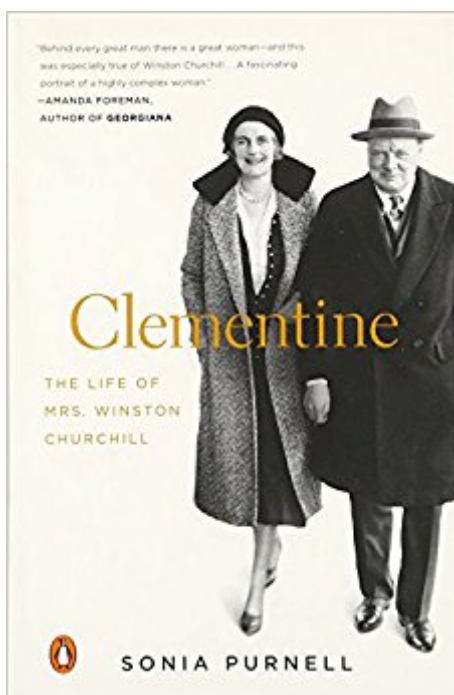


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Clementine: The Life Of Mrs. Winston Churchill



Synopsis

"Sonia Purnell has at long last given Clementine Churchill the biography she deserves. Sensitive yet clear-eyed, Clementine tells the fascinating story of a complex woman struggling to maintain her own identity while serving as the conscience and principal adviser to one of the most important figures in history." — Lynn Olson, bestselling author of *Citizens of London* • Shortlisted for the 2016 Plutarch Award • A long over-due tribute to the extraordinary woman who was Winston Churchill's closest confidant, fiercest critic and shrewdest political advisor that captures the intimate dynamic of one of history's most fateful marriages, as seen on *The Crown*. • By Winston Churchill's own admission, victory in the Second World War would have been "impossible without her." • Until now, however, the only existing biography of Churchill's wife, Clementine, was written by her daughter. Sonia Purnell finally gives Clementine her due with a deeply researched account that tells her life story, revealing how she was instrumental in softening FDR's initial dislike of her husband and paving the way for Britain's close relationship with America. It also provides a surprising account of her relationship with Eleanor Roosevelt and their differing approaches to the war effort. Born into impecunious aristocracy, the young Clementine was the target of cruel snobbery. Many wondered why Winston married her, but their marriage proved to be an exceptional partnership. Beautiful and intelligent, but driven by her own insecurities, she made his career her mission. Any real consideration of Winston Churchill is incomplete without an understanding of their relationship, and Clementine is both the first real biography of this remarkable woman and a fascinating look inside their private world.

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Customer Reviews

"Engrossing. . . . Purnell's book is the first formal biography of a woman who has heretofore been relegated to the sidelines." [The New York Times](#) "Winston Churchill kept nothing from Clementine. "You know," he informed FDR, "I tell Clemmie everything." Purnell has delivered an astute, pacey account of a woman who hardly ever emerged from the shadows. It is a sharp analysis of what it meant to be a politician's wife. . . [and] shows how much we can learn about Winston Churchill from his wife and marriage." [The Wall Street Journal](#) "Thorough and engaging. . . . Purnell's extensive and insightful biography offers a much welcome portrait of Clementine Churchill, a woman whose remarkable life has long been overshadowed by her famous husband." [Washington Post](#) "Until this biography, Clementine's influence had been completely overlooked and undervalued by Winston's biographers. Clementine was a complicated, mercurial figure, and Purnell does a wonderful job painting a full picture of a woman who was an excellent wife, a mediocre at best mother, and privy to some of the most profound moments of the modern era." [Jessica Grose, in Lena Dunham's A Lenny Letter](#) "Fascinating! [Purnell's] book may leave you thinking Clementine is one of the most underrated, complex women in British history." [The Daily Beast](#) "Sonia Purnell's fine biography. . . brings out a lot of the shadows this formidable woman who was much more than strictly a spouse." [Newsday](#) "A fascinating and well-written account of a woman who played a key role in many pivotal moments of early-20th-century British and world politics." [Minneapolis Star-Tribune](#) "A sharply drawn, absorbing portrait of Churchill's elegant, strong-willed wife, who was also his adviser, supporter, protector, and manager. . . . Purnell argues persuasively for Clementine's importance to history: she functioned as her husband's astute political strategist; insisted that he consider her feminist views; vetted his speeches; and campaigned for his successes. . . . A riveting, illuminating life of a remarkable woman." [Kirkus Reviews](#) (Starred Review) "[A] probing, well-researched and wise biography." [Washington Times](#) "This exemplary biography illustrates how Clementine's intelligence, hard work, and perseverance in often difficult circumstances made her every bit a match for her remarkable, intimidating husband, and a fascinating figure in her own right." [Publishers Weekly](#) (Starred

Review)“The extensive research shines a deserved spotlight on Britain’s first lady through wartime and beyond.” •Fort Worth Star-Telegram“Purnell does a remarkable job of proving that Clementine had a large impact on Winston’s life. . . He seems to have known immediately upon meeting her that she would be the one who could support his great ambitions and moderate his mood swings and gambling. . . She edited his writing, advised him on political decisions, and volunteered in many ways throughout both world wars. Her significance, in many way, can be compared to that of Eleanor Roosevelt.” --Library Journal“Sonia Purnell has restored Clementine Churchill to her rightful place in history. Behind every great man there is a great woman and this was especially true of Winston Churchill. Clementine is a fascinating portrait of a highly complex woman who only ever showed a brave and elegant face to the world. At last, thanks to Sonia Purnell’s excellent book, we see her true nature.” Amanda Foreman, author of *A World on Fire*“At last Sonia Purnell has given us the first political biography of Clementine Churchill, a woman of power and progressive vision. Although she was her husband’s best guide and most astute advisor during the worst of times, her essential role is generally unacknowledged. Boldly written and illuminating, this is a generative restoration of a fascinating woman who transcended family grief and marital agonies to lead her husband and the nation with grace, commitment and persistence.” Blanche Wiesen Cook, author of *Eleanor Roosevelt*“An acute and sympathetic biography which brings Clementine Churchill out of the shade into which her illustrious and domineering husband has cast her and shows how key she was to his success.” Sonia Purnell makes us ask how Clementine endured life with Winston, and provides the answers.” Margaret MacMillan, author of *Paris 1919* and *The War that Ended Peace* “In this wonderful book Sonia Purnell has at long last given Clementine Churchill the biography she deserves. Sensitive yet clear-eyed, Clementine tells the fascinating story of a complex woman struggling to maintain her own identity while serving as the conscience and principal adviser to one of the most important figures in history. Purnell succeeds brilliantly at an almost impossible task: providing fresh and thought-provoking insights into Winston Churchill in the course of examining his complicated marriage. I was enthralled all the way through.” Lynn Olson, bestselling author of *Citizens of London* and *Those Angry Days*“An excellent book! Both scrupulous and fair-minded, Sonia Purnell has done her subject proud in this eye-opening and engrossing account of the strong-willed and ambitious woman without whom Winston Churchill’s political career would have been a washout.”

“It seems extraordinary that no one has given this remarkable woman proper biographical treatment before. . . She sacrificed her children and her health in the greater service of her husband, but she also kept him buoyant. This book is a salutary reminder that the Churchills were always a team.”

“Compellingly readable. . . Sonia Purnell’s biography of Winston’s wife Clementine brings her out from behind the shadow cast by the Great Man. She became her husband’s wise counselor, discreetly offering sound advice, re-writing his speeches, toning down his foolish or angry letters, preventing him from making certain terrible political mistakes. . . Her wheeling and dealing was done behind a veil of gracious femininity.”

“Eye-opening. . . A bold biography of a bold woman; at last Purnell has put Clementine Churchill at the center of her own extraordinary story, rather than in the shadow of her husband’s.”

“In our own era of sturdy individualism, it is remarkable to read of Clementine’s resolve to subordinate her own desires and her children’s happiness to her husband’s cause. . . An intriguing study of a character both deeply flawed and, in her way, magnificent.”

Sonia Purnell is a biographer and journalist who has worked at The Telegraph and Sunday Times. Her first book, *Just Boris*, a candid portrait of London mayor and Brexit champion Boris Johnson, was longlisted for the Orwell prize. *Clementine* (published as *First Lady* in the UK) was chosen as a Book of the Year by The Telegraph and Independent and shortlisted for the Plutarch Award for biography. She is working now on a book on the daring exploits of Virginia Hall, America’s most courageous and unlikely wartime spy. Residence: London, UK Social: Twitter: SoniaPurnell

She put Winston before everyone, including children and her own health. This excellent book focuses on Clementine’s family, origins, marriage, and her interactions with the political elite between the world wars. Highly recommended biography!

This was a book club selection -- I like historical biographies and found this one to be interesting to see the perspective of the woman behind the man. I did find the writing difficult at first because of the sentence structure. But after several chapters got used to it. I appreciate the way the author brought different people’s point of view into the description of the times. Every time I read a book

about WWII, I am amazed at the tenacity of the people of that time to emotionally and physically survive the horror of that war. This book shares some of those thoughts and emotions from one close to a major participant in the decision making process.

Really enjoyed this book as it was a great history of Britain as well as an intimate look at both Churchills, their family and friends as well as some of the great leaders of their day - Roosevelt, Stalin, Clement Atlee, Averell Harriman -- it certainly knocked these people off their pedestals and gave us a look at all the skeletons in their closets. Rather than pick on details, I tended to look at the broad picture and thoroughly enjoyed this well-written biography which was well written and gripping in many ways. To be that gripped by a book when the ending is already well known says a lot for the writing. I found myself rooting for Clementine and occasionally wishing someone would have given Winston a good boot in the butt for not appreciating all she did for him, risking her health and subverting her own interesting personality to cater to his needs. Most people idolized Churchill and his accomplishments, and indeed, I wonder if any other politician could have saved the world from Hitler. However, this book makes it very clear that without his 'Clemmie' behind him, Winston most likely would never have succeeded. Not terribly maternal with her children, Clementine nevertheless put up with her gigantic child-like, spoiled and demanding husband, catering to his every whim and studying not only the politics but the personalities behind them in order to guide him in making intelligent decisions. Unknown to most, she became the iron hand in the velvet glove and eventually won the admiration and respect of many world leaders. She did not have an easy life, constantly fearing they could not afford his extravagant demands and habits and often living hand-to-mouth on the charity of friends. Although we all know the outcome of the war, few of us might know the great part Winston Churchill's wife Clementine played in it.

Loved this book. Very good information on the remarkable Mrs Winston Churchill. Does not whitewash her character flaws. She was very critical of her mother in law, Jenny Churchill for her neglect of her children. But she herself was a distant and aloof mother of all of her older children, who all had major problems with alcohol, drugs, depression, mental illness and suicide. She did get it right with her last child, Mary. Clementine was a devoted and diligent advocate for her husband, Winston. It is hard to imagine that he could have overcome the obstacles he placed in his own way, without her help. Winston was notoriously oblivious and obtuse about the feelings of others. This would have been a career killer if he had not had a wife who was able to influence and get him to become more self aware. Strangely enough her friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt, was reflective of

two women who had a lot in common. Both women came from aristocratic families. Both had been troubled with severe insecurity that they overcame to become major personalities in their own right. Both women were also the "Conscience" of their husbands. The difference between them is that Clementine's relationship with Winston was a love match. Eleanor's relationship with FDR's was notably a platonic friendship after his affair with Lucy Mercer. Winston remained devoted to Clementine and quite dependent on her for the rest of his life. Winston would have driven most women crazy, he was a very difficult man, and it was probably the best decision he ever made to marry Clementine.

I have read multiple biographies about Winston Churchill; however, this was the first one I have read about Mrs. Churchill. The ones about him are often a bit tedious and mention her infrequently. This book brought to light her significant role in helping him lead the country and at times, the world through two tragic wars. She led women into new and important roles in the world and did so with beauty and grace while seldom receiving acknowledgement for her contributions. Wow as she would have expressed when she was really impressed by something. Wow is how I rate this book. Hard to put it down! Great writing. TRW

This is a marvelous book because it reveals a woman's complicated life in nuanced detail AND because it situates that life within the context of history. Clementine Churchill is as deserving of a first-rate biography as her husband, and Sonia Purnell has given her that. It's a compelling read that makes no attempt to gloss over anything--such as her indifference to her children at times. All it does is give "Clemmie" credit for years of devoted service to her husband and her nation. As the author of a "woman behind a great man" biography myself, I know what it takes to bring someone out of the shadows. Purnell has done exactly that and I, for one, am grateful for her work and her talent.

While I consider myself a very deep student of all things Churchill, I found this quite a learning experience. Particularly illuminating about her contribution to his success and indeed her role in the WW2 result. It also highlighted what a difficult personality this great man possessed. The book also was a very useful study of the family dynamics and how that affected all of them.

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