

32, FOWSON ROAD
BANGOR, S. E. 4.

15th November 1936

My dear Jim,

I received your charming letter last evening and I lose no time in (at least beginning) to reply to it, with the resolve to finish it within a reasonable period, But I don't know how far my laudable intention will be fulfilled, for I often begin letters that don't get very far owing to circumstances beyond my control. And perhaps, to tell the truth, are prevented by the indolence of old age.

At 81 I spend a lot of time with my pen and typewriter, but not overmuch in personal and intimate correspondence, but I do pride myself that I have not omitted a weekly letter to my favourite nephew Cyril who went out to India, as a missionary, three years ago. I suspect the spell will be broken when he returns on furlough early in next year, if I live long enough to see him made a priest here in England and then to go back to his work in Bangalore.

As to family records about which you ask, I do not seem to know very much; I have never been as keen on family history as, perhaps, I ought to have been. Aunt Chriss (R.I.P.) used to be very keen on some imaginary greatness attaching, properly, to the family, with a castle and property in Scotland fraudulently withheld from us, but this always used to amuse me as a "fairy story" !

However, I have in recent years found out that we have a quite respectable ancestry going back to the year 1230 !!! A kinsman, by name, A.F. Cairncross, of Broughty Ferry, Forfarshire in Scotland, has compiled "A History of a Forfarshire Family" and begins his records "The Birth of the Cairncross Family". And goes on "It is highly probable, if not a certainty, that the first individual who adopted Cairncross as a surname was descended from the lay abbots of the Celtic Church in Brechin and Glenesk, in Forfarshire, then called Angus" He traces a great many of the names down to recent times, but he does not definitely identify my father James Wilson Cairncross, although he himself belongs to Dundee where my father was born and bred.

My mother's maiden name was Methven, and ^{she} was supposed to be well-born, and in marrying to have done so below her social position !!

My parents lived in Dundee; my father worked for a firm of jute merchants, and was sent by them to London to be foreman of a firm with which they were connected in some way or other, namely T. & D. Henry, Sack makers & c of Mark Lane, London, E.C. near the Tower of London. I think they brought ~~three~~ ^{two} children with them - James and Christina - and I believe the others, Sarah, John, Alice (your mother), Clara, and Henry (myself) were all born in London. I fancy there were others, who died in infancy; ~~and there was one, Lillie of whose maternity we were uncertain. We always believed she was a love child of my father. She was married before I was born, and I hardly knew her at all.~~

My father was born in 1815, in Dundee; and he died in London in 1865.

James	born 1843; died 1920
William	born 1846 died 1925
Christina	born 1847 died 1935
John Henry	born 1851 died 1922
Sarah Ann	born 1852 died 1920
Clara	born 1854 died 1920
Alice	born 1857 died 1915
Henry	born 1856 surviving

The three deaths in 1920 were within three weeks of each other. R.I.P.

James had 8 sons and 5 daughters, of whom I know hardly anything, except that his grandson Walter is a churchman and comes to see me at rare intervals. He has a sister living very near me, in the next road, but I have never met her. Her husband is a grocer's assistant, who is too grand to "know" his neighbour who is a tram conductor, and as my niece-housekeeper's husband is also a tram conductor I have thought it advisable not to make the acquaintance of my great-niece lest she should snub my admirable and devoted housekeeper.!

William's son and one daughter are living and I meet them at rare intervals.

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John emigrated to Canada about 1866, I think, not so very long before your mother joined him out there; and yet, I don't know for certain, my memory is defective. I'm rather inclined to think now, that your mother went out after 1876. Perhaps you know better than I do.

John had one son and two daughters. And I believe they are living still; one of the daughters came over to England three or four years ago and paid me a visit. She was a widow; ^{my} one daughter, who accompanied her on the European tour; a nice child, preternaturally sharp.

~~This daughter, Christine, had married a German and was very poor. He died, and I think her married sister~~

also died, and Christine kept house for the widower,

and in due course he died and left his large fortune to Christine !!! Who, by the way, has a son at the Uni-

versity. (I don't know what is the matter with the spacing of this machine - unless it's the stupidity of the typist!!)

His son Methven, I believe, has a sound business as a builder &c in Canada, having succeeded to his father's business.

my sister
Christina., first married a William Dewar, who died without leaving any progeny. She next married Edward John Smith, still surviving in his 88th year. They had a large family, of some seven or eight children, of whom one or two died in infancy. Edward the eldest, and Sidney, the second son both died a few years ago. The former married twice, but I do not think had any family by either wife. Sidney was also married and had several children, who are, so far as I know, all living, as well as his widow. Alfred married and has about eight children living. Harry (Henry Matthew) married just about the time you were in London, of which event I knew nothing for some time, when I happened to see it in a church magazine. His bride was also living here as a boarder! He went to the war and lost a finger of his left hand. He has had no children, and his wife is a confirmed invalid. She is a very well educated and superior person, and very capable in every way. I got him a post in my office and there he is to the present day, earning a respectable salary, which with his war pension enables him to live in decent comfort, though doctors' bills are rather crippling. He is very solicitous for my welfare and spares me all the worries, so far as he is

able. He also manages his father's affairs for him.

Edith, the eldest daughter of E.J.S. is married and has a large family, all being married except one, a boy of about 22. Some of them are doing fairly well, better than their parents who have always been in poverty.

You will have heard in the past all about Mother Smith (Christina) and her husband. She was a dear. Poor thing, she suffered blindness for a number of years, but bore it with exemplary fortitude. She passed away on Feb. 8th, 1935, as I think I wrote and told you. He has since lived alone, until Easter Day (12th April last) when he had to be taken to a General Hospital, where he still is, and I fear he is not likely ever to recover sufficient health to be discharged. He keeps mostly to his bed, although he was up and about for several weeks, he has had a relapse and is back in bed again. He is quite alert, and cheerful, and very talkative, and has all his faculties. I go to see him once a week - in the fine weather I went twice a week.

I fear you will consider all this very desultory and disconnected. I ought to have drafted it out in the rough, and then edited it before putting it in a letter. If I can find time, in the not distant future, I will set the information out in more intelligible form and send it to you, but for the present you can try to disentangle the information above.

I ought to have mentioned that my father was admitted a Freeman of the City of London, the possession of which is considered some distinction. I believe I could have claimed the Freedom by reason of my birth in the City, by merely registering; and as the son of a Freeman, but I did not bother about it. - woe is me.

I observe that I have said nothing about my sister Sarah Ann. I rather fancy she married in London and that she and her husband, and I think one child, emigrated to the States, and there had a considerable family. One of her sons, joined up in the Great War, and when he got a "blighty" came to stay with me. I remember that while on that visit his first child was born. He was rather young, in his early 20's. He worked at the Ford Motor Works and had good pay - about £ 7 a week. I corresponded with him for some time after the war, but eventually we lost touch of each other, for which I am now sorry.

15/1/37 Just as I anticipated.! Two whole months and then inaction, so far as writing goes. And then in the interim comes more evidence of your loving kindness and thoughtfulness in the gift of the charming calendar of Contentment, with its weekly inspiring thoughts. Thank you ever so much.

That period of the year always is most busy for me; much to be done in the way of church work; old (and more rarely, new) friends to be communicated with; needs to be considered; some small book or other to be got into publication; and goodness only knows what; so really people tell me I am not indolent, far from it

and that I do far too much. Perhaps I'm a bit irregular and lose time by not properly organizing my activities. But I'm too old to reform now !!

Since I started this letter there has been another death in the family. Uncle Ted's eldest daughter, Edith, lost her husband after a short illness in December. (R. J. P.)

He himself, I am sorry to say, ^{seems} has had a relapse and seemed very near death when I was last able to visit him on Wednesday. His son Harry and I are going tomorrow. He suffers agonizing internal pains which the doctors do not seem able to cope with. We are praying that he may soon be taken and be at rest, as the doctors say nothing can be done for him, beyond what they are doing, which is only keeping him alive to suffer.

I'm taking all the scent "home news" in my stride before answering the details of your letter, so as to get off the least interesting part of my duty in writing.

For Xmass, as for the past 30 years and more, I had a (dwindling) Family Party to keep Xmass. Besides my house-keeper-niece, Lily, and her husband and son, Harry Smith and his Mabel, and his sister Alice, with her husband and son Gilbert. and a sister of Lily's (a niece I have not been in close touch with) all came for the day; and they came up into my bedroom and consoled their aged Uncle, who had incontinently contracted a severe attack of lumbago, which was so acute that the doctor had to be summoned, a thing I

hesitated

consenting to as it was only the second time in eleven years that he had had to come to me.!!!

However as I had more or less spoilt their festival it was arranged that they should all come again on the Sunday week following. And they did. And so did my acute pains.!! But I insisted on sitting up and managed to get through the afternoon and evening very pleasantly, and entertainingly.

I've just interrupted my writing to read a letter from a lady friend of my youth, from whom I had not heard since before the War, and her letter is beautifully written, as steady as my own script, and she tells me written without glasses and she in her 90th year. I blush at my own youthfulness of 81 years, ~~can't~~ altogether do without glasses . !

Now for your own charming letter ad seriatim.

I'm always more than delighted when you do write, but I never attribute silence as forgetfulness, or loss of affection. Indeed I am very proud to have won your love and esteem upon so slight an acquaintance of one meeting - you and Isabel. It is wonderful that you should continue so faithful when I am myself so neglectful.

It's very nice of Isabel to send me the snaps. I got a Kodak myself some years ago especially to make snaps for you but I was too old to begin a new hobby, and hardly any use was made of it, though I fancy a few were taken and forwarded to you. But I'm pleased immensely to have any that are sent me; it helps one to visualize. I see, e.g. that you look little older than Paul; ~~and that he is a fine specimen of manhood.~~ And so on and all that.

Gilbert took me about a year ago, and I am not so sure that I did not send you a copy. But lest I did not, here it is, and if it is de trop no doubt you have a waste paper basket.!

However does Isabel get through all that she seems to do, without making a slave of herself, and, more wonderful still, preserving the freshness of youth and interest in life? I suspect Paul and his boy-friends react upon her good self.

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Paul is a youth after my own heart, for I seem as if I had known and loved him a long time; ever since I hung the curly-headed boy's photograph on the wall where I can see him every day. God bless and prosper him and keep him ever "mother's boy". I think I'm glad he inclines to mechanics rather than pen-pushing.

Posterity may recognize him as another "Bill Morris" (Lord Nuffield) who started bicycle-mending on 39/-, and 30 years later gives away a couple of million pounds in a casual sort of way!!

But don't you yourself, my dear boy, get too absorbed in work to the exclusion of other interests. I know, for quite early I lost the capacity of getting full enjoyment out of recreation, and now in my ageing state, care little for amusement, and even have nearly lost the power of "reading", and turn with more readiness to a technical work (in my own pet subject) than to the even best fiction of the day. Like yourself, I broke down in 1919, with over concentration on my work, and had to be forced to take a long rest, or get the sack - rather, I mean, than be pensioned off. !!!

That was the year when I tried to get over to the States ~~fer-a-vaist~~ on a visit to my little-known relatives, but could not secure a passport, without an adequate reason, which mine was not so considered.

I'm sorry your dad should have suffered a second bereavement in the loss of his second wife; and that fortune has not smiled on him. It's a bit rough on you that you should be taxed with the support of poor relations while you are struggling to establish your own secure independence in your own old age, when it comes.

I am interested in what you tell me of Edith, whom I do remember, and of Alex; and I am sorry the

latter does not bear his fair share in helping his father. But so it often is.

I think I had better bring this discursive epistle to a close, as otherwise I should have to lay it aside, and it might be another two months, or longer, before I resumed it, and that would be too bad. Such as it is you will take it - you will not find it as interesting as I find your letters; I never could write really good epistles without first drafting them.

Accept, all of you, my undying love, and fondest wishes for your truest happiness and success.

And believe me, Your ever affectionate

Uncle Harry Cairncross

82, HAYSON ROAD,

BROCKLEY, S. E. 4.

1st March 1938

You dearest of dear young folk,

How to answer in anything like adequate fashion Isabel's wonderful epistle of mid-December is quite beyond my feeble powers, but I can at least make, what ought to have been done a month ago, some sort of acknowledgment beyond the mere post-card that I think I posted at once, in anticipation of some delay. I confess I do not get many letters of this kind - though more than I deserve - but in replying to them it is always the same old thing, the having to ask forgiveness for long delay.

And now how am I to begin? I am indeed embarrassed with riches:

Shall I take first the scanty home news that I may have to tell?

'Tis now nearly a quarter of a century since I first had the happiness of meeting you two dear ones; and how sweet I found you from the moment that I opened the door and darling Jim kissed me there and then, completely capturing my rather lonely heart. Well, well!!! And the few short weeks you stayed in London cemented an affection that - on your side as on my own - I am sure will never die, though thousands of miles continue to separate us. God bless all three of you.

I think I must have written and told you of the passing of dear old Uncle Ted on Jan. 22 last year, and yet I am not certain; I never am, I am always in doubt; a failing memory, and an uncomfortable tendency to severe giddiness, are the chief evidences of my 82 years, recently completed!

That left me the sole survivor of our original family. So what can I write about? Lily and her husband and son are all well and happy. Dick found a job in my old company, the North British &

Mercantile Insurance Company, and seems to have settled down happily. He works hard in the evenings to prepare for exams in accountancy, and some day he might be promoted to a good position in his company. Lily continues to be very devoted to me, and looks after my every want, often before I express it, and I am entirely dependent on her loving offices for my material comforts. Harry Smith and his wife jog along. She is a confirmed invalid though, D.G. not often confined to bed; but always in the doctors' hands and baffling them to find a cure, which is never likely to materialize.

The Moxleys are O.K. Gilbert comes in to see me, generally once a week, and usually takes a meal with me on Sunday evenings. He is in his 30th year, and I wish he would get married, but I don't know that any girl has yet captured his heart. He says he can't afford to marry on his salary of £300, which however is progressive. My father never earned anything like that, I'm sure, and we were a family of ten!

Cyril got permission to come to England last year (in January) to get ordained priest, which materialized in October last. He has a curacy in central London, and is working devotedly therein. He is quite a saint, and is held in high esteem by his colleagues and others.

In June last year I lost an old friend of over 40 years standing, who left his affairs in the hands of a young man of 30 (married and with two children) and with whom I then became acquainted and we have struck up a ~~friendship of close intimacy.~~ He is a most charming, gentle, placid, and devout young fellow; and I often liken him in my mind with your own dear self; Jim. He has become the apple of my eye, and has brought much joy and companionship into my lonely declining days. His name is Basil, and now that I am on the telephone, as he is we are able to be in daily touch with each other.

No 82 is just the same shabby old house that you will remember. It suits my modest wants, and like an old tree I am too deeply rooted in it to be easily transplanted. All the family look down in scorn upon it, but if I had a more expensive house (probably no more comfortable) I should have a smaller margin of income devotable

to more needy objects. So that's that.!

My life jogs on quietly, uneventfully; I go into the City and potter about my church as warden, three days a week; and for the rest I leave to the exigencies of the occasion. My "literary" work on my annual kalendar occupies a fair amount of time; and I am now interested in the revision of my book, published in 1935, RITUAL NOTES, of which a fresh edition, may be called for perhaps at the end of this year. But we must wait and see, as Mr Asquith used to say.

~~I really don't think there is anything more I can write about that would slightly interest you - very different from your own letters which always enthrall me~~

Now for you letter.!

I rejoice that you keep well enough to stick so closely to your business, though life ought not to be all work; at any rate I expect that your home life brings you great joy and sufficient mental relief to make life worth living. Paul must be a remarkable youth; how proud you must be of him. I often gaze upon his portrait with admiration and almost envy!

Thank you ever so much for the lovely snaps. I can with their aid visualize your mode of living and interests. I'm no hand at photographing; or indeed at hardly anything else, except wielding a pen; and not much to boast about in that.

~~I should like to see your living room - just exactly double the size of mine! I hope you can keep it warm in the bitter weather such as we have been passing through. I spend many long hours all alone in my front room, and it is large enough for the purpose. Only three or four times a year, when the Moxleys and Smiths join us, does it seem a bit too small for my use.~~

I am interested to hear about your dad, and I am glad you are able to be a help to him. I wonder if he remembers me? I can hardly recall Edie's face. I should like you to give her my kindest remembrances.

I expect Isabel would like to keep her letter

which she sent for my delectation, and so I return it herwith with a thousand thanks and congratulations upon a wonderful compilation. You are really a very brilliant and gifted family, and I feel very small and ungifted in comparison. Good luck to you, and may your worth be properly recognized and bring you prosperity.

Fancy your all having visted the LIMBERLOST - I read the book and was entranced.

How very interesting is Isabel's account of Paul's business relations ~~is~~. I am sure he will make a great success. Did Isabel get that trip she wrote abot with the American Pen women? It would have been grand, I guess.

I should love to stop and deal with every bit of news in both your letter and Isabel's avuncular epistle, but I'm such a poor typist and my one finger is aching, so I had better shut up and not weary you any more, *with typing errors - my machine is a bad speller!*

With my fondest love and very best wishes to you all; and if only the rest of my relations knew I was writing those who met you would join me, I know, in kind greetings.

Believe me,

Ever your most affect.

Uncle Harry C. *Uncle*

P.S. What an ingrate I am! When I began this letter I was half inclined to begin by thanking you for your most generous and acceptable gift of a year's issue of the ~~READERS DIGEST~~, but I thought I had better do so later on, and then, of course, it went clean out of mind till I began to envelope this. Forgive me. I am so glad to have the DIGEST. Its wonderfully informative. I read it in bed each night, and love it. And then I lend it to Basil, who likes to discuss some of articles with me. I can't read as much as I used to do; seldom any books now-a-days; and newspapers I merely glance at. So my intellect is getting atrophied.

H.