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# MR. CHURCHILL'S PROFESSION

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The Statesman as Author and the Book That  
Defined the "Special Relationship"

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For Mark and Michael, fifty years on ...

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# Prologue

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The Nobel Prize for Literature is the world's greatest accolade for an author. The roll call of recipients salutes many of the literary giants of the twentieth century and in turn makes it likely that more will be written about them as authors – books about books, often piling up by the score or by the hundred. There is one notable exception. Rarely can an author's writings have received less attention than those of the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1953. This particular Nobel laureate's literary achievements have generally received only passing acknowledgement, even though he liked to remind everyone that he had always earned his living by writing. We could call Winston S. Churchill the most famous unknown author of the twentieth century.

This is not because his books were suddenly forgotten after his death in 1965. It is surely because they have long been eclipsed by the author's fame in politics, above all as Britain's wartime prime minister and, alongside Roosevelt and Stalin, as one of the Big Three who reshaped our world in the mid-twentieth century. Churchill's literary career, by contrast, consumed much of his prodigious energy during the four decades before he and Roosevelt met face to face as leaders of their respective countries in August 1941.

In fact, this was not their first meeting. For Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had visited Britain while serving as Assistant Secretary of the Navy (under President Woodrow Wilson) in World War I, certainly remembered meeting Churchill in 1918. It was at a banquet at Gray's Inn, where London barristers meet to dine in the ancient hall; and it is claimed that FDR recollected in later years that he found Churchill 'a stinker' and felt that the British Minister of Munitions was 'lording it all over us'. And what did Churchill recollect? Nothing at all, apparently, as became embarrassingly obvious when the two men next met twenty-three years later, though Churchill made amends in his later volume of memoirs, *The Gathering Storm*, with the brazen claim that, back in 1918, 'I had been struck by his magnificent presence in all his youth and strength.'<sup>2</sup> Thus an embarrassing political lapse was retrospectively amended by the author's well-practised literary artifice.

The name Churchill, it might seem, was simply better known at the time of World War I, whereas the name Roosevelt then usually meant not Franklin but his cousin Theodore, the former president who died in 1919. The possibilities of confusion, though, are not all on one side. There is an intriguing remark in one of FDR's letters in July 1917: 'I am just back from lunch with Winston Churchill. He saw the President yesterday and apparently had a very satisfactory talk.'<sup>3</sup> No, there had not been an earlier meeting that both men had somehow forgotten. The reference was actually to the American author Winston Churchill: no relation, but, born in 1871, only three years senior to his English namesake. He was to live until 1947. Some of his novels, in their original editions, can still be found in second-hand bookstores, especially in North America – often shelved inadvertently in the history and war section. He did not win the Nobel Prize; this book is not about him; it is a salutary tale of the evanescence of fame.

Part One of this book, 'The Two Careers of Winston S. Churchill', comprises two main biographical chapters on his early life. He was first known simply as the son of the late Lord Randolph Churchill, whose brilliant but erratic career as a Tory politician had been cut short, first by his own unforced errors and then by his physical collapse and early death in 1895. Here is the largely political perspective in which his aristocratic heritage is examined in Chapter 1, 'Father's Boy'. Winston's biography of his father (1906), a monument to filial piety, identified the author as the keeper of the Churchill flame – for better or worse. 'I dislike the father and dislike the son' was the reaction of Theodore Roosevelt when he read the book, needlessly adding, 'so I may be prejudiced.'<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the

elder Roosevelt and the younger Churchill, so similar in many superficial ways, were simply too competitive, for public attention and literary recognition alike, to admire each other.

Still in his early twenties, the young Winston had already begun his own literary career. Why and how he did so is the theme of Chapter 2, 'Mother's Boy'. In becoming the author of his fortune Winston was positively encouraged and supported by his American mother, and even the negative impact upon him of her own financial improvidence worked to the same effect, in spurring him on. He was tireless in capitalising on his family connections and his high profile as a controversial war correspondent, determined to get and keep his name before the public. Two books based on his newspaper assignments were published by the time of the author's twenty-fifth birthday (11 November 1899). Moreover, a third was currently appearing in serial form – a novel entitled *Savrola* published in *Macmillan's Magazine* between May and December 1899.

This made for a remarkable literary debut. He wrote later in his memoir *My Early Life* (titled *Roving Commission* in the United States): 'In the Spring of 1899 I became conscious of the fact that there was another Winston Churchill who also wrote books; apparently he wrote novels, and very good novels too, which achieved an enormous circulation in the United States. I received from many quarters congratulations on my skill as a writer of fiction. I thought at first that these were due to belated appreciation of the merits of *Savrola*.'<sup>5</sup>

Hence the tongue-in-cheek formality of the transatlantic correspondence that ensued: 'Mr Winston Churchill presents his compliments to Mr Winston Churchill, and begs to draw his attention to a matter which concerns them both' – namely that the English Churchill proposed to adopt a formal convention: 'In future, to avoid mistakes as far as possible, Mr Winston Churchill has decided to sign all published articles, stories, or other work, "Winston Spencer Churchill", and not "Winston Churchill" as formerly.' This was all very amicably agreed. It was another good gimmick for publicity. When the two men met in Boston in the following year, it made front-page news in the *Boston Herald*: 'Namesakes Meet: Winston Churchills Fast Friends.'<sup>6</sup> The story is that they were duly introduced by a mutual friend – 'Mr Churchill. Mr Churchill' – and took a walk together on Boston Common, in the course of which the English Winston said to the American Winston: 'Why don't you go into politics? I mean to be Prime Minister of England: it would be a great lark if you were President of the United States at the same time.'<sup>7</sup>

The English Churchill duly fulfilled his ambitions as a statesman – after some delay. Moreover throughout his literary career the name that graced his long list of publications was either Winston Spencer Churchill or simply Winston S. Churchill. 'The initial S. is added,' his secretary was still routinely explaining in the 1930s, 'because this is Mr Churchill's distinction from the American author of the same name, whose books appear in England.'<sup>8</sup> It would be agreeable to suppose that the American novelist, whenever he happened to see any new volumes in later years, checked that the middle name or initial had duly appeared, in fulfilment of their youthful contract, thus implicitly acknowledging that *he* was the real Winston Churchill.

Like so much Churchilliana, however, this story seems to have been improved in the telling. A glance at the original editions of his early books will confirm that the English author's name was already given on the title page as Winston Spencer Churchill. Legally, indeed, his family surname was Spencer-Churchill, and had been for over half a century before his own birth. This is the name he answered at school; he complained unavailingly about his low position in the alphabetical roll card under 'S' rather than 'C'. Even *Liberalism and the Social Problem* (1909) – the first of many volumes of political speeches – carries on the title page the full name Winston Spencer Churchill. Possibly he later opted for his middle initial rather than the full form to avoid any impression that he was adopting a hyphenated name in his political career: the more so since his father had made a famous gibe against

upstarts who used double-barrelled names. For in politics Winston was never known as anything but simply Churchill – like his father before him.

It is this career, treading in his father's footsteps in politics, for which Winston S. Churchill is remembered. Not only did he eventually become prime minister but he did so at the most critical moment in his country's history, charged with resisting the relentless Nazi surge through Europe. Thus in May 1940 he faced nothing less than a crisis of national survival. It was, however, one for which he sensed himself peculiarly prepared, as shown implicitly by his demeanour at the time and explicitly by what he later wrote in *The Gathering Storm*: 'I felt as if I were walking with destiny, and that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial.'<sup>9</sup>

These well-known words have usually been interpreted solely with reference to his political career. True, he already had long and varied political experience: entry to the House of Commons at the age of twenty-five, cabinet minister in a Liberal government by the time he was thirty-three, recall to the Lloyd George coalition as Minister of Munitions, five years as Chancellor of the Exchequer in a Conservative government when he was in his early fifties, a return to office at the outbreak of war in 1939 in the same office (First Lord of the Admiralty) that he had held at the outbreak of war in 1914. Hence the sense of inevitability and the legendary message sent to the ships of the Royal Navy: 'Winston is back.' Moreover, the vicissitudes of Churchill's political career, which had seemed terminally blighted in the 1930s, supplied him with a wartime alibi – a clean record of opposition to the policies that had resulted in Hitler's string of triumphs by 1940. The shaping of Churchill's political career indeed seemed providential in retrospect. What is less appreciated is that Churchill's life saw him walking with destiny in another sense, in his parallel career.

Mr Churchill's profession was as an author. This is a story that needs telling with sufficient focus to do it justice. Hence the more detailed narrative in Part Two, 'The Author of his Reputation', which for the first time, fully explores his commitment to writing and his financial dependence on it – something that Churchill himself always acknowledged. 'After all, I am a member of your profession,' he assured one editor in 1945. 'I've never had any money except what my pen has brought me.'<sup>10</sup>

Admittedly, many politicians write their memoirs, not least for money. Churchill did so more than once. His memoirs of World War I, published under the title *The World Crisis*, ran to five volumes. The book was tellingly described by Arthur Balfour, a colleague who knew him well, as 'Winston's brilliant Autobiography, disguised as a history of the universe'.<sup>11</sup> Churchill's later set of war memoirs, *The Second World War*, was to run to six volumes with a similarly expansive ambit: at once an extraordinary achievement in making sense of the course of the hostilities, on all fronts worldwide, while all the time providing a highly personal viewpoint – and, of course, vindication. He remained confident of the verdict of history, as he is recorded as saying at the time, 'because he intends to be one of the historians'.<sup>12</sup> Between the wars he had published *My Early Life* (London, 1930) with well-deserved acclaim for its evocative qualities and its nicely distanced irony in exposition. It crossed the Atlantic as *A Roving Commission* (New York, 1930), though its publisher, Charles Scribner, felt disappointed that, until 1939 at least, it failed to achieve the American sales that it merited.

But Churchill's literary output went far beyond this, in range and scope and quality alike. The authorised edition of his Collected Works runs to thirty-four volumes. The oeuvre is formidable even if we discount a dozen volumes of memoirs, and also his false start as a novelist, and likewise books essentially republishing his journalism. The eight volumes of his great speeches from 1936 to 1945 stand in a unique position, as we shall see later. Memoirs, speeches and journalism aside, Churchill was the author of two major biographies: the double-volume work of his youth, *Lord Randolph*

*Churchill* (1906), and the four volumes – six in Scribner's original American edition – on the first Duke of Marlborough (1933–38). Churchill ultimately became more widely known as the author of *History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, published in four volumes in 1956–58, with enormous success on both sides of the Atlantic. It is a book with a special position in his oeuvre, but its authorship has been little studied.

Why Churchill chose to write on the English-speaking peoples came to seem blatantly obvious, not least to himself. Indeed in 1963 he was to become an honorary citizen of the United States of America. Everyone saw it as fitting that a man already laden with so many tributes should nonetheless have received from President Kennedy this particular recognition. Churchill was now too infirm to attend the ceremony at the White House, but an appropriate message was sent: 'Mr President, your action illuminates the theme of unity of the English-speaking peoples to which I have devoted a large part of my life.'<sup>13</sup>

Yet, in a literal sense, this was only a half-truth. Churchill at nearly ninety could certainly have looked back over half his lifetime – to an auspicious occasion, forty-five years earlier, on American Independence Day, 4 July 1918. It was then that he gave a widely reported speech to an Anglo-American rally at the Albert Hall in London. 'The Declaration of Independence is not only an American document,' Churchill declared. 'It follows on the Magna Charta [*sic*] and the Bill of Rights as the third great title-deed on which the liberties of the English-speaking people are founded.' This was the key passage in his speech, reported as such in *The New York Times* the next day.

This public meeting in 1918 marked the public launch of the English-Speaking Union, of which Churchill was to serve a term as president a few years later. It was not the only Anglo-American organisation active in this era but it quickly became the most prominent, with branches proliferating in both countries. Franklin D. Roosevelt seems to have been an early member. The ESU absorbed a previous body called the Atlantic Union, founded in 1899, at the time of the Spanish-American War supporting American claims over Cuba. The Pilgrims Society, founded in 1902, late in the South African War, correspondingly offered support of the British side. This was essentially a dining club hosting distinguished Anglo-American visitors, initially sponsored by prominent members of the military in both countries.

The South African connection was significant, for it was the hub of British imperialist activity at the turn of the century. It was there that Lord Milner had occupied a pro-consular role, recruiting a talented group of disciples as his 'Kindergarten' in pursuit of a common vision of Empire; and it was there that the plan for the Rhodes scholarships at Oxford University had originated. These recruited able students from the United States as well as the British Empire, many of them going on to prestigious careers on their return home. The scholarships thus fulfilled the vision of Cecil Rhodes who had died in 1902, leaving the terms of his extraordinary last will and testament to fuel 'the union of the English-speaking peoples throughout the world'.<sup>14</sup> Lord Rosebery, a former prime minister and family friend of the Churchills, chaired the Rhodes Trust for its first fifteen years, to be succeeded in 1917 by its real helmsman, Milner, by this time a cabinet colleague of Winston Churchill.

Because institutional and personal ties of this kind are easy to sketch out, a pattern of elite manipulation has sometimes been alleged. Some people point, with intermingled disdain and suspicion, to the emergence of an 'Anglo-American establishment'. Undeniably, there remains a reasonable and widespread assumption that the concept of the English-speaking peoples originated in socially privileged, politically conservative and generally establishment-minded circles; and that it subsequently achieved its peak of influence in the Churchill-Roosevelt era spanning World War II.

But how much of this is actually true? Part Two poses this question in Chapter 3, which documents a rather different pedigree for the concept of the English-speaking peoples. The fact that it emerged from the political left rather than the right, and did so much earlier than we might suppose, may con-



as a surprise but is surely significant. Moreover, there was a long-standing tension between professional Anglo-American ideals of democratic self-government and the maintenance of the British Empire. To many Americans, these were irreconcilable commitments; yet Churchill claimed to be committed to both. The senses in which he was, and was not, an imperialist need more scrutiny in this context, linking themes that were central to his career from the 1890s to the 1940s.

Churchill had many talents and many interests. Thus he called painting a pastime: one that he enjoyed, working hard to perfect his technique, but without any illusion about his lack of professional status or about the intrinsic value of his own paintings, which he would proudly exhibit and sometimes donate to favoured individuals and institutions, but not offer for sale in the art market. Writing, by contrast, was his profession. Already in the 1920s, while he was in cabinet office more often than not, the pursuit of literary contracts was necessary to support his family and their country house at Chartwell, Kent, in the style that an aristocrat thought fitting. We remember Churchill as a world statesman but sometimes also need to remember how the bills were paid at home. The result was to create an overload in his commitments, on which Chapter 4, 'One Author, Two Contracts', uses Churchill's own archive to throw some revealing light.

The pattern of his life changed after 1929 because he was excluded from government office until 1939. During these 'wilderness years', he retreated more often to Chartwell, partly through choice but also through necessity, since it became his 'word factory'. At this time, his parliamentary salary – his earnings as a professional politician – accounted for about 2.5 per cent of his income, compared with his literary earnings no less than thirty times greater. Moreover, it is not just an accountant's view that Churchill's profession was as an author. He regarded himself as a professional writer, and was simultaneously engaged in juggling the competing claims of his literary projects, especially the two big books he had taken on: his biography, *Marlborough*, and his *History of the English-Speaking Peoples*. This is why Chapter 5 is called 'The Struggle on Two Fronts'.

It is closely interconnected with Chapter 6, 'The Historian as Prophet', which examines the making of the *History* as a feat of authorship. The fact that the publication of this work was delayed by almost two decades, and that it later underwent a process of revision by other hands, has masked two crucial facts: that Churchill composed almost all of the original text himself, and that he did so in 1938–39. It is not just hindsight to perceive that these were years that foreshadowed the coming war. Churchill talked as early as 1936 of a 'gathering storm', a phrase later appropriated as the title of the first volume of *The Second World War*. The pages of the *History* are infused with a sense of an impending conflict in which the common destiny of the English-speaking peoples would be put to the test.

Churchill had to put the *History* aside for the duration of World War II, despite all his pre-war efforts to finish it. 'I knew the war was coming,' he subsequently explained to one of his research assistants in 1947, 'and I knew that I should be called to high office, but I also knew that I could only lead the people of our country if I understood how they felt and behaved, so I determined to steep myself in their history.'<sup>15</sup> This claim, like his political claim to have been walking with destiny, cries out for critical scrutiny. But if not the literal truth, it may embody a sort of literary truth, as Chapter 6, 'The Author of Victory', will suggest in examining Churchill's wartime leadership and oratory in the context of his other career.

When this *History* finally appeared, in four substantial volumes (1956–58), it met with enormous success on both sides of the Atlantic, for reasons explored in Chapter 8, 'The Author as Celebrity'. And clearly politics is an inescapable part of the explanation. For Churchill's concept of the English-speaking peoples has a resonance beyond the writing of two thousand years of history. It has also informed the making of history throughout the second half of the twentieth century. The idea was influentially developed in the post-war period in Churchill's famous speech at Fulton, Missouri, 20 March 1946, when he talked of a 'special relationship' between the United States and Great Britain.

Moreover, far from disappearing when Churchill made his own political exit in 1955, the 'special relationship', for which he had pleaded, continued to carry significant political freight through subsequent decades, under Harold Macmillan and Dwight Eisenhower, Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan – right down to the era of Tony Blair and George W. Bush, and beyond.

Churchill has been dead for nearly half a century, during which time his name and his words have often been invoked for rhetorical effect, without paying much attention to context. The origin of the concept of the English-speaking peoples is itself an instructive story, warning us not to assume too much about the provenance of ideas that were only later put to very different ideological uses. The year 1940 indeed remains his great historical moment – a moment when Churchill's two careers opportunely converged, each providing its own kind of 'preparation for this hour and for this trial'.

# PART I

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## *The Two Careers of Winston S. Churchill*

## Father's Boy: Heritage, 1874–97

‘He has a great talent for show off exaggeration and make believe.’

Lord Randolph Churchill on his son Winston, 1893.

It is impossible to understand the political career of Winston Churchill without giving attention to his father. The latter was styled Lord Randolph Churchill, a courtesy title since he was the younger son of a duke. But this aristocratic lineage was no impediment to his seeking a political career in the House of Commons – quite the reverse, for the father as for the son in due course. In Winston’s own account the Churchills, though often wracked by family quarrels, placed great emphasis upon close relations between fathers and sons – ‘both Lord Randolph and his elder brother, throughout lives strongly marked by an attitude of challenge towards men and things, preserved at all times an old-world reverence for their father’.<sup>1</sup> Winston himself duly perpetuated the old-world reverence but got nothing back, craving a kind of supportive intimacy and mutual understanding that his father was unable or unwilling to give.

Lord Randolph, always more of a taker than a giver, had been luckier. He evidently received paternal indulgence of his own transgressions, whether being impertinent to his schoolteachers or breaking other people’s windows; and for Lord Randolph this was simply the beginning of a lifelong habit. At fourteen he was writing from school at Eton to tell his father of how he and other boys had ‘knocked down’ the policemen who were seeking to protect the newly wed Prince and Princess of Wales in nearby Windsor: ‘There was a chain put across the road, but we broke that; several of the *genteel* ladies tried to stop me, but I snapped my fingers in their face and cried “Hurrah!” and “Whar larks!”’ Indeed he was described by a fellow Etonian as ‘very fond of collisions with “cads”’. Winston is our source for such anecdotes, and also for a comment that is all too revealing: ‘Nothing will change him much. Lord Randolph’s letters as a boy are his letters as a man.’<sup>2</sup>

Winston’s letters as a boy tell their own story. As a neglected pupil, sent away just before his eighth birthday to an appalling boarding school at Ascot, he writes home (perhaps under supervision): ‘My dear Papa, I am very happy at school.’ Only after two school years have passed do the parents notice that something is amiss and Winston is sent to a relatively more humane establishment in Brighton where he languishes unvisited. To ‘darling Mama’ he has to point out that if she gives priority to her dinner party in London, she will obviously have to default on attendance at a school play, for which Winston pleads in vain. And to ‘dear Papa’ there is the bleak reproach: ‘You never came to see me on Sunday when you were in Brighton.’<sup>3</sup> Winston’s devoted nanny, Mrs Everest, watched the boy grow up, apparently with a warmer concern for furthering his prospects than in protecting her own interests from the Churchill family’s shabby treatment that she was to receive at the end of her life.

Instead of resenting the callous neglect of his hedonistic parents, Winston idolised them, his father especially. Winston had been eleven years old when Lord Randolph reached the peak of his political career. In August 1886, aged only thirty-seven, he ascended to the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer, the office in which his great Liberal opponent Gladstone had made his own reputation thirty years previously by turning the Treasury into the powerhouse of British government. But whereas Gladstone had seized his chance, fashioning a series of famous budgets, establishing canons of sound public finance that became hallowed throughout the British Empire and beyond, and duly rising to become prime minister four times, Lord Randolph muffed it. By the time of Winston

twelfth birthday at the end of November, his father was already restive in the new Conservative cabinet and before the end of the year he had resigned, before even presenting his first budget.

He never came back. The meteoric career was over. By 1895 he was dead. The ceremonial Chancellor's robes – 'those imposing and expensive robes which seem to assert the opulence which should result from thrift, rather than thrift itself', as Winston described them – were worn on only one formal occasion and subsequently 'kept in tissue paper and camphor' by Lady Randolph until her own death in 1921, when they passed to her son.<sup>4</sup> Thus in 1924 Winston had the satisfaction of bringing the opulent robes out of storage when he fulfilled the ambition of himself becoming Chancellor. He stayed to present five budgets; he did not resign; he served more than twice as long as any of the seven Chancellors who preceded him; the tissue paper was at last thrown away and the smell of camphor was left to evaporate.

There is, of course, no problem in explaining why any of the Churchills went into politics. It was the family business. Winston was born in 1874 at Blenheim Palace, the truly palatial home of the Duke of Marlborough. His grandfather, John Winston Spencer-Churchill, was the 7th Duke, and had sat in the House of Commons as Marquis of Blandford, the courtesy title of the heir to the dukedom. In the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* he is categorised as 'politician', as is the 6th Duke, the 5th Duke, the 4th Duke and the 3rd Duke (there was no 2nd Duke). To describe the 1st Duke of Marlborough, John Churchill (1650–1722), as 'politician and army officer' risks understatement. He was renowned throughout Europe, on a scale later termed Napoleonic, as the victor of the Battles of Ramillies, Oudenarde, Malplaquet and, of course, Blenheim, which saved Vienna from the French and the Bavarians in 1704 and gave its name to the vast stately home erected in rural Oxfordshire. This was provided to the victorious hero under an Act of Parliament of 1706, at public expense, along with a perpetual pension of £5,000 per annum.

The father of the first Duke had borne the name Sir Winston Churchill (c. 1620–1688). This was a source of family pride to his namesake, who later wrote about him at some length in the first volume of his *Marlborough* and even gave him a walk-on part towards the end of the second volume of *History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, quoting with approval the seventeenth-century Sir Winston's prescient vision of Britain's horizons 'extending to those far-distant regions, now become a part of us and growing apace to be the bigger part, in the sunburnt America'.<sup>5</sup> The first Sir Winston's own attempt at authorship, in a work 'still widely extant and universally unread', is treated with evident sympathy, as is his genealogical reconstruction of the Churchill family tree, apparently later cited with respect by Sir Francis Galton whose name became notorious, in the light of twentieth-century adaptations of his doctrines, as the founder of 'eugenics'.<sup>6</sup> Winston Spencer Churchill plainly liked to cultivate the sense that, as the bearer of a famous name, he strode into the twentieth century as the representative of an unbroken line of Churchills.

This is not strictly true. The reasons are implicit in his own full name and due to the fact that there was no 2nd Duke of Marlborough. John Churchill and his Duchess, the redoubtable Sarah, had no surviving male heirs, and special provision was made for the title (and the perpetual pension) to pass through their daughters. Thus on Duke John's death in 1722, his daughter Henrietta, Lady Godolphin, succeeded to the Marlborough title, though estranged from her mother Sarah who sat out much of her twenty-two-year widowhood at Blenheim, completing its construction. Moreover, since Henrietta's son predeceased her, the title passed to a son of a younger daughter of the Marlboroughs, who had married into the Spencers, Earls of Sunderland. (The Spencers are the ancestors of the late twentieth-century Lady Diana and hence of Prince William, the present Duke of Cambridge, who is thus also a direct descendant of Duke John.) The result was that it was one branch of the Spencers who took the Marlborough title and Blenheim Palace – not forgetting the pension.

During most of the century and a half that separates the death of the most famous Duke

Marlborough from the birth of his most famous descendant, the heirs to Blenheim were not called Churchill at all. They had naturally used the family name Spencer and their eldest sons had taken, their courtesy title, the style Earl of Sunderland. Only in 1817 was the Churchill connection reinvented. The family name was changed by Royal Licence to Spencer-Churchill and the courtesy title Marquis of Blandford was likewise revived. Thus the Churchill blood coursing through the veins was duly legitimated and the ancient pride of the family in its great ancestor was reaffirmed. So the story goes.

Genealogy, of course, is roughly one part 'genes' to ten parts 'alogy'. Those who attach great significance to it, among whom many members of the Churchill family can be numbered, might reflect that a lot depends on the forceful impression made by the convention that nomenclature follows the male line. Hence the Spencers' initial opportunity; hence too, perhaps, their later opportunism in 1817. For in an era when reformers were casting a sceptical eye upon the survival of the 'dead hand' in determining property rights and calling the civil list of government expenditure 'Old Corruption', a perpetual pension, as big as the prime minister's salary, which had now passed into a family called Spencer, might seem anomalous and potentially vulnerable. It is likewise possible that, but for this Royal Licence, the British Empire would have faced its finest hour led by a Mr Spencer. Conversely, Galton or no Galton, the genetic endowment that the later war leader shared with his notable predecessor, spanning some eight generations, would be well under 1 per cent – and such trace levels Prince William too has some claim to Churchill blood.

But this is not how the author of *Marlborough* looked at the matter, nor the author of *Lord Randolph Churchill*. In two of his most solidly constructed works, drawing in a thoroughly professional way upon original historical documents, and taking him years to complete, Winston Spencer Churchill was painstakingly asserting his family's pedigree and claiming his heritage.

He was patently a child of his own aristocratic upbringing. This showed even in his radical moments. He told his mother as early as 1897 that he was in favour of the payment of MPs. 'Payment of members (on request)' was how he put it.<sup>7</sup> The implication was that no gentleman would actually make such a request. Payment of parliamentary salaries to MPs was to be introduced in 1911, under pressure from the Labour Party, by a Liberal government in which Winston was currently Home Secretary. The new salary of £400 a year was princely by working-class standards, niggardly by the standards of Winston's own class, hardly likely to alter his lifestyle either way; but he was in any case disqualified from receiving it while holding cabinet office. His ministerial salary of £5,000 a year was another matter. As Lord Randolph had told his wife, when pondering the prospect of a cabinet post in 1886: 'It seems to me we want the 5000 *l.* a year badly.'<sup>8</sup> Politics was an expensive profession to enter in those days and his lifelong problem, as his son Winston well appreciated, was shortage of cash.

At first it seemed that Lord Randolph had solved the problem with his brilliant marriage to Jennie Jerome in April 1874. She was just twenty, the daughter of Leonard Jerome of New York, who had made a fortune on Wall Street. She was no stranger to Europe. Her father had served briefly as American consul in Trieste. At thirteen Jennie went to live in Paris with her mother, initially leaving her errant father in New York, though he rejoined his family later. It was while living in Paris that Jennie met Randolph, at the fashionable Cowes Royal Regatta. She was subsequently to recruit English husbands for her two surviving sisters, whose own families grew up alongside her own two boys, Winston and Jack.

The anglicised, expatriate Jennie was by birth American, if not quite as American as Winston sometimes found it useful to make out. When he accepted the invitation to address a joint session of Congress on 26 December 1941, less than three weeks after Pearl Harbor brought the United States into the war, his opening remarks seem preordained. 'The fact that my American forebears have for s



many generations played their part in the life of the United States,' he duly began, 'and that here I an Englishman, welcomed in your midst, makes the experience one of the most moving and thrilling in my life, which is already long and has not been entirely uneventful.' Then the elevated wish, that his mother ('whose memory I cherish across the vale of years') could have lived to see it, was deployed nicely to set up a characteristic Churchillian descent from straight-faced piety to streetwise wisecrack: 'if my father had been American and my mother British, instead of the other way round, might have got here on my own'. But Churchill's Anglo-American parentage explains only so much. It may help explain why he first visited the United States (very briefly, in transit to Cuba) just before his twenty-first birthday in 1895 – 'This is a very great country my dear Jack,' he assured his young brother.<sup>9</sup> It may be one part of the explanation for why he did so again five years later, but hardly the main reason. For on leaving the United States on 1 February 1901, having pocketed the dollars he could earn by public lectures, Churchill then steered clear of America throughout nearly three decades, the great country and dear mother's memory notwithstanding.

Dollars were much prized by the Churchills. Lord Randolph was admittedly the son of a duke, but only a younger son. And Disraeli's suspicion that the 7th Duke of Marlborough was 'not rich for a Duke' had been confirmed by the sale of the Marlborough gems in 1875. Then the great library was sold, and also the Blenheim enamels. Moreover, the 8th Duke, Lord Randolph's elder brother, on succeeding to the title in 1883, was promptly back in the market offering the best of the Blenheim pictures, Raphaels and Van Dycks alike; and then in 1888 he too married an American heiress ('Duchess Lily'). Like his brother, he was fated to die young, succeeded as 9th Duke in 1892 by his son (and Winston's cousin), called 'Sunny' as a diminutive of his subsidiary title as Earl of Sunderland. Three years later Sunny duly married another New York heiress, Consuelo Vanderbilt. The birth of their own son in 1897 meant that he rather than Winston would later become the 10th Duke of Marlborough.

The love match between Winston's parents needs to be seen in this context. A great name and great heritage generated expectations rather than income for the cadet branch of the family. Little wonder that the 7th Duke, on hearing of Randolph's plans, took such a keen interest in the proposed marriage settlement. Leonard Jerome's speciality in investments was selling short – high risk but immensely profitable while it worked. He liked to talk about how many thousands of dollars he had made on a good day; but not every day on Wall Street was a good day, of course. He had been reunited with his family in Paris after 1870 mainly because he needed to keep one step ahead of a market that had suddenly turned sour on him. But although his investments popped down at just the time that Lord Randolph popped up, Leonard settled £2,000 a year on Jennie – say a hundred and fifty thousand today's values – at a time when the exchange rate was nearly five dollars to a pound.

A good income, then? Not in the hands of the happy couple, for the extravagance of the new Lady Randolph Churchill even exceeded that of Lord Randolph himself. She was a social asset to him, a political asset in his meteoric career, but a financial liability in her own right. Winston's parents first lived in what he describes as a small house in Curzon Street, Mayfair, where even small houses do not come cheap, and they moved a few months later to a larger house, with an imposing entrance and grand staircase, in nearby Charles Street, 'where they continued their gay life on a somewhat more generous scale than their income warranted'.<sup>10</sup> After a brief Irish exile, they had another fashionable house in St James's Place, off Piccadilly, and then one in Connaught Place, overlooking Hyde Park. Here they stayed for nearly ten years, before having to move in, for reasons of economy, with Lord Randolph's widowed mother, 'Duchess Fanny' in Grosvenor Square, Mayfair.

They were thus a glamorous couple. Even Lord Randolph's apprehensions that his life would be short only led him to increase rather than diminish the pace. He latterly became one of the country's leading owners of racehorses, and was lucky with one horse, which, having won ten thousand pounds

in prize money, was sold for seven thousand guineas in 1891. But its owner's luck was running out. Trapped in a wild spiral of self-destruction, he became increasingly reckless not only in his politics but in his personal investments.

The new money, American or otherwise, was needed to prop up all the old pretensions; but it was never enough. Lord Randolph's father had, in the 1870s, sold off land to a branch of the Rothschild family, with their vast resources generated in banking. Nathaniel Rothschild, created first Lord Rothschild in 1885, became a close friend of Lord Randolph and an adviser during his brief Chancellorship. 'Natty' Rothschild had financial interests in Burma, which, given the annexation of Upper Burma by Lord Randolph as Secretary of State for India, raised some eyebrows; and Natty was certainly accommodating about his friend's own heady plunge into speculative investments. In fact Lord Randolph's holdings in South African goldfields, at the time of his death in January 1895, were worth about £70,000 (several millions in today's values). It would be naive, however, to conclude that Lord Randolph's will left his widow well provided; the snag was that the overdraft that he had been allowed by Natty to run up at Rothschilds now stood at nearly £67,000.<sup>11</sup>

Such was Winston's inheritance. But he also inherited a great name and, in particular, a great slogan, as he showed himself keenly aware. 'Lord Randolph did not think of himself as a man, but rather as the responsible trustee and agent of Tory Democracy,' was his noble claim when he came to write his father's biography.<sup>12</sup> What did Tory Democracy mean? What did it mean for Winston as a biographer? And what substance did it have as Winston's political heritage?

At the gates of Blenheim lay the small borough of Woodstock, which retained its ancient right to its own representation in the House of Commons. Its total population was about seven thousand in 1885 compared with a population at that date in Oldham (the Lancashire cotton town that was to be Winston's first parliamentary constituency) of over 150,000, albeit with two MPs. In Birmingham a population of over 400,000 currently elected three Members, notably including Joseph Chamberlain, the undisputed boss of Birmingham politics, whether he was fighting for the Gladstonian Liberal Party or later against it. The MP for Woodstock from 1874 until the parliamentary borough was abolished in the Reform Act of 1885, which introduced criteria of broadly equal representation by population, was Lord Randolph Churchill.

How had the trustee of Tory Democracy fashioned his own career? It might be supposed that a politician committed to the rule of democracy would have seen the obvious case for giving equal weight to the votes cast in Oldham or Birmingham and would have conceded, with whatever nostalgic sentiments, that little Woodstock was a quaint survival from another era; in short, recognised that in the last quarter of the nineteenth century the game was up. Not so Lord Randolph. His set-piece speech across the floor of the 1874 parliament with the Radical MP, Sir Charles Dilke (with whom he was in evident collusion), were to give each of them a high profile, with Woodstock as the shuttlecock. In attacking Chamberlain's proposals to take local government out of the hands of the squirearchy, Lord Randolph made a point of insulting Birmingham – 'Brummagem trash' – while offering 'opposition to this most Radical and democratic measure, this crowning desertion of Tory principles . . .'<sup>13</sup> Lord Randolph thus championed the Woodstock system against the cads with an adroit combination of rhetorical excess and reactionary zeal. What larks!

His son obviously knew better than to resist the claims of democracy. His biography of his father makes no bones about exposing the electoral situation: 'after the delivery of the Manor of New Woodstock to John, first Duke of Marlborough, and the building of Blenheim, the seat practically became the property of the Churchills and its representatives were uniformly the nominees of the reigning Duke'.<sup>14</sup> Woodstock had been nothing more than the family's pocket borough. During the



nineteenth century, the main changes in its representation came when one or other of the junior Churchills fell out with his brother or his father. Otherwise the principle was that, while the Duke of Marlborough sat in the House of Lords representing the landed interest, his eldest son would sit as Lord Blandford in the House of Commons as MP for Woodstock, representing the interests of the people.

One episode remains particularly instructive. In the era after Waterloo when electoral reform came to the fore, eventually bringing the 1832 Reform Act, the Marquis of Blandford had been, true to form, simultaneously the MP for Woodstock and the heir to the 5th Duke. At this moment of political crisis he had successfully persuaded his Tory allies to embarrass the Whig sponsors of reform, not only by resisting their modest proposals to extend the franchise but also – counter-intuitively – by supporting a bigger extension of the county franchise. The stratagem worked; the Whigs were caught out; the vote was granted to tenant farmers on short leases, as well as to freeholders. Moreover, as everyone well knew, these farmers were in practice likely to follow their landlords in a deferential manner, especially since there was to be no secret ballot for another forty years. In short, the future 6th Duke showed how a Tory demagogue could dish the Whigs by a selective adoption of some of the rhetoric of populism and trust in the people. He was Lord Randolph's grandfather, not least in a tactical sense.

In 1874 Lord Randolph's claims to the seat were preferred to those of his elder brother, the current Lord Blandford. Their father and their uncle had quarrelled, in the usual way, about the representation of Woodstock. Their father had prevailed in 1865, being the 7th Duke, and had ousted his own brother instead putting in a Marlborough stooge called Barnett, rightly confident that the electors of Woodstock would truckle, as they did, and were to do again in the election of 1868. Winston's account of the next act, as a further General Election loomed in 1874, is ironically conveyed in *Lord Randolph Churchill*, without serious pretence about the process: 'Mr Barnett now, as it turned out, very conveniently, expressed an earnest wish to relinquish the toils and responsibilities of public life; and the ancient borough, with an imperturbable solemnity and a conservative reverence for the forms which things should be done, was prompt in sending a regular requisition for Lord Randolph's services.'<sup>15</sup>

The author spares us any cant about democracy here. As it happened, Lord Randolph was at the point more interested in getting married – he had fallen for Jennie at Cowes – than in going through the rigmarole of a parliamentary election. But his father held all the cards; his wishes were decisive in both engagements; and Woodstock served as a stepping-stone to the altar – two perfect matches for the price of one. Randolph happily told Jennie of the enthusiasm for his candidature among the farmers – 'They all go as one man.' Little wonder; a landed estate usually voted en bloc. The new factor that threatened to spoil the situation, thanks to Gladstone's Liberal government, was the effect of the Ballot Act. 'People that I think know better than anybody, tell me that it will be very close,' the apprehensive candidate reported to his beloved. 'You see, with the ballot one can tell nothing – one can only trust to promises, and I have no doubt a good many will be broken.'<sup>16</sup> But that was politics as ever, as Lord Randolph quickly learned, and in the event his anxieties were allayed by a solid result, to be repeated in subsequent elections in 1880 and 1885. Such, then, was his apprenticeship as a democratic statesman.

'It seems incredible that a man of such uncertain education should have risen to such heights.' This is not a comment on Lord Randolph but on Winston as prime minister, as seen by a perceptive admirer, Margot Asquith, whose husband gave the essentially self-taught prodigy his first cabinet position in 1908. She had first known Winston in the days when, so she said, he had never heard of Robert Louis Stevenson and had thought Blake was an admiral.<sup>17</sup> This cannot be the exact truth; in *My Early Life* there is an appreciative reference to the nine-year-old Winston's relish in reading *Treasure Island*. But he also makes clear his relative lack of achievement at school, somewhat exaggerating

in retrospect and, above all, avoiding any reproach to Lord Randolph for lack of encouragement. Yet father and son differed less in native intelligence than in the advantages they were given to develop early in life. The father was pampered; the son left to remedy his embarrassing ignorance by late becoming an heroically accomplished autodidact.

Lord Randolph's academic education had ended in disappointment, entirely his own fault. The lazy insouciant Etonian became a lazy, insouciant undergraduate at Oxford. He evidently regarded the place less as a great seat of learning than as a handy outpost for continuing to hunt with the Blenheim Harriers, though at least this made him popular with the farmers among his future constituents. On the basis of this experience, Lord Randolph was to deny his own eldest son – equally wayward, perhaps but surely equally gifted – the possibility of an (expensive) education at Oxford or Cambridge and direct him instead into the army class at Harrow School. 'For years I thought my father with his experience and flair had discerned in me the qualities of military genius,' so Winston wrote, with tongue in cheek, in *My Early Life*. 'But I was told later that he had only come to the conclusion that I was not clever enough to go to the Bar.'<sup>18</sup> Not all sons would have been so magnanimous.

Despite himself, Lord Randolph had clearly benefited from his Oxford education. Although he had done little work for his history and law examinations until too late, he revealed an intellectual potential that might otherwise have secured the First Class Honours that he just missed. In particular he had impressed Mandell Creighton, then his tutor at Merton College, and also Edward Augustus Freeman, one of his examiners: both of them eminent historians in their day. Creighton was a churchman, later a bishop, of conservative temperament, perhaps amenable to the charm of a duke's son; but Freeman was notorious as a democrat and a Gladstonian (as will be seen in Chapter 3), and it was certainly an achievement to win his good opinion. It was Creighton who recognised Lord Randolph's 'marked ability for practical politics early in his career' in that 'he chose his ground of attack, and then took every pains about the form of expression'.<sup>19</sup>

A good memory had been trained by his own reading, choosing for himself what he would read. Lord Randolph chose the Bible, it was not because he shared the conventional Tory reverence for the Church of England – he was 'indifferent about the Church,' claimed his Oxford friend, Lord Rosebery.<sup>20</sup> But Scripture was to provide an adaptable source of sonorous quotation for the platform. It is hardly surprising that R.S. Surtees's comic character, in *Jorrocks, Jaunts and Jollies*, the hero of the hunting field, should have solaced Lord Randolph; and Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, though doubtless quoted less often than *Jorrocks* to the Blenheim Harriers, was to prove as instructive in cynical historical insight as in its 'easy though majestic writing'. Winston was so impressed that his father 'could recite in an extraordinary manner whole pages at a time'.<sup>21</sup> Winston followed this example faithfully when he later came to educate himself as an army officer in India, getting his mother to send out the books he needed. 'Fifty pages of Macaulay and twenty-five of Gibbon every day' was how Winston recorded progress. 'There are only 100 of the latter's 4,000 odd left now.' That would make about 160 solid days' reading in all. As he candidly told Lady Randolph, he felt that his remedial efforts were necessary because 'my mind has never received that polish which for instance Oxford or Cambridge gives'.<sup>22</sup>

Plenty of the MPs recruited from Lord Randolph Churchill's privileged class had less aptitude for politics in those undemanding days. In 1874 the new Member for Woodstock joined a House of Commons where there was a majority Conservative government for the first time in nearly thirty years. Disraeli, who had waited so long, was finally prime minister at seventy; Gladstone resigned the Liberal leadership, apparently now retired at the age of sixty-five. But for an ambitious young aristocrat of twenty-six, the anticipated joys of sitting on the government backbenches soon palled

much as Winston was to discover for himself in the 1900 parliament, while writing *Lord Randolph Churchill*. ‘The Whips do not want speeches, but votes,’ he comments, with fellow feeling. ‘The Ministers regard an oration in their praise or defence as only one degree less tiresome than an attack. The earnest party man becomes a silent drudge, tramping at intervals through lobbies to record his vote and wondering why he came to Westminster at all.’<sup>23</sup>

Lord Randolph, however, was not so much an earnest party man as an untamed party animal. He had just married a glamorous heiress; the wedding had been on 15 April 1874; their first child was born on 30 November. Some thought the interval rather short; the family story was that Winston had simply made a precocious entrance into the world. He later offered a candid view of his parents’ extravagant and frivolous lifestyle. ‘Little else was thought of but enjoyment,’ he admits; ‘and though the members for Woodstock liked discussing politics and took an intelligent interest in affairs, his attendances at the House were fitful and fleeting.’<sup>24</sup> This was actually very different from Winston’s subsequent assiduity in his political ambitions from the moment he entered Parliament: the difference between an amateur who never sustained a proper career and a professional who successfully pursued two.

Democratic commitments are less evident than the social commitments of the aristocratic season. Lord and Lady Randolph were members of a fashionable ‘fast set’ at the very top of London society. It included Lord Randolph’s elder brother, Lord Blandford, and Edward, Prince of Wales. They were known as the Marlborough House set, not because of a direct connection to the Churchills but because Marlborough House, on the Mall, had become a royal residence, currently occupied by the heir to the throne. ‘Bertie’ (as he was known) was notorious for his sexual liaisons, which had initially dismayed his wife, the Danish beauty Alexandra, Princess of Wales; her own increasing deafness and her selective social blindness helped distance her from embarrassment. They were all very close. It is not clear how close Bertie got to Lady Randolph at this stage. Country-house weekends permitted considerable latitude to all parties, so long as discretion was observed among the clique, and so long as a male heir had been duly delivered. When the prince went off on a visit to India in 1875, with what he regarded as inadequate provision from the public purse, Lord Randolph jumped to support his claim for more money with an alacrity that already cast a shadow over his rising reputation in the eyes of Disraeli, who detected signs of a Marlborough House conspiracy. It was not very clever of Lord Randolph to upset the prime minister; but this was only the beginning of the story.

Like many an opera, the plot is complex, with much of the action behind the scenes. Bertie’s companion in India was another mutual friend, Lord Aylesford, who also left his wife behind, and subsequently announced that he intended to sue for divorce because of her conduct in his absence. Here was the Churchill family connection. Lady Aylesford was one of their set; in fact she was currently the mistress of Blandford, who was named by the absent Aylesford as co-respondent; and Blandford wanted to marry her; but since he was already married, he too would need to go to the divorce court – which his father, the Duke of Marlborough (offstage), was determined should not happen to his elder son. So the younger son stepped in to save the situation.

Lord Randolph’s ill-managed intervention was the real disaster. He well knew that Lady Aylesford had had a previous affair with Bertie himself. Moreover, Lord Randolph had the letters to prove it. None of this came as news to Alexandra; she was shocked, however, when Lord Randolph came to her with a threat that the letters would be used in court unless the Aylesford divorce case was dropped. It was. Lord Aylesford was induced to back off; Lady Aylesford’s good name was saved (at least, for the moment); and Lord Blandford was duly thwarted in his plan to marry her, so there was likewise to be no divorce hearing to besmirch the good name of the Churchills (again, at least for the moment). Lord Randolph’s actions have often been represented as a chivalrous, albeit imprudent, defence of his brother; but actually his lovelorn brother was far from pleased. More important, the prince, lingering on his travels, was livid. Not only did he personally drop Lord and Lady Randolph from his circle; o

his return, he took steps to shut them out of London society. Scorned and excluded, they now sought solace in a friendless in a smart Mayfair house that they could not really afford.

From this fate they were snatched away to find solace in Ireland. Winston tells of 'a little, long, low white house with a green verandah and a tiny lawn and garden' where he himself grew up for over three years as a child in Dublin.<sup>25</sup> The one person whom Lord Randolph had pleased in 1876 was his own father; and the duke correspondingly saved the situation by agreeing, albeit reluctantly, to go to troubled Ireland as Lord Lieutenant or Viceroy, with an official residence in the Viceregal Lodge in Dublin. Crucially, he took Lord Randolph with him to Ireland, in effect as his secretary. Goodbye Piccadilly; farewell, Berkeley Square.

Lord Randolph, always a quick learner, naturally developed a better appreciation of the dynamics of Irish politics. It was exactly the period when the Nationalist challenge was being refocused under the leadership of Charles Stewart Parnell, himself a member of the Protestant elite but imposing himself as the imperious leader of his plebeian Catholic followers. He adopted the slogan of a New Departure linking agitation in the country with ruthless tactics of parliamentary obstruction to insist on his objective, Irish Home Rule. 'Parnell was a squire,' Winston's *Lord Randolph Churchill* notes admiringly, 'reared upon the land, with all those qualities of pride, mettle and strength which often spring from the hereditary ownership of land.' Here is a clear enough suggestion that his own class possessed leadership qualities that could be projected in a democratic context. It gives an insight into Winston's own overarching interpretation of Lord Randolph's politics and explains a comment on the enforced Irish interlude: 'Without it he might have wasted a dozen years in the frivolous and expensive pursuits of the silly world of fashion; without it he would probably never have developed popular sympathies or the courage to champion democratic causes.'<sup>26</sup>

True, in his years of exile from Mayfair, Lord Randolph picked up some useful notions for his own new departure. He showed his ability to reinvent himself as a populist politician, ready to use the methods that had served Gladstone so well (and were currently ensuring his return to the Liberal leadership). But Lord Randolph would exploit popular politics as a Tory, for Conservative ends. It was not so much the substance or content of his politics that changed as the tactics – extenuating parliamentary obstruction, for example (much to his father's disapproval). And it was, above all, the rhetoric.

All this served him well on re-entering Westminster politics. After 1880, Gladstone was back in politics; the Conservatives were back in opposition; the Duke of Marlborough was back from Ireland. The member for Woodstock, back in his place in the Commons, found new room for manoeuvre, in a loose alliance with three other backbenchers in the so-called Fourth Party (the Liberals and Conservatives were already facing a third party in Parnell's Irish Nationalists). The Fourth Party was not, of course, actually a party; the label was simply a parliamentary gibe at the degree of tactical independence that Randolph Churchill and three other Tory backbenchers claimed in the dissatisfaction over the ineffectiveness of the official Leader of the Opposition, Sir Stafford Northcote.

The Bradlaugh case, as everyone acknowledged, was the making of the Fourth Party. Charles Bradlaugh was a radical Liberal, elected for the borough of Northampton – about eight times the size of Woodstock – in the General Election of 1880, and again in successive by-elections in 1881, 1882 and 1884, made necessary by his repeated ejection from the House. The problem was that, as an atheist, he could not conscientiously subscribe to the religious form of the parliamentary oath and initially wished to make a secular affirmation instead. Gladstone, a High-Church Anglican himself, gave one of his greatest speeches upholding what he saw as an issue of civil and religious liberty against an outmoded requirement that offered a demoralising incentive for cynical conformity.

When Gladstone sat down, it was Lord Randolph's opportunity. It was he rather than the hapless



Northcote who took up the challenge. From the bench where the Fourth Party sat, he called the supporters of atheism ‘the residuum, the rabble and the scum of the population; the bulk of them a persons to whom all restraint – religious, moral, or legal – is odious and intolerable’.<sup>27</sup> This served to get Bradlaugh ejected (and then re-elected, and re-ejected, and so on). Winston’s *Lord Randolph Churchill* quotes several pages of the speech in the same vein, without, of course, endorsing old Tory sentiments that, after Bradlaugh’s ultimate triumph in seeing the House adopt the option of affirmation, had manifestly been discredited by the time his book was published in 1906. But what he never mentions is the Marlborough perpetual pension.

For Bradlaugh had been no single-issue crusader and never gratuitously paraded his atheism on the public platform. Instead he was a republican and secularist: a populist Gladstonian who made financial retrenchment a key issue, with a consequent attack on the survival of antique sinecures and aristocratic handouts. He had therefore produced a pamphlet on the perpetual pensions charged to the civil list, seizing on the fact that the present Duke of Marlborough, with his ample landed estate, was still receiving, after tax, £4,000 a year from the public purse (say, £300,000 in today’s terms). Lord Randolph, as ever, had sprung to the defence of his family. ‘I shall next Session direct my arguments to his sensitive part,’ Bradlaugh promised in 1880. ‘I shall menace his pocket.’<sup>28</sup> But, of course, he was much inhibited in doing so when the House, inflamed by Randolph Churchill’s pious appeal to the moral majority, refused even to seat the Member for Northampton. This shut him up nicely and made the ongoing Bradlaugh case a means of harassing and embarrassing the Liberal government. But, like father, like son: the family name had to be protected, one way or another, by different methods. Winston often did so by silence and suppression in writing the biography. Aristocratic vested interests, by contrast, were never defended with such noisy populist panache as Lord Randolph displayed in his Fourth Party days.

‘The working classes must have leaders,’ so a friend told Lord Randolph at a moment when his spirit needed reviving. ‘Yes,’ was the reply, ‘but they will not want aristocrats.’<sup>29</sup> Lord Randolph, though self-consciously an aristocrat, was no run-of-the-mill aristocrat. His son was not wrong to see something special in him, and to think that he could himself learn from his father’s example. But filial piety blinded him to crucial limitations. For though Lord Randolph had enough insight to see that the old game was up, he had little idea how to change the game itself. He was undoubtedly quick and clever, with a gift for the right riposte, the cutting remark and the memorable catchphrase. He stepped outside his aristocratic milieu mainly to exploit the sort of tactics that he saw politicians like Chamberlain and Parnell using with apparent success. Each of them, however, had a clear agenda or programme, to be achieved through legislation.

This Lord Randolph lacked. His real model, in mobilising the idiom of democracy, was really Gladstone himself – forty years older – who had been hailed as ‘the People’s William’ once he had emerged as a popular tribune in the 1860s. Public opinion was to be aroused through great oratory, in pursuit of noble ends, of course: a politics of emotion that did not depend on appeals to material self-interest. Gladstone’s strategic aims – ultimately Irish Home Rule – may have had a moral dimension, often infused with a strong respect for nationality. What impressed Lord Randolph more was his tactical and rhetorical mastery.

Hence by the early 1880s, in the Grand Old Man’s heyday, Lord Randolph seized his own opportunity. He cultivated the newspapers, notably *The Times*, which he would tip off about political secrets; and would brief it with advance copy for his platform speeches, to be printed verbatim. Whereas the Liberal Gladstone had done the same, the Conservative Disraeli had scarcely made any platform speeches; here was the novelty. Winston, of course, in an era when such practices had become common, was likewise to make sure that his great oratorical efforts were never wasted.

He obviously envied his father's gift for publicity, emulated it too. With his jaunty air and his protruding eyes, 'Randy' became a cartoonist's dream: his waxed moustache as much his insignia as his son's cigar became later. Winston's relish for the sheer theatre and effrontery of his father's career is obvious. Several of the cartoons printed in *Lord Randolph Churchill*, with the simplification inherent in the art, give a devastatingly clear-sighted view of what his father was up to; and Winston, always unabashed in puncturing pomp with a stab of vulgar insight, must surely have appreciated this. One cartoon from *Punch* in 1883 shows Randolph (labelled 'an aggravating Boy') rowing his own boat right into the course of the two rival, disciplined crews that are approaching. He says: 'In the water again! 'ooray!!'<sup>30</sup>

Through sheer effrontery Lord Randolph made himself into a larger-than-life figure who could not be ignored. He did so, moreover, by publicly squaring up to Gladstone himself, as he had first done over the Bradlaugh case; and did so increasingly in a way that drew blood. 'Gentlemen, we live in an age of advertisement, the age of Holloway's pills, of Colman's mustard, and of Horniman's pure tea.' Lord Randolph told a big meeting at Blackpool in 1884, speaking in a brash seaside resort built on similar insights; 'and the policy of lavish advertisement has been so successful in commerce that the Liberal party, with its usual enterprise, has adapted it to politics. The Prime Minister is the greatest living master of the art of personal political advertisement.'<sup>31</sup> This stung Gladstone – because it was true. And it was likewise true that the GOM now faced a brand-name war with a Tory rival.

Lord Randolph became a master of the sound bite *avant la lettre*. 'Ulster will fight, and Ulster will be right', once uttered, defined the struggle over Irish Home Rule. Gladstone found his intervention in Egypt all too memorably characterised as 'a bondholders' war'; and his continued efforts over Home Rule damned as those of 'an old man in a hurry'. Lord Randolph's own slogans, in his son's admiration, 'spread with spirit-speed all over the country'.<sup>32</sup> The point about a sound bite is that it makes its impact without requiring anything so tedious as explanation. Lord Randolph was ready to steal Gladstone's thunder – Lincoln's thunder too – when he told his Blackpool audience that 'this Tory party of today' had a simple motto: 'Of the people, for the people, by the people'.<sup>33</sup>

Late in a short life, he stepped out of the Woodstock system, which he had defended so passionately. Under the impact of the electoral reforms of the mid-1880s, he had the courage to stand as a Conservative candidate in Chamberlain's stronghold, Birmingham. It was here that he was to unleash some of his most memorable rhetoric, speaking to vast crowds, in a way that no other front-line Tory politician could. Thus in 1884:

'Trust the people' – I have long tried to make that my motto; but I know, and will not conceal, that there are still a few in our party who have that lesson yet to learn and who have yet to understand that the Tory party of to-day is no longer identified with that small and narrow class which is connected with the ownership of land but that its great strength can be found, and must be developed, in our large towns as well as in our country districts. Yes, trust the people.<sup>34</sup>

Also in Birmingham, some four years later, and by then in the political wilderness, Lord Randolph made a further plea for 'the dream of Tory Democracy'. As so often before, he then provided little elaboration about what he meant by the term, in a way that can be termed either tantalising or prudent. 'What is Tory Democracy? Tory democracy is a democracy which supports the Tory party' was virtually all that he left his Birmingham supporters to ponder.<sup>35</sup> This was not a program; it was simply a good election cry.

It was because of his grassroots following among Conservatives in the country that Lord Randolph imposed his claims on his party leaders. In 1885 Conservative electoral gains in the boroughs were often attributed to the apostle of Tory Democracy. So Lord Randolph was now in a strong position which he exploited by refusing cabinet office unless the hapless Northcote was displaced as Leader

the House of Commons. Meanwhile Lord Salisbury, in the House of Lords, now headed a Conservative government in search of a majority. Lord Randolph thus became Secretary of State for India for a few months, during which he added Upper Burma to the Empire. On his last, doomed voyage around the world in 1894, his ambition to see Burma ('which I annexed') was to be achieved just when his health finally collapsed. Historically, this was to prove one annexation too many for the British Raj, which weakened rather than strengthened, as Lord Randolph's son was to become sullenly aware some six years later.

The Home Rule crisis of 1885–86 finally put Lord Randolph in a position to ask for more or less anything he wanted. He did so, he got it, then he threw everything away. Winston's biography was to spend page after page in unveiling and admiring the proposals of the abortive 1887 Budget – without, however, offering any convincing explanation as to why the Chancellor suddenly threw in his hands and, consulting virtually nobody, just went one night with his resignation letter to *The Times* (through which Lady Randolph, when she read the paper next morning, first learned of her husband's action).

The resignation was baffling at the time, and remains so in Winston's later account. It is clear that Lord Randolph was fighting over the defence estimates, looking for economies that were unlikely to be forthcoming from an imperial-minded government. Beyond this, however, he was also plainly looking to broaden his challenge to the way that the government itself was run, inevitably bringing him into a direct personal conflict with Lord Salisbury as prime minister. Much of this was unfocused in terms of specific issues; rather it was symptomatic of a power struggle at the top. In his biography Winston still seems unable to decide whether to endorse his father's claim 'that it is only the sacrifice of a Chancellor of the Exchequer upon the altar of thrift and economy which can rouse the people to take stock of their leaders, their position and their future'. It was actually a very small – and varying – defined – issue for which this alleged martyrdom beckoned; and Winston also undercuts the sacrificial claim with the comment: 'Undoubtedly he expected to prevail.'<sup>36</sup>

Almost in spite of itself, Winston's *Lord Randolph Churchill* provides compelling evidence about the real breach between the prime minister, already master of his cabinet, and his unruly Chancellor. 'I am afraid that it is an idle schoolboy's dream to suppose that Tories can legislate – as I did so stupidly,' Lord Randolph writes, with all the authority of a minister who never legislated in his life. His son then prints at length Lord Salisbury's magisterial reply; and even a few prosaic, unillusioned sentences convey the tone. 'I think the "classes and the dependents of class" are the strongest ingredients in our composition, but we have so to conduct our legislation that we shall give some satisfaction to both classes and masses', the prime minister lectures the impatient young demagogue. 'This is especially difficult with the classes – because all legislation is rather unwelcome to them, tending to disturb a state of things with which they are satisfied. It is evident, therefore, that we must work at less speed and at a lower temperature than our opponents.'<sup>37</sup>

Evident, yes indeed, at least to Lord Salisbury. It may help explain why he was to be so successful in rallying the forces of conservatism for most of the next two decades. It was obviously not evident to Lord Randolph, whose alternative strategy was to outbid the Radicals at their own game in the name of Tory Democracy. Yet it was this failed project that initially captivated the imagination of his loyal son and heir.

Syphilis: this is a distasteful suggestion for a son to introduce into a discussion of the early death of his father. The word does not appear in Winston's *Lord Randolph Churchill*. Admittedly, some warning premonitions are given that all is not well. 'How long will your leadership last,' Lord Rosebery is quoted as asking the newly appointed cabinet minister, aged only thirty-seven, in 1885. 'Six months' is the riposte given ('gaily') by Lord Randolph. 'And after that?' 'Westminster Abbey!' The author simply quotes this exchange, as he likewise quotes solicitous comments from cabinet

colleagues later in the year. ‘Little did they know how short was the span, or at what cost in life and strength the immense exertions of the struggle had been made,’ Winston comments, more than halfway through his second volume. ‘That frail body, driven forward by its nervous energies, had in these last five years been at the utmost strain.’ It would take an alert reader to remember, a mere five hundred pages previously, the passing mention of ‘a long and painful illness’ in 1882, which confined Lord Randolph to his bed for no less than five months. Given these sparse remarks, uninformative where they are not inconsequential, it might come as a surprise, only twenty pages from the end of the biography, to learn of the sudden onset of ‘a very rare and ghastly disease’.<sup>39</sup>

The first allegation in print that it was syphilis came, twenty years after Winston’s biography, from Frank Harris. Now Harris was in a position to know; seven years younger than Lord Randolph, he was a well-connected journalist who had moved in the same demi-monde; and he was later useful to young Winston in getting the author a large advance for his *Lord Randolph Churchill*. Harris was in the know; he knew a good story when he heard it on good authority; and, failing that, he would resort to the well-tried journalistic tradition of making it up or at least embellishing the detail. His autobiography, *My Life and Loves* (first published in Paris in 1926), is thus both a revealing and an unreliable source, and its much-quoted anecdote of Lord Randolph contracting syphilis from a prostitute is as unlikely to be true as the rival version that it was from a maidservant at Blenheim. In both cases, the lower classes are conveniently blamed for an affliction just as likely to have come from Lord Randolph’s promiscuous contacts with women of his own class – as his wife well knew.

Their own sexual relations seem to have ceased in the early 1880s. There was even a rumour that Winston’s younger brother Jack, born in 1880, was not his father’s child. Certainly the couple were barely together by the mid-1880s, and Lady Randolph’s long-running affair with her husband’s friend the diplomat Count Kinsky, was talked about as ‘the Austrian alliance’. Lord Randolph meanwhile was apparently living at the Carlton Club. He was receiving mercury treatment from two doctors, Dr Robson Roose and Dr Thomas Buzzard, who specialised in the treatment of syphilis.<sup>40</sup> So, although we now know more about other causes of neurological disorders, like multiple sclerosis, the presumption seems clear.

As regards the potential impact, less turns on retrospective diagnosis than on what everyone supposed at the time. As Lord Randolph lay dying, the Prince of Wales wanted to know why, not unnaturally. Professional confidentiality disregarded, Dr Buzzard was prevailed upon to supply ‘such information about Lord Randolph Churchill’s condition as I think may be communicated without indiscretion’. He termed it General Paralysis of the Brain. Winston’s biography embroiders this form of words, saying that ‘the numbing fingers of paralysis laid that weary brain to rest’.<sup>41</sup> Whether he knew much more at the time is unclear. In 1966, following his death, his official biographer (his own son, also named Randolph) says of his grandfather that ‘the older members of the family knew that he was suffering from a severe mental disease’; but he also prints a letter from Winston to his mother saying that ‘I asked Dr Roose and he told me everything and showed me the medical reports.’<sup>42</sup> The loyal family biography of Winston, however, does not allude in the text to another, and rather significant, letter from Lady Randolph.

Jennie had become publicly reconciled with her sick husband. Possibly the revelation of his condition had helped. Certainly in Lord Randolph’s years of decline, she stood by him, lived with him, travelled with him. And during her protracted vigil at his deathbed, we find her writing to her sister Leonie with confidential comments that seem fairly conclusive. She simultaneously explains that she and Kinsky have finally parted, on good terms, and then, without a break, admits that ‘Randolph’s condition and my precarious future worries me much more.’ This is written three weeks before his death on 24 January 1895, six months after she had set out with him on a final, nightmarish cruise.



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