

A Review by
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THE WORLD CRISIS, 1915. By the Right Hon. Winston S. Churchill, C. H. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. \$6.50.

MANY are the hearts that are weary tonight, waiting for the war to cease. Everybody who took part in it seems to insist on fighting it over again in post-mortems as acrimonious and futile as those of the bridge table. About the only prominent public man who is not arguing about how the hand was played is M. Poincaré, who is too busy adding up the score.

Mr. Winston Spencer Churchill, among others, is going back over the war and explaining what he did in it, writing about the events of each year a volume almost as long as the year itself. We have here to deal with his history of the year 1915, or rather the things that he did, and were done to him, in that year. This was the year of the Dardanelles, also the year which saw Mr. Churchill put out of the Admiralty, which he had ably managed since 1911, and gently defenestrated via the shock-absorbing Chancellorship of the Duchy of Lancaster. The man in the street may be pardoned for not seeing this event as the awful apocalyptic catastrophe which it seemed to its victim; but there is plenty of interest for the reader in Mr. Churchill's spirited and on the whole very effective defense of his Dardanelles expedition. To the reflective there is a deeper value in the book, for it is one of the most forthright defenses of the amateur spirit ever written, by one of the distinguished amateurs of our time.

Mr. Churchill, to be sure, does not regard himself as an amateur. He is an expert on most subjects, especially military and naval affairs. Yet throughout this volume, dealing with his career as head of the Admiralty and as a member of the War Council even after his demotion, he appears in a dual rôle. He runs with the hare in naval matters, where he argues, and convincingly, that the naval experts usually agreed with him on the Dardanelles business. He hunts with the hounds, however, in dealing with the army, whose Generals persisted during 1915 in losing the war in their own way after Churchill had shown them how to win it.

Mr. Churchill doubtless has a grievance against a public which has always been inclined to underestimate his real and considerable abilities, but for this his own personality is much to blame. He would certainly have gone further had he been born plain John Smith. His whole life has been overshadowed by the fact that he is a Marlborough manqué, gifted with much of the broad vision, the energy and the talent of his eminent ancestor, but lacking just the touch of genius (also, one must add, the aptitude in double dealing) which enabled the great original Churchill to put it over. One cannot help feeling that Mr. Churchill deserves comparison with an even more versatile amateur, of still more exalted lineage, who was on the other side in the late unpleasantness; a gentleman who was also obsessed by his own singular resemblance to a great military ancestor, who knew that he could handle every department better than the dull routinarians who were in charge; who wanted to lay out every campaign, fight every battle; and who chewed his nails in futile despair as he saw other people losing a war which he could have won off-hand if he had been allowed to run it single-handed.

This is perhaps unfair, though a dozen passages in Churchill's book suggest it. After all, the late First Lord of the Admiralty never composed an opera or ventured into biblical criticism. He did a good job in

getting the British Navy ready and having it in hand when the war broke out, and he manages to convince the reader that in so far as the Dardanelles disaster can be blamed on any individuals less eminent than Cliothe, Lachesis and Atropos, it is not on him. His retelling of this ancient epic is interesting enough; but more important is this picture of the conflict between the professional and the amateur mind, in which the rights and wrongs were by no means all on one side. In the Dardanelles affair the conflict is less pronounced, and sheer blundering and had

What was needed, in short, was something which would leave the battered Germans abashed in helpless submission before the majestic superiority of British intellect. And who so expert in the original and sinister touch as Mr. Winston Spencer Churchill, who, as Home Secretary, had shown his preference for manoeuvre over slaughter when he called out the Coldstream Guards and a battery of field artillery to arrest a couple of East End gunmen? Yet in this, as in most of Mr. Churchill's theories and doings, there is more value than is apt to be

You must be bold and violent." The Czar must be put in his place. Unfortunately, Churchill put the letter away overnight to think it over, and the next morning Venizelos had resigned and it was too late.

Observation of a British attack in France, from a point as near the front as could be reached "without incurring unjustifiable risks," leaves our hero with a conviction that Generals knew nothing about the life and hardships of the rank and file. Doubtless this was true, but it merely confirmed Churchill's opinion of the habitual stupidity

of Generals; so, when he resigned from the Cabinet in November, 1915, and went to the front as a Colonel, he was "the bearer of a good gift—the conception of a battle and a victory." A militia Colonel, coming to France to see his first active service, explains to the Commander-in-Chief how he can win the war, and the Commander-in-Chief obtusely ignores him. * * * And yet the idea was, indeed, as its author says, worthy of study; it had in it the germ of the tank battles of 1918. The argument is not all on the side of the professional; nor of the amateur.

Churchill's strictures against the fossilized military mind which could conceive only of throwing masses of men against the enemy's trench lines have a good deal of merit. The war was not won by piecemeal offensives; it was not won purely by a western front campaign. This volume deals with the beginning of the long conflict between westerners and easterners which was never ended until unified command in France, and closer governmental co-operation, enabled the Allies virtually to operate on the basis of the single front, as the Germans had always done. When the lines were broken decisively by the west, it was with tanks and motorized troops, as Churchill had foreseen in 1915. Certainly his visions were those of the amateur; he even suggested, at one time, obliterating the enemy's trenches with steam rollers. Yet the original construction of the tanks would not have been possible without his eager support, and he was not responsible for the haphazard and inefficient tactics by which their first effects were squandered.

Indeed, one is impressed by the fact that Mr. Churchill's viewpoint on the war resembled, in many ways, that of Mr. H. G. Wells. Both had the grand and sweeping vision; both saw that this was a new kind of war; both felt, rightly, that it would be won by novel methods; and both, in their search for novelty, sometimes went rather far afield—Wells, naturally, rather more than Churchill. Wells as a fiction writer was used to bold and cheap experiments; yet after all it was another fiction writer, Colonel Swinton, who alone of officers on active service had the imagination to conceive the practicability and utility of something like the tanks.

So Mr. Churchill's jeers at the Generals who did not want to spare troops for his "side show" at the Dardanelles, when they carelessly threw them away by tens of thousands to win a square mile or so of French territory, have some foundation; also his sighs for the public which always distrusted the side show while it cheered up and hoped for the end of the war every time another French apple orchard was captured. Yet the heat of controversy is apt to lead him into the same error; most notably in dealing with the French offensive in Champagne (supported by the British at Loos) in the Fall of 1915. Churchill heard of this project with natural dismay, for it meant the withholding of reinforcements from his beloved Dardanelles. By that time, when he was out of the Admiralty, he had become a one-day man. The Dardanelles (Continued on Page 14)



N. Y. Times Nov. 4 1925

"Our new heavily armored cars, known as 'tanks,' now brought into action for the first time."

From "Raemaekers' Cartoon History of the War," New York: The Century Company.

luck played a big part. But Mr. Churchill's efforts to tell Kitchener, French and Joffre, not to mention Sir Edward Grey, how to win the war are more entertaining and of more permanent philosophical value.

Churchill's theory of war is expressed on Page 5:

Battles are won by slaughter and manoeuvre. The greater the General, the less he demands in slaughter. * * * There is required for the composition of a great commander not only massive common sense and reasoning power, not only imagination, but also an element of legerdemain, an original and sinister touch, which leaves the enemy puzzled as well as beaten.

discerned by the casual reader who laughs at the author's unhappy manner and does not go beyond. With all his faults, he has and had the open mind. It was open to a good deal which might profitably have been shut out; but it also admitted ideas which did not penetrate certain military skulls till it was almost too late.

So we see the diligent Winston, whether or not things were going well in his own department, tormented by the spectacle of incompetence elsewhere and finally setting out to straighten things up. The Czar forbids Greek participation in the Dardanelles campaign. Churchill writes at once to Sir Edward Grey, beseeching him "not to make a mistake in falling below the level of events.

campaign was his baby, and it is hard to see that he might have occurred among other members of the Government the usual unpopularity of the monomaniac. Churchill promptly told Kitchener that the offensive in France had no chance of success. That is his story, and he is going to stick to it; so he proceeds to say that in the event it obtained only "slight advances of no strategic importance," which is true, and that the German drive against Russia proceeded unchecked, which is not. General von Falkenhayn, who knows more about that offensive than Churchill, has told us that the German Third Army was on the very point of a withdrawal which would have dislocated the whole front when the situation was reversed by the arrival of two army corps brought back from Russia despite the anguished walls of Ludendorff, one of whose grand schemes thereupon collapsed because there were not enough men to carry it out. There was much futile and fat-headed wastage on the western front; but, after all, the war could have been won there, and on that occasion it almost was.

This book, however, is primarily the apology of Churchill, who was looking for the less bloody alternative—something original and sinister. A German flank must be turned; and if there were no flanks on the western front, the dominant sea power must find a flank vulnerable by sea. Lord Fisher wanted to attack through the Baltic. Circumstances never permitted this; and, as Mr. Churchill solemnly adds, it would have been wrong anyway to get the Scandinavian countries into the war without being sure we could protect them against the Germans.

It was the call for help from Russia at the beginning of 1915 which finally decided the British Government to do something at the Dardanelles. The rest of the story, to some degree the story of the disaster between Churchill, who saw it as the original and sinister move, Lord Fisher, who would terrorize the Kaiser as well as knock off the German and a Government, and an army which might have been as strong as often did not seem to be. Churchill's view that the Dardanelles would have ended the war in 1915 with an almost victory, and certainly right, is the view that that year was the last year the war could have been won in either time or space. One must not fast that deadline, it spread over the world and, in its consequences, on into the generation of our grandchildren.

Nobody except the most embittered westerner has ever denied that the general strategic conception of the Dardanelles campaign was sound; and while no one can claim all credit for that conception, Churchill was always the man who saw it large and regarded it as the major operation which it certainly was. Yet it failed, and the story of its failure is a story of an almost unparalleled sequence of bad luck, stupidity and afterthoughts, one of the most tragic documents on the defects of the human mind in all history. Churchill sets forth the fundamental cause of the disaster succinctly. If anything like the force that was eventually expended in dribbles had been concentrated at the beginning, the British would have had Constantinople in a week. But "we always sent two-thirds of what was necessary a month too late."

All or most of this is history, but Mr. Churchill makes a new disclosure (so far as this reviewer's memory serves) in the documents published on pages 517 and following. At the beginning of November, when General Munro, sent out to command at Gallipoli, had reported that there was nothing to do but evacuate, even at the cost of 40,000 casualties, Kitchener suddenly flashed into unexpected fire. His telegram to General Birdwood, on the eve of his own departure to look over the situation at Gallipoli, announced the sudden determination to sweep together all the troops who could be assembled and make a last great effort, in conjunction with the navy, to break through. Admiral Wemyss and the then Commander Keyes had prepared a plan for naval participation which would have obliterated the heart of Nelson, Beatty or Farragut; and what is now known of Turkish weakness at the moment—due largely to the activity of British submarines in cutting the lines of supply—

have succeeded at the eleventh hour. Kitchener grew colder and colder as he traveled eastward, and the cautious de Robeck had no great trouble in arguing him out of it.

A painful story. When the men on the spot wanted to go forward, Whitehall and Downing Street held them back. When the civilian Government was willing to countenance a bold stroke the commanders on the ground were despondent. As one of the minor ironies of the year it may be mentioned that the first four monitors which relieved the battleships in the Dardanelles squadron, after the submarine menace made it undesirable to expose capital ships, were (temporarily) named the General Grant, Admiral Farragut, Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee. Perhaps this was only a delicate compliment to Mr. Schwab, who made their turrets and guns; but the fact that they were later renamed suggests that the British Government was building hopes on the great flaming up of American sentiment after the sinking of the Lusitania, which were not to be fulfilled until the Germans had committed the more heinous offense of breaking a promise made to Mr. Wilson.

One of the conventional reproaches flung at Churchill deals with the Queen Elizabeth, first of the fast super-dreadnoughts armed with 15-inch guns, which played a considerable part in the naval attack on the Straits. It has been charged that he was mystically fascinated by her gun power, and thought she could blow Turkish forts off the map as easily as the heavy German siege guns destroyed the forts at Antwerp. He is at considerable pains to refute this, yet it appears from his own story that there is a good deal of truth in the charge. Only, the discomfiting fact is, Everybody felt mystically. Everybody felt that the Queen Elizabeth a superdreadnought, even such a formidable vessel could hardly have inspired in the popular mind. As it was, the shells falling on the Turkish forts, which could be blown to bits with the destruction of the forts, were considered more powerful than similar shells, and the batteries of the Queen Elizabeth were a gun out of them.

Churchill was anxious, though, to make it clear, that the Queen Elizabeth had forced the Turkish army and army certainly had not some audience. However, had not some audience, the person always had misgivings about moments which offered some chance of success.

Queen Elizabeth was not the only institution which aroused religious awe in the British Ministry. Lord Kitchener produced the same effect. Churchill tells us that the War Cabinet never overruled him and rarely even argued with him. Even so great a naval authority as Fisher, with a powerful hold on the popular imagination, never aroused such a feeling among Ministers and other dignitaries; probably because naval matters were something more or less familiar to the whole British governing class, or at least to actual members of the Government. In dealing with the fleet they were on ground they knew. In military affairs, on the unparalleled scale of this war, the most experienced politicians were no better than Childer Rowland before the Dark Tower, and they clung eagerly to the coat-tails of a man who seemed to know his way around in these strange and ominous regions.

This record may offer some evidence of considerable value to the psychologist who knows how to use historical data obtained in a period of unprecedented stress, which might naturally produce unprecedented nervous reactions. Another problem for the psychologist is afforded by the very curious instances in the Dardanelles story of what may be called, provisionally, the postponed perception. Something or other was imperatively necessary at a given moment. Yet, at that moment, nobody saw it—often, not even Churchill. A few weeks later everybody saw it, and did it; but it was then too late. This happened again and again during the Dardanelles campaign. As read in Churchill's narrative, it suggests a problem in a new and almost untold science, not herd psychology or mass psychology, but the study of the collective reactions of a limited group. The British leaders had a talent for being wrong together. Unfortunately, they were not so prone to be right together.

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