

THE POLITICAL BELIEFS OF WINSTON CHURCHILL

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I

THE literature relating to Winston Churchill is by now so extensive, and our evidence about him so abundant, that the approaching completion of the official life by Martin Gilbert may seem to herald the end of historical inquiry into Churchill for at least a generation. This may be so; but it is more likely that he will continue to be the focus of animated discussion. Churchill, like Roosevelt or Trotsky, has inspired a perennial curiosity which springs as much from complexity of character as from fame. A. J. P. Taylor has justly applied to him Dryden's couplet: 'A man so various that he seemed to be, not one, but all mankind's epitome.'¹ Admittedly, there are individuals so prejudiced for or against Churchill as to lack interest in assessing him. But for anyone who overcomes this barrier, Churchill holds the fascination of a rare species of animal which no one can easily place in the scheme of creation. A part of this curiosity stems from the fact that Churchill as a policy-maker was both peculiarly inspired and peculiarly disaster-prone. Military historians, evaluating his strategic conduct of the Second World War, are pursuing a controversy which began at Gallipoli in 1915. Political historians, too, are intrigued by the fact that Churchill's judgment was so prescient on some issues, and so mistaken on others. Like Churchill's contemporaries, they tend to detect in him strands of genius interwoven with strands of folly.

A related source of curiosity, and the theme of this paper, is Churchill's motivation: the dynamics of his career. That Churchill was a professional politician in pursuit of power, all would acknowledge, but how much further can analysis be taken? Is it possible to discern, in the many campaigns which Churchill waged, a pattern of behaviour? And if Churchill had any conscious goals for the use, as distinct from the winning, of power, how can they be described?

Such questions have been asked ever since the turn of the century when contemporaries registered the first shock of acquaintance with a young man who impressed them as very strange. Churchill's first

¹ *Observer*, 22 October 1967.

biographer, writing in 1905, had to discount the rumour that Churchill drew inspiration from the hypodermic syringe, so highly strung did young Winston appear.² In 1960 Desmond Morton, a retired civil servant who had known Churchill well in the late 1930s, was offering equally novel hypotheses to the writer R. W. Thompson. He argued, for example, that Churchill was

‘all his life torn between his pride in his great Marlborough ancestor . . . and his love for his Yankee mother. His overpowering ambition was to amalgamate the two; to be made whole through the emergence of one vast English-speaking people . . .’³

Beginning with Churchill’s contemporaries, and merging in recent times into the work of historians, there runs a brilliantly lit highway of biographical comment which includes such names as H. W. Massingham, A. G. Gardiner, Violet Bonham-Carter, Lord Moran, Robert Rhodes James, and many others too numerous to list. To study Churchill is, inevitably, to plagiarize the observations of others. Yet all these judgments do not crystallize into a single convincing portrait. On the contrary, there is a diversity of opinion which tends to stimulate rather than satisfy.

In the stream of comment on Churchill there is one illuminating and major divergence of view which merits attention. On the one hand we find a tradition which regards Churchill as a rootless, un-socialized individual, peculiarly weak in values or convictions of any kind, and singularly deficient in public purpose. This was a view of Churchill which originated among some of Churchill’s brother officers in the Boer War, and was still going strong in the Second World War. It gained currency within the traditional governing circle: the Conservative and Liberal front benches, the upper reaches of the civil service and the armed forces. To understand this pattern of comment we have only to recall that the public school code of gentlemanly conduct, however flawed by hypocrisy, was as real a force among the old governing classes as trade union solidarity among the working classes.⁴ In the Army it was essential that officers should be able to rely on one another’s word, and in the world of government, too, it was crucial that men working together in small groups, on the front bench or in a committee behind the scenes, should be able to trust in a certain amount of team-spirit. If the Old Harrovian or the Old Etonian was expected to be ambitious, it was also expected that he would pursue that ambition in legitimate fashion by earning

² A. MacCallum Scott, *Winston Spencer Churchill* (London, 1905), p. 246.

³ R. W. Thompson, *Churchill and Morton* (London, 1976), p. 30.

⁴ On the relationship between the public school ethos and politics, see Rupert Wilkinson, *Gentlemanly Power* (London, 1964).

the loyalty and respect of his equals. In a gentleman, a man of character, a degree of self-restraint and self-sacrificing effort was required. But Churchill was deficient in these qualities. From the start he was reckoned to be a politician obsessed by personal interest, pushing himself relentlessly forward in a blaze of publicity at the expense of worthier men. During his first term of office as Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office from 1905 to 1908, his Permanent Secretary wrote of him:

‘He is most tiresome to deal with, and will I fear give trouble—as his Father did—in any position to which he may be called. The restless energy, uncontrollable desire for notoriety, and the lack of moral perception, make him an anxiety indeed!’⁵

In 1942 Sir Maurice Hankey, a great civil servant now relegated to the sidelines, no doubt had Churchill prominently in mind when he announced at a private lunch: ‘This is a cads’ war.’⁶ The feeling that Churchill was a cad, albeit a highly gifted one, was deep-rooted and long-lasting. For men of strong religious convictions it was compounded by the knowledge that Churchill lacked what Lord Halifax used to call ‘spiritual values’. To a devout Presbyterian like Sir John Reith, Churchill was a repulsive amoralist.

These deficiencies Churchill might have remedied by loyalty to party and partisan attitudes. But party politics merely drew attention to the vacuum in his beliefs. In 1904 Churchill crossed from the Conservative to the Liberal benches and began to rain down vituperation on his former colleagues. By 1924 he had worked his passage back to the Conservatives, but his loyalty was never absolute and after 1930 he was a rebel attacking the party leadership. The Liberals were grateful to him for the loan of his talents but always remembered that he had begun as a Unionist. The Conservatives became very embittered against him in the Edwardian period and salt was added to the wound during the 1930s. Hence there has always been a high Tory tradition in which Churchill figures as little short of a traitor to his class.

Given, then, that Churchill appeared so deficient in conventional values, how could his behaviour be explained? The reply was obvious: Churchill’s were the politics of naked egotism. As Leo Maxse’s *National Review* put it in 1907:

‘Mr Winston Churchill, to do him justice, is no hypocrite. He is a soldier of fortune who has never pretended to be animated by

⁵ Ronald Hyam, *Elgin and Churchill at the Colonial Office* (London, 1968), p. 502.

⁶ Henry Williamson, *Lucifer before Sunrise* (London, 1967), p. 230.

any motive beyond a desire for his own advancement. He has no principles and no enthusiasm except egoism.⁷

Lloyd George, in many ways an admirer of Churchill's gifts, could say privately of him in 1934: 'He would make a drum out of the skin of his own mother in order to sound his own praises.'⁸ As for the many passions which Churchill appeared to express, these were interpreted as histrionics or exhibitionism. Many of Churchill's colleagues believed that he was simply posturing, and they were as likely to be amused as angered by such amateur theatricals. After the German annexation of Austria in March 1938, Churchill made one of his great House of Commons orations calling for a resolute foreign policy. When an American journalist asked a Conservative M.P. what he thought of Churchill's speech he replied: 'Oh, the usual Churchillian filibuster; he likes to rattle the sabre and he does it jolly well, but you always have to take it with a grain of salt.'⁹

For a contrasting appreciation of Churchill we may turn to the British Left, broadly defined to encompass the Labour movement and the progressive intelligentsia. The governing circle tended to evaluate its members on personal grounds according to their reliability and integrity as colleagues. The Left, relying more upon class and doctrinal tests, have always tended to rank individuals on a scale of progress and reaction, and seem to believe that everyone can be located somewhere on the spectrum. In the first years of the twentieth century Churchill identified himself with advanced Liberalism, but on the whole the Left were sceptical and doubted whether he had the root of the matter in him. From about 1910 onwards this suspicion slowly hardened into the opinion that of all the members of the front benches, Churchill was the most full-blooded man of the Right. His violent speeches against Bolshevism, his praise for Mussolini, his part in the General Strike and his opposition to the Government of India Bill convinced the Left that Churchill was the true instinctual representative of imperialism, militarism, and what in Britain passed for 'the class war'. Of course this was a hostile portrait in relation to Churchill's opinions. But it granted him depth and sincerity of motivation, a sense of purpose which could be recognized and in a curious way respected more highly than the shifts and compromises of Baldwin and Chamberlain. To the Left, Churchill was an authentic reactionary. When, therefore, the Left began to find common ground with Churchill in the late 1930s in opposition to Hitler, they felt secure in the belief that he was not merely rattling the sabre. On the con-

⁷ *National Review*, no. 287, January 1907, p. 758.

⁸ *Lloyd George: A Diary by Frances Stevenson*, ed. A. J. P. Taylor (London, 1971), p.

253.

⁹ Virginia Cowles, *Looking for Trouble* (London, 1941), p. 121.

trary, they recognized in him the 24-carat imperialist, dedicated to the salvation of the British Empire from Nazi Germany. Harold Laski, writing in 1942, likened Churchill to Edmund Burke:

'The premisses of Mr. Churchill's thinking are set by the old world that is dying, as Burke's were set in 1789; he is unable to see, as Burke was unable to see, the outlines of the new world that is struggling to be born.'¹⁰

Attlee, with first-hand experience of Churchill over many years, maintained that Churchill's character was constructed of several layers, each layer of which represented a different century: eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth. Of course the notion of Churchill as a great historic artefact could easily be given an insulting twist, as when Aneurin Bevan likened him in the 1950s to 'a dinosaur at a light-engineering exhibition'.¹¹

In these contrasting perspectives we can find the seeds of various historical interpretations. The Establishment view, as it may be called for short, leads on to a sceptical Namierite account of a man obsessed by a series of strategies for obtaining office, advancing behind a cloud of overblown rhetoric, and subsequently embalming himself as a hero in a series of autobiographical histories. Such is the general implication of Maurice Cowling's analysis of the 1930s, *The Impact of Hitler*.¹² This view, with its emphasis upon lack of root identity, would square well with a psychoanalytic approach, confirming Erich Fromm's description of Churchill as a narcissist, a creature peculiarly weak in the human core of 'conviction, conscience, love and faith'.¹³ The left-wing approach, on the other hand, leads on to an appreciation of Churchill as a profoundly ideological politician; no theorist, of course, but a man for whom values and beliefs were of primary importance, an embodiment of traditional forces. Thus the Soviet historian V. G. Trukhanovsky, in a biography which emphasizes Churchill's greatness, concludes that he will 'go down in history not as a great fighter for freedom, but as a stubborn and aggressive enemy of all the peoples who sought social and national liberation'.¹⁴

How much importance should we attach to values and beliefs in Churchill's career? How far were they operative factors in his politics? To a behaviourist these are unreal questions, for the mind can do nothing but reflect and rationalize emotional drives, social identity, and learnt responses. Even so, an investigation of Churchill's mind

¹⁰ Harold Laski, *Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London, 1943), p. 197.

¹¹ Lord Attlee, 'The Churchill I Knew': Aneurin Bevan, 'History's Impresario'; in *Churchill by his Contemporaries: An 'Observer' Appreciation* (London, 1965), pp. 24, 57.

¹² Maurice Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler* (Cambridge, 1975).

¹³ Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (Harmondsworth, 1977), p. 274.

¹⁴ V. G. Trukhanovsky, *Winston Churchill* (Moscow, 1978), p. 383.

would reveal various orientations of behaviour and thus in a sense locate him. For the rest of us, who believe in the power of mind to shape and manage our affairs, Churchill is a particularly interesting case. For us to forget Churchill's unconscious drives or his social background, or to omit the political context in which he operated, would be naïve indeed. Still more foolish would be to assume that Churchill's mind was *sui generis* rather than fashioned from the spirit of the age. J. H. Plumb, for example, has convincingly demonstrated the potent effect on Churchill of Whig history, which coursed through his career like blood through the arteries.¹⁵ But if we need always to remember the raw materials from which Churchill shaped his view of the world, we must equally recall that it was Churchill himself, with his wayward intellect, who moulded them into his personal sense of identity and purpose. It is therefore essential in interpreting Churchill to understand his perceptions both of himself and of politics and society.

II

In his autobiography, *My Early Life* (1930), Churchill described himself as 'a child of the Victorian era'.¹⁶ The notion of a formative period in life is always too neat, but there is good reason to judge that Churchill developed his primary beliefs between 1895, when he first decided on a political career, and 1900, when he entered the House of Commons.

It was political ambition which awakened Churchill's self-consciousness and intellect, and we can date the point at which this happened. Lord Randolph, seeing little promise in Winston, had arranged for him a career in the Army. Churchill therefore attended Sandhurst and while he was there shared in the general atmosphere of horseplay, frivolity and adolescent Toryism. In January 1895 Lord Randolph died, and at the same time Churchill graduated from Sandhurst and took up his commission. Almost at once he was overcome by an overpowering thirst for a political career. With desperation he realized that his regiment was bound for India and the remote garrison town of Bangalore. Churchill, however, fought back. He fought back on one front by pulling every string he could in a campaign of self-advertisement, calculating that as a daring young soldier and war correspondent he could still make a splash in London. Equally significant, he fought back by developing his intellect and training himself for the arts of politics. To make up for his lack of

¹⁵ J. H. Plumb, 'The Historian', in *Churchill: Four Faces and the Man* (Harmondsworth, 1973), pp. 117–51.

¹⁶ Winston S. Churchill, *My Early Life* (London, 1930), p. 9.

a University education, he deliberately set out to educate himself by a programme of reading during the long afternoons in India.

Churchill read with all the hunger of a Victorian artisan striving to improve himself, and he read also in a state of intellectual innocence, accepting ideas in a grateful and fairly uncritical spirit. The book which seems to have made the deepest impact on him was a minor Victorian classic, Winwood Reade's *The Martyrdom of Man*. First published in 1872, this was both a work of history and of popular philosophy.¹⁷ Winwood Reade was a noted African explorer, and his book was a history of Africa and the Middle East from the earliest times, tracing the rise and fall of empires and religions. His book also attempted to demonstrate laws of history. Reade was an atheist and in the course of his book took exceptional pains to prove that Christianity was, like all other religions, a superstition. Churchill had already experienced doubts about Christianity, and *The Martyrdom of Man* precipitated a loss of faith which he found emotionally disturbing. He tells us that for a time he passed through a violently anti-Christian phase.¹⁸

Yet Winwood Reade aimed to provide an alternative, humanist creed. In the second half of the nineteenth century there were many attempts to find a social and political application for the theories of Charles Darwin. Indeed there were so many attempts that the term 'Social Darwinist' can serve only as an umbrella sheltering a multitude of contrasting philosophies. The mainspring of all Social Darwinism was the belief that history was not a chain of accidents, but an expression of laws of evolution operating through the principle of the natural selection of the fittest. It was the story of the substitution of higher for lower types of humanity or social organization. This basic idea was highly and perhaps infinitely adaptable to existing political traditions. When combined with anti-semitism and the rejection of reason, it could give rise to Hitler's Social Darwinism of the gutter. When combined with the ethical and gradualist elements of British socialism, it could give rise to Ramsay MacDonald's belief in the inevitable triumph of progressive ideas. Churchill combined it with Whig history and Tory Democracy to form a creed in which he himself figured as one of nature's men of destiny.

Winwood Reade rejected the idea that human beings were brute creatures who could never rise above animal instincts. He asserted, on the contrary, that humanity had a high and inspiring goal, for history was the story of the growth of social co-operation, the growth of conscience, and the growth of scientific mastery over nature. The

¹⁷ Winwood Reade, *The Martyrdom of Man* (London, 1932).

¹⁸ Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume I*, part 2 (London, 1976), pp. 724-5; Churchill, *My Early Life*, p. 129.

struggle of the individual for self-preservation led human beings to experiment with collective institutions whereby the welfare of the individual was protected by the strength and vitality of the group. It was through his becoming a social animal that the individual prospered best. The path of evolution, therefore, lay through the development of progressively more advanced forms of social co-operation, accompanied by ethical and scientific progress. Humanity was on the march from barbarism to Utopia, and the perfectibility of man was guaranteed by the laws of evolution.

To a degree, therefore, Winwood Reade was a popularizer of the great mid-Victorian gospel of progress and optimism. But this philosophy was overlaid by a sequence of pessimistic reflections which made the overall picture a sombre one. The laws of evolution were harsh, for progress was achieved only through continuous struggle between the more and the less advanced elements of humanity. Only through competition could the higher forms of society supersede the lower. The higher classes, the aristocracy and the intelligentsia, arose to dominate the masses. The more enlightened doctrines struggle against the more backward. The more dynamic empires expanded at the expense of the declining and degenerate ones. Not only was social competition the taproot of progress, but war itself was one of the chief instruments of evolution, an essential agent of change. In recent times war had united Italy and Germany, and freed four million slaves in the United States. In the future the Europeans would, so Winwood Reade predicted, emancipate Asia through conquest.¹⁹ Thus Winwood Reade identified progress with conflict, and humanitarianism with social or military aggression. Progress entailed suffering and could only be purchased at a high cost. The time scale, too, was a tragic one, for evolution was a painfully slow process in which each generation could expect no more than to add a few bricks to the building. For the individual there could be no personal salvation, nor did evolution hesitate to extinguish individuals for the greater cause of human progress. The only comfort for the individual lay in the possibility that he might be one of the chosen agents destined to lead humanity on its long march; and if there were no personal God, there was at least an animating force and purpose in the world which might be termed God or Providence.

Such ideas became the foundation of Churchill's outlook as a young man. To them he was able to relate other items in his reading. Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, with its panorama of imperial virtues undermined by luxury and Christianity, and Macaulay's *History of England*, with its vision of England as the champion of liberty and progress, fitted well enough with Winwood Reade's historical scheme. For

¹⁹ Winwood Reade, *Martyrdom of Man*, pp. 133, 413–15.

guidance on more recent affairs Churchill soaked himself in the speeches of his father, Lord Randolph. All these notions became interwoven with his overwhelming ambition, and related to his early experiences.

Between 1895 and 1900 Churchill wrote a host of letters and memoranda, and five books. All this material provides us with an intimate insight into his thinking, but one of his books in particular provides a touchstone. His novel *Savrola* was slight as a literary confection, but commentators have agreed in finding it illuminating as an expression of Churchill's mind. In form *Savrola* is a Ruritania fantasy, a tale of revolution set in the vaguely Balkan state of Laurania.²⁰ The value of the book lies in Churchill's attempt to picture the workings of a political system, and it is clear from outside evidence that he filled the book to the brim with his own ideas and experiences.

Three aspects of *Savrola* ought to claim our attention. First of all the book gives us Churchill's notion of the politician as a hero, a rehearsal for his own role. The central character, Savrola himself, reflects that the driving force of his life is not the people's good, but overpowering ambition, enjoyment of the political game, and the excitement of taking great risks in a crisis. At times he experiences a strong sense of the futility of all the efforts he is making. Yet, as Churchill wrote to his mother, Savrola was a 'great democratic leader' and 'a fine character':²¹ the novel treats him as a true hero. Savrola becomes a hero by acting a heroic part in public life, and throwing himself into a cause greater than the motives which prompt him as an individual. A similar theme runs through Churchill's letters to his mother from India and Egypt. His private motives, he confesses, are shabby, and he thinks himself cowardly, but he still believes that he can win a great public reputation. Indeed the desire for popular recognition leads him to perform deeds of true courage. After an episode on the north-west frontier during which he had come under fire, he wrote to Lady Randolph:

'I rode on my grey pony all along the skirmish line where everyone else was lying down in cover. Foolish perhaps, but I play for high stakes and given an audience there is no act too daring or too noble. Without the gallery, things are different.'²²

Churchill's many escapes from danger lured him into the further speculation that some great destiny awaited him. After one such

²⁰ Winston S. Churchill, *Savrola* (London, 1957). The book was first published in 1900.

²¹ Randolph S. Churchill, *Companion Volume I*, part 2, p. 815.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 792.

occasion he wrote: 'I do not believe the Gods would create so potent a being as myself for so prosaic an ending.'²³

If *Savrola* provides a clue to the working of Churchill's egotism, it also contains interesting social and political assumptions. Churchill reported that he had put his own philosophy into the mouth of the hero, who duly expounds the ideas of Winwood Reade. Savrola reflects, for instance, on the inevitable triumph of the Europeans over the coloured peoples, observing that even when Europe loses its moral superiority it will remain superior in its weapons. 'The effete and trembling European', Churchill wrote, 'will sweep from the earth by scientific machinery the valiant savages who assail him.'²⁴ Sentiments like this may at first sight appear to be no more than the speculations of a young man showing off, yet they were intimately related to Churchill's experiences at the time. Between starting and finishing *Savrola*, Churchill fought in two campaigns on the frontiers of empire in the course of which 'valiant savages' were in fact swept from the earth by scientific weaponry. He himself took part in the battle of Omdurman at which the British under Kitchener suffered 49 casualties and destroyed with their artillery 11,000 Dervishes. Sixteen thousand Dervishes were left wounded on the field, and Churchill witnessed the scene as British soldiers moved among them thrusting in their bayonets. Exhilarated as Churchill was by battle, he could not pass through such an experience without guilt, and the wickedness of the slaughter was self-evident to him. Compelled to find some ethical justification, he naturally found it in the conviction that civilization must necessarily triumph over barbarism, however tragic the process. For the sake of Churchill's pride of race it was essential for him to believe that by conquering and dominating other peoples, the British were also elevating and protecting them. After the battle of Omdurman, Kitchener ordered that the tomb of the Mahdi, the leader of the Sudanese revolt against Egypt in the 1880s, should be razed to the ground, the corpse of the Mahdi dug up, and the head carried away as a trophy to Cairo. Churchill was not only shocked, but concerned to advertise the fact. He protested publicly and in his book *The River War* included a passage which epitomizes his early imperialism:

'If the people of the Soudan cared no more for the Mahdi, then it was an act of vandalism and folly to destroy the only fine building which might attract the traveller and interest the historian. It is a gloomy augury for the history of the Soudan that the first action of its civilised conquerors and present ruler should have been to

²³ Randolph S. Churchill, *Companion Volume I*, part 1, p. 839.

²⁴ Churchill, *Savrola*, p. 81.

level the one pinnacle which rose above the mud houses. If, on the other hand, the people of the Soudan still venerated the memory of the Mahdi—and more than 50,000 had fought hard only a week before to assert their respect and belief—then I shall not hesitate to declare that to destroy what was sacred and holy to them was a wicked act, of which the true Christian, no less than the philosopher, must express his abhorrence.’²⁵

In this respect, then, generalizations which might sound speculative in the mouth of Savrola embodied assumptions which were for Churchill the *terra firma* of his activities. A third strand of *Savrola* concerns the relations between the hero and the people of Laurania. Savrola is a demagogue who excels in the manipulation both of his party and of the mass meetings which he addresses. Yet he occupies a definite position in the political spectrum. Laurania is in the grip of a reactionary military autocracy. Savrola is the leader of the popular party who spearheads a revolt in favour of parliamentary democracy. He is a liberal democrat and social reformer, to the left of the old regime, but menaced from the left of his own party by a socialist faction led by a politician with the unambiguous name of Karl Krauze. This melodrama accurately represented the vantage-point from which Churchill began his career. His father—or so the myth of his father’s career ran in Churchill’s head—had rebelled against the old guard of the Conservative party in the name of Tory Democracy. He had aimed to shift the party from its base in the counties and small boroughs, to the big urban centres. Churchill was now seeking to assume his father’s mantle and to pursue the same strategy.

Some commentators have dismissed Tory Democracy as no more than a slogan, designed to make working men vote for the party. And there is no doubt that Tory Democracy had a strong character of partisan self-interest. Lord Randolph was pointing out that there was electoral gold to be mined in the cities. It has also been said that Tory Democracy lacked a programme. On the whole it did lack legislative content, but Lord Randolph was also offering a wider view of class relations and their bearing on political stability. He argued that the working classes, whom so many members of the upper classes feared, were in fact the raw materials of stability and the natural pillars upon which the élite might rest. By inclination workers supported the Constitution, the Empire and the armed forces. And as previous classes had risen to power in the past, and turned to the State to protect them, so now workers and trade unions were doing the same. It was therefore in the interests of the State to protect them, especially as they might otherwise be alienated by extremists.

²⁵ Winston S. Churchill, *The River War*, II (London, 1899), p. 214.

It was, then, through his father's spectacles that Churchill first tried to envisage a class of beings almost as remote from him as the Pathans or the Dervishes. Lord Randolph's perceptions became his own and he found confirmation for them at many points in his early life. On the north-west frontier Churchill observed that the British soldier was determined to maintain his superiority as a white man over the native regiments. 'This', he commented in a newspaper despatch of 1897, 'is the material for empire-building.'²⁶ In 1900, when he was a hero of the Boer War by virtue of his escape from a prisoner-of-war camp, he was elected for Oldham partly through the assistance of the Tory Cotton Spinners Union. In his rhetoric he equated social reform with patriotic and imperial strength, and the fashionable idea of 'national efficiency'. In a speech of October 1898 he declared:

'To keep our Empire we must have a free people, an educated and well fed people. That is why we are in favour of social reform. That is why we long for Old Age pensions and the like.'²⁷

When Churchill in 1901 read Seebohm Rowntree's *Poverty, A Study of Town Life*, he again found a connection between the condition of the people and the strength of the Empire. In an apparently unpublished article intended for one of the service journals he wrote:

'Let it be granted that nations exist and peoples labour to produce armies with which to conquer other nations, and the nation best qualified to do this is of course the most highly civilised and the most deserving of honour. But supposing the common people shall be so stunted and deformed in body as to be unfit to fill the ranks the army corps lack. And thus—strange as it may seem, eccentric, almost incredible to write—our Imperial reputation is actually involved in their condition.'²⁸

The young Churchill, then, saw a substantial community of interests between himself and the working classes. They provided a platform for demagoguery, a foundation for social stability, and the underpinning of a strong external policy. Finally Churchill expressed admiration for the courage and endurance of working people in the struggle for survival. In an election speech of June 1899 he justified the Workmen's Compensation Act by likening it to the provision of pensions for wounded soldiers. Industry, too, was a battlefield and

'the wars of industry—those campaigns in the unending struggle for life—take every year a terrible proportion of those engaged in

²⁶ *Young Winston's Wars*, ed. Frederick Woods (London, 1972), p. 51.

²⁷ *Winston S. Churchill: His Complete Speeches*. I, ed. Robert Rhodes James (London, 1974), p. 30.

²⁸ Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume II*, part 1, p. 111.

manufacture . . . What battle that was ever fought, what siege that was ever laid, can show such a grim casualty list as that?'²⁹

Such was the rhetoric and the cast of mind of Churchill as a young man. The values and assumptions he acquired between 1895 and 1900 were to prove fundamental throughout his career, not because Churchill was a 'man of principle' but because he was sufficiently sane and stable to possess a root identity which, once established, could never be discarded. In all the voluntary manoeuvres of political life an involuntary core of emotion and belief always coloured his activities, and was liable to erupt under pressure. Thus his freedom to pursue a career of creative opportunism was always bounded, the pure politician flawed by a volcanic Churchill overflowing with pride and prejudice. And in the final analysis it was the volcanic Churchill which made him a great historic figure. To broach such an argument is simpler than to demonstrate it within the time available. But the remainder of this paper briefly examines Churchill's outlook on the twentieth century in three respects: his assumptions about himself, his assumptions about race and his assumptions about the working class.

III

There were saving moments in Churchill's life when he allowed himself to step down from the plinth, and behave as though he were made of common clay instead of marble or bronze. Often he would speak in a ripe and worldly fashion of his love of power. Before 1940 he is said to have likened his hopes of obtaining the premiership to 'winning the Derby'.³⁰ After the war there was an embarrassing incident when he was clinging on to the leadership of the Conservative party. Lord Halifax was deputed by members of the party to go and see Churchill to urge him tactfully to resign as leader. Churchill listened patiently and, having blown a ring from his cigar, replied: 'My dear Edward, you can tell your colleagues that one of the unalterable rules of my life is never to leave the pub until closing time.'³¹

But Churchill was never free for long from compulsions to glory. He was either driven by the conviction that he was a genius and a man of destiny, or harrowed by fears that he was not. As he wrote to Clementine in November 1913: 'At times I think I cd. conquer everything—& then again I know I am only a weak vain fool.'³²

²⁹ James, *Complete Speeches*, I, p. 38.

³⁰ Robert Skidelsky, *Spectator*, 25 October 1975.

³¹ Malcolm MacDonald, *Titans and Others* (London, 1972), p. 124.

³² Mary Soames, *Clementine Churchill* (London, 1979), p. 97.

Churchill avoided introspection, held colourful but cardboard views of individual character, and believed very simply in the role of great men and heroic deeds in history. No shadows of psychology or sociology darkened the picture. His was an innocent Victorian egotism, impossible for an educated person today, and fortified by a mysticism which we should not dismiss merely because it was naïve. Churchill believed that evolution had marked him out as a man of destiny. MacCallum Scott observed in 1905:

‘Churchill is a fatalist. He feels upon himself the hand of destiny. He is the instrument of some great purpose of nature, only half disclosed as yet.’³³

In 1908, when Churchill was busy devising social welfare measures, he told Charles Masterman that Providence had brought him to the rescue of the poor.³⁴ Soon after this he began to develop intimations that he had been blessed with military genius. After witnessing a Field Day in May 1909 he wrote to Clementine:

‘I have much confidence in my judgment on things, when I see clearly, but on nothing do I seem to *feel* the truth more than in tactical combinations. I am sure I have the root of the matter in me—but never I fear in this state of existence will it have a chance of flowering—in bright red blossom.’³⁵

In the Great War Churchill’s military passion was of course to flower in the shape of Gallipoli, and the failure at the Dardanelles was to prove the greatest blow Churchill’s self-image was ever to sustain. But after a long agony his faith recuperated. In his memoirs of the Second World War he recorded his emotions on becoming Prime Minister in 1940: ‘I felt as if I were walking with destiny, and that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and this trial.’³⁶

If Churchill began life with illusions of grandeur, he was to end it secure in the grandeur which these very illusions had compelled him to attain. If his rationalizations are transparent to us, they were nevertheless potent in shaping both the style and content of his career. Churchill did fancy that he was in touch with destiny, and peered into the future in the manner of H. G. Wells, whose science fiction he devoured with boyish excitement. From the outset his rhetoric contained a prophetic element. In his third parliamentary speech, delivered in May 1901, he smuggled into a discussion of army reform

³³ MacCallum Scott, *Churchill*, p. 247.

³⁴ Lucy Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman* (London, 1939), p. 7.

³⁵ Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill. Vol. II: Young Statesman 1901–1914* (London, 1967), p. 225.

³⁶ Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War. Vol. I: The Gathering Storm* (London, 1948), pp. 526–7.

a remarkable passage which accurately anticipated the character of the Great War.³⁷ In the early 1930s his Indian campaign took on an apocalyptic tone as he predicted that if Britain lost India she would sink within two generations to the level of a minor power like Portugal.³⁸

There is no need to humour the notion that Churchill had some sixth sense about the future. Like Wells himself, he was as often wrong as right. Between the wars he was curiously blind to the long-term peril in the Far East, and in 1924 wrote to Baldwin to argue that there was not the slightest chance of a war with Japan in their lifetime.³⁹ But Churchill's prophetic sense did bear directly on his career in the sense that his intellect was always questing for the future. His case for the development of the tank, or his sensitivity to the ideas of the New Liberalism, sprang from this habit of mind. Arguably he understood the long-term consequences of the Bolshevik revolution far better than his colleagues, and his analysis of the future of India after the collapse of British rule makes uncomfortable reading today.

Given the nature of Churchill's egotism, his colleagues were of course correct in their view of him as a solitary, largely unsocialized creature, who did not identify, except for purposes of ambition, with actual groups and interests. First and foremost Churchill thought of himself not as a Liberal or a Tory, a champion of the services, of the aristocracy, the poor or the India lobby, but as a freelance man of destiny. Aneurin Bevan described him as 'the greatest artist who ever entered politics',⁴⁰ and this perfectly describes Churchill's behaviour. The gift of the great artist is the capacity to combine a highly personal vision with command of the smallest detail. Churchill's politics were grounded in intense labour. He was a man of committees, smoke-filled rooms and the painstaking drafting of memoranda. He devoted his time to the mastery of information and the manipulation of colleagues and subordinates. Ineed his speeches and papers are so richly honey-combed with argument and detail as to create an illusion of Peelite statesmanship. They give the impression of massive administrative logic applied to accurately defined problems. But like a great artist, Churchill produced odd results from the data. The Peelite subordinates vision to matters of fact. Churchill followed Disraeli in subordinating matters of fact to vision. Historians will recognize in him the inspired generalizer who begins with original ideas and ransacks the archives to prove them. From the raw material of everyday politics Churchill was always seeking to fashion some great theme as a frame

³⁷ James, *Complete Speeches*, I, p. 82.

³⁸ James, *Complete Speeches*, V, p. 4990.

³⁹ Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, *Baldwin* (London, 1969), p. 328.

⁴⁰ Bevan, 'History's Impresario', p. 61.

for a heroic portrait of himself. Hence, of course, the artistic unity of his career. No one picked other people's brains more ruthlessly than Churchill: as he explained to Beatrice Webb in July 1903, he never did brain-work himself when he could get others to do it for him.⁴¹ His Edwardian programme of social reform was borrowed from many sources, but it was Churchill's strategic imagination which fused a variety of schemes and ideas into a political and rhetorical whole.

If Churchill looked down on the world from such Olympian heights, it may appear that he had liberated himself from conventional ties and loyalties and was free to intervene in the affairs of mere mortals in any way that pleased him. But Churchill was not inhumanly detached. Early associations and friendships meant much to him, and above all the ageing Churchill remained loyal to his youth. He preserved in his bones conceptions picked up in the 1890s: notions about class, race, war, economics, British history, the nature of progress. The further that Churchill travelled from the era of the Diamond Jubilee, the more he stood out self-consciously as the champion of the period in which he had grown up. Hence, over the long run, Churchill's career unfolded with historical logic: a cast of mind which had at first ranged him as a new-fangled urban demagogue on the advanced wing of politics, gradually pushed him into the role of bulwark against change.

IV

Churchill is rightly identified as a full-blooded imperialist, but his imperialism was of a particular variety. Anyone with Churchill's early education in the politics of Lancashire knew full well the character of the Empire as a piece of economic machinery. No one was more soundly briefed on the cotton industry than Churchill after his free trade campaign of 1903–5, and his interlude as M.P. for North-West Manchester from 1905–8. His next constituency, Dundee, which he represented until 1922, depended upon jute supplies from Bengal. The problems of contract labour were also familiar to Churchill both from his knowledge of South Africa, where he encountered the problem of 'Chinese slavery', and from his visit to East Africa in 1907. Churchill also acquired considerable experience of the Empire as a Commonwealth of self-governing white dominions. He was one of the architects of self-government in South Africa after the Boer War and in Ireland after the war of independence. He formed close friendships with Smuts in the Edwardian period and Menzies during the Second World War. But while Churchill worked hard on economic problems and constitutional affairs, and took a general pride in the

⁴¹ Beatrice Webb, *Our Partnership* (London, 1948), p. 269.

Empire, he never had an imperial programme. For Churchill the magnetism and excitement of the Empire lay in the dominion of the British over the coloured peoples of Africa and Asia, and the two most evocative spots on the globe were Egypt and India, the scenes of his first adventures.

The term 'racialist' has many connotations which were alien to Churchill. Churchill had no theory of race as a biological entity. He was briefly an enthusiast for a bill to sterilize the unfit, and declared privately in October 1912 that the British race was degenerating rapidly.⁴² But eugenicists were by no means racialists, and Churchill's enthusiasm was a flash in the pan. Nor would it have entered Churchill's head to stoke up racial animosity against immigrants, or to persecute minorities. His inoculation against anti-semitism was almost complete, and from the days of his early contacts with the Jewish community in Manchester, he turned sympathy for Zionism into one of the motifs of his career. Yet Churchill has been recently described as a racialist by the historian Christopher Thorne in his powerful study of Anglo-American relations during the Second World War, *Allies of a Kind*. He describes, for example, how Churchill in private could 'launch into a most terrible attack on the "babooos", saying that they were gross, dirty and corrupt' . . . or talk of 'not letting the Hottentots by popular vote throw the white people into the sea'.⁴³

It would have been very surprising if Churchill had not believed in the racial superiority of the British. For centuries Europeans had regarded coloured peoples as backward and inferior, and these ideas were strengthened by the new imperialism of the late nineteenth century. In *A Modern Utopia* (1905), H. G. Wells commented on the prevalence of muddled racial attitudes:

'No generalisations about race are too extravagant for the inflamed credulity of the present time. No attempt is ever made to distinguish differences in inherent quality—the true racial differences—from artificial differences due to culture . . . The politically ascendant peoples of the present phase are understood to be the superior races, including such types as the Sussex farm labourer, the Bowery tough, the London hooligan, and the Paris apache; the races not at present prospering politically . . . are represented as the inferior races, unfit to associate with the former on terms of equality.'⁴⁴

Racial assumptions were widely held by liberals and even socialists. Marx had often made anti-semitic comments, and Engels considered

⁴² Wilfred Scawen Blunt, *My Diaries: Part Two 1900–1914* (London, 1920), p. 416.

⁴³ Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind* (London, 1978), p. 5.

⁴⁴ H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia* (London, 1905), pp. 316–17.

the Czechoslovak peoples and the South Slavs to be 'ethnic trash'.⁴⁵ The Webbs remarked on the racial backwardness of Chinese, Koreans, Burmese and Indians.⁴⁶ As late as 1950, Hugh Dalton confided to his diary his horror of becoming Colonial Secretary: 'I had a horrid vision of pullulating, poverty-stricken, diseased nigger communities . . . querulous and ungrateful.'⁴⁷

Churchill's attitudes were not unusual for his generation, but there is no doubt that in his case they had a special salience and force. Churchill was not a utilitarian who calculated the material interests of his nation or his class. He was a romantic who believed in the status and prestige of the British race as ends in themselves. W. S. Blunt, the eccentric Arabist and opponent of Empire, had a number of conversations with Churchill before 1914, and recorded Churchill's opinions. Churchill admitted to him that in his view India did not pay and that Britain got no financial advantages from the Empire. None the less Churchill continued to champion imperialism as an altruistic undertaking for the benefit of the subject races. Blunt commented:

'It is the vanity of Empire that affects him more than the supposed profit or the necessities of trade, which he repudiates; also, doubtless, his military training counts for much in his Imperialism.'⁴⁸

Churchill, in short, believed in the civilizing mission of the British race. In his radical Liberal phase he was positively concerned to improve the condition of subject peoples, as his record as Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office from 1905 to 1908 bears out. He was not merely solicitous about the welfare of the Kikuyu in his book *My African Journey*, but privately angry about the treatment of the Zulu by the whites of Natal.⁴⁹ What Churchill could not, of course, tolerate was the theory that the welfare of subject peoples demanded an eventual transfer of power. The Great War shook the foundations of British power in the key territories of India and Egypt, and Churchill after 1918 became a more negative and embittered imperialist. In February 1922 he told a conference of ministers:

'An idea was prevalent among many people, both in India and at home, that we were fighting a rearguard action in India, that the British *raj* was doomed, and that India would gradually be

⁴⁵ W. H. Chaloner and W. O. Henderson, 'Marx/Engels and Racism', *Encounter*, July 1975, pp. 18–23.

⁴⁶ J. M. Winter, 'The Webbs and the Non-White World', *Journal of Contemporary History*, ix, no. 1, January 1974.

⁴⁷ P. S. Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement 1914–1964* (London, 1975), p. 336.

⁴⁸ W. S. Blunt, *My Diaries*, p. 287.

⁴⁹ R. Hyam, *Elgin and Churchill*, p. 251.

handed over to Indians. He was strongly opposed to that view of the situation. On the contrary, we must strengthen our position in India . . . He believed that opinion would change soon as to the expediency of granting democratic institutions to backward races which had no capacity for self-government. He believed that a way out of our difficulties might be found by extending the system of Native States, with their influential aristocracies and landed proprietors.⁵⁰

In 1929 the Labour government made concessions to nationalist movements in both Egypt (in theory a sovereign state by this time, but in practice under British influence) and India. Churchill's prophetic spirit was aroused, and he began to denounce the government violently for betraying the mission of the British in the East. In January 1931 he broke with Baldwin and resigned from the Conservative shadow cabinet over Indian policy. As usual Churchill's philippics were regarded with wry disbelief at Westminster, but Churchill had in fact sensed a real point of change which was to him agonizing. The historian George Woodcock, in a book analysing the reasons for the fall of the British Empire, has argued that the decisive point of no return occurred in the year 1930.⁵¹ Historians who believe that Churchill's Indian campaign was purely a tactical struggle against Baldwin need to explain why throughout the Second World War Churchill conducted a tooth-and-nail struggle in private against all attempts to introduce representative central government in India. Churchill's outlook on the question was utterly straightforward, as he explained to Lord Moran in 1952:

'When you learn to think of a race as inferior beings it is difficult to get rid of that way of thinking; when I was a subaltern in India the Indians did not seem to be equal to the white man.'⁵²

V

If Churchill's assumptions about race led him inevitably from chivalrous paternalism at the start to diehard conclusions by the 1930s, his sense of class produced a more chequered picture. Churchill continued to regard manual workers as a virile, individualistic and patriotic force, warriors and competitors like himself, but of necessity subordinate members of the tribe. As an Edwardian social reformer

⁵⁰ PRO, CAB 23/39, Minutes of a Conference of Ministers held at 10 Downing Street 5 February 1922.

⁵¹ George Woodcock, *Who Killed the British Empire?* (London, 1974), ch. xi.

⁵² Lord Moran, *Winston Churchill: The Struggle for Survival 1940-1965* (London, 1966), p. 370.

he emphasized that labour exchanges, unemployment insurance and minimum wages legislation were designed to mitigate but not to supplant the competitive system. Whereas the New Liberals and Fabians whose brains he picked sought to build a bridge between Liberalism and Socialism, Churchill in his speeches sought to emphasize the gulf. In the celebrated speech of October 1906 in which he first defined the differences between Liberalism and Socialism, Churchill said:

'The existing organisation of society is driven by one mainspring—competitive selection. It may be a very imperfect organisation of society, but it is all we have got between us and barbarism. It is all we have been able to create through unnumbered centuries of effort and sacrifice . . . I do not want to see impaired the vigour of competition, but we can do much to mitigate the consequences of failure . . . We want to have free competition upwards; we decline to allow free competition to run downwards. We do not want to pull down the structures of society and civilisation; but to spread a net over the abyss.'⁵³

Trade unions, he went on to argue in a later speech, were functional to a competitive society:

'Trade Unions are not Socialistic. They are the antithesis of Socialism. They are undoubtedly individualistic organisations, more in the character of the old Guilds, and much more in the direction of the culture of the individual, than they are in that of the smooth and bloodless uniformity of the masses.'⁵⁴

Great changes took place in the world of labour between 1908 and 1919, by which date the Labour party had established itself as a national force, and a greatly enlarged trade union movement was caught up in a wave of industrial militancy. But Churchill, who had come into renewed contact with labour as Minister of Munitions, maintained his former diagnosis. In a newspaper article of November 1919, contrasting the trade union and socialist wings of the Labour party, he observed:

'The ordinary trade unionist working man has a great deal of natural conservatism about him. He is a strong individualist in all his personal affairs. He is a sturdy patriot and nationalist, as was so abundantly proved throughout the war . . . He shares also the average Briton's dislike and mistrust of Government management and State control . . .

⁵³ James, *Complete Speeches*, I, p. 676.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1030.

If all the income of the country were divided up equally among its population, most trade unionists would find their weekly wages substantially reduced. In fact, the trade unionist is really a bourgeois, with a bourgeois outlook strongly tinged by Radicalism, and with bourgeois interests to defend.

It is for these reasons that the trade unionists, while supplying the main motive power to the labour movement, have always been a stabilising force in British national life.⁵⁵

As we can see from this passage Churchill valued labour not as a passive, deferential force, but as an organized and active one which helped to sustain a hierarchical society. Churchill's instincts were for order and oligarchy, and for him the trade unions were an aristocracy which ruled the working class. Hence his remark to the Cabinet of February 1919:

'The curse of Trade Unionism was that there was not enough of it, and it was not highly developed enough to make its branch secretaries fall into line with the head office. With a powerful union either peace or war could be made.'⁵⁶

Churchill clashed with organized labour in the General Strike, but the collapse of the strike may well have confirmed his view of the character of trade unionism. The force which Churchill truly feared was middle-class socialism, which he regarded as cranky and destructive. It was this which caused him private as well as public anxiety when Labour governments took office in 1924 and 1929. In 1935 Churchill took the opportunity to reaffirm his confidence in industrial workers in a preface to the autobiography of David Kirkwood. When Churchill was Minister of Munitions in the First World War, Kirkwood was a Clydeside shop steward deported to Edinburgh for organizing strikes. Churchill released him from detention and appointed him manager of a shell factory which subsequently produced a record output. Churchill wrote in his preface:

'This book is valuable for the picture it gives of the feelings and thought of the radically-minded wage earners. Their sturdy independence, their mood of political revolt, their strong suspicion that they are being "got at" and put upon, their super-developed sense of injustice, their hatred of snobbery and affectation, their readiness to use their rights as citizens to the full, their innate conviction that one man is as good as another—these traits show themselves on every page ...

⁵⁵ *Illustrated Sunday Herald*, 16 November 1919.

⁵⁶ M. Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume IV*, part 1 (London, 1977), p.

David Kirkwood and the strong types he represents are the natural foes of tyranny. Gripped in the iron regimentations of the Continent, they would resist with an indomitable, or at the worst desperate, tenacity. Many of his readers have disapproved of his views and actions in the past, and will probably do so in future. But should the life and freedom of our race again be called in question we shall all find ourselves together heart and hand.⁵⁷

Churchill has often been caricatured as anti-working class. But although as he grew older he increasingly lost touch with working-class problems and conditions, Churchill had a broad understanding of working-class conservatism, and a confidence that the working classes would resist regimentation in any form, which were borne out by events. Against this background it can be understood why Churchill placed so much trust in organized labour both during the war with Hitler and the Cold War. Given his basic assumptions, Churchill's behaviour was inevitably that of a benevolent paternalist. Charles Masterman wrote of the Edwardian Churchill that he desired 'a state of things where a benign upper class disposed benefits to an industrious, *bien pensant*, and grateful working class'.⁵⁸ In 1942 Herbert Morrison put the same point in a different way to the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, W. P. Crozier:

'He is full of sympathy, you know, for the ordinary British men and women, and doesn't like inflicting hardship on them ... He's the old benevolent Tory squire who does all he can for the people—provided that they are good obedient people and loyally recognise his position, and theirs.'⁵⁹

Churchill's benevolent instincts were brought into play chiefly when they were of service to his ambition, but they were real enough: many ambitious people do not possess them at all and could not bring them into play if they wished. Yet in the last resort order rather than kindness is the imperative of the benevolent paternalist. When Churchill feared that trade unions were undermining the State, as during the railway strike of 1911 or the General Strike of 1926, he was clear that the first priority was the restoration of order. An instructive contrast can be drawn here between benevolent paternalism in domestic and imperial affairs. The reason that Churchill remained fundamentally a Whig in domestic politics, while developing into a diehard over the

⁵⁷ David Kirkwood, *My Life of Revolt* (London, 1935), p. vi.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Robert Rhodes James, *Churchill: A Study in Failure 1900–1939* (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 45.

⁵⁹ W. P. Crozier: *Off The Record. Political Interviews 1933–1943*, ed. A. J. P. Taylor (London, 1973), p. 323.

Empire, is that on the whole Labour accepted the authority of Crown and Parliament while the Indian Congress Party rejected it.

VI

The coherence of Churchill's career is to be detected at some levels but not at others. There is no point in trying to manufacture the continuity of strong instincts where they do not exist. What, for example, did Churchill believe or feel about Ireland? Little, perhaps, except that the Irish were difficult, depressing, and deserved to be manipulated for the benefit of Churchill and the British State. In international affairs Churchill was peculiarly uncertain and erratic. Sometimes he was for peace and retrenchment, sometimes for rearmament and intransigence, sometimes he identified a rising threat and sometimes he was oblivious to it. The idea that Churchill was a perpetual warmonger appears absurd when it is recalled that it was Churchill who, in 1928, placed on a permanent footing the 'Ten-Year Rule' whereby defence planning was to assume that there would be no war for at least the next ten years.

But it can be said of Churchill that he regarded human life and civilization itself as rooted in aggression, even though warlike impulses had been sublimated into such peaceful forms as general elections or international negotiations. Churchill preferred to think in images rather than abstractions, and throughout his career his rhetoric was rich in metaphors of physical energy and struggle. Habitually he likened the world either to the animal kingdom or to the battlefield. When in 1899 he compared the position of Britain among the powers to that of 'a dog with a bone in the midst of a hungry pack', or in 1906 spoke of the poor as the rearguard of an army, 'struggling in mountainous country, attacked and assailed on every side by the onslaughts of a pitiless enemy',⁶⁰ he was not merely decorating a speech but expressing a view of the world. Yet his rhetoric was also characterized throughout by hopeful images of progress. In 1940 he was calling upon long cherished phraseology when he pictured the life of the world 'moving forward into broad sunlit uplands', or envisaged 'the forward march of the common people in all lands towards their just and true inheritance'.⁶¹ Churchill was not a logical thinker and could not have explained theoretically his view of history. He managed to believe at the same time that human beings were sunk in war and competition, yet struggling towards peace and co-operation. This outlook suited his temperament. Churchill was a bellicose creature but also a man of reason and conscience, aware of base motives yet striving

⁶⁰ James, *Complete Speeches*, I, pp. 40, 677.

⁶¹ James, *Complete Speeches*, VI, pp. 6238, 6298.

to play a noble part. The Whig view of civilization as a structure painfully built up over the centuries, so natural to a man of his time and class, was also a self-justification to which he was passionately attached. To grasp Churchill's volcanic reaction to the Bolshevik revolution, an explosion of feeling which he was powerless to control, we need to recognize that Lenin and Trotsky were challenging the historical faith or myth by which Churchill lived. When H. G. Wells, after a visit in 1919 to revolutionary Russia, wrote a newspaper article proclaiming that the new regime contained within it the seeds of advance, Churchill at once replied in an article in which he poured out his whole vision of the laws of progress through the ages. The Bolsheviks, he argued, were engaged in the insane task of destroying the mainspring of human achievement: the competition of individuals for property.⁶²

The high Tory conception of Churchill as a histrionic opportunist is, therefore, inadequate. The Left were correct in seeing him as essentially the champion of a declining order. Churchill embarked on his career with a Victorian faith in measured and scientific progress which carried him to a sparkling peak of optimism in Edwardian Britain. The Great War shook his confidence in his own destiny, undermined the ordered world of his youth, and plunged him into a phase of embittered resistance to change. After 1918, Martin Gilbert tells us, 'Churchill was deeply disturbed by the collapse of settled values and ancient institutions.' In his notes for a speech during the 1922 General Election, Churchill wrote:

'What a disappointment the Twentieth Century has been ...
We have seen in ev. country a dissolution,
a weakening of those bonds,
a challenge to those principles,
a decay of faith
an abridgement of hope
on which structure & ultimate existence
of civilized society depends.

We have seen in ev part of globe
one gt country after another
wh had erected an orderly, a peaceful
a prosperous structure of civilised society,
relapsing in hideous succession
into bankruptcy, barbarism or anarchy.'⁶³

Churchill's defeat in the 1922 General Election was one of the many episodes of failure which chequered his middle age. From the age of

⁶² *Sunday Express*, 28 November and 5 December 1919.

⁶³ Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, IV (London, 1975), pp. 914, 915.

forty to the age of sixty-five he appeared to be frequently on the edge of political bankruptcy. But the very postures and values which brought this great Whig adventurer so low between the wars were to restore his fame and fortune, and even establish him as a hero, after 1940. The great enemies of his life were Trotsky, Gandhi and Hitler, and he fought them all for the same reasons. Against them he launched his three great crusades, each in its way a passionate revival of the ideals of his youth. And if the first and second isolated him, and called his judgment into question, it so happened that the third proved vital to the interests of Britain, the United States and Western Europe.