

RSVP Curran Fellowship – Final Report

Narrative Report

In February, 2021, I was offered a Curran Fellowship to pursue my project on Christian-Muslim Relations in Victorian Periodicals. I had proposed to research five different editors who not only edited a range of periodicals in India and Britain during the Victorian era, but also made original written contributions themselves on the subject of Christian-Muslim relations. In addition to examining the content of their writings and of what they chose to publish, I wanted to examine their work *as editors*. Did they try to promote a unified perspective of Islam and of interactions between Christians and Muslims, or did they encourage a diversity of perspectives? To what extent did they exercise editorial control over what was published? For those who edited journals over a span of several decades, how did their analysis of the “other” evolve?

The reviewers of my proposal also emphasized the importance of learning about the editors and editing, beyond merely studying what the contents might reveal about Victorian understandings of Christian-Muslim relations. They pointed out that this would involve researching correspondence and other archival materials where available, not just examining the periodicals themselves. These recommendations, then, shaped my approach when I made the research trip to England for which I had requested funds. Despite COVID restrictions, I flew to Britain and spent most of my four weeks in London libraries and archives from November 9 to December 9, 2021. The trip was made possible by the Curran Fellowship and by a one-semester sabbatical from Briercrest College and Seminary where I teach.

Prior to my departure, I compiled an extensive bibliography of periodical articles on Islam presumably written by the most prolific editor in my list: Meredith Townsend, editor and owner of *The Spectator* from 1860 to 1898. The problem of unsigned contributions to *The Spectator* has been addressed by Robert H. Tener, who has also contributed much on Townsend’s co-editor Richard Hutton. Because Hutton’s notebooks and other author files are currently missing, I knew it would be difficult to verify Townsend’s authorship of those articles conclusively apart from those reprinted in the books *Asia and Europe* (1902) and *Mahommed: The Great Arabian* to which his name is attached. I arranged two visits to the Parliamentary Archives where some of his papers are held and found them beneficial. These included a hand-written memoir of Townsend written by his daughter-in-law which described in detail his schedule and his work as an editor, as well as a series of letters written by him to the editor who succeeded him at *The Spectator*, John Strachey. The letters come from the final years of Townsend’s contributions and provide reliable evidence of the editorials he composed during those years. Presumably they exist simply because he was no longer going to the office on a regular basis where he and Strachey would have discussed such matters in person in the previous decades.

Unlike Townsend, Irene H. Barnes is practically unknown as an editor of Victorian periodicals and does not even appear in the *Waterloo Directory of English Newspapers and Periodicals*. She was Editor or Editorial Secretary with responsibility for the following periodicals: *Service for the King* for the Mildmay Mission (1890-1892); *The Protestant Woman* and *The Protestant Girl* for the Women’s Protestant Union (1893-1894); *India’s Women and China’s Daughters* for the

Church of England Zenana Missionary Society (1898-1902); and the *Church Missionary Gleaner* for the Church Missionary Society (1902-1916). I was able to peruse the relevant runs of each these journals either through online databases or physical copies at the British Library in London and at the Crowther Mission Studies Library in Oxford. Some of Barnes's contributions were identifiable through her initials, I.H.B., at the end of articles. Others which were marked "Editor" or remained anonymous could be identified because they were collected into a book, *A Parable in Porcelain and other papers* (1899), also found at the British Library. Because of the complete lack of secondary sources on her, my research on Irene Barnes became an engaging exploration of these periodicals. Unlike the other editors I studied, Barnes had not had direct contact with Muslim communities in India, and so wrote little in the way of original articles on Islam. But the missionary letters she selected to publish were instructive. Ultimately, though, her view of Muslims comes through most clearly in one of books for children, *Puck, M.P.* and in her history of the CEZMS in India.

Unfortunately, COVID restrictions did prevent me from visiting the Cadbury Research Library at the University of Birmingham which contains the archives of both the CEZMS and the CMS. I followed the website directions and contacted them a week before my visit only to discover the library had no spaces available during the days I was in Birmingham. I was thus prevented from exploring the correspondence or meeting minutes surrounding the appointments of Irene Barnes and George Knox to their respective editorial posts. While much of the CMS missionary correspondence and related materials is available on an online database, the records of the Editorial Secretary have not been included. I have been in correspondence with the library staff regarding those materials.

With the papers relating to Hajee Abdullah Browne, I had much better success. The online catalogue of the National Archives indicated that his last will and testament could be found in the Foreign Office papers relating to Egypt. While that was a productive lead, I was hoping to discover copies of the newspaper, *The Egyptian Herald*, which he had edited while in Cairo. I had been unable to locate any copies either in online library catalogues or through correspondence with archivists and other scholars around the world. I am very pleased to report I located copies of the first issue (7 June 1895) and the first number of the second volume (22 Feb. 1896), also in the Foreign Office papers. Accompanying them was a fascinating series of letters by and about Browne revealing more of his life and work as an editor. In the British Library, I was able to read through volumes of *The Office* which he edited in 1889 as well as other periodicals such as *The Crescent* and *Fraternity* to which he contributed. The India Office papers held further memos and correspondence related to Browne.

My final editor, Aziz Ahmad, founded two magazines, *Missions* and *Asia*, in 1890. He continued as the editor and main contributor to both until 1891 when the former was absorbed into the latter; after 1893 *Asia*, too, had ceased publication. These were once again very different from the periodicals of the other editors in that the primary purpose appeared to raise funds and elicit support for his efforts to go to India as a Christian missionary to Muslim communities. In a way, these periodicals provided the most intimate look at the life of the editor as successive issues showed his developing skills in compiling a magazine as well as his growing frustration that the anticipated support was not materializing.

Each of the five present a different perspective of Christian-Muslim relations. Townsend and Knox wrote reviews of recent publications on Islam as well as carefully reasoned opinion pieces. These reflected the priorities of their respective periodicals: Townsend wrote on Muslim movements in India, Egypt, and the Ottoman Empire and on British policy related to those regions, while Knox focused more the religious beliefs and practices of Muslims and on the efforts of Christian missionaries to convert Muslims. As mentioned earlier, Barnes's contributions to the journals she edited were less explicit though the priority of missions and evangelism is still evident. Browne, a convert to Islam, regularly advocated an alliance between Muslims and Britain, whereas Aziz Ahmad, a convert from Islam to Christianity, promoted a more sympathetic understanding of Islam and was, somewhat surprisingly, quite critical of British rule and of Christian missionary efforts in India.

After receiving the Curran Fellowship, I was invited to contribute a chapter on missionary views of Islam to a book being edited by Jamie Gilham, *Islam and Muslims in Victorian Britain: New Perspectives*. When I described the RSVP project on which I was working, he felt that it would fit well with the other chapters in the book. So now I have a place to publish my findings and an added motivation to write the paper!

Financial Statement

Proposed Expenses

The following is the list of expenses I proposed in my application (in US funds):

Transportation from Regina, Canada, to London, UK: \$900

Transportation within London and return trips to Oxford and Birmingham: \$350

Lodging in London for 3 weeks: \$1,500 (The Highbury Centre); or \$1,000 (B&B)

Lodging in Oxford for 1 week: \$450 (Oxford Cowley Hotel)

Databases:

The Spectator database - \$13.34/mo.

The British Newspaper Archive database – \$17.29/mo.

Adam Matthew Digital – free trial possible?

Total requested (and received): \$ 3,200.00

Actual Expenses

The following is the list of actual expenses (in US funds):

Return ticket from Regina (YQR) to London (LHR) – \$874.36

Transportation within England – \$300.00*

Lodging in London at The Highbury Centre for almost four weeks – \$1,465.03

[Lodging in Oxford cancelled; day trip from London substituted]

The Spectator database – 1-year subscription – \$160.01

The British Newspaper Archive database – 3-month subscription – \$145.99

Photocopying – \$17.37

COVID-19 testing – 10 Nov. and 7 Dec. 2021 - \$313.76

*Ticketed transportation amounted to \$135.34 while the additional expenses are estimated cash “top-ups” to my Oyster card.

Total spent: \$ 3276.52