ONE

Masood

Edward Morgan Forster was born in 1879, the only surviving child of an English architect, Edward Forster, who died in the year of his son's birth and left his wife, Alice Clara (known in the family as Lily), to bring him up. His childhood was spent at home, cosseted by his mother and by his elderly female relatives. Unsurprisingly, he developed into a prim and quietly conventional youth who found difficulty in mixing with others. He was neither robust nor brave. Stress could reduce him to floods of tears. At school he was bullied, causing him to withdraw into himself and inculcating the quiet reserve for which he was to be noted throughout his life.[1]

Pupils at English public (fee-paying) schools are inevitably exposed to some experience of homosexual practices, but it was not until 1897, when he went up to King's College, Cambridge, that there is any indication that Forster felt affection for anyone of his own sex. King's was quietly known for allowing its homosexual students a greater degree of freedom than was common elsewhere at the time. It housed a semi-secret discussion society, the Apostles, whose members carefully picked new entrants using criteria that included both their intellectual and physical talents. Forster was made an Apostle in 1901 and found in the society many hugely talented fellows who were homosexual or bisexual, including Maynard Keynes, Roger Fry, and Lytton Strachey.[2] Apostles felt free to be camp, flirtatious, and promiscuously sexual, and the bolder among them were very open about their orientation and the affairs of their hearts.

This milieu opened Forster's eyes, but as he could never be numbered among the bold in either his College or society at large, he did not experience love, either emotional or physical, in his time at

Cambridge, and he was not, at this stage of his life, fully conscious that his sexual orientation was immutably and uniquely homosexual. That realisation would come later. Despite his reticence, his character made him friends among the Apostles, who had liked him for his intelligence and liberal views. He was certainly not one of those elected for any ease upon the eye — he was a plain, awkward-looking youth who would develop into an even plainer adult, and for most of his life, he would fret about what he considered "his ugliness".

His closest friend among the Apostles was Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, called "Goldie" by Forster and other close friends, who was a King's College don (a Fellow of the College) of a generation older than Forster's.[3] Dickinson was also homosexual, but he remained anguished and very discreet about it for the whole of his life. By the time Forster first met him, he had found the courage to publish a book titled *The Greek View of Life*, which was for many British youths the *only* guide available to anything like their own predicament until some time after the Second World War.[4] However, Dickinson embargoed his autobiography, in which he frankly discussed his sexual orientation, for publication for forty years after his death.[5]

After going down from Cambridge, Forster remained in touch with his closest friend at King's, Hugh Meredith, whose sexual orientation seems never to have been made explicit to others or even clear to himself, a confusion that resulted in those close to him finding his teasing frustrating.[6] He was perhaps bisexual, and indeed he was to marry later. A handsome man, he was much desired by many male students of his generation, with some of whom he indulged in platonic relationships which tended to end in the discomfort of both parties. Forster thought Meredith very beautiful.[7] Around the Christmas of 1902, their friendship developed into an affair that progressed as far as occasional cuddling and chaste kisses, but Meredith had a nervous breakdown in the following year and the romance, such as it was, petered out by 1904.[8] For Forster, the affair marked a watershed; he could no longer avoid understanding his own nature. By now, he was twenty-three and had come to the unavoidable conclusion that he desired only men. This was an agonising self-revelation so secret that he confided it in his diary only by the merest hint some two years later.[9]

Apart from teaching at the Working Men's College at Great Ormond Street in London, Forster was adrift after leaving Cambridge, unsure about what he wanted to do with his life. His temperament, intellect,

and interests, coupled with the fact that his family had sufficient funds to make salaried employment unnecessary for him, best fitted him for the life of a man of letters.[10] He turned to writing fiction and did so with success. After he had tried his hand at some short stories, his first novel, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*,[11] was published to good reviews in October 1905, and he then set to work on a second novel, the semi-autobiographical *The Longest Journey*.[12]

This should all have been exciting, but it did not strike Forster in quite that way, and he fretted that he had settled into what he feared was a middle-class rut.[13] He and his mother were by now living a suburban life in Weybridge, then a small Surrey village being developed into a commuter town close to the banks of the River Thames, and his society there consisted mostly of women. His mother was his conduit to what there was of Weybridge society, and she had made friends with some of those living in the neighbourhood, including, in 1906, when they returned from India, Theodore and Margaret Morison. This was a rather grander couple than many of their neighbours. Theodore Morison had enjoyed a distinguished educational career that included membership in the Viceroy of India's Administrative Council and culminated in membership in the Council of India, the Whitehall body that advised the Secretary of State for India.[14] India had brought him guardianship of a Muslim Indian boy named Syed Ross Masood, to whom the Morisons were to give lodgings while he crammed for the Oxford University entrance exam.[15] He was due to arrive in October that year, so they cast about for a suitable Latin tutor for him. Lily Forster suggested her son.

Masood was no ordinary ward. Though not the prince that people might have assumed from his demeanour, he was nevertheless a Muslim aristocrat, descended from nobles who had served India's Moghul emperors and who had contrived to survive and even improve their standing under the British Raj.[16] They were one of the most prominent Muslim families in India. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Masood's grandfather, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, had been pre-eminent among the leaders of a renaissance in Indian Muslim culture,[17] and in 1875, he had founded the Muslim Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh, a town in the plains of northern India, southeast of Delhi.[18] By his death in 1898, Sir Syed Ahmad had become a pillar of the British Raj. He was the only Syed with a knighthood in the India of his day and was universally known as "Sir Syed'.[19] The English journalist Sir Valentine Chirol wrote of him: "In our day the British connexion

has had no stouter and more convinced supporter than the late Sir Syed Ahmad." In 1889, the year of his grandson Syed Ross Masood's birth, he had appointed Theodore Morison as a professor at the College. Morison gradually became a friend of the founder and his family, and just after Sir Syed Ahmad's death, he took over as its Principal, a post he retained until 1906.[20]

Sir Syed Ahmad's son, Syed Mahmood, was an accomplished lawyer who rose to be a Judge of the High Court of Allahabad, the first Muslim to become a High Court Judge in the Raj,[21] but he ruined his life with alcohol and died comparatively young in 1903, leaving his son, Syed Ross Masood, in Morison's hands.[22] Morison had, in fact, become Masood's guardian, in practice if not in law, when, one night in 1899, he had rescued the ten-year-old boy from his deranged father, who was drunkenly trying to teach him to plough the College lawn with a wooden plough.[23] Henceforth, Masood lived with the Morisons and in an English style.

At his father's death, Masood received the state pension of 200 Rupees per month[24] which the Government of India had bestowed on his grandfather and which now extended to him until he reached the age of twenty-five. The Government of India continued to value the family enough to invest in its future, and during Masood's education it kept a distant eye on him, intending that he should study at an English university. Morison was unsure that the boy would be capable of this, as he revealed to the Government in the report they required of him in 1904, in which he recommended instead that Masood take a first degree in India. By 1906, though, when nearing retirement, Morison had changed his mind, reporting this time that Masood was ready to study in England. He was, however, still not oversanguine about the young man's prospects, telling the Government of India that "he is solid rather than bright" and estimating that he would likely get a third or at best a second-class degree. He did not believe that Masood would achieve sufficient success to attempt the notoriously difficult entry exam for the Indian Civil Service (the ICS). Morison added ruefully that Masood "had been somewhat too much with older people". Nevertheless, the Government felt confident enough to have Masood sent to England and the Viceroy approved payment from state funds of 300 pounds a year to pay for his education, with an immediate grant of 1,500 Rupees to outfit him and pay for his travel.

All this, it should be noted, was a political payment, not an educational scholarship. As Morison retired home to Weybridge, he made the arrangements to continue his guardianship of Masood during the next phase of his education.

Masood arrived in London on 17 September along with another student sponsored by the Government of India, Mohammed Abdul Rashid Khan, the son of the foreign minister of Patiala, a small Sikh state in the Punjab. The pair stayed initially with a retired Civilian, a Mr W. Coldstream, at his house in the West Cromwell Road. Coldstream sent the India Office a swift report: "Masood is promising. He has ability and a promise of 'force'. He will require careful attention and training." This initial arrangement, always intended to be a temporary one, lasted but a few weeks, after which Masood moved on to live in "Pine Cottage", nearby the Morisons' Weybridge property. On 29 October 1906, Morison wrote to the India Office that:

> I had directed Masud [*sic*] to come down to Weybridge and arranged lodgings for him. I am looking out for a tutor to prepare him for Responsions. I can introduce him to some of my acquaintances in Weybridge who will also have him to their houses.[25]

The tutor was to be Forster.

Forster could have had no idea where this would go when he agreed to tutor the young Indian.[26] Masood burst into Forster's sedentary life like a firework. His ebullient character and his life with the Morisons in Aligarh had given him a confidence vast enough to impress all the English men and women he met. Most found him a very attractive man, and Forster was no exception. Masood awakened responses in him which were a huge surprise and which slowly evolved through love into adoration. Forster said much later of this time: "He shook me out of my rather narrow academic and suburban outlook, and revealed to me another way of looking at life — the Oriental, and within the Oriental, the Moslem."[27]

Masood's expansive personality was matched by his impressive appearance. Over six feet tall, with dark features in a broad face,

sporting a dashing moustache that curved upwards at each end, he was a very handsome young man. He was so powerfully built that he was strong enough to lift Forster off his feet, hold him upside down, and tickle him, something he took to doing when he was bored with Latin lessons. He was not afraid of physical contact nor of displaying affection, unlike the English among whom he had grown up. He lived life with an energy that took Forster's breath away, doing everything swiftly and to excess, though often not with any consistency or thoroughness. To Masood, life was to be lived for its enjoyment, a performance needing an audience, and he loved playing the oriental prince let loose in the decadent and dull West.

He could be prickly, though, swift to take offence at what he considered a racial slight, very much aware of his family's position in Muslim Indian society and proud of his descent from the Prophet Mohammed.[28] He was quick to respond to anything he regarded as an insult and was totally unafraid of standing up for himself against Europeans, physically if need be, something rather rare at the time and which tended to knock otherwise condescending Englishmen off balance. Conversely, he was correspondingly swift to respond to affection. Masood was a charming egoist, a man who conceived that the world, and in particular all his friends, revolved totally around himself. Forster found him exotically, excitingly alive.[29]

Forster had known no Indians or indeed any Asians before, and he found Masood and all that he seemed to represent immensely attractive. His own cool, rational heart was warmed in the Oriental sun of Masood's hyperactive bonhomie. He fell first for the experience and then for Masood. However, he was, in a fashion typical for him, slow to fall in love. In April 1907, when he wrote a friend a small summary of events, he could still say that "[n]othing much has happened this year", mentioning only that he had met Masood — though he did not name him, instead saying he had met "a nice (who isn't, except in novels?) Mohammedan — at least he thinks he's a Mohammedan and that I am a Christian".[30] A month later, he had warmed slightly, writing in a letter to Masood himself that:

> I'm anxious to hear from you […] I hope you will always talk over difficulties with me when you feel inclined. I am far from being the wisest of your English friends, but I am the nearest to your own age — and at all events such talk would be a great pleasure to me.[31]

By that summer, Forster began to recognise that he was very attracted to Masood and his blast of energy from a different world. He also began to understand the reason why and to recognise the difficulties to which this affection would lead. He recorded in his journal: "We like the like and love the unlike."[32]

Friendship was of great importance to both men. It was perhaps the major strand which united the Apostles in Forster's college days, and it loomed very large in Masood's scheme of life. He talked much about it and about his friends, whose company he sought in preference to taking his studies seriously, a trait that was one of the first things Forster identified in his character. In his diary entry for 24 December 1906, he recorded: "Masood gives up duties for friends — which is civilization. Though as he remarks 'hence the confusion in Oriental States'. To them personal relations come first."[33] More than simply valuing his friends for themselves, Masood needed them to validate himself and his pre-eminent place in the world. Wherever he was, he collected about him a group among whom he could shine, young men who were to him always "dearest" and "darling" and whom he sucked into his orbit then ruled as a patriarch.[34] Masood did this to men of any nationality, succeeding even with the staid and repressed English. He was always the centre of attention, always to some degree on show. His friends more than tolerated this as they basked in his warmth and generosity, for Masood was exceptionally generous to those who were close to him and showered them with expensive presents. He was soon doing so to Forster. On 21 April 1907, Forster wrote to thank him for a pair of shoes: "As I write I wear your shoes. They are even more beautiful than I expected and make my socks, and indeed the whole of me, look horribly dowdy and prosaic."[35]

Masood also gave Forster a pair of slippers and a hookah, which Forster evidently carried with him on a train: "I arrived safely and my hookah made me a centre of interest to my fellow travellers. Here, too, it is greatly admired. I am so delighted with it."[36] The reverse of this un-English largesse was that Masood had a somewhat communal view of property and would "borrow" things without asking, on one occasion relieving Forster of one of his caps.

His pupil's behaviour made it possible for Forster to indulge in the wishful thinking that there was more to their relationship than simple friendship. The youth's open displays of affection and his often elaborately turned phrases of endearment signalled things to Forster's

imagination that were just not real. There were two problems that Forster preferred not to face. One was perhaps soluble with the passage of time: Masood was ten years younger than he was and was still only eighteen to his twenty-eight years. The other was not soluble and never would be: Masood was irredeemably heterosexual.

Despite Masood's lack of attention to his lessons, Forster's tuition proved a success, and his pupil passed his entrance exams. In the autumn of 1907, he went up to read modern history at New College, Oxford. This separated him from Forster for the eight weeks of each term, but Forster maintained their friendship by correspondence and occasional visits. The effort was almost all on his side, although when he visited Oxford, he found that Masood was glad to be able to show off a friend who was by now the well-received author of two novels, *The Longest Journey* having been published that April. At Oxford, Masood would continue to prove careless in his studies and worked no harder than he had in Weybridge. Nevertheless, he went on to make a name for himself in the university as a tennis player, winning prizes in the South of England Tennis Championship at Eastbourne, and also as a wrestler, for which he gained his college colours.[37]

Masood lived in New College in some style and quickly gathered a large and growing circle of friends and acquaintances, which even included some of his tutors, and Forster began to meet these.[38] Many of them were Indian, and Forster came to appreciate the pleasures of being part, at least for short periods of time, of a circle of lively and affectionate young men. The society from which Masood came had given him a wide acquaintance, and many of the young men he knew in India were now pursuing their studies in England. All of these were Muslim, something which, due to their anglicised behaviour and their adoption of English fashions, was often not noticeable on first acquaintance. Many would become part of Forster's life.

Introduced to Forster on one of his earlier visits was the student with whom Masood had come to England, Mohammed Abdul Rashid Khan, whose daughter Amtul would, many years later, become Masood's second wife.[39] Another was Syed Mohiuddin, who would be a colleague of Masood in India's education services and would rise to become Education Secretary of Hyderabad State. A third was Sheikh Mohammad Meer, who later went into law, joined the service of the Government of India, and ultimately became a District Judge at Meerut.[40] Haroon Khan Sherwani, a fourth, studied history with Masood,

but in a much more dedicated fashion, one that enabled him to go on to a distinguished academic career.[41] He was under twenty years old at this stage but became very friendly with Forster, and they commenced a correspondence that would continue for much of their lives. Masood taunted Sherwani, who was President of the University of Oxford India Society, with making over serious speeches to earnest Indians.[42] Sherwani and Mohammed Abdul Rashid Khan had both been fellow students of Masood at Aligarh. These were able young men with promising futures in their native land, and they welcomed Forster into their circle.

When he was not visiting Masood at Oxford, Forster stayed in Weybridge with his mother, working on his next novel, *A Room with a View*. He did not rate his own work highly and recorded in his diary on 1 May that year that he thought *A Room with a View* was "bilge".[43] He was already coming to the conclusion that his fiction was false, stemming as it did from his unavoidable need to write of heterosexual rather than homosexual relationships. He knew that he was being untrue to himself and hated it.

Forster's growing attraction to Masood amplified these feelings and inevitably awakened thoughts of sex. He began to explore what little he could find in the literature of his day that might illumine the sensibility he recognised in himself. At that time, this was a common step, perhaps the only one open to a closeted middle-class man and one that had been trodden by many since Walt Whitman had galvanised the consciousness of homosexual men in the middle of the previous century with his poems *Leaves of Grass*.[44] Forster read Whitman and was excited by his hymns to same-sex love. Due to the indirectness of its medium, poetry was almost the sole means available for homosexual men to write of their love and lusts and was very often the key to the closet door. It certainly was for Forster.

In 1908, in Masood's second year at Oxford, Forster went on a solitary walking tour in Shropshire, where he read, for a second time, A.E. Housman's collection of poems, *A Shropshire Lad*.[45] He had been introduced to these poems by Hugh Meredith while they were up at King's but now saw that they were clearly about the love of men.[46] He wrote his first homoerotic poem, which commenced "I saw you or I thought of you", the words coming to him as he left the novelist Henry James's house at Rye.[47] Forster found he despised James for the way he had allowed his repressed homosexuality to warp his style and feared that he was travelling the same road.[48]

Notwithstanding his reservations about his honesty, Forster's writing was already making him a literary success; others, it seemed, saw no falsity in what he wrote. It was neither surprising, then, that his friends took pleasure and interest in his talent, nor that those of them who were connected with India attempted to kindle in him an interest in writing about the sub-continent. There were at least four men who aroused Forster's interest in doing so, of whom Masood, of course, was the most influential. A Canadian, Rupert Barkeley Smith, was, however, the earliest.[49] A chance encounter on a cruise around Greece in 1903 had led to a friendship and a correspondence that would last until 1924. Barkeley Smith was a member of the ICS, and he was on leave from his station in Meerut when he met Forster. Malcolm Darling was the third to prompt Forster to write about India. At this stage, he was little more than an acquaintance from King's College who was now also in the ICS, serving in the Punjab.[50] Darling had reopened their slight acquaintance by writing to Forster to congratulate him on the publication of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, thus starting what would become a regular correspondence and eventually a very close, long-term friendship. The fourth influence was a young man named Gaunt, who, with Forster, had been a tutor for the children of the von Arnim family at Nassenheide in Prussia. In 1907, when Elisabeth, Gräfin von Arnim brought her children's past tutors together for an unlikely caravan holiday in Kent, Forster joined the group and became re-acquainted with Gaunt, to whom he took a fancy. Gaunt was about to go out to India, and from there he would continue a correspondence with Forster until he died of malaria in 1909.[51]

The influence of these men and his growing friendship with Masood's circle piqued Forster's interest in India, and he set himself a reading programme to widen his knowledge of the country. In 1908, for instance, he absorbed *From Adam's Peak to Elephanta*, an Indian travelogue written some sixteen years before by the sage of sexual, and homosexual, liberation, Edward Carpenter.[52] As Forster was to do, Carpenter had gone out to India as a guest of an Indian and had thereby been able to see the country from an unconventional angle, that is, from the bottom upwards. He disliked Anglo-Indian snobbery (any snobbery at all, in fact) and hated racial discrimination. His book embodied his hope for the eventual establishment of friendly relations between British and Indian, freed from the bonds of imperial servitude, and it