PENGUIN CLASSICS

WINSTON CHURCHILL

Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat: The Great Speeches

Edited by DAVID CANNADINE

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PENGUIN BOOKS

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PENGUIN CLASSICS

BLOOD, TOIL, TEARS AND SWEAT

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL was born at Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire in November 1874, and died in London in January 1965, whereupon he was accorded a state funeral in St Paul's Cathedral. Inbetween, his life was the most varied, extraordinary, controversial and heroic of any Briton of his generation. His mother, Jennie Jerome, was an American heiress, and his father, Lord Randolph Churchill, was an aristocrat whose meteoric political career first flashed then fizzled. Lord Randolph feared his son would never make a success of life, and Winston, even as he idolized his father, was also determined to prove him wrong. It would take him a long time to do so. Between 1905 and 1929, Churchill was almost continually in power as a member of Liberal, Coalition and Conservative Governments, and he presided over virtually every great department of state except the Foreign Office. But he had not become Prime Minister, he had made many enemies, and his next ten years were spent 'in the wilderness', as he seemed out of fashion, out of favour, out of touch and out of date, and his warnings about the growing Nazi menace went largely unheeded. But on the outbreak of the Second World War, Churchill returned to government, and in May 1940, he became Prime Minister, leading the nation through its 'finest hour' to eventual victory. The promise of greatness had become reality at last, but the voters rejected him in the general election of 1945, and it was not until 1951 that Churchill returned to 10 Downing Street. His second premiership was much harder going than the first, his efforts to broker a détente between the United States and Soviet Russia came to naught, and he eventually retired in April 1955. In addition to being a politician, war leader and statesman, Churchill was a soldier, a journalist, a biographer, an autobiographer, an historian, a painter – and a bricklayer. His most famous books were his lives of his father, Lord Randolph, and of his greatest ancestor, the first Duke of Marlborough, his histories of the First and Second World Wars, and his *History of the English-Speaking Peoples*. During the last two decades of his life, Churchill was laden with honours, including the Nobel Prize for Literature, and he was widely acclaimed as 'the greatest Englishman of his time', and the 'saviour of his country'.

DAVID CANNADINE is Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Professor of History at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London, and Chairman of the Trustees of the National Portrait Gallery. He was born in Birmingham in 1950, and educated at the Universities of Cambridge, Oxford and Princeton. He is the author and editor of many acclaimed books, including *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, *G. M. Trevelyan: A Life in History*, *Class in Britain*, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw their Empire*, *In Churchill's Shadow* and *Mellon: An American Life*. He is a Commissioner of English Heritage, a member of the Royal Mint Advisory Committee, a Trustee of the Kennedy Memorial Trust, and chairman of the Blue Plaques Panel. He is also the General Editor of the *Penguin History of Britain* and the *Penguin History of Europe*, and a well-known broadcaster on radio and television.

Preface

During the last two decades of his life, Winston Churchill was widely acclaimed as 'the greatest Englishman of his time'. His death was mourned by millions around the world, and he remains to this day Britannia's most celebrated son. The flood of books and articles about him continues unabated, and the public appetite for more is both voracious and insatiable. Each year, hundreds of thousands of peopie from all over the world visit Blenheim, Chartwell, Bladon and the Cabinet War Rooms in London. The adjective 'Churchillian' and the noun 'Churchilliana' are now authoritatively accommodated between the covers of the new edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Ships in the Royal Navy are named after him, as are cigarettes and public houses. His life is the subject of films, television series and even West End musicals. His books are still avidly and appreciatively read. His paintings command high prices in the salerooms. His most famous words have become immortal.

Yet there is no single-volume edition of his most important speeches, and the purpose of this book is to provide one. I am most grateful to Anne Boyd of Cassell for first suggesting this appealing project to me, and for her unfailing enthusiasm, encouragement and assistance thereafter. Mike Shaw of Curtis Brown has been both a tower of strength and a pillar of wisdom. I am also very heavily indebted to Dr David Reynolds, of Christ's College, Cambridge, for many memorable and illuminating conversations on the subject of Winston Churchill, and for his personal kindness no less than for his intellectual generosity. Clare Kudera provided invaluable research assistance at a crucial stage. But, once again, my greatest debt is to Linda Colley.

DNC
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Introduction

When Sir Winston Churchill celebrated his eightieth birthday as Prime Minister, in November 1954, there had been nothing like it in British public life since the days of Palmerston and Gladstone. Indeed, in one significant respect, his anniversary surpassed theirs: for he received an unprecedented, all-party tribute from members of both Houses of Parliament in Westminster Hall.[1] His speech in reply has rightly been described as a 'gentle masterpiece': 'the puckish humour, the calculated asides, the perfectly modulated control of voice, and that incomparable moral sturdiness made him look, and sound, years younger than his true age.' Referring to the alleged impact of his wartime words, he offered the following self-deprecating observation:

> I was very glad that Mr Attlee described my speeches in the war as expressing the will not only of Parliament but of the whole nation. Their will was resolute and remorseless and, as it proved, unconquerable. It fell to me to express it, and if I found the right words, you must remember that I have always earned my living by my pen and by my tongue. It was a nation and a race dwelling all round the globe that had the lion heart. I had the luck to be called upon to give the roar.[2]

But this was scarcely the whole truth of things, for luck is when preparation and opportunity meet, and Churchill had spent the whole of his long life preparing his words and his phrases for the time when he hoped they might make history – which, in 1940, they certainly did.

As his friends never doubted, and as even his enemies conceded, Churchill was the most eloquent and expressive statesman of his time, truly the master, but sometimes also the slave, of the English language. Here is Asquith, himself no mean wordsmith, recording in his diary of October 1915 an encounter with Churchill:

> For about a quarter of an hour he poured forth a ceaseless cataract of invective and appeal, and I much regretted that there was no shorthand writer within hearing, as some of his unpremeditated phrases were quite priceless.[3]

And here, from much later in his career, is an appreciation from Oliver Lyttelton, another friend who also wielded a felicitous pen:

> His effects were procured with all the artfulness which a lifetime of public speaking had given him. He began usually, and of course on purpose, with a few rather stumbling sentences; his audience was surprised that the phrases did not seem to run easily off his tongue. The tempo was slow and hesitant. Then gradually the Grand Swell and the Vox Humana were pulled out, and the full glory of his words began to roll forth.

In short and, as Churchill himself put it on one occasion, 'I have in my life concentrated more on self-expression than self-denial.'[4]

Indeed, his extraordinary career may fittingly be regarded as one sustained, brightly lit and scarcely interrupted monologue. Day after day, and often night after night, he turned out words and phrases in tumultuous torrent and inexhaustible abundance – inspiring, exhorting, moving, persuading, cajoling, thundering, bullying, abusing and enraging. In private engagement or public appearance, Cabinet meeting or Commons debate, car or boat, train or plane, dining-room or drawing-room, even bedroom or bathroom, his flow of oratory never ceased. Dozens of books, scores of articles, numerous state papers and countless memoranda bear literally the most eloquent witness to his unfailing verbal resource, his prodigious rhetorical ingenuity and his lifelong love of language. From the time of his election to the Commons in 1900, until his last weeks as Prime Minister in 1955, Churchill was someone of whom it could properly be said that he almost never seemed lost for things to say. As Lord Moran once noted, 'few men have stuck so religiously to one craft – the handling of words. In peace, it made his political fortune; in war it has won all men's hearts.'[5]

Because he was essentially a rhetorician, who dictated and

declaimed virtually every sentence he composed, most of Churchill's words were spoken rather than written. But some were more spoken than others. For it was as an orator that he became most fully and completely alive, and it was through his oratory that his words and his phrases made their greatest and most enduring impact. With Churchill, as it was said of Gladstone, 'speech was the fibre of his being': indeed, more so, for in the number (though not the length) of his orations, Churchill was emphatically ahead: 2,360 to Gladstone's 2,208.[6] During his own lifetime, more of his speeches were published in book form than those of any other political contemporary; the definitive edition of them runs to eight vast volumes, containing well over four million words; and his most memorable phrases – not just 'blood, toil, tears and sweat', 'their finest hour', 'the few' and 'the end of the beginning', but also 'business as usual', 'iron curtain', 'special relationship', 'summit meeting' and 'peaceful co-existence' – have become part of the everyday vocabulary of millions of men and women. As Churchill himself once remarked, 'words are the only things which last for ever', and this confident prediction has also become an incontrovertible epitaph.[7]

I

From almost his earliest years, Churchill was enthralled by the art and the craft of oratory, and he determined to succeed at it himself. He wanted to be an heroic historical figure, commanding great events, and stirring men's souls, and he saw speech-making as the essential way to achieve these ends. While serving as a subaltern in India, he wrote an essay on 'The Scaffolding of Rhetoric', which set down his early thoughts on the subject. There were, he believed, 'certain features common to all the finest speeches in the English language': the continual employment of the best possible words to express the full meaning of the speaker; a particular balance and rhythm to the phrasing, producing a cadence which resembled blank verse rather than prose; the careful accumulation of argument through 'a rapid succession of waves of sound and vivid pictures'; the use of colourful and

arresting analogies to render established truths more comprehensible, or new ideas more appealing; and powerful perorations which would arouse and electrify the listeners. By 'observation and perseverance', Churchill concluded, the secrets of rhetoric, the power to move audiences, the 'key to the hearts of men,' might be found; and the speaker who could command such oratorical resources would always be a force to be reckoned with:

> Of all the talents bestowed upon men, none is so precious as the gift of oratory. He who enjoys it wields a power more durable than that of a great king. He is an independent force in the world. Abandoned by his party, betrayed by his friends, stripped of his offices, whoever can command this power is still formidable.[8]

At the same time, Churchill was working on what would be his only novel, *Savrola*, and the eponymous hero, who is clearly the author's idealized version of himself, displays many of these qualities.[9] For Savrola believes in freedom and hates tyranny; he hopes to be the saviour of his country, Laurania; and his main weapon in this quest is his unrivalled power of oratory. Early in the novel, Churchill gives this description of Savrola putting his words and phrases together:

> His speech – he had made many and knew that nothing good can be obtained without effort. These impromptu feats of oratory existed only in the minds of the listeners; the flowers of rhetoric were hothouse plants.
>
> What was there to say? Successive cigarettes had been mechanically consumed. Amid the smoke he saw a peroration, which would cut deep into the hearts of a crowd; a high thought, a fine simile, expressed in that correct diction which is comprehensible to the most illiterate, and appeals to the most simple; something to lift their minds from the material cares of life and to awake sentiment. His idea began to take the form of words, to group themselves into sentences; he murmured to himself; the rhythm of his own language swayed him; instinctively he alliterated. Ideas succeeded one another, as a stream flows swiftly by and the light changes on its waters. He seized a piece of paper and began

> hurriedly to pencil notes. That was a point; could not tautology accentuate it? He scribbled down a rough sentence, scratched it out, polished it, and wrote it in again. The sound would please their ears, the sense improve and stimulate their minds. What a game it was! His brain contained the cards he had to play, the world the stakes he played for.[10]

With minor modifications and embellishments, such as the presence of a long-suffering secretary prepared to take dictation at almost any hour of the day or night, this was exactly how Churchill would set about composing his own speeches throughout the whole of his career.

Later in the novel, Savrola delivers his great oration to a large and enthusiastic crowd. Beforehand, he quivers with scarcely suppressed excitement, and his composure was merely assumed. Initially, he seemed nervous and halting, 'and here and there in his sentences he paused as if searching for a word'. But gradually he mastered his audience, and the phrases and sentences began to flow, evoking 'a hum of approval', and conveying 'an impression of dauntless resolution'. He ridiculed the tyrannical president of Laurania, and 'every point he made was received with cheers and laughter'. He 'spoke of the hopes of happiness to which even the most miserable of human beings had a right', and 'silence reigned throughout the hall'. Time and again, 'sound practical common sense' was expressed with 'many a happy instance, many a witty analogy, many a lofty and luminous thought'. For an hour, Savrola had conveyed 'his passions, his emotions, his very soul' to the thousands in his audience. And so to the peroration:

> Each short sentence was followed by wild cheering. The excitement of the audience became indescribable. Everyone was carried away by it ... His sentences grew longer, more rolling and sonorous. At length he reached the last of those cumulative periods which pile argument on argument as Pelion on Ossa. All pointed to an inevitable conclusion. The people saw it coming, and when the last words fell they were greeted with thunders of assent.[11]

Churchill was in his early twenties when he wrote these words, and he had scarcely made a public speech, let alone faced a large audience or moved a multitude. But already, he knew the speech-maker he wanted to be, and this account sets out, with vivid imaginative force, and in arrestingly prescient detail, the sort of speech-maker he did eventually become, and whom Oliver Lyttelton later portrayed and saluted. Indeed, as a description of the great perorations with which he would end his wartime speeches, more than forty years later, these early words are hard to surpass. And in depicting Savrola's behaviour at the close of his address, Churchill was no less accurate in foreseeing the sense of anxious and expectant exhaustion he himself would later feel:

> Then he sat down, drank some water, and pressed his hands to his head. The strain had been terrific. He was convulsed by his own emotions; every pulse in his body was throbbing, every nerve quivering; he streamed with perspiration and almost gasped for breath . . .
>
> Savrola turned to [his colleague:] 'Well Louis . . . how did it sound? I liked the last words. It is the best speech I have ever made.'

Inspired by his uplifting words, the Lauranians storm the presidential palace and depose the tyrant, and Savrola returns in triumph to the capital, 'the ancient city he had loved so well'.[12]

In more senses than one, *Savrola* was a rhetorical romance. But in order to become his own Savrola, young Winston had a great deal of work to do, for he was in no sense a born orator, and 'in truth', as Lord Moran noted, 'he did not seem to be designed by nature for his part'. He was physically unprepossessing and uncharismatic, not much above five feet tall, with a hunched frame, a stooping walk, a weak upper lip, a delicate skin and a waistline which became self-indulgently expanded in middle age. He felt deeply his lack of an Oxbridge education – partly because it left him with an abiding sense of intellectual inferiority in the company of such cerebral sophisticates as Balfour, Asquith and F. E. Smith, and partly because it meant he 'never had the practice which comes to young men at university of speaking in

small debating societies impromptu on all sorts of subjects'.[13] Although his conversation was widely regarded as brilliant, and while his repartee could be devastating, Churchill never mastered the art of extemporaneous public-speaking except for making a few brief remarks at social gatherings or at the beginning of his speeches. Most distressing of all, his voice was unattractive and unresonant, and he suffered from a speech impediment, part lisp and part stammer, which in his early years often made it painful to listen to him. As one observer noted, he was 'a medium-sized, undistinguished young man, with an unfortunate lisp in his voice . . . and he lacks face'. Or, as Lord Birkenhead bluntly put it to Churchill later on, 'it isn't as if you had a *pretty* voice'.[14]

The main reason why Churchill's oratory eventually took the ornate and memorable form it did was that he had to overcome these many debilitating disadvantages. Like Savrola, he only mastered his chosen craft by 'hard, hard work', by 'extraordinary self-discipline', and by serving a 'long and painful apprenticeship'. He studied, and often memorized, the greatest orations of Cromwell, Chatham, Burke, Pitt, Macaulay, Bright, Disraeli and Gladstone. He knew his father's speeches off by heart, and deliberately emulated Lord Randolph's dress and mannerisms. He laboured heroically to overcome his lisp and his stammer, by visiting voice specialists, by constant practice and perseverance, and (like Aneurin Bevan, another stammerer-turned-orator) by choosing unusual words and phrases so as to avoid the treacherous rhythms of everyday speech.[15] He spent hours in front of the looking-glass, rehearsing his gestures and practising his facial expressions. And he steeled himself to succeed, using all his willpower to still his nerves and calm his racing heart before rising to speak. Yet despite this monumental resolution and dedication, the prospect of composing a speech always hung over him like a cloud; he was constantly afraid, in his early years, that he would blurt out some unpremeditated remark in the Commons; and to the very end of his career he remained apprehensive before making any major speech, and was on edge until he was satisfied that his words had not misfired.[16]

Above all, he was obliged, again like Savrola, to lavish hours

on the detailed construction of the speeches themselves. Whether delivered in the Commons, on the platform or at the microphone, Churchill's orations were, as Arthur Balfour once observed, far from being the 'unpremeditated effusions of a hasty moment'. For he took enormous care 'to weigh well and balance every word which he utters', creating speeches which were formal literary compositions, dictated in full beforehand, lovingly revised and polished, and delivered from a complete text which often included stage directions.[17] As such, they were indeed 'hothouse plants': meticulously constructed set-pieces, carefully planned from beginning to end, with ample documentation to support the case being made, and with the arguments flowing in ordered sequence, until the peroration was finally reached. Inevitably, this process occupied a great deal of Churchill's time. His first major speech in the Commons took six weeks to put together; a forty-five minute oration usually took him between six and eighteen hours to perfect; even during the darkest and busiest days of the Second World War, he was never prepared to shirk or skimp the task of composition; and his last great address in the Commons took twenty hours to draft and structure and polish. Although he sometimes made speeches which were ill-judged or unsuccessful, he rarely made a careless or a slovenly one.[18]

To this extent, Churchill mastered the techniques of speech-writing and speech-making in ways that best compensated for his physical, temperamental and intellectual disadvantages. But, like Savrola yet again, he also fashioned a personal style which was essentially his own. He began by combining the stately, rolling sentences of Gibbon with the sharp antitheses and pungent wit of Macaulay, the two authors he had read so carefully during his days as a soldier in India. Among living orators, he was most indebted to Bourke Cockran, an Irish-American politician out of Tammany Hall, whose best speeches were even more eloquent than those of William Jennings Bryan. The resounding perorations which soon became such a marked feature of Churchill's utterances were modelled on those of the younger Pitt and Gladstone, while for invective and vituperation, there was always the strikingly successful example of his father, Lord Randolph. To this exceptionally heady mixture, Churchill added his own

personal ingredients: detail, humour and deliberate commonplace. The result, as Harold Nicolson noted during the Second World War, was a remarkably arresting 'combination of great flights of oratory with sudden swoops into the intimate and the conversational'. 'Of all his devices,' Nicolson went on, 'it is one that never fails.'[19]

In addition, Churchill was himself a true artist with words. For a self-educated man, no less than for a career politician, his vocabulary was uncommonly large and varied. From the time when he was an otherwise unpromising schoolboy at Harrow, he took an almost sensuous delight in military metaphors, arresting alliterations, polished phrases, apt antitheses and explosive epigrams. His speeches, like his paintings, were full of vivid imagery, sunshine and shadows, and rich, glowing colour. He relished evocative, assertive and often bookish adjectives: 'silent, mournful, abandoned, broken' – his description of Czechoslovakia in the aftermath of the Munich settlement. He loved short, strong, robust nouns: 'blood, toil, tears and sweat' – all he could offer on becoming Prime Minister in 1940. He became the master of the unexpected but apt choice of word, as in his description of the Mississippi as 'inexorable, irresistible, benignant', where the last, unusual adjective breaks the predictable alliterative pattern to great effect.[20] Above all, he was unrivalled among his political contemporaries as a fertile maker of memorable phrases. His remark at the time of the General Strike, 'I decline utterly to be impartial as between the fire brigade and the fire', is one well-known example. And his later description of Russia as being 'a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an engima' is another.[21]

The combined result of such remorseless determination, diligent application and consummate artistry was that Churchill very rapidly acquired the most rhetorical style of any statesman in British history. From department to department, from one crisis to another, from government to opposition and back again, he took his glittering phrases with him, modifying and reworking well-tried word patterns to meet new circumstances. Consider his famous panegyric on the Battle of Britain fighter pilots in September 1940: 'Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed, by so many, to so few' – a sentence of classic