

Churchill kept feeding his huge cat, Nelson, pieces of smoked salmon, which was our first course. He did it very surreptitiously, but finally handsome, white-haired Mrs. Churchill caught him at it and said reproachfully, "Winston, you're spoiling that cat frightfully!" The Prime Minister looked as sheepish as a boy caught with his hand in the apple barrel.

Churchill talked about motion pictures he had seen. "The film people send me three or four pictures each week. Last week they sent a Marx Brothers picture. I've seen it five times, and each time I see it I roar with laughter."

Hopkins said that President Roosevelt was a great movie fan and that he had had a projector installed in the White House.

Everyone at the table seemed so relaxed that it was difficult to realize this may have been Britain's darkest hour.

THAT AFTERNOON I worked with Hopkins on his speech. We were just finishing when Mrs. Churchill came into Hopkins' room. "The Prime Minister and I hope you can stay for dinner," she said graciously. "Averell will be driving to London afterward, and he can drop you off."

The Churchill household observed the rationing laws meticulously. We had the same kind of meal that millions of English families were sitting down to. And again, there was only incidental mention of the war. Finally, Mrs. Churchill left us to our coffee, and now the atmosphere changed. Churchill talked with Hopkins and Harriman about problems of getting more tanks and aircraft to England. He talked freely—I was a friend of Hopkins and therefore could be trusted not to reveal anything of significance outside the room. Churchill passed his famous cigars around the table. As he smoked the huge but mild Cuban exports, he finally talked of the war in terms of the recent reverses.

"WE'VE HAD our setbacks this past month—serious ones," he said grimly. "But I'm not one bit discouraged. We have a long way to go, but with help from our friends across the sea," he nodded to Hopkins and Harriman, "we'll win out in the end."

"I'm sure the *Luftwaffe* will continue to harass London," he continued; even at his dinner table his voice was the same sonorous voice we had heard so often on the radio. "But every time they come over, our night fighters take big chunks out of them. Their bombers have crews of four or five. Every time we down 20 of their bombers, it means they have lost nearly 100 trained men. They can replace planes but not men."

"Max Beaverbrook is turning out Spitfires fast." (Beaverbrook was then in charge of producing aircraft.) "The balance of air power will soon be in our favor. You notice it has been a long time since they attempted any day raids." He chuckled. "They know it is suicide to come over this island by day."

"Do you want to know something?" his whole face smiled. "That evil man Hitler

knows that he is beaten. I say this even now when his submarines are sinking our vessels in the Atlantic, even now when his troops seem to have the upper hand in the desert. But we are growing stronger every day, and he knows it. You correspondents," he turned to me, "have been writing about how well England can take it. In a few months, believe me, you will be writing—if I may use American slang—about how well England can dish it out. We'll be on the offensive soon, and Hitler knows it."

He lit a fresh cigar and gazed reflectively through the cloud of blue-gray smoke. He was thinking aloud now, seemingly making a pledge to some unseen power. Then he pointed to the empty chair at the foot of the table, where Mrs. Churchill had sat.

"Hitler would like to be sitting in that chair right now," he said solemnly. "He'd like to be talking to me, asking me if there wasn't some way out for him. I would tell him that his type of political philosophy would have to be stamped out and him with it. I would tell him that if my allies agree, I would be in favor of trying him in an international court, and if he were found guilty of being an international criminal, as I know he would be, I would be in favor of having him exterminated."

I think we were all hypnotized by this magnetic, confident figure who thought only in terms of eventual victory. "Our President feels exactly as you do, Mr. Churchill," Hopkins said.

"I know," Churchill chuckled. "I speak to him two or three times a week by phone. We both know it will take time and entail sacrifices, but we are both confident that we will bring that evil man to his knees."

AS HIS strong voice vibrated through the room, I found myself completely captivated. The Germans were threatening Tobruk, were about to swallow Russia, and were leveling war factories all over England. But what of it? Churchill wasn't worried. His voice and indomitable spirit filled the room. Suddenly I realized that there were some 44 million lesser Churchills in England, and he was voicing their own tremendous confidence. After months of hearing nothing but ominous talk about how England was being weakened, I was awestruck—and I, too, felt confident. An hour listening to Churchill had changed my thinking completely.

I left with Harriman an hour later. Churchill walked to the front door with us. He shook hands and said good-bye. We climbed into the car. Churchill stood there in the huge Gothic doorway, and the dim light inside silhouetted him—sturdy, rock-like, immovable. His cigar was stuck in the corner of his mouth at a jaunty angle. As we left, he grinned and waved.

Now all my doubts were gone. His absolute confidence in eventual victory had rubbed off on me, had completely inspired me, and now I felt as he did. The next day I wrote an article and sent it to the magazine for which I worked. I called it, "England Won't Lose."

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