

LEFT: Enemy prisoners on their way to the rear during the final Allied offensive in North Africa

Practically single-handed! The idol bounced upright again with astonishing speed.

The serious papers, while welcoming a useful corrective to unbridled Churchillianism, opined that Alanbrooke was not the man seriously to undermine the Churchill repute. The diarist himself was too perfect; no man could be so invariably free from error and live.

Punch put this viewpoint neatly by publishing some diary notes allegedly written by a disgruntled private of artillery about his superior, one Sergeant Rooke—

"Only yesterday he was on fire with a plan to move some heavy balks of timber from behind the cookhouse and push them out of sight under the Battery office. It took a lot of delicate handling and some hard debating to make him see that to divert men from scouring the undersides of tables, six foot, for this purpose is to run the risk of failing in both enterprises. But in the end I made him see reason."* (*Sgt. Rooke's own account of this incident is in some respects different: "I told the little perisher to jump to it, and he jumped." *The Rooke Papers*, II, 179.)

Because of prior serial publication, *The Turn of the Tide* controversy was well under way when the book was published. At a "launching" dinner in the Dorchester Hotel on February 5, Alanbrooke and Bryant were able to answer some of their more violent critics. Their speeches, together with the introductory remarks of the chairman, Viscount Portal, former Chief of Air Staff, were recorded and are to be heard next week in *ZB Sunday Showcase*.

It is Portal also who endeavours to compensate for the unwonted silence of one of the principals, Churchill himself. An argument between the two, Portal recalls, ended with his apologising to Churchill for his seeming rudeness. Churchill gave one of his most charming smiles and said, "My boy, in war you don't have to be nice; you only have to be right."

(*ZB Sunday Showcase: The Turn of the Tide*—all ZB stations, Sunday, May 26, 9.35 p.m.)



To believers everywhere, the explosive thump of nuclear fission is *pianissimo* when compared with the thud of falling idols. A Siberian testing-ground may seem less a desert than an empty pedestal in Budapest. Even the tranquil British, sanguine before the prospect of a white-hot Christmas, are shocked by the notion of clay feet in Westminster.

This being so, some diary notes about his Defence Minister by Britain's former Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Lord Alanbrooke (left), were certain to provoke outraged noises. What man would dare to speak dispassionately of Winston Churchill, whom war-time legend had depicted as immaculate, infallible? Alanbrooke could, and dared.

Reading *The Turn of the Tide: The Alanbrooke Diaries*, by Sir Arthur Bryant, moderate admirers of Churchill found little to offend them. True, there was criticism, but the Old Man emerged from the narrative much as the discerning would expect: as a leader given to

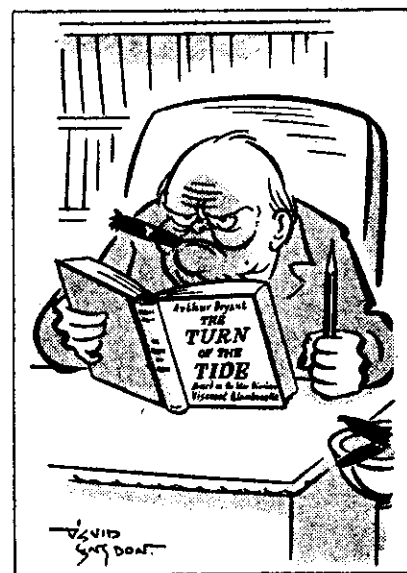
enthusiasms, sometimes to naive pleasures and impulses; capable of illogicality, petulance, humour and irrelevance; an eccentric but red-blooded aristocrat of a kind uniquely English.

"On the other hand," said the *New Statesman*, "they [the diary notes] have given distress to Churchill's simpler hero-worshippers, who have cherished a completely romantic illusion about the way great decisions are taken by great men, an illusion often enthusiastically shared by great men themselves." The same paper's book reviewer asked: "Can it be that Sir Arthur has decided that, whereas lesser mortals must be spared, it is time that someone, acting on behalf of the Service chiefs, deflated Sir Winston's wartime reputation?"

"Underlying the whole book," said the *Observer's* critic, "is an implicit and fundamental criticism of the Prime Minister in his overall conception of the conduct of the war, coupled with many deep expressions of personal and affectionate appreciation."

"Through Lord Alanbrooke's eyes," cracked *Punch*, "Churchill looks almost insanely impetuous, intolerant and selfish; and doubtless through Churchill's Alanbrooke seemed maddeningly cautious and slow. So must the piston appear to the steam."

The popular press was, as usual, more decisive. Britain, it declared, had not merely nursed, but honoured, an unsoldierly gossip. But was it not truly wondrous that, even with such treachery in high places, the Grand Old Man had still succeeded in winning the war?



(C) *Punch*

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