



Prologue

IN ONE OF THE GRAND ROOMS in Speaker's House there is a vast walnut and gilt bedstead, with a crimson silk damask canopy reaching up to the ceiling. It purports to be the State Bed, reserved for the monarch on the eve of his or her coronation. It has never been used. It was commissioned in 1858, when the Victorians sought to cast Britain's magnificence in stone, building a deliberately ostentatious palace in the Gothic style to replace the higgledy-piggledy suite of medieval buildings at Westminster that had been engulfed in flames in 1834. Not only did they construct new chambers for the Commons and the Lords, both bigger and better than before, but the Lord Chancellor and the Speaker were provided with plush pavilions at either end of the Palace, overlooking the river. From the comfort of his library the Speaker, Evelyn Denison, could survey London's history. Down the Thames stood St Paul's Cathedral (completed 1708) and the Tower of London (founded 1066); across the water stood the Clink (built 1144) and St Thomas's Hospital (named 1173); a little further upstream was Lambeth Palace (established c.1200), and a short stroll away was Westminster Abbey (rebuilt in 1245). Surrounded by far older historic monuments, parliament affected antiquity of its own. Hence the State Bed – grand, opulent, but ultimately fake.

But then, self-aggrandizing exaggeration has been parliament's stock-in-trade for centuries. Elizabethan and Stuart antiquarians claimed the uniqueness of the English parliament. The Whigs of the

eighteenth century preached the gospel of the Glorious Revolution. Without a scintilla of self-doubt, Winston Churchill declared in 1945 that ‘we have the strongest Parliament in the world’.¹ Even today MPs place metaphorical hand on heart, summon up the blood and trot out the threadbare phrase ‘the mother of all parliaments’ with inordinate pride.

But this assumption of effortless superiority is nonsense, and it is time we dispelled such self-regarding mythology. For too long, successive historians have charted our supposedly ineluctable ascent from ‘ignominious vassalage’ to glorious liberty with excessive ease and we have lapped it up, mistily praising ourselves for our long-established independence of thought, our inalienable freedom from corruption and our elegantly evolved constitution.

Quite simply, we have got it wrong; and there is a real danger that a combination of misplaced patriotism and unalloyed cynicism will lead us to fetishize our past and encase our very imperfect modern parliament in aspic.

There are six core myths that these two volumes seek to dispel:

1 ‘Westminster is the mother of parliaments’

Nancy, Viscountess Astor claimed in her maiden speech in 1920 that it was the ‘fighting men of Devon who dared to send the first woman to represent women in the Mother of Parliaments’.² It was a nice thought, but wholly inaccurate: though the phrase is often repeated and equally often misquoted, Westminster has never been the ‘Mother of Parliaments’. Indeed, the originator of the phrase, a Victorian Liberal campaigner for parliamentary reform and universal suffrage, John Bright MP, coined it not to praise but to criticize England. Yes, he acknowledged in his speech in Birmingham Town Hall in 1865 that ‘England is the ancient country of Parliaments’, that its parliament had met more or less constantly for six hundred years and that ‘England is the mother of Parliaments’. But his whole point was the terrible irony that the English ‘are free to think, they are free to speak, they are free to write’, so ‘why is it that her people should not

be free to vote?’³ Far from eulogizing England’s constitution and harking back to a glorious past, Bright was pointing to the country’s abject failure to reform its political institutions. He was right. The ‘Great’ Reform Act of 1832 enfranchised only about 5 per cent of the population – and explicitly barred anyone but ‘male persons’ from voting.

The British like to think that the parliament at Westminster is the oldest representative democracy in the world, and yet it is quite a late-comer – in more ways than one. The oldest parliament in the world is the Icelandic Althingi (established 23 June 930), and the parliament of the Isle of Man, the Tynwald, came into existence in 979. Ireland’s first known Act of Parliament, dated 1216, beats England’s, enrolled in 1229. In modern times, too, we have lagged behind others. New Zealand was the first country to give women the vote, in 1893, followed rapidly by the Cook Islands (whose women narrowly beat the New Zealanders to the polls that same year). It was not until 1918 that universal adult male suffrage was introduced in the UK – and even then, only women over the age of thirty got the vote. Women had to wait until 1928 to gain the franchise on an equal basis with men – after their sisters in Norway, Denmark, Canada, Germany, Poland, the Netherlands, the United States and the Irish Free State. When Finland became the first European country to allow women to stand for its new Eduskunta in 1906, nineteen (out of 200) seats went to women, a figure the UK was not to reach until 1945. By any criterion it is difficult to maintain the claim to parliamentary motherhood.

2 ‘The history of British parliamentary democracy has proceeded according to plan’

For many a nineteenth-century historian, the history of parliament was one of the central proofs of Britain’s greatness. Like a barnacle-encrusted galleon, the constitution had sailed on through stormy waters towards her long-charted destination, modern constitutional monarchy. Just listen to the first sentence of Henry Hallam’s *Constitutional History of England*, published in 1846:

The government of England, in all times recorded by history, has been one of those mixed or limited monarchies which the Celtic and Gothic tribes appear universally to have established in preference to the coarse despotism of eastern nations, to the more artificial tyranny of Rome and Constantinople, or to the various models of republican polity which were tried upon the coasts of the Mediterranean sea.⁴

Few sentences encompass more prejudice and patriotism untainted by examination of the evidence, but this belief in the inalienable righteousness of British history was a consistent theme in most historical works on parliament well into the twentieth century. The Great Charter, the 'Model Parliament' of 1295, Henry VIII's Reformation by parliamentary statute, the Stuart wars of the three kingdoms, the Acts of Union and the Reform Act of 1832 were all stepping stones on the path towards the completed masterpiece that was the Victorian constitutional settlement. As Thomas Babington Macaulay, himself an MP and government minister, put it, his *History of England* would tell 'how, from the auspicious union of order and freedom, sprang a prosperity of which the annals of human affairs had furnished no example; how our country, from a state of ignominious vassalage, rapidly rose to the place of umpire among European powers.'⁵ The drum roll of rising rhetoric proclaims its own patriotism.

But the evidence for an intelligent plan behind the development of parliament is extremely thin. Rather, this has been a great improvised experiment in which caprice has played every bit as important a role as any consciously pursued constitutional ideology. Sometimes the caprice lay in the accidents of birth and death. Often, in both England and Scotland, it was a contested throne that led to the summoning of an early parliament. So, had Henry VIII's or Charles I's elder brothers or William and Mary's child lived, or had Queen Anne brought forth an heir, the succession itself would have passed down a very different route. The uncertainty over who would succeed

Elizabeth I encouraged parliament to flex its muscles, and Victoria became queen only because her grandfather, father, three uncles and three cousins all died before her own twelfth birthday. It is not just the sad stories of the death of kings, either, that have played a part in determining the pattern of our history. Had Pitt the Younger been his father's eldest son and inherited his title in the Lords, he would almost certainly not have become Prime Minister; and if Edward Wood's three elder brothers had not died in infancy, leaving him to inherit his father's title as Viscount Halifax in 1934, it might well have been he rather than Winston Churchill who took over from Neville Chamberlain in 1940.

Time and again the hazard of fortune has sat at the table as an extra player. The 1713 Place Bill, which would have taken all government ministers out of parliament and split the executive from the legislature, failed to get on to the statute book only because the vote on the third reading in the Lords was tied. The Reform Act of 1832 was later thought so good they named it Great, but on its second reading in 1831 was carried in the Commons by a single vote, as was the vote of no confidence in the government of Jim Callaghan in 1979 that led to Mrs Thatcher's first election victory. Even more bizarrely, one of the key legal texts underpinning the freedom against arbitrary arrest, the Habeas Corpus Act of 1679, only got through the House of Lords by two votes when the teller for the Ayes counted a fat peer for ten votes. On forty-nine occasions since 1801 the Speaker has had to decide on a tied vote, including the occasion on 23 July 1993 when it was discovered that one vote had accidentally been added to the Ayes over the Maastricht Treaty.

So the history of parliament is not the tracing out of some hidden, intelligent design, but a story of the vagaries of chance – and indeed, it is in the detail of these moments of haphazard history that the real drama of that story comes to life.

3 ‘There is no going back’

The ability to stand on one’s head has always been an important political skill. Witness the two parliaments of 1376 and 1377, which removed and then reinstated the king’s ministers. The tergiversations of the Tudor parliaments of Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth were even more dizzying, as Edward made parliament enact a fuller Reformation of the church than even his father had allowed for, Queen Mary had the whole of parliament beg forgiveness on bended knee before Cardinal Pole, and when Elizabeth became queen she demanded that parliament restore her brother’s Reformed religion.

Some advances have stuck – free and fair elections, the rule of law, votes for women. But other forward steps have gone into reverse. Take the relative power of crown and parliament. At the end of the eighteenth century Edmund Burke and others complained vigorously about the corruption of parliament through the army of government placemen on salaries and pensions. Their numbers were cut, and any member appointed to an office of profit under the crown was compelled to fight a by-election. Yet when the two world wars were being waged the rules were relaxed and the crown was allowed to appoint ever more ministers, under-secretaries and parliamentary private secretaries. When you consider this alongside the nineteenth-century land grab that put the whole parliamentary timetable in the government’s hands, it is difficult to argue that parliament achieved an unalterable supremacy over the crown. Indeed, the primary role of parliament today is not to scrutinize a government but to staff and sustain it.

So too with freedom of speech. Tudor and Stuart parliaments battled with the monarch over the right to debate whatever they wanted, and in 1641 the Long Parliament abolished the Star Chamber, which had acted as state censor. But its replacement, a monopoly exercised by the Stationers’ Company, was equally restrictive. Newspapers had to be licensed before publication – and the rules were strictly enforced. That monopoly was ended in 1694, but fear of a French invasion or of internal insurrection inspired ‘Gagging Acts’ in 1795 and 1817 that

made most publications financially unviable. Even the principle of habeas corpus was enacted in 1640, repealed at the Restoration, re-enacted in 1679, suspended in 1794 and 1817, and withheld for purposes of internment during both world wars and the Northern Ireland Troubles.

4 ‘There was a golden age of glorious independents’

Parliament has certainly had its standalone heroes: William Wilberforce campaigning for the abolition of the slave trade; Andrew Marvell refusing to take a post in a corrupt government; Simon de Montfort summoning knights and burgesses for the first time; Sydney Silverman securing the abolition of the death penalty through a private member’s Bill in 1965. Often they have been neglected by the wider sweep of party political history. Take Samuel Plimsoll, the Liberal MP for Derby for twelve years between 1868 and 1880, who left school in Sheffield at the age of fifteen and battled with bankruptcy and destitution before refreshing his fortunes as a coal merchant thanks to a prosperous marriage. Plimsoll’s campaign against the shipping rules that had seen overloaded ships go to the bottom with all hands came about thanks to a casual acquaintance with a shipbuilder on Tyneside, but he pursued it with vigour and not a little high emotion. First, in 1871, came a Merchant Shipping Survey Bill, which was lost by just three votes in the Commons. Then, in 1873, a polemic, *Our Seamen: an Appeal*, which made an emotive case for reform that Disraeli could not bring himself to refuse. A government Bill was introduced – and allowed to run into the sands, whereupon Plimsoll lost his temper, declaring that he was ‘determined to unmask the villains who send [men] to death and destruction’. As MPs screamed ‘Order!’, the Speaker demanded five times that Plimsoll retract his accusation before he was forced to leave the House, shouting, ‘Do you know that thousands are dying for this?’ as he went.⁶ Members were scandalized and he was forced to apologize, but within a year Disraeli was shamed into introducing a new Merchant Shipping Bill and in 1890 the Plimsoll Line was

enshrined in law as an obligatory marking on all British merchant vessels.

The point about Plimsoll is that he was not immaculate. He was thrown out of his local church for his business practices, he was vain enough to make his own heraldic shield and he lost his seat in 1880. Even Lord Shaftesbury, who pursued his Factory Act and campaigns against chimney boys with just as much emotion, thought: ‘He is proud of his own impetuosity and seems to think that no-one can be weary of it. I find him bold, earnest, rash. He will ruin himself and the cause by his violence.’²⁷

Moreover, the modern-day lionizing of the individual parliamentary hero should not obscure the fact that the development of political parties has been one of the most important innovations in the British political system. Their growth from the simple congregation of like-minded MPs and peers in a Tudor tavern in London to the popular Exclusion campaigns in 1679–81, the inauguration of the political clubs such as the Reform and the Carlton, and then fully fledged parties with membership cards, enforced discipline and election manifestos is as important as the tales of individual talented politicians. Indeed, the strength of the political party system in the United Kingdom, with the ‘whippers-in’ enforcing discipline, has latterly made it far more difficult to buy a vote in parliament than in the US Congress.

5 ‘Today’s parliament is worse behaved than ever’

The most frequent complaint about today’s House of Commons is its resemblance to a children’s playground. It is true that the noise level during Prime Minister’s Questions is so high that without the microphones and speakers little would be heard. But it would be wrong to suggest that this is a recent phenomenon. Asquith was howled down as Prime Minister in 1911, and in 1863 ‘an angry and determined House’ silenced a series of speakers, including Disraeli, over the purchase of the Great Exhibition building. Sometimes it was just a question of individual high spirits. We know from Samuel Pepys

that ‘Sir Allen Broderick and Sir Allen Apsley did both come drunk the other day [19 December 1666] into the House and did both speak for half an hour together, and could not be either laughed or pulled, or bid to sit down and hold their peace.’⁸ Nearly three centuries later, on 4 April 1938, things got very heated during questions on Spain as the irascible Scottish Labour MP Manny Shinwell accused the Conservative minister Rab Butler of ‘humbug’ and, when jeered at by a Tory MP, stomped across the chamber and, in the words of Hansard, which rarely includes stage directions, ‘struck the hon. and gallant Member for Cleveland (Commander BOWER) a blow on the face’.⁹

The worst moment of the modern parliamentary era came on the evening of 27 July 1893, when Gladstone and Joseph Chamberlain sparred over the Irish Home Rule Bill, which was coming to the end of its forty-seventh filibustered session in committee. Gladstone had already secured a guillotine motion, requiring all remaining questions on the Bill to be put at ten o’clock. Chamberlain ended his speech by taunting the Liberals with their apparent desire to do whatever Gladstone demanded. ‘The Prime Minister calls “black,” and they say, “it is good”: the Prime Minister calls “white,” and they say “it is better.” It is always the voice of a god.’ This was standard party political taunting, but then he added sardonically: ‘Never since the time of Herod has there been such slavish adulation.’¹⁰ This equation of Gladstone with Herod prompted the Irish MP T. P. O’Connor, who had slogged back a fair amount of champagne that evening, to hurl his favourite term of abuse, ‘Judas!’, across the Chamber. Immediately the other Irish nationalists took up the chant and the Tory Vicary Gibbs could not even make himself heard as he tried to get the chairman to demand that the term be retracted. Chaos ensued as the division proceeded. The Liberal Sir John Logan, sitting down on the opposition front bench next to the Unionist Sir Edward Carson, was grabbed round the neck by Hayes Fisher, pummelled in the stomach by Sir Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett and bundled under the bench. Someone jostled Colonel Edward Saunderson, another Unionist, who

took aim at the Labour Nationalist Eugene Crean, but instead landed a bloody punch on another Irishman, Michael Austin. Others were dragged into the battle, including the Unionist Colonel Robert Gunter and the Nationalist Tim Healy, and when Dr Charles Tanner arrived in the Chamber and launched himself at the maul, J. A. Pease leaped on his back ‘and in an old Rugby Union style . . . collared and held him back on the floor of the House’.¹¹ Order was only restored when John Burns started tearing people out of the scrimmage and thrusting them back into their seats and the Speaker was summoned. (Memory plays tricks: James Lowther recollected that the clerk read out the title of the next business, ‘Pistols Bill – Second Reading’,¹² and everyone laughed. Sadly, there was no such moment, as the Bill’s title had been read out three days earlier.)

6 ‘Today’s MPs are the most venal we have had’

One of the most potent myths is that today’s set of MPs is more vicious, self-serving and incompetent than any other. It’s a charge that is difficult to substantiate. Look at one small slice of the Victorian era, 1889–92. In that short period, one MP, Colonel Hughes-Hallett (Conservative, Rochester) was forced to step down after he was discovered to have stolen £5,000 of his deceased first wife’s first husband’s daughter’s inheritance; another, Captain Edmund Verney (Liberal, Buckingham) was convicted of procuring a nineteen-year-old girl for sex and was expelled from the Commons; a third, Samuel Wesley de Cobain (Unionist, Belfast East) fled the country when a warrant for his arrest was issued for committing gross indecency with a man named Allan, and was expelled when he refused to return; one George Hastings (Liberal Unionist, Worcestershire East) was expelled over a £20,000 inheritance fraud; and John Deasy (Nationalist, Mayo), stood down when he was convicted of an assault on his own maid. Other convictions were to follow, most notably that of Jabez Spencer Balfour (Liberal, Burnley) who fled the country, was brought back and in 1893 was sentenced to fourteen years’ penal servitude for fraud on a massive scale. Any one of these stories would have press and public

frothing at the mouth today; at the time, the *Morning Advertiser* commented with notable restraint: ‘The chosen of the electorate in Parliament and elsewhere have not been turning out particularly well lately.’¹³

There were plenty more parliamentary rogues and unfortunates, too – like Sir Giles Mompesson, expelled from parliament for abusing his monopoly over the licensing of inns and taverns; or the Sadleir brothers, John and James, who were implicated in a series of Victorian frauds, and respectively ended their days with a draught of prussic acid on Hampstead Heath and shot dead after a mugging in Switzerland. Or John Mytton, who drank five bottles of port every morning and when that ran out supplemented it with eau de cologne. Or Lord Charles Townshend, killed on the way back from his election at Great Yarmouth in 1796 by either his own hand or that of his brother Frederick.

In fact, for much of its history the whole parliamentary system was soaked in corruption. Rotten boroughs with no real voters lasted well into the nineteenth century; pocket boroughs in the gift of local magnates were still being sold, and voters were still being bribed with cash, in the 1800s; and the likes of Sir William Paxton, who bought his Carmarthenshire seat with 11,070 breakfasts, 36,901 dinners and 25,275 gallons of ale, carried on treating the electorate with food and booze until a series of Corrupt Practices Acts in 1854, 1883 and 1885. Successive royal favourites and prime ministers bought political loyalty with secret service money, James I invented baronetcies and sold them to the wealthy to subsidize the royal purse, the Tories packed the Lords with extra peers to vote through the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, and both Lloyd George and Austen Chamberlain sold peerages, baronetcies and knighthoods to raise money for their respective parties after the First World War. This is not to sanction corruption, simply to set more recent scandals in historical context.

There are many other parliamentary myths. The red lines in the carpet of the House of Commons are not two sword lengths apart and are a Victorian innovation. The phrase ‘toe the line’ is of nautical origin and does not come from the Speaker admonishing a member for overstepping the line. MPs were never required to wear hats. The two Houses did not first sit separately in Acton Burnell in 1283. The ‘Model Parliament’ of 1295 did not fix the composition of parliament. The Scots were not bribed to accept union with England (though the Irish were). The Great Charter of 1215 makes no mention of parliament. Owain Glyndwr did not hold a ‘parliament’ in Machynlleth in 1404: the one contemporary account, by Adam of Usk, maintains only that he ‘held, or counterfeited or made pretence of holding parliaments’,¹⁴ and there is no evidence of anyone attending other than a council of nobles.

But perhaps the most dangerous myth of all is that politicians have only ever been out for themselves. You only have to knock on a few doors to hear the cynicism with which MPs are viewed. ‘Typical, they only ever come round when they want your vote.’ Or, better yet: ‘If voting ever changed anything, they’d abolish it.’ This two-volume history is written from a different perspective. In my experience most politicians have lofty aspirations – to change the world, to improve the human condition, to transform people’s opportunities, to bring peace. Sometimes the most passionate have been the most dangerous. Often the quietest have been the most effective. Invariably they have proved to have feet of clay. Yet each twist of parliament’s history has been driven by an attempt to improve upon what was already in place. It has been a constant experiment in making things better, pursued against many challenges and temptations. Edmund Burke put it well when he confessed: ‘To be a good Member of Parliament, is, let me tell you, no easy task; especially at this time, when there is so strong a disposition to run into the perilous extremes of servile compliance, or wild popularity.’¹⁵ This is why the Commons starts its business every day with a prayer that MPs ‘may never lead the nation wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideals’.

It is impossible fully to comprehend the history of Britain or of parliament without examining the personal entrails of events. With its rowdy confrontations and angry altercations, its fierce antipathies and deep loyalties, its towering personal triumphs and its very public falls from grace, Westminster's parliament has always been a place of personal drama. Within the two-acre sliver of land between the Abbey and the Thames people have been tried, excoriated, humiliated, ostracized, executed and exiled from the body politic. Others have been lionized, risen to great office, performed great service to the nation and even on occasion died with the adulation of the crowds still ringing in their ears. In the main these have been uncommon individuals, imbued both with a vision of how the world should be and with a sense of their own destiny. Few were unambiguously noble. Many were as ambitious for themselves as for the common weal. Most are scarcely remembered today. But their lives, whether complicated or straightforward, were so intertwined with the history of the kingdom that if we ignore the deeply personal aspects of their contribution we miss the true driving force of politics.

That is why this history follows in detail the lives of so many people who passed through parliament – mitred abbots, prince-bishops, lords, knights, burgesses and clergy – because personal conviction, personal loyalty, personal antipathy have framed many of the key moments in that history. Indeed, it is the clashes between different opinions and contrasting personalities, the struggle between reaction and progress, the tension between preserving the past and forging the future, that have characterized the way these isles have made constitutional history – through a process of evolution, not the tidy or deliberate manufacture of a monolith.

This is a complex and densely populated story, so it has been divided into two volumes. The first deals with the different strands that came together to form parliament. Starting in 1258 with the first commoners to attend a parliament, it considers the often ignored but equally important parliamentary traditions of Scotland and Ireland and deals with early elections, the development of free speech, the civil

wars and the separation of the two houses, ending with the establishment of the Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, or the 'Imperial Parliament' as it was gazetted, in 1801. It takes us from Simon de Montfort to Pitt the Younger via Thomas Cromwell, John Hampden and John Wilkes. The second volume will recount the campaign for reform in the UK parliament, the development of the party system, the collapse of aristocratic dominance, the arrival of working men, the eventual admission of women, the radical effect of two world wars and the many attempts at modern reform. It will include chapters on financial corruption, and on the roles of alcohol and of sexuality. It ends with Margaret Thatcher.

Many have been cynical about parliament; and many still are. T. P. O'Connor (who began that Gladstonian brawl) complained of it that 'the tide of talk rolls on' – though that did not stop him sitting in it for fifty years. The novelist and Unionist MP John Buchan thought of it as a tedious form of opera. And after the Second World War Christopher Hollis MP wrote in *Can Parliament Survive?* that it would be 'cheaper to keep a flock of tame sheep and from time to time drive them through the division lobbies in the appropriate numbers'.¹⁶ More recently, a lethal combination of apathy and anger has inspired profound distrust of politicians, deep scepticism about party politics and a significant fall in voter turnout in elections.

Others, though, have been overly sentimental about parliament and have accepted every Victorian reinvention of our history as gospel truth. One instance makes the point – that of the two red lines on the carpet in the Commons, which every tour guide will tell you are two sword's-lengths apart. It is patently untrue. MPs did wear swords in the Commons in the past. When the Great Remonstrance was agreed in 1641 several MPs reached for their swords. Lord North once managed to catch the wig of Welbore Ellis on his scabbard. General John Burgoyne was thought rather thin-skinned for grasping the pommel of his sword when someone insulted him in the chamber. Eighteenth-century court dress, which ministers were required to wear, included a sword, and when Lord North's government fell Sir Nathaniel Wraxall

MP was amazed to see in April 1782 the former opposition members throw off their blue and buff uniforms and return from court as ministers, ‘decorated with Swords, Lace and Hair Powder’.¹⁷ But all these moments took place in the old Commons chamber, where there was no carpet and there were no red lines, both of which only arrived with the new Victorian chamber after the fire of 1834. By then nobody wore a sword in the Commons. In fact, the distance between the two benches owes more to the space required for the altar party of a crucifer and two candle-bearers to walk abreast to the altar in the old Chapel of St Stephen’s. Yet misty-eyed nationalists, imbued with self-conscious patriotism, adhere to this and many other parliamentary myths as a new Thirty-Nine Articles of religion.

My argument – and the argument of these two volumes – is that neither cynicism nor sentimentalism serves us well, and that Robert Blake was right when he maintained in his history of the Conservative Party that ‘all these efforts and struggles, these dramatic changes of fortune, do mean something; that the careers devoted to politics are not a complete waste of time . . . and that it may make a real difference which side prevails in the unending struggle for political power’.¹⁷ The whole point of these two volumes is that when chance plays such a part that a government can be lost by just one vote, when a death or a birth or a love affair can change the course of history, the individual endeavours of so many thousands of men and women are the very stuff that change is made from, if only we combine.