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INTRODUCTION

LIFE AND PROBLEMS

Thomas Arnold was born in 1795 at Cowes in the Isle of Wight, the youngest of a large family of seven children. It was an ambitious professional household, a little uncertain of its place in society and anxious to resolve and consolidate its position by good marriage and education. Accordingly young Thomas was put through the fairly typical schooling of a person in his position and learnt the rudiments from his father and his aunt before going to school at Warminster in Wiltshire. He was an eccentric rebellious boy, difficult to handle, and after a few years he went on to Winchester and finally to the university. At Oxford he entered into his happiest and most fruitful period to which he looked back nostalgically all his life. He was entranced with the town, found the conditions ideal for study and obtained a first in 1815. What was more important, he also formed useful friendships that helped him at all stages of his life, into his first post at Oriel and even to the headmaster's chair at Rugby. At twenty-four he fell in love, and in view of the rather limited university prospects he became a schoolmaster, taking in private pupils alongside his brother-in-law in the Thames-side village of Laleham. There he spent the next nine years with his rapidly growing family, leading a quiet life interspersed with holidays abroad and writing articles. As time passed he became more and more restless and at last was urged by his friends to apply for the post at Rugby. There, his life suddenly took on a new confidence, urgency and success; his period of influence and controversy had begun.

The bare bones of such a career do not reveal anything unusual or dramatic, and normally it would have anticipated a relatively uneventful if successful life, similar to

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hundreds of others in the nineteenth century. In spite of that Arnold became a seminal figure in the church, a champion of the new order; he became too an anonymous political thinker and acquired the reputation of a reformer of public schools, the feature for which he is best known today. What made Arnold different from the rest? Was it just a question of ability or were background and character important?

As a youth he was rebellious, and, although there were instances of physical resistance, it was mainly a rebellion of the mind. The setting of England at that period encouraged such an attitude, and there were plenty of kindred spirits in a society that was shaken by the American and French revolutions, followed by the long Napoleonic conflict. Moreover, the rapidly developing industrial scene saw the rise of social unrest, suppressed during the war, but flaring into riots after Waterloo.

Arnold was undoubtedly affected by these matters, the war in his early years and the social problems later in life, when the agitation and the threat of revolt perturbed him greatly: 'But I feel the state of public affairs so deeply, that I cannot bear either to read, or hear, or speak, or write about them.'[1]

At the same time he was a classicist by upbringing and an historian at heart. He was certainly more concerned with Hannibal and Caesar than with Wellington and Napoleon. Even so, the rebellious streak, so marked in his youth, persisted and became the dominant feature of his manhood. With most people the spirit of rebellion grows thinner as studies inevitably grow deeper and become more complex, and especially as they acquire the responsibilities of life and marriage, but for Arnold the opposite was the case. The more complex the material became the better he relished it and the more he was able, to his satis-

[1] *SL*, CCIII, 23 August 1839, p. 513.

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faction at least, to include the new elements into his reform programme, until ultimately he had created a grand overall pattern based on a simple skeletal framework. As a result he adjusted everything to his own vision, rather than the reverse, and he became interested in reform both as a concept in itself and as a process across the whole span of human endeavour. Although he yearned to enter the reform battle personally and did in fact try to influence matters by writing and creating a newspaper, Arnold remained essentially a theoretician and an onlooker, as may be seen in the social and church fields. In social terms he lived in stirring times with erupting incidents in Peterloo and the riots; but in fact his own life was far removed from the troubles and, apart from a very short period, he lived all his days in country towns and villages well away from the slums, the smells and the social unrest. His interests here as elsewhere were really concerned with his own theoretical designs for the world and the necessity for seeing that the right decisions were made to give them meaning. In church affairs and in his continued attack on the Oxford Movement he played a vital role, but again in terms of writing only—the real battles were left to his disciples and those who thought like him. If he had been a bishop, no doubt he would have carried the fight directly to the enemy; but his Rugby duties prevented that. The fact is that to Arnold reform was the driving force of his thinking in social affairs, politics and religion, and that this was related to an ideal model for society he had created in the grand manner of Plato and Aristotle. Only towards the very end of his life, in his middle forties, are there signs that his ardour was beginning to fade and that he was looking forward to an easier life, in spite of his grandiose plans to force the pace of reform by a national survey.

Some of these matters—his social, religious, and educat-

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ional ideas together with his influence and writings—are developed in the following sections. The effort to gather together all these ideas from such disparate fields into one framework did not really produce simplicity in the man himself. He was indeed an extremely complex person whose actual life and theoretical concepts were often in different worlds. This has led to the charge of hypocrisy by his critics and certainly, on any superficial analysis, his life presents us with a network of paradoxes which must be faced if we are to understand his character and ways of thought.

Thus he was deeply religious, preaching humility; yet he was also very worldly, and in spite of his condemnation of vanity, anxious to be recognised and rewarded by the world and those in authority for his true worth. He drew his religious, moral and mental inspiration almost entirely from the remote past, and physically retraced the paths of history in Italy and elsewhere, and yet he was even more vitally concerned with the applications of history and the evolution of present day society. Again, he emphasised continually the significance of law and order but rejoiced in revolution. Similarly he took great pride in the concept of the stability provided by the English landed gentry and aristocracy and yet he championed lower-class rights, looking forward to a phased lower-class revolution and lower-class control. His way of life as represented by his households, cultural ways and travel was essentially that of the gentry and yet he castigated that way of life, in its normal meaning and implications, as sinful. In this connection, although he wished to apply reform to all institutions, he exempted his own family from its consequences, since he wanted to strengthen its roots in the past, gentry fashion, and create a sense of continuity.

On the educational side, he had a very large family but

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he did not really understand children at all; he ran a public school but his heart was in the religious and social struggles outside the gates. Again, he adored the classics and despised the moderns, but thought the future hope of mankind lay with industry. As a headmaster it was his duty to educate and prepare boys for the professions and yet openly he despised these occupations. Even after he died the paradox remains, for he is said to have reformed the public schools whereas in fact there is precious little evidence of it.

RELIGIOUS IDEAS AND EDUCATION

The one unshakeable basis of Arnold's religion was a belief in the divinity of Christ. Everything else was human, almost trivial, and in continual need of critical and rational assessment. The church itself was a useful and necessary institution, but nothing more. It was man-made and as such should be attacked with the same vigour as politicians or parliament. For Arnold criticism was not adverse comment but a sign of concern and love—the more you loved an institution the more you should seek to reform it. At the same time reform must be legitimate; it must only come from within the institution, from those members who were genuinely interested in its preservation. Anyone who wished to change the basic nature and freedom of the institution, thereby destroying its independence, he regarded as treacherous. This principle lay at the root of his bitterness against Newman and the Tractarians:

My feelings towards a Roman Catholic are quite different from my feelings towards a Newmanite, because I think the one a fair enemy, the other a treacherous one. The one is a Frenchman in his own uniform...the other is the Frenchman disguised in a red coat, and holding a post within our praesidia, for the

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purpose of betraying it. I should honour the first, and hang the second.[1]

Arnold could not agree on the significance of the apostolic succession, its historical and divine background, the exclusiveness of the powers of priests (priestcraft), the divorce of the church from lay influence, the condemnation of parliamentary links and the isolation of the church from the social problems of the times. Similarly he was against chanting, excessive ceremonial, incense and the like. The common ground between him and the Tractarians lay simply in the divinity of Christ and little else.

In contrast to the spirit of Newmanism, Arnold wanted the church to adopt an active, positive role in the concepts of state and citizenship, christianity should be the moral binding force comparable to the political element of parliament. To this end a fusion of churches was necessary to incorporate the people within one community, and he insisted that this was not just a dream, but a practical policy since all christians had the same fundamental bond. It was in the first instance particularly feasible for the anglican and dissenting churches, and he spelt out the details in his *Principles of Church Reform* (1833): 'wherever there are...ministers of different denominations, the Church [of the parish] might be kept open ready the whole of the Sunday...the different services being fixed at different hours, and performed by different ministers'.[2] True statehood was the aim, and the citizen of such a state owed allegiance not only to the law and the fundamental institutions of state, but also to the moral law, which, in

[1] *SL*, CCLXXXIV, 30 October 1841, p. 617. Such vehemence was common in his letters, which for some might be regarded as privileged and private, but such thoughts are also found in publications as well, e.g. see 'The Oxford Malignants and Dr Hampden', *Edinburgh Review* (April 1836).

[2] *Principles of Church Reform*, 1833, p. 68.

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the case of England, meant christianity.[1] Thus Jews, Moslems and non-christians, including Unitarians, could not partake of English citizenship.

The adaptation of these principles to education led Arnold into difficulties. Education was moral and, apart from the subtle inculcations of belief in childhood, could only start after the rudiments were established and the person could begin to appreciate the problems involved. Also, in view of the childhood associations and allegiances, the moral framework could only be built around the particular behaviour of the family concerned. Since the majority of the people in England were christian the moral fibre of the nation must be christian also; it followed that the education of the English citizen must follow suit. This need for a national christian system of education led to his stand against the efforts to make London University non-religious and secular—a resistance he carried to the point of resignation.[2] The problem of the different sects was, of course, a real one, but Arnold's solution was not to eliminate the essential religious nature of education or to compromise on impossibles but to provide alternative arrangements. Non-christians could not have citizenship, but they had a right to education. Jews, Unitarians and others must receive moral instruction acceptable to their beliefs, and at the universities new halls should be specially set up for them. It followed from this that in another non-christian country a different basis for education and citizenship should exist—in Egypt, for instance, the education must be based on Islam.

In school Arnold gave the christian–anglican spirit priority over all other studies and insisted that all pupils pay adequate attention to it. He would not, for instance,

[1] For relevant extracts and the social context of this, see pp. 156–9 etc.

[2] See pp. 163–4.

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knowingly admit Unitarians to the school. At the same time this attitude was a personal one and not necessarily binding on his staff; indeed in one celebrated instance, involving correspondence, he was willing for the boy to remain in the charge of another member of the staff at Rugby but not in the Sixth, which was his own responsibility.[1] This apparent tolerance on a subject in which he felt so deeply is impressive and yet it makes his intransigence over London University and over other questions difficult to understand. Perhaps the answer lies in his concept of the ideal professionalism of teachers in which each member of staff has a right to his own opinions and actions on the pattern of the Oxford or Cambridge don. At the same time it should not be assumed that tolerance was an essential part of Arnold's nature. It was not; he was quite intolerant over evil; and over sociological problems he could be utterly ruthless, even brutal and callous over long continuous periods, as shown by his actions at Rugby in the treatment of very young boys in his care.

Arnold's belief in Christ and the eternal meant that the world was merely a testing ground and a preparation for the life hereafter. He felt that not only was he in charge of boys but he was responsible for their souls and ultimate fate. Entry to the next world was only possible by the good life, by the conscious building of a sufficient stock of virtue and an equal effort at repelling evil. Evil was something positive that Arnold could almost see and feel. When faced with it he would rise in anger and could, indeed, on occasions completely lose his self-control; while on more formal occasions in chapel, when considering it in the abstract, he would rave and cry in the pulpit. It is impossible to read the sermons in their entirety without receiving the vision of a man in torment.[2]

[1] See p. 76. [2] For the nature of his sermons see p. 167 n. 1.

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Evil was a key concept. He saw it as partly inherited and partly acquired. Innocence to him was a sham and tantamount to a denial of original sin. A person's misdeeds and misthoughts were balanced against virtue and the net profit or loss totted up like money in a cash register, with the culprit answerable for the total in the final reckoning. This applied not only to adults and boys as individuals, but to their masters also, who would be responsible if they avoidably allowed the boy's soul to slip. Six evils were evident at school—profligacy, falsehood, bullying, disobedience, idleness and the magnetism of evil.[1] At other times he offered also extravagance and childishness. He followed the consequences of some of these into the pastimes of youth. The growing habit of reading popular books and serials of the Pickwick variety had become an obsession and was absorbing the time and attention of boys to an extent that they could not really afford. And, by finding satisfaction and excitement in these stories, they no longer found any satisfaction in their studies.[2]

From the catalogue of evil there is one startling omission. No mention is made of sex anywhere. Although he was continually talking and writing about evil and the problems of evil, itemising the various types and elaborating on their nature, nonetheless we have to read between the lines and guess at the sexual innuendoes when he is actually considering gluttony or sensuality or drunkenness. The nearest approach comes in one of the sermons: 'The actual evil which may exist in a school consists, I suppose, first of all in direct sensual wickedness, such as drunkenness and other things forbidden together with drunkenness in the Scriptures.'[3]

Both he and the boys knew that the problem of homosexuality was the most serious one of all, but the code of

[1] See pp. 86–91. [2] See pp. 141–3.
[3] *Sermons*, vol. 5, p. 66. See pp. 86–91 for fuller extract.

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the times prevented it from being mentioned. This continual skirting round the point, without ever reaching it, seems a little comic to us now, especially as most of the boys came from backgrounds without the usual Victorian inhibitions to sex. In one sense Arnold and the staff were the centre of a sandwich—with the boys knowing far more about sex than they would admit, and the Trustees, coming mostly from the gentry and aristocracy, viewing the staff with amused tolerance for their primness.[1]

But evil, whether of the open type or the unmentionable, grew rapidly among new boys soon after entry; it was triggered off by the new social setting and generally prospered when boys were gathered together; conversely it declined with solitude. This period of moral lapse Arnold equated with boyhood, and he saw the sequence of childhood, boyhood and manhood as a kind of instinctive unfolding of the past, thereby reflecting the changes which had taken place in man's ancestral history in a manner reminiscent of Darwin and Jung.[2] By and large there was a correlation between the total evil recorded for one person and the quantity of original sin. Original sin was inherited in an amount dependent on one's parents and similarly transmitted in large or small amounts to one's children. Those with large amounts of original sin (recognised by their deeds and convictions) had little chance of redemption; they must be shunned and so must their children. This is a hard doctrine, but, admitting the postulate of original sin, it is logical. Expulsion was not a punishment so much as a means of ridding the school of

[1] One problem was the clergyman role of the masters. It might have had social status importance and moral implications for the *loco parentis* situation, but it also cut them off from everyone in the community as carriers of false standards and moral levels. The uneasy atmosphere in mixed civilian-clergyman groups is still noticeable today and was most marked in the last century.

[2] See p. 91.

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