

Remarks given to
The International Churchill Society Canada
at the Albany Club, Toronto
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by Randolph Churchill



My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen. It is four years since I was last with you in the Great Dominion, as my great-grandfather was wont to call Canada, and I am thrilled this time to have returned with my wife, Catherine. The timing of

this visit could not be better as we are en route to California where, in Long Beach, we will be celebrating the 80th anniversary of the great ocean liner, the *Queen Mary*, who brought hundreds of thousands of refugees to North America, as well as being a great favourite of Churchill's.

This evening I plan to talk about Churchill and Canada but, as this year is the centenary of the great bravery of your sons in the Great War, I will also focus on that time. However, no evening is complete without some Churchill humour so let us take ourselves back in time and let us pretend we are dining with Churchill. As you might have guessed, dinners with Churchill were never quiet affairs. I love one story from Chartwell in the 1950s where my great-grandfather had a visitor who happened to be a Mormon. Churchill offered his visitor a whiskey and soda, and his visitor said: "*May I have water, Sir Winston?*"

Lions drink it.” Churchill said: “Asses drink it too.”
The Mormon said: *“Strong drink rageth and stingeth like a serpent.”* Churchill replied: *“I have long been looking for a drink like that.”*

Churchill was never happier than when engaging in good conversation with great company, as we are this evening, and of course puffing away at his cigar. One guest at Chartwell noted that his cigar was *“going like a steam locomotive on a stiff grade”*. I think amongst us here we all know someone who enjoys a cigar or two. This evening it is also my chance to thank Randy Barbour and his wonderful wife Solveig for giving the lifeblood, energy and Churchillian zest to this Society over so many years. Randy and Solveig, thank you. I will recite a great Churchill cigar story in your honour.

In 1899 Churchill lost his freedom in the Boer War in South Africa and was imprisoned. He

escaped on his 25th birthday and travelled alone over land. Churchill noted that: *“We are all worms, but I do believe that I am a glow worm”* and was most put out that the bounty for capturing him dead or alive was just £25. During his escape he had travelled many miles on foot and had run out of rations in the heat of South Africa. One day at dusk he knocked on a door to seek help and he found the only British subject for many miles around, a Mr. Howard from Lancashire, who let him in. He had to hide Churchill down the mine shaft and I recount in Churchill's own words his relief at his continued liberty:

“A door was opened and I entered the cage. Down we shot into the bowels of the earth. At the bottom of the mine were two Scottish miners with lanterns and a big bundle which afterwards proved to be a mattress and blankets. We walked for

some time through the pitchy labyrinth, with frequent turns, twists, and alterations of level, and finally stopped in a sort of chamber where the air was cool and fresh. Here my guide set down his bundle, and Mr. Howard handed me a couple of candles, a bottle of whisky, and a box of cigars. What more do you need in life!"

Of course, we need our beautiful wives! Sadly the quote about Churchill and Nancy Astor is not thought to be true, when Lady Astor says: *"If I were married to you, I'd put poison in your coffee"*, to which Churchill supposedly retorted: *"If I were married to you, I'd drink it."* Churchill was always gracious to ladies and aged 26 he wrote: *"It is hard, if not impossible, to snub a beautiful woman; they remain beautiful and the rebuke recoils."*

Let me now turn to weightier matters. The Old World owes you much for playing your full part in defending our freedoms and liberties in two world wars. Inverting the lines of your national anthem:

*"Oh Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!"*

That freedom has not been won without sacrifice. In two world wars Canada was a lynch pin. As a Dominion in the Great War she was bound to Britain, but the incredible loyalty of the Canadian people in those and later years is still unsurpassed in all history. Sadly, we are now losing the heroes of the Second World War. Just two years ago the Churchill family lost its matriarch, Lady Soames, Churchill's daughter, your Society's Patron, who herself commanded an anti-aircraft battery in the Second World War. And I am honoured to now carry that mantle as

your Society's Patron. That there is such a Society here, that indeed there are seven such Societies in Canada, including the oldest Churchill Society in the world - that in Edmonton, formed while Churchill was still alive - says much about the legacy of my great-grandfather. More than anything, though, it is the values - Churchill's courage, strength, emotion, steadfastness, determination, his perseverance in the face of adversity, his defiance, his honesty, his generosity, his ever-present good humour and the impact of his oratorical brilliance - that constitute the underpinnings of that legacy.

It was 76 years ago that Churchill delivered one of the great speeches of history in the House of Commons, less than four weeks after becoming Prime Minister. Its most powerful words were: *"We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we*

shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender." And on the same theme, when he visited his old school at Harrow on 29 October 1941: *"Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never, never - in nothing, great or small, large or petty - never give in, except to convictions of honour and good sense."*

That Churchillian defiance has a distinctly Canadian connection. As you well know, in 1942 he delivered his inspirational: *"Some chicken! Some neck!"* speech, and as part of that address, albeit a less well-known part, he said, defiantly:

"The peoples of the British Empire... are a tough and hardy lot. We have not journeyed all this way across the centuries, across the oceans, across the mountains, across the prairies, because we are made of sugar candy..."

We shall never descend to the German and Japanese level, but if anybody likes to play rough we can play rough, too. Hitler and his Nazi gang have sown the wind; let them reap the whirlwind...

The enemies ranged against us, coalesced and combined against us, have asked for total war. Let us make sure they get it."

Then, when he completed that address, to thunderous Parliamentary applause, he strode to the Speaker's office, where 32 year old photographer Yousuf Karsh transformed that verbal Churchillian defiance into the iconic image that has been, and remains, so well-known around the globe. And in September that image will be on tens of millions of British £5 banknotes!

Last year, on VE Day plus 70, it was wonderful for us to be able to show our appreciation to those heroes who won our freedom and who survive today. In two wars, Canadian young men signed up in droves to come to the aid of the 'Mother Country'. As former Prime Minister Mulroney, speaking of Churchill's leadership qualities, pointed out at Blenheim Palace:

"From a population of 11 million, over 1 million Canadians - mostly volunteers - served in uniform. Canada fielded the fourth largest air force and the fifth largest naval fleet in the world. We suffered some 100,000 casualties, half of whom were killed in action."

I will now focus rightly on Canada's heroes who are immortalised for ever for their

extraordinary bravery, determination, courage and remarkable achievement a century ago in Flanders for, without their sacrifice, all would have been lost. Canada gave us her sons so we could all have a better future. I am reminded of Churchill's words about the sacrifice in the Great War:

"We are often tempted to ask ourselves what we have gained by the enormous sacrifice made by those who perished. But this was never the issue with those who marched away. They only saw the light shining clear on the path of duty. They never asked the question 'What shall we gain?' They only asked the question 'Where lies the right?' It is thus that they marched away forever."

Let us remind ourselves of that sacrifice 100 years ago. In 1914 Canada responded to the call to defend the 'Mother Country' and sent the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry composed entirely of ex-service veterans, followed by the 1st Canadian Infantry Division - the first of 4 divisions. In 1915 they were flung into the horror of the German gas attacks during the Second Battle of Ypres, defending St Julien - where the beautiful 'Brooding Soldier' Canadian memorial stands - without gas masks, until a Canadian doctor remembered that ammonia cancels out chlorine and got the men to urinate on their hankies and tie it over their nose and mouth! Many lives were saved that way. That same year, another Canadian doctor, John McCrae, wrote the iconic poem: *In Flanders Fields*. I was moved to see it a few years ago at the University Club in Montreal where the original letter with the poem is framed on the

wall alongside McCrae's medals. The second verse is particularly poignant:

*"We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields."*

It was during the Winter of 1915 and Spring of 1916 that Churchill, commanding the Royal Scots Fusiliers in the line at Plugstreet, near Ypres witnessed the brilliant and incredibly heroic trench raiders under the command of Major General Lipsett. This Spring I revisited Plug Street with the son of Churchill's ADC, Nigel Dewar Gibb, who is no longer a spring chicken and who has just updated his father's book, *With Winston Churchill at the Front*, which had not been re-published since its first release in 1924.

15 September 1916 saw the highly successful Canadian attack at Courcollette in the Battle of the Somme using tanks - designed by Churchill at the Admiralty - as well as the creeping barrage and a Canadian-devised indirect machine gun barrage. 1917 saw the famed capture of Vimy Ridge by Canadians and, towards the end of the Third Battle of Ypres, it was the Canadian Corps under the superb Arthur Currie that captured the Passchendaele ridge and village. 1918 saw the advance to victory spearheaded by the Canadian Corps, which was brought down from Ypres to Amiens in total secrecy - such was their fearsome reputation, wherever they appeared in the line, the enemy knew they were going to be in serious trouble!

We should never forget the bravery of these Canadians. One such young Canadian from Edmonton followed a call to arms and joined the 49th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary

Force. His name was John Kerr and he was the first Canadian Victoria Cross recipient and the only one to survive the war. Born in Nova Scotia in 1887, he and his brother Roland moved west in 1906 and ended up farming in northern Alberta. In 1915 they walked 80 kilometres to catch the train to Edmonton and join the army, leaving a sign on their cabin door that read: *“War is hell, but what is homesteading?”* With heroes like that, fighting for a cause they believed in, no wonder that ultimate victory was ours.

Authors such as Pierre Berton and Sir Martin Gilbert have immortalised Canada’s unsung, as well as better known, heroes. Sir Martin’s book *The Somme* quotes from Field Marshall Haig’s diaries about visiting the Canadian forces. He found them: *“...in the best of spirits, determined to give the Enemy more than they had received in hard knocks from him.”* It was a great sadness last year that Sir Martin died.

He grew up as a child evacuated from the Blitz in London to the heart of your nation. He viewed himself as a chronicler of the 20th century and his 8-volume biography of Churchill remains an unsurpassed gift to future generations.

After the end of the Great War with its unimaginable loss of life, the soldiers thought they had seen the war to end all wars. It was the soldiers themselves who established the *English-Speaking Union* to build a better world. But that world was not to be. Churchill warned time and time again about the dangers that lay ahead, but his pleas were ignored. In one of his most beautiful and powerful passages in *The World Crisis*, his less well-known treatise on the First World War, he reflected on the futility of the world falling again into conflict:

“They sound so very cautious and correct, these deadly words.”

(Churchill was referring to sabre rattling between France and Germany in 1911 at Agadir, in North Africa.) *“Soft, quiet voices purring, courteous, grave, exactly-measured phrases in large peaceful rooms. But with less warning cannons had opened fire and nations had been struck down by this same Germany... It is too foolish, too fantastic to be thought of in the twentieth century. Or is it fire and murder leaping out of darkness at our throats, torpedoes ripping the bellies of half-awakened ships, a sunrise on a vanished naval supremacy, and an island well-guarded hitherto, at last defenceless? No, it is nothing. No one would do such things.*

Civilisation has climbed above such perils...

Are you quite sure? It would be a pity to be wrong. Such a mistake could only be made once - once for all.”

What is clear is that Churchill was determined to avoid a new generation being slaughtered in another world war. He refused to abandon Britain’s historic role as a guarantor of Europe and placed great hope in the League of Nations which had been created after the First World War. That institution, sadly, failed and with the rise of Hitler, we fell into world war for a second time in a generation.

In the 1930s, when relegated to the Wilderness, Churchill warned the British Government and the people to prepare. The

Government did not do so and then, when it was almost too late, they called on him. W.H. Thompson, his long-in-service bodyguard, recounted Churchill's reaction when they returned from the Palace on 10 May 1940, moments after the King had asked Churchill to form a government. Thompson observed to Churchill in the car: *"I only wish that the position had come your way in better times, for you have an enormous task"*. Churchill, of course, reacted. Thompson later described the new Prime Minister's emotional response: *"Tears came into his eyes as he answered gravely: 'God alone knows how great it is. I hope that it is not too late. I am very much afraid that it is. We can only do our best.'"* He certainly did.

My great-grandfather loved Canada. In 1919 he wrote to his wife Clementine: *"Darling, I am greatly attracted to this country. I have made up my mind that if Neville Chamberlain is made*

leader of the Conservative Party I will clear out of politics and see if I cannot make you and the kittens a little more comfortable in Canada before I die." Thank goodness he did not carry out that longing!

Of course, on his visits here there was one serious obstacle that was put before him - temperance, or what Churchill would call: *"A giant game of hunt the slipper"*. At the time Prime Minister Mackenzie King, I understand, had determined not to drink for the duration of the war. However, at the Quebec Conference in December 1941, to make Churchill more at home, he allowed cocktails to be brought in from a neighbouring club. When he asked Churchill what he cared to drink, Churchill replied out of mischief: *"Tomato Juice!"* Mackenzie King later wrote in his diary on 25 November 1947:

“I felt that perhaps in more respects than one he was the greatest man of our time. Not by any means the greatest in any one field but rather in a combination of fields – in aggregate. His great knowledge of history... would cause him to speak with authority, causing other men to realise how little their knowledge and vision really was. The form with which he expressed his views was what gave him his great influence.”

Churchill’s last visit to Canada was in his second term as Prime Minister, in 1954 at the age of 80. His final words to the Canadian people were: *“Canada stands high in influence and authority in the councils of nations. I know you will continue playing your part in keeping bright the shield of freedom and justice.”*

In Churchill’s last speech as Prime Minister he ended with the following words,

which always seem to me to be his Valediction and which bear a message for us all today:

“The day may dawn when fair play, love for one’s fellow men, respect for justice and freedom, will enable tormented generations to march forth serene and triumphant from the hideous epoch in which we have to dwell. Meanwhile, never flinch, never weary, never despair.”

On 30 January last year we commemorated the 50th anniversary of Churchill’s State Funeral and the Churchill family was greatly touched by the huge interest across the world. We travelled on the barge *Havengore*, that had carried Churchill from St. Paul's Cathedral to Waterloo down the Thames, and a crowd of about 40,000 spontaneously lined the

length of the river and covered all the bridges. We all shed a tear that a new generation had not forgotten the sacrifice of that generation. On that day in 1965, 350 million people gathered to see the images from London. The world stood still and the silent and dignified grief of people so clearly marked the end of an era.

Our generation has been bequeathed an opportunity not known to others for over 100 years. We have seen how easy it was to fall into the First World War and then a Second. We owe it to those who paid the ultimate sacrifice that we do not squander our inheritance. Let us be warned that instability, debt and lack of leadership could bring us all to our knees.

I would like to end by paying tribute to our Great Monarch and the Queen of Canada, Elizabeth II. Churchill was so proud to be her first Prime Minister 63 years ago. The Queen and

Prince Philip have shown us, the younger generation, that through endeavour, common purpose and decency we can build a better global family. It does not come easily; it has to be worked at. The work never ends and each new generation needs to come to the mantle and do its part.

In 1955 Churchill as Prime Minister wrote to the Queen: *"Our island no longer holds the same authority of power that it did in the days of Queen Victoria. A vast world towers up around it and after all our victories we could not claim the rank we hold were it not for the respect for our character and good sense and the general admiration not untinged by envy for our institutions and way of life. All this has already grown stronger and more solidly founded during the opening years of the present Reign, and I regard it as the most direct mark of God's favour we have ever received in my long life that the*

*whole structure of our new formed
Commonwealth has been linked and illuminated
by a sparkling presence at its summit."*

Thank you so much for your attention this evening and for your generous welcome to Catherine and me. On behalf of the whole Churchill family, we send our best wishes to your Society and the wonderful work you do in keeping alive the memory of Churchill and our shared and hard-won legacy of freedom.