

## Mr. Churchill's Apologia\*

(Reviewed by the RIGHT HON. C. F. G. MASTERMAN, P.C.,  
in the *Review of Reviews*.)

I have already made some observations concerning the remarkable piece of rhetoric which Mr. Winston Churchill describes as *The World Crisis, 1911-1914*. I have been partly amused and partly amazed by the reviews which have appeared from many intelligent men, who have taken apparently no steps to ascertain the exact truth concerning any particular incident, but who have been swept away by the rhetoric of a man who, if rhetoric could win wars, could win any war which was waged under his direction.

I bring no charge against him, except that fundamental incapacity for right judgment which seems to be an hereditary characteristic. Mr. Winston Churchill's first instincts were always wrong, sometimes so wrong that one was reduced to a kind of astonishment and despair that the genius of a man of extraordinary capacity for work should be so gravely marred. On the other hand, in all civil decisions, he was always open to the appeal of reason, and when I worked with him at the Home Office, both the permanent officials and myself rejoiced in the fact that he would always listen to the reasons which made his first decisions impossible; and when his intellect was convinced would always reverse them. Unfortunately, however, these reverberations of his mind in time of peace ceased altogether to operate in time of war. Even when he was fighting a railway or a coal strike, he ceased to listen to the demands of reason, and saw himself as a kind of Napoleon. I could tell strange stories of some of the propositions which he seriously advanced, of the treatment which he would bestow upon sections of the working people of England if they continued to resist his imperious demands. I should be delighted to see Mr. Churchill charged with the mission of building houses for the British people who are now living in pigstyes, attics, or cellars—whole families whose male representative fought through the war or whose wife has been made by that war a widow. I should be delighted to see Mr. Churchill encharged with the duty of furnishing work for the unemployed. But in any office connected with war or foreign affairs he remains a danger to this country. He has never been, as this book points out in almost frantic self-revelation, a Liberal. He would be very happy in the position of Mussolini or of Trotsky, or as the head of a Socialistic State in England. This great stream of so many hundred pages of egotistic and vaunting rhetoric reveals him in all his strength and weakness. It is a cataract like Niagara: useless unless properly harnessed.

Unfortunately he has not always considered it worth while to take blame which really belonged to himself on his own shoulders and frankly to acknowledge where he has been at fault. One would think that nine years afterwards, in the record of a time of terrible testing of all men, anyone associated with the tremendous events of that terrific challenge, would be prepared to say frankly, "Here I agree I was wrong; here my subordinates gave me advice which I ought to have taken." No one at this distant period would think less of him for such generosity. But he has set himself to prove that the war was won by the First Lord of the Admiralty, that all those others who opposed him were recommending methods which could only lead to ruin, and that Churchill will stand in the future in a position higher than Chatham as the man who saved civilisation and the British Empire in our darkest hour.

The imaginative can read into his confessions facts which he proclaims, not with apology, but with defiance; his fierce determination to compel all the neutrals to fight either for us or for Germany; his contempt for all moral judgments of the civilised world; his desire to utilise the toy which he had in part created, the gigantic Armada of ships and guns; and his belief that the only thing which mattered was that this Armada should be given full scope for its energies, regardless of treaties and neutralities and any suffering which might be imposed upon those who had no quarrel with either combatants. I have no hesitation in saying that if we had had a Government of Churchills, Britain, France, and a Russia in hopeless decay, would in 1914 have been fighting almost every other

nation in the world; and that we ourselves would have been declared outlaws because of the use of our preponderant sea-power in violation of every Convention of justice and humanity, not against our enemies, but against those with whom we had no legitimate quarrel at all.

You may turn from foreign policy to the practical application. From the opening of hostilities, Mr. Churchill had taken, from the First Sea Lord, the full responsibility "over everything that was proposed or was done." "Right or wrong, that is what I did, and it is on that basis that I wish to be judged." He would show us, at the Admiralty, maps and models indicating the position of every warship in the British Navy. In those models were included the three cruisers which wallowed daily off the shores of Holland, and who came to be termed "live bait," obviously in jeopardy every hour. After six weeks of it, in a visit to the Grand Fleet, he hears a casual mention of the "live bait squadron." He then gives orders for their withdrawal, but owing to the rough weather, the substitute system cannot be immediately arranged. He goes up to Liverpool, and mocks at the German Navy as "rats which dare not come out of their holes," and that night departs on a visit to France with his friend Lord Birkenhead. While he is away, one "rat" slips out of its hole and sends the "live bait" to the bottom of the sea; with the loss of 1400 persons, largely schoolboys and married men—an episode, as he cheerily describes it, "of a peculiar character in human history." The "episode" gave rise to a Court of Inquiry, whose decision was neglected because its adverse verdict was "a reflection upon the Admiralty by a subordinate Court." It was not a reflection on the Admiralty by a subordinate Court. It was an expression of the opinion of the Navy upon Mr. Winston Churchill.

Again, in his brooding over the mad expedition to Antwerp, Mr. Churchill still endeavors to defend the indefensible. It may have been a sound strategical idea to attempt to defend that great city, whose forts were simply being battered to pieces by the gigantic long-range German artillery to which the Belgians could give no reply whatever. But what kind of madness is it which, after Lord Kitchener has refused the Territorial battalions as insufficiently trained for this defence, drags out the Naval Brigades to certain slaughter, who had never received any training at all, or, madness again, which subsequently proposes to take over an independent command in Belgium over "the Allied forces in the low countries," quite neglecting the terrible struggle which was being continued southward by Sir John French with an army enfeebled every day.

Of the Second Naval Brigade from Deal, the majority had never fired a shot before they were put in the trenches. They had been drilled with obsolete rifles. Some lads were seen trying to slide their cartridges the wrong way in. One officer, for example, subsequently to become one of the most distinguished generals of the army, had only joined up a few days before. They had no khaki, no water bottles, no identification discs, and an officer who saw them off at Dover remarked: "The poor beggars are being sent to be murdered." Needless to say that without any efficient artillery support they were useless for any defensive purposes, and this fine body of men were in three days broken to pieces. This was not strategy; it was lunacy. And Mr. Churchill would have done better in his book to confess in frank acknowledgment of an outrageous decision, made under exceedingly difficult circumstances, that he has nothing to offer but an open apology and regret. Instead of doing this, which would have turned many minds in sympathy with him, he indulges in a series of defences of his own actions, some of which are inaccurate, and some of which assail the intelligence or energy of other men. And he so excites a process of violent controversy out of what might have been an honest confession of mistake, which would have stimulated sympathy and forgiveness for one whose personal courage could never be impeached and who undoubtedly followed the light in so far as he could see it.

The book will have value. It may live as a brilliant rhetorical exposition of the war and the preparations for the war as revealed in the mind of one who took no small part in both. But it will only have value when it is published with annotations and notes showing where the author has forgotten or omitted the truth; something like the annotated editions of Carlyle's *French Revolution* produced by modern historians. It would have been better if it had been published twenty years hence.

\* *The World Crisis, 1911-1914*. By the Right Hon. Winston S. Churchill. (Thornton Butterworth.)