

PART 1

Pickthall and the British Muslim Community



Pickthall, Muslims of South Asia, and the British Muslim Community of the Early 1900s

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Marmaduke Pickthall, as is well known, had a lengthy personal connection with India – from September 1920 he spent most of the rest of his life there (he died in 1936) and it was in India that he carried out his authoritative translation of the Quran. Pickthall's links with South Asian Muslims, however, predated his time in the subcontinent itself. Instead these began in earnest in the years leading up to the First World War when he interacted with Indian Muslims based in Britain when they – like him – became increasingly involved in issues that concerned the fate of the Ottoman sultan-caliph. Although he did not formally announce his conversion to Islam until November 1917, he had been working closely with Khawaja Kamal-ud-Din (1870–1932), the Imam of the Shah Jahan Mosque at Woking, and other South Asian Muslims connected with the Woking Muslim Mission (established in 1913) since the beginning of the war. This interaction brought him into contact with a wider network of Muslims in London, many of whose concerns resonated with his own. From this perspective, Pickthall's engagement with this particular collection of transnational Muslims hailing from the subcontinent might seem unproblematic.

The reality, however, was rather less straightforward, for behind it lay a more complex set of interactions, which – it could be argued – brought together what may have seemed like an odd set of bedfellows: on the one hand, there was Pickthall, with his strong belief in monarchy, empire and “one-nation” conservatism, and, on the other, groups of Indian Muslims who possessed a more ambiguous – even challenging-relationship with the British Raj. And yet in 1920 Pickthall found himself accepting the editorship of the *Bombay Chronicle*, the leading Indian nationalist newspaper of its day, a decision that he acknowledged would very much “shock” his close friend, the Conservative MP Aubrey Herbert, “for going so far from the direction you would chose for me, but believe that I still preserve the straight path of Islam and mean to keep it”.¹

This chapter accordingly explores how and why Pickthall – a self-confessed supporter of “Empire” – moved during the period spanning the First World War to a position in which he was able to collaborate closely with those Muslim

1 Anne Fremantle, *Loyal Enemy* (London: Hutchinson, 1938), 314–15.

interests in India that by 1920 were actively challenging Britain's imperial role in the subcontinent. It asks why and how this relationship came about, what it was based on, and the part that it played in Pickthall's own longer-term intellectual and political evolution, which resulted in him – perhaps unexpectedly – accepting this opportunity to work in India.

Making Contact

Pickthall is likely to have first come into closer contact with South Asian Muslims in the years leading up to the First World War. London, which he visited regularly from 1909 onwards, was home to various overlapping and interacting networks of Muslims, many of whom had come from India: Syed Ameer Ali (1849–1928) had settled there with his English wife, likewise Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1872–1953), I.I. Kazi (1886–1968), M.H. Shairani (1880–1946) and Mushir Hussain Kidwai (1877–1937). Belonging in the main to elite backgrounds, their interests drew them together to pursue common Muslim causes. Whether faith-oriented, empire-loyalist or Pan-Islamic radical, they were sympathetic to the Ottoman Empire in varying degrees. Pickthall's own interest in the affairs of the Ottoman Empire had been growing. It had been stimulated by his fascination with Islam and Muslim societies which began with his sojourns and experiences of Egypt and the Levant at the end of the 1890s and during the first decade of the twentieth century. As his concern for the Ottoman Empire expanded, so did his involvement in London's Muslim networks.

But Pickthall's interaction with Muslims of South Asia, especially the leading members of London's Muslim networks, was not entirely unproblematic. Their differences stemmed from how they interpreted the position of Muslims within and outside the British Empire. While Kidwai, for instance, as a "colonial" subject, saw Pan-Islam as a way of promoting the independence of Muslims from Western imperial rule on a transnational scale, Pickthall, who had been brought up a Tory,² considered British rule beneficial for Muslims. Hence, for Kidwai, it was imperative that Muslims combined "to present a strong front to the merciless blows of united Christendom":³ Moreover, a Muslim, he affirmed,

would by his very nature prefer to live even in a semi-civilised country with his self-respect, dignity and equality of rights established, than live under even *Pax Britannica* with a brand of "native" on his forehead

2 Peter Clark, *Marmaduke Pickthall: British Muslim* (London: Quartet Books, 1986), 20.

3 Mushir Hosain Kidwai, *Pan-Islam* (London: Luzac, 1908), 12.

and a constant shriek in his ears telling him that “the conquerors” have more rights than the “conquered”, that the colour gives more dignity and privileges to a person than any other colour, the policy of coercion is the best policy for Asiatics, and that the Christian civilisation is the only civilisation that can be respected. A Muslim cannot bear ignominious treatment ... This is the secret of the Egyptians disliking British predominance and their want of appreciation of the benefits that have accrued to them through it.⁴

Pickthall, by contrast, remained a great admirer of Cromer’s twenty-year “autocratic but benevolent and upright reign” in Egypt.⁵ His pro-imperial attitude was made amply clear in his reflections on the Denshawai Incident of 1906 that had resulted in the public hanging of four peasants and life imprisonment and lashes for others. Kidwai, writing in 1908, criticised the punishments meted out to the villagers on what amounted to fabricated charges as “inhuman”; for him, they testified to the “barbarous fanaticism of Christian, white and ‘civilised’ people”, which he viewed with “great disgust and abhorrence”.⁶ Pickthall, in contrast both to Kidwai and to liberal opinion in England outraged by the executions, absolved Cromer of any wrong-doing:

English rule in Egypt at the time stood for things which did not exist in neighbouring lands – things like religious toleration, personal security and some attempts at even-handed justice. The uniform symbolised British rule; its prestige had to be “jealously” guarded and its authority unreservedly upheld; it could not be allowed to be “violently insulted with comparative impunity”. The villagers of Denshawai were perfectly aware, when they attacked those pigeon-shooting officers [though others contradicted this account, claiming that it was the officers who fired shots at the villagers first, provoking their response] that they were committing an unheard-of crime for which unheard-of punishment might be exacted.⁷

In Pickthall’s view, the villagers’ actions were not unpremeditated and so while the “punishment, awarded by a Special Court [may have been] extraordinarily

4 Kidwai, *Pan-Islam*, 28.

5 *Athenaeum*, 4503 (14 February 1914), 222.

6 Kidwai, *Pan-Islam*, 22–3.

7 *New Age*, XIV (26 February 1914), 520.

severe, [it was] not excessive, when one considers that British officers were in uniform".⁸

Nevertheless, in 1908, as the Young Turks first took hold of the Ottoman Empire, and then again after the counter-coup in 1909 when their regime came under attack from European powers, Pickthall demonstrated increasing unhappiness with its treatment, especially by Britain. In this response his views converged with those of many Muslims hailing from South Asia. Together they were concerned about the threat to the Ottoman Empire posed by European powers, though not necessarily for the same reasons. As conflicts intensified during the Tripolitania and Balkan campaigns, anti-Muslim sentiment reached a new peak in Britain. Islam along with the Ottoman caliph were subjected to unrestrained popular and official ridicule and insults, issued from pulpits and platforms no less than in the print media. Under popular pressure, British foreign policy moved away from its nineteenth-century support for the Ottomans as a bulwark against Russian expansion. However, this fast-growing antagonism towards Islam and Muslims began – perhaps not surprising under such circumstances – to galvanise opinion among many Muslims living in Britain in defence of the sultan-caliph as the key symbol of the *umma*.

In 1908, Kidwai, by now one of the most active Indian Pan-Islamists based in Britain, complained that "England has done nothing to appeal to the sentiments of the Musalmans and to win over their fiery enthusiasm for her glory. On the contrary her statesmen [...] and her officials in India and Egypt have very often hurt their feelings [...] the best way to win over the Muslim world to her side will be for England to revert to her old policy – the policy of Lord Beaconsfield [Disraeli], towards Turkey".⁹ For Muslims of his political persuasion, Pan-Islamism and Indian nationalism could be complementary, but Pickthall firmly disparaged the activities of Syrian and Egyptian nationalists. It was thanks in large part to the First World War that these differences would gradually make way for support for a common cause.

The War Years

What drew Pickthall into closer contact and collaboration with Indian Muslims in the early twentieth century, therefore, was a shared concern for the survival of the Ottoman Empire. But their support was based on quite different perspectives. Pickthall viewed the 1908 revolution as bringing progressive Muslims to

⁸ Fremantle, *Loyal Enemy*, 141.

⁹ Kidwai, *Pan-Islam*, 28–31.

power, who wanted to extend and deepen what he viewed as traditional Ottoman values of toleration. The Turks, he thought, “alone of all Mohammedans [had] stepped out of the Middle Ages into modern life”.¹⁰ He had hoped that the British government would welcome the Young Turks’ modernist reforms – after all, a constitution had been established, despotic rule had been replaced, and Muslim and non-Muslim peoples had been given charters of freedom. These were measures that he felt Britain would view favourably, because they very much embodied the values that the country stood for itself. Instead, fearing that the successes of the Young Turks might inspire Muslims in Egypt and India to call for similar constitutional changes, the British government did little to prevent the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire in the years before 1914.¹¹

South Asian Muslim support for the Ottoman Empire, meanwhile, stemmed from quite different motives to Pickthall’s, though there was some overlap. While there was not total consensus – some were more radical than others – on the whole it formed part of the wider Pan-Islamic view that resistance to European dominance of Muslims and their struggle for liberty required unity. Consequently their support for the independence of the Ottoman caliphate formed an important part of their aspiration to free themselves from Western imperial control. Even pro-establishment and empire-loyalist South Asian Muslims such as the Aga Khan and former judge Syed Ameer Ali now found it possible to join forces with co-religionists such as Mushir Hussain Kidwai who took a more uncompromising pro-Ottoman stand.

Like Pickthall, these influential transnational Muslims warned that Britain’s policy was changing Muslim sentiment in India, and elsewhere, towards Britain for the worse and that this would prove harmful not only to British relations with Muslim states but also expose its strategic position in Asia to its dangerous rival Russia. Again, in a fashion similar to Pickthall, Indian Muslim activists back in India and Britain appealed to the London authorities to intervene on Turkey’s side. Given that the British Empire ought to be representing the largest number of Muslims under her control, they felt that this policy would be most likely to facilitate the working of “their own territorial loyalty and extra-territorial patriotism [...] in the same direction”.¹² These appeals went unheeded.

10 *The Nineteenth Century and After*, LXXII (December 1912), 1147.

11 Feroz Ahmed, *From Empire to Republic: essays on the late Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey* (Istanbul: İstanbul Bilgi University Press, 2008), 143; see also Azmi Ozcan, *Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, The Ottomans and Britain (1877–1924)* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 131.

12 *Comrade*, 14 October 1911.

Instead, Prime Minister Asquith, in a speech in November 1912, declared that “The map of Europe was to be recast [...] that the victors [the Balkan League] are not to be robbed of the fruits”.¹³ The British government’s apparent indifference towards “the atrocities of [Turkey’s] enemies”, instigated these Muslims to inquire, “If Britain owes no responsibility to [...] the Musalman subjects of His Majesty, we do not know on what scale [...] the Musalmans are thought to recognise their responsibilities to the Empire”.¹⁴

Pickthall, like his South Asian Muslim counterparts, was similarly horrified by the devastating attacks mounted against the Ottoman Empire, and in particular Britain’s indifference to its European dismemberment. He too was exasperated by Britain’s policy of non-intervention in the Balkans where, in his view, “sheer acts of brigandage encouraged by the Powers” were being perpetrated against a Muslim state, and this “dastardly and cruel war acclaimed as a Crusade by Christian Europe”.¹⁵ He was equally frustrated by the popular sympathy in Britain for European Christians: “when one hears (as I did lately) in an English church, the Turks compared to Satan, the Bulgarian advance to that of Christian souls assailing Paradise, one can only gasp”.¹⁶ In early 1913, “sickened” by the atmosphere in Britain which resounded with the cry of a crusade against the Turk, from the press and public alike, Pickthall, visited Constantinople and returned shocked, having learnt first-hand about the scale of the massacre of the Turks committed by Britain’s Balkan allies.¹⁷ He immediately became involved with all those who were campaigning on behalf of the Ottoman cause.

His first move was to assist with setting up “The Ottoman Association Committee” with the objective of “helping in the maintenance of the integrity of the Ottoman Empire”.¹⁸ Then he became even more closely involved with the Anglo-Ottoman Society (AOS), a body comprising a range of Muslim and Christian members, which “in British and Continental political and Press circles [...] called] for a European defence of Turkey”.¹⁹ It was here that he came into close contact with South Asian Pan-Islamists who had established a number of lobbying bodies of their own – the London Moslem League (LML), the Islamic Society/Central Islamic Society (IS/CIS) and the Woking Muslim Mission

13 Ozcan, *Pan-Islamism*, 163.

14 *Ibid.*, 165.

15 *New Age*, XII (14 November 1912), 32.

16 *New Age*, XII (7 November 1912), 8.

17 Marmaduke Pickthall, *With the Turk in Wartime* (London: J.M. Dent, 1914).

18 *Manchester Guardian*, 22 January 1914.

19 *The Near East*, 6, 145 (1914), 475.

(WMM) – with over-lapping objectives, activities, patronage and memberships. Increasingly, they began to participate in all of these organisations to varying degrees. Their shared motives for supporting the short and long-term future of the Ottoman Empire brought them together to interact politically and socially, and to develop appreciation of each other's reasons for doing so. They collaborated in organising pro-Ottoman protest meetings, public debates and lectures; numerous resolutions and memorials were passed to the Foreign and India Offices; letters were sent to national newspapers and journals; pamphlets and books were published highlighting Turkish attributes and warning against Russia's malign designs. The AOS supported by South Asian Muslims in London but run almost single-handedly by Pickthall provided him with an opportunity to write and speak critically on British attitudes and policies towards Turkey's "progressive" Muslims. But from the amount of "public ridicule and private abuse"²⁰ that he received, Pickthall must have known that he was "defending an unpopular cause". All the same, he asserted that in being critical he was actually being, at heart, patriotic:

As an Englishmen who has the interests of the Muhammedan at heart, I am a pro-Turk until the balance is adjusted. Any sentimentality [...] I may have felt or betrayed when writing of the Turks, is for the British Empire, which some men deride. I confess that I cannot see England in a mean and, at the same time, ruinous course of policy without emotion of a most decided kind.²¹

As this reflection suggests, it would appear that Pickthall wanted to sustain the Young Turks fundamentally because he considered a strong Turkey to be in Britain's best interests. At a meeting of the Ottoman Association that the *Islamic Review* reported in February 1914, he demanded, seething with anger, to know why England did not enable Turkey to do the work that was necessary to maintain her integrity; why "we" did not "secure to Turkey fair financial treatment, which is all she needed to become again the strongest bulwark of our Indian Empire". He lamented a greatly missed opportunity: "the Young Turks had remained fanatically pro-British. England virtually had the offer of a virtual protectorate of the whole of the Ottoman Empire [...] if only Britain would] return to the old, solid, Oriental policy on the past principle of the integrity of Turkey".²²

²⁰ *The Near East*, 6,133 (1913), 75.

²¹ *The Near East*, 6,137 (1913), 233.

²² *Islamic Review*, February 1914, 63.

Mushir Hussain Kidwai's support for the Ottoman Empire differed from Pickthall's in that his was not concerned with safeguarding the British Empire but instead was underpinned by the principle that the struggle for the freedom of colonised Muslims required solidarity with the few remaining independent Muslim powers. Among these, the most pre-eminent was the Ottoman Empire. Hence, Kidwai was intensely exercised by Britain's role in the erosion of Ottoman sovereignty. In taking this stance, he was echoing the sentiments of Pan-Islamists back in India such as Zafar Ali Khan (1873–1956), editor of the Indian newspaper *Zamindar*; writing in the *Islamic Review* in February 1913, he stressed the need for Britain's "friendly relations with the surviving Muslim states, which in his case – such is the constitution of the Muslim mind – supply the void created by the absence of a free and unfettered Muslim sovereignty in India".²³

While Pickthall conducted his campaigns through more mainstream channels, Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din's monthly journal, the *Islamic Review*, also warned of the grave apprehension caused by "the variance between the proclamation of the Government [which was broadly supportive of Ottoman territorial integrity] and the tone of the organs of public opinion with regard to the conflicts in the Balkans, which was proclaimed by the Bishop of Oxford 'a Holy War of Cross against Crescent'".²⁴ In the run up to the First World War, the *Islamic Review* continued to make trenchant criticisms of British policy viz-à-vis the Ottoman Empire. Kamal-ud-Din's open letter to the Prime Minister, published in several parts during 1913, fulminated against European (imperial) greed, its boundless "usurping of other's life and property" through imperialist expansion, justified by the doctrine of the "survival of the fittest" and the notions that the European "is the best of the human race and the coloured races were created simply to bear the white burden".²⁵ In the process, Kamal-ud-Din argued, Islam was being devastated and that the desire of Muslims was that the British government should change its policy and use its good offices against European imperial ambitions. But just before the outbreak of war, though Pickthall's argument in support of the Ottoman Empire clearly differed from that being made at the same time by South Asian Muslims in London, the Ottoman cause proved sufficient to unite them in their – unsuccessful – attempts to persuade the British government to secure Ottoman neutrality in the likely conflict ahead.

The entry of Turkey in the war on the side of Germany and its proclamation of jihad in November 1914, calling on Muslims all over the world to rise

23 *Islamic Review*, February 1913, 28.

24 *Ibid.*, 36.

25 *Islamic Review*, May 1913, 128.

up against its enemies, lent much intensity to complex questions of the relationship of Muslims within the empire and the British state. As the conflict progressed, the awareness that Muslims belonging to Britain's empire were fighting against their co-religionists caused considerable unease and debate, particularly on ethical questions with regard to loyalty and patriotism; indeed, the war and its aftermath would cruelly test the limits and frailties of the embryonic British Muslim identity.

Pickthall's position during the war contrasted in varying degrees with that of the more patriotic British converts and indeed some empire-loyalist Indian Muslims. For instance, the well-known convert Lord Headley was full of admiration for "the heroism and devotion" of the "sons" of "a grand Empire", who were "freely pouring out their life blood in defence of honour for the love of truth and justice".²⁶ He had no truck with the Ottoman caliph's call for a global jihad against the Entente powers, asserting that this was not a religious war and together with Maulvi Sadr-ud-Din (d.1981), the Imam of the Woking Mosque, unhesitatingly adopted a resolution at a meeting of the recently established British Muslim Society, on 20 September 1914, which stated:

We desire to offer our wholehearted congratulations to our eastern brethren now at the front, and to express our delight to find that our co-religionists in Islam are fighting on the side of honour, truth, and justice, and are carrying into effect the principles of Islam as inculcated by the Holy Prophet Muhammad.²⁷

Likewise, he lambasted the "few misguided and unpatriotic persons, calling themselves British who would willingly hand over our glorious Empire to the modern Huns". Britons who opposed the war were, he argued, only traitors, and "their seditious utterances [were] drowned in universal acclamations coming from [...] India and other portions of the Empire".²⁸

Another influential convert, Abdullah Quilliam, similarly repudiated his earlier rhetoric about religion taking precedence over patriotism: "Our Holy Faith enjoins upon us to be loyal to whatever country under whose protection we reside".²⁹ He wrote to Sir Grey, the Foreign Secretary, pledging his absolute

²⁶ *Islamic Review*, October, 1914, 421–22.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 421.

²⁸ *Islamic Review*, November 1914, 493.

²⁹ R.A. Quilliam [Abdullah Quilliam's son] to Grey, 28 August 1914, FO371/2173, 44432, TNA. For a detailed study of Abdullah Quilliam's conversion to Islam and his career thereafter, see *Jamie, Gilham, Loyal Enemies: British Converts to Islam, 1850–1950* (London: Hurst & Company, 2014), in particular, Chapters 2 & 3.

loyalty to the British crown and, moreover, offered his services to the government so as to promote “loyalty amongst the Muslims throughout the Empire”.³⁰ To convey the genuineness of this loyalty, he resigned as Vice-President of the Anglo-Ottoman Association (by then under suspicion for “undesirable activities” in relation to Turkey) and offered to help the British authorities to instil a greater sense of loyalty among the empire’s Muslims.³¹

As the conflict against Turkey intensified so did anti-Muslim sentiment in the British press and wider society. Fearing the backlash, Lord Headley, though he lamented the fact that Turkey was now an enemy, cautioned his fellow believers to refrain from “taking part in any political discussions and controversies [...] for if we do so we shall be certain to come to grief either through internal dissensions or through collision with some outside-authority”.³² Khalid Sheldrake (d. 1947), another convert and stalwart of the British Muslim community, went further and wrote to assure the Foreign Secretary of Muslim “support, co-operation and loyalty”.³³ Along with other converts he joined the army in 1917, and, as attempts to foment rebellion among Muslims came to light, offered – like Quilliam – assistance in galvanising Muslim loyalty to the Crown.³⁴ While Turkey’s entry into the war on the opposing side caused unease for some, converts such as John Yehya-En-Nasr Parkinson (1874–1918) (vice-president of the British Muslim Society) affirmed that:

as a Britisher I would support my country in the contest by every honourable means in my power, to bring matters to a victorious ending [...] Yet, while doing so, I would regret the necessity that compelled me to fight against Turkey, a people with whom I sympathise on many national ideals and to whom I was bound. Those of us who have long stood by [Turkey] in weal and woe, in good and evil days, will still stand by to help by every means in our power, so long as that help does not interfere with our greater duty to our own Empire, to our native land.³⁵

Pickthall was equally grappling with the dilemma facing Muslim subjects of the British Empire. He, like South Asian Muslims, was opposed to the war

30 Leon [the name Quilliam adopted on his return to England] to Grey, 6 November 1914, FO371, 2146, 68803, TNA.

31 “Activity of Ottoman Association and Anglo-Ottoman Society”, FO 371/2488, 1915, TNA; “Moslems in Turkey”, FO 371/2146, 1914, TNA.

32 *Islamic Review*, January 1915, 12.

33 FO371/1973, 85051, TNA.

34 L/PS/1/125, 3273, BL.

35 *Islamic Review*, December 1914, pp. 588–89.

against Turkey and as the conflict dragged on he, like them, became steadily more Pan-Islamic in outlook, arguing that Pan-Islam was “the conscious effort for the united progress made by educated Moslems”. For him, Pan-Islam was now “the most hopeful movement of our day, deserving the support of all enlightened people, and particularly the British Government, since a British Government inspired it in the first place”.³⁶ So, while deeply sympathetic to the Ottoman cause and having vowed “never [to] serve against the Turks”, he made it quite clear that he was “in no sense anti-British”.³⁷ Indeed, he was not unwilling to contribute to the war effort locally, helping to recruit soldiers in his small village, while his wife spent her time in “making and collecting things” for the Belgian army. Pickthall did not himself volunteer, but he wrote admiringly of those who were enlisting, happy to participate in fêtes organized at their “send-off”. At one point, he expressed great disappointment at not being able to secure a “military interpretership”.³⁸ In May 1916, when Sir Mark Sykes rejected his request for a passport to travel to Switzerland to meet Turkish representatives there, possibly to initiate a peace process between Britain and Turkey, he admitted to being “hurt by the imputation [...] that his motive in applying [...] might be to evade military service”.³⁹ In fact, when eventually called up in early 1918, he joined as a private in the 17th Hampshires.⁴⁰

But Pickthall’s underlying loyalty to his country did not prevent him from doing all that he could to check, if not completely prevent, the demise of the Ottoman Empire. Pickthall was drawn to the community of Muslims in London because, for him, as for these South Asian Muslims, the key attraction of the Young Turks was their modernist approach to social and political reform in their empire and to Islam more broadly. Like him, London-based Muslims had enthusiastically welcomed the new constitutional government as suffusing Muslim polities everywhere with the ideals of democracy. In his view, this gave the “sick man of Europe” its best chance at recovery. While it is unlikely that Pickthall and the pro-Turk South Asians would have personally known each other to any great extent before the war, each were undoubtedly well-acquainted with influential Young Turks and had become well-attuned to their thought and politics. Pickthall and Syed Ameer Ali, for instance, both knew Halil Halid, the Turkish Consul General, well. Ameer Ali’s liberal and rational “interpretations of the text of the Qur’an [had seemingly] enabled the Turkish reformers to convince the *Sheikh-ul-Islam* that the grant of a constitution by the head of a Muslim State

36 *New York Times*, 30 April 1916.

37 Fremantle, *Loyal Enemy*, pp. 286, 276.

38 *Ibid.*, 257.

39 *Ibid.*, 272.

40 *Ibid.*, 289.

was not opposed to the precepts of the Koran, and that the Caliphate would not suffer in prestige by admitting non-Muslims to civil equality and rights with Moslems in the Courts of law".⁴¹ It was, therefore, not surprising that, with their views converging, Pickthall and some of the South Asian Muslim activists in London came together to campaign for Turkey's defence.

Social, cultural and intellectual similarities also helped to bring them together politically. Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din (barrister and founder of the Woking Muslim Mission), Syed Ameer Ali (who was the first Indian member of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council), and Mushir Hussain Kidwai (barrister and radical writer on pan-Islam) were among the leading lights of the emerging Indian professional upper middle and landed classes based in London thanks to its role as the capital of the British Empire. While there, they moved in elite social circles having adopted many aspects of the requisite lifestyle. Abdullah Yusuf Ali (translator of the Quran in the 1930s) and Kidwai were both members of the National Liberal Club. They worked closely with pro-Turk members of the British imperial establishment, even if they fell marginally short of becoming part of it. Belonging to the elite backgrounds themselves, they found it relatively easy to make contacts among the upper and middle classes, persuading them to adopt more sympathetic views and policies in respect of South Asian Muslim concerns.

These Muslims were equally accommodating in their social behaviour. Much of their work was conducted with a light touch in a convivial atmosphere with due regard for the social etiquette, conventions and customs, modes of conduct and practices current at the time. Pickthall gravitated towards these Muslims because he found much in common between his Christianity and their thought and practice of modernist Islam – both sets of interpretations affirmed tolerance of other faiths, consonance between God's law and natural law, and the necessity of reasoning and scientific exploration to reveal it. He and these South Asian Muslims viewed the reforms enacted by the Young Turks as the practical unfolding of "modern" Islam; and they needed defending because they were being severely threatened by European powers. By the end of 1914, Pickthall was well and truly involved in the cultural activities of the newly-established British Muslim Society set up with Kamal-ud-Din's encouragement by the prominent convert Lord Headley.⁴² Then, according to his biographer Fremantle, "[i]n December 1914 he at last became a Mohammedan [...]. His profession of this faith was a witness, a protest against the

41 Ozcan, *Pan-Islamism*, 128.

42 Humayun Ansari, *"The Infidel Within": Muslims in Britain Since 1800* (London: Hurst & Company, 2004), pp. 130–136.

hysterical hate preached in the name of the Christ [with Turkey as its prime target] he had served and loved so long".⁴³

During the remainder of the war, Pickthall's interactions with Muslims in London deepened both on the religious and the political level. In January 1917 he gave an address at the Prophet's Birthday celebration. His series of articles, "Islam and Progress" were published in *New Age* during 1916, in which he elaborated modernist understandings of Islam, on tolerance, equality of women, and war. These were reproduced in two parts in August and September 1917, reflecting the convergence of his views with those of South Asian Muslims such as Ameer Ali, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Kamal-ud-Din and Kidwai. Then, in November 1917 (somewhat later than mentioned above) he formally and publicly declared his conversion to Islam to an ovation at a packed meeting of the Muslim Literary Society after he had given his lecture on "Modernism and Islam".⁴⁴ Thereafter, his religious association with other Muslims became much more visible. He gave sermons at Friday prayers at the London Prayer House in Notting Hill; he led *Taraveeh* prayers during Ramadan, and, when he took over as Imam in Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din's absence in early 1919, he led the Eid congregations at the Woking Mosque. He edited and regularly wrote in the Muslim Mission's monthly *Islamic Review* and ran the Islamic Information Bureau's weekly journal *Muslim Outlook*.

Politically, Pickthall now found himself at the head of an ambitious pro-Turk public campaign involving Muslims, both British and South Asian, in London. Their aim was to win over hearts and minds in government circles and more widely in order to secure a separate peace agreement between Britain and Turkey. Their efforts were generally channelled through the AOS, the IS/CIS (of which Mushir Hussain Kidwai was the president for much of this time) and the London Moslem League (LML) that had been founded (and headed up) by Syed Ameer Ali in 1908. Individually – in his capacity as a polemical journalist – as well as through these organisations, Pickthall together with South Asian Muslims, and along with mutual Young Turk friends and sympathetic members of the British establishment, campaigned passionately for the Ottoman cause. As a leading figure – among British Muslims, he took on a variety of religious and political roles and responsibilities, ardently seizing every possible means of

43 Fremantle, *Loyal Enemy*, 252. There is little other evidence to substantiate Fremantle's statement regarding Pickthall's conversion in 1914. However, Pickthall writing to Aubrey Herbert in January 1915 hints that he was close to converting in that when Lady Evelyn Cobbold met him at Claridge's the first time in 1914 she "wished [him] to declare [himself] a Muslim there and then [...] before two waiters for witnesses". *Ibid.*, 257.

44 *Islamic Review*, January 1918, 3–4.

propaganda – he conducted interviews, spoke in public debates, gave lectures, wrote letters to national newspapers, sent resolution after resolution to the Foreign and India Offices and organised protest meetings – to drive home the Muslim message.

In common with other prominent Muslim activists in Britain at this time, Pickthall was marked out as a security risk. The intelligence agencies kept a close watch on them all, dubbing the Indian Muslims among them as “fanatics”. They were suspected of being involved in “undesirable activities”, writing “more or less violently worded resolutions in favour of the Turk”.⁴⁵ Another report branded them “hirelings of the Committee of Union and Progress”, and others such as Pickthall for never being “weary of enlarging in the daily papers on the merits of the Turk”.⁴⁶

As the conflict spread from Europe to the Middle East, like most South Asian Muslims, Pickthall was horrified at British machinations in Ottoman territories. The news of the Arab Revolt in June 1916, for instance, crystalized their emotional and political commonality. Rather than assuaging pan-Islamic sensitivities within the empire, the British believed that the setting up of an Arab caliphate at Mecca or even Cairo would counter the Ottoman threat. But the vast majority of Indian Muslims immediately condemned the Arab Revolt which the British had conspired to foment. They instead regarded Sharif Hussain of Mecca as a traitor, a puppet who was being manipulated into betraying the Pan-Islamic cause. For them it was an intrigue on the part of the British government designed to alienate the sympathies of the Indian Muslims from the Ottoman caliph-sultan and his Turkish subjects. Writing in *The Nation* (London) on 29 July 1916, Mushir Hussain Kidwai fumed, “The Sherif of Mecca, if he has revolted against the Khalifa, doubly deserves the same fate [i.e. execution], and perhaps even worse than the Irish leaders who revolted against their sovereign. Islam does not encourage rebellion and revolts”.⁴⁷ Pickthall himself added: “It never seems to have occurred to the inventors [of the Arab scheme] that the majority of Muslims might resent the removal of their centre from the most progressive Muslim country in close touch with Europe, to one of the most backward countries of the world”.⁴⁸ In late 1917, a letter from him was published in the *Saturday Review*, which, according to the Foreign Office, was likely to create bad feeling between Britain and its Arab allies, especially

45 See, for example, FO371/2486, 34982 (1915); FO371/2488, 50954 (1915); FO371/3419, 199619; 4 December 1918; 197557 (1918), TNA.

46 Foreign Office letter, 1 July 1916, FO371/2777, 122654, TNA.

47 Y.D. Prasad, *The Indian Muslims and World War 1* (New Delhi: Janaki Prakashan, 1985), 113.

48 Fremantle, *Loyal Enemy*, 261.

the Kingdom of Hejaz or the Holy Places of Islam (Mecca and Medina) by insinuating that “our ally King [Sharif] Hussein [then ruler of the Hijaz and key British ally] is a venal traitor [...]; set[s] the Arabs at variance [...]; suggests that we have violated the holy territories [... and] goes in for pure Turcophilism [love of the Turks]”. Pickthall’s writings, according to one contemporary intelligence report was “a masterpiece of enemy propaganda”.⁴⁹

Three months later, Pickthall again courted controversy when in a challenging piece published in the radical anti-war newspaper *The Workers’ Dreadnought* he accused “our present rulers” of attempting to “pit the Arabic-speaking Muslims against the Turkish-speaking Muslims” on “our false ideal of nationality and patriotism”. In his view, “the great division in Islam is that between Progressive and Reactionary; and we at present are supporting the reactionaries” [i.e. the Grand Sharif of Mecca Hussain]. Then, in concert with South Asian Muslims, when the British government set out the proposal to create a Jewish state in Palestine under the tutelage of a Christian power, Pickthall once more intervened likening this taking of territory from the Muslim government to “a world-disaster”.⁵⁰

After the First World War ended, with the Ottoman Empire defeated, the tension between competing loyalties should have ended, at least in theory. But it did not thanks to the continuing uncertainty over the ultimate fate of the Ottoman sultan-caliph – an outcome in which Britain played a key role. Pickthall now joined other British Muslims to call on the government for a sympathetic hearing for and response to Turkey, pleading for the preservation of the Ottoman caliphate and opposing the hereditary Arab alternative that was being mooted by Britain: the latter, British Muslims insisted, ran the risk of rousing very angry feelings in the Muslim world and so would not be in Britain’s best interests. This controversy thus kept alive the question of loyalty long after the war had ended because Muslims who argued Turkey’s case seemed to be continuing to support strongly and energetically, particularly in India through the Khilafat Movement (1919–24), the state that had so recently been Britain’s explicit, and defeated, enemy. Pickthall, alongside a number of prominent Indian Muslims, was in the vanguard of this campaign in London; he was considered as troublesome enough by the British authorities to be kept under surveillance – along with the so-called “Woking Mosque gang”, a network of agitators connected in various ways with the long-established mosque,

49 Eastern Report xvLI (1917), FO395/144, 239516, 238406, TNA.

50 M. Pickthall, *Muslim Interests in Palestine* (Woking/London: Central Islamic Society, 1917), 1; *Islamic Review*, August 1917, 319–22.

and “in communication with the most dangerous conspirators in this country and abroad”.⁵¹

As the Khilafat agitation intensified so did the vilification of Pickthall and his collaborators. Critics denounced him as “an enemy of Christendom” and the organisations in which he participated most frequently with South Asian Muslims were labelled “anti-British”. As intelligence reports explained, “[T]he only reason for tolerating Kidwai and Pickthall is that we have never had sufficient ground on which to put a stop to their activities, though they make a practice of sailing very close to the wind”.⁵² But interestingly, as these reports explained, while Kidwai could “be looked upon as an enemy to this country”, Pickthall, in contrast “may be regarded as somewhat of a crank, but in all probability, at heart he is a loyal British subject”.⁵³

Pickthall himself remained troubled by the aspersions that were cast on his loyalty. He was acutely aware that some people regarded him as a traitor to his country, and while these accusations caused him no small personal distress, he defended his position on Turkey:

It is possibly because I care so much about the British Empire in the East, and from the circumstances of my life can see things from the Muslim point of view [...] I realised the terrible effect which such a policy [a partition of the Turkish Empire] [...] could have upon my Oriental fellow-subjects. And in my small way I have been trying to make England realise it.⁵⁴

Indeed, one reason offered for why he strove single-mindedly for the preservation of the Ottoman caliphate was because “he wanted to have the Mohamadan East solidly on our side, for he was terrified of any challenge to the route to India”.⁵⁵ For Pickthall, Soviet Russia still posed the biggest threat. His deeply-held suspicion of Russian imperial expansion remained, “although he was relieved and delighted at the Bolshevik renouncement of territorial aims and at their refusal to accept the proposed Allied plans for a peace settlement”.⁵⁶ For him, as for many others in the British establishment, whether Russia was Bolshevik or Tsarist, the danger would always be the same. They believed that

51 FO371/4233, 110154, TNA.

52 FO371/4154, 163700, TNA.

53 FO371/4155, 169869, TNA.

54 *Saturday Review*, 124, 3241 (December 1917), 461–62.

55 Fremantle, *Loyal Enemy*, 231.

56 *Ibid.*, 288.

“the existence of a strong Turkey would form a barrier against this ever-present danger the value of which would be the greatest mistake to overlook”.⁵⁷

Pickthall's mind set, in many ways, remained that of “an imperialist in that he believed that it was the mission of the British Empire to be Asia's and Africa's guide in their awakening towards ‘modern progress’”.⁵⁸ He “wished England to become the benefactress of the East, its guide to freer life and more enlightened institutions”. It seemed that even once the war was over he still held the view “that this great work could be achieved only by the intermediary of a strong and independent eastern State. No better for this purpose could be found than the Ottoman Empire with the headship of the Muslim world”.⁵⁹ In contrast, many South Asian Pan-Islamists welcomed the Bolsheviks' broad support for Muslim peoples, especially those who were politically oppressed; they had been encouraged by pronouncements in favour of the “wakening nations of the East” and the Bolsheviks' appeal for solidarity in the “fight against International Imperialism”.⁶⁰ They were further reassured by the Bolsheviks' support for the Afghan ruler, Amir Amanullah Khan's resistance against British efforts to reassert their dominance over his kingdom, as well as for Atatürk, whom they had helped with money and military hardware in Turkey's war of independence against Greece and the Allies.

Britain's policy with regard to Turkey sharply contrasted with that of the Bolsheviks. When the British government, in 1920, refused to countenance the demands of the Indian Khilafat Delegation, the Bolshevik declaration on the rights of all peoples to self-determination and specifically their support for India's freedom gave Pan-Islamists such as Kidwai little option but to become more favourably disposed to seek their help.⁶¹ For such individuals – whether in India or in London – participation in the Khilafat Movement rapidly formed part of the broader anti-imperialist struggle in India. Pickthall's priority, however, still seemed to be how to sustain the British empire in the East, in particular in view of the threat that, he believed, it faced from Russia:

The only way to avert the Red peril is to solve the Turkish question instantly in a manner to satisfy Asiatics – for one Muslim who desires the

57 *Islamic Review*, January 1920, 10.

58 Fremantle, *Loyal Enemy*, 231.

59 *New Age*, 21 January 1915, XVI, 305.

60 K.H. Ansari, *The Emergence of Socialist Thought among North Indian Muslims (1917–1947)* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2015), 22.

61 Accordingly, they declared “every sympathy with the Bolshevik Movement so far as it is consistent with the principles of Islam”, see Ansari, *The Emergence*, 57.

triumph of the Bolsheviks, there are millions who would be against them if they could feel assured that the Turkish Empire and the Khilafate were safe and protected by England. It is not the love of the Bolsheviks, but the hatred and distrust of England (fast becoming general) which constitutes the real danger.⁶²

Turning towards India

However, receiving the news streaming out of India at the beginning of 1919, Pickthall began to realize the tremendous solidarity of Muslim feeling there. He acknowledged their loyalty towards the Ottoman caliph was demonstrated daily in an unprecedented volume of protest; as the British intelligence reported, the “sheaf of telegrams [...] addressed to the Prime Minister [bore] testimony to the extent of the pro-Turkish agitation in India”.⁶³ He heard that Indian soldiers (who by now had returned from war), the civilian population of India (which had given its best as a contribution to the victory of the Allies), and the princes (who had placed their resources at the disposal of their sovereign), all were horrified at the proposals of the Turkish Treaty, which, if carried into effect, would involve – they unhesitatingly declared – a breach of faith, a renegeing of the pledge given by the British Prime Minister in January 1918. Writing to his friend Aubrey Herbert, Pickthall conveyed this concern in no uncertain terms: “Our Empire is in a most unhappy state [...] in Asia we could till very lately command a good deal of devoted loyalty. Now that is changed to horror and disgust, fast crystallizing into bitter and enduring hatred”.⁶⁴

When a Khilafat Day was organized in London in 17 October 1919 to coincide with mass protests in India, Pickthall led the prayer for the preservation of the Ottoman Empire and the “undiminished power and authority” of the Turkish sultan. Resolutions were passed on the occasion affirming the Ottoman sultan as the caliph of the Muslim world and emphasized his political independence. As chairman of the meeting Pickthall signed the telegram sent to the Sultan-Caliph expressing the London congregation’s “devotion to [his] Majesty as Caliph”.⁶⁵ In December 1919, along with the Aga Khan, Syed Ameer Ali, Lady

62 Fremantle, *Loyal Enemy*, 310.

63 But in its “opinion [this] Pan-Islamic agitation [was] being engineered from this country by Sheikh Kidwai and his associates”, see FO371/4154, 145162, TNA.

64 Fremantle, *Loyal Enemy*, 303.

65 *Islamic Review*, November 1919, 408.

Evelyn Cobbold () (a Scottish aristocrat who had converted to Islam⁶⁶), M.H. Ispahani, Mushir Hussain Kidwai and Maulvi Sadr-ud-Din, Pickthall was one of the more than fifty British and British Indian signatories of the memorial reminding the Prime Minister of his pledge on the sovereignty of Turkey and urging him to pursue a policy of appeasement towards Turkey.⁶⁷ When the Indian Khilafat delegation arrived in London in February 1920 to canvass support on the “Turkish Question”, its leader Mohamed Ali was immediately so impressed by Pickthall that he offered to put him in charge of the dissemination of the delegation’s views as well as the management and organisation of its meetings and other activities.⁶⁸

But it was probably Lloyd George’s speech in which the Prime Minister waxed lyrical about General Allenby’s conquest of Palestine as winning “the last and most triumphant of the crusades” that marked the turning point in Pickthall’s emotional relations with Indian Muslims and his understanding of the sense of humiliation they felt at the hands of the British. He was utterly appalled given that the victory had been accomplished in no small measure through the sacrifices of thousands of Indian Muslim soldiers. As his comment in the January 1920 edition of *Islamic Review* bitterly observed: “If the words of Mr. Lloyd George are to be regarded as authoritative, I can have henceforth neither part nor lot in England. We [Muslims] have been deceived, made use of, then insulted. For the sake of all our brethren who have fought and died for England, in the belief that England stood for justice, we cannot let this cruel insult pass”. And yet, he still added, “For the sake of England we must try to stop such mischievous and foolish talk”.⁶⁹

Conclusion

In September 1920 Pickthall left for India with much trepidation. What was causing him anguish was that, on the one hand, he wanted to continue the struggle for the Ottoman Khilafat as the Indian Muslims were doing even after

66 See the Introduction by William Facey, Miranda Taylor, Ahmad S. Turkistani to *Pilgrimage to Mecca*, by Lady Evelyn Cobbold (London: Arabian Publishing Ltd., 2009).

67 *Islamic Review*, January 1920, 7–11.

68 Mohamed Ali to Shaukat Ali, 6 May 1920, encl. Chelmsford to Montagu, 3 June 1920. See M. Naeem Qureshi, *Ottoman Turkey, Atatürk, and Muslim South Asia: Perspectives, Perceptions, and Responses* (Karachi, Oxford University Press, 2014) 90. See also Undated Memo, 1921, FO371/6549, E1013, TNA.

69 *Islamic Review*, January 1920, 17.

its partition had been agreed at the Treaty of Sèvres in August 1920, but he also realised that these Indian Khilafatists had now started working with Indian nationalists to challenge the Raj. There were other matters that were similarly causing him anxiety. His relations with South Asian Muslims, while generally proper and correct, seemed to lack warmth and empathy.

By the end of the war, although he had developed a collaborative working relationship in the political sphere with a number of South Asian Muslims, their temperamental differences had exposed the difficulties in sustaining the effective organisation of their combined efforts. This became apparent in the workings of the Islamic Information Bureau (IIB), viewed as the principal source of Pan-Islamic “propaganda” in Britain after 1918. The Central Khilafat Committee in India set up in Bombay that year, of which Kidwai was a founding member, had been impressed by Pickthall’s efforts on behalf of Turkey. He was duly invited and appointed to run the IIB and its weekly newspaper, *Muslim Outlook*, both of which were financially supported by M.H. Ispahani and the Aga Khan.

Pickthall’s time at the Islamic Information Bureau was not happy, however. Towards the end of 1919, seeking help from his close friend, the Conservative (Turcophile) MP, Aubrey Herbert, to get him out of the Bureau, he expressed his discontent:

I would get out of it like a shot if I could see my way to do so without damaging the show. But I do not at present. The work is exceedingly distasteful to me, and the atmosphere more so [...] it is quite possible that I may be “self-ejecting” before long, the more so that I have made myself objectionable all around by insisting on certain little matters which appeal to Englishmen rather than to Orientals.⁷⁰

So, while Pickthall felt morally compelled to continue his work at the IIB, he had expressed his discomfort with his Indian Muslim colleagues’ apparently more strident style. The Director of Intelligence, who had been keeping a careful watch on the activities of the Bureau, reported “a divergence of opinion between Sheik [sic] Kidwai and Mr. Marmaduke Pickthall – the latter has been expressing his opinion that Kidwai is becoming indiscreet and his articles have become dangerous”.⁷¹ Apparently, Pickthall was now complaining of “Kidwai’s interference and intimated [sic] Ispahani, that unless Kidwai was kept in check he would leave”. On 2 December 1919 Marmaduke severed his connection with

⁷⁰ Fremantle, *Loyal Enemy*, 306.

⁷¹ FO371/4155, 169869 (10 January 1920), TNA.

the Islamic Information Bureau,⁷² but (according to his biographer Fremantle) in a manner that was sufficiently amicable for Yakub Hassan (1875–1940) to write to him that “The Indian Muslim community is grateful to you for your disinterested and devoted work”.⁷³ Fremantle suggests that, “[a]lthough he was glad to leave the Islamic Information Bureau, he remained friends with Kamal-ud-Din to the end”.⁷⁴

Despite these personality clashes, Pickthall was nevertheless held in high regard by both British and Indian Muslims – in general, they respected his erudition, his religious scholarship and his command of the scripture. However, given their awareness of the imperial/colonial dynamics at work, informal social mingling and deeper bonding remained elusive. While Pickthall’s understanding of Islam resonated with his Indian associates, when it came to working in close proximity to each other, there were “little things about the Oriental” that still seemed to cause him irritation, things that he could not abide, that would from time to time cause their communications to break-down. The result was that he resigned himself to “living amongst ... cranks and second-raters. It was the price he paid in Europe for becoming a Muslim and defending an enemy [...] and Marmaduke, in spite of the companionship he found in Islam, was in Europe, very much alone”.⁷⁵

This relative lack of personal friendship and emotional warmth with the diasporic South Asian Muslims whom he encountered may have been at least in part because much of Pickthall’s life – punctuated as it was with trips to the Middle East and Turkey where the romance, the pageantry and the unthreatening exoticism of these places and people proved immensely attractive to him – before the war and to an extent during and after it, was spent as a writer and journalist living in rural Suffolk and Sussex. So it is possible that his more intimate social circle was unlikely to have been anything other than the culturally rural middle English, a circle typically imbued with a sense of imperial superiority and “Orientalist” condescension. Those individuals with whom he did establish long-term personal relationships were non-Muslim but, crucially, from culturally similar backgrounds to his own – T.W. Hickes, a clergyman, “who was to become one of his greatest friends”;⁷⁶ Aubrey Herbert, with whom

72 Director of Intelligence, 5 March 1920, FO371/5202, 1073, TNA.

73 Fremantle, *Loyal Enemy*, 307.

74 *Ibid.*, 309–10.

75 *Ibid.*, 309. It is a moot point whether – even among his Muslims associates – he considered people such as Kidwai (described by British intelligence as “sane but not sensible”), a crank. See L/P&J (S)/416, 1916, BL.

76 Fremantle, *Loyal Enemy*, 92.

he would share his more political inner thoughts and views; the aristocratic Lady Valda Machell, a lifelong friend, apparently always at hand when needed to help out with issues such as housing; the Fremantle family including his biographer Anne; and Arthur Field, a fellow political campaigner (and conscientious objector during the war) who remained throughout his adult life “one of his greatest friends”.⁷⁷ With Lord Cromer (1841–1917), Consul General of Egypt for twenty years, he continued to share his view of an essential distinction in mentality and character between the European and the Oriental and whom he very much respected as an “autocratic, but benevolent and upright” ruler.⁷⁸ On the other hand, Anne Fremantle’s biography of Pickthall, which offers much interesting detail and penetrating insight into his personal relations, provides little indication that there was anyone at all among London’s South Asian Muslims with whom he found such companionship or ever became similarly intimately and affectionately connected.

For much of his time in England, Pickthall seems to remain wedded to a highbrow English lifestyle, with walking, gardening and recreation abroad as his main pastimes. Take, for instance, the following description of his appearance by Fremantle: “close-cropped his hair, excellent his tailor, correct his footwear [...] Harrow haloed him in the eyes of the British ruling class, and even to men like Lord Lloyd, he was, though sometimes an enemy, yet always a man – indeed a gentleman”.⁷⁹ Indian Muslim cuisine, such as “Pulao and Qurma”⁸⁰ – the usual fare at largely Indian Muslim gatherings – would be very unlikely to have been served up for supper by Muriel, his wife.

Pickthall also seemed often to struggle in his attempts to escape his “Orientalist” mental frame. Despite his romanticist intimacy as a young man with ordinary “Orientals” on his trips to Egypt and Syria, whose apparently unthreatening exoticism appears to have been immensely attractive to him, he was never able entirely to move away from assumptions about the “Orient” that would have become deeply embedded during the formative period of his life. For him still, the so-called “Oriental” world constituted a distinct type in terms of civilisation, cultural essence and core values – these he believed shaped a different consciousness, mind set and behaviour. For instance, Egypt, as far as Pickthall was concerned, was the home of a race “whose mentality”, he once declared, “is so different from us that it is impossible for them to understand us perfectly”.⁸¹ Likewise, “[I]t is a fact which cannot too often be emphasized”, he

77 Ibid., 228.

78 *Athenaeum*, 14 Feb 1914, 4503, 222.

79 Ibid., 309.

80 *Islamic Review*, August 1918, 298.

81 Fremantle, *Loyal Enemy*, 47.

wrote before the war, “that what people in Europe are accustomed to regard as high ideals – humanity, philanthropy, patriotism, the thirst for abstract liberty, and so on – have no growth in the East; for the Oriental they are pure illusions [...] Fact, our idol, is for him a senseless stone. He worships fiction... he only appreciates truth in story form, authority in the display of power, and justice in the guise theatrical[...] He dwells contentedly under cruel tyranny [...] the Oriental, in his soul, admires despotic action”.⁸² He claimed that he knew “that the Oriental loves a keen, enthusiastic worker in authority, even though ill-tempered, brutal, or a martinet [...] The languid type, which lets things take their course does its duty merely, he does not admire”.⁸³ Fremantle in a similar vein observed that Pickthall “never cared for India as he cared for the Near East, for the Indian mind was alien to him”.⁸⁴ Turkey, on the other hand, was much more appealing for it was “a country in close touch with Europe, was the head of the progressive movement in the East, the natural head, the sanest head that could be chosen; for the Turk was capable of understanding Europe and acting as an interpreter to those behind him”.⁸⁵

Brought up as a conservative Englishman, Pickthall was imperially minded, albeit in the Disraeli mould; for him the preservation of the Ottoman empire was in Britain’s best military, strategic and commercial interests. He was content with the world of empires, whether they were British, French, Russian or Ottoman, so long as the balance of power among them ensured peace and benevolence. Still wanting to keep the East within the imperial frame, he was dismayed after the war by Britain’s stubborn rejection of the Khilafatists’ demands because he saw in this refusal the thin end of a wedge that would drive Indian Muslims into an alliance with Gandhi’s mounting Non-Co-operation Movement, creating a popular united front of Hindus and Muslims in opposition to British rule in India.

As Pickthall was about to depart for India in 1920, some of this mental turmoil was reflected in a letter that he wrote to his old friend Aubrey Herbert:

This is to tell you (what I fear will shock you very much) that I have accepted the editorship of the *Bombay Chronicle*, an Indian nationalist newspaper. If you want to know the primal reason for my taking such a step, it is simply economic pressure. [...] I cannot afford to live in England, and the offer of a salary of 1400 rupees a month came to me as a positive godsend at the moment of almost of despair’ [...] It will quite

82 Ibid., 145–47.

83 *New Age*, xv (8 October 1914), 544.

84 Fremantle, *Loyal Enemy*, 320.

85 M. Pickthall, *With the Turk in Wartime* (London: Dent, 1914), 155, xii.

possibly end in my cursing the whole crowd and throwing back their money in their teeth as I have done before [...] Forgive me if you can for going so far from the direction you would choose for me, but believe that I still preserve the straight path of Islam and mean to keep it.⁸⁶

Even at this late stage, what comes across from this correspondence is a total absence of the kind of fellow-feeling and comradeship that could be expected to have accumulated through prolonged involvement at various levels for a cherished cause. Instead, it seems that Pickthall's motives for taking on this latest role were primarily utilitarian and expedient. Little did he know how radically his experience of India would transform him, especially in respect of his perceptions of the Muslims there and his relations with them.

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86 Fremantle, *Loyal Enemy*, 314–15.