

## OBITUARY NOTICE

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THOMAS HENRY THORNTON, C.S.I.

SINCE the last issue of this Journal the Asiatic Society has had to deplore the loss of one of its Vice-Presidents, Mr. Thomas Henry Thornton, C.S.I., who died at Bath on March 10, 1913.

Thornton was born in 1832, so that his life had been a long one; and it had been not only long but full and honourable. The son of a man of some distinction as a journalist, who had served on the staff of the *Times*, he was educated at Merchant Taylors' School and St. John's College, Oxford, of which College, after taking honours in Classics and Modern History, he became a Fellow. This was in 1855, when the Indian Civil Service was being thrown open to competition, and Thornton was one of the first batch of "competition wallahs". Among the twenty who were selected from more than a hundred candidates there were several who did well in India, and one whose career was somewhat closely connected with Thornton's, namely, Charles Aitchison, who passed sixth on the list, Thornton coming out tenth. Both were sent to the Punjab, both did good service in the Mutiny, and both held for a time—Aitchison for an unusually long time—the post of Foreign Secretary. It was my good fortune when a young man to serve under them in turn as an Attaché in the Foreign Office, and to know them both well.

Thornton's service in the Mutiny won him considerable reputation. There is not space to describe it at length, but Lord Roberts, in his *Forty-one Years in India*, has given an account of one stirring incident which afforded Thornton an opportunity of showing marked courage

and devotion to duty. He was serving under George Ricketts, the Deputy Commissioner of Ludhiana, when the native regiments at Jullundur and Philour, to the number of 3,000 men, broke into mutiny and marched for Delhi, the few British officers in Philour being compelled to retire to the Fort. I quote the following passage from Lord Roberts: "Ricketts had with him at that time an assistant named Thornton, who had gone to Philour to lodge some money in the Treasury. This officer had started to ride back to Ludhiana, when he suddenly became aware of what had happened, and how perilous was the position. Had he consulted his own safety he would have returned and taken refuge in the Fort, instead of which he galloped on, having to pass close by the Mutineers, until he reached the bridge of boats [over the Sutlej], which, with admirable coolness and presence of mind, he cut behind him, then, hurrying on, he informed Ricketts of what had taken place; and that the rebels might shortly be expected to attempt the passage of the river." This unselfish action on Thornton's part delayed the advance of the rebels on Ludhiana, and enabled Ricketts to make a gallant attempt to bar their passage across the river. The attempt failed, but, as Lord Roberts shows, it might well have been successful if others had done their duty as energetically as Ricketts and Thornton.

Only seven years later, while still a young man of 32, Thornton was appointed to the responsible post of Secretary to the Punjab Government, and this post he held for twelve years, until 1876, when Charles Aitchison, who was now Foreign Secretary, having taken furlough, Thornton was selected to act for him. It was at this time that I made Thornton's acquaintance, and a pleasanter chief to serve under I could not have had. A hard worker himself, and appreciative of hard work in others, he encouraged his officers to do their best; and off duty

his kindliness and sense of humour made him a general favourite. He and his under-secretary, Frederick Henvey, were on the best of terms, and were both good friends to the juniors in the office — irreverent juniors, who habitually spoke of their chief as “Tommy”.

In 1876 and 1877 Thornton presided over the arrangements for the Delhi assemblage, when Lord Lytton proclaimed the assumption by the Queen of the Imperial title. It was a fine pageant, a fitting celebration of a great act of State, and Thornton deserved much credit for its success, as did his under-secretary Henvey. For this and other services Thornton was made a Companion of the Star of India, by no means an excessive recognition of more than twenty years' distinguished work.

But both Aitchison and Thornton were Punjab officers, and pupils of John Lawrence, to whose foreign policy Lord Lytton was strongly opposed. Early in 1878, therefore, Aitchison was induced to go to Burma as Chief Commissioner, and Thornton was not chosen to fill his place, the Foreign Secretaryship going to Alfred Lyall. Thornton became a Judge of the Punjab Chief Court and a member of the Legislative Council, from which positions he retired in 1881, having then completed twenty-five years' service in India.

Thornton's Indian career was not as successful as those of some of his contemporaries. He did not rise to the highest post in his province, and he left the service without a handle to his name. Yet a man who not only has shown courage and resource in time of war, but has been a Chief Court Judge and Acting Foreign Secretary, and filled both places with credit, has a good record.

Nor was this the sum of Thornton's lifework. He was still when he retired a comparatively young man, and more than thirty years were to pass before the end. During that time he was prominent in many lines of activity, and of help to others. His long secretariat

training had given him a ready pen, and he published two notable books. Sir Robert Sandeman, also a Punjab officer, and gifted with a real genius for dealing with the wild tribes of the North-West Frontier, found in the former Punjab Secretary an understanding and sympathetic biographer. Thornton's experience of the Indian Foreign Office and Political Department enabled him to give a competent and interesting account of the life of Sir Richard Meade, one of the steadiest and soundest of the old school of political officer. Thornton also wrote some excellent review articles and other papers. Besides his literary work, he was for many years an energetic and popular Chairman of the Wandsworth Bench of Justices, and he was connected with several societies and charitable institutions. Of late the infirmities of age had grown upon him, and prevented him from attending as often as he used to do the meetings of such bodies; but to the end his face was a familiar one in the rooms of the Asiatic Society, where I last saw him, and among his colleagues he was regarded with much respect. Many, indeed, looked upon "Tommy Thornton" with real affection, for his extreme kindness of heart, his unvarying courtesy of manner, and his pleasant humour made him a large number of friends. If not a great man, he was a thoroughly good and capable one, an admirable type of the men by whom the work of the race is being carried on all over the world—men whose upright, honourable lives are a credit and a material gain to their country. And when an Englishman is gathered to his fathers no better thing can be said of him.

H. M. DURAND.

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