

MEMORIES OF CHURCHILL AND HOW HE WOULD HAVE SEEN THE WORLD TODAY

**The Right Honorable Lord Amery
March 27, 1994**

Mr. President, I am deeply honored by your invitation, first of all, to come here at all, but particularly, as I had to let you down last year for unexpected major surgery which made it impossible for me to undertake the journey. I am very touched by the degree with which you have presented me. I only have one small confusion: I see it is not a Doctor of Law but a Doctor of Laws, in the plural. Whether that commits me to the Shari'a law in Saudi Arabia, or any other laws, I don't know; but in ignorance I can always plead that as a reasonable excuse.

Before I say anything else, may I congratulate you on having invited my friend, Professor R.V. Jones, here the other day. It showed not only wisdom but foresight. As I see, the CIA have since conferred a special medal on him shaming my own country, who, in spite of my own efforts, have not done the same thing.

I have read with great interest the published versions of your previous speakers in this interesting sequence, and of course you are now scraping the bottom of the barrel of the people who knew Churchill at all intimately. It is not surprising. He would be 120 years old if he were still alive, and it is 40 years since he retired from public life. However, in accordance with the examples set by previous speakers in this series, I shall confine myself to my personal recollections of the great man.

I suppose I have always known him, because he was a close friend of my father's, and, since he lived for the most part while not in office, in his country house in Kent and my father lived in London, he was a frequent visitor to our home. So, I suppose I grew up not realizing quite who he was or what he was, but he was a familiar figure with a gold watch chain and very often a spotted necktie.

My first conscious memory of him was at school when he came to judge a competition in oratory. And he didn't give me the prize, which I rather resented. But he called me over afterwards and he said, "You dropped your voice at the end of the sentence – same mistake as Anthony Eden makes." Who was corrected. I must say I was very touched. I was 16 or 17, and Anthony Eden was the rising star in the Conservative party, and I thought I had been admitted to the magic circle by being asked not to make the same mistakes as this rising figure.

My next and first grown-up meeting with him was in February, I think it was, of 1939. My father had invited Count Coudenhove-Kalergi, the first prophet of United Europe, to meet Churchill at lunch. My father had to go out to an early board meeting and he said to me as he left, "Julian, make sure that Churchill has enough liquid refreshment." It was to me a memorable occasion. Not only did Count Coudenhove-Kalergi talk about United Europe, all of which Churchill received very well; and he wrote a powerful article that evening in support of it, but Coudenhove-Kalergi also said, "You do realize, Mr. Churchill, that Hitler

and Stalin are just about to conclude an agreement.” And Churchill was shocked, and he said, “Not possible. I see the Soviet Ambassador Mr. Maisky quite often. I don’t think this can happen.” Coudenhove said, “This is what I learned from my sources in the Vatican.” Well, the Vatican has a habit of being rather well informed. And so Churchill was silenced for a moment by this. Not many things silenced him. That is my principal memory of the conversation at lunch that day.

Next time I saw him was the last big dance or ball given in England before the war. It was at Hever Castle, and Churchill had very kindly asked me to stay in his house for the occasion. We were mostly a gathering of young people, perhaps eight or ten. But he had just received visitors from Czechoslovakia, for they were still with him, because to Mrs. Churchill’s dismay, an hour after dinner he hadn’t yet finished. He was not the most considerate of men where the clock was concerned; but as he came out he was in a rather gloomy and grumpy mood and rather quiet at dinner, as was his way until he had eaten and had a little champagne. By then he had cheered up, and we all went to the ball, which was the last big social occasion before the outbreak of war, which all of us thought by now was inevitable.

Then came the war. I was abroad. I was in Yugoslavia at this time. I had no further contact with him for a bit. As I remember very well after the fall of France, the people of Eastern Europe lost hope, particularly those who were democrats and who feared the advance of Nazi Germany. I went to a village in Serbia trying to study agricultural conditions in the old Yugoslavia and was taken to a small farm. There was a small impoverished farmer, who showed me over his farm, and there was a pretty cross looking pig. Then he pointed to his pig and said, “I call him Churchill.” I was a little offended. I was a young attaché at our embassy then, and I said, “Why do you call your pig after our Prime Minister? He said, “He is my last hope of getting through the winter alive!”

There followed for me months of excitement in the war, sometimes months of boredom, but mostly interesting work until Marshall Rommel, the great German commander, came to the gates of Cairo. He was only about a day’s march away, or his tanks an hour’s drive away. My job was then in the Secret Service, and we had to make plans how to deploy the network of Secret agents we had, in case the Germans took over. Otherwise, all of these men would have been in real danger. Some were shipped off to South Africa, some even to India, but there was no certainty that we would survive. And I went home to London in what was regarded as very privileged position – in the belly of a Liberator bomber – anxious that the pilots shouldn’t press the lever that would drop me out like a bomb. However, I got home safely, and I went to my father’s home and found my father having lunch with Harold Macmillan, then a very young Minister. And they said to me, “What is going to happen?” I said, “It is a very dangerous position. The army is low in morale,” and they said, “How do you know that?” “Well,” I said, “I have to go up to the front quite often and to the forward airfields. We’ve taken a hell of a pasting from the Germans. We have lost several hundred tanks, and their replacement is coming ‘round Africa, but it won’t be here for two or three weeks.” What is to be done? “Well, I said, “you can’t get the tanks any quicker to the desert. The only idea I have, and you may think it a foolish thing for a young man to propose, is if Churchill, himself, were to go out and show himself to the troops and speak to them. It just might make the difference and give us a few more days.” Having said my piece, I went off to my own office in the Secret Service headquarters, and I was at a meeting

with my boss when the telephone rang and he said, "I am terribly sorry, this is Downing Street on the line, I may have to ask you to leave the room for just a moment while I just check." Then his face fell, and he said, "the call is not for me. It is for Julian Amery." And the call was an order from Churchill to come at once to Downing Street. I was with him in a few minutes, since the traffic was pretty thin in London in the wartime years.

I was shown into the cabinet room, where he was dressed in that familiar Air Force blue siren suit, smoking a cigar with what looked like a sort of weak whisky in front of him. On the right hand was Sir Alan Brooke, The Chief of the General Staff. He said, "Tell me what you have to say. I have heard about your lunchtime conversation." So I repeated it. Alan Brooke did not like the idea of a junior officer criticizing the morale of any army which was under the command of friends of his. But Churchill said, "Let him have his say. Let him talk." And so Alan Brooke kept quiet, and I finished what I had to say. Then he asked me a series of questions about the journey. Had I stood up to it easily? Had it been very cold in the air? Was it very hot in Cairo? He asked me one question after another, showing a keen interest in the journey, and then he thanked me and bade me good afternoon.

I left thinking, I have done my bit for what it was worth. Two or three weeks later, his private secretary, Mr. Martin, telephoned and said, "I thought you would like to know Churchill left for Cairo this morning. So your words have borne fruit." It led to the big change in the high command, and Field Marshal Montgomery was appointed to lead the battle with General Alexander as his field commander. So, that was my contribution to the battle of El Alamein. Coming as it did at about the same time as the battle of Stalingrad, this reassured us that victory was now certain. The United States and the Soviet Union had both become involved in the war, and the Germans could no doubt put on a tough fight still, but they were cornered. Churchill's problem was, alright, we're no longer going to be defeated, but how are we going to win and what are we going to do with our victory? Already, the shadow of the Soviet advance into Eastern Europe could be seen, and there was a big conference at Teheran, where President Roosevelt, Marshal Stalin, and Churchill were all there. At that conference, Churchill deployed the strategy he wanted to pursue. This was that the Anglo-American army, then in Italy, should halt its operations half-way up Italy. If you think of it, Italy is very narrow. It was the most uncomfortable place to fight a war. There is not much room for maneuver. He said, "Let's send the army across the Adriatic and bid for the Danube and try to get there and cut off the Germans from Eastern Europe." He put forward this plan, but it was vetoed by Stalin and Roosevelt. Stalin, of course, already had ambitions in Eastern Europe. Roosevelt guessed that what Churchill was after was keeping the road to the Middle East open to the British Empire. And so his plan failed, and he came back to Cairo, increasingly suspicious about the ambitions of the Soviet Union.

Mr. Casey, a great mining magnate, had a villa just under the pyramids. At a dinner on one of the evenings after Churchill came back, he said, "Oliver Cromwell was a very great man, but he made a very great mistake. Obsessed with the power of Spain, he failed to observe the rise of France. Will they say this of me?" Meaning, that the Germans were already really defeated and the Russians would take over unless something was done.

There was a dinner a couple of nights later at the British Embassy. He was celebrating his birthday, and all the great men were there – Montgomery, Alexander, Smuts – but he also invited what he called "the boys," young men like me who were operating behind the lines in

Greece, Albania, and Yugoslavia. After dinner he took “the boys” aside and said, “I think what I am going to do is to support the Communists in Yugoslavia, and the King in Greece.” Having said this, he went around and asked what we thought about it. When it came to me, I said, “It may be a bit awkward because Yugoslavia and Albania have a common border with Greece.” And he looked at me and he said, “Well, Julian, you may think I am being inconsistent, but I still have some influence here and this is my policy.” So I shut up pretty quickly. What he meant, of course, was that Eastern Europe was going to fall to the Soviets. Was there any chance of peace before then?

Your Professor Charmley, who was here, has written a book called *The End of Glory*, in which he said, “Churchill could have made peace at the end of 1940 or ’41.” I think this is a good example of an academic not understanding politics. We had not a card in our hand in ’40 and ’41. Our whole army had been destroyed at Dunkirk. Our Air Force had just survived the Battle of Britain, and not much of it was left. The Germans still had a good deal in order to prosecute their war, which was just coming with the Russians. So, I don’t think there was any chance of peace when Professor Charmley thought it might have happened.

It was just conceivable, it seemed to me, that in the end of ’42, the beginning of ’43, after the Battle of Stalingrad and El Alamein, that the German Generals might have attempted to overthrow Hitler and accept terms that we might have thought possible. But we had all signed up the agreement on unconditional surrender. Germany was to surrender totally. And this was something that both President Roosevelt and Marshal Stalin were committed to. And Churchill, by now the Junior partner in the Great Western Alliance, was in no position to say “no.” So we went on for another 15 months to fight the war at considerable cost.

In 1945 we could at least say peace was here. We had avoided defeat. We had won the war. Then there was a general election in Britain. And, for the first time in my life, I ran for office. I have never seen such enthusiasm. The British are a fairly phlegmatic people, but I have never seen such enthusiasm as there was for Churchill. I accompanied him on the long drive to my constituency, and people came out with flags tied to their crutches – veterans from World War I. They threw flowers at his car. I was absolutely convinced of victory, we lost. Largely, I think, because of the overseas vote of the Army. They all wanted to come home, and they felt Churchill would continue the war, the war against Japan particularly. Anyway, there he was – defeated.

He wasted no time in futile regret or feeble reproaches. He pulled himself together and, according to his old maxim, he said, “Who is now the enemy?” He was convinced by this time that the Soviets had become the enemy, but no other statesman of the front rank had yet reached this conclusion. It was here in Fulton, and later in Zurich, that he denounced the danger of the “Iron Curtain” dividing Europe and leading to an even greater danger than the Germans had presented.

I, of course, sympathized and applauded what he said at Fulton and at Zurich. I got involved in the European Movement. I had been to visit the Count Coudenhove-Kalergi, whom I have already mentioned to you, at his villa in Gstaad. On the second day I was staying with him, a telegram arrived from Churchill saying, “I am going to start a European Movement. I understand you have got one, too. Please let me have full details of your

organization.” And Coudenhove-Kalergi replied, “Julian Amery is returning to London tomorrow, and he is fully briefed.”

So, I found myself a couple of days later lunching at Chartwell with Churchill, Robert Boothby, Duncan Sandys, and my father. Churchill was in very good spirits. He said, “I have decided to simplify my drinking, nothing but champagne and brandy.” We talked over lunch, and he was quite clear that he wanted to launch a movement for the unity of Europe, and he wanted Britain to play a full part in it. There have been a lot of arguments since, as to how far he wanted to commit Britain. I can tell you, as I was with him then and in the remaining development of the European Movement, I have no doubt, whatever, that he expected Britain to join fully. But, when I say to join fully, he was not a federalist. He had seen British Commonwealth and independent countries fight through the First World War and the Second World War alongside of us, and so he did not think federation was the answer. He thought the answer lay in a close union of sovereign states. General de Gaulle, in exile in London, watching how the Commonwealth operated, came to the same conclusion. And that was what led him to proclaim “a union of States” for Europe. He said, in rather cynical terms, “I want a Europe to evolve on British lines, but, hopefully, without the British!”

Then came the question of what to do about the threat of the Soviet Union. Churchill had managed to maintain good relations with Marshal Stalin, though in no way was he taken in by him. And there is perhaps a story here I can tell. Possibly you have heard it before. After one of their conferences, Stalin said to Churchill, “Come and have a bite of something to eat and a drink in my flat in the Kremlin. I will just have an interpreter.” And so they went off. Churchill drank a lot of whiskey, and Stalin drank a lot of red wine. When Churchill got back to the British Embassy at two or three in the morning, he went to sleep. When he awoke in the morning, he said to himself, “I wonder what I agreed to.” And so he rang for his secretary and he dictated a letter: “Dear Generalissimo: I very much enjoyed our evening. I think we agreed to the following points,” and he put down the points he would have liked to be agreed upon. Two hours later, the reply came back: “I also enjoyed our evening. My recollection of the conversation is completely different than yours, but do not worry. We were both drunk, and the interpreter has been shot.”

Gradually the relationship with the Russians deteriorated, and I see a Mr. Ponting has said in a book that Churchill wanted to launch a nuclear war against the Russians. This is quite untrue. But what is true is that he did recommend that, while the United States had the monopoly of nuclear weapons which was until 1950 or '51, we should put an ultimatum to the Russians and ask them to withdraw from Eastern Europe. This was not done, so presently they developed their own nuclear power. Once they had done that, the prospect of a major war faded away as far as he was concerned. The consequences would have been too dreadful for any advantage either side might have secured.

In 1953, Marshal Stalin died, and Churchill recalled that when the great Khan, Ghengis Khan, had died in Karakorum in the thirteenth century, I think it was, all his generals had saddled up and ridden home as fast as they could to be in on the succession. And he thought, well now there may be a chance to penetrate the totalitarian armor of the Russians. And he called for a summit meeting of the United States, Britain and France with the Russians. Everybody was against him, including his own foreign office, so he embarked on

some secret diplomacy and began a negotiation, the venue of which strangely was my own house in London, with the Russian Ambassador, to see if such a negotiation could take place. He had some reasons for thinking it might work. There were clear signs the Soviets were going to withdraw from Austria. But I think it was premature. They did withdraw from Austria, and the result was that Hungary blew up in their face, and they had to invade Budapest.

Churchill, of course, as you know, was a lifelong friend and ally of the United States. He knew, without the United States, we could not have won the war. Anyway, he was half American by birth, and he had many friends in the United States, but he did resent American anti-colonialism and, more particularly, their criticism of our policy in India, which was still under the British Raj. I remember before I paid my first visit to the United States, I had some lectures then arranged; he said to me to be sure and tell them that under British rule the population of India has risen three or four times. The same cannot be said for the Indian population in the United States.

At the end of his life a shadow was cast over his friendship with the United States, in the shape of American pressure on us to withdraw from the Suez Canal base. And Anthony Eden, his Foreign Secretary, agreed with the American line, while Churchill, himself, rejected it.

I made a speech one day in the House of Commons, criticizing Anthony Eden in the sort of rather unmannerly terms that a young man sometimes uses. The telephone rang the next morning, and it was Number 10 Downing Street. I thought I'd be getting a rocket. It was the Prime Minister's Private Secretary, who said, "Prime Minister has read your speech. He wants me to say he agrees with every word of it." – (The speech attacking his own Foreign Secretary.) This was in 1953. He left office in '55, so he was not there when Eden launched his attack with France against Colonel Nasser. I often wondered whether the American response might have been friendlier than it was, if he still had been in office and had been able to fly to Washington and tell President Eisenhower what was in his mind. His own verdict on the Suez operation was simply this: "I don't know whether I would have dared to start; I would never have dared to stop." You may think this has some application to the recent crisis in the Gulf!

But then he left office. He was over 80, his hearing was very bad; his physical capacities were beginning to decline. And having once left government, he didn't make any effort to intervene in the conduct of affairs. But he used to come to the House of Commons quite a lot. I was sitting next to him one day and on the bench behind us a distinguished conservative member, Sir Bernard Braine, was speaking, and Churchill said to me, "Who is that?" And I said, "Braine." "James?" he queried. "No, I said, "Braine." "Drain? You can't be called Drain. No one is called Drain." So I wrote it down. "Braine." "Oh!" he said, "is he well known?"

He spent those last declining years painting, taking an interest in his racing horses – he had never been interested in that before. And he very much befriended Mr. Onassis, the Greek shipping magnate, who found a key to conversation with him. (Churchill) It is perhaps difficult for people today to realize that Churchill's authority was such that nobody, certainly not a young man who knew him as well as I did, would have dared to argue much with him.

Certainly not criticize him. Onassis had no such inhibitions. I remember a dinner where Onassis turned to him and said, "You let Roosevelt down very badly," over some issue and Churchill said, "What did you say?" So Onassis repeated the criticism, and he got in reply a five or ten minute vintage speech from Churchill. Onassis had the effect of slapping him in the face, as it were, and making him respond.

The last time I saw him was at dinner at the Other Club, a club he had founded, and I was just about opposite to him. He was too deaf for any conversation, but I scribbled one or two notes to him. The first one had no reply. The second drew a real Churchillian response. It was about de Gaulle for whom he had a great regard. At dinner after some oysters, he had some roast beef and a big pudding, and he drank champagne throughout and then two or three glasses of brandy. That was early in the New Year before he died. But the sparkle never left him, and his son, Randolph, told me that a day or two before he died, Randolph went in to see him in his bedroom and Churchill said, "I would like to see the press, the newspapermen," and Randolph said, "But you're not well enough to do that." "Yes," he said, "I would like to see some of the top commentators." "Oh," said Randolph, "what do you want to say to them?" He said, "I want you to say to them that my Doctor, Lord Moran, is sinking fast." It was typical of the sense of humor that never left him, even in the hour of death.

His legacy – well that would mean writing a book, and I won't attempt to inflict it on you now. I see somebody has said that he was not really a Democrat. His idea of Democracy was perfectly simple. He said, "Every government must give the people the chance every five years or so to get rid of it, if they want to." But he didn't believe in framing your policy from day to day in the light of public opinion polls.

He once said, "A politician, with his ear to the ground, must inevitably have his bottom in the air. This is a vulnerable and undignified position and should be avoided."

Basically, I suppose he was a free-trader and a free market man. His views on religion were simple. Once he said to me, "I am a buttress of the church, rather than a pillar," by which he meant that he thought religion had an important part to play in peoples' lives, even if not entirely in his own. He was incapable of resentment. You might say the opposite of what he believed in to him. He never held it against you. Working with him was fun, enlivened by refreshment and excitement at the feeling that you were working with history, living with history.

Thank you very much.