RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

Newspapermen

Ruth Dudley Edwards

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About the Author

Ruth Dudley Edwards is an historian, journalist and crime writer. Her non-fiction includes *Victor Gollancz: a biography* (winner of the James Tait Black Memorial Prize), *The Pursuit of Reason: The Economist, 1843-1993* and *The Faithful Tribe: an intimate portrait of the loyal institutions*. Her nine crime novels are satires on the British Establishment.

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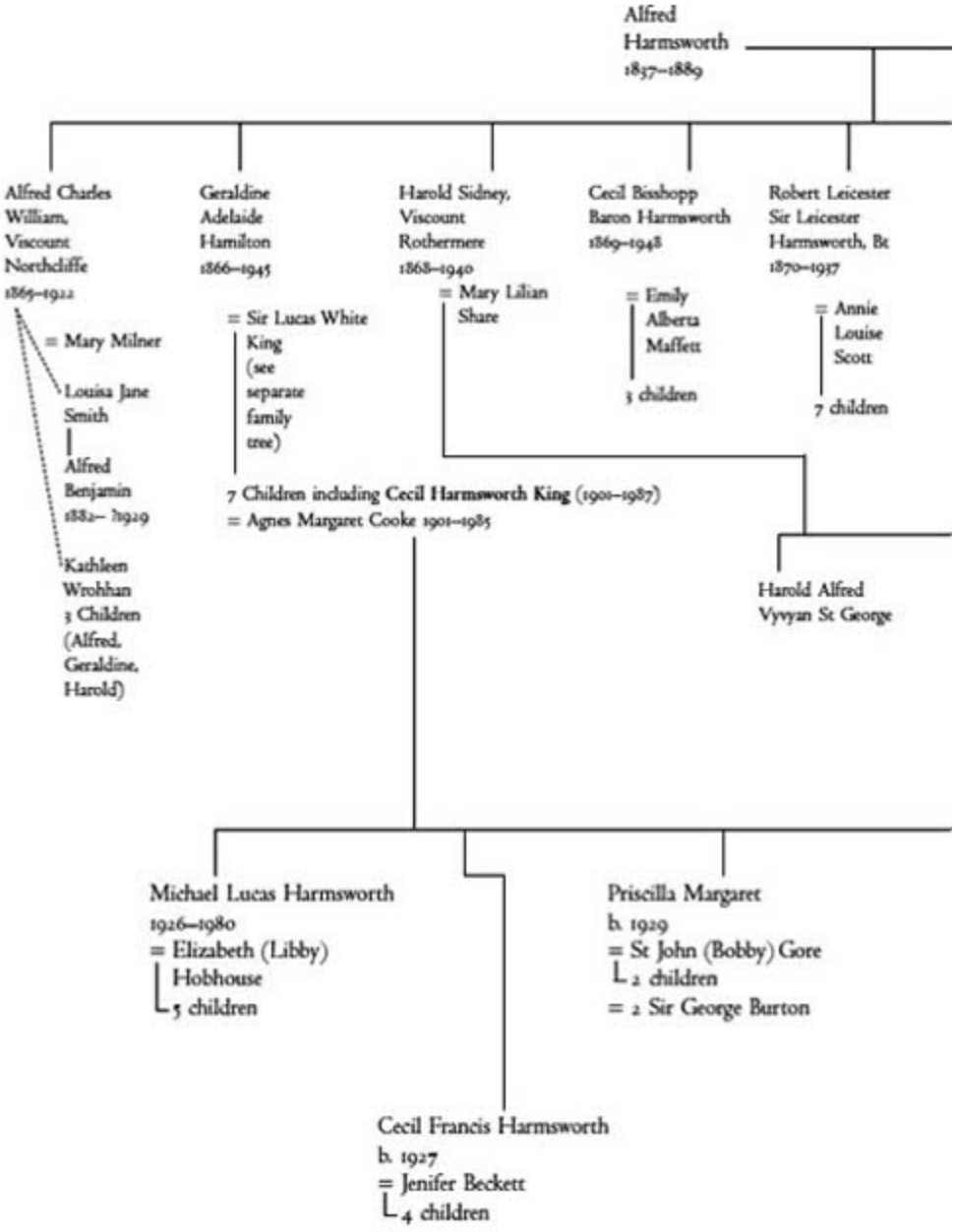
To Jodi and Scilla

NEWSPAPERMEN

Hugh Cudlipp, Cecil Harmsworth King and the Glory Days of Fleet Street

Ruth Dudley Edwards

Secker & Warburg
London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Louisa Jane Smith
Alfred Benjamin 1882– ?1929
Kathleen Wrohhan
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Geraldine Adelaide Hamilton 1866–1945
= Sir Lucas White King (see separate family tree)
Harold Sidney, Viscount Rothermere 1868–1940
= Mary Lilian Share
Cecil Bisshopp Baron Harmsworth 1869–1948
= Emily Alberta Maffett
3 children
Robert Leicester Sir Leicester Harmsworth, Bt 1870–1937
= Annie Louise Scott
7 children
7 Children including Cecil Harmsworth King (1901–1987)
= Agnes Margaret Cooke 1901–1985
Harold Alfred Vyvyan St George
Michael Lucas Harmsworth 1926–1980
= Elizabeth (Libby) Hobhouse
5 children
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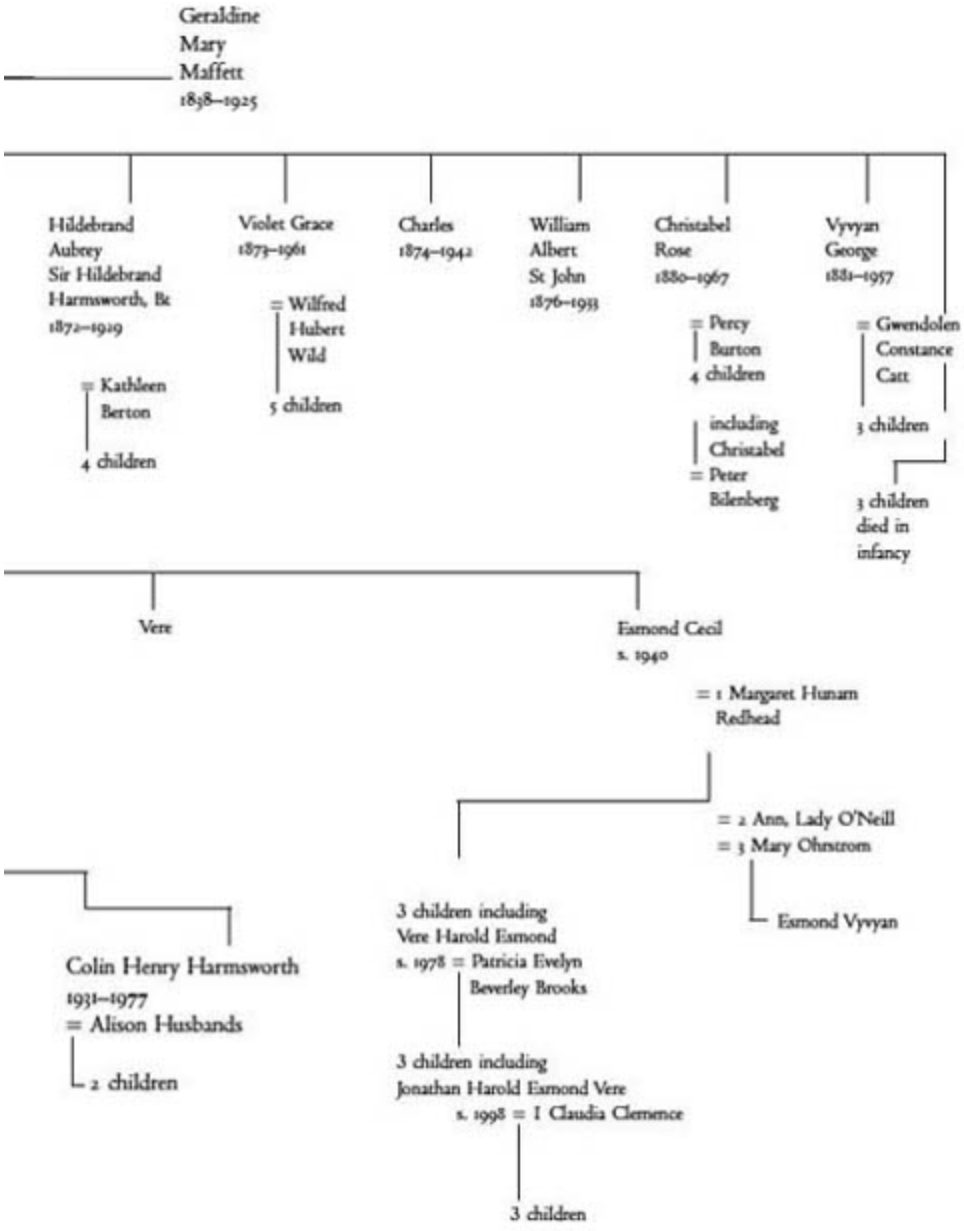
= 2 Sir George Burton
Cecil Francis Harmsworth
b. 1927
= Jenifer Beckett
4 children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Charles 1874–1942
William Albert St John 1876–1933
Christabel Rose 1880–1967
= Percy Burton
4 children
including Christabel
= Peter Bilenberg
Vyvyan George 1881–1957
= Gwendolen Constance Catt
3 children
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Vere
Esmond Cecil
s. 1940
= 1 Margaret Hunam Redhead
= 2 Ann, Lady O'Neill
= 3 Mary Ohrstrom
Esmond Vyvyan
Colin Henry Harmsworth 1931–1977
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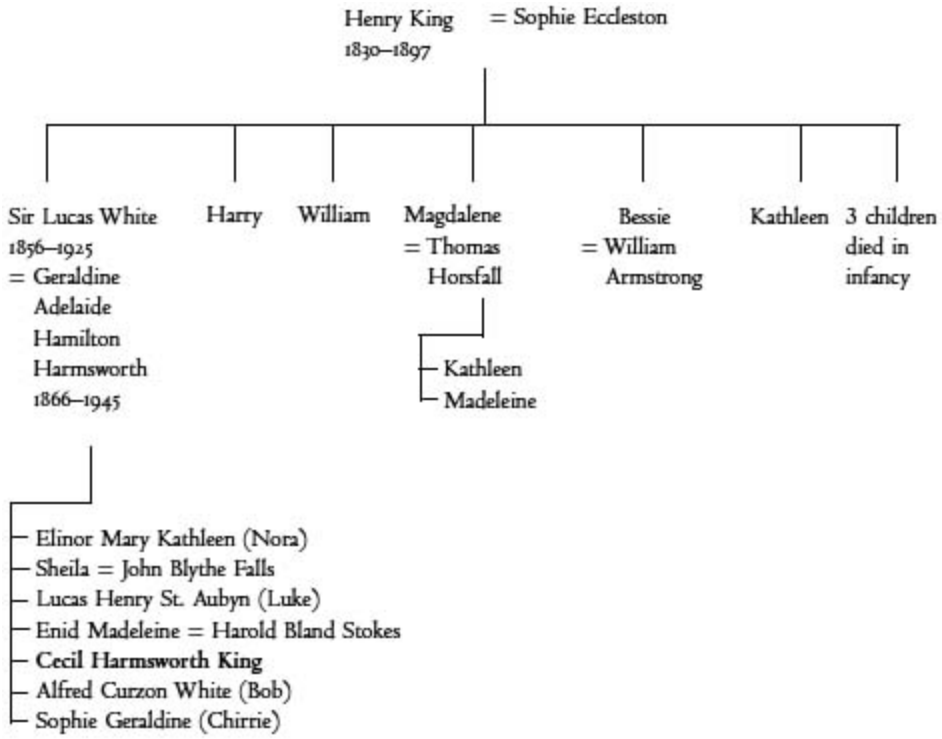
s. 1978 = Patricia Evelyn Beverley Brooks
3 children including Jonathan Harold Esmond Vere
s. 1998 = 1 Claudia Clemence
3 children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1856–1925
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1866–1945
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Magdalene
= Thomas
Horsfall
Kathleen
Madeleine
Bessie
= William
Armstrong
Kathleen
3 children
died in
infancy
Elinor Mary Kathleen (Nora)
Sheila = John Blythe Falls
Lucas Henry St. Aubyn (Luke)
Enid Madeleine = Harold Bland Stokes
Cecil Harmsworth King
Alfred Curzon White (Bob)
Sophie Geraldine (Chirrie)

PREFACE

‘YOU WILL NEVER WANT FOR A LIVING WRITING WHITE-WASHING biographies that will please people’s relatives,’ said Cecil Harmsworth King, then 78, to Charles Lysaght.[fn1] King has numerous descendants and few of them agree about him; however, as a family they have in common a high regard for truth and to the best of my knowledge none of them wanted a whitewash. Nor did Hugh Cudlipp’s widow or his battalion of surviving friends.

What was to have been a life of King developed into a biography of both King and Cudlipp, the odd couple of Fleet Street who pooled their exceptional and complementary gifts to create the biggest publishing company in the world. At eight or nine, Cudlipp’s ambitions were sparked by the success of his brother Percy on the local paper; in his teens, King was gripped with the desire to exercise power like his Uncles Alfred and Harold, the press lords Northcliffe and Rothermere.

Onlookers were often bewildered at a partnership whose principals had such contrasting backgrounds, intellects, interests and personalities. Yet they had a joint obsession: though Cudlipp was no businessman and King no journalist, both were passionate newspapermen. King would give Cudlipp his chance; Cudlipp would become King’s amanuensis. And the whole quickly became immeasurably greater than the remarkable halves.

I never met Cecil King, but I would, I believe, have liked him and enjoyed his conversation. I knew and loved Hugh Cudlipp, who was of enormous help throughout all that long period when I was intending to write a book just about King;

he and Jodi also gave me full access to all their papers. Hugh also extracted a great deal of fun from all the frustrations and annoyances that dogged what had originally seemed a straightforward project. I am very glad that before he died he knew I had decided – with the enthusiastic approval of the publishers and some of King's family – that the book had to be about both of them.

Cudlipp's memoirs are a delight, while King's do his own reputation terrible harm. As a writer King was as terse, gloomy and disparaging as Cudlipp was eloquent, funny and generous. King never put a cheerful slant on anything; Cudlipp never spoiled a story for the want of an amusing embellishment.[fn2] It was the hope of Cudlipp that this biography would do King the justice he seemed incapable of doing himself.

I could not have written a decent book about Cecil King without the help of his daughter Priscilla, who gave me her wholehearted trust and never flinched from telling the truth, however much it hurt. She and her husband, George Burton, cosseted and encouraged me, even though we often doubted if the biography could ever be written. Jodi Cudlipp is another cosseter who was always exceptionally good to me; since Hugh died we have become very close. Her innumerable kindnesses have included lending me her flat and correcting the proofs.

Scilla and Jodi both read the book in typescript. Scilla confined herself to correcting factual errors, but Jodi fought like a terrier for Hugh when she felt he was being pushed into second place because of the sheer weight of the King archives. Our disagreements always ended in amity and laughter, with her identifying herself as 'bossy-boots' to my 'prissy historian'.

I have been in the biographical trade for a long time and I work hard to avoid allowing my personal feelings to affect my judgement: I do not believe that my affection for Jodi

and Scilla, to whom I dedicate the book with deep gratitude, has distorted the story of Cudlipp and King.

For reasons that will become clear later, I have been involved with this book for almost fifteen years. During this period, my editors at Secker & Warburg have been uniformly supportive in strange circumstances and have always shared in any laughs that were going. My thanks to Dan Franklin, who was lucky to get out early, to Max Eilenberg, who was there during the worst of times, and to Geoff Mulligan and Stuart Williams who ultimately had the best. And my thanks also to Felicity Bryan, who was my agent on the project.

I am grateful to Howard Gottlieb, Margaret Goosetray, Sean Noel and all their staff in the extraordinarily efficient and reader-friendly Department of Special Collections in Boston University; to the London Library, as always; and to the staff of all other libraries I used.

I list my most important sources and interviewees at the back of the book and acknowledge with gratitude the help of all those listed. A special word of thanks to Bruce Arnold, Piers Brendon and Alison Hawkes for making some fascinating material available, to Laurence and Carey King for writing at length about their relationships with Cecil and Ruth, to Geoffrey Goodman and Donald Zec for reading the typescript and to Mandy Greenwood and Kate Worden for doing their jobs so well. Without Sasha Borissenko, Maureen Cromey and Johann Geronimus, who tackled my repetitive strain injury, it would have taken much much longer to finish the book.

I am blessed in my friends, but this project has been kicking around for so long and so many of them have been kind and interested and helpful at various times that it would be ridiculous to single out any except Máirín Carter and Seán O’Callaghan (who read and commented critically on all of it), Nina Clarke, Kathryn Kennison, Paul le Druillenec, John Lippitt, James McGuire, Jonathan Madden,

Úna O’Donoghue, the late Gordon Lee and my niece Neasa MacErlean. As usual, my assistant, Carol Scott, was my rock.

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fn1 Lysaght had just published an honest, sympathetic and highly-praised biography of Brendan Bracken, whom in 1945 King had described as ‘trumpery’; King’s opinion of Bracken went down even further over the years.

fn2 Where there are several versions of any important Cudlipp anecdotes, I’ve chosen what seems the most accurate; where it is of no historical significance, I’ve chosen the most amusing.

Prologue

9.35 a.m., 30 May 1968

CECIL HARMSWORTH KING, ALL SIX FEET FOUR AND EIGHTEEN STONE of him, sat behind the eight-foot octagonal desk formed by two eighteenth-century Italianate baroque tables; a journalist later described it as 'fit not merely for a King but for an emperor.'[1] Symbols of his eclectic interests as well as his status were evident all around him – in the gold and green Kermanshah carpet, the Anatolian prayer mats, the Chippendale and Hepplewhite chairs, the seventeenth-century sideboard, the Adam fireplace, the shelves of rare books on Africa and the carefully chosen objets d'art. 'A visitor hijacked to the place would assume at first glance that he was at the country retreat of a cultured aristocrat, a former Viceroy,' remarked Hugh Cudlipp later. 'What the room did not in any way resemble was the powerhouse of a world-wide publishing empire responsible not only for *Country Life* and *Halsbury's Laws of England* and other impeccable tomes but for popular newspapers and mass magazines regarded by highbrows like King himself as sensational or vulgar.'

In the basement, the rotary presses were being geared up to print over five million copies of the *Daily Mirror*, the biggest-selling newspaper in the world, each issue read by almost 15 million people. On the ninth floor, in King's suite, a portrait of the tabloid's founder, Lord Northcliffe, stared from the wall behind his nephew, Chairman of the *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Pictorial* companies since 1951, and since 1963 of the enormous Reed Paper Group and of the

International Publishing Company, the biggest publishing company in the world. Like Northcliffe in his last years, King had come to think of himself as more powerful than governments. And as Northcliffe and his brother Lord Rothermere had been instrumental in 1916 in having Asquith deposed as Prime Minister, so King was confident of toppling Harold Wilson. He had forgotten, however, that unlike Northcliffe and Rothermere, he did not own the newspapers whose policy he directed.

Four floors down, all five feet seven and eleven stone of him, was Hugh Cudlipp, King's protégé since 1935, his amanuensis, his interpreter, his trusted deputy, the person who knew him better than anyone else and the nearest King had to a friend and confidant; they were seen as a team like Gilbert and Sullivan, Marks and Spencer or (Cudlipp's suggestion) Barnum and Bailey. At 8.15 that morning, a letter signed by Cudlipp had been delivered to King's home; on behalf of the board of directors, it asked for his immediate resignation. 'Three of us who have worked with you for many years,' the concluding paragraph had begun, '– myself, Frank Rogers and Don Ryder – will be ready to see you together on Thursday morning at IPC to discuss the appropriate next stage.'

As Cudlipp later told it, King dialled 01 on his internal phone: 'I understand you want to see me,' he said to Cudlipp. 'The temperature was zero. I replied, "Yes. We will come up right away." It is curious how banal the conversation tends to be on these occasions.'[2]

As the trio apprehensively entered the directors' private lift and began the ascent, Cudlipp warned Rogers and Ryder that, although all three were expected, there would inevitably be only one chair in front of the William Kent tables. He would take that, but say nothing until they were seated too. 'I anticipated long pauses from Cecil, designed to promote in the unhappy delegation a sense of discomfort,

doubt or guilt . . . There was one chair in front of the octagonal desk, and there was a long pause . . .’

CHAPTER I

Heavy Baggage

THEIR PATHS FIRST CROSSED IN JUNE 1935, WHEN PERCY CUDLIPP, Editor of the *Evening Standard*, advised his precocious young brother to answer a mysterious classified advertisement for a 'bright assistant features editor with ideas, able to take charge.'[1] 'I can still remember opening a letter from Hugh Cudlipp,' recollected King decades later. '. . . He was twenty-one but had by then seven years experience of journalism.'[2]

King was thirty-four, a middle-ranking executive and no journalist, but from childhood he had been determined to become a force in the world of newspapers that had brought his uncles riches, titles, fame and power: 'My first contact as a boy with Fleet Street was standing behind Northcliffe's chair while he was presented with a bust of himself by the fathers of the various chapels.'[3] Hubert Kinsman Cudlipp had never heard of Fleet Street when, as a boy intent on early escape from the boredom of Howard Gardens Secondary School in Cardiff, he listened agog to Percy's tales of scandals, crimes and free cinema tickets and determined to become a journalist too.[4]

Cudlipp's family baggage was light. Sturdily rooted in Cardiff, straightforwardly Welsh to the core, with his younger sister and two elder brothers he was reared in a lower-middle-class area of three-up, two-down terraces. His big rosy-cheeked father, Willie, an amiable commercial traveller in eggs and bacon, traversed the Welsh valleys

‘with his order book and umbrella, a new carnation in his button-hole’.[5] Bessie Amelia Kinsman, his wife and the neighbourhood entertainer, passed on to her youngest son in abundance her talents as a raconteur, mimic and gossip – ‘the life and soul of the party without the aid of gin in a street where there were no parties’;[6] against stiff competition, Hugh (as Hubert renamed himself in adolescence) was to be the life and soul of another street – Fleet Street – which lacked neither gin nor parties.

Cecil King’s baggage was as heavy as the trunks and tin boxes that accompanied paternal and maternal ancestors across the seas. First, there was the matter of his nationality and allegiances. He tended to describe himself as Irish, yet the preceding two generations of Irish Kings had made their careers in India as servants of the British Empire. Although Grandfather Henry King, born in Drogheda, County Louth, in 1830, was an enthusiastic proponent of Irish Home Rule,[7] he prospered in the Indian Medical Service. He and his wife, Sophie Eccleston (of Irish parentage, but a New Yorker by birth and upbringing), retired to Dublin in 1884, by which time their elder son, Lucas White, had already completed eight years in the Indian Civil Service. Their second son, also Henry, would end his career as a Lieutenant-Colonel in the 33rd Punjabis, and their elder daughter, Magdalene, lived in India too as wife to a civil servant.

Cecil’s maternal grandmother, Geraldine Maffett, was of a solid Ulster-Scots background, but Alfred Harmsworth, whom she married in her home city of Dublin, was English, and they moved to London after a few years and raised their family there. Cecil himself was born in London and soon taken to India, spent most of his first two years there and then returned to London, accompanied by two ayahs, his mother (Irish-born and London-reared) and three of his six siblings; taken to live in Dublin in 1905, he was educated mainly in England, where he made his career.

Both Cudlipp and King inherited brains in abundance, but King's came with intellectual baggage and heavy expectations: the Cudlipps cared as little about their ancestry as the Kings cared much. Cecil's paternal great-great-grandfather was a bookseller and publisher; his great-grandfather, Luke White, a classics graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, became a headmaster; and Grandfather Henry had been a prize-winning classics scholar before studying medicine. With a trace of the perverseness that was to distinguish his grandson, Henry served the Empire but refused to stand up for 'God Save the Queen'.[8] His son Lucas White, Cecil's father, was the intellectual star of the family: head boy and a prize-winner at school, at Trinity he shone in logic, classics, Persian, Arabic and Hindustani, took a BA and LLB and came high in the Indian Civil Service examination; later he was to reach proficiency in Biluchi, Pushtu and Russian. That family track-record was to weigh heavily on Cecil at school and university.

When he began his career, all Hugh Cudlipp had to live up to was the steady progress of his brothers Percy and Reg along the provincial newspaper route to Fleet Street. Cecil King had the Harmsworths – the newspaper magnates Uncle Alfred (Viscount Northcliffe) and Uncle Harold (Viscount Rothermere) – and for good measure, in public life, his godfather, Uncle Cecil (MP and later Lord Harmsworth), and his Uncle Leicester (baronet and MP). More important, though, were the two men's contrasting upbringings: King emerged from privilege, coldness and tragedy an emotional cripple, who gazed like a contemptuous outsider at his fellow man and who could achieve intimacy only through sex. Cudlipp was not just clubbable; there was almost no one in the universe with whom he could not get on. Even Cecil King.

'I was born on 20 February 1901 at Poynters Hall, Totteridge, an eighteenth-century house of no distinction, now pulled

down.’ A very Cecil opening to his memoirs – factual, precise and dismissive. Yet his sister Enid remembers it as ‘charming’,[9] while a cousin described it as ‘a fine old house . . . a Queen Anne mansion with thirty-five acres laid out by “Capability” Brown’.[10] Poynters belonged to his redoubtable Grandmother Harmsworth, who, as Geraldine Maffett, had married imprudently for love and fun. One of ten children of a prosperous land agent with a reputation for harshness, she was auburn-haired, plump and attractive, but with a will of steel, formidable strength of character and such uncompromising Ulster-Scots values as implacable integrity and disconcerting candour and forthrightness. ‘She always said she had excellent health, but poor spirits,’ wrote her granddaughter Enid, who lived with her for long periods as a child and young adult. ‘She had a tremendous fund of good sense and good judgement and though [she was] nervous, I have never met anyone who could give such a formidable impression of unchanging strength, deep affection and earthy wisdom. She was a rock to which all her family clung, especially her sons. They loved and reverenced her to the end far more than their wives.’[11]

Geraldine Maffett was twenty-six when in 1862 she met the twenty-five-year old Londoner, Alfred Harmsworth, son of a greengrocer-turned-merchant and now a master at Dublin’s Royal Hibernian Military School. He was handsome, charming, clever and amusing: his wife used to remark that he was the brains and she the ballast.

Ballast was certainly required, for Geraldine was fecund and Alfred Harmsworth was poor. It was her idea that he better himself by becoming a barrister: in 1864, the year of their marriage, although he remained in Dublin, he was admitted as a student of the Middle Temple in London.[12] Three years later, having reason to believe the Fenians were targeting Harmsworth, they bundled their babies (also named Alfred and Geraldine) into blankets and left their home outside Dublin, staying successively with Ulster-Scots

relatives in Dublin, Armagh and Belfast before settling in London: ‘Geraldine Harmsworth left her native land with anything but a heavy heart,’ said one family biography. ‘Loyal in sentiment to her Ulster connections, she had no great love for Ireland, holding the over-simplified view that the North was constructive and the South destructive.’

After two years and two more children, Alfred Harmsworth was called to the bar. Although he had great ability, he was too amiable, easygoing, convivial and fond of drink to be a success in a profession that required drive and application. He was given the odd brief and did a bit of devilling, but he preferred artistic and literary company to work; he published the occasional mediocre poem or story and in 1868 founded the Sylvan Debating Club, where he was the outstanding speaker. His family (of their fourteen children, eight sons and three daughters survived) lived in poverty, their homes increasingly down-market and their creditors ever angrier. Though they kept up appearances and managed to keep a maid, as a provider Harmsworth was a failure. Yet he was so lovable, and his sense of humour so pervasive, that his wife still adored him and his family forgave him; his tough daughter, Cecil’s mother Geraldine, seems to have loved him more uncritically than she ever loved anyone else. It was a devastating blow to his family when, in 1889, at the age of fifty-two, Harmsworth followed in his father’s footsteps by dying of cirrhosis of the liver;[fn1] without him, home was dreary.

Alfred senior died on Alfred junior’s twenty-fourth birthday. ‘It will be a bit of a struggle to keep the family in its place,’ wrote Alfred to one of his brothers, ‘but we will do it and we must make our folk powerful and prosperous, where the father would have loved to have seen us . . . We must all set to work to make the mother’s life the happiest possible.’ Young Alfred had eventually been forgiven for impregnating the maid when he was sixteen – an indiscretion that had caused his horrified parents to turn him out of the house. By

then he had already become a journalist; before his father died, he had married above him and founded *Answers,* his first paper, geared towards those who, Alfred explained, had been ‘taught to read but not to think’.

The most handsome of a handsome family, with blue eyes and golden hair, Alfred was a brilliant journalist, his natural instinct as an observer honed by years of looking at and listening to the world around him. He was also daring, driven and inspirational. His brother Harold, prudent and Midas-like with money, agreed to leave the Civil Service and look after the finances. Leicester, Cecil and Hildebrand joined shortly afterwards and even their clever but indolent sister Geraldine worked hard at typing, research and the odd article. Other papers followed and within a couple of years the family was prosperous; within a couple more they were rich.

But before the Harmsworths became famous, Geraldine’s life was turned upside-down. In the spring of 1890, while on a visit to a Maffett relative in Dublin, she was introduced to Lucas White King – at thirty-three, ten years her senior and convalescing after an illness that had followed a stay of nine months in Moscow learning Russian. She fell instantly for this handsome, fair-haired, blue-eyed, widely travelled, serious man, and he just as quickly for this slim, striking woman with huge brown eyes, dark gold hair and perfect skin. They had met only five times when he had to leave for Europe, but they conducted a passionate correspondence and were engaged by June. He came briefly back to London and was a hit with the Harmsworths, who found him as nice as he was socially desirable; in February 1891, bearing a splendid trousseau for which Alfred had paid £250,[fn2] Geraldine arrived in Karachi and married Lucas King the following day. She sent a telegram to her mother: ‘Married Dot [her nickname]’.

The danger signals were already evident. King, who had been separated from his India-based parents at the age of

eight and reared in Ireland with relatives, was emotionally needy, sentimental and short on humour. His wife – from a family where argument and teasing were the stuff of everyday life – was confident and self-possessed, and even in the early days found it difficult to give him the reassurance he constantly craved. King used his abilities to the full, was a brave, just and industrious colonial officer and had a huge range of interests (archaeology, antiquities, anthropology, coins, flora, fauna, folklore, geography, linguistics and big-game hunting are just a sample), which he pursued with dedication. Geraldine was bone-idle: the piano she had brought from London was unplayed; although encouraged to write, she managed only a couple of articles; and nothing came of her promise to be involved in his hobbies and not just be a housekeeper ('I must be far more than that – I must be your chum as well'[13]). But she enjoyed the social life as a memsahib and took instantly to the pleasures of having everything done by servants. She had considerable managerial ability; throughout her life, in several different locations in India as in Ireland, England and Scotland, her houses were efficiently run and she had no trouble keeping servants.

King continued to rise steadily through the ranks, respected for his political acumen, his coolness in the face of danger and his conscientiousness, while Geraldine adapted easily to her improving social position. But the rise of her siblings was on a far more dizzying scale. During Geraldine's first visit home after five years in India, Alfred launched the *Daily Mail*. On the morning of 4 May 1896, the day of the first issue, as the family sat round in a circle looking at copies of the paper, he kissed the top of his mother's head and said, 'It's either bankruptcy or Berkeley Square.'[14] The Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, was one of those who sent a congratulatory telegram, though in private (in a reference to Thackeray's Pendennis, who started a newspaper 'by gentlemen for gentlemen') he described the

Daily Mail as ‘a newspaper produced by officeboys for officeboys’.[15] That, of course, was its strength.

A year later Alfred was in Berkeley Square, but well before that he had bought a fine town house for his mother in Marble Arch.[fn3] It was from there that – magnificent in yellow satin – Geraldine left in her mother’s carriage with her mother’s liveried servants to be presented at court – ‘bending low to kiss Queen Victoria’s tiny, puffy, purple hand with rings embedded in her fingers’.[16]

By then the Kings had three children: Elinor Mary Kathleen, known as Nora, Sheila Geraldine and Lucas Henry St Aubyn. Enid Madeleine, born in 1897, was the fourth to be born in India, but the Kings were back in England for the birth of the ten-pound[17] child who would be Cecil, two months after a Harmsworth Christmas that netted Geraldine enough money to buy herself *inter alia* a mink cape, a sable muff and a diamond brooch.

The putative godfather, Cecil Harmsworth, wrote:

> My dearest Dotkin . . . Much love and thanks to you & Lucas for the honour you intend me in regard to the name of the latest arrival. I need not tell you how greatly the idea pleases me – but you won’t mind my saying that it would be more in accordance with the wisdom of the serpent to name the young man after the head of the house. Of my most affectionate regard for all your scions of the race you may assure yourself – but in the rough and tumble of life sympathy & affection are not the most useful things. Nor do I know that Alfred’s love for a god-child would be smaller than mine . . .[18]

Alfred had no legitimate children, and Leicester and Cecil had each given his name to their eldest sons (Cecil’s Alfred had died in 1899), but Geraldine stuck to her decision, though paying obeisance to the family in giving Cecil Harmsworth as a second name. So fair as to be almost white-haired, he was nicknamed Snowball.

The three eldest children were sent to be looked after and educated in what Enid, who was sent there subsequently, described as ‘a sort of home from home’ in Wiltshire;[19] Enid and Cecil were taken to Lahore. The following March they

moved to Simla for the hot season, and here Geraldine reached the social heights of Anglo-Indian society in a whirl of ‘dinner parties, balls, dances, lunch and tennis parties . . . races and gymkhanas . . . polo, cricket and tennis tournaments [and] amateur dramatics’.[20] She was basking in the glory of her husband, whose courage and ability had brought him promotion and honour: he was made Companion of the Star of India at a ceremony to which he drove with the Viceroy and the Maharajah of Patiala ‘in a State carriage of solid silver through lines of elephants covered with red and gold embroideries and carrying howdahs of silver and gold’.[21]

Only Geraldine knew how intensely vulnerable was the private Lucas King. ‘Sweetest Heart,’ said a typical letter from the field. ‘Two of your dear letters today came together & none yesterday. You must always write to me in the morning Sweet as I pine for my darling’s letters.’[22] ‘This is a long letter for your short one, darling,’ he wrote a few months later. ‘I think she cares for him a little now and then but no woman can love like a man, sweetheart. With worlds of tenderest love and a storm of kisses from your ever devoted Boysha.’[23]

In Simla, Geraldine became an intimate of Mary, the rich and beautiful young American wife of the new Viceroy, Lord Curzon. Enid remembered ‘dancing classes at Vice Regal Lodge, and rows of tiger skins on a vast polished floor, and stools made out of elephants’ feet lined with red velvet.’ Geraldine’s great deprivation was that the arrival of her twins caused her to miss the Coronation Durbar – designed successfully by Curzon to be the greatest event of its kind ever seen in India. Brother Alfred wrote in December 1902 from the Paris Ritz to congratulate her:

My dearest Dot

The time for my annual screed is come & I recline comfortably before an excellent wood fire in my beloved Paris this biting cold winter day to tell you, amidst all your oriental magnificence, bearer peons, chokedars, marlis (is that

it?) & the rest of them not to forget your good & increasing brother left behind in Europe . . .

We left the dear Mother very well & happy, not a day older I think, a very wonderful old lady indeed with the modest demand for 'more freeholds' for an Xmas and birthday gift . . . Kiss the little niece for me & select nice names for the twins.[24]

The female twin was unremarkably named Sophie Geraldine after her grandmothers; she would be known as Chirrie (after the Urdu for 'little bird'). The male was christened Alfred Curzon White, and though he was given a lowly uncle as godfather (St John, the seventh son, known as 'Bonch'), his godmother was Lady Curzon; he would be known as Bob.

King received the Coronation (Durbar) medal, but he was becoming increasingly desperate to get out of the Indian Civil Service and into academia. 'His strenuous official duties in the Punjab, Mysore, Waziristan, Kohat and elsewhere,' it was later observed, 'did not prevent him from following with conspicuous success his natural inclinations for, and applying his aptitude to, archaeological, historical, linguistic and numismatic study':[25] he was the author of *The History and Coinage of the Baraksai Dynasty of Afghanistan, The History and Coinage of Malwa* and *A Monography on the Orakzai Country and Clans (N.W. Frontier)* and in 1896 had acquired a doctorate from Trinity. Tired of endless travel across vast tracts of inhospitable territory, King was anxious to have a proper home where the whole family could live together; Geraldine, on the other hand, later told Enid that she wept into her trunk when packing to leave India for the last time.[26]

Money was no obstacle: Geraldine received from Alfred (now a baronet) an allowance of £2,000[fn4] a year, and opposite Poynters was the Old House, which their mother owned and would make available to the Kings. In March 1903 Geraldine left India for good with Enid, Cecil and the twins.

‘My earliest recollections are of Totteridge,’ wrote Cecil King:

> – my very first is of being held by Nurse Dunch, who gripped my nose while pouring medicine down my necessarily open mouth.
>
> I can remember getting my woollen gloves dirty on the pram wheel in which I was being pushed: Aunt Christabel’s wedding to Percy Burton: receiving a sovereign from Uncle Alfred [Northcliffe] when he became a peer in 1905: going home from a children’s party given by Uncle Harold [later Lord Rothermere] and Aunt Lil in such dense fog that the footman had to walk in front with one of the carriage lamps to light the way. Finally, I can remember a visit to Elmwood, Northcliffe’s place in Thanet, where there was a boat from an Arctic expedition Northcliffe had financed, and an alligator in the hothouse.[27]

They were in Totteridge for two years, during which time Lucas King was home for nine months. He had always been popular with the Harmsworths and Alfred was as munificent as ever, giving his brother-in-law a cheque for £500 to spend as he liked: King rented a house and shooting in Aberdeenshire, beginning an association with Aboyne and its surroundings that lasted until his death. He returned reluctantly to India as Commissioner of Rawalpindi: ‘I hate the idea of India more and more every day so find me a nice home, sweetie, and *home* I will come in October,’ he wrote in April 1904. [28] ‘I must stick it till then, I suppose. Darling Pet life is absolutely worthless without your sweet presence.’

‘In my vast experience,’ wrote King’s Lahore language teacher, ‘I have never come across any other Officer who has taken such interest in Oriental studies and has attained such proficiency as Mr White King. He can write and speak these languages with great facility, and in my opinion is well fitted to lecture in any or all of them.’[29]

Back in Totteridge in October, King applied for the chair of Arabic, Persian and Hindustani at Trinity College, Dublin;[30] his appointment was announced the following March and he retired from the Indian Civil Service on a pension of £1,000 [fn5] per annum. While the parents set up house in Dublin, the children went to Uncle Alfred’s country house for the

summer and were there introduced to their governess, Miss Amy Matthews, BA. ‘Tiny, grey-haired, plain and indomitable,’[31] said Enid; and in maturity even Cecil spoke well of her: ‘a strict disciplinarian and an excellent teacher. What we learned from her we really learned.’[32] She was to spend eight years with the Kings, teaching all the children except the eldest son (known when very young as Aubyn, but now called Luke), who had been at prep school in England from 1903.

Judging by the precocity of the letters Cecil wrote at three-and-a-half, Miss Matthews wasted no time. One of the earliest demonstrated the curiosity that was to distinguish him intellectually:

Dear Mum
I shall be so glad to come and see my new nursery will it be pretty. was the big ship rolling about that you and Daddy went on. I am waiting to come to Ireland. I want to unpack our toy box. did a big ship carry all our things. shall I play with Enid every night downstairs. We are all quite well. Love and kisses From Snowy xxxxxxxxxxx[33]

He wrote again the day they set off for Roebuck Hall, four miles from the centre of Dublin, this time exhibiting the honesty that was to be one of his most memorable characteristics:

We are going to Ireland to-day in a big ship, We are in the Billiard Room, Today. I hope That The sea won’t Be rough, and That we won’t be ill.
I wrote That This letter nearly all myself.
We are all good.
Snowy.
Sheila helped me[34]

(‘I remember arriving in Ireland,’ recalled the adult Cecil, ‘. . . it was pouring with rain.[35])

Set in eleven acres, the house, said Enid, was ‘solid and square, late Georgian and built of stone painted cream with a slate roof and granite portico. It was uncompromising, ungraceful’.[36] The furnishings included many valuable Indian carpets and ‘oriental china, stone Buddhas, brass

figures and embroideries. Our large hall was like a small museum of these things with weapons and musical instruments hanging on the walls as well as Dad's fine tiger skin'.[37] Apart from Miss Matthews, who dominated the children's lives, the staff consisted of a nanny, nurserymaid, cook, housemaid, kitchenmaid, parlourmaid, gardener and a cowman; there was also a coachman to drive the two bay horses and four magnificent carriages presented by Uncle Harold. 'The coachman's livery was of chocolate cloth with silver crested buttons and, as Dad's service allowed it, he wore a cockade on his smooth top hat. He wore white breeches and black top boots with light brown tops. Crests were painted inconspicuously on the doors of the carriages.'[38] A chauffeur replaced the coachman in 1908 when the horses and carriages gave way to a car, a Darracq, presented by Uncle Leicester Harmsworth, who owned the company.

Enid and Cecil developed diametrically opposed views of their father. Cecil found it 'impossible to reconcile the picture of the youth with an education in remote County Clare, ambitious, enterprising and brilliant, with the irascible old gentleman I knew, who had no imagination and no enterprise that I ever noticed . . . There was . . . an occasion, which I vividly recall, when he kicked me down a flight of stairs. When I asked why, I was told I knew full well, but I didn't! I supposed I was making too much noise, but I was a quiet child and this did not seem certain.'[39]

Yet for Enid, 'My father was the dearest person in life to me and much the closest, with his merry blue eyes, enormous general knowledge, his simplicity and affection . . . If something amused him, he would very nearly burst with laughter . . . he always drew out the very best in anyone he was with, making them feel twice as good and clever and happy as usual.'[40] For her, 'the happiest room in the house was Dad's study lined to the ceiling with books; there I would curl up in a huge armchair in the evenings and

read while he read also, twiddling his toe out of his shoe, or rapidly wrote Persian script from right to left, while the rest of the family gossiped or played joking family Bridge (which I also enjoyed) with Mother in the drawing room'.[41] Family recollection favours Enid: 'Very nice, very mild' was their cousin Christabel Bielenberg's memory of King.[42]

Cecil's earliest recollection of his father was 'of his playing his last game of tennis. He behaved like an old man, but during the years in Ireland he only went in age from forty-eight to sixty-three . . . The contrast between my father in 1878 and my father in, say, 1908, when I can first remember him, is so great that it has always seemed to me that the explanation must be with my mother, who devitalised him and squashed him flat.'[43] Geraldine, according to Cecil, insisted on King 'being treated with great deference, but we all observed that on family matters she herself ignored him'.[44]

'The Indian climate might have been a cause,' admitted Cecil, 'but then my father spent his service in the hills of the North-West frontier and not in the plains, which must have been very trying in those days.' Cecil showed no more empathy than he did charity in his memoirs; he was either unable or unwilling to take account of the physical toll on King of the often gruelling conditions he had faced during more than a quarter of a century in India, or of the emotional vulnerability that had stemmed from a largely parentless childhood. By the time King had the permanent home he had always craved, he was prematurely old (as early as 1895, Geraldine wrote apropos a visit to their 'honeymoon places . . . Lu is getting too old, so he says, for rubbish of that kind, he was 39 the other day!'[45]); although his letters to his wife continued the habit of passionate language, their relationship suffered, she told Cecil years later, because he had lost interest in sex, which, as a true Harmsworth, she greatly enjoyed.