



A History of the English-Speaking Peoples, 4 Vols

Winston S. Churchill

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A History of the English-Speaking Peoples, 4 Vols Details

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From Reader Review A History of the English-Speaking Peoples, 4 Vols for online ebook

H.W. says

I am reading history lately. This is so I can better foresee if my country is heading towards political dissolution. That's all I'll say about my motivations.

TL;DR: The book succeeds due to Churchill's strong narrative, accessible style and intense focus on political development.

This is not a new book, of course. Originally written in the mid-1950s, after Churchill's time in politics, his four volumes represented a well-researched, comprehensive review of history from pre-Christian Roman times to the eve of the First World War. This version is a single-volume abridgment by Christopher Lee, originally released in 1958.

Given this history was written by a man who was a Anglo chauvinist and full-throttle behind Britain's ambition on the world stage, the tale stops short of any self-criticism regarding Britain's colonial ambitions. Thus, this book's narrative needs to be taken in context with other works. For instance, there is no reflection on the rightness of what Great Britain's leaders did to grasp control in South Africa and India, for instance. He includes brief histories of Canada and Australia as well, and his glossing over the treatment of both lands' original inhabitants is callous to the extreme.

Churchill almost never reflects upon whether exercises of blatant military or political power were 'right'. He does, of course, discuss the political imperatives driving the decisions of the men (mostly) and women who controlled the state at the time. That is his major contribution.

I'm a long-time Anglophile and have read many accounts covering periods of British history. But given how confusing and convoluted was the genesis of Modern Britain from the small kingdoms of rude warriors to a democratic world power, I never had a clear vision of how Britain got from point A to point Z. Churchill gives us that. His mastery of political evolution finally clarifies how a country lurched from 'off with their heads!' religion-dominated tyranny to a more civilized state; he explains how the powers of the kings and queens grew and waned. He puts the great personalities of British politics in context, from their rise, struggle, mastery and fall.

Aaron Crofut says

"It is all true, or it ought to be; and more and better besides."

The day is going to come when I run out of new Winston to read, and that will be a very sad day indeed. I absolutely loved this series. Churchill has a written voice unmatched in the English language, and the reader will struggle less with finishing the 1700 plus pages than he will in putting the book down. I would absolutely recommend this for those homeschooling middle school aged children, as it provides a delightful overview of English and American history up until the start of the 20th Century, with a focus on the rise, evolution, and importance of English institutions. I would also recommend it for adults whose historical gap includes English history, the foundation of American political and social thought.

Cathy DuPont says

Prior to My Self-Imposed Challenge

Guys, applaud, please, I'm getting out of my comfort zone, mysteries. All with Jeff's Yoak's encouragement, and I'll say thanks, Jeff, when I finish. Maybe.

Yes, I'm Happy I Read It and Yes, Happy I Finished the Book

Dedicated to Jeff Yoak who said "Look forward to reading your review."

My effort to step outside my comfort zone due to Jeff's kind remark. My apology for the length, however I can assure you it's not as long as the book!

Sir Winston S. Churchill, who himself made history as Prime Minister of Great Britain twice, twice (1940–45 and 1951–55.) He began the book in 1939 and delivered the book prior to the outbreak of WWII to his publisher with about half a million words. This book was finally published in 1956. However, this book, A History of the English-Speaking Peoples, Volume I, The Birth of Britain, was the one I read and finally, finished.

This book took me 10 days to read. My average read is one to two days, three max but there are a few reasons for taking so long on this great book.

Not quite sure the adjective 'nerd' pertains to me (I'm not going to dismiss it for lack of another word) but I have a difficult time reading history without knowing where the action is taking place. And while I know where England is, of course, Wales, and Scotland and Ireland, I had no idea where Dobnni, Catuvellauni or the town of Durobrivae was/is located during the time that Rome inhabited Great Britain. (Therefore the Latin names.) So I stopped and printed out maps of Britain when it was under the control of the Roman Empire (which owned much of the known world at the time) and, of course, looked on the maps to see where the events were taking place.

When an obscure character was mentioned, I stopped reading, turned on my Kindle and read more about the person and how he/she related to the event happening.

When I came across words that meant nothing to me, not in my vocabulary, I had to stop, and then look up on my Kindle or computer.

Here are some words and definitions unknown to me until now:

- Mail - flexible armor composed of small overlapping metal rings, loops of chain, or scales;
- Assizes -one of the periodic court sessions formerly held in each of the counties of England and Wales for the trial of civil or criminal cases;
- Scutage - a tax paid in lieu of military service in feudal times;
- Ken - to understand; perceive;
- Suzerainty - dominance or power through legal authority.

You get the idea, reading an unfamiliar word, it not making sense in the context of the sentence, then

stopping to look it up and re-read the sentence. It's certainly not the fault of the author, the reader's (my fault) because readers of books such as this, should have some background and knowledge of the subject. In this case, I'm a novice on the history of Britain and that's being very kind. Such a word 'of lesser degree' than novice? If so, that's me on British history; that is, until now.

Thus the main reasons this book took me so long to read because as I've stated in other reviews, is I love the back story, the meaning of words, and the places of events and will not rest until I satisfy my curiosity at that moment.

The book was such an eye opening read for me, bringing together subjects and events I had heard about throughout my life, but didn't 'know' about.

As mentioned above, the book began with Britannia, ruled by the Roman Empire.

A surprise was how hostile, land grabbing for the purpose of stealing jewels and anything of value, and simply cruel, were the Vikings. I had never read much of their conquests until now. And of course, had to stop and print out maps of the travels and conquests of the Vikings all over Europe. Most of us readers have heard of Common Law but until now, didn't know from where it came. It's explained in depth with intermingling of the power of ultimate authority, the King. How the Parliament came to be, the back and forth of powerful earls and lords the resulting wars occurring, both civil and abroad.

And imagine this! It was all about money and power.

At one time Britain inhabited and ruled much of France but with the divine intervention of Joan of Arc, France was once again an independent nation. (Needless to say, printed map of where Joan of Arc lived and traveled to meet the King and had to stop and read more about Joan of Arc on Internet.)

The English Common Law and the Magna Carta both had stand alone chapters knowing the importance of these documents to the basis of the history of law in Britain and ultimately, the United States of America.

Further chapters include the importance of the long bow in warring and how it changed history, and the Black Death and the end of the Feudal Age. (Feudal system - A political and economic system of Europe from the 9th to about the 15th century, based on the holding of all land in fief or fee and the resulting relation of lord to vassal and characterized by homage, legal and military service of tenants, and forfeiture.)

I had heard of the Wars of the Roses, so named because the two Houses of the Plantagenet Dynasties fought among themselves for 30 years, determining what historian is quoted. The House of York (white rose) and House of Lancaster (red rose) warred and murdered hundreds of members of the royalty on both sides with one house taking the kingdom, then the other. Intrigue and deception was the norm of the day. And of course, I had to read more about some of the key players in the long event for control of the Island especially the Earl of Warwick, the 'Kingmaker.'

Eventually, the small remaining area in and around Calais (Burgundian area) in France controlled by Britain was no longer an issue, due in part to the Wars of the Roses. The Earls and Lords were too busy killing each other.

The decades long Wars of the Roses ended with the marriage of Henry VII of the House of York to Elizabeth of the House of the Lancaster thereby creating the House of Tudor with their symbol a red and white rose. It was a marriage made for peace. However, it was not over as historians still debate exactly when the last war was fought.

Fortunately for me I read about ten books on Henry VII, his six wives and society of the period, so the

ending of this book, takes me up to very close to that period of British history.

I really loved the book. And just one reason I loved it so much was because it seemed to bring all these small subjects together that I had heard about, read about, and studied, unfortunately very little, but now I know how they interrelate. That's the bonus for me. I just feel smarter, that's all. Not historian smart, but Cathy smarter. It took enough time, though; I damned well should feel smarter.

Matt says

If 1500 years of British history is a lot to digest in one book - Romans, Vikings, more Vikings, Saxons, Normans, all the way through the 100 Years' War through the ascension of Henry VII.

Churchill's conclusions on everything from the Magna Carta to the accomplishments of reigns of the first English kings are often quite insightful. In other cases - ie: covering 7 adjacent Anglo-Saxon kingdoms from the 6th through 9th centuries, or the constantly evolving succession dramas and blood feuds of the War of the Roses - the very complexity of the history itself makes it difficult to keep track of what is going on.

This work clearly evidences Churchill's interest in military history. I found his reputation as having spun a "great men of history" narrative is partially deserved. I say "partially" because Churchill also strikes me as incredibly cognizant of political and social changes driven by more mundane organizational and administrative efforts of government over the years. The latter certainly makes for a less sexy historical narrative, but Churchill covers it convincingly and with energy.

Take his coverage of Edward I as a case in point. While sparing few grisly details of the rule of "The Hammer of the Scots," aka the bad guy from Braveheart, Churchill also paints a picture of a dedicated administrator who set up a fair local judiciaries to limit baronial oppression and organized Parliament to make it a legitimate legislative body.

Even if the whole work is a bit much, I would recommend the Prologue - which covers the whole arc from Roman Britain to the rise of America as a world power in the 20th century, or Volumes 1-4 of the "history" series - to anyone and everyone willing to go out and pick it up. Winston Churchill knew how to make some rousing prose in his day.

Hannah says

Oh my word, if I could give this series 6 stars I would. It's as good as they come. Outstanding material. Covers British and American history quite well. Churchill's integrity as a historian is made evident in every book in the series, and he's not lacking in a sense of humor or a sense of scene. He keeps his own opinions on the characters to himself--for the most part--but occasionally flashes out in glorious commentary. His remarks on Catherine Howard are interesting--he so rarely comments on the appearance of the ladies :P--and I found his insights into the character of Charles II very satisfying.

David says

In general very informative. Given the vast amount of time and covering The commonwealth etc it was a lot to take in. It was abridged so all of Elizabeth I in 10 pages or so. Therefore you have to already know a lot or allow the significance of things to not really be clear. I felt I learned a lot and Churchill's style was generally readable. I enjoyed parts of it a lot but some of it not at all. Military history details of battles number of cannons horses etc generally not that interesting to me. I'm sure others would appreciate. So I can only give 3 stars.

Brian says

Perhaps one of my all time favorite books. I have reread this several times. If you are a lover of history this is it. If not, you will probably be bored to death. Either way a win-win for the rest of us!

Lu Wang says

I have rarely seen a book of history so deeply personal and analytical at the same time. By reading this 4-volume book, one gets a glimpse of Winston Churchill's intricate thinking pattern. As one of craftiest politicians of the 20th Century, he led a deeply pacifist British public to rise up against the Nazi's; he predicted America's downfall in Vietnam; he also infamously forced America into WWI at the cost of more than one thousand civilian lives aboard RMS Lusitania.

His mastery shines through in this book. He eloquently defended every British action from Burgundy to India, as if every aggression was Britain's manifest destiny. Yet, a profound perspective of history permeates this book. This book is a history of heroes, English-speaking heroes who created the Magna Carta, those who fought and triumphed the Boer War, and those who built the Second Empire at the heel of English defeat in the First. Neither did he hesitate to defend the Victorian decadence of Britain - even the beginning of the end can be polished to shine!

After reading this book, you can't help but wonder what kind of people deserve such a leader- the kind of leader who is relentlessly pragmatic, ruthlessly indifferent to human conditions and yet charismatic enough to save an empire from the cusp of an apocalyptic destruction.

Gerry says

Sir Winston S. Churchill has been rightfully penned as the "Last Lion" (William Manchester) and if this is the case then certainly the "First Lion" would have to be King Henry II (the "Coeur de Lion" is King Richard I). King Henry II legacy is lasting in terms of organization and of the continuance of the British Commonwealth today. The masterpiece of Sir Winston S. Churchill work lays the foundation for the persons who are interested to pursue new interest along old lines – I personally have discovered many topics of interest now and I wish to study deeper, and learn in a fashion that is both eager and willing in the new forthcoming journey of our collective History.

Feel free to share your thoughts on your impressions of this wonderful History.

Volume I: The Birth of Britain (I rate this Volume 5 full stars)

Read: 26 March 2016 to 17 April 2016

Intentionally, I read the first volume slowly as I wanted to ensure I could learn as much as possible. I knew that in this first of four Volumes it would not only set the tone for the remainder of the other three – I wanted to ensure I was able to capture the essence of this important History of a nation that has done more good for mankind than harm when one looks at the accomplishments of structure to locations of the many that took the challenge to accomplish, work, study, and learn long before my own existence came into being. As we see the beginning of the British Nation with the foundation of Julius Caesar in the year 55 BC (699 in the Roman Calendar) we begin the journey of the same great nation that had at best auspicious beginnings. Sir WSC captures the events in prose as none other could in my opinion. This work “A History of the English Speaking Peoples” is also an abridgement to the same. Four volumes have no manner of way of encapsulating all of the history but the highlights and details to these events are placed in context to the love of one’s country. This clearly comes across in Volume I. His accounting of Battle of Hastings in 1066 was a wonderful display of poetic respect. The chapter on the Blackdeath exposes how after the plague had concluded that the upper classes were in need of serfs to work the land – the serfs attempted to negotiate their position for land, money, and in some cases both as the human race had been decimated not by war; but, by disease – an interesting history to itself when normally the economic value of human life was clearly a point lost to the times. This begins an awakening of working class peoples to see the value to what they brought (and continue to bring in the modern age to a different sort of degree.) His accounting of my favorite battle “Agincourt” with King Henry V was wonderful read for me personally. King Henry V is of course the first King after Agincourt to send correspondence in English – acknowledging this at the time was quite a dare and the English from French becomes the main language of England – the lower classes of people of the time were already speaking English regularly. My personal opinion of King Henry V was only solidified in this accounting – unfortunately for history King Henry V died earlier than what one would have hoped. Joan of Arc gets more than an honorable prose in a chapter dedicated to her, King Henry VI was merely lucky to have the strength of his Queen. Sir WSC provided a 2016 laugh from me out loud as I read his description of “old crooked back” (King Richard III) which was the last chapter of Volume I.

Volume II: The New World (I rate this Volume 5 full stars)

Read: 17 April 2016 to 25 April 2016

In brilliant fashion Sir WSC begins Chapter I (“The Round World”) of Book IV; and, within Volume II entitled “The New World”. In the first chapter (as one would hope) we read of the fact in point that though Britain was then-as-is-now an island unto herself that the world around her was not laying idle nor still. The sixteenth century is as we know the 100 years that lay in the 1500’s; it seems to historians with a global perspective that the “sixteenth century” more or less begins in 1485 – unbeknownst to the persons who lived during that time frame. The legacy of King Henry VIII continues of course here in this early part of the book. We read of Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth I, the torment of the peasants, the rising of the middle class and a most interesting chapter on “The Monasteries”. The consequence of the monasteries is of course one that provides revenue for a Kingdom suffering from not enough money. The chapter on the Protestant Reformation is more correctly entitled “The Protestant Struggle”. Within this layer would be the future seeds (in my opinion) of the confusion that modern day people have with genealogical studies of their ancestors. By the time we get to the 1600’s and to the years of the late 1800’s people will find (as they currently do) relatives of their past switching between Protestant and Catholic Churches in the many registers that have been maintained – the reason is simple; who ever could provide the food to middle and peasant classes could sway their faith in order that the same could be able to eat. It’s not rocket science – but is difficult at times for persons researching their ancestry. The “Spanish Armada” chapter was brilliantly described to facts of points and historical documents of previous centuries works that only a Churchillian prose could present for the masses. There are many topics in this Volume II that lays the groundwork for further reading. What one

needs to keep in mind during the 21st century in reading this detail of heads being lopped off and people being disemboweled for reasons far away from our existence is that this was not the era of political parties – this would evolve much later; however, this was the time of patronage and clientage. In order to maintain order in semi-dissolved feudal societies this form of control (though brutal by today’s standards and even standards of the 18th century and beyond) was a necessary component to one’s existence as a ruler of potentially war faction nations within ones’ realm. Queen Elizabeth I was no different for her time; make no mistake this Queen was stronger than any King could have been following the death of King Henry VIII. William Shakespeare was certainly an admirer; his plays and many forms of literature prove this and have stood the test of time like no other of his era; though some may come close – no author has outlasted his popularity and he was by this American’s standard an excellent representative of his era to History. The English Civil War was devastating and Oliver Cromwell certainly maintained power – seems he “got his due” a few years after his death when his skeletal remains were dug up and treated with the most disrespect. Prior to this however was the brilliance in the plan of King James I and the creation of the full English reading bible – for the time and with no copy ability and next to nothing of a British Postal Service; the Committees located at Oxford, Cambridge, and Westminster (comprised of 50+ scholars and divines. Directions were clear, tendentious rendition and interpretation prevented and each committee then had to submit their section to the next committee for review. In 3 years-time the work was finished when the supervisory committee then reviewed the final draft version – 12 persons on this committee completed the task within 9 months-time. This is truly King James I lasting legacy – a thorough, complete, and unbiased edition in English of the Holy Scriptures. This volume ends with King James II as the third volume then begins with William of Orange (King William III and the grantor name of the University of William and Mary in Williamsburg Virginia – the former Capitol of the British Colonies pre-Revolutionary times.)

Volume III: The Age of Revolution (I rate this Volume 5 full stars)

Read: 25 April 2016 to 29 April 2016

This volume begins with King William III and Queen Mary II; a tumultuous left over location of the world following the removal of King James II. At this juncture it has become clear that the mixture of Church and State was a mixture that everyone knew at the time was lethal; however, the anger of Parliament attempting to create the crown as a figure head is all too apparent. Religious strife continues at this point – for most Americans this can be a confusing matter within the Volumes; however, one just need to read the words carefully – research on the side and understand fully the implications – it isn’t that difficult but one has to be committed to do such a thing. In this Volume III we read in addition to William and Mary; that of Queen Anne, the Duke of Marlborough, and the ill-fated investment/opportunists of the 1720 South Sea Company that had promised (and outbid the Bank of England) to wipe away the National Debt of the time. The National Debt of Great Britain was £30,000,000. Additionally, small time scoundrels presented investment idiocies such as improving the British jackasses by breeding them with those imported from Spain; one advantage taker had even gone so far (and succeeded) in advertising “...a company for carrying on an undertaking of such GREAT ADVANTAGE, but no one is to know what it is...” or so the advertisement read in the London Times. Sir WSC described this person as an “amiable swindler” and the scoundrel had so many investments made to him personally in advance that when he collected £2,000 (quite a some in the year 1720) he “prudently absconded.” I couldn’t stop laughing for quite some manner of time when reading this – Churchill humor is something that quietly hits you after you have read the words – this description is one of those laughing moments. When the South Sea Company fails the previous greed of 462 Members of the House of Commons and 162 of their peers are among the many ruined; greed and fear then as now knows no boundaries of moral compass directions. Others committed suicide, some were sought by pitch fork and the Post-Master General took poison. This bubble had burst in 1721; enter the financial genius of his time Sir Robert Walpole, who would become Britain’s first PM.

In Volume III we enter into the unrest to the 13 Colonies; unrest that had previously lay within embers smoldering until kindle had been placed to the stove. The Revolution of 1688 and later a war with Spain had forced a different focus upon Britain an ocean away. All the while, it was apparent that Colonists in America

were learning how to thrive in a vast untamed wilderness with Native Americans or First Nation civilizations. It is a rather fascinating read to see the interpretations of Sir WSC. He gives credit where it is due of course; however, he introduces us to the concerns of the Parliament and King George III. Another fascinating point is that by the time we move from King George I who could speak no English to his grandson George III we are witness Hanoverian methodology of the throne that is never quite authentic “British”. A smugness of sorts seems to have existed – this is my American interpretation of course and is not designed to infuriate national feelings of any sort – these are after all Sir WSC’s words that I interpret.

Moving from the American Revolution the entrance of the French Revolution is no less important. The impact of the French Revolution on the European Continent was in reflection for the English the same sort of situation with their own Revolution of 1688. The differences between the two essentially were the foundations of reason and the structure within the political bodies which remained for the citizens of each nation. The French essentially ran amok of the complete political foundation of structure and there was a very dark period known as “the Terror” from the outset to the death of King Louis XVI 21 January 1793. For the likes of Robespierre there is no comparison to the English version of Cromwell. In his book “Reflections of the French Revolution” by Edmund Burke – he reflects upon the differences of the English and French Revolutions. Specifically, Burke states that the convulsion in France was not a dignified, orderly change, carried out with due regard for tradition, like the English Revolution of 1688. It was however a tail wind from the recent American Revolution – implemented much differently as well. When the storm of the Bastille Gate was crashed there were only 7 prisoners at the time and 1 deemed as a “lunatic.” Moving onto the history of Napoleon and the naval wars that ensued I came away with a new form of admiration made greater for Admiral Horatio Nelson and Sir Arthur Wellesley. This book ends with the last three chapters; one of which is entitled “Washington, Adams, and Jefferson”, “The War of 1812”; and, the last chapter of book 9, chapter 24 entitled “Elba and Waterloo.”

Volume IV: The Great Democracies (I rate this Volume 5 full stars)
Read: 29 April 2016 to 2 May 2016

This volume begins with the end of hostilities of the war of 1812 and the resulting effects of the close of the Napoleonic Wars. Whigs and Tory’s are continuously at each other throats and we read of many good intentions of the British Empire with Prime Ministers all who forget to update the Army following the battle of Waterloo. We enter the Crimean War; a war with the French and the goal of one day taking the Russian Frontier. For their part, the Cossacks themselves and the Tsar forget the methodology employed that helped to kick Napoleon out of Moscow and so there are many sad stories that ensue – only the French seem to have updated their weaponry in the between years of war and Army in these years that followed Waterloo. Enter Queen Victoria, a woman one can tell by the words of Sir WSC that are held in high respect and regard for the Queen that did so much for her Empire.

Sir WSC breaks for a spell – but maintains a link to the History of English Speaking Peoples by providing occasional references to what other matters are going on globally at the time. First, he describes the vast amount of immigrants that left the British Empire for Canada, to include the 100,00+ Loyalists that did not wish to live under the new Republic of the United States. Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Québec, Ontario, the Canadian Pacific Railroad development and the desire of Canadians to ensure the encroachment of Americans to the locations of modern day Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan (the Canadian bread basket for oil, wheat, oats, and corn) were prevented from being overtaken. This matter gets resolved peacefully and the 49th Parallel is assured – America wanted the 54th. The establishment of British Columbia is the Province connected by railway that assists this international agreement. Churchill then goes on to describe the South African immigration and frontier, and from here he pays respectful history of fact to the foundation of Australia, New Zealand, and the island state of Tasmania. At this point reading through this fascinating history – we move back to the American frontier. The Gold Rush of 1849 in California drew one interesting Australian to the California coast. He notices that the rock formations of where gold is mined and discovered is similar to the formations in Australia. Ironically, and with great knowledge – the man

returns to Australia with this knowledge and discovers gold in the State of Western Australia in 1851.

Enter the American Civil War – a whole book inside of Volume IV is dedicated to this important part of history. One can tell by reading Sir WSC's words that he held a deep respect for the ruggedness of Andrew Jackson and that of Sam Houston. From his very experienced position at this stage in life to which he writes of the American Civil War – he ties in historical events in a very balanced fashion; incorporating history of John Quincy Adams, the Monroe Doctrine, the burning embers of North vs. South in business, and he incorporates the considerations of the American Western Frontier where politically (following the Mexican/American war of 1846-48) the impact of concerns as to whether the war that looms within the nation will be West and North vs. South or West and South vs. North. This was a very real prospect for the time and one that Sir WSC is neutral in his very British form of writing. I can only speculate that this Volume IV and specifically Book XI entitled "The Great Republic" is one that most Americans will have likely enjoyed the most. For me personally it was a re-introduction of many American Civil War books I have read over the years; however, I must admit in terms of the big picture view (and with some form of prejudice) Sir WSC's work on this topic is the best I have read to date. The British and European view of our internal hostility for the time during the reign of Queen Victoria was in fact refreshing and unbiased.

Following the descriptions of the War Between the American States – Sir WSC moves back into the European realm. The Franco-Prussian War takes center stage – what was the missing link in the Prussian success was the quiet advancements of Krupp Armaments – made during a time where Prussian and German interests were rather scant from the scene. This has a profound effect in the later hatred of the First World War where the Economic Consequences of the Peace were forever entwined with what had occurred in 1871. This said, it was later that the Treaty of Stefano would prevent war in Europe for some 36 years; however, this too led the path down the road to the Great War. What entails from within are quiet developments of alliances following this treaty; it was also the result of the same. As I read this section near the end of Volume IV I acknowledge that I possess the benefit of arm chair leisure reading; these events occurred 140+ years ago those of us interested in History for the mere fact that it "exists" know the outcome. Disraeli and Gladstone as PM's had their moments in the sun; Disraeli of course attempted to get to the spot of the sun much longer in my opinion. They both had their good points; but, Disraeli was the more preferred between the two when it came to Queen Victoria.

Sir WSC then moves briefly from this period of time in Europe back to America – he writes of "Reconstruction". American schools can take a note from the history as provided as in depth and as knowledgeable as he was on our internal affairs.

Moving from American Reconstruction – we read of the Boer War; the first event that brought Churchill to the forefront of activity – it is this same chapter (and final chapter) to which we learn of the love the United Kingdom had for her majestic Queen Victoria – an era concluded with her death and as Sir WSC is compiling these words in the late 1950s he is clearly attempting to write for future generations the era to which he became a man and to which the British Empire had struggled to gain throughout all of her existence. Interested parties such as myself and for others who take keen interest to History must be able going forward to reflect upon these words, this History, this love of one's nation, and in particular this extraordinary man and show to future generations what the struggles of others before us have achieved so that we may move forward.

In the closing paragraph of Volume IV, Book XII, Chapter XXI Sir Winston Churchill writes: "Here is set out a long story of the English-speaking peoples. They are now to become Allies in terrible but victorious wars. And that is not the end. Another phase looms before us, in which alliance will once more be tested and in which its formidable virtues may be to preserve the Peace and Freedom. The future is unknowable, but the past should give us hope. Nor should we seek to define precisely the exact terms of ultimate union."

Alexander Kerensky says

It is useful to remember that books tell you as much about their author as they do about their subject; indeed, that's sometimes the point of reading them. And these four were penned by none other than Winston S. Churchill -- soldier, painter, politician, historian, war leader, and often voted the greatest Briton -- or even Anglo -- of the entire second millennium. "We are all worms", he once said, "but I do believe that I am a glow-worm".

Churchill wrote prolifically in his life, whether articles, speeches, novels or histories, and often published expansive multi-volume goliaths. There was the four-volume biography of Marlborough, the four-volume history/memoir of the First World War, the six-volume history/memoir of the Second World War, and now this, begun to make some cash in his "wilderness years" of the 1930s and picked up again when he was in his late seventies and eighties, two prime-ministerial terms and one very big war (with its accompanying memoirs) later. He impressed his personality firmly into everything he did, so it might be prudent to ask if there's anything we can learn about the Grand Old Man from his four-volume, twelve-book, 102-chapter account of the entirety of Anglo history.

Firstly, he's a whig historian. For Churchill *The History of the English-Speaking Peoples* is a story of unstoppable progress towards a set destiny of world hegemony and endless greatness. He makes much of *habeus corpus*, of the spreading out of enlightened British folk across the globe, he recites all of the various constitutional debates that led to English Common Law, and he lovingly charts the growth of Parliament as an institution. It is very triumphalist, and that will bring him censure from more modern historians who aren't so keen on shouting about the British war record and the fact we haven't had a revolution since 1688 and that Anglos have controlled the world since at least 1815. I think they're too pessimistic. It's certainly true that not everything the British have done is worthy of praise, and making excuses for some of the Empire's handiwork is downright shameful to attempt, but I don't think it can be seriously denied that the world is a better place for it, in the end, and the new-founded countries Britain left behind are certainly a proud legacy. Churchill, refreshingly, knows this.

On the other hand, I admit some of the things he wrote did make my modern eyes wince. The warning signs were there from the very second chapter, the account of the Bouadicea rebellion:

"No less", according to Tacitus, "than seventy thousand citizens and allies were slain" in these three cities. . . . This is probably the most horrible episode which our Island has known. We see the crude and corrupt beginnings of a higher civilisation blotted out by the ferocious uprisings of the native tribes. Still, it is the primary right of men to die and kill for the land they live in, and to punish with exceptional severity all members of their own race who have warmed their hands at the invaders' hearth.

Well, that's nice. It really says it all, doesn't it? The stupid British natives were too bloodthirsty and resisted the loving embrace of the civilised empire come to invade them, but it's OK because everyone has the right to butcher race traitors. Of the Tasmanian Genocide off Australia he mentions only that the native tribes met a "tragic" end and "were extinct by the beginning of the twentieth century". He can't quite bring himself to say they were exterminated by the British in the only successful genocide in history. In fact, of the entire period of colonialism he remarks:

The nineteenth century was a period of purposeful, progressive, enlightened, tolerant civilisation. The stir in the world arising from the French Revolution, added to the Industrial Revolution unleashed by the steam-engine and many key-inventions, led inexorably to the

democratic age. . . . At the same time the new British Empire or Commonwealth of Nations was based upon government by consent, and the voluntary association of autonomous states under the Crown.

Suffice to say, the fourth volume in particular is stuffed full of some -- how can I put it? -- outdated opinions. As a final example, when discussing early trade unionism in America Churchill notes that the organisations attracted "a host of fanatics ranging from suffragists to single-taxers".

But that does not make him an unworthy guide through history. In fact, I assert some of the most appealing parts of the narrative are Winston's evaluations of the different characters and events, which he can be relied upon to deliver as they exit the scene. All of these are entertaining and some are downright enlightening. He points out that Charles I, for instance, had genuine qualities as a general, considering he ruled a country that had known seventy years of peace, while Oliver Cromwell is censured because he was the only military dictator England has ever known, ruling with no popular consent by force alone, and parallels are drawn with the twentieth century that I wouldn't have thought of myself. Burr is nothing more than an "evil genius". He has implied sympathy for the Confederacy in the U.S. Civil War, but he does a decent enough job justifying it and clearly isn't a fan of slavery. He also gives a much-needed new perspective on the Indian Mutiny: the British were not the only belligerents who shamed themselves in 1857. I was genuinely interested to see how he would take the U.S. Constitution, but somehow he manages to convincingly portray it as a *restatement* of British Common Law principles:

At first sight this authoritative document presents a sharp contrast with the store of traditions and precedents that make up the unwritten Constitution of Britain. Yet behind it lay no revolutionary theory. It was based not upon the challenging writings of the French philosophers which were soon to set Europe ablaze, but on Old English doctrine, freshly formulated to meet an urgent American need. The Constitution was a reaffirmation of faith in the principles painfully evolved over the centuries by the English-speaking peoples. It enshrined long-standing English ideas of justice and liberty, henceforth to be regarded on the other side of the Atlantic as basically American.

The second thing we learn is that Churchill *really* likes kings, queens, prime ministers, presidents and wars. He writes about little else. When these books came out Clement Attlee quipped that a better name for them would be *Things in History that Interested Me*, and he's probably right. Whether or not this represents a comprehensive history probably depends on how one defines history. If one seeks an account of British government, of monarchs, of conflicts, of strife in the corridors of power, of relations with other countries, this might be the next *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. If one wants to know how your average peasant was doing, it's worthless. The Industrial Revolution is given a paltry few pages, and the development of society prior to that is so overlooked that I didn't even realise muskets had been invented until Marlborough's troops are described as "red". Great British culture fares little better. John Locke is mentioned only in connection to the Earl Of Shaftesbury, a prominent politician of the time, while Thomas Paine is merely an "extremist" who helped provoke the American War of Independence. He dotes lengthily on Parliament, but that's about it. Instead we have pages and pages and pages and pages of troop movements, campaigning, battles, retreats, marches, treaties, etc. The war leader considers these things to be more important.

I find that very telling of Churchill's personality. How can one define what is "worthy" of being written up as history, really? In the end it's subjective. I forget his name, but there was one Marxist historian who pointed out that millions of people crossed the Rubicon; we just remember Caesar doing it for arbitrary reasons. The historian must choose which facts to fill his history with, and Churchill has chosen battles and monarchs. Could one have expected much else? He was, after all, one of those "great men" we hear so much about. A

war journalist who wrote histories of the River and Boer Wars, participant in the great cavalry charge at Omdurman, PoW and escapee in South Africa, returning later as liberator, disastrous First Lord of the Admiralty who redeemed himself by enlisting to fight in the trenches, ex-chancellor who made the most spectacular comeback, and finally the spirit of the nation in its -- and his -- finest hour. Rumour has it that when he was told he had won the Nobel Prize, his face lit up and he rose to his feet, only to fall back in disappointment when he realised it was for Literature. He fought in three wars and was at the political forefront of the two greatest. With this in mind, I don't think he can be blamed for the charge of historical elitism. He has earned the right to praise great people.

Finally, we learn about Churchill's thoughts of the future. "It is in the hope that contemplation of the trials and tribulations of our forefathers", he writes in the preface to volume 1, "may not only fortify the English-speaking peoples of today, but also play some small role in uniting the whole world, that I present this account". Lofty goal. Churchill always saw a certain connection between Anglos not to be found elsewhere. Europe was important to him, but only in the way neighbours are important, and also as a security concern. The English-speakers around the world were like family. It's certainly true that Britain has never really been a European country: there are 20 miles of ocean between Britain and Europe, and that shows in our language, our legal system, and if one looks, our history. So what are we? Whether or not Churchill's boundless love of the Commonwealth is positively reciprocated is only partly relevant: I suspect the bond is deep enough for unity in the face of whatever awful martial challenge awaits next, even if time has left it in need of a polish. It will be remembered before the end. Reading the final sentences, I think Churchill knows this too:

Here is set out a long story of the English-Speaking Peoples. They are now to become Allies in terrible but victorious wars. And that is not the end. Another phase looms before us, in which the alliance will once more be tested and in which its formidable virtues may be to preserve Peace and Freedom. The future is unknowable, but the past should give us hope. Nor should we now seek to define precisely the exact terms of the ultimate union.

Sean says

This is one of the greatest histories ever written, on par with Gibbon and Macaulay. Winston Churchill's command of English history is unparalleled and his style of writing is clear and accessible. This history is directed at the general public so if you are looking for a serious academic treatment of English history, Churchill's work is not for you. However, it is a useful read in case you wanted to know more about the names, places, and dates of English history. Churchill is particularly strong in his treatment of the Tudors, the English Civil War, and the rise of the British Empire. Recommended for one and all.

Mike says

As a history, it is merely okay. Far too much emphasis is placed on political and military history; social and cultural history is barely mentioned. However, when read as Churchill's take on how the two great democratic powers of the last 200 years arose and evolved from a Roman backwater, it's fascinating.

David Corley says

The man could write.

Jeff Stilwell says

It may sound odd to hear it, but I've reread the first volume of this excellent four-volume series so many times that I can almost quote sections from memory. Why? What is his trick of making medieval history even more enthralling than, say, Arthurian legends, or the stories of the Merovingians?

Churchill's writing carries the dictum: if you don't love history, it's because you had awful history teachers. Interestingly, his magic seems rooted more in the past than in the near present. So while I have read and reread and reread all four volumes of this series, I note a declining power or punch to his story-telling from first to the fourth.

Nevertheless, the series is a wonderfully insightful read into power and politics and the personalities that drive both.

Erneilson says

I never realized what a wonderful historian Mr. Churchill was. His prose is entertaining and you can tell when he describes the battles that he looks at it from his military and strategic experience. He is very sensitive, too, to the American side of the story when he includes that part of his story.
