

this force by replacing the trawlers with fast destroyers equipped to sweep mines, and this was in fact completed by April 4. As for the main forts, by the end of the day they had been dominated by the ships. Besides, it was known at the time that the forts were short of ammunition. It seemed clear that the Straits could be passed if the attack were renewed. The ships never again fired another shot, however, and for entirely unrelated reasons.

It will be recalled that Lord Kitchener had supported the naval plan from the first, both because he could not provide an army and because he thought the navy could get through on its own. He had since been persuaded to send the Twenty-ninth Division, among others, to help in case the navy ran into unforeseen difficulties. On March 22, General Sir Ian Hamilton, commander of the British military forces destined for the Dardanelles, and Vice-Admiral de Robeck had a conference aboard the *Queen Elizabeth*. Without consulting the Admiralty, de Robeck decided—whether prompted by Hamilton or not is uncertain—to abandon the purely naval attack in favor of a military operation, even though it would require waiting until all of Hamilton's forces arrived, which would not be until the middle of April!

De Robeck remained convinced he could reach Constantinople. His reason for abandoning the attack was that he was concerned about his supply line once he reached the Sea of Marmara. When the War Council had originally approved the plan it had done so because in the judgment of its members, Constantinople would capitulate as soon as the fleet reached the Sea of Marmara. De Robeck, however, differed with this political decision and thought it would be necessary to keep his ships in hostile waters for an extended period of time. That is to say, Vice-Admiral de Robeck, with the support of General Hamilton, abandoned an operation begun because of political judgments (including the importance of draw-

ing the Balkan powers into the War) regarding the likely consequences of a successful passage. The naval attack, which was approved as much for political as for naval considerations, was abandoned on purely political grounds by a naval officer.

Since no one had argued that the ships could not get through the Straits, and because any delay increased the possibility that Austrian submarines would arrive before the operation was finished, Churchill wanted to order de Robeck to continue with the attack. Unfortunately, Fisher chose this moment to discredit Churchill and to further his own plans for an attack in the north. Now that the admiral on the spot had decided to abandon the operation Fisher absolutely refused to have anything more to do with it, and he did his best both by his resignation and by using his contacts with the Opposition to see Churchill removed from the Admiralty.

Although later observers have often testified to the strength of Asquith's Liberal government at the beginning of the war (his cabinet included Churchill, Lloyd George, Lord Kitchener, and Earl Grey), it is often overlooked that it operated under one important handicap. There had always been a strong element of pacifism in the Liberal Party and this image had to be changed if the country were to feel confident that the Party could win the war. Although Fisher was not appointed First Sea Lord for this reason alone, his presence did help convince people that the Liberal Government meant business. After the navy had abandoned the attack, the army landed and suffered a series of reverses which finally led to a retreat and the abandonment of the attempt to reach Constantinople. While the country was looking for a scapegoat, Fisher resigned, thus focusing attention on Churchill's part in the original naval plan. The Government could ill afford Fisher's resignation at any time, but especially in May 1915 (it was still feeling the effects of

the Shell Shortage scandal). Fisher sent Asquith a list of stipulations which would have to be met if Fisher were to return to the Admiralty. These culminated in the extraordinary demand that he have "complete charge of the war at sea, together with the absolute sole disposition of the fleet and the appointment of all officers of all ranks whatsoever, and absolutely untrammelled sole command of all the sea forces whatsoever." These demands were not met, of course; but with Fisher's urging, Bonar Law, leader of the Conservative Party, insisted upon Churchill's removal from the Admiralty as one of his conditions for a coalition (the only means by which the Liberal Party could stay in power).

Thus Churchill was forced to resign in the face of criticisms by the Conservatives that he had meddled in technical naval strategies and tactics. But it was not Churchill the politician who caused the disaster of the Dardanelles by interfering in professional naval matters. Rather it was Fisher, the sailor, who, using the opportunity given him by de Robeck's disagreement with the political judgment of the War Council, destroyed a sound naval plan. In this case, at least, the historians are right when they complain that politics and strategy were mixed with bad results; but they are right for the wrong reasons. Had the politician governed the admiral, the Dardanelles attack would probably have succeeded. A passage to Russia might have shortened the war by years, and would have given renewed prestige to the Tsarist regime. The Bolsheviks might not have seized power and the totalitarian governments generated by Bolshevism might never have come to dominate the politics of the twentieth century. In this instance, at least, the cause of democracy would have been better served if the art—or science—of war had been left to the politicians. To paraphrase a comment of Churchill's in the Second World War: War is too important to be left to the generals and admirals. □

Philip Vander Elst

The Warrior Churchill-1940

PERHAPS NO FIGURE in recent history has been the object of so much study and commentary as Winston Churchill. One would think therefore that it was impossible to say anything original about the greatest Englishman of the twentieth century, yet that is precisely what Patrick Cosgrave's new book does.

Churchill at War is not a banal biography which merely takes the reader down a mental portrait gallery and invites him to gaze admiringly at a frozen fragment of time before beckoning him on to the next scene. On the contrary, it is a remarkably documented and acute analysis of Churchill as an administrator, general (for that, in effect, he was), and politician during the most crucial period in his life. The greatest merit of Mr. Cosgrave's work is that his analysis of

Book Review

*Churchill at War
Alone, 1939-40 (Vol. 1)*

by Patrick Cosgrave
Collins [English Publisher]

Churchill's mind and character under the stress of war makes constant intellectual demands on the reader: it compels him to appreciate the paramount importance of integrating the exhaustive (and at times, exhausting) data of wartime organization—culled from Cabinet minutes, memoranda, and letters—with the quirks of

individual psychology and the impact made by the actual movement of events. The result is an intelligently constructed puzzle in which the relationships between the bewildering variety of pieces are subjected to a rigorous and coherent scrutiny. The reader finds insights of unusual clarity and good sense on matters which must inevitably remain largely conjectural.

Mr. Cosgrave's account of Churchill's role in the first and most critical phase of the war, weaves the events of 1940 into a backcloth against whose starkness and simplicity the essence of Churchill's genius is most sharply defined.

We are constantly aware of the tension between Churchill's brilliant and sweeping grasp of strategy and his more volatile, though still formidable, command of tacti-

cal detail. His realization that in a conflict between a continental power like Germany and a maritime power like Britain, the latter's central objective had to be one of blockade and containment (ultimately leading to an offensive strategy), combined with an unfortunate tendency toward excessive interference with the disposition of forces by commanders on the spot. Thus Churchill recognized correctly the need to prevent Axis domination of the Mediterranean and North Africa if Britain's trade routes and links with the Dominions were not to be imperiled and her strategy of containment destroyed, but he unjustifiably harassed Wavell to take the offensive when the latter was hampered in his operations by lack of materials and equipment. On the other hand, Churchill's extraordinary capacity for detecting and striking at the enemy's jugular vein—witness his plans to use naval power to cut Germany off from her sources of ore in Scandinavia and to mine German waterways in order to disrupt her internal communications—was prejudiced as much by the procrastination and chronic indecisiveness of his colleagues as by any personal rashness on his part. The fiasco of the Norwegian campaign was principally a re-

flection of Chamberlain's inability to guide his Cabinet and infuse the war machine with a central impetus and a sense of purpose. From the moment Churchill took over and was able to impose his will on the conduct of the war, the beneficial effects were quick to materialize.

At a time when it has become the fashion to criticize Churchill and minimize his personal contribution to victory, Mr. Cosgrave's book reminds us of the indispensable part Churchill played in making the correct decisions at the most critical moments. In a powerful onslaught on the Dowding myth, Mr. Cosgrave shows how important Churchill's opposition to depleting the strength of Fighter Command in Britain (in the vain hope of propping up France) was in saving the Island from invasion. Similarly, the decision to destroy the French navy at Oran rather than let it fall into the hands of the Germans, and to send vital tank reinforcements to the Middle East at a time when Britain herself was in deadly danger, can be very largely attributed to the impact of Churchill's personality, in particular to his ruthlessness and steadfastness of purpose.

Churchill's immense talent for cross-

examination and administration blended with a depth of psychological insight which enabled him both to sense the mood of the nation, and to awaken its pride and patriotism. In addition, Churchill had the ability to select brilliant subordinates and to delegate important responsibilities to them, which happily complemented his awareness of organizational weaknesses and the consequent need for energetic reconstruction. Nowhere was this more apparent than in his appointment of Beaverbrook to overhaul aircraft production and of Bevin to obtain the enthusiastic and unwearying cooperation of organized labor in the common war effort.

Mr. Cosgrave is far from painting an uncritical picture of Churchill the Warlord. Nevertheless, the unmistakable impression left by his book is that of the unfashionable truth that one of the most vital determinants of history is still the personalities of its chief participants. Churchill, describing his own part in the war, ascribed victory to the lionheartedness of the nation. "I had the luck to be called upon to give the roar." It is Mr. Cosgrave's achievement that he demonstrates how self-deprecating that remark was. □

William Kristol

The Victorian Churchill

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS has reissued, in celebration of the one-hundredth anniversary of Winston Churchill's birth, his collection of twenty-five essays entitled *Great Contemporaries*, first published in 1937 and long out of print. Their central theme is the "group of British statesmen who shone at the end of the last century and the beginning of this," and the book serves, Churchill tells us, as a commentary on the vast changes that have taken place in British politics since then. The book also includes essays on nonpolitical personages and on foreign leaders, and could well be read simply for its character sketches, of which Churchill's portrayal of "Leon Trotsky, Alias Bronstein," is perhaps the most famous, and which non-Trotskyite readers of this journal will undoubtedly enjoy.

Yet the book as a whole is not polemical; Churchill's attitude toward most of his—and all of his British—*Great Contemporaries* is sympathetic. The work's dominant tone is one of melancholy. Churchill's portrait of the twilight of aristocratic England leads him to feel, he tells us in his Preface, "how much has changed in our political life," and although "we must all hope" that it is only an illusion that our ancestors were "wonderful giants" compared with us, Churchill seems to believe it is so. Churchill is not at all unaware of the improvements and progress that modern technological development and democratic politics have brought in many spheres, and he is also well aware of the limitations of his *Great Contemporaries*. But his sympathy and admiration for these "Great Men" is

Book Review

Great Contemporaries

by Winston S. Churchill
University of Chicago, \$7.95

evident; he chooses not to consider those men "who are with us today," in 1937, as his contemporaries, but rather those men than whom he was, in fact, "far younger." He allies himself, as it were, not with the political leaders of the thirties but with the leaders of "the old vanishing, and now vanished, oligarchic world which across the centuries had built the might and the freedom of Britain." Churchill says of Roseberry, in one of his most interesting essays, "He was often palpably out of touch with [the modern] environment; perhaps that is no censure upon him."

Part of the achievement of the Victorian age lies in its preserving an essentially aristocratic form of government while encouraging the upward movement of "the men of the new middle class"; the British regime maintained the elevated nature of a regime in which "the aristocratic circles . . . dominated the political scene" and pondered and debated the future of the nation, while allowing "the full fruition of outstanding capacity" of men like Peel, Disraeli, Chamberlain, and F.E. Smith. Yet that age, whose destruction was ensured by World War I, was not entirely golden and was decaying before World War I. Although

"Britain herself was universally envied and accepted as the leader in an advancing and hopeful civilization," the period was marred and warped by the way the Irish question came to dominate British political life, and it was with the Irish question that the great traditions of Parliamentary decorum and reasonableness began to seem irrelevant. The greatness of late nineteenth century England rested in and reinforced a strong feeling of confidence and even a certain restriction of horizon which rendered it incapable of coping with the issues of the modern age, much perhaps as Coriolanus is incapable of adapting to a new social order. This incapacity, however, may reflect as much on the new social order as on those whose horizons are too narrow but perhaps also too high to adapt.

Churchill is reminiscent of Tocqueville in his acceptance of the inevitability of the passing of the old regime and in his simultaneous doubts as to what will replace it. Surely few in modern times have shared with Churchill and Tocqueville so acute an appreciation of both sides of the coin of political change. For example, Churchill maintains, on the one hand, that British trade-unionism "has introduced a narrowing element into our public life," and "has become the main foundation of a socialist political party, which has ruled the State greatly to its disadvantage, and will assuredly do so again." On the other hand, Churchill writes that British trade unions have been on the whole a "stable force" compared with movements on the Continent, that they have brought to the forefront