

### *Lord William Bentinck and Murat*

AMONG the minor personages of the Napoleonic period few have been more neglected, or, when remembered, more attacked, than Lord William Bentinck. His qualities and his successes were not of the brilliant character that earns popular appreciation; his defects were openly avowed; he served a tory ministry, though by convictions a whig; and he was set problems of the greatest difficulty to solve. Here are reasons enough for the more than unhandsome treatment he has received. Yet a sober review of his work can leave no other conclusion than that he was a statesman of the greatest qualities of head and heart, and that where he only partly failed most men would have failed completely. He was sent out to the Mediterranean in the year 1811 to take command of the British forces in Sicily, and to act as diplomatic representative at the court of King Ferdinand. He remained the representative of Great Britain in Sicily until the fall of Napoleon, and his mission was marked by three chief incidents. The first of these was his famous quarrel with Queen Mary Caroline, leading to the establishment of a new Sicilian constitution and the driving of the queen from the island. The second was his unsuccessful expedition to Catalonia in 1813 to effect a diversion for Wellington. The third was his negotiation with Joachim Murat, king of Naples, in 1813-4. It is with this last incident alone that the present article is concerned.

Before coming to an account of this matter, however, it will be best to state that two books published in 1902 deal with Lord William Bentinck. One of these, *La Sicilia durante l'occupazione Inglese*, by Signor Bianco, is chiefly concerned with the Sicilian constitutional question, but also contains matter that throws light on Bentinck's motives in his dealings with Murat and Italy. The other, *Le Prince Eugène et Murat*, by M. Weil,<sup>1</sup> is an important work of erudition, which takes up in close detail for the first time every step of the negotiations, and concludes that Bentinck displayed in his dealings with Murat not only ineptitude but bad faith. As no account of these matters save that of M. Weil has any

<sup>1</sup> See *ante*, vol. xviii. p. 597.

pretension to completeness or accuracy, it must be to a great extent in following his footsteps that a clearer view of the subject can be gained. The basis of this narrative will be the Record Office papers utilised by M. Weil, and others he has either overlooked or thought it unnecessary to quote.

In the early weeks of 1813 Joachim Murat, king of Naples, arrived in his capital from Poland, one of the few survivors of the *grande armée*. His relations with Napoleon had been strained for some years; more than once he had been threatened with the confiscation of his crown; he was tired of war, and thought the military supremacy of France lost with her army in the snows of Russia. Very soon after his return to Naples he exchanged views with the Austrian minister at his court. The emperor Francis and Count Metternich were projecting intervention with a view to mediation and peace. They were anxious to secure support, and gave Joachim to understand that they were prepared to treat with him on the basis of his retaining his present possessions. During the spring of 1813 the king of Naples, who considered Austria now the decisive military factor on the continent, pushed these negotiations on the one hand, while on the other he declined to move his troops north or to join the army in Germany, as Napoleon wished him to do. But if Austria might be accounted the decisive military factor on the continent, there was another power, Great Britain, whose goodwill it was even more essential that the king of Naples should secure. Her troops helped Ferdinand, the dispossessed king of the throne now occupied by Murat, to maintain himself in the island of Sicily; her fleets controlled the Mediterranean and the Adriatic. A man of great character and ability, Lord William Bentinck represented her interests at Palermo in the double capacity of general-in-chief and diplomatic agent.

The five years of Joachim's reign had been marked by continuous hostilities with the Anglo-Sicilians, and now that all French troops were being hurried into Germany, leaving only the native army to defend his kingdom, it was evident that the king had a great difficulty to face. At the best his army might suffice to protect Naples and keep in check Bentinck's Anglo-Sicilians, supported by a British fleet. Accordingly, when Joachim had ascertained that Count Metternich and the emperor of Austria were not unfavourably disposed towards him, he decided to sound the views of Great Britain as to whether that power might adopt a similar attitude. The result proved a complete disappointment. Bentinck proceeded from Sicily to the little island of Ponza, near Naples, where he met the secret agents of the Neapolitan government (May-June 1813), but the only conditions he was willing to grant, without referring back to London, were hard ones; they

were based on two essential facts—that the British government was allied to Ferdinand, who had not renounced his rights to the throne of Naples, and that Bentinck considered Joachim's position extremely weak and precarious. He demanded that the Neapolitan army should immediately co-operate with those of the allies in an attack on northern Italy, and that Joachim should surrender the throne of Naples to Ferdinand; in return for this a territorial equivalent was to be provided, and there was to be no actual transfer of the regal authority by Joachim until this compensation was found.<sup>3</sup> These terms did not suit Murat; he replied evasively, yet without definitely breaking off negotiations, probably hoping that Austrian influence might obtain better conditions from the British cabinet. Bentinck meanwhile, carrying out previous instructions, crossed to Spain with a considerable expedition intended to effect a diversion for Wellington, but he foresaw already that the negotiations would be resumed, as they were in the following winter. On his report of what had occurred to Lord Castlereagh the British foreign secretary approved the course taken, and authorised Bentinck to conclude an arrangement on the basis he had proposed. That policy was consistently adhered to by both Castlereagh and Bentinck, as is shown by the instructions given by the foreign secretary on sending Lord Aberdeen as ambassador to Vienna (6 Aug. 1818),<sup>4</sup> and by other dispatches to be quoted presently.

Through May, June, and July, while Napoleon was steadily driving back the Russians and Prussians, winning victories at Lützen and Bautzen, Murat remained irresolute at Naples. He was secretly negotiating with Metternich, though outwardly professing fidelity to France; but French influences were acting on him. Letters came from the headquarters in Germany urging him to join his old comrades; and finally he came to one of those impetuous decisions that so often led him to disaster in the field of diplomacy, if also to triumph on the field of battle. Early in August, just as Prince Eugène was leaving Milan to assume command of the French army in the Julian Alps, a travelling carriage was swiftly conveying King Joachim across the Brenner Pass; he was hastening to Napoleon's headquarters at Dresden. The king of Naples remained with the army two months. He commanded the right wing at the battle of Dresden, with brilliant success; he afterwards assumed command of the army that opposed Schwarzenberg's march on Leipzig, and was present at the fighting about that city. During all this period his relations with Napoleon were much strained. By an extraordinary anomaly the Austrian and

<sup>3</sup> Bentinck's dispatches relating to the Ponza negotiations were published by Weil in his *Recueil de Documents Anglais sur Ponza*, now incorporated in his *Prince Eugène*, i. 6–75.

<sup>4</sup> *Ross, Napoleon*, ii. 301.

Neapolitan ministers were not withdrawn from their respective posts, and the king resolutely declined to move a single soldier north from Naples, though frequently ordered to do so by the emperor. There were stormy scenes between the emperor and the king, and finally, after the crushing disaster of Leipzig, Murat abandoned the army. His return to Naples was the flight of an escaping prisoner; his arrival in his capital, in the first week of November, was a complete surprise to all.

No sooner was Joachim Murat safely out of the clutches of his terrible brother-in-law than he showed unmistakable signs that he had decided to assert an independent line of policy. The Austrian minister, Count Mier, who was still at Naples, soon obtained definite proposals for the conclusion of an Austro-Neapolitan alliance.<sup>4</sup> But there was a consideration only less powerful than the conservation of his throne that swayed Murat in a contrary direction to that represented by his proposals to Austria. The king's ambitions happened to coincide with a natural policy that appeared the only one that could bring back prestige and some measure of success to Napoleon. The whole of the Italian peninsula, for the first time since the days of Rome, was under the same master, the same system of government. In the kingdom of Italy, the French departments, and the kingdom of Naples, the military, judicial, and administrative systems were practically identical. Natives of all parts of the peninsula were fighting under the same flag; but one word pronounced by Napoleon would have created Italy a nation, would have revived his failing fortune with an accession of strength based on public opinion, and would have placed a new enemy at Austria's door.

There had been for some years in Italy a small but active, intelligent, intriguing party with nationalist tendencies. Its members hoped for the eventual unification of the peninsula under an independent government framed on the French model. This party was strongest at Naples, where it included most of the native officials. The king was on good terms with its most conservative and able members, such men as Zurlo, minister of the interior, Ricciardi, and others. From the time of Joachim's return from Russia in the early part of 1813, the idea of Italian independence and unity assumed a concrete shape in his mind. It hinged principally on military considerations that may be reduced to two propositions: the 30,000 useful troops that Murat could send over the Po were sufficient to turn the scale as between the armies attacking and defending Italy; the uniting of the forces of the northern provinces and of Naples under Murat's command, the declaration that they were fighting for the unity and indepen-

<sup>4</sup> M. Weil has well established that the Ollendorf interview, hitherto accepted as fact, is purely imaginary.

dence of Italy, would result in a movement of public opinion that would infuse spirit into the national army and enable it to roll back the tide of Austrian invasion.

On his return to his capital Joachim at once decided that he would send no more Neapolitan troops to reinforce the emperor. He constantly asserted that he was willing to march to the Po with 30,000 men at his back, and hinted that if they were to be employed in support of the viceroy's army, it would be necessary that he should have supreme command. Even after he joined the imperial headquarters at Dresden he could not be persuaded to order reinforcements north to assist Prince Eugène in the defence of Venetia against the Austrians. Now that he had once more left the army, and had deliberately embarked on an independent policy, he still thought the best hope for himself, for Italy, and even for Napoleon, was the proclamation of Italian unity and independence under his rule. During November and December his letters to Napoleon, recently brought to light by the researches of Baron Lumbroso and M. Weil, urged that policy as the only cure for a nearly impossible position. They also clearly conveyed the fact that if Napoleon would not adopt that policy, then Murat would be obliged to save his crown by coming to terms with the allies. But Napoleon viewed the possibility of his insubordinate lieutenant's aggrandisement, just at the moment when his own fortune was falling, with jealous dislike. It was not in his nature to make concessions, and he made none.

King Joachim was thus simultaneously making proposals to Austria for an alliance and pressingly entreating Napoleon to accept the conditions on which he was prepared to co-operate with him. In either eventuality his army would be required on the Po, and its advance was quietly begun. The French departments, formerly the States of the Church, had been drained of troops, and the Neapolitans were everywhere received as allies by the emperor's functionaries. At the same time as he pressed his negotiations with the court of Vienna, Murat had felt the necessity of once more attempting to arrive at an understanding with Great Britain. It was, in fact, the weak point of his policy, leaving questions of political morality on one side, that it was not based on a clear recognition of the fact that he could not safely detach himself from France until he had secured the friendship of the great power whose fleets and armies were at the very gates of his capital. He should either have negotiated with the British cabinet in the first place or have made the vital condition of his treaty with Austria that that power should obtain the recognition by Great Britain of his tenure of the throne of Naples. Under the exigencies of a very false and difficult position Joachim fell short of this indispensable basis of safety and suffered in consequence.

Shortly after the king's return from Leipzig a Neapolitan agent, Schinina by name, was sent to Sicily to open negotiations with Bentinck. The two met at Syracuse on 12 Dec. Schinina asked Bentinck to sign an armistice, on the ground that a treaty of alliance was about to be concluded between Austria and Naples, and that Joachim could not move his troops north in support of the Austrians unless assured that he had no attack to fear from the Anglo-Sicilians. As evidence of the Austrian attitude he produced dispatches showing that on 7 Oct. Metternich had offered Murat recognition at the price of an alliance. But Bentinck was not satisfied as to the sincerity of these overtures, and pointed to the fact that since the date of Metternich's proposals the king of Naples had taken part in the battle of Leipzig. He could see no reason to assume that Metternich would be prepared to repeat an offer made before an event of such magnitude, and on that ground declined to negotiate. This was a pretext, though not a bad one. Bentinck's real motives for refusing to negotiate were probably somewhat mixed; he appears, for one thing, to have been jealous of Austrian influence. He wanted Italy to become free and England to help her on the way to freedom; he thought the most effective military weapon against Napoleon would be a national insurrection similar to that which had enabled the British arms to win such signal triumphs in Spain. Perhaps he even dreamed of becoming the Wellington of Italy. These views were somewhat insecurely founded, but Bentinck made no mistake when he considered Murat's position at Naples very precarious, and it is difficult to see that he committed an error of judgment in declining to enter into negotiations of which the first result would have been to enable Murat to move 80,000 men to the valley of the Po. M. Weil believes this to have been extremely bad diplomacy, and is entitled to his opinion; but he goes further and clearly suggests that this was a virtual disobedience of orders on the part of Bentinck, for he had received instructions from Lord Castlereagh authorising him to conclude an armistice.<sup>5</sup> This suggestion is unwarranted. The dispatches of Castlereagh had reference to the Ponza negotiations in the early part of the year. How can it be said that in declining Schinina's overtures Bentinck disobeyed his instructions, when these referred back to events occurring before King Joachim left Naples for the campaign of Germany, and were merely permissive? So far from adopting such a criticism it may fairly be said that Bentinck would have been extremely imprudent had he accepted the Neapolitan proposals.

At the very moment when Bentinck was declining the

<sup>5</sup> Weil, iii. 233.

overtures of the king of Naples the British and Austrian cabinets were formally exchanging views on the Neapolitan question. On Austria's joining the allies against Napoleon in the early part of August 1813 the British cabinet had resumed relations with that of Vienna, and had selected as ambassador Lord Aberdeen. The choice was not a good one, for Aberdeen was young and totally unversed in diplomacy. He was eager to help on with all his might the downfall of Napoleon, but failed to keep clearly in sight the distinctions between British and Austrian policy, and proved perfectly pliable in the dexterous fingers of Metternich.<sup>6</sup> Metternich, who had no treaty with the court of Palermo to hamper him, was still determined to detach Murat from Napoleon and to bring the Neapolitans to the assistance of the Austrian army now operating against Prince Eugène in northern Italy. Having received proposals for an alliance through Prince Caristi, Neapolitan minister at Vienna, and Count Mier, Austrian minister at Naples, Metternich decided, early in December, to conclude the matter on the basis of Murat's being guaranteed his throne of Naples. He consequently sounded Aberdeen as to the concurrence of his government. Now the British ambassador's instructions were that Great Britain could not consent to the alienation of King Ferdinand's rights to Naples, but that the provision of a 'liberal establishment' for Murat in central Italy by way of compensation could be entertained.<sup>7</sup> Yet Metternich succeeded in obtaining a note from him on 12 Dec., in which Aberdeen stated that he had taken cognisance of the instructions given by Metternich to Count Neipperg for negotiating an alliance with the king of Naples; that he saw nothing in these instructions contrary to the views of the British government; that he must, however, declare formally that the British government would not become party to a treaty guaranteeing Naples to Murat without providing a just compensation to the king of Sicily. To this Metternich replied that the indemnification of King Ferdinand, in case he should renounce his rights to Naples, was an essential part of the views of the Austrian court and would be provided for by the treaty it was proposed to conclude.<sup>8</sup>

It is clear that in this exchange of notes Aberdeen was in error. For the policy of Great Britain was to compensate Murat for Naples, while that of Austria, to which he assented, was to compensate Ferdinand—a very different matter. And it is further clear from dispatches and instructions already quoted that both Castlereagh and Bentinck held to the British policy unwaveringly. It will also be shown presently that neither of them was deluded into following

<sup>6</sup> Foreign Office, Austria, 102, and War Office, Sicily, 182; Aberdeen's dispatches, September to December 1813 (in part referred to by M. Weil).

<sup>7</sup> Foreign Office, Austria, 102, 6 Aug. 1813.

<sup>8</sup> Weil, iii. 227, 228.

Aberdeen's false lead. In all this there is one obvious fact to be recognised, and that is that the British ambassador to the court of Vienna was far too young and inexperienced for his extremely delicate post. To show how loose and changeable were his ideas as to the direction British policy should take in this matter, it will suffice to quote the following sentence from one of his dispatches to Castlereagh on the subject of Murat: 'The grand thing in the first instance is to precipitate his acts of hostility against Bonaparte without committing ourselves by any engagement or precise understanding.'<sup>9</sup> Having fallen into line with Metternich, Aberdeen immediately wrote to Lord William Bentinck, enclosing copies of the notes exchanged, stating that Count Neipperg would inform him of the course of his negotiations, and that Austria was anxious to conclude matters rapidly, so as to bring up the Neapolitans to assist in the operations against Prince Eugène. He added that, with these facts and his instructions from home, Bentinck should be able to conclude a convention on parallel lines with Neipperg's. This dispatch from the British representative at Frankfort to the British representative at Palermo is taken by M. Weil to amount to formal instructions to Bentinck to negotiate a treaty with Naples; Aberdeen's policy is treated by him as the policy of Great Britain. From these two gratuitous and untenable assumptions he proceeds to attack Lord William Bentinck in reiterated terms of the greatest bitterness and contempt for disobeying instructions in not negotiating a treaty with Murat. And he goes even further by accusing him of disobedience at a period when, on M. Weil's own showing, he had not received these so-called instructions. As a matter of fact Aberdeen's dispatch reached Bentinck at Palermo on 18 Jan.,<sup>10</sup> and on 3 Feb. he signed an armistice (not a treaty) at Naples.

We must now take up the thread of the narrative again at Schinina's failure to open negotiations with Bentinck on 12 Dec. While conferring with Bentinck a dispatch reached him from Mentz; in this the Austrian *chargé d'affaires* at Naples stated that he had advices from Metternich of 28 Oct. informing him that a treaty was about to be concluded between Austria and Naples, and that Lord Aberdeen had full powers to sign a treaty on behalf of Great Britain. To this Bentinck replied, with some force, that he was only confirmed in his resolve not to negotiate by the fact that Lord Aberdeen had full powers.<sup>11</sup> Austrian diplomacy was, in fact, trying to effect with Bentinck what it had succeeded in doing with Aberdeen, but had found a more wary antagonist. Bentinck was devoid of all official information, yet he suspected that misleading or partial statements were being placed before him; and his

<sup>9</sup> Foreign Office, Austria, 102, 10 Nov. 1813.

<sup>10</sup> Weil, iii. 487.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 230, 570; Mentz to Bentinck, 14 Dec. 1813.



suspicions were true. For Aberdeen's instructions were, as we have seen, that Great Britain was prepared to see Murat compensated for surrendering the throne of Naples, and Bentinck would have been tacitly admitting Murat's title to Naples and abandoning Ferdinand's claim had he entered on a negotiation for a treaty of peace. Yet M. Weil sees in this dispatch of Mentz, a dispatch that contains a perversion of the truth, *la preuve la plus indiscutable . . . de la perfidie et de la désobéissance de Bentinck.*<sup>12</sup> On receipt of this communication from Mentz Bentinck perceived clearly enough that some modification in the relations of Murat with the allies was in progress; he accordingly showed a more conciliatory front. He now began to feel his way diplomatically but with the utmost caution. He merely informed Mentz and Gallo the Neapolitan minister for foreign affairs, that he was anxious to co-operate so as to further the intentions of the Austrian and British cabinets, but that he was in complete ignorance as to the terms of the treaties and must wait for information. These communications he intrusted to his secretary, Mr. Graham, to whom he ostensibly gave powers to conclude a suspension of hostilities. He, however, handed him secret instructions to conclude nothing, to get all the information he could at Naples, and, if possible, to find some pretext for getting passports with which to proceed to the headquarters of the allies. There Bentinck hoped Graham would be able to get precise information or instructions from Aberdeen or Castlereagh. As Bentinck had received no official news for some two months either from England or the Adriatic, this would hardly appear so very extraordinary as M. Weil would have us think.<sup>13</sup> He also informed the Sicilian court of the overtures made and of his attitude, and was notified of its approval of the course he had adopted.

Graham sailed from Palermo on 1 Jan. 1814; only the day before Count Neipperg had arrived at Naples with full powers to sign the Austro-Neapolitan treaty of alliance. Graham, who appears to have conducted himself with diplomatic ability, learned from Neipperg that the chief reason for Austria's entering into the treaty was the non-success of Field-Marshal Hiller's operations in front of the Quadrilateral, and also heard that there was little prospect of dislodging Prince Eugène from that position without the prompt co-operation of the Neapolitans. On 8 Jan. Graham, having obtained passports, left Naples for the headquarters of the allies; on the same day Neipperg wrote to Bentinck urging him to conclude an armistice, setting out at length the military reasons that made the Neapolitan co-operation so valuable to Austria, and confidentially communicating the terms of the treaty. It provided for the joint prosecution of the war; the emperor of Austria

<sup>12</sup> Weil, iii. 280.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 351.

guaranteed Joachim's actual possessions; the principle of an indemnity to King Ferdinand was recognised; the emperor of Austria agreed to use his best offices to obtain Ferdinand's renunciation of the throne of Naples and to facilitate the conclusion of a peace with Great Britain. There were further provisions not relevant to the question here dealt with.

It is curious, after reading the violent criticisms of the British agent's conduct that are to be found in M. Weil's book, the wearying reiteration that he was acting in flagrant disobedience to the instructions of his government, to find the text of the Austro-Neapolitan treaty producing on Bentinck exactly the same effect that it produced on Castlereagh, whose conduct M. Weil does not venture to attack. The point was simply this: that Austria was, and Great Britain was not, prepared to sacrifice Ferdinand to Joachim. How far the divergence of views between the two powers really went may be judged by the fact that Neipperg confidentially communicated to the duke di Gallo that his instructions from Metternich authorised him to give a verbal assurance that Austria would, in case of necessity, employ force to compel King Ferdinand's renunciation of his rights to Naples.<sup>14</sup> Castlereagh, who had thought it expedient to join the headquarters of the allies and to take charge of Great Britain's interests in person, wrote to Metternich informing him that the perusal of the treaty had caused him a painful impression, as it constituted an obstacle to the restoration of Ferdinand on the conclusion of a general peace. Yet he had decided to send instructions to Bentinck to conclude a convention for the cessation of hostilities. But he called Prince Metternich's attention to the fact that an understanding with the court of Palermo would have to be reached before there could be any question of terminating the state of war between Great Britain and Naples.<sup>15</sup> This warning of Castlereagh is most important as marking the British position. An armistice—that is, a temporary cessation of hostilities—might be concluded as a concession or matter of expediency; but a permanent peace must be based on the satisfaction of King Ferdinand's claims. Bentinck thought even worse of the treaty than Castlereagh, from whom he was still waiting for instructions. In a dispatch of which M. Weil gives a very inaccurate text<sup>16</sup> Bentinck declared the Austro-Neapolitan treaty impolitic, inopportune, and useless, and returned to his argument that from the point of view both of Great Britain and Italy it would be far better to act in opposition to Murat and provoke a national rising against the French.

Neipperg's letter asking Bentinck to sign an armistice with the king of Naples proved ineffective for the moment. The British agent declared that until he heard from Aberdeen or Castlereagh

<sup>14</sup> Weil, iii. 618.

<sup>15</sup> Castlereagh, *Correspondence*, ix. 196, 27 Jan. 1814.

<sup>16</sup> See below, p. 279.

he would not commit himself. On receipt of this unsatisfactory reply Neipperg forwarded to Palermo Aberdeen's dispatch of 12 Dec., which he had so far withheld; this reached Bentinck on 18 Jan. But the Austro-Neapolitan treaty was one he did not approve, and he probably viewed Aberdeen's diplomacy with no great confidence. Besides this he felt that precise instructions from the British foreign secretary, either through Graham or some other source, must now be well on their way. He at all events decided to wait, while announcing that he would cross to Naples and negotiate. This conduct M. Weil thinks highly discreditable. Bentinck now had received what M. Weil persists in calling the instructions of his government, but what was really a mere advice from the British representative at the Austrian court. Any other diplomatist would have straightway proceeded to Naples, he says, instead of which Bentinck persisted in his obstinate disobedience. What is the real fact? Bentinck looked for instructions to Castlereagh, not to Aberdeen. The latter certainly did agree with the Austro-Neapolitan treaty; he announced its terms with satisfaction to Castlereagh a few days before the latter joined the headquarters of the allies. But the latter did not share Aberdeen's views; he addressed the note already quoted to Metternich, and Bentinck took the same position, only more strongly. It is not fair to blame Bentinck, isolated in Sicily and for many weeks cut off from all certain knowledge of what was proceeding, for choosing a dilatory course. On the contrary, he showed the wariness, perspicacity, and insight of a statesman, by holding back until he knew with certainty what course British policy would take at this very difficult turning-point, and by resolutely keeping his government free from dangerous complications both with the court of Palermo and with that of Naples.

Castlereagh, to whose fine judgment and diplomatic skill at this critical period history has done scant justice, wisely decided that the only course now open was to make the best of a bad bargain. He did not approve of the Austro-Neapolitan treaty, yet the vital object was the concentration of all available military forces against Napoleon. He therefore decided to subordinate the question of Naples, and, as we have already seen, to offer an armistice, though not a treaty of peace. M. Weil quotes Castlereagh's dispatch to Metternich, in which he declares that the state of war between Great Britain and Naples must continue, subject to an armistice (27 Jan.), and also his instructions to Bentinck (22 Jan., from Bâle), and yet in the face of these documents accuses Bentinck of disobedience and obstinacy for not being prepared to discuss a *treaty of peace* with the Neapolitan negotiators.<sup>17</sup> The British agent only offered an armistice, and had he done more

<sup>17</sup> Weil, iii. 515.

would have deserved to be dismissed. Proceeding to Naples from Palermo on 30 Jan., Bentinck concluded the armistice on 3 Feb. It provided for the cessation of hostilities, the opening of commerce, and three months' notice of the resumption of hostile operations. The signature of this convention marks the close of the first period of the negotiations between Bentinck and Murat, a period during which it is confidently asserted that the British agent showed fine diplomatic judgment and carried out the policy of the British cabinet.<sup>18</sup>

A second period now opens, in which it will not be possible to speak of Bentinck's conduct with such unqualified praise. The great question in the early weeks of 1814 was the military one. In France the genius of Napoleon nearly sufficed to check the tide of invasion. In Italy the viceroy, Prince Eugène, had fought a successful defensive battle on the line of the Mincio, and had arrested the forward movement of the Austrians under Marshal Bellegarde (8 Feb. 1814). The king of Naples had marched his army to the neighbourhood of Bologna. It was now decided that Bentinck should support the military operations against France by attacking Genoa. To arrive at this result he decided to move a body of some 14,000 or 15,000 Anglo-Sicilians from Messina and Palermo to northern Italy. He hoped to land at Leghorn, to take possession of Tuscany, whence he would draw his supplies, and from this base to advance along the Riviera di Levante. An exchange of views as to the military situation took place between Bentinck and Neipperg, and the latter agreed to the proposed plan of operations. But by the time the Anglo-Sicilians were prepared to take their part in the campaign Tuscany was in the occupation of the Neapolitans, and this proved a difficulty that nearly led to a rupture between Murat and Bentinck. The British agent failed to adapt himself to the new situation created by the Austro-Neapolitan alliance and the Anglo-Neapolitan armistice. If the British government was prepared to grant an armistice to Murat, such a concession could only have one meaning—that his military co-operation against Prince Eugène was urgently required. It was, therefore, clearly the duty of the representative of that government to avoid all causes of friction with the king of Naples. But Bentinck was not an amiable man; he had diplomatic instinct, the tact of large things,

<sup>18</sup> One subsidiary point need not be discussed here, what may be referred to as the *Rêve d'un Voyageur* incident. M. Weil has nothing new to offer on the subject, and is apparently unacquainted with the interesting documents recently published by Signor Bianco (*Sicilia e l'occupazione Inglese*). It will suffice to say, for the present purpose, that Bentinck had a personal policy aiming at the preservation of the liberal institutions he had fostered in Sicily; he hoped that if Ferdinand recovered Naples he would be willing to admit a virtual British protectorate over Sicily that would maintain parliamentary institutions in the island. That hope had arisen from a suggestion first thrown out by Queen Mary Caroline, and since adopted by Bentinck and some of the liberal leaders in Sicily. This matter is also referred to in the manuscript memoirs of Queen Mary Caroline.

but not of small ones. He clung firmly to his opinions, and had rigid, sometimes peculiar ideas; he had not the faculty of rapidly seizing the changing aspects of a situation and adapting himself to them. Castlereagh was now quite clear that the point of first importance in Italy was to get the Neapolitans in action and force Prince Eugène back from the Quadrilateral to the Alps, but Bentinck still kept foremost the fact that Murat was in reality an enemy who must expect no concessions. Castlereagh had decided to let discussion with Murat go for the present, but Bentinck could not realise the first importance of the operations against the Quadrilateral, and still vaguely clung to a hope that his cherished scheme of an Italian national movement might be evolved from the circumstances of the times.

The earliest indication of his mistaken position was given on the embarkation of the first division of his army at Palermo. On this occasion the hereditary prince addressed a proclamation to the Sicilian soldiers taking part in the expedition, in which he exhorted them to do their duty and asked them to remember that the king had never renounced his rights to the throne of Naples. This was certainly true, but, as the expedition was under the command of Lord William Bentinck, in whose hands the hereditary prince was a mere puppet, its effect was that of a British threat against Murat. However correct the theory of the proclamation might be, there can be no question that it was extremely ill-timed, and that it was from every point of view an inexcusable mistake.

For Bentinck's conduct on his arrival in Tuscany there is some excuse to be made, though it was clearly enough ill-judged. He left Palermo on 28 Feb. and reached Leghorn on 8 March. By the 12th his first division was landed. Having issued a proclamation calling on the people of Italy to rise and win their national independence, he decided to occupy the time while his transports were returning to Sicily for the second division in visiting the headquarters of King Joachim and Marshal Bellegarde, to settle various military and political questions. He arrived at Reggio, where Murat was quartered, on the night of 15 March. What was the position as it then presented itself to the British agent? Tuscany was nearly entirely under the control of the Neapolitan civil and military officials. The Papal States, the Marches, and a great part of Romagna had likewise been occupied, so that Joachim was in actual possession of rather more than one half of the Italian peninsula. His officials were everywhere proclaiming the approaching independence of Italy under the king of Naples. Nothing could be more vexatious to Bentinck than this; nothing could strengthen him more in the opinion that the policy of the Austro-Neapolitan treaty of alliance was a wrong one. But facts even more striking confirmed his view that the only rational

course was to treat Murat as an enemy. For two months the Neapolitan army had remained inactive in Romagna, and Prince Eugene was still skilfully foiling his opponents on the line of the Mincio. Joachim had persistently declined to act until he had received the ratification of his treaty with Austria. This did not reach him until 3 March. He had during all this time been in uninterrupted communication with Prince Eugène and the French camp, and was evidently meditating treachery. Marshal Bellegarde hardly hoped for the Neapolitans' assistance and feared they might at any moment fall on his flank as enemies. From the few Austrian officers he met on his arrival at Reggio Bentinck heard that they looked on the king of Naples as a traitor who was only awaiting a turn of fortune in favour of France to sell them to the enemy. He learned that ten days earlier the viceroy had released some Neapolitan soldiers who had been taken prisoners; that although the Neapolitans had got into action after the arrival of the Austrian ratification the king had permitted a French division, surrounded at Reggio, to make its escape. Bentinck now completely lost sight of the fact that Murat's treasonable intent was a matter of subordinate interest, providing his troops could be actually got into action on the viceroy's exposed flank. He assumed a dictatorial tone; his tactlessness led him so far that he wore the Sicilian cockade in his hat, and avoided using the expressions 'sire' and 'majesty' when addressing the king. He demanded the immediate abandonment of Tuscany and the energetic prosecution of the campaign by Murat; he reminded him that the treaty he had secured from Austria was founded on his armed co-operation, failing which it had neither value nor force; he went so far as to threaten an immediate attack on Naples if his demands were not complied with.

The roughness of Bentinck's declarations was not entirely a matter of temper or bad manners. Bentinck was far too able to be judged in such superficial fashion; he was certainly constitutionally deficient in urbanity, but the attitude he assumed represented more than that. He considered Joachim a weak man in a weak position, and, basing his calculations on that estimate, he thought a show of brutal strength would conquer all opposition and enable him to dictate terms; but he was mistaken.<sup>19</sup> His galling behaviour and threatening declarations, coming after the proclamation to the Sicilian troops, were taken to mean uncompromising hostility. Murat, who ever since he had received the ratification of his treaty had been seriously prosecuting military operations, now thought he had nothing to hope for. He determined therefore to retain Tuscany, to renew his negotiations with Prince Eugene and the emperor on the basis of Napoleon's ceding

<sup>19</sup> War Office, Sicily, 182, Bentinck to Bathurst, 27 Feb. 1814.

him all Italy south of the Po, and stopped the advance of his troops. Having failed to obtain satisfaction at Reggio, Bentinck proceeded to Verona, where Bellegarde had fixed his headquarters. There he discussed matters with the Austrian commander and the British officer on his staff, Sir Robert Wilson, who was as distinguished for his charm of manner as Bentinck was for his bluntness. In every quarter opinion was against Bentinck. It was not very material to the Austrians whether the Neapolitans or the British momentarily controlled Tuscany; what they wanted in the first place was that Murat should be persuaded by some means or other to march his army on Piacenza. That done, the line of the Mincio must fall, and Prince Eugène must retreat to the Alps. The Austrian view was entirely supported by Sir Robert Wilson at Verona, and Castlereagh wrote despatches from France to Bentinck enjoining on him a conciliatory attitude towards Murat and the subordination of his operations to Bellegarde's.

Bentinck was profoundly displeased at the situation; he was angered at finding that Prince Eugène with his small army of conscripts could successfully hold Lombardy against the much larger forces of the allies. He ascribed the failure to the adoption of the Austrian policy, instead of that on which he had set his heart. Yet the unanimity of opinion against him, the representations of Bellegarde and Wilson, the tenor of his instructions, all warned him that he had gone very far. He appears to have realised that he was no longer acting in the spirit of his instructions, and on returning to the Neapolitan headquarters, now at Bologna, he took Wilson with him. All felt that an understanding of some sort must be come to. Murat now put forward a new proposal: he offered to evacuate Tuscany if Great Britain would sign peace; this was immediately rejected by Wilson.<sup>20</sup> On 2 April a note was drawn up by Bentinck and presented to Gallo. In this document are clear indications that the British agent felt that he must abandon the position he had taken up at Reggio, though it can hardly be described as conciliatory. He formally declared that Great Britain approved the Austro-Neapolitan treaty and that the signature of a treaty of peace was declined merely out of consideration for the just claims of the allied Sicilian government. He invited the Neapolitan government to consider the question of compensation to King Ferdinand with a view to

<sup>20</sup> M. Weil states within the space of one paragraph: (1) that Bentinck in declining to open negotiations for a treaty of peace was deliberately aiming at a rupture with Murat (of this there is not one scrap of evidence); and (2) that the king's proposal to evacuate Tuscany in return for a treaty of peace exasperated Bentinck. But if Bentinck was aiming at a rupture, as M. Weil declares, he ought, on the contrary, to have been delighted, and not exasperated, at Murat's offer, for his instructions and the whole course of British policy gave him no choice but to decline it (iv. 457).

arriving at a settlement. But in addition to these official views Bentinck stated a personal opinion. He complained that the Neapolitan government had not participated in the military operations, and that suspicious negotiations had taken place with the French camp; he also protested against the apparent project of permanent occupation of the territory overrun by the Neapolitan army. He concluded by recommending, not demanding, the cession of part of Tuscany to facilitate the British operations, a prompt co-operation with the Austrians, and the renunciation of all projects of political aggrandisement.<sup>21</sup> This *grossière et insolente* communication, as it is described by M. Weil, was dealt with skilfully. Gallo merely addressed a polite note to Bentinck, in which he stated that he could not accept his views, as he found them in disaccord with those of Lord Castlereagh as transmitted by the Neapolitan minister at the headquarters of the allies, Prince Cariati. Under these circumstances he would continue negotiations through the intermediary of the latter.

Bentinck's efforts had failed, and there was nothing left for him to do but to return to his army and accomplish what was possible. A few days later came the news of the abdication of Napoleon at Fontainebleau; it found the Anglo-Sicilian army in possession of Genoa and Spezzia, the king of Naples under the walls of Piacenza, the Austrians still facing the viceroy on the Mincio.<sup>22</sup>

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NOTE.

A serious blot on M. Weil's book, which invalidates his judgments and cannot be passed over, is his chronic inaccuracy. He must be judged by the highest standard of accuracy, for he has devoted no less than ten years to research, and his book is nearly entirely founded on unpublished military and diplomatic dispatches. The inaccuracies of a trifling or typographical character are extraordinarily numerous; it may be that they are fewest in the first volume, most numerous in the third. A few examples must be given as a matter of fairness. Thus in the account of the engagement fought at Caldiero three spellings of the name of that

<sup>21</sup> Weil, iv. 460.

<sup>22</sup> A trifling incident that took place after the termination of hostilities illustrates the distortion of M. Weil's views on the subject of Lord William Bentinck. King Joachim, as a matter of regal courtesy, offered the Grand Cross of the Order of the Two Sicilies to Marshal Bellegarde, and sent his own sword to Lord William Bentinck. Bellegarde declined the Order; Bentinck, though loth to accept the sword, as he explained to Castlereagh, thought it his public duty to take it, and wrote to Joachim a perfectly proper letter of acknowledgment, of which the first words were, 'Sire, the sword of a great captain is the most flattering gift that can be offered to a soldier.' M. Weil compares Bellegarde's conduct with Bentinck's in this matter, and concludes in favour of Bellegarde (iv. 569, note). He further gravely assures us that every word of Bentinck's letter to the king cost the writer a 'shriek of fury.' This is not good sense, not even good rhetoric. It only confirms the opinion that M. Weil has completely failed to grasp the character and the conduct of the English statesman.



place are given, 'Caldier,' 'Caldiero,' and 'Calderoin;' this is the more confusing as there happens to be a village named Calderino within a few miles of Caldiero (vol. iii.) In Hiller's army orders of 12 Oct. 1818 (ii. 274) the march of Fenner's and of Eckhardt's divisions on Trieste is absurdly impossible, and should be on a point in the upper valley of the Adige. The British prisoners of 1808 were taken at Capri, not at Capua (iii. 195). But small slips, even when so numerous as they are in this case, are less important than the incorrect quotation of documents. In some cases, perhaps one in thirty, M. Weil does not give a reference at all; more often his reference lacks precision, as 'Foreign Office, 98,' for 'Foreign Office, Sicily, 98;' with scarcely an exception he fails to indicate typographically where passages have been omitted. But for the purpose of this article the texts of documents as given by M. Weil have been tested for verbal accuracy at two points only with the following results: In the first case (iii. 112), that of a dispatch from Murat to Colletta, which is strangely described as *presque inédite* (the fact being that it was published in 1861), a comparison of M. Weil's text with the original to which he refers discloses twelve errors in transcription; of these most are trivial, and there is only one serious omission, of nine words. The second case is far worse. The same dispatch is here given twice (iii. 825 and iii. 418). It is important to note that in this case we are dealing with a translation from a dispatch of Bentinck to Castlereagh, written in English from Palermo on 14 July 1814. Here is the text as given at the two pages. In both cases it is in inverted commas and without indication of omissions:—

'J'ai toujours craint de voir Neipperg se laisser jouer par la cour de Naples. Les conditions de ce traité sont à la fois impolitiques, inopportunes et inutiles.

'Il n'y a aucun fond à faire sur Murat.

'Et le traité ne nous crée pas seulement un rival, il peut rendre Murat maître de l'Italie. Quand on aura rejeté le vice-roi sur les Alpes, les Italiens graviteront certainement de son côté,

'Les conditions de ce traité sont impolitiques, inopportunes et inutiles. Murat, j'en suis sûr, se serait contenté d'un équivalent pour Naples. De toute façon il est inadmissible qu'il ait jamais rêvé d'obtenir plus que Naples.

'Il n'y a aucun fond à faire sur Murat. Il convient donc de lui donner le moins possible. Le traité ne crée pas seulement un rival à l'Autriche, il rend Murat maître de l'Italie. Quand on aura rejeté le vice-roi au delà des Alpes pour qui son armée d'Italie et d'Italiens prendra-t-elle parti? Les Italiens n'aiment pas les Autrichiens. La preuve en est dans la résistance que le vice-roi leur oppose avec des Italiens.

'Ils préfèrent donc Murat à l'Autriche. Il est devenu prince

tandis que, si la protection et l'assistance de l'Angleterre s'étendaient sur eux, cette grande force se serait, sans aucun doute, tournée de notre côté. On aurait alors provoqué un grand mouvement national, semblable à celui qui a soulevé l'Espagne et l'Allemagne, un grand mouvement en faveur de l'indépendance, et ce grand peuple, au lieu d'être l'instrument d'un tyran militaire ou de quelque autre personnage, au lieu d'être le triste esclave de quelques misérables petits princes, serait devenu une formidable barrière dressée aussi bien contre la France que contre l'Autriche. La paix et le bonheur du monde aurait eu un puissant appui de plus.

' Je crains fort que l'heure soit passée.

' Sans compter qu'il est lamentable de voir de hautes récompenses accordées à un homme dont la vie entière n'a été qu'un crime, qui a été le complice le plus actif et le plus intime des forfaits de Bonaparte, et qui n'a trahi son bienfaiteur que sous la contrainte de la nécessité, le traité qu'on veut conclure avec lui est une scandaleuse violation de tous les grands principes de justice publique et privée.' <sup>23</sup>

The inevitable conclusion is that in at least one case what is set before us as the actual text of Bentinck is nothing better than a very loose paraphrase. But a paraphrase is not documentary evidence, as a comparison of M. Weil's two versions of this dispatch will show; for in at least two places one text gives a precisely contradictory statement to the other (see the passages given above beginning, *Le traité ne crée pas seulement un rival*, and *L'Italie sous Murat*).

<sup>23</sup> This dispatch has served as text for an English magazine article, quoted with approval by M. Weil. It may be that he has in one case translated from this article, in the other from the text itself. That, however, would be an explanation but not an excuse. The present article is unfortunately written many hundreds of miles from the Record Office, otherwise this chain of errors would have been traced more fully than is actually possible. It must be added that the dispatch quoted is only examined with a view to testing M. Weil's historical methods.

italien et s'est déclaré le champion de l'indépendance italienne. L'intervention de l'Angleterre

aurait pu amener,

comme en Espagne et en Allemagne, un soulèvement national et donner l'indépendance au pays.

L'Italie sous Murat sera une menace constante pour la France et pour l'Autriche, un véritable danger pour la paix du monde.

' Il est trop tard maintenant.

' Mais c'est chose lamentable de voir accorder de pareilles faveurs à un homme dont toute la vie n'a été qu'un crime, qui a été l'intime et actif complice de Bonaparte

et qui ne trahit son bienfaiteur que par ambition et sous la contrainte de la nécessité.'