



MARTIN GILBERT

WINSTON
CHURCHILL
THE WILDERNESS YEARS

Speaking out against Hitler
in the Prelude to War

TPP

Sir Martin Gilbert is Winston Churchill's official biographer, and a leading historian of the modern world. He is the author of more than eighty books, including *Churchill: A Life* and his acclaimed two-volume work on World War I and World War II. He is an Honorary Fellow of Merton College, Oxford. From 2009 to 2012 he served as a member of the British Government's Iraq Inquiry.

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Author's acknowledgments

For more than twenty years I have been doing historical research on the personalities and episodes that appear in this book. I have also published several books using this research, beginning with a detailed study of appeasement, and including both the biography of the British Ambassador to Berlin when Hitler came to power, and several collections of documents and essays on the interwar years. From the outset, and for several years before I became Churchill's biographer, Churchill himself was a central figure in these researches, playing as he did so prominent, if controversial, a part in the national and foreign policy debate of the thirties. This book is based upon my work during these twenty years.

In 1968 I began work on the Churchill biography itself. Readers who are interested in the detailed academic story of Churchill's wilderness years may consult the fifth volume of the official biography of Sir Winston Churchill, published by William Heinemann Limited, and also the biography's three 'companion' volumes of documents. These document volumes, each of which contains more than 1,400 pages of previously unpublished material, are entitled respectively 'The Exchequer Years, 1924-1929', 'The Wilderness Years, 1929-1935' and 'The Coming of War, 1936-1939'.

Anyone wishing to follow up Churchill's political or personal life during these years may consult the above volumes, which are fully annotated for the general reader, the student and the scholar.

I have drawn further material for this volume from several sources, including: Hansard (for Parliamentary debates); the Public Record Office, London (for material on the Government's defence and foreign policy); the British Library (for Churchill's own published books and articles); the BBC Written Archives Centre (for the texts of Churchill's broadcasts during the thirties); and the Churchill papers. I am grateful to all copyright holders, and to all those who gave me their recollections of the period, for permission to quote their materials and recollections here; these sources are listed on page 269.

For help in preparing this book, I wish to thank Sue Rampton, for her valiant typing efforts; Erica Hunningher, for her considerable editorial skills; and my wife Susie, for her work with me on this subject over many years, and for her advice and guidance at every stage of the writing of this book. Without her substantial efforts, it would not have been written.

Merton College
Oxford
10 May 1981

Introduction

Winston Churchill's political career spanned sixty years. Of those, ten were spent without political office, as a Member of Parliament voicing unpopular policies, first towards British India and then, from 1933, towards Nazi Germany. Churchill's ability to swim against the tide was remarkable. He had few allies and many opponents.

These were a difficult, frustrating and at times bruising ten years for Churchill. Yet, when he was finally brought into the War Cabinet on 3 September 1939, the first day of the Second World War – and emerged as Prime Minister eight and a half months later, on 10 May 1940 – he bore no vindictiveness. When Colin Thornton-Kemsley wrote to him six weeks after the outbreak of war to apologise for the efforts he had made to try to have Churchill removed from Parliament, Churchill replied to the young Member of Parliament: 'I certainly think that Englishmen ought to start fair with one another from the outset in so grievous a struggle, and as far as I am concerned the past is dead.'

Another Conservative Member of Parliament, David Margesson, had repeatedly used his authority as Chief Government Whip to belittle Churchill's judgement. Churchill was urged by his son Randolph to remove Margesson. Not only did he keep Margesson on as Chief Whip after 10 May 1940, but in December 1940 appointed him Secretary of State for War, explaining to his son: 'The fault alleged against him which tells the most is that he has done his duty only too well. I do not think there is anyone who could advise me better about all those elements in the Tory Party who were so hostile to us in recent years, I have to think of unity, and I need all the help I can get.'

On 18 June 1940, Churchill explained to the House of Commons why unity, not division, was essential at this testing time for Britain:

There are many, who would hold an inquest in the House of Commons on the conduct of the Governments – and of Parliaments, for they are in it, too – during the years which led up to this catastrophe. They seek to indict those who were responsible for the guidance of our affairs. This also would be a foolish and pernicious process.... Of this I am quite sure, that if we open a quarrel between the past and the present, we shall find that we have lost the future.... It is absolutely necessary at a time like this that every Minister who tries each day to do his duty shall be respected, and their subordinates must know

that their chiefs are not threatened men, men who are here today and gone tomorrow, but that their directions must be punctually and faithfully obeyed. Without this concentrated power we cannot face what lies before us.

Most conciliatory of all, in his obituary tribute to Neville Chamberlain, Churchill sought to draw the line under the continuing deep divisions between the Men of Munich and the anti-appeasers, telling the House of Commons:

It fell to Neville Chamberlain in one of the supreme crises of the world to be contradicted by events, to be disappointed in his hopes, and to be deceived and cheated by a wicked man. But what were these hopes in which he was disappointed? What were these wishes in which he was frustrated? What was that faith that was abused? They were surely among the most noble and benevolent instincts of the human heart – the love of peace, the toil for peace, the strife for peace, the pursuit of peace, even at great peril and certainly to the utter disdain of popularity or clamour. Whatever else history may or may not say about these terrible, tremendous years, we can be sure that Neville Chamberlain acted with perfect sincerity according to his lights and strove to the utmost of his capacity and authority, which were powerful, to save the world from the awful, devastating struggle in which we are now engaged. This alone will stand him in good stead as far as what is called the verdict of history is concerned.

Churchill's efforts during the Wilderness Years had shown the importance of independent voices in a highly controlled political environment. They were also a tribute to the power of an individual to persevere against high odds, and reflected a growing public mood and public concerns that otherwise had far less chance of being heard.

Martin Gilbert
14 November 2011

The pinnacle of success

The year 1928 marked a high point in Churchill's career. As Chancellor of the Exchequer he had already introduced four Budgets. The Conservative Party, from which he had been estranged for more than a quarter of a century, but which he had rejoined in 1924, now held him in high esteem. The Conservative Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, frequently sought his advice. His speeches in the House of Commons were witty, well-argued and widely praised. After nearly thirty years in British politics he was a well-known and well-liked figure, despite past controversies. At the age of fifty-three he had reached a pinnacle of national recognition, and of personal contentment.

As an administrator Churchill had already held, by 1928, a series of Ministerial posts in which his zest for work and his interest in constructive legislation had made him a popular chief. Since first entering the Cabinet twenty years before, he had held office as President of the Board of Trade, Home Secretary, First Lord of the Admiralty, Minister of Munitions, Secretary of State for War and Air, Colonial Secretary, and now Chancellor of the Exchequer. This list itself was a formidable one. So too was the range of legislation for which he had been responsible, and which he had piloted through Parliament.

Three Prime Ministers, Asquith, Lloyd George and Baldwin, had each in their turn found Churchill an energetic, frank and constructive colleague, always willing to defend the Government in public against attack, a brilliant debater on controversial issues, a font of stimulating ideas in Cabinet and of wise counsel in private. Each of these three Prime Ministers had given Churchill senior Cabinet office, and had asked him to undertake major responsibilities outside the normal range of ministerial duties. Each had made use of Churchill's strength of character and resolution, turning to him in times of crisis.

Churchill had responded with alacrity to these approaches and appeals. As a member of the War Council in the early months of the First World War he had been a pillar of resolve in Asquith's often confused Cabinet. At the time of the German breakthrough on the western front in the spring of 1918 he had been a force for perseverance in Lloyd George's Government, and was sent by Lloyd George personally to report on the morale of the armies and the prospect for victory. In the aftermath of the General Strike of 1926, he had conducted conciliatory negotiations with the miners, surprising many of the members of Baldwin's Cabinet by his resourcefulness, his patience, and his desire for a magnanimous settlement.

In Foreign Affairs, Churchill had consistently sought the reconciliation of

former enemies and the appeasement of international hatreds. In time of war he had been a force for optimism, perseverance, and faith in the justice and triumph of Britain's cause. Yet with his first-hand experience of war as a young soldier, and on the western front in 1916, he had known and was still affected by what he himself had called the 'vile and utter folly and barbarism' of the battlefield. These feelings were expressed again and again in his own writings. By 1928 his multi-volume history of the First World War was almost completed. In it, he had already castigated the Passchendaele offensive as an unnecessary waste of life: a view which he had also held and expressed both before and during the offensive itself.

Yet despite his long experience and wide ranging achievements, Churchill's career had been punctuated by criticism, hostility and disappointment. His dynamic personality and outspokenness had gained him many enemies. For every quality he possessed, these enemies alleged equally strong defects. He was frequently accused of lack of judgment. Critics pointed to a series of episodes to uphold these accusations, among them 'Tonypany', 'Antwerp', 'the Dardanelles', the Allied intervention against Bolshevik Russia, and even the publication of a Government newspaper during the General Strike. These accusations were emotive, and widely believed as a matter of faith, rather than of fact or of evidence. Much of this criticism arose because Churchill had taken personal responsibility for failures which were not his alone, and had refused to shirk decisions which might harm him politically. Nor could these accusations be answered fully at the time, either by Churchill himself or by his supporters, for the answers depended on the use of secret documents, many of which only became public in the decade after Churchill's death.

Despite all Churchill's successes by 1928, and despite his own confidence in his abilities, there lurked substantial public suspicion that he could never be Prime Minister. After all, what political Party would accept him as its leader?

Twice, Churchill had fallen from political grace. First, in 1915 when the Conservatives had refused to join Asquith's wartime coalition unless Churchill were removed from the Admiralty. Then, in 1922 he had been defeated at the General Election and was out of Parliament for two years. For those who believed that there was some 'fatal flaw' in his character, these two events were pointers to his vulnerability.

Churchill's abilities, combined with his open, energetic and assertive personality, inspired jealousy as well as trust and affection. Even those who most admired and supported him, could at times give way to a sense of doubt. 'It is a pity, isn't it', Asquith wrote to a friend in March 1915, 'that Winston hasn't a better sense of proportion, and also a larger endowment of the instinct of loyalty. He will never get to the top in English politics, with all his wonderful gifts; to speak with the tongue of men and angels, and to spend laborious days and nights in administration, is no good, if a man does not inspire trust.' Yet six days later Asquith himself was writing, to the same friend, 'Winston is really loyal to me. I am sure, and I have never doubted that he is.'

The First World War left Churchill a wiser man and a more mature politician. His energy was unabated and his administrative abilities more widely acknowledged. So also was his ability to inspire by speech and example. By the time he had become Chancellor of the Exchequer, even former critics spoke of the emergence of a new man. 'The remarkable thing about him', one Conservative Member of Parliament, Lord Winterton, wrote in June 1927, 'is the way in which he has suddenly acquired, quite late in his Parliamentary life, an immense fund of tact, patience, good humour and banter on almost all occasions; no one used to "suffer fools ungladly" more fully than Winston, now he is friendly and accessible to everyone, both in the House, and in the lobbies, with the result that he has become what he never was before the war, very popular in the House generally – a great accretion to his already formidable Parliamentary power.'

Even Neville Chamberlain, Churchill's chief rival in the Cabinet, looked on him with passionate mixed feelings, and could write of him in August 1928, in a private letter: 'One doesn't often come across a real man of genius or, perhaps, appreciate him when one does. Winston is such a man. . . .'

Chamberlain and Churchill were to be rivals, critics and enemies for the whole of the next decade. 'There is too deep a difference between our natures', Chamberlain wrote in this same letter, 'for me to feel at home with him or to regard him with affection. He is a brilliant wayward child who compels admiration but who wears out his guardians with the constant strain he puts upon them.' Similar feelings had bedevilled Churchill's relations with his three most powerful patrons, Asquith, Lloyd George and Baldwin. Each had turned to him, and given him high office. But each had also expressed qualms about him, for they feared his courage, decisiveness and honesty, as did many of those backbench Members of Parliament on whose support they depended. 'Winston's position is curious,' Baldwin had written to a friend in September 1927. 'Our people like him. They love listening to him in the House, look on him as a star turn, and settle down in the stalls with anticipatory grins. But for leadership, they would turn him down every time.'

Churchill was aware of these adverse feelings, and worked hard to overcome them. His fourth Budget, which he introduced in the House of Commons in April 1928, was a masterpiece, winning him much praise from those who had hitherto withheld it. In it he unveiled a plan, the complete details of which he had worked out with his advisers, and pushed through the Cabinet, aimed at stimulating industrial production and reducing unemployment, by relieving British industry of the burden of Rates.

The idea of 'de-rating' had first been put to Churchill early in his Chancellorship, by a young and reforming Conservative MP, Harold Macmillan. It had taken more than a year of arduous preparation to work out the scheme in detail, and make it acceptable to the Cabinet. Always alert to new ideas and guidance, Churchill had shown the final plans to Macmillan, and been encouraged by Macmillan's detailed scrutiny and enthusiasm.

In his Budget speech of April 1928, Churchill presented 'de-rating' to the nation. The whole of his speech, so Stanley Baldwin informed King George V, would be recognized by the public 'as being the most remarkable achievement in Mr Churchill's career', while a former Conservative Prime Minister, Lord Balfour – once one of Churchill's severest critics – wrote to him on the following day: 'It is a great moment in the history of British finance and of the Unionist Party – of your personal fame I will say nothing.'

That same Unionist Party – the Conservative and Unionist Party as it was formally known – had, however, years of grievance to overcome. Many of these 'old-time' Conservatives could never forgive Churchill's 'betrayal' of their Party in 1904, when he had not only left them to join the Liberals, but had used all his youthful oratorical skills both to attack them with skill and invective and to become a leading champion of one of their chief hatreds, Free Trade. A decade later he had become an outspoken supporter of another Conservative hatred, Irish Home Rule, and in 1921 he had played an important part not only in the negotiations for the Irish Treaty but also in the Parliamentary debates in which the Treaty was expounded, and in the subsequent negotiations with the southern Irish leaders – the former gunmen – for its implementation. By 1928, six years had already passed since the Irish Treaty but many Conservatives still regarded it as a grave blow to the unity of the United Kingdom, and were critical of Churchill as one of its principal architects.

The dislike, amounting at times to hatred, which Home Rule and Free Trade had roused against Churchill since before the First World War, had never died. It surfaced again during the course of 1928 when a group of Conservative backbenchers tried to move their Party towards Protection. Churchill challenged the Party's trend towards protective tariffs, but did not allow the hostility he had aroused to upset him. 'Really I feel very independent of them all', he told his wife in the autumn of 1928, and he returned for a while to his literary work, a further volume of his war memoirs, in which he told the story of the Treaty of Versailles and of the immediate postwar years, including his part in the intervention against Bolshevik Russia, and in the Irish Treaty.

Churchill's sense of personal contentment in 1928 centred on his country house, Chartwell. Bought six years before, it had quickly become the focal point of his family life, the scene of work and writing, of bricklaying and painting. From the terraces, he could look across the lawns to the swimming pool he himself had built, to the lake, and to the artificial island which had been excavated from the bank with the aid of a great mechanical digger. From the upper gardens, and from the windows of the house, fine panoramas unfolded; on the west, across a small country road, to a spectacular bank of rhododendrons opposite, and from the garden side, southwards across the rolling valleys of Kent, to the distant hills of the South Downs.

Churchill's wife Clementine, despite her original dislike of the house, supervised the comfortable domestic arrangements, and ensured that there was a large enough staff to meet the family's many needs, and the constant flow of

weekend visitors. She often needed periods of recuperation away from the domestic responsibilities at Chartwell and did not always accompany Churchill on his travels. Whenever they were apart she wrote letters filled with advice which he valued. His letters to her were kaleidoscopes of news and opinion, reflection and humour, filled with personal tenderness.

It distressed Churchill enormously when his wife was tense and worried. Sometimes she expressed her anxiety about their financial affairs, sometimes about Chartwell. Whenever they were apart, he sought to comfort her in long and affectionate letters, gently and sympathetically telling her not to worry about household matters: 'let them crash if they will,' he wrote, 'Servants exist to save one trouble, and should never be allowed to disturb one's inner peace.'

By 1928, the older children were away at boarding school. Randolph was at Eton, their daughters Diana and Sarah were also only home for the holidays, Mary, their youngest daughter, just five years old, was the only child still permanently at home. In the holidays the house resounded with their bustle and laughter. There were quarrels too, for each of them was a strong character. But the storm clouds which these quarrels provoked could blow over in an instant as Churchill's own impish sense of humour cajoled and won over the disputants. Once, amid a ferocious quarrel over some topic long since forgotten, Churchill reduced the whole family to mirthful convulsions with a mock-serious stentorian outburst: 'Randolph, do not interrupt me – while I'm interrupting.'

At weekends Treasury officials came down to Chartwell to discuss the next moves in the Government's economic policy. A research assistant, seconded from the Foreign Office, helped to prepare the materials needed for the new book. Bricklayers were busy building a small cottage for Mary, and for several hours each day Churchill amused himself by helping them. One frequent visitor was an Oxford don, Professor Lindemann, who intrigued Churchill by his graphic descriptions of the world of science and physics.

Lindemann, known by the Churchills as 'Prof', held a particular fascination for Churchill. There was no scientific question which Prof could not answer, or at least appear to answer. Sometimes, at dinner, he would be asked to explain a complex theory within a specific time, say five minutes. Out would come Churchill's watch, and the explanation would begin. Two minutes, three, then four would pass. The final sixty seconds would tick to a close. Then, only seconds from the end, the explanation would be over. Led by Churchill himself, the whole table, family and other guests, would burst into applause.

Prof was witty, wise, and devoted. Often he would drive over from Oxford, a long three hours on winding roads, for a weekend, sometimes as the only guest. No Christmas or New Year passed without Prof being there: often, other than family and cousins, he was the only outsider present. But he was always welcome. Churchill, while teasing him about his antipathy to alcohol, and arguing with him volubly over many issues, delighted in his company, valued his knowledge, and frequently sought his advice.

Friends, colleagues and relations, artists, writers and politicians made the Chartwell weekends vibrate with conversation and laughter. Above all it was Churchill's own personality which gave the weekends their memorable quality for all who took part in them. 'It is a marvel how much time he gives to his guests,' one visitor noted in September 1928, 'talking sometimes for an hour after lunch and much longer after dinner. He is an exceedingly kind and generous host, providing unlimited champagne, cigars and brandy.'

Churchill's conversation was always witty and absorbing. With ease he could draw on his wide historical reading, on his knowledge of men and events, and on his personal experiences of war and politics going back to the reign of Queen Victoria and his own part in the cavalry charge at Omdurman. 'When he becomes engrossed in his subject', the young visitor noted, 'he strides up and down the room with his head thrust forward and his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, as if he were trying to keep pace with his own eloquence. If he shows signs of slowing down, all you have to do is to make some moderately intelligent observation, and off he goes again.'

Churchill's capacity for work amazed those who saw it at first hand. The four or more hours after dinner, from ten or eleven in the evening until two or even three in the morning, were particularly busy ones, with long official memoranda, or chapters of the new book, being tested on Treasury officials or research assistants, and then dictated to one of the secretaries who worked special night shifts.

Those who were caught up in this fever of work found it tiring, but exhilarating. Churchill was a hard taskmaster, but a kind one, and those who worked with him most closely became all the more devoted to him. Both in good times and in bad, he generated enthusiasm and productive energy on a formidable scale.

In the autumn of 1928 there seemed no reason to believe that the good times would end, or that either the bitterness of his isolation of 1915, or the frustrations which had followed his Parliamentary defeat in 1922, would ever return.

Political strife

In the last week of September 1928, as the summer holidays drew to their close, Churchill was at Balmoral for four days' stag hunting and grouse shooting with King George V. Determined to continue work on his war memoirs, he took with him both his secretary, and the documents relating to the chapter he was working on: the Treaty of Versailles.

In a letter from Balmoral, Churchill gave his wife a survey of the royal scene. The King, he wrote, was 'well – but ageing'. He no longer stalked deer, but went out on the hill where the deer were 'moved about for him', in the hope that 'some loyal stag will do his duty'.

While Churchill was at Balmoral, Stanley Baldwin returned from his annual summer holiday at Aix-les-Bains. As in previous years, while the Prime Minister was away in his favourite French mountain resort, political activity in England was suspended. But as soon as Baldwin returned, political speculation mounted rapidly, centring around the question of the date for the next General Election.

In a year's time – in November 1929 – the Conservative Government would reach the end of its five-year span. An election in the spring or summer of 1929 was thought most likely.

As the election approached, Churchill's writing centred on the last volume of his war memoirs. 'He tells me', a friend noted, 'that he does a certain amount of work in bed in the morning, spends only twenty minutes in dressing, and keeps two hours free every night for dictating his books.' Among those who helped Churchill with material for the chapters on the Russian revolution of 1917 was Major Desmond Morton. Morton and Churchill had known each other for more than a decade: they had first met on the western front during the First World War.

After the war Morton had been drawn into intelligence work while Churchill was Secretary of State for War in 1919. He had become an expert in the military and economic preparations first of Soviet Russia, and later of Germany. In January 1929, while helping Churchill to assemble historical facts, Morton was appointed to a senior intelligence post, as Head of the Industrial Intelligence Centre of the Committee of Imperial Defence, a position he held until the outbreak of the Second World War. His official instructions were to 'discover and report the plans for manufacture of armaments and war stores in foreign countries'.

As Chancellor of the Exchequer, Churchill knew of Morton's new appointment. Morton's country cottage was only a fifteen-minute walk across the

fields from Chartwell and they would often meet to discuss matters of State policy together.

Their most frequent topic for discussion was the balance of power in Europe, for they shared the concern that Germany was aiming at rearmament. Under the Treaty of Versailles, signed just ten years before, Germany had been stripped of her armaments, and forbidden to build up a navy, an air force or an army. These clauses of the Treaty were explicit and binding; the German Imperial Navy itself lay rusting under the water of Scapa Flow, off the coast of Scotland, where it had been scuttled at the end of the First World War.

Although Churchill did not doubt Germany's existing weakness, he was convinced of her ability to revive, and to challenge not only the Treaty of Versailles, but the very European frontiers which the Treaty had established. He had therefore consistently opposed European efforts for disarmament towards which the powers were obliged to work under the post-war settlement. In particular, for four years he had opposed international efforts to persuade France to disarm. His reasoning was clear: the existence of a forcibly disarmed France and an aggrieved, rearming Germany would lead sooner or later to war between the two.

Despite the imminence of the election, the problems of long-term defence policy continued to press upon the Government. Now the United States had begun to urge a general disarmament. Churchill was active in Cabinet in opposing what he described to his colleagues as 'these stupid disarmament manoeuvres', even if such pressure originated in the United States. Churchill believed that France must maintain an army 'strong enough to overpower a German invasion', so long as Germany's grievances resulting from the Treaty of Versailles were still unsatisfied. This was even more necessary since the United States had withdrawn from the League of Nations and gone back on its post-war promise to help France in the event of a German attack. A strong French army, Churchill argued, would protect Britain from the 'most probable danger' of being forced to intervene in Europe.

As for British rearmament, this, Churchill urged the Cabinet, should be based upon a careful study of the most recent foreign, and above all German techniques of armaments manufacture, details of which Morton and Churchill studied together.

Churchill spent Christmas 1928 at Chartwell, where work on his book kept him busy throughout the holiday period and into the New Year. As each chapter was typed it was sent out for comment to several Cabinet colleagues, experts and friends. On New Year's eve Professor Lindemann arrived with further reflections and encouragement.

Over Christmas Lindemann was plunged into a Churchill family discussion over Randolph's desire not to return to Eton but to go straight to Oxford University. It was the middle of the academic year, and Randolph had not yet sat the autumn entrance examination. But Lindemann, himself an Oxford Professor, had managed to procure a place for Randolph at Christ Church, his

own college, and while at Chartwell he argued in favour of Randolph taking it. Churchill was reluctant to see his son break off his school career too early, but after a somewhat accrimonious discussion he agreed to let Randolph try his luck.

In the first weeks of the New Year Churchill's literary work intensified. He was anxious to finish his book before the election campaign began, and continued to send his chapters to friends for comment and criticism. Among those to whom he wrote, and who sent Churchill comments and material, was his former second-in-command in Flanders, Sir Archibald Sinclair, who had been Churchill's principal private secretary both at the War Office in 1919 and 1920, and at the Colonial Office in 1921 and 1922. More critical comments arrived during January 1929 from Desmond Morton, from Lord Beaverbrook – who had been Minister of Information in 1918 – and from a senior member of the Foreign Office, Robert Vansittart, another personal friend.

These men helped Churchill willingly. He accepted their criticisms, and added the documentary material which they sent him to his account of the events of a decade before. Chartwell was filled with the sights and sounds of literary activity: secretaries typing and retyping the chapters as they were written and rewritten, and Churchill pacing up and down his study, late into the night and on into the early hours of the morning, dictating, pausing to mould a sentence or to polish a phrase, stopping to consult a reference book or to pore over a map.

The publication of the new, and fifth, volume of his war memoirs provided Churchill with a moment of personal satisfaction. The book was called *The World Crisis: The Aftermath*, and Churchill sent out, at his own expense, more than a hundred personal copies. One copy went to his Labour Party opposite number, Philip Snowden, one of his fiercest and most persistent opponents in Parliament. 'I shall treasure it', Snowden wrote, 'not only for its own worth, but as a memento of the friendly personal relations which can and do exist between keen political opponents.'

Not only the personal, but also the public comments, showed the extent to which Churchill had succeeded as an author and historian. 'With what feelings does one lay down Mr Churchill's two-thousandth page?' J. M. Keynes wrote in the *New Republic*. 'Gratitude to one who can write with so much eloquence and feeling of things which are part of the lives of all of us of the war generation, but which he saw and knew much closer and clearer. Admiration for his energies of mind and his intense absorption of intellectual interest and elemental emotion in what is for the moment the matter in hand – which is his best quality. A little envy, perhaps, for his undoubting conviction that frontiers, races, patriotisms, even wars if need be are ultimate verities for mankind, which lends for him a kind of dignity and even nobility to events, which for others are only a nightmare interlude, something to be permanently avoided.'

As the date for the General Election drew nearer Churchill began to worry

about its outcome. Lord Beaverbrook told a friend, 'Churchill is plunged in despair', believing electoral defeat to be inevitable. Beaverbrook added, however, that of all the prominent men he knew, Churchill was the worst judge in these matters.

Early in January 1929, almost five months before election day, Churchill advised the Prime Minister that everything possible should be done to confront the electors with a direct choice between Socialism on the one hand, and what he called 'modern Conservatism' on the other. Votes for Conservatism, Churchill believed, would be cast by all who believed in national cooperation, and the continuity of national policy. This was the trend all over the world. 'Women', he told Baldwin, 'can feel these tide movements by instinct.'

Churchill's contribution to the actual election campaign began in mid-February when he spoke in London at a meeting organized by the Anti-Socialist and Anti-Communist Union. His message was clear: the Labour Party in power would bring subversion in the factories and in the armed forces and would probably lead to a second 'general strike'. Here was Churchill's election cry: anti-socialism. He feared a façade of respectable Labour Cabinet ministers becoming the tools of an evil conspiracy; and he was determined to ring what he called the 'alarm bells'.

During the campaign Churchill's political future was the topic of some discussion among his fellow Cabinet Ministers. Much of this speculation took place behind his back and not all of it was complimentary. Some of his more senior Cabinet colleagues, especially Neville Chamberlain, were keen that Churchill should be removed from the Exchequer. One Minister suggested Churchill might make an excellent Foreign Secretary. Neville Chamberlain disagreed. But he was also afraid that Churchill might, if he remained Chancellor, become Baldwin's obvious successor as Prime Minister, and he expressed these fears in private conversation, and in his diary. Baldwin himself considered Churchill as a possible Secretary of State for India, remembering as he did Churchill's successful efforts for conciliation both towards the defeated Boers in South Africa in 1906, when Churchill was Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, and again in 1921 towards the southern Irish, when Churchill was Colonial Secretary. Even the Viceroy of India, Lord Irwin – later Lord Halifax – agreed, but went on to express his doubts as to whether Churchill might not prove 'out of sympathy' with Indian political aspirations, and even 'rather disposed to despise' them.

Baldwin rejected these arguments, and asked Churchill to become Secretary of State for India. An important measure of Indian constitutional reform was imminent. A leading Liberal politician and lawyer, Sir John Simon, had already been sent to India by Baldwin, at the head of a Royal Commission, to make suggestions for further steps towards Indian self-government. Baldwin wanted Churchill to be in charge of the subsequent reform, as he believed that it would be in general harmony with Churchill's sentiments, and with his past

constructive record, to direct a third great measure of self-government within the Empire.

Churchill declined Baldwin's invitation. 'I was not attracted by this plan,' he later recalled. 'My friendship with Lord Birkenhead, then at the India Office, had kept me in close touch with the movement of Indian affairs, and I shared his deep misgivings about that vast sub-continent.'

Meanwhile, with election speculation in the air, Conservative hostility to Churchill was growing. In particular, mischief was being made about a meeting between Churchill and Lloyd George, at which Lloyd George had put the Liberal Party's conditions for supporting a future Conservative Government.

Baldwin ignored the anti-Churchill talk, however, and decided not to move him from the Exchequer. On 15 April 1929 Churchill presented his fifth Budget: he abolished the duty on tea, removed railway passenger duty, ended the betting tax, reduced the duty on motorcycles and bicycles, imposed new duties on brewers, distillers and tobacco manufacturers, and announced an increase in Government spending on the telephone service, especially in rural areas.

On the following day Baldwin wrote to Churchill in a personal handwritten note: 'I have never heard you speak better, and that's saying a great deal.' Baldwin added: 'I hate the word "brilliant": it has been worked to death and is too suggestive of brilliantine: but, if I may use it in its pristine virginity, so to speak, it is the right one. I congratulate you with both hands.'

After the Budget, in a special election broadcast on April 30 to an audience of more than a million, Churchill set out the Conservative Government's achievements: 'Peace abroad; steady stable government at home; clean, honest, impartial administration; good will in industry between masters and men; public and private thrift.' All these benefits could be lost, he warned, if the election went against the Tories. 'Avoid chops and changes of policy', he told his listeners, 'avoid thimble-riggers and three-card trick men; avoid all needless borrowings; and above all avoid, as you would the smallpox, class warfare and violent political strife.'

Churchill was also able, during the campaign, to remind the electorate of the domestic achievements of his five years as Chancellor of the Exchequer. Since the passing of one of his very first pieces of legislation in 1925, well over a million people had become entitled to State benefits, including 236,800 widows, 344,800 children, 227,000 people over seventy, and 450,000 people between the ages of sixty-five and seventy. It was a formidable achievement.

Two days before the Poll, Churchill sought to rally his constituents at Epping, telling them: 'Victory is in the air. We are on the eve of a decisive manifestation of the steadfastness and perseverance of the nation.'

The British people went to the Polls on 30 May 1929. That night Churchill went to 10 Downing Street, where the Prime Minister was reading the results as they came in over a tape machine. One of those present recorded the unfolding scene in his diary: Baldwin, sitting at one desk, with narrow slips of paper on which he 'inscribed the three lists as they arrived'; at another desk,

'Winston doing similar lists in red ink, sipping whisky and soda, getting redder and redder, rising and going out often to glare at the machine himself, hunching his shoulders, bowing his head like a bull about to charge.' As Labour gain after Labour gain was announced, those present watched as 'Winston became more and more flushed with anger, left his seat and confronted the machine in the passage; with his shoulders hunched he glared at the figures, tore the sheets and behaved as though if any more Labour gains came along he would smash the whole apparatus. His ejaculations to the surrounding staff were quite unprintable.'

The Conservatives won only 260 seats, as against Labour's 288. Churchill was re-elected. Stanley Baldwin resigned, and Ramsay MacDonald became Prime Minister for the second time, at the head of a Labour Government. The Liberals announced that they would not use their balancing votes to topple MacDonald. The Conservatives were now in opposition.

The Party Churchill had rejoined only four years before was now out of office. The Liberals, in whose ranks he had once been so influential and popular a figure, now held the balance of political power. Once again, but only for the third time since 1908, he was without Ministerial office.

The five difficult but happy years at the Exchequer had marked a high point of Churchill's influence and achievement. Now, free of the daily pressure of departmental and Cabinet affairs, he embarked on a period of writing, reflection, relaxation and travel. In July 1929, less than two months after the General Election, he began work on a massive, long-term task, a full-scale biography of his famous ancestor, John Churchill, victor of the battle of Blenheim and later First Duke of Marlborough. It was work which was to absorb many of his energies for the next five years, keep him up long into the night, and lead to four enormous and magnificent books. His aim, as he explained to his cousin 'Sunny', the Ninth Duke of Marlborough, was 'to tell this famous tale from a modern point of view', and he had no doubt that he could do so, and do so successfully.

Churchill began work in the archive at Blenheim, amid the hundreds of letters and documents of his ancestor's life. It was here at Blenheim, nearly a quarter of a century before, that he had written his other biography, a two-volume life of his father. Sunny had been Churchill's friend throughout those years, despite their differences in temperament, Sunny irascible and morose, Churchill good humoured and philosophical. Again and again Churchill revived his cousin's flagging spirits, and sought to reconcile him to the modern world of social reform and growing equality of opportunity. Sunny resented these changes. Churchill urged him to accept them.

Travel plans also filled Churchill's unexpected leisure time. He decided to go to Canada and the United States, and to show his son Randolph 'these mighty lands'. To one of his American hosts he wrote that he was anxious to discuss the future of the world, 'even if we cannot decide it'. As for himself, he wrote, during the trip he would have 'no political mission and no axe to grind'.

Before leaving Britain for his transatlantic travels, Churchill made two efforts to influence the future direction of British Conservatism. Both efforts failed. And both, in failing were to divide him still further from the emerging leadership.

The first undertaking was to seek a Conservative reconciliation with the Liberals. To do so, Churchill urged his fellow Conservatives not to return to the policies of Tariffs and Protection which had marked their pre-war breach with Liberalism and had driven him into the Liberal Party twenty-five years before. There were, he pointed out to Baldwin, eight million Tory voters, and eight million Labour voters. The five million Liberals held the balance. 'Where will these five million go?' If the Tories returned to Protection or allowed their traditional 'anti-Liberal resentments' to have sway, a Liberal-Labour grouping was inevitable. Such a development, Churchill warned Baldwin, would reduce Conservatism to nothing but 'a Conservative Right hopelessly excluded from power', for many years to come.

Baldwin was tempted by Churchill's vision of a Liberal-Conservative alliance. Indeed, he went so far as to authorize Churchill to talk again privately to Lloyd George, a man whose past history and reputation were anathema to millions of Tories, and above all, on personal grounds, to Neville Chamberlain, who had served under Lloyd George in the First World War, and had come almost to loathe him.

Churchill saw Lloyd George in utmost secrecy, and suggested a pact based on Liberal-Conservative agreement on specific issues, as they might arise in the House of Commons. But within a week Neville Chamberlain had alienated the Liberals by publicly declaring his support for Tariffs, and for protective taxes to enable Empire goods, especially from Canada and Australia, to enter Britain more cheaply than foreign goods. Such schemes were the death-knell of any would-be Conservative alliance with any sector of the Liberal Party.

Churchill's Liberal background, experience and outlook were becoming increasingly out of place in the defeated Tory party. If Neville Chamberlain were made leader of the Conservative Party, 'or anyone else of that kind', Churchill confided to his wife, 'I clear out of politics'. Only one goal still attracted him, he told her, the Premiership itself. If that were barred, he added, 'I should quit the dreary field for pastures new'.

Churchill's second struggle with the Conservative leadership soon emerged. The divergence arose from his strongly held views on Empire. He believed that one of Britain's greatest achievements was what he described as the 'rescue of India' from centuries of tyrannical government and civil war, and the sub-continent's progress towards civilization. With Labour now in power, Churchill feared that the fabric of the Empire would be weakened, possibly even destroyed, and that Baldwin would not oppose the Labour Government's attempts to whittle away the basis of Britain's achievement in Imperial policy.

Not only British rule in India, but British control over Egypt, seemed proof to Churchill of the benefits and merits of Imperialism: as viewed 'not from the

perspective of conquest and exploitation, but from the knowledge and encouragement of constructive effort'. But as Churchill had feared, the new Labour Government soon recalled the British High Commissioner in Cairo, Lord Lloyd, and announced its plan to remove all British troops from Egypt except for those in the Suez Canal zone.

Churchill reacted 'vehemently', as he later recalled, against the 'rough and sudden gesture' of Lord Lloyd's recall, and tried to rally Conservative opinion against MacDonald. His effort failed, and failed dismally. As he rose in the House of Commons from his seat on the Front Opposition Bench, and began to chastize the Labour Government's actions, he noted that Baldwin sat on the bench at his side 'silent and disapproving'. He saw at once that the Conservative Party had been instructed by the Whips not to criticize MacDonald's policy.

Yet Churchill persevered, rebuking MacDonald for damaging Britain's prestige throughout the East by the decision to withdraw troops from Egypt. 'The whole quality of Egyptian administration will deteriorate', he warned. Other European powers would demand or intrigue 'to fill the gap made by British abdication'.

As Churchill spoke, he sensed his isolation. 'Murmurs and even cries of dissent from the Conservative benches', he later recalled, 'were added to the hostile Government interruptions, and it was evident I was almost alone in the House.'

Soon after this Parliamentary humiliation, Churchill left for Canada and the United States, writing to Lord Beaverbrook that it was 'fun' to get away from the worries and responsibilities he felt for the increasingly 'tiresome' developments at home. Travelling with Churchill were his son Randolph, his brother Jack, and Jack's son Johnny. At the age of eighteen, Randolph, no longer away for months at a time at boarding school, was becoming a real companion to his father. Father and son were finding much in common.

The vast open spaces of the Canadian countryside impressed Churchill, with their untrodden forests, 'Scottish' burns and vast lakes full of fish. Churchill reported to his wife that Randolph was tempted to 'renounce society and ambition', buy a small patch of land and settle down.

'Champagne and the warmest of welcomes' greeted Churchill wherever he was recognized. As he travelled westwards, Churchill was delighted when men whom he had not seen since the turn of the century came up 'in twos and threes' at every place to shake hands with him. One day, as he told his wife, a former Sergeant of Engineers, who had helped him in 1898 to make his plans for the battle of Omdurman, stopped him in the street and gave him 'an excellent box of cigars'. Churchill added: 'He was in quite humble circumstances and I was greatly touched.'

In each of his letters to Clementine, Churchill reported on their son's progress, writing that he was an 'admirable companion'. He also reported that Randolph had made 'a good impression' on everyone who had met them.

Randolph and his father were enjoying their travels together immensely. Riding near Calgary one morning, 'on sure-footed ponies galloping up and down the hills', Churchill wrote, his son was in his 'seventh Heaven'. Randolph described their riding expedition in his diary: 'Papa came out looking magnificent. Jodpur riding suit of khaki, his ten gallon hat, a malacca walking stick with gold knob, and riding a pure white horse. We rode up to the Lake of the Clouds and then on to the edge of the moraine where we had lunch at two o'clock.' Soon afterwards they reached a glacier and Randolph recorded how 'Papa, Johnny and I climbed all over it - Papa with especial vigour.'

During their visit to the oilfields at Calgary, Randolph recorded in his diary: 'I happened to say (after seeing the Calgary oilfields) that it was a depressing thing to see all these oil magnates pigging up a beautiful valley to make fortunes and then being quite incapable of spending their money, and went on to criticise their lack of culture. Instantly Papa flared up, "Cultured people are merely the glittering scum which floats upon the deep river of production!" Damn good.'

On the following afternoon the Churchills went fishing. 'I hooked no less than three', Randolph wrote, 'but each time although I let them have their heads the hook on the spoon broke. It was most disappointing. However as Papa remarked, "'Tis better to have hooked and lost, than never hooked at all.'"

In each of his letters to Clementine, Churchill wrote of Randolph's own progress. Never before had the two of them spent so much time together, and Randolph was even making short speeches at his father's side. 'He speaks so well,' Churchill wrote, 'so dextrous, cool and finished.' As for his son's habit of sleeping for ten and even twelve hours a night, he wrote, 'I suppose it is his mind and body growing at the same time.' And Churchill added: 'I love him very much.'

Overwhelmed by the warmth of his welcome in Canada, Churchill told Clementine that 'the workmen in the streets, the girls who work the lifts, the ex-service men, the farmers, up to the highest functionaries have shewn such unaffected pleasure to see & shake hands that I am profoundly touched.'

From Vancouver the Churchills drove south into the United States. Since his youth, Churchill had believed in the strength of America, and been impressed by its buoyant democracy. 'A great, crude strong young people are the Americans,' he had written to his brother at the turn of the century, 'like a boisterous healthy boy among enervated but well bred ladies and gentlemen.' In the last year of the First World War, when it seemed that Germany might win, he had written to Archie Sinclair: 'I fear the tendencies are no longer as favourable as they used to be. Still, America, dear to your heart and mine, is please God, a final makeweight.' As Minister of Munitions he had worked in closest harmony with his American opposite number, Bernard Baruch, and he hoped that cooperation with America would continue after the war. The one great reward of the war, Churchill declared in a public speech in July 1918, would be the

'supreme reconciliation' of Britain and the United States: that, he said, was 'the lion's share'.

Churchill always kept this 'supreme reconciliation' in the forefront of his thinking', telling his constituents, during a bout of wartime British anti-Americanism in 1918: 'We must keep in step with them. They are our kinsmen from across the ocean. They are our sons returned from a long estrangement.'

After 1919, much as he was saddened by America's abrupt withdrawal from Europe, and angered by the constant American pressure for disarmament, Churchill always looked forward to a return to the comradeship of the war, and to the substantial improvement of Anglo-American relations, urging Lloyd George, at the height of the quarrel, to try to establish 'personal friendly relations' with the President as a means of reaching a common policy.

In California, Churchill himself took on the task of urging Anglo-American amity on the leading businessmen of the State, many of whom favoured America's total isolation. His efforts were not in vain, for, as the British Consul reported to London, Churchill had been very successful in influencing those who had been hostile to British interests.

One of Britain's strongest critics, the newspaper-owner William Randolph Hearst – the legendary 'Citizen Kane' of the cinema – was persuaded by Churchill to let him write for the Hearst newspaper chain, with outlets all across America: and to write on politics and international affairs with no editorial restrictions.

As guests at Hearst's castle, the Churchills enjoyed the 'extreme personal courtesy' they received. Churchill liked Hearst's 'strong, liberal and democratic outlook', but described the newspaper-owner as 'a grave simple child – with no doubt a nasty temper – playing with the most costly toys'.

From Hearst's castle, Churchill travelled to Hollywood, where he was introduced to Charlie Chaplin. Churchill was captivated by Chaplin. 'He is a marvellous comedian', he reported to Clementine, 'bolshy in politics and delightful in conversation.'

At the beginning of October the Churchills arrived in New York, as guests of Bernard Baruch. Randolph described Baruch in his diary as 'the greatest speculator there has ever been. He actually bought a seat on the New York Stock exchange costing one hundred thousand pounds solely in order to transact his own business. During the war he was Chairman of the War Industries Board, and came into considerable contact with Papa. He is a tall man about six foot five inches, of great dignity and with a magnificent carriage and personality.'

During his stay in New York Churchill arranged to write a series of twenty-two magazine articles for the Hearst syndicate, articles which were to earn him £40,000 in under a year. This was an incredible sum of money for a journalistic assignment, the equivalent of more than half a million pounds in 1981.

After visiting the battlefields of the American Civil War, Churchill returned to New York to complete the purchase of large blocks of American shares,