

# CURRENT MAGAZINES

---

## CHURCHILL AND HIS CRITICS

**The Human Phoenix: Mr. Churchill**—Mr. P. Guedalla, in *Saturday Review*.

**Some Reflections on a Government in War-time**—Prof. H. J. Laski, in the *Political Quarterly*.

**The Situation**—Editorial, in the *Nineteenth Century*.

---

IT has for some time been apparent that an effort was in progress to work up an anti-Churchill party in Britain. When parliament was lately asked for a vote of confidence in the Prime Minister, this was recorded with only one dissentient voice. But it is always possible to argue that the verdict of parliament is no true reflection of opinion in the country, and the anti-Churchill movement has continued in the press. Current magazines, in the exercise of that freedom of discussion which the Prime Minister would be so reluctant to curtail, have spoken with vigor.

What is the ground, open or covert, for this sudden criticism?

### I.

Part of it is directed at decisions of a military character which are, in the strictest sense, a problem for the expert. Why were the Japanese so successful in landing troops in Malaya? Could not Singapore have been supplied in time with far greater air protection? Were the right men in command of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* when these ships were sunk? Was it excessive hoarding of equipment in Britain that caused such disastrous shortage in the East, from Hong-Kong to Rangoon? As these and many more such questions are raised, by the strategist of the fireside armchair and the editorial office, the hint is thrown out that once again, in London, a Minister who trusts too much his own amateur sagacity in the art of war has been over-riding expert advice to which he should have deferred. And, inevitably, memories are stirred about "what happened at the Dardanelles in the previous war."

All these enquiries and comments Mr. Churchill has shown the utmost readiness to meet. It would be too much to say that his explanations have been always satisfactory. Nor could any

change be more dangerous than a change which should stifle criticism of a Minister, however he may command general public confidence. Memories tenacious enough to recall such details of the previous war will suggest many a parallel: the first that comes to my mind is the agitation raised by the Northcliffe newspapers regarding deficiency in high explosive shells, and the heated interchange—not altogether unlike some recent fireworks in the London press—about the unsuitability of shrapnel for the demands of a new kind of warfare. A good deal was said on one side about old Ministers whose direction of a country in war-time was so dangerous, and about old soldiers who refused to think in any terms except those of the war-method in which they had won personal distinction many years before. Retorts came thick and fast from the other side about sensational journalism, about the menace of newspapers which shake public confidence in leadership at such a critical hour, about rash resort to a type of war machine that is still in the experimental stage, and about how the risks of stubborn maturity are in general slighter than those of presumptuous self-advertising youth. The *Daily Mail* was burned on the London Stock Exchange, but Mr. Lloyd George, whose elevation the *Daily Mail* had strained every nerve to secure, became Prime Minister. From all that fierce “criticism of the government” there came in the end an enormous public benefit. It brought about exactly the change in war method that was essential. One trembles to think what would have been the issue if such change had not been made. And one is at a loss to suggest any other means by which it could have been secured. A notable example (to abash dictatorial scoffers at democracy) of how democratic candor in criticism can gird a nation far better.

## II

But there is another, and a very different, line of attack on Mr. Churchill that is being promoted, not quite openly and yet unmistakably for those who look below the surface of some recent articles in the English press.

The writers insinuate that the stability of the British Empire is being imperilled by the war method of this government. Apparently they belong still to a type of Imperialism that flourished forty years ago—the type whose exponent was Joseph Chamberlain, whose poet was Rudyard Kipling, and whose principal achievement in foreign policy was the South African War. They are annoyed by indications of a more liberal spirit

in Mr. Churchill's programme, and suspicious that Mr. Roosevelt's influence is affecting him in the wrong direction. Disgust is expressed by such organs at the intimation that Great Britain seeks no territorial gain at Germany's expense; so one must suppose that annexation of further territory is not outside their own hope! They were angry, too, at the promise to review the matter of the world's supply of raw material for industry, in order to make this accessible more equitably than in the past to all nations that need it. Here, they say, is a promise to re-equip Germany, when defeated, for becoming a menace once more. They find grave fault with the B.B.C. broadcasts in German as tinged by the folly of drawing distinction between the German people and its Nazi rulers: all this emphasis on respect and goodwill towards his kinsmen whom Hitler has misled is, in the opinion of these critics, just "blah and blather". Underlying their references to origin of the war, and hence suggestive of the terms on which to make peace, is the conception of Germany as the one great European ruffian, to be answered only with well-directed blows, and of Germany's allies as having been quite needlessly "thrown into her arms" by the foolishness of British leaders. What nonsense, and worse than nonsense, we are asked to remember, was the exasperation of Italy by "Sanctions"! How monstrously ill judged was the abandonment, in 1921, of the Anglo-Japanese alliance! And then comes the ever-recurring note of complaint—that the villains of the piece were the pacifists, the fanatics of "international mind", devotees of the senseless idealism called "League of Nations". What is suspected in Mr. Churchill, by this group of assailants, is a drift towards the like again.

So we are warned against such premonitory indications as the constant close conferring with President Roosevelt, and the manifest hints that in post-war settlement Canada should conciliate the United States by removing tariff walls. Next we are bidden to be very watchful of the policy which brought General Chiang Kai-Shek to India as an agent of reconciliation with Indian malcontents. Getting the British Commonwealth itself together, as of old, in defiant isolation, is what this school desires, instead of another attempt—like Woodrow Wilson's—to integrate and transform the world. Particular welcome has been given in such circles to Viscount Bennett's new term "United States of the British Empire".

Now in this line of argument, already being conducted with propagandist skill, there is a danger which cannot be too quickly

realized and met. The present British Prime Minister was a leading member of the government that abandoned twenty years ago the alliance with Japan, and the present British Foreign Secretary was principal architect of the scheme called "Sanctions" against Italy. Neither has any reason, or disposition, to apologize for what was then done. If, in 1921, the alliance with Japan had been maintained, and—as seemed likely—war had then broken out between Japan and the United States, Great Britain would have had to choose between declining to fulfil her pledge and fighting the United States on the Japanese side. That no such war broke out, but there ensued instead the Washington Conference and the *Nine-Power Treaty*, was due in no small measure to this policy of Mr. Lloyd George's government in Far East Affairs. Canadians may reflect with satisfaction that it was known to have been adopted on the prompting of Canada. It had a most wholesome effect on Japan in 1921 to be warned that if she was indeed determined to fight the United States (for more spoil from the World War), she must engage in such conflict alone.

And which of us, looking back on 1935, has now any other feeling about the application of "Sanctions" to Italy in the affair of Abyssinia than that Great Britain then took the lead in a method of peace-preservation which failed only because others, equally bound to it by covenant, dishonored their own word?

### III

As these lines are written, the new proposals for India, presented to leaders of Indian opinion by Sir Stafford Cripps as representative of the British Government, are the topic of immediate vital interest. That some such scheme was apprehended, by those with constant concern to keep the old imperial dominance over "possessions and dependencies of the British Crown", has been obvious in that section of British journalism. When one reads in an organ of land-owners and industrial magnates about "Communism" as the risk beyond all other risks, it is not too soon to suspect that a Fascist or semi-Fascist plan is being incubated. And, to anyone with an eye for journalistic signs, the stream of recent articles about peril from the Indian Congress party, with bitter allusion to British "liberal" thought favoring that party's projects, showed conservative groups getting ready for battle about India.

The tide of events, however, has largely superseded debate.

What happened in Malaya, at Singapore and in Burma was taken as warning to unite all local interests and forces in India against a coming Japanese attack, better than they had been united in earlier scenes of eastern conflict. A startling disclosure, in a broadcast by Lord Beaverbrook, was that in which he told us that the loss of Singapore was not due to lack of munitions: in that respect, he said, the superiority lay on the side of the defenders. He added, most suggestively, that sustained *morale* is indispensable, if tanks and planes and guns are to do their best work.

As these lines are being written, the failure of the negotiation by Sir Stafford Cripps for a "New Deal" in India is among the chief sources of disappointment. Among other consequences is a certain stimulus to the hostile criticism which had previously been directed against the government policies of which the despatch of Sir Stafford Cripps to India was the most sensational sample. "More fatuous coddling of Indian malcontents" angrily exclaims the stern and unbending apostle of "strong measures." There are still those in command of high journalistic influence in London who write of the late General Dyer as a martyr, of what happened at Amritsar in 1919 as an experiment in the true method of Indian administration, and of the judgment about it led at the time by Sir Michael O'Dwyer as the voice of wisdom which a weak-kneed *Hunter Commission* had neither the insight nor the courage to appreciate. These are reflections which the failure of Sir Stafford Cripps in his spectacular recent effort will naturally bring back even to such leaders of the type of journal I have mentioned as are too patriotic to dwell upon them just now. And others do not observe even the patriotic inhibition.

That Mr. Churchill, of all men, should be reproached for an over-indulgent mood towards "Indian malcontents" is strange indeed. He was the most conspicuous leader of resistance to what he called the rashness and the risk of Indian autonomy. It is a specimen of the Fate which an old proverb declares to be "ironical" that the concession he so vehemently opposed, in the serene atmosphere of peace, he should be the Prime Minister to promote, amid those war excitements which as a rule provide no good atmosphere for constitutional change. But this is by no means a solitary illustration of Mr. Churchill's power to adapt himself to the logic of events. "Opportunism"—is it? It is the sort of opportunism without which no man would be fit to lead a country, above all in war. Mr. Lloyd George once put

this well in his defence of that arch-opportunist, his friend Aristide Briand. That dexterous French negotiator had been brought up on the coast of Brittany, where the sailors do not (like "men of principle") keep a uniform course at sea, but "tack" in accordance with shifting winds and waves. M. Briand, said Mr. Lloyd George, was an expert sailor, and he transferred to politics the power of flexible adjustment he had acquired by practice at sea.

But it was not solely, or chiefly, though it may have been partially, as a means of arousing the spirit of wholehearted Indian cooperation that Mr. Churchill despatched Sir Stafford Cripps on the mission which failed. In last number of the *Dalhousie Review* I wrote about those "Have-Not" Powers clamoring at the door of the "Have's" for more equitable share of industrial opportunity, and pointed out how the *Atlantic Charter*, issued from "somewhere in North Atlantic", last mid-August by President Roosevelt and Mr. Churchill, promised an international New Deal. For this, as was to be expected, a tempest of criticism has descended upon them both.

## II

The old method of search, by raising the question *Cui bono*, will here save our purpose. Upon whom would the international New Deal bear most sharply? It is a fair working hypothesis that such a group is the one first impressed with objections to it. And it would be quite in the customary tradition of such controversies if such objectors kept their personal apprehensions in the background, insisting exclusively upon their alarm for "the Empire". That sharp critic of the leaders of French finance, M. Caillaux, once observed, in an article he contributed to *Current History*, that the men of the French Right, when planning how they may best preserve their class privileges, always include as first item in their program "bellowing anthems to patriotism".

It cannot be kept too clearly before public opinion in all countries that this war is being fought for no mere purpose of ensuring, still less of extending, special advantages in trade or territory which historical accident conferred upon the British and American peoples. "I hate all this international sharpening", said a character in one of the novels by H. G. Wells; "if the Empire means anything at all, it is something more than a conspiracy in restraint of trade." What Mr. Churchill has recognized, and his angry critics refuse to recognize, is that the

time has come for international as well as domestic readjustment. Disparity of wealth is the fault of no nation, as it is the fault of no individual, that has merely inherited superior privilege. But a time comes to review one's superior privileges, and to ask what duties they entail.

If one-third of the surface of the globe is under the special influence of one race, there are reasons for this in the record of early effective enterprise by that race's explorers and colonizers. There is a similar explanatory record of the founding of great personal fortunes by men who were quicker and more energetic than others in seizing an opportunity which was open to all. A later Communist equalization is not the remedy for those now galling inequalities, which are obvious, and in some respects are manifestly unjust. This is a remedy which would create more hardships than it would remove. But although nations, like individuals, resent at first the suggestion that not a mere appeal to benevolence but also a demand of justice calls for the equalizing of opportunity, it is a suggestion with just the same intrinsic strength when Mr. Churchill and Mr. Roosevelt apply it on the international scene as it had when Lord Shaftesbury in the middle nineteenth century applied it in the domestic

How fierce the antagonism of the menaced private interests proved during Lord Shaftesbury's campaign, history is there to show. Interference with freedom of contract, by such a change as a Factory Act or a Mines Act, was declared by Nassau Senior (that eminent economic authority whom the mine-owners and factory-owners quoted with such pride) to be the first step towards ruin of British commercial supremacy! It is always the same, always a professed deep concern for something "British", never an acknowledgment of personal or group interest, that is advanced in these so transparent distribs against reform. In the present case it is the alarming suggestion of a purpose in the *Atlantic Charter*, as in the "conciliating of Indian malcontents", to give the Empire away, that figures most conspicuously in the anti-Churchill critique. But the strategy is as plain as before.

Mr. Churchill has nothing to learn in imperial patriotism from those who are now presuming thus to admonish him. What concerns the Prime Minister of Great Britain, in this cause which—as he proudly reminds us—has now the support of three-quarters of the human race, is to preserve its appeal as that of freedom and justice for all mankind, and the British

glory which he prizes most of all is the glory of leadership for this. He has no thought whatever of placing again in jeopardy the Britain he struggled so hard to awaken to a sense of her danger when that danger was very real, and some of his present vociferous critics were turning a deaf ear to him or even trying to drown his voice. But he realizes better than his critics realize how it is on this fidelity to the cause of justice, believed by so great a part of the world to be in a special sense British, that the enthusiasm of the countries she leads has rallied to this leader.

To every assailant of Mr. Churchill the silencing reply is "Whom do you suggest to take his place?"

H.L.S.

---