

· R E V I E W S ·

Winston Churchill's War Memoirs

By FRANCIS NEILSON

WHEN I FINISHED READING Winston Churchill's book, "The Gathering Storm," I was foolish enough to predict that no one at present would have the courage to point out the inaccuracies it contained. I was mistaken. In an article published in *The New York Times* of May 9, 1948, Hanson Baldwin reviewed a staff study made under the direction of Major General C. F. Robinson, entitled "Foreign Logistical Organizations and Methods." This report was prepared for the Secretary of the Army. Baldwin tells us that the facts in this survey take "sharp issue with some of Winston Churchill's contentions."

He then deals with several assertions that appeared in the serial production of the book and remarks:

These conclusions are at sharp variance with some of Mr. Churchill's statements. . . . The staff survey shows that in 1934, when Mr. Churchill first commenced to express his concern, Germany produced only 840 combat aircraft, 1,968 of all types, and that up until 1940, at least, Germany's production did not markedly outstrip Britain's. . . .

So it was with tanks and trucks up to the outbreak of war in 1939. If the figures given in the staff report are approximately correct, much that Churchill has written on Germany's preparations for war should be read with caution and thoroughly examined by all who desire to know the facts, because there are many other statements in the book which will not be readily accepted by those who have made a study of the causes of wars.

Joseph Kennedy, who was American Ambassador to Great Britain in 1939, pointed out in a letter to *The New York Times*, of Sept. 26, 1948, several other slight inaccuracies in "The Gathering Storm." On Oct. 17, 1948, Churchill's son, in a reply, admitted that his father had "erred" in giving wrong dates for certain happenings.

Let us admit at once that it is a very hazardous job for a recorder to deal impartially with current events, such as this war. It is one thing to quote from documents what happened long after the turmoil has passed. It is quite another for a man to reject all the propaganda and set sanely to work to find the truth in the fog of national and personal interests. Here the moral reputation of a government is at stake; there the prestige

of a statesman must be shielded at all costs. Any statement that questions the probity of the administration is not to be tolerated by its servants. Furthermore, it is regarded as blasphemy to impugn the political integrity of men who, with the aid of propaganda, have been placed upon pedestals, or to cast doubt upon their words and actions.

After World War I, it was difficult enough to make people understand that there were no angels holding portfolios in European cabinets when the conflict began. Shortly after the Treaty of Versailles was signed, tens of thousands of intelligent people who had believed the propaganda stories issued by the governments were amazed to find critical works written by reputable authors—American, British, French, and Italian—which revealed the hollowness and falsity of the claims of those responsible for the conflict.

Churchill's Feud with Stanley Baldwin

WHEN CHURCHILL WROTE this first volume of his memoirs, he was conscious that it would not pass as history. He says frankly, "I do not describe it as history." In the first place, he was a protagonist. Indeed, a wit has already said that the proper title of the book might well be "The One-Man War." There are twenty-five *I*'s in the preface of barely two pages. In the second place, he set before himself a thesis that is reduced almost to a personal matter. He is quite candid in stating what that thesis is. Stanley Baldwin, when Prime Minister, did not see eye to eye with Winston Churchill, who had been a private member since the year 1925—a long time for an ambitious politician to be out of office.

As early in the book as the second chapter, Churchill begins his story of his conflict with Baldwin. He says:

. . . My relations with this statesman are a definite part of the tale I have to tell. Our differences at times were serious, but in all these years and later I never had an unpleasant personal interview or contact with him, and at no time did I feel we could not talk together in good faith and understanding as man to man.¹

This feud was carried on intermittently until Baldwin retired in 1937, when the coronation of the present King took place; and a great part of "The Gathering Storm" is devoted to the differences that arose between the Prime Minister and Churchill. We can easily understand Churchill's resentment at Baldwin for not offering him a place in the cabinet. He is just as human as any other member of the House, and in reading his book, it is plain that he felt slighted at this neglect.

¹ "The Gathering Storm," Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1948, pp. 19-20.

In a passage that lights up this two-men drama in a shadowy scene, Churchill declares:

Mr. Baldwin certainly had good reason to use the last flickers of his power against one who had exposed his mistakes so severely and so often. Moreover, as a profoundly astute party manager, thinking in majorities and aiming at a quiet life between elections, he did not wish to have my disturbing aid. He thought, no doubt, that he had dealt me a politically fatal stroke, and I felt he might well be right. . . .²

But what he takes chapters to tell of this parliamentary quarrel will in all probability be reduced to a page or two by the historian; for the simple reason that other matters of far greater moment were taking place, many of which are not even noticed by Churchill in his book.

Churchill vis-à-vis Lloyd George

IT WILL BE DIFFICULT for anyone who knew what the real issues were in Great Britain and on the continent during the years when Churchill was a private member of the House to comprehend how he has succeeded in ignoring the cases presented by his opponents in Parliament. In several instances he omits the views of those opposed to him in debate.

Now Lloyd George was certainly no Nazi and, although he said: "Hitler is one of the greatest of the many great men I have ever met," he would be the last to agree with Hitler's system of government. The record of the controversies in the House clearly reveals that some well-informed members were not impressed by Churchill's fulminations. In a remarkable debate on Feb. 5, 1936, Lloyd George reviewed the position of the powers in connection with the final protocol of the Locarno Conference, and he declared: "We are responsible for creating the atmosphere of fear. Is it not possible to break this circle of death before it is too late?"

It is important to mark the date. About a month later—March 10—after Churchill delivered "an alarmist diatribe," Lloyd George surveyed the whole question of armaments and said he did not agree with Mr. Churchill's estimate of the power of Germany. He then went on to show the cause of much of the friction:

For 12 years or more France refused to carry out her undertaking to disarm, and even after Locarno, which was intended partly to provide a basis for disarmament.

He also remarked that some people thought that Germany "was the only enemy we had to think about."

² *Ibid.*, p. 201.

In the House of Lords, March 2, 1937, Lord Lothian dealt with the government's policy of armed alliances. He said:

. . . That is a policy which in the first fifteen years of peace concentrated on keeping Germany without arms and encircled, and which is now concerned in building up a system of armed alliances about it, a policy, I may add, for which we and the United States of America must bear our full share of blame.

It is impossible for any unprejudiced person to study the parliamentary debates before the Sudeten crisis arose and to give a satisfactory reason why Churchill in his book has ignored the criticism of his policy made by men who not only imagined they had reliable sources of information but who were as devoted to the interests of Great Britain as Churchill himself.

However this may be—and only a thorough investigation of the controversy may decide the matter—it is just as well to bear in mind that Churchill tells us in his book what his attitude had been since the autumn of 1933. In the following extraordinary passage, which antedates so many important events, he remarks:

It is difficult to find a parallel to the unwisdom of the British and weakness of the French Governments, *who none the less reflected the opinion of their Parliaments in this disastrous period.* Nor can the United States escape the censure of history. Absorbed in their own affairs and all the abounding interests, activities, and accidents of a free community, they simply gaped at the vast changes which were taking place in Europe, and imagined they were no concern of theirs. The considerable corps of highly competent, widely trained professional American officers formed their own opinions, but these produced no noticeable effect upon the improvident aloofness of American foreign policy. If the influence of the United States had been exerted, it might have galvanised the French and British politicians into action. . . . (Italics mine)³

The immediate cause of this outburst was "The MacDonald Plan" to which he was opposed. But Hitler did not become the *Führer* until March, 1933. Here is an example of Churchill's method of writing about an event long after it has happened, and judging it on the basis of information gathered some years later.

In the passage quoted above there is an indication of his utterly undemocratic notions of parliamentary government. Was he in accord with Hitler in his contempt of free institutions? In his book, "Amid These Storms," published in 1932, he said:

. . . Democratic governments drift along the line of least resistance,

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 77-8.

taking short views, paying their way with sops and doles and smoothing their path with pleasant-sounding platitudes. . . .⁴

Some sympathy might be found for him in expressing himself so caustically, for he must have felt rather isolated politically by men who did not appreciate his worth. We may infer from the above that he realized he stood alone in an apathetic world. How strange that this man who had formerly proclaimed from many platforms the right of the people to determine the policy of their government should now find an obstinate electorate paying little heed to his call to arms!

Still, it may be said that the people in Great Britain, France, and America knew a lot more about affairs than he thought they did. There were books enough in circulation to edify a schoolboy of sixteen; and many of them published in England presented facts that Churchill ignored from the beginning. His present work gives no indication anywhere that he was at any time conscious before he began to write letters to himself, March 13, 1936, that the public had these sources of information. The reason for his neglect to consider the probability of an informed public, or one that did not want another war, may be that he knew he was making an excursion upon slippery ground when he started to write about the part that he took in these affairs after Hitler became leader of the Third Reich. He had placed himself in a very difficult position, for on the one hand he had praised Hitler and his achievements; and, on the other, in letters written to himself and in speeches in and out of the House, he had conducted a campaign against the man who had merited his approval.

Churchill on Hitler's "Remarkable Exploits"

THE AMERICAN EDITION of his book, "Step by Step," was published in 1939. The preface to it is dated May 21 of that year. In a letter written to himself, under the date of Sept. 17, 1937, explaining his anxiety about the rearming of the German forces, he said:

To hold these opinions is not to be hostile to the German Government, and still less to the Germans as a nation. To feel deep concern about the armed power of Germany is in no way derogatory to Germany. On the contrary, it is a tribute to the wonderful and terrible strength which Germany exerted in the Great War, when almost single-handed she fought nearly all the world and nearly beat them. Naturally, when a people who have shown such magnificent military qualities are arming night and day, its neighbors, who bear the scars of previous conflicts, must be anxious and ought to be vigilant. One may dislike Hitler's system and yet admire his patriotic achievement. *If our country were defeated I hope we should*

⁴ "Amid These Storms," New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932, p. 78.

find a champion as indomitable to restore our courage and lead us back to our place among the nations. (Italics mine)⁵

In "The Gathering Storm," Churchill says:

... The Weimar Republic, with all its liberal trappings and blessings, was regarded as an imposition of the enemy. It could not hold the loyalties or the imagination of the German people. For a spell they sought to cling as in desperation to the aged Marshal Hindenburg. Thereafter mighty forces were adrift; the void was open, and into that void after a pause there strode a maniac of ferocious genius, the repository and expression of the most virulent hatreds that have ever corroded the human breast—Corporal Hitler.⁶

Surely the intelligent reader will wish to know why the Corporal rather suddenly became "ferocious" and "the repository" of "virulent hatreds." Because Churchill in "Great Contemporaries" extols Hitler's "patriotic ardor and love of country" and says his story "cannot be read without admiration for the courage, the perseverance, and the vital force which enabled him to challenge, defy, conciliate, or overcome, all the authorities or resistances which barred his path." Moreover, in the same essay Churchill tells us:

... Those who have met Herr Hitler face to face in public business or on social terms have found a highly competent, cool, well-informed functionary with an agreeable manner, a disarming smile, and few have been unaffected by a subtle personal magnetism. Nor is this impression merely the dazzle of power. He exerted it on his companions at every stage in his struggle, even when his fortunes were in the lowest depths. Thus the world lives on hopes that the worst is over, and that we may yet live to see Hitler a gentler figure in a happier age.⁷

This is the most bewildering psychological cataclysm that has been recorded, and it all took place in about twelve months. It was more than a "breakdown"; it was a spiritual earthquake. What caused it? Let the student probe this question. If he does so, and goes deeply enough into it, he will learn something about the European political system that will amaze him, something indeed that very few Americans understand.

The panegyric on Hitler to be found in "Great Contemporaries," published in 1937, is one of the most extraordinary tributes paid to a foreign politician by an Englishman:

... When Hitler began, Germany lay prostrate at the feet of the Allies. He may yet see the day when what is left of Europe will be prostrate at

⁵ "Step by Step," New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1939, pp. 143-4.

⁶ "The Gathering Storm," p. 11.

⁷ "Great Contemporaries," New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1937, p. 232.

the feet of Germany. Whatever else may be thought about these exploits, they are certainly among the most remarkable in the whole history of the world.⁸

The difficulty that faced Churchill when he sat down to write his story was how to reconcile the conflict of his esteem for Hitler and the campaign that he had waged against him since he became *Führer*. An explanation of any worth could not be given without raising the whole matter of the Sudeten question, the Anschluss, and that of Danzig and the Corridor. Churchill was a bitter opponent of the Munich settlement and denounced it in the House of Commons.

There is so much more to be told of these affairs that what is now known about them might easily fill two or three volumes as big as this one under our notice. History will demand from students much deeper consideration of the problems raised in Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Poland than Churchill gives to them. Slightly he refers to Lord Snowden's accusation that Hitler's peace overtures before Munich had been ignored. Students will want to know the nature of these overtures.

In the days to come serious-minded people will not be satisfied with merely part of the history of events that led up to the war; they will want to know the facts, irrespective of whether they come from a German source or any other, just as they did after the last war. It is not the business of historians to defend this or that State, or this or that politician; if they are honorable men, free to speak clearly, they must sift the data they have collected and present to their public an intelligible statement of what occurred.

Churchill's Attitude toward Germany

CHURCHILL ADMITS that he has been charged with being an enemy of Germany. It is true that he has often been denounced on English platforms as a fomenter of war. Many examples could be given of the way his former colleagues criticized his demands. Here a single one must suffice. Sir Herbert Samuel, a leading Liberal, in the House, July 13, 1934, said:

. . . He [Mr. Churchill] comes forward and tells the nation that we ought straightaway to double and redouble our Air Force, that we ought to have an Air Force four times as big as we have now, without giving the smallest reasons why this colossal expenditure should immediately be undertaken. That is rather the language of a Malay running amok than

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

of a responsible British statesman. It is rather the language of blind and causeless panic.⁹

However, before Churchill went to the Admiralty in 1911, he might have been called a pro-German, for some of his speeches were undeniably pacific and in a few he extolled Germany and her people for their achievements. During the naval panic of 1908 he delivered a remarkable speech at Swansea on Great Britain's relations with Germany, in which he said:

I think it is greatly to be deprecated that persons should try to spread the belief in this country that war between Great Britain and Germany is inevitable. It is all nonsense. In the first place, the alarmists have no grounds whatever for their panic or fear. . . . Look at it from any point of view you like, and I say you will come to the conclusion in regard to the relations between England and Germany that there is no real cause of difference between them, and although there may be snapping and snarling in the newspapers and in the London clubs, those two great people have nothing to fight about, have no prize to fight for, and have no place to fight in. . . .

. . . I have come here this afternoon to ask you to join with me in saying that far and wide throughout the masses of the British dominions there is no feeling of ill-will towards Germany. *I say we honour that strong, patient, industrious German people, who have been for so many centuries divided, a prey to European intrigue and a drudge amongst the nations of the Continent.* Now in the fulness of time, after many tribulations they have by their virtues and valour won themselves a foremost place in the front of civilization. I say we do not envy them their good fortune; we do not envy them their power and prosperity. We are not jealous of them; we wish them well from the bottom of our hearts, and we believe most firmly the victories they will win in science and learning against barbarism, against waste, the victories they will gain will be victories in which we shall share, and which, while benefiting them, will also benefit us. (Italics mine)¹⁰

The Churchill who recognized then that Germany was "a prey to European intrigue and a drudge amongst the nations of the Continent" was certainly not the man who in 1911 was sent to the Admiralty by Asquith to prepare for war with Germany. Nor could he have had the Swansea speech in mind when he wrote, in "The Gathering Storm":

. . . Five times in a hundred years, in 1814, 1815, 1870, 1914, and 1918, had the towers of Notre Dame seen the flash of Prussian guns and heard the thunder of their cannonade. Now for four horrible years thirteen

⁹ Quoted in Churchill's "While England Slept," New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1938, p. 126n.

¹⁰ Quoted in F. Neilson, "How Diplomats Make War," New York, B. W. Huebsch, 1915 (5th printing, 1940), pp. 108-10.

provinces of France had lain in the rigorous grip of Prussian military rule. Wide regions had been systematically devastated by the enemy or pulverised in the encounter of the armies. . . .¹¹

Not even Gladstone excelled Churchill in delivering homilies upon naughty politicians and their nations. But students of the past wars in this century should be able to conclude by now that moral sentiments expressed by politicians are slippery things. Still, it is possible to form a judgment as to why they change so frequently and adapt their morals to fit the circumstances that arise from time to time. Lord Acton, the finest European mind of the past century, wrote in a letter to Mary Gladstone:

. . . The inner reality of history is so unlike the back of the cards, and it takes so long to get at it, which does not prevent us from disbelieving what is current as history, but makes us wish to sift it, and dig through mud to solid foundations.¹²

The Attitude of the Historian

THERE IS ONE THING to be avoided in writing the history of political and diplomatic events, and that is the rather natural desire of the writer to create an atmosphere in which his own country will appear in a favorable light. He would be a perfect historian who was not prone to do this. What puts the stamp on a historian worth his salt is the attitude of aloofness that he takes to the national interests of the countries involved in the struggle. Before I read the volume with which I am now dealing, this idea came to me, and I wondered if Churchill could resist the temptation of preparing the reader's mind for a ready acceptance of the story he had to tell. Referring to World War I, he writes at the very beginning of his memoirs:

. . . Germany, the head and forefront of the offence, regarded by all as the prime cause of the catastrophe which had fallen upon the world, was at the mercy or discretion of conquerors, themselves reeling from the torment they had endured. Moreover, this had been a war, not of governments, but of peoples. . . .¹³

Whether it was courage or effrontery that prompted him to write this statement may be left for the honest student of the first World War to determine. Not a few, when they read it, will say that no one knew better than Churchill himself that Germany was *not* "the head and fore-

¹¹ "The Gathering Storm," p. 5.

¹² "Letters of Lord Acton to Mary Gladstone," ed. by Herbert Paul, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1904, p. 131.

¹³ "The Gathering Storm," p. 4.

front of the offence." French, British, and American authors who investigated the causes of the war have shown in their works that the idea spread abroad by propaganda that Germany was wholly responsible for World War I is not true.

And as for its being a peoples' war and not one of governments, there is not the slightest evidence for this statement. Churchill knows that not even ten per cent of the members of Parliament on the 3rd of August, 1914 knew the causes of it. Certainly the French people did not; and as for the Germans, who have been condemned for taking so little interest in foreign affairs, they knew less than the British or French. There were in all the capitals small gatherings of rowdy rowdies who were fighting mad and cheered the declarations of war. But as for the people at large, they knew scarcely anything about its real causes until after the Treaty of Versailles was signed.

The second instance in which Churchill attempts to prepare the mind of the reader is as follows:

. . . All their lives they [the French] had dwelt in fear of the German Empire. They remembered the preventive war which Bismarck had sought to wage in 1875; they remembered the brutal threats which had driven Delcassé from office in 1905. . . .¹⁴

This canard was shot to pieces by Jaurès, the French Socialist leader, soon after it took the wing. The facts were published in *L'Humanité*, Oct. 13, 1905, and the whole matter may be traced in the Paris papers of that time. But the man who knew the inside story was Robert Dell, the Paris correspondent of *The Manchester Guardian*, and his detailed report of it may be found in the British publication, *Foreign Affairs*, for November, 1922. The history of the Delcassé yarn is exciting reading but not quite nice for decent-minded people because in it there is revealed a conspiracy that was certainly not to the credit of Great Britain. It is strange indeed that this nauseating affair should be revived by Churchill.

There are so many passages in this work to which the industrious and well-informed student will take exception that it is difficult to know which one or two should be considered in a critique. But it is essential for the reader to remember that Churchill is not only a protagonist, but one who shows in his work that it was necessary for him to defend his actions. Therefore, many of his recordings should not be accepted as history but as the opinions of a man who has a personal case to present.

One very important matter that must be dealt with is the following:

¹⁴ *Loc. cit.*

The Foreign Secretary has a special position in a British Cabinet. He is treated with marked respect in his high and responsible office, but he usually conducts his affairs under the continuous scrutiny, if not of the whole Cabinet, at least of its principal members. He is under an obligation to keep them informed. He circulates to his colleagues, as a matter of custom and routine, all his executive telegrams, the reports from our embassies abroad, the records of his interviews with foreign Ambassadors or other notables. At least this has been the case during my experience of Cabinet life.¹⁵

I doubt if there is one in a hundred historians here or in Great Britain who knows what underlies these statements. When the government of Campbell-Bannerman was formed in December, 1905, Mr. Churchill was not a member of it. The first post he held was that of Undersecretary for the Colonies. Still, I do not think he should be ignorant of the fact that only three members of that cabinet really knew Grey had taken over the agreement from the outgoing government concerning the secret understandings with France. These provided that the British and French staffs should meet for the purpose of making plans in case of war. Lord Loreburn, who was Lord Chancellor (certainly a principal member of the cabinet), reveals that the matter was not brought to the notice of the cabinet over a period of eight years. Loreburn deals with this particular case in his book, "How the War Came." He writes: "This concealment from the cabinet was protracted, and must have been deliberate. Parliament knew nothing of it till 3rd August 1914, nor anything of the change in policy which the suppressed communications denoted."¹⁶

Sir Edward Grey, in his speech to the House on Aug. 3, 1914, said:

. . . Upon that occasion a General Election was in prospect. I had to take the responsibility of doing that without the Cabinet. It could not be summoned. An answer had to be given. I consulted Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, the Prime Minister; I consulted, I remember, Lord Haldane, who was then Secretary of State for War, and the present Prime Minister [Asquith], who was then Chancellor of the Exchequer. . . .¹⁷

This extraordinary account of what happened astonished not a few members who knew it could not be true. In the first place, there was no difficulty about calling a cabinet meeting in 1905, as Lord Loreburn points out in his book. Besides, it was easy enough after the debate to trace the movements of Bannerman, Haldane, Asquith, and Grey himself at the time he gave the pledge to France. If the student will refer to my sequel

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

¹⁶ "How the War Came," London, Methuen & Co. Ltd., no date, p. 81.

¹⁷ Quoted in "How the War Came," appendix, p. 326.

to "How Diplomats Make War," entitled "Duty to Civilization,"¹⁸ he will find in it a record of the places in which these ministers spoke during the election. They were all within short distances of one another.

The importance of this can scarcely be exaggerated if the people are to know the causes of wars and how perilous it is to surrender their interests to the care of politicians. After World War I was over, both Bonar Law and Sir Austen Chamberlain declared in the House that if Parliament had known of that engagement with France, there might have been no conflict.

Sir Edward Grey could not have consulted with the Prime Minister, for Campbell-Bannerman had not the slightest idea of what the commitments amounted to.

Arthur Balfour, in a speech delivered at the Albert Hall, in December, 1905, said:

I noticed with amazement that Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, at the Albert Hall, in the speech to which I have just referred, announced to his audience that he meant to cut down the cost, and, as I understood him, with the cost the number and magnitude of the defensive forces of the Crown—Army and Navy, as the case may be. I wonder whether he consulted the present Secretary of State for War [Haldane] before giving that pledge. I doubt whether he did. . . .¹⁹

I know for a fact that John Morley, who was Secretary for India at the time, was not informed of Grey's policy. John Burns, who was President of the Local Government Board, knew nothing about it. Morley and Burns resigned when the crisis came in August, 1914. Perhaps Churchill may say that Morley and Burns were not principal members, but he cannot state that the question was ever discussed at a cabinet meeting at any time during the eight years before the war began.

There is another matter that Mr. Churchill has overlooked, which should be well within his recollection, and that concerns the movement of the fleet in July, 1914, without knowledge of the cabinet. If he wishes to refresh his memory on this, he has only to turn to the French Yellow Book. In Dispatch No. 66, M. de Fleuriau, French *chargé d'affaires* at London, informed his government on July 27:

The attitude of Great Britain is confirmed by the postponement of the demobilization of the fleet. The First Lord of the Admiralty took this measure quietly on Friday on his own initiative.²⁰

Furthermore, *The Times* of July 27 said that the fleet sailed from Wey-

¹⁸ New York, B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1923, pp. 20-1.

¹⁹ Quoted in "How Diplomats Make War," p. 301.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

mouth, "a welcome earnest of our intention to be ready for any course which the national interests may render desirable."²¹ Moreover, well-informed naval correspondents told their public:

. . . Mr. Churchill was almost the only Minister who appreciated the gravity of the situation, and is understood to have given early orders "on his own" for the mobilization of the entire British Fleet a fortnight before the Servian coup. . . . Italy was told there was going to be a storm . . . the English ambassador got the tip. Hence the assembly of the whole Fleet for inspection by the King. Mr. Churchill's extraordinary courage, decision, and foresight were never excelled by his great ancestor. England, thanks to Mr. Churchill, begins the war at her selected moment, not at the chosen moment of the Mad Dog of Europe.²²

Churchill was a member of the cabinet at that time, and an important one. Indeed, he was First Lord of the Admiralty, and I was assured by some ministers that the matter had not been brought to the attention of the cabinet. Other instances could be given of actions taken by individual members of the "Inner Circle," which were not presented to the cabinet as a whole.

Britain's Pledge to Poland in 1939

AS AN EXAMPLE of how Mr. Churchill has gone to work to create an atmosphere of his own making, we may take the case of the pledge to Poland given in March, 1939. If the student will turn to the letters that he wrote to himself in "Step by Step," he will find the last four dated after the pledge was given. In the one entitled, "The Russian Counterpoise," Churchill writes to himself as follows:

. . . The preservation and integrity of Poland must be regarded as a cause commanding the regard of all the world. There is every reason to believe that the Polish nation intend to fight for life and freedom. They have a fine army, of which now more than 1,000,000 men are mobilized. The Poles have always fought well, and an army which comprehends its cause is doubly strong. . . .

These are days when acts of faith must be performed by Governments and peoples who are striving to resist the spread of Nazidom. The British Government, who have undertaken to go to war with Germany if Poland is the victim of aggression, have a right to ask the Polish leaders to study the problem of a Russian alliance with a sincere desire to bring it into lively and forceful action. We do not know at present what proposals have been made by the Russian Government to Great Britain and France. There is reason to believe that they are bold, logical and far-reaching. . . .²³

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 250.

²³ "Step by Step," p. 318.

The above is all we have from him before the war began about the pledge which many have believed did more to bring about the conflict than any other action taken up to that time. The statement he makes in the letter dated May 4, 1939, is so moderate that not a note of alarm is sounded in it. Writing in "The Gathering Storm," long after the event, he presents us with the following tirade:

And now, when every one of these aids and advantages has been squandered and thrown away, Great Britain advances, leading France by the hand, to guarantee the integrity of Poland—of that very Poland which with hyena appetite had only six months before joined in the pillage and destruction of the Czechoslovak State. *There was sense in fighting for Czechoslovakia in 1938 when the German Army could scarcely put half a dozen trained divisions on the Western Front, when the French with nearly sixty or seventy divisions could most certainly have rolled forward across the Rhine or into the Ruhr.* But this had been judged unreasonable, rash, below the level of modern intellectual thought and morality. Yet now at last the two Western Democracies declared themselves ready to stake their lives upon the territorial integrity of Poland. History, which we are told is mainly the record of the crimes, follies and miseries of mankind, may be scoured and ransacked to find a parallel to this sudden and complete reversal of five or six years' policy of easy-going placatory appeasement, and its transformation almost overnight into a readiness to accept an obviously imminent war on far worse conditions and on the greatest scale. (Italics mine)²⁴

In this explosion of temper for which no parallel can be found, the student must not imagine that in 1939 Mr. Churchill was unaware of "the pillage and destruction of the Czechoslovak State." For in "The Gathering Storm" he says:

. . . Immediately after the Munich Agreement on September 30, the Polish Government sent a twenty-four-hour ultimatum to the Czechs demanding the immediate handing-over of the frontier of Teschen. . . .²⁵

It would be an almost interminable exercise for the most industrious budding historian to go through Mr. Churchill's works published since 1932 and present a comparative portrait of him as he was in thought and action before the war and as he appears in this volume. The mass of contradictions of attitude of mind is most bewildering—certainly beyond the understanding of what is called "the intelligent reader." Although in the preface he assures us that his book must not be taken as history, he is dealing to a great extent with historical crises, actions in which he was involved. Giving full allowance for his rôle as a protagonist, it is

²⁴ "The Gathering Storm," p. 347.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

still obvious to anyone who followed the week-by-week happenings of the war that Churchill presents a very one-sided view of many of the most significant events.

What the "hard-boiled" historian will say about the Norwegian campaign, as narrated by Churchill, will astonish readers of the future. It is not easy to follow the dates in Churchill's story of that disaster. Furthermore, much of it concerns movements of the fleet, which information might have been put into a volume on naval operations. So that the reader may have an idea of the mystery of events referred to by Mr. Churchill, it is necessary to mention a report of singular interest to be found in *Les Fossoyeurs* by Pertinax, who tells us that the waters of Norway were sown with British mines on April 8, 1940.

Mr. Churchill, in his book, refers to the visit of Admiral Darlan to London on April 9, 1940. Pertinax informs us that Darlan was in London on the preceding March 28 and that, while he was in his room at the hotel, an Italian valet stole from him a memorandum relative to the operations under consideration by the Allies. Pertinax thinks that in this way the Germans were informed "*en détail sur les desseins franco-britanniques et que leur apparition en Scandinavie, le 9 avril, (24 heures après la pose des mines) n'ait pas été simple coïncidence.*"²⁶

I have seen no contradiction of this curious incident. Perhaps we shall not know the truth of it until the persistent investigator sets to work. Its importance cannot be overestimated because the invasion of Norway by the Germans was the turning point in the European war, and people who pay for its cost in blood and taxes deserve to know the real causes of what Churchill calls "Frustration in Norway."

What the British people will say about Mr. Churchill's book is a question that interests me deeply. That many will resent the tone of it I doubt not. Those who were colleagues in the war parliament will not take some of his animadversions complacently; and as for his feud with Baldwin, others will complain that the book gives a one-sided review of it.

Still, if it be possible to overlook the shortcomings in this volume, we may be thankful that it was written, for it is a portentous lesson to those who believe that alliances are to be relied on when the moment comes for concerted action. It was not Churchill's intention, of course, to point this moral, but the reader can gather it for himself. Agreements, under-

²⁶ "*Les Fossoyeurs*," two vols., New York, *Éditions de la Maison Française, Inc.*, 1943, vol. I, p. 64. (The Germans were informed in detail about the Franco-British plans, and that their appearance in Scandinavia on April 9 (twenty-four hours after the laying of the mines) was not simply a coincidence.)

standings, alliances, or whatever they may be called by diplomatists, failed to save Czechoslovakia and Poland, to mention only two States. And the result is a distracted Europe, fearful of the future.

New York

Report on the Greeks. By Frank Smothers, William Hardy McNeill and Elizabeth Darbishire McNeill. New York: The Twentieth Century Fund 1948, 226 pp., 13 illustrations, maps, \$2.50.

A survey of the social and economic status of the Greek people and their attitude toward the political issues confronting their country, this book contains much valuable information on several aspects of the Greek economy, society and State. The all-pervading influence of general poverty and economic insecurity is set out. The nature of the land question, the industrial problem, the tax burden and the class character of the State are indicated. The recommended policies for economic revival are superficial.

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