

62 Banbury Rd
Oxford
Wednesday 9 May 1945

Dear Mabel,

The last two days have been one continuous celebration and it is only sinking in tonight that the war in Europe is finally over.

I am sitting upstairs in father's study with the wireless and Aunt Angela's Boston Terrier for company. There are still quite a few people downstairs and I think the poor dog is as relieved as I am to have escaped all the commotion. Mrs Argyle spent the last hour tinkling the ivories and Uncle Septimius led the singing with such enthusiasm that nobody seemed to mind that he sounded like a distressed badger. He's usually so reserved and stern-faced, it was quite something to see him let his hair down, or what's left of it anyway.

Priestley's broadcast just came on the radio, and he likened the current situation to waking up in a train carriage after a long and dark journey. This is quite an accurate summary and I wish I had thought of it myself. How have the celebrations been in London? I don't think I have ever seen Oxford so busy and jubilant. On Tuesday we went down to a thanksgiving service at New College and then on to see the mayor's speech. All the church bells rang out simultaneously this afternoon and we could hear them from the street party in Norham Road. At this point everyone started to do a conga which was briefly halted when John Cattell, the butcher, tripped over a drain cover and sent the tea urn and Miss Baxter flying. Thankfully the only thing damaged was Mr Cattell's pride and his wife wouldn't let him drink any more brandy. Yet, despite the carnival atmosphere, I confess that since the announcement my emotions have fluctuated enormously.

Initially, I felt a strong sense of elation and relief, which was quickly replaced by an inescapable sorrow that Wilf and so many others did not live to see this moment come to pass. I have been reminding myself of the words spoken by Fr Martin D'Arcy of Campion Hall, who said that one does not need to believe in supernatural forces to understand that the deceased live on through our memories and actions. I feel reassured that Wilf's life and all the others lost in battle were not given in vain. They were for the realisation of this very moment, and we must therefore not dwell in despair but celebrate their sacrifice and the victory they secured.

Edith and Ronald Tolkien were here earlier, and both asked after you. Perhaps we can go and see them when you are down next Friday? Please excuse my vulgarity, but this dog has the most intolerable flatulence. Would you mind bringing some of those scented candles with you when you visit? I thought we could have lunch at The Bear on the Saturday to celebrate my birthday and then go to the cinema with Irene and Rupert?

Yours truly,

Horace