

SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL: THE MAN

By GILBERT MURRAY, O.M.

SIR Winston Churchill occupies a great position. There are men who are great party leaders. There are men who stand out as representatives of a particular nation. But none, I think, who so completely represents the struggle of the whole free world.

How was it that Winston, to use the name of friendship by which he is always called, was in the war without question accepted as embodying Britain? There were other distinguished statesmen and soldiers, just as loyal and patriotic. I think it was in the first place that Winston had long been conspicuous as the almost lonely opponent of the accepted policy of the pre-war Govt; he was politically an exile, a supporter of the wrecked and defeated League of Nations; and when in a new situation it was determined to fight for freedom, that meant that the whole country accepted Winston as its guide.

A second cause perhaps was his singular gift at each crisis of expressing in a sentence just what the crisis needed, just the word that kept the fire in our hearts burning bright. A further cause also was simply his amazing energy. It was the sort of energy that Julius Caesar had, but which made Cicero call him "this miracle." A civil servant summoned in the evening to work with Winston would find his chief still eager and vigorous at 5 a.m. Nothing was left undone; and, that being so, Winston, like Napoleon, could instantly fall asleep.

He watched every aspect of a war by land, sea and air spread over all quarters of the globe, and never neglected details or quarrelled with his subordinates. In the midst of difficult business, when other men would very reasonably claim to have a rest, an almost boyish spirit of adventure would spring up in Winston, such as once made him, when returning from America, insist on piloting a huge aircraft himself. An extra adventure seemed rather to cheer him up.

Phrase That Stirred The World

But power and energy may make a man admired; they do not necessarily make him trusted and beloved. What did he stand for? What was the great cause which was embodied in his name? It can be stated in the combination of two of his well-known utterances. One was spoken in the midst of the second war, when all the nations of Europe were beaten; when our armies were almost all sent abroad and we depended only on the

air force to prevent invasion. We hoped it would not come, but if it came—"We will fight on the beaches. We will fight on the hills. . . We will never give in. . ." Very simple, but just the thing which the country and the whole free world wanted said.

And in the year 1946, after the Victory, when anger at the Nazi atrocities was at its highest and real hate of the enemy seemed almost legitimate, he appealed at Zurich, now that the war was over, for "one simple thing; that some hundreds of millions of men and women should now set themselves to do good instead of evil and reap therefrom blessings instead of curses." And the first step in that "simple thing" must be the reconciliation of France and Germany. That is, beyond all doubt, the great message which the free world wanted then and wants now, and without which it will perish.

It is easy for public men, still easier for preachers, to utter principles like this; but is their advice practical, is it even sincere? Winston's words had been proved in the fire; when he said he would never yield, he never did yield; when he appealed for forgiveness of wrongs and reconciliation, one trusted him because of his proven generosity. One knew his great championship of reconciliation and freedom after the South African War.

He had an extraordinary appeal both to the aristocrat and the democrat, to the man of culture and the simplest workman. He came from a ducal house, but is at home with bricklayers and engine drivers. He is a master in the grand style of oratory, but he is also a master of style that made the most uneducated hearer feel at his ease. When a great military authority, who after the defeat of Europe considered that the conquest of this small island would be "like wringing the neck of a chicken", his answer is remembered: "Some chicken! Some neck!"

A Generous Fighter

He had no personal feuds. When called to the post of Prime Minister to succeed Neville Chamberlain, who had so long made him an exile in Parliament, he never said a word against a fallen minister. In his great history of the war he never throws the blame of any failure on other men, or claims personal credit for some successful policy on which he had been opposed. Indeed, it is a curious relief to turn to Winston's memoirs after reading the recriminations which are so prominent in many of the others. I shall never forget the words which another generous leading statesman once used to me about Winston. "I have often been opposed to Winston, and had long battles with him", he said,

"but I would say this for him. He is a hard fighter, but he never bears malice. Secondly, he never intrigues. Thirdly, he cannot tell a lie, for I've seen him try to, and he turned pink all over."

There are two fine busts of Winston by the Yugoslav sculptor, Nemon. In one he is a man full of vitality and almost of youth, with a smile of defiance, ready to welcome any fun or adventure or danger; in the other a grave elder statesman, looking downward, his brow bowed with experience and thought. Both are Winston; the almost boyish adventurer and jester is not dead in the great Prime Minister, and in the young man who fought in the Malakand Field Force and rode in a wild cavalry charge in the Omdurman War, there were occasional flashes of maturer wisdom. "If modern men of light and leading could see the face of war closer, simple folk would see it hardly ever." That was at the age of 25. He refrained, one may notice, from saying Never. That might be exaggeration.

He insisted in his early days, as much as later, on the absolute need of "generosity and forgiveness" towards a defeated enemy and due respect for the qualities in that enemy which deserved it. More striking still, as early as 1906, when the European world stood in apparent security, he could say "It may be that we have a very imperfect organization of society, but it is all we have got between us and barbarism."

Defence of Civilisation

Not many observers could see that truth in 1906. Now it is only too obvious. The great civilisation which we call "Christian" or "Western" or sometimes "Liberal" is clearly in great danger. We are haunted by the ghost of war. War is incompatible with civilisation. It wrecks the complex machinery of modern societies. It poisons its Christian character by substituting hate for love and the effort to injure in place of the effort to heal. It makes freedom more and more difficult by its ever-increasing insistence on unanimity and its immense organization of force as the readiest weapon for meeting trouble. The cause for which Sir Winston Churchill stands is the defence, or may we even say the rescue, of civilisation and all its standards. It is threatened by many dangers; first, the uncontrolled and almost insane force of nationalist ambition, seen at its worst in Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia.

Sir Winston bids us never to forget our need to protect the freedom, the sense of honour, the spirit of justice to others, the order and culture of integrity which man in his centuries of pro-

gress has laboriously gained. They are all in danger; and Sir Winston defends and values them all. It was once said of France that when she needed a great man, Providence at least was kind enough to send her a great orator. Providence was this time kinder to England. If Winston had failed as a statesman he could still be a great orator. If he had never made a speech he would still be a great writer. If his style showed no particular charm, he would still be a great historian. Of his painting and bricklaying, I hesitate to speak.

There have been few men ever like him, but I suspect that when he and Julius Caesar meet among the shades they will have many common subjects to talk over, from war and statesmanship to the writing of history and the use of personal pronouns, and their respective problems as prisoners of war and their different methods of escape.