

David Irving

Churchill's War

Volume One



The Struggle for Power.

David Irving

CHURCHILL'S WAR

I – *The Struggle for Power*

Part 1 of 4
Introduction, Chapters 1–18

‘Two books in English stand out from the vast literature of the Second World War: Chester Wilmot’s *The Struggle for Europe*, published in 1952, and David Irving’s *Hitler’s War*’

JOHN KEEGAN, *Times Literary Supplement*, 1980

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FOCAL POINT

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Introduction

WINSTON CHURCHILL trod carefully into the middle of the second floor clubroom and paused, deliberately surveying the dozen faces that had turned toward him.

As he stood there, short and squat, in a tuxedo that had seen long and honourable service, it occurred to him that he was probably a quarter century older than any of them.

Hosting this dinner at the Union Club in New York City was Henry R. Luce, publisher of the magazines *Time*, *Life* and *Fortune*. It was March 14, 1946: the uneasy interlude after the end of World War Two had ended, and everybody could sense it. Luce's fellow editors and executives scrutinised the famous Englishman as if taken aback to find him so small, in the way that movie fans are startled to find that their idols are less than the twenty-foot giants of the silver screen. In the words of a lucid and penetrating memorandum* that Charles Murphy wrote for Luce's private files, there was just a dress-shirted cave where the chest should have been, and a swelling paunch that bore testimony to years of rich fare.

Henry Luce, who had brought him in, turned to greet his other guests. As Churchill swayed alone and splendidly in mid-room, the image struck Murphy of the Cunard Line's *Queen Mary* at the moment when she cast off her tugs in Southampton Water – heavy and loggy, drifting as the Solent's current pressed her hull until her screws bit water and she forged ahead again.

WITH SOFT rolls of flesh linking his head and body he looked to Murphy like a congenial, well-adjusted bullfrog. The frog's arms and legs were short and stubby, the hands small-boned and white. The complexion was pasty. Then Churchill's expressionless and bloodshot eyes fastened on a

* The memorandum, sixty-three pages long, is now archived in *Life* executive C. D. Jackson's files in the Eisenhower Library at Abilene, Kansas. Among those present were John Billings, John Davenport, Allen Grover, Jackson, Henry R. Luce, Charles Murphy and Charles Wertenbaker.

portrait on the far wall. The liner's screws began to thump and churn, he swayed across the clubroom and challenged: 'Who's that blighter?'

Luce guessed from the portrait's dress that it was an eighteenth-century Englishman; with the smug certainty of Charles Lamb's 'wary connoisseur,' he confirmed it by a glance at the brass nameplate and pronounced: 'William the Fourth.'

That it was that blundering and inept monarch took Churchill by surprise. He harrumphed, and said: 'Looks more like Lord Rosebery to me. Same heavy jowls.'

Behind them was a brooding sculpture of a bald eagle, carved in clear ice some hours earlier by the Union Club's chefs. The wings of this symbol of American might were outstretched; its eyes glittered, and every crevice was heaped with black caviar. The club's heating had been turned up, and rivers of iced water dribbled down its chest. Churchill leered. 'The eagle,' he announced, 'seems to have caught a cold.'

He was hypnotised less by the sculptor's art than by the caviar. He waved aside the genteel slices of dry toast an editor handed him, exclaimed: 'This stuff needs no reinforcement,' and put words into action by shovelling a whopping helping onto a plate, and from there, with scarcely a perceptible interruption, straight and undiluted to his mouth – seemingly unabashed at the appreciative belches that shortly emerged from that orifice. 'I hope, gentlemen,' he apologised with little evidence of true contrition, 'I hope you don't find me too explosive an animal.'

Luce misinterpreted the remark. 'On the contrary, Sir,' he said, 'you were only putting into words what was gravely in the minds of many Americans.'



Just over a week earlier, on March 5, 1946, Churchill had delivered an astonishing speech at Fulton in Missouri, accusing the Soviet Union of having imposed an 'Iron Curtain' across Europe. On March 10 the entire Soviet press had fired a mighty broadside back, and even Joseph Stalin had joined in the assault, stating in the official Soviet newspaper *Pravda* that Churchill 'has now adopted the position of warmonger.'

Another mighty belch was Churchill's response to Luce's compliment. Dismissing it with a slice of one hand, he said: 'The explosions I had in mind were those given off by my internal pleasure.'

He gazed mistily at the spoonful of caviar poised in his hand. Times were when Stalin used to send him a lot of this delicacy. 'I don't suppose I'll ever be getting any more,' he said.

DINNER WAS not yet served. For a few minutes he quietly contemplated the others. Then he began to speak, with a purposeful tone that in Murphy's description cut like a buzzsaw across the grain of idle conversation. Luce signalled with his arm that the others should stop.

They led the Elder Statesman into dinner after that, and Luce seated him at the place of honour on his right.

Clear turtle soup was served, and he gobbled it down. It was followed by terrapin: lowering his head so as to be nearer to his prey, he skillfully forked the delicacy from plate to mouth with swift grabbing movements which reminded one onlooker of a steamshovel's grab-bucket at work.

Words and oratory cascaded from him, his tongue now loosened by rare champagne; true, he appeared to be taking only delicate sips, but from the number of refills it was clear that he had imbibed a considerable volume – editor Allen Grover assayed his intake on this evening as one martini, two sherries, four or five glasses of champagne and a formidable balloon of brandy.

Once, he recalled, Stalin had debated with him the real meaning of democracy. Britain, said Stalin, was really a dictatorship because one party – the party that happened to be in power – controlled everything. Churchill remained a skeptic, committed to parliamentarianism. He told Luce's dinner guests how, at Potsdam in 1945, he had warned Stalin that he might well find himself replaced as prime minister at the General Election whose results were even then being awaited; Stalin had solemnly commented, 'My kind of election is better.'

Several remarks showed Churchill's warm regard for Stalin. 'Stalin is the one human being in Russia,' he said, 'I'm sure he doesn't believe any of those awful things he said about me.' Later he said, 'Stalin always kept his word' – and gave as an example how the Kremlin had adhered to the Soviet–German agreement of August 1939 right up to Hitler's attack two years later. Who actually controlled Russia? Churchill pondered the question, then said: 'While Stalin appears to make policy in a sort of vacuum, I doubt very much that he is really free to do what he wants to do.'

There was no gainsaying his admiration of the Soviet Communist Party's role in the war. 'The party members are highly disciplined, very brave men,' he reflected with unashamed reverence. 'They died in very large numbers in the first great battles.' But shortly he qualified this attitude. 'I have always been for the Russian people; it is communism that I oppose.'

Just as in Europe's feudal past so in the Soviet system the party officials got the best wages, food, shopping discounts, and accommodation in trains and hotels. As a system of power, the caste structure was hard to

defeat, he admitted. 'Take your own United States,' he said casting a mischievous hand around the tuxedo'd table. 'Suppose by some mischance that in this marvellous country three of four millions of people emerged as a self-appointed, highly disciplined elite with all the political and economic controls in their possession. Suppose they had all the privileges – the first-class railroad carriages, the best food, the best food for their children. You would have quite a time, I dare say, trying to shake them loose.'

Churchill raised laughter with Vyacheslav Molotov's description of his November 1940 meeting with Hitler in Berlin. Molotov had once asked Churchill if he recalled sending Royal Air Force bombers to Berlin one night in November 1940. Churchill replied that he had a vague recollection of something of the kind.* 'Well – Molotov went on – while I was talking to Hitler and other German officials an alert sounded and we all hurried down into an air-raid shelter, a most comfortable place, and I found myself alone with von Ribbentrop. As soon as the door behind us closed, von Ribbentrop turned to me and said, *Let's start dividing up the world*. I replied, But what will England say to that? Von Ribbentrop said, *England is finished, we can forget England*. But I said, if England is finished, why are we here in this shelter. And wherefrom come those bombs which fall?'

From the depths of his fathomless memories he retrieved glittering episodes – his direction of the White armies of Kolchak and Denikin against the Bolsheviks in 1919; the great community of purpose that had grown up between Britain and the United States. To Murphy his rhetoric seemed like the display put on by a blast-furnace – the incandescent phrases were flung out like pieces of molten metal. 'The impression of them lingers dimly and tantalisingly in memory,' wrote Murphy, frustrated afterward, 'but somehow the words are gone, like sparks that burned out on the blast-furnace floor.'

Churchill's language captivated his listeners. Several of them urged him to drive home a point that he had made about nuclear power policy in the farewell speech he was due to deliver on the next evening at the Waldorf Astoria.

Churchill feigned surprise and asked: 'Exactly what did I say? I have already forgotten.'

ONLY THIS morning, March 14, 1946, he had propped himself up in bed in the Waldorf Astoria and read an editorial in the *New York Times* which catalogued the territories in Europe that had now come under Soviet con-

* In fact, knowing from British codebreaking operations that Molotov was visiting Hitler that night, Churchill ordered the air raid in an attempt to inconvenience them both.

trol. There was Finland, in Russia's sway right up to the tip. There were the Balkans, where Josef Tito was supposedly independent but itching to grab Trieste at Stalin's bidding. In the Far East the Russians had also been given the Kuriles, at Japan's expense. 'In short,' admitted Churchill, 'they have regained in one war everything they ever lost.' At every summit conference, he had allowed Stalin to jolly him along with alcohol and frivolity, while the Red Army methodically rolled up the map of Europe.

The United States had done nothing to prevent it. The fruitful association that had joined Britain and the United States in a common cause had withered since the war's end, and Churchill regretted it. As his remarks roamed into this sensitive arena, his bantering tone dropped away. He talked bitterly of the American public's seeming hostility toward Britain's policy in the Far East – what he called 'the whole awkward problem of the colonial peoples who inhabit these vast oceanic regions.'

He groped also toward the rawest topic of all, first saying with a half-smile something about British 'tyranny in India,' and then adding with his customary courtliness, 'it is natural that you should wish to hear my views on India' – only to have this topic snatched away from him by Henry Luce, who deftly shut off that debate and lured Churchill back onto more congenial avenues.

There was emotion in his voice when he touched on the adventures that Franklin Roosevelt and he had shared. He had loved 'Franklin,' as he called the president, like no other. 'It's too bad that things were not left to Franklin and myself to handle,' he ruminated. 'I don't mean the Roosevelt at Yalta. Then he was ethereal. His face was transparent. He was obviously a man preparing to depart.'

True, the United States were still powerful, but surely they still needed the British, with their knowledge of the seas, of world trade, and strategy. He talked of the possibility of war with Russia – pointing out that Britain was demobilising more slowly in Europe than the United States, and adding that the R.A.F. was capable of carrying out any task assigned to it. The Americans must assert their leadership, using the tremendous temporary leverage granted by the atomic bomb. 'If Russia had the bomb,' he pointed out, 'and you didn't, I don't think we'd be feeling so comfortable here tonight.'

He lit a long cigar and puffed at it.

John Davenport, an editor, asked Churchill pointblank about Yalta. 'How did it happen, Mr Churchill,' Davenport challenged, as he applied a match to the end of his own cigar, 'that you and Mr Roosevelt were so misled at Yalta as to offer such a high price to the Russians in order to lure them into the Pacific war – a war which was already won?'

There was a pained hush. Many people had nursed the same unspoken question: why had the west, though armed with the atomic bomb, and comforted by the secret knowledge that Japan was already attempting to surrender, fawned on Moscow to such an extent? Henry Luce flushed, and sternly announced: 'Mr Churchill, it is hardly necessary to answer that question. Foremost among the subjects on which Mr Davenport certainly is not an expert are the Far East and the Japanese War.'

Churchill scowled, ungrateful for Luce's defence. He offered the standard excuse: at Yalta the main thought was to end the fighting. The Rundstedt offensive had destroyed their hopes of an early victory over Germany. And then the fighting at Iwo Jima and Okinawa showed that the losses the Americans might expect if they had to invade the Japanese home islands – probably half a million American casualties or more, and eighteen months more fighting after VE day. 'The shadows of the dead,' he argued, 'were already lengthening at an alarming rate over American homes. Who could wish this to go on an instant longer than was absolutely necessary?'

Of course Iwo Jima and Okinawa were after Yalta, so his argument was artificial. But when this was pointed out, Churchill still refused to abandon his line that the price offered to Russia was reasonable. He just shook his head and mumbled 'Oh, no, no, no, there was never any question as to what was the right course.'

AT ONE point that evening, Churchill just settled back and let his thoughts ramble – over Eisenhower, whom he always called 'Ike'; over that vanishing breed, horses; over Drew Pearson and American journalism. Then he eagerly described a new American gadget, the Dictaphone: 'Think of being able to talk for twenty minutes into a little green disc that only costs a dime,' he said. 'But that is not the end of the marvellous accomplishments of this machine. If you wish to ponder what you have said, it is only necessary to flick a switch and it will play your words right back.' This invention would spell the end of that dreary business of putting down 'one miserable little letter after the other.' The Dictaphone company had given him two such machines, complete with a lapel microphone which would enable him to dictate as he paced up and down. He had instantly plugged one in and dictated a less than grammatical message of thanks to the company's workers in Connecticut. 'This is me, Winston Churchill,' he began, sending a small seismic shock-wave into that corner of the English-speaking world.

Would he ever write a history of this last war? somebody asked. 'Quite positively no,' he answered. 'I am old and, I suppose, in retirement. It would be too much for me to attempt.'

The journalists present that evening would probably never forget their encounter with Winston Churchill. With fire in his eyes, he talked wistfully of the panoply of battle, and he said challengingly: 'War is the greatest of all stimulants.'

'At moments,' wrote one, 'the light seemed to pour out of him. One could sense the power in him to summon men, at an hour of universal sinking, to live beyond themselves.'

Henry Luce proposed a toast in words which everybody felt exactly right: 'We are accustomed,' announced Luce, 'to drink toasts to people. I propose a toast to Civilisation. But Civilisation is embodied in people. So, to Winston Churchill, the First Citizen of Western Civilisation, Defender of the Faith.'



They were sorry to see him leave. Churchill pulled himself to his feet, politely repeated the name of each person as he shook hands with him, and peered intently into that man's face as though fixing it hard upon his memory. He was no longer prime minister, but in opposition. A spent force? 'The fire has unmistakably burned low,' wrote one observer.

If there was one passage that had fixed itself on their minds, it was when Churchill warmed to the theme of Fulton and the furore that his 'Iron Curtain' speech had caused. He dismissed the Soviet reaction as ill-tempered, crude and a typically communist trick. In fact – and his cheeks positively glowed as he said it – Stalin had used almost the same terms to attack him as had Hitler in his time. 'Warmonger, inciter of ears, imperialist, reactionary has-been – why, it is beginning to sound like old times,' scoffed Churchill.

Stalin's attack was clumsy and heavy-handed, but he was flattered all the same. A sudden idea struck him, and a broad grin creased his pink, baby-soft complexion.

'You know,' he said, 'if I had been turned loose on Winston Churchill, I would have done a much better job of denunciation.'

WHAT SORT of book would Winston Churchill, the author of *My Early Life*, have written if he had set out to denounce Winston Churchill, the statesman?

It is hard for other mortals to write about him, but the millions of casualties of World War Two demand that his leadership be soberly re-

searched and told. Few families were left untouched by Churchill's Wars. They robbed families of fathers, husbands – and wives, mothers and children too. I had spent twelve years researching the life of Hitler. How often Hitler had berated and scorned Churchill! What more natural than that I turn to Hitler's adversary, the free world's hero, over roughly the same period of time?

This is not a hostile biography. How could it be? Any writer immersing himself in a subject as lively and human as Winston Churchill is bound to find himself charmed by what he finds within the first few weeks. It is revealing to see from the diaries of the staff at No. 10 Downing-street like John Colville and John Martin the transition which they underwent in May 1940, from distraught horror on learning that this 'adventurer' was to succeed Neville Chamberlain to grudging acceptance of Churchill for his buccaneering verve and drive, and then outright admiration of his steadfastness. In part this was due to his leadership qualities, in part to his fluent and rapid wit.

Often he told jokes at his own expense. Once he exclaimed, 'The world is seething with lies about me – and the damnable thing is that most of them are true!'

His energy was prodigious, indeed startling in a man of his age. He inspected troops, flew in converted bombers, tramped around dockyards, toured bomb-blitzed towns, clambered over coastal defences. He wanted to hit the Normandy beaches together with General Dwight D. Eisenhower's armies on D-Day, 1944.



What scheme have I followed in writing this biography?

Firstly, I have been mindful of Sir Winston's own advice to writers, to heed the dictates of chronology. To his dear friend Mrs Consuelo Balsan, who had drafted rather untidy memoirs, he once wrote:

If you get someone to put the dates in the margin opposite each event, you could then see where the pack might be shuffled with advantage. Chronology is not a rigid rule and there are many occasions when a departure from it is a good thing. Nevertheless, I think it true to say that chronology is the secret of narrative.*

* The letter, dated June 27, 1952, is in the Daniel Longwell collection at the Columbia University library, New York.

Secondly, I attach proper importance to the role of Britain's code-breaking in Churchill's War. He was not allowed to mention it in his own memoirs, nor would it have enhanced his fame if he had. Remarkably, the official historians prior to Professor F. Hinsley were not privy to the existence of this special Intelligence, let alone allowed to refer to it; this surely renders their expensive volumes of questionable value. The background of their ignorance was a July 1945 decision by the Joint Intelligence Committee. Worried by the avalanche of captured German documents reaching Britain, the J.I.C. recognised one danger: that the sheer alacrity of Britain's counter-measures to some operations signalled in cypher by the Germans must betray the secret to any alert researcher or official historian. 'Obvious instances,' the J.I.C. figured, 'are the rerouting of our convoys to avoid submarine attacks by orders issued immediately after the issue of German orders to their U-boats; the counter-measures to meet the G.A.F. [German airforce] attacks on this country, and the routing of our deep penetration raids into Germany; the employment of our forces in the field in face of German dispositions.'

Thus the British chiefs of staff circularised all government agencies forbidding their historians to mention or inquire into special Intelligence.* National security was placed before historical truth. Those who learned of it – as I did by chance in 1963, by precisely the kind of analysis feared by the J.I.C., of British and German documents on V-weapons – were forbidden to divulge the ULTRA secret.

The present volume squarely addresses the question why Winston Churchill was so widely mistrusted before his illustrious appointment in May 1940. It is an area about which we have hitherto had little information.

The Churchill family cannot help us, because by the stipulations of the family trust the Churchill papers are to remain closed until ten years after Dr Martin Gilbert has hewn the final volume of his monumental official biography to which we all owe a genuine debt. What is perhaps more remarkable is that important collections of official documents outside Churchill's archives have been effectively sealed: for example, the letters that passed between Churchill as prime minister and His Majesty King George VI, surely the most official of records, are being held at Windsor Castle at

* J.I.C.(45)223(O) dated July 20; and C.O.S. 187th meeting, July 31, 1945; in CAB.79/37. See David Stafford's paper in *Military Affairs*, vol. 42 (Feb. 1978), page 29ff. The result was a General Directive for Safeguarding Intelligence Sources in Compiling Official Histories. 'It is imperative,' this laid down, 'that the fact that such intelligence was available should NEVER be disclosed.' Official historians were forbidden to probe into 'apparently unaccountable operational orders.' The Pentagon endorsed the decision.

the exclusive disposition of Dr Gilbert. In consequence, researchers acting without the warrant of the Churchill family are obliged to carry their inquiries into the four corners of the world.

But this has been a rewarding search. We can screen collections of papers held at the Hoover Library in California, the National Archives in Washington, the Public Archives of Canada in Ottawa, the presidential libraries of Roosevelt, Truman and Eisenhower and Kennedy, the tomes of the Archives Nationales in Paris, the records of the National Library of Australia in Canberra, the French, Czech and Germany foreign ministries. We can trawl through private collections of important individuals in Churchill's life, like those of Henry Stimson and Tyler Kent at Yale University, of Winthrop Aldrich at Harvard, and the *non-Churchill* papers housed at Churchill College, Cambridge (to whose archivist, Dr Correlli Barnett, I am of course indebted).

A full list of archival sources will be published in volume two of this biography, but I should like to mention here Madame Reynaud, widow of France's wartime premier, who kindly gave me access to her husband's files in Paris which throw new light on the Dunkirk disaster (particularly useful since Lord Gort 'lost all his papers' in the retreat). Among them are some exchanges evidently missing from Churchill's files, for example, a telegram on May 24, 1940 which is also among the files captured by the Nazis along with the French accounts of conversations with Mr Churchill.*

I am also indebted to the Soviet authorities for supplying to me copies of all the Russian embassy telegrams from London relating to Churchill, and of his conferences with Stalin, and to Mrs Neham Chalom of the Weizmann Institute of Science at Rehovot, Israel, for allowing me access to the entire file of confidential correspondence between Churchill and Professor Chaim Weizmann, the Zionist *éminence grise*.

What we find in rare sources such as these both offsets and enhances the picture presented by Churchill's own narrower archives, as reflected in Gilbert's writings. Perhaps this is small wonder: we should *expect* to find for example, in the private files of the exiled Polish prime ministers Wladislaw Sikorski in London and Stanislas Mikolajczyk at Stanford, California, and of their foreign minister Tadeusz Romer in Ottawa, rich documents on Churchill's dealings with the Poles. But what European historian could have hoped to uncover in the confidential papers of the Canadian premier and mysticist, William Mackenzie King, the kind of astonishing tableaux that will be found in this biography?

* Microfilmed by the U.S. National Archives: T120, rolls 115 and 127.

Readers may be alarmed at some elements in these pages. Few of the visiting statesmen failed to comment in their private papers on Churchill's consumption of alcohol, occasionally coupling their remarks with the puzzled observation that even the hardest liquor appeared to leave him unimpaired. In official American publications, documents have been doctored to omit such passages. There is evidence that on occasions Churchill's temporary incapacitation resulted in political or military decisions that damaged British prestige, and even caused casualties among the soldiers and sailors concerned.

He was at his happiest in war, and said so.

He was rarely a creator, always a destroyer – of cities, of monuments and works of art, of populations, of frontiers, of monarchies, and finally his own country's empire.

His bombing policy led to the slaying of a million civilians in Holland, France, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Germany and Scandinavia; it seems not to have dismayed him. On the contrary, when I toured his underground war headquarters near Parliament-square twenty-five years ago, I found on permanent proud display, as they had been for his wartime visitors, the stereoscopic photographs of the destruction of Dresden. It is as though Hitler had pinned up colour photographs of Auschwitz or Buchenwald for visiting celebrities.

His indifference to public suffering was documented again and again. In 1944 crowds jeered him when he appeared in dazzling R.A.F. uniform in a newly blitzed suburb of London and declared 'This is the thing! It is just like being back in the best days of the Blitz again.' While postwar Britain starved he sheltered the flow of tens of thousands of dollars from New York publishers against the depredations of the Inland Revenue while he vacationed with his retinue in North Africa and on the French Riviera. It would be unfeeling to criticise him for an excessive mercenary zeal. What writers are not at times beholden to financial problems? But this book's early chapters are overhung by the enormity of his financial deficit during his years in the political wilderness, a cash crisis illuminated by the papers of his literary agent now on deposit in the University of Oregon at Eugene.

This financial quandary might seem of only vestigial importance, but in following chapters comes the suggestion that he proceeded to sell his soul to a syndicate of politicians and financiers called the Focus, a group which continued to fêted and finance him until the outbreak of war.

THE MATERIALS on this episode are perhaps typical of the sources which I have developed for this biography.

One was a diary of a member of the Focus made available to me by Dr Howard Gottlieb, director of the Mugar Memorial Library at Boston University. This shows that at the time of Munich the Czechs were paying Focus members £2,000 per annum. The papers of the former Czech minister in Paris, Stefan Osusky, at the Hoover Library, Czech documents now in Prague F.O. archives, and captured Nazi intercepts of Beneš's secret telephone conversations with Osusky and Jan Masaryk confirm that senior British politicians were being paid by the Czechs in return for a promise to topple Neville Chamberlain's government.

The rarest items come from the most distant sources. From Finnish archives, a telegram from Paris to Helsinki dated March 30, 1940, reporting Churchill's discussions with French premier Paul Reynaud: intercepted by the Nazis, it triggered Hitler's invasion of Norway a week later. From Stockholm archives come the telegrams revealing the extraordinary efforts by Churchill's opponents in the war cabinet to make peace behind his back in June 1940.

Some material I obtained as gifts – one lady entrusted to me the diary kept by her late husband, Churchill's personal bodyguard, from 1942 to 1945. Churchill's private secretary allowed me to copy his wartime diaries. A stranger telephoned with the text of the cabinet's message empowering Lord Gort to accept whatever surrender terms at Dunkirk the Germans would offer (the stolen document was in his possession).

Other documents I have had to purchase or even rent – like the daily appointments record kept by Churchill and his staff throughout the war.

Several years ago I was able to photocopy large tracts of the files of the late Lord Cherwell which have since been sealed. These relate to Churchill's role in the allied dealings on the atomic bomb, the Morgenthau Plan, and postwar policy in Germany.

Not all my researches were successful.

In Nazi files I found evidence that the German post office had listened in on Churchill's telephone conversations with Roosevelt and recorded them on discs. I found Nazi transcripts of only two of them, however; the rest were evidently destroyed at the war's end.

My search for the corresponding U.S. Navy recordings and transcripts made for the American Bureau of Censorship lasted ten years and has narrowed their probable location to the National Security Agency, but the N.S.A. rarely opens its files. Future historians *must* continue the search; the telegrams that F.D.R. and Churchill exchanged were often drafted by committees, and obviously of less importance than their private conversations, as my chapter 'A Telephone Job' in this volume shows.

WHEN SIR Winston Churchill died in 1965, modern Britain lost her most fabled son. His place in the world's immediate history was assured. Subsequent decades have already seen the accents change, but it remains true that he towered over his own times.

His spirit was magnificent, his energy prodigious.

What forces of locomotion impelled him in those dark years of the war? Was it the unswerving faith in the rightness of his cause?

He remained unerringly convinced that he was protecting his country and its empire from its greatest enemy. Yet in reality he had allied himself with that empire's profoundest enemies, and presided over its dissolution.

Churchill came to be remembered as a champion of peace and freedom and human dignity. In the closing days of his life he murmured to his old friend Sir Robert Boothby, 'The journey has been well worth making — once.'

Boothby asked, 'And then?'

'A long sleep, I expect: I deserve it.'

I : *Faithless but Fortunate*

THE ANCIENT Greeks prescribed that a man of virtue must possess twelve qualities – ambition, gentleness, generosity, truthfulness, magnificence, magnanimity, reverence, justice, prudence, wit, courage, and a degree of charm.

Stealing a march into the world on November 30, 1874 after only seven months in the womb of a noted American beauty, Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill proved as years passed to be deficient in prudence, but possessed of other qualities not listed by the Greeks, and that is what this book shall be about.

He learned that he was the first son of the Right Honourable Lord Randolph Churchill, perhaps not the most desirable of fathers.

He learned too that he had English and American blood in equal measure, like many others we shall be meeting in these pages, his mother Jeanette being daughter of one Leonard Jerome, editor and occasional majority stockholder of the *New York Times*. He had no doubt inherited some of the recklessness and most of the enterprise of this grandfather, if little of his material fortune.¹

He learned that Leonard Jerome had made and squandered four fortunes during his lifetime. 'It would have been a fine thing,' Winston's younger brother Jack used to commiserate with him, 'if Grandfather Jerome had held on to at least one of his fortunes.'

His learning continued until Lord Randolph entered him at age thirteen into Harrow, one of England's more fashionable schools. Here it virtually stopped. Years later, when Winston's friend Lord Melchett boasted over luncheon that his son was stroke of the Oxford boat, Churchill crushed him with the retort that athletic or academic achievers were to be distrusted. 'I did nothing at Harrow,' he reminisced, 'but I regard my time there as very well spent.' He had whiled away his hours eating ice-cream and candy, he said, and that was the important thing when growing up – to 'learn to be an omnivore.' His theory was that the energy squandered on academic or athletic pursuits was not available for more vital purposes in adult life.

Upon joining the army he made it a rule not to work after lunch. In fact out in India he would do no work after breakfast, but whiled away the daylight hours playing endless polo or reading in Gibbon, Plato, Aristotle and Schopenhauer.²

Latin and mathematics had eluded him at Harrow, but providence had set him before a brilliant English teacher: Winston now found he had a prodigious memory for poetry and prose. He won a prize for reciting Macaulay's 'Lays of Ancient Rome' and began to glow dimly under the radiated power of the great masters of the English tongue. His great brain thus fuelled and ignited, he would repay the debt many times over with prose treasures of his own.

Admitted at the third attempt to Sandhurst military academy, he passed out eighth of 150 cadets and was gazetted in March 1895 to the Fourth (Queen's Own) Hussars. A year later his father, a son of the seventh Duke of Marlborough, died alcoholic and incoherent, aged only forty-six.

For a time Winston drifted in the army. Later that year, still aged only twenty-two, he went on furlough to Cuba to observe the Spanish-American conflict. The British ambassador in Madrid, a friend of Lord Randolph's, had obtained the travel documents. He sent back war letters to the London *Daily Graphic*, which had many years before published travel letters sent in by his father.

His regiment left for India. Unenthusiastic about the posting, he took special leave seven months after its arrival at Bangalore, in October 1896, and returned home. Restless and ambitious, he used the influence of his mother and her friends to serve in punitive expeditions and other military adventures on India's Northwest Frontier, in Lord Kitchener's Army of the Nile (1898), and at Khartoum. By the time that the *Daily Telegraph* published his despatches from these battlefields, he had decided on the same public career that five generations of his immediate ancestors had chosen.

He resigned his commission and entered politics.

THE BRITISH parliamentary system, though still not perfect, had by the end of the century become more democratic than in Lord Randolph's day.

Winston had a hard fight at the hustings, and developed a profound respect for the parliamentary institutions which he did not abandon even forty years later when at the summit. Once his chief of staff, finding him agonising over a parliamentary speech, would suggest offhandedly: 'Why don't you tell them all to go to hell?'

Churchill was shocked. 'You should not say those things,' he rebuked the general in private. 'I am a servant of the House.'³

This humility before Parliament remained the most surprising of his virtues: while lesser Members merely nodded to the division clerk as they herded through the Division Lobbies, adequately recognised on sight, one member would hear him, by then Sir Winston Churchill – and prime minister – tell him distinctly, 'Churchill, W. S.'⁴

Defeated at this first election attempt at grimy industrial Oldham in 1899, he returned to the battlefields, reporting the Boer War lucratively for the *Morning Post*. By November he was a prisoner of the Boers in Pretoria; miraculously, he escaped.

'Wanted,' read the broadsheet: 'Englishman, 25 years old; about 5 feet 8 inches tall, of indifferent build; walks with a little bend forward.' The Perils of Winston, of which he circulated his own thrilling version, made him a hero. Funded by his lifelong friend and cousin Sunny, ninth Duke of Marlborough, he was elected as Oldham's representative in Parliament in 1900; he was then aged twenty-six. Vowing to vindicate his father's memory, he took the same seat below the gangway. He aped his father's dress – long frock coat, wide-winged collar and tie – and his debating stance too, leaning forward, jaw jutting, and hands propped on his hips beneath the falls of his frock coat.

He found that he was no mean orator. Not that he was a man of ordinary conversation anyway: his talk flowered with verbal finery. A Canadian would observe, years later, that he drew similes from family life and the relationships of tame and wild animals – talking of cat-and-mouse, growling, and getting one's back up.⁵ He often used military metaphors, though seldom naval ones. He had a lisp, though it grew less as the years passed, and would punctuate his remarks by elevating his sandy-coloured eyebrows. 'His speeches are brilliant,' fellow Tory Neville Chamberlain would write after Winston had been a quarter-century in the House, 'and men flock in to hear him as they would to a first class entertainment at the theatre. The best show in London, they say.'⁶

Enjoying public speaking, he profited from it too – launching himself onto the well-paid lecture circuits in England and then North America under what he called 'a vulgar Yankee impressario.'

Doubly enriched therefore by the Boer War – both in experience and in wealth to the amount of £10,000 – he ceased importuning publishers and family contacts for sustenance. He had his political independence, and that was what mattered. 'I care not for your political ideas,' remarked one of his mother's friends to Winston, who was experimenting with a mous-

tache, 'but my distaste for them is nothing compared to what I feel about that dreadful moustache.'

'Madam,' he ungallantly replied, 'I see no earthly reason why you should come in contact with either.'

He soon tired of Arthur Balfour's sluggish Conservative Party and its hostility to free trade. 'I am an English Liberal,' he wrote. 'I hate the Tory Party, their men, their words and their methods.'⁷ Impatient for high office, in May 1904 he crossed the floor to the Liberals.

It was a timely defection. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's Liberals won office by a landslide in early 1906. He appointed the renegade Churchill as under-secretary for the colonies. Two years later H. H. Asquith, constructing a new Liberal cabinet, took Winston in as president of the Board of Trade (minister of trade). He was then thirty-three, an ebullient figure with reddish hair, a hesitant smile and a courtly demeanour that was perhaps a vestige of his birth at the ducal Blenheim Palace.

High office came none too soon for him. Dogged by the spectre of Lord Randolph's early cerebral decline, he had become a man in a hurry.

'Surely,' somebody once pointed out to him, 'you have *years* before you.'

Those faint eyebrows rose, 'Oh,' he replied, 'but I *do* need to hurry. I have compelling need of time. You see – we Churchills all damp off after the age of forty.'

This was an exaggeration. His illustrious ancestor John Churchill, the first Duke of Marlborough, had not been given an army until age fifty-two. He was Winston's idol. He had commanded Queen Anne's armies from 1702 to 1711 without losing a battle or siege. His victory at Blenheim brought to his dynasty the great estate named after it in Oxfordshire by way of reward. And this in turn had laid the foundation of the Marlborough wealth and political influence.

WOMEN HAD long guided the fortunes of the Marlborough dynasty. It was they who had accomplished his transfer of allegiance to the Liberals. Winston's Aunt Fanny had married a later Liberal chief whip and cabinet minister, Baron Tweedmouth, and it was he who had arranged his adoption as a Liberal candidate for North-West Manchester. Fanny's sister, Winston's Aunt Cornelia, had married into ironworks money and it was her in-laws the Guest family who, enraged by Joseph Chamberlain's tariff reform in 1903, had put their money behind Winston.

Most remarkable of the female influences on his political fortunes now was Clementine Hozier. In September 1908 he had married this forceful girl from Dundee. In the agreeable words of *My Early Life*, published

twenty-five years later, he 'lived happily ever after.' In many ways she had a better understanding of the common people whose destinies her husband was later to rule. She governed and cherished Winston, remonstrating, pleading, guiding and supporting him in the home and at the electoral front.

Marriage mellowed him. He and the Welsh firebrand Liberal, David Lloyd George, had been regarded as pacifists and radicals ('except,' as one critic scoffed, 'possibly by pacifists and radicals'). Something of that holy fire now went. In February 1910 Asquith moved him up to the Home Office – an important pivot on his way to the admiralty which was his ambition.

As public unease grew at the navy's unreadiness for war, and professional disquiet about the admiralty's reluctance to appoint a naval staff mounted, Asquith placed the navy under Churchill's control.

Appointed First Lord – navy minister – in October 1911, Churchill rapidly expanded his knowledge of naval affairs, visiting naval establishments and talking endlessly with officers. He could learn fast when he wanted: and having learned he began, to the irritation of the First Sea Lord, to send peremptory orders to the other Sea Lords and even made signals to the fleet without board of admiralty approval. The First Sea Lord Sir Francis Bridgeman objected, and became the first to realise the folly of crossing Winston's path: dismissing him, Churchill demonstrated in the words of official navy historian Captain Stephen Roskill his 'ruthlessness' by reading extracts of Bridgeman's private letters to the House to foster the notion that the outgoing admiral was in declining health.⁸

As his insight grew, so did his interference. Late in 1913, he took to listening to junior officers gripe against their seniors, and intervened in the fleet's disciplinary affairs in one extraordinary episode that involved ordering the Post Office to intercept a certain letter; the First Sea Lord (whose biographer called Winston's high-handed conduct that of 'a thwarted spoil schoolboy') threatened to resign, as did the Second, Third and Fourth Sea Lords. These episodes did the first damage to Churchill's reputation in naval wardrooms and in the smoking room of the House alike.

He became increasingly sure-footed as he perceived that the board was possessed of brains inferior to his own, and that its admirals were less well versed in dialectic. Churchill enforced innovations which partially restored his fame, particularly in the lower deck. He introduced sweeping reforms of the harsh conditions, he abolished some of the humiliating summary punishments that captains could inflict on their men, he updated pay scales unchanged for sixty years, and he made it possible for bluejackets to

achieve officer's rank. It was typical of his nature that to discover more about naval aviation, he learned to fly himself.

He hurried the fast and powerful *Queen Elizabeth* battleships through the shipyards, and initiated the conversion from coal- to oil-firing. But if his fleet was ready in the broadest sense when war broke out in August 1914, it was still imperfect in important details. The magazines of the battle-cruisers were vulnerable, naval gunnery was poor, and the heavier shells, mines, torpedoes and other equipment would prove badly deficient when the time came.



In the World War his personal intervention extended to naval operations, often to awesome effect: he took to drafting signals to the fleet in his own hand and despatched them without consulting the First Sea Lord. It was lawful, but the often ambiguous wording resulted in mishaps like the escape of the German warships *Goeben* and *Breslau* to Constantinople, which in turn encouraged Turkey to come in against Britain.⁹

He was right to want to exploit the Antwerp bridgehead in October 1914 to strike into the German right flank, but he did so in such meagre strength that the result was a fiasco even after he, erstwhile lieutenant in the Hussars, had crossed to Antwerp in person and flamboyantly offered to take charge in the rank of lieutenant-general which Lord Kitchener no less rashly offered him.

In November his navy lost its first action at Coronel, largely because of faulty dispositions ordered from his desk thousands of miles away. His reputation was salvaged by the victory off the Falklands six weeks later, but nothing could expunge the memory of the ill-fated expedition to the Dardanelles in 1915.

Insisted upon with his customary forcefulness, he devised it as a purely naval operation to force the Dardanelles straits and capture Constantinople. Already questionable in concept, it was ill-prepared in practise and a bloody failure in execution. Hoping vaguely that his battleships could out-range the Turkish guns and pulverise their forts, he talked the Dardanelles project past his tongue-tied naval and cabinet colleagues. Too late, at the end of February, he realised that substantial military forces should also be despatched, but he still went ahead with his purely naval assault first, forfeiting the element of surprise.

This naval assault was made on March 18, and was repelled. Writing in his diary the next day Sir Maurice Hankey noted that he had 'urged Churchill to have troops to co-operate, but he wouldn't listen, insisting that [the] navy could do it alone' – hoping, as Hankey suspected, to reha-

bilitate his name after Antwerp. By the time infantry had been trained and equipped for a frontal assault on the Gallipoli peninsula in April they ran into the machine guns and bayonets of well-prepared Turkish positions. Carnage and stalemate resulted.

The First Lord and First Sea Lord, two eccentric, hot-tempered, ambitious characters, had been at loggerheads throughout. The admiral, Sir John Arbuthnot Fisher, kept navy hours, rising at dawn; while his minister was wont to lie a-bed until mid-day and to take afternoon siestas, achieving a bustling crescendo of alertness and activity toward nine P.M. — just as 'Jacky' Fisher was normally steering for his cot. By mid-May 1915 Fisher could take it no longer. Undaunted by the sickening bloodshed and mounting warship losses off the Gallipoli peninsula, Churchill demanded that even more ships be sent out. The First Sea Lord suffered a nervous breakdown and quit.

The public was horrified by the débâcle and Asquith dismissed his wayward First Lord. Clementine thought Winston would die of grief. In vain he pleaded with his prime minister — first for reprieve, then at least for office, even the most humble; the latter plea suggested to historian Roskill that love of power was a 'very strong feature' in Winston's character.

Resigned eventually to paying the political price for failure, Churchill did it in style. He reported for officer training, crossed the Channel as a lieutenant colonel at the beginning of 1916, and served in France as a battalion commander in the Royal Scots Fusiliers for the next five months. He was a popular and efficient officer, but he was careful too to remain in correspondence, both directly and through the assiduous Clementine, with his influential friends in Westminster.

Although a world crisis of Stygian darkness was perhaps not the most appropriate time for such self-indulgence he campaigned for a public inquiry into the Dardanelles, hoping to clear his name by sheer weight of eloquence. In March 1916 he returned briefly to England and stated this demand to the House. Ignoring Clementine's advice, he struck a fitful and ill-advised alliance with his old foe Jacky Fisher and attempted from the Opposition front bench to vindicate them both. But when he ended by urging that Fisher be recalled as First Sea Lord it knocked the bottom from the barrel: his words were received in hostile silence.

Eventually a select committee did inquire into the Dardanelles, but its conclusions were anything but satisfying for Winston.

It might have been the end of his career, but Lloyd George — prime minister since December 1916 — preferred to have Winston where he could see him and in July 1917 he gave him the ministry of munitions. It

was the first of several offices during the six years of Lloyd George's premiership, offices which allowed Winston to complete his knowledge of the workings of modern government.

The next stage was in January 1919 when he became secretary of state for both war and air. If it fell short of defence minister, which was the role to which Churchill aspired, it was because Lloyd George was shy of placing that much power in this one man's hands. He must have felt justified in this restraint in February, when Churchill demonstrated a certain instability by fluttering over to Paris on his own initiative and demanding at a summit conference of foreign ministers, that all the Allies intervene against the Bolsheviks in Russia now. 'Churchill at his worst,' was how Sir Maurice Hankey described it.

Churchill at his worst: that was how the taxpayers might have regarded his campaign, still in this office, for four battleships to be built every year for the next four or five years: in 1920 the only putative enemy was the United States, and war against her was traditionally unthinkable.

Two years later he was back at the desk of under-secretary for the colonies – the same desk he had vacated fifteen earlier. Across that desk now flowed state papers on Ireland, where the 'troubles' were at their height. It underlines the garish side of his character that he urged a strongly repressive line against the republicans, supporting what he coyly termed 'legalised reprisals' for the murder of British security forces; but his was the statesmanlike hand behind the treaty ultimately signed with the new Irish Free State on December 6, 1922.

Instability continued to be his problem. In September, by his premature release of a communiqué on the Turkish–Greek conflict in Asia Minor, he nearly precipitated Britain into war with Turkey without first obtaining Dominion guarantees. The Dominions suspected that he was railroading them and Canada and Australia declined their support. The Canadian prime minister was shocked to learn years later from a privy councillor that Churchill had been under the influence of drink at the cabinet meeting concerned.¹⁰ This 'Chanak crisis' brought down Lloyd George's coalition. The Dundee electorate expressed their personal displeasure with Mr Churchill at the subsequent general election: they turfed him out of the House for the first time since 1900; to add to his misery, he was ousted by a Mr Scrimgeour – a Socialist and Prohibitionist whom he had defeated at the five previous elections.

He travelled to the Riviera and began to sketch a multi-volume history of the war, *The World Crisis*. The five volumes of what Balfour wittily termed 'Winston's brilliant autobiography disguised as a history of the universe' would make him a wealthy man: he expected to earn £5,000 and

£8,000 from the first two volumes alone – very large sums of money in those days. He bought Chartwell, worked on further volumes, toyed briefly with the idea of a Centre Party with Lloyd George, and stood unsuccessfully as independent anti-Socialist at Westminster constituency in March 1924.

Failing there, he went back to the Conservatives. He was returned to the House as a Tory M.P. after a decisive victory at Epping that October. Stanley Baldwin rewarded Winston's fickleness with high cabinet office, as chancellor of the Exchequer: it was the office his father Lord Randolph had held in 1886.

TWICE A TURNCOAT. If it left him with an uneasy conscience he made light of it. 'People often mock at me for having changed parties and labels,' he wrote when he was sixty. 'They say with truth that I have been a Tory, Liberal, Coalitionist, Constitutionalist, and finally Tory again . . .

My own feeling is that I have been more truly consistent than almost any other well known public man. I have seen political parties change their positions on the greatest questions with bewildering rapidity, on protection, on Irish home rule, and on many important secondary issues. But I have always been a Tory democrat and free trader, as I was when I first stood for Oldham more than thirty years ago.¹¹

To Kay Halle, girlfriend of his only son Randolph, he remarked one weekend at Chartwell upon how his fortunes had improved each time he betrayed his party. 'I've ratted twice,' he said, 'and on the second rat Baldwin made me chancellor.'

He added, 'The family motto of the House of Marlborough is Faithful but Unfortunate. I, by my daring and enterprise, have changed the motto to Faithless but Fortunate.'¹²

His five years at the Treasury cannot be glossed over. They were a grim epoch. He came under the influence of powerful City figures who persuaded him to restore Britain to the Gold Standard of 1914. The decision unleashed an economic avalanche. He found the zeros and 'damned little dots' beyond his grasp. He resorted to patter and showmanship on the floor of the House to mask his own ignorance.

His naval colleagues watched with particular bitterness as he slashed defence spending to finance eye-catching schemes for social insurance, de-rating industrial property, and sixpence or even a shilling off income tax.

This poacher turned gamekeeper attacked every vestige of new naval construction with unremitting zeal.

It shocked his old friends in cabinet and at the admiralty. 'That damned fellow Winston,' snorted Hankey, referring to Britain's unreadiness for the new war that slowly loomed, 'was largely responsible.'¹³ Admiral Lord Beatty wrote to his wife on January 26, 1925: 'That extraordinary fellow Winston has gone mad. Economically mad, and no sacrifice is too great to achieve what in his short-sightedness is the panacæa for evils – to take a shilling off the income tax.'

Where just one year earlier he had enthusiastically endorsed plans for a new naval base at Singapore, now he mercilessly struck it from the list; he opposed the admiralty's cruiser building programme, and vetoed the increase in submarine strength at Hong Kong.

In particular he scorned the very idea of a Japanese danger to Britain's immense interests in the Far East. 'A war with Japan!' he scoffed to Baldwin, 'But why should there be a war with Japan? I do not believe there is the slightest chance of it in our lifetime.'¹⁴

The naval staff disagreed, arguing in March 1925 that Japan's growing population and need for markets and sources of self-supply would compel her to 'push a policy of penetration, expansion and aggression.'¹⁵ Churchill as chancellor demurred: 'I do not believe Japan has any idea of attacking the British empire,' he wrote, 'or that there is any danger of her doing so for at least a generation to come.' If she did attack, he believed that Britain's naval power was sufficient to force Japan's surrender after three or four years.¹⁶ At his suggestion the Ten Year Rule – the policy-making assumption that no major war was likely within ten years – was extended in 1926 and again in 1928.¹⁷



He was becoming aware that Britain's world position was slipping, and despite his American blood he was inclined to identify the United States as the culprit. At Chartwell he talked of their 'arrogance' and 'fundamental hostility' to Britain. They wished, he believed, to dominate world politics. In a cabinet memorandum he urged a similar view: Britain alone should decide how large a navy she required, independently of American desiderata; as for President Calvin Coolidge, he was just a crude amateur with the 'viewpoint of a New England backwoodsman.'¹⁸ Coolidge delivered an anti-British electioneering speech, which raised Churchill's hackles further: 'They have exacted every penny from Europe. . . Surely they might leave us to manage our own affairs.'¹⁹ He warned his colleagues against cutting the navy down to 'the limits which the United

States considers suitable for herself.' When Coolidge was now defeated by Herbert Hoover, Churchill described even this as being not good for England. 'She is being slowly but surely forced into the shade,' he wrote sombrely to Clemmie.

By the spring of 1929 this wise woman was writing to warn him that his 'known hostility to America' might stand in the way of his becoming foreign secretary: 'You would have to try and understand and master America and make her like you. It's no use grovelling or being civil to her.'²⁰

But the change of feeling which now overtook him was wrought less by Clementine's wise advice than by his growing infatuation with the huge North American continent, as he revisited it on a lecture tour in September 1929 – borne luxuriously from coast to coast by special railroad coaches provided by steel magnate Charles Schwab or his financier friend Bernie Baruch, or driven by limousine through the giant Sequoia forests of northern California to splash about in a starlet's heated marble pool in Hollywood. He liked almost everything about the country, and even Prohibition held no terrors for him since Randolph the Rabbit – as he affectionately spoke of his son – had filled every flask and medicine bottle in their cases with brandy or whisky: 'Up to the present I have never been without what was necessary,' twinkled Churchill in a letter home.²¹

By the end of that September his affection for this great new nation was complete. 'I explained to them all about England and her affairs,' he wrote Clemmie from Los Angeles, still suffused with the thrill of America, 'showing how splendid and tolerant she was and how we ought to work together.'²² This visit began a love affair that never ended.

After Labour leader Ramsay Macdonald, the 'boneless wonder,' captured power in May 1929, all the fun had gone out of politics for Churchill. He had lost interest even in naval affairs. He began to write more, drafted *My Early Life* (published in 1930) and embarked on the four volumes of *Marlborough, His Life and Times* (1933–1938). His style was good, but his desire to find the unblemished truth about the victor of Blenheim was less than absolute. 'Give me the facts,' he would tell his research assistant, 'and I will twist them the way I want to suit my argument.'²³

He would remain out of office for nearly a decade. His enemies mocked him as a Cassandra and warmonger. He was not idle in the House, as we shall see, but he had lost the confidence of the public.

'Here I am,' he remarked bitterly to Harold Nicolson, strolling across Horse Guards Parade, 'after almost thirty years in the House of Commons, after holding many of the highest offices of state; here I am – discarded. Cast away. Marooned. Rejected. And disliked.'

A gardener sweeping up dead leaves noticed him and raised his hat.

‘Good ol’ Winnie!’ he called out quite unexpectedly.

Churchill grinned. ‘The British public,’ he observed, ‘is a curious animal. It relishes the familiar. When it has consistently disliked a man for thirty years he becomes a familiar object of abuse. And as such: Good ol’ Winnie.’

Perhaps it was providential that he now set out across the lonely wilderness – encumbered with impotent insight and wasted ability. More than once Baldwin seemed on the verge of re-instating him in office, only to hesitate; but more than once in later years Churchill would reflect upon his good fortune in having thus avoided responsibility for the events that tarnished those who remained in power.

Ten years later the Canadian prime minister would suggest to him ‘There is a destiny about your life. You were meant for these times,’ and Winston could only agree. The same Canadian would suggest that he had been singled out to be war leader and again Churchill would agree.

‘It was fortunate,’ he added, ‘that I was out of office for ten years. It gave me time to study the situation.’²⁴

Why did prime ministers Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain spurn him? It was not just that his name had become a political liability. There was a powerful mistrust of him, and jealousy of his oratory too. The Socialists had no reason to like the politician who had sent in troops to break the miners’ strikes, and now he had double-crossed both Tories and Liberals. In 1917 Lord Esher wrote in one savage indictment that Churchill became too easily intoxicated with his own verbosity:

He handles great subjects in rhythmical language and becomes quickly enslaved by his own phrases. He deceives himself into the belief that he takes broad views, when his mind is fixed upon one comparatively small aspect of the question.

We have noted that Chamberlain conceded that M.P.s regarded Winston’s oratory as the ‘best show in London’; but he went on to remark that this was precisely the weak point. ‘So far as I can judge they think of it as a show and they are not prepared at present to trust his character and still less his judgement.’²⁵ Conservatives like the proprietor of the *Daily Telegraph* suspected he was out for office and even secretly double-dealing with rivals like Lloyd George.²⁶

Thus the British followed Baldwin and Chamberlain. They might be dull, but they offered what Britain cherished: tranquillity, safety, and Business As Usual; while Winston thrived on stimulation, danger and risk.

Philip Snowden would call him an adventurer and soldier of fortune. To which novelist H. G. Wells added his own telling commentary: 'Before all things,' he wrote, 'he desires a dramatic world with villains and one hero.'

Winston Churchill had one enduring ambition – to become prime minister of Britain. That was natural enough. What was less natural, as a mutual friend remarked at this time to Harold Nicolson, was that he wanted above all to hold that office in a very dangerous war.

The lure of absolute power was always with him.

Entertaining visitors years later at Chartwell, he suggested a party game – 'I will ask each of you in turn what is your secret ambition.'

The game soon ran out of steam. It was evident that he was more eager to reveal his own than to hear of their ambitions.

'I have two ambitions,' he obliged them. The first was, 'To become prime minister.' He paused, but the other ambition his houseguests would never have divined if they had tried every permutation all weekend.

'The second is,' Winston revealed, 'to enter into daily telegraphic and written communication with the President of the United States.'²⁷

Some may have chuckled at that. It seemed unlikely that fortune would smile on him again. He was out of office, and had retired to Lord Randolph's old seat below the gangway.

Here in the wilderness he met another man – it does not matter whom – who asked him which was the more dangerous, war or politics.

He retorted: 'Politics – in war you can only be killed once.'



As a boy at Harrow School Churchill was wayward and indolent.



'And we lived happily ever after,' wrote Churchill in an autobiography shortly after marrying Clementine.



In August 1929 Churchill set off with his boorish son Randolph and bibulous daughter Sarah for a holiday in Canada.



Addiction to alcohol – an inherited weakness – left Churchill prone to a variety of illnesses, including pneumonia and paratyphoid, for which he was hospitalised in October 1932.



Wearing spurious naval costume, Churchill returned from his first conference with Roosevelt in August 1941 to be met by his wife and Eden.



Outwardly loyal and an honest backer of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, Churchill despised no covert methods of destroying both the man and his reputation.



Often unsure in his early months of premiership, Churchill turned to his former enemy, South African premier Jan Smuts, for counsel.

2: *Keeping It under His Hat*

HE HAD never been wealthy, but his outgoings in no way diminished with lessening responsibilities of office. His finances roused curiosity over the years.

Rumours of corruption dogged him. Oscar Wilde's friend and consort Lord Alfred Douglas published one scurrilous pamphlet in 1923 alleging that on behalf of a 'Jewish syndicate' including a friend, Sir Ernest Cassel, Churchill had issued a false communiqué on the Battle of Jutland in return for a £40,000 cut of their stock market killing.¹ Churchill had his Lordship jailed for criminal libel.

While in office he had been cushioned by his emoluments as M.P. and minister, and he had profited from the traditional perquisites of the high-born – a currency flutter; £500 won at the tables from the Duke of Westminster; a £5,000 fee to handle oil companies' dealings with the government. Even after Baldwin's defeat his contacts in Whitehall were of pecuniary value, and he attracted lucrative directorships in coal storage and transport companies.

Hoping to found a personal fortune, he plunged into the U.S. stock market, and liked the easy money that he made. He began to commune by transatlantic telephone with the financier Bernard Baruch, the head of the U.S. War Industries Board with whom he had dealt when munitions minister. But in vain will the inquisitive search the Baruch papers in New Jersey for any trace of financial succour – apart from one item, a note in the multi-millionaire's hand acknowledging repayment of five dollars which he had advanced to the Englishman. It was that kind of detail that makes rich men what they are: rich.

Baruch's advice was worth every dollar. In 1929 Winston earned £2,000 from his U.S. electrical stocks; in one three-week period these jumped £5,200 in value, prompting a jubilant letter to Clementine that he had recovered a fortune: 'And this, with the information I can get and now am free to use, may earn further profits in the future.'

He continued to speculate. But now funds flowed also from his writing. He was commanding substantial fees. He had contracted for twenty-two articles for American weeklies which would earn him no less than £40,000 – so he telegraphed to Clemmie in October 1929.

But his dreams of great fortune dissolved on the twenty-fourth of that month, as he was eye-witness to the New York stock market crash. 'O Lord,' he gasped, stepping out into Wall-street as the Stock Exchange ejected visitors at noon-thirty: 'What a day!'

HE HAD spent that summer lecturing in North America.

When he arrived back in England on November 5, it was to find that Baldwin, in informal alliance with the Socialists, had agreed to a Royal Commission on the grant of self-government to India.

From that moment, he was overwhelmed by a new obsession – India, 'that most truly bright and precious jewel in the crown,' as his father had termed the subcontinent forty years before.

Many shared his bitterness at the viceroy's appeasement of the disruptive, extremist and unrepresentative Indian Congress party led by that 'malevolent fanatic' Mohandas Gandhi. Churchill seized the chance to try for the Conservative leadership.

India was part of Churchill's youth: India was an adventure that still lingered in his blood. He could not heed the logic of his critics. Once, the Viceroy Lord Irwin – later Lord Halifax – reproached him for having the ideas of a subaltern a generation ago. 'There is a number of interesting Indians coming to the Round-Table Conference,' Irwin murmured diffidently to Winston, having the usual trouble with his r's, 'and I weally think that it would be valuable to you to talk to some of them and bwing your views up to date.'

'I am quite shatisfied with my views of India,' lisped Churchill in reply. 'I don't want them dishturbed by any bloody Indian.'²

The India Bill was debated on November 7, 1929. Sam Hoare wrote to Irwin afterward, 'Throughout the debate Winston was almost demented with fury and since the debate has scarcely spoken to anyone.'

GERMANY WAS not at that time among his dangerous obsessions. His baleful eye still glared at Washington. 'They are arrogant,' he said of the Americans in 1928, 'fundamentally hostile to us, and . . . wish to dominate world politics.'

But in 1929 a British journal reported that Germany was planning a new 11-inch gunboat and that France intended to go one better. Churchill warned the cabinet that the secret German plan rendered the current British cruiser programme, currently orientated on the American navy, obsolete.

Soon after Heinrich Brüning's election victory in Germany in October 1930 Churchill lunched with a high official at the German embassy. He

remarked that France was justifiably worried about Germany, and voiced the first concern about Adolf Hitler – then only a minor politician leading an opposition party.

‘At present,’ reported the diplomat, quoting Churchill’s words in a telegram to Berlin,

Hitler has of course declared he has no intention of making a foreign war, but he, Churchill, is convinced that Hitler or his supporters will seize the first opportunity to resort to arms again.

When the diplomat, taken aback, remarked upon Germany’s ‘impossible frontiers,’ and particularly the Polish corridor imposed upon her, Churchill replied, ‘Poland must have an outlet to the sea.’

They found common ground again on the Soviet Union. Churchill roundly proposed that Germany, Britain, and France take concerted action ‘under German leadership’ against Soviet dumping on the world markets. ‘He sorely regrets,’ the German official reported, ‘that the joint offensive against Soviet Russia which he proposed immediately after the war was not approved by the British cabinet.’

In a reflective mood, Churchill revealed that he was now writing *The Eastern Front*, and expressed interest in meeting the German field commanders there.

‘At the outbreak of war,’ he reminisced, ‘it was totally incomprehensible to me and the entire war cabinet that Germany didn’t throw her entire weight against Russia, restricting herself in the west to defending her frontiers. That would have cast France in the role of aggressor in the eyes of the world.’³

INDIA STILL concerned him more than Germany. To the German diplomat he spoke of the Round-Table Conference being summoned to decide her future, and excoriated the name of Lord Irwin.

‘When I think of the way,’ he reminded his friend Lord Beaverbrook, ‘in which we poured out blood and money to take Contalmaison or to hold Ypres, I cannot understand why it is we should now throw away our conquests and our inheritance with both hands, through helplessness and pusillanimity.’

‘My only interest in politics,’ he added, ‘is to see this position retrieved.’⁴

It was an emotive, crowd-pulling controversy. His opponents on both sides of the House feared that he might ride this horse all the way to

Downing-street, rallying followers with the battle-cry, 'The Socialists are giving India away!'

An Indian Empire Society was founded. Addressing its first meeting in December 1930 he argued that the practical way to avoid turmoil in India was to improve the lot of the masses, while continuing to assert Britain's will to rule. Many times over the next six months Churchill orated in this vein and, with our hindsight of what occurred when India was ultimately abandoned, it is hard to say that he was wrong.

There were times when he cursed universal suffrage. It might well be, he sorrowed in a letter to Randolph early in 1931, that future historians would record that within a generation of 'the poor, silly people all getting the votes they clamour for,' they squandered the treasure which 'five centuries of wisdom and victory' had accumulated.⁵

Releasing India remained his party's official policy. Regardless of this, he developed his attack on Baldwin, culminating in a speech to the House on January 26:

Two centuries of effort and achievement! Lives given on a hundred fields! Far more lives given and consumed in faithful and devoted service to the Indian people themselves! All this has earned us rights of our own in India.

He could sense the backbenchers warming to him as he spoke – some began to cheer. There were many Conservatives who regarded Baldwin now as weak or woolly and even 'letting down the party.'

With this speech, and the letter he wrote to Baldwin that evening formally breaking ties with the shadow cabinet, he deliberately put himself beyond the pale.

THAT HIS self-exile from the inner councils might last eight years did not occur to him. He devoted the early months of 1931 to the attack on the bipartisan India policy, doubting not, as he wrote to his wife, that he had the whole spirit of the Conservative Party behind with him.

He basked in the support of the powerful newspaper lords, Rothermere and Beaverbrook. Launching his India campaign, he had made the fiery boast: 'Nothing will turn me from it, and I have cheerfully and gladly put out of my mind all ideas of public office.'

But nothing would dislodge Baldwin from his complacency. 'Decided only to be undecided,' Churchill would rasp about the Tory leader: 'resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift.' But time was on Baldwin's side. When the hue and cry over India ebbed that summer of 1931, it left

Churchill stranded: high and dry, and still out of office, just as Baldwin had known it would.

Churchill surveyed his position. Many said that he was finished. Boats, once burnt, cannot be rescued from the flames.

He was in political isolation; the New York stock market crash had wiped out the fortune he believed safely invested there; he had the upkeep of Chartwell which he had bought in happier times – in 1923, from the proceeds of *The World Crisis* – and he had a sizeable family to support: the eldest Diana, born 1906; the spendthrift Randolph, 1911; the artistic Sarah, 1914; the quiet and helpful Mary, 1922.

He was a man without a party. One newspaper scoffed that while he might change his party with the facility of partners at a dance, he had always been true to the one party he really believed in – ‘that which is assembled under the hat of Mr Winston Churchill.’

His life is one long speech. He does not talk. He orates. He will address you at breakfast as though you were an audience at the Free Trade Hall, and at dinner you find the performance still running. If you meet him in the intervals he will give you more fragments of the discourse, walking up and down the room with the absorbed self-enraged Napoleonic portentousness that makes his high seriousness tremble on the verge of the comic.

He does not want to hear your views. He does not want to disturb the beautiful clarity of his thought by the tiresome reminders of the other side. What has he to do with the other side when his side is the right side? He is not arguing with you: he is telling you.



As on earlier occasions when his luck had run out, he slipped out of England for a while. Late in 1931 he again launched himself onto the American lecture circuit to talk about the destiny of the English-speaking peoples.

He hoped to spend some time with ‘Bernie’ Baruch. He wrote to Baruch on November 1 that the forty lectures he had arranged would net him £10,000.⁶ He travelled with wife, daughter Diana, valet and Scotland Yard bodyguard. In North America he indulged his sybaritic tastes to the full. He surfaced in Hollywood, was photographed with movie starlets, and did not want for either food or drink. Lecture managers were told, ‘His tastes are very simple: He is easy to please with the best of everything.’

It was a hectic pace for a man of Winston's advancing years, and New York City nearly terminated that weary existence.

Visiting Baruch alone on December 13, he had taken a cab to Fifth Avenue and on getting out instinctively looked right instead of left, being a London man. He stepped under the wheels of an onrushing car driven by an Italian immigrant. He collapsed into a bundle of flesh, blood and clothing, and reflected semi-consciously upon his plight. After satisfying the American medical profession's primary concern, his credit-worthiness, he was treated at the Lennox Hospital. The repair costs – he had broken fifteen bones – and loss of lecture revenue added to his misfortune.

But he would not be Winston Churchill if he could not turn a disaster to his own good fortune. John Wheeler, president of the North American Newspaper Alliance, suggested he write about it.⁷ Churchill hired a new private secretary – Phyllis Moir – dictated a wonderful account of his misfortune, which was still painfully in his memory, and pocketed \$1,500 for the syndication rights. He blew the money on a three-week convalescence in the Bahamas with Clemmie.

Somewhere in the black bundle [he had written in the article] toward which the passers-by are running there is a small chamber or sanctum wherein all is orderly and undisturbed.

There sits enthroned a mind apparently intact and unshaken. Before it is a keyboard of levers or buttons directing the body. Above, a whole series of loudspeakers reports the sensations and experiences of the empire controlled from this tiny headquarters. This mind is in possession of the following conclusion: 'I have been run over by a motorcar in America. Here is a real catastrophe. Perhaps it is the end.'

The flippant style concealed a deepening worry about his future. Writing to Randolph from the Bahamas, Clemmie reported: 'Last night he was very sad and said that he had now in the last two years had three very heavy blows. First the loss of all that money in the [stock market] crash, then the loss of his political position in the Conservative Party, and now this terrible physical injury.'⁸

Returning to England, he had time on his hands. He built brick walls and otherwise improved upon Chartwell. He painted in oils the canvases recording his meanderings along the French Riviera, Dutch canals, Norwegian fjords, and the cotton plantations of Hobcaw, Bernard Baruch's place in South Carolina. 'His friends agree,' wrote a benevolent American

observer, 'that his finest piece of work in this period was a still life of two glasses alongside a bottle of brandy and a bottle of Scotch.'⁹

Back in England he enlarged his new profession, journalism, although because of its demands on his time and energy it was at right-angles to his preferred one of politics. But politics were dominated now by the unappetising coalition of Baldwin and Macdonald, and he was glad to be out of it.

A year before, Harold Nicolson had found him at Chartwell working on three books simultaneously – polishing *My Early Life*, completing *The Eastern Front*, and embarking on a four-volume life of the Duke of Marlborough which would fully occupy him until the awful September of 1938. Shuffling books along a thirty-foot table carpentered to his own design, jousting on every page with the long-dead historian Lord Macaulay, he laboured to dispel that great historian's accusations against the duke – charges of treason and taking bribes – and to glorify him instead as the hero who had delivered Europe from a despot, Louis XIV.

The volumes painted a magnificent portrait of the times. The glorification was no easy task for Winston, despite the opening to him of the Marlborough archives at Blenheim Palace. He found confirmed therein the details of John Churchill's womanising with well-endowed female objects of his lust and greed. On the weightier charge of high treason, he could only suggest that the letter in question was a forgery; this did not ride well on the lips of a man who had in his own time made political capital out of the Zinoviev Letter of October 1924.

THE MONEY flowed in and out of his bank account like an Atlantic tide. He put his literary income for 1930 alone at £35,000. He made an £8,000 deal with the *Daily Mail*, for example, to publish his articles on the North American tour.

This literary income was now indispensable for him. Inevitably, much of it depended on political posturing that can only be termed irresponsible. The change in several of his tunes can be traced directly to changes in his personal fortunes. He had to toe the line of a fickle international readership, particularly in the United States. Churchill, who in 1929 and 1930 had reserved some of his baser utterances for America and her predatory intentions toward Europe and the empire, now spoke in his lucrative 1931/32 lecture tour of the need for Britain and the U.S. to stand together to protect 'the distracted peoples of Europe' from communist tyranny; and he highlighted the absurdity of each country 'gaping at each other in this helpless way,' and being ashamed of Anglo-American co-operation 'as if it were a crime.'¹⁰

In 1920 Mr Churchill had published in one Sunday newspaper an article about 'the schemes of the International Jews,' in which he had warned against the 'adherents of this sinister confederacy,' and called them a 'world-wide conspiracy for the overthrow of civilisation and for the re-constitution of society.'¹¹ By the 1930's all such ugly phrases had been tailored out of his writings.

His posture toward the Soviet Union was one of consistent abhorrence. In July 1927 he proclaimed that Soviet diplomats were 'treacherous, incorrigible, and unfit for civilised intercourse.'

Italian fascism held few horrors for him. In 1926 he had lauded Mussolini's 'commanding leadership.'¹² In January 1927, after several days as Benito Mussolini's guest, he had praised Italy's corporate state, the 'discipline, order, goodwill, smiling faces,' and even the ubiquitous fascist salute.¹³ He had declared himself charmed by Mussolini's simple bearing and dedication to the Italian people; and he had gushed to the Roman journalists, 'If I had been an Italian, I would have been entirely with you from the beginning to the end of your victorious struggle against the bestial appetites and passions of Leninism. . . Your movement has rendered a service to the whole world.'¹⁴

'Nearly thirty years ago,' he wrote for the North American Newspaper Alliance – many of whose readers were of Italian descent,

I visited the island of Rhodes, then a part of the Turkish Empire. I have just visited it again, under Mussolini's rule. What a change is presented! The dirt, the squalid and bedraggled appearance, are entirely gone. Everything is clean and tidy. Every man, however poor, looks proud of himself. Not a beggar is to be seen, and even the cabmen are well shaved. Yet they all seem quite happy.¹⁵

As for Germany, Hitler still seemed a long way from office. But Churchill's literary sales there were non-existent; and since he was writing for the greatest democracy in the world – writing so to speak to 'the gallery' – he played on the latent anti-German sentiments in the English-speaking peoples. In one American article he denounced the Customs Union established early in 1931 by Germany and Austria as 'a revival of the secret Old World diplomacy' beneath which lurked *Anschluss* – the dreaded union of German-speaking peoples. In his writings for the American Hearst newspapers, he warned of Germany and Austria, towering 'grim and grisly' over France, a 'boisterous fierce-lapping ocean of Teutonic manhood and efficiency' surrounding the Bohemian 'island' of Czechoslovakia on three sides.¹⁶

Not speaking German, it was easy for Churchill to be anti. In the summer of 1932, still writing *Marlborough*, he toured the duke's victorious battlefields in Flanders and Germany.

Winston took with him the friend who had largely replaced F. E. Smith – who had died an alcoholic in 1930 – in his affections, the German-born Professor Frederick Lindemann. 'The Prof.' had studied at Darmstadt and Berlin, was fluent in German and conversant with the customs.

Randolph had been in Germany during July covering the elections for the *Sunday Graphic*. ('The success of the Nazi party,' he had written, 'sooner or later means war.') When their paths now crossed in September in Munich Randolph tried to bring his father together with Adolf Hitler. Winston loafed around the hotel with Hitler's court jester Ernst 'Putzi' Hanfstaengel, hoping to see the Führer; but in vain. Neither man set eyes upon the other, nor ever would.

Why should Hitler have seen Churchill then, in 1932? The one's star was in the ascendant, the other's on the wane. The former cabinet minister, who had been fêted across the North American continent in special trains and limousines and whose name was a household word in the empire, cannot have enjoyed being frozen out by a former corporal who had never been in office.

His speeches reflected an injury more lasting than any New York motorist could inflict on his esteem. As the disarmament conferences now began in Geneva, and there was talk of allowing Germany equality in arms, Churchill found a holy obsession to replace India.¹⁷

3: *Wuthering Depths*

THROUGHOUT THESE earlier years of political exile, he was harassed by accumulating money problems. To keep his country house and feed his family, and to pay off the debts incurred by an increasingly wayward son, he had to devote more time to authorship and less to public affairs; it was a vicious circle, but there was no alternative unless he found philanthropic backers, with all the dangers to his independence that that implied.

As yet, the moneyed aristocracy saw little cause to back him.

His enemies had written him off; worse, he had begun to write himself off too. 'I'd give up politics entirely,' he confessed to a family friend, 'if it weren't for the faint chance that one day I shall be prime minister.'¹

To a keen poker player like Beaverbrook he was a 'busted flush.' At the time of the break with Baldwin, Winston's 'diehard' act over India did not seem to carry conviction. 'He has disclosed too many shifting faces to expect to be regarded as immovable now,' Beaverbrook commented to a Canadian friend. 'His voice lacks that note of sincerity for which the country looks.'² He was irritated by Churchill's harping on India. 'Winston Churchill,' he wrote, 'is making it his ladder for the moment.' To which he added the barbed comment: 'Churchill has the habit of breaking the rungs of any ladder he puts his foot on.'³

He expected Churchill to make one farewell tour, then retire from politics.⁴ It was an irony that Stanley Baldwin, who was at heart a diehard, was leading the campaign for federal rule in India while the diehards were led by Churchill, who had given Home Rule to Ireland. 'The result is,' Beaverbrook summed up, 'that Baldwin does not feel happy about his policy, and the diehards are not happy about their leader.'⁵

As the campaign against Indian self-government slithered and withered, Churchill threw himself with greater abandon into his other profession. In August 1931 his friend Brendan Bracken landed for him a £7,800 contract with the London *Daily Mail* to write a weekly article for one year. He had the entrepreneurial and literary skills to produce and market sheafs

of readable prose even if his ramshackle methods did raise the eyebrows of the more fastidious among his researchers.



As an author, he rarely originated material himself. Adam Diston, a balding, middle-aged Scotsman who sported a butterfly collar, ghosted the weekly articles that Churchill fired off to *Answers* magazine. They spent a few hours in each other's company, then Diston went home to draft the article and sent it to Churchill to amend.⁶

He hired and fired these literary other ranks at will, often treating them little better than a Victorian admiral would the bluejackets below decks. He fluttered across their draft manuscript pages like a butterfly, depositing literary pollen. One such researcher, Edward Marsh, slaved on the galleys for years; his sacrifice was dismissed by Churchill years later with the curt remark that the man had 'never been of any use to him at all.'⁷

The Times in 1922 furnished assistants to search out chapter mottos for his money-spinning war history. Lesser mortals burrowed in archives, read secondary literature, prepared outlines: he sifted, perused, analysed, interpreted – and on occasion distorted too.

Marlborough provided instances of this. So did his narrative of the Dardanelles campaign. *The Times* reviewer in 1923 exposed his free-wheeling adaptation of documents;⁸ and modern historians with access to the official inquiry's files agree that his responsibility for the disaster was substantially more than would appear from his own tale. 'Indeed,' concludes one, 'Churchill's later account is little better than a pack of lies.'⁹

Churchill stood over his devils and skimmed their drafts for style, testing them occasionally on the touchstones provided by acknowledged masters like Gibbon or Macaulay.

'You are very free with yr commas,' he lectured Eddie Marsh in 1922 on colonial office notepaper. 'I always reduce them to a minimum: & use an "and" or an "or" as a substitute, not as an addition. Let us argue it out.'

Twelve years later he was still educating Edward:

(1) I am in revolt about your hyphens. One must regard the hyphen as a blemish to be avoided wherever possible. . . I notice Macaulay would write 'downstream' one word, and 'panicstricken' one word. On the other hand 'richly embroidered' seems to me to be two words. . . In 'salt mines' you want a hyphen, but who would ever write 'gold-mining shares are good' today? . . . We had a controversy about this last time and arrived at a com-

promise the principle of which I have forgotten. Would you mind thinking over this again.

(2) 'Judgement' no 'e' . . .

and so on for the whole page of typescript. Fourteen historic years after delivering this master-class in syntax, Churchill was still plaguing the aide who had become Sir Edward Marsh: 'I am still balancing,' the now retired war leader wrote, 'between "Goering" and "Göring" and "Fuehrer" and "Führer," etc.' To which he added with airy disregard for publisher's expense:

It will be quite easy to change the text throughout by a general directive to the Printer. Curiously I like some one way and some t'other. Let us talk about this.

(2) On the whole I am *against* commas. . .

And thus he had come full circle again.¹⁰

Many promising young brains were hired by Churchill to assist his. There was history graduate Maurice Ashley, an authority on Oliver Cromwell and the seventeenth century, paid £300 per annum to review and sift the treasures of the muniments room at Blenheim Palace.¹¹ There was Major Desmond Morton, brought in to work on *The World Crisis*: they had met on the western front, where Morton had been subsequently shot through the heart but survived; and there was diplomat Owen O'Malley, who drafted his outline chapters.

Churchill rarely worked with the pen. He declaimed the texts to shorthand girls, while stomping the available floor space and chewing an unlit cigar. He had developed this habit – of dictating manuscripts – while at the Treasury, and freely commandeered his secretary there, one Lettice Fisher, to accompany him on shoots at Balmoral in order that the Muse might not be interrupted.¹²

Thus his written prose was as eloquent as his oratory, a silver torrent of spoken words, often chosen more for their sound than for any precise shade of meaning. A Churchillian sentence crafted with the pen had all the stilted awkwardness of a freshly bricked row of houses: 'Everyone may try to make his own bed so long as he is ready to lie in it afterwards,' he wrote in a letter to his wife.¹³

In later years he would dictate his masterpieces to Kathleen Hill. She sat at the foot of his bed, typing them into her silent typewriter while inspiration flowed from him. The cigar was still there, but now he sipped iced water or whisky and soda, grunted as though in labour, twitched his

toes beneath the bedsheets. At inspiration's end he would bellow 'Gimme,' seize the paper that rolled out of the platen, and correct it with a fountain pen gripped half way up the barrel.¹⁴

His output was prolific, but of an enviable quality, particularly the multi-volume histories. He knew how to organise and construct such a major opus. In the Thirties he was generating two or three thousand words a day, an entire volume in three months, a major book every year. He told one visitor that he kept two hours free each night for dictating manuscripts.¹⁵

It would be churlish to deny that they are well composed. He knew his job. In 1930 he would gently admonish a less accomplished friend that writing was like painting. 'My teachers used to tell me that the question you must ask yourself is – "What do you mean to do? What was it you saw that struck you? What was the message you had to give?"'¹⁶

If, with Churchill, style vanquished content every time, what perfect style it was! He could conjure out of a string of unpromising words spontaneous images of a pertinence and sting that probably only a master cartoonist like Illingworth could otherwise accomplish – and then only after hours of draughtmanship.

The consequence of this obsession with style is that, when divested of linguistic flora and dissected in the cold light of the late twentieth century, some of his most memorable sentences mean little if anything at all.

He sometimes seemed to re-invent the English language. He agonised over principles. Who else but Mr Winston Churchill would dare to inflict Fowler's *Dictionary of Modern English Usage* as a Christmas gift upon the bemused royal family:¹⁷ was it not rather like bestowing a deodorant stick or nail file on a particularly scruffy friend?

He split no infinitives, that is true. He would wield words carelessly, even wrongly – selecting the rare verb 'compass' instead of 'encompass' – to intimidatingly archaic effect. The choice of words was baroque and indiscriminate, but the aim was unerring and the results often delightful. Once returning from Harvard he enlarged upon the hope that after the war alliance might be so perpetuated that the *Missouri* – then America's newest battleship – might steam into Gibraltar and 'receive cannonballs for her guns.'¹⁸

His entire vocabulary might have been memorised from some newspaper found lining a 19th-century *escritoire*. From the early Thirties he adopted as effective the injunction 'pray' instead of 'please' – as in 'Pray attune your acute mind into [*sic*] analysing this Constitution.' Thus he commanded the Prof. (Lindemann) one day in 1931 when still stubbornly campaigning for the Indian princes.¹⁹

But when Winston Churchill ventured forth across the slippery glaciers of the most tangled language forms he did so with the surefootedness of a mountain goat. In that same famous speech to the American Congress in which he would memorably challenge: 'What kind of people do they think we are?' he would unabashedly unfurl this ceremonial banner of a sentence:

Sure I am that this day now we are masters of our fate, that the task which has been set us is not above our strength, that its pangs and toils are not beyond our endurance.²⁰

Sentences like this suggest that there were times when, for Winston, the Word had become an end unto itself.



This Leonardo of the English tongue was well paid for his pains. The sales of *Marlborough* in 1929 showed the price his pen commanded. Empire serial rights went to his friend Lord Camrose, the Tory newspaper owner, for £5,000; empire volume rights to Geo. Harrap's for £10,000 more; and the American rights to Scribner's for £5,000.²¹

Even £20,000 would not last long, given his outgoings. Undaunted as he sauntered across the threshold and began to plumb the depths of political unpopularity, he cast his mind ahead in the way that authors do to the post-*Marlborough* period, and in October 1932 he took to Cassell's his new idea – a project for a *History of the English Speaking Peoples*, which would alone be worth, he suggested £20,000.

This immense, farsighted construction project, Winston's one-man TVA, mapped out when he was in the foothills of his fortunes, would carry him to the summit of his literary achievements.

'The professors tell me,' he would say years later, 'that it is very good up to Richard III. But thereafter I am not satisfied with it. Much remains to be done.'²²

His favourite passage was that devoted to the American Civil War – sixty thousand racy, exciting words, bordering at times on a screen-writer's mastery.

In the United States his books did not at first attract large sales. Reviewers acclaimed the third volume of his war history but only 1,000 were sold compared with 11,000 in Britain. But Charles Scribner was a man of fortitude. 'We have not lost courage,' he would console Winston in 1932, 'and will continue to back them until they come their own.'²³

Even in England sales of the final volume on the eastern front had disappointed.²⁴

As book sales declined, Churchill double-banked his income with newspaper and magazine articles. In England, he was already writing for Nash's *Pall Mall* magazine, *Answers* and *Strand Magazine*. Friends now helped to place articles in the U.S.

In February 1926 *Cosmopolitan*, then rather more staid than now, published a typical Churchill offering: 'When Life Harrasses Me I Ride My Hobby.' Though *Cosmo* paid for many, they published remarkably few of these rare Churchills – spiking four in 1927, one in 1928, five in 1929, and four in 1930; they published only one each in 1928, 1930 and 1931.

His literary agent Curtis Brown had negotiated in 1930 a ten-year agreement with *Collier's* magazine to write six articles a year at £2,000 per annum. He became an Art Buchwald in striped pants, dilating upon topics as diverse as iced water and Franklin D. Roosevelt, as the Depression and corn on the cob. He would write two articles for *Collier's* in 1930, three each year from 1931 to 1933, two in 1934, five in 1935, three in 1936, five in 1937, four in 1938, and five in the last months of peace, 1939.

UPON HIS return from Germany in the summer of 1932, where he had failed to meet Hitler, he resumed these literary chores.

He was confined to bed, having contracted paratyphoid while visiting Blenheim. There was a rumour – unlikely on the face of it – that he had been poisoned by the drinking water.²⁵ While convalescing he still dictated to his secretary or read Ashley's latest findings on Marlborough.

He found this new practise of bedroom dictation congenial and convenient: he was after all nearly fifty-eight.

With Ashley's aid he embarked on new money-spinning literary adventures. The literary energy that radiated from the bedroom at Chartwell had a half-life that is a-glowing and a-humming to this day in the files of the *Chicago Tribune*–*New York News Syndicate* archived at Eugene, Oregon.

Probably the oddest literary project revealed by these files is that commenced in September 1932. Curtis Brown had wired him that the *Chicago Tribune* had accepted his latest brainwave, for 'the six great stories of the world as retold by Mr Churchill.' He agreed to a \$1,000 fee – no mean price in those days – for condensing each of the world's classics into twenty-five pages of double-spaced typescript for American newspaper readers. There is no denying his paternity of these potboilers – the manuscripts are there with Winston's own corrections at Eugene.

It made a striking contrast. In Germany there was terror and turmoil as Hitler made his final bid for power. At Chartwell, Churchill and his devils bent to this eccentric new task.

He rattled off the digests rapidly, getting 'A Tale of Two Cities' and 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' through the U.S. Customs by November 3, delivering 'Moonstone' and 'The Count of Monte Cristo' on November 18, and submitting 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles' and 'Ben Hur' early in January.

He also sold these articles for £2,000 to that discerning readership, the *London News of the World*.²⁶

In January 1933 Hitler seized power. In three weeks he was virtual dictator. In England, Mr Churchill was being something of a dictator too – dictating still more digests, though unsolicited. The Nazi menace was far from his mind.

On the last day of January – as the Nazis were staging torchlight processions outside the Reich Chancellery in Berlin – Churchill was proposing in a chatty cable to his New York agents that he now digest 'Wuthering Heights.' He had a digest of both that and 'Jane Eyre' in his agent's hands by February 13.

In Berlin Hitler ordered the secret expansion of his army and airforce, and the liquidation of all opposition. Churchill had other fish to fry. From New York came a fresh suggestion from his delighted agents that he now tackle 'The House of the Seven Gables,' 'Dombey and Son,' 'The Way of All Flesh,' 'Ivanhoe,' 'Ramona,' and Dostoevsky's 'Crime and Punishment.'

FOR THE next year he continued this exiguous existence. He wrote his memoirs and sold them as *My Life* to the Americans for \$6,000 in 1934. He cabled his agents on November 30, 'Greatly obliged,' and put the package on the transatlantic steamer to them on the appointed day ('Pray communicate this to the *Tribune*') together with forty snapshots from his scrapbooks. Again the *News of the World* bought it, for £4,200. The entrepreneur in him had artfully worked into the American manuscripts puffs for his other books; the *Chicago Tribune* equally neatly excised them.

Early in 1935 he suggested a monthly column syndicated throughout North America. 'I don't need to emphasise to you,' wrote agent Curtis Brown to the syndicate, 'his ability as a journalist for American consumption.'²⁷ Nothing came of it, and he did not return to the idea.

4: *Wild Man in the Wilderness*

IF I WERE elected dictator of the world,' Churchill murmured a few days after his final retirement in 1955, 'I should kill all the scientists and burn all the books.'

He was cruising the Mediterranean with an American publisher when he made the remark.

'Of course,' said Churchill, seeing the hurt look of Lord Cherwell, his chief scientific adviser, 'I'd make an exception of the Prof. Just simple favouritism, of course, my prerogative as dictator.'

His eyes twinkled. 'And I should make it a criminal offence for anyone to go around bothering molecules. The little atom should be left in peace for ever.'

Clementine leaned over and shouted into his earpiece. 'But why, then, Winston, are you always telling the scientists in Britain to get on with it, get on with it?'

Churchill smiled feebly. 'Well, quite obviously I am *not* dictator of the world. No, nor is this a platform on which I should be likely to be elected one. So we have to keep our own end up.'

IF IT is true that a man can be judged by the company he keeps, it was not easy to judge Winston in the Thirties, because his friends were so few.

Lord Birkenhead (F. E. Smith) had died in 1930, and it was the Prof. who stepped into the gap in the firmament around Churchill. Lord Cherwell – at that time Frederick Lindemann – was to remain his friend and counsellor for the next thirty-five years, while his close-cropped hair receded across the Central European cranium, the neat military moustache turned white, and the sallow skin tautened over hollow cheeks.²

They had met in August 1921, when the Prof. had pandered to Winston's children in the hope of attracting an invitation to Chartwell. Two lonely men, they understood and complemented each other perfectly.

Lindemann was Winston's walking pocket calculator, and a compendium of useful data. Fastidiously dressed in long topcoat and bowler, he

was a lifelong bachelor, fanatically abstemious and a cranky vegetarian. By some stroke of ante-natal destiny he had been born on German soil. His father was a product of Alsace, his mother American like Winston's. He had studied at Berlin – under the famous Nernst – and at Oxford. Not deficient in personal courage, he once demonstrated in practise his theory of rescuing planes from the 'uncontrollable' spin.

He was wealthy and unscrupulous, both qualities that Winston admired. He was modest, but arrogant too, and vindictive in pursuing former opponents beyond the grave. He was anti-Semitic, but sheltered at his Clarendon Laboratory the many Jewish scientists who in 1933 began to trickle out of Germany. It was the Prof. who gave the first shoulder-heave to the Allied atomic bomb project, and he was the first advocate of saturation bombing; but his first collaboration with Churchill had been on an article for *Pall Mall* magazine in April 1924 on the 'future possibilities of war and how frightful it could be for the human race.'

Prof. and politician clung to each other with an oft-unseeing loyalty. Repeatedly Lindemann was wrong – in one famous prewar dispute with Sir Henry Tizard's air defence committee he scoffed at the practicability of radar and suggested backing infrared devices and 'aerial mines' instead. Later he denied the German radio beam navigation, and later still he called the enemy rocket threat a 'mare's nest.'

But his usefulness to Churchill in his lonely campaigning outweighed all these blemishes.



Three major issues obsessed Churchill during the mid-Thirties: India, Germany and disarmament. He boiled each issue down to personalities, and waged a ruthless personal attack on them – Sir Samuel Hoare, secretary for India, to whom he referred in private as a 'dirty dog'; Adolf Hitler, fast becoming dictator of Germany; and the prime minister, Ramsay Macdonald, in whose direction he hosed a torrent of corruscating abuse that brought more enemies than friends. Many who later rose to high office under him, including Cripps, Eden and Sinclair, joined in the protest against Churchill in 1933, while other Members described his attacks in the House as 'mean and contemptible,' or as a personal vendetta by 'a disappointed office-seeker.'

His case on India was sound, and it had the makings of a Churchill comeback: many leading Britons, worried about Britain's future in India, looked to him to stop this surrender of imperial authority. He had the eloquence: appealing to his fellow Conservatives to reverse the government's policy, he would say on February 17, 1933, 'One deep-throated growl

from the National Union of Conservative Associations would be enough to stop the rot.'

But as so often, he poisoned his case with personal animus. His opponents were able to portray his motives as 'ill-disguised' – 'rather the break-up of the National Government than the safety and welfare of India,' said one.

Samuel Hoare squirmed beneath the sting of Churchill's sarcasm. His correspondence with the viceroy of India, Viscount Willingdon, and the governors of the provinces reveals his real anxiety about Churchill's 'entirely selfish and wrecking' campaign.

'Winston and his crowd,' he wrote on March 17 to Willingdon, 'have been very active and completely unscrupulous.' Churchill was out to smash the government, he said: 'He will stick at nothing to achieve his end. India gives him a good fighting ground as he can play upon the ignorance . . . of some of the most trusted members of the Conservative party.'

However effective Winston's attack may be, there is a great body of opinion in the country that will never trust him and even the extreme right of the Conservative party, whilst these will use him for their own ends, would never, I believe, take him as their leader.

The House appointed a Joint Select Committee on India. Churchill tried to oppose the move, and was ridiculed by his opponents. 'I will say,' mocked one Member, 'that with all the experience of my right Hon. Friend in manual labour, he cannot shovel enough earth over his past to obliterate it from human view.'

Hoare invited him to join the committee, hoping to muzzle him. Churchill hesitated, and declined. Hoare wrote sneeringly to Willingdon that at the back of Winston's mind was the belief that Britain was 'going Fascist' and that 'he, or someone like him' would eventually rule India as Mussolini was governing North Africa.³

CHURCHILL SWITCHED his attack to the committee. He described the manner in which members had been picked as 'a scandal.'⁴ Three-quarters were known supporters of the government's India policy.

Two – Hoare himself and Lord Derby, the walrus-like Tory man of influence in Lancashire – shortly adopted shabby methods to deflect evidence addressed to the committee particularly by the Manchester Chamber of Commerce whose cotton interests were at stake.

When Churchill learned of this from private newspaper sources a year later, in April 1934, he saw in it a means of raising a press outcry: 'What will then happen,' he told his allies, meeting at the Savoy, 'will be an uproar.'

He called upon the Speaker to have the matter investigated by a Committee of Privileges. He was entitled, indeed obliged, to do so as a Member of the House. After all, Hoare and Derby had quite clearly tampered with witnesses before a Joint Select Committee. Whatever his entitlements and obligations, his action was of course a clear attempt at forcing Hoare's resignation, collapsing the India policy, and perhaps even bringing down the national government.

Hoare was stunned by the weight of this attack.

I had no word of warning until late on Sunday night [April 15] when Winston sent me a letter saying that he was going to raise a question of privilege on the following day in the House. . . All this was made a thousand times worse by the fact that I had sat next to Winston at luncheon with Philip Sassoon on the previous Thursday, when he had behaved as the best of old friends and colleagues. The very next night he was dining with Lloyd George and Horne for the purpose of arranging an attack. . . Can you imagine a more treacherous way of treating not only two former colleagues in various Governments, but two prominent people in his own party? I now hear that he is mobilising a terrific case with solicitors, counsel and dozens of witnesses, and he intends to turn the whole business into something in the nature of an impeachment.⁵

Months of acrimonious investigations followed. The mood is illustrated by lines that Hoare wrote on June 1, 1934 to the acting viceroy, Lord Derby's brother George Stanley: 'I do not know which is the more offensive or more mischievous, Winston or his son [Randolph]. Rumour, however, goes that they fight like cats with each other and chiefly agree in the prodigious amount of champagne that each of them drinks each night.'

On June 4, 1934 the Committee of Privileges unanimously threw out Churchill's complaint. This was most unjust. The papers of Hoare, the India Office and Lord Derby make it plain that all three had deliberately withheld from the committee documents which established that he was right.

'I do not mind confessing to you,' Churchill wrote to Cyril Asquith two months later, still smarting from the unjustified defeat, 'that I sus-

tained a very evil impression of the treatment I received and some day I hope to nail this bad behaviour up upon a board, as stoats and weasels are nailed up by gamekeepers.’⁶

The raw truth was that he had fewer friends in the House than Samuel Hoare. In the resulting debate, the House hounded him mercilessly. Winston, scoffed Leopold Amery, wished to be true at all costs to his chosen motto – *Fiat justitia ruat cælum*.

‘Translate!’ shouted Churchill, before he could stop himself.

Amery obliged, to hoots of unkind laughter: ‘If I can trip up Sam, the Government’s bust.’

THWARTED OVER India, Churchill redoubled his attack on Hitler. Justifying his actions by the failure of the Allied powers to abide by their covenants to disarm after 1919, Hitler was rearming Germany, contrary to the dictates of Versailles. Churchill uttered the first warnings on March 23, 1933.

When we read about Germany [he had then told the House], when we watch with surprise and distress the tumultuous insurgence of ferocity and war spirit, the pitiless ill-treatment of minorities, the denial of the normal protections of civilised society to large numbers of individuals solely on the ground of race – when we see that occurring in one of the most gifted, learned, scientific and formidable nations in the world, one cannot help feeling glad that the fierce passions that are raging in Germany have not found, as yet, any other outlet but upon Germans.

Much of this was cant. He had himself enforced Britain’s ruthless measures of repression in Ireland. Nor would he express comparable concern about Britain’s measures in India, where several thousand Congress supporters had been arrested with their leader Mohandas Gandhi. Nor do his other utterances of this period betray any of his later hostility to fascism. In one February 1933 speech, inspired by Mussolini’s stout anti-communism, he had called him ‘the Roman genius’ and ‘the greatest law-giver among living men.’

He also spoke public words of sympathy for Japan, although her army had now invaded northern China. Britain must try to understand Japan’s high sense of national honour and patriotism: ‘On the one side,’ he explained, ‘they see the dark menace of Soviet Russia. On the other, the chaos of China, four or five provinces of which are now being tortured under communist rule.’⁷

HIS OPPONENTS regarded the relentless assault on Ramsay Macdonald and his quest for disarmament as prompted by selfish political motives.⁸ But it was easy to contrast Macdonald's tireless efforts with Hitler's stealthy rearmament. It made good copy. Europe, Churchill told his Theydon Bois constituents on August 12, lay under an evil and dangerous storm cloud: 'Nobody can watch the events which are taking place in Germany without increasing anxiety about what their outcome will be.'

Tiring of the one-sided bargaining, in October Hitler pulled the plug out of Geneva. He walked Germany out of the disarmament talks and the League of Nations.

This provoked Churchill to even more garish language about Germany. 'We read,' he told the House on November 7, 'of the military spirit which is rife throughout the country; we see that the philosophy of blood lust is being inculcated into their youth in a manner unparalleled since the days of barbarism.'

The exuberance of his own verbosity intoxicated him like little else. A week later he returned to the charge: 'The Nazis inculcate a form of blood lust in their children extraordinary without parallel as an education since barbarian and pagan times.' 'It is they,' he continued, without offering any source, 'who have laid down the doctrine that every frontier must be made the starting point of an invasion.'⁹

He also claimed that the Nazis had declared that 'war is glorious.' Against this might be held his endless conversation about his own glorious campaigns. (The Boer War was 'the last enjoyable war,' he later remarked to his private secretary.¹⁰)

HE FELT the lack of friends keenly. He cultivated relations with his opponents like Chamberlain – their correspondence remained on 'My dear Neville' and 'My dear Winston' terms throughout – and plied him and Baldwin with copies of each scintillating new Churchill volume.

Resolutely barred from office, Churchill pouted and stowed away his inner feelings for later use. He boned up on the art of human relations, patiently replenished the depleted funds of goodwill, and made contact with both newcomers and old men of faded power alike, who slouched around low tables drinking whisky in the smoking room of the House.¹¹ He felt at home in this familiar room with its smoke-filled air, its raucous laughter and lack of decorum.

Fortified by his grasp of history, he was willing to be patient. Somebody asked him at this time why he had so few allies. He replied, 'I have one you don't reckon with – events!'¹² He did not know what event he

might be waiting for, but as Adolf Hitler was also wont to say – ‘You must grab the Goddess of Good Fortune by the hem: she passes only once!’

Early 1934 saw him at Chartwell writing up Marlborough’s military campaigns. But he also wrote fifty newspaper articles that year, and spoke twenty times in the House. His tone became more shrill. Britain preferred not to listen to his unsettling language. Jan Masaryk, the ebullient Czech minister in London, suggested in one March 1934 despatch that Winston was crying wolf.

In fact it is well known that Winston is going through an alarmist phase and is forever pointing to the imminence of war and the need for rearmament.¹³

MONEY REMAINED a problem, thanks to his own profligacy and Randolph’s gambling. But Churchill was not short of benefactors. In 1931 Lord Rothermere had paid him £2,400 for a dozen *Sunday Pictorial* articles on British personalities, and the *Daily Mail* had backed him on India; but two of this great newspaperman’s sons had been killed in the Great War, and he was irritated by Churchill’s belligerent tone toward Germany. He had begun corresponding secretly with Hitler and would do so with increasing warmth until the outbreak of war.¹⁴

Churchill evidently sensed this irritation. In August 1934 he wrote to Clementine that he was disgusted at the *Mail*’s ‘boosting of Hitler,’ but accepted that Rothermere was sincerely pacifist: ‘He wants us to be very strongly armed & frightfully obsequious at the same time.’ The Socialists, he added, wanted Britain to remain ‘disarmed & exceedingly abusive.’¹⁵

While Hitler became absolute dictator upon President Hindenburg’s death, consolidated his power base and eliminated opponents throughout that summer, Churchill submerged himself in his manuscripts and the pleasures of the Mediterranean. Twice that summer he went down there – living in borrowed Riviera villas and sponging off willing friends.

In the second half of August he took the Prof. and Randolph down to Golfe-Juan to work on *Marlborough* at the villa of an American actress. Rothermere, it seems, declined to bail him out after heavy losses on the tables at Monte Carlo. Fortunately a Hungarian film producer rescued him. A cigar-smoking millionaire with a Homburg hat and an inch-thick accent, Alexander Korda had just produced the first important British ‘talkie,’ ‘The Private Lives of Henry VIII.’ Churchill told him that the Silver Jubilee of George V was imminent. ‘London Films,’ Korda replied in effect, ‘will commission you to write a film treatment called “Jubilee,” the history of the House of Windsor.’ The £10,000 Korda contract reached

Chartwell a few weeks later; it was the beginning of a mutually rewarding friendship. (In 1936 a bemused Tibor Korda who ran the *News Review* was telephoned by a temporarily confused Churchill asking for more.¹⁶)

Winston put all other work aside and returned the next day to the Mediterranean, to the yacht of his old brewer friend Walter Guinness, now Lord Moyne. Behind him he left a burgeoning staff of writers and researchers preparing chapters for both *Marlborough* and a new history of the English-speaking peoples.

Quaffing champagne and venerable Napoleon brandy, Churchill cruised the Holy Land and Middle East, worked on the film script, and lectured Korda by letter on how to make movies. He suggested that they might introduce animated historical photographs, and declared himself willing to intone the commentary.

Korda probably needed no lessons. He had arrived in England from Hollywood in 1930 and established London Films two years later. The Prudential were backing him, but would lose every penny. 'Jubilee' was never filmed. Churchill was paid £4,000 nonetheless, and sold off what he could salvage to the *Daily Mail* for £2,500.

Imprudently dispensing Prudential largesse, Korda hired his new friend at £2,000 per annum 'to write such scripts as might be needed' – although he had little intention of filming them. He put Churchill's daughter on the payroll too.

The film magnate shifted into Winston's social circle. The young Brendan Bracken later introduced him to financier Bernard Baruch as 'one of Winston's great supporters in the days when he was running his lonely battle to get Britain re-armed.'¹⁷ When war broke out Korda, who had become a British citizen, would move on to Hollywood and produce films flattering to Britain's cause. At Churchill's suggestion he filmed 'Lady Hamilton' with Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh in the title role; Winston would see this film scores of times – just as in Berlin Hitler became hypnotised by the American actress Jeanette MacDonald and the theme music of 'Donkey Serenade.' There is a suggestion that Korda's offices provided cover for Intelligence activities; others in the film industry including Noel Coward and the urbane Leslie Howard, alias von Ardenne, certainly had minor starring roles in the S.I.S.

In 1942 Churchill allowed Korda the first knighthood in the film industry. Whether his gratitude was for blessings received, or for 'Lady Hamilton,' or for his toils for the S.I.S., the records do not tell.



As 1934 progressed Churchill developed an important subsidiary theme to disarmament: the growth of German air power. In March the government had announced a small but timely expansion of Britain's airforce. Labour criticised even that – 'The government,' charged Cripps, 'has had its hands forced by the wild men like Mr Churchill.' Sinclair too derided this foolish and wasteful accumulation of armaments.

Churchill rightly saw through Hitler's various subterfuges like 'Air Sport,' detecting in them ruses to provide an airforce denied to Germany under the terms of the Versailles Treaty. 'I dread the day,' he told the House on March 8, 'when the means of threatening the heart of the British empire should pass into the hands of the present rulers of Germany.'

Such melodramatic statements were typical of the debating stance that Churchill would adopt over the next five years. Sir John Simon predicted in cabinet on March 19 that Hitler would move east or into territories of German affinity like Austria, Danzig and Memel. His colleagues were unconvinced that Hitler harboured evil designs on the empire, and rightly so. We now know from the German archives that even his most secret plans were laid solely against the east. In August 1936 he would formulate his Four Year Plan to gird Germany for war against Bolshevik Russia; and not until early 1938 did he order that Germany must consider after all the contingency of war with Britain – a contingency which, it must be said, Mr Churchill had himself largely created by his speeches.¹⁸

To many he was a public nuisance. But in a sense he had become a one-man Opposition now that Britain was governed by a national government. That summer of 1934 he found that Britain's weakness in the air was a popular theme, particularly among leading London businessmen. Their doyen Sir Stanley Machin invited him to address the City Carlton Club on it. He developed his campaign on the floor of the House, in newspaper and magazine articles, and in B.B.C. broadcasts too.

What made his campaign difficult to ignore was that by mid-1934 his old friend Desmond Morton was feeding him with data, allegedly from British Intelligence sources, on Hitler's rearmament. Morton, a bluff, pink-gin-swilling former army major, was repaying a kindness: it was Churchill, while secretary for war in 1919, who had appointed him to the Intelligence service. Since then Morton had set up the Industrial Intelligence Centre. He lived near Chartwell and now became a regular visitor there, ostensibly as one of Winston's literary researchers. In reality he brought with him secret files which the Prof. illicitly photocopied for Churchill. There is no evidence to support the latter's postwar claim that Morton did so with prime ministerial approval; other papers were just filched by Morton and never returned.

Morton's figures reflected the general confusion of Intelligence information at that time. He calculated that Germany would have five thousand planes by the end of 1935, and suggested by comparison that Britain now had nine hundred, France 1,650, Russia 1,500 and Italy a thousand. His figures omitted any consideration of quality or range, but Churchill relied upon them in an effective speech on July 30 alerting Members to the danger of Nazi air raids.

With our great metropolis here, the greatest target in the world, a kind of tremendous, fat, valuable cow tied up to attract the beast of prey, we are in a position in which we have never been before, and in which no other country is at the present time.

Churchill followed with this announcement: 'I first assert that Germany has already, in violation of the Treaty, created a military airforce which is now nearly two-thirds as strong as our present home defence airforce.'

By the end of 1935, he warned, Hitler would match Britain's airforce; by 1936 he would overtake it – such was Churchill's claim.

These prophecies of doom met with more scorn than alarm, best summarised in the words of the Independent Labour Party M.P., Jimmy Maxton. He suggested that Mr Churchill remember – 'from his position of relative irresponsibility below the Gangway' – that his name still counted heavily abroad. 'His cynical, sarcastic words in this House,' said Maxton, 'are taken much more seriously abroad than he takes them himself.'

Churchill now had the bit between his teeth, however. He initiated a major debate on air defence that November. Again Morton supplied the ammunition. Germany might have, he now claimed, three thousand pilots and a thousand war planes by January 1935 – a substantial increase in his earlier estimate. These would include bombers with a five-hundred-mile radius.

It is plain from the record of November 25 that the cabinet was concerned about the effect of Mr Churchill's brash campaign on their delicate relations with Germany. Hoare felt they must make clear to the world that his 'charges were exaggerated.' Chamberlain expressed puzzlement that they themselves had no information backing Churchill's claims – which makes it unlikely that Morton's access to government Intelligence was as close as he implied – and certainly nothing to justify enlarging Britain's airforce in her present economic situation.

Churchill delivered his new attack three days later. His speech was an unabashed attempt at polarising the House and winning over the more

dissatisfied and querulous Members. Resorting to his most alarmist language yet, he now prophesied that in one seven-day Nazi air attack on London over 30,000 people 'would be killed or maimed.' Warming to his theme, he prophesied 'a dreadful act of power and terror' in which even incendiary bombs might be used; and he reminded Birmingham, Sheffield and all other major manufacturing centres that they were all at risk.

'We cannot move London,' he pointed out. 'We cannot move the vast population which is dependent on the estuary of the Thames.'

The only direct defence would be the deterrent – the power to retaliate simultaneously: that was why he insisted that Britain double, perhaps even treble, her expenditure on her airforce. Because if both countries continued to rearm at their present rate, in 1937 Germany would have twice the airforce Britain had.

Stanley Baldwin roundly rejected these estimates (and rightly so, as his figures would, years later, prove more accurate than Churchill's). It was left to former prime minister David Lloyd George to urge that Britain stop treating Germany like a pariah – they might later be glad to rely on her as a bulwark against communism. 'If Germany broke down,' he said, 'and was seized by the communists, Europe would follow.'

WINSTON CHURCHILL was two days short of sixty. Perhaps it was the realisation of his own mortality that spurred him to this wild fling in the House. It was unfortunate that his opponents lacked the eloquence and expert knowledge to counter him. They could have pointed out that the German planes then under construction were incapable of carrying a serious weight of bombs as far as London, whether or not they overflew the neutral Low Countries: they could carry the fuel, or the bombs, but not both.

Churchill was right to call attention to the probability that German civil aviation could be converted to military use. But the captured files of the German air ministry reveal both his statistics and his strategic predictions to have been wild, irresponsible, exaggerated scaremongering, delivered without regard for the possible consequences on international relations.

Six years later, in the late summer of 1940, he would find himself hostage to his own predictions. By then the war had raged for a whole year and London, 'heart of the British empire,' had still not been touched. It was not until Adolf Hitler was deliberately provoked – as we shall see – in late August of that year that he allowed his airforce to attack the British capital, and part of Mr Churchill's predictions came true.



In February 1938 advice from his U.S. millionaire friend Bernard Baruch (left) brought Churchill to the edge of bankruptcy. In desperation he put up for sale Chartwell, his beloved country mansion. Four weeks later, bailed out by a South African financier, Churchill took Chartwell off the market.

5: *Sixty*

SIXTY YEARS!' began Churchill, plucking the cigar from his mouth and pausing in his stride. It was November 1934, and he was dictating the manuscript of his life.

'Not so very long ago I thought this a very advanced age. When I was a child I was told that Methuselah [*sic*] and others lived even longer, but I never imagined for a moment that I should compete in such a class.'

He paused to let his secretary catch up.

Death was getting busy among his friends. In June his cousin Sunny, Duke of Marlborough, had died, widening the wound left in Winston by the death of Lord Birkenhead. Was he already an old man, a failure?

Friends like Lady Lambton pleaded with him not to think like that – 'To me,' she wrote, 'you are still a promising lad.'

'Lately,' he continued, brightening, 'I have not felt the same impression. Sixty now seems to me to be a very reasonable age, when a man may still have vigour of mind and body with knowledge and experience besides.'¹ A few hours later the manuscript was finished. He posted it to literary agent Curtis Brown on the thirtieth, his sixtieth birthday.

Age was crowding in on him – absentmindedness, obsessiveness, a one-track mind. Sometimes the often charming, witty and courteous man would huddle in a chair, boorish and indifferent to visitors.

Said aircraftman T. E. Shaw (Lawrence of Arabia), now a regular visitor at Chartwell: 'If Winston was not concerned in a question he would not be interested.'²

American magazine executive Daniel Longwell found the same, visiting Chartwell. 'If his mind is on other things,' he reminisced years later, 'you are somehow just not "there" when you're with him. I wasn't "there" that night at all during dinner.' Churchill, still labouring on *Marlborough*, left them to work on his book.³

Not that a Chartwell weekend was unenjoyable.

Churchill had built a round pool into a slope, and with the Prof.'s hydraulic expertise had directed the water from a spring – the 'well' in the house's name – over a series of cascades into it, and rigged up a furnace to

heat the water. At eleven the next morning Longwell located Winston and Randolph cavorting in this pool, quoting Ogden Nash poems to each other. He only had to mention that he had worked with Nash at Doubleday to find that he was suddenly 'there' for Winston after all.

He made up a tennis foursome with Clementine, Randolph and a sister while Winston did some bricklaying. Driving him back to London, Randolph explained why he had been invited. 'You've seen my father now,' he said. 'Why don't you tell the editors of *Time* that he is not "roly-poly"!'

Time humoured the request and Longwell was 'there' for ever after that.

THE RELATIONSHIP between father and son was singularly uneasy. Randolph was tall and burly, his eyes were very blue, his complexion the pink and ginger-blond of all the Blenheim tribe. He was a heavy drinker and uncontrollably ill-tempered, but possessed of a residual charm. He would mortally offend, then mollify. 'Really,' he would say penitently, 'I ought not to be allowed out in private.'⁴

In 1933 Winston had to pay £1,600 of his profligate son's debts. It was a testing time for him, and he found Randolph's jibes impossible to swallow. Conflagrations ensued which even laboured written apologies could not extinguish. 'If, infected by the violence of your own language,' Randolph would write after one blazing row, 'and in the heat of an argument I used words unbecoming for a Son, I should have thought you might have excused such conduct, particularly when assured that it was accidental.'

In January 1935 Randolph was just twenty-three when, abetted by his sisters Sarah and Diana, he stood at the Wavertree by-election, adopting his father's line on India. But there was already an official Conservative candidate: Churchill was mortified, and his critics gleeful. Samuel Hoare expressed to one correspondent the hope that Randolph would fare 'really badly.' Randolph attracted enough votes, even though defeated, to feel encouraged to field a candidate, again against the official Conservative candidate Mr Duncan Sandys, at a London by-election in February.

It provoked another blazing row. His father refused to speak to him for weeks afterward.

'He has acted entirely against my wishes,' he grumbled in a letter to Clementine, 'and left my table three days ago in violent anger.' 'Randolph seems,' he added in a later letter, 'to have got a considerable fund through Lady Houston. . . His programme seems to be to put Socialists in every-

where he can, in order to smash up Macdonald and Baldwin.' Randolph's candidate came last; Winston was hard put to disguise his relief.

Momentarily thwarted in his ambitions, his son grew a beard and proclaimed he looked like Christ. To Winston he looked uncannily like Lord Randolph, his own father, in the final phase of his fatal disease.⁵ Being father to a Churchill was no easier than being the son of one.

HE ABANDONED the fight on India in July that year. He mended his fences, wrote letters of conciliation to the most rancorous of his adversaries, and generally kept his remaining powder dry.

He also sought new allies.

He invited Lord Londonderry, secretary for air, to Chartwell.

He put out feelers to Sir Robert Vansittart, the opinionated and embattled permanent under-secretary at the foreign office – first telephoning him, then striding into his Park-street house, and finally turning up at his room at the F.O., bringing their connivance into public view to 'Van's' dismay.

On the first day of September he set off again to the Riviera. Here he heard from the editor of the *Observer*, J. L. Garvin. On India, the editor commiserated, Churchill could never have won more than one-quarter of his party. 'On defence,' however, 'you can have three-quarters of it at least with you, for good. . . Your greatest hour is yours now for the taking.'



Churchill was still an outsider, obliged to rely on illicit Intelligence.

He cultivated disgruntled civil servants seeking an outlet for their own opinions. They would come over to Chartwell, float lazily in the pool and whisper secrets to him. Since they were violating civil service ethics, Churchill kept it secret when writing his memoirs ten years later. But he may also have been loath to reveal how tenuous were the grounds upon which he built his dramatic attack on the government's level of defence spending from 1935 onward.

Primary among his sources was Desmond Morton. He trusted the major implicitly: 'We four,' he said emotionally one day, waving his hand around a cluster of these friends, 'must never part till death mows us down with his impartial hand.' The words were from Queen Anne, the emotion from his heart. Morton, it must be said, took a more detached view of Winston. He would write to a friend a quarter-century later, 'I do not care if I never see him again and certainly would not wish to attend his funeral.'⁶

Morton's figures on Hitler's rearmament were, it is now plain, wild and wilful exaggerations. Churchill's biographers have made no attempt to compare them with the *German* files; the latter are difficult to access, couched in an unfamiliar language, and follow different criteria. They have also ignored the shortcomings of German plane types. And they have totally disregarded what is surely the most fundamental issue: whether Hitler ever really threatened Britain and her empire.

Churchill may have suspected the weakness of his case. Outwardly brash and sure of himself, in private he floundered in fathom-deep uncertainty.

Quite properly invited by the secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence in January 1936 to reveal in confidence any special sources of Intelligence he might have, Churchill decided on balance to rest on his record and not to claim any 'dæmonic powers.' He drafted a reply at some length, but replaced it by terse and unhelpful obfuscation: 'I cannot claim any "special sources of Intelligence" for the figures,' he replied. 'They are simply my personal estimate.'⁷ To have revealed that his sole source was a retired army major on the outer fringe of the Intelligence agencies would surely have exposed him to ridicule.

His retrospective search for cast-iron evidence in support of his pre-war claims about the German airforce strength would continue for ten more years.⁸ 'There must be Germans,' he pointed out to the Prof. in 1947, 'who know what the G.A.F. strength was in 1935.'⁹ He wrote to American airforce commander General Carl F. Spaatz, but even Spaatz could only supply figures for 1938-39.¹⁰

The air ministry were quietly confident of their (far lower) figures. As they explained to the cabinet in November, they made assumptions 'which may not find ready acceptance by those to whom the mass of Intelligence data is not accessible.' By September 1935 the breaking of low-grade German airforce codes had enabled them to identify firmly from call-sign evidence that the Germans had 578 individual aircraft operational.¹¹

Hitler was bluffing throughout the mid-Thirties. His airforce was under par, and he pulled the wool over the eyes of his neighbours. When he re-militarised the Rhineland in 1936, he flew the only available fighter squadron from airfield to airfield, repainting its insignia each time. As late as August 1938, when the French airforce commander General Vuillemin visited Germany, every available fighter plane was shoe-horned onto one airfield in southern Germany at which the Frenchman's plane would make a casual stop.¹²

Thus Hitler and Churchill played into each other's hands. Each had reason to talk loudly of Germany's air strength. Mr Churchill had also

spoken of thirty to forty thousand dead in the first days of an air attack, and lurid figures like these were easy to remember. In fact even in 1938 Hitler would have only two bomber types capable of reaching London – the Dornier 17F (range 997 miles, speed only 220 mph) and the even slower Heinkel 111E (745 miles, 200 mph). Neither could reach Britain without violating the neutral Low Countries, and even then no escort fighter could accompany them to Britain from German airfields.

Despite this Churchill now claimed in the debate on defence spending on March 19, 1935: 'Practically the whole of the German bombing air force can reach London with an effective load,' and pointed out that few if any British bombers could reach Berlin.

A Labour Member called this speech 'scaremongering' and an attempt 'to make our flesh creep.' But six days later Hitler mischievously claimed to the visiting foreign secretary Sir John Simon that his airforce had already reached parity with Britain. It was a bulwark against Russia, he added, and it is worth noting that his top airforce general Erhard Milch, after meeting him in February to discuss the forthcoming naval talks with Britain, jotted in his pocket diary: 'We're banking on Britain, against Russia.'¹³

Hitler's claim put the fat in the fire. In Churchill's words it was a political sensation. 'This,' he exulted in a letter to his wife on April 5, 'completely stultifies everything that Baldwin has said and incidentally vindicates all the assertions that I made.'

Fresh informants flocked to his cause. Two days later an impressionable young aide of Vansittart, Ralph Wigram, visited him and began furnishing secret F.O. files, including sets of the British ambassador's despatches from Berlin reporting among other things Germany's growing militancy and Hitler's complaints about Mr Churchill. It was a fruitful association and, when Wigram committed suicide a year later, aged only forty-six, Churchill would attend his funeral as a mark of gratitude.¹⁴

Others begged him to abandon his irresponsible campaign. On April 13 Lord Londonderry, uneasy at this mounting clamour, telephoned.

'I told him that no confidence could deter me from my public duty,' Churchill wrote to Clementine, 'Ha ha!' 'On the whole,' he chortled, 'since you have been away the only great thing that has happened has been that Germany is now the greatest armed power in Europe.'

The flippant tone contrasted with the voice of sincerity that he reserved for the House. Here, on May 2, he now claimed that Hitler's airforce would be 'between three and four times' the size of Britain's.

His critics were cowed to silence. Those who did speak did not rise above personal rebuke. 'Although one hates to criticise anyone in the evening of his days,' sneered one fellow Conservative, 'nothing can excuse

the Right Hon. Member for Epping [Mr Churchill] for having permeated his entire speech with the atmosphere that Germany is arming for war.'

Hitler was, of course, arming for war but not, as Churchill kept claiming, war against Britain. Behind closed doors alarm was voiced about the dangerous policies toward which Churchill was steering public opinion. The Chief of Imperial General Staff (C.I.G.S.) Sir Archibald Montgomery Massingbird suggested that by aiming at parity 'we were issuing a new challenge to Germany in a form of warfare in which we were most vulnerable.' Germany had conscription, was larger and geographically better placed, and her industry was infinitely better prepared. Britain, moreover, had important world-wide commitments.

But Hitler's boast had brought to Mr Churchill powerful newspaper allies. Lord Beaverbrook's *Daily Express* apologised for having failed to heed him. When Churchill wrote to Lord Camrose, the tall, distinguished proprietor of the *Daily Telegraph* expressing anxiety at the way in which the Germans had 'turned the tables upon us in the air,' Camrose replied: 'You can rely on us to do all we can.'

Only Lord Rothermere still had doubts. Like Londonderry, he began telephoning Winston, who had now leased a two-floor apartment at No. 11 Morpeth Mansions not far from Westminster.

'His anxiety is pitiful,' wrote Churchill scornfully to his wife. 'He thinks the Germans are all powerful and that the French are corrupt and useless, and the English hopeless and doomed. He proposes to meet this situation by grovelling to Germany. "Dear Germany, do destroy us last!" I endeavour to inculcate a more robust attitude.'¹⁵

Rothermere resisted Churchill's endeavours. On April 29 he wrote flatteringly to Hitler ('My dear Führer') as 'one who may occupy the first place in all European history.' He was not, he said, taking to heart the current disruption in Anglo-German relations. 'The sentiments and views of parliamentary demagogues,' he assured Hitler, making an obvious reference to Churchill, 'are capable of quick and unexpected changes.' The people's friendship toward the Germans was steadily growing, he added: seven out of ten people writing to his *Daily Mail* were in favour of Germany's claims being entirely acceded to.

Hitler urged Rothermere in his reply not to heed the 'parliamentary demagogues.' Nine-tenths of the blood that had flowed in the last three centuries had flowed in vain, Hitler wrote, at least for the interests of the peoples involved. Britain had been shrewd enough to keep out, and her mighty empire was the reward.

Lord Rothermere [appealed Hitler] if today I urge an Anglo–German entente then this is not just something new since yesterday or the day before yesterday; in the last sixteen years I have spoken to four or five thousand audiences in Germany, small, large and immense; but in not one speech or line that I have written have I ever uttered the slightest sentiment against an Anglo–German entente.

Then he reverted to his old dream: ‘An Anglo–German entente,’ he reasoned, ‘would form in Europe and thus in the world a force for peace and reason of 120 million of the most superior people. Britain’s sea power and unique colonial talent would be united with one of the world’s first soldier-races. Were this entente extended to embrace the American nation, then it would, indeed, be hard to see who in the world could disturb the peace without wilfully and consciously neglecting the interests of the White race. . . The Gods love and favour those who seem to demand the impossible!’¹⁶

The press lord sent a copy of this eight-page confidential letter to Churchill. But Winston had committed himself too stridently against Hitler to change now.

‘If his proposal,’ he rebuked Rothermere in his reply, ‘means that we should come to an understanding with Germany to dominate Europe, I think this would be contrary to the whole of our history.’ He reminded Rothermere of the fable of the jackal who went hunting with the tiger – ‘and what happened after the hunt was over.’

FOR A WHILE he tried to form the kind of backbench Conservative pressure group that he had created to defend India, this time ‘to arouse the country to the peril in which we stand.’ But it aroused little enthusiasm, and when Lord Londonderry’s successor invited him in July to join the Air Defence Research sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence, he agreed. It was an important confidence: it gave him a renewed toehold in the innermost councils, and legal access to important reports on defence affairs. He immediately circulated a memorandum on the ‘ugly possibility’ that Hitler might be able to force a nation to its knees within weeks ‘by violent aerial mass attack,’ and he suggested that Hitler was spending £1,000 million on military preparations that year alone.*

* Here he was closer to the mark. German defence estimates fluctuated constantly, but figures entered in Milch’s pocket diary on January 12–15, 1935 show that including the SA (Brownshirts) the 1935 estimate was 9,600 million Reichsmarks (approximately

Whatever the merits of his case, with the co-opting of this fertile brain a sense of urgency and a wealth of administrative experience were brought to the committee. He urged clandestine preparations for an emergency expansion of aircraft production, immediate airfield construction, broader pilot training schemes, and the exploitation of Imperial Airways (the forerunner of B.O.A.C. and British Airways) for aircrew training just like Germany's Lufthansa. He put forward other novel ideas too, like infiltrating fast planes to shadow raiding bomber formations; but at the committee's first meeting on July 25 he learned that work had started on a new radiolocation device, later known as radar, instead.



Escaping to the Riviera villa of rich socialite Maxine Elliot in September 1935, he painted, he bored her houseguests with diatribes – according to American air attaché Martin Scanlon, one guest who kept a diary – he basked in the sunshine and enjoyed what he called in a letter to Clementine the ‘contentment engendered by old brandy after luncheon here alone with Maxine.’

Back in London he again spoke to the City Carlton Club about German rearmament, wooing wealthy City backers. Instinctively he also began canvassing influential Americans. Late September found at Chartwell the Boston financier Joseph P. Kennedy and his family. Rose Kennedy would afterward reflect that Winston, ‘with his puckish face,’ looked more like a country squire; he had ‘talked expansively, narrating [and] explaining,’ urging an imaginative plan for the two English-speaking countries to construct a common navy to police the world and counter the Nazi foe. But, Winston had said with a sigh, there were too many isolationists in America – ‘too many Irish haters of England,’ perhaps a tactless remark in view of the Kennedy origins.¹⁸

His name was becoming a household word in Germany. The Nazi newspapers crudely suggested that his twenty-year friendship with American financier Bernard Baruch was his real motive for dissipating his remaining strength in attacking Hitler. The London correspondent of the Nazi *Völkischer Beobachter* reported that whenever Churchill opened his mouth it was a safe bet that an attack on Germany would emerge.

Every major speech bore this out. ‘We cannot afford,’ he thundered in the House on October 24, ‘to see Nazidom in its present phase of cru-

£800 million), of which the army claimed 4,000 million, the navy 760 million, and the airforce 3,300 million.¹⁷

elty and intolerance, with all its hatreds and all its gleaming weapons, paramount in Europe.’

The November issue of *Strand* magazine published a sulphurous attack on Hitler’s record. In this he claimed to have learned from his reading of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* – which can at best have been cursory – that ‘the French are not the only foreign nation against whom the anger of rearmed Germany may be turned.’

He also described how Hitler had exploited anti-Semitism:

The Jews, supposed to have contributed by a disloyal and pacifist influence to the collapse of Germany at the end of the Great War, were also deemed to be the main prop of communism and the authors of defeatist doctrines in every form. Therefore the Jews of Germany . . . were to be stripped of all power, driven from every position in public and social life, expelled from the professions, silenced in the press and declared a foul and odious race.

Churchill had certainly turned a wide circle since publishing his astonishing newspaper attack on the Jews fifteen years before, in which he had called them ‘the principal inspiration and driving power’ behind Bolshevism and underlined that ‘the prominent, if not indeed the principal, part in the system of terrorism applied by the Extraordinary Commissions* for Combating Counter-Revolution has been taken by Jews, and in some notable cases by Jewesses.’

He would have been ill-advised to repeat these obsessive claims in 1935, and it was little wonder that he now adopted the opposite line. Inspired by his robust line against Hitler, the wealthy and influential flocked to become his friends. The South African gold mining industrialist Sir Henry Strakosch started furnishing to him his own data on German raw material imports; Strakosch estimated that Hitler had spent £1,600 million on armaments since July 1933.

Authorities like these were hardly reliable or unbiased, but Churchill’s was the voice heard on the hustings. When the air staff issued a secret memorandum on November 5, 1935 – based, we now know, on its authentic codebreaking sources – stating firmly that the German front line

* The notorious Chekas. In his 1920 article Churchill had written of the ‘evil prominence’ obtained by Jews in Bela Kun’s recent brief ‘rule of terror’ in Hungary and he disarmed one obvious argument by pointing out, ‘Although in all these countries there are many non-Jews every whit as bad as the worst of the Jewish revolutionaries, the part played by the latter in proportion to their numbers in the population is astonishing.’¹⁹

consisted of only 594 planes, Churchill sent an exasperated letter to the Committee of Imperial Defence: 'It is to be hoped,' he wrote, 'that this figure will not be made public, as it would certainly give rise to misunderstanding and challenge.'

A GENERAL election was due in mid-November. He hankered after his old office as First Lord of the admiralty but Stanley Baldwin, who had succeeded Macdonald as prime minister in June, had no time for Winston or his warlike election posture. In his own speeches Baldwin denied Labour's claims that the Conservatives would 'endanger world peace by a vast and expensive rearmament programme.'

The Conservatives swept back to power on November 14. It was a landslide. At a party at his London mansion that evening Lord Beaverbrook said over-candidly to Winston, 'You're finished now. Baldwin can do without you.'

This proved to be true. Churchill's telephone did not ring.

Disappointed, he left Westminster in December to winter in the Mediterranean. He was glad to be out of London, because passing through Paris on the tenth, he heard the first details of the malodorous Hoare-Laval pact: It would have appeased Mussolini by obliging Abyssinia to surrender twenty per cent of her territory to Italy. Under public protest Baldwin dropped the plan, and Hoare resigned.

He was succeeded at the foreign office by Anthony Eden. Following these events from afar, Winston dismissed this young politician as a 'light-weight' – 'The greatness of his office will find him out,' he predicted to Clementine.

Seeking the certainty of sun, he travelled first to Barcelona and then to Marrakech. He painted from his hotel balcony, played bezique, dictated newspaper articles to his secretary Violet Pearman, sharpened his claws, and drafted manuscript. Something that Marlborough had written in 1708 attracted him: 'As I think most things are settled by destiny,' the duke had reflected, 'when one has done one's best the only thing is to await the result with patience.'

Occasionally he bumped into acquaintances along these shores. Rothermere mockingly wagered Winston £2,000 that he could not forswear alcohol in 1936. It was a tempting prospect. He would save £500 on liquor, and pick up £2,000 tax-free. But he gallantly fought off mammon's temptation.

Before joining Winston here, on December 6 Rothermere had written a further clandestine letter to Hitler, on *Daily Mail* notepaper, volunteering 'to stress again the cause of Germany,' and asking certain questions.

On December 19 the House would reassemble, he said; he asked Hitler to reply the day before: 'As you know. I am an ardent partisan of the cause of Anglo-German friendship.' One question was whether oil sanctions would end the Italian-Abyssinian war.

'Believe me, dear Lord Rothermere,' Hitler replied, 'The problem is not whether this or that sanction will today bring Italy to her knees; the real problem is whether one is in a position to remove the causes underlying the tensions from which the world suffers at present.'

For a hundred million years this earth has moved around the sun. During that long time it has always been filled with the struggle of human beings for nourishment, and later for dwellings and clothing et cetera. . . . Countless influences have wrought constant changes in the distribution of property. . . . And now, in a certain year [he continued, sardonically], after millions of years in which the earth has moved around the sun, an American professor proclaims the formation of a League of partly heterogeneous nations with completely opposite interests, with a view to banishing future change from this world.

Rothermere had asked whether Germany ought not now to state her colonial claims, but Hitler frowned on this. 'I do not want to give the slightest impression that I want to avail myself of your government's present predicament or that of the British empire.'²⁰

Rothermere sent copies of Hitler's reply to the prime minister and King George V. A month later the king was dead, and Churchill hurried back to England. He would have preferred to stay abroad longer, to keep at a finite distance from both Baldwin's difficulties and Randolph's latest venture.

Randolph had accepted an invitation to stand yet again against a government candidate, this time at a Scottish by-election to split the vote and thwart the return of Malcolm Macdonald to cabinet office. Winston angrily suggested that he had been invited on his 'reputation as a specialist in wrecking.' It certainly blighted his own chances of being invited back into the cabinet.

For a time in February he had hoped that a minister of defence might be appointed and that, since his difference with Baldwin over India was now behind him, he would be the first incumbent. This hope dashed, he reverted to the attack on Hitler. The peripatetic American diplomat William C. Bullitt, visiting London at this time, was baffled at the mounting hysteria he found: the German 'menace,' he reported to Washington, was

being played for all it was worth. At dinner tables he heard people say that unless Britain did not make war on Germany soon, Hitler would have his way in Central Europe and then attack Russia. 'Strangely enough,' wrote Bullitt to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, 'all the old anti-Bolshevik fanatics like Winston Churchill are trumpeting this Bolshevik thesis and are advocating an entente with the Soviet Union!'²¹

Churchill shortly put out quiet feelers to the Soviet embassy. He would meet Ivan Maisky, the Soviet ambassador, early in April 1936 and again during May. Maisky assured him that Russia wanted to play her part in keeping the peace in Europe, and Churchill believed him.

ON MARCH 7, 1936 Hitler's troops had re-entered the Rhineland from which the Versailles Treaty had banned them. His calculated risk came off. Britain and France were obliged by treaty to pitch his troops out, but did not. Neither's public was ready for war. It looked like the end of the League. Eden and Ralph Wigram hurried to Paris to discuss convening a League meeting (Wigram reported to Churchill on his return on the eleventh), and on the twelfth the French foreign minister Pierre Flandin also came to Morpeth Mansions.*

Addressing the House's Foreign Affairs Committee that evening, Churchill urged collective military action to fulfil Britain's obligations. He contemplated all Germany's endangered neighbours rallying to this cause, but according to the minutes he said nothing about their military preparedness. Hoare sobered the committee down.

Thwarted in Whitehall, Churchill rampaged across the front pages of the press. Remarkably, it was Lord Beaverbrook's *Evening Standard* that began publishing his fortnightly articles on March 13. Through Curtis Brown Ltd these articles – with titles like 'How Germany is Arming,' 'Our Navy Must be Stronger,' and 'Organise our Supplies' – were also syndicated around the world. Churchill's slogan now was the resuscitation of collective security and the League of Nations.

To Lord Beaverbrook, this was flogging a dead horse. He had once denounced the League as 'a greater danger to peace than the armament makers.' When the pro-League *News Chronicle* attacked him in 1931, Beaverbrook replied that such treaty obligations compelled Britain to take sides in any quarrel between France and Germany, no matter how remote its cause. 'A single shot fired on the borders of [Poland],' he argued, 'may send our young men again to the slaughter, and expose our civilian population to terrors of which the last war was but the faintest shadow.' He

* Churchill had occasionally written to Flandin asking for French estimates of German air power, always being careful to prompt Flandin with his own estimates first.²²

never wavered from this belief. 'The British empire minding its own business is safe,' he apostrophised in July 1934 in his own *Sunday Express*. 'The British empire meddling in the concerns of the Balkans and Central Europe is sure to be embroiled in war, pestilence and famine.'

The only upshot of the crisis was the appointment of a minister for co-ordination of defence. Again Churchill was by-passed. Baldwin appointed a colourless lawyer, Sir Thomas Inskip, who would excite no enthusiasm as Chamberlain remarked in his diary on the eleventh but would also 'involve us in no fresh perplexities.'

Shortly, Churchill began canvassing just such a perplexing involvement – to send part of the fleet to a Russian port to dominate the German fleet in the Baltic. It overlooked a number of impressive snags. 'In view of the danger from Germany,' Sir Maurice Hankey wrote to Inskip on April 19, '[Churchill] has buried his violent anti-Russian complex of former days and is apparently a bosom friend of Maisky.' He dismissed the Baltic plan as 'fantastic.'

Worried about the accelerating slide toward war, a leading Tory wrote to Beaverbrook: 'The government seems to have committed themselves more than ever to the cause of collective lunacy, and Winston is all out to endorse it, fearing that otherwise there really might be a war somewhere and we not in it. Worst of all, all this folly is calculated to shake the Empire to pieces.'²³

It was not difficult to guess Hitler's next victims: probably Austria, perhaps Czechoslovakia after that. Churchill was haunted by visions of what he called 'the great wheels revolving and the great hammers descending day and night in Germany.' To flesh out his figures on German rearmament he introduced the financial element, claiming that Hitler had spent £1,000 million on *arms* between March 1933 and June 1935 (figures which even Morton deprecated as exaggerated). In a quaint reference which suggested that his thinking had advanced little since the Great War, he referred to Germany's autobahns as 'great military roads where four columns of troops may march abreast.'

Winston's influential friends followed his 'obsession' with Germany with alarm. Hitler had now talked to Lord Londonderry for two hours, but only about the communist menace. On May 4 the former air minister reproached Churchill: 'Your success was due to your being able to frighten the people of this country by giving them wholly exaggerated figures.' He suggested that Churchill visit Germany himself to see things at first hand: but Churchill's reputation was built upon the alarming quagmire that he had himself created, and he did not want it drained just yet.

Nettled by Londonderry's phrase about his 'obsession,' he sent back a cool reply. 'If I read the future alright,' he said, 'Hitler's government will confront Europe with a series of outrageous events and ever-growing military might.'²⁴

There is no doubt that he believed his own figures, in all sincerity. But in April the air ministry had checked his estimates and concluded that he was exaggerating. They wrote to him pointing out that he had included in his German first line of 1,210 planes 360 which were in fact second-line. The air ministry now put the German first line at 850, while the British was 785.

Churchill preferred his own figures. On May 12, 1936, Ralph Wigram sent him an extract from *Mein Kampf*, pointing out sentences omitted from the authorised English translation. 'If one tells Big Lies,' Hitler had written, 'people will always believe a part.'



The desk at which Churchill did his writing, where his great biographies and histories have been written. Literary medals awarded for his works are used as paperweights.

6: *The Hired Help*

SOON AFTER the Nazis seized power, shadowy groups had evolved in Britain and America, united by the aim of restoring the status quo in Germany. These now jointly and severally approached Mr Churchill.

Their intervention came not a moment too soon for him. By the end of 1935 he had intimidating debts. No amount of writing dismantled his overdraft. It gnawed at his mind and distracted him from his work. He needed all the financial aid he could get.

The president of the Anglo-Jewish Association, Leonard Montefiore, had begun sending him literature on the plight of the German Jews. But it was the Anti-Nazi Council, later known as the *FOCUS*, that would ensure Churchill's political and financial survival.

He wryly recognised who was behind this body. 'The basis of the Anti-Nazi League,' he would write later in 1936 to Randolph, misquoting its proper title, 'is of course Jewish resentment.'¹

The secret of the *focus* was kept almost until his death. The code-word *focus* glistens like an unrefined gold nugget in the dull and fusty papers of his followers like General Spears and Captain B. H. Liddell Hart. But it remained a mystery. When one of its lesser financiers – a refugee who had left Germany in 1922 – drafted a manuscript about the *focus*, Churchill pleaded with him not to publish it during his lifetime.*

These groups had established contact with Churchill during April 1936. Encouraged by Churchill's reborn faith in the League of Nations and in collective security, and particularly by a speech that he delivered to the House on April 6, Lord Robert Cecil put out the first feelers to him on behalf of the League of Nations Union (LNU). At the same moment Churchill received an approach from the Anti-Nazi Council (A.N.C.). Both wanted him to speak at Albert Hall meetings.

The harmless-sounding A.N.C. had its roots in New York. The driving force was local attorney Samuel Untermyer. Hitting back at the Na-

* This was Eugen Spier. Upon the war's outbreak he would put himself at the government's service. Like most other enemy aliens he was arrested and interned without trial until 1941.²

zis' mindless anti-Jewish boycott, in 1933 his World Jewish Economic Federation had organised a trade boycott of Germany. Together with mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, Untermeyer had established the grand-sounding 'World Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi Council' in 1934. Later that year he visited Sir Walter Citrine, leader of the Trades Union Congress. Citrine was angered by Hitler's brutal closure of the trade unions. Together they had founded a British 'Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi Council to Champion Human Rights.'³

Such were the origins of the A.N.C. A kaleidoscopic panel of communist fellow travellers, industrialists, financiers, trade unionists and disgruntled Conservatives was quilted together for A.N.C.'s letterhead. At the bottom of the paper were two slogans. The first was, 'Nazi Germany is the Enemy of Civilisation.' The second was a vestige of the A.N.C.'s boycott origins, like the coccyx that remains in an to remind him of his descent from the lower vertebrates: 'Refuse to Trade with the Enemy!'⁴

The reason for the A.N.C. approach to Churchill in April 1936 was this: in London, authoritative Jewish bodies including the powerful Board of Deputies had come out against the more strident boycott activities, lest these provoke the Nazis to more extreme measures; in New York, the firebrand Zionist leader Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, an associate of Untermeyer's, disagreed and founded a militant World Jewish Congress based in Geneva. As the Board of Deputies was the principle source of its British finance, the A.N.C. shifted to a political approach in 1936, and began hiring helpers on the political scene.

There followed months of Zionist intrigue and extraordinary contrasts – of union leaders like Citrine banqueting at the Savoy cheek by jowl with the barons of the munitions industries and big chemical combines. Privately commending Citrine years later to Roosevelt, Churchill would write: 'He worked with me three years before the war in our effort to arouse all parties in the country to the need of rearmament against Germany.' He added his favourite phrase of approbation: 'He has the root of the matter in him.'⁵

The A.N.C. decision to recruit Churchill had been taken two weeks after Hitler's Rhineland coup. It seemed clear that Austria or Czechoslovakia would be next, but Labour Party policy still flatly opposed rearmament.

At an emergency joint conference with other anti-Nazi forces in London on March 19 and 20, Citrine and Ernest Bevin, the tough transport union boss, opened their campaign for rearmament. Among the speakers were Norman Angell, a communist fellow-traveller, and Henry Wickham Steed. Steed would bulk large in the focus. Sixty-five, this bearded

broadcaster and former editor of *The Times* had been in Czech pay for thirteen years. One is tempted to ask, reviewing Czech documents captured by the Nazis in 1939, who was not? Prague had paid him £23,000 in 1923–24 alone (about a quarter of a million pounds in present terms).⁶ He had a then-fashionable ambivalence about the Jews: although a Zionist at heart, he singled out the Jews among the Germans, whether bankers or Marxists, for particular hatred, believing them to have conspired to make a German master race.⁷

Describing this March 1936 conference some months later, Steed recalled that they decided to widen their circle. They decided to hold a private luncheon at which Citrine would again preside, but they would invite Churchill and other prominent Conservative, Liberal and Labour politicians and businessmen to attend as well.⁸

BEFORE THAT luncheon Churchill received an approach from a third quarter, a letter dated April 21 from Rex Leeper. Aged forty-eight, Leeper was the foreign office specialist on Central Europe. He was an Oxford-educated Australian who had worked previously for Intelligence; he and his brother at the F.O. were also heavily in Czech pay.* Vansittart, his letter said, had asked him to contact Winston about a matter of national importance ‘in which he hopes very much to enlist your interest.’

Churchill welcomed Leeper to Chartwell three days later. Leeper had long campaigned within the F.O. for a programme to re-educate the man in the street in favour of the League of Nations. ‘Our people,’ he had urged Vansittart in January, ‘are being given little or no guidance, and yet time presses.’

There is no record of what he discussed with Churchill but he told friends afterward that Churchill was the man Britain needed: ‘Rex thinks he will come back,’ wrote one such listener.¹⁰

Still calling themselves the Anti-Nazi Council, the new group held a private luncheon in Mr Churchill’s honour at a hotel in Northumberland-avenue on May 19.¹¹ ICI industrialist Sir Robert Mond acted as host.¹² Churchill invited Liberal politician Lady Violet Bonham-Carter to sit next to him. She was the daughter of Herbert Asquith; he had been fond of her

* Reginald Wildig Allen Leeper was later ambassador to Greece (1943–5) and Argentina. Captured documents show that Prague was paying him and his brother A. W. A. Leeper to thwart Hungarian interests in the F.O.; when Rex’s brother died in January 1935 the Czech minister in London Jan Masaryk had organised a fund to which each state of the Little Entente – Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia – contributed £500 per annum; £5,000 was set aside for the upbringing of his daughter.⁹

ever since they met – he a dynamic redhead of thirty-two, she a stunning beauty of nineteen.

‘At this luncheon,’ wrote Steed afterward, ‘Mr Winston Churchill said that a situation which could bring so many political opponents together round one table, to talk across party and above party, must be a grave situation indeed. Nothing less than the freedom and the peace of democratic Europe were at stake.’¹³

Winston suggested they find a title that was less cumbersome and negative than A.N.C.¹⁴ In a short speech, he called upon them to find common ground against Nazi tyranny. They should prepare for the time when ‘suddenly the tension may rise and we may feel that we could go all lengths together.’ ‘That is why,’ he said, ‘we ought to keep a little in touch with one another.’¹⁵

Labour theoretician Dr Hugh Dalton suggested that their manifesto ‘point the finger’ at Hitler. Lady Violet disagreed. ‘There are only two policies to be adopted towards Hitler,’ she would write a few hours later to Winston, ‘to hold out the hand or to clench the fist.’

In his reply to her Winston set out, perhaps for the first time, his own strategic concept: they should *encircle* ‘Nazidom,’ marshalling every country from the Soviet Union right round the Mediterranean – including Mussolini’s Italy – to the Belgian coast and back to the Baltic to this end.



A fresh informant joined Winston’s flock of disciples. A jug-eared air ministry official of forty, Squadron Leader Charles Torr Anderson contacted him at Chartwell on the day after this luncheon and wandered into Morpeth Mansions some days later, laden with verbose memoranda on the R.A.F.’s unreadiness for war and its pilot training deficiencies. It was all grist to Winston’s mill.

Anderson was a sad figure, as should have become clear to Mr Churchill’s biographers by now. A brave and severely injured officer who was by 1936 Director of Training at the air ministry, he was clearly in the early throes of a behavioural illness – difficult to detect in its early stages – that would lead to his invaliding out of the R.A.F. six years later.¹⁶

Churchill welcomed all informants whatever their motivation. It was going to be a long haul back. ‘If all our fears are groundless and everything passes off smoothly in the next few years,’ he had written to mineowner Sir Abe Bailey – Diana Churchill had just divorced his son – on June 3, 1936, ‘as pray God indeed it may, obviously there is no need for me. If on the other hand the very dangerous times arise, I may be forced to take a part.’

Until that time came, he proposed to expand his power base: he would exploit the A.N.C. and League of Nations Union; he would accept too the invitation to be president of the New Commonwealth Society. 'I feel so strongly,' he wrote to his constituency chairman, explaining the latter decision, 'one ought to do all one can to get this country rearmed and to relieve people from feeling that rearmament means war. In my belief, it is one of the few chances of peace.'

He kept strictly out of any controversy not directly in line with his main attack on Hitler. When Lloyd George stoutly declared that Britain would never go to war for Austria's sake, the Austrian envoy Georg Franckenstein called on Churchill, as 'one of the most brilliant orators,' and begged him to repudiate the remark. The latter declined, offering only a tenuous excuse. He was not, he explained, planning to speak in the debate (which was on Italy and sanctions).¹⁷

THE PROTRACTED internal wrangling continued about the size of Hitler's 'first line' airforce. Wing Commander Peter Warburton, air adviser to the Committee of Imperial Defence, thought the air ministry's figures convincing.

'Mr Churchill,' rejoined the CID's secretary, Hankey, 'does not want to be convinced!'¹⁸

Over at the ministry an exasperated Lord Swinton put down all this Churchillian 'interference' to Baldwin's foolhardy decision to let him see the CID's secret papers: now Churchill was using its air *research* subcommittee as a platform for policy making; but it was none of their business to discuss Hitler's air strength, let alone advise on the strength of the R.A.F. 'That,' Swinton lectured Hankey, 'is the function of the CID and the cabinet.' He suggested that 'in view of recent events' they should refrain from letting him see any more secret papers.¹⁹

Churchill had perfected a propaganda method that might be called the Circle Line. He would declare that the Germans had spent a staggering £800 million on arms during 1935. (Hitler had set aside approximately that amount in 1935 for all three armed *services* including armaments and the SA: after all, their cupboard was bare. His defence budget for 1936 would be smaller.) The figure would be reported by the *Morning Post*, in this case on June 25. An unexpected bonus would be that Neville Chamberlain, chancellor of the exchequer, publicly agreed. Less unexpected was that Ralph Wigram at the F.O. also minuted agreement: 'The information in our possession, which generally coincides with that given by Mr Churchill and the *Morning Post*, shows that in 1935 the Germans spent on

armaments . . . about £800 million; and are likely to spend as much, if not more, this year.'²⁰

On July 20, speaking to the House, Mr Churchill would cynically include both the newspaper and Mr Chamberlain as authorities for his £800 million figure. Thus his figure completed its circular trip and nobody spotted the sleight of hand.

The secretary for air muttered in private about Winston's 'fallacious statements about German strength.'²¹ But Swinton was like a blind dog in a butcher's shop: he could smell raw meat all around him, but could not put his paw on it.

We are going away on our holidays [Churchill concluded his speech]. Jaded ministers, anxious but impotent Members of Parliament, a public whose opinion is more bewildered and more expressionless than anything I can recall in my life – all will seek the illusion of rest and peace. . . And the influence of the Conservative Party machine is being used through a thousand channels to spread this soporific upon Parliament and the nation. But, I am bound to ask, has not confidence been shaken by various things that have happened, and are still happening?

He asked Baldwin to receive a parliamentary deputation, and the prime minister agreed. Churchill tried to manoeuvre Labour and Liberal leaders Attlee and Sinclair into his deputation, but they declined to join.

Playing rough in a speech at Horsham on July 23 he appealed over Attlee's head to trade unionists and Leftist intellectuals. 'All the left wing intelligentsia,' he would triumph four months later to his son Randolph, 'are coming to look to me for protection, and I will give it wholeheartedly in return for their aid in the rearmament of Britain.'²²

ON THE day after the Horsham speech the ten top members of the A.N.C. trooped into Morpeth Mansions, his London *pied-à-terre*, for a second conspiratorial luncheon. In response to Churchill's wishes for a less negative title, they now called themselves the Focus but, cat-like, this was a name known only to themselves. The main decisions this day were to set up a research section under Wickham Steed and to draft a manifesto. (According to Steed it was seen by 'one American visitor' who insisted it be shown privately to certain associations, which he did not identify, in the United States.²³)

There were embarrassed coughs when the organising secretary of the A.N.C., A. H. Richards, inquired where the money for all this was to

come from; Mr Churchill appeared angry at the question. Richards was taken aside and asked to announce simply that all their requirements had already been met.²⁴

Funds had been arranged two days earlier at a private dinner in North London, hosted by the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Its vice-president Sir Robert Waley-Cohen, chairman of British Shell, was a charismatic Zionist extrovert who would become, in the words of his authorised biographer Robert Henriques, the 'veritable dynamic force of Focus.' At a dinner on July 22 at his home, Caen Wood Towers, he launched the initial secret £50,000 fund for the Focus. His associates signed immediate cheques for £25,000 and pledged the rest.²⁵

It was a colossal sum for such an organisation to butter around in 1936 – five times the annual budget of the British Council. Personally administered by Waley-Cohen, the fund was used to procure journalists like *Times* leader-writer Captain Colin Coote – who published for the Focus a series of 'Vigilance' pamphlets – and for widespread slushing operations coordinated by H. T. Montague Bell.

It was Waley-Cohen who ruled on what the Focus might say. According to Henriques he read all manuscripts and amended them profusely, explaining that they had to refute the growing belief among the British public that Nazism had 'its legitimate aspects.' Even Churchill's writings were not excepted from this editing. A year later he wrote an article entitled 'The Better Way.' Waley-Cohen made copious alterations on the draft, and Churchill meekly swallowed them.²⁶

On July 28, 1936 Churchill took his parliamentary deputation to see Mr Baldwin. He based his case on Morton's and Anderson's data, and put forward what he called the latest French government estimate of a German first line of two thousand planes by the end of 1936. He talked of Germany's power to bomb Britain's major food-importation ports as well as London, and freely claimed that Hitler could already drop five hundred tons of bombs on London in one mission.

The fallacies are now obvious. He ignored the deficiencies of German bomber types, while highlighting those in the British. R.A.F. bombers, he claimed, could barely reach the German coast. (A few days later the air ministry would wearily refute this: R.A.F. bombers could already reach the Ruhr, no doubt by overflying neutral Holland, as they subsequently did;* and by July 1937 Berlin would be within their range.)

* As First Lord in 1913 Mr Churchill had advocated seizing and holding a naval base on the 'Dutch, Danish or Scandinavian coasts' in the event of war with Germany. All were of course neutrals.²⁷

Already concerned by what the secretary for air later called the 'waste of time' that Mr Churchill was inflicting on everybody – the transcript of this two-day deputation would run to forty printed pages – both Baldwin and Chamberlain were worried about the side-effects of his raucous campaign for rearmament.²⁸

It was already affecting relations with Germany. Moreover, if rearmament were begun without proper reason, the diversion of industrial capacity to arms production would also be a catastrophic setback to Britain's struggling peacetime economy.

Baldwin put this argument forcefully to Churchill's deputation. The politician who in public so often cloaked his meaning in vagueness and complacency did not mince his language in private. He had strong doubts, he said, about 'the peril itself' as depicted by Mr Churchill. Were the public to understand that Germany was arming to fight *Britain*?

'We all know the German desire to move east,' he said, adding that Hitler had stated it candidly enough in *Mein Kampf*. 'And if he should move east I should not break my heart.'

Since he was behind closed doors, he used language of exquisite clarity. 'I am not going to get this country into a war with anybody for the League of Nations – or anybody else.' And finally: 'If there is any fighting in Europe to be done, I should like to see the Bolshies and the Nazis doing it.'²⁹

BALDWIN WAS NOT the only Englishman to hold that view. In proclaiming that Germany would lead the defence of Europe against Bolshevism, Hitler had devised a slogan of dangerous magnetism. This image of Britain, Germany and Italy standing shoulder to shoulder across Europe, defending the continent against Comintern subversion, was too alluring for Churchill to accept, although he could not explain why. 'It is too easy to be good,' he wrote lamely to the French ambassador on July 31.

Events in republican Spain illustrated the cleft stick in which he was now held. The Red Terror of the republican government of Juan Negrin was a matter of public record. The evil *Chekas*, of which Churchill had written in 1920, had been installed in Spain's ancient cities, and were practising executions, assassinations and torture with accustomed expertise. When nationalist insurgents now began a civil war to overthrow this cruel regime, Mr Churchill declared his sympathies for them and he would maintain this stubborn stand until their victory in 1939.

Germany and Italy ferried aid to the insurgents. But France's socialist premier Léon Blum, whose new Popular Front government included communists, supported the Reds. Fearing a divergence of British and

French interests from which only Hitler could benefit, Churchill campaigned for both countries to maintain absolute neutrality. Meanwhile he wielded his pen ceaselessly on the insurgent General Francisco Franco's behalf. 'A revived fascist Spain in closest sympathy with Italy and Germany is one kind of disaster,' he polemicised in Beaverbrook's *Evening Standard*. 'A communist Spain spreading its snaky tentacles through Portugal and France is another and many will think worse.'³⁰

As usual now, he spent September away from his family, painting at Maxine Elliot's villa on the Riviera. Still beset by financial uncertainties he planned to complete there a dozen articles for the *News of the World* – 'They are very lucrative,' he explained to Clementine. 'It would be folly not to work them off in view of many uncertainties.'

He arrived in Paris on August 30 and conferred with Georges Mandel (born Jeroboam Rothschild), a leading politician like himself without portfolio. Mandel said they were witnessing a breakdown of British and French influence in Europe. General Alphonse Georges, who had been Pétain's chief of staff, invited Winston to visit the army's summer manoeuvres with himself and the French *generalissimo*, Maurice Gamelin. Winston was fatefully impressed by these grave, elderly French generals and their troops. 'One feels the strength of the nation resides in its army,' he wrote privately to Clementine.

In Paris he drafted a speech about the need to establish a common Anglo-French 'front' against Germany. The deputy editor of the *Times*, to whom he sent it for comment, discouraged this word: they should not abandon the hope – supported by so many authoritative pronouncements by the German leaders – that Germany was willing to reach a general understanding with the British empire.

Churchill delivered the speech late in September all the same. It conjured up an image of a Britain or France under dictatorship: 'How could we bear, nursed as we have been in a free atmosphere, to be gagged and muzzled; to have spies, eavesdroppers and delators at every corner; to have even private conversation caught up and used against us by the secret police and all their agents and creatures; to be arrested and interned without trial?'

How, he rhetorically asked, could we bear to be 'treated like school-boys when we are grown-up men?'

HIS CAMPAIGN of speeches urging collective security against Germany aroused fresh anger in Berlin. The *Deutsche Diplomatisch-Politische Korrespondenz* challenged that he was trying to 'camouflage personal dislike of Ger-

many' as 'practical reasoning.' Churchill was delighted to know he was under attack.

On October 15 the Focus met for its third luncheon. Since men of standing were still shy of formally joining, Spier would later relate, the A.N.C. finally decided to have no membership at all. On this day they adopted the style of a Focus for the Defence of Freedom and Peace. The drafting committee had produced a manifesto, duly boiled down by Waley-Cohen, Lady Violet, Steed and Angell to a statement of principles. They were unexceptionable: to unite British citizens in defence of freedom, secured by democratic government and public law, and to join with others in preserving peace and withstanding armed aggression.³¹

Churchill merely approved it, in a speech which was not among his best. He had other things on his mind, as will shortly be seen.

'We have the means,' he told this luncheon group, 'of being the spear-point of all this vast mass of opinion which guards our rights.' A few days later he wrote to the secretary, 'I do not contemplate the building up of a new and rival society, but only a welding together of those organisations and galvanising them into effective use.' On October 26 he confirmed: 'In my view we are a focus bringing together all these various forces.'³²

The manifesto won prominent men to the Focus, including Sinclair and Sir Austen Chamberlain. A typical secret recruit was disaffected Conservative M.P. Vyvyan Adams, an official of the L.N.U., who wrote to Churchill on October 20 of his growing apprehension that the government was contemplating a deal which would leave Hitler free to attack eastward or southward.³³

On November 5 the Focus held its fourth luncheon.³⁴ Churchill sent its manifesto to Randolph, writing: 'A Peace with Freedom committee has been formed. I enclose a copy of the formula at length adopted. This committee aims at focusing and concentrating the efforts of all the peace societies like the New Commonwealth and the League of Nations Union in so far as they are prepared to support genuine military action to resist tyranny or aggression.' 'The basis of the Anti-Nazi League,' he added, 'is of course Jewish resentment at their abominable persecution. But we are now taking broader ground.'³⁵



Late that October of 1936 the third volume of *Marlborough* was published. What should have been a moment of 'post-natal' triumph was clouded by a domestic crisis that momentarily eclipsed all else. Under the eyes of a gleeful press, his daughter Sarah eloped to New York to join

Victor Samek, an Austrian comedian known to vaudeville audiences as Vic Oliver. Oliver had a still-undissolved marriage in Vienna.

It was the penalty for a father too preoccupied with himself to care for his children. Quite without his realising it, Sarah had become a grown-up woman, but he had continued to treat her like a schoolgirl.

She had been a delicate child. She had chosen an acting career, no easy choice for somebody with a famous name. At seventeen she had pirouetted around the gramophone in Chartwell's dining room imagining herself in the arms of Fred Astaire.³⁶ By 1936 she was in C. B. Cochrane's chorus line. When she fell in love Winston purpled with paternal anger, and to judge from her letters he left Vic Oliver in no doubt of this.

In a few days' time she would be twenty-two. 'I have given up any hope,' Sarah wrote in the frantic letter she left behind for her mother, 'that you and Papa can ever understand or have any conception what I have been through these last nine months that I have loved Vic – To be in love and to know the weakness of your love – To have to realise not only the incongruity of the situation – but that the man is despised by those who say they love you – To continually and perpetually have him insulted and treated as a low adventurer – To be made to feel you have committed an error.'

Clementine had a better understanding of her daughter's feelings. There was not much romance in Winston. Years later she would tell an American airforce general about their own honeymoon in Venice. Winston had insisted on a motor launch. 'It is far more healthy than a gondola,' he had insisted, 'the fumes kill the germs.' Not much romance in Winnie, she would sigh.³⁷

No one ever asked if I was sad [her daughter's lament continued] or how the long days and nights at Chartwell, with nothing to occupy my mind, ever passed, Then I had a feeling that Papa was not playing quite straight with us – It seemed an ominous silence – Was he . . . just a playing for time in the hope that lawyers working night and day might unravel something in his [Vic Oliver's] past to prevent us marrying?

Faced with blanket disapproval, Sarah had eloped to join Vic in New York while her father was still vacationing in France. She chose the German liner *Bremen* to make the crossing. Sailing on October 1, she had written her mother, 'Please make Papa understand that I did not just wait till he was out of the country. It was a last minute decision. I just have to go – I'm sorry.'

Churchill was aghast. The newspapers went wild. His enemies wrote letters of heartfelt sympathy, and chortled up their sleeves. The ruthless American press steamed disclaimers of any real marriage intent out of Vic Oliver. From shipboard Sarah wrote pitifully to Clementine, fearful lest 'Papa might . . . even have me stopped at the immigration place.'³⁸

She had judged her father's resoluteness well. Post-haste, he sent Randolph across the Atlantic. He had to grapple with fifty reporters to get off the boat. Winston asked Baruch to help; he described it as a 'tiresome' affair.³⁹ Baruch hired for him a slick New York lawyer, Louis Levy, to investigate Oliver and sabotage the embryo relationship if he could.

Pleased to be attracting family attention at last, Sarah ignored her brother's advice. Winston told Levy to press on.

'Papa has the best lawyer in America working for him,' Sarah wept in one letter to her mother. 'In an informal moment Levy as good as admitted that if we were (Vic and I) paying him to get us married, the legal difficulty could have been straightened out in a few days – but I suppose it is his job to prolong the thing as long as possible, to stall and stall and play for time – in the hopes that it may die – or at best circumstances *will* divide us.'

'I don't know if you know what Levy has resorted to now,' she added. 'Failing to find anything on Vic, he has turned his activities to Vienna and in a delicate and for him safeguarded way he has had men suggest to Vic's wife to contest now – at the ninth hour with the first decree passed! – to contest the case. All her expenses will be paid for her etc. I refuse to believe that Papa knows of this – and that Levy is just over-zealous. Those are apparently just the usual American tactics. Levy is the smartest lawyer and can delay this marriage for some months, if Papa asks him to – equally if Papa asked him to speed it up, we could be married so soon.*'

Resorting to the kind of blackmail that favourite daughters often use on indulgent fathers, she added: 'Considering the situation – and the publicity – I should have thought it [marriage] preferable to me being out here unmarried and still a subject of mystery, gossip and rumours.'

Levy's methods failed. Baruch concluded that Oliver was serious and told Randolph so. Winston reluctantly gave his consent. While waiting the requisite six weeks to marry, his actress daughter worked the East Coast

* In 1940, Churchill instructed J. Arthur Leve of the same Broadway law firm Leve, Hecht, Hadfield & Clark in a libel action brought against him in New York. The British embassy now confidentially warned him that Leve had a bad reputation 'owing to his partnership with Louis Levy who was disbarred from federal courts for his connection with bribing of Judge Manton in New York.'⁴⁰

stages. The wedding was celebrated on Christmas Eve at New York's City Hall.

The papers on this poignant episode are in her mother's personal files. The watchful Clementine never allowed these details of Winston's feudal paternalism to become public property.

Her husband's instincts turned out to have been right. The marriage to Vic Oliver eventually foundered. But Winston Churchill's love for his daughter Sarah endured, and she would return it, becoming a devoted if still troublesome daughter.

THIS NUPTIAL crisis late in 1936 destroyed his usefulness to the Focus for many weeks; almost immediately a second crisis emerged, one of historic significance.



*An effective and compelling orator,
Churchill developed a style never
adequately copied by his admirers.*

7: *Over-Reaching Himself*

THIS MARRIAGE to Clementine was blissfully happy. True, they took separate vacations – he preferring the Riviera, while she took Mary skiing in Austria. But he was beholden to her. ‘What can be more glorious,’ he had written at age sixty, ‘than to be united in one’s walk through life with a being incapable of an ignoble thought?’

‘I have shown this passage to my wife,’ he continued impishly, ‘who says I am to scratch it out, but I won’t.’¹ He dutifully red-inked it nonetheless, and it did not figure in the thirty-six-episode autobiography which the *Chicago Tribune* published in 1935.

On divorce he was very definite – there shouldn’t be any. Clementine agreed with a frankness that startled casual acquaintances. ‘It is difficult to know what to say,’ recorded one embarrassed listener, ‘when the P.M.’s wife goes off into a long account of . . . her father’s infidelities and failure to pay the children’s allowances specified under a judicial separation, and his habit of pursuing his women friends for ever after in a vindictive spirit!’²

As he watched the boyish King Edward VIII nervously opening his first Parliament on November 3, 1936 Churchill could not guess that a matrimonial scandal was about to break upon the very highest plane.

He had kept up the stale wrangle over Britain’s air defences, but that campaign was running out of steam. The cabinet was reluctant to re-arm despite all the arguments marshalled by Eden, the foreign secretary, and by Alfred Duff Cooper, the pink-faced secretary for war. Chamberlain warned that the cost of rearmament would place burdens on future generations.

For want of a better cause, Churchill kept up the pressure. Speaking in the House on the twelfth he claimed that the R.A.F. could field only 960 first-line planes against Hitler’s 1,500, most of which were what he called in a fit of exaggeration ‘long-distance bombing aeroplanes.’ Criticising the inadequate provision of battlefield equipment, tanks and ammunition, he used these famous, scathing words:

The government simply cannot make up their minds, or they cannot get the prime minister to make up his mind. So they go on in a strange paradox, decided only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift, solid for fluidity, all-powerful to be impotent. So we go on preparing more months and years – precious, perhaps vital, to the greatness of Britain – for the locusts to eat.

Baldwin offered the lame response that to have announced rearmament would have been to lose the 1935 election – ‘a squalid confession,’ as Churchill called it in a private letter. Encouraged by Bracken he refused, like a bulldog with a well-gnawed bone, to drop rearmament in the belief that the marrow must still be in it, somewhere.

He marched a second deputation round to No. 10: the prime minister wearily protested that the first had already wasted an immense amount of the time ‘of very busy men.’ Across fifty-eight pages of printed text Churchill haggled and hectored and harangued, still chewing over the disparities between the various estimates of German air power – the air ministry’s, his own, that of the French.

Still the root issues remained unaddressed – Hitler’s actual strategic objectives and his capabilities in the air.³



Hovering on the outer fringes of this central debate, the Focus had begun to peel bills off the Jewish Defence Fund’s £50,000 bankroll.

Some of those who moved into its ranks were undoubtedly motivated by deeper emotions than those inspired by the persuasive crackle of banknotes. There were men of moral authority and substance like Sir Robert and Henry Mond (Lord Melchett) and the Dean of Chichester; politicians of every hue from the ‘gentile Zionists’ like Lloyd George, Lord Cecil, Wickham Steed, Amery and Nicolson, to those who had expressed an early coy admiration for fascism like Duff Cooper and Neville Chamberlain’s brother Austen; and yet others in whose breasts stirred similar emotions for the Soviet Union, like Angell, Boothby and Dalton.

Now that it had funds, the Focus could be choosy. In a letter gently fobbing off one would-be intriguer, Winston referred to ‘our Group’ as consisting of people who had been associated before the Great War, served in the cabinet or held office. ‘If the Group is widened at all,’ Churchill however promised, ‘I should certainly press for you.’⁴

The editors of the influential weekly journals *The Spectator*, *New Statesman*, *The Economist* and *Time & Tide* were wooed and won: Wilson Harris, Basil Kingsley Martin, Lady Rhonda, Harcourt Johnstone.

The Liberals were wooed as well. Dining confidentially with the Focus on November 23 to discuss their first Albert Hall mass meeting – ‘Arms and the Covenant’ – in ten days’ time, Churchill found both Sir Walter Layton and A. J. Cummings, chairman and chief commentator of the *News Chronicle*, as well as Lady Violet and two B.B.C. executives. Churchill invited Cummings to speak on the platform with him; the newspaperman balked at that, but later figured at the group’s secret functions.⁵ Labour also showed interest. ‘Attlee,’ said a note passed to Churchill by an M.P., ‘will support you on any rearmament programme. He admires & likes you. The door is open if you want to talk to him.’

With good reason, Churchill believed he was riding the crest of the wave.

True, another personal crisis loomed. He owed his bank £2,600 – perhaps £50,000 at current values. He could toss royalty cheques into an overdraft like that and never hear them hit bottom. And he expected a £6,000 tax demand in 1937.

But he was undismayed: his ship was coming in, of that he felt quite sure. He expected to earn £15,000 from his writings in 1937. A month’s lecturing in America would pay off his taxes, and he would bank the dollars in the United States for safety. So he booked the Cunard Line’s best cabins and planned to leave on December 22 to spend Christmas in Florida, at Consuelo Balsan’s villa in Palm Beach.

He had another purpose – to inaugurate the Focus in the United States. Confidential approaches had been made to him by the American Jewish Committee, and he had given Randolph instructions to talk about it with Baruch, the wealthy financier.⁶

At this buoyant moment his ship of fortune ran aground. An event happened which was by no means an ally, and he overreached himself.



At age forty-one, the Prince of Wales had succeeded to the throne on January 20. Modern in outlook and gay in disposition, Edward VIII was a popular monarch; but uneasy rumours had long been snaking around the diplomatic circuit – rumours that he was ‘seeing’ a married woman, Mrs Wallis Simpson, and intended to make her his queen.

In starch-collared London, of whose morals Stanley Baldwin considered himself custodian, there was outrage. Mrs Simpson was American. Worse, she had a husband and an ex-husband still living.

At court functions the Churchills and Bracken found themselves sharing tables with handsome monarch and elegant mistress. The king touted her around quite openly. At St. Tropez he had rested his nerves in her company. 'In the circumstances,' commented the Italian consul there, 'she seemed to have become an amorous nurse as well.'⁷

In February 1936 Baldwin murmured loyal reproaches, but the king felt popular enough to tell him not to interfere.⁸ Shortly the prime minister had greater cause for disquiet. The francophile foreign office learned that, although a high-ranking Freemason, Edward VIII was an outspoken admirer of Hitler and National Socialism, and that he had developed indiscreet relations with the German ambassador, Leopold von Hoesch.⁹ M.I.5's wiretaps must have echoed this. On March 10 during the Rhine-land crisis Hoesch persuaded him to threaten abdication if Baldwin wanted war, and on the eleventh after an audience with the P.M. the king telephoned the embassy to report success.*

Winston had been his friend for many years. While recognising all the happy traits of a young man in love, he urged the king at first to sacrifice any idea of marrying the American, if he was to stay on the throne.

Early in July her divorce petition was entered at Suffolk Assizes. To discuss the several niceties, Walter Monckton, the king's legal adviser, visited Churchill, though it is not clear why. Perhaps as a senior privy councillor. Churchill urged that Mrs Simpson abandon her divorce petition because of the inevitable scandal for Edward that would ensue. But she went ahead, and late in October won her decree nisi. Shortly, in a fatal miscalculation of the public temper, he changed his opinion: Edward should fight Baldwin, marry Mrs Simpson, and sit tight.

The decree would become absolute in April 1937, a clear month before the coronation. The implications were obvious: Fleet-street was agog, but Lord Beaverbrook persuaded his colleagues to hold their tongues. American and French newspapers splashed salacious stories, however, and lurid letters began to pour into No. 10. Undeterred, on November 16 the king informed the prime minister he proposed to marry Mrs Simpson.

Baldwin summoned the party leaders and Churchill to discuss the crisis. He intended to confront the monarch with something of an ultimatum, but first he asked for assurances that the others would not accept an

* The conversation was cryptic. 'Can you hear me? This is David speaking,' King Edward said. 'Please don't address me by name.' He had seen 'that bastard' Baldwin and given him a dressing down. 'I told him I'd resign in the event of war. There will be no war. Don't worry.' The German press attaché, listening on a second earpiece, made a note.¹⁰

invitation to form a government if he did tender his resignation to the king.

Attlee and Sinclair gave them; Mr Churchill kept quiet. We shall probably never know what train of thoughts triggered his decision to play *va banque*. No doubt he surmised that championing a popular king against his first minister might prove a crusade with a Gaussian force greater than India and rearmament. Perhaps this was at last the issue on which he could topple the government?

If this be so, the cynicism of his choice now seems obvious. The king's pro-Nazi inclinations can surely not have been any more palatable to him in 1936 than they were to prove, under very difficult circumstances, four years later. It was a clumsily obvious manoeuvre. As Chamberlain once said, when Lloyd George was out for mischief, one might only see the wake of his periscope; but Churchill's hull would be half above water. Winston, Chamberlain mused in his diary, was 'moving mysteriously in the background and, it is suggested, expressing willingness to form a government if there should be any refusal on our part to agree.'¹¹

Lunching with Churchill on December 2 to discuss their great Albert Hall meeting on the morrow, T.U.C. leader Citrine made quite plain that organised labour would back Baldwin in any showdown with the king.

'I will defend him,' retorted Churchill, ignoring this further warning sign. 'I think it is my duty.'

'What,' gasped Citrine, 'irrespective of what he has done?'

'He feels it *here*,' said Churchill gravely, placing his hand upon his breast.¹²

On the next day, the newspapers broke their self-imposed silence. There were the first ominous signs that Mrs Simpson was not popular. As she fled that evening to Cannes, people clustered outside her house in Cumberland Terrace booing.

THAT DAY, December 3, Churchill packed the Albert Hall. The Focus had styled itself a movement for the Defence of Freedom and Peace for this public manifestation. Out at Chartwell, he had laboured for days on his speech. It scorned Britain's pacifists, appealed not to discard the League of Nations, and derided former Labour minister Sir Oswald Mosley, now leader of the British Union of Fascists. 'Fascinated by the spectacle of brutal power,' he charged, 'his followers grovel to Nazi dictatorship in order that they can make people in their turn grovel to them.'*

* By this time Mosley's blackshirt organisation was being financed by Mussolini. The author located in the Archivio Centrale dello Stato at Rome reports by Italian ambassador Dino Grandi documenting the secret delivery of cash to B.U.F. officials.

The loud applause that his speech earned may well have contributed to Churchill's false assessment of his standing at this juncture.

There is no doubt that his anti-Hitler campaign was still developing horsepower. 'With Churchill,' wrote Lord Beaverbrook a few days later, 'the man's whole political faith – as he sees it – is bound up in running the anti-German line coupled with a demand for more arms. He has had some success with this already. Indeed he has emerged as the leader of a big armaments, anti-German movement in politics, hostile to the government.'¹³

This hard-headed Canadian press lord played a central role in the palace crisis. Fearing that a discredited monarchy might weaken the empire, he too had urged King Edward to fight. More than one political observer detected this new Beaverbrook-Churchill axis.¹⁴ On the third they were seen together at Beaverbrook's London mansion, Stornoway House, deep in consultation with the king's solicitor George Allen. They recommended that Edward broadcast immediately to his people – over the heads of his truculent ministers.

The king liked the idea, and Baldwin had to warn him that this would be unconstitutional so long as he remained on the throne. Edward asked if he might talk with Mr Churchill, and invited him to dinner at Fort Belvedere, his Windsor home.

Both on the third and fourth Churchill had loudly insisted at Question Time that Baldwin keep the House informed. Out at the fort on December 4 he found the king 'debonair' but perceptibly cracking under the strain. 'He twice in my presence completely lost the thread of what he was saying,' he wrote to the prime minister, 'and appeared to me driven to the last extremity of endurance.'

Churchill's new advice was that the king ask for time to decide – whether to marry, abdicate, or drop his questionable bride. The king liked that, and suggested that two weeks in Switzerland would be long enough to decide.

Churchill had enough nous to know that leaving England was no way to win support just now. His language adopted a military flavour, always a dangerous sign. Exclaiming, 'Sir, it is time for reflection, you must allow time for the battalions to march,' he returned to London, again to confer with Beaverbrook. ('A devoted tiger!' he said, commending the Canadian in a private note to the king, 'very scarce breed.') 'News from all fronts!' he wrote breathlessly to Edward on the following evening, continuing the military metaphor. 'No pistol to be held at the king's head. No doubt that this request for time will be granted.'

He assured the king that the issue could be shelved until February or March. 'On no account must the king leave the country,' he emphasised, adding quaintly: 'Windsor Castle is his battle station (*poste de commandement*).'¹⁵

In this lather of royalism he had overlooked the fickleness of public temper. Edward's popularity was ebbing. At the Palladium cinema that Sunday evening the audience shuffled out even while the national anthem was played.¹⁶ But Winston neither went to vulgar cinemas nor hobnobbed with the hoi-polloi. That Sunday he was in the seclusion of Chartwell drafting a glittering statement to the press. It pleaded for time and patience, and did not mince words about those who issued ultimata to their kings.

It provoked a uniformly hostile comment; only his toady Desmond Morton appears to have endorsed it.

The storm cones were hoisting, but Winston was blind to them. M.P.s now suspected that he had been playing this painful crisis for his own ends. Harold Nicolson, a stout, florid member sitting that afternoon just one place away from the hunched and pouting Churchill, heard their neighbour Sir George Lambert, former admiralty colleague and friend of Winston for thirty years, beg him not to speak. 'Can't you *feel* the temper of the House?' pleaded Lambert. 'You will do yourself irreparable harm.'

'I am not afraid of this House,' was Churchill's reply. 'When I see my duty I speak out clearly.'¹⁷

Baldwin made a statement, but without even listening Winston bounded to his feet and reiterated his plea to the P.M. to take no 'irrevocable step.'

The House erupted. There were screams of 'Drop it!' and 'Twister!' and howls to sit down.

Churchill now grasped the awfulness of his misjudgement. He swayed, twisting his spectacles.

'If,' he lisped above the cacophony, pinking with anger, 'the House resists my claim to speak it will only add importance to any words I use.'

The Speaker called him to order, then directed him to sit down: he was trying to make a speech; it was Question Time; he was out of order.

He stormed out, thunder on his brow. Bracken loped out at his side and joined him in his car. As Winston glanced out to his left the photographers popped their flashbulbs; he smiled a wan smile. Nicolson described Winston's defeat that day to his wife: 'He almost lost his head, and he certainly lost his command of the House.' 'In three minutes,' wrote another observer, 'his hopes of return to power and influence are shattered.'¹⁸

WORSE WAS to follow. The king had decided to abdicate. 'Our cock,' Beaverbrook grimly telephoned to Winston in a phrase that said everything, 'won't fight.' Edward wanted only to marry Mrs Simpson. At ten A.M. on the tenth he signed the deed of abdication.

With no course but to retreat, Churchill did so with customary grace and courtesy. 'What is done is done,' he said. 'What has been done or left undone belongs to history, and to history, so far as I am concerned, it shall be left.'

He lunched at Fort Belvedere on the eleventh and left Edward moist-eyed. Teetering upon the threshold, and tapping out the tetrametres with his walking stick upon the rhythmic flagstones, he recited Andrew Marvell's lines upon the beheading of Charles I: 'He nothing common did, or mean, / Upon that memorable scene.'

Two men, one twenty years younger than the other: their paths would cross again in history. A few hours later Edward, shortly to become the Duke of Windsor, left for Austria where he would remain until Mrs Simpson's decree was made absolute on May 3, 1937; one month later he married her.*

General opinion was that Churchill was done for. He wrote the duke that he was 'feeling rather battered.' A year later the latter, reflecting on the crisis, would inform Hitler's deputy at a private dinner that he had been brought down 'partly through murky intrigues but mostly on account of his healthy social instincts and Germanophile sentiments.'¹⁹ Be that as it may, the relevant sections of those cabinet proceedings are still closed.

The fiasco left Churchill deeper in the wilderness and more desperate than ever. It had enhanced his public image of instability. The Focus suffered, Spier would recall, because of the criticism attracted by Churchill's posture.

Worse, the American Jewish Committee, which had toyed with bringing him over to inaugurate the Focus there, dropped the idea at short notice: in 1937, a year when sixty-four per cent of all Americans believed they shouldn't even have entered World War One, he was too wild a man. According to their historian, the A.J.C. feared that 'any known connection between Churchill and the Jews would bring charges of warmon-

* In a file of the Italian military Intelligence service the author found a whimsical letter from the ex-king dated (mis-dated?) Fort Belvedere, December 12, postmarked in Hammersmith on the thirteenth. Writing to an English friend in Italy, 'Edward P., ex R.I.' referred caustically to his brother as 'little Tich' and 'Stuttering Bertie,' to Queen Elizabeth as 'his sweet little Queen of Scots' (*dolce piccola reglia scozzesa*), to himself as 'Edward the Confessor' and to Mrs Simpson as the 'Baltimore belle.' The same *SIM* file contains intercepted British embassy letters on the crisis.

gering from anti-Semites.'²⁰ This was no idle apprehension: soon after Europe's tragedy began even Chamberlain was heard to remark that 'America and the world Jews had forced England into the war.'²¹

Churchill optimistically hoped the invitation was merely postponed. 'I have every hope,' he wrote to Baruch on New Year's Day, 'that I shall be able to come over to the States in April and hope to inaugurate the Defence of Peace and Freedom movement about which Randolph consulted you. It would have been a great pity,' he conceded, 'to hurry it unduly.' Later in January however the A.J.C. invited Wickham Steed, co-founder of the Focus, instead.²²

Churchill tried to gloss over this reverse. 'The abdication,' he wrote in the same letter to Baruch, 'has been most painful and has left far deeper marks among the people than Parliament or the newspapers show. I cannot convince myself that with time and patience it could not have been avoided.'²³

His financial master plan was now in tatters. Hiring Levy's talents against Vic Oliver had not been cheap. His American trip cancelled, he stayed at Chartwell, painting in the pouring rain, or pounding away at *Marlborough*. He would have to finish it by April 1937 just to meet current expenses. To Clementine, still vacationing in Austria, he remarked on how much his ghost writer Francis Deakin was aiding him: 'It is quite an effort,' he added, 'to keep all the points of this argument in one's mind when so much else is afoot.'²⁴

When Lord Rothermere – who had spent the first week in January 1937 *en famille* with Hitler – invited Winston to join him on the Riviera, Churchill took his secretary Mrs Pearman with him as well as Randolph: because now he had to write or founder into the icy waters of insolvency. Without a commission, he risked summarising the Russian blockbuster *War and Peace* into thirty-four pages of double-spaced typescript.

It should not be thought that these pot-boilers did not contain fine prose. Even at his worst, he was superior to most other writers at their best. Pacing the floor of Rothermere's villa he dictated this description of Tolstoy's heroine Natasha, 'the jewel of the book':

one of the most enchanting creatures 'that Fable e'er hath feigned.' All the loveliest things in English poetry might have been written about her: she is made of spirit, fire and dew: her body talks, 'she dances like a wave'; her singing might charm a soul from the ribs of death; and she has a decidedly tempestuous petticoat.'

He sent the hasty typescript, captioned with scant modesty 'A Digest by Winston Churchill of Tolstoy's Great Novel,' to the *Tribune* syndicate. They accepted it on the last day of March, coughed up the usual \$1,000 — but did not publish it.* That was ominous.

TO HIS terror, the hitherto lucrative North American syndication 'pot' began to boil dry. He was already digesting Feodor M. Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, but a chill wind had begun to blow from Chicago. When his agency notified the syndicate that he was familiar with the 'long and very fine novel' *Jean Christopher* by Romain Holland, he met with a rebuff. Evidently his anti-German line had irked Colonel Robert Rutherford McCormick, the *Tribune's* isolationist publisher.

In October the *Tribune* syndicate would also turn down Winston's project for a major series on the line of Edward Shephard Creasey's classic, *The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World*. There were too many war features already from Spain and China: that was the unconvincing explanation.²⁵

He had painted himself into a corner and saw no way to get out. May 1937 would probably be the cross-roads for him. Baldwin would probably resign then and Chamberlain replace him. His fortune now might lie equally in the City or Whitehall. 'I really do not care very much which,' he wrote offhandedly to Clementine on February 2. Frederick Leathers, a steamship company director, had held out the prospect of boardroom office, and Winston admitted that it sounded attractive: he would need time to reflect and read if he was to complete his *History of the English-Speaking Peoples* by 1939, and pick up the £16,000 due thereby.

Until then the signs indicated trouble. He wrote to Cassell's, who were to publish the *History*, pleading for another £1,000 advance although he could offer no more than an earnest to begin that autumn. He even talked of selling Chartwell: 'If I could see £25,000,' he confessed to Clementine on February 2, 'I should close with it.' The children were nearly all flown, he mournfully explained, 'And my life is probably in its closing decade.'

He was in the throes of a financial nightmare. Financially, as well as politically, he had over-reached himself in 1936. His outgoings, including the upkeep of Chartwell and Morpeth Mansions, amounted to over ten thousand pounds a year, while his gross income from writing, before taxation, seldom exceeded fifteen thousand.† On April 8 he determined

* The New York *News* published it eventually, in September 1937; and again in 1943.

† Mr Churchill's annual pre-tax income from literary sources had been: tax year ending April 1930, £10,695; April 1931, £12,883; April 1932, £15,240; April 1933,

to limit the outgoings for 1937–1938 to £6,000: 'This cannot on any account be exceeded,' he lectured Clementine.²⁶

Of necessity his campaigning, even for the Focus, slackened. Lord Davies had urged him on January 7 to use great public meetings of the League of Nations Union or failing that the New Commonwealth or the Focus as his vehicle to attain power as 'the first minister.' Churchill, he said, only had to play his cards right: 'Honestly,' he added, 'I prefer to see you in the wilderness than play the part of second, third, or any other kind of minister.' Churchill replied that he was under no illusions how little a private person with no access to the B.B.C. could influence government policy by addressing public meetings.

For months the Focus stagnated, issuing manifestos and organising multiple-signature letters to *The Times*, mostly drafted by Angell. The first, a letter 'For the Defence of Czechoslovakia,' on March 10, was published simultaneously in Paris with French signatories, mostly of Léon Blum's Popular Front.²⁷

From disgruntled economists, civil servants, arms factory employees, and serving officers, a stream of well-meaning letters continued to reach him: he would invite their authors to lunch, give them a hearing, and ask for more information. Armoured warfare expert Brigadier Percy Hobart, inspector of the Royal Tank Corps since 1933, was one such furtive informant; he had already visited Morpeth Mansions in October 1936. Often Wing Commander Anderson arrived, sat at Churchill's bedside and dictated to Mrs Pearman memoranda on the R.A.F.'s weaknesses in tactics or equipment, adding concrete detail like the lack of underground fuel storage tanks. 'You must realise,' Churchill calmed him once, 'that loyalty to the state must come before loyalty to the service.'

NOT ALL of his informants shared Churchill's unalloyed loyalty to the empire. Some were pursuing more distant goals, and he was putty in their hands. In April 1936 he had based his frightening (and inflated) £1,000 million estimate of Hitler's annual arms expenditure on men whom he would in his memoirs identify only as 'two German refugees of high ability and inflexible purpose.'

They understood all the details of the presentment [*sic*] of German budgets, the value of the mark, and so forth.²⁸

£13,981; April 1934, £6,572; April 1935, £13,505; April 1936, £16,312; April 1937, £12,914.

His reticence is now understandable. One was Leopold Schwarzschild, editor of the Paris *Neues Tagebuch*; the other the economist Jürgen Kuczynski, the furtive editor of the Berlin *Finanzpolitische Korrespondenz*. Aged thirty-two, Kuczynski was a functionary of the banned German Communist Party (K.P.D.). Some time after he fled to London in January 1936, M.I.5 expressed curiosity about his wealth and voiced the suspicion that he had brought out the entire K.P.D. funds.²⁹

In fact, as he later bragged, he had been financed by Churchill's group. After publishing an anonymous article in Brendan Bracken's *The Banker* in February 1937, with tongue-in-cheek 'calculations' of Hitler's annual arms budget, he had been contacted by 'certain circles,' and these he had ruthlessly milked of both funds for the party coffers and secret information for the Soviet Union. These circles, he said by way of identification, were those that came to power in 1940 'with the overthrow of Chamberlain.' Kuczynski published an expanded version of the article some months later as a book which his biography would describe as 'the first public initiative of the Churchill group in the City against the Hitler regime.'

We can just imagine [adds the biography] the glee of his K.P.D. comrades to see a German comrade marching against German fascism at the head of a section of the City of London.³⁰

Kuczynski also drafted a blimpish brochure on *Hitler and the Empire*, to which an R.A.F. air commodore wrote the foreword. 'I chose the pen name James Turner,' he wrote. 'The whole thing was a rather improbable romp.' Turner's line was, he chuckled, to deny any personal dislike of fascism – that was a matter for the Germans alone – 'If *only* it were not such a danger for the British empire.' The party printed ten thousand copies. The brochure's closing sentence warned against Hitler:

Let Great Britain's statesmen be wide awake to the danger to the Empire and act accordingly! Let her take up her rightful place as the outstanding protector of the world's peace and welfare.*

Meeting Kuczynski later, the Soviet ambassador Ivan Maisky roared out these lines, bellowed with laughter, and winked broadly as he did so.

* Of this creature M.I.5 would warn the F.B.I. in 1941, 'Since the outbreak of war [he] has been frequently reported as a communist spreading defeatist propaganda amongst alien refugees.' Kuczynski's career climaxed in persuading fellow refugee Dr Klaus Fuchs to betray Britain's atomic secrets to the Soviets; both later lived in East Germany.

WHO CAN say what Churchill really felt about this abyss into which financial *misère* had plunged him?

Perhaps he had ceased to feel pain. Clementine would reveal to the Canadian prime minister how Winston kept asking her, during these lonely years, whether she thought he would ever return to government, and she would silently shake her head.

In May 1937 Chamberlain became prime minister. Winston was not invited into the cabinet, and Clementine now told him she did not think he ever would be.³¹

8: *People Are Buying 'Churchills'*

SOMETIMES, CHURCHILL told a general in 1937, he could not sleep for thinking of the danger to Britain – of how her empire might be dissipated ‘in a minute.’

‘If mortal catastrophe,’ he would tell the House on March 24, 1938, ‘should overtake the British nation and the British empire, historians a thousand years hence will still be baffled by the mystery of our affairs. They will never understand how it was that a victorious nation, with everything in hand, suffered themselves to be brought low, and to cast away all that they had gained by measureless sacrifice and absolute victory – gone with the wind!’¹

For a historian born that very day, when the British empire was at its greatest influence and extent, it is truly baffling to review the archives and compare the specious estimates of Hitler’s aims and capabilities in the British records with what is revealed by the German archives. The former are strewn with the distortions of Britain’s foreign-policy-making elite, inspired by hatred of Germany imbibed with their mother’s milk decades before the Nazis and their atrocities. These men have created legends of magisterial permanence. The legends pollute the history books and have a charm and existence of their own, devoid of any foundation in the archives.

Further comparisons crowd upon the researcher: the businesslike protocols kept by French and German ministries; the total absence of American cabinet minutes; and the languid letters of self congratulation, oozing self-esteem and virtuosity, in the files of the British foreign office. Incoming despatches were slipped into manila ‘jackets’ on which officials scrawled ironic comments – accumulating collective wisdom like a pearl gathering successive layers of sheen. This was no way to arrive at basic truths. The outcome was a mother-of-pearl reflection of the department’s own culture and prejudices.

Politically, Churchill was staking everything on his claim that Hitler planned to hurl his growing airforce against London, heart of the empire.

It was now generally believed. The German records, however, reflect only concern about France and the recent treaty between Prague and Moscow which would permit Russia to operate from Czech airfields in a future war.*

At the end of 1936 General Erhard Milch sent to Göring his 'Thoughts on Air War.'† Contemplating their 'probable adversary,' he had contrasted the multiplicity of France's targets – munitions and aircraft factories – with Germany's few bomber units (*Staffeln*) even by mid-1937: ninety-six 'heavy' and twelve dive-bomber units, each with nine planes in the first line and three in reserve.²

Meanwhile Mr Churchill and Wickham Steed of the Focus bombarded Whitehall with their own estimates of Hitler's air power and intentions.³ Sir Herbert Creedy of the War Office warned that further 'rebuffs' of Hitler's overtures would change his tune. In scratchy, disjointed handwriting Ralph Wigram – one of Winston's secret sources – inked indignant denials on the 'jacket.' His minutes during this last year of his young life burgeon with misapprehensions, misspelt names (*Ribbentropp*) and phobias. 'Our only protection seems to be,' was one comment, 'that if given enough rope the Germans will usually prove to be even more stupid than we are.'⁴

Hitler often protested that he had no quarrel with Britain. In the summer of 1935 he naïvely authorised Göring to offer authentic data on the airforce to Whitehall on condition it was not revealed to other countries (France or Russia). In December he repeated the offer; the F.O. instructed British ambassador Sir Eric Phipps to reject it.⁵ Early in July 1936 Milch came over to see Lord Swinton in person, by-passing F.O. channels, and repeated the offer. Impressed, Swinton told the Committee of Imperial Defence a few days later, 'General Milch had made it perfectly clear that he was not prepared to give information if it were going to be used in Parliament.'⁶ Overruling F.O. objections, they decided to accept the offer. The figures now released by Milch tallied with the secret estimates worked out by Air Intelligence – a German target of 1,500 first line aircraft by the spring of 1937.⁷

Encouraged, the air ministry sent over to Germany in January 1937 a British mission led by the deputy chief of air staff, Air Vice-Marshal C. L. Courtney.⁸ From secret Reich Air Ministry records it is clear that they

* The F.O. had reliable evidence that a 'subterranean understanding did exist' to this effect. 'The balance of evidence,' Wigram conceded, 'is in favour of General Milch's assumptions.'

† The author has been able to use Milch's private diaries and question him exhaustively. He was effectively air minister from 1933 to 1944.

were furnished with genuine figures.⁹ Milch even invited Courtney up to his room and let him leaf through the bound volumes containing air plans until the fall of 1938. Reporting this to the cabinet on February 3, Swinton put Hitler's first line as 1,107 aircraft on New Year's Day, 1937; the British first line consisted of 1,040 in metropolitan squadrons, 204 in the Fleet Air Arm, and 272 in squadrons overseas – a total of 1,516. The admiralty was receiving German naval data, and had found them bona fide.*

The Churchill group had one obvious recourse: to dismiss the German figures as lies. 'Hitler,' Sir Robert Vansittart, permanent head of the F.O., wrote to the cabinet on the following day, 'two years ago assured us most solemnly that the German army would never exceed thirty-six divisions and 500,000 men.' The manila jackets collected more ink: it was obvious that 'Milch was lying from the start,' said one; in June 1937 it was accepted that he had told the truth.



The motives of the permanent F.O. officials are obscure. Mr Churchill was driven by a different imperative: self-preservation – certainly political, probably financial. He was at his lowest ebb since Gallipoli.

Chartwell had become a financial millstone. His wife had always disapproved of the sprawling mansion. Its extravagance remained a bone between them for forty years. He employed there nine indoor servants – housemaids, personal maids, valets and a handyman – as well as three gardeners, a chauffeur, a polo pony groom and a farmhand. Seeing ruin loom, she had begged Winston to watch his step.

Lectured to turn off every light, their children grew up in dichotomy: outward opulence, behind-the-scenes frugality. Sometimes the furniture was dust-sheeted, the mansion closed, and a cottage in the grounds opened for the family to hibernate in. None of this financial crisis was visible except to his benefactors, his publishers – whom he importuned for advances – and the local tradesmen whose bills remained unpaid.¹⁰

Among the benefactors were a new Hungarian and Beaverbrook. The *Evening Standard* was now paying him £60 per article – typical being that of February 5, 1937 which spotlighted the Czechs – 'under fear of violent invasion, with iron conquest in its wake.'

Already they see the directions given to the enregimented German press to write them down, to accuse them of being communists,

* Hitler was in fact concealing technical breaches of the 1935 Anglo-German naval agreement: the displacements of his new capital ships were more than permitted.

and in particular, of preparing their airports for a Russian assault upon Germany. Vain to protest their innocence. . .

The Hungarian was Emery Reves. Born Imre Revesz in 1904, he had set up a left-wing news agency in Paris in 1930. By agreement, he now began to syndicate Churchill's articles around the world. Soon every major Hitler speech was countered by a well-paid Churchill riposte published in most of Europe's capitals – 'The new encirclement of Germany!' he quipped to the *Standard's* editor.¹¹ Working in tandem with the Focus, Reves commissioned counterfeit anti-Hitler pieces still widely cited by the unsuspecting, like Hermann Rauschning's account of non-existent conversations with Hitler.¹² *

Still stockpiling ammunition against the government, Churchill accumulated fresh informants. It was all rather hole-in-corner. A typical F.O. 'mole' would write a guarded letter from his club, suggest a clandestine meeting, and ask for 'a reply to this address and not to the foreign office.'¹³ For months he lay doggo. 'W.S.C.,' one observer would write to another, 'has been very quiet for eight months, which is rather a long time for him.'¹⁴

At the end of March he left for a week's vacation on the Riviera. 'I paint all day,' he wrote to the near-by Duke of Windsor, to whom he felt bound by the ties of a shared ordeal, 'and, so far as my means go, gamble after dark.'

Meanwhile, he learned how to manoeuvre at periscope depth. Occasionally he loosed off torpedoes in the House. In mid-April he urged British non-belligerence toward General Franco. There were bellows of Labour dissent. 'Winston Churchill,' wrote one Tory member, 'made a terrific speech, brilliant, convincing, unanswerable, and his "stock" has soared, and today people are buying "Churchills" and saying once more that he ought to be in the government.' 'But,' added this shrewd observer, 'were he to be given office, what would it mean? An explosion of foolishness after a short time? War with Germany?'¹⁵

In May the new king was crowned. Watching Elizabeth become queen consort tears of remorse clouded Winston's eyes. He admitted to Clementine the obvious – 'The other one,' meaning Mrs Simpson, 'would never have done.' The abdication had cost him dear. Two years later King

* Other Reves beneficiaries included Attlee, Blum, Eden and Duff Cooper. Naturalised British in February 1940, he was whisked out of France in June and transported to New York a year later, where he concocted the 'autobiography' of steel magnate Fritz Thyssen, *I Paid Hitler*. He later handled the foreign language rights to Churchill's war memoirs.

George VI still spoke unfavourably of his role, and it would be 1941 before Winston was powerful enough to insist, for example, that Canada receive the duke and duchess with a guard of honour.¹⁶



Of the new alliances that he forged, the most influential was the alliance with the Zionists. This intrusion by Mr Churchill into the history of the barren, holy territories between the Jordan and the Mediterranean was something of an anti-climax.

Since the Canaanites had first settled Palestine for the Arabs in 3500 B.C. it had been visited by kings and prophets, by warriors and pilgrims, by warring tribes of Turks, Greeks and Romans, by Moslems and Christians and Jews. Abraham had brought the Jews from Ur of the Chaldees in 2000 B.C. Only 380 years later famine drove them to Egypt, where the Pharaohs delivered them into bondage.

When Moses led them back to Palestine in 1250 B.C., Joshua the son of Nun had commanded his troops besieging Jericho, 'Burn ye all that is in the city and slay with the edge of the sword both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep, and burn the city with fire and all that is therein' (Joshua, 7:21).

The Jewish kingdom at Samaria (Nablus) fell in 722 B.C. to Shalmaneser, king of the Assyrians; that at Judah endured 130 more years until Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, put Jerusalem to the torch and transported the Jews to his own country. Seventy years later Cyrus, king of the Persians, returned them to Palestine; they were again conquered there in 332 B.C. by Alexander the Macedonian.

The Roman legions conquered Palestine in 63 B.C. and ruled it for seven hundred years, until Caliph the Arab retook it in 637 A.D.¹⁷ For nine hundred years the Arabs ruled. Even after Palestine passed under Turkish hegemony in 1517, Arabs and Turks shared government until the twentieth century, when British troops moved in upon the break-up of the Ottoman empire in 1918. The League of Nations mandated the territory to Britain. It had fallen to Mr Churchill as colonial secretary in 1922 to draft the terms.

Two years earlier he had written unfeelingly of the Jews, in an article, but even there he had regarded them as an accursed people who should be given a home of their own.¹⁸ 'Nothing could be more significant,' he had argued, 'than the fury with which [Leon] Trotsky has attacked the Zionists

generally, and Dr Weissmann [*sic*] in particular.* 'The struggle,' he concluded, 'which is now beginning between the Zionist and Bolshevik Jews is little less than a struggle for the soul of the Jewish people.'

In view of the substantial Jewish financial contribution to the Focus it would have been surprising if Mr Churchill had not become by 1937 a committed Zionist. He explained – to the Peel Commission – that the foreign secretary Balfour had been motivated by a desire to curry favour with United States opinion when he sent to Lord Rothschild the famous letter (the 'Balfour Declaration') of November 2, 1917 affirming Britain's readiness to establish for the Jews a 'home' in Palestine. In London, Zionism had become fashionable: among the gentile Zionists were Balfour's niece Mrs Blanche (Baffy) Dugdale, Walter Elliot, Leo Amery, Lord Strabolgi, and many who turned up in Churchill's secret group, the Focus.

Weizmann would later scan Churchill's *The Second World War* in vain for any reference to his Zionism. 'There is not a single word in it,' he would write in 1948, 'either about Zionism or about Palestine or about his various negotiations with me through these years. It is no doubt a studied omission.' He pondered whether to comment on this in his own memoirs. 'It will no doubt produce an outburst on the part of Winston,' he remarked, 'but I really do not care.'

Three years later, Churchill used these words in the last letter he ever wrote to Weizmann:

The wonderful exertions which Israel is making in these times of difficulty are cheering to an old Zionist like me.¹⁹

But in 1937 no colonial secretary could ignore the millions of Moslems in India, balefully watching Britain's attitude to Palestine. The man in the street, wrote Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister (later Lord Swinton) in November 1933, had no interest in the Balfour Declaration. 'The only element we can rely on,' he lectured Weizmann and David Ben-Gurion, 'is the Moslems.' Labour's Jim Thomas, twice colonial secretary despite his humble origins, had roused Zionist anger with a proposed democratic legislative council for Palestine. The 160,000 Jews there were a minority but demanded the majority voice on any council. 'It is not fit,' Mrs Dugdale huffed in her private diary, 'that the future of the Zion should be in the hands of a drunken ex-engine driver.'²⁰ That plan too was dropped. On

* Dr Chaim Weizmann (1874–1952), an outstanding chemist, was later Israel's first president. From 1921 to 1931 and from 1935 to 1946 he was president of the World Zionist Organisation and Jewish Agency for Palestine. The author is indebted to the Weizmann Archives at Rehovot, Israel, for access to their files.

March 24, 1936 Sir Josiah Wedgwood claimed the credit for having 'slain the Palestine Constitution.'

I got Churchill and Chamberlain and Amery and Sinclair all to speak and they did, leaving the Rt. Hon J. T. Dress-Shirt [Jim Thomas] in tears.

Frustrated at the growing stream of immigrants, the Arabs rose in revolt three weeks later. Their rebellion began with the murder of two Jews, and was still smouldering in 1937, costing British lives and siphoning off British troops and arms. A commission under Lord Peel examined Palestine's future, and Mr Churchill was invited to testify before it.

ABRAHAM THE prophet; Joshua, son of Nun; Shalmaneser, king of the Assyrians; Nebuchadnessar, king of Babylon; Cyrus, king of the Persians; Alexander the Macedonian, Caliph the Conqueror – the names of those who had determined the destiny of Palestine were scripted in the pages of history.

Now, stepping out of the elevator at Morpeth Mansions, a Pickwickian figure in temporary financial embarrassment, destiny in the shape of Mr Churchill took his own place amongst these august arbiters of Zion.

He testified to the Peel Commission on March 12, 1937. His startling proposal was that *all* Palestine be turned over to the Jews. He spoke of their right to immigrate and Britain's 'good faith' toward them.

When Peel's deputy Sir Horace Rumbold spoke of the injustice done to the Arabs by this invasion of a 'foreign race,' Churchill expressed outrage at that phrase, then offered a novel concept of 'just invasions' of which the incumbents of Berlin's Wilhelmstrasse might have been proud:

Why is there harsh injustice done if people come in and make a livelihood for more, and make the desert into palm groves and orange groves? Why is it injustice because there is more work and wealth for everybody? There is no injustice. The injustice is when those who live in the country leave it to be desert for thousands of years.

As for the 'invasion,' it was the Arabs who had come in after the Jews, he maintained, and they had allowed the Jewish hill terraces to decay. 'Where the Arab goes,' he generalised, 'it is often desert.'

Rumbold may not have known much about the Canaanites, but he did remind Churchill of the Moorish achievements in Spain. 'I am glad they

were thrown out,' was Churchill's only retort. To him all Arabs were wastrels and inferiors. Calling for a marked Jewish preponderance he looked forward to the day when Britain had no further duties to 'the Arab minority' in Palestine.

Upon reflection he regretted his words about the Moslems and Arabs and asked the commission a few days later to omit them from any permanent record.²¹

The commission decided to partition Palestine between Jews and Arabs, which was less than Mr Churchill asked. He made this clear as principal guest at a small dinner party organised by Weizmann on June 8 at Sir Archibald Sinclair's West London home.

Weizmann disagreed: they should accept partition, but if it was to succeed Britain must allow many more Jews to immigrate each year. Moreover the Jewish state must have defensible frontiers. He chided Leo Amery and Churchill that both had been colonial secretary – yet neither had been able to influence their government.

'Yes, we are all guilty men,' admitted Churchill to Weizmann. 'You know, you are our master. And yours,' he added pointing to Attlee and Wedgwood, 'and yours,' to Victor Cazalet and James de Rothschild, the others round the table. 'What you say goes. If you ask us to fight we shall fight like tigers.'

For all the flowery language, he dismissed Weizmann's proposal for an increase to fifty thousand Jewish immigrants a year as a 'mirage.' The Arab rebellion would then become a bloody war. His advice to the commission had been to allow immigration right up to the current limit of ten thousand. 'By all means let us have a Jewish majority in Palestine,' he cried. 'I realise we have let the Jews down in the past and it is shameful for us to wake up only when the Jews come unto us in dire distress.'

As for partition, he thought it dangerous and unworkable. 'The government is untrustworthy,' he explained. 'They are a lot of lily-livered rabbits. They will chip off a piece here and there.'

The Jews, Mr Churchill advised, could do only three things: 'Persevere, persevere, and persevere.' Later he repeated: 'The Jews must hang on.'²² He said much the same to David Ben-Gurion, chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive in Jerusalem. 'Our entire tragedy is that we have a weak government.'

The Baldwins are idiots, totally lacking in talent etc. . . They are concerned only with deposing and crowning kings, while Germany is arming and growing stronger, and we are slipping lower and lower.

'But,' he prophesied, 'this situation will not last long. England will wake up and defeat Mussolini and Hitler, and then your hour will also come.'

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN had just succeeded Baldwin. Still there was no office for Churchill, and his financial crisis remained unmitigated. His new Jewish friends did not desert him. On the first day of June 1937 his attack on the budget proposals earned plaudits from Lord Melchett ('You are indeed a *very* great man') and Nathan Laski, Harold Laski's father. Sir Robert Waley-Cohen encouraged Churchill to host another luncheon for the Focus on the fourteenth. 'I have chosen to go my own way,' Winston confirmed on this occasion.²³

He was navigating into murkier waters. One furtive visitor from Germany was Carl Goerdeler, later hanged as a traitor. Goerdeler, outgoing prices commissioner, was conspiring with the disgruntled chief of general staff Ludwig Beck to overthrow Hitler. As in England, the motives were disparate: Beck had applauded the bloody purge of Ernst Röhm's SA, but now he was piqued at Hitler's growing reliance on rival Wehrmacht officers for advice. Visiting London in mid-June 1937, Goerdeler gave economics experts like Frank Ashton-Gwatkin of the F.O. and Sigismund Waley (Schloss) of the treasury the less than patriotic advice that France and Britain 'stand firm' and seize the opportunity to 'inflict a diplomatic defeat' on Germany which would enable the moderates to 'act.'²⁴

Czech influence on Churchill also increased, both clandestinely through Wickham Steed and Leeper, and openly through Sheila Grant Duff, the *Observer's* young correspondent in Prague. In mid-June she begged him to ensure a 'firm and unfaltering' attitude by Britain.²⁵ Churchill encouraged her letters – they were all grist to his mill.

That summer, cash worries crowded his horizon. He interrupted labours on *Marlborough* and the *History* to paste together an anthology of his articles on world personalities. Entitled *Great Contemporaries*, it was published in October. To Clementine, vacationing in Austria, he wrote in July that he was overwhelmed with work – 'The new book in its final birth throes: articles, & always Marlborough.' In an evocative phrase he added, 'The well flows freely: only the time is needed to draw the water from it.'²⁶

The manuscripts laid siege to his senses. When Anderson visited him on August 1 with another airforce officer, worried about pilot training figures, Churchill – unable to listen to Anderson's devotions for long – seized upon the fattening *Marlborough* and recited episodes to the wing

commander. 'How like the Tory Party of those days our present lot is!' he wrote to a researcher months later. 'I wish I had studied history at the beginning of my life, instead of at the end.'²⁷

Of all these historic figures, Hitler fascinated him. Anxious not to offend Beaverbrook, who knew the Führer personally, he published this famous panegyric in the *Evening Standard* on September 17, 1937:

If our country were defeated I hope we should find a champion as indomitable to restore our courage and lead us back to our place among the nations.

He had moved in a residential secretary, Kathleen Hill, who was musical and widely travelled although only thirty-seven. The costly mansion hummed, and she was bewildered by it all. She had never seen a house like it before – alive and restless, but as quiet as a mouse when he was away.

Typical of Chartwell was one September evening when Winston invited down the Prof. – to explain a balloon device – and Frank Owen, the *Standard's* editor. 'I found him extraordinarily stimulating,' Owen reported to his proprietor, 'high spirited, abounding in vigour and full of confidence, very encouraging and kindly.' After dinner Churchill turned on the rhetoric, full flood, in defence of liberal democracy against dictators Hitler and Mussolini – 'These men of the microphone and murder.' Then he switched to the abdication, argued that the duke should return home. 'Better ostracism here,' he cried, 'than keep a court of dagos on the Loire.'

If the duke flew back tomorrow and drove to the Ritz, 'Would there be any demonstration in His Majesty's streets?'

'Not in the streets,' laughed Owen, 'but probably in His Majesty's Ritz!'

'The kraal of the kaffir,' exploded Winston – 'the igloo of the eskimo, the sweaty throng of Wall-street – all are more enlightened than the Ritz! God help the state that the Ritz rules!'

Would Fleet-street incite the people to mob violence?

I replied [reported Owen] that I confidently expected *The Times* to incite them to snob violence.

At this, Winston launched into a diatribe against *The Times* and 'the whole sordid crew' in government. By two A.M. this tireless gentleman had tugged off his outer garments and was marching up and down his bed-chamber in his underwear, holding forth on Napoleon, pausing only to

fondle a bust of the warlord. He pulled out books of Napoleon's despatches and declaimed from them to Owen and the Prof., 'in execrable French, vilely translated.' Owen silently recalled how, at Beaverbrook's home, he had seen Churchill urge some Hungarian producer to film Napoleon – the Corsican returning from Elba with forebodings of calamity.

'I think,' he wrote that night, 'that Winston has both a sense of returning himself, and of the calamity.'*

WHEN THE Focus lunched secretly at the Savoy on October 3, Churchill invited Eden. Preparing him for the unexpected, he added that Eden would find both Labour and Liberal men there, and even trades unionists; the latter, he suggested, might even be detached from particular political parties in the future.²⁹ Since the foreign secretary had just secured Anglo-French agreement at Nyon on a patrol against Italian submarine piracy, Churchill congratulated him. It looked like a long step toward a Grand Alliance against the dictators.

Hitler did what he could to undermine these exponents of confrontation. He believed friendship with Britain still possible. Sending Joachim von Ribbentrop, the haughty, opinionated businessman who had successfully handled the naval talks in 1935, as his ambassador to London in 1936 he had said, 'Ribbentrop, bring me back that alliance with Britain!' In May 1937 Ribbentrop recommended that Hitler try to receive Churchill personally – they might still win him as a friend for Germany, 'as recent personal contacts with the embassy seemed to indicate' – a remark he did not amplify.³⁰

Churchill and Ribbentrop met occasionally, at social functions like a dinner given by Lord Kemsley. Their dislike was mutual and profound. 'If Germany gets too big for her boots,' bragged Churchill at one embassy luncheon, 'she'll get another thrashing.'

Ribbentrop crowed that this time they had the Italians on their side.

'That's only fair,' remarked Churchill, puffing at his cigar. 'We had them last time.'³¹

His only other contact with the Nazis that autumn was when Bradford-born gauleiter Ernest Bohle visited Morpeth Mansions for an hour's confidential talk; he was chief of Hitler's *Auslands* (Foreign) Organisation, which had been coming in for newspaper criticism by Churchill. Learning

* Entirely without malice – or tact – Beaverbrook sent Owen's uproarious account to Winston on condition that he 'treat it with laughter because it is good fun.' Churchill was sick with fury. It gave 'a loose and sloppy impression' of his remarks, he replied. It would give 'gross offence' if ever published. 'It gives a vry much better picture of F.O. [Owen] than it does of me.'²⁸

that Ribbentrop was Bohle's *bête noir* too, Churchill dropped his own attack.³²

Churchill never met Hitler, but other Britons accepted invitations to Germany. General Sir John Dill, the director of military operations, went over and returned impressed by Hitler's sincerity.³³ The Bristol Aeroplane Company sent aviation expert Roy Fedden around Göring's imposing factories. But now the new British factories were also taking shape; Hankey wrote to Churchill early in October that he had visited half a dozen, huge and well-equipped, covering acres in the Midlands where twelve months before there had been grassland. These were the shadow factories – factories still engaged in peacetime production but laid out with a thought for war.

To Churchill's irritation the air ministry invited General Milch over again, returning his hospitality in January. 'How we have been let in for this visitation at the present moment,' wrote Group Captain Lachlan MacLean gloomily to Churchill, 'is beyond imagination.'

'We have invited the German mission over,' Churchill echoed, in an incautious letter to Sir Maurice Hankey on October 16, 'Why, I cannot tell. Highly competent men are coming. A desperate effort is now being made to present a sham-show. A power-driven turret is to be shown, as if it was the kind of thing we are doing in the regular way. Ought it to be shown at all?'

In peaked caps and leather greatcoats, the German airforce generals were photographed outside Adastral House, home of the air ministry. On Swinton's orders they were shown over the shadow factories and selected R.A.F. establishments including Cranwell; prototypes of modern military planes – the Wellesley, Blenheim, Harrow, Battle and Whitley – were flaunted to them.

On October 20 Churchill met Milch, a stocky cigar-smoking James Cagney figure, face-to-face. 'Boom' Trenchard had invited the generals to dinner at his club.

'What d'you think of gliding as a sport?' ventured Churchill, adopting a bantering tone. 'D'you think I could pick it up, if I tried to at my age?'

Milch offered the services of the gliding schools in Germany.

'If you value gliding so highly,' said Churchill through the cigar smoke, 'could you not with profit dispense with powered flight entirely? That would eminently solve our difficulties!'

There were delighted chuckles from his party – Amery, Lord Camrose and Duff Cooper.

'I am convinced,' said Milch thickly, 'that our Führer would accept such a proposal.' He had one condition. 'Oh,' said Churchill, 'and that is?'

‘That the Royal Navy revert to those beautiful old sailing ships.’

‘One—nil to Milch,’ boomed Swinton.

Back in Berlin, Milch reported to Hitler for two hours on November 2. Hitler questioned him closely about Churchill, and emphasised again his desire for friendship with Britain.³⁴

IN PROTESTING about the Milch visit in his letter to Sir Maurice Hankey, Churchill had betrayed an over-detailed knowledge of the air defences. Hankey sent a blistering reply, regretting that serving officers in a disciplined force had felt able to communicate ‘backstairs information’ to a politician and critic rather than to their proper military superiors. He reminded Churchill that, even when years passed before such distasteful episodes were revealed, they could annihilate reputations. Had not Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson’s reputation been soiled long after his assassination when his wife published his diary, revealing his ‘trafficking with the opposition leaders’ before the Great War?³⁵

If this was a hint that Hankey knew of Churchill’s own ‘trafficking’ with Eden, Attlee, Sinclair and the Focus, he missed the allusion. Stung in his dignity, he made a haughty reply:

I certainly did not expect to receive from you a lengthy lecture when I went out of my way to give you, in strict confidence, information in the public interest. I thank you for sending me the papers back, and you may be sure I shall not trouble you again in such matters.³⁶

Unabashed by the magisterial rebuke, only two days later he invited Lord Derby to the next clandestine luncheon on November 2. ‘We have a small “focus,”’ he wrote, ‘which aims at gathering support from all parties, especially those of the “left,” for British rearmament, for the association of the two western democracies (France and Britain), and for the maintenance of peace through British strength.’

Again Eden, the foreign secretary, joined this little circle at the Savoy.

Churchill also continued to solicit secrets from his sources. In mid-November 1937 Anderson handed him another secret memorandum. The wing commander’s mental instability was showing – Mrs Pearman, who took his ‘phone calls, suggested that the R.A.F. officer ‘brooded too much’ owing to his lonely and introspective life. After one ‘phone call, she typed this note to Churchill: ‘He said *himself* that you were not to think he was not “balanced,” because he was so pessimistic.’ But it cannot have

been easy to regard him as stable. In January 1938 he sent more papers, writing to Mrs Pearman: 'Will you give the attached papers to Papa.'

While Churchill plodded away through November and December 1937 at *Marlborough*, Mr Chamberlain searched for an alternative to confrontation and rearmament. Göring had extended an invitation to Lord Halifax to visit Germany, and Chamberlain welcomed it. Seeing Eden, their star acquisition, being by-passed, the Focus tried to sabotage the trip but failed.

The Halifax visit was debated in Parliament on December 21. Churchill attacked Hitler's record on the Jews, and argued that Europe's security was better founded on 'the power of the French army and the power of the British fleet.' Halifax's success, however, encouraged the cabinet to review Britain's defence budget, 'changing the present assumption as to our potential enemies,' as Sir Thomas Inskip, minister for co-ordination of defence, delicately put it. 'Germany,' he pointed out, 'has guaranteed the inviolability and integrity of Belgian territory.'³⁷

An ineffable weariness was overcoming Churchill. At this crucial moment, he went off to spend January 1938 at Maxine Elliot's villa on the Riviera. On the way, he arranged private meetings in Paris with certain French politicians – among them Alexis Léger, Edouard Daladier, and Léon Blum. 'I am anxious to persuade him [Blum] to pay us a visit over here,' he notified the British embassy, 'and I would give him a luncheon at our "focus" of which I will tell you more when I come.' He was worn out. 'He came away on the 2nd,' Mrs Pearman wrote to the secretary of the Focus, 'not before he needed it, as he looked very tired.'³⁸

There was little sunshine, apart from a brief visit by Eden, and it rained incessantly. Work on *Marlborough* consumed every hour. He had bought a Discavox machine, which recorded his dictation on thin discs of gelatine, but its recording time was only a few minutes, and he abandoned it.

It was early February before he returned to Chartwell. Churchill was appalled to learn that, during his month's absence, Chamberlain had removed Vansittart, head of the anti-German F.O., and given him an empty post (Chief Diplomatic Adviser). In Berlin, Hitler had sacked his foreign minister, appointed Ribbentrop in his place, and used two sordid sex scandals both to replace his army commander and to take over the Wehrmacht himself. 'Now,' Churchill wrote to Maxine, 'the whole place is in the hands of violent men.'

Ribbentrop was in no doubt as to Britain's earnest (later wartime propaganda to the contrary notwithstanding). 'Today,' he had warned Hitler, writing in December 1937, 'the British governing class is ready

and willing to go all the way, i.e., to the point of war, to protect its vital material interests and its position as a world power, so long as there is the slightest chance of victory.'

In January 1938 he had underlined this: 'In my view, sooner or later Britain will always fight.'³⁹

Writing this, perhaps Ribbentrop had his altercations with Mr Churchill in mind.

Closely connected with the movie industry after Hungarian-born director Alexander Korda bankrolled his gambling debts, Churchill and his country home became a mecca for the world's film stars like Charlie Chaplin (here visiting Chartwell in 1931).



9: *The Grand Alliance*

HE MIGHT be out of office, but by early 1938 Churchill had his own foreign policy and had established his own direct links with foreign governments. While waiting for *the event*, he called upon foreign statesmen, sent out personal envoys like Sheila Grant Duff, Francis Deakin or General Spears (Tory M.P. for Carlisle) and encouraged the diplomatic corps to look upon Morpeth Mansions as a second Court of St. James.

That corps in January 1938 was an eccentric gallery.

Joachim von Ribbentrop had left, but re-appeared like a bad penny. The Austrian envoy was Baron Georg Franckenstein, a guilt-stricken diplomat of sixty who would shortly become a British subject and join the British secret service rather than risk returning home.¹ The Romanian minister Viorel Virgil Tilea would be stripped of his nationality three years later for his activities in London.

The Czechs were affably represented by Jan Masaryk, at fifty-two a heavily-built, well-dressed six-footer. Tainted with madness from his maternal ancestors, Masaryk spoke a rapid mid-Atlantic brogue larded with 'eloquent profanity,' as an American newspaperman wrote; he admitted to being the kind of man who liked to eat hamburgers with the mustard dribbling through his fingers.²

Stalin's man in London was Ivan Maisky, a shrewd, porky, Munich-educated Bolshevik of fifty-four. His slant eyes betrayed proud traces of a distant Mongolian ancestry. His job was not easy. Anglo-Soviet relations were at sub-cryogenic temperatures since the appeasement of the Nazis had begun. 'Your Neville is a dolt,' Maisky had told Winston; 'he thinks you can ride a tiger.' Churchill was saddling up a different tiger: in his memoirs he owned to 'friendly relations' with Maisky, adding that the Russian also 'saw a good deal' of Randolph.³ But Moscow archives show there was more to their meetings than that.

Europe was awash with secret embassy funds. Sir Charles Mendl had destabilised several French governments since his appointment as press attaché in Paris in 1926.⁴ The Italians were making lavish 'presents' to Mosley.⁵ The German embassy wielded substantial sterling funds, but their press attaché would bleat: 'Buying influence is all but impossible in Brit-

ain; neither press nor M.P.s are corrupt. The only way to influence them is by the lavish luncheon or dinner customary here' – to which he added the not unfamiliar grouch: 'Given London prices, this method comes costly enough.'⁶

The Czechs were most prolific, although relevant British investigatory files have been closed for seventy-five years.⁷ When Robert Boothby, once Churchill's private secretary and now a member of his Focus, was later obliged to resign ministerial office over irregularities involving Czech funds and a certain Mr Weininger, he advised the House, as an M.P. of sixteen years' standing, not to set impossible standards 'in view of what we all know does go on and has gone on for years.'⁸

The Czech president Dr Edouard Beneš had been buying foreigners since the Twenties, and not just H. Wickham Steed – ex-editor of *The Times* – and the Leepers. In his files the Nazis found receipts signed by some of the most famous names in British journalism and politics.* By 1938 Czech payments to Englishmen, both direct and indirect, were staggering. Spears alone was getting '£2,000 a year from [the] Czechs.'¹⁰

As the 1938 crisis climaxed Beneš increased the secret funds to his legations: emergency credits totalling two million crowns were rushed to Masaryk, and the same amount to Stefan Osusky in Paris. The first instalment went to the Midland bank account (£6,988 on May 26 – a significant week in Czech history – and £2,600 on June 10). The second instalment, of £7,182, would go directly to Masaryk's personal account at Barclay's on September 20. After Beneš fled, his successors sent investigators to London; Masaryk refused to co-operate, citing the 'unorthodox manner in which the funds had been applied.'¹¹

VACATIONING ON the Riviera in January 1938, Churchill had several times driven down to Cannes. He joined Anthony Eden moodily playing roulette at the casino. One evening they stacked their chips on No. 17 repeatedly, confounded the laws of probability, and left well rewarded. Neither forgot how No. 17 kept turning up to redeem their fortunes.¹²

During Eden's absence on the Riviera, Chamberlain took charge of foreign affairs. His principal advisers were Sir Horace Wilson and Sir Joseph Ball. Ball, director since 1929 of the Conservative Research Depart-

* Nazi radio in Munich reported early in 1939 that Beneš had kept such lists and that according to *Cyrano* – a Paris magazine incidentally being 'helped' by Mussolini – the Quai d'Orsay had requested Prague not to publish them. The British foreign office, pricking up its ears, asked their envoys in Prague and Paris to establish who had 'received Czech money during the [Munich] crisis.' The envoys stonewalled – it was a 'delicate matter.'⁹

ment and connected with M.I.5, was keeping Churchill and other dissidents under surveillance for Chamberlain. Wilson, former industrial adviser to the government, moved into the treasury a few steps from No. 10, becoming one of Churchill's most implacable enemies.

Through Ball, by-passing the obstructive foreign office completely, Chamberlain had made overtures to Italian ambassador Dino Grandi in October 1937; Mussolini dealt directly with the P.M.'s sister-in-law, Lady Chamberlain. These illicit contacts continued even after the foreign secretary returned in mid-January 1937. Eden's *amour propre*, already injured beyond repair, was further violated by an episode involving an approach from Roosevelt which Chamberlain fended off without even consulting him. A ridiculous quarrel began which continued for weeks without the cabinet learning of it.

Unfortunately, neither Ball nor Wilson left notes or diaries; in cabinet files is only one narrative by Wilson on the crisis that now followed, written three years later. It refers to Eden's 'vacillation' over whether or not to improve relations with Italy.

Chamberlain arranged to see Grandi with Eden on Friday the eighteenth to talk about recognising Italy's claim to Abyssinia. Late on the seventeenth, at a private meeting of M.P.s – many of them now in the Focus – Churchill urged that they back Eden to the hilt. 'We must call a halt,' he said, and roused vehement approval. The record of this stirring meeting was placed in Eden's hands, we do not know by whom, on the following morning. It stiffened his resolve.¹³

When they met Dino Grandi that Friday, he and Chamberlain were at loggerheads. They clawed at each other 'like two fighting cocks,' the chortling Italian telegraphed to Rome.¹⁴ On Saturday the cabinet learned of their differences. Unexpectedly for the taut, angry Eden and those in his corner, Chamberlain refused to climb down. Unexpectedly too, he did not refer the matter to the House but left it to the cabinet to decide which should resign, prime minister or Eden. Eden put up a highly-strung performance, and one senior cabinet member concluded that he was 'both physically and mentally ill.'¹⁵

Late on Sunday word was telephoned to Chartwell that Eden's resignation had been accepted.

Winston was shocked. From the ringside, he had followed the in-fighting with the same predatory relish as the run-in to the abdication. Now Eden had jumped right out of the ring and was flat on his face. Many times in later years Churchill chided him over the resignation, even when they were at Yalta. But he also asked himself if he had not egged Eden on.

He would spend ten years re-furnishing and re-decorating his memory for his memoirs.

I had heard something of [the emerging cabinet differences] but carefully abstained from any communication with Mr Eden. I hoped that he would not on any account resign without building up his case beforehand, and giving his many friends in Parliament a chance to draw out the issues.¹⁶

Beaverbrook was not taken in. 'I have been told differently,' he wrote.¹⁷

Churchill's memoirs also devoted twenty-five melodramatic lines to the sleepless night after Eden's resignation. ('I watched the daylight slowly creep in through the windows, and saw before me in mental gaze the vision of Death.') But what kept Winston awake was a profound relief to other men: more than one wise counsellor slept more soundly for the knowledge that Anthony Eden had put himself beyond the pale. 'Today,' wrote Hankey, the cabinet's veteran secretary, setting out his reaction to the news, 'I felt there just a possibility of peace'; while Inskip found he could sleep until eight A.M. instead of lying awake, bathed in anxiety.¹⁸

Indulging his wanderlust Eden trailed back to the Riviera. He would not bother the House with his presence until mid-May, but idled at Cap Ferrat, leafing through local newspapers and listening to Radio Vienna, until it became a blaring subsidiary of the Grossdeutscher Rundfunk.

THE FOCUS – now domiciled at No. 54 Fleet-street in London – made what capital it could out of his departure. Labour called a vote of censure, Churchill spoke, and over twenty Tory M.P.s, including all of those now embraced by the Focus, abstained. Among them were Harold Nicolson, Derrick Gunston, Ronald Cartland, Paul Emrys-Evans and Harold Macmillan, a left-wing Conservative who had been brought into the group by Waley-Cohen; one Focus man, Vyvyan Adams, even voted *against* the government.

The Focus confidentially circularised other M.P.s who had abstained. One was General Spears. The letter invited him 'at the personal request of Mr H. Wickham Steed' to 'a small meeting of our Focus to discuss questions of policy' on March 1. He was assured that he would be present in his private capacity and that the 'Defence of Freedom and Peace' (as the Focus overtly styled itself) was not a new and rival political party, just 'a Focus' of influential people meeting periodically for 'discussions across the gulf of politics.'¹⁹

At the Savoy on the appointed day Spears found his friend Churchill presiding over the expensive luncheon. After the platters had been cleared and brandy and cigars passed round, Winston rose and spoke scathingly of his party leader's policies. He talked of Britain nosing from door to door mooing dolefully like a cow that had lost its calf, now in Berlin, now in Rome – 'When all the time the tiger and the alligator wait for its undoing.'²⁰

The campaign lost him some benefactors. He had written flatteringly of Hitler in September 1937, and of Mussolini as recently as October. Beaverbrook still bristled, and printed a lead article accusing Churchill of 'lending himself to the most violent, foolish and dangerous campaign to drive this country into war since he drove us into it himself against Russia in 1919.'²¹

DURING THESE months Churchill had developed his strategic theory of a Grand Alliance – a formal alliance between Britain and France, to replace the present loose, unstipulated arrangements; to this new alliance should be added the Soviet Union and the smaller countries of central Europe.

Chamberlain was pragmatic. He told Lord Halifax, the languid, easy-going successor to Anthony Eden, that in a crisis the Czechs would appeal not to 'collective security' but to France and Britain, neither of whom was ready for war. 'Therefore,' argued Chamberlain, 'this problem must be settled practicably.' He repeated these words to the new American ambassador later that day, March 4.²²

The ambassador was Joseph P. Kennedy, one of the more controversial appointments made to the Court of St. James. To Dorothy Schiff, publisher of the *New York Post*, Roosevelt would guffaw that sending a millionaire Boston Irishman to England was 'the greatest joke in the world.' But he had other reasons than purely jocular. Kennedy had helped to finance his campaigns; but when he nonetheless gave the U.S. Treasury to Henry Morgenthau Jr., Kennedy had become a virulent critic. 'Kennedy,' F.D.R. remarked to Morgenthau, 'is too dangerous to have around here.'²³ That is why he had shipped him abroad.

Joseph Kennedy lunched with Winston and Randolph at Morpeth Mansions on Wednesday March 9, 1938. He was a man with the kind of tall, loose-limbed charm that unlimited wealth does bring. He was pushing fifty, a Harvard graduate who had grown wealthy by sleazy stock dealings; he had made millions from the merger of Pathé and R.K.O., many said by defrauding stockholders.

Kennedy waved aside the proffered glass and smiled a toothy grin. He didn't drink, smoke or gamble, so any real intimacy with Churchill

seemed unlikely. Powerful men did not intimidate him, he confessed later: peering at them through eyeglasses in circular rims set close together, he slyly visualised them in red frilly underwear and lost all awe of them. He had sparse sandy hair like Churchill's, but there the similarity ended. 'He has an athlete's figure,' *Liberty* wrote a few weeks later, 'a clean-cut head, clear straight-shooting eyes, a flashingly infectious smile and faultless taste in dress.'²⁴

Churchill told the new ambassador of the deal that Ribbentrop was offering: Germany undertook not to proceed westward, but wanted her colonies back; and Britain must turn a blind eye on what Hitler undertook to the east. It was pure 'fallacy,' said Churchill, to delay the showdown until Britain had rearmed. He wanted it now, on whatever pretext. Hitler's army would soon be larger than the French, and his airforce was gaining on the R.A.F. with every month.²⁵

Kennedy had both family – four sons – and fortune, and didn't propose to lose either in somebody else's showdown, as he put it later. He told Washington that he had found in Britain's prime minister 'a strong character and realistic mind,' but as for Mr Chamberlain's most powerful opponent, it may well be that as Kennedy left Morpeth Mansions he found himself visualising the paunchy, cigar-smoking Englishman in frilly red underwear.

'EVENTS!' CHURCHILL had once proclaimed: they would be his ally.

Later that same Wednesday he learned that – in apparent violation of an agreement that had been extracted from him at Berchtesgaden by Hitler – the Austrian chancellor Dr Kurt Schuschnigg had announced a snap plebiscite for Sunday March 13.

Perhaps the Focus had urged this risky idea on Vienna. (The Anti-Nazi Council, its *alter ego*, maintained offices in Vienna as well as in London and Prague.) Writing in the *Evening Standard* as early as March 4, Churchill had certainly touched upon a plebiscite, expressing confidence that, if they could vote fairly and without fear, two-thirds of all Austrians would support their country's independence.

In the upshot, there was little to choose between Schuschnigg and Hitler when it came to rigging referenda: only *Yes* ballot forms were printed in anticipation of that Sunday; the text made it treasonable to vote *No*; voters had to insert their addresses; and the voting age was raised to twenty-four, above the average age of Austrian Nazis.²⁶

The ballot never took place. Hitler's tanks clattered into Austria early on Saturday March 12. The sound was music to Churchill's ears: who would deny the truth of his assertions now?

Ten years later he wrote a characteristic memoir. As chance would have it, he claimed, he was that very day attending Chamberlain's farewell luncheon for Ambassador von Ribbentrop at No. 10 Downing-street – telegrams interrupted their repast – Hitler was invading Austria – his mechanised forces were advancing upon Vienna. He clearly recalled how the villainous von Ribbentrop had deliberately 'tarried for nearly half an hour,' engaging Chamberlain 'in voluble conversation' to keep him away from work and telephone, ignoring every hint to leave.

At length Mr Chamberlain said to the ambassador, 'I am sorry I have to go now to attend to urgent business,' and without more ado he left the room. . . The Ribbentrops lingered on, so that most of us made our excuses and our way home. Eventually I suppose they left.

'This,' his ungenerous narrative would conclude, 'was the last time I saw Herr von Ribbentrop before he was hanged.'²⁷

As so often, the truth was different. Ribbentrop's records, which outlived him, show that Hitler treated him no better than Chamberlain treated Eden; he was completely in the dark.²⁸ Moreover, the farewell luncheon with Churchill was on Friday March 11, the day *prior to* the invasion; and the Churchills left *before* the day's telegrams, ominous enough in themselves, arrived.²⁹

True, a restlessness did pervade the luncheon company toward the end, but it was the impatience of Neville Chamberlain as he waited for Winston and Clementine to leave: he had an urgent personal message for Hitler to discuss with Ribbentrop – alone.

Eventually Winston gathered up his hat. 'I hope,' he lisped to the Ribbentrops, 'England and Germany will preserve their friendship.'

'Be careful you don't spoil it,' Frau von Ribbentrop rejoined.

The telegrams were from Vienna: the Nazis were insisting that the plebiscite be postponed; Schuschnigg had cancelled it; on instructions from Berlin Dr Arthur Seyss-Inquart, the Nazi lawyer appointed minister of the interior as a result of the Berchtesgaden talks, had issued an ultimatum to appoint him chancellor instead. Schuschnigg resigned.

The finality of it all took Churchill's group by surprise. That same Friday, Bracken was writing to Bernard Baruch: 'No one here knows what may happen in Austria on Sunday. There is a rumour – probably a baseless one – that Hitler may march his troops into Austria on the pretext of "keeping order."' Significantly, Churchill's friend hoped that this would lead to 'a showdown with the German bullies.'³⁰

On Saturday morning Hitler's troops crossed into Austria at the new chancellor's bidding. 'There can be no doubt,' Churchill grumbled in a letter to Unity Mitford, repeating his *Evening Standard* prediction, 'that a fair plebiscite would have shown that a large majority of the people of Austria loathe the idea of coming under Nazi rule.'³¹ He hurried back to London on Monday March 14, past bands and populace trudging down Park-lane chanting 'Chamberlain Must Go!'

Europe [he told the House that day] is confronted with a programme of aggression, nicely calculated and timed, unfolding stage by stage, and there is only one choice open, not only to us: . . . Either to submit like Austria, or else to take effective measures while time remains.

He now stated his call for a solemn treaty of mutual defence organised by Britain and France, 'what you may call a Grand Alliance.'

Later that afternoon he and Chamberlain discussed the idea with Halifax and Cadogan.

The P.M. was scornful: 'You have only to look at the map,' he wrote his sister a few days later, 'to see that nothing that France or we could do could possibly save Czechoslovakia.' The frontier facing Austria was virtually unfortified. He had abandoned any idea of guaranteeing Czechoslovakia.³²

Chamberlain's attitude was guided by realism, not pessimism. With Churchill's warning of the enemy 'knock-out blow' against London firmly in their minds, his chiefs of staff agreed with him. Britain, they advised the cabinet, was totally unprepared for the world war that must result. She could send only two poorly-equipped divisions to the Continent. Of twenty-seven fighter squadrons, twenty were obsolete; there were no medium or heavy anti-aircraft guns, and no air-raid shelters. If Italy and Japan joined in, the empire would be wide open to attack.³³ The cabinet decided to press Dr Beneš to come to terms with his German minority.

Would France go along with appeasement? Chamberlain, whose crony Joseph Ball was privately monitoring certain telephone lines, suspected that Léon Blum's French government was 'in closish touch with our Opposition.' 'There are all sorts of intrigues afoot,' wrote Cadogan in his diary, mentioning Winston's name; he added: 'God help us all.'³⁴

Churchill made plans to fly immediately to Paris, but for various reasons he postponed the trip by a week.³⁵

ONE OF those reasons was the personal crisis that now towered over Churchill. He was living from hand to mouth in the shadow of a sheer granite overhang of revenue demands. Late in 1937 he had begun pirating his own works, selling a ten-part version of *My Life* to the *Sunday Chronicle*.³⁶ His foreign markets were shrinking. As Austrian Nazis hounded down their opponents and oppressors, the Vienna newspapers stopped printing his articles syndicated by Emery Reves.

In the second week of March 1938 a slump wiped out Churchill's American stockholdings. Becoming uneasy about them while still at Cannes, he had inquired of Baruch whether to sell. Baruch had telegraphed back: 'See it through. Bernie.'³⁷ The advice was wrong: the stocks collapsed; suddenly his share account with London stockbrokers Vickers, da Costa & Co was £18,000 in the red, and they wanted payment.

Stricken by this cruel misfortune, he told Bracken on the eighteenth that he was quitting politics for good. He wanted time to complete his *History*; completion by the due date – the end of 1939 – would enrich him by £15,000. 'But how,' observed Bracken, this Man Friday, in a memo, 'is he to do this while events run at this pitch, still less if he should be required to devote his whole energies to public work?'

Bracken passed word of Churchill's insolvency around City financiers. 'I cannot tell you,' Winston wrote to him, 'what a relief it would be if I could put it out of my mind; and take the large decisions which perhaps may be required of me without this distraction and anxiety.'

HE MADE a final throw, although it was a paradox of which he was himself aware. Having for years castigated the government for Britain's military inferiority he now began demanding, as he had urged on Kennedy three days before Hitler invaded Austria, a preventive war. His brassy reasoning was that now Germany and her opponents were equally matched. Later the gap would widen.

Vestiges of this ambivalence still showed when he met mutinous M.P.s at Pratt's Club on March 16. He talked of their 'blind and obstinate' leaders, and threatened to refuse the Whip and take fifty Tory M.P.s with him unless Britain staged a showdown: 'We stand to lose everything by failing to take some strong action,' he growled on this occasion. But then he reverted to the 'knock-out blow' theory he had propagated so often before. 'If we take strong action,' he prophesied, 'London will be a shambles in half an hour.'³⁸

Two days later his *Evening Standard* article was less equivocal in justifying an early showdown:

Many high authorities believe that the German army is not yet in a condition to undertake a major aggressive land war. Neither her stores of raw materials nor the state of her officer-cadres are sufficiently complete to encourage during the present year a hasty challenge to a group of well-armed States, with Great Britain and France at the core.

Churchill had high hopes of the French army. Those who knew her statesmen and generals, he would write a month later, realised her immense latent strength better than the casual observer: 'They see the French army always on the watch. Part of it mans the ramparts round the country. The rest constitutes,' he maintained, 'the most perfectly trained and faithful mobile force in Europe.'³⁹

The P.M. and foreign secretary did not share his awe of either French or Russian might. Halifax called Mr Churchill's plan unrealistic. Under it, the French army, merely by manning the Maginot Line, was to detain large German forces while Czechoslovakia engaged the rest. It did not explain how the French defenders could detain forces if the enemy declined to address them – as happened a year later. Churchill's plan for a British-French-Russian alliance, warned the foreign secretary, would look as though Britain was 'plotting to encircle Germany.'

AWARE THAT Chamberlain would make a major foreign policy statement to the House on the morrow, Churchill invited the Soviet ambassador to breakfast at Morpeth Mansions that morning, March 23. Gnome-like, Ivan Maisky's feet seemed not to reach the floor as he sat at the table.⁴⁰

Churchill began by expressing concern about Stalin's purge of the Red Army; he needed to know the facts for the next day's debate. 'Twenty years ago,' he told Maisky, anxious to assuage the Russian's natural suspicions about him, 'I fought with all my strength against communism. I considered communism with its doctrine of world revolution the greatest threat to the British empire. Now,' he continued, 'communism does not pose such a threat to the empire. On the contrary, now the greatest threat to the British empire is Nazism, with its doctrine of world domination by Berlin.'

'As I've several times told you in the past,' he explained, 'I hate Nazi Germany and am campaigning hard for the formation of a "Grand Alliance" within the framework of the League of Nations for the struggle against Germany.' While this alliance ought to embrace all 'peace-loving nations,' the main role would devolve upon Britain, France and Russia. 'A strong Russia is absolutely essential,' he continued, 'but people keep tell-

ing me that as a result of recent events Russia is finished as a serious factor in international politics. Pray set aside my doubts.'

Maisky explained the rationale behind Stalin's ruthlessness. (A decade later he would barely escape the same dictator's anti-Jewish purge.) Churchill listened keenly, puffing at a cigar, occasionally interrupting with intelligent questions or observations. 'When I had finished,' Maisky reported to Moscow, Churchill exclaimed,

'Well, thank God you've set my mind at rest! I loathe Trotsky, and I've been following his activities for a long time. I considered him the evil genius of Russia. I am all for Stalin's politics. He is creating a powerful Russia, and that's what we need – more than anything.'

Churchill outlined his own plan. Ought not the Soviet army demonstrate that rumours of its demise were an exaggeration? Some kind of action was called for. Maisky asked what he had in mind and Churchill suggested a solemn declaration that Russia would give significant aid to Czechoslovakia if invaded. 'This need only be, of course,' he added, 'on condition France fulfils her obligations. But of that I have no doubt.'

Maisky replied dubiously that it was common knowledge that the Soviet Union honoured its obligations.

'I am aware of that,' interjected Churchill. 'Stalin is a solid and reliable fellow. He keeps his word. All the same, there are times when it is important to emphasise even something that is common knowledge. Now, for instance.'

MAISKY CHANGED the subject: how were things in England?

Churchill replied that a 'ministerial crisis' had threatened Chamberlain a few days before, and he had agreed to modify his policies. The P.M. had given him certain undertakings, and he had accordingly agreed to delay his visit to Paris. He promised Maisky that he was going to trip up Chamberlain wherever he could in the next day's debate: an early cabinet reshuffle would soon see Churchill and perhaps Eden as well back in office, perhaps in a coalition with the Opposition. Major legislation – on conscription, trades-union reform and the abolition of restrictive practises to step up arms production – would need Opposition support, and they loathed Chamberlain.

He was confident that Hitler was not planning an early strike against Czechoslovakia. He might try meanwhile a backdoor annexation of Hungary, then go on to Romania, isolating Czechoslovakia from the outside

world; she could then be destabilised from within using the Sudeten German minority and economic pressure. 'She will lose her nerve,' he predicted, 'and drop into Hitler's hands like ripe fruit.'

Hitler is aiming at creating a 'Central European Bloc' from Germany to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. In four or five years he'll be able to realise his dream if he isn't stopped in time.

This, reasoned Churchill, was why they had a common interest in fighting Hitler. 'If,' he concluded, 'the fascist threat to the empire were to disappear and re-emerge again in communism, then – let me be completely frank with you – I would resume the fight against you. But I don't foresee such a situation arising in the immediate future. Certainly not before I die.' Maisky calculated: the Englishman at the far end of the breakfast table was sixty-three.

'For the time being,' said Churchill, 'you and we must travel the same path.'



In the House on March 24, 1938 Chamberlain agreed to step up rearmament. But Britain, he defined, would use force only to defend the empire's immediate interests, which included France, Belgium and certain other countries with which she had treaty obligations.

This did not satisfy Churchill. He demanded a formal military alliance with France, and a ministry of supply to ensure the orderly manufacture of war materials. He blamed the slowness of rearmament on the cabinet system of government.

'Twenty-two gentlemen of blameless party character,' he declaimed, 'sitting round an overcrowded table, each having a voice – is that a system which can reach decisions from week to week and cope with the problems descending upon us?'

The system had broken down hopelessly in the last war – they needed a new system for this one: because this was not peace in which they were living now. 'Is it not war without cannon firing? Is it not war of a decisive character, where victories are gained and territories conquered, and where ascendancy and dominance are established over large populations with extraordinary rapidity?'

He decided to visit France that weekend. As Ivan Maisky had reported, Churchill's 'politics and intrigues are without a doubt unique and of the highest order.'⁴¹

THAT DAY Lord Beaverbrook delivered a right hook to this apostle of confrontation. The *Evening Standard* ended his lucrative contract, with the barest minimum of notice. The newspaper proprietor who had boasted so often of his liberalism toward his writers would tolerate no longer that Winston both ran with the hare and hunted with the hounds. It was an abrupt end to the Beaverbrook–Churchill axis.

It should have come as no surprise. The Canadian newspaperman was by 1938 everything that Winston wasn't: anti-League, a closet admirer of Hitler, and antiwar. Still an isolationist, in recent weeks he had become a believer in rearmament, but only for its deterrent value. When a *News Chronicle* leader writer – now covertly in the Focus – badgered him to campaign for Winston's return to office, Beaverbrook sent this withering reply: 'Unhappily he would bring pressure upon the government forthwith to give a guarantee to Czechoslovakia that we will fight in defence of that artificial nation, brought into existence by Messrs [Lloyd] George, Clemenceau, and [Woodrow] Wilson.' He wanted the soldiers to stay at home, guard Britain, her empire and its outposts.⁴²

Beaverbrook was aware of the rumours as to who was bankrolling the Bring Back Winston campaign. Upon his recent return from Miami, he had used infelicitous words about the people sabotaging rapprochement. 'There are twenty thousand German Jews in England,' he wrote, 'in the professions, pursuing research, in chemical operations, etcetera. These all work against such an accommodation.'*

'The Jews have got a big position in the press here,' this press lord rasped in another exasperated, ill-considered letter. 'One third of the circulation of the *Daily Telegraph* is Jewish. The *Daily Mirror* may be owned by Jews, the *Daily Herald* is owned by Jews, and the *News Chronicle* should really be the *Jews Chronicle*. . . I am not sure about the *Mail*.' For years, he continued, he had prophesied there would be no war. 'But at last I am shaken. The Jews may drive us into war. I do not mean with any conscious purpose of doing so. They do not mean to do it. But unconsciously . . . their political influence is moving us in that direction.'⁴⁴

The ending of the *Standard* contract might have been the *coup de grâce* for Churchill. We can imagine with what bitterness he now asked *The Times* to advertise his beloved Chartwell for sale. The advert would appear on the second day of April, inviting offers of £20,000 (about £1 million in today's values).

A few days before that date, on March 28, 1938, he was saved.

* For what it is worth, the Aga Khan would assure a diplomat in 1940 that Churchill had 'for years' been in the pay of both the Jews and Lord Beaverbrook.⁴³

Bracken's South African friend Sir Henry Strakosch, the gold mining millionaire and chairman of Union Corporation Ltd., agreed to pay off Churchill's debts.⁴⁵ Strakosch was a Jew born in Moravia, Czechoslovakia. Chartwell was withdrawn from the market, and Churchill campaigned on.

10: 'Let's Wait and See,' Said Maisky

THE PLEBISCITE held under Nazi auspices did not bring the result Churchill had predicted. Forty-nine million Austrians and Germans were jointly asked, 'Do you accept Adolf Hitler as our Führer, and do you thus accept the reunification of Austria with the German Reich as effected on March 13, 1938?' Over ninety-nine per cent voted 'Yes.'*

It jolted the British foreign office. 'I can't help thinking,' observed the new permanent head, 'we were very badly informed about feeling in that country.' Britain, he felt, would have been very wrong to prevent the *Anschluss* against the wishes of 'to put it mildly' such a majority; she had only vetoed the *Anschluss*, he now recognised, 'to spite Germany.'²

Czechoslovakia was obviously next. This artificial implant in postwar Central Europe had been vigorously rejected by her neighbours: her only friends were in Moscow, Paris and London. Her population consisted of Czechs and Slovaks, but of Poles, Hungarians, and Ruthenes too – and of three million Germans in the Sudeten region.

As part of his eastward strategy, Hitler planned to get those Germans back. On March 19, 1938 his propaganda minister circularised Nazi editors to soft-pedal the term *grossdeutsch* – greater German: it might be taken to imply that Germany's appetite was 'satisfied' with Austria. Nine days later we find Hitler and Ribbentrop conniving with the Sudeten German leader Konrad Henlein, and the high command ordering the reinforcement of Austrian road bridges on the way to the Czech frontier. On April 5 the general staff told General Wilhelm Leeb that he would command the Seventh Army, operating from Austria into Czechoslovakia.†

CHURCHILL TINKERED at his Grand Alliance. He flew to Paris on March 25, arousing the curiosity of London diplomats. What was he up to now? Was he working for or against Chamberlain?³ He spread rumours that he

* Voting was on April 10, 1938. The ballot was secret, but in some districts concealed markings were used to pinpoint spoiled ballots and 'No' votes for future reference.¹

† *The War Path*, pages 90–91.

was on a semi-official mission – to get France’s statesmen to agree on a government of national concentration. Whitehall assured Italian ambassador Dino Grandi that these press stories were untrue: Mr Churchill had gone of his own volition. Reporting to Rome, Grandi sized him up as ‘the most authoritative representative’ of a group of ‘ambitious, malcontent and power-hungry’ opponents of Chamberlain.

True, Churchill was ambitious, but he was no fool. He arranged the Paris meetings through the embassy, and slept under its roof. When he asked to meet known communists, however, the ambassador drew the line.

It was a mad gourmet weekend. Winston dined tête-à-tête with Edouard Herriot, president of the Chamber; he lunched with Paul Reynaud and supped again with foreign secretary Joseph Paul-Boncour and prime minister Léon Blum. ‘Why do you French,’ he asked each one of them in turn, ‘bother to vote large sums of money to increase your navy?’ British naval superiority over the German and Italian navies was absolute and could cover all France’s Mediterranean interests. ‘You,’ he urged, ‘should concentrate on your airforce.’ The French had only 250 obsolete fighters and 320 bombers.

Like a streetcleaner after a cavalry parade, Sir Eric Phipps followed Churchill round the Paris salons, bucket and shovel in hand, cleaning up. He cautioned the French politicians to take what Winston said with a grain of salt: he spoke for only a tiny minority; he was ‘not the arbiter of our destinies.’⁴ After Blum’s tottering government was shortly replaced by one under Edouard Daladier, the ambassador suggested that Halifax now visit Paris with Chamberlain to ‘put things into somewhat better proportion than they have been left by Winston.’

To France’s statesmen Churchill was a phenomenon. He spoke an eccentric – some said execrable – French. Declaring to Blum: ‘We must make good,’ he translated it literally by, ‘*Nous devons faire bonne!*’ This might be translated loosely as ‘We’ve got to do the house-maid.’⁵ It was an emotional evening. Léon Blum was in distress over his wife’s death, and Phipps saw both men’s eyes filled with tears.⁶

Churchill spent some hours with Louis Marin, Jules Sauerwein of *Le Soir*, colonial minister Georges Mandel and Camille Chautemps – Blum’s immediate predecessor – advocating staff talks and grand alliance. The chief of general staff Maurice Gamelin had doubts about that alliance. ‘The Red Army,’ he objected, ‘has soldiers, officers, arms, planes, tanks – all of these, but does it have *morale?*’⁷

Churchill particularly liked what he saw of Alexis Léger, the dapper, fifty-year-old secretary-general of the French foreign office. Léger was the

Vansittart of the Quai d'Orsay – obsessively anti-German and at the forefront of the intrigues against Daladier.⁸ On Phipps's advice he was not included in Daladier's visit to London in April, and was eventually dismissed: No. 10 awarded him the G.B.E. and a K.C.V.O., and Mr Churchill would in 1940 urge even higher honours.*

Churchill returned to London from Paris on March 29.

Perhaps unwilling to be seen in too-frequent communication with the Soviets, he sent his son to report to Ivan Maisky on the trip. Young Randolph told the ambassador that they had found support there for the Grand Alliance, but that feelings toward Moscow were cool. Winston had extolled the French army, and wanted Maisky to know that France would honour her commitments to Czechoslovakia.

Randolph Churchill also notified me [Maisky told Moscow] that very influential cabinet members are working on Chamberlain about the need to bring his father into the government immediately.

Winston's plan was, confided his son, to make Lord Swinton the scapegoat for the poor condition of the R.A.F. and to replace him as secretary for air.

'I have heard so often before,' reflected Maisky in his secret telegram to Moscow, 'about Churchill's imminent re-admission into the cabinet that I am inclined to view such information somewhat sceptically.'

The root of the matter lies in Churchill himself – powerful and headstrong at a time when other cabinet members are distinguished only by colourless mediocrity. . . Churchill would tower head and shoulders over the lot of them, especially in a crisis.

Still, some Conservatives might feel it expedient to have this voice muted inside the cabinet, rather than outside.

'Let's wait and see,' he said.¹⁰

CHURCHILL HAD begun clumsy efforts to school Randolph in the wider virtues as he grew older. He was harnessing him at that moment to extracting and editing his major speeches for *Arms and the Covenant*. But

* 'As M Léger's services have been dispensed with by his Gov't,' minuted Sir Alexander Cadogan, 'I fear it would not be a good moment at which to confer on him a signal honour.'⁹ Léger thereupon emigrated to Washington and joined the Library of Congress as a consultant.

Randolph had a drinking problem and was difficult to handle. A typical scene blazed up that spring of 1938 when Randolph taunted his father over what he – probably correctly – perceived as naïve attempts to curry favour, and over one dinner he tactlessly reminded his father of one such gift sent to War Minister Leslie Hore-Belisha in February.

Winston found this jibe ‘singularly unkind,’ and, as he wrote curtly to his son, ‘offensive, & untrue.’ He refused to speak to Randolph. His son wrote a contrite apology, which attracted a further paternal slap: ‘I was about to write to you,’ wrote Winston haughtily, ‘to ask you to excuse me from coming to luncheon with you on Thursday, as I really cannot run the risk of such insults being offered to me, & do not feel I want to see you at the present time.’¹¹

In a reply of almost feline jealousy, Randolph retorted that he did not see why his father should not show him the same friendship and respect that he showed to ‘that amiable flibbertigibbet,’ Brendan Bracken. This extraordinary mutual flagellation of frustrated father and only son continued in letters for several days, illustrating vividly the flaring tensions consuming them both as they saw a famous career seemingly draw fruitlessly to a close without the Event it needed.

A FEW days after the confidential briefing of Maisky, Winston spoke to a lady who had the ear of Prague about his hopes of persuading Russia to help against Germany.¹²

Inevitably, it meant compromising on some of his beliefs. A week before seeing Maisky he had written nobly in the *Evening Standard* of the right of the Sudeten Germans to expect ‘good treatment and equal citizenship’ from Prague. Since then, the Moravian born Strakosch had paid off his £18,000 debts; and Churchill no longer had to humour Beaverbrook. By May 7, in a letter to his stockbroker, he would be calling the Sudeten Germans ‘the best treated minority in Europe.’

Significantly, he also evacuated his shell-cratered position on the Spanish Civil War. It had taken sustained bombardment after he published praise of General Franco on August 10 and 21, 1936, even more after the articles of January 8 and April 2, 1937. On April 14 of that year he had defiantly told the House: ‘I will not pretend that if I had to choose between communism and Nazism I would choose communism.’

Since then he had shifted his weight to his left foot. ‘Until recently,’ he admitted in conversation on November 1, ‘I was for Franco for this reason: victory for the Reds in Spain would put tyrants and extremists into power and their inevitable atrocities would estrange British public opinion.’ The Italian ambassador, to whom a mutual friend quoted these re-

marks, reported him as adding: 'If the British find Bolshevism right on their doorstep they'll react against it.' Then no British government could establish close links with a Radical Socialist France against Hitler. Contemplating the further danger of Italian bases in a fascist Spain, Churchill now expressed doubts that it would be 'expedient to allow Franco to win.'¹³

After seeing Maisky he developed this theme in public:

A thoroughly Nazified Spain [he wrote on April 5, 1938] retaining its German nucleus would be a cause of profound anxiety both to France and Britain.

The more he wooed the Kremlin, the more pronounced became his hostility. 'Nothing,' he would scoff two days before the end of 1938, 'has strengthened the prime minister's hold upon well-to-do society more remarkably than the belief that he is friendly to General Franco and the nationalist cause in Spain.' He added, 'It would seem that today the British empire would run far less risk from the victory of the Spanish [Republican] government than from that of General Franco.'

With Franco's victory in April 1939, the transformation was complete: on the twentieth of that month Churchill would claim that Franco was preparing to attack British Gibraltar. Reports, he further claimed, were streaming in of 'concentrations of troops and preparations of aerodromes behind the Pyrenees, and of submarine bases on the north coast of Spain.'

To those who had followed his career since 1935 it rang familiar. His four-seasons attitude to Franco was, albeit on a larger canvas, a copy of one cameo in October 1937 that he had probably forgotten: in one Friday's *Evening Standard* he had headlined an article: 'War is Not Imminent.' In the *Sunday Chronicle* two days later he uttered a cry of alarm about the peril of war descending at that very moment upon Europe.¹⁴

AMONG THOSE Tory M.P.s who had joined the Focus was Sir Louis Spears. Born Spiers in 1886, this military gentleman had been British liaison officer to the French high command, and had anglicised his name in 1918. Retiring as a brigadier-general, he had married a lady novelist from Chicago; her brother lost every penny of the Spears fortune when Wall-street crashed, but since then Spears had gone into business and was now earning £15,000 per annum.¹⁵

Like many in the Churchill group, he was financially in the thrall of the Czechs. The Czech president Dr Edouard Beneš, a friend for twenty

years, had invited the M.P. onto the board of the steelworks at Vitkovice, sited in Moravia within tempting distance of both Poland and Germany. This gave Spears a hefty interest in Czechoslovakia indeed, quite apart from other 'considerations' and in 1938 he shuttled between Prague, London and Paris in a way that Churchill could not politically afford.¹⁶*

Two days after Hitler's troops entered Austria Beneš told Spears his tactics: he had his 1924 treaty with France, about a million Czechs had been trained, and he was going to 'play for time' to complete his defences. On the previous day, he added, the Russians had promised him 'an absolute minimum' of one thousand planes; his airfields were ready to receive them.¹⁷

That was in mid-March 1938. Early in April, Churchill directed his good-looking young researcher Francis Deakin, who was also about to visit Prague, to ask Beneš what 'we can do to help.'¹⁸

Despite these clattering distractions, Winston had to keep writing. The *History* overwhelmed his hours. On the sixth, The *Daily Telegraph* nervously agreed to a six-month trial of his articles. Encouraging the newspaper's proprietor, Lord Camrose, he mentioned the Reves syndicate as evidence of worldwide interest in his articles – 'Though as the Nazi power advances, as in Vienna,' he admitted ruefully, 'planks are pulled out of it.'

His 'interface' with the political power centres was still the Focus. Not surprisingly, the archival material about the links between Churchill and the Focus under its various aliases, and about its fringe activities, is sparse – but the circumstantial evidence is strong. He was its powerhouse. He hosted its luncheons; he was its sole protégé. It shared members, finance, and operational addresses with those who now ventured into less passive fields. And this it now did, after Austria: on April 13 Wickham Steed circuitously explained to Spears that he was now 'getting our "focus" into action' in support of a positive policy.

The first such operation would be an orthodox mass meeting funded by the Focus at Manchester, calling itself here 'Peace and Freedom within the League.' When first approached for this away fixture by the Focus on April 2, Churchill showed reluctance. Sir Henry Strakosch had paid off his debts five days before; perhaps he felt he could dispense with the Focus?

* The Wittkowitz Bergbau- und Eisenhütten-Gewerkschaft manufactured armourplate, partly for British navy contracts. The Austrian Rothschilds held a 53 per cent controlling share. In 1938 the well-informed Rothschilds transferred the company to the Alliance Assurance Company, a London Rothschild firm. Blackmailing the family to sell off their controlling interest to Germany, the Nazis imprisoned Louis Rothschild in Vienna. Even after they physically seized Vitkovice in March 1939, the haggling went on until the bargain was struck for £3.5 million.¹⁹

But he himself had once said that he who rides a tiger finds it difficult to dismount. The Focus called a special luncheon in strict privacy at the Savoy four days later: 'Winston wobbled a good deal,' Wickham Steed described afterward to Spears, 'but has now agreed to kick off at Manchester on May 9, with [Lord] Derby in the Chair.'²⁰

He was slithering to the left. After this luncheon the *New Statesman's* editor put out secret feelers to influential Liberal and Labour politicians: would they join a putative Churchill coalition with Eden as foreign secretary, if their minority parties were strongly represented in his cabinet? It was their first sniff of power for some time. Attlee agreed in principle, but retired into his shell soon after the editor sounded him. Greenwood and Morrison showed more interest, and Bevin was also rumoured to be willing, if offered the ministry of labour. These remarkable soundings, described by Kingsley Martin to Hugh Dalton a few days later, were an echo of things to come.²¹

Ten days later Churchill put out cautious feelers to Eden, ex-foreign secretary, still sulking on the Riviera; his letter was critical of the P.M.'s new agreement with Italy. Eden, still reluctant to gang up openly with Churchill, replied in terms of polite endorsement.

Using Waley-Cohen funds, the Focus now set up a publishing company and this brought *Headway*, the official monthly of the League of Nations Union, under its control.²² It had a circulation of sixty thousand, but to some it seemed a further leftward lurch. 'The policy of the new *Headway*,' wrote co-financier Eugen Spier, disagreeing with the purchase, 'would be to turn out the Conservative government.'

At Waley-Cohen's request Brendan Bracken released German-born Werner Knop, who had been foreign news editor of his *Financial News and Banker* since 1935. The Focus set him up in an office in the fountain yard of one of the ancient Inns of Court near Fleet-street. Knop's 'front,' Union Time Ltd, disguised as a press agency, was funded 'by a group of British businessmen and newspaper editors.'²³ It agitated for an anti-German foreign policy; it financed the pamphleteering into Nazi Germany by Commander Stephen King-Hall; and, Knop claimed, it funded at least one attempt on Hitler's life.²⁴

There were other, lesser issues that April to perplex Churchill, of course, like the treaty abandoning British sovereignty over naval bases in southern Ireland. 'You are giving away,' protested Churchill, 'the sentinels of the western approaches.'

But his main target remained Hitler. 'The destruction of this thug,' he told Sheila Grant Duff, one of his clandestine contacts to Prague, 'would justify even great sacrifice by the rest of the world.' He reassured her that

neither he nor Eden had any intention of joining Chamberlain's 'government of cowards.'

Unfortunately the British showed little enthusiasm for war with Germany, as he had admitted to a friend some months before. That would involve conscription and utmost exertions; while to defeat Italy would involve only the 'gentlemen of our gallant fleet.'²⁵

In Czechoslovakia he espied the germs of a preventive war in which by one concerted effort Britain, France and Russia could dispose of Hitler before he became too strong. He said so quite frankly on April 8 and 11 to Miss Grant Duff, who was now the *Manchester Guardian* and *Spectator* correspondent in Prague. He would wager fifty-to-one, he said, that Hitler would not attack yet. 'He expressly said,' wrote a Prague official, quoting the report she sent him, 'that he would prefer Czechoslovakia to provoke war now.'

If they waited a year, the country would be destroyed from within. He thinks we would certainly win a war against Germany this year. Next year that would be less likely, while in 1940 all hope would have gone. Today the German army is far weaker than the British, and the British fleet is very good. True, Britain is short of planes, but the war won't be won in the air.

'If the Germans bomb London,' Churchill had told this young woman journalist, using words which viewed from the other side of 1940 leave a sediment of suspicion, 'they will provoke the profound embitterment of a people that is still proud and, once awakened, will hold out to the end.'²⁶ But it certainly was his real fear then: on the first Sunday in May he warned the four million readers of the *News of the World* about the lack of anti-aircraft guns.

Britain must not withhold one penny to consign to a sure doom the 'accursed air murderer,' for so the Winston Churchill of 1938 adjudged the 'bomber of civilian populations.'

The attack on the nests from which the hostile vultures come, as well as the attack on the military depots, railway junctions, mobilisation centres of the enemy army, if vigorously and successfully maintained, will very soon compel the aggressor State to withdraw their aeroplanes from merely murdering civilians, women and children, the old, the weak and the poor, and come back to the fighting fronts in order to concentrate upon military targets.

On the ninth he addressed the Focus mass meeting at Manchester called in the 'defence of freedom and peace.' Here, in public, he spoke with a different tongue. The world must avoid war, he said, by strengthening the League. He called upon other nations to join in grand alliance with the 'two great western democracies.' To link friendship with Germany with any agreement to return her colonies or give her a free hand in Central Europe would be a 'disastrous decision.' If they had begun rearmament two years earlier than they had, he said, Britain would have been spared many humiliations.²⁷

His warmest references were to Moscow, and the Manchester audience fiercely applauded them. This worried his Essex voters. His constituency agent telephoned at breakfast time on May 12 to warn that while they liked the speech they disapproved his 'over familiar tone' about Russia.

EAVESDROPPING ON this 'phone call from across Churchill's breakfast table was once again the Soviet ambassador. Again neither Churchill nor his biographer ever made any reference to this clandestine meeting.

Churchill wanted to draw Maisky's attention to the *Manchester Guardian's* extensive coverage of his 'large and highly successful' meeting. It was the first of many, he added; Eden, with whom he had talked the other day upon his return from the Riviera, was adamantly refusing to back Chamberlain and might yet come out in open support of Churchill's campaign. It was being organised, he confided, by men from all three parties.

As Mr Churchill explained, his aim is to create a mass movement of a non-party character to demand the concerted resistance of all peace-loving nations against the aggressors, especially Germany.

He himself had devised its slogan, *Arms and the Covenant*: that had something for both right and left.

His Grand Alliance was, as the ambassador pointed out to Moscow, in essence the old League of Nations without the aggressor nations but with a stronger commitment to mutual armed defence. 'In actual fact,' reported Maisky, 'he considers that without the U.S.S.R. nothing will come of his Grand Alliance. . . Without Moscow's close co-operation there will be no peace in Europe.'

Winston admitted that he had had to express reservations at Manchester about aspects of the Soviet internal regime, but only because he had to take account of the feelings of his constituents.

He had particularly praised Stalin's strategy in the Far East, said Maisky – 'The way we maintain neutrality and simultaneously help China with arms.'

Open Soviet military intervention on China's side would rouse anti-Soviet feeling . . . making it more difficult to form the Grand Alliance which Churchill now sees as the sole salvation of mankind.

Referring tactfully to Stalin's sanguinary liquidation of army officers, Churchill hoped that any 'complications' in the Soviet forces had been purely transitional and had since been 'rectified.' He unabashedly angled for an invitation to the next Red Army manoeuvres.

'So long as I'm pressing for collaboration with the Soviet Union,' he said, 'It's important I form my own impressions of your army.' Randolph also asked to go, as he wanted to write newspaper articles on Russia.²⁸

CHURCHILL REFUSED to consider visiting Germany. Perhaps he preferred to keep Hitler at arm's length, as the devil he didn't know. He had little gut feeling against Nazis as such – each important Nazi who came to London usually crossed the welcome mat at Morpeth Mansions.

On the day after he saw Maisky, May 13, he was visited by the leader of the Sudeten Germans, Konrad Henlein, an athletic forty year old suspected by Heinrich Himmler of homosexual tendencies.²⁹ Professor Lindemann interpreted; Winston invited two cronies – Colonel Malcolm Christie, a former air attaché in Berlin, and Archie Sinclair – to attend.

Stressing the need for secrecy about his visit, Henlein promised these gullible drawing-room conspirators that he had received no instructions from Berlin.* But affable, charming and persuasive though he was, his mission was to drive a wedge between the Czechs and their allies – to prepare the coming war of nerves. Back in Berlin nine days later Henlein would be assured by Hitler that as soon as the West Wall fortifications were complete, in eight or ten weeks' time, he would finish off Czechoslovakia.³⁰ He left Churchill with the impression that he would restrain Hitler, work with Beneš, and persuade his Sudeten Germans to limit their demand to local 'autonomy.'³¹

Churchill sent copies of Lindemann's notes on Henlein to Chamberlain and Halifax; they thanked him politely.³² This private fawning upon

* But preserved among the papers of Hitler's adjutants is a note signed R[ibbentrop]: 'I received Konrad Henlein before and after his trip to England and took the opportunity to discuss in detail with him the tactics to be pursued.'³³

Chamberlain and Halifax, about which latter he had expressed contempt to Ivan Maisky, suggests that he hoped to stay near the inside track – or, to coin an apter phrase for this kind of ungainly manœuvring, to run with one leg on each side of the fence.

The Focus was still campaigning for Chamberlain's overthrow, but Winston would have accepted office even under him, as Randolph made plain to Maisky. To create the necessary opening, he had sedulously aroused the House against Lord Swinton over alleged inadequacies in the R.A.F.'s repair organisation, its shortage of ammunition and bombs, and its inadequacies inevitably showing up in bomber pilot training and squadron serviceability now that it was expanding.³⁴

Swinton was obliged to resign on May 16. Winston wrote him the customary letter of condolences, but Chamberlain gave the air ministry to someone else (Sir Kingsley Wood). 'The Government,' Churchill explained in a wistful note to a young Tory M.P. ten days later, 'have a solid majority and Chamberlain will certainly not wish to work with me. If of course the foreign situation darkens, something in the nature of a National Government may be forced upon us, but events, and great events alone will rule.'³⁵

He shifted his aim now to the war office, writing on June 3 to Leslie Hore-Belisha, secretary for war, alleging scandalous deficiencies in flak, in Bren guns, and in anti-tank rifles. Hore-Belisha took it coolly, replying that the allegations were not accurate.

SINCE EVENTS would not oblige, circles in London took a hand in creating them.

Through Spears, Churchill had the assurances of Beneš that Czechoslovakia could mobilise seventeen active and seventeen reserve divisions. As he had told Miss Grant Duff, Winston wanted a showdown now. A still-unexplained chain of circumstances later in May 1938 nearly brought it about. On Friday May 20 Intelligence officials in London passed on to Czech colleagues³⁶ information that eleven German divisions were approaching the Czech frontier.³⁷ German archives make plain that this was not true.³⁸ Prague mobilised 175,000 reservists. For twenty-four hours, Europe teetered on the brink.

What was the origin of the canard? Did Masaryk talk with Churchill in those crucial days? The ebullient Czech was certainly spotted the day before the crisis in conclave with Vansittart.³⁹ Without instructions from Prague, Masaryk requested the British foreign office to intervene in Berlin; Chamberlain and Halifax were out of London for the weekend. At the F.O. press conference on Saturday Rex Leeper – whose close association

with both Prague and Churchill has earlier been noted – announced that war was imminent. When Britain’s ambassador uttered the requisite admonitions in Berlin he was manhandled by an outraged Ribbentrop – innocent once again, as now turns out.

This was precisely what Masaryk had wanted. ‘You are aware,’ he gloated to his superiors in Prague, ‘of how unpleasant Ribbentrop was to Henderson and how much that has aided us.’⁴⁰

When no tanks rolled into Czechoslovakia, Leeper poured fuel on the flames, flaunting it as a triumph of ‘collective security’ over Hitler’s ambitions.

LEEPER’S POSTURING brought about what the Focus had been working for for many months: the inevitability of war with the Nazis.

Months later, Hitler would still betray a smouldering bitterness over the episode: despite every assurance to Henderson, as he told an adjutant, that not one German soldier had been set in motion, Fleet-street had crowed over Germany ‘bowing to British pressure.’⁴¹

His patience had snapped. At the beginning of May 1938 a joint conference between his admiralty and airforce staffs in Berlin had already be-



Russian documents from Soviet archives show that Churchill conferred in secret with Ambassador Ivan Maisky before the war more frequently than his own memoirs admit.

gun analysing the changing situation: 'Britain,' they concluded, 'is emerging more and more as Germany's principle opponent.'⁴² Now, on May 24, Hitler told his naval aide to telex his admiralty that they must assume that Britain and France would be on the enemy side, and prepare the immediate acceleration of battleship construction. He hurried back to Berlin.⁴³

Unseen from Mr Churchill's *poste de commandement* at Morpeth Mansions, the May 1938 crisis had thus set torch to fuse. For Hitler, it was a severe blow: on his confident instructions, Raeder had been building the wrong navy and Göring the wrong airforce for war with Britain. He ordered work stepped up on the West Wall.⁴⁴ On May 28 he harangued his generals at the Chancellery. 'It is my inflexible resolve,' he pronounced, 'that Czechoslovakia shall vanish from the map.'⁴⁵

General Milch made a note of the likely airforce figures given a 'mobilisation day' on October 1 – the beginning of the new military year.⁴⁶

The fuse was slowly burning. It was not the immediate showdown that Churchill had hoped for; but it was the next best thing.

At the height of the disastrous April 1940 Norway campaign Churchill, as First Lord of the Admiralty, found it more convenient to arrive at the back garden gate to No. 10 Downing-street.



In the summer of 1940 Churchill rode down every attempt by Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax to ascertain and accept the German peace terms. He finally exiled this dangerous critic to Washington.

11: *Choosing Between War and Shame*

THAT SUMMER of 1938 he took a corner seat and was content with it, as he wrote to one M.P. hovering on the threshold of the Focus.¹ He remained at Chartwell, savouring the Weald of Kent and the country home he had so nearly lost; he even toyed with the idea of revisiting California.

Prague had begun exasperatingly slow negotiations with Henlein; Churchill's writing load allowed little time for the history of any other peoples than the English-speaking. Mademoiselle Curie had sent him a new book about her clever mother; but he found no time to read it. He was 'horribly entangled,' he wrote to Lord Halifax, with ancient Britons, Romans, Angles, Saxons, and Jutes – 'all of whom I thought I had escaped from for ever when I left school!'²

'So much to do, so little time' – Cecil Rhodes's final words might have described this period for him. He turned down General Spears's invitation to speak at a regimental anniversary. 'No, No, dear Louis,' he mix-metaphored: 'Let us keep our powder & shot in hand.'³

For his oldest friends he made exceptions. Bernard Baruch had announced back in April he was coming over on Roosevelt's behalf on about June 13, to investigate the dictators' aeroplane production and the democracies' rearmament.⁴

Six foot four, Baruch had the spare, athletic frame of the boxer he had once been. Brendan Bracken once wrote to him, 'Nature made you and Winston for each other and it does you both great good to meet.'⁵ They had done so often, since their first encounter at the 1919 peace conference – in New York or at Hobcaw, Baruch's plantation in South Carolina. Once the American philanthropist had ordered up three redheads from the local cat-house for the virile English politician: before delivering them that Thursday their madam had had to concoct one with dye; fortunately her colour lasted until the return to base on Monday.⁶ 'Faithless,' Churchill may well have murmured once more as he contemplated the offerings, 'but fortunate.'

Thirty-five years later Baruch would write him this fond pen portrait:

I wish the world could see you for a few moments walking with your dog, Rufus, about your garden, marvelling at the beauty of a rose, or lecturing the fish in your pond as you feed them. The world should be a guest at your dinner table and enjoy the treat of hearing you talk, with a bottle of wine always at hand, of military tactics in the American Civil War, of your early adventures in South Africa, of Gibbon and Macaulay and of the knaves and fools you have known.

Sometimes he would slump into a chair, listening to the others argue and murmuring merely, 'No, Bernie dear.'⁷ He could not conceal from Baruch his disillusionment with life. He talked about going into business. He talked of his farm or horses, and then of the approach of war. Once he pointed to the side of the house and exclaimed, 'Look at that beautiful vine with its lovely flowers! That is something man cannot do – he can never equal what nature has done there.' Baruch saw how these bleak years had eroded Winston's spirit, and tried to hearten him. 'I know,' he wrote, to Churchill fifteen years later, 'how keenly you felt the accusation of "warmonger" that was hurled at you, for that was the epithet pinned upon me in the United States.'

'Well,' remarked Churchill on the night before Baruch left, 'the big show will be on very soon. You'll be running it in America. And I'll be on the sidelines here.'⁶

TANTALISINGLY, BARUCH – who had been initiated by Randolph into the Focus at the time of the abdication crisis – would reminisce to Churchill: 'I have been wondering for some time how you were going to treat certain subjects in your book. It will be difficult to ignore them or to gloss them over.'⁹

Churchill also made time for the Focus. On June 2, 1938 he spoke on 'peace and freedom' on a League of Nations Union platform at Birmingham. He talked scornfully of Franco and his fascist aid, predicted that he would demand unconditional surrender, and confessed that he found it difficult to maintain his previous 'impartial neutrality' on Spain. Referring to the recent Czech crisis, he crowed over Hitler's apparent climbdown on May 21 – claiming it as a definite success for collective security – and scoffed at the critics of rearmament:

Is there then to be only one armed camp, the dictators' armed camp, and a rabble of outlying peoples, wandering around its out-

skirts, wondering which of them is going to be taken first and whether they are going to be subjugated or merely exploited?¹⁰

Basil Liddell Hart was now the Focus military adviser, but this tank warfare expert found that during their meetings Churchill did not really take in a point except where it fitted his own theories. Liddell Hart tried unsuccessfully to warn of the coming of fast, fluid armoured warfare; later, Churchill would admit that he had not kept pace with such developments.¹¹

AT ONE week's notice the Focus called a secret meeting at the Savoy for June 22, 1938, ostensibly 'in view of the present international situation.' Most probably their guest was Dr Hubert Ripka, a high-ranking Prague foreign Intelligence official whom Churchill certainly met at this time.¹²

Somewhere out there in the wilderness of the last two years was the old, anti-Bolshevik skin that Winston had now shed: but in the darkness of such conversations as with Ripka, as Czech archives reveal, the new skin glowed in warmest pink. Years before, strolling with Baruch in a frosty Bois de Boulogne during the 1919 Paris peace conference, he had jabbed his walking stick toward the east and growled, 'Russia! That's where this cold weather is coming from.'

Now he confided to Ripka how distressed he had been by the internal weakness and decay in the Red Army. 'This was why,' the Czech reported, 'he was so pleased that Stalin had liquidated Marshal [M. N.] Tukhachevsky, who had certainly been plotting with Germany.* He spoke frankly of his great admiration for Stalin, and of his hopes that he can bring the convulsions presently disrupting Russia under control.'

They talked of the Sudeten Germans. Churchill repeated what he had told Henlein – that Britain would intervene if Hitler attacked. 'We used rough and minatory language to Henlein,' he said, 'because that's the only way to speak to a Boche.' But then he talked of the good impression Henlein had made, and of how he seemed to be keeping his engagements. Ripka choked, and pointed to Henlein's less roseate interviews with senior *Daily Mail* journalist G. Ward Price, and Karl Frank's conversations with British reporters in Prague. At this Churchill lost his composure: Prague must come to terms with Henlein, he said; it would be an error to rely too 'carelessly' on British aid.

'Every one of us leading politicians,' he lectured Ripka, 'has to ask ourselves whether we have the right, whether we can in all conscience force our country into war – whether we can permit London to be de-

* He had not. Tukhachevsky had been framed by the S.S.

stroyed, and our empire to be shaken once more.' He added with rare candour, 'I cannot say that I would not act similarly to Mr Chamberlain, if I had the responsibility as head of government.'

After this outburst something of the heroic, lachrymose Churchill returned. Ripka stammered that the Czechs would defend themselves, and were no longer vulnerable to a sudden mechanised thrust across the frontiers. Tears shot into Winston's eyes.

'Masaryk was right,' he cried, referring to Jan's father Thomas. 'Death is better than slavery.' If war did come, he continued, mopping his eyes, this time they must wage it against the Boche so thoroughly that he wouldn't recover for generations. 'We'll smash them to smithereens,' he snarled, 'so they don't trouble us for a century or more.'

After a while he spoke of 'Herr Beans,' as he pronounced the name of Czechoslovakia's president, Edouard Beneš.

[Churchill] called him one of the greatest men of our epoch, and praised the resolution of the Czechs to fight for freedom with such vehemence that he began to cry all over again.

IN MID-JUNE 1938 he had accepted an admiralty invitation to tour the underwater weapons establishment at Portland. Here he inspected Asdic, the new secret acoustic device for locating submarines; he concluded that the submarine threat had been defeated.

Writing in the *Daily Telegraph* on June 23 he pointed out that an aggressive Hitler would have to contend with France, Russia and eventually Britain too. After a horrendous report from a 'refugee from Vienna' appeared in *The Spectator*, he pleaded with the foreign office to give him material about Austria. Cadogan could only suggest some punning phrases about taking people for 'Joy (through Strength) rides.' 'It is easy to ruin and persecute the Jews,' Winston wrote in the resulting article, 'to steal their private property; to drive them out of every profession and employment; to fling a Rothschild into a prison or a sponging-house.'¹³ (Louis Rothschild was still imprisoned in Austria, held hostage until the family agreed to sell the Vitkovice steelworks to Germany.)

Churchill nursed his clandestine contacts with the French and Czechs. On June 28, July 19 and September 4 General Spears paid visits of several days to Paris where his close friend Sir Charles Mendl was the embassy's bag-man.¹⁴ The moody, melancholy Jan Masaryk was an equally frequent visitor to Winston – while Neville Chamberlain did not receive him until September. At the end of June Masaryk flew home to report; it was Chamberlain's opponents whom he saw on his return. 'Churchill,' he ad-

vised Prague, 'as well as Eden and Sinclair are constantly in touch. I think there'll be a showdown this autumn, if the Gods grant us peace until then.'¹⁵

Another of Hitler's henchmen called at Morpeth Mansions that July – Albert Forster, the thirty-six-year-old gauleiter of beleaguered Danzig. Again Churchill was oddly impressed, commenting to him favourably on the lack of anti-Jewish laws in the Free City, and admitting (according to Lindemann's note) that while anti-Semitism was a 'hindrance and an irritation,' it was 'probably not a complete obstacle to a working agreement,' – meaning between Britain and Germany. When the gauleiter urged him to come and see Germany for himself, Churchill asked with gentle irony whether August and September would not be 'unhealthy months' for that. Hitler was not thinking of war, Forster responded with a smile to Churchill: The Führer's immense social and cultural plans would take years to fulfil. As for disarmament, he reminded Churchill of how often Hitler had even offered to prohibit aerial bombardment. Churchill did not know the answer to that, but replied in broad terms that only Hitler could remove the shadow of war from the world.¹⁶

After Forster had left them, the Prof. told Winston of one remark tactfully omitted by the gauleiter's interpreter: Forster had suggested that Britain and Germany 'divide the world' between them. Winston invited Halifax to dinner on the strength of it.¹⁷

He was in an odd, uncomfortable limbo – between impotence and influence, between pariah and *persona grata*. Later that month he was graciously allowed to accompany Their Majesties on their state visit to Paris and Versailles.



Hitler now had one and a half million men under arms. He completed his western fortifications, ranted about war, but probably still had not made up his mind – the prerogative of he who takes the initiative.

Downing-street dithered, appalled at the slithering toward war. Two army divisions – forty per cent of Britain's total field force – were tied down in Palestine, keeping Arab and Jew from each other's throats. With only two infantry divisions available to send to France, with only ten capital ships in service, with the new eight-gun monoplane like the Spitfire still far from operational, Britain was powerless.

Late in July Mr Chamberlain sent a deaf and decrepit liberal peer, Lord Runciman, to arbitrate in Czechoslovakia – a country that he could not with certainty have located on the map until quite recently. 'I think,'

Churchill lamented in a letter to Lloyd George, 'we shall have to choose in the next few weeks between war and shame.'¹⁸

Another German came to see him, this time an anti-Nazi army officer – the landowner and gentleman farmer Major Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin. The young *News Chronicle* journalist Ian Colvin had picked him up at his exclusive Berlin club and introduced him to Englishmen like Lord Lloyd. Von Kleist, quoting a 'top army general' – probably Hitler's chief of general staff, the lamentable Ludwig Beck – told all and sundry that Hitler would attack Czechoslovakia on September 28. The general begged Britain to announce that she would fight, promising: 'Then I'll put an end to this regime.' It is not apparent why Beck needed the London stimulus – why he could not squeeze the trigger of his pistol the next time he met Hitler, with the same salutary effect.

Von Kleist settled discreetly into London's Park-lane Hotel on August 18, his exit-visa having been furnished by the traitorous Intelligence chief Vice-Admiral Wilhelm Canaris. That evening he repeated 'September 28' to Vansittart. The next day Randolph brought him down to Chartwell.

Some of his reactionary proposals were not for tender ears: his client generals, he promised, could install a new regime 'probably of a monarchist character' within forty-eight hours; they wanted the liquidation of the irksome Polish corridor – a somewhat inopportune demand, felt Winston, since even Hitler was not yet asking that.¹⁹ He humoured 'Monsieur de K.,' as the transcript discreetly called him, and – after obtaining sanction by telephone from Halifax – drafted a letter for von Kleist to brandish at his turncoat generals, setting out the horrors of war but going no further than had Mr Chamberlain in his speech of March 24.

Von Kleist was emphatic that Germany couldn't fight longer than three months, and that Hitler's defeat was certain. 'H.,' he disclosed, 'regarded the events of May 21 as a personal rebuff.'

Winston sent Randolph's transcript to Halifax and, four days later, to the P.M. 'I do not suppose it can do much good, but every little counts.'²⁰



His romantic meetings with these renegades were not entirely without profit. By putting to them the alluring notion that he was 'anti-Nazi and antiwar,' but *not* anti-German, Churchill lit a slow-burning fuse in their minds: the belief – misguided, as time would show – that if they rose against their dictator they could count on Winston Churchill.

Chamberlain was too hard-boiled a politician for cloak-and-dagger fantasies. In July 1938 he had referred dismissively to them as 'unchecked reports from unofficial sources.' The files bulged with them. In April

Vyvyan Adams had visited Beneš, Hodza and Krofta, like Spears and Deakin before him.²¹ Wickham Steed had sent material later that month from 'a German financial expert on Central and South-Eastern Europe,' a week later from a 'competent British observer visiting Czechoslovakia,' and in mid-June a further rambling, anonymous summary.²² Once, he had warned of serious defeatism in Whitehall – secretary for war Leslie Hore-Belisha had told American journalists on April 27 that government policy was to let Hitler 'eat his belly full.'²³

As for von Kleist, whose treacherous career would be terminated by the Nazi People's Court in 1944, this officer and gentleman reminded Chamberlain of the loathsome Jacobites at the Court of France in King William's time: 'I think,' he noted to the foreign secretary, 'we must discount a good deal of what he says.'²⁴

ON AUGUST 19, 1938 the Focus secretary wrote to the group about a national campaign to 'rally the people to the support of a resuscitated League of Nations.' But ideas had crystallised in Churchill's mind, since seeing Major von Kleist, that some kind of a joint note might trip up the mad dictator Hitler in full gallop. He talked it over with the foreign secretary, and the cabinet considered it on the thirtieth. Halifax pointed out that Mr Churchill's other prospective signatories – France and Russia – might ask what *Britain* proposed to do; this would be embarrassing, because the answer was: 'Nothing until late 1939.'²⁵

Ignorant of this discussion, Winston pressed on. On the following day he invited Maisky down to Chartwell – another meeting not mentioned in his memoirs.

'Today,' the Soviet ambassador cabled to Moscow afterward, 'I lunched with Churchill. He seemed very much on edge.'²⁶ Churchill said that war might be imminent. The Czechs would fight, France would probably go to their aid, and even Britain might eventually abandon her present reserve.

According to Churchill, feelings in Britain – both amongst the masses and in government circles – have clearly hardened against Germany and in favour of Czechoslovakia over the last ten days.*

He had a plan that might prevent this catastrophe. If Beneš made what Lord Runciman felt was a decent offer and Hitler rejected it, then Britain, France, and the Soviet Union must issue a joint note to Hitler, unmistakably

* As with all of Maisky's telegrams from Soviet foreign ministry archives, these have been translated from the Russian.

bly pointing to the consequences of aggression. Simultaneously, their ambassadors in Washington would formally show it to Roosevelt and invite him to associate the United States with the note. That would lend it greater authority. It was in his opinion the only hope of preventing world war.

Churchill particularly hopes [reported Maisky] to secure Vansittart's approval – a man who in his words is gaining in influence. However, I myself don't share Churchill's optimism.

Churchill obviously wanted to know the Kremlin's attitude to his plan. For the rest of their discussion, said Maisky, he spoke about Germany with unmitigated hatred. As the evening drew on he declared that he had thought up a new slogan: 'Proletarians and free-thinkers of the world, unite against the fascist tyrants!'

INSPIRED BY this eccentric approach, the Russians formally suggested that London and Paris concert their plans with Moscow while there was still time. When French foreign minister Georges Bonnet inquired through diplomatic channels what Russia planned to do, his Soviet counterpart Maxim Litvinov informed the French chargé d'affaires Jean Payart on September 2 that they would honour their 1935 alliance with Czechoslovakia, but that Moscow felt more entitled to know *France's* position in advance. In particular, since neutral Romania and Poland were refusing to allow Soviet troops through to Czechoslovakia, the League of Nations would have to vote upon the matter.²⁷

Notified of these remarks on the same day, Maisky telephoned Chartwell and asked to see Churchill again, urgently. The little Russian diplomat arrived the next day, September 3, related Litvinov's important guarantee to fulfil Soviet obligations, and suggested that Churchill obtain government pressure for the summoning of the League of Nations council. Without – rather curiously – revealing that it was Maisky who had informed him ('I have received privately from an absolutely sure source the following information . . .'), Churchill passed this on to Halifax immediately. But nothing came of this important project. The foreign secretary said merely that he would keep it in mind.²⁸

There were other eclectic visitors to Chartwell early that September. Through an indiscretion of Clemmie's sister, leaked in the *Daily Express*, we know that under a personal guarantee of secrecy Dr Heinrich Brüning, the last of the Weimar chancellors, had come down from Oxford, where he was a deeply respected research fellow at Queen's College. Anti-Nazis

had asked him to get Churchill to influence No. 10 to 'speak plainly to Hitler.'

We have no note on what they discussed; but perhaps this is the place to mention that ten years later Dr Brüning wrote to Churchill's publishers, enjoining them not to publish a letter he had written to Winston on August 28, 1937 about the tragic error of those guilty of funding Hitler before his rise to power. Industrialist Friedrich Flick and the I.G. Farben company had been forced to contribute only after the Nazis came to power, he said, but he knew from bitter inside knowledge as chancellor that others, including the French secret service, had voluntarily financed the Nazis into office:

I did not [Brüning wrote to the editors of *Life*, prohibiting the use of his letter, in 1948], and do not even today, for understandable reasons, wish to reveal that from October 1928 the two largest regular contributors to the Nazi Party were the general managers of two of the largest Berlin banks, both of Jewish faith, and one of them the leader of Zionism in Germany.²⁵ *

It must have been a lively household that September of 1938, but Churchill always made time for wealthy and influential American emissaries. On the ninth he was visited by Alfred Bergman, whose fortune came from the Royal Typewriter Company's European concession (which included Czechoslovakia) and whose influence came from his friendship with Roosevelt. Churchill asked him to send regards to Roosevelt – 'the outstanding leader of our century,' an accolade he had only recently bestowed on Beneš – and boasted that he himself did not have the civilian's fear of war.

'How far is America willing to go?' it occurred to him to ask.

Bergman replied that America would back the British provided they did something – 'Which up to now they have not.'³⁰

Churchill told him of his new joint note plan: he was going to put it personally to Chamberlain the next day, and F.D.R. would be invited to give moral support.

By this time, however, Hitler's campaign against Czechoslovakia was approaching its climax. As Churchill walked into No. 10, the Big Four

* Brüning stated that the French secret service and Schneider-Creusot works had made up one-half of Hitler's revenue from 1921 until 1932; and he added that before 1933 the S.A. (Brownshirts) and S.S. had been equipped with revolvers and machine guns made in the United States.

crisis committee (Chamberlain, Halifax, Simon and Hoare) stepped out of the cabinet room.

Winston demanded that they issue his joint note as an immediate ultimatum to Hitler – 'It's our last chance of stopping a landslide.'

But Chamberlain had trumped his old opponent again: he had just revealed secretly to the other three a long-prepared plan for a dramatic flight to Hitler. They had no interest in Churchill's plan now.

Churchill repeated his demand on September 11, now limiting it to Britain alone. She must issue a simple ultimatum: if Hitler set foot in Czechoslovakia, he would have Britain to contend with.³¹

They did not heed him. Why should they have? They were in office, and he was not. To one of his benefactors, the Guinness brewery owner, Churchill now repeated his gloomy phrase: 'We seem to be very near the bleak choice between war and shame.'³²

12: *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow*

NO EVENT yet had seemed to offer Churchill an opportunity like the 1938 Czech crisis. He had lain submerged on the political seabed all summer, filling barely an inch of the index to *The Times* with his doings. Now Chartwell reverberated to the blast of ballast tanks discharging as he rose toward the surface, manned stations, and prepared to do war. The Event, the showdown of which he had so often talked, seemed to have come.

Not everybody shared his relish. ‘Public opinion here,’ the American ambassador reported at the end of August, ‘is definitely against going to war for the Czechs.’ In France they liked it even less.

If Roosevelt, Hitler, Beneš, Churchill and certain of his friends in Paris were similar in this respect, their motives were very different.

‘The president,’ dictated one American official two days after a White House cabinet meeting on September 16, ‘thinks that economically the United States will fare well whether Europe goes to war or not. He looks for an improvement in business during the winter months and he says that [Treasury Secretary Henry] Morgenthau agrees with him.’ Europe’s gold, explained F.D.R., was now flooding into the United States to purchase munitions – they might even have to use navy ships to ferry the gold across. British and French citizens owned U.S. securities of enormous value and would be forced to sell them if war broke out. The United States, Roosevelt concluded, could only profit from a war.²

Hitler, let it be said, was no less cynical. ‘Clausewitz was right,’ he liked to remind his more nervous generals: ‘War is the father of all things.’* Even the Czech president Edouard Beneš looked forward to it after some unseemly wobbling. As he ‘happily’ signed the mobilisation papers later in September he rejoiced that the die had been cast: ‘We are heading for war.’³

He had been supported, as this chapter will now show, by Stefan Osusky and Jan Masaryk, his envoys in Paris and London – and by Mr

* *The War Path*, page 129.

Chamberlain's principal opponent, Winston Churchill, who also regarded war as one of the highest aspirations of mankind.

Neither Chamberlain nor his French counterpart, the short, squat Edouard Daladier, wanted war. Daladier had been an artilleryman in the World War and had seen what war was like. He rasped at Georges Mandel, one of his ministers, that he wasn't going to sacrifice the flower of France's manhood to whitewash the 'criminal errors' that he had committed at Versailles with his chief, Clemenceau.⁴

Nor, it must be said, did Göring relish the prospect of war. Late in August his chief of staff had ordered the western Luftflotte 2 to prepare bomber units in case of war against Britain; General Hellmuth Felmy replied on September 22 that unless they could operate from the Low Countries their planes had neither the bombloads nor the range.⁵

If this was a shock for Göring, it would have been an even greater shock for Mr Churchill, who had widely publicised that Hitler intended to deliver an immediate 'knock-out blow' when war began. Although Göring's pilots used their radios freely, British air Intelligence had no evidence of any such preparations – of units training, stockpiling bombs, or concentrating in the north-western exit corner of Germany.⁶

AT FIRST Winston fought alone. Eden was away; Duff Cooper, First Lord of the admiralty, was cruising in the Baltic.⁷ Churchill did not share Chamberlain's apprehensions about a showdown. Britain with her fleet, France with her army, seemed invulnerable. The battleship seemed the embodiment of power. Privileged to have seen the Asdic, he assured his readers in the *Telegraph* that the submarine was in 'undoubted obsolescence' as a 'decisive war weapon.'

That summer he scattered such valuable opinions freely: airforces decided nothing in land battle; they were 'an additional complication rather than a decisive weapon' – so he wrote on the first day of September 1938, exactly twelve months before Hitler proved him wrong. He scoffed at the 'air experts' who claimed that British battleships costing millions could be sunk by enemy aeroplanes costing thousands. 'Aircraft will not be a mortal danger to properly equipped modern war fleets, whether at sea or lying in harbour under the protection of their own very powerful anti-aircraft batteries reinforced by those on shore.' Come 1942 he would be wiser in this respect as well.

Chamberlain was not blind to the dangers below. He had a kind of Asdic too. At a nod from Sir Joseph Ball, the home secretary Sam Hoare placed wiretaps on Eden, Macmillan, and Churchill – all future prime ministers.⁸ M.I.5 was already tapping embassy telephones.⁹ Vansittart,

wise to the ways of ministers, eschewed the telephone and contacted Winston and Labour conspirators only in their private homes.¹⁰

The intercepts raised eyebrows, but the English were gentlemen – Neville Chamberlain betrayed no feelings when Messrs Churchill and Attlee were heard conniving with Maisky and Masaryk, undertaking to overthrow his government; nor when Masaryk telephoned President Roosevelt direct; nor when the Czech used language which could only be termed infelicitous. ‘I would not let my dog,’ he once said, ‘lift his leg in [Sir John] Simon’s left eye.’¹¹ Asked by one conspirator whether Chamberlain was getting firmer, Masaryk hooted: ‘Firm! About as firm as the erection of an old man of seventy!’¹²

M.I.5 has declined to make available the British transcripts although the requisite thirty years have long since elapsed. The German intercepts of London embassy communications indicate that Masaryk was furnishing documents and funds to overthrow the British government.¹³ The fight that he put up earned grudging praise from Hitler after reading the German intercepts.¹⁴ ‘They won’t look me in the eye,’ Masaryk was heard shouting down the line to Prague early on September 14: ‘They’re just a rabble here.’ ‘I’m in telephone contact with Roosevelt.’ ‘As for France, they’re a load of ratbags too.’ ‘I must hang up now, Eden’s here.’ After it was all over, and Masaryk had lost fatherland and legation, Sam Hoare recommended he be awarded the Grand Cross of the Victorian Order – despite having ‘consorted with Winston and his friends.’¹⁵

Chamberlain’s ministry would have needed strong stomachs to look Masaryk in the eye that day. Winston learned of the reason for their evasiveness over lunch with the First Lord at the admiralty.¹⁶ Duff Cooper, his soft complexion looking pinker than usual, sitting with his back to the light so that his disconcerting squint was less noticeable, told him that the prime minister proposed to see Hitler the next morning – making his first aeroplane flight ever – and would agree to a plebiscite in the Sudeten areas that Hitler was demanding.

Even under Czech supervision, its outcome would be a foregone conclusion. The choice was not between war and a plebiscite, Duff Cooper had objected in that morning’s cabinet, but between ‘war now, and war later.’ The idea was, it seemed, to take the wind out of Hitler’s sails. ‘The stupidest thing that has ever been done,’ exploded Churchill.¹⁷ His sails were now empty too.

Masaryk telephoned the ugly news to Prague at ten P.M.

BENEŠ: Impossible!

MASARYK: That sow Sir Horace Wilson’s going too.

Relief swept Paris. This British initiative was opposed, as the U.S. ambassador William C. Bullitt observed, only by communists, Soviet agents, and certain Jews like Mandel; even Léon Blum approved. Apart from Reynaud and permanent officials at the Quai d'Orsay – meaning Léger – nobody, he added, wanted war just to maintain France's traditional power in Europe.¹⁸

Foreign minister Georges Bonnet had warned Britain's ambassador, Sir Eric Phipps, that France would not intervene even if Czechoslovakia were attacked.¹⁹ When his clandestine sources at the F.O. leaked this to Churchill there was hell to pay. He and the Focus ran the telephone lines to Paris red-hot. Bonnet complained to Phipps that Churchill and General Spears had pestered him and other ministers by telephone. 'Presumably,' the boozy ambassador cabled to the F.O., Churchill had 'breathed fire and thunder . . . to binge Bonnet up.'²⁰ He urged Halifax to remind the two that the Germans were probably tapping their conversations.*

Masaryk did not give up. That Friday noon, September 16, even before Chamberlain returned to England, the Czech was on the telephone to Prague:

MASARYK: Yes, before anything happens, if anything's to be done,
I'd like money.

BENEŠ: Yes.

MASARYK: I need just enough here – you know – and right now. †

Chamberlain's dealings with Hitler produced uproar among Focus members. Writing to its secretary A. H. Richards on the seventeenth, Churchill predicted that, if the government was going to let Czechoslovakia be cut to pieces, 'a period of very hard work lies before us all.'²³

Daladier and Bonnet came over for talks on Sunday September 18, with 'their tongues [hanging] out,' as American ambassador Joseph Kennedy heard, eager to avoid war; Vansittart was kept out of the conferences because of his intriguing with Léger and Churchill. They talked emotionally of France's honour and Czechoslovakia's plight. 'We must,' they repeated, 'take a realistic view.'²⁴ Their airforce was negligible, their army

* Mussolini's agents were certainly intercepting high-level calls in 1936; Gestapo agents tapped one Reynaud–Chamberlain conversation in May 1940.²¹

† This passage is lined in British files. Czech archives show that four days later the national bank sent one million crowns – £7,182 – to Masaryk's *private* account at Barclays bank. He refused to tell later Czech investigators how he disposed of the money 'because of the unorthodox manner in which the funds in question had been used.'²²

qualitatively inferior: of sixty-eight divisions facing Germany, only two were 'light armoured divisions' equipped with antiquated Hotchkiss H-35 and Somua S-35 tanks. They were strong in artillery but not in anti-tank guns, and that was what mattered.

Churchill learned little of this that Sunday. By circuitous route – Sheila Grant Duff telephoned it to him at Chartwell – he gathered confirmation that Chamberlain had some 'miserable plan' to impose on Prague. He assured her he was going to issue a powerful declaration on Wednesday. Until then, everything depended on the Czechs: they must be willing to fight at all costs. She passed this on to Ripka, their agent in Prague.²⁵

At the end of that day the British and French governments sent an ultimatum to Beneš to transfer the primarily German areas to the Reich.²⁶ On Monday Eden and others advised Masaryk that Prague must play for time – perhaps they should reply that first they must consult their parliament as it was a matter of such 'entirely unexpected' concessions.²⁷ Later on Monday, at three-twenty P.M., Masaryk spoke with Beneš.

MASARYK: The uncles are still in session here and haven't breathed a word to anybody. . . . Yes, you know what? They're even speaking of ceding territories without a plebiscite.

BENEŠ: Yeah, yeah.

MASARYK: I'm not going over there [to Whitehall] at all. They haven't sent for me. So what I say is: Shit them, Mr President.

Playing for time, he feigned sickness. When Halifax sent for him, he sent back a note that recent surprises had been 'a little too much' and he was suffering gallbladder problems: 'My "vet" thinks that I must stay in bed for a couple of days.' He had just telephoned Beneš, he said, who was still waiting for 'the verdict.'²⁸

That evening Churchill bore down on the foreign secretary. Halifax educated him to the weakness of the French, particularly in the air: General Gamelin had warned that war would end in a *débâcle*. Winston emerged muted and chastened.²⁹

BENEŠ: I wanted to ask what people like Churchill –

MASARYK: They're hopping mad, think it's absolutely shocking.

BENEŠ: Couldn't you ask their advice?

Masaryk already had; they had replied that they were in no position to offer advice, but 'hoped we wouldn't put up with it.' Beneš became evasive.

MASARYK: And what line do we take on this?

BENEŠ: That's obvious!

MASARYK: *Yes or No?*

BENEŠ: *No* of course. That's obvious.

NOW THAT Eden was on the same side of the net, though not yet on the same team, Churchill set to work on Labour Party leader Clement Attlee. He telephoned congratulations on Labour's declaration in the morning papers: 'Your declaration,' he lisped, 'does honour to the great British nation.'

Attlee answered in clipped tones: 'I'm glad you think so,' and replaced the receiver.³⁰

Prague had still not replied to the Anglo–French demand. Chamberlain needed the reply urgently, as he was about to meet Hitler again at Godesberg. The intercepts reveal the reason for Prague's delay.

BENEŠ: What I'm looking for is a formula which isn't *No* and isn't *Yes*. Briefly one that lets me negotiate honourably.

MASARYK: Yeah, the Old Man's packing his bags again and he's on hot bricks.

That evening, Prague's formal refusal reached the F.O. 'It is not only the fate of Czechoslovakia that is in the balance,' this said. Together with Halifax and Cadogan, the P.M. and Sir Horace Wilson drafted a muscular ultimatum to Dr Beneš demanding that he withdraw his refusal and accept the Anglo–French plan – 'before producing a situation for which France and Britain could take no responsibility.'

Masaryk meanwhile checked with Prague, learned that half 'his fortune' was being transferred immediately and the rest later.

MASARYK: Just as soon as possible. That's what matters to me. . .

Any moment now the balloon will go up I've nothing to go on.

Spears contacted Robert Boothby, Churchill's former parliamentary secretary. Boothby said there was nothing they could do as a group, meaning that night. He also predicted that Eden 'would not come round.' This, he pointed out a few days later, proved right. Spears relayed to Winston that Boothby was no longer interested in Czechoslovakia.³¹

Disappointed in his friends, Churchill flew over to Paris to ‘stiffen the French government.’³² His literary agent Emery Reves met him at Le Bourget airport. Winston had an impulse to telegraph to Beneš, to stand fast – ‘*Fire your canon and all will be well.*’³³ But sensing that it might be unwise to put such words in writing, he left the cable unsent.

He had flown into a French hornet’s nest. At two-fifteen that Wednesday morning the British and French legations in Prague had delivered the ultimatum to a dishevelled Dr Beneš. Prague radio announced it some hours later.

It evoked consternation in Paris. Dr Stefan Osusky, a career diplomat of impeccable credentials, had been Czech minister there for twenty years. Not until 1942 did his papers, filed for an abstruse libel action in London, shed light on the two Anglo–French ultimata to Beneš, on his evasiveness, and on his search for honourable ways of saying neither Yes nor No. On the seventeenth, these papers suggest, the French minister in Prague had pressed the president about the crisis; Beneš had *volunteered* to cede territories to Germany. He had outlined them on the map – the move would have transferred a million Germans to Hitler – but then suggested that London and Paris confront him with an ultimatum so he could save face. Small wonder that his sudden rejection of that ultimatum had aggrieved his allies. Osusky now learned that Daladier had revealed this background in confidence to his cabinet. The foreign minister did not reply to Osusky’s shocked inquiry, but Daladier confirmed it in an interview with him.³⁴

At eight A.M. on September 21 this telephone conversation was found going on between Prague and an anonymous voice in Paris:

PRAGUE: Beneš has accepted the London plan upon the nocturnal *démarche* of the British and French ministers, since both countries threatened to ditch us completely if he didn’t. There’s only one hope: You’ve got to contact Blum immediately – leader of the biggest party in France – and try everything you can to make Herriot head of government. And contact Attlee to do the same in England. I’m going to try and get through to Attlee from here too. There’s not a moment to lose, you must act immediately.

By ten-thirty Churchill had contacted Osusky. His advice was plain, as the Nazi wiretappers reported.

OSUSKY: You've got to hold out!

BENEŠ: Yes, but how long?

OSUSKY: Well, what deadline did they give you?

BENEŠ: They want it [the reply] this afternoon.

Osusky asked him to think it over calmly.

BENEŠ: The choice is simple enough: either we hit out or we don't.

OSUSKY: I was taken aback because I phoned Masaryk in London and he told me it was all over already –

BENEŠ: We haven't made our reply yet.

OSUSKY: – because he asked me to tell Churchill, who's in Paris today. So I told Churchill it's all over and you'd accepted. I told him I've heard nothing about it from Prague myself. He didn't know anything and couldn't tell me anything. I told Churchill, 'Jan Masaryk asks me to tell you it's all over – they've accepted.'

Osusky said he didn't know.

BENEŠ: They're not going to march now?

OSUSKY: I told you already, what matters is for us to present a united front. Their government is here today and gone tomorrow.

Osusky did what he could to unseat Daladier. 'In this uncertain situation,' he would testify, 'I approached my political friends for support and help.'³⁵ He told Mandel, Campinchi, Reynaud, and others of the new Anglo–French ultimatum to Beneš; three of the ministers said they would resign if Daladier did not withdraw it.

Reynaud had entered Churchill's name in his desk diary at mid-day and that of Spears that evening. (Spears was also in Paris seeing 'discontented ministers.') Churchill told Beneš, years later, that he found both Reynaud and Mandel depressed and talking of resigning.³⁶ He told Beneš he had argued them out of it. Reynaud's memory was different: Churchill tried to persuade Mandel and himself 'to insist on resigning.'³⁷

Winston certainly intended Beneš not to cave in. 'After his Paris talks with Mandel and Reynaud,' noted the private secretary of Beneš, 'he wanted to telegraph us to put up a fight, but afterward he dropped the idea because he didn't feel he could do so on his own responsibility.'

While still in Paris, Churchill issued to the British press association the declaration he had foreshadowed to Sheila Grant Duff on Sunday. It described the 'partition of Czechoslovakia under Anglo-French pressure' as a surrender to the 'Nazi threat of force,' and talked of 'the prostration of Europe before the Nazi power.'

The idea that safety can be purchased by throwing a small state to the wolves is a fatal delusion.

It was a call for an immediate showdown. German war power, he warned, would grow faster than the Anglo-French preparations for defence. Parliament, in short, must be recalled.



He had the feeling that Chamberlain's hours in office were now numbered. Back in London on Thursday September 22, he triumphantly told Jan Masaryk that three French ministers had submitted formal protests to Daladier. Now he needed to know precisely how the Anglo-French ultimatum had been worded. Whitehall and the Quai d'Orsay alike refused to release the details.

MASARYK: Please have the original text of the plan read through to us.

BENEŠ: Original? We already sent it in a telegram!

Masaryk explained, without comment, that it had not reached him.

BENEŠ: Aha!

MASARYK: Things here are snowballing in our favour.

That afternoon Masaryk's staff telephoned solid chunks of disinformation to Prague. His deputy Karel Lisicky predicted that 'that swine' Bonnet and the British cabinet would resign within hours; his military attaché Josef Kalla confirmed it, and spoke of huge demonstrations sweeping London. At all costs Beneš must hold on until Monday the twenty-sixth: then, Churchill hoped, Parliament would reconvene.

It was time to call the Focus. Churchill telephoned its peers, M.P.s and journalists to meet him at his apartment at Morpeth Mansions at four-thirty P.M. First he steered his cab driver to No. 10 to learn the latest news from Godesberg, where the P.M. was conveying Beneš's agreement to Hitler; Chamberlain hoped to attach certain terms to it. Then Winston

drove on to his apartment, where the first arrivals were already waiting for the lift. They rode up together.

'This is hell,' said Harold Nicolson.

'It's the end of the British empire,' was how Churchill put it.³⁸

Standing behind the fire-screen nursing a whisky and soda, 'rather blurry,' as Nicolson affectionately described him, and 'rather bemused,' Churchill outlined the cabinet's conditions for agreement.

'Hitler will never accept such terms,' pointed out Nicolson.

'In that case,' replied Churchill, 'Chamberlain will return tonight and we shall have war.'

That would make it mildly inconvenient, observed someone, for Mr Chamberlain to be in enemy territory. 'Even the Germans,' observed Churchill, 'would not be so stupid as to deprive us of our beloved prime minister.'

During the evening, Attlee phoned: Labour was now prepared to come in. 'Let us form the Focus,' said Churchill. From Pratt's to the Beef-steak, the mood was one of despair.

IN PARIS the rebellion had fizzled out. The three ministers marched in to see Daladier – Reynaud's desk diary shows his appointment, together with Mandel and Champetier de Ribes, at four P.M. But when the premier told them Beneš had accepted the ultimatum, and had suggested the original ultimatum himself, they saw no further cause to resign.

Churchill had left Spears in Paris; he visited their mutual friend Alexis Léger. Léger blamed Britain for ditching Czechoslovakia. Several others of the Focus were in Paris too that day: Stephen King-Hall – the pamphleteer hired by Union Time Ltd. – had an appointment with Reynaud at eleven; T.U.C. chief Citrine was seen haggling over his room price at the Lutetia; Dalton cornered Blum and whispered '*Courage!*' into his ear. Blum mistook the encouragement and kissed the towering Labour intellectual on one cheek.³⁹ Boothby flew in, then on to Geneva to meet Litvinov at the League of Nations. 'The Russians will give us full support,' he confirmed afterward to Spears.⁴⁰ But nobody at No. 10 was interested in that.

The talks at Godesberg broke down on the twenty-third. Hitler, rendered mistrustful by his knowledge of the Masaryk-Beneš conversations, increased his demands; Chamberlain was only willing to forward, but not to recommend, those demands to the Czechs.

Thus the crisis seemed at hand. Recalling Churchill's June 1937 advice to wait until Britain's hour of distraction, Chaim Weizmann, Israel Moses Sieff, and the other Zionists bore down on Jan Masaryk late that afternoon, urging war. 'Perhaps God is doing all this so that the Jews may go

back to Palestine,' said the minister of health that evening. 'I believe that will be the result.'⁴¹

At four-thirty p.m. the foreign office telephoned to their Prague legation a telegram to inform the Czechoslovak government 'that the French and British government cannot continue to take the responsibility of advising them not to mobilise.' Beneš was told at six. Halifax told Jan Masaryk at six p.m., adding: 'For God's sake, do it quick!'⁴² Beneš signed the mobilisation papers and later recalled having been most happy: he turned to his wife and to Jan's sister Alice and said that the die was cast. 'We are heading for war.'⁴³



Churchill drove down to Chartwell for the weekend. That Saturday morning, September 24, he knew that if Hitler's plan was rejected it would bring Europe to the brink of war.

MASARYK: Mr President, first of all please send me by cypher the text of the telegram with which they advised us to mobilise.

BENEŠ: Yes, right away.

MASARYK: Second, how does the plan go?

BENEŠ: The one we're to get now?

MASARYK: Yes.

BENEŠ: We haven't yet got it.

MASARYK: I've told people here we've gone as far as we can go.

BENEŠ: It's right out of the question for us to abandon our position.

MASARYK: Our troops must stay right where they are at any price, come what may! . . . And the moment anything comes at us, we open fire.

Evidently the Czechs were not planning to honour any agreement to withdraw. How useful it was, Masaryk commented, that Chamberlain was at Godesberg. 'People' hoped the mobilisation would not upset the Old Man there. 'People here are only afraid we may give way again.' 'Things here look very different now.' 'I think all the parties are with us now, even *The Times* sees we've got the upper hand. The *tours de force* have all stopped.'

At mid-day that Saturday, Masaryk saw the plan. He telephoned Eden, then hurried round to show it to him, saying his government could never accept it.⁴⁴ From there he telephoned the F.O. to arrange to see the map at about four. From what he told Spears, the foreign secretary was evi-

dently glowing with the Hitler-radiation that Chamberlain had brought back from Godesberg: the Führer, he echoed, would be satisfied with the Sudetenland.⁴⁵ France would not fight. ('His Majesty's government should realise,' Phipps had by that time telegraphed from Paris, 'extreme danger of even appearing to encourage small, but noisy and corrupt, war group here.'⁴⁶) Three hours later, Masaryk handed out to Dalton, Attlee, Greenwood and others the first copies of the 'petrifying' pre-dawn ultimatum that the British and French had slapped on Beneš three days before.⁴⁷ That evening, General Spears and seven others of the Focus, including Harold Macmillan, sent an urgent letter to Lord Halifax threatening a Tory revolt if the screw was turned on Beneš any tighter as Hitler was demanding.⁴⁸

THAT SUNDAY, September 25, Randolph Churchill and Desmond Morton lunched down at Chartwell with Winston. One of the Sunday newspapers, *Reynold's News*, had leaked accurate details of the ultimatum to Beneš, supplied by a mole at the F.O.; L. W. Carruthers, a Finchley journalist for *Time & Tide*, rushed copies down to Churchill and Spears. He urged Churchill to challenge Chamberlain to produce the note to Parliament. Around mid-day, Lady Spears telephoned. Sir Derrick Gunston, one of the Focus M.P.s who had signed the previous night's letter, had telephoned with rumours that half a dozen ministers were now threatening to resign. Winston said, 'There is nothing to be done yet,' but drafted a new statement demanding Parliament's recall.

Knowing that Daladier was coming over to see Chamberlain, Churchill and his colleagues winced at the thought that No. 10 might yet persuade Beneš to accept.⁴⁹ But Masaryk came down to Chartwell for lunch, and put Churchill's mind at rest. Earlier that morning, at 8:37 A.M., he had 'phoned Beneš:

MASARYK: After lunch I'll be coming together with some of the most important people and I think it'd be a good thing if this afternoon I tell the French and British something. When Daladier gets here I'll say I have a message for him and the British. '*I much regret,*' I'll announce, '*to have to say that this document cannot be accepted.*'

Over lunch Winston hammered that point home. Masaryk must deliver a firm No from Beneš. The way that he expressed it breathed new life into the drooping Czech. On his way to No. 10, Masaryk called in on

R. W. Seton-Watson – another of his legation’s ‘clients’ – for tea; he told him of the decision. Masaryk’s tail was up for the first time in days.⁵⁰

Now that war seemed inevitable, some people like Lord Cecil felt that evening that Winston should be P.M. Others felt sure that Chamberlain would pull back from the brink but be swept aside in the resulting humiliation. Wise men disagreed: ‘If we have peace,’ said Zionist sage Chaim Weizmann, ‘people will forget their wrath and only remember that they have been somehow saved from war under their present rulers.’⁵¹

At four P.M. the B.B.C. announced that Prague had rejected Hitler’s terms. When Spears telephoned Georges Mandel in Paris, the Frenchman reassured him that the mandate that Daladier and Bonnet intended to deliver to No. 10 was to back the Czechs.⁵²

At five-thirty Masaryk handed over the formal rejection note to Halifax and Chamberlain, and explained why, conscious that he was making history. ‘They called me in,’ he told Beneš immediately afterward, ‘and we talked for an hour. Their ignorance is so abysmal you wouldn’t believe it.’ They had asked, however, whether Czechoslovakia would agree to an eleventh-hour conference ‘at which we’d all participate.’ That would at least stave off the evil hour set by the latest scandalous proposals. ‘Well, then,’ said Beneš, still playing for time, ‘yes. Yes.’

Fresh in funds, the Focus began printing millions of leaflets and booked a London hall for a protest meeting on Thursday to throw out the Chamberlain four and set up a national government.⁵³ That evening the cabinet met – in a ‘blue funk,’ as Winston later said – then waited for the Frenchmen.⁵⁴ It was nine-thirty P.M. before they arrived, breathing new determination; but under painful cross-examination by Sir John Simon they could offer little account of what France could actually do for Czechoslovakia.

Since there was no word yet of Parliament being called, Churchill sent out overnight telegrams from Chartwell to the Focus summoning a council of war at four P.M. the next day at Morpeth Mansions.⁵⁵

WHEN HE returned to London on that Monday morning, September 26, he was conscious that the week ahead might be one of the most crucial in history, and that he might end by playing the central role. On the previous evening Masaryk had handed out copies of the Hitler map to British and American journalists,⁵⁶ and now Fleet-street splashed Hitler’s demands as well as Churchill’s insistence that Parliament be recalled. Masaryk telephoned Prague.

MASARYK: Everything's going fine here. Every newspaper is 100 per cent behind us. There's not one backing the other side.

But a terrible anguish overwhelmed the more vulnerable. Gripped by a clammy fear of the knock-out blow, parents evacuated children to the country, fired their less essential below-stairs staff, hid their treasures, packed the family silver and sent it to the bank. 'Will I be sent to a concentration camp?' asked one elderly German Jewess, fearing internment in England. 'It is probable,' was Lady Spears's bleak reply.

That Monday Winston opened a telegram from Baruch: 'In case of war,' said Baruch, 'send the children and expectant mother [Diana Churchill] to me.' But Diana would be an air raid warden in London. Winston replied: 'Now is the time for your man to speak' – meaning Franklin Roosevelt.⁵⁷

Hitler announced that he would broadcast that night. In the privacy of No. 10, the prime minister read to his cabinet Churchill's appeal for the recall of Parliament and added that he would wait two more days.

He had one more card up his sleeve, but he seems to have feared that it would no longer be enough. Chamberlain had sent Sir Horace Wilson with a letter to Hitler. It offered a conference to decide the means of implementing the Anglo-French plan. When Churchill was shown in at three-thirty he found Chamberlain 'an exhausted and broken man,' as he told Leo Amery. He urged the P.M. to issue a warning that Britain, France and Russia were united against Hitler; they must mobilise the fleet; they must call up all reserves. The prime minister promised to do so one hour after Hitler's broadcast if it was not conciliatory.⁵⁸

Churchill hurried back for the four o'clock Focus meeting at his *poste de commandement*, Morpeth Mansions. He found them apprehensively awaiting his return.⁵⁹

In Berlin that afternoon, in the marble halls of the Reich Chancellery, Hitler issued an ultimatum to Sir Horace Wilson: aware from the wiretaps of Prague's delaying tactics, he gave Beneš until two P.M. on Wednesday to agree to his terms. Come what might, he declared, he would have his troops in the Sudeten German territories on Saturday.

In Westminster, at No. 11 Morpeth Mansions, Winston Churchill poured himself another weak whisky and dilated at length upon what he had told Chamberlain: now they must press for a national government, for immediate war measures, for the blockade of Germany, for conscription – 'We must get in touch with Russia.' Unaware of his trafficking with Ivan Maisky, Leo Amery warned that wooing Russia would dismay Conservatives. They decided that Winston should go to Lord Halifax and persuade

him to put out a threatening communiqué *before* Hitler's broadcast. This would force Chamberlain's hand and leave him no room for further manoeuvres.

The original intention of the Focus was to have a forty-second announcement broadcast in German over Nazi wavelengths in the pause just before Hitler spoke. All Germany would then hear of England's resolve to fight.*

Just how the document came to be drafted, and whose voice dictated the words it contained, are not clear even now. It spoke of 'Russia' instead of the 'Soviet Union,' but it was headed 'official communiqué' and typed on foreign office notepaper. Rex Leeper, one of Masaryk's 'clients' at the F.O. who had steered Britain to the brink in May, sent it to Reuter's agency. (Afterward the F.O. and the French foreign ministry immediately disowned it. Phipps told the Quai d'Orsay that it was not genuine; Bonnet told journalists that it was the work of 'an obscure underling' of Vansittart.)

The German claim to the transfer of the Sudeten areas has already been conceded by the French, British and Czechoslovak governments, but if in spite of all the efforts made by the British prime minister a German attack is made upon Czechoslovakia the immediate result must be that France will be bound to come to her assistance, and Great Britain and Russia will certainly stand by France.

WHATEVER THE exhilaration these underground schemes produced amongst the Focus and in Whitehall, the ordinary citizens, and not a few of their M.P.s, viewed coming events with a foreboding whose intensity became apparent only after the shadow was dramatically lifted. Not since the abdication, in fact, had Churchill so overlooked the darkening chasm that occasionally opens between public and published opinion. Reading Tuesday's *Daily Sketch*, one day before Hitler's ultimatum would expire, Lady Spears nervously wrote in her diary: 'Worse than we thought. We feel on the brink. Curious atmosphere.' Either the Germans overthrew their Führer – an echo, that, of Goerdeler and von Kleist – or: 'We'll be at war by Saturday.'

That early autumn Tuesday morning, September 27, Londoners glimpsed scenes whose like they had not seen for twenty years: lines out-

* In the event no break-in was made into German wavelengths. The B.B.C., said Lindemann, fumbled or refused to break international wavelength agreements, so it went out only over the conventional channels, an hour after Hitler's speech.⁶⁰

side libraries where gasmasks were being issued; volunteers digging air raid trenches in the royal parks; evacuees crowding railroad stations, glancing at the skies; a solitary anti-aircraft gun in Hyde Park. From Wellington Barracks to Eton College ramparts of sandbags were being filled and stacked. Spears arranged for all Jewish refugees who wanted to fight to write him saying so. He phoned his wife: 'Arrangements have been made' – in fact by the Focus – 'to broadcast Chamberlain's speech in German.' She unhung their better pictures and drove their valuables to their cottage in the country.⁶¹

That afternoon the prime minister instructed the First Sea Lord to mobilise the fleet as Churchill had suggested; Duff Cooper, the navy's minister, was only informed later. Even before learning of this, Hitler partially shifted his ground: he sent a telegram assuring Chamberlain that German troops would not advance further into Czechoslovakia than the territory which Prague had already agreed to cede. 'I feel certain,' Chamberlain replied in a perhaps unfortunately-worded telegram, offering to fly over yet again, 'that you can get all essentials without war and without delay.'

From Prague, Ripka telephoned Sheila Grant Duff that the foreign office was applying 'great pressure' on Beneš to knuckle under. She telephoned the news to Churchill. He was furious. He had seen Chamberlain and Halifax the day before, he shouted to her, and they had assured him the pressure was at an end; he was so angry that he slammed down the telephone when he finished speaking.⁶² Shortly, he received from Masaryk bare details of what the Czech called the 'Hitler-Chamberlain auction,' with full permission to use them – 'Just please not verbatim so some of my "friends" will not have a pretext to send me away from London. The map will be ready tonight.'

Churchill listened at Morpeth Mansions as Chamberlain broadcast at eight that night, in deepening gloom as the familiar, grating voice talked of the letters that were pouring into No. 10. 'How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is,' the prime minister said, 'that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks here because of a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing.' These careless words aroused in those closest to the Czech cause – whatever their motives may have been, bankers, diplomats, journalists, and politicians in the Focus – 'bewilderment,' in the words of one, 'and grief.'

Around nine-thirty Winston telephoned General Spears and commanded him to telephone Reynaud in Paris, to assure him that the speech did not reflect the feeling of the country. But Spears found a strange drumming noise on his telephone and a three-hour wait to get even long

distance; it was the mobilisation of the fleet, they reflected. Later a friend telephoned from Brussels and through her they got Reynaud to telephone at midnight.

Over dinner with Duff Cooper at the admiralty, Winston learned that the fleet had been mobilised. He sent round to the *Evening Standard* an anonymous item for its Londoner's Diary, congratulating the First Lord on this move and reminding readers that Mr Winston Churchill had taken the same steps on the Tuesday before the declaration of World War One.⁶³

BRONZED AND fit, the M.P.s streamed into Westminster for the recalled Parliament that Wednesday September 28, 1938. Before going down to the House Lady Spears looked around their Bayswater home, decided the servants' lavatory would be safest in an air raid, and sent a servant out to buy black paint for the skylight. Passing the bank she withdrew £10 for emergencies.

If the rank-and-file M.P.s had opinions, they still kept them to themselves. At eleven o'clock the Focus caucus and a hundred other dissidents met in uproar over Chamberlain's broadcast in a tense committee room, issuing notes to party leaders. Into this mood of rising panic, the B.B.C. broadcast two hours later air raid and child evacuation regulations.

Churchill drove down to the House.

Over at the Carlton Grill, his friend Chaim Weizmann saw his hour coming too; he lunched in style, and invited several gentile Zionists to discuss how to exploit the Czech crisis in the context of Palestine. Britain had only two divisions there, and only two more available for France. He thought he had Chamberlain over a barrel now. A year earlier a foreign office memorandum had pointed out that the Zionist policies of the colonial office were rousing anger throughout the Moslem Middle East, and that there was a powerful argument for revising them if the air situation was as perilous as Mr Churchill claimed.⁶⁴ Since then the P.M. had replaced William Ormsby-Gore by Malcolm Macdonald as colonial secretary; and now, in September, Macdonald had made it clear that partition of Palestine was a dead duck. On this famous Wednesday he sent for Weizmann and notified him that, should war now break out, Palestine would be subject to martial law and further immigration halted. Weizmann wrote to him that same day, warning that the British must choose between friendship of Jewry and of Arabs.

Blanche Dugdale returned from the Carlton to the House in time to hear a roar of applause lift the roof. She entered to find M.P.s giving Chamberlain a standing ovation. Churchill was sitting, ashen-faced, with

arms folded; his friends were seated with him, while six hundred M.P.s stood and cheered. The Queen Mother watched intently from the Speaker's gallery as Conservatives waved order-papers. The party had rallied to their leader just as Weizmann had predicted days before.

Half an hour before, Chamberlain had spread out his papers before him and embarked on a painfully ordered narrative of the Czech crisis, while messengers hurried along the oaken benches handing out the telegrams and pink telephone slips that were descending on the Palace of Westminster; Churchill had stacked his telegrams ostentatiously in front of him, held together with an elastic band, confident that his hour had come.

As the deadpan prime minister's narrative advanced into the recent and unknown, the clock beneath the peers' gallery – where Churchill had espied his old enemy Lord Baldwin – moved on to twelve minutes past four. The P.M. had reached 'yesterday morning' in his narrative when a sheet of F.O. foolscap was rapidly passed along the front bench and handed to him.

'Herr Hitler,' he announced, interrupting his own speech and straightening up from his notes, 'has just agreed to postpone his mobilisation for twenty-four hours and to meet me in conference with Signor Mussolini and Monsieur Daladier at Munich.'

War had been averted: the world was back from the brink. There was that instant of silence that demagogues know so well – a silence, broken by thunderous applause.⁶⁵ It sends a thrill into the marrow of the speaker; today it chilled Churchill to the bone. Unjustly, he suspected that his crafty rival had stage-managed the scene; he certainly did not forget the lesson when he came to announce the sinking of the enemy's biggest battleship some years later.

The House broke up in joyous cacophony. Were they tears of jealousy that welled in Winston's eyes, or of remorse? He gripped Chamberlain's hand as the P.M. swept out of the chamber. '*By God,*' he growled at him, '*you're lucky.*'⁶⁶

13: *Outcast*

ONLY A SLICK of oil remained on the bubbling parliamentary surface to mark the failure of Churchill's torpedo run. There followed eleven months of bitter personal despair. If Chamberlain stubbornly refused to give him office in those months he had more than enough reason: he was concerned about Winston's growing recourse to alcohol, as he showed by remarks to Joseph Kennedy. Moreover, Winston's group had fought dirty; they had sold themselves to the Czechs for their own ends.*

The wounds never entirely healed between the vanquished and the victor. Chamberlain did not crow, but kept his lamentations private, telling only his sister what he was learning from the wiretaps: 'I had to fight all the time against the defection of weaker brethren and Winston was carrying on a regular campaign against me with the aid of Masaryk the Czech minister. They, of course, are totally unaware of my knowledge of their proceedings; I had continual information of their doings & sayings which for the nth time demonstrated how completely Winston can deceive himself when he wants to, & how utterly credulous a foreigner can be when he is told the thing he wants to hear.' In this case, added the P.M., Churchill's message had been: 'Chamberlain's fall is imminent.'²

Winston's methods had also ruffled Britain's allies. The cabinet's secretary noted in his diary that his sudden flight with Spears to Paris – and his visit only to Mandel and other government members opposed to Daladier's policy of peace – was most improper. The French foreign minister complained about it, and asked what Britain would say if prominent French statesmen did the same?³

* The principal Czech agent in London reported on October 20 that Masaryk had told him in July 1938: 'I know that neither Sinclair, Seton-Watson, nor Attlee can save us: they're opposition. What we've got to do is get amongst the members of government and the Conservatives.' Now for the first time this agent received substantial funds from Masaryk: 'I never had such a guilty conscience,' he reported to Prague, 'as when I was handing out the money the minister placed at my disposal.'¹

THE WORLD rejoiced as the news broke about the Four Power conference. As Chamberlain packed for Munich a two-word telegram from President Roosevelt lay on his desk: 'Good man!'⁴ * Come Sunday and the whole of Fleet-street would have performed a complete somersault in Chamberlain's favour.

But the news left Winston more cast down than before. In London's clubs that Wednesday night, September 28, M.P.s spat out his name like snake venom. Anthony Crossley, a young Tory M.P. who had teetered on the brink of the Focus, listened to them discussing the recent 'disreputable intrigues' and told Winston afterward that, frankly, his name was mentioned.

'The last word has not been spoken yet,' replied Churchill, affecting indifference.⁶

The plans of the Focus had come unstuck. They met that Thursday in private over luncheon at the Savoy – Churchill, Lady Violet, Lord Lloyd, Nicolson, Spears, Wickham Steed and many M.P.s.⁷ Glasses of cognac stood amongst newspapers whose front pages already carried wire photos of Chamberlain being cheered through the streets of the Bavarian capital. That afternoon Lloyd, Cecil, Sinclair and Churchill signed a telegram entreating him not to betray the Czechs but to draw upon Russia's aid.

Eden refused point-blank to sign, seeing it as a 'vendetta against Chamberlain.'⁸ Attlee, when found, also ducked out: first, he said, he must secure the approval of his party who were meeting, as Lady Violet recalled, 'at some watering-place a fortnight hence.'

The Focus meeting dragged on until evening, gloomily aware that nothing could be done. Nicolson saw that even Winston had lost his fighting spirit. His eyes were wet as the meeting broke up. On the nine o'clock news Spears heard of the first British proposals at Munich. His eyes brimming with tears, he told his wife he had never been so ashamed, so heartbroken. Together they went round to Morpeth Mansions, but all the fight had gone out of their champion.

'It's too late to do anything,' Churchill muttered.

Spears replied, 'It's never too late.'

In a towering rage at the refusal of Attlee and Eden to sign the telegram, Churchill dined at the Savoy with the Other Club.⁹ When he re-emerged hours later, the early editions carried the Munich terms. These directed Beneš to pull his troops out of the Sudetenland including the vital fortifications over the next ten days.

* Ten years later Chamberlain's widow sought White House permission for its release. President Harry S. Truman deemed it inadvisable in a presidential election year. In 1950 she tried again. Truman scrawled, 'I do not think it should be released. HST.'⁵

Spears soldiered on. Through an emergency committee set up the next day he issued a million leaflets on 'Czechoslovakia's Martyrdom.' There were no problems of finance.¹⁰

Overnight Churchill too recovered his old spirit. At Morpeth Mansions Nicolson glimpsed on Winston's face on Friday morning, September 30, a grim expression he could only describe as utterly blank, and heard him exclaim to Lord Cecil: 'I feel twenty years younger.'¹¹ After telephoning Masaryk that Friday evening to implore Dr Beneš to dig his heels in and refuse to pull Czech troops out of the vital fortifications for the next forty-eight hours at least – he assured Masaryk that 'a tremendous reaction against the betrayal of Czechoslovakia is imminent' – he climbed into his black Humber and drove down to Chartwell. Chamberlain's wiretappers had also picked up this final incitement to war – for such there would have been if Beneš were now to disregard the Four Power agreement. The head of the foreign office recorded in amusement that Winston, Lloyd and others were still 'intriguing with Masaryk and Maisky.'¹²

By the time the prime minister landed at Heston airport at six o'clock that evening, to declare to the enraptured throng that he had gained peace with honour, Mr Churchill, author and broadcaster, had resumed work on his *History of the English-Speaking Peoples*. On the following day, Saturday October 1, he had an appointment with a young producer from the B.B.C., fresh out of Cambridge and already secretly in the pay of the Soviet government. We don't know what they discussed, but they seem to have found common ground because after their talk he inscribed a copy of *Arms & The Covenant*: 'To Guy Burgess, from Winston S. Churchill, to confirm his admirable sentiments.'

It poured with rain that weekend. Lady Diana Cooper phoned Chartwell to report that Duff Cooper had resigned as First Lord. She heard Winston sobbing. Chamberlain gave the admiralty to Lord Stanhope.

Trying to rebuild a united front against the prime minister, Churchill telephoned the economist Roy Harrod. 'This is Winston Churchill speaking,' he began, and explained what he was attempting. Harrod suggested that he try the more eminent trade union leaders. 'I have done that already,' came the icy reply. 'They're worse than Chamberlain.'¹³

CHAMBERLAIN GAVE orders to buy up Prague's surplus arms to stop them getting into the wrong hands (in Spain or Palestine).¹⁴

He viewed the Zionists and Winston with the same loathing as he bestowed on Dr Beneš and Jan Masaryk, and it would not have surprised him had he known that as Masaryk walked into Weizmann's home late that

Saturday October 1, the whole company rose in mute acknowledgement and the ladies kissed the diplomat. Masaryk found there the Marks & Spencer's directors Simon Marks and Israel Moses Sieff, discussing ways of destroying Chamberlain's policies on Palestine;¹⁵ a few hours earlier Macdonald had informed Weizmann that if war broke out Palestine would come under martial law and the *yishuv*, the Jewish community, would be conscripted. 'We can only work by every means, fair and foul,' wrote one virago attending that evening's conclave on how to end the British mandate, '. . . to buy land, bring in men, get arms.'

Masaryk revealed that he had tackled Sir Alexander Cadogan about the wiretap records handed over by Hitler, and had denied using such language. 'From one friend to another,' was Cadogan's reply, 'be careful.'¹⁶

The downpour continued throughout Sunday.

After a brief ultimatum, Poland seized Teschen (Tešín), a Czech mining town. A bedraggled Churchill lunched at Bracken's house with the Polish ambassador – whose name he could never remember. They had last lunched together on the day of Chamberlain's announcement of the Munich conference. Now whatever sympathy he had entertained for Poland had evaporated: if war came, the world would leave her to the Nazis and their *Schrecklichkeit*.

Count Edward Raczynski inquired, 'But do you think there will be war, Mr Churchill?'

'My dear Polish ambassador,' said Churchill, side-stepping that elusive name, 'There is war *now!*'¹⁷

It had not yet occurred to the Poles to court the democracies. In Warsaw, they introduced vicious nationality laws to prevent Polish Jews returning home from emigration; in Berlin, they coquetted with Hitler over a grand alliance against Russia; in Washington, their ambassador complained about the 'almost one hundred per cent Jewish control' of American radio, film and newspapers, and about the Jews' coarse but effective propaganda line. 'The American people,' this noble diplomat, Count Jerzy Potocki, informed Warsaw, 'are told that peace in Europe is hanging only by a thread and that war is inevitable.' He identified the men behind this campaign as Baruch, Morgenthau, Judge Felix Frankfurter, and the governor of New York State – they posed, he said, as defenders of democracy but in the final analysis were 'connected by unbreakable ties with international Jewry.'¹⁸ * The Poles would remain pariahs until March 1939.

* The Nazis captured Count Potocki's telegram in Warsaw and published it in March 1940. Baruch wrote him icily: 'I think this requires an explanation.'¹⁹ Potocki denied the document's authenticity. (It was genuine. The original carbon copies of all his telegrams are in the Louis P. Lochner collection at the Hoover Library.)

For four days beginning that Tuesday, both Houses debated the Four Power agreement. Winston manoeuvred for one final torpedo run: he sent Macmillan to ask Dalton to bring his leader Clement Attlee to a meeting of dissident Tories at Bracken's house. Attlee ducked the meeting again, and it went ahead without him. The M.P.s agreed tactics in the big debate: should the Tory dissidents vote against Chamberlain or merely abstain? Anxious to see as many M.P.s abstaining as possible, both on the government's motion and on the Labour amendment, Churchill asked Dalton not to make the latter too patently a vote of censure. Dalton said his friends were not frightened of that.

'We must not only be brave,' Churchill lectured him. 'We must be victorious.'

Dalton liked him, preferring Churchill's toughness to the 'wishy-washiness' of Eden, whom Churchill had also persuaded to attend.

Overshadowing all the Tory dissidents was the fear that Chamberlain might call a snap election and withdraw the Whip from them. Few of Churchill's group could afford to lose an election: General Spears would be 'faced with the prospect of losing £2,000 a year from Czechs,' as his wife wrote disarmingly in her diary, adding almost as an afterthought: 'And his seat in Parliament.'²⁰

Churchill asked if Labour would agree not to contest constituencies where the dissidents were opposed by official Conservative candidates: Dalton refused to commit himself.²¹



At ten past five on October 5, 1938, Churchill rose to deliver the most important speech in his career.²²

Years before, he had studied Lord Randolph Churchill's style of oratory, and perfected it as his own. 'Never peek slyly at your notes,' he would say in 1945, tutoring a colleague on the art.²³ 'They should be flagrantly waved in the face of the M.P.s.' He took his time and studied his notes quite openly, grasping the lapels of his coat and standing well back from the box; with his special glasses he could read his typescript at five feet. 'Do not touch the box lightly with your hand – that only distracts the audience's attention. If you touch the box at all, then bang it solemnly with the fist at an appropriate moment.' And, he added, a menacing scowl glowered at the audience would add theatrical effect.

In this speech he made a fatal error: he set those notes aside. He had begun to praise Duff Cooper as the real hero of Munich, when Lady Astor loudly interrupted: 'Nonsense!'

Rattled, he looked up to answer her.

'She could not have heard the chancellor of the Exchequer admit,' he began, 'in his illuminating and comprehensive speech just now that Herr Hitler had gained in this particular leap forward in substance all he set out to gain.'

It was an obscure, uncharted side-track, but he rattled further down it. 'The utmost,' he floundered, pausing, 'my right Hon Friend the prime minister has been able to secure by all his immense exertions, by all the great efforts and mobilisation which took place in this country, uh, the utmost he has been able to gain –'

'– *Is peace!*' shouted several Members in delight.

After that his speech fell off its hinges. At one point he attacked the Munich settlement in a laboured witticism: 'One pound was demanded at the pistol's point. When it was given, two pounds were demanded at the pistol's point. Finally the dictator consented to take one pound, seventeen shillings and sixpence, and the rest in promises of goodwill for the future.'

There can never be [he went on] friendship between the British democracy and Nazi power, that power which spurns Christian ethics, which cheers its onward course by barbarous paganism, which vaunts the spirit of aggression and conquest, which derives strength and perverted pleasure from persecution, and uses, as we have seen, with pitiless brutality the threat of murderous force.

As Churchill thundered this denunciation, Chamberlain tossed his head in scornful denial.²⁴ Sir Harry Goschen felt Winston should have held his tongue; the speech had been trumpeted all round the world and had set back Britain's reputation. The *Times* scoffed that he made Jeremiah look an optimist by comparison; the *Express* derided it as 'an alarmist oration by a man whose mind is soaked in the conquests of Marlborough.' Only the *Daily Telegraph* stated thoughtfully that Mr Churchill's earlier warnings, seemingly verified by events, entitled him to be heard.

When the vote was taken, the mutiny squibbed. Only thirty M.P.s abstained, with thirteen including Churchill remaining seated.

He found it hard to forgive his valiant friends who now voted for the government. One he abused 'like a Billingsgate fishwife,' and cancelled their first-name friendship. Another, Robert Boothby, reprimanded by Bracken for 'crumpling,' bleated in a note to Churchill that he had in fact – surreptitiously – abstained. 'I do not think I have "crumpled"; but confess I cannot regard the events of the past few days, which I sincerely believe portend the doom of at any rate my generation, without agitation.' 'I really have not changed my mind at all,' Boothby explained to Spears, 'but

after Munich I was given certain information by two people who knew the facts, which led me to the conclusion that in the event of war we should probably have been defeated within three weeks. In these circumstances I don't think Chamberlain had any alternative but to come to terms.'²⁵

His position secure, Chamberlain adjourned the House until November 1, pointing out that it was for the Speaker to decide if it should be recalled earlier. 'But,' Churchill loudly interjected, 'only on the advice of His Majesty's Government!' – an offensive remark which Chamberlain haughtily called 'unworthy.' Churchill pinked with anger and demanded that the P.M. retract, which attracted this reply on Downing-street notepaper: 'You are singularly sensitive for a man who so constantly attacks others.'²⁶

A month without Parliament would allow tempers to cool. There was no knowing what mischief the bellicose would reap if they continued to sow disharmony from that ancient platform.

By a hair's breadth, peace had been preserved at Munich. So Chamberlain remarked in a letter to his sister. 'Unhappily,' he continued, 'there are a great many people who . . . do all they can to make their own gloomy prophecies come true.'²⁷

For several days Churchill tried to prepare a fresh torpedo run. It was Cripps who suggested that a small group of men 'prepared to take their political lives in their hands' should sign a national appeal.²⁸ Dalton asked fellow Labour Party leaders Attlee and Morrison to join him in a three-a-side conference in the Conservative Harold Macmillan's flat; this time Eden got cold feet and Duff Cooper would not come without him. 'Only Churchill would have met us,' wrote Dalton, 'and this we judged could be done without so much elaboration.'²⁹

Winston shrugged and returned to Chartwell. Observing him, Macmillan felt he was relapsing into a complacent Cassandra: 'Well,' seemed to be Churchill's attitude, 'I've done my best. I've made all these speeches. Nobody has paid any attention. All my prophesies have turned out to be true. What more can I do?'³⁰



One reason for the crumbling of support at this stage was the drying up of funds. Masaryk had resigned; on the advice of the Czech agent mentioned earlier, the legation was purged of leftists, Polish and German émigrés, and staff of Jewish origin. Beneš also resigned and shortly arrived in England with his wife.³¹

He found he was not popular. Many Czechs disliked him even more than Chamberlain. When Chamberlain announced a £10 million credit for

Czechoslovakia,³² a Mr Samson, whom the British authorities identified as 'a Jew long resident in Britain,' tipped off the foreign office that Beneš and his former prime minister Milan Hodza had transferred £3 million in English banknotes out of Prague and deposited them at his (Samson's) Lloyds Bank safe deposit at Stamford-hill. When Cadogan recommended a treasury investigation, an F.O. official fobbed him off, suggesting an examination of Samson's mental health instead.³³

Such intrigues seem germane to this account: Beneš was later baffled by Churchill's hesitancy to recognise the exile government he formed.³⁴ There were more such dubious transactions. On December 20 Masaryk tried to transfer £21,000 out of Prague using the Lord Mayor of London's Czech Refugee Relief Fund as a currency evasion device; part of these funds also belonged to Beneš.

Churchill's stock had sunk to near zero. Replying to a commiserating letter from *Winnipeg Free Press* editor John W. Dafoe, Winston wrote on October 11, 1938: 'I am now greatly distressed, and for the time being staggered by the situation. Hitherto the peace-loving powers have been definitely stronger than the dictators, but next year we must expect a different balance.'

Over the next weeks a new bloc had begun to form including Eden, Duff Cooper, and Cranbourne. Lady Spears thought they were 'making a mistake in not wanting to include Winston.' On November 6 Eden invited Gunston, Amery, Spears, Cartland, Crossley, Macmillan and others to a meeting, but not Churchill. Nicolson was relieved, finding that the old man had become embittered, 'more out for a fight than for reform.' Discouraging the notion of inviting Eden to their next luncheon, Churchill explained on the twelfth to the Focus secretary: 'I doubt if Mr Eden would come. He is very shy at present.' Shy was the wrong word. One cold morning, visiting Stornoway House, Winston asked Lord Beaverbrook to get Eden on the 'phone. A voice said he was just coming, until Max said: 'Mr Churchill wants to speak to him.' After some delay, the voice said: 'He's out walking,' and put the phone down.³⁵

Beaverbrook wrote off Churchill. 'This man of brilliant talent, splendid abilities, magnificent power of speech and fine stylist,' he wrote on the tenth, 'has ceased to influence the British public.'³⁶ A week later, in a debate on the need for a ministry of supply, Winston passionately appealed for fifty members to vote with him: only Macmillan and Bracken did so.

WHAT BROUGHT Churchill back into the limelight was the Nazi propaganda campaign that began nine days after Munich. Speaking in his snarling, guttural Austrian dialect to fortification workers at Saarbrücken, Hit-

ler picked on him by name. 'It only needs for Mr Duff Cooper or Mr Eden or Mr Churchill,' he declared, rolling the r's in Churchill, 'to come to power in Britain in place of Chamberlain, and then we can be quite sure that the aim of these gentlemen would be to start a new world war. They make no bones about it, they speak of it quite openly.'

Shortly, Hitler's propaganda officials issued a secret circular:

'In future the German press is not to pass up any opportunity of attacking Eden, Churchill and Duff Cooper. These men are forever picking on Germany and stirring up hatred of her. We must repay them in their own coin. In the eyes of the world Churchill and Duff Cooper are to be branded as warmongers and provocateurs whose schemes have been thwarted by Munich. Newspapers close to the three are putting it about that they are candidates for high cabinet posts. The German press is to adopt such a censorious attitude to these three that without our uttering one word to this effect the entire world decides of its own volition that for such personalities to be given high office would be the gravest affront to Germany.'³⁷

The barrage continued when Hitler spoke on November 6 at Weimar. 'I recently named three of these globetrotting warmongers by name. What stung them was not the allegation, but my audacity in naming them.'

Mr Churchill [he continued] has openly declared his view that the present regime in Germany must be overthrown by internal forces who are standing gratefully by to make themselves available to him. If Mr Churchill would mingle more with Germans and less with émigré circles, with venal traitors in foreign pay, he would see the absurdity and stupidity of such vapourings.

Hitler asked 'this gentleman who appears to be living on the moon' to believe that no force capable of turning its hand against the regime existed in Germany.

If this campaign was the first turning point for Churchill – since British public opinion instinctively rallied to his defence – the second came very shortly. On the seventh a young Polish Jew demented by Warsaw's new nationality laws gunned down a German diplomat in Paris. Dr Goebbels's own newspaper *Der Angriff* claimed 'a direct link' between Churchill and the assassin. The diplomat died two days later, and Goebbels touched off a

vicious pogrom in revenge: synagogues and businesses flamed; Jews were manhandled, murdered or thrown into concentration camps.

Just when his isolation seemed final and complete, this Nazi 'Night of Broken Glass' saved him. The loathsome pogrom made Germany an international outcast; and it released substantial Jewish funds into the 1939 campaign to draft Churchill into No. 10.

It was a sickening setback for appeasers like the American ambassador. Like Chamberlain, Joseph Kennedy preferred peace at any price. His habitat was the Cliveden set. His views were poison to Churchill, whose men were already canvassing round the backdoors of the White House, demanding the ambassador's recall. 'I may say in passing,' Bracken wrote privately to Baruch, 'that your ambassador in London exhausted the resources of his rhetoric in praising the Munich pact.' Hobnobbing with his German colleague Herbert von Dirksen, Kennedy – like Count Potocki – remarked upon the 'baleful influence' of the Jews upon American journalism and government. At the Trafalgar Day dinner three weeks after Munich, he declared that democracies and dictatorships should settle their differences – 'After all,' he said, in a passage which Bracken drew to Baruch's attention, 'we have to live together in the same world whether we like it or not.' To London friends he described Roosevelt's Democratic policy as 'a Jewish production.'³⁸*

Churchill made no secret of his adherence to the Zionist cause. When Palestine was debated on November 24 he criticised Chamberlain's policy. 'The court is august,' he said finding some of his former eloquence, 'the judges are incorruptible, their private virtues are beyond dispute, but the case is urgent and all they have been able to do in three whole years of classic incapacity is to paulter, and maunder, and jibber on the bench.' Regardless of the uproar it would cause in the Moslem world, he recommended allowing up to twenty-five thousand Jews to immigrate into Palestine annually for the next ten years.⁴⁰

Kennedy meanwhile sailed for the United States in December 1938, and would not return until late February.

IN MID-NOVEMBER 1938 Clementine Churchill left England for the West Indies. To her long letters Winston replied with only the patchiest of telegrams. He was still swamped with work on the *History*. 'I have been toiling

* Biographer James Landis studied Kennedy's (still inaccessible) 1938 diary and wrote him informally ten years later: 'I've been over the October and November stuff. You get busier and busier, not to speak of the Jews starting to mess the thing up.' And – justifying a draft chapter on 'the Jewish propaganda following Munich' – 'You personally were very conscious of it at the time.'

double shifts,' he dictated on December 18. 'It is laborious: & I resent it & the pressure.' He softened the typed letter with a few lines in 'his own paw.' Writing a few days later about the death of her eldest friend, he reflected upon mortality – upon the many now dying whom he had known when they were young. 'It is quite astonishing to reach the end of life & feel just as you did fifty years before. One must always hope for a sudden end, before faculties decay.'⁴¹

He was the kind of driven man who seldom contemplates suicide, however bottomless the slough. The post-Munich strain might have pushed other men over that brink. 'Winston, Eden, and the rest of us who regarded Munich as a great surrender have been much abused,' wrote Bracken, most intimate of his conspirators, to Baruch.⁴²

But Churchill never lost his curiosity about what the future held in store for him. One evening ten years later, in the smoking room at the House, he reminisced about films – he had seen some, like Alexander Korda's 'Lady Hamilton,' twenty times. 'You know, one can't help admiring the Almighty,' he said, in that voice he used when working up to a point. 'He's been telling this Story of Life for thousands of years, he's never repeated himself once, nobody knows what the end is going to be – but only one in ten thousand walks out in the middle!'⁴³

FOR A while he tried to unseat Leslie Hore-Belisha at the war office. He saw his chance when his M.P. son-in-law Duncan Sandys, a first lieutenant in the army, was disciplined by the army after revealing secret data on anti-aircraft deficiencies in the House. Sandys claimed this was a breach of parliamentary privilege. 'For the Churchill clique,' smirked a German diplomat in London, 'the affair is grist to the mill, and that is why Churchill egged Sandys on to raise the matter.' This was also the war office view, where Sir Henry Pownall wrote that Sandys was a 'slippery young gentleman' backed by Winston, and that both hated the secretary of state and longed to catch him out. The Committee of Privileges found in Sandys's favour, but to Churchill's dismay it later turned out that it had been furnished with inaccurate facts. Sir John Simon wrote to the P.M., 'I have the impression that Winston and Co . . . would not be sorry to see it dropped provided, of course, that they escape the discredit which may come to them.'⁴⁴

Months later, on December 5, the house debated the affair. Churchill declared that Hore-Belisha had been too complacent over the Territorial Army. 'When?' demanded Hore-Belisha, rising to his feet. 'And where?'

'I have not come unprepared,' replied Churchill.

But he fumbled his notes, and those press clippings he read out mitigated the minister rather than condemning him. Hore-Belisha challenged, 'Will the Right Hon. Gentleman go on reading!' Each succeeding sentence demolished Churchill's own argument the more. 'He is becoming an old man,' remarked one Tory M.P.; to another it was like watching a tiger miss his spring.⁴⁵

Personal indebtedness still oppressed Churchill as 1939 began. He hoped to earn £22,420 that year, including £7,500 on the completion of the *History* – he was now fighting the Wars of the Roses, having put Joan of Arc to the stake – £4,880 from the *Telegraph*, and £4,200 from the *News of the World*. Chamberlain had no intention of distracting him from his literary endeavours. 'If Winston walks in at the door,' he had once said to Baldwin, 'I walk out of the window.' He quoted this in mid-December to one of Roosevelt's intimates who brought him a private message – that in the event of war he 'would have the industrial resources of the American nation behind him.' People could not expect to walk in and out of governments at will, said Chamberlain, particularly if they had made things difficult at an anxious moment.⁴⁶

Privately, Churchill did not believe that Britain was Germany's next target. He predicted on December 22 to Clementine that when Hitler moved again, probably in February or March, it would be against Poland. In fact he cared little for that country: she had attracted disdain by her 'cynical, cold-hearted behaviour' in seizing Teschen.

For tactical reasons, however, he wanted the British to believe they were at risk, and equally that the Soviet Union presented no danger at all. 'War is horrible,' Churchill told Kingsley Martin for the *New Statesman*, 'but slavery is worse, and you may be sure that the British people would rather go down fighting than live in servitude.'

At the same time he urged closer co-operation with the Kremlin. 'Soviet Russia,' he averred in an interview for *Picture Post*, 'has never made the blunder of thinking the welfare of its people could be increased by looting its neighbours. However much one may disagree with its political and economic theories, it has hitherto shown no trace of the aggressive intentions which appear to inform the three partners of the so-called axis.'⁴⁷ Before many months had passed he would be wiser in this respect.

By January 1939 Whitehall was awash with rumours of Hitler's next strike. Sources spoke of a sudden coup – of a knock-out blow against Britain, of an invasion of Holland. Perhaps malignant forces in England were keeping tension high. Lord Halifax hinted at this in a telegram to Washington later that month: some messages had come, he said, from highly-

placed Germans of undoubted sincerity, others from refugees claiming links with leading German personalities.⁴⁸

Churchill did not take them seriously. On January 7 he left to vacation on the Riviera. Passing through Paris, he lunched with Reynaud, met with Phipps and Mendl, listened to Blum's opinion that those two 'ruffians' Hitler and Mussolini would soon be off again, then headed for the Mediterranean by overnight train. Courage had returned to the French generals as the threat of war receded. He learned from Blum – who had it from Daladier who had it from Gamelin who had it direct from General Georges – that the French could have pierced Hitler's West Wall by the fifteenth day of the Czech war at least.⁴⁹ Perhaps it was fortunate for their self-esteem that they never knew that Hitler had planned to have his Panzer divisions in Prague by the third day.

His feelings toward his own party were of unmitigated bitterness. His local officials at Epping had now suggested that Britain come to terms with Germany, and indicated that they preferred an M.P. of that view. Winston wrote to Clementine on the ninth not mincing his language about 'these dirty Tory hacks who would like to drive me out of the party.'

He lazed at his usual château, lying abed and dictating fifteen hundred words a day of manuscript. In the evenings he played the tables, preferably with other people's money. 'Just as at Chartwell I divided my days between building and dictating,' he teased Clementine, 'so now it is between dictating and gambling.'⁵⁰

He dined frequently with the Windsors, who lived nearby. An American friend of the duke's, a colonel from their London embassy, was also there, writing a copious and contemptuous diary about the wealthy foreigners he encountered on the Riviera. 'We dined with Maxine Elliot at her villa,' he wrote one night, identifying among the other guests Mr Churchill, Lady Drogheda and the flamboyantly lesbian Marchioness of Milford Haven: 'The duke does not like people with her reputation.' After dinner they played *vingt-et-un*, and Churchill launched into a monologue, disapproving of Charles Lindbergh for visiting Germany and accepting a decoration. The American winced at some of his remarks, 'But knowing his gift for oratory and my inarticulateness I remained silent.' He thanked God he could leave early.⁵¹ Churchill dominated these evenings. Often he deprecated France's coming victory. After dwelling upon the illusions which had made Franco popular among the 'well-to-do,' a chauffeur drove him down to the casino. 'It amuses me very much to play,' he explained to Clementine, 'so long as it is with their money.'⁵²

On the day after he wrote these words, he and the Duke of Windsor sat by the fireplace and argued fiercely about Franco.* Perched on the sofa's edge the slim ex-king tore into Churchill's latest article about Spain, and mocked his proposed alliance with the Kremlin.

The paunchy politician was the kind of checkers player who sweeps the pieces off the board when the game goes against him.

'When our kings are in conflict with our constitution,' he roared, with gravelly voice, 'we change our kings.'

Britain, he cried, was in the gravest danger of her long history. Some of them may have pondered why then he was desporting himself down here; others probably reflected, as had Chamberlain, that the danger of war was lessened with each day that Winston was far from Westminster. Of course nobody dared to provoke the famous temper by uttering such *lèse-majesté* out loud. 'The rest of us sat fixed in silence,' wrote one guest.⁵³

A FEW days after Winston's return, Chamberlain replaced Inskip with Lord Chatfield as minister for co-ordination of defence. Winston took it as a fresh snub. 'How indescribably bloody,' he wrote to his sister-in-law, 'everything is!'⁵⁵

He resumed his wooing of Labour. On February 9, 1939 several Labour M.P.s were invited to the Savoy for a 'strictly private' luncheon with the Focus. Lord Halifax was principal guest; he spoke briefly and answered questions. His secretary made a private note that one of the Labour men, Rennie Smith, had become very pro-Halifax 'since the Focus lunch.' Smith approved the plan that Churchill, who had presided, set out for encircling Germany with a ring of peace-loving states.⁵⁶

That spring of 1939 the heavily-financed publicity push for Churchill began. It was to characterise the middle months of 1939. *Picture Post's* Hungarian born editor Stefan Lorant, who had fled Germany in 1933, ran three prominent articles on his background and political views. The first, written by Wickham Steed, promised that Churchill's 'greatest moment' was about to come. There were spreads of photographs of Chartwell and his family.⁵⁷ Asked in one episode about his policy at home, Winston explained: 'I think it will be necessary to form a government upon a broader base and ensure the co-operation of the great mass of the working people if we are to carry through a strong foreign policy.'

* Five months into the war, Spears was told by a French officer friend that the duke had told him, '*Moi, j'aime les allemands!*' While the duchess asked the French Senator de la Granges and others, 'After all, does anybody know what we are fighting for?' And, 'Will we be any better at the end of it all?'⁵⁴

He was happy to let the publicity machine gather momentum without him. Resolving his personal indebtedness still had first claim to his time. Turning down a request from Spears to speak at Carlisle, he explained that it was 'absolutely necessary' for him to be down at Chartwell every possible night of 1939 in order to complete his *History*.⁵⁸

14: *Still Hibernating*

WHILE FIRST Prague, then Danzig began to smoulder, Churchill barely lifted his head from the desk where the final chapters of his magisterial *History of the English-Speaking Peoples* were taking shape. He rarely ventured forth from Chartwell. Once General Spears invited him to speak in July. He replied declining: 'I am so rarely in London now, and so busy on my *History*.' He would still be marshalling source books, directing researchers and dictating manuscript weeks after war broke out.

Munich had made him enemies and he knew it. Determined attempts were made to unseat him and he had to speak at several constituency meetings defending his record. Visitors found him in resigning mood. When he looked to the future, beyond Neville Chamberlain, he saw only the grinning features of Lord Halifax as Britain's next prime minister. Over lunch one day in March he said as much to Ambassador Kennedy – the tide was running so strongly for Chamberlain that it would be better to lie low.¹

In Central Europe, Czechoslovakia began to break up from within, subverted by Hitler's agents. On the third Prague's Intelligence service reported to their British colleagues that Hitler planned to invade in mid-March.² On the eleventh Cadogan had like messages from both M.I.5 and the S.I.S.; he wrote a bland 'Maybe' in his diary. On the twelfth the banker Tony Rothschild forwarded to Churchill's informant and benefactor Sir Henry Strakosch a similar 'ear-witness' report.* The latter's protégé Sir John Simon commented sardonically on the rotten luck of Ribbentrop & Co., unable to communicate their horrible designs to the general staff without 'ear-witnesses' giving the game away. Equally authorita-

* Characteristically, this report's hard factual kernel about Prague was cocooned in hoey: Franco about to be overthrown by Serrano Suñer; Mussolini about to hand an ultimatum to France; Italy about to swoop on Switzerland using paratroops and the Göring Regiment; and Germany about to invade England with flat-bottomed boats massing in northern harbours.

tive warnings had earlier pinpointed March, he pointed out, and scoffed to Halifax: 'Well, the Ides of March have come, but not gone.'³

Chamberlain cared little for the Czechs. According to German intercept records he sent a secret message to Berlin on the fourteenth expressing disinterest in Czechoslovakia.⁴ Dr Goebbels notified Nazi editors: 'London will show the utmost reserve even if there should be an external attack on Czecho-Slovakia.'⁵

Late that day the new Czech president visited Hitler. Under menace, he signed over his strife-torn country to Germany's protection. Even before he arrived at the Reich Chancellery an elite S.S. unit had occupied the Vitkovice steelworks to keep it from the predatory Poles – a serious blow for the Rothschild consortium who owned it, and for General Spears, whose membership of the board would probably seem less necessary to the Führer than it had to Dr Beneš. By dawn on March 15 Hitler himself was in Prague.

Chamberlain took it calmly. In the House that afternoon he declined to associate himself with those who charged Hitler with a breach of faith. His Intelligence authorities were less sanguine, having lost valuable resources in Prague, and invited the head of the Czech Intelligence service to transfer his staff to Britain; that gentleman accepted, passed through Paris on the eighteenth, and directed the Czech legion there to send its war contingency Intelligence funds to him in London through the British embassy.⁶

TO HIS credit, Lord Halifax refused to swallow Hitler's occupation of Prague. Upon his insistence, Chamberlain found belated words of indignation and spoke them at Birmingham on March 17. Churchill was impressed. Back at Chartwell, he received a letter from the secretary of the Focus welcoming the P.M.'s apparent recognition that he could not 'shoo off dictators with an umbrella.'

Prague galvanised several associates of the Focus into action – though for different motives. Wickham Steed asked the foreign office to grant immediate asylum to a number of Czechs; he guaranteed the foreign office that their maintenance would be assured by himself 'acting on behalf of Dr Beneš and certain wealthy Czech-Americans.'⁷ Spears badgered the treasury to take action over Vitkovice, its account at N. M. Rothschild & Co., and the hapless Nazi hostage Louis Rothschild.⁸ And Mr Churchill's former secretary Robert Boothby also hurried to the treasury on Friday the seventeenth, though on a different mission of humanity.⁹

He had been hired by a wealthy Czech resident émigré, Richard Weininger. Weininger had assets of £242,000 blocked in Prague; prom-

ising the Tory M.P. ten per cent of any proceeds, he had advanced to him £1,000 in February and asked him to get any monies available in London – for example Britain's loan to Prague – released to people like himself.¹⁰ On March 17 Boothby was at Downing-street urging the blocking of all Czech assets in Britain. Five days later he spoke thus in the House: 'Every person, and I would apply this to Czech residents in this country as well as to British subjects, who can prove assets held in Prague ought now to be paid out of the [Czech Loan] Fund.'¹¹ His campaign resulted – as he would confide to Weininger in June – in a treasury decision in favour of holders of Czech cash and bonds.

Churchill, by way of contrast, lay low in the countryside. He was momentarily distracted from his writings by a sudden fear of an all-out Nazi air attack – the spectre that he himself had conjured up. He wrote to the prime minister on the twenty-first suggesting that with such a man as Hitler – under intense strain, fearful of British encirclement plans – anything was possible. He might be tempted to throw a surprise attack at Britain's capital or her aircraft factories. Winston urged Chamberlain to announce that Britain's anti-aircraft defences were manned now.

'It is not so simple as it seems,' the P.M. replied.

ONE BY ONE the props defending the fragile peace in Europe were being knocked aside. At any moment the dreadnought of war would begin its slide down the slipway. A growing number of politicians in London wanted precisely that: Hitler, it seemed, was getting away with everything, and nobody was willing to call his bluff.

Can we not discern their hand in that month's odd Romanian episode? We can call it the Tilea Untruth. Two days after Prague, the Romanian minister in London, Viorel Tilea – intimate friend of the Focus – told Lord Halifax that Germany had issued an 'ultimatum' to his government. Bucharest, astonished, denied the ultimatum, but Tilea stuck to his story. Robert Boothby would brag a few days later over lunch with Dorothy Macmillan at Quaglino's that he had himself 'entirely invented' the story: he had called on the legation to obtain a visa, Tilea had mentioned that Germany was asking Romania to concentrate more on agriculture, and he had persuaded Tilea to tell the F.O. that this was an 'ultimatum.' He himself had then sold the story to the newspapers.¹² According to a German intercept, Tilea admitted to another Balkan diplomat that his instructions had only been to talk of an 'economic ultimatum'; he had 'made the utmost possible use of his instructions.'¹³ Whatever the background, he shortly retired a wealthy man; he purchased a farm and maintained a mo-

nastic silence until his death. The foreign office took note that among Tilea's effects in January 1941 was a pound of solid gold.¹⁴

The consequences of the Tilea Untruth were serious. Fearing new Hitler schemes, this time against Romania, Chamberlain began drafting a Four Power declaration to be signed by Britain, France, Poland and Russia, to 'act together in the event of further signs of German aggressive ambitions.'¹⁵ But an important meeting of his Foreign Policy Committee on March 27 accepted that Poland would not join a system that gave Russia the right to pass troops through her territory. Britain quietly decided therefore to include Poland, rather than Russia, in the non-aggression scheme.¹⁶

While Churchill bent over his *History*, reports about German designs on Poland also quickened. On March 22 an Intelligence (CX) report stated that the German *Aufmarsch* was to be completed by the twenty-eighth; five days later a similar source claimed that the Germans in Danzig were standing by for a coup on April 1. These reports were entirely false, but seemed serious enough when viewed from London.

On the last day of March Sir Horace Wilson, who now had a private office at No. 10, was told that military Intelligence concluded that Hitler was forcing the pace, hoping to obtain Danzig in the next few days by force or agreement, or to intimidate Warsaw.¹⁷

CHURCHILL REMAINED in political hibernation. By March 23 – the day that Germany regained Memel from Lithuania – many associates were asking the Focus why he was not giving a lead. When the League of Nations Association invited him to speak, he lifted his head long enough to make the truculent reply that since his 1938 speaking campaign had made no impact he would reserve his declining energies for the House.

Even here his influence seemed on the wane. When he and Eden set down a resolution late in March demanding conscription and a national government equipped with special powers over industry, it attracted only thirty-six signatures, including Duff Cooper and Harold Macmillan, and was flattened by a counter-resolution signed by 180 Conservatives. Churchill returned to his manuscript.

One of his private Intelligence sources was young Ian Colvin, the *News Chronicle's* correspondent in Berlin. Then aged twenty-five, Colvin was used by anti-Nazi elements in Berlin as a vehicle for scare stories. Churchill showed no dismay at the fail-rate of Colvin's prophecies: in January 1938, before the *Anschluss*, Colvin had alleged that Hitler planned to invade Czechoslovakia that spring; after the November pogrom, he had described a 'speech' made by Hitler to three foreign ministry officials setting

out his aversion to Britain and Chamberlain, and describing how he was going to get rid of the Jews, the churches and private industry in Germany (there was no such speech).¹⁸

Now, on March 29, he arrived in London. Cadogan found him a 'nice young man, rather precious,' but together with Halifax listened with disquiet to the newspaperman's latest report, that an attack on Poland was imminent. This too was untrue: four days earlier Hitler had secretly assured his commander-in-chief that he was not going to tackle the Polish problem – yet.¹⁹

Together the F.O. officials walked Colvin over to No. 10. Given the delayed shock of Hitler's entry into Prague, and the nervousness generated by Tilea, Chamberlain was determined not to be caught napping. After some reflection, because he disliked being stampeded, he decided to guarantee Poland immediately – before it was too late.²⁰

He announced the guarantee in the House that Friday, March 31.

The effect was not what he intended. Within an hour of the news reaching Hitler, he sent for General Wilhelm Keitel – as the diary of his adjutant shows* – and ordered the high command to draw up a directive for CASE WHITE, war against Poland.

This, and the further remarkable British guarantees to three Balkan countries that shortly followed, were welcomed by the Focus. They were like tripwires. As Iverach McDonald, diplomatic correspondent of *The Times*, would later write, they were justified in the eyes of a growing number of Tory M.P.s and journalists for one simple and overriding reason: 'The sooner that war came the better.'²¹ In this curious, even base desire they were at one with their greatest enemy. On April 3 Keitel signed the CASE WHITE directive, outlining a contingency which might make war on Poland necessary on or after September 1.

Roused at last by the rattle of these events, Mr Churchill found himself in broad agreement with the government for once, and declared so in the House on that same day, April 3. Again he commended Stalin to Mr Chamberlain as a partner; later, he strolled down to the lower smoking room to clink glasses with the Soviet ambassador.²² Poland, he pointed out to Ivan Maisky, would want to know that any Russian troops she allowed in would also eventually get out.

'Can you give us such assurances?'

Maisky gave no reply.

The prime minister did not share Winston's benevolent appreciation of the Kremlin. He feared that Soviet motives were quite remote from Western ideas of liberty. Despite 'painstaking examination,' Sir Horace

* *The War Path*, pages 194 and 280.

Wilson would recall, writing in October 1941, Mr Chamberlain could not believe that the Soviet policy was anything but selfish – ‘mixed with a strong desire to see civilised Europe ruined by a conflict between England and Germany.’ And, he continued, nothing the Russians did up to the time of his death suggested to Chamberlain that he was mistaken.²³

ON GOOD Friday, while England warmed to the Easter bank holiday weekend and Mr Churchill applied himself once more to his *History*, Benito Mussolini occupied Albania.

The next day, April 8, Churchill and Macmillan lunched at Chartwell and pored over maps of the Mediterranean; Winston learned that the British fleet was scattered throughout that sea and that three of its five capital ships were actually ‘lolling about’ Italian ports. He spent much of that Saturday hectoring the P.M. by telephone and messenger-borne letter, begging him to order the fleet to seize the island of Corfu that night – to pre-empt further Italian plans in those waters.

Chamberlain found out that Churchill had also contacted his cronies in the French government. The distant whiff of cordite had revived Churchill’s flagging spirits, but it appalled the P.M.; he wrote his sister about how Winston had ‘badgered’ him to recall Parliament, telephoning at all hours of the day.

I suppose he has prepared a terrific oration which he wants to let off. I know there are a lot of reckless people who would plunge us into war at once, but we must resist them until it becomes really inevitable.

On April 13, intending to announce Britain’s guarantee to Romania, Chamberlain invited Winston to call on him before they went into the chamber. Churchill wrongly grasped that the invitation meant he was about to be offered a new ministry of supply. But more than ever since Saturday’s Corfu intermezzo, the P.M. mistrusted his judgement; the invitation had been uttered merely in a mood of reconciliation, hoping to keep the House united. Before tossing to his disgruntled rival some morsels of secret background information, he revealed nonchalantly that he was quite aware that Winston passed on such secrets through Randolph to journalists and ‘others’ – no doubt meaning the French and Ivan Maisky.

Winston allowed that he would be making a ‘not unhelpful speech.’²⁴ He thought he had phrased it carefully, but neither its acid undertone nor the cheers that it attracted from Labour benches escaped the prime minis-

ter; when he shortly set up a ministry of supply, he gave it to somebody else. Churchill remained in the wilderness.

The polemics in the newspapers increased – hostile to Hitler, favourable to Winston. Typical of Fleet-street's spring campaign was the reader's letter prominently printed by the Odham's Press *News Review* on April 6: 'When we fight Germany again,' a Mrs E. Heffer wrote, 'give her a thorough beating, exterminate the German men and divide Germany between Britain and her Allies!' The publication of such a letter was widely commented upon in Germany.

Largely to spike Mr Churchill's guns, Chamberlain now introduced conscription, having first sent a secret message to reassure Hitler.²⁵ As Chamberlain put it, in a cutting private remark about Churchill, 'The nearer we get to war, the more his chances improve, and vice versa.' The *Sunday Pictorial's* young editor Hugh Cudlipp wrote to Winston that he had received twenty-four hundred letters overwhelmingly in his favour, and accepted an invitation to Chartwell in return; pleasingly few of the correspondents had recalled Gallipoli. Winston's stock was rising. Ambassador Kennedy agreed to be principal guest at the Focus luncheon on April 25,²⁶ and after Churchill addressed the House two days later, still dissatisfied with Chamberlain's Military Training Bill, Lord Camrose's *Daily Telegraph* printed a flattering report of M.P.s pouring in to hear him.

IT WAS fortunate that he had not committed himself to Chamberlain's cabinet, because in May 1939 he was called upon to attack it again. Dismaying word had reached Chaim Weizmann in Jerusalem of Britain's probable future policies in Palestine – a White Paper would propose an independent Palestine with a Jewish population limited to one-third of the total, settling only one small 'ghetto' area.

Weizmann sent a menacing cable to Chamberlain – with a copy in code to Mr Churchill – warning that the Jews in Palestine would oppose such a policy with all their strength. It would destroy all Jewish hopes and surrender them to what he called 'the Arab junta responsible for terrorist campaign.' 'Jews are determined make supreme sacrifice,' he warned, 'rather than submit to such regime.' Begging Churchill to get the White Paper postponed, he spoke of the 'grave consequences' if Downing-street announced the new policy or authorised the use of force against the Jews: 'It will engender further bitterness between Jews and Arabs and drive Jews who have nothing to lose anywhere to counsels of despair.'²⁷

A further telegram to Churchill followed on May 4. With Italy and Germany poised to invade Egypt and Libya, Weizmann suggested, Britain could ill afford to alienate the 'single group in Middle East whose loyalty

absolute and war potential [are] not inconsiderable.’ The Jews could produce forty thousand disciplined men to reinforce Britain in the Middle East, as well as bringing over reinforcements from Eastern and Central Europe and America.

The government however suspected that different motives underlay the desire to arm the immigrants in Palestine. The potential nuisance value of the Moslems, they reasoned, far outweighed that of the Jews.

Besides, if war did come with Hitler, the Jews would have no option but to support Britain. The White Paper was issued on May 17, heedless of the blandishments from Jerusalem, and was debated in the Commons a few days later.

Churchill’s group was outspoken against it. He himself delivered a fine oration, which he rehearsed to Weizmann over lunch that day at Morpeth Mansions. It derided the notion of prohibiting Jewish immigration after 1944 unless Palestine’s Arab population agreed. ‘Now there is the breach,’ he cried. ‘There is the violation of the pledge. There is the abandonment of the Balfour Declaration. There is the end of the vision, of the hope, of the dream.’ It was another Munich, he mimicked – ‘*They’re on the run again!*’

There were many abstentions. Chamberlain’s majority fell to eighty-nine. The Focus associates – Amery, Bracken, Cartland, Cazalet, Law, Locker-Lampson, Macmillan, Sinclair, Nicolson and many others – all voted with Churchill against the White Paper.

‘Words fail to express my thanks,’ Weizmann wrote that day, and Bob Boothby echoed him: ‘One of the few things in my life of which I am proud is that . . . I have hitched my wagon to your star.’²⁸ Churchill, his prospects of cabinet office receding still further, returned to his *History*.



He had healed the breach with Eden. Eden too emphasised the need for an early alliance with Russia, and was to be heard when speaking to his constituents early in May 1939 quoting the words of Churchill – ‘whose exceptional talent the nation will wish to see employed in its service at this time.’ On the fourth he was to be seen in a huddle with Churchill in a corridor of the House. ‘Fancy having thrown away the Czechs, a gallant and democratic people,’ Winston exclaimed, loud enough for Hugh Dalton to hear, adding with evident distaste: ‘And now we have to do the best we can with the Poles.’²⁹

That day’s *Daily Telegraph* carried his article urging the Poles to accept Russia as an ally; a ‘definite association’ between Poland and Russia would soon become indispensable. What Poland feared was precisely the associa-

tion that Moscow defined three months later – that between the meal and the monster. But Churchill was out of office, and could afford the luxury of over-simplification. In mid-June he would refer to ‘Poland, a new force, and behind it, the Russian pad.’³⁰ These were words, phrases, images devoid of political reality.

In the *Telegraph* on June 8 he reverted to his call for an immediate Triple Alliance. He guessed that time was running out. Late in May, a former British air attaché in Berlin had furnished to him a report from inside the war ministry: according to this a German traitor had written to him on May 8 warning that Hitler was seeking a Russo–German alliance and had ordered editors to tone down their articles on Russia.³¹

Time was running out in another sense for Churchill. He was like a gambler whose pile of chips was steadily declining. Strained by the upkeep of Morpeth Mansions and the Chartwell estate, his funds were nearly exhausted. Thanks to That Man, as he soon took to calling him, ever fewer countries were now willing to syndicate his articles. Poland, Romania, Greece – all found his articles too risky to print. ‘The net is closing round our activities,’ he lamented in a letter to international literary agent Emery Reves on May 8, ‘through fear of Germany.’

But he sensed that his hour was nigh. His oldest friends reassured him. Blum came over and met with associates of the Focus at the Berkeley Hotel, and several times that summer Paul Reynaud noted Winston’s name in his appointment book in Paris. One old comrade reflected after dining with Winston that he was charming and friendly and looked younger than he had in years. ‘He too regards a more or less early war as certain!’ noted P. J. Grigg.³²

Joe Kennedy also accepted the inevitability of war that summer. Over dinner in June the senior American columnist Walter Lippmann related this to Winston, while adding that the ambassador was also convinced that Britain would be defeated. Whisky and soda in one hand, cigar stub in the other, Churchill loudly disagreed, delivering a fine oration in rebuttal of this ‘tragic utterance.’ His speech vibrated with familiar rhetoric about perils, ordeals and jeopardy, about trials and disasters, and about veritable rains of fire and steel, scattering death and destruction. ‘I for one,’ he ended, ‘would willingly lay down my life in combat, rather than, in fear of defeat, surrender to the menaces of these most sinister men.’

Such was Harold Nicolson’s recollection of his words, while Lippmann jotted down Churchill’s prediction that Hitler’s Wehrmacht could never pierce the French carapace. When in form like this, nobody liked to contradict him. Puffing at his cigar, he suggested that only one argument counted, and that was the use of force: ‘At [Germany’s] first provocative

action, cut German railway communications with Europe and defy them to do anything about it!’³³

Once he touched upon the alleged threat from Japan. In March he had dismissed it. ‘Consider,’ he had written then to Chamberlain, ‘how vain is the menace that Japan will send a fleet and army to conquer Singapore.’³⁴ Now, in June 1939, he repeated that insouciance. Were he in power, he said, he would cut his losses in the Far East; ‘no dispersion of the fleet,’ scribbled Walter Lippmann; and, ‘settle with Japan after the war.’

Two weeks later Churchill spoke to probably the largest lunchtime audience of the City Carlton Club. ‘I was not deceived last year,’ he maintained, ‘and I warn you not to be deceived this year.’

His prediction now was that, after the crops had been harvested, July, August and September would see tension rising in Europe. Could he but address Germany’s Führer direct – speak to him right at the summit – he would declaim: ‘Pause, consider well before you take a plunge into the terrible unknown. Consider whether your life’s work, which might now be famous in the eyes of history, in raising Germany from prostration and defeat to a point where all the world is waiting anxiously upon her actions – consider whether all this may not be irretrievably cast away.’³⁵

That day, June 27, 1939, he published another pot-boiler, *Step by Step*. In its proof copy, the book had closed with a chapter entitled, ‘Will Hitler Make Napoleon’s Mistakes?’ – predicting that Germany would ultimately invade the Soviet Union.

At the last moment Churchill excised this prophetic essay.³⁶

15: *Two-Fisted*

YEARS LATER, increasingly deaf and a prisoner to his thoughts, he occasionally looked back in contrition upon the holocaust that had ensued. Once a historian would see him pacing his room at the House murmuring, 'Europe is a sea of blood and it is all our fault.'¹

Perhaps it could not have been foreseen by the democracies in that summer of 1939. Other matters seemed paramount: the rise of anti-Semitism, the resurgence of nationalism, the infectious spread of racial intolerance.

At the beginning of that summer Churchill was visited by an eminent American whom some researchers now regard as having been a clandestine emissary from President Roosevelt – Felix Frankfurter.

The meeting was seemingly confidential, for neither man's biography mentions it. Judge Frankfurter had emigrated as a boy of twelve from Vienna, risen through the ranks of the American judiciary, and was now one of the president's most respected advisers. Appointed to the Supreme Court in January, he had begun sending hand-written messages to the White House on the Court's small notepads – about Weizmann and Ben-Gurion, refugees, and the repeal of the neutrality law.²

Frankfurter was close to the American Jewish Committee (A.J.C.) which stood – at one or two removes – behind the Focus. Perhaps unconsciously he also used its jargon: in one note on May 24 he urged Roosevelt, even when talking on domestic issues, to stress at all times the Nazi threat to 'freedom and peace.'^{*} Shortly before Frankfurter's visit to Mr Churchill, as his surviving papers show, there had been meetings to discuss the most seemly manner of spending the \$3-million propaganda fund raised by the A.J.C. At one meeting, called in New York on December 22 to discuss the rising anti-Semitism, somebody had suggested using Hitler's

* Churchill wrote to Clementine on January 8, 1939 that Chamberlain had adopted the very phrase he had been repeating for the last two years, namely 'freedom and peace'; and he commented particularly that Chamberlain 'put, as I have always done, "freedom" first.'

Germany as a kind of lightning conductor – to ‘deflect’ the endemic hatreds from Jews wherever they were to Nazi Germany.

It was an ingenious but disturbing suggestion. At a second secret meeting in Washington in April 1939, chaired this time by Frankfurter himself, he expressed alarm at the A.J.C.’s ‘present secret and undercover methods’; such methods, he suggested, implied ‘a distrust of the very democracy in which, as Jews, we profess to believe.’

In his view they must either continue to use respectable front organisations – he instanced the Conference of Jews and Christians – or they must use only methods respectable enough to stand investigation. Suppose a snap congressional investigation exposed the A.J.C.’s current \$3-million campaign? It would embarrass the entire Jewish community. ‘And,’ he warned, ‘what capital its enemies would make of such an attempt to mould public opinion in this country!’³

Invited to Oxford to receive a doctorate in law, Frankfurter told Sir Maurice Bowra, warden of Wadham College, that Hitler was a threat to freedom and peace everywhere. Bowra ensured that Lindemann took him to Churchill.

We know little about his visit except that Frankfurter thanked the Prof. for arranging it. ‘That talk with Mr Churchill,’ he wrote, ‘was one of the most exhilarating experiences I had in England – it made me feel more secure about the future.’⁴ He wrote to a fellow judge afterward that all his friends in Britain expected war. One of them evidently predicted that Hitler’s clock would begin to run on August 21.⁵

SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH Frankfurter’s departure from London, an extravagant publicity campaign began on Churchill’s behalf. In a pleasingly artless paragraph of his memoirs the latter professed surprise and ignorance of its origins:

Thousands of enormous posters were displayed for weeks on end on metropolitan hoardings, ‘Churchill must come back.’ Scores of young volunteer men and women carried sandwich-board placards with similar slogans up and down before the House of Commons.

‘I had nothing to do,’ he pleaded, ‘with such methods of agitation.’⁶

Mysterious agents rented advertising hoardings – a typical one photographed on July 24 in The Strand bore only three huge words: WHAT PRICE CHURCHILL? By rumours, innuendo and outright statement, Fleet-

street suggested he was actually about to return; newspaper editorials and readers' letters debated the issue.

It was the *Daily Telegraph* which started this great paper chase on July 3. 'No step,' argued this, the flagship of Lord Camrose, 'would more profoundly impress the Axis powers with the conviction that this country means business.' The *Star*, *Sunday Graphic*, *Observer* and *Yorkshire Post* took up the cry, with the *Mirror*, *Evening News*, *Daily Mail* and the communist *Daily Worker* hard on their heels.

This virtual editorial unanimity was impressive, not to say unique. Several diplomats suspected that it was orchestrated. In Berlin, the appalled British ambassador told the equally disgusted Lord Kemsley, owner of the *Sunday Times*, *Sunday Graphic* and *Sunday Chronicle*, just what he thought of 'brother Camrose's Churchill campaign.'

In London, the American embassy recalled having seen periodic agitation for Churchill earlier, but never on such a scale. Over at Carlton Terrace, the German ambassador ascribed it to dissidents trying to subvert the cabinet and sabotage its constructive policies on Germany – 'mainly Anglo-Jewish circles with the Churchill group in their wake.'⁷*

Vexed by the *Telegraph* editorial, Chamberlain sent for Lord Camrose and explained in confidence just why he would not hire Winston. The man was bad-tempered and his ideas and memoranda 'tended to monopolise' everybody's time in government, an argument of some validity as events had shown. He enlightened Camrose about the strange Corfu Saturday, citing it as an example of Churchill's uneven judgement.⁹ He detected in the agitation a conspiracy involving the Soviet ambassador – his sources reported that Maisky was in close touch with Winston's son. On July 8, after a visit from the Australian high commissioner, the prime minister wrote to his sister that the Dominions thought like him – that if Winston was in the government, 'it would not be long before we were at war.'

Truth called the 'blatant press campaign' an intrigue to enable Winston to 'muscle into the cabinet'; it quoted one admiral as making clear that he did not want 'the indispensable Mr Churchill' back in the government, let alone at the admiralty. 'Sir Walter Layton wants Mr Churchill in the cabinet,' mocked *Truth* on July 14. 'Why not make a job of it and have [his comedian son-in-law] Vic Oliver too?'¹⁰

* The former queen of Spain told Ambassador von Dirksen on July 6 that a letter from Churchill to the Republican prime minister Negrin had been found listing the art dealers in Holland suitable for disposing of the Spanish treasures.⁸

ONCE THAT July, when the agitation was at its height, Churchill flew to Paris, thrilled to the Bastille Day parade down the Champs-Élysées, and returned flushed with military panoply and the cognac of the Ritz, where he had lunched with his principal accomplice Paul Reynaud.

Friends and rivals alike were struck by his liquor consumption. Lord Rothermere wagered £600 that he could not forswear cognac for a year; Chamberlain too mentioned this minus element of the Churchill equation when the American ambassador called on the twentieth. Kennedy commented on the raucous press campaign – which had climaxed, he reported to Washington, three or four days earlier – and inquired why the P.M. refused to yield. Chamberlain replied that he did not believe that Winston could deliver one-tenth as much as people thought. ‘He has developed,’ he murmured ‘into a fine two-fisted drinker.’ Reverting to a prevailing theme, he added that Churchill’s judgement had repeatedly proven unsound; had he been in the cabinet he was convinced Britain would have been at war by now.¹¹

As suddenly as it had begun, the agitation subsided. Sam Hoare explained, perhaps unjustly, to Lord Astor: ‘Anything that Winston attempts is overdone.’ In this case it had only stirred up reaction against him.¹² By the twenty-second the American embassy could confirm that the campaign had ended. It had, in Kennedy’s picturesque phrase, ‘fallen out of bed.’¹³

The ‘Bring Back Churchill’ campaign certainly irritated Hitler. When he received Lord Kemsley at Bayreuth on July 27, he ‘referred particularly,’ as the press lord confidentially informed the foreign office, ‘to Mr Winston Churchill and his powers of expression.’ Kemsley advised the Führer not to attach undue importance to the Opposition; Mr Churchill in particular had been unfortunate in his campaigns several times in the past, ‘starting with the abdication.’¹⁴

Churchill buried his head in his manuscripts at Chartwell; occasionally august visitors came down to see him. General Sir Edmund Ironside, the army’s commander-in-chief, was one, on July 24. In December 1937, Winston had visited him, had listened approvingly as the general poured out laments about the new secretary for war, Leslie Hore-Belisha, and had attempted some clumsy flattery. The general had stiffly replied that he had never influenced his career ‘by asking or intriguing for things.’ Churchill had hastily explained that he had not either, but ‘I’ve had my ups and downs.’¹⁵

Down here at Chartwell they talked until five A.M. The birds were chorusing the arrival of the dawn as they retired to bed, Ironside overwhelmed by Churchill’s conviction that war was inevitable. Standing in front of the six-foot-square map of Europe that adorned the wall above his

writing desk, the politician had lectured the C-in-C about the likely sequence of events: Poland destroyed; diversions by Mussolini, then an Italian invasion of Egypt; a German advance through Romania to the Black Sea; and finally 'an alliance with Russia when the latter sees how the land lies.' It must be said that his prophecies were a *tour de force*.

Winston also outlined a plan he had himself devised to send battleships into the Baltic. Months later, he would elaborate it under the codename CATHERINE. It was never executed, although it did feed his obsessive interest in Scandinavia.

Churchill had once called Ironside the finest brain in the British army, but this view was not held widely or for long. Kennedy would report to Washington that people said the general could talk twelve languages but doubted he could think straight in any of them; and Cadogan privately thought him 'so stupid as to be impervious to anything.' General Ironside could not get Winston out of his mind, and days later still pictured him walking up and down his study, chafing at the inaction – 'a man who knows that you must act to win.'¹⁶

If during this July 1939 press agitation Mr Churchill himself had avoided the limelight, it was for a more pressing reason than diplomacy. His year's gross income was lagging some £10,000 behind expectations; but he was nearing the end of his half-million-word *History*, and upon completion would be entitled to collect £7,500. His manuscript had reached the imperial reign of Queen Victoria; but now, in mid-1939, the British empire with its accretions at Versailles was even more majestic, far-flung and prosperous than in her time. If ever in later years he cast a backward glance upon the vanishing empire, perhaps in that brief mood of contrition after the ensuing holocaust, he must have realised that it was his own stewardship of office that marked the passing of its prime.

OCCASIONALLY HE ventured up to London that summer, but in strict privacy – usually for one of the mysterious witches' sabbaths organised by the Focus. From its office at Southampton Buildings in Chancery-lane, its secretary arranged a luncheon to enable Dr Beneš 'to meet, quite privately, just a few associates of our Focus' upon his return from America.¹⁷

Since earlier chapters have made repeated reference to this cabal, it will serve a historical purpose to identify some of the forty 'associates' of the Focus who lunched in that private room at the Savoy on July 27, 1939. Fortunately Beneš retained the guest list, and this reveals among those present Messrs Churchill (who presided), Ronald Cartland, Colin Coote, Cummings, Eden, Emrys Evans, Henderson, Greenwood, Layton, Nicolson, Salter, Seton-Watson, Sinclair and Spears, as well as Mr and Mrs

Wickham Steed, Captain B. H. Liddell Hart, Miss Megan Lloyd-George, Lady Violet Bonham-Carter, the Lords Lytton, Lloyd and Davies, and of course Sir Robert Waley-Cohen, whose committee was providing the funds.

The Czech record tells us that in his 'secret speech' Mr Churchill praised their venerable guest for his moderation during the Sudeten crisis; as long as he, Churchill, lived he would seek to undo the terrible injustice done to Czechoslovakia, and as he said this the tears were seen to trickle down his cheeks.¹⁸

Writing in February 1943, Sam Hoare would urge Beaverbrook to remember the oppressive mood, that summer of 1939.

It was an atmosphere of peace at almost any price; the Peace Ballot, the Labour opposition against any service estimates and conscription, the pressure of business and industry against war. Neville was not the man to fight this opposition, for at the bottom of his heart he sympathised with it. Nor, I believe, would Churchill have fought it if he had not been in Opposition.

Parliament dissolved. Outside the chamber, Churchill buttonholed Chamberlain and protested that he could not trust his judgement during the coming vacant weeks. The P.M. replied that this was mutual.

This stung Churchill to repeat Archie Sinclair's charge that if Parliament had met earlier last September Britain could have mobilised her fleet, reached agreement with Moscow, and saved Czechoslovakia. It seemed to the P.M. a 'fatuous and imbecile proposition.' Winston stormed into the chamber purple with fury.¹⁹ Here he delivered a speech demanding Parliament's recall later that same month. Hitler, he claimed, had a habit of perpetrating his felonies when the Members were on holiday. (Chamberlain checked and found that on the contrary the House was in session on every such recent occasion.)

In an ironic broadcast on the eighth, Churchill invited his American audience to listen to the tramp of armies 'going on manœuvres.'

Yes, only on manœuvres! Of course it's only manœuvres – just like last year. After all, the dictators must train their soldiers. They could scarcely do less in common prudence, when the Danes, the Dutch, the Swiss, the Albanians – and of course the Jews – may leap out upon them at any moment and rob them of their living space, and make them sign another paper to say who began it.

Before leaving on vacation, Churchill wrote a lengthy letter, at Linde-
mann's suggestion, assuring the secretary of state for air, Sir Kingsley
Wood, that the development of an atomic explosive such as recent press
scares had suggested would take 'several years,' and that Mr Chamberlain
must not allow himself to be bluffed by any German or 'Fifth Column'
threats of a secret weapon, 'some terrible new secret explosive, capable of
wiping out London.'²⁰

That letter sent, he left to vacation in his own way – with his beloved
French. His notorious affair with France still raised indelicate titters in the
less francophile sections of society. During the French state visit to Lon-
don over Easter ('Frog Week'), one Tory M.P. remarked upon Churchill,
who was no art-lover, and 'all the pro-Frog boys' going to Covent Gar-
den.²¹

As with all affairs of the heart, his emotions blinded his common
sense. Oblivious of the foetid odour of decay arising from her army and
society, he still saw across the Channel the France of 1914. He had assured
Ironsides in 1937 that the French army was an 'incomparable machine.' His
solid confidence was fortified in mid-August when he and Spears toured
the Maginot fortifications at Gamelin's invitation. Wearing a natty light-
coloured pinstripe and trilby, and with only the wispiest gold chain across
his waistcoat, he explored the subterranean workings and tunnels without
pausing to reflect upon the psychological ill effects of such monumental
defensive positions upon the offensive spirit of an army.

Looking grave and slim in his gold-braided képi, the local field com-
mander, his old friend General Georges, drove him down to where the
broad, fast-flowing Rhine formed the frontier with Germany. Winston
suggested that monitors – ships mounting heavy guns on a protected deck
– would help thwart a German offensive here. He returned to Paris
pleased to find the platform at the Gare de l'Est crowded with photogra-
phers and gawking railway workers.

He checked into the Ritz, collected Clementine and Mary, and went
on to vacation at Consuelo Balsan's. The artist Paul Maze joined him;
sometimes they fished together off a local humpback bridge, but mostly
Winston marshalled canvases, brushes and tubes and set off to paint the
old manor house or nearby Chartres cathedral.

He was aware by now that Hitler's clock had already begun to tick. In
Moscow, the Anglo-Soviet talks were stalled. Modest British and French
military missions had arrived there on the eleventh, but Stalin had re-
sponded to Hitler's flirtations and now stated impossible demands to the
British and French. In London a week later Vansittart learned from a se-

cret source with access to communications between Berlin and Rome that Hitler was going to attack Poland on the twenty-fifth or soon after.

On August 23 Berlin radio broke the extraordinary, awful news of the pact between Germany and the Soviet Union.* Poland, caught between them, was doomed. Elder statesman Maurice Hankey, summoned urgently by Chamberlain to No. 10 Downing-street to advise him on how to set up and run a war cabinet, wrote in his diary: 'He then consulted me about personnel: Should Winston Churchill be in? I agreed with him that public opinion would expect it.'

Catching the unmistakable whiff of gunpowder in the air, and frantic lest Chamberlain set up his war cabinet before he could return, Winston called briefly on Paul Reynaud at the ministry of finance, dashed off an article for the *Daily Mirror* ('At the Eleventh Hour'), then flew home by the first available plane, leaving his wife and daughter to follow. As his plane circled Croydon he was already picking out deficiencies in the air-field's camouflage, shelters and defences.²³

He was in no doubt that the Event was upon them: Chamberlain was about to be tripped up – by his own tripwire, the Polish guarantee.

When Archie Sinclair phoned after dinner he found Winston in high fettle. He had just telephoned Reynaud, and the Frenchman had assured him that all was going well – 'By which he means war,' Harold Nicolson supposed, hearing of this.²⁴

Hearing rumours of twenty thousand 'organised Nazis' lurking inside England, Winston decided to take precautions: he took out and checked his own revolvers; and he called his former Scotland Yard detective, Inspector Thompson, out of retirement, and told him to bring his pistol with him.

The prime minister was dazed by these events. On August 23 Kennedy had called upon him, shocked by his haggard looks, and asked how things stood. Chamberlain replied, downcast: 'It appears as if all my work has been of no avail.' The guarantee to Poland had not worked. 'The thing that is frightful,' he stated, 'is the futility of it all. After all, the Poles cannot be saved.' Now Britain could only wage a war of revenge, leaving Europe in ruins and her own position in the Far East progressively weakened.²⁵

Parliament, recalled on the twenty-fourth, enacted an Emergency Powers Bill. In the streets, hired women mutely paraded sandwich-boards bearing one word: CHURCHILL.

* Washington even learned of the secret protocol dividing Poland between Hitler and Stalin. Hans-Heinrich von Herwarth, a traitor in the German embassy in Moscow, betrayed it a few hours later. He was appointed ambassador to Britain after the war.²²

Chamberlain squirmed at the name. To invite this troublesome man into his cabinet would be to scuttle every last prospect of an accommodation with the dictators. When Sir Nevile Henderson had called upon Hitler on the previous afternoon, he had mentioned this stout refusal to employ Churchill as the ultimate proof of the P.M.'s desire for peace; according to the German record, Henderson explained that the hostility in Britain was being whipped up by 'the Jews and the enemies of the Nazis.'²⁶

Unable to understand why even now Chamberlain was not sending for him, despite his premature return from France, Churchill dined gloomily that evening with Duff Cooper, Eden, Sinclair and Sandys at the Savoy. Afterward he drove to Chartwell to continue on the *History*.

THROUGHOUT 1939 he had barely thought about Poland: such feelings as he entertained for her were of contempt.

Now it was Munich all over again – with Masaryk's place taken by that Polish ambassador whose name he could never recall. Day after day he now picked up one of the two 'phones on the wall shelves in his study and telephoned the ambassador to beg Warsaw not to weaken or give in.²⁷ Others in the Focus kept up the pressure – Lord Lloyd, Harcourt Johnstone, Hugh Dalton, Brendan Bracken and Duncan Sandys all 'phoned or called upon Count Raczynski.

For the last days of August Churchill invited General Ironside down to Chartwell – the general had just paid an official visit to Poland and was full of what he had seen. Churchill had also continued to correspond with Eden, who had now joined a rifle battalion as an officer, and when Parliament was recalled on August 29 photographers caught them walking together to the House – Eden immaculate in striped tie, Churchill more sombre in spotted cravat, dark three-button suit, black homburg and gold-knobbed walking stick.

He believed that Hitler was in a corner. He called up Eddie Marsh and told him so on the phone: the Führer was rattled, he said, but in mortal fear of climbing down. Fearing that Chamberlain might yet force a compromise upon Warsaw, at Churchill's urging the Polish ambassador now risked doing as Masaryk had done in 1938 – transforming himself from a diplomat into an agent interfering in British internal politics, 'and, what is more,' he admitted, 'in opposition to the government.' His most willing accomplices were 'the politicians of various shades grouped around Churchill.'²⁸

As August 1939 ended, Winston Churchill stood at the long inclined trestle table that he had carpentered and plucked at the reference books

stacked along it. Peering at their pages through circular, metal-rimmed spectacles, in a zip-fronted romper suit that he called his 'siren suit,' clenching a damp, unlit cigar in his mouth, he applied himself again to his *History*.

As the first hours of September 1939 dawned, his head was still bowed over his manuscripts: he had now completed 530,000 words. It was an overrun; he would have to cut it back.



The rattle of the telephone woke him at eight-thirty: it was Count Raczynski, announcing that Hitler had invaded his country.

As Winston drove back to London that Friday morning he glimpsed the placards: DANZIG PROCLAIMS RETURN TO REICH: GERMANS BOMB POLISH TOWN. Invited to No. 10, he learned from the P.M. that he had decided to form a small war cabinet of half a dozen ministers without portfolio, including Mr Churchill – who agreed without comment – and Lord Hankey, who told his wife his job appeared to be to keep an eye on Winston.

Behind black-out shades the crowded House met under subdued lights at six P.M. Since Chamberlain's hands were tied by the French, there was little he could report; for once the Soviet ambassador was absent from the gallery. Now that Stalin was Hitler's ally, it would not have been tactful to appear.

'THE DIE IS CAST,' Chamberlain had told Churchill that morning. Yet nothing came of his offer of war cabinet office for several days. The new war cabinet did not even meet.

Churchill worked out that its average age would be sixty-four (his own) and sent a note that night urging the inclusion of younger men like Eden and Sinclair. He told Colin Coote of the Focus that he was stating 'very heavy terms' and did not believe Chamberlain would last out the week.²⁹

The strain of this final baffling wait for cabinet office was cruel. When Lord Hankey went to the House on Saturday the second, he found Winston in the smoking room ('The amount of alcohol being consumed was incredible!') holding forth to some of the younger M.P.s. Embarrassingly, Churchill had allowed the press to announce his appointment to the war cabinet – an item that was both premature and unhelpful, because Chamberlain still dimly hoped to restore the crumbling peace.

With his face as black as thunder, Winston hung around the House waiting for the summons to No. 10. He muttered to Bob Boothby – who

confided it over drinks to Blanche Dugdale – that he had refused cabinet office unless there were other changes. The temper in the bars and smoking rooms of the House was curdled by Chamberlain's inactivity. When, at 7:42 P.M., he read a statement speaking of the chance of further talks, Arthur Greenwood swayed to his feet and said that he spoke for the Labour Party. Somebody shouted, 'Speak for Britain!' Startled by the uproar Churchill nearly rose, according to Walter Elliot, to move a vote of No Confidence; but he had learned caution since Munich and the abdication and bit his tongue.

Meanwhile Hitler's Panzer divisions were rampaging eastward, laying claim to ever greater areas of Poland. That evening Churchill's associates foregathered at Morpeth Mansions – Eden, Boothby, Bracken, Sandys. Duff Cooper also arrived from the Savoy, bringing two junior ministers, Harold Balfour and Euan Wallace. The mood was dismay: it seemed that the Anglo-German talks might even now be resumed.

Once Winston telephoned Raczynski, anxious for news. The ambassador told him that London and Paris were still undecided. Speaking slowly and in a strangled voice, Winston replied: 'I hope – I hope that Britain will keep – will keep its . . .' The Pole heard the familiar voice tail away, then what sounded like a sob. Was it anxiety or humiliation?

Later that Saturday evening, the Morpeth Mansions group sent one of their number – Duncan Sandys – round to tell the ambassador that they had resolved to overthrow Chamberlain if he showed further signs of weakness.³⁰

His ambitions cruelly slighted, Churchill sent a hurt letter to Downing-street after midnight:

I have not heard anything from you since our talks on Friday, when I understood that I was to serve as your colleague, and when you told me that this would be announced speedily.

I really do not know what has happened during the course of this agitated day; though it seems to me that entirely different ideas have ruled from those which you expressed to me when you said 'the die was cast.'

Again he urged the P.M. to bring Labour and the Liberals in, and at least to let him know where he stood before the debate at noon on Sunday.³¹

Chamberlain had more urgent matters on his mind. A British ultimatum had been telegraphed during the night to Berlin. It expired at eleven A.M. on the third, and he broadcast the announcement declaring war on Germany. As his broadcast ended, London's sirens sounded. Many now

expected the all-out attack that Churchill had prophesied. Winston himself recoiled to the street shelter clutching a brandy bottle and other comforts.

Shortly, he ventured the few hundred yards to the House; he received a note to visit the prime minister in his room after the debate; he himself rose to speak at 12:21 P.M.

In this solemn hour [declared Churchill] it is a consolation to recall and to dwell upon our repeated efforts for peace. All have been ill-starred, but all have been faithful and sincere. This is of the highest moral value. . . This moral conviction alone affords that ever-fresh resilience which renews the strength and energy of people in long, doubtful and dark days. Outside, the storms of war may blow and the lands may be lashed with the fury of its gales, but in our own hearts this Sunday morning there is peace. Our hands may be active, but our consciences are at rest.

Later, he received a summons to the prime minister's room. Chamberlain offered him the admiralty. It was the office he had coveted more than any other. It would afford him the means of expunging the misfortunes of Gallipoli and the Dardanelles; it would solve his rather more personal problems too. He could sell off his apartment at Morpeth Mansions and move into the First Lord's official residence.



Their Lordships of the admiralty now signalled to the fleet these words: 'Winston is back.'³²

16: *A Foot in the Door*

LIKE A new boy at school he spent the first days of the war avoiding antagonising his prime minister. Members might lash and lambast, but Churchill sat in his new place on the front bench with arms folded, biding his time. The Opposition cliques still met, but Winston Churchill, First Lord of the admiralty once more, was no longer in them. This was perhaps the very reason that Chamberlain had brought him into his war cabinet. He had also invited Eden to head the Dominions office; although this lowly position would be outside the war cabinet, the former foreign secretary reflected that half a loaf was better than no bread at all and took the job.¹

Here in the middle ground, Churchill was ill at ease. One Member wrote on September 3 that his first war speech 'sounded rather grandiloquent and forced.'² M.P.s regarded his appointment to the cabinet as a ploy to stifle criticism of the government: 'They hope Winston will be so busy with his own department,' General Spears observed, 'that he will not make a nuisance of himself.' On the sixth this M.P. heard from the Tory chief Whip that underlying Hankey's appointment as minister without portfolio was Chamberlain's hope that he would 'act as a kind of tame elephant to Winston.'

Churchill had in no way abandoned his ambitions. Though he now lived in the admiralty building on the far side of Horse Guards Parade, he wanted to hang his hat permanently on the peg marked prime minister near the cabinet room of No. 10 – taking precedence over all the other pegs labelled Lord Chancellor, Lord President, Lord Privy Seal, and the rest. Even so, as First Lord he had his foot securely in the door.

'Rhetoric,' Stanley Baldwin had once caustically defined, 'is the harlot of oratory' – and Winston had made a blowsy, gutsy rhetoric his handmaiden ever since his youth. As a wartime minister now, he spoke a dynamic tongue that both moved and thrilled the uneducated masses, as well as swaying even the most erudite of his colleagues into reconsidering their often healthier views and re-tailoring them into accordance with his own.

In a famous index entry to his war memoirs he would revile Baldwin for putting ‘party before country.’ His own actions while First Lord can be indexed in the same shorthand way: he put war before law; offensive before defensive; initiative before inaction; propaganda before truth; and often, probably without realising it, the interests of Mr Winston Churchill some way ahead of those of Britain and her empire.

In his own mind, his interests became inseparable from those of his country. He saw himself as Britain’s natural ultimate leader, and he trod down the basic rights of other nations in that quest for power. Having achieved it, he would hang on to it regardless of the cost to Europe, to his own people, and to their hard-won Dominions. His famous phrase of ‘blood, toil, tears, and sweat’ could with equal aptness describe the tools with which his British forebears had pieced together that incoherent crimson patchwork across the world’s atlas, the British empire. One monarch’s demented follies had finally lost the transatlantic colonies to Mr Churchill’s own rebellious American ancestors, but the truncated empire had continued to grow, reaching its greatest extent in the aftermath of Versailles. The coming war would bring about Britain’s financial ruin and the empire’s dissolution.

The Dominions had responded immediately to Britain’s clarion in September 1939, but not without muted alarm: we shall see how Mr Churchill, deaf to these voices, heeding only the desiderata of the clever and sophisticated Franklin D. Roosevelt – whom the American people had had the greater gift to elect their president – reeled down the path of power politics into those tenebrous years.

‘We have been outwitted,’ was the candid admission he would once make in the coming months, after Hitler had checkmated him. It would make an appropriate epitaph for the empire that crumbled apart at the hands of his great transatlantic friend.

HE DID not of course confine himself to naval matters at the admiralty. Eden told their mutual friend Hugh Dalton that Winston was adopting a more active, wider role in cabinet. ‘You can’t imagine his remaining silent,’ said Eden, ‘and thinking only about submarines when a general conversation develops!’³

Winston knew what he was after. One colleague likened him to an Indian elephant – there again, that elephant comparison – hauling a load of tree trunks through the jungle, trampling bush and undergrowth underfoot, not really knowing the precise route but forging on by instinct all the same.

Thus he rampaged across the preserves of generals and ministers. His speeches and memoranda marauded over foreign and military affairs. Oblivious of precedent and protocol, he would correspond with presidents and foreign notables as though they were his equal. To Lord Halifax he would write artlessly, 'I hope you will not mind my drawing your attention from time to time to points which strike me in the foreign office telegrams, as it is so much better than that I should raise them in cabinet.' A few days later, urging Halifax to bring Bulgaria into the Balkan defence system, he added tongue-in-cheek, 'I shall equally welcome any suggestions about the admiralty which at any time occur to you.'⁴

Tireless in his criticism of the dictators' barbarity, he could survey the privileges of neutrals and the rights of non-combatants with equal disdain. Once this century the unredeeming Gods of war had already trailed death and ruination across the poppy fields of Belgium; yet Churchill was unable to grasp that small nations such as these were unwilling to invite those same Gods back in again, this time in the garb of French and British troops, to meet a putative invader. A concept like the indivisibility of right and wrong was foreign to him: it was a crime for Hitler to invade Poland, but Stalin's subsequent invasion roused from Morpeth Mansions not a whimper.

He had waxed indignant in his speeches about Gestapo terrors in Bohemia and Moravia, while the liquidation by the Poles of the German ethnic minority, in the days before and after Hitler's invasion, aroused no horror in Mr Churchill. Only occasionally did the sapient man inside the First Lord struggle to the surface. Learning in October that a British warship had tricked a U-boat into surfacing and then destroyed it, he commented privately to the First Sea Lord that it was 'odious' that that warship's crew had picked up the submarine's survivors and murdered them 'one by one during the next twelve hours, the last two found hiding in the screw alley.'⁵

He treated the laws of war with abandon. A year later the chief of air staff would refuse to allow assassins to parachute into France in plain clothes. When the air staff submitted legal objections to his project for mining enemy rivers, Churchill scored through their heading ('Note on the Use of Mines laid by Aircraft in Inland Waterways') and angrily wrote instead: 'Some funkstick in the Air Ministry running for shelter under Malkin's petticoat.'⁶ He broke international conventions with little more compunction than his enemy. In October he would endorse the Panama agreement for a three-hundred-mile zone free of hostilities, then ordered the German pocket battleship *Graf Spee* attacked inside it. In December he recommended mining neutral Norway's waters.

To his more queasy colleagues he offered the unusual argument that, since Britain had declared war in accordance with the covenant of the League, no infringement of international law, 'so long as it is unaccompanied by inhumanity of any kind,' could rob Britain of the 'good wishes' of the neutrals.

This stocky, pink-faced figure in black jacket and striped pants felt he was somehow above international law. Much evil flowed from that belief. Had Europe been privy to his views – its cities laid to ruins by 1945, and its lesser nations newly enslaved under the secret agreement he had reached with Stalin the previous October – she would have scarcely credited his language of 1939. 'We are fighting,' he had postulated, 'to re-establish the reign of law and to protect the liberties of small countries. Our defeat would mean an age of barbaric violence, and would be fatal not only to ourselves, but to the independent life of every small country in Europe.' This, he argued, gave Britain the right and indeed the duty to abrogate the very laws she sought to reaffirm.⁷

He himself would do so without a second thought. In February 1940 he would order the seizure of a German supply vessel in Norway's waters; in June he would browbeat the French to transfer to Britain the Luftwaffe pilots they had taken prisoner, although a Geneva Convention specifically forbade such transfers by the detaining power; in July he would bombard a French naval squadron at Mers-el-Kébir – a war crime by any definition, since it was an unprovoked attack on an allied force without declaration of war; in August he would recommend dum-dum bullets as the best way of 'killing Huns'; and reply, when his son pointed out they were illegal, that since the Germans would make 'short shrift' of him he had no intention of showing any mercy.⁸ He would suggest drenching invasion beaches with poison gas, arguing that he could do as he liked on his own territory – which was certainly not a view held at Geneva; and four years later, demanding that his forces use bacterial warfare and poison gas, he would write: 'It is absurd to consider morality. . . It is simply a question of fashion changing, as she does between long and short skirts for women.'⁹

Implicit in everything he did in the late fall of 1939 was a nervous, urgent desire to see action against the enemy. Hitler was making all the running. He was defeating his enemies in detail, sometimes without firing a shot. Churchill was determined to wrest the initiative from him.

This was sound strategic reasoning, although there was also an underlying cause for Hitler's triumphs: a dictatorship is better tailored for seizing initiatives than the committee system enshrined in a democracy. 'I see such immense walls of prevention, all built and building,' Churchill would write to Halifax in a lament about bureaucracy, 'that I wonder whether

any plan will have a chance of climbing over them.' 'Victory,' he lectured, 'will never be found by taking the line of least resistance.'¹⁰

He sat on some of these committees himself, still as a junior member and endowed with little authority outside naval affairs. But inside the admiralty he was absolute lord and master, possessed by the need to take the offensive. Lacking the means yet to inflict direct damage on Hitler's Germany, he found himself planning minor operations on the periphery – mining rivers like the Rhine or the coastal waters of Scandinavia, and even bombing the Russian oilfields at Baku. Developing such subsidiary theatres was, a later C.I.G.S. remarked, a weakness of many statesmen.¹¹ But it grieved the admirals, who failed to talk him out of them. 'His battery of weapons,' wrote Admiral John Godfrey, director of naval Intelligence, 'included persuasion, real or simulated anger, mockery, vituperation, tantrums, ridicule, derision, abuse and tears.'¹²

Godfrey recalled dryly that when Mr Churchill became their 'chief asset' they found that he lived largely on an exotic diet of 'the carcasses of abortive and wildcat operations.' The First Sea Lord was prepared to indulge him, but it involved setting up duplicate planning, operational and Intelligence staffs.

It will suffice here to take one such plan, CATHERINE – named after the Russian empress, because Russia was never far from his thoughts. Three days after his return to the admiralty, Churchill offered his proposal for a foray by fifteen-inch battleships into the Baltic, across which passed Hitler's only links with Norway, Sweden and Finland. By the twelfth he had drafted the plan in outline.¹³ The attack would have to be in March when the ice melted; oil tankers would fuel this fleet for the three months that it rampaged around the Baltic. He did not consider what would happen if the tankers were sunk. Churchill of course believed that battleships were at no risk from air attack, that their guns would be sufficient defence. As Admiral Godfrey pointed out, the fleet would be right under the German fighter umbrella and well outside British air range. 'Don't worry,' Pound quietly assured him, 'it will never take place.'¹⁴

Nor it did. Nonetheless the investment in planning was substantial. Winston appointed a special unit under his old friend Admiral the Earl of Cork and Orrery to report to him.¹⁵ In his memoirs Mr Churchill claimed that Pound's deputy, Rear Admiral Tom Phillips, had supported CATHERINE; having gone down with his battleship in 1941 – sunk by air power in a sea far larger than the Baltic – Phillips was in no position to dispute this. Godfrey, his friend and term-mate, confidentially dismissed Churchill's postwar claim as 'nonsense.'¹⁶

AS THE silence of the graveyard settled upon Poland that October, Mr Churchill burrowed into Whitehall. His primary tool in these undermining operations was Branch – a private statistical office he set up under Professor Lindemann. To staff it he raided Godfrey's own statistical section, claiming that he wanted to investigate shipping statistics; but he would direct the Prof. on October 9 to use these men for 'special inquiries' – to double-check cabinet papers submitted by other ministers. Godfrey watched with chagrin as the section became a 'private piece of machinery,' operated for the furtherance of the First Lord's ambitions.¹⁷

Typical of the wide net that Winston now flung out, harvesting public anxieties, was a note to Hoare criticising needless blackouts, gasoline restrictions, and food rationing. He also suggested a volunteer 'Home Guard' of half a million over-forties. All this was of little direct concern to a navy minister, but he was unabashed. 'I hear continual complaints,' he wrote, justifying his intervention, 'from every quarter of the lack of organisation on the home front. Can't we get at it?'¹⁸



At six P.M. on September 3, after attending his first war cabinet, Churchill hastened over to the admiralty, a sprawling Portland-stone office labyrinth under the lofty telescope of Admiral Lord Nelson. From his private entrance he was escorted up to the First Lord's room. Not that he needed any escort – he knew it well.

Casting around, he missed an octagonal mahogany table; it was found elsewhere and brought back into the room. Little had changed since the Dardanelles disaster. The map case containing naval charts of 1915 was still behind the sofa where he had last seen it. Pound came in and the two men eyed each other – 'amicably if doubtfully,' as Churchill recalled. He had publicly criticised the dispositions of Pound's fleet at the time of Albania. But Pound had useful qualities: he was forgetful, quiet and complaisant. Humourless and remote as well, he was never seen to read a book; he was at sea if any conversation steered into non-naval topics. He regularly dozed off in staff meetings (the consequence of an undiagnosed brain tumour). He was prone to rare phobias too, believing that enlisted men ashore conspired to avoid saluting him.¹⁹

Later that evening Churchill lowered himself into the familiar leather-backed chair in the board room, bade Pound introduce his staff, and then adjourned them with the words: 'Gentlemen – to your tasks and duties.' 'From today,' he rasped down the telephone to the Polish ambassador at eleven P.M., 'I am First Lord of the admiralty. If you should need me, I am at your disposal any time.'

From that first moment he fired off orders and inspirations, catechising, querying and carping, a volcano of aggressive instinct that for ten years had lain dormant – some had hoped it extinct. He called for statistics on Hitler's U-boats and their capabilities; he set up a map room in the library, flagging the onward march of the merchant ships and escorts bringing in supplies; he railed at the neutrality of the 'so-called Eire.' He ordered faster construction of escort destroyers; 'cheap-and-nasties' he called them – 'cheap to us, nasty to the U-boat.' These messages became known as 'First Lord's Prayers' because of his style, which substituted 'pray' for 'please,' as in 'Pray let me know your views.'

In his search for an initiative, his eyes had lit upon Narvik, the ice-free port in northern Norway through which Sweden plied her iron ore trade with Germany during the winter when her own Baltic port of Luleå was icebound. Until Luleå reopened each spring, the iron ore ships had to hug the coastal waters of Norway as they headed south to Germany. At an admiralty staff meeting on September 18 somebody, probably Churchill himself, recommended halting those iron ore shipments even if it meant violating Norway's neutrality. On the following day he put to the war cabinet a scheme for mining Norwegian waters.



Throughout the war each month's appointments would be entered on large-format cards. The first was an eleven-thirty A.M. war cabinet on September 4; it was at first marked as being in the Cabinet War Room bunker, as London still expected Hitler's knockout blow, then amended to No. 10. Across these cards, which were salvaged by his admirable A.D.C.,* parade the notables of Churchill's War – dukes and duchesses and peers and admirals who might go down in ships and history. September 1939 saw Cork and Orrery, Drax ('if train punctual'), Evans, Tyrwhitt, Wake-Walker, as well as press lords (Beaverbrook) and journalists like the American H. R. Knickerbocker. Different hands pencilled in appointments with his trusty friends from the wilderness like Vansittart or 'Dr Revesz' (Reves, his literary agent) or the Romanian, Tilea. On September 25 a 'Mr Spier' was pathetically entered – Eugen Spier, earliest financier of the Focus, was about to be interned.

Once or twice Field Marshal Ironside came. He had few admirers in the soldiery – 'It's a mercy his soldiering days are over,' one general assessed a year earlier. 'There's always been more bluff and brawn than

* The author rented them from Tommy Thompson's heirs and has donated a copy to the Public Record Office, London, where they form part of PREM 10.

brain.' Their minister, Hore-Belisha, told those who would listen that Ironside's appointment was the fault of politicians who did not know the man *au fond*, 'notably Winston.'²⁰

Of course bare names, like those of Colonel Stewart Menzies, who shortly became head of the S.I.S., and Sir Vernon Kell, head of M.I.5, give little clue as to the subjects discussed. The colour has to be filled in from other sources – like when Winston dined at Lord Kemsley's. At the end of the meal the newspaper owner invited him to a chair at the top of the table and asked in a stage whisper what new intrigues he was hatching against Chamberlain; the First Lord purpled, rose, rang for a servant and sent for his car.²¹

Churchill's influence grew throughout that month. He was appointed to the land forces committee. It met on September 7 and resolved to raise fifty-five divisions by late 1941 and to build the factories to sustain them.²² On the next day Churchill told the American ambassador that fourteen merchant ships had already been sunk by U-boat warfare; but he spoke encouragingly of France's immense army of four million.²³

In cabinet he turned out much as the others expected – in Sam Hoare's words, rhetorical and very reminiscent; Churchill struck him as an old man, easily tired and over-emotional.²⁴ The much younger secretary for war, Leslie Hore-Belisha, expressed frustration at the way his more elderly colleagues wasted time phrasing communiqués rather than preparing for a major war.²⁵ After one flowery Churchill monologue Hoare heard a colleague scoff: 'Why didn't he bring his six-volume *World Crisis*?' Churchill, he snidely commented in his diary, was no doubt already writing new memoirs.²⁶

Scepticism about Churchill's vitality was probably justified. The real war had yet to begin, and that was the stimulus he needed. Not until the ninth did elements of the expeditionary force even cross to France. Their commander, General Lord Gort, followed two evenings later after Churchill and Lord Camrose had dined him at the Other Club – the cliquish dining club which Winston had founded with F. E. Smith in 1911. According to Camrose's notes, Churchill predicted that they would master the present U-boat menace quite rapidly, but he perceptively added that in about a year's time it would revive.²⁷

As yet there was little that Britain could do. Dalton expressed shock that Chamberlain had made no realistic plans for aiding Poland after guaranteeing her. Churchill replied that as a cabinet member he could not voice open criticism. 'I have signed on for this voyage,' was the way he put it. He was still groping for a strategy, uncertain of himself. In a sense, he was still living the Great War; his mental images were those of Jutland

and Gallipoli, of fleet actions and of bayonet charges on Turkish trenches. Pacing the floor, he told Dalton that he had a dream of all the states of southern and south-eastern Europe moving ultimately against Germany, and of the flags of freedom fluttering in Prague and Vienna. (Curiously, he made no mention of Poland's capital.) A few days later, to the cabinet, he was more specific: he wanted 'all the Balkan countries and Turkey' dragged in:

We needed as many allies in the Balkans as we could secure, and it was not at all to our interest that the Balkans should be kept in a state of quiet, whilst France and ourselves were left to bear the full brunt of the German assault on the Western Front.

'But,' he told Dalton on the thirteenth, 'all this is very far away, and there will be a long, grim interval first.'

'If only we had the Czechs as well as the Poles!' he sighed. Britain might have won over the Russians too – 'But at the end they played a deadly game!'

'I sit here,' he mused out loud to Dalton, 'and I only get bad news – of our ships sunk. I don't get the good news, when their submarines go down.' He was confident that the U-boats would be defeated. He pictured in vivid words to the socialist intellectual the effects of depth charges on submarine crews – the sudden concussion, the claustrophobia.²⁸

Donning a spurious naval uniform, he left to inspect the northernmost naval bases at Scapa Flow and Loch Ewe, which he had last visited a quarter century before: the fleet had been berthed at this hideout on the west coast of Scotland for the same reason as now – the unreadiness at Scapa. He returned to the admiralty three mornings later to learn that the aircraft carrier *Courageous* had gone down with her captain and five hundred of her crew escorting a convoy in the Bristol Channel.

'Gentlemen,' he began his admiralty report to Mr Chamberlain's cabinet that morning, 'I have a piece of bad news to give you' – and he reminded them that although old, she had been one of their most valuable warships. He was stoic about such casualties; in fact loss of life affected him far less than the loss of personal prestige, particularly when the former was somebody else's and the latter was his own. Some months later the troopship *Lancastria* would be sunk by enemy aircraft off Saint-Nazaire, drowning three thousand British soldiers; he ordered the news suppressed, and confessed six weeks later when it leaked out in America that it had entirely slipped his mind. Now, as even more sinister news came that the Red Army was invading eastern Poland, he reminded Hankey of

how exactly twenty-five years before they had lost the *Aboukir*, *Cressey* and *Hogue* to enemy submarines, and that this was not the first time Russia had defected.²⁹

Powered by conflicting emotions – the desire to punish Germans and to act aggressively, while not scandalising neutral opinion – on September 10 he advised Chamberlain against taking any initiative in bombing. ‘It is to our interest,’ he wrote, ‘that . . . we should follow and not precede the Germans in the process, no doubt inevitable, of deepening severity and violence.’³⁰ Count Raczynski came to the admiralty, followed on the thirteenth by Hugh Dalton, to argue that bombing Germany would bring relief to their reeling Polish allies.

‘If we disregard Poland,’ replied Churchill, disagreeing, ‘it is unquestionably in our interest not to make the first move in air warfare in the west.’ British aircraft factories were still gearing up. ‘If we can,’ he said with measured cynicism, ‘let us secure that the first women and children to be hit are British, and not German.’ For maximum effect on American opinion it was vital that *messieurs les assassins commencent*.³¹

Toward the Italians he still showed a vestigial affection – having met and rather liked the ‘bluffing gangster’ who presided over them. But there was a hard core of rationalism too. Mussolini, he reminded Dalton, had one hundred submarines.³² So in cabinet he recommended selling aeroplanes to Italy and buying motor boats as ways of developing a fruitful Anglo–Italian trade.³³ *Détente* with Italy would be one way of retrieving British forces from the Mediterranean and the Middle East.³⁴

Another would be if British troops in Palestine could be partially replaced by a Jewish contingent. The Jewish Agency had offered a truce over the bitterly-contested White Paper for the duration of the war and Jewish support world-wide in the fight against Hitler. But in return they demanded a not inconsiderable concession – the right to raise a Jewish army in Palestine.

Over dinner with Winston and Brendan Bracken at the admiralty on the nineteenth, Chaim Weizmann claimed that seventy-five thousand young Jews had volunteered in Palestine and that more could be recruited from Romania and Poland. ‘What is important,’ he explained, ‘is to create cadres and establish a military organisation.’

Churchill saw no objection. ‘Once the Jews are armed,’ he agreed, ‘the Arabs will come to terms with them.’

He directed Bracken to liaise with Weizmann and to comply with every wish. But the first wish that Weizmann expressed when Bracken visited him at the Dorchester – London’s only bombproof hotel, now filling with the rich and influential – was not so simple to fulfil. The Zionists

wanted permission to erect a Jewish arms factory in Palestine. Over this, the war office would dig in its heels.³⁵

MANY MEMBERS of Parliament came to look upon Churchill during those first weeks as a source of spirit and moral uplift. One speech by him could change the temper of the House.

On the last day of September a statement by the prime minister had been greeted with funereal gloom. Beside him sat Churchill, silent, true to the cabinet solidarity he had explained to Dalton, but visibly unhappy and looking in one observer's words like the Chinese god of plenty suffering from indigestion.³⁶

As he rose he was cheered from all the benches – no longer just by the Labour opposition. He set out Britain's naval prospects, and could not forebear to remark how strange was the experience of finding himself after a quarter century in the same room at the admiralty, poring over the same maps, and fighting the same enemy.

'It is the sort of thing,' he added, grinning hugely – and with a side-long glance at Chamberlain, who could raise no more than a sickly smile – 'that one would hardly expect to happen.'

There were M.P.s who felt that he had hauled himself closer, in those few minutes of oration, to the coveted premiership than ever before. Even the Chamberlain faction was overheard in the lobbies exclaiming, 'We have now found our leader.'

Over in Grosvenor-square, as this momentous opening month in Europe's bloodiest war came to an end, the American ambassador composed a broad survey for his president. As he viewed it, England was once more fighting for her possessions and her place in the sun. 'Regardless of the God-awful behaviour of the Nazis,' wrote Kennedy, 'surely the fact is that the English people are not fighting Hitler – they are fighting the German people, just as they fought them twenty-five years ago, because forty-five million Britons controlling the greatest far-flung maritime empire in the world and eighty million Germans dominating continental Europe haven't learned to live together peacefully.'

He saw it as a sign of decadence in London that nobody had told the British the truth about their plight. They had no leaders, and he doubted whether their parliamentary machine was capable of throwing up one.

Many people, continued the ambassador in this challenging despatch, doubted whether Chamberlain could survive a serious reverse: 'Who is to replace the prime minister? Possibly Halifax, possibly Churchill. But for all Halifax's mystical, Christian character, and Churchill's prophecies in re-

spect to Germany, I can't imagine them adequately leading the people out of the Valley of the Shadow of Death.'³⁷



After attending Churchill's war cabinet sessions in 1941, Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies put on a jovial face for photographers, then left to warn the other Dominion premiers that Churchill was running amok.

17: *Naval Person*

TOWARD THE end of that first month of war, September 1939, the prime minister's private secretary admitted to himself that perhaps Mr Chamberlain ought to stand down in favour of somebody more forceful; but he feared that Mr Churchill seemed too old to succeed him.¹

Churchill's performance in the House soon dispelled such fears. One M.P. who had been in the Focus – and who would be buried eight months later near Dunkirk – was jubilant at the manner in which their champion confounded the critics who had been whispering that 'the years had been taking their toll.'

I know that the *nation* will never let him go now that, at long last, he is back in the cabinet.²

From time to time Winston's mind strayed across the North Atlantic. He had been born half American but considered this no misdemeanour. A genealogist, that *rara avis* of historical research, would establish that in the eighth generation he shared three pairs of ancestors with President Roosevelt.³ The seat of the Jeromes, his maternal ancestors, was Rochester in New York State, and his mother had been born in Brooklyn. Directly descended on her side from a captain in George Washington's armies, Churchill could claim to be a member of the Society of the Cincinnati. So in 1776 he would have had loyalties to both sides of that historic quarrel.⁴

Before speaking at the turn of the century at New York's Madison Square Gardens, this gentleman of much-mixed blood had been introduced by Mark Twain with these words: 'I give you the son of an American mother and an English father – the perfect man!' Half a century later, when Mr Adlai Stevenson came down to Chartwell to solicit a message for the English Speaking Union in London, Winston would growl: 'Tell them I *am* an English speaking union.'⁵

Though it might derelict the interests of the Old World, he never entirely overcame this maudlin affection for the New. In New York in March 1946, recalling their victorious alliance in two world wars, he would mistily ask of his dinner guests: 'Why do you have to wait for a war to

bring us together?' A year after that he would emotionally remark to an editor of *Life*, 'America needs good men, for America has to save the world.' Laying aside his brandy glass, he murmured very slowly: 'America – is – the – world.'⁶

HE HAD SOON made himself at home at Admiralty House. The desk was cluttered with toothpicks, gold medals used as paperweights, countless apothecaries' pills and powders, and the special cuffs he used to prevent his dark jacket sleeves from becoming soiled. The table beside it carried the bottles of liquor.⁷

The First Lord was probably the one popular figure in the government and he knew it. The public had the feeling that *they* had chosen him, a delayed reaction from the mysterious poster campaign of that summer. The newspapers wrote of him as a future prime minister.⁸

On the first Sunday in October he delivered a wartime broadcast. Churchill sent for his Intelligence chief, Rear Admiral John Godfrey, to make sure his facts were right. The admiral, a frank, open-faced officer, saw an efficient typist with a silent typewriter skimming out the text in triplicate on half-sheets of foolscap, while a dishevelled Mr Churchill, fortified by two long drinks and two enormous cigars, paced the room dictating, dropping cigar ash, and spilling whisky over his waistcoat. 'The sentences,' recalled the admiral, 'seemed to emerge without any effort.'⁹

He spoke briefly of Poland's unquenchable spirit and prophesied: 'She will rise again like a rock, which may for a spell be submerged by a tidal wave, but which remains a rock.' He lingered on the Russian conundrum; he announced that the cabinet was preparing a war of at least three years. It was an unaccustomed, archaic language that flowed from the loudspeakers, but the English understood it and were enthralled. There was danger developing in Hitler's submarine offensive – 'But the Royal Navy has immediately attacked the U-boats and is hunting them night and day, I will not say without mercy, because God forbid we should ever part company with that, but at any rate with zeal, and not altogether without relish.'

Congratulations reached him from all round the listening world. 'Your broadcast magnificent,' Prime Minister William Mackenzie King cabled from Ottawa, 'as perfect in its appeal to the New World as to the Old.'¹⁰ But from across Horse Guard's Parade there glowered the green of envy behind the windows of No. 10. Writing up his diary, Chamberlain's secretary now suspected that Winston would be P.M. before long. 'Judging from his record of untrustworthiness and instability,' this official mused, echoing his master's oft-stated views, 'he may in that case lead us into the most dangerous paths.'

AT THE American embassy, Joe Kennedy had also listened to the broadcast. He was worried by this war: he had asked Sir John Simon two days before, 'Just what are you fighting for now? You can't restore Poland to the Poles, can you?'

'No,' replied Simon, 'not all of it.'

'You can't talk about aggression,' he had argued, 'and permit Russia to retain half of Poland and have its claw over the Balkan states as well?'

'Possibly not,' the chancellor agreed.

People coming from Germany had assured Kennedy that if Hitler went there would be chaos, and Germany might turn communist. 'The cost to England and France,' he prophesied, 'will be so great that it will reduce them to a mere shell of their present selves.'

Simon, Halifax and Chamberlain all shared this bleak view, or so he reported to Roosevelt. 'If they were to advocate any type of peace,' he continued, 'they would be yelled down by their own people who are determined to go on.' He urged the president to help Britain end the war while she still could.¹¹

'Of all the wars that men have fought in their hard pilgrimage,' Winston had declared in this broadcast, 'none was more noble than the great Civil War in America nearly eighty years ago.' Less felicitously he added,

All the heroism of the South could not redeem their cause from the stain of slavery, just as all the courage and skill which the Germans always show in a war will not free them from the reproach of Nazism with its intolerance and brutality.¹²

Kennedy choked on these words and rushed word to Winston that this comparison would not commend him to Southern editors. Winston suggested putting out a suitably contrite statement to mitigate the *faux pas*, but it turned out that the American press had ignored his broadcast. While there had been some comment 'in the Senate cloakroom,' Roosevelt himself was said to be quite pleased.¹³

On the morning after the broadcast Kennedy came to lunch at the admiralty. Eyeing the fine silver and mahogany, he asked what would happen if Hitler now offered acceptable peace terms – a possibility troubling many minds that week.* Privately he believed Britain hadn't a chance.

* The Irish foreign office allowed the German embassy in Dublin to learn on October 3 that Mr Chamberlain and people of influence around him wanted peace provided Britain's prestige could be preserved. In the British archives, the foreign office, Chamber-

Two weeks earlier he had told an officer of the Coldstream Guards that Britain and France would both be 'thrashed'; and his son Jack had interjected that even the repeal of neutrality legislation would not help, because Britain hadn't the gold to buy in America.

Answering the ambassador's question, Churchill confirmed that Britain might agree to an *armistice*, but only to gain respite.

He had clearly written Poland off. Kennedy expressed curiosity as to why Britain had not declared war on Russia, who had also invaded Poland. 'The danger to the world,' Churchill gravely responded, 'is Germany, and not Russia.'

An uneasy discussion followed on the Nazi air raids that everybody expected, but which still had not begun. Churchill was looking forward to them – hoping that the inevitable 'air massacres' might draw in the United States. The ambassador's ears pricked up at remarks like these. 'It appears to me,' he telegraphed immediately to Washington, 'that there is a feeling that if [British] women and children are killed . . . the United States will tend more towards their side.'

One theme that Churchill developed was to be repeated in different variations many times over the next two years. 'If the Germans bomb us into subjection,' he pointed out, 'one of their terms will certainly be that we hand over our fleet. And then your troubles will begin.'¹⁵

Kennedy knew what was behind Churchill's remarks. 'Every hour will be spent by the British,' he predicted, 'in trying to figure out how we can be gotten in.'

Later he prophesied that, when he finally succeeded, Winston would charge his brandy glass and say, 'I have done my duty. Victory is ours! This is my crowning achievement! God save the king!'¹⁶



Immediately after this luncheon on October 2 Churchill's remarkable correspondence with Roosevelt began. A letter arrived by diplomatic pouch from Washington for Ambassador Kennedy to deliver sealed to the First Lord.

The ambassador was resentful at having been by-passed, but before revealing it to the morning cabinet on the fifth Churchill tactfully invited him to the admiralty and read to him Roosevelt's bland, almost over-innocent letter.

lain, Wilson and Hankey files covering this episode have been closed until the twenty-first century.¹⁴

Dated September 11, it congratulated Winston on his appointment and continued: 'It is because you and I occupied similar positions in the World War that I want you to know how glad I am that you are back again in the admiralty.' F.D.R. invited Winston to enter into correspondence. 'What I want you and the prime minister to know,' he said, 'is that I shall at all times welcome it, if you will keep me in touch personally with anything you want me to know about. You can always send sealed letters through your pouch or my pouch.' After this veiled invitation to by-pass regular channels, F.D.R. concluded, 'I am glad you did the Marlboro' volumes before this thing started – and I much enjoyed reading them.'¹⁷

It was an unorthodox communication on any count: a Roosevelt could write to foreign heads of state or government, but hardly to anybody lesser; it violated every convention.

As Churchill launched into a monologue, Kennedy still felt bitter. The more he heard the First Lord's effusions about neutrality and 'keeping the war away from the U.S.A.,' the more his Irish blood was roused. 'Maybe I do him an injustice,' he brooded in his diary,

but I just don't trust him. He almost impressed me that he was willing to blow up the American embassy and say it was the Germans, if it would get the United States in.¹⁸

AT THE eleven-thirty cabinet, Mr Churchill persuaded his colleagues to let him develop this secret correspondence.

It is clear from what we now know that he delighted in clandestine communication – the secret courier, the scrambler telephone, the unofficial telegraph. We have noted his extramural dealings with Maisky, with Masaryk and Mandel. We shall soon see him establish private radio links with his favourite commanders during the Narvik and Dunkirk episodes, enabling him to circumvent both the ground commander and the board of admiralty with directives and instructions.

Throughout the coming war he would commune regularly with Roosevelt by channels which prevented the foreign office and Britain's ambassador in Washington from automatically reviewing the messages. The two men had evidently communicated informally through third persons like Frankfurter before this correspondence began, and Churchill may even have identified himself as 'Naval Person' in such *billets doux*. How else can we explain Kennedy's use of the phrase 'Naval Person' in his four P.M. telegram despatched in advance of Winston's reply to the president later that day, October 5? 'The Naval Person,' he now wrote, will not fail to avail himself of invitation and he is honoured by the message.'¹⁹ That per-

son, he added, would write immediately. And it is only in the reply that now went off, drafted in fact by Pound's wiry, irascible deputy Tom Phillips, that we find the first recorded use of Mr Churchill's famous sobriquet: 'The following from Naval Person.'²⁰ Perhaps transatlantic telephone conversations had preceded this. While dining at Morpeth Mansions that same night, Churchill was telephoned by President Roosevelt from three thousand miles away – again by-passing the prime minister – and an admiral who chanced to be his guest witnessed it.

The background of this urgent 'phone call suggests that F.D.R. shared Kennedy's appreciation of Mr Churchill's wily capabilities. Grand Admiral Raeder, whose cryptanalysts had broken the main British naval cypher,²¹ had called in the U.S. naval attaché in Berlin at mid-day on the fourth and handed him in confidence a note warning that an American steamer – the 6,209-ton coaster *Iroquois* – was to be sunk off the East Coast of America 'under *Athenia* circumstances,'* possibly by concealed explosives; the vessel had left an Irish port on the second, laden with refugees including Americans. German naval Intelligence had learned of Churchill's alleged plan from 'a particular source.'²² Roosevelt told his cabinet, ordered Raeder's claim publicised immediately – and telephoned Churchill.²³

'Admiral,' said Churchill, returning to his dinner guests, 'I think you must now excuse me. This is very important and I must go and see the prime minister at once.'²⁴

THE F.D.R.—CHURCHILL telegrams were extraordinary in several respects. No attempt was made to paraphrase them before transmission – a security lapse which must have delighted British codebreakers, who took as keen an interest as the Germans in reading American telegrams.²⁵ Since the American diplomatic cypher (GRAY) was already an open book to codebreakers – legend has it that at one Washington banquet a diplomat delivered his entire speech in GRAY – it was perhaps of only academic interest whether the First Lord showed the F.D.R. messages to his prime minister or not.²⁶

Lord Lothian, ambassador in Washington, was as displeased as Kennedy at being side-tracked, and the foreign secretary, Lord Halifax, asked Churchill on January 6 to desist from using non-F.O. channels. Churchill replied on the twelfth that it would be a pity to close down 'this private

* The *Athenia* had been torpedoed in the Atlantic on September 3 with the loss of 112 lives, including twenty-eight Americans. The Germans righteously denied blame – Hitler had embargoed attacks on passenger liners – but later learned that a U-boat was indeed responsible. Seeking to embarrass Churchill, the Nazis continued to blame him.

line of communication through the American embassy and the state department.'

I have availed myself of your permission to send such messages with the most scrupulous care to keep strictly within the lines of your policy.

Regretting that Lothian had been by-passed, he suggested that future communications might go simultaneously both by F.O. and American embassy channels, thus 'giving the president the feeling that he has a special line of information.'²⁷

At the White House only two officials were allowed to handle these 'Naval Friend' messages. 'Many a night,' one of them – the White House communications officer Captain Donald Macdonald – would state in 1970, 'I was out on a party and I'd get a call because one of these messages came in and I'd have to come and break them down and then notify the president that the message was in. And the president invariably would send me over to talk with Morgenthau, whom he had ticked off to be his man to work with the British. . . This was kept very, very quiet, what we were doing.'²⁸

As their intimacy became more profound, the two men relied increasingly on the transatlantic radio-telephone link. Roosevelt certainly resorted to it when need arose to by-pass cumbrous diplomatic channels.* So did Churchill, who would call him from a privy-like booth in the underground War Room. On its outer door a circular brass dial indicated Vacant or Engaged; the door opened to reveal a short passage and a second green baize door behind which was the special scrambler telephone, a black instrument with a green dial standing on a small table next to a leather-seated chair. Above the door was a ship's clock with an extra red hand to remind him of Washington time.

Nor were these the only secret channels developed by the two inventive statesmen. The unclassified archives contain some 950 items originated by Churchill and eight hundred by F.D.R., but these files are clearly incomplete: they contain almost no reference to either *ULTRA* or *MAGIC*, the solution of German and Japanese codes so important to their wartime decisions.²⁹ Perhaps these messages can be found in the archives of the S.I.S. and the National Security Agency. By mid-1941 certain of their communications were definitely flowing through a radio link established between S.I.S. headquarters in London and the F.B.I.'s North Beach radio facility on Chesapeake Bay. In the twelve months following June 1940,

* See page 560.

two or three hundred messages a week used this channel using the F.B.I. one-time pads, a cypher considered invulnerable, or other cyphers exclusive to the British, and J. Edgar Hoover was told that this was in part traffic between Churchill and the president.*



Kennedy had again detected in Churchill at this October 5, 1939 interview what he termed 'a soft and appeasing policy toward Russia.' The Soviet Union, the First Lord implied, was justified in occupying eastern Poland as that territory was 'really Russian soil.' Imperceptibly Britain's war aims had shifted from guaranteeing Poland's independence. On the previous day, Kennedy had discussed Churchill with Lord Halifax, who had couched his views in terms that showed little respect for Churchill's judgement: at a recent cabinet, he said, the First Lord had mentioned the torpedoing of a Greek ship – and had then launched into an oration about how the wind had shrieked and the waves grown high and fearsome.

Kennedy urged the foreign secretary to give due consideration to Hitler's peace terms when they came and, in an unappealing turn of phrase, again commented on the Jewish influence on the British press.

Hitler, victorious now in Poland, announced his proposals to the Reichstag on the sixth. He confirmed the neutrality of his neighbours, and told France he would not even claim Alsace-Lorraine. The speech was devilishly cunning: it attracted favourable comment in American newspapers, but Fleet-street condemned it in such intemperate language that at the next day's cabinet Lord Halifax murmured that the press commentaries were entirely unauthorised.

Of the 2,450 letters that poured into Downing-street over the next few days, 1,860 begged Chamberlain to end the war. The cabinet however was agreed that Hitler's offer was unacceptable; it remained only to discuss how to reject it. Halifax, Churchill, Cadogan and Vansittart all drafted possible replies. Churchill suggested the briefest possible text, mentioning the fate of Roosevelt's final peace attempt in August as an example of the uselessness of negotiating with Hitler.

He was still struggling to finish off the fourth and final volume of his *History*, aided by his trusty scribes. Deakin was reviewing the proofs on the Victorian age and a young ghost called Alan Bullock was completing Canada. While Deakin delegated Ashley to devilling ten thousand words on Cromwell, Bullock began rough-hewing a similar quantity of Churchillian prose on the origins of the empire in the antipodes. 'By December,' rec-

* See page 596.

ords Martin Gilbert, in whom this manner of literary endeavour struck no odd chord, 'only Waterloo and Trafalgar remained to be done.'³⁰

WHILE ESTABLISHING clandestine channels to the west, to Washington, Winston did not neglect his relations with the Russians. The Soviet ambassador had steered clear of him since the Hitler–Stalin pact and Churchill's inclusion in the cabinet; but with visions of CATHERINE – the proposed naval foray into the Baltic – dancing before him, the First Lord had reiterated his pro-Soviet line in his broadcast on the first, and at ten P.M. on the sixth Maisky groped his way through the thickening London fog to the unfamiliar building.

Churchill reminisced about the history of this room and showed off the relics of earlier wars. 'This,' he said, opening the map case let into the wall behind his desk, 'is the very map I used to follow the German Grand Fleet's movements on.'

He admitted frankly his regret that Britain and Russia were not allies against Germany. Maisky blamed it on Chamberlain.

'I know, I know,' commiserated Churchill. 'But bygones must be bygones.'

Their basic interests were the same, he said, and he was certain that Britain and Russia would eventually come together. Meanwhile he was doing what he could to further Soviet interests in cabinet: he had persuaded his colleagues not to oppose Soviet naval bases in the Baltic, arguing that anything that hurt Germany must be in the British interest.

Maisky answered cautiously. 'I would not like to speculate what will happen in the future.'

Churchill smiled indulgently. His reply was gently veined with sarcasm: 'Yes, time will tell.'³¹

A few days later Günter Prien's U-boat skulked into the fleet anchorage at Scapa Flow and sank the battleship *Royal Oak*; eight hundred sailors perished, from admiral to seaman. It turned out that the admiralty had been warned in April that the defences were inadequate. That was before his time, but Mr Churchill ruled against holding an inquiry.³² He assured his colleagues that even giving the complete picture and not 'slurring over' setbacks he could satisfy the House by 'leading up to a happy conclusion'; and sure enough that afternoon saw his rhetorical skill – a fine example of how to appease one's critics by abject acceptance of broad responsibility, while still rejecting it in detail.

Such verbal gymnastics were his forte. Immediately after taking office he had lectured Rear Admiral Godfrey, his director of naval Intelligence, that the admiralty bulletin must 'maintain its reputation for truthful-

ness.³³ This was not the same, of course, as telling the truth. Describing his minister's approach to that elusive commodity, the D.N.I. would recall in a confidential history, 'He did not hesitate *not* to tell the truth or to paint a rosy picture that had no connection with reality.'³⁴ As the U-boat war went from bad to worse, the next weeks produced samples of this dexterity. Admiral Godfrey would recall that since Winston preferred to compose later broadcasts unaided, 'the truth regarding our anti-U-boats measures got fogged.'

Churchill's memorable juggling and jousting with statistics had started before the war when he claimed that Hitler had secretly built more submarines than allowed under the 1935 Anglo-German naval agreement – a canard he would even sustain in his memoirs.³⁵ Years later Godfrey would analyse the U-boat war using captured German records. Hitler, he found, had started the war with only the fifty-seven allowed by the agreement, most of them training in the Baltic. But Churchill had claimed that the enemy had sixty-six, explaining to his puzzled staff that many were operating in the South Atlantic (in fact none would be south of Cape Saint-Vincent before June 1940).

He began an extraordinary multiplication game to conceal the disappointing results from the British public. Before his Sunday broadcast on November 12, the D.N.I. correctly informed him that six U-boats had been sunk (out of his 'sixty-six'). But on the air that evening Winston announced: 'The attack of the U-boats has been controlled and they have paid a heavy toll.' Reminded three days later that the true figure was six, Churchill forbade its circulation except to Pound, Phillips and himself.

Naval Intelligence consistently estimated right. Admiral Godfrey was shocked at the widening discrepancies. 'I assumed,' he wrote in a confidential admiralty history, 'that his perversion of the truth was part of Mr Churchill's technique of heartening the nation at a time when all news was bad.'

In December 1939 Godfrey had reported eight sunk; the actual figure was nine; Churchill claimed *twenty-four*. In January the figures were nine, ten and (Churchill) *thirty-four*. Broadcasting on the twentieth, the First Lord claimed: 'It seems pretty certain tonight that half the U-boats with which Germany began the war have been sunk, and that their new building has fallen far behind what we expected.' (He had taken the nine known sunk, added sixteen 'probables,' and rounded the total upward.)

In February 1940 the figures were ten (Godfrey), eleven (actual), and *thirty-five* (Churchill). The First Lord was fully aware that there had been no sinkings at all for several weeks since he minuted on the seventh, 'I am sorry that we sunk no U-boats in the two months between December 4th

and January 30th'; he ordered 'this gloomy view' restricted once again to Pound, Phillips and himself.

So it went on. On February 17 he added seventeen 'probables' to fourteen 'known sunk,' called the resulting thirty-one 'a working hypothesis,' and added in green ink on the docket, 'I think forty-five will be nearer the truth.' The actual figure was sixteen; Churchill announced *forty-five*.

Admiral Pound's wretched director of anti-submarine warfare, Captain A. G. Talbot, concluded that by March 10 all the attacks had failed except fifteen of which they had actual 'remnants,' and that as many as forty-three enemy submarines were still fit for service. Churchill angrily retorted that clearly the Germans could not have more than twelve left – because he himself had publicly said so. He insisted on Talbot's dismissal. ('This conclusion leads me to think that it might be a good thing if Captain Talbot went to sea as soon as possible.') Pound had the decency to ensure that Talbot was given command of an aircraft carrier.³⁶

Not until mid-April was a document captured from an enemy submarine, U-49, listing Hitler's entire submarine fleet. The canard was exposed, but only to those in the know.³⁷ When he left the admiralty shortly thereafter, Mr Churchill was able to limit the secret to the smallest possible circle of admiralty officers; he deceived the cabinet about the true figures. Even his successor was kept in the dark – the new First Lord believed as late as July 1940 that during Churchill's admiralty stewardship thirty U-boats had been sunk, saving the Atlantic lifelines of the nation.

He embroidered upon the shipping losses in like manner. After he accounted to the House on December 6 ('We are buffeted by the waves but the ocean tides flow steady and strong in our favour'), it did not escape every M.P. that, in totting up the empire's surviving tonnage, Winston had included the ships operating on the landlocked Canadian lakes.³⁸

Captain Talbot was only the first of a number of staff officers whose head was brought into the First Lord's room on a platter. The next was the director of plans, Captain V. H. Danckwerts: he had the temerity to criticise CATHERINE and was summarily dismissed. A hush fell upon the admiralty, and captains and admirals wondered who would be the next foolish virgin sent into the wilderness. Godfrey had the impression that during this initial *furore*, Mr Churchill was unconsciously including the admiralty establishment among those he blamed for keeping him in the wilderness for so many years; the procession of directors, Sea Lords and others evicted by him from the admiralty certainly damaged morale.

One final example will illustrate this aspect of his tenure. 'It became his habit to cheer everyone up in his Wednesday broadcasts,' Godfrey

would write. 'Good news was made to seem better; bad news was toned down, delayed or sometimes suppressed.' When particularly spicy news came in, its release was routinely held up so that the First Lord might include it in his Wednesday broadcast. 'No one,' reasoned the admiral, 'was more conscious than Mr Churchill of the popularity of the bringer of good tidings.' Woe betide any officer who stole his thunder. Vice Admiral Theodore Hallett, who controlled the admiralty's press section, did so — thrice. Winston dismissed him, too, and posted him to sea.³⁹

18: *The Joybells Will Ring*

LEO AMERY observed in September 1939 that with the exception of Churchill the government was entirely devoid of fighting spirit.¹ This was true, but as First Lord he still had only limited authority to act. In October he reverted to his prewar habit of dealing with foreign statesmen independently of No. 10. He decided to renew his contacts with Mandel and other prewar associates; General Spears, sent over to Paris to set these meetings up, soon found however that Whitehall had warned official Paris that he was a creature of Winston's and connected with *des affaires louches* – 'bent dealings.'²

When the First Lord arrived at the Ritz on November 2 Mandel asked to see him alone. More canny now than when he was out of office, Churchill decided it would not do, as he told Spears, to be 'caught' in an intrigue and invited Mandel to a larger dinner on the fourth. Meanwhile he drove out to French navy headquarters and – perhaps rashly – offered to the fleet commander Admiral Jean-Louis Darlan the British anti-submarine device, Asdic.³

Later he visited the C-in-C Maurice Gamelin – a Gallic general so diminutive that even with his platform heels he encountered problems in decorating taller Nordic officers like Ironside, since a certain amount of cheek-kissing was involved. Churchill set out to him a novel scheme just suggested to him by the Prof.: the French should float special mines down the Rhine, creating consternation among the Germans and sinking barges and damaging bridges.⁴

He dined his French associates at the Ritz on the fourth. Prime Minister Edouard Daladier, invited to attend, had curtly made his regrets having telephoned first to inquire about Winston's other guests. The table plan shows that to his right were two of Daladier's most venomous critics, Paul Reynaud and Alexis Léger; to his left were navy minister César Campinchi, Spears, Phillips, Darlan, Mandel, the British ambassador, Blum, Winston's A.D.C. Tommy Thompson, and son-in-law Duncan Sandys.

AS AUTUMN shadows lengthened, London was depressingly empty except for hundreds of air-raid wardens and extra police now wearing steel helmets in anticipation of Hitler's knock-out blow. The streets were dominated by uniforms. Sometimes the sirens sounded and the silvery-white barrage balloons were winched up into the yellow, smoggy air, like slow bubbles rising in champagne.

From his embassy window Joseph Kennedy could see the balloon tethered in Grosvenor-square: it seemed like a big white elephant to him. The war was clouding the entire Anglo-U.S. financial horizon; Hollywood film imports were to be cut from \$35 million to \$5 million annually.⁵ 'Yes,' Sir Frederick Leith-Ross, director-general of the ministry of economic warfare, agreed in a tone of flat finality: 'If the war goes on our gold will be gone, our export trade gone and our foreign securities sold.'⁶

The British government had acquired \$800 million of assets in New York by compulsory purchase from its citizens; of these assets, \$500 million would now have to be sold off to finance the war of 1940 alone. The huge sale was overhanging Wall-street like a reservoir about to burst its dam.

Kennedy had not tired of trying to halt this unpopular war. 'Make no mistake,' he wrote to Roosevelt early in November, 'there is a very definite undercurrent in this country for peace.' The British didn't want to be finished economically and politically – 'which they are beginning to suspect will be their fate if the war goes on very long.'⁷ A few days later twenty Labour M.P.s appealed for a more considered reply to Hitler's October offer; and Mr Attlee openly stated on November 8, 'We wish the German people to know that they can now secure if they will an honourable peace.'⁸

Only Churchill seemed to desire hostilities to continue. His prime minister deeply mistrusted him – Joseph Kennedy reassured himself of that when he visited No. 10 – but preferred to have him inside the cabinet; it was easier to handle him there. 'As for the prime minister-ship,' Chamberlain calmed the American ambassador, 'I don't think there's one man in the cabinet who'd vote for him. People are getting on to Churchill. He can't keep up this high pace all the time. I really hate the whole thing, Joe, but I just won't let Churchill get away with it.'⁹

This underlying desire for peace was cruelly exploited by Hitler's Gestapo. Two of his generals turned up on the German-Dutch border offering to overthrow him. Lord Halifax was inclined to take them seriously, but his ministerial colleagues hesitated to reply in Winston's absence. 'Cabinet did nothing about reply to generals,' noted one senior F.O. offi-

cial in disgust, 'as Winston away till Sunday night! . . . No one dares answer without his approval.'¹⁰ Halifax undertook to talk him round.

On Sunday the fifth, Winston returned from France. On the following morning his appointment card read: '10:15. Halifax comes over.' He evidently persuaded Churchill, because an invitation duly went to the German generals to meet on the Dutch frontier as soon as possible.

The First Lord was by nature an optimist – 'I call him the Great Optimist,' the C.I.G.S. told Kennedy. He took German army dissidence as a welcome sign of imminent collapse, brought about by his blockade. Chamberlain shared this belief in Germany's internal break-up. 'I don't believe it will last beyond next spring,' he told Kennedy, while waiting for the outcome of the frontier rendezvous.

The next day the S.I.S. station chief at The Hague went in person to the historic rendezvous with the dissident enemy generals. The latter turned out to be Gestapo heavyweights in disguise. After a shoot-out in which a Dutch Intelligence officer was killed, the S.I.S. men were kidnapped, dragged over the border into Germany, and tossed into Dachau. In London, a D-notice was issued to editors forbidding mention of the fiasco.

AFTER THAT, Churchill was contemptuous of all feelers from Germany. 'Your predecessor was entirely misled in December [*sic*] 1939,' he would admonish the foreign secretary in 1941, not without a triumphant undertone. 'Our attitude towards all such inquiries or suggestions should be absolute silence.'¹¹ Though he was loath to do so, Chamberlain now rebuffed appeals for peace submitted by King Leopold of the Belgians and Queen Wilhelmina of Holland. Broadcasting a few days later, Churchill robustly demanded Germany's unconditional withdrawal from Poland. 'The Germany which assaults us today,' he urged his listeners, 'is a far less strongly built and solidly founded organism than that which the Allies and the United States forced to beg for an armistice twenty-one years ago.'

In this broadcast he uttered several prophecies about the enemy.

As they look out tonight from their blatant, panoplied, clattering Nazi Germany, they cannot find one single friendly eye in the whole circumference of the globe. Not one! Russia returns them a flinty stare; Italy averts her gaze; Japan is puzzled and thinks herself betrayed; Turkey and the whole of Islam have ranged themselves instinctively but decisively on the side of progress.

By 1941 these prophecies of Nazi isolation would be mercifully forgotten. R. A. Butler, the under-secretary at the foreign office, thought the broadcast 'vulgar' beyond words, but reassured the protesting Italian ambassador that only a tiny minority in Whitehall were as inflexibly belligerent as Mr Churchill; there was no question, said Butler, of demanding that Hitler pull out of Poland as the price of negotiations. 'This is not the only instance where Mr Churchill's language has been out of line with official government policy. He speaks only for himself.'¹²

THAT WINTER he still lacked a sense of direction.

He lunched with Eden at the Savoy, he received American journalists, he talked business with Reves, he conferred with ancient friends like Sir William Wiseman, who had headed the secret service in North America in the World War. Occasionally he conducted more formal business with 'C' – the head of the S.I.S. – or with his own D.N.I. He conspired with Oliver Stanley and General Ironside on ways of eliminating Hore-Belisha from the war office, he listed a Privy Council meeting – noting, in evident disappointment, 'ordinary clothes.'

On the day after his broadcast Paul Reynaud came over to see him, dapper and bustling, eyebrows arching more like circumflexes than ever. Reynaud was still conspiring against Daladier – their jealous feuding, partly over a woman, would have grave consequences for the Allies before the spring was over. He was a picturebook Frenchman with thin moustache, twinkling eyes and receding hair parted down the middle. He looked younger than his age but his size had saddled him with a lifelong feeling of inferiority. Their papers show them dining with Sinclair and Attlee, but we do not know what they discussed.¹³

While waiting for events, Churchill stimulated his own flow of adrenalin by cobbling at his naval staff. A deputy director in the operations division inked this remark into his illicit diary on November 17: 'The Fifth Sea Lord [Vice-Admiral the Hon. Sir Alexander R. M. Ramsay] has been pushed out by Winston with his usual charming way – a chit left on his table. [Captain C. A. A.] Larcome goes too – a pity. I feel Ramsay was about the only S[ea] L[ord] on the staff side who ever spoke his mind – a failing sometimes, but an immense attribute in war.'

Overnight, Churchill's first real crisis began. From mid-day on the eighteenth hourly reports came in, of ships sinking off the east coast. A new enemy mine was causing the trouble. Admiral Pound brought him the grave news at Chartwell that Saturday: six ships had sunk in the Thames. Winston hurried back for a special Sunday cabinet 'blaspheming against

the Germans,' but relishing every moment. 'He enjoys this sort of life,' wrote the operations officer. 'Extraordinary man.'

Fortune played into his hands. By Wednesday a naval officer had salvaged one of the new mines at low tide near Shoeburyness. The First Lord hauled the lieutenant-commander, J. G. D. Ouvrey, before eighty admiralty officials on Thursday night to relate the weapon's secrets.

'You have dissected this monster,' Mr Churchill summarised his narrative, 'divided it into pieces and now you can examine it at leisure!'

The mine's detonator was magnetic – the mine would be triggered by the magnetic shadow of any ship passing within range.¹⁴

The episode had tangential consequences. The German use of this indiscriminate weapon would justify employing the equally illegal fluvial mines against Rhine shipping. The cabinet authorised him to proceed.¹⁵ By Thursday Major Millis Jefferis had already demonstrated a five-pound prototype to him; two weeks later they were tested in the Thames. Of course the whole operation (now codenamed ROYAL MARINE) would first need France's sanction, and *there* would be the rub. Meanwhile Churchill directed that the test report be kept in an 'O' box – O for offensive – and ordered several thousand manufactured.



During the winter Winston Churchill's predatory gaze fell upon Norway, that luckless, lustrous land of trolls and sleepy inlets. Norway was a neutral in this war. But Churchill knew that Hitler's blast furnaces were deriving most of their iron ore from Swedish mines at Gällivare; that during the cold months Sweden's own ore port of Luleå was icebound; and that the ore was then hauled by train to Narvik, in the far north of Norway, and by ship down Norwegian coastal waters to Germany.

In October, Churchill proposed that Britain stop this traffic.

It was a correct strategic decision; it should have been possible to effect it almost immediately. But in the six months that followed the British high command was beset by doubt and dither – between Mr Churchill, the cabinet, and the French general staff who had begun nourishing strategic ambitions of their own, including an invasion of Russia from north and south (Scandinavia and Syria) and the total destruction of Hitler's Soviet ally.

As it will be a tangled story, a broad review will not be out of place. Churchill's strategic objective never varied: to choke off Hitler's ore supplies, either on route or at the source. His first plan (WILFRED) was to mine the Norwegian waters and force the ore ships into the open sea where the gentlemen of the navy could deal with them. Shortly, he fa-

voured a bolder plan to capture Narvik; as the weeks passed, and with them the colder weather that kept Luleå closed, he developed an even more hazardous plan – to advance from Narvik into Sweden and seize the ore-field itself. Out of all plans there thus evolved by March 1940 a plan to turn Norway and Sweden into a major theatre of operations against Hitler.

All these plans were unfortunately quite illegal. They would involve British troops invading neutral waters and even going ashore with or without permission; neutral citizens who got in the way would be killed. As will be seen, this aspect disturbed many of Churchill's staff ('I thought we were fighting for Law & Order!' wrote Captain Edwards) and ways were sought around their objections.

Mr Churchill offered various solutions. His own minor violation, WILFRED, might goad Hitler into committing a major infraction, such as invading southern Norway. This in turn would justify Britain executing her own large plans. After Russia attacked Finland on the last day of November, Churchill suggested an expedition to help the Finns; first, of course, Finland must appeal for aid, but Helsinki dithered, and by mid-March the formal appeal had still not come.

Churchill's private remarks show that he was interested in Finland only as a pretext for getting troops into Norway and Sweden. When Lord Cork, still planning CATHERINE, suggested on December 5 that the Soviet aggression might be the last chance to mobilise anti-Bolshevik forces of the world, Churchill was horrified. 'I still hope,' he replied, 'war with Russia may be avoided and it is my policy to try to avoid it.'

CHURCHILL DECIDED to sound Roosevelt before initiating WILFRED. To stimulate interest in the war, he had sent over to the White House a colourful account of the loss of *Royal Oak*: 'We must not let the liaison lapse,' he explained to Admiral Pound.¹⁶

He winked at Washington outrageously and often. 'The great English-speaking republic across the Atlantic Ocean,' he postulated in his November broadcast, 'makes no secret of its sympathies or of its self-questionings, and translates these sentiments into actions of a character which anyone may judge for himself.' Whether blind ardour or wishful thinking, it remained unreciprocated. He even offered Roosevelt the secrets of Asdic in return for the Norden stabilised bombsight; the president refused to be drawn.

Churchill knew that Ambassador Kennedy was planning to spend Christmas at Palm Beach reading detective stories and relaxing, and on November 28, the eve of Kennedy's departure, he invited him around. He

hopefully offered a whisky-and-soda – the ambassador was teetotal and declined – then disclosed his secret plan to mine Norwegian waters. How, he asked, would the president react? Adopting the conspiratorial tone that he felt was appropriate in dealings with the First Lord, Kennedy told him he would certainly ask the president. If Roosevelt disapproved, he would cable, 'Eunice had better not go to the party'; presidential approval would be signified by the message, 'My wife cannot express an opinion.'¹⁷

Kennedy left the next day; from Lisbon the *Manhattan* would take him to New York. Before boarding her he pleaded with the state department to announce that, even if this vessel mysteriously blew up in mid-Atlantic with an American ambassador on board, Washington would not consider it a cause for war. 'I thought,' wrote Kennedy in his scurrilous unpublished memoirs, 'that would give me some protection against Churchill's placing a bomb on the ship.'¹⁸



Callous of Britain's larger agony in the fight against Adolf Hitler, the Zionists had begun a private war against her over the White Paper on Palestine. But they had made no headway against war office and colonial office hostility to their scheme for a Jewish army; by November 1939 forty-three members of the Haganah were awaiting trial for illegal possession of arms, a serious offence in Palestine.

Ben-Gurion visited the colonial secretary on the fifteenth and warned of bloodshed – in vain. Frustrated by Churchill's passive attitude, Weizmann tackled their mutual friend Brendan Bracken. 'Winston,' apologised Bracken, 'is terribly worn and is not sleeping.' In fact he wondered whether Churchill could hold out much longer.

In mid-December, Weizmann wrote to Churchill urging that he arm the Jews and oppose the White Paper. The First Lord invited him round briefly at seven p.m. on the seventeenth and expressed his usual optimism about the war. 'We have them beat,' he told the Zionist leader.

Weizmann was more interested in Palestine. 'You stood at the cradle of this enterprise,' he reminded his friend. 'I hope you will see it through.' Churchill asked what he meant by that.

'After the war,' was the reply, 'the Zionists would wish to have a state of some three or four million Jews in Palestine.'

'Yes,' said Churchill mechanically, 'I quite agree with that.'¹⁹

Weizmann was leaving for New York; Bracken had arranged the passage. He took careful note of those words, and over the weeks that followed Churchill and Bracken kept him informed of the Zionist office's

continuing struggle against Lord Halifax and Malcolm Macdonald – using a code designed to foil British postal censorship.



The *Manhattan* arrived intact in New York, and Kennedy visited the president on December 8.

While Roosevelt sat up in bed and poured coffee from a Thermos, the ambassador tackled him about the irksome secret correspondence with the First Lord. Roosevelt's explanation showed little esteem for Churchill. 'I have always disliked him,' he drawled, 'since the time I went to England in 1918. He acted like a stinker at a dinner I attended, lording it all over us. I am giving him attention now because there is strong possibility that he will become the prime minister and I want to get my hand in now.'

We cannot divine his motives for now encouraging Winston's Norwegian adventure. When Kennedy traced out on Roosevelt's bedroom highboy the shipping lanes that the British planned to mine, the president nodded assent. Kennedy sent off the pre-arranged message: 'My wife cannot express an opinion.'²⁰ Churchill in turn notified the cabinet – Roosevelt's secret response had, he claimed, been 'more favourable' than he had hoped.²¹

He even suggested an operation much wider in scope: suppose the 'trend of events' forced Norway and Sweden into war with Russia – 'We would then be able to gain a foothold in Scandinavia with the object of helping them, but without having to go to the extent of ourselves declaring war on Russia.' Then Britain could seize the Norwegian ports of Narvik and Bergen. By the sixteenth he had put the finishing touches to his plan. Throttling Hitler's iron ore supplies, this suggested, was one way of 'preventing the vast slaughters which will attend the grapple of the main armies.'²²

ONE INCIDENT brightened Churchill's War that December. A British naval force hunted down and damaged the enemy raider *Graf Spee* which had sunk many ships in the South Atlantic. Unable to effect repairs at Montevideo, where Uruguayan officials had been bribed – perhaps on Churchill's instructions – to deny her a long enough stay, her captain took the pocket battleship out to sea, scuttled her, and shot himself upon her bridge.

One night during this battle, admiralty staff saw Churchill, clad in a strange night garment, appear in their operations centre, itching to transmit instructions to Commodore Harwood in the South Atlantic. Admiral Pound convinced him that Bobby Harwood probably knew best. In later weeks, the director of naval intelligence later wrote, Churchill resorted to

many a subterfuge to get his way: 'Not the least tantalising procedure was his trick of drafting telegrams as if they originated in the admiralty.' The D.N.I. was astonished that Pound allowed it, and attributed it to his failing powers of resistance.²³

While Churchill broadcast a few days later a homily on the freedom of the seas, his warships continued entering the new three-hundred-mile war-free zone of South America to seize or sink ships trading with Germany. To his dismay, even Roosevelt's administration joined in the chorus of neutral protests. On Christmas Eve he apologised in a message to the president and reassured him that he had now given instructions 'only to arrest or fire upon [enemy ships] out of sight of United States shore.' The *Graf Spee* battle had been well within the three-hundred-mile zone, of course, but the First Lord was unrepentant and dismissed the neutral clamour. 'Much of world duty is being thrown on admiralty,' he chided Roosevelt. 'Hope burden will not be made too heavy for us to bear.'

He was human enough to understand what underlay American official aloofness – the coming presidential election. 'Roosevelt is our best friend,' he explained to Chamberlain, 'but I expect he wants to be re-elected and I fear that isolationism is the winning ticket.'²⁴

Not until February 1940 did F.D.R. even acknowledge Churchill's narrative on the *Graf Spee* and, when he did write, it was to carp at British warships searching American merchant vessels: 'There has been much public criticism here.'

ON DECEMBER 20 Churchill dined Admiral Darlan at Admiralty House. A proud and honourable sailor, the Frenchman remembered that in this same dining room a British officer had once told him that no Briton could sleep easily so long as there was one French submarine in the Channel. Two years later he would be liquidated with a pistol provided by the S.O.E. – one of Mr Churchill's secret agencies.

The French were independently warming toward a Norwegian operation. At the Supreme War Council meeting in Paris on the nineteenth, Edouard Daladier announced that Hitler's exiled steel magnate Fritz Thyssen had recommended disrupting the iron ore supplies.²⁵

The French also wanted to speed aid to Finland – though for her own sake and not, as Mr Churchill preferred, merely as a pretext to land troops in Scandinavia. General Ironside even talked of sending four thousand ski troops to seize Gällivare, reassuring the cabinet's military co-ordination committee on the twentieth that the ore-fields were too remote for any accidental entanglement with Russia.²⁶ When Churchill again talked of his

original uncomplicated plan to mine Norwegian waters, Lord Halifax objected that this might endanger the 'larger plan' for seizing Gällivare.²⁷

Probably it was here that Winston made his mistake. Instead of insisting that they keep their eye on the ball – stopping the ore traffic – he too now became enthusiastic about larger operations.

HIS INTERMEDIATE ambition was to become minister of defence.

Uprooting the obstacles in his path, he engineered the dismissal of Hore-Belisha from the war office – whom only a few months earlier he had praised for forcing through conscription. The minister, a Jew, detected Churchill's hand in it, and that of 'Tiny' Ironside, who often dined with him; he suspected Ironside of scheming to become military dictator. He had certainly become acutely unpopular with the generals at B.E.F. headquarters. 'A fine day's work for the army,' General Pownall called the dismissal in his diary. Fleet-street was in an uproar, but Gort's chief of staff put this down to the alarm of 'the Jew-controlled press' like the *Daily Mail* at seeing 'one of their champions and nominees' removed.

Offered the Board of Trade, Hore-Belisha refused it, assuring friends that he would make a come-back as prime minister. *Daily Mirror* editor Hugh Cudlipp had to advise him that the increasing anti-Semitism generated by the war would rule out his chances. So, emulating Churchill, he began to write for the salacious *News of the World*, evoking from another editor the chuckling comment that without Winston's strength he would be unable to serve as 'a cloak for dirty stories' and get away with it.²⁸

His successor was a pleasingly complaisant man, Oliver Stanley, a personal friend of Mr Churchill. The latter now reverted to the Norway problem. 'If they [the Germans] did invade Norway, I would be glad,' Churchill told his cabinet colleagues. 'They would become involved in a serious commitment.' But still no decisions were taken. On the twelfth he exclaimed that the debate had now dragged on for six weeks; he had heard every argument in favour of doing nothing; they were letting the initiative rest with Germany. But the old fear remained – that WILFRED might prejudice the 'larger plan' to seize Gällivare. Meanwhile, although Winston had privately secured Roosevelt's endorsement of WILFRED, nobody had bothered to consult the Dominions.²⁹

That day Spears brought their old friend Admiral Sir Roger Keyes to lunch at the admiralty. 'When things seem to be going smoothly,' Winston philosophised, 'you may be perfectly certain Fate is preparing some particularly unpleasant trick for you.'

What form would it take? Perhaps the knock-out blow against London? He speculated that there would be violent action soon, probably the

invasion of Holland, which would bring the German bombers within range. (Lindemann had now explained to him that they could not reach London without overflying the Low Countries.) A German courier aircraft had crash-landed two days earlier in Belgium carrying (genuine) staff plans for an invasion of the Low Countries. Churchill clearly thought them genuine, but the B.E.F. commander dismissed them as obvious fakes in the best Hollywood tradition – ‘reminiscent,’ he scoffed, ‘of the famous railway train plan of the days before the last war.’³⁰

Still struggling against the Soviet invaders, on January 20 Finland appealed for immediate British help – for about ten Hurricane fighter planes, with British volunteer pilots and ground crews. Whitehall still prevaricated. Churchill supported the idea and Finland’s fight attracted broad space in his broadcast that night. ‘Only Finland – superb, nay sublime – in the jaws of peril – Finland shows what free men can do.’

Let the great cities of Warsaw, of Prague, of Vienna banish despair even in the midst of their agony. Their liberation is sure. The day will come when the joybells will ring again throughout Europe, and when victorious nations, masters not only of their foes but of themselves, will plan and build in justice, in tradition and in freedom a house of many mansions, where there will be room for all.

HOW EPHEMERAL are the finest dreams of man! Many a citizen of Central Europe, entering the Russian army’s unremitting thrall five years later, might well have pondered on these words in Winston’s peroration. But even in January 1940 no neutral was deceived by his hollow verbal architecture, however grandiose and filigree. Oslo and Stockholm huffed at his insinuation that they ‘yielded humbly’ to German threats; Geneva and The Hague suspected that Britain’s turbulent First Lord coveted their countries for battlefields.

The foreign office saw his broadcast as a setback to every effort to win neutral sympathy. ‘Would you think it unreasonable of me,’ Lord Halifax pleaded on January 26 in that over-courteous tone he used to express extreme annoyance, ‘to ask that in future, if you are going to speak with particular reference to foreign policy, you might let me see in advance what you had it in mind to say?’

Besides the clattering events of war, Churchill’s January appointment card had been dotted with publishers, ghost writers and literary agents. Once he nipped over to France with Randolph and Spears for another reassuring look at the Maginot line and a talk with General Georges about

operation ROYAL MARINE. Toward the end of January the cabinet sent over General Ironside for staff talks with the French. 'As Daladier says,' the C.I.G.S. wrote in his diary, 'time is slipping on and we are doing nothing but talk.'

'Winston,' he added, 'is mad to start something. . .'



'What price Churchill?' Is there some political motive behind this giant poster in The Strand which has been mystifying Londoners for several days?



Churchill's first wartime broadcast on October 2, 1939. In later months, as the strain began to tell, he had his famous speeches broadcast by a B.B.C. actor instead.



When going got rough in 1938 Churchill threatened to abandon politics and take up the directorships offered to him by the City. The Lord Mayor's banquets were a favourite milieu.