

CHURCHILL THE VISIONARY

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It is one of the oddities of the English language – and of the sensitivities of the English mind – that while the word “vision” is commendatory, suggesting a positive quality, “visionary” may have, indeed it often does have, a dubious sense. There are of course varieties of the meanings of these words in the *Oxford English Dictionary* but here are at least the principal ones. Vision: “Something which is apparently seen otherwise than by ordinary sight,” or “A mental concept of a distinct or vivid kind: a highly imaginative scheme or anticipation.” On the other hand Visionary: “given to fanciful and unpractical views;” or “One who indulges in fantastic ideas or schemes; an unpractical enthusiast.” This last pejorative meaning, according to the O. E. D., appears in English in 1702. Two and a quarter centuries later this was exactly how Winston Churchill’s English opponents – and many others too – saw him. But is not with opponents and critics of Churchill that my present discourse is concerned. My purpose is different. It is to assert that “visionary,” may be properly and, I hope, convincingly, applicable to Churchill in a positive sense.

During the two-thirds of a century that have passed since his *Finest Hour* in 1940 and during the one-third of a century since his death there has been – relatively – little change in his reputation, by which I mean his historical portrait. This is unusual, since in the broad sense of the term all history is revisionism. Unlike the subjects of law, the subjects of history are subjects to multiple jeopardy, since history (indeed, all human thinking) consists of thinking and rethinking of what we know of the past. It is of course possible that the recent wave of anti-Churchill writings by different people such as David Irving, John Charmley, Alan Clark may continue and acquire followers. But not that, apart from their other shortcomings (of which there are many) the only main argument that these different posthumous critics of Churchill have in common is that Churchill’s single-minded and obstinate hatred of Hitler led Britain into bankruptcy and to the dissolution of its Empire. Now the theme of my present discourse is not to argue against these argumentators, except for one thing. This is that the unwillingness of the British people and, even more, of their politicians to maintain the Empire of 1900 or even of 1920 – as well as their inability to maintain the industrial and financial primary of Britain – had long preceded Churchill’s regime and has continued after him for a long time.

And this brings me to my essential point: that Churchill was an extraordinary phenomenon not only in the general history of the twentieth century but particularly in that of Britain. There was no one like him – well and good; but there is more to that. There was no one who could have done what he did in 1940. This is a matter that, after nearly six years, we ought to see somewhat differently from how we saw it for a long time. In 1940 Churchill, alone, stood in Hitler’s path; across the path leading Hitler to victory. Not only Americans – who, justifiably, associate the start of their Second World War with December 1941 – but many other people, including serious biographers and historians of Hitler, tend to see, in retrospect, Hitler as having been doomed by a war that he started and in which he and his Reich would be overwhelmed by the associated might of Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union. But what few people understand, even now, is how close Hitler had come to

win his war in the early summer of 1940, and well before the air Battle of Britain. He would have won his war if he had landed on the English coast in June or July – that much has been recognized by a few, mostly British, military historians. But that is a speculation. What is not a speculation is what Churchill, on the twenty-seventh day of May in 1940, in the secret sessions of the War Cabinet, called “the slippery slope.” If at that moment a British government would have signaled as much as a cautious inclination to explore a negotiation with Hitler, amounting to a willingness to ascertain his possible terms, that would have been the first step onto a Slippery Slope from which there could be no return. There were two men (Halifax, and less so, Chamberlain) among the five in the War Cabinet who did not see eye to eye with Churchill about that. And beyond the secrecy of that room there was the majority of the elected representatives of the British people, and the Chamberlainite Conservative Party, who would have agreed with them. But Churchill did not let go; and he had his way. That was the greatest turning point – a turning point, more than a milestone – in his career. It may have been the greatest turning point in the entire history of the Second World War. During the following months Churchill and Britain defied Hitler’s Reich alone. Later he was no longer alone. He and his Britain could not conquer Hitler by themselves; but as long as Churchill governed Britain, Hitler could not win his war. Probably this was the reason why Hitler’s hatred for Churchill burned so fiercely till the very end. Hitler respected, if not altogether admired, Stalin; he spoke contemptuously of Roosevelt; but his hatred for Churchill flared in his mind above the others.

And now I arrive to the principal theme of my address, which is that the bravery and the resolution that Churchill demonstrated at that time were inseparable from certain recognizable elements of his vision. Visionary elements may be recognizable also at other times of this career; and some of these elements may be more obvious than are others. I propose to sum up five of these. But before I do this, one last glance at the meaning of the word visionary. In every sense – whether in a good or a bad sense – the word suggests foresight. Now foresight may be good as well as bad, excessive as well as inadequate – note that characteristically British proverb: “We’ll cross that bridge when we get to it.” That admonition reflects the pragmatism of common sense; but it may also lead to an unwillingness to think too much, or too fast. That was never a fault of Winston Churchill. Impetuosity, impatience, willfulness, fancifulness – often, yes. Shortsightedness? No. He had an extraordinarily quick mind (not a typical British trait); and an unwillingness to think? Seldom: perhaps never. And I believe that these traits of his were not only inseparable from his temperament and character but inseparable, too, from the visionary capacity of his mind.

One example of this was his visionary assessment of Adolf Hitler and of his Third Reich. That during the crucial summer months of 1940 Churchill comprehended Hitler better than Hitler comprehended him was a great asset – and note that this kind of intelligent human understanding at that time had almost nothing to do with the later so celebrated British intelligence interception of German signals. Their struggle during those months was a veritable duel – the title that I chose for my book dealing with those crucial eighty days, describing Churchill’s and Hitler’s reciprocal moves, among other things. But there was more involved here than the fact of one strategist; but a visionary he is not. Yet Churchill’s understanding of his great opponent contained insights that must be properly recognized as visionary ones.

Allow me only to mention a few pertinent instances. Churchill dined at the German Embassy in London in October 1930. He told his hosts there that he was anxious about Hitler. The Counselor of the Embassy, a descendant of Bismarck, considered Churchill's words significant enough to report them to Berlin. They may be found in the collection of German diplomatic documents. Now note that this happened in 1930, at a time when on one – certainly no one in England, but also no one in Germany, perhaps with the solitary exception of Adolf Hitler – thought that the latter could ever become the Chancellor and leader of that nation.

Thereafter, during the Thirties, we have a long series of Churchill's comments about Hitler, some of which are well-known. I shall not cite or sum them up here, except to say that while some of them are more pertinent than are others, they are always interesting and telling in retrospect. But let me now jump ahead and bring up another instance that has fascinated me for a long time in my capacity as a historian. This is a brief sketch – or, rather a summary description – of Hitler's character that Churchill dictated in 1948 when he composed the first volume of his War Memoirs. There he said that the crystallization of Hitler's view of the world occurred not before the war but in 1919; and not in Vienna but in Munich. Yet Hitler in *Mein Kampf* had insisted – and most historians have accepted the thesis – that while his life took a turn in 1918-1919 in Munich, his political ideology had crystallized in Vienna. You may be interested to know that it is only now, almost fifty years after 1948, that some historians – including an excellent Austrian lady – are beginning to revise the Vienna thesis, including Hitler's conscious misstating the sequence of his mental evolution. Yet in those rapidly dictated pages, Churchill's insight into Hitler was phenomenal.

There is another, connected, matter that I am constrained to mention here. This involves Churchill's view – and sometimes, indeed, his vision – of the destiny of the German people. Many people, especially in Germany, see Churchill as a representation of an atavistic Germanophobe Britisher, an old-fashioned John Bull, obsessed with the spectre of German power and obsessed with the single-minded desire to destroy it. This is not the place to argue that (all of those famous bulldog-like Karsh photographs notwithstanding) Churchill was not at all a reincarnation of John Bull, not in his personality, in his character, or in his wide interest and knowledge of the world beyond England. What I must mention here at the many evidences of Churchill's respect for Germany. They are there, forcefully expressed in the last passages of his *World Crisis*, his history of World War I; they may be found in the last volume of his Second World War Memoirs when, visiting a ruined Berlin in the summer of 1945, he writes about himself that now he had nothing but sympathy for the ragged and hungry people he saw; and there is his 1946 address in Zurich, second only in importance to his Fulton speech in that year, where he exhorts France and Germany to form a new kind of alliance, in order to begin a new chapter in the evolving history of Western Europe. Less evident but more latent in many of his wartime words and paper there is his, then increasing, recognition of what the German armies were able to accomplish, of how formidable a force they were. This brings me to a last example of his visionary quality in that regard. He saw that Hitler had forged a formidable unity of his people; that German National Socialism was a terrific wave of a possible future; and it was against this that his Britain had to stand fast. Consider, in this respect, the difference between his vision and that of the French premier, Paul Reynaud, a decent man whom Churchill liked. In June 1940, a few days before Paris fell, Reynaud broadcast to the French people: If Hitler wins this war, "it would be the

Middle Ages again, but not illuminated by the mercy of Christ.” A few days later on 18 June, in his “Finest Hour” speech, Churchill envisioned a very different prospect – not a return to the Middle Ages, but a lurch into a New Dark Age. If Hitler wins and we fall, he said, “then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and care for, will sink into the abyss of a New Dark Age, made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of the perverted science.” Note the word “protracted.” He, better than Reynaud, and perhaps better than anyone else, knew what he had to stand against.

I am coming now to another instance: to Churchill’s view of Europe (which incidentally, or not so incidentally, shows him as someone very different from the type of John Bull). John Bull was single-minded. Winston Churchill was not. There are dualities in the inclinations of most human beings (please consider that by “dualities” I do not mean “split-mindedness.”) One of Churchill’s dualities in his vision of the world and of history involved England’s relationship to the United States (and to the English-speaking peoples) on the one hand, and to Europe on the other. The latter is a rich and complex theme. It involves, among other things, his great appreciation of the civilization and culture of Europe, together with respect of its ancient constituents, such as the constitutional monarchies that were still the principal forms of state in his lifetime (note that as late as in the thirty-sixth year of his life there were only two republics in all Europe: France and Switzerland). But it would be wrong to attribute Churchill’s view of Europe to the attraction of Victorian or even Edwardian memories in his mind. Nor was his Francophilia the logical consequence of the Germanophobia of which he has been often accused. His affection for French culture and civilization and history (consider only his often expressed admiration for Joan of Arc and his respect for Napoleon) went deeper than that.

But then here I come to the perhaps narrow but essentially profound difference that separated Churchill from most of his contemporaries in the then Conservative Party. They knew less of Europe than had Churchill; more important, they were more suspicious of English ties and commitments to Europe than was Churchill. When in 1935 Lord Rothermere, then an important figure in the evolving relationship of Britain with Hitler and Germany, talked up Hitler to Churchill in a private conversation, Churchill answered: “if Hitler’s proposal 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.” This was exactly what the Chamberlainites did not understand. On the one hand they did not comprehend the awesome dimensions of Hitler’s purposes and of his power, while they took some comfort from his anti-Communism. At the same time they did not understand that by letting Germany dominate all of Central and Eastern Europe the independence of Western Europe, including France, would be fatefully compromised, and fatefully constrained; that what was at stake was more than the traditional questions of a balance-of-power. There were, and there still are many Germans, some Americans, and lately even British writers who criticize Churchill for having pursued his policy of fighting Germany with the result that the destruction of German power led to the presence of Russian power in the eastern half of the continent. I shall come, in a moment, to argue that this melancholy outcome of the Second World War in Europe was not an outcome of some kind of Churchillian shortsightedness. Here I wish to nail down what, to me, was the essence of Winston Churchill’s statesmanship in the Second World War. As early as 1940 he saw two alternatives: Either Germany dominates all of Europe; or Russia will dominate the eastern portion of Europe (at worst for

a while). In any event, half of Europe was better than none. Because of this, and because of this alone, the savior of Britain proved to be the savior of Western Europe too.

It is of course true that the duality of his vision of Europe was his version of a duality that is essentially British. He knew that in so many ways the Channel was wider than the Atlantic. (At the same time I dare to think that he would have welcomed the Channel trains.) On the one hand he publicly supported the ideas of a European confederation, the “Pan Europe” movement piloted by Count Coudenhove-Kalergi which had a brief public life in the 1920s (even as the Pan-Europe then envisaged would not have included Britain). I mentioned his exhortation for a closer union of Western European states immediately after the war. And in this very place at Fulton we ought to be aware that Churchill in his Iron Curtain speech emphasized not the danger of International Communism but what Russian suppression of ancient Eastern European states and their enforced isolation from the rest of Europe meant. In this then concern with Eastern Europe, he was alone among all of the statesmen of the Western world, even including such impressive men as President Truman and General De Gaulle. On the other hand we must acknowledge that Churchill, even during the second time of his Prime Ministership, did little or nothing to promote a British connection with the European states and their then developing European institutions across the Channel. I have often thought that in 1945 the British missed a great chance. They could have acquired the leadership of Western Europe for a song. Such was their prestige among the liberated Western European and Scandinavian peoples in 1945, a prestige that was greatly due to the wartime leadership of Churchill. But the leaders and the elected representatives of the British people were wholly uninterested in such a prospect; and, at least to a considerable extent, so was Churchill. Perhaps, had he been reelected in July 1945, things may have been different. But because of many conditions – including the political and financial constraints of his country, and also because of his personal constraints of ageing and failing health – this may not have been decisive. At the same time he was, and remained, a propagator of a more united Europe – unlike many of anti-European British politicians even now.

I am coming now to a third example of his visionary capacities: to his view of Russia and Stalin during the war – and not only during the war. This is where Churchill’s statesmanship has been criticized often. My purpose here is not to argue in favor of his statesmanship in terms of realistic politics, except to repeat what I said a few moments ago: that half of Europe was better than none, and that – not only because of the geographic distance – Russian rule in Eastern Europe, though regrettable and potentially dangerous, was not comparable to the acceptance of German rule all over the continent. My purpose here is to draw attention to his view of Stalin; and to his – in this instance, truly visionary – predictions of how Soviet rule over Eastern Europe would not be protracted, because it could not last.

There are a few serious works dealing with – assuredly complicated – history of British-Russian relations during the Second World War. There are fewer studies dealing with Churchill’s relationship with Stalin, which is a pity, because the subject is – at least to me – fascinating. There were conflicts and misunderstandings by both. There were a few Churchillian phrases that have been and will continue to be criticized; his praising Stalin in grandiloquent terms, on one or two occasions. Yet let me assert that – unlike President Roosevelt – Churchill did not misunderstand what Stalin represented and what Stalin was. Let me emphasize again that I am not speaking now of Churchill’s statesmanship, of his comprehension of its constraints, of his knowledge that without Russia, Germany may be

unconquerable. I wish to refer not to the pragmatist but to the visionary qualities of Churchill. One instance of this may be his famous remark to his secretary before his great speech of 22 June 1941, the evening of the day when Germany invaded Russia – an, at first sight perhaps somewhat frivolous, remark that he characteristically felt proper to record in his War Memoirs: “If Hitler invaded Hell I would at least make a favourable reference to the Devil in the House of Commons.”¹ That realization that The Opponent Of My Enemy May Be My Ally may be the reaction of a pragmatist statesman – but I am interested in more than that. I am interested in Churchill’s realization that Stalin was a Russian nationalist, rather than an Internationalist Communist; and that thus the clue to the Russian “enigma” was the interests of the Russian imperial state as seen by Stalin. In a letter in 1948, excoriating Churchill, Evelyn Waugh wrote: “Churchill and Eden thought at Yalta – that Stalin was just old Tsar writ large...A frightful mistake...” But of course Stalin was a Tsar writ large. Only not that shuffling, bumbling, kindly Nicholas II type, with his spade-beard, resembling that of George V of England, but a monstrous Tsar writ large, a new Ivan the Terrible. Many years later I read, in a respectful article about our then Secretary of State, that Stalin’s book on “Marxism-Leninism” stood on the desk of John Foster Dulles. I am sure that it had not stood on the desk of Winston Churchill. (Or on that of Joseph Stalin either).

His understanding of Stalin’s character explains his, sometimes criticized, agreements with Stalin, as that of the 1944 Percentages’ Agreement, by which Churchill succeeded in saving Greece (and which Stalin rather meticulously kept). It was the same visionary understanding of the postwar Russian danger that lay behind Churchill’s futile urgings to design Anglo-American strategy in the last year of the war with the purpose of arriving as far east in Central Europe was possible, in order to forestall a dangerous extension of Russian military presence there. Allow me to emphasize again that this had little to do with Communism, while it had everything to do with where the Russian and the Anglo-American armies would meet and stand at the end of the war – in essence, where and what the division line across Europe would occur and what it would mean. This was the essence of his Iron Curtain speech in Fulton too. And we ought to remember that during this crucial period – indeed, from 1943 to 1946 – Churchill encountered criticisms and misunderstandings from many Americans, including General Eisenhower, who thought – and suggested, on occasion – that Churchill’s ideas reflected views that were narrowly British, imperialist, and dangerously anti-Russian. Recall, too, that even the Fulton speech – even though it had come after the suddenly influential Kennan Long Telegram from Moscow – was very cautiously treated by Washington, somewhere between a courteous disavowal and a muttering approval.² And recall, too, that the same Eisenhower who had regarded Churchill as unduly dangerous because anti-Russian described and treated him as dangerously senile and unduly pro-

¹ Many years later I found an odd forerunner of that phrase – and I wonder whether Churchill was aware of it. In the Irish nationalist paper *Fianna Dr.* Eoin McNeill wrote in September 1915 (note that this was published in Dublin in the midst of the First World War): “...if Hell itself were to turn against English policy, as it is known to us, we might be pardoned for taking the side of Hell...”

² A telling example was Dean Acheson who a year later then attempted to sell the Truman Doctrine to Congress by evoking the spectre of the Communication of most of Europe. (*Present At the Creation* was the title of Acheson’s later autobiography.) No, I wrote on one occasion: he was present at the packaging. Another interesting instance: Lord Halifax, then and still British Ambassador in Washington, wrote Churchill after the Fulton speech that he should have been more careful, and that he should perhaps contact Stalin. Thus Halifax the Trimmer – in 1937 as well as in 1946...

Russian in 1953 and 1954 when, after the death of Stalin, Churchill attempted to persuade the United States to attempt a renegotiation of the division of Europe with the then new and unsure leadership of Moscow. Again he was rejected, on ideological grounds. But, then Churchill never was an ideologue. Unlike for men such as Eisenhower, what mattered for Churchill was not current ideas but certain principles. What John Morley once wrote about Edmund Burke may be applied to Churchill: “He changed his stand; but he never changed his ground.”

Now it may be said – and, I admit, with a certain amount of cogency – that, perhaps contrary to my earlier distinction, what I have just made were arguments attempting to prove Churchill The Pragmatist rather than Churchill The Visionary. Yet such a distinctive caveat cannot be applied to Churchill’s long-range vision of the future of Europe and of Communism – which are extant in at least two startlingly telling sources, even though not in his War Memoirs. In any event, it is remarkable that he chose to entitle the last volume of his War Memoirs *Triumph and Tragedy* – because of the unnatural division of Europe and the coming of the cold war – while no such usage of the word “Tragedy” may be found in the war memoirs or assessments of American or Russian leaders of that time. It is also remarkable, and amply proved, that Churchill chose to underemphasize, indeed, to eliminate many of his records and recollection of his misunderstandings with American political and military leaders in 1944-1945 – for pragmatic reasons, since that volume was about to be published at a time when his wartime ally Eisenhower was about to become the president of United States; but surely also because of that agreeable, indeed, magnanimous element in Churchill character, appearing at many times in his life: his unwillingness to employ the argument: “I told you so.” But the startling nature of his vision – in this case verily meaning foresight – is there in two sources. One is in General De Gaulle’s memoirs. Churchill returned to Paris after four years, in November 1944. It was a memorable occasion. He cried. And when General De Gaulle criticized the Americans who were letting so much of Eastern Europe go to the Russians, Churchill answered that yes, this was so; Russia was now a big hungry wolf, in the midst of sheep; but after the meal comes the digestion period. Russia will not be able to digest what she was now about to swallow. The second instance is the remark he dropped to his former secretary. John Colville, on New Year’s Day in 1953 (consider that he said this even before Stalin’s death): “[Churchill] said that if I lived my normal span I should assuredly see Eastern Europe free of Communism.” Counting Colville’s expectable three score and ten, that would have been the 1980s; -- and that was exactly what happened. Bismarck was reputed to have said that a statesman can look forward to five or six years, at most. It is given to few statesmen in history to suggest the unexpected, decades ahead, so accurately and clearly. Yet such were the visionary powers of Winston Churchill.

And now, in conclusion, I can offer nothing but a summation of the failures of this visionary. A summation: because the matters they involved are enormous. He was astonishingly right about Hitler. He was also right about Communism and Stalin. About the first he was able to translate his views into action. About the second – mostly because of American unwillingness but also other constraints – only partly so. And this had something to do with a difference that separated Churchill’s view of history from Franklin Roosevelt’s – a difference that was transitory but with fateful consequences, at least in the short run. That Roosevelt and Churchill agreed that the prime object of the war was the defeat of Hitler’s Third Reich was a blessing. (Recall that many of Roosevelt’s domestic opponents did not

agree: they believed that Communism was a greater danger than National Socialism, and Russia greater than Germany.) But then consider that Roosevelt saw the United States in the middle: in the middle not only between these two potential opponents, Churchill's Britain and Stalin's Russia but in the middle of the progressive development of history, the historic position of the United States being in the middle between the old Tory England and the rough pioneer experiment of the Soviet Union. Now Churchill would not deny or even resent that the United States represented something ahead of Britain. But his view of the Soviet Union was very different: it was that of a powerful but backward empire, with its structure and mentality well behind that of the Western World – in any event, unfitting in such a scheme of evolutionary progress as seen by Americans.

He also believed that the American idea of anti-colonialism was, at least, premature. There are many evidences of his disagreements with President Roosevelt about this. He did not share (and I think that even now he would be skeptical about) the frequent American inclinations of considering China as a Superpower. But my attempt to draw attention to the visionary qualities of Churchill must fail – or, rather, it must not extend – when it comes to his vision of the Empire. Yes, Churchill was an imperialist; yes, he did say – at one, fateful occasion, with one, fateful phrase – that he had not become Prime Minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire. Yet we cannot say – as we do not have any clear evidence – what would have happened with the Empire, had the aged Churchill remained Prime Minister after 1945. I am inclined to think that, except here and there, the ending of the Empire would not have been altogether different. What I can say is that his vision of Europe and his vision of the Anglo-American relationship were stronger and clearer than any vision he still may have had about the future of the Empire.

And here I arrive – and conclude – with a summary of his greatest vision (and perhaps of his greatest failure): that of an eventual confederation of the English-speaking peoples of the world. He possessed this vision from the very beginning to the very end of his public life, from about 1895 to 1955 – from his youthful support of his mother who published the short-lived *Anglo-Saxon Review*, from 1899 to 1901 (Churchill did not like the title) through literally innumerable printed and spoken instances, perhaps culminating in the final publication of his four volumes of *The History of the English-Speaking Peoples* in the 1950s. Churchill's affection and respect for the United States was attributable to more than to the influence of his mother. It included his vision of the future of the world. It was historic more than racial, civilizational more than cultural, with one of its fundamentals being the quality of his interest and the extent of his knowledge of American history. Allow me to mention only one, to me forever interesting and even inspiring item. In a delightful little book, entitled "If" (Subtitle: "If It Had Happened Otherwise/Lapses Into Imaginary History"), edited by J.C. Squire in 1931, Churchill contributed a chapter which reversed the logic and the order of all the other chapters. Those chapters had titles such as "If Napoleon Had Not Lost At Waterloo," etc. But Churchill's chapter was entitled: "If Lee Had Not Won The Battle of Gettysburg." In this brilliant *tour de force*, Churchill speculated about the regrettable consequences of Lee's imagined defeat at Gettysburg – for then, alas, the rapid ending of the War Between The States, and their thereafter confederation with the other English-speaking nations of the world would have not happened, and the lamentable result would have been a First World War. So this was but another summary expression of Churchill's vision: had there been a closer union, perhaps even a federation, of the United States and of the English-speaking countries of the world, the First and then the Second

World War could have never occurred; the world would have entered another Age of the Antonines, moving forward to the sunny uplands of a democratic world order and contentment, buttressed by the mild and benevolent global and maritime primacy of the English-speaking peoples.

We ought to consider that this vision was not devoid of reality – by which I mean the possibility of its accomplishment. It was exactly after 1895 that the American tendency of Twisting the Lion’s Tail began to disappear; and after 1900 the idea of a Pax Britannica was being replaced in the minds of some very acute people by the image of a Pax Anglo-Americana. This was not only a governing idea of Churchill during his entire public life, from 1895 to 1955. It corresponded, at least for some time, with the inclinations of many people among the American upper classes. It is at least possible that Churchill may have been unduly influenced by his connections and contacts with such people, that he was insufficiently aware how the composition and the structure of the American population were changing: and that consequently, the influence of an Anglophile leading class were lessening. Perhaps he recognized this; perhaps not. In any event: this vision of a closer and closer union, perhaps a confederation, of the English-speaking peoples of the world was not to be.

Fifty years later, at the end of the twentieth century, the respect of the American people for Winston Churchill now transcends many classes and many generations. It is more than a mental interest in a brave man of the past; it has an element of what F. Scott Fitzgerald, in a memorable and lovely phrase, called the American “willingness of the heart.” Of this we (and I) are beneficiaries of such an occasion as this. That includes my true gratitude for the honor of being the first Churchill lecturer who has no English or American blood in his veins. And now allow me, a historian, to end this discourse with a suggestion about Churchill’s place in history. I ask you to consider that Churchill was not some kind of an admirable remnant of a more heroic past. He was not The Last Lion. He was something else. He represented certain aristocratic traits and virtues in an age of democracy that he felt bound to accept and even to cherish. He knew that not only the primacy of his nation among world powers but perhaps an entire era in the world that had begun about four hundred years before his birth were moving toward their end. In sum, he was the defender of civilization at the end of the Modern Age. That word, “civilization,” also appeared first in English four hundred years ago, then defined as the antithesis of barbarism. And at a crucial moment in the twentieth century, towards the end of the Modern Age, God allowed him the task of being its principal defender.