

Little Adstock, Bletchley,
4th June, 1941

My dear Rufus,

I am glad you want to know about the family and your forbears and I hasten to give you a few facts, which I have wished in vain to make interesting to my children in the past. Ancestry may not be very important but I feel it is interesting.

As to your paternal origin, you know about the Liberator and presumably those who are interested either in an ancestor well-known or an ancestor meritorious will get hold of his biography. I can add a reason for doing so, namely that it was I who got it republished, after five editions had gone out of print. I got Dent & Co. to bring it out in the Everyman series. Dent preferred it unrevised, as a sample of good Victorian writing. It was by his son Charles, a well-known M.P., whose "Notes of Thought" you have. As you know, my grandfather, the Liberator's son, Sir Edward, who was Member for West Essex, lived at Colne House. This illustrates a feature of the family tradition which I think should be a subject of pride. He could easily have bought a large country house. My father used to tell us that we must not regard ourselves as belonging to the grand county people, though he happened to have a lot of land and a big house. The origin of Warlies was that my grandfather thought that he ought to have land in his Parliamentary division and bought it for this reason, though not intending to live in it. (The tradition I refer to is rather unique. Since about 1700 the family, who had lived in Paycock's house up to then, became rich enough to buy land and bought various farms in East Essex, but they always divided them among their sons and never aimed at a territorial social position. My uncle Louis Buxton of Bolwick (the genealogist of the family; you should see my copy of his volume "The Buxtons of Coggeshall") pointed out that for a very long period they were people of comfortable means, of orderly ways and apparently of very serious outlook. They joined the Independents of Cromwell's time, now the Congregationalists, and they built a chapel at Coggeshall about 1700.

I put a stained-glass window in the hall at Paycocks, with the arms claimed by William Buxton in 1625. He is the first definitely identified. The generations were William, Thomas, Isaac, Charles, Isaac, Thomas Fowell Thomas Fowell the Liberator, Edward North, Thomas Fowell (my father). The second Isaac married Sarah Fowell, whose portrait, probably by Gainsborough, is at Woodredon. She brought the family diamonds. He was the cause of the Liberator becoming Member for Weymouth, and it occurred in a picturesque way. Isaac took his bride Sarah on their honeymoon to look at the famous view over Weymouth and Portland harbour and she was so charmed that he decided to give her a surprise, and one year later conducted her to a charming mansion which he had built on the spot. It was called Bellfield. It was left to his younger son Charles, a rough diamond who founded the Four-in-hand Club. He entertained George IV, who frequented Weymouth. Isaac's eldest son, the first Thomas Fowell, remained however in Essex. I took you to see the house at Earls Colne and the inscription to his gamekeeper in the church. Of course you will remember that the Liberator married the sister of Elizabeth Fry, who is so famous about prison reform.

If public repute is any guide, we ought to feel that we owe our forbears a good deal. One learns through public speaking (the chairman's remarks upon one) that the Buxtons have a reputation which is widely known for public spirit. This must come mainly from the Liberator. His descendants have not been so notable, but a lot of them have been useful people, public-spirited and reliable and the reputation is due to them too.

I was elected in Norfolk when not a single other rural seat in England voted Labour, owing to what is called "family influence". This is interesting, because we had no great territorial influence. It comes from many of the family being useful people in Norfolk and especially, I think, because countless Norfolk village women, who have been servants in Buxton houses, have found their employers markedly considerate.

The Eugenic Society lately published a tract about three "eugenic families", one of which was the Barclays. It was really more about Buxtons. It made out that the family had produced more Varsity Blues, good business men and politicians than almost any other family.

Now a few facts about the Noels, because my mother was a notable person. You must read her memoir. I like to record things which my mother told us as being of interest. There is a large family history (written by my cousin Emilia Noel) but I have not seen it. I gather that the Noels became prominent in Elizabeth's time. It is recorded that one was a courtier about whom Elizabeth wrote the lines you remember:

"The word of denial and the letter of fifty

Is the name of a man who will never be thrifty".

Exton, their chief place, where my mother was brought up, came, I think, from a man called Sir John Harrington, who had been put in charge of an exiled Queen of Bohemia, and at Exton there is a walk along the pond called the Queen of Bohemia's walk. When it came to the Noels I do not know. There was a glorious Elizabethan hall, of the lovely stone of those parts. It was burnt down in the time of my grandfather's father, Sir Gerard Noel, and he is said to have sat in an armchair watching it burn. The ruins are lovely and belong to the National Trust. You should go and see them. The new house was built by my grandfather on a better site. His son, turning Romanist, added a large chapel. The house is good Elizabethan. I used to stay there with my first cousin Gainsborough and later Mum came there with me for his son Gainsborough's funeral. A peculiar thing about Exton is the park being quite separated from the house, very big, with red deer. In the old Town Hall at Oakham you see the shields which record numbers of Noels who represented the Borough in Parliament.

Somewhere about the Civil War, the Noel of the day married the heiress of a great cloth-making magnate of the Cotswolds, Sir Baptist Hicks. He had built Campden House just before the war. Although it was a very lovely house (as one can see even from the stone summer-house which is all that remains) when Cromwell's armies approached he burned it down to save it from falling into their hands. Talk about devoted loyalty! There are wonderful monuments to the next generation or two of Noels in Campden Church; the new Campden House, where I often stayed, is very charming but fairly modern. It went to my cousin, Gainsborough's second son, and he later sold it without saying a word to any of his relations. You must get all the family to see Campden, which is perhaps the most beautiful village in England. We took you there when you were at the Dragon School and you will anyhow remember the cherries you ate, near the ruined summer house.

The peerage of Gainsborough had become extinct and my grandfather was a peer through inheriting through his mother, who was Lady Barham in her own right. The earldom of Gainsborough was revived afterwards in his favour, probably owing to his wife, my Grannie, being intimate with Queen Victoria. My grandfather owned Campden House ^{in London} and Campden Hill was called after it. He was rich, partly because he inherited from his mother's ancestor, Sir Charles Middleton, a share in the New River Company, which was built by Middleton in James I's time, but he had a passion for buying land and I remember my father saying that he therefore sold the New River Shares. They afterwards went to a value of £ 100,000, while the land which he bought with the proceeds had gone down to zero.

You would be interested in what you would read in my mother's memoir about recollections of hers and they recall two or three things worth noting about her forbears. First in regard to her mother. She was Lady Fanny Jocelyn. The Jocelyns originally came from Esses and got a grant of land in Co. Down in Ulster. Her father, Lord Roden, was head of the Orangemen, extremely pious and also anti-Romanist. @) He once allowed a demonstration of Orangemen in his park at Tollymore - where I learnt to poach salmon - which led to a raid on the Romanists at a place called Dolly's Brae. This became notorious and as a result there was a great agitation against him, which caused my Grannie great grief, especially as she was attending on the Queen at Windsor at the time. She was one of the Queen's first ladies-in-waiting. (This connection with Queen Victoria was a great feature of our life when I was a child, as Grannie was a widow and constantly at Warlies, so that we were brought up to tremendous reverence for the old Queen. Grannie was always getting books from the Queen with emotional inscriptions about her "sorrowing widowed life", the Prince Consort having lately dies. My mother gave me one of these books, which will no doubt come to you.

@) You know his portrait at Cromer.

Now about a Noel ancestor who was important, Lord Barham. You know the print at Cromer of him, with a ship in the background. This man had been Sir Charles Middleton, descending from the Middleton who built

the new River. He had been a sailor and then Permanent Head of the Admiralty, and retired about 1790. When war began (1793) though he was over 80, Pitt selected him to be First Lord of the Admiralty, that is, Naval Minister, and he became Lord Barham: he lived at Barham Court near Maidstone. He was a naval genius and made the plans which led to Trafalgar. His papers were published not so very long ago and his naval fame was so great that the battle cruiser Barham, then the largest in the world, was called after him. This old man's wife was a very live wire, artistic and humane. She painted very well. Tom has her "Infant Samuel" and her organ on which Handel played. She was stirred to great interest in the slaves of the West Indies by the vicar of Teston, the Barham Court parish, who had been a missionary in Jamaica. She cast about for a politician to work at Slave Abolition and selected Wilberforce. She brought him down to meet the parson and this was the origin of his taking up the work of abolition. You see that when my father married my mother the marriage brought together the origin of the Anti-Slavery Movement, which began with Wilberforce's attack on the slave trade, that is, the catching and shipping of blacks from Africa to America, and its consummation in the abolition of slavery, i.e. the liberating of the slaves in the British Empire, in 1834.

The thing I have noticed about the Noels is their versatility. They produce a marvellous variety of types. Uncle Roden was a poet; Uncle Gerrard was a Tory politician who rose to be a Cabinet Minister (as Commissioner of Works he laid out the flower beds along Park Lane); Uncle Baptist joined the non-conformists and became a famous preacher; my cousin Norah wrote novels and was a professional singer and toured the world as such; Conrad is the "Red Vicar" of Thaxted; Emilia collected butterflies in South America for the British Museum; Colonel Edward Noel wrote a book on changing the decimal from 10 to 8; and his son Rufus was the "Lawrence of Arabia" of the Indian Secret Service. Gerard the Admiral // turned the Turks out of Greece //

Perhaps all this variety accounts for C.R.B. becoming a Quaker and L.W.B. a Romanist! My Uncle Gainsborough became a Romanist. Versatility is good but I think it is more valuable that (on the Buxton side) we have the contribution of Quakerism! The Liberator's mother, wife and daughter-in-law (my grandmother) were Quakeresses.

It is interesting to think of our debts to forbears. We know what we owe to them; that must be why some religions (e.g. the Japanese) are mainly ancestor-worship. We are largely what they made us, and our parents, if we cared for them, are the spirits whom we most surely feel to be alive.