

EMMET JOHN HUGHES
ON
A LEGACY OF VALOR



The white marble gravestone of Winston Churchill, in the mist-shrouded Oxfordshire village of Bladon, shone last week with hyacinths and daffodils from widow and kin, to mark the first anniversary of his death. The moment commanded no gaudy pageantry. Nor could London reporters, glancing back over the year since his passing, remember more than the prosaic and public facts. The Royal Mint has now stamped out 13.5 million Churchill commemorative crowns. His old limousine, with its oversized cigar ashtray, has long since been sold. The railroad baggage car that bore him to his grave now belongs to a Californian, at the cost of \$980. The Churchill Memorial Fund is rich with scholarships, thanks to fund raisers carrying their slogan through the countryside: "Give generously—he did." And the terse appeal instantly explains why any ornate celebration of the anniversary would have been preposterous. He needed none. His memory abides in his work and his words.

Is there a simple sum to his legacy—especially for American appreciation? No. For his was the story of a complex man's sensitivity to a complex world—the response of a passionate peacemaker to a warring globe. Yet precisely this fact urges us to honest recalling of his sense of truth in the affairs of nations.

Jackals and Prairies. For all his zeal and fire, he was neither fanciful idealist nor implacable warrior. In the heat of World War II, he could warn the Commons: "There is a precipice on either side of you—a precipice of caution and a precipice of over-daring." Emotionally hailed as a prophet of both trial and triumph, he most unemotionally counseled after the Yalta Conference: "It is a mistake to look too far ahead. Only one link in the chain of destiny can be handled at a time." And at the Yalta Conference, he crisply expressed his historical patience in a note to FDR, eager for the design of a United Nations to be completed in five or six days' discussion: "Even the Almighty took seven."

The steely hater always wanted to be the saving healer. During World War II, the Fascist leaders were "jackals" or "butchers"; Yugoslavia's hapless Prince Paul became "Prince Palsy"; and Europe had to rise against "the deadly, drilled, docile, brutish masses of the Hun soldiery." Once World War II was done, he hastened to hail "the greatness and the genius of the German race."

He esteemed raw power—but sagacious diplomacy even more. Thus he could rouse a wartime

Canadian Parliament: "We have not journeyed across the centuries, across the oceans, across the mountains, across the prairies, because we are made of sugar-candy." Yet this master foe of aggression coolly scanned the postwar world, sundered by Stalinism: "Powerful political maneuvers are no longer practicable. One must negotiate." And American jingoists, bellowing the cry of "Munich" to deplore all compromise with Communism, never heard the Churchill who told the Commons in 1950: "Appeasement in itself may be good or bad according to circumstances . . . Appeasement from strength is magnanimous and noble and might be the surest and perhaps the only path to world peace."

Dreams and Polls. The clarity of the man's judgment never seemed confounded by mysteries of the Asian temper—or whimsies of the American temper. Defending policy toward Peking in 1949, he judiciously noted: "The reason for having diplomatic relations is not to confer a compliment but to secure a convenience." His view of the Asian military arena in the 1940s carries its own commentary on American military policy in the 1960s: "Going into swampy jungles to fight the Japanese is like going into the water to fight a shark." And for all his deep devotion to the American people, he shrewdly feared their passion for the abstract: "The bigger the Idea the more wholeheartedly and obstinately do they throw themselves into making it a success. It is an admirable characteristic—provided the Idea is good."

For him, the heart of democratic leadership, of course, was forever one virtue: courage. As he later remembered the night after becoming Prime Minister in Britain's black spring of 1940: "I slept soundly and had no need for cheering dreams. Facts are better than dreams." Or as he shortly warned the Commons: "Nothing is more dangerous in wartime than to live in the temperamental atmosphere of a Gallup poll, always feeling one's pulse." As for statesmen prone to "keep their ears to the ground," he acidly judged: "[The people] will find it hard to look up to the leaders who are detected in that somewhat ungainly posture."

The legacy of the man thus appears complex, but not at all cryptic. It stubbornly insists that the true test of strength is not the fist but the head. And for all peacemakers, the best part of valor is fearless intelligence.