

Victory

In the late 18th century Europe was convulsed by the French Revolution, with its mass executions of the French aristocracy and the frequent use of the awful guillotine. All of this created great instability in France; and into the situation stepped a rising military star, Napoleon Bonaparte. He became First Consul in 1799 and then Emperor in 1804. Napoleon pursued expansionist policies which led to two decades of Napoleonic wars (1803- 1815), during which period France and Britain were in bitter conflict and, tragically, the whole of Europe became one great battlefield. With practically everyone against him, and after several severe defeats, Napoleon abdicated in 1814 and he was exiled to Elba. However, he returned from exile, mobilized 360,000 men, and in 1815 he attacked the British forces under the Duke of Wellington, at the Battle of Waterloo.

The battle raging, Europe agonized in suspense, waiting for news of the outcome. At last a sailing ship signalled with flags the result. A signalman decoded the message from one of the ships in the channel: “Wellington defeated...”, then fog obscured the ship, with the result that this was the message sent throughout the British Isles: “Wellington defeated...” It was devastating news and brought shock, followed by despair.

Hours later, when the fog lifted, it became possible to receive the whole of the signalled message – “Wellington defeated the enemy.” The truth was that there had actually been a decisive victory at Waterloo and this, once received, brought tremendous rejoicing – and nearly 100 years of peace in Western Europe.

On the Friday Christ died, it appeared He had been defeated; but on the first day of the week this

was seen to be a misapprehension. It then became clear that, contrary to what earlier seemed to be the case, Christ was in fact the Victor who had defeated the enemy: the enemy of sin, death, and hell. “He rose again the third day” (1 Cor. 15:4). As our Saviour, he had dealt with sin; he had destroyed the power of death and taken away the threat and horror of hell. Victory! Victory!