by the consideration of questions which belonged to the Statesman, the Financier, and the Diplomatist, rather than to the General, and to which we will venture to say no general was ever before subjected; thwarted as he was, in all the more enlarged views which he took of the means by which difficulties were to be averted or overcome, he never flagged, he never gave way! If we were to be guided merely by his official dispatches, published in the Gazette of the day, or such parts of them as the Government at home thought themselves justified in making public, we might never have ascertained his own opinions. The reference would have been to the past, and not to the future. We know that men in such situations, whatever may be their real feelings of doubt, or even despondency, must conceal them from the world at large. It is impossible to deny that there were times, at home, when the public were almost without a hope of ultimate success. His withdrawal at that moment, although it would no doubt have been the cause of much obloquy to himself, and of triumph to those who had constantly predicted failure, would in all probability have been felt by the nation as unavoidable; and he had difficulties to contend with that must have weighed with the Government and the public if he had recommended such a step. A sense of his own arduous responsibility, a sense of duty to those under whom he was acting, would compel him in his "private" communications to make known his *private* apprehensions, if he had them.