

Two letters from Alfred Marshall, 1889 and 1919

Rita MacWilliams Tullberg

Marshall scholars owe a huge debt of gratitude to John Whitaker for his work in publishing three volumes of extensively annotated Marshall correspondence. Letters from all major and many minor sources are gathered together for the researcher's convenience and the collection can be regarded as well-nigh exhaustive. It is, therefore, not without a certain rush of excitement that it is possible to report stumbling across odd Marshall letters of interest in unexpected places or among recently-deposited private papers. The first of the following two letters found its way to the British Archives among papers originally belonging to Anne Jemima Clough, the first Principal of the Henry Sidgwick's house of residence for women coming to Cambridge to study, later to become Newnham College [1]. Dated 1889, Marshall deals with the alarming topic of female franchise. Thirty years later, Marshall wrote to Michael Sadler, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leeds explaining just why, in his view, Lynda Grier should not be appointed to the vacant Chair of Economics.

Women's franchise [2]

Marshall's early enthusiasm for women education had not included any mention of female franchise. The subject was not one that it was felt wise to raise in the circles round Henry Sidgwick to which Marshall belonged, where the primary aim was to bring the benefits of tertiary education to middle-class women so that they could contribute in a meaningful fashion to the social progress of the nation. Others working in the field of women's emancipation mid-century were cautious on the subject of suffrage. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, the first woman to qualify in Britain as a doctor, while remaining a supporter of the constitutional suffrage movement, withdrew for several years from active involvement lest the suffrage issue damaged her newly-opened medical practice [3]. The founder of Girton College, Cambridge, Emily Davies, although she wanted both education and the vote for women, felt very firmly that until women were better educated and had more knowledge of political issues, they would be unable to gain the vote. She joined the National Society for Women's Suffrage in 1887 but as a non-active member. Josephine Butler, early a driving force in the women's education movement, tactfully dropped out when she began her campaign against another highly contentious issue, the Contagious Diseases Acts. However, Newnham College did have a closer link with the suffrage movement from the outset through Henry and Millicent Garrett Fawcett. As a Member of Parliament and Marshall's predecessor in the Chair of Political Economy, Henry Fawcett and his family lived half the year in Cambridge and half in London. The couple had been among those most actively supporting the scheme for women's education in Cambridge in 1869 and in that same year Millicent Fawcett made her first speech on the suffrage issue in London.

As the century progressed and great strides were made in the education of girls and young women, the circumspection exercised by prominent women on the suffrage issue abated. As they became better educated, not only did their expectations rise but their ability to analyse, organise, write and speak on the disabilities under which women laboured also grew. Inevitably, opposition to women's suffrage on the same terms as it was currently offered to men met with stiffer and more organised opposition from men and women. The women's suffrage movement also became subject to the controversies within political parties, not least the issue of Home Rule. The 'Liberal Unionists' left the existing central organisation and founded the Central Committee of Women's Suffrage [4]. Thus it was that on 13 December 1888, Millicent Garrett Fawcett met with her new executive committee and in this or the following month it can be assumed that the general committee of the new organisation met or its membership was made public. This general committee included two prominent Cambridge 'names', that of Mrs Henry (Eleanor Mildred) Sidgwick and Anne Jemima Clough [5]. It is presumably with reference to this meeting or incident that Marshall wrote his letter to Anne Clough.

Balliol Croft
Madingly Road
Cambridge
27 Jan [18]89

Dear Miss Clough [A. J.]

I am going to venture to intrude upon you some feelings of anxiety wh[ich] have gradually been growing on me with regard to the relation in wh[ich] the Higher Education of Women stands to what – for the want of a better name, I may call – the movement

for the Social & Political Emancipation of Women. These anxieties have received a momentary impulse from my having heard a rumour, which was I daresay erroneous, that you recently attended a semi public meeting for the purpose of considering the policy to be adopted by the advocates of womans [sic] suffrage. The fact that such a rumour could circulate at all shows that spirit by wh[ich] the leaders of the Newnham Movement are governed has changed considerably from what it was in the old days, when nearly all those connected with it used to say that – whatever their private opinion might be – they w[ould] exert themselves to the utmost from being in any way associated with any movement for altering the social & political relations of men & women.

I think you know that observation of the students at Cambridge & at Bristol, has caused me to think that it is not an unmixed benefit to women to leave their homes for the purposes of study. For some of them it is a gain all round, for many others it is the only means of getting the education wh[ich] they want. I think the world owes a deep debt of gratitude to the founders of Newnham, I have rejoiced so far at every step of its gradual expansion. It is truly said that nothing that happens in the world is very important except that wh[ich] happens to the coming generation: and perhaps there is no College in Cambridge wh[ich] will exert nearly as great an influence on the destinies of England, as Newnham. It is therefore a matter of the deepest anxiety to me that the influence of Newnham should be beneficial; & especially in that direction in wh[ich] the interests of the coming generation are most deeply concerned – I mean the stability of family life.

It has been my lot more than that of most people to study socialistic utterances. I find that though many aimable [sic] people stop half way, nearly all those socialists who are logical and consistent thinkers, see that their fundamental principle that all differences between men & women wh[ich] can be removed, ought to be removed – this principle leads to the corollary that famil[ies] shall cease & that the State sh[ould] care for the rearing of their children. Nature is stronger than the Socialists: but I believe that if the differences in character between men & women were to be lessened to any considerable extent, the result w[ould] be a greater evil not merely than the destruction of Newnham & Girton, but also than that of Oxford and Cambridge. I believe that when [a] man returns tired from his work, he wants rest; & that this can be given him only by a nature different from his own – one less self-asserting, self-centred than his own. If he finds at home anyone at all like another man, he won't get rest; he won't care for his home, he will avoid it when he can; & the younger men who are let into his confidence, will be disinclined from marriage. The more nearly the wife is the equal of her husband in education and ability, the happier, the more restful, and the holier marriage is likely to be: but the more she imitates his self assertion the more, I believe, marriage will be degraded.

I say this not with the hope of bringing you to my way of thinking: but in order to recal [sic] to your mind the attitude of those who in Newnham's early days greeted it cordially as an earnest endeavour to educate the best faculties of women, while exercising over them an influence wh[ich] w[ould] in some measure take the place of the home associations that they had left for a time, and w[ould] tend to make them cherish as their most precious birthright all those nuances of character which fitted them to exercise a soothing influence in the household as wifes [sic] wives and as mothers. For people who hold different opinions Girton is ready; for people who think as I do what refuge is there if we are deserted by Newnham?

I have been long in working myself up to the boldness of writing this letter. I feel that there is a certain impertinence in my offering to you, – so careful & tender as you are, so true and thorough a woman as you are (if I may be forgiven this yet further boldness) – any suggestions even of my own anxiety. But those who thinking as I do, fear that Newnham is drifting away from the course wh[ich] they w[ould] prefer, are placed in a great difficulty. Public criticism is almost out of the question: for those who are able to watch Newnham most closely, are just those who w[ould] be most unwilling to make any sort of public comment. And those who are engaged in the actual work of developing Newnham, are apt to move away unconsciously from their old position, that they hardly recognize how far they [sic] gone.

So then I throw myself on your mercy, recalling all your great kindness both long ago and in recent years, and imploring your forgiveness when I entreat you to exert your gentle but strong influence to counteract any tendency that the undergraduates – like life of Newnham – may inevitably have to make the best teachers of the coming generation of women inspire towards masculine rather than towards feminine strength of character. Forgive my boldness, dear Miss Clough,

yours most respectfully

most gratefully, and affectionately

Alfred Marshall

Of course Mary is not a party to my writing this letter

Marshall's clumsy attempts to flatter Anne Clough and Newnham's less strident (by comparison with Girton) approach towards University recognition and degrees for women probably made little impression even on the timorous Anne Clough [6]. Some readers might even think it a little impertinent of him to address such a letter to a woman more than twenty years his senior, who was also his wife's immediate superior. Marshall's views on the subordinate role of women and their sole destinies as homemakers were well known. He adhered firmly to the principle that women should not be allowed to have any formal authority over men or to compete with them in any way. Marshall was particularly perspicacious in identifying a threat to family life as the Victorian male knew it. The educational goals of middle-class women in the final years of the century were no longer simply those of being able to earn their own living should the marriage market fail them or a husband or father die, but now included the

freedom to reject Victorian marriage and its disabilities entirely in favour of self-supporting independence. As the following correspondence shows, Marshall was still unable, thirty years later, to accept the need for women to earn a good living even after the loss of a whole generation of young men, potential husbands, in the first world war.

During the First World War it became necessary for women to fill a wide range of posts, from postmen to professors, vacated by men who had volunteered or been called up for military service. The tragedy of war gave women the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to shoulder tasks and responsibilities that had hitherto been the exclusive domain of men. Some women recognised the political significance of what they were doing; most simply did their duty, made their contribution to 'the war effort', and slipped back into their subordinate roles when the men returned wanting their old positions back. When D.H. Macgregor left his Chair in Economics at Leeds University for war duties in 1915, there were few men of academic distinction available temporarily to fill his post. Macgregor, however, had not long left Cambridge and recommended Lynda Grier, who he remembered had so impressed the examiners of the 1908 Economics Tripos, that she and another Newnham student alone were awarded first class degrees. Grier remained in Cambridge after her degree, originally assisting and later taking over Mary Paley Marshall's role of teaching and tutoring students reading economics at Newnham and, later, Girton as well. Following further enquiries and recommendations, the Macgregor's post was offered to Grier "for one year certain, or until the end of the war" [\[7\]](#).

At the end of hostilities, Macgregor informed Leeds that he had been appointed to the Stanley Jevons Chair in Economics at Manchester. Michael Sadler, Vice-Chancellor of Leeds University, who had been very supportive of the work done by Grier, solicited opinions on who should be appointed to the vacant post. It can be assumed that Sadler in view of his passion for breaking new ground in education untrammelled by traditions that excluded candidates on the grounds of sex or class, was ready to appoint a woman to the vacant Chair. However it would seem that members of the committee appointed to elect a new Professor or other powerful voices in the Faculty were not yet prepared to countenance such an experiment. A microfilm exists in the University's Central Record Office of a faded carbon copy of a letter from Sadler addressed to Walter Layton seeking his advice on the appointment of Grier to the Economics Chair.

[10-15] June 1919

My dear Sir,

The Council of the University of Leeds will be grateful if you will give them your advice, in strict confidence, and a matter of great importance to the future teaching of Economics at the University.

We are just losing Professor D. H. Macgregor, who has accepted the Sidney Jevons Chair at the University of Manchester. During his absence on active service, his place has been taken by Miss L. Grier, Tutor of Newnham College, Cambridge. She has won the confidence of the University and the City, so far as her work is known, by her wisdom, tact and fairness of judgement, especially in the development of the course of training for posts of public service in factories and administration.

A small Committee, which includes the Pro-Chancellor of the University and myself, is now considering the future organisation of the Department of Economics. The situation here, though at present calm, is likely to become difficult during the new few years. Public opinion on a number of grave questions of taxation, industrial management and public ownership is already divided and may become disturbed. The district is feeling its way towards a new social and economic ideal; but old habits are tenacious and there is no clear conception of a social order which, by wise transition, might gradually replace the existing one. I am afraid the barometer is falling and that we shall have storm. In the meantime, the University is gradually winning for itself a place of greater importance in the life of the community. The more Radical and the more Conservative alike are beginning to realise what the place of higher education may be in an industrial and commercial community. We are in close [illegible] not with Leeds only but with almost the whole of the West Riding, half way to Sheffield. We are anxious that, in our Department of Economics, the students should have the opportunity of hearing from the representatives of opposing opinions frank and well-considered statements of alternative theories and policies. But it is desirable that the Head of Department should not be prominently identified now or in future with any militant school of economic opinion. At the same time, the Head of Department must have personality and refrain from public propaganda not from any want of conviction, but from a sense of duty to the community as a whole and to the best and most permanent interest of the University as a place of learning and of training.

We have not approached any possible candidate, but have had certain names suggested to us for consideration, though the individuals concerned are not aware that they have been mentioned in this connexion.

The Committee are agreed (and I think the University will concur with us) as to the general plan of organisation of the future Department. We propose a Head of Department (Professor) with an Assistant, one of these two being conversant with Industrial History. It is further proposed that special lecturers engaged in banking and other professional work in Leeds, Bradford, or London should give regular courses in banking practice, foreign exchanges, accountancy etc. In addition to this, we should

hope to have several lecturers who would deal, from slightly different angles, with the main public questions of the day, e.g. nationalisation of the railways, coal mines, etc.

Furthermore, there would be a Lecturer in Geography. Three other sections of the Department's work will be concerned with (a) Tutorial Classes for adult students in the West Riding, (b) lectures for railwaymen in connexion with the North Eastern railway, (c) social welfare training. In the last named section, the chief importance is attached to the practical training, which is in the hands of the Warden of the Red House University Settlement, Leeds.

Miss Grier's admirable service as temporary Head of the Department suggests the feasibility of her being appointed as Professor, in general charge of the work of the Department. But some members of our Committee feel hesitant as to the appointment of a woman to this responsible post at the present time.

It would be a very great service to us if you could tell us in confidence whether, in your judgment [*sic*], it would be inexpedient to appoint a woman as Professor of Economics in the University and whether, from your knowledge of her work and personality, you would regard Miss Grier as qualified for the duties which would devolve on the Head of this Department at this critical juncture.

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday morning, and it would be of great assistance to us to have your judgment [*sic*] by this time. The members of the Committee would regard anything you wrote as strictly confidential,

Apologising for troubling you at such a busy time,

I am

Yours faithfully

[To] W. T. Layton, Esq., C.H., C. B. E.,
43, Platts Lane
Hampstead N. W. 3

It seems likely that the same or a similar letter was sent to Alfred Marshall, although the latter included names of alternative candidates. In reply to Sadler's queries, Layton wrote that in his experience women were at neither a social nor academic disadvantage when lecturing nor, based on his experience of the success of women in administrative positions during the war, when dealing with businessmen. He felt that Grier's intellectual qualifications exceeded those of any other candidate likely to be available and that her qualities of judgement and tact had long since been recognised. 'In short, I should recommend Miss Grier without any hesitation for this post on the ground that her qualifications fully fit her for it and that she is the best possible person to overcome any prejudice that there might be in business circles in Leeds against the appointment of a woman Professor' [\[9\]](#).

True to form, Marshall in replying to Sadler found he could not recommend Grier for the post:

5 Devonshire Place
Weymouth
17.6.19

My dear Vice Chancellor,

Your letter has but just reached me: and in order that my answer may reach you in time, it must be written at once.

Responding to your invitation to write confidentially, I propose to speak as freely as possible in a most difficult matter.

Miss Grier was a faithful and diligent attendant at my lectures; and my wife sees much of her. She wrote, in answer to lecture questions, answers unsurpassed in length, often about a third as much as I got from the (about 50) men who attended the class. Nearly all that she said seemed to be clear, true and to the point: but I found them rather dreary. Her reproduction, not only of book-work, but also of anything relevant to the questions set which I might have said in lecture, was clear full and faultless: but she seemed to have no spontaneity, she added nothing of her own. She seems to have developed in later years some individuality: and I can imagine her doing excellent tutorial work in correcting the errors of beginners. But, if she has developed any great power of thinking out difficult questions in a responsible way, it has not come under my notice.

As to the other names which you mention I can speak only of two: and I fear they are not likely to leave their present posts.

Professor Scott was long known chiefly as a historian: but he has recently won for himself a place in the first rank of economists. His work in Scotland as a Professor is of exceptional strength: and so many weighty responsibilities have been set on him by Government during recent years, that I cannot think it likely that he would be willing to come south.

D. H. Robertson is a much younger man: but has I think a very important future. His papers for me, when an undergraduate, were short, but full of originality and power. But not long ago, in connection with another vacant economic chair, I asked about him; and I was told that he had no wish to leave Cambridge. We should be very sorry to lose him: but if you can induce him to desert us, you will do a good service to Leeds.

I have never seen Mr Kno[op]: but I recollect that, on reading his first book, I came to the conclusion that much might be expected from him in later years. I think he has written more since then, but I do not recollect to have seen it.

Leaving Prof. Scott and Mr Robertson out of view, I should – as at present advised – incline towards a closer study of Knoop's work.

Yours faithfully
Alfred Marshall
The Vice Chancellor
The University
Leeds

P.S. My wife, having read this letter, says that she agrees with it: but that I ought to add that Miss Grier was very successful as a lecturer to Newnham students; interesting herself in them individually, and getting them to take an interest in their work. My wife thinks also that the lack of individuality which Miss Grier showed as a student seemed to be less conspicuous in later years; and that her experience at Leeds seemed to have improved her greatly and developed a somewhat interesting personality [\[10\]](#).

It is something of a puzzle as to why Sadler canvassed Marshall's opinion on Grier as he must have been familiar with Marshall's views on women academics. Sadler, who graduated from Trinity College, Oxford in 1884, had in his first year at Oxford moved and carried a motion in the Oxford Union in favour of the higher education of women. Sadler remained passionately involved in educational issues throughout his life – primary, secondary and tertiary, as well as education for women and for the working-classes [\[11\]](#). Soon after his graduation in 1884, he was appointed Secretary of the University Extension Lectures Sub-Committee, which attracted the enthusiastic interest of the same group of dons as were involved with the Lectures for Women scheme in Oxford [\[12\]](#). During the four terms the Marshalls spent in Oxford at Balliol College, Mary Paley Marshall lectured in economics to women. It is probable therefore that Sadler first made the acquaintance of the Marshalls during this period. His continuing interest in the education of women makes it unlikely that he had not heard of Alfred Marshall's strong opposition to the academic education of women on the same terms as men and their appointment to academic posts that involved the teaching of men students.

The matter of the professorial appointment seems to have been quickly closed in the month that followed Sadler's letter. J. Harry Jones, who had been lecturer in Social Economics at Glasgow, was appointed to the economics chair. Further direct evidence is lacking to suggest how seriously Sadler promoted Grier as candidate for the professorship or of Grier's own reaction to her failure to secure the post [\[13\]](#). It is no doubt relevant that Sadler had only returned to Leeds in April 1919 after 18 months in India where he had headed a Government Commission on the University of Calcutta, and had little time to prepare the ground for the new appointment. Grier, who at no point in her adulatory account of Sadler's career as an educationalist mentions her own time at Leeds, includes a passage that may perhaps be taken as indirect evidence that Sadler had perhaps promised her more than he was able to deliver:

But in personal matters, ... his generous temper sometimes led him into making promises which in the long run he could not fulfil. Being himself convinced of the right thing to do, he could not believe that others would demur and was deeply distressed when they did and he could not secure for a candidate the post which he had regarded as a certainty when he offered it. Such occasions were rare and the victims usually forgave him, knowing that he had been misled by his own enthusiasm and his belief in them and also knowing how his spirit was seared by such mishaps. For he never forgot.

It was a singularly happy community [at Leeds University] over which he presided. Full recognition was given to the work of all. Something new and interesting was always happening. Women for the first time found themselves on equal terms with men in the academic world. To many it was exhilarating to have their opinion sought and treated with deference on public matters. It was also exhilarating to be expected to do as much work as if they were of the opposite sex. For the most part they rose to meet the demands which were made on them. Again they knew, as did all in the University, that what they were asked to do was as nothing compared with what the Vice-Chancellor did himself (Grier, 1952, p. 186).

Grier returned to Newnham where she taught for a further year and was then appointed Principal of Lady Margaret Hall, one of Oxford's two original colleges for women. Oxford had admitted women to degrees and University membership in 1919 and in 1926 Grier was the first woman to be appointed to the Hebdomadal

Council, the University's policy-making body. Here her competence and ability to work with men for the good of the whole University rather than as a representative of the women's colleges was recognised and she was elected to various sub-committees. She was also appreciated among economists, who invited her to act as President of Section F of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1925 and by various governments, for whom she served on a number of trade and wages councils. After retirement in 1945 she became chief representative for the British Council in China, successfully working there at the height of the revolution. In 1953 Grier became the first Cambridge-trained woman to be awarded an Honorary LL.D by Cambridge University for her life's work. Marshall, who could imagine her doing no more than "excellent tutorial work in correcting the errors of beginners", would have limited her talents and those of other women to lowly, single-sex teaching posts instead of allowing them to contribute to academic and public life to the very best of their ability. The mystery remains why Michael Sadler could ever have asked someone with Marshall's known principles on the subordinate position of women for his opinion on Grier's suitability for the post of Professor of Economics at Leeds University.

[1]. The letter is part of the Clough-Shore Smith Papers purchased by the British Library Department of Manuscripts in June 1996. They had been the property of Miss Katharine Duff, great-niece of Arthur Hugh Clough. A. Marshall to A. J. Clough ADD 72824A f97. By permission of the British Library.

[2]. Material for this section can be found in McWilliams-Tullberg, 1995 and 1998.

[3]. She did, however, address a large public meeting in Aberdeen in 1871 on the suffrage issue and took up public speaking again in earnest in the 1880s. For a while, towards the end of her life, she actively supported the Pankhursts' militant Suffragette movement.

[4]. Elizabeth Crawford, who has done valuable research on the suffrage movement has sent me the following explanation of the Committee's role: "The Central Committee was a society, having as its administrative engine an executive committee, and, as a 'shop window', a 'general committee' of the great and the good – they were always keen to have 'good names' – of which Miss Clough was one. As a member of the general committee she would have paid her subscription and allowed her name to be printed in the annual report".

[5]. Crawford (2002, p. 253). Henry Sidgwick who as a young man had accepted that women should be given advanced educational and professional opportunities, found the idea of letting them vote "amusing" (Sidgwick A. and E.M., 1906, p. 73, n. 1). Twenty years later, after encountering the whole spectrum of arguments as to why women should be kept out of male universities and professions, Sidgwick wrote in a letter on Women's Franchise to the *Spectator*: "So long as the responsibility is thrown on women, unmarried or widows, of earning their own livelihood in any way that industrial competition allows, their claim to have the ordinary constitutional protection against any encroachments on the part of other sections of the community is *prima facie* undeniable" (*ibid.*). In the face of all evidence to the contrary, Marshall could never accept that women needed to earn, or needed to be prepared to earn their own living through access to (higher) education and a full range of jobs.

[6]. John Neville Keynes later reported that Marshall refused to meet Miss Clough "because she is in favour of women's suffrage" (John Neville Keynes *Diaries*, 8 April 1890). The story had been passed on to him by James Ward, at that time on the Newnham Council who got it from Mrs Francis (Ellen) Darwin, at one time Newnham lecturer and member of the Council. By 1890 there were two Miss Cloughs at Newnham, Anne Jemima Clough and Blanche Athena Clough, Arthur Clough's sister and daughter respectively. B.A. Clough was acting as Secretary to the Principal, her aunt.

[7]. 14 August 1915 M.E. Sadler to L. Grier. From the Lynda Grier file, Central Records Office, University of Leeds. Printed by kind permission of the University of Leeds. I am grateful to Ann Pulleyn and Hannah Westall for their help in searching for material relevant to this article. Grier was at first doubtful if she could shoulder ten lectures a week, including two in Economic History, but when other arrangements were made to cover this subject, she accepted the job. From the outset, she lectured to Economics Honours students, Ordinary Degree students in Arts and Commerce, gave public evening lectures based on the requirements of the students for the Social Diploma as well as organising their practical work, and was responsible for terminal examinations in all classes as well as degree examinations. She was also heavily involved in the Workers' Education Association and responding to demands from the Government for information and statistics on established local industries and munitions and other war-related industries in the Leeds area (Lady Margaret Hall, 1968, p. 14).

[8]. Grier file, the Central Records Office, University of Leeds. Printed by kind permission of the University of Leeds. The exact date of the letter is unclear but in view of Layton's reply, the 10-15 June seems most probable. Walter Layton had received a First in Part II of the Cambridge Economics Tripos, 1907. The following year he was made Lecturer in Economics at Cambridge. Layton, who is best known as editor and proprietor of *The Economist*, worked in government during both world wars.

[9]. *Ibid.* Walter Layton to Michael Sadler 16 June 1919.

[\[10\]](#). *Ibid.*

[\[11\]](#). Grier (1952, pp. 1, 4, 7-8).

[\[12\]](#). A.H.D. Acland, for example, who was on the founding committee of Somerville College preceeded Sadler as Secretary of the University Extension Lectures Sub-Committee.

[\[13\]](#). Unfortunately the records of the Appointments Committee are missing.

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