

His Finest Hour

By: John Keegan



Amy Hissom

History of Civilization II

Article Response #4

Sunday, November 15, 2009

Sir Winston Churchill was an uninspired student who won the Nobel Prize for literature. He failed military school examinations twice--and then became Lord of the Admiralty. A disastrous decision during World War I threatened to ruin Churchill's political career, but he was named Prime Minister of Britain in 1940. I think he was a great man! If only his father could have seen it. His speeches boosted the morale of the British people which helped take away their fear and inspire them to not give up.

The "This Was Their Finest Hour" speech was delivered by Sir Winston Churchill to the House of Commons of the Parliament of the United Kingdom on June 18, 1940. It was given shortly after he took over as Prime Minister of Britain on May 10th, in the first year of World War II.

Churchill gave three speeches during the period of the Battle of France; the "Blood, Toil, Tears, and Sweat" speech of May 13th, the "We Shall Fight On The Beaches" speech of June 4th, and the third being the "This Was Their Finest Hour" speech. These three speeches were a great inspiration to the embattled United Kingdom as it entered what was probably the most dangerous phase of the entire war.

This speech was given as France continued to reel from the stunning and massive German breakthrough at Sedan, France; which was shortly to be overcome and sued for peace a week later on June 22nd. In this speech,

Churchill tried to give a confident overview of the military situation and rally his people for what he probably knew was going to be a tremendous struggle. The final sentence of the extract below, referring to the idea that the British Empire might last a thousand years, illustrates Churchill's extreme attachment and faith in the Empire — its gradual dissolution in the subsequent decades was a source of great distress for Churchill.

"What General Weygand has called the Battle of France is over. I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization. Upon it depends our own British life, and the long continuity of our institutions and our Empire. The whole fury and might of the enemy must very soon be turned on us. Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this Island or lose the war. If we can stand up to him, all Europe may be freed and the life of the world may move forward into broad, sunlit uplands. But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science. **Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves, that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, "This was their finest hour."** - *Sir Winston Churchill*