CHURCHILL

Churchill

A PROFILE

Edited by Peter Stansky

WORLD PROFILES

General Editor: Aïda DiPace Donald

MACMILLAN

ISBN 978-1-349-01233-6 ISBN 978-1-349-01231-2 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-01231-2

COPYRIGHT © 1973 BY PETER STANSKY

SOFTCOVER REPRINT OF THE HARDCOVER 1ST EDITION 1973 978-0-333-12690-5

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA 1973

FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE UNITED KINGDOM 1973 BY

THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD

LONDON AND BASINGSTOKE

ASSOCIATED COMPANIES IN NEW YORK TORONTO

DUBLIN MELBOURNE JOHANNESBURG AND MADRAS

SBN 333 12690 4

I am grateful to the friends and colleagues who have taken the time to discuss with me writings about Churchill. I would like particularly to mention my deep gratitude for the suggestions of A. F. Thompson, Shirley Hazzard, Paul Guinn, and of the editor of the series, Aida DiPace Donald.

—PETER STANSKY

Contents

Introduction   vii

Winston Churchill, 1874-1965   xv

PART ONE

Young Churchill   3

JOHN GIBSON LOCKHART

The Youngest Man in Europe: Churchill at Twenty-four   17

G. W. STEEVENS

At the Colonial Office, 1905-8   21

RONALD HYAM

Historian of the Great War   36

PETER WRIGHT

Genius Without Judgment: Churchill at Fifty   48

A. G. GARDINER

The Family Man and Writer in the 1930s   54

ROBERT RHODES JAMES

A Man of First Principles: Churchill in 1940   67

ISAIAH BERLIN

Churchill in War	91
B. H. LIDDELL HART	
Churchill as Prime Minister	110
JOHN COLVILLE	
In Parliament After the War	152
WOODROW WYATT	

PART TWO

The Power Politician and Counterrevolutionary	173
ARNO J. MAYER	
Churchill on Balance	188
CLEMENT ATTLEE	
Churchill: A Minority View	207
GORONWY REES	
The Inner Man	222
ANTHONY STORR	
<i>Bibliographical Note</i>	263
<i>Contributors</i>	267

Introduction

IN MARCH, 1965, the American periodical *The Atlantic Monthly* dedicated a special number to Churchill under the heading: "The Greatest Englishman." The exaggeration is understandable, coming only a few months after his death. But enough time has now passed for the fact of his greatness, if not the degree of it, to be beyond argument. Yet if Churchill had died in 1940, in his sixty-sixth year, he would have been remembered chiefly as a fascinating but ultimately unsuccessful political figure in the first four decades of twentieth-century Britain.

Even, perhaps, if he had died sometime after the Second World War—having at the war's end returned with characteristic overcommitment to partisan politics and to attacks on his former Labour colleagues in the national government—his claim to greatness might not have been so readily or universally granted. There, all too palpably, was the intemperate political chieftain, blurring the

recollection of the great unifying wartime leader. And in the early days of the Cold War—which, with his gift for finding a striking phrase, he helped along in his “Iron Curtain” speech at Fulton, Missouri, in 1946—he appeared to some a difficult, even a senile old man, who was participating in politics beyond his time. His postwar political activity was motivated at least in part by determination to wipe out the insult of his rejection by the electorate in 1945. Power had to be regained, and indeed was, but not even his most devout admirers would claim that these were his great years.

It was not until 1955, at eighty-one, that he finally retired. Then, no longer a mercurial force in the play of British politics, he could safely be moved into myth, and became a figure whom all Britain and the Western world could venerate now that his days of activity were over.* The tributes that had poured out on the occasion of his eightieth birthday were renewed at the time of his death a decade later. The funeral itself was an extremely moving ceremony, watched by the world on television and film, and recorded in countless words and photographs. Not since the death of the Duke of Wellington was the nation so moved.

It is characteristic of Churchill, with his instinct for pomp and circumstance, that he should have given some thought years earlier to the ceremonial to be followed at the time of his death. It is unlikely, though, that he would have foreseen the dual symbolic aspect of the funeral itself when the time came for it: a farewell to a great Englishman, and a farewell to the greatness of England. The decline of British influence on the world had been tacitly if not overtly acknowledged in the realignments of the postwar power structure. Now even the illusion of imperial grandeur had ended; this was as clear to the man in the street as to the men in Westminster.

Churchill began his political career at a time when Great Britain was the most powerful country in the world. His first period of

* His heroic stature and its early introduction into popular consciousness is marked, I believe, by the great number of books for children written about him: an image of extraordinary force is impressed upon the young at a time when it is likely to remain in their memories for life. In this respect at least, he may well prove to be “the greatest Englishman”; certainly no other twentieth-century political figure approaches him. [ed.]

importance, treated here by Ronald Hyam, was during the heyday of empire, from the turn of the century to 1914. He moved steadily forward as undersecretary of state for the colonies, president of the Board of Trade, home secretary, and first lord of the Admiralty. But from 1915 to 1939 his life was a succession of comparative failures, all on a grand scale. He was war secretary, colonial secretary, and chancellor of the exchequer, but his aggressive stands against those he considered enemies of the state—Bolsheviks and workers—and his increasingly critical attitude toward his colleagues isolated and weakened him, despite his high offices. Then, at the time of the Second World War, he achieved the premiership and led Britain alone against Hitler.

In his eightieth-birthday speech he stated modestly, "It was the nation and the race dwelling all round the globe that had the lion's heart. I had the luck to be called upon to give the roar." But "to give the roar" required a genius that was peculiarly his, and a dauntless tenacity of a sort that in the past frequently had led to his undoing, for he would not see the possibility of an attitude toward a problem other than the one he himself adopted. So, in 1940, after the fall of France, he did not waver in his conviction of an ultimate British victory over the Nazis. Adapting a phrase of Rupert Brooke's in a sonnet of the First World War, one can say that now, as the Second World War began, Churchill was matched with his hour.

He did, as he intended, lead Britain to victory, and paradoxically—as discussed by Liddell Hart—he led her grandly off the main stage as he made concessions to her eventual allies, the United States and the Soviet Union, concessions that helped assure the defeat of Germany but also resulted in Britain's decline to a second-class power. And though the United States and Russia were the dominant partners in the alliance in the sheer accumulation of power, Churchill, as the spokesman for embattled Britain, caught the imagination of people everywhere.

This culmination as prime minister and war leader makes Churchill a figure whose position is secure in the world's history. Although his importance in the war years can make the rest of his life seem like little more than a long prologue and a brief epilogue to those heroic years, in fact all of Churchill's life is of interest. The object of the present collection is to try to suggest as many

facets of it as possible, without pretending to completeness and without touching on every one of his activities or all aspects of his personality. The biographies of him are legion; some are satisfactory but most are in differing ways inadequate to the challenge their subject presents.

The mammoth official life—which at this time consists of three thick volumes of text bringing the story up to 1916 and three companion volumes of documents—has been delayed by the death of its original author, his son Randolph. For any student of Churchill it is an invaluable source, but it holds too closely to the motto that Randolph Churchill set himself, “He shall be his own Biographer,” and tends to present too many unassimilated documents, even in the main volumes. But whatever its faults, it will continue to be indispensable.

Apart from formal biographies, there are also innumerable studies, some of which I mention in the bibliography, of various parts of Churchill’s career; and he is a compelling figure in almost any political memoir, biography, or autobiography of the period. But to extract bits and pieces from such books—with some exceptions, where the effect is self-contained—would result in a confused picture and would not do justice to either author or subject. Rather, I have attempted here to select, on the whole, essays complete in themselves that suggest aspects of Churchill—a “profile”—and will give the reader some feeling and appreciation for his strengths and weaknesses.

Every facet of Churchill’s life is marked by controversy and drama, even his very entry into life prematurely during a ball at Blenheim, the seat of the head of the family, his grandfather, the Duke of Marlborough. Since he was a masterly writer, he has been able to present his own version of events, with an overpowering rhetoric of assurance. (His lack of self-doubt most of the time was balanced by periods of black depression, about which Anthony Storr writes in his psychoanalytical study.) Accordingly, his own books, while they afford a great deal of pleasure, must be read with care. His coparticipants in events, and historians, are continually attempting to set the record straight. But in many cases, most particularly in his accounts of his own and Britain’s role in the two world wars—it is frequently hard to distinguish between them—he has been able to set the terms of the debate, and to convey his

story first. As Noel Annan, the intellectual historian, has remarked in a review of a recent group of Churchill books:

In a curious way Churchill may impose upon historians in the future his own vision of history. They may be able to discern some broad principle which reconciles some of the more startling changes in policy, but apart from his brief spell in the field of social insurance (before the First World War) it is hard to associate him with any of the movements of change in this country. But they will never be able to convey the true sense of British politics in the first half of this century without often referring to this astonishing phenomenon who, almost totally ignorant of how the rest of his countrymen lived, exhibited so many of their characteristics in a most memorable form, and was hailed in his old age, after a lifetime of unfulfilled promise, as the saviour of his country.*

He was clearly motivated at the beginning of his career by an effort to prove himself worthy of his father and more deserving of affection and regard than parental neglect would seem to indicate. Like his father, he was intensely ambitious, but he failed to show any early promise and was shunted off into the military. He was intent on fame, and on fortune as well. As a member of the upper classes, but as the son of a younger son, he had the tastes of the very rich, but not the income, and he was determined to succeed. He had that assurance—as pointed out by G. W. Steevens—that goes with being a member of the British ruling classes, the conviction that he belonged to the best group in the world. Along with this went bravado and arrogance: he would risk his life in order to make a grand show. At the same time, he was able to speak generously and selflessly: to speak for the downtrodden (whose misery he never experienced) and for those in prison when he was home secretary before the First World War; and to “speak for England” during the Second World War.

He did not question the social order or his own place in it, but he was determined to make himself as important as he felt he deserved. Early on, the thought may well have occurred to him that he might someday be prime minister. He was probably surprised that the premiership took so long in coming. Yet there must have been moments, particularly during his growing estrangement from his own Tory Party, in the late 1920s and 1930s over

* *The New York Review of Books*, July 10, 1969, p. 30. [ed.]

India and in the later 1930s over rearmament, when he felt that his ambitions would never be realized. (Churchill had changed allegiances twice before, from Tory to Liberal and back again, which hardly created confidence within party organizations.)

The conventions of upper-class life meant that children need not be much trouble to their parents, but Winston was unusually ignored. Still, he was able to forgive his parents their neglect, perhaps because he was sustained for years by the overflowing love of his nurse, Mrs. Everest, and later by a very happy marriage and family life. He had to make his own career, and in a way he could be unconventional about procedures, because so little was expected of him. He did not do well at school, although he enjoyed in later life exaggerating these failings, but Harrow, his public school, helped instill in him a respect for, and a knowledge of, English prose. If he had not been the extraordinary human being he inherently was, he might have turned out simply another Edwardian "gent," an officer on half-pay, who would have served his country in India and in France during the First World War, and perhaps have figured in the Harrovian lists of those who had died for King and Country. That was not enough for him, and it was an act of will that made him into the "glow-worm," as he described himself at thirty-two.

In his early years he was always pushing himself forward, for medals, for office, as an observer at the front for any war. He began by making his way as a correspondent, but journalism was to serve him as an entrance to politics, and his flamboyant escape from the Boers made him a hero. (Whether he violated the terms of his imprisonment as a correspondent is one of the many disputed points about his life.) It meant, in practical terms, that his defeat as Parliamentary candidate in 1899 was turned into a victory in 1900.

His precipitousness, his excitement about any possibility that offered itself, his frequently excessive commitment to the cause of the moment continued as his style in politics. He began to be enjoyed as someone who was colorful, and about whom stories could be told but who was not trusted. Asquith, the leader of the Liberal Party, whose ranks he joined over the issue of free trade in 1904, felt he was incapable of discrimination and loyalty, and

explicitly predicted that he would not be prime minister. A. G. Gardiner, in his discussion here, points out that Stanley Baldwin, the Tory leader between the wars, who shared some of the sobriety of Asquith's views while granting many of Churchill's gifts, felt that since Churchill lacked judgment and wisdom, his opinions need not be taken seriously.

In a sense, these eminent critics were right; but another way of putting it would be to say that Churchill lacked caution, and perhaps balance. He would devote himself single-mindedly to the immediate question at hand, whether it was how to solve the problems of the poor or how best to unload a truck. (Whatever the case, he was highly methodical, and believed that administration should not be sloppy and that all suggestions and orders should be conveyed in writing or, if first discussed orally, should then be written out.) During the Second World War, as John Colville reminds us, his memoranda, accompanied by the red tags he had printed up saying ACTION THIS DAY, were the terror of his staff, but they helped produce the efficiency that was essential to winning the war. His Edwardian high spirits were too much for many of his political contemporaries, and frequently they served *him* badly as well—could make him curt and unfeeling—but they were also what gave him his gifts of imagination, those extraordinary phrases that leaped to his lips or pen, his fantastic enthusiasm. When the combination of man and circumstance was in tune, as happened at certain points in his career, he was exactly right, and the price was worth paying for all his mistakes and gaffes.

Since he committed himself completely to the cause of the moment, it is hard to be sure of the depth of a particular commitment: how much, for example, did he believe in the causes of the Left when he and Lloyd George, in the Asquith government before the First World War, were the chief architects in creating what has come to be regarded as the twentieth-century foundation of the welfare state in Great Britain? He was deeply involved in such revolutionary concepts as unemployment insurance, even though he was moved not by radical ideology but simply by a desire to do his best for his country. He recognized the wastefulness of the Edwardian social system, the needlessly high price in unrest and suffering down below that was paid for the opulence the rich enjoyed, and he hoped to make Britain a better place for

all. But his aim was to strengthen, not to upset, the status quo, and this was one reason for his near-hysterical hatred of "Bolshevism" between the wars, as Arno Mayer points out. What he wanted was England "as she was, only more so," with some degree of contentment for all. He was a pragmatist in the service of an ideal of a traditional England. With that the paramount consideration, he could adapt to the needs of circumstance and appear to change his mind and principles—as when he welcomed Stalin enthusiastically as an ally during the Second World War.

His independence, his imagination, his ability to see ways that were obscure to others, seemed to go off the track from the second year of the First World War to shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War.* But in 1940 he felt that it was he, of all English politicians, who was best qualified to wage the defense of England, and it would appear that he was right. This overriding achievement should be kept in mind as successive stages of his career are considered in the pages that follow. I have attempted to bring together some of the most telling views of Churchill, in various styles and guises, at various points in time—some admiring, some critical—in order to illuminate a man who, with all his faults, did heroic service for his own country and for the Western world.

PETER STANSKY

Stanford in Britain
Cliveden
June, 1971

* Since it would require other books of documents to discuss them adequately, it has seemed wisest not to touch directly on the debates among historians over, for example, the value of Churchill's unsuccessful attempts to save Antwerp in October, 1914: did the few days' delay caused by the attempt mean that the nearby coast was saved for France? The controversy is much more intense over the question of the Gallipoli campaign of 1915: if the British had persisted, would it have succeeded? Churchill was largely responsible for the campaign; did its failure lead to his being dropped from power during the war? Consideration of these issues would involve complex discussion of details, essential if one were concerned with trying to determine the precise nature of specific events, but obscuring the lineaments of a man's personality and importance. Similar limitations affect the much-debated question of the various strengths and deficiencies of Churchill's policies during the Second World War. [ed.]

Winston Churchill, 1874–1965

WINSTON CHURCHILL was born on November 30, 1874, in Blenheim Palace, the home of his grandfather, the Duke of Marlborough. He was the eldest son of Lord Randolph Churchill (1849–1895) and Jennie Jerome (1854–1921), a rich, beautiful American of less exalted background. Lord Randolph was a prominent and imaginative Tory politician whose career reached its height in 1886 when he was chancellor of the exchequer; it collapsed that same year when his resignation over the military budget was accepted. He had little faith in the intelligence and future of his son, who was to write Lord Randolph's biography in 1906 and who, throughout his life, was motivated to some degree by a desire to prove his father had been wrong in his estimate.

He was educated at private schools from 1882 to 1888; then, from 1888 to 1892, at Harrow. From 1893 to 1894 he was a cadet at the

Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst; in February, 1895, he was commissioned in the 4th Hussars.

He had his first taste of war as an observer of the conflict between Spain and Cuba in 1895. It was there, too, that he began his career as a journalist. In 1896 he went to India with his regiment, in 1897 fought on the northwest frontier, and in March, 1898, published his first book, an account of that campaign—*The Story of the Malakand Field Force*. During his time in India he deepened his political knowledge through extensive reading of the *Annual Register*; a close reading of Gibbon and Macaulay helped form his style. In 1898 he managed to attach himself to the campaign in the Sudan, and he published *The River War* in 1899. In July, 1899, he ran unsuccessfully for Parliament as a Conservative candidate from Oldham. In October he went to South Africa as a war correspondent during the Boer War; he was captured while defending an armored train, but escaped from prison. The exploit made him famous. He wrote two volumes on the war: *Ian Hamilton's March* and *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria*. That same year, 1900, he published his one novel, *Savrola*.

In 1900 he was elected to Parliament from Oldham, as a Tory. He became increasingly discontented with his party, particularly its policy to expand the army and its growing commitment to tariffs. In 1904 he "crossed the floor" of the House of Commons and became a Liberal. When the Liberals formed a government in December, 1905, he was appointed undersecretary of state for the colonies; in the general election of 1906 he was elected for north-west Manchester as a Liberal. After Asquith became prime minister in 1908, Churchill was made president of the Board of Trade, with a seat in the Cabinet. That same year he was very happily married to Clementine Hozier. In February, 1910, he became home secretary and in 1911 first lord of the Admiralty. In all his posts he was known for his imagination—he was thought to be somewhat radical—and for his willingness to try new ways. As first lord he helped to strengthen the navy, so that it was in a state approaching preparedness when war came in 1914.

His own career during the war was not successful. At the time the government was reorganized in May, 1915, he was demoted to being chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster, in large part because

of the already evident failure of the Gallipoli campaign that brought the British to the Dardanelles. Churchill was largely responsible for the adventure. The hope was to knock Turkey out of the war, but the terrain, the number of Turkish troops, and an insufficiency of British forces and supplies doomed the campaign and Churchill's reputation. He resigned from the government in November, 1915. From then until the following June he served on the front in France.

Lloyd George, who had succeeded Asquith as prime minister, called him back into the government as minister of munitions in 1917. He became secretary of state for war in 1919 and was a firm supporter of the unsuccessful Allied campaign against the Bolsheviks in Russia that year. From 1921 until 1922 he was colonial secretary, and was active in negotiating the treaty creating the Irish Free State in December, 1921. He was defeated in the general election of 1922, and was not successful in returning to Parliament until November, 1924, at which time he rejoined the Tory party. He was appointed chancellor of the exchequer in the Baldwin government of that year. He led England back onto the gold standard in 1925, in the hope of restoring economic confidence. But the effect of the move was to damage Britain's international economic position. During the general strike in 1926 he edited the government paper, the *British Gazette*, and allowed his enjoyment of a fight to make him excessively vehement against the workers.

Throughout these years, even while active as a politician, he continued to write, publishing *The World Crisis* in four volumes (1923-29), his account of the First World War. Labour came into power in 1929, and Churchill went out of office. Before the national government was formed in 1931 he had already dissociated himself to a considerable degree from his party over what he regarded as its too indulgent attitude toward India.

During most of the 1930s he was in the political "wilderness." But it was a productive period for his writing: most notably *My Early Life* (1930); *Marlborough*, his biography of his great ancestor in four volumes (1933-38); and *Great Contemporaries* (1937). He became increasingly alarmed about the international situation, the growing strength of Germany, and the need for rearmament. When war broke out in 1939, he was brought back into

the government as first lord of the Admiralty. On May 10, 1940, he became prime minister, and during the next five years he led his country to victory.

In July, 1945, a majority of the electorate would not trust him in peace as they had in war, and a Labour government was elected. From 1948 to 1954 Churchill published his six-volume history, *The Second World War*. He returned to power as prime minister from 1951 to 1955; he then retired as leader of his party, but remained as a member of Parliament until 1964. From 1956 until 1958 his *History of the English-speaking Peoples* appeared; much of it had been written before the Second World War. In 1953 he was made a Knight of the Garter, and received the Nobel prize for literature. He died on January 24, 1965, received a state funeral at St. Paul's, and was buried in Bladon Churchyard near his birthplace at Blenheim.