CHAPTER XXV

1855

AUSTRIAN PROPOSALS FOR PEACE—ATTITUDE OF GLADSTONE—LORD CLARENDON'S PROPOSAL FOR A TREATY WITH SWEDEN

I HAVE in the last few pages epitomized very shortly the transactions of a most painful and difficult time, which lasted from the departure of Lord John Russell for Vienna in the middle of February to his return at the end of April, and then till his resignation at the end of July. This was a period of some four and a half months, during which we had the most critical and dangerous navigation. We were acting for a people who were watching us with angry and suspicious eyes, without having themselves any intelligent idea of exactly what they wanted. One section was jealous lest we should make peace too soon; another section was equally jealous lest we should fight too long. It was hard enough to be called upon to make up our own minds on the terms we should ask, before we could possibly guess what were the terms which military success might enable us to impose. But it was worse still to be under the necessity of communication with an ally so peculiar as Louis Napoleon. I do not wish to give a bad impression of him. My conclusion at the time, as it is my conclusion still, was that the French Emperor wished to run true with us, and that for some reason he had set his heart on the English alliance, at least for a time. He allowed himself, in the Eastern Question, to be chiefly guided by our advice. As to the

negotiations at Vienna, he told Lord Cowley, our Minister at Paris, that it was his desire to support us in them. But Louis Napoleon was not only a bad man of business, he was also liable to sudden changes of impulse and opinion, which he seemed unable to correct by a careful attention to the exact meaning of words, and to the effect of diplomatic documents. Thus, he hastily adopted erroneous impressions from his Ministry or supporters, who were not very scrupulous in the representations they put before him. They cared little or nothing about the permanent interests of Europe, or about any interests but their own. A typical man among them was Prince Napoleon, commonly called 'Plon-plon,' and he told one of our officers at Varna that it was very easy for us to be in favour of the attack on the Crimea, because failure could only cost us a Cabinet, but with them (the French) failure would cost them a dynasty. So now the Emperor's advisers were getting more and more nervous about the want of success in the Crimea. They wished, in short, to back out of the whole affair as soon as possible, and when they heard of Lord John Russell approving of the Austrian proposals on the Third Point, they got hold of Louis Napoleon, told him falsehoods on the nature of those proposals, and actually persuaded him to write urgent letters to us insisting on our acceptance of them. Nothing could be more embarrassing in our position. We had postponed our final decision on the Austrian proposals till we could hear from Lord John Russell personally what he had to say in their favour. He came on the 30th of April, and we had a Cabinet on the 2nd of May.

I have spoken severely of Lord John as regards his conduct in the Aberdeen Government, but I must speak well of his conduct now. He had been very incautious in his language to Austria, which was virtually language to Russia; but in the Cabinet of May 2nd, among ourselves, he was moderate and rational. He did not even profess to think that the Austrian pro-

posals could be the basis of a really satisfactory peace. It might perhaps last, he said, for some ten or fifteen years, during which Turkey might recover strength, but we must count, on the other hand, on our own very unsatisfactory position in respect to military success in the Crimea. Palmerston was strongly against acceptance, declaring the Austrian terms to be such as we might accept on the footing of a capitulation. We all sincerely wished to think the question out under every aspect of the case, and with a due regard to the possible alternative of a serious military reverse. This continued to be the state of matters in the succeeding Cabinet of the 4th of May; but at our meeting on May 5th we received a telegram from Paris to the effect that the Emperor had again changed his mind, and would follow our advice in refusing the Vienna scheme.

What had happened was this: Our Ambassador at Paris, Lord Cowley, was a very able man. He had inherited that powerful blood of the Wellesleys to which we owed so much. Only one generation back, the eldest brother, the Marquis Wellesley, was Governor-General of India; the second was Sir Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington; whilst the third was Sir Henry Wellesley, an able diplomatist, afterwards raised to the peerage as Lord Cowley. It was his son, the second Lord Cowley, who now represented us at Paris. He had a strong personal opinion against the Austrian proposals, and, in discussing them with the Emperor, he found that Louis Napoleon was under the delusion that those proposals included a limitation of the Russian fleet in the Euxine. Cowley assured the Emperor that in this he had been deceived, and that nothing of the kind existed. The Emperor then said that he must again consult his own Foreign Minister. Cowley made the bold request that he might himself be allowed to be present when this consultation should take place. To this Louis Napoleon consented, and this was fatal to the French intriguer. Cowley

was able to prove to the Emperor, from the documents themselves, that the Austrian proposals placed no limit on Russian fleets, and that everything in this direction which the allies had already accepted would be sacrificed in the new peace. Marshal Vaillant, who was head of the French War Office, was then asked by the Emperor what his opinion of the feelings of the army was, to which the Marshal at once replied that the feeling of the army would be strong against such a peace. This decided the Emperor. He told Cowley that he abandoned his advocacy of the Austrian proposals, and Cowley at once telegraphed this result to us.

This was all very well for once, and it was a great escape, but I could not help feeling that it indicated a very dangerous situation. If Cowley had really gained such an ascendancy over the Emperor, and if he allowed it to appear to his own Ministers, the French people would soon come to know of it, and a proud nation would ill bear the idea that their policy, at a very difficult conjuncture, was determined by the will of a Foreign Ambassador. Granville had gone to Paris on a private visit, and, of course, saw all the political personages concerned. He wrote me a very curious letter, about the strength of the language which Cowley allowed himself to use against the Austrian proposals—a letter which seemed to indicate that he wished me to give some note of warning. I accordingly sent a note to Clarendon, pointing out the danger to which I have referred, and urging that Cowley should be reminded of it.

But this was not the only kind of embarrassment we met with in our communication with the Emperor. The strict sentiments of honour and of integrity by which English statesmen are always guided in the transactions of business, whether private or public, could not be sentiments familiar to a man to whom intrigue and conspiracy had been the breath of life from his earliest years. Scruples which to us seemed insuperable objections were scarcely intelligible to him ; and

the case was worse with all his Ministers. Accordingly, we were very soon plied with French advice that we should reopen negotiations with Austria, keeping in reserve certain conditions, to be sprung upon her after the negotiations had made some progress. We were obliged to explain that this was a plan impossible for us—that we must be ourselves quite open with Austria, not only with respect to all our immediate proposals, but as regards all our aims and objects for the future. Cowley had positive difficulty in even explaining to the Emperor what we considered the unfairness of the proposed methods of proceeding, and told us that we must take care of the honour of France, as well as of our own, for there was nobody to do so in Paris.

On the 26th May, 1855, my wife and I dined with the Queen at Buckingham Palace. I had a long conversation with Prince Albert after dinner—always a great pleasure, since he was so wise and thoughtful. I found he was fully alive to, and much concerned about, the low standard of morality which seemed to rule French diplomacy. He told me that Louis Napoleon had shadowed forth to him, personally, his scheme for first catching Austria as an ally in the war, and then declining to make peace when our avowed objects had been attained. The Prince argued with the Emperor against this scheme, as one not consistent with our honour—an argument to which the Emperor listened with perfect good-humour, but also with amusement that so much stress should be laid on any considerations of the kind. The policy was one to be acted upon, not to be argued about on abstract grounds. These he would not debate, merely saying with a shrug of his shoulders: 'Je n'ai rien à dire.' It will be seen how uncomfortable, and even dangerous, our position was. Our only safety was that the French Emperor sincerely clung to our alliance, and was determined in the main to follow our advice.

And so this crisis passed—one which kept us in

continual anxiety during the whole months of April and May. We had other embarrassments at home, only less serious because those who occasioned them had less opportunity, and were less in a position of advantage. The head and front of them was, not the leader of our avowed opponents—Disraeli—but our once familiar friend, with whom we had taken sweet counsel together since negotiations began at Vienna—Gladstone. The moment that he and his friends quitted us—because a useless Committee of the House of Commons would put an end to the British Constitution—I was quite sure that he would very soon be our fiercest opponent in everything. I knew his nature too well to believe that he could long maintain the position of a mere dissentient on one point and remain friendly upon others. Accordingly, the moment he heard that Austria was making proposals which Lord John Russell was at least willing to entertain, but which we considered to be illusory, he at once got up a high head of steam, and argued himself into a fever of antagonism and suspicion against Palmerston, as determined to fight for mere victory, when everything substantial as to terms had been or could be gained. I found my dear friend Aberdeen a good deal influenced by him, and had some long arguments with him, both by word of mouth and by letter. Fortunately, Gladstone, as usual, overdid his part, but if his Parliamentary and popular credit at the time had been what they were at a later date, he might have done infinite mischief. His whole tone was that Russia, not Turkey, was the country that was now likely to be treated unjustly, and that it was his duty to help her to retain adequate naval defence against aggression from the Black Sea. We had a great triumph in the secession which his violence caused in the scanty number of his own friends. Sidney Herbert, who had followed him in all else, could not follow him in a course which could scarcely be reconciled with the previous conduct of the Aberdeen Ministry in its long insistence on the Third

Point. Sidney Herbert opened communication with us, and co-operated with us in some Parliamentary expedients, by which we gave it to be understood that negotiations were not finally closed, although we had declined such Austrian proposals as had hitherto been made. But although this sort of language conciliated a few, it irritated a far greater number. The House had voted for Palmerston as the Minister who would prosecute the war vigorously, not as the Minister who would listen to shabby terms of peace. The feeling, therefore, was that of jealousy and suspicion, and Palmerston returned to our Cabinets all the more determined to resist the Austrian muddle. In this, to our surprise, he was finally supported by Lord John Russell, although quite lately his language to Aberdeen had led him to believe that he and all the Peelites were quite agreed.

The feeling of the House was proved on the 24th May, 1855, when a motion by Disraeli, supported by all the malcontents, was defeated by a majority of more than a hundred. A similar attempt in the House of Lords, supported by all Lord Derby's forces, on the 25th May, met with a similar signal defeat. Both Houses of Parliament thus showed unmistakably that they desired the Government to prosecute the war as best it could, until success should enable and entitle it to demand such terms of peace as might satisfy the objects for which it had been undertaken.

There are one or two incidents of this time which are significant of some of its peculiarities, and which, therefore, it may be well to mention. Palmerston had not yet quite finished his work of Cabinet-making, and the new member whom he recruited was Lord Harrowby, who had sat long in the House of Commons as Lord Sandon, and was a regular member of the Conservative party. He was the son of that older Lord Harrowby to whom the famous Cato Street Conspiracy had been betrayed, and whom I had met, still alive and well, at Hamilton Palace in 1840. Lord

Harrowby had never taken any very active part in politics, and I hardly knew why Palmerston wished to have him ; but I believe it was because Lord Harrowby was one of the few public men who felt strongly on what used to be called the 'Polish Question,' in which his kinsman Lord Dudley Stuart was deeply concerned. In one of our discussions on the Vienna terms of peace, Harrowby rather surprised us by saying that no real good could be done without the dismemberment of Russia, and that all arrangements short of this were practically useless. This was a new phase of opinion to me. It was obviously useless in our discussions, because Harrowby himself did not seriously propose a war for the dismemberment of Russia, neither did he seriously propose that we should make an immediate peace on any terms we could get. It was a mere outburst of impatience with the condition of Europe, and was at once dismissed both by Palmerston and by others. Indirectly, however, it may not have been without its use. It put into definite words vague views, which were only half consciously entertained by many, and when thus put into words they were seen at once to be impracticable.

There was, however, another incident of this time which had serious significance as a symptom of the condition of the public mind. There is nothing that the multitude will not think or believe, when it is angry and alarmed, and accordingly, one of the many mad suggestions which arose out of the passion of the time was that the Crimean misfortunes were all due to what was called aristocratic government. In this country, where the different layers of society are so finely graduated, it is difficult to give any definite meaning to language which assumes them to be widely separated and distinct. But, however true it might be that the higher offices of Government were then, and had always been, filled largely by men of birth or of academical education, this was, and had always been, the result of successful competition in the open contests of the world,

and of the exhibition of qualities which secured for them the confidence of those who had risen to the top. There was not the smallest reason to believe that there were in the House of Commons, or in the country, neglected men of the middle classes who would have conducted affairs better. But there was undoubtedly at that time in the House of Commons a considerable group of clever and discontented men, who thought very well of themselves, and who had much influence with the press. In attacking what they called the aristocracy, they were in reality blowing their own trumpets, and were perhaps hopeful of forcing an entrance into the highest offices of the State. They had succeeded in raising a vague feeling of uneasiness and discontent, and in getting up one of those stupid cries to which any demagogue could appeal. We never heard anything about it in the Cabinet, except occasionally as a joke.

I recollect being much amused one day by Graham saying solemnly that he could not conceive how any Cabinet could stand that was weighted with two Dukes —alluding to Newcastle and to me. It was with surprise, therefore, that we heard Ellenborough, who attacked us in the House of Lords on the 14th May, 1855, resort to this miserable claptrap in his speech. He got nothing by it, and deserved to get nothing. He was himself born of the middle class, and was then enjoying a peerage won by the abilities of his father. Moreover, no man had shown such contempt as he for the very best representative body of the middle classes in the country. When appointed Governor-General of India, he took every opportunity of snubbing the Court of Directors, to whom India owed so much, and treated them so disrespectfully that he brought down on his own head the unprecedented penalty of recall. We beat Ellenborough by a majority of forty-four, but I was unable to speak, as I had intended to do. One consequence of this was that a day or two after, in responding for the House of Lords at a dinner at the Mansion House, I made a sharp attack on those who

assailed what they called the aristocracy, and asserted our right to whatever place our faculties might assign to us in the government of the country. This speech was suppressed altogether by some members of the press, which nevertheless attacked it viciously.

We have now come to a time when events took a somewhat new turn. In the last days of May and the first ten days of June, 1855, we heard of our capture of Kertch, which opened the gateway into the Sea of Azof, and of the destruction by our gunboats of an enormous amount of Russian stores destined for Sebastopol. Important roads by which the great fortress was fed were destroyed at the same time. This great success gave new life to us as a Government, in the country and in Parliament, and was interpreted as the beginning of the end. The credit we got for it shows the ignorance and injustice of which the public mind was full. We had been living for some time on the reforms which the Aberdeen Cabinet had set on foot, but which could only come into operation after some interval of time. But it so happens that the instructions to attack Kertch, and the designation of that attack as of primary importance in the fall of Sebastopol, had been pressed on Raglan and on Lyons by Graham and Newcastle, and it had been delayed only because our Generals and Admirals could not overcome the inactivity of the French. At last, in Pelissier, Lyons found a French General who consented to co-operate with our troops, and the conquest was effected easily by the energy and enterprise of our naval officers, with little fighting on land at all. It was even of greater importance than we had fully estimated, because the strain on the resources of Russia was becoming every day more and more severe, in keeping up the enormous supplies needed for her army and garrison in the Crimea. Those supplies were largely derived from the country by the Don, and were conveyed to Sebastopol by boats, and by roads and causeways on and along the shores of the Sea of Azof and the Putrid Sea, which is a branch of

it. The destruction of stores on such a scale, and the shutting up of the roads by which they came, added immensely to the difficulties of defence, and to the exhaustion of the Russian Government.

The effect of this great success was not less marked at home. For some time a monster debate had been pending in the House of Commons, raised on a Motion of Censure by Disraeli. There had been a perfect wilderness of amendments moved from all the disintegrated factions in the House. But in a moment, when the occupation of the Sea of Azof burst upon us, all reality and interest in the result of the debate were at once extinguished, and the credit of the Government was immediately restored, although quite as unreasonably as it had been impaired before. Then, only two or three days after this great success, we heard of another, entirely different in kind, yet all the more on that account most acceptable and encouraging. This was the capture by the allied armies of two of the actual outworks of Sebastopol itself, called respectively the Mamelon and the Quarries. All our previous successes had been mere repulses of the enemy attacking us. This was a success against the great fortress itself, and was received by all of us with great rejoicing.

It was just at this juncture that I met Gladstone at luncheon at Stafford House—our first meeting for some time. Social intercourse between men who have been intimately associated in public life, and have become sharply separated, is not always an agreeable occupation. Gladstone could always argue in private life with perfect temper, and so could I. But there was one thing he could not do: upon any question on which he was keenly interested, and on which his mind was irrevocably made up, he could not even entertain an opposing thought. Under such circumstances, his mind was essentially fanatical, and there is nothing so hopeless or so tiresome as argument with a man in this frame of mind. As I expected, I found Gladstone full of the papers on the Vienna Conference, and declaring

that they filled him with sorrow. It was evident, he said, that it was we who had broken off the Conference, and that we might easily have attained a satisfactory peace. He said he felt this so deeply that he reproached himself whenever he found himself thinking or speaking of anything else. It did not seem to me that he could find many occasions for this self-reproach, if he was always in the mood in which I saw him. When Gladstone had once taken up an opinion in this way, it became to him a religion, and even every outwork was sacred. But there was one thing which could generally be done with Gladstone on such occasions, and that was to quote him against himself. This it was not difficult for me to do. In the many intimate conversations we had had together on men and measures only a few months before, when we were colleagues, Gladstone had been one of the keenest supporters of the war.

I think it right to say here that, although Lord John Russell's course regarding the negotiations at Vienna was so vacillating that it is extremely difficult to give a definite account of it, yet it is certainly not true that he was overruled by the Cabinet. He never fought any battle in the Cabinet for the Austrian proposals, as if his own mind were fully made up upon them. He stated them, and some things that might be said in their favour, but he left the Cabinet to decide on a fairly balanced statement of the pros and cons, leaving us, no doubt, under the impression that he advised acceptance, though still doubtfully. The truth is, we had committed a great mistake in taking him as a member of the Cabinet at the very time when he had accepted the post of our Plenipotentiary at Vienna. In this last capacity he was the recipient of instructions from us. In the capacity of a Cabinet Minister he had a right to a share in the framing of his own instructions, and the two offices made a hopeless confusion when he returned home. The French Foreign Minister had resigned when his advice was not taken. But Lord John was willing to retain his office, and to speak in an altered tone. The

whole affair was a hopeless entanglement, and undoubtedly would have upset the Government, unless the knot had been cut by Lord John's retirement into private life.

But although the close of the formal Conference at Vienna had relieved us from some real dangers and constant anxieties, other anxieties took their place, and there is no part of the Crimean War which to me was more full of trouble than the few weeks that elapsed between the retirement of Lord John Russell and the early days of September. The close of the Conference at Vienna did not put an end to those negotiations of a vaguer sort which had been going on for months before the Conference had begun. These were at once resumed, and they were even more tiresome and inconclusive than before. The same influence continued to prevail. Austria was as anxious for peace as ever, but also as determined as ever not to be drawn into the struggle. France was as anxious as ever to be guided by us, but the Emperor had seen clearly that to withdraw from the Crimea before any military success had been achieved, and with no record except of repulses by the enemy, would be a serious danger to his throne. One only difference there was: reports reached us of the terrible strain on Russia caused by the war, and of an increasing disposition on the part of the Czar to agree to some peace.

There was an old danger which now suddenly took a new form. The Peelites had suspected Palmerston of a disposition to enlarge the declared objects, and to widen the area of the war. Hitherto I had seen no indication of it, although occasionally I had to insist upon the adequacy of the terms indicated in our original 'Four Points.' But now suddenly I was startled by a cut-and-dry proposal from Clarendon that we should agree to a treaty with Sweden, guaranteeing that northern kingdom against Russian aggression, especially on her northern frontier in Finland. The British interest involved was said to be to prevent Russia acquiring a

great naval arsenal in a sea always open, by seizing or conquering the Verunger Fiord in the North Sea. Clarendon introduced it as if in principle the Cabinet had already agreed to it, and as if he expected from all of us a ready assent to its particular form. I at once challenged the assumption that the Cabinet had ever given, or had ever been asked for, its assent. Several other members joined me in saying that they had no recollection of any such agreement. We did not even know how far it went. Clarendon was then obliged to confess that it was a specific guarantee given by us, not covering the Finland Harbour alone, but the whole possessions of Norway and Sweden; that it bound us to resist Russia, in defence of these possessions, both by sea and land; and that it did not stipulate for any part of the cost being repaid to us. I protested against so formidable an engagement being sprung upon us in this way. Several other members of the Cabinet took the same view, and when Clarendon and Palmerston saw that we were seriously divided, they withdrew the question for the time and for further consideration. I was astonished and alarmed by the support given to so rash an undertaking by such a man as Lord Lansdowne.

On the other hand, George Lewis and George Grey were with me in opposition. At this time I wrote the following letter to Clarendon on the subject:

'ARGYLL LODGE,
'KENSINGTON.

'MY DEAR CLARENDON,

'The impression on my mind at present is so strongly against the proposed Swedish Treaty that I wish to explain it to you before the matter comes more formally under the consideration of the Cabinet.

'I do not at all doubt our interest in supporting the Scandinavian kingdoms against the aggressions of Russia. On the contrary, that interest is so direct and obvious that it gives us rights of interference even stronger than those which we are now exercising against the same Power in the East of Europe. But

the more strongly I feel this, the more strongly do I feel also that we may safely leave the cases of such aggression to be dealt with as they arise. On general, as well as on special, grounds it seems to me that we ought to do so. It is no light matter to deprive future Governments of that full and free discretion which it is, above all things, necessary they should have on great questions of peace and war. We value that freedom of judgment much ourselves, and nothing but the strongest necessity should induce us to deprive of it those who are to succeed us in future years. What should we feel now if any former Government had hampered us with a guarantee of Cuba? What effect would such a guarantee have had on the disposition of America to be troublesome to us now when our hands are full? The guarantee proposed would place it in the power of Russia at some future time to force us either into hostilities, or, worse, the evasion, perhaps, of inconvenient obligations.

'That time Russia will know how to choose. It might be when we had complications with America or with France, or when, from other causes, it would be most embarrassing. What should induce us to place such a weapon in the hands of any Power?

'One inducement apparently held out is the securing of a promise from Sweden that she will never give what we fear Russia asking. This is supposing the case of Sweden ceasing to consider the concession as dangerous to herself. But can we really suppose such a case? Or, if we do, can we really believe that Sweden would not find out some way of evading the obligation? So long as Sweden continues sane, or so long as she does not join a Northern League against us, she will resist the aggression of Russia on Finmark; and when she either ceases to be sane or joins the League aforesaid, her promise to us will not be worth the paper on which it is written.

'Now, what light is thrown on these probabilities by Mr. Crone's paper?

'In the first place, we find that so long ago as 1826 Russia made a desperate effort to extend her march to the Atlantic coast, and that she was firmly resisted by the Swedish Government.

'In the next place, we are told that the late intrigues of Russia have roused the attention of the Norwegians and of the Government, and that Sweden was on the point of *appealing to*

Europe, when the war took off the attention of Russia for the time.

'Farther, it appears that the Russian design has been cherished since 1774, or a period of eighty years, and that for thirty years she was nearer its attainment than there is any reason to suppose she can be for thirty years to come.

'Surely, then, this is no case of urgency, none in which we should be justified in taking out of the hands of future Governments the freedom which ought to belong to them. We have not only no reason to fear any blindness on the part of Sweden, but we are expressly told that her eyes are open, and that she was actually about to carry her appeal to Europe and, of course, to us. When the danger again arises, we have the best ground of confidence that she will pursue the same course; or if, whenever that event should happen, England still takes the same view of her policy or her interests as that which we now take, she will be free to act upon it. If, on the contrary, her views should be changed, that change will not have happened without a good cause.

'Lastly, we gain no immediate advantage in exchange for this burden of future inconvenience. There might be some inducement if Sweden were now to join in, in this pending war. But this is not proposed. I see no one result, except the danger of embarrassment which we shall bequeath to others. I think that in waging this war we should at least take care not to sow the seeds of future wars, in so far, at least, as we can help doing so.

'Yours,

'ARGYLL.'

One of the most serious matters which weighed on me was the dispirited and dispiriting tone of the letters from our new Commander-in-Chief at Sebastopol, General Simpson. He had evidently lost heart and hope. He expected the whole expedition to be a failure—warned us that if the siege went on our army must be prepared to spend another winter in the Crimea, and doubted whether the strength and spirits of the men would stand such a trial. Moreover, he told us that, whilst the French army had regular 'lines,' we had none. Simpson added

that, in his opinion, nothing could be done with four separate armies. They must be united under one great man—a condition practically impossible. We were obliged to answer that if Simpson felt himself unable for the duties cast upon him he ought to resign —a very good answer to silence him. But if all he said, or even part of it, was true, what were we to do? I wrote to Palmerston urging him to insist on a definite answer as to the measures to be taken for preparng 'lines' for our army. It was almost a despair to me to find Palmerston muffled up in his old dangerous optimism. When I spoke to him on the 1st of August of the serious responsibility cast upon us by Simpson's letter, he said with his usual careless confidence: 'Oh, but Simpson is evidently rather a nervous man. They must take the Malakoff now, and when they have that the condition of affairs will be different.' I saw no comfort in this sort of language. Simpson gave us no hint of any hope of a successful assault, and Palmerston's 'must' was no better than a guess.

The only comfort I received at all came from my old friend and future brother-in-law, Sir John McNeill, who passed through London on his way from the Crimea. He was the younger brother of the Duncan McNeill, afterwards Lord Colonsay, who had been Sir Robert Peel's able Lord Advocate for Scotland, and was now Lord President of the Court of Session. Sir John had been our Minister in Persia, and in that capacity was highly valued by Palmerston for his ability. On coming home, he was appointed to be President of the Poor Law Board for Scotland, which had been instituted by his brother. Palmerston and Panmure fixed on him as the best-fitted man they could find to go out as Commissioner to the Crimea, and to do what the House of Commons Committee could not possibly do—report on the causes of the breakdown under Raglan. Although well advanced in years and by no means strong in health, he with great public spirit accepted the arduous duty, and had now returned

to London. He told me on July 30th that he had seen Simpson's letters, and thought them much too desponding, and that they proceeded from a mind in some degree enervated. In its way, of course, this was a comfort; but what sort of a prospect did it hold out as regards the officer who was still in command of our army?

It was some days after these transactions, on the 20th August, that we heard for the first time in the Cabinet of an idea which ultimately took form in one of the greatest events of our time. This was the idea of cutting a canal to join the Mediterranean and Red Seas. It was a French idea, and was urged upon us by our ally, Louis Napoleon. Palmerston surprised me and others by the most vehement opposition. It would, he said, cut off Egypt from Turkey, stop the advance of the troops of the suzerain Power, and place British interests in Egypt and in India at the mercy of France. Clarendon was at that time completely under the sway of Palmerston, and took the same line. I don't think they were supported in it by one single other member of the Cabinet. All my colleagues and I thought that the proposal in itself was one which could not be creditably or successfully opposed. I suggested that all the political dangers feared by Palmerston might be averted by making the canal a joint enterprise with other nations, and by placing it under some international control. In this I was supported by the whole Cabinet, and under this influence Clarendon was moved somewhat from his original position. But Palmerston remained as hostile as ever. He seemed quite ready to risk a quarrel with France rather than to consent to any such canal. The result at that time was curious. Clarendon conveyed to Louis Napoleon how very strong a feeling on the subject existed on Palmerston's part, and the Emperor, on receiving this, said at once to Cowley: 'If you will say nothing more on the subject, I will take care that my people shall let it drop.' There could not be a more

striking proof of the personal influence of Palmerston. I never quite knew whether it was a feeling of personal gratitude on the part of the Emperor for the early support Palmerston had given to him at the time of the *coup d'état*, or whether it was simply part of his determination at that time to consolidate his alliance with us, and to run no risks of alienation.

Neither this nor any other question of political interest, however important, could then dwell upon my mind, as compared with the terrible and engrossing anxiety of the great siege which had been so long trying our utmost military strength, and in which, up till that date, no victory had been achieved at all decisive of success. I was not made less anxious by reading an impressive Memorandum to the Cabinet from the Queen, calling upon us to take due note of the warnings of General Simpson, and to see that, if by misfortune our army should be detained for another winter in the Crimea, it should be provided with every possible comfort in its lines. I had no confidence whatever in Palmerston's 'must,' nor any perfect reliance on Panmure. Under these conditions, it may be imagined with what joy I hailed every symptom which seemed to indicate any real progress of the attack, against the magnificent defence of our great adversary.

At last, on the 17th of August, one such symptom did reach us under very peculiar conditions, and was an immense relief to us all. On the previous night a telegram from Berlin had reached Clarendon, saying that it was known in that capital that Gortschakoff had been ordered by the Russian Government to attack our position before Sebastopol with his whole army. We had hardly sat for an hour at the Cabinet when a telegram reached us from Simpson, to say that the Russian army, 60,000 strong, had just attacked the French and Sardinian fronts on the Tchernaya, and had been repulsed with the loss of between 4,000 and 5,000 men, and with little loss to the allies. This was great news. It indicated the intolerable pressure felt by Russia in

maintaining the defence, and the comparative weakness of her means of attack upon us by any force that could be gathered outside the fortress.

At this Cabinet I had another battle to fight against the projected treaty of guarantee to Sweden. I fought it strenuously against Palmerston, almost single-handed, for I had little help from my colleagues, who seemed shy and intimidated by Palmerston's attitude. On the other hand, very few of them supported him, and these few only half-heartedly. Clarendon was evidently entirely under Palmerston's guidance, and took no very decided part, the final result being that both Palmerston and Clarendon allowed the subject to drop; and I think I did some good in helping to free the country from a serious danger, by which we might have been involved, at the pleasure of Russia, in a difficult war at any time.

Among the trials of this time to me, although a minor one, was the somewhat altered footing on which of necessity I was placed with Lord Aberdeen. I could not have that unreserved consultation and intercourse which I had enjoyed before, because his policy now appeared to me to be one of peace at any price, and I thought him much under the influence of Gladstone in denouncing any effectual limitation of Russian preponderance in the Black Sea. They had themselves been parties to the 'Third Point' as an essential condition of peace, and there was no meaning in that point and no sense in the attack upon Sebastopol, except with a view to strike a great blow at the naval power of Russia in the Euxine. Still, my affection for Aberdeen, and my confidence in the almost austere integrity of his mind, led me not infrequently to my old haunt at his house. As at this time I was about to leave London for Scotland, I went to see him in September, and found him in company with Graham. This conjunction, I felt, redoubled the antagonism with which I should be encountered. Himself an excellent and high-minded man, Graham was sus-

picious of others, and especially of those from whom he differed greatly. I knew his dislike of Palmerston, and his ineradicable suspicion of Palmerston's intentions. He and Gladstone had now taken up the championship of Lord John Russell, because Lord John had patronized the Austrian proposals, and because Palmerston's Government had declared them inadequate.