

CHAPTER XVI

THE NEGOTIATION OF THE PRELIMINARIES

“FORTUNATELY,” Disraeli once said of his native land, “this country is not governed by logic. It is a Parliamentary Government, and it is governed by rhetoric.”

There had been critics a plenty to point out, during the interim between the sessions, that the Ministry had in no wise subjected the country to a new experience in this regard. To be sure, the flow of eloquence had, perforce, been attenuated. But it was felt that Gladstone and his colleagues had shown that England could be governed just as illogically by the Cabinet alone as by two conscientiously officious Houses. By awkward and obscure means, they had maintained a comfortable peace. It was feared that certain fiery Parliamentarians might, with great comfort to themselves, plunge the country into the discomforts of war.

The illogic of the course was certainly alluring. Those “muscular peacemakers,”¹ who most eagerly favored intervention, had disclosed, with the utmost candour, England’s unpreparedness. The time had arrived when she could, at last, be certain of entering the lists without allies, and of reviving hope in France when Gambetta himself had bowed his head to circumstances. There was, also, that age-old temptation to try to arrive at a durable peace through war. But there is this difference between the Briton and the Celt.

¹ Pseudonym of a bellicose correspondent of the *Times*. Lord John Russell was another of those who, as Disraeli phrased it, raised armies by a stroke of the pen.