



## To a Statesman and a Scholar

**Taler**

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**Sted**

Universitetet i Oslo, Aulaen

**Omstendigheter**

Conferment, Doctor of Philosophy, Honoris Causa, on the honourable Winston S. Churchill

1 Deres Majestet, Deres Kongelige Høyhet,

Your Excellency,

5 Mr. Winston Churchill,

Welcome to Norway! You are welcome indeed!

Welcome to this University!

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I think we are justified in saying that this is the proper place for the expression of those feelings of gratitude with which all our hearts, nay, the hearts of all Norwegians are filled.

15 Universities are and always must be the sacred strongholds of truth, of personal and intellectual freedom. But in our own case the situation is also a special one, in so far as the foundation of the Royal Frederiks University in 1811 marks the first and most decisive step in our fight for political freedom.

20 Norway is, as you know, an ancient kingdom. But during centuries of autocratic government, in a personal union with Denmark, our country was on the point of losing its distinctive personality as a nation. When our forefathers succeeded in establishing their own Norwegian University, this gave a tremendous impetus to their self-confidence. And only three years later- under  
25 the most adverse conditions during the Napoleonic wars- they took their fate into their own hands, summoned our first constitutional assembly and gave us our free and truly democratic constitution which was in point of fact far in

advance of its time. This constitution, which opened up a rich cultural and  
30 social development, is and remains the basic foundation of Norway of today.

From then on we lived in peace, perhaps taking our freedom too much for  
granted. But we certainly had a rude and terrible awakening.

35 It may interest you to know that this University Aula has, during the dark years  
that followed, witnessed a series of sinister and humiliating events.

Here the first Norwegian officers, taken prisoner of war, were kept in captivity  
during those dramatic April days in 1940. Here the Nazis called a meeting of all  
40 our University teachers in September 1941. This happened during an  
"Ausnahmezustand" when the first two civilian hostages were court-martialled  
and shot.

You can imagine the sombre feelings prevailing in this Hall at the meeting  
45 which took place on the following day. We were relatively decent people, not  
yet accustomed to think in such a vile and wicked way. On that occasion our  
peaceful University Aula resounded with the clanking of German weapons, and  
the trampling of iron heels. Our Rector was deprived of

50 his office and arrested on that occasion, as were also some of the University  
professors.

Finally, in November 1943 during a big Gestapo razzia, our students, professors  
and other University teachers were chased like rats and arrested- in the lecture  
55 rooms, the laboratories, the hospitals, in their homes and in the streets of Oslo.  
More than 1500 students were packed into this Hall, awaiting an unknown  
fate. For half of them it proved to mean transportation to German  
concentration camps for the remainder of the war. And of that company some  
never returned to their native land.

60 These experiences, bitter at the time, now seem strangely remote. But only  
against this background, Sir, may you fully realize what it means to us to have  
you as our distinguished guest of honour in this selfsame Hall tonight. If we  
had been told at the time that we should live to participate in this event, we  
65 certainly would have regarded it as the wildest fairy-tale.

Is it not wonderful that fairy-tales sometimes really do come true!

70 Gratitude is one of the purest sources of joy, of human happiness. I shall never  
be able to tell you adequately how highly we appreciate your presence and how  
deeply the feelings of indebtedness and affection are rooted in the hearts of all  
Norwegians. In this we are all united, irrespective of social background, outlook  
on life or political opinion. One of your political opponents, the former  
75 chairman of the Labour Party, Professor Harold Laski, has said: "No citizen of  
Great Britain with any love for his country is likely to underestimate the debt it  
owes to Mr. Churchill." We Norwegians make these words our own.

You are known all over the globe as "the Architect of Victory", a magnificent  
80 distinction indeed. But somehow, to us here in Norway this title seems a little  
too cold, too technical.

To us you are first and foremost the untiring champion of the cause of freedom  
and the unfaltering torchbearer of the flame of hope, when the night of  
85 barbarism and brutal tyranny had descended over our continent and over our  
beloved country.

Few as we were, weak as we were, we Norwegians had in 1940 to sustain the  
first terrific brunt of the ferocious German onslaught. Hard times followed: the  
90 Dutch surrendered; Belgium surrendered; even mighty France collapsed. What  
about Great Britain?

During those days, in that supreme emergency, you were the man who kept our  
hopes burning. And hope means everything under such conditions.

95 We shall never forget what it meant to us when your message reached us across  
the North Sea that Great Britain would not flag or falter, that she would stand  
firm- "if necessary for years, if necessary alone".

100 To us Norwegians that first crucial year, when Great Britain had to carry the  
tremendous burden alone, will always hold a place of its own in our memory.  
Those were the days when we felt the truth, the bitter reality in those lines of  
Longfellow which President Roosevelt quoted in his message to you one year  
later:

Sail on O Union, strong and great!

Humanity with all its fears,

110

with all the hopes of future years

is hanging breathless on thy fate!

115 We do not forget that already in those April days in 1940 you sent British troops to our aid. The odds were as yet too great. Many of them found their graves among the Norwegian mountains. But I do not exaggerate when I say that your own speeches at that time had the force of army corps.

120 *Magna est eloquentia sicut flamma!*

Why did your words have this tremendous appeal? There are many reasons. But for the moment I shall stress only one, what I may call their wholesome truthfulness. You did not minimize the appalling dangers. At a time when, to  
125 the utter disgrace of humanity, respect for truth had vanished, when lying, unscrupulous mendacity, had been raised by the barbarians to the first rank among political methods, you alone were brave enough, candid enough- even in the darkest hours- to tell the unvarnished truth with particular frankness and sincerity.

130

You followed your father's advice: "Trust the people!" You had confidence in the perseverance and steadfastness of the British character, the iron, unyielding tenacity of the people of whom in spite of all your supreme power, you were never the master, but always the faithful, loyal servant.

135

In all your speeches we felt the undertone of a fundamental conviction which may well be summarized in the plain words coined by the great and noble thinker Spinoza nearly three hundred years ago: "The ultimate aim of government is not to rule, nor to restrain by fear, nor to exact obedience, but  
140 contrariwise, to free every man from fear, that he may live in all possible security; in other words, to strengthen his natural right to exist and to work without injury to himself or others. The object of government is not to change men from rational beings into beasts or puppets, but to enable them to develop their minds and bodies in

security, and to employ their reason unshackled; neither showing hatred, anger or deceit, nor watching with eyes of jealousy or injustice. In fact the true aim of government is liberty."

150

That is what we Norwegians like, that is what we believe in!

Norway is largely a country of farmers and sailors. Our flag too flies on the Seven Seas. Through generations we have learned to know your fellow-  
155 countrymen, not only in their own island, but in all quarters of the globe. This contact has fostered and strengthened feelings which are well expressed in a lyric by our greatest poet, Henrik Wergeland, the first-born child of our free constitution.

160 He gave his poem an English title: "The Appearance of England". The sailors are singing. Let me quote some verses, in Dr. Gathorne-Hardy's masterly translation, though I am fully aware that a translation, however good, can never convey the full force of the beauty of the original.

165 That which glitters in the west,

"Twixt the waves and cloud-banks over,

That is England, sun-caressed:

170

See the cliffs of Dover!

England's bulwark, strongly bound

175 Pearly white cement, emerges:

Freedom has her stronghold found

Mid the ocean surges.

180

God has built around her home

Massive walls and lofty towers,

185

Where it faces, o'er the foam,  
Europe's envious powers.

190

White as snow the cliffs arise,  
Black as night the soil impending.

195

Velvet green the pasture lies,  
Wave on wave extending.

O how rich this soil must be

200

Where the English oaks are planted,

Oaks which only to the free

Have their garlands granted.

205

O how rich is he and blest

House and home who there has made him;

210

O how glorious there to rest

Neath the oaks that shade him!

Sir,

215

To us you were and always will remain, not only the spokesman, but the personification, the embodiment of your great nation, of its history and its noble traditions. Your inspiring words to which we listened with beating hearts under the most difficult- so-called "illegal"-conditions, infused us, not only with trust, with confidence, but also with obligation, an ardent desire also to do our duty in that tremendous struggle for all that makes life worth living.

220

For obvious reasons Norway's share was small compared with that of the  
225 mighty world-powers. But we are glad to know that our ships were an effective  
contribution to the common cause during that terrific Battle of the Atlantic  
when the German wolf packs were threatening to get at your throat. Two and a  
half million tons of our shipping- nearly one ton per head of our population-  
were lost and more than 3.500 gallant sailors found their grave in the oceans  
230 they died to keep free.

As an indication of their spirit I cannot help recalling today the words of a  
splendid sailor with whom I shared a prison-cell in 1941. He and his comrades  
had had bad luck. They were sighted by a German aircraft in a small motor-boat  
235 far out in the North Sea on their way to England. I asked him to tell me his  
story. And I shall never forget the opening words of his reply. He said: "Well,  
you see, I had got to get across to help Churchill finish the job."

They kept this fine boy in prison for one year. Then he was shot. He was one of  
240 the more than 10,000 Norwegians who made the supreme sacrifice for their  
beloved King and country- in the air, on the sea, in other lands, in the resistance  
movement at home, or in German concentration camps. On such a day of joy as  
this, they shall not be forgotten.

245 Nor do we forget what we owe to all our allies- the Soviet Union, the great  
Republic across the Ocean and all the others, who were at that time united in  
the fight for a common cause. May an era of equal mutual confidence and  
cooperation return under peaceful conditions to the lasting benefit of  
humanity!

250

Commilitones, Fellow Doctors,

The time has come to confer upon Mr. Winston Churchill the highest honour  
in our power. This task placed the Senatus Academicus in something of a  
255 dilemma. We have the impression that the Doctor of Laws degree is considered  
the highest academic distinction in English-speaking countries. Not so with us.

To be sure, nothing could be more appropriate on this occasion than to confer  
a Doctorate in the Faculty of Law on the most outstanding defender of human  
260 rights and the rule of law. We know from experience what it means to be  
deprived of these priceless treasures! Still, to us, this degree does not in the

present case seem quite comprehensive enough.

265 We are going to honour a statesman and soldier of pre-eminent powers, an  
orator whose speeches, though richly laden with substance and replete with  
extraordinary mental energy and will-power, nevertheless sparkle with poetical  
beauty and with sudden emanations of that saving sense of humour, which  
broke like sunshine through the dark clouds of German oppression to warm  
270 and cheer our hearts. And moreover, a scholar of profound knowledge, a writer  
of far-famed and monumental historical works, an artist whose lucid style-  
though plain and to the point- is cast in a classic mould. A man whose works  
and words will forever live in English letters.

275 To a man of these dimensions only a Doctorate in Philosophy- that all-  
embracing Mother of Science and Learning- seems in our opinion the adequate  
distinction.

On behalf of the Senatus Academicus I ask the Dean of the Faculty of History  
280 and Philosophy to assist in conferring the degree of Doctor Philosophiae  
honoris causa upon the Right Honourable Winston Spencer Churchill, who  
wrote history, lived history and made history.

**Kilde**

285 Churchill's visit to Norway- Speeches (J.W.Cappelens Forlag, Oslo, 1949)

**Emner**

Takketale, Utdanning

**URI**

290 <https://www.virksommeord.no/tale/to-a-statesman-and-a-scholar>

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