

Personal Contacts¹

An Excerpt

By Winston S. Churchill

AP English Language Lesson by Eileen Bach

British statesman Winston Churchill was a Member of Parliament for more than half of the twentieth century. During this time he served with many colorful figures, including the man featured in this excerpt from his essay, "Personal Contacts" from his book Thoughts and Adventures, published in 1932 and republished in 2009. Read this excerpt carefully and answer the questions below.

Almost the chief mystery of life is what makes one do things. Let the reader look back over the path he has travelled and examine searchingly and faithfully the reasons, impressions, motives, occasions which let him to this or that decisive step in his career. Sometimes he will find that people who impressed him least, influenced him most. Small people, casual remarks, and little things very often shape our lives more powerfully than the deliberate, solemn advice of great people at critical moments. Men and women as often as not address themselves to serious emergencies with resolution and with a conscious desire to choose the best way. But usually in our brief hazardous existence some trifle, some accident, some quite unexpected and irrelevant fact has laid the board in such a way as to determine the move we make. We have always to be on our guard against being thrown off our true course by chance and circumstance; and the glory of human nature lies in our seeming capacity to exercise conscious control of our own destiny. In a broad view, large principles, a good heart, high aims, a firm faith, we may find some charts and a compass for our voyage. Still, as we lean over the stern of the ship and watch the swirling eddies in our wake, the most rigid and resolute of us must feel how many currents are playing their part in the movements of the vessel that bears us onwards....

No one can have worked as closely as I have with Mr. Lloyd George without being both impressed and influenced by him. The reputation

which he has long enjoyed as a parliamentary and platform speaker has often been an exaggerated one. Extraordinary as have been his successes in public, it is in conclaves of eight or nine, or four or five, or in personal discussions man to man, that his persuasive arts reach their fullest excellence. At his best he could almost talk a bird out of a tree. An intense comprehension of the more amiable weaknesses of human nature: a sure gift of getting on the right side of a man from the beginning of a talk: a complete avoidance of anything in the nature of chop-logic reasoning: a sure, deft touch in dealing with realities: the sudden presenting of positions hitherto unexpected, but apparently conciliatory and attractive – all these are modes and methods in which he is a natural....

One of his most impressive faculties was the power of seeing, in moments when everyone was asking about the next step, the step after that. To use sporting terms, he was often hunting in the next field to that which we were all galloping. Just as we had all made up our minds where to jump the fence, he would exclaim, "Anyone can see that; but how are we going to get over the canal, or that railway line over there? See, we must make for that bridge or that level crossing, otherwise we shall be hopelessly thrown out. That means a big jump now, and not the easy one you were all thinking about." I may say he has never hunted with hounds in his life, but had he been born to the part of a nimrod instead of to that of a wizard, foxes would have had a hard time.

¹Winston S. Churchill, "Personal Contacts," *Thoughts and Adventures*, ed. James W. Muller (Wilmington, Delaware: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2009) p. 47, 56-57

Questions based on excerpts from “Personal Contacts” by Winston S. Churchill

- ___ 1. The reader may infer from this passage that Churchill believes:
- We have total and complete control over our destinies.
 - We have no control over our destinies.
 - We have limited control over our destinies.
 - Only God controls our destinies.
- ___ 2. The voyage spoken of in this passage is a voyage:
- through life.
 - through school.
 - to maturity.
 - to heaven.
- ___ 3. All of the following words are terms used to further the analogy of a voyage EXCEPT:
- stern
 - bow
 - wake
 - eddies
 - vessel
- ___ 4. The distinction between the public and the private man is most clear in this line:
- “parliamentary and platform speaker has often been an exaggerated one”
 - “conciliatory and attractive – all are modes or methods”
 - “turn a Cabinet round in less than ten minutes”
 - “in conclaves of eight or nine...his persuasive arts reach their fullest”
- ___ 5. The meaning of the word “nimrod” most nearly means:
- hunter
 - rifle
 - prey
 - spokesman
- ___ 6. Churchill claims that Lloyd George’s best quality is his:
- patience
 - foresight
 - reasoning
 - charm
- ___ 7. Each of the analogies employed in this excerpt is based upon:
- politics
 - human nature
 - nature
 - navigation
- ___ 8. “No one can have worked as closely as I have with Mr. Lloyd George without being both impressed and influenced by him” means:
- Most who worked with Lloyd George would agree with Churchill regarding his influence.
 - Few have worked closely with Lloyd George.
 - Few would be impressed by Lloyd George.
 - Every one who sees Lloyd George is impressed by him.
- ___ 9. The reader can infer that “chop-logic reasoning” is:
- solid reasoning
 - faulty reasoning
 - universal reasoning
 - lack of reasoning
- ___ 10. “positions hitherto unexpected, but apparently conciliatory and attractive” is an example of this rhetorical device:
- parallel structure
 - litotes
 - chiasmus
 - antithesis

ANSWER KEY TO EXCERPTS FROM “PERSONAL CONTACTS” BY WINSTON CHURCHILL

1. c
2. a
3. b
4. d
5. a
6. b
7. c
8. a
9. b
10. d