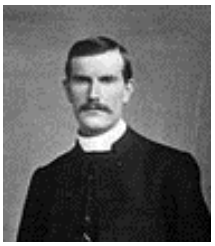
Douglas Thornton 1873-1907

Pioneer in Egypt and the wider Muslim World



Douglas was a man of one idea and one aim—not a narrow aim but all-inclusive. It constituted the sole interest in his life. He wrote a poem that summarises this aim—the only poem he wrote!

The whole wide world for Jesus,
All creatures great and small.
Come ye, bow down before Him,
God shall be all in all.

Go, Christian men united,
Filled with compassion, sing
The earth's awakening chorus
Peal forth: 'Make Jesus King!'

The Gospel of the Kingdom,
Go, teach, baptise today.
Let all creation listen
Before it pass away.

Those millions groping, longing
For peace, for pardon free.
Tell them the words of Jesus.
Ring out: 'Come unto me!'

This generation calleth
Shall Christians not obey?
Commands of Jesus age-long
His promise stands today.

All power to Me is given,
My banner rests unfurled.
Lo, I am with you always.
Evangelise the world.

Childhood and Schooldays

He was born in Suffolk in March 1873, the third son of an evangelical Anglican vicar in Southwold. The Thornton side of the family had been leaders in the great Evangelical Revival of the 18th century. His mother's family had a Quaker background. One of his mother's brothers went to India as a Christian worker with CMS. He later returned to be the vicar of Holy Trinity, Cambridge.

So Douglas came from a deeply spiritual home. His parents dedicated him to God quite deliberately. His mother died before he was six but by then she had taught him to read the Bible. His mother called him "Little Bishop" for he was an earnest little fellow apparently with a sunny disposition, affectionate, fond of flowers, intelligent and truthful.

His father married again and his new wife was a true mother to Douglas. She had a powerful influence on his life. In the vicarage Douglas had a large family of brothers and sisters, the love of parents and an atmosphere of faith and devotion.

Douglas was a boy of evident talent. He was sent to a well-known private school—Marlborough College. In 1886 his older brother Cecil had a serious illness. Cecil wrote to Douglas that his illness led to his "conversion" and the great change that had come into his life. He wrote, **"Turn and serve only Christ-you will never regret it!"** Douglas tells us, **"I tried but not sincerely and I failed"**. Cecil had to undergo a serious operation with a possible outcome of death. He recovered. Douglas wrote, **"It was there that the light dawned. I thanked God for Cecil and then I thanked him for giving me health and strength. Then it dawned on me further that I had never really thanked him for sending Jesus to die for me. So there and then I did so and there and then I gained assurance of forgiveness which I have never lost."**

Before he went to Cambridge University he studied for several months at a tutor's house in Cambridge. Staying with the same tutor were three boys from India one of these three was, *"Very well read in the Qur'an"*. Another was a Parsee. This led Douglas to study Islam and Zoroastrianism. He also learned about, *"victory over sin"*! He goes on to say, **"Selfishness and impurity are the chief besetting sins—how to overcome them? Only by the revelation of the Lord Jesus."**
[He wrote this in 1892 aged 19 just before going up to Trinity College Cambridge.]

Cambridge Oct. 1892 - Jan. 1896



Trinity College Cambridge 1890

There are two parts to his three years or so in Cambridge:

- **The development of himself as a person**—spiritually, emotionally and intellectually and combined with this,
- **A fiery devotion to the Lord Jesus and the work of influencing others to faith in Christ as well as to the cause of world mission.**

Until the 1880s the religious life of undergraduates was almost entirely expressed in frequent College Chapel services. The great Evangelical Revival under the Wesleys taught the great distinction between church attendance and a real and continuing experience of the living Lord Jesus.

But at Cambridge this conscious, passionate devotion had grown cool until the great Charles Simeon of Holy Trinity Church began to preach the necessity not only of evangelism but also of worldwide missions. One of the results of this was the sending out of Henry Martyn to the Muslim World.

In the 1880s there was a great revival in the University as the result of the visit of D. L. Moody. This gave rise to the Cambridge Intercollegiate Christian Union (CICCU). The offer of "the Cambridge Seven" (C.T. Studd and others) to serve in China with the CIM, powerfully moved the students in Cambridge to think seriously about missions.

In 1892, the year Douglas arrived in Cambridge, the Student Volunteer Missionary Union was formed modelled on a movement going on in American colleges. It spread to other universities in the UK. CICCU gave birth to what is called today IFES.

As Douglas prepared for his time in Cambridge he thought of family members who had preceded him there. He wrote in his autobiography: **"My grandfather, Spencer Thornton, was traced to have been the means of the conversion of thirty under-graduates when at Cambridge. I went up, knowing this, to do likewise, D.V."**

Douglas threw himself into CICCU activities—weekly college Bible studies and meetings for prayer. There was a weekly missions meeting for all the students. One of the main goals was to win fellow students to the Lord Jesus especially overseas students—mainly Indians. Douglas was in the advance of new methods and approaches.

He was a member of Trinity College, but he collected the names of all new students to the University. He then found the names and addresses of all the oriental students and organised teams of Christian students to go and visit them all. Usually the Orientals were puzzled, but very pleased, to have new English friends. He organised lunches for them on Sundays after which the entire group would walk towards a small village called Grantchester along the River Cam.

Douglas often preached in the open-air. On one occasion he suddenly seized a one-year-old child out of his mother's arms and holding him shoulder high said, "***Except you are converted and become as little children you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven."*** (Lk. 18:17)

Usually those students and towns- folk who wanted to respond to the call to repent were asked by Douglas to kneel under a tree (still there) on Parkers Piece and offer themselves to God in prayer. He was a radical!

Douglas was a rower. He rowed for the First Trinity Boat Club. But he frequently became ill. He began studying mathematics. Evidently he was expected to gain a first class degree. He had the ability for patient, incisive analysis. His problem was how much time he should devote to studies and how much to witnessing and encouraging others in mission. In the end he decided he would be satisfied with a 2:1 degree and give most of his time to Christian work among the students of his generation.

After that first year at Cambridge University he went up to the Keswick Convention in the summer. Later he wrote, **"Never shall I cease to be thankful that I got to Keswick that summer, for God showed me that the power of His Holy Spirit was needed in my life and a momentous experience was given to me. The Holy Spirit came in all His fullness into my soul and immediately I seemed to see Jesus."**

A different, very radical Douglas returned for his second year. He sold a good part of his furniture and ate "starvation lunches" in order to have money for the work of God. He evangelised furiously. His room became a storm centre of prayer. Someone has said, **"A youth who is not successful rarely makes a man who is successful."**

In June 1894 Douglas met J. R. Mott, the American leader of the SVMU (Student Volunteer Missionary Union). Mott introduced Douglas to the SVM's watchword:

"The evangelisation of the world in this generation."

This became a hugely animating force in Douglas' life. He said his, **"Whole inner man suddenly expanded. New visions floated before his astonished eyes. Deep called to deep".**

He felt he was personally responsible. He went out to pray—to speak to God face-to-face, **"It was an aweful time. But there came a stillness of resting on Him and casting this worldwide burden on Him."**

The rest of his life was given over to this watchword and it dominated his life.

Douglas' third year at Cambridge was largely spent developing the SVM (Student Volunteer Movement) in Cambridge and helping it to get going in Oxford University and other universities. In February 1895 he began to organise a nationwide student conference for the SVM Union to be held in the summer of 1896. This involved considerable work and travel. The aim was to send out 1000 men (150 from Cambridge) into pioneer missions as a result of the conference.

Amazingly he got an honours degree in mathematics in June 1895. After graduation, Douglas was asked to be the first full-time worker for SVM in the UK. But his father wanted him to be ordained. It was a great struggle and finally Douglas decided that God was leading him in the direction of ordination. He went to study theology at Ridley Hall in Cambridge. But during that year much time was spent visiting other theological colleges to challenge them about missions.

The great Liverpool Convention of the SVM was held in January 1896. As a result of this conference SVM groups started in France, Spain, Switzerland, Holland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Germany. The great message at the convention was: **"God's love for all people".**

The Student Christian Movement Jan. 1896-Oct. 1898

The first goal: to inspire churches to recruit workers

Douglas had nearly three more years in the UK before going to Egypt. During those years he worked full-time for the Student Volunteer Missionary Movement. One of the major projects he promoted was **"The Memorial to the Churches"**. This was a challenge to the various denominational leaders to adopt the watchword: **"The Evangelisation of the World in this Generation"**

He urged each denomination to get down to seriously planning how to send out thousands of workers.

The first great attempt was to try to persuade the Archbishop of Canterbury not only to get the Church of England to adopt it, but to persuade the worldwide Anglican Communion of the Lambeth Conference in 1897 to do so. Very earnest prayer by hundreds of students went up in many countries. Douglas had a long interview with Archbishop Temple. The Archbishop said he would do his best but he added, **"I only hope you'll get the bishops to take it up. I've been trying to move them for the past ten years but they are hard to move."**

In fact nothing happened! Douglas' comment was, **"All the bishops were over 50 years old and didn't have a generation to live".**

But Douglas' attempt got him into the newspapers and this opened many doors to speak in churches of various denominations. Douglas had a God-given sense for dreaming and for scheming and a great passion to urge men and women to action. But he found it hard to work for the ideal without losing sight of all the present limitations.

Many loved the ideal, but thought the whole idea was premature. In fact he was a prophet—perhaps the greatest European prophet the Student Movement ever had. He looked into the future and then planned. To others these plans were quite impossibly big. He was often ridiculed. One critic said, "***To evangelise the North West Frontier Provinces*** (now in Pakistan) ***alone in this generation wants a greater upheaval in the churches than the Reformation produced.***"

The tendency was to pile up the difficulties and problems. But Douglas' reply was always that the Church of Jesus Christ was involved in so many secondary issues that distracted it from the major call to the church to evangelise the world. This would need revival. But a revival was not just for blessing, it was always for a specific purpose.

The second goal: a study of missions

Douglas was a missiologist before the word was coined. He became aware that even church leaders were ignorant of the spiritual state of the world. He wanted all college Christian Unions to be educated about this. Since there was no material, he wrote a textbook called, **Africa Waiting**. It covered the whole continent and included a study guide and prayer points not too dissimilar to **Operation World**. It took about six months of research mainly at the British Museum. The book was eventually published. Initially it was sent out in instalments to every Christian Union.

Many urged Douglas to stay in England as a missionary statesman/champion. But he was averse to this idea he didn't want only to persuade others to go but rather to go himself. So in July 1897 he applied to join the Church Missionary Society (CMS).

It is very interesting to see how the Lord led him to the specific place he should focus on—the Muslim World. Douglas had a unique opportunity to survey the whole world-wide challenge of the nations. He was attracted to India. He was fully aware of opportunities in China and in the Far East. Increasingly he saw Islam as the strategic spiritual stronghold. An Egyptian wrote to him from Cairo, "***Islam defies your King!***" So to Douglas the greatest hindrance to **"Evangelisation in this Generation"** was Islam. He came to the conclusion, "***I must go to Islam***".

From his study of the spiritual state of Africa and Asia he thought that there were three key areas: **India**, **Egypt** and what he called **'Hausaland'** (Northern Nigeria and Northern Cameroon to Senegal). But he said, "***More and more I believe prophecy (relating to Egypt and the Arabs) indicates the future importance of Egypt ....***" He came to the conclusion that the language he must be fluent in was either Urdu or Arabic.

The third goal: getting theological colleges to study missiological principles

He organised a conference in Birmingham in April 1898 for all theological students in the UK. He called all theological colleges to have a specific week of prayer for missions. Theological students are usually critical, but God moved and it was a ground-breaking time.

One issue that came up was the theology of mission. So Douglas began to work on this. His first clause in the **"Basis of Mission"** was, **"A belief in Jesus Christ as God the Son and the only Saviour of the world"**. Later he changed it to, **"I desire to declare my faith in Christ as my Saviour, my Lord, and my God."**

Nearly all theological students did join the British Colleges Christian Union, although even then liberalism was beginning to cause doubts. In many ways this Birmingham conference began to bring about greater unity between denominational and inter-denominational missions in the UK.

While Douglas was organising and travelling, he began to believe that Arabic was the key language to master in order to reach Muslims. So this excluded the Persian and Turkic Worlds and the Hausa-

speakers of West Africa and the Sahel. It also excluded India. The key Arabic speaking centres were Mecca, Damascus, Jerusalem and Cairo. To Douglas the most important of these was Cairo.

So in August 1897 he wrote to CMS to see what they thought. Once he had written the letter he said, **"I feel stronger every day about going to Cairo and it will take a good deal now to convince me that I am meant to start the first few years of service in the mission field in any other sphere. I had ample opportunity of once again studying the Indian mind while at work on the Essay, but in the light of our watchword I still feel that the hardest spots of the Muslim World really do need proportionately more attention than C.M.S. has been able to give them even in these last thirty years."**

Why did he come to this conclusion? He wrote, **"What you write in Arabic will soon reach India and will find entrance to some in all Muslim lands"**. He began to believe that Cairo was a strategic centre for the Muslim World. This became settled with CMS by December 1897.

In October 1898 he was ordained in St. Paul's Cathedral for work abroad. It was a joy to him to have been ordained by a Bishop of London, Dr Creighton, and in a cathedral dedicated to St. Paul.

At about the same time he was engaged to be married. His fiancée was Elaine Anderson, the daughter of Sir William Anderson, Director General of the Royal Ordinance Factories.

Douglas believed that marriage was essential to the work God was calling him to. He took the decision, like all his decisions, in the light of the work. Any other way of looking at marriage was inconceivable to him. He knew himself and knew that he could do little without one to share all his thoughts and plans and give him the full measure of love that his nature craved. And he was right. Of Elaine we can safely say that she gave him what his nature craved.

They were married in Cairo on November 7, 1899 after he had been a year on the field. Before leaving for Egypt the previous year he had written to Elaine, **"I want this letter to be from my heart…. I want you secretly before your Maker to make a firm resolve that you will help me to be true to all my past convictions wrought out on my knees and in the presence of Christ and of the Book.**

I must be true to God and conscience all my life. I will not, by the help of God, allow the world to dazzle me in wealth, in popularity, in literature or in soul. I see before me two divergent ways. The one is that of settlement and ease, the other that of pioneering as a preacher-prophet all the time. I do not feel prepared to say that God wants me to live comfortably in the sense of settled down. I trust you will always stand in readiness to bear separation if the Lord shall cause it. It may be we shall stay in Cairo many years. It may be that we move to Sudan or to 'Hausaland'. I trust you will not think me selfish if I have to work at night in years to come. I fear there will be very little 'sitting-room time' in my active life. I feel I must work while it is called 'today'. God willing, Cairo must undergo a spiritual transformation of its religious life. How to bring this about calls for our constant prayers. It must be done!"

His married life was what he hoped for. It was a family life wholly dedicated to 'the cause'; the Kingdom came first by the deliberate choice of both husband and wife. But that did not mean that the beautiful family life was sacrificed. It was not. His was a real home and if the husband and father could give but little time to home-life, what he did give was great in quality so that little Cecil always remembered his father as the one who made his life happy on the strength of those few, rare hours he could give. Douglas had arrived in Cairo in November 1898. He died nine years later in 1907 from typhoid.



The Wedding of Douglas and Elaine in Cairo November 7,

The Egypt Douglas arrived in – 1898



Courtyard of Al Azhar University 1900

Egyptians were mainly descended from the period of the Pharaohs with some elements of Arab genes as well as Turkish or Circassian – especially among the richer people.

The Copts had inter-married less and were racially "pure" old Egyptians. The Copts are Monophysite and were largely found in Upper Egypt especially Assiut. After more than 1000 years of oppression the Copts were at a very low spiritual ebb. But one thing they had preserved was an "open Bible". The Bible in Arabic was read in their churches. They also have no doctrine of purgatory unlike Catholics and Orthodox.

Christian work by foreigners began in Egypt soon after the Napoleonic Wars ended. Cairo was known as the intellectual and educational centre of the Muslim World. The population was about ½ million. The great university mosque of Al Azhar (meaning "the flowering/flourishing") had become an international institution with thousands of students from all over the Muslim World. By the end of the 19th century the Suez Canal had made Egypt the most important country in the Muslim World.

CMS sent its first workers there in 1825. They were followed by the American Presbyterians. Both agencies came to an early conclusion that reaching Muslims directly was too problematic and it may be more fruitful to revive the Coptic Church so **they** could reach the Muslim World. The Anglicans wanted "evangelical" Copts to stay in the Coptic Church. The Presbyterians thought it would be better for them to leave the Coptic Orthodox Church and form an independent church – the Coptic Evangelical Church (Presbyterian). Some Muslims came to faith, but they were very few. CMS work in Egypt was shut down in 1862.

In 1879 dual control by Britain and France was established in Egypt. This continued until the First World War under the Ottoman Empire. CMS returned shortly after with a definite view to focus on evangelising Muslims. To do this, medical and educational work was started. An appeal was put out for workers especially able to reach students at the Al Azhar University. Douglas was the first to respond.

The remarkable thing about Douglas was that within six months he had a very clear strategy. Yet he had to go through the difficult years of 'apprenticeship'. He had to learn Arabic with its gutteral letters and complex grammatical rules. Like everyone else, he started off dumb, then slowly became a stammering blunderer frustrated that the truths he burned to preach must be put into simple language that was painfully inadequate – so bald and tame that it transformed the glorious truth to a poor platitude.

In terms of cultural adaptation he had to learn how to be a "Christian" (follower of the Lord Jesus) in his new culture and live out a Christian life. He quickly grew a moustache and beard. "Method" pervaded everything he did and this enabled him **"to see inside Egyptian culture and mind"** very early on. What drove him was "vision". He wrote, **"I find that constant inspiration is gained by looking at the goal. It is the chief thing that helps me to persevere"**.

Most of his colleagues in CMS thought he was rash, but he was tolerant of criticism and humble under rebuke. He was practical and full of ideas on how things should be done – usually his way!

Yet generosity was one of his major qualities. He wasn't gifted in languages like Henry Martyn. He just worked hard! He was very much loved by his Egyptian friends for somehow he overcame the "anglo-saxonism" of his natural man and became an Egyptian in thought and word as well as in manner and aspiration. All this was born out of a love for Egyptians. All those he met – Egyptians, Muslims, Copts and believers – were amazed at his self-consecration and total self-abandonment to the "one thing" – the Kingdom of God. He always insisted on being with Egyptians. Once when his friend booked him an empty train carriage, he refused and found a carriage full of Egyptian officials. He said, **"Why man? I want to fish!"** The last discernible words he spoke before he died were just these: **"the work"**.

In February 1899, just two months after his arrival in Egypt, he produced “a strategy paper”. It had six separate plans:

- Evangelistic meetings for Muslims conducted in a number of places if we have Egyptians staff to run them
- Training classes for teachers and young men in English – he suggested YMCA should start in Egypt
- Bible classes for Coptic and Muslim teachers varying in size from 1-12
- Literature: Christian literature both devotional and apologetic as well as a whole series of aids for Bible study
- Educational work: he was impressed by the spiritual impact of the American Presbyterian School in Assiut.

He said he hadn't had time yet to think through the medical work or how to reach women.

Later he was directly involved in starting all these except the last. He was particularly passionate about literature in Arabic. He gathered workers from agencies in the Arab World and as far away as India so they could plan together what was needed.

Looking out from his rooftop one night in prayer he noticed the green fields of crops in the irrigated Delta land ready to harvest. Then he saw the desert dry and arid – lands of spiritual desolation. In between was Cairo and through the middle of Cairo the Nile. He tried to count the minarets and domes. He got as far as 500. As the sun came up he was overwhelmed with the need not just of Egypt and the Arab World but of the whole of Muslim Africa. Then he was overwhelmed that Jesus is Lord – the Lord of all! His rule is an everlasting rule and His Kingdom endures for ever. Following this was the strong, persistent thought that the church must be purified by the Holy Spirit and filled to overflowing with devotion to the Lord she owns.

In the first two months he developed the idea that Cairo should become a major centre for training workers for the whole Muslim World. He felt it was the best place because:

- It was the best place to learn Arabic
- It was a healthy place to be
- There was a great deal of toleration

Lastly he saw the absolute imperative of training Egyptians and other Arabs to be evangelistic workers to Muslims – especially down into Sudan.

These are his goals for CMS when he had been in Cairo less than 3 months:

1. Evangelisation from the Delta down the Nile to Sudan

2. Helping the Copts
    - in Bible teaching
    - in encouraging their priests with evangelical theology
    - in literature
    - training their theological students to reach Muslims

3. Evangelising the educated men of Cairo
    - by Bible classes
    - by personal work
    - by evangelistic services

4. Literature to evangelise Muslims
    - to reach the whole Arabic-speaking Muslim World
    - a conference of all workers among Muslims to plan and execute this

5. A Christian high school in Cairo

6. Training of workers to reach Muslims
    - nationals by Bible and discipleship training
    - nationals at leadership level
    - a hostel for promoting these goals
    - training of foreign workers resident in Cairo

Others thought all this was crazy. But 9 years later all these had started and were on-going projects.

The Spiritual Life of Douglas Thornton during the first year

Often there is something very spiritually deadening about the first year on the field. There is a violent shift of the moral and spiritual centre of gravity, an enforced dumbness and a contrast between aspiration and reality. The spiritual "high" on leaving the homeland fades rapidly in the new environment. Any romantic feelings quickly wither away. It is only a spirituality that has deep roots down into the Spring of Living Water that will maintain its freshness and strength.

Douglas found the roof was his great resort as the weather heated up – reading Scripture, praying late into the night. But sometimes he couldn't sleep because the dogs were howling!

After 11 months in Cairo, Douglas married Elaine Anderson. After a honeymoon in Upper Egypt he began his second year. He called this his "apprenticeship" year. He and Elaine lived in Bab-al-Luk area of Cairo. Douglas evolved a system of language study. He decided unlimited pains must be given to pronunciation and to reading out loud. He worked hard on phonetics and on teaching his teacher to teach him correctly! He found prolonged reading practice as indispensable as exercises in translation. The books he used for Arabic study were kept. They are scored, marked, amended, added to and even corrected! He took great pains with grammar. He was a very early pioneer of the theory that colloquial Arabic needs as much study as classical.

He learned to read the Arabic Bible publicly and memorise chunks of it. He did his own translation of the Qur'an and learned to recite it properly. He memorised many parts of the Qur'an. He also read theological, historical and scientific books in Arabic to widen his vocabulary. He read Arabic daily newspapers and he soon began to write to his friends in Arabic. He spent much time visiting Egyptians.

His early attempts to share the Gospel in Arabic were very painful. He took care to practice on all sorts of people from all classes so that he could learn suitable body language as well as suitable vocabulary. Early on he took great care to learn the language of prayer – praying in public for/with Muslims and with other believers. He could easily pray aloud even when he was able to say very little else!

One of his favourite sites for an open-air gathering was by the Nile in the evening where the boats were moored. He would rig up a sheet in the ropes and have a "lantern show" (early version of a slideshow). He would carefully explain the Gospel to the boatmen as he sat on the deck or in the other boats in the dim starlight. There was no electricity. The only light they had came from a smoky lamp.

At Easter 1901 Douglas had the joy of baptising two BMBs (believers from a Muslim background). One was an Egyptian and one a Syrian. The Anglicans didn't yet have a church so it was an immersion baptism. Douglas had spent many months discipling these two fellows. Also in 1901 his son, Cecil, was born.

At the end of his third year in Egypt he produced an Arabic prayer book (about 500 pages) and got it through the press. He spent many hours visiting the Muslims in the printing press so that by the end all the workers had a good understanding of the Gospel. He gained much respect in the printing industry because of this.



After 3 years Douglas and Elaine went back to UK for 6 months. On their return to Cairo and for the next 6 years until his death Douglas focused on:

1. A bookshop near Al-Azhar that became a centre for religious discussions
2. An international Arabic-speaking church for BMBs
3. An evangelistic newspaper – "**Orient and Occident**"
4. In his last year: visits to upper Egypt

1. The Bookshop



Douglas and Elaine with Brother Boulos

CMS already had a small run-down bookshop in the centre of Cairo near Al Azhar. Douglas set to work upgrading it so there was a good sitting area as well as bookcases. It was open at night since this was when most people came to the shop. They were welcomed in, given a seat and the given a book to read. Often a lively discussion started with customers.

The books were in several languages other than Arabic (Turkish, Ethiopian, Urdu etc.). There was a small room at the back for "personal work" and prayer. Douglas often stood at the door and invited people in. He gave a tract to those who didn't come in. To get more people to come he produced a handbill detailing the goods and the advantages of the bookshop. Thousands of these leaflets were distributed on a great public holiday when people were in good humour. They were distributed on a bridge over the Nile. On some leaflets there was a temperance tract which was much liked by the religious. One distributor was asked, **"This is a moral tract, haven't you one about the Messiah too?"**

For middle-class men he started a weekly Arabic-English Bible class. It was a success. Every night the room was filled with people reading controversial books which frequently led to somewhat heated discussions. Some Egyptian believers began to come and help.

The shop proved a rallying point for enquirers. Eventually it was too small and the stock was moved to a depot. Douglas started a second room with a separate entrance for the "effendis" (upper middle-class educated Egyptians) for they didn't like to mix with the mainly Al Azhar students. The "effendi room" was a bit more up-market and Douglas advertised it quietly. For the next 5 years this was his daily focus. He was in the thick of apologetics almost every evening.

2. BMB Church Planting

From the "bookshop" ministry several BMBs came to faith. Douglas thought they would be the **"strongest of all possible means"** to bring revival to the Christian background church (Copts etc.)! So in discipling BMBs he kept them together and separate from the few evangelical churches in Cairo. Originally they met in his house in the downstairs "majlis". Sheikh Boulos and a Jewish convert (!) began to lead these meetings. They called themselves **"The Society of Faith"**. These meetings were not welcomed by Coptic Christians or by other evangelical churches except, strangely, by the Patriarch of the Coptic Church.

After a while **"The Society of Faith"** had 4 "branches" in Cairo. Sadly I have not been able to find out how he focused on leadership development.

3. Literature Publication

Through his bookshop experience, Douglas realised that what was written/published in Arabic was not answering the questions Muslims were asking. He saw that BMBs needed different discipleship materials to those from a Christian background. He knew there was a demand for this. There was a demand for English books including Christian books, but again they did not meet the specific needs of BMBs. So he started a publishing house.

He wasn't the only one! Muslim publishing houses had started to publish books and booklets countering the arguments of Christians such as Karl Pfander. Douglas' books were not combatant. Read the preface of Pfander's great book, **The Balance of Truth**, to realise that these pioneers wet the pages with tears and agonised in love for Muslim peoples.

Muslim publications were very combatant! They frequently quoted **liberal** European theologians to support their arguments. It was probably true that only 5% to 7% of the population were literate. But these people were "the future".

Douglas gives six reasons why Christian literature is often more important and effective than people (full-time workers) in pioneer situations like Egypt:

- Street preaching is not permitted and is inadvisable.
- Full-time workers find it impossible to gain entrance into middle-class homes except very rarely. Even doctors can only enter when there is a severe illness.
- A visit by a full-time worker to Muslims in their shops or factories or offices brings deep suspicion of their neighbours.
- Evangelistic meetings need to have local people who invite their friends personally to their homes – not foreigners.
- Using Christian schools has severe limitations. Boys/men can get completely free religious education at Al Azhar.
- Evangelistic work is really confined to mission premises and this is very limiting.

Douglas saw "**the great language of Arabic which binds together the continent of Asia and Africa**" was sadly lacking in effective Christian literature. He claimed that next to English, "**Arabic is read and reverenced over the widest area of the earth's surface. As long as Islam exists and spreads, so long will Arabic increase in influence.**"

He goes on to point out that in Islam the most significant book is the Qur'an and it is this book that has, "**the greatest influence over their minds**". In his experience, even the Arabic Bible (Van Dyke) never attracted a Muslim as a literary production.

Who was to produce this Arabic literature? He wrote to CMS in England to focus on recruiting highly educated men and women, but not clergy! He dismissed the idea of conferences and big meetings. "**The work of winning one at a time will pay better in the end**". So the focus was to get recruiters into every university town. He also saw that tentmaking was crucial, "**We had much better follow the line of Paul and Priscilla ....**". He liked to call such people "**Christian emigrants**".

An evangelistic magazine (O&O)

Douglas started with the magazine **Orient and Occident**. It was more like a newspaper than a glossy magazine. Each edition had a Bible passage (a story/parable) with a simple study. The characters were voweled if they came from the Bible. There were drawings to illustrate. There were also articles on aspects of the faith often in a question and answer format. Some of these were general: **Why we believe in God** or **Science and Faith are compatible**.

There were biographies, stories of the spread of the Gospel and also Arabic hymns and poetry. There were stories of good men who have made a contribution to world history. Finally there were articles of general interest – national progress, education of women, how to influence people for good and against national evils like opium smoking, alcohol etc.

The magazine gave reports of talks and debates held weekly at the centre/bookshop. The initial print run was 7000. Many were mailed throughout Egypt and into Sudan. There was some opposition but letters came from as far away as Fashoda, Kassala and Wadi Halfa. People expressed their thanks and paid an annual subscription. After a time 80 towns in Egypt and 20 in Sudan saw many people, including many educated Muslims (effendi class), paying the subscription.

Douglas wasn't a businessman. He urged CMS to send him someone to take up the editorship and financial administration, but no one came. With preaching in church and the "effendi meetings" that had moved to a new location and were very well attended, as well as maintaining the meetings in the bookshop, Douglas was over busy.

Here is a glimpse of a meeting in a very crowded bookshop. The series was on the Life of Moses. They had reached the Ten Commandments. There was straight talking on swearing, Sabbath-breaking, honouring parents, anger, impurity, stealing etc. Many of the attendees were shopkeepers and

craftsmen from the nearby suqs. There were also students and sheikhs from Al Azhar. **"How they listened and paid great attention in the question and answer period! Finally nearly all stood to pray showing how deeply they had been touched. A hearty handshake with them all as they left with a cheering word pressing upon them to make a decision to do what they had heard ... closed the day..."**

Once a week there was another big meeting with 50 selected effendis in the meeting room below their home! After 4 years in Cairo Douglas was allowed to enter Al Azhar freely without a guide or guard. He was welcomed everywhere. He said **"No longer any suspicion remains"**. So the evangelistic work and the magazine complemented and supported each other. Some articles were in such demand they were reprinted as tracts/booklets. One of the first of these was, **"The Life of Abraham"**.

With all the demands on him, Douglas came close to a breakdown. Still no reinforcements came. Someone said of him, **"He's tired, with a worn expression and a face so palpably thin – writing in his study, unable to do anything but think of the work and its needs and too tired to stop thinking!"**

Soon after this Douglas and Elaine went on home leave. There he tried to recruit workers. One idea he pushed was a Christian University in Cairo. He wanted a cooperative effort by many agencies. He wrote and spoke much about this. Eventually the American Presbyterians started what is now **The American University in Cairo. The American University in Beirut** started by Dr Bliss was already going.

The second emphasis on his home leave was the need to reach educated Muslims and disciple them well so they could lead other BMBs. Douglas took with him Sheikh Boulos Fawzi (an BMB) a former Sheikh at Al Azhar. They spoke in universities about the challenge of the Muslim World. He also gathered businessmen and spoke on "Commerce and Missions" but associated with agencies.

When Douglas, his wife and Boulos returned to Cairo it was to be his last year. On his return he found the beginning of a revival movement within the Coptic Church. The Coptic Patriarch regularly read the O&O magazine. Douglas reported, **"He sees nothing that is not building up of the church"**. Evangelical theological works produced in Lebanon and Palestine began to be circulated among Coptic priests and monks. O&O's book reviews were making an unimagined impact on Coptic laymen and as well as on the clergy.

One outcome of this was that Coptic children in government schools did not have to study Islamics, but could be taught by Coptic religious teachers. Of course this required textbooks which the publishing company produced. Douglas commented, **"I see a real awakening beginning in the Coptic Church"**. But he never lost sight of the great objective of his life – winning Muslims to the Lord Jesus.

4. Visiting to Upper Egypt

In 1907 Douglas caught dengue fever that laid him very low. On recovering, he had a bad accident on his bicycle shocking him and breaking his arm. But he didn't want these events to stop his planned visits to Upper Egypt. His primary focus had been on **"the 6 million Muslims of the Delta"**. But now he wanted to focus on **"the 5 million of Upper Egypt"**. He travelled by train down to Kena and Luxor where there were American workers. He preached at open-air meetings arranged by the Coptic Bishop and the Muslim Governor. He wrote, **"This was the first time I had seen men weeping at the Gospel message in Egypt"**. Muslims leaders said, **"We have never seen and never heard greater news that this"**. He was very impressed with the educational and medical work done by workers in Luxor where over 800 people came to an open-air meeting every night where the Gospel was presented with a "lantern show".

His next trip was down to Aswan invited by German workers focusing on the Nubians. There too, he held public meetings with mainly Muslims present – Sudanese, Berbers, Egyptians, Syrians, Turks etc. There were sheikhs, lawyers and other government officials. He wrote, **"For days afterwards the talk in the cafés was nothing but the Way of Salvation"**. He realised that it was so many Muslim effendis reading O&O that had opened the door to the 'effendi class'.

Back in Cairo he longed to revisit these places in response to new invitations to go to many more towns in both upper and lower Egypt and down to Sudan as well. They were largely from Muslim government officials and Coptic bishops.

He longed to go again. He saw follow-up as vital. He said that in one town a group of Muslim sheikhs were meeting to read the Injil and study it led by one sheikh who was convinced that Christianity was true. He also witnessed what sounds very like a "signs and wonders" meeting. This was before "Azuza Street" and the rise of the Pentecostal Movement!

Douglas came back from his first two journeys in high spirits and full of new ideas. He saw it was possible to do mass evangelism among Muslim people. He saw the vital necessity for a boat on the River Nile going up and down discipling people. The boat would be staffed by believers trained to disciple new believers. The purchase of a boat was approved by CMS, but after Douglas' death it never happened.

Such was the urgency of the need to follow-up these two journeys that he planned a third visit. But now it was high summer. He visited Beni Suef and Minya but found evangelistic meetings were not possible. He wrote, **"I found the leading Muslim men were more anxious to know our message that the 'Christians' "**. The Muslim Governor received a bound copy of issues of O&O as every other Governor in the province had done. All wanted to become paid subscribers.

Douglas got back from this visit very tired. He complained to Elaine of his **"utter slackness"**. He couldn't find the energy to do anything. It was clear something was seriously wrong. His temperature rose. The doctor thought he had caught enteric fever. He also caught pneumonia and by September 7 it was clear that he would not recover. Later he was diagnosed as having typhoid.

Before getting engaged to Elaine, Douglas had warned her that God's calling on his life was to be a **"preacher-prophet"** to the Muslim World and that he may die young. He asked if she was ready to accept this.

As the end came near his mind became delirious. He uttered in a fragmented way what was in his mind. At times he was lucid and spoke to Elaine, his little son Cecil and those caring for him. At other times there were disconnected thoughts of the great passion of his life – **"the work"**.

Elaine and friends read Scripture and sang hymns. The peace of God that passes understanding was present. The opposite of joy is not sorrow, but sin. And to those around his bed it seemed that joy and sorrow reigned together. Sometimes he appeared to be preaching a sermon. Once he shouted out, **"wonderful opportunities!"** And another time, **"joy in service"**. As he died he said quite distinctly, **"Yes Lord!"** He is buried in a quiet cemetery between the desert and the Nile. Several spoke at the service – an Egyptian BMB, an English clergyman, a Coptic bishop and other fellow workers.



Bait Arabi Pasha CMS HQ 1904-1911
Home to the Thornton family and the Temple Gairdner family



The graves of Thornton and Gairdner