

## Background to the 1925 letters

*Cyril got engaged to Elaine Oakden out in India in April 1925. Elaine had two sisters, Gladys and Dorothy and they were the daughters of Ralph & Rosa Oakden (Later Sir & Lady). Ralph was a Collector in India, an important civil official. Cyril, Elaine and Gladys all visited the UK during 1924 and there are photographs of them in the garden at 3 Woodlands Road, Barnes. I am uncertain as to when George & Ellen first met Ralph & Rosa. The following letters refer to Elaine's sister Dorothy who married Ernest Herbert in December 1924 in India. It would seem that they travelled to the UK following their wedding.*

3 Woodlands Rd, Barnes, London SW13  
7<sup>th</sup> January 1925

Dear Cyril,

I feel very proud of myself in starting this letter on Wednesday afternoon instead of leaving it until the last moment on Thursday morning.

Last week the year commenced with wind and rain and the enclosed pictures are merely instances of floods which were pretty general. Still, when I took your ma and Mildred & Ella to North London on Friday night we were not inconvenienced. It was not cold or wet and we made the journey each way quite comfortably without waiting for trains or buses. We visited the Wrights and enjoyed ourselves as they were very pleasant and had the right touch. The previous evening we spent with Mr & Mrs A L Sellar and they were kind but inclined to press their hospitality.

Saturday night the weather changed and we have had 2 or 3 days of clear sky, - cold – but with sunshine. Beatrix went off on Monday to stay at Shere for 5 days with her friend Margaret Clarke and so we are especially glad the rains have stopped a bit. Francie is better and has gone this afternoon to the

Haymarket Theatre with Amy Dunster to see “A Kiss for Cinderella” by Sir James Barrie.

I have received from Lloyds Bank the guarantee I signed in July last and have been informed that the loan has been repaid. I will keep the papers for a few months. Congratulations on getting clear and best wishes that you will not require to repeat it. If difficult to carry on normally, it is much harder when repayments have to be made. Some correspondence about Mess Expenses has appeared in the Times and I send 2 cuttings so that you may not miss it. There is also the paragraph about Revision of pay of Officers in India which raises our hopes for you. Last paragraph but one suggests free passage to this country and that would be joyful.

The extract about Christmas in India makes us wonder how far it agrees with your experience. If you make any observations about it, please return it for reference as it is rather difficult to remember some of the accounts of a life that is so strange to us.

Your Aunt Alice (or Elizabeth as she is now called at Abbots' Langley) stayed with us here from Saturday to Monday and Mildred & Ella are going to Abbots' Langley tomorrow for the day. All are well. Aunt Maria is gaining flesh and strength. Francis has been a little anxiety but she is making good progress.

*Rest of this letter is missing.*

*Another portion of a letter – p2,3 – undated.*

*If 2, 3 & the next unnumbered page are all the same letter (the paper and writing suggest so) then it must be 1925 or later as it refers to Dorothy Oakden's marriage to Ernest Herbert, dated 10<sup>th</sup> December 1924.*

*It must also precede the letter dated 29/1/25 which refers to hearing from Herbert.*

2.

Is there service at Woolwich outside of Staff and of Ordinary Services?

It reminds me of Blake at Cambridge. Do you write to him there. Would you like me to do so?

When I read your letters telling me of the many things which calls on your time I feel the complaint is in the family and, personally, I think it is a good sign, a sign that one is taking interest in the life around. If you have not time to read the cuttings I send I hope you won't let them worry you. They are only sent on the off chance of being useful. But the mind cannot absorb all kinds of good things at once, - there is a limit. And what is useful at one time may not be so at another. Just now you may be needing Football qualities and next month require different thoughts in your mind. I have long been under the impression that I have missed something by not having given more attention to poetry. It would seem to be much better than gardening but the body must have some physical exercise.

I am rambling about general principles because there is practically no more news.

3.

We have not heard from the Herberts since Dorothy wrote on her bed to thank us for our wedding gift. (10/12/24)

Others are much as usual. Aunt Maria is not so well. She has an abscess on her neck, glands decaying, and had to keep in bed all last week. It is rather a severe tie for your Aunt Alice.

I am doing some mild chess against much weaker opponents but I get tired sooner than I used to do and cannot stand the strain so well. Tomorrow I have a match against Richmond.

No news from Brondesbury Park lately. I believe Buff is having bad business time.

I have been rather interested in the Calendar lately. I suppose the English arrangements apply generally in India although Mohammedans I believe have a separate Calendar and begin their years at a different time. Is there any confusion on the subject? We have taken our Calendar from the Romans who had 10 months only for a time and then added January & February making them first and last; but later first & second.

Of course, in the earliest times people worked by the moon and only gradually discovered the exact length of the year

*The next page is probably p4 of the above letter (the corner has been torn) which Cyril kept for what I think will be obvious reasons. Quite heartwarming to read!*

Your ma rows me occasionally because she says I did not treat you well when you were at school. I did not know it. I did not mean it. I am sure I can rely on you to forgive me if I blundered and appeared to take the wrong line. Of course if I was not so liberal as I should have liked to have been it was the result of proportion between income and the demands made on it. As I neither smoked nor drank intoxicants nor had other expensive hobbies I did not spend an undue amount on myself. I do remember one snowy day you asked me to carry you and I refused merely because I thought the exercise would help to keep you warm. A little while after you were laid up with diphtheria and had an impediment in your speech. And the thought that I might have been more kind if I had carried you has been with me ever since. Now you are better able to carry us! And I am very glad.

Ever your affectionate Dad

GAH

.....

*This is an extract from a letter which refers to Friday fortnight, 13<sup>th</sup> February which places it in late January 1925.*

And so you see even when we go to the pictures you come to our mind.

What are you going to do with the leopard's skin? I daresay you felt lively and active when you saw him but I cannot guess what Mrs Oakden's feelings were when she saw the tiger near her.

This morning your ma had a letter from Graham Freaker about a whist drive to be held next Friday fortnight - 13<sup>th</sup> Feb. I expect some of us will go. He mentioned that his mother had received a letter from you and I was very glad to know you had written. Mrs Freaker is a kind lady and I am glad when anyone helps to brighten her life.

I am going to paste a few cuttings on to the back in case you have not seen them.

No doubt you find life much too short and you cannot do nearly all you want to do. It is the same with all of us, - but go on wanting to do it and you will do something.

The weather here keeps very wet and makes getting about very troublesome. We should have gone to see Mt Everest on the pictures this evening had it been better weather but as it is we prefer the fireside. Beatrix is dancing with Irene and her society.

*Thursday morning 29/1/25*

A letter from Herbert this morning.

He is staying with the Revd C Roberts at Aylesbury and is going to St Leonards for a few days. He will be back in London next Tuesday and of course we shall ask him to bring Dorothy and make this their base whilst in London.

If I do not write next week you will know the reason, - they will be occupying my time. Your ma will see for extra household assistance and we will do our best to give them a good time. We expect Mildred home on the 5<sup>th</sup> Feb and she will help a bit although I think she is coming up for her Mathematical Society of which she is Secretary.

How are you getting on with your Munshi?

Herbert says you looked fit and we were glad to have his testimony. He arrived in London last Saturday - 24/1/25.

I won't send you a crossword puzzle, - they take too much time.

Ever your affectionate Dad  
GAH

3 Woodlands Road, Barnes, London SW13

18<sup>th</sup> Nov 1925 Wednesday

Dear Cyril,

As I am afraid I missed the mail last week I am writing on Wednesday this week but there is not much to tell. We had Francie at home for the week and she brought a new dress in Kensington. On Saturday we took her to see "Lionel & Clarissa" – a musical play written 200 years ago by J Bickerstaffe, - music by Dibdin.

(NB You can actually hear an audio recording from 1925 on [You Tube here!](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwDHCaNhZ4A))

Link Address: <https://youtu.be/AwDHCaNhZ4A>



It was old fashioned but very good and we had a pleasant evening.

(Bickerstaffe committed some capital crime, fled the country and was not heard of afterwards.)

Next week and we have your Aunt Elizabeth as she now wishes to be called. She won her Chess match in a team against the National Liberal Club last Saturday and I am playing tomorrow evening against the Ludgate Circus Cle. There is always a certain amount of nervousness beforehand.

Last week end Mildred was at Cambridge visiting her friends Mis Major and Stephanie who got married in August to Prof Taylor. We have been having

[https://www.google.com/search?q=Lionel+and+Clarissa&rlz=1C1VDKB\\_en-GBGB1003GB1003&oq=Lionel+and+Clarissa&gs\\_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOdlBCDU4NDFqMGo3qAIAA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:fac0b4f6,vid:AwDHCaNhZ4A](https://www.google.com/search?q=Lionel+and+Clarissa&rlz=1C1VDKB_en-GBGB1003GB1003&oq=Lionel+and+Clarissa&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOdlBCDU4NDFqMGo3qAIAA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:fac0b4f6,vid:AwDHCaNhZ4A)

Excerpts from Alfred Reynolds's version of Dibdin and Bickerstaffe's 1768 opera recorded in 1925 by the cast of the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith. The opera opened on 28th October 1925 and was produced by Nigel Playfair who had staged the highly successful 1920 revival of 'The Beggar's Opera' at the same theatre. The part of Lionel was taken by Wilfred Temple (real name Wilfred Templeman Windeler) who was described as "the most handsome tenor in London". As well as a boxer, athlete and swimmer, Temple had been a cavalry officer in the Indian Army, but by 1925 was running a large fruit farm in Kent. Clarissa was played by Olive Groves, wife of singer George Baker. Other cast members included Herbert Waring (Sir John Flowerdale), Ivan Samson (Harman), Hayden Coffin (Jenkins), Lottie Venne (Lady Mary Oldboy), Stella Seager (Diana), and Nadine March (Jenny). The first night was attended by, among others, H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett. HMV rapidly cashed in on the success by making three double-sided records using the new Western Electric process comprising:

1. Go and on my truth relying
2. To fear a stranger
3. Ah, talk not with me
4. Why with sighs
5. O, what a night is here for love
6. Indeed, forsooth, a pretty youth
7. Ah, prithee spare me
8. How cursedly vexed
9. Ladies, pray admire the figure
10. In Italy
11. Come, then, peevish, pining lover
12. Bear, oh bear me
13. Oh, bliss unexpected

The illustration is taken from 'The Bystander' of Wednesday 9th December 1925.

