



The Will of the People: Churchill and Parliamentary Democracy

Martin Gilbert

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The Will of the People is an incisive, in-depth look at Winston Churchill's lifelong commitment to parliamentary democracy. First elected at twenty-five, Churchill was still in the House of Commons sixty-four years later. By far the largest part of his life – of his working days and nights – was spent in the cut and thrust of debate in the service of the people, whose instrument he believed Parliament to be. “I am a child of the House of Commons,” he told a joint session of the US Congress in December 1941. “I was brought up in my father’s house to believe in democracy. Trust the people – that was his message....”

Throughout his career, Churchill did his utmost to ensure that Parliament was effective and that it was not undermined by either adversarial party politics or by elected members who sought to manipulate it. Even the defeat of the Conservative Party in the General Election of 1945, which ended his wartime premiership, in no way altered his faith in parliamentary democracy. “It is the will of the people,” he told a small gathering of friends and family the day after the results were announced. And he meant it. Reflecting on the importance of the Second World War as a means of restoring democracy, Churchill told the House of Commons: “At the bottom of all the tributes paid to democracy is the little man, walking into the little booth, with a little pencil, making a little cross on a little bit of paper – no amount of rhetoric or voluminous discussion can possibly diminish the overwhelming importance of that point.”

Today’s readers will readily compare Churchill’s regard for democracy and the importance of that “little man” with the attitudes of contemporary leaders, and of those who seek leadership.

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