SIR THOMAS ARNOLD: THE FAMILY PERSPECTIVE

MR. ARNOLD R. BARFIELD &

DR. LAWRENCE H. BARFIELD

As surviving descendants of T.W. Arnold, we have few family records or memories of him which could be used to write a full biography of our grandfather, and the most informative account of his life must remain his obituary written for the British Academy, by his dearest friend, the Hungarian-born explorer of Central Asia, Sir Marc Aurel Stein (1932).[1] Still, we can piece together, from family and other sources, some observations which do provide additional information about his private thoughts, beliefs and political views.

One of us (Arnold) was seven years old when Sir Thomas died in 1930; the other (Lawrence) was not yet born. Arnold, however, still retains a clear impression of him, perhaps not truly 'memory', as a kindly, whiskery person, who, when he stayed in his house, was to be visited in a book-lined study. When his grandfather died he was very upset, and our father, later, often expressed surprise at the extent of his grief. So it can be concluded that, even though mentally an academic of distinction, he was able, and wished, to make a relationship with a child.

Looking back, he was obviously 'different' from most of his contemporaries, and we can perhaps find other clues to the origins of his attitude to Islam if we look at some of these differences.

He was brought up in an age where children were expected to be 'seen but not heard'. He was different for, as Arnold's own small experience of him suggests, he seems to have rejected this axiom. This is evidence of an openness of mind and interest in others, especially the young, which characterized his life.

Apart from this direct memory, we in the family have a few sparse reminiscences retold to us by our mother (Nancy), and two bundles of letters written by Sir Thomas to his wife in England; one series over a four-month period between October 1896 and February 1897 from Aligarh, while his

wife was in England for the birth of their daughter, Nancy, and a second series written from Cairo in 1908.[2]Another fascinating collection of letters, written to Sir Thomas from a number of famous people, including among others T.E. Lawrence, the Dalai Lama and the explorer Young husband, had been kept by him. Unfortunately, these are no longer in existence as the result of the action of an over-zealous charlady who, noting that the letters seemed rather old, threw them away in the 1950s.

Thomas Walker Arnold was born in Devonport in the County of Devon in 1864. Census returns show that his father and grandfather were ironmongers on Fore Street, the main thoroughfare leading down to the port. The shop was large, employing at the time of the 1851 census seven men, and its main function probably would have been the supply of equipment to sailors and the Navy.

We know that Thomas Arnold had an early desire to become a sailor and that he maintained a lifelong interest in the British Navy and its history (Stein, 1932).[3]

The family were strict non-conformists, as far back as the 18th century, but Thomas broke with the family tradition even to the extent of cutting off communication with his brothers and parents on account of, what he regarded as, the intolerance of their religious views.

He afterwards kept a personal distant': from religion, while at the same time being academically totally absorbed by it, becoming not only interested in Islam, but also in all kinds of religious sects, both eastern and western. It was this wider interest which led him, while he was in Lahore,[4]to undertake a translation of The Little Flowers of Saint Francis from the Italian, published in 1898, for a series being edited by his old school-friend Israel Gollancz. His own personal beliefs, however, were never clearly defined, although they appear to have been close to those of the Ethical Church, in which he had considerable interest.

His interest in other religions started while he was an undergraduate at Cambridge when he wrote an essay on 'Muhammadanism', which was the seed from which his leading work. The Preaching of Islam grew. It all fits into the picture of a radical and 'different' household to observe that his wife May Arnold was herself a woman of independent ideas, who by no means

fitted into the too-familiar character of the typical English memsahib in India, keeping apart from 'the natives' and haughty with servants.

We have less evidence of his political views; and certainly politics were never of major interest to him, even though his position in India as intermediary between the British and Muslim cultures must have required considerable skills of diplomacy. He was, moreover, the first president of the Anjuman Urdu' and a member of several Islamic Societies.

His middle class background, in 'trade', may have been a factor in helping him to identify with the Muslims, and he certainly embraced enthusiastically the ideals of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, founder of the Aligarh College, which were: to promote the advancement of Muslim culture and 'regenerate a fallen people'.

His independence of mind in spiritual matters seems to have been a difference between himself and his intellectual and academic colleagues in England; and at least by the time he reached the Indian Sub-continent he seems to have stood apart from the formal religious communities to which most of the other representatives of the colonial power belonged or, paid lip service.

While, to this day, a high proportion of English children are given at least formal entry to Christianity by baptism, and this must have been almost universal in Sir Thomas's youth, there is no record that his daughter, Nancy, our mother, born in 1896, ever underwent this experience; nor, indeed, did she choose it for any of her sons.

On the contrary, Sir Thomas was careful to prevent his daughter being influenced too early in life by formal religious teaching. At the age of four, Nancy's mother was struck down by typhoid, and for four months they were separated. Nancy was looked after in the home of the Principal of the American Presbyterian College at Lahore,[5] clearly a very religious establishment. When they were re-united, Nancy's mother records, the Principal and his wife had 'kindly respected our wish that nothing should be said to Nancy on religious topics, and she has apparently returned to us with as free and unprejudiced a mind as ever.[6]

Later in her record of Nancy's upbringing, her mother notes how she was much impressed by seeing a congregation at prayer in the Badshahi

Musjid[7] on the last Friday of Ramadan. She said, 'I wish I could do that with a lot of other little children'. Her mother writes: 'I feel her loneliness dreadfully. I know how happy she would be going to Sunday school with the other children, but for her peace in after life I and Toni feel it must be denied her now. Things that we no longer believe must surely be wrong to teach to her'.

But Nancy's upbringing was not free of moral education. From at least the age of four, Sir Thomas read to her every morning some passage from a religious or secular anthology. These were likely to have emphasized the importance of loving others, doing good works in life, but not for hope of reward. There were also readings of poems, especially those about duty to others, and, at another level, the wonders of nature.[8]

This independence in ethical thought was evidently reflected in T.W. Arnold's choice of wife. May Hickson come from a family of equally independent ideas. Her parents mixed with people of advanced, radical views, and were friendly with some of the leading radicals of their time, including Charles Bradlaugh, the first independent radical member of the British Parliament, and with Mrs. Annie Besant, one of the first British agitators for women's rights. Mr. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant lived openly together, though not married, at the time a very shocking practice, for this was the heyday of Victorian England, when British industry and the British Empire seemed to be the leaders of the world; and when, partly in consequence, there was, at least among the professional and upper classes, great emphasis on conformity around the existing social system and especially around the established Church of England, and its values.

In this his wife was also clearly of the same mind; for in a farewell letter to the Arnold from the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College of Aligarh, written six years after they had left the college and were heading for England, the students write that 'Mrs. Arnold always evinced the liveliest interest in the welfare of the College and the community, and particularly in the advancement and education community who belong to her own sex'.

And in another address from members of the College Club, they remember 'how completely Mrs. Arnold identified herself with the whole "Aligarh Movement", how she 'heartily shared and seconded her husband's

efforts in the cause of the Indian Mussalmans and how 'her reception of the servants8 will always be remembered with appreciation and gratitude'.

Thomas Arnold first became interested in Oriental languages under the influence of Professors Cowell and Robertson Smith whiles a student at Cambridge between 1883 and 1887. His wide study of non-course subjects, especially languages, which included not only Sanskrit and Arabic but also Provencal, put his studies for his Classical Tripos under somewhat of a strain, so that he eventually only obtained a third class degree. It was directly from Cambridge, however, that he was recruited, by his college[9]friend Walter Raleigh (later Sir Walter Raleigh) to the staff of the Anglo-Mohammedan College at Aligarh, as a 'lecturer in Philosophy, in 1888 - exactly a hundred years ago today.

His energies, as we all know, were primarily directed towards academic research and the teaching of his students; and it was probably the intellectual stimulation that he found among his Muslim colleagues at Aligarh, rather than any political, ideals, that made him feel more at home in their company than in the more Philistine British social scene in India. In order to identify more closely with the students, he even adopted Muslim dress while teaching at Aligarh. This must have been quite a brave action in British India of the 1890s, and we would like to know what reaction it evoked among the British community.[10]

Lelyveld, in his book on Aligarh as it was at the end of the last century (Lelyveld, 1978),[11]describes Arnold in Aligarh as a man of shy, scholarly temperament. However, his ability communicated as a teacher, and the warm friendships he established with both staff and students at Aligarh and Lahore were praised and acknowledge by all. A letter written to The Times in 1930[12]records that: "Where others saw dullness he found interest, and could make the interest general. Himself a fascinating talker, he had the rarer gift of inspiring his hearers to talk well, so that each went away with the pleasant, if erroneous, sense of being brilliant". Some of his friends, such as Iqbal and Shibli, were themselves great intellectuals; but as they acknowledge, Arnold's gift of teaching served to inspire them as well.

While at the Anglo-Mohammedan College, his interest shifted from Sanskrit to Arabic, possibly under the influence of Shibli. The two men developed a close working partnership. Arnold help Shibli locate European

source, taught him some French, and acquainted him with the conventions of English scholarship, while Shibli was Arnold's major guide to Arabic literature.[13] According to Stein 'This was the British-Muslim friendship of Sayyid Ahmad's dreams, and he[14] helped both of them obtain books and manuscripts for their research. He also made sure they were known to the scholarly world and that their writings were published'. In a letter written to his wife in London in November 1896 Arnold describes Shibli's philosophical reaction to a burglary at his home, when he expressed thanks that the burglar was not a scholar, otherwise he would have lost his most precious possessions - his books.

Other scholars with whom he had a deep friendship, besides Sir Sayyid himself, included Nawab Mohsinul Mulk. In one of the letters written home in 1896 Arnold recalls a discussion in which Mulk Jestingly reproached Arnold for "traducing his religion" in his book The Preaching of Islam, which had just been published. "His religion, he said, according to the Maulavis,[15] had flourished under the shadow of the sword, whereas Arnold, under the heretical influence of Syed "Sahib, had said that it was not spread by the sword".

Sir Syed[16] at the same meeting solemnly shook his head and said to Arnold that it was a pity he was not a Muslim.[17]

The family story has it that, in fact, he was on the point of converting to Islam when he met his future wife, May Hickson. She 'saved him', as she put it.

In a book written by his colleague at Aligarh, and later Principal of the College, Theodore Morison, he (Morison) may have been thinking of TWA" when he suggested that modern teaching at colleges in India was too distant and should be encouraged to develop more towards the personal relationship between teacher and pupil characteristic of the 'pundits and Maulavis of old days'. It must be admitted, however, that an important motivation behind this proposal was the need to convince the pupils of the beneficence of British rule in order to counteract growing disaffection among the population of India. (Morison, 1899; p. 116)[18]

T.W. Arnold's move to Lahore in 1898, as Professor of Philosophy at the Government college,[19] was apparently prompted by the difficulties the European Staff had at Aligarh College after the death[20] of Sir Sayyid Ahmad

Khan. We, unfortunately, have practically no details of this period of his life, since no letters survive and thus there is no family documentation of his early contacts with Iqbal. Stein suggests that at Lahore it was more difficult for him to develop the same close relationships with his students that he enjoyed at Aligarh. It was also a period when he published less than before or afterwards.

His decision finally to return to England in 1904 was a clearly difficult one; but he made the move to a less well paid and less prestigious position as Assistant Librarian at the India Office Library for the sake of the education of his daughter, who was then seven years old.

In 1909 he was selected by the India Office to be Education Adviser or Indian students in England, a commitment which he undertook with such dedication and, according to Theodore Morison, with well-nigh saintly unselfishness, that it eventually earned him a knighthood, and it was in that capacity that he was able again to assist Iqbal.[21]In 1921 he was appointed to the Chair of Arabic at University College, London.

His later association with Iqbal is unfortunately as undocumented by our family as the first encounter in Lahore. All that exists is a letter Iqbal wrote in 1911 to my mother in England when she was thirteen, recalling her instruction of his in the names of English flowers, and one or two postcards.[22]

In his later life back in Europe, Arnold's research interest turned more towards Islamic Painting. He had always been passionately fond of the early Italian Renaissance art, and he was clearly inspired by the same bright clear colours which were to be found in Islamic painting. In the preface to his book Painting in Islam he states its purpose as being to "indicate the place of painting in the culture of the Islamic world both in relation to those theological circles which condemned the practice, and to those persons who, disregarding the prohibitions of religion, consulted their own tastes in encouraging it".

He was particularly interested in the influences which led to the development of Islamic painting from Sassanian, Chinese and Christian sources. His fascination for the link with Christian traditions reflected his earlier interests in the relationship between Islam and the West, and he devoted a series of lectures to the subject which were posthumously

published as The Old and New Testaments in Muslim Religious Art. On the other hand his editorship of the Legacy of Islam, and the short article he wrote for it on 'Islamic art and its influence on painting in Europe', show his interest in the opposite current of influence: the influence of Islam on the West.

Sir Thomas Arnold is held to be the first person to awaken interest in this style of painting in Europe, and was engaged on the preparations for the Persian Exhibition at the Royal Academy held in 1931 when he died. The official guide for this exhibition was dedicated to his memory.

NOTES & REFERENCES

**Editorial comments added by Chairman, Iqbal Academy (UK)*

[1]M-A. Stein, 1930. Thomas Walker Arnold, 1864-1930, Proceedings of the British Academy, XVI

[2]It was during this time that Iqbal deputized for him to teach Arabic at the University College, London. -Ed.

[3]M-A. Stein, 1932. Thomas Walker Arnold, Proceedings of the British Academy, XVI

[4]Where he arrived in 1898. -Ed.

[5]According to the official history of the Anjuman-e-Taraqqi-e-Urdu („j jvf), Professor Arnold was its first President. -Ed."

[6]Presumably, the Forman Christian College, Lahore - Ed.

[7]Badshahi (Imperial) Mosque at Lahore. - Ed.

[8]The reference is to the members and office-bearers of the 'Duty Club' of the College. -Ed.

[9]Magdalene College, Cambridge. -Ed.

[10]According to Mr Arnold Barfield, who visited Aligarh in the spring of 1989 (and where he was greatly honoured), this 'brave action' of Professor Arnold's (i.e. adoption of Muslim dress) is still recalled by the staff of that university today. -Ed.

[11]Lelyveld, 1978. Aligarh's First Generation, Princeton University Press.

[12]On Arnold's death. -Ed.

[13]Shibli, we believe, gave Arnold lessons in Arabic. -Ed.

[14]i.e., Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan. -Ed.

[15]The term is usually reserved for Muslim scholars or divines; here Nawab Mohsinul Mulk, apparently, applies it to Christian scholars (or, possibly, to Muslim theologians, as a witticism, for Arnold starts the sentence by saying 'He [the Nawab] was very amusing'). -Ed.

[16]Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's first name is variously spelled as 'Syed' or 'Sayyid'. -Ed.

[17]T.W. Arnold. -Ed.

[18]T. Morison, 1899. Imperial Rule in India, Archibald Constable, London.

[19]Arnold, also acted as the principal of the Oriental College at Lahore. -Ed.

[20]In 1898, -Ed.

[21]Although Professor Arnold did assist Iqbal in many ways during the latter's stay in Europe (1905-1908), Iqbal, in fact, returned to India in July 1908. -Ed.

[22]Iqbal's letter of condolence to Lady Arnold, expressing profound grief at Sir Thomas's death in June 1930, and paying him handsome tribute, has also survived in the special album (of messages, etc.) prepared by the deceased's family. Incidentally, since the present speech was made at the 'Arnold Day', Mr Arnold Barfield has unearthed three postcards written by Iqbal to Professor Arnold during the period 1906-7 (one from Cambridge and two from Munich). These have been included in a recent paper on Iqbal's Munich and Cambridge activities, written by the present editor (Dr S.A. Durrani). -Ed.