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# **William Thomas Thornton's Family, Ancestry, and Early Years: Some Findings from Recently Discovered Manuscripts and Letters**

Mark Donoghue

Strange indeed was the influence of you Thorntons on my former life.  
—George Liddell, secretary of the Levant Company,  
in a letter to Elizabeth Moore on 3 November 1845

The last two decades have been witness to an impressive accrual of literature covering the economic and political writings of William Thomas Thornton (1813–1880).<sup>1</sup> Yet the growing stature of this Victorian figure in the histories of both mid-Victorian economic thought and British-India politics stands curiously alongside the elusiveness of Thornton's personal history. Indeed, the details of William Thornton's exotic ancestry, family,

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1. See, for example, Negishi 1986; White 1994; Lipkes 1999; Mirowski and Tradewell 1999; Ekelund and Thornton 2001; Mirowski 2004; Donoghue 2004, 2007; and Moore 2006.

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and early years remain little visited and surprisingly unexplored for someone of his standing within Victorian middle-class society.

The most definitive, though by no means exhaustive, biographical account of William Thornton is contained in an admirable study by Jeff Lipkes (1999) that corrects several factual inaccuracies found in earlier biographical sources, notably, the *Dictionary of National Biography* (Norgate 1909) and the *Palgrave Dictionary of Economics* (Egerton [1899] 1918). The Lipkes study, however, does not lay claim to being anything more than a general survey of Thornton's life story. Several important features of the biographical record remain obscure. More recent biographical sources, such as the *New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics* (Picchio 1987), the *Economic Writings of William Thornton* (Mirowski and Trade-well 1999), the *Biographical Dictionary of British Economists* (Pastrello 2004), and the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Vint 2004, which, by the way, errs in stating that Thornton's portrait hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in London), contain short biographical notices of Thornton's life and times. These typically describe his father, Thomas Thornton, as having worked in the Levant consular service, while his mother, Sophie Zohrab, is often incorrectly portrayed as the daughter of a Greek merchant. Passing reference is usually made to Thornton's schooling in a Moravian settlement in Derbyshire. Despite his having been described as the youngest child in a large family, the identities of his siblings have generally not been brought to light. Details concerning his wife and children remain generally unnoticed, while several prominent relatives who enjoyed successful diplomatic careers during the nineteenth century have thus far been overlooked. As relevant as these concise essays are in furthering current understanding of certain crucial aspects of Thornton's life and work, a more encompassing characterization of his life story is wanting.

Emphasis should be laid, moreover, upon Thornton's own silence in relation to crucial details of his personal life. He left no personal record of his childhood and adolescence, education, family background, and professional career. Beyond a few fragments of biographical information, no vivid anecdotes bearing on the development of his emotional life have been left to posterity, including details of the lessons he learned during his sojourn on the Continent, relations with his parents and siblings, the depression that followed the shattering deaths of his two young children, and the many unexpected and fascinating connections he established with prominent Victorian personalities. In fact, what is striking about Thornton's biographical portrait is the lack of documentation concerning his past, almost as if all records of it had been carefully and

deliberately erased. Likewise, his published writings rarely encroach upon personal experience, personality, or private life.

Historians attempting to delve deeper into the recesses of Thornton's life story have also found themselves thwarted by the dearth of biographical information currently available, especially in relation to unpublished manuscripts, personal memoirs, and private correspondence with family, friends, and associates. There is, of course, the small, albeit significant, cache of letters from John Stuart Mill to Thornton published in the *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, as well as several important letters from Thornton to Mill and John Elliot Cairnes (see Donoghue 2000). Both sets of correspondence constitute an invaluable source of information on Thornton's intellectual pursuits, concerns, and interests, particularly in the field of political economy, where his views gained considerable traction in the 1860s and 1870s. These letters also mention the odd holiday in the south of England, make passing reference to his son's career in the army, and refer fleetingly to a child's serious illness or death, as if the last subject is too painful to broach in writing. These letters further indicate that the Thornton family moved their residence on several occasions. Their final address was 7 Cadogan Place, near Sloan Square, a fashionable West London address between Belgravia and Knightsbridge. Beyond these tantalizing snippets, however, Thornton's correspondence remains largely free of the details of his family heritage, domestic life, the character of his children, family rivalries and feelings, or the general atmosphere in the family home.

A stroke of good fortune, however, has led to the recent discovery of the Thornton family letters and papers in the possession of Mrs. Pru de Lavison, William Thornton's great-great-granddaughter.<sup>2</sup> These crucial documents permit new aspects of the drama of Thornton's life story to be

2. I wish to acknowledge the investigative role of Brian Barraclough, professor of medicine, University of Auckland, in unearthing the Thornton family papers. Professor Barraclough had himself been preparing a memoir of Dudley William Carmalt Jones (1874–1957), a professor of medicine from 1920 to 1939 at Otago University, New Zealand. As it happened, William Thomas Thornton was Carmalt Jones's maternal grandfather. In fact the grandson came to be well acquainted with his maternal grandparents as a young boy when his own mother, Evelyn Danvers Thornton, passed away in childbirth. As a result of this tragic event, he was sent in 1876 to live with his grandparents. Professor Barraclough's own research uncovered several holdings of Carmalt Jones's papers both in New Zealand and the United Kingdom, including part of an autobiographical manuscript by Carmalt Jones now preserved in Corpus Christi College Library, Cambridge. Unfortunately the first two chapters, almost certainly revolving around family heritage, were found to be missing. Undeterred by this setback, however, Professor Barraclough continued to delve into the whereabouts of the missing manuscript, eventually establishing contact with Mrs. Pru de Lavison, Carmalt Jones's granddaughter, who fortuitously happened to possess a copy of the entire document.

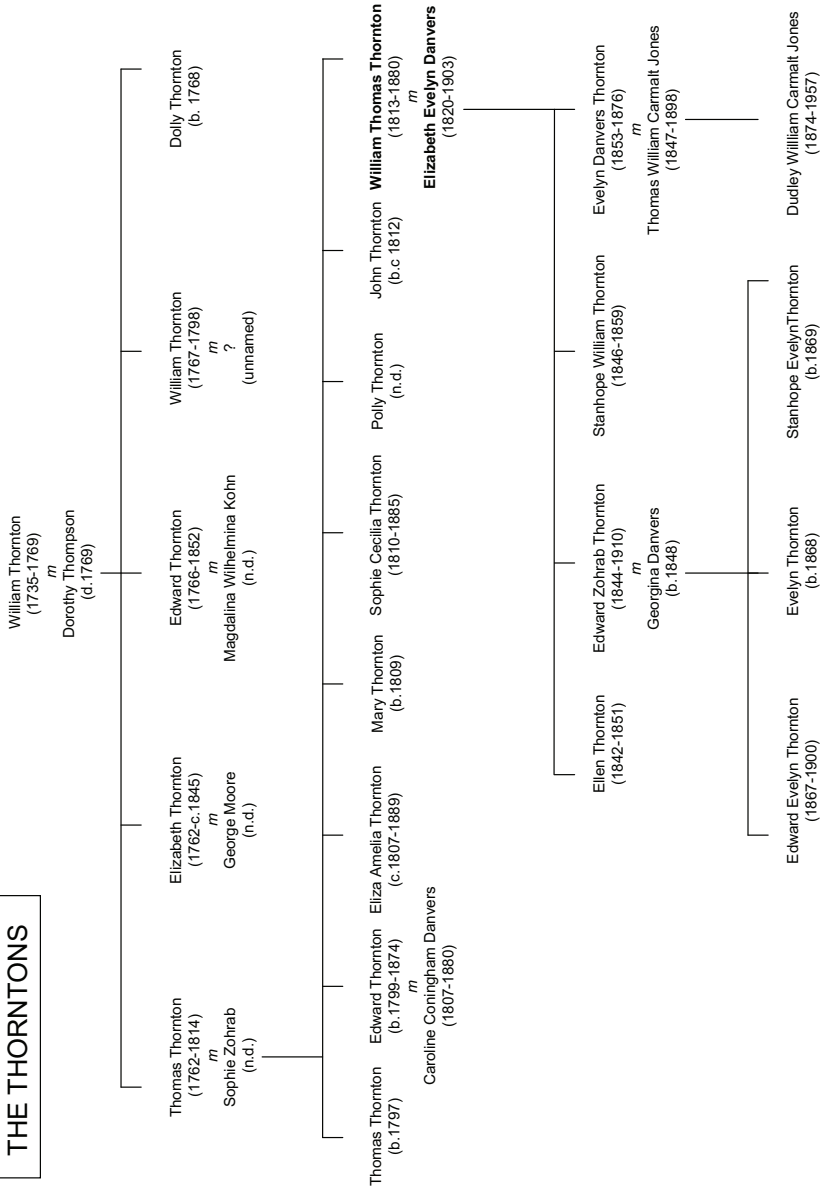
recounted in greater depth than has hitherto been possible. Mrs. de Lavi-son has in her possession a significant portion of Thornton family papers, including several letters to and from William Thornton, his parents, and other family members. To date, this collection is almost certainly the single largest extant cache of Thornton family memorabilia. The collection includes not only William Thornton's letters to and from family members, friends, and acquaintances, but also correspondence between other family members with some bearing on William Thornton's life story. There are, for example, twenty-one letters from Thomas Thornton, William's father, to his sister Elizabeth Thornton, William's Aunt Moore, written during Thomas Thornton's residence in the 1790s in the British Levant, revealing fascinating accounts of Thomas's life in the Near East, his attitudes to the Turkish people, their customs and habits, as well as information on his meeting and subsequently marrying Sophie Zohrab. Sophie Zohrab's letters to her sister-in-law, Elizabeth Thornton, likewise contain useful information concerning her hopes and aspirations for her husband and children as well as her desire to form a close relationship with Elizabeth. In the context of the present essay, mention should be made of two important letters written by William Thornton to Elizabeth Thornton, his beloved Aunt Moore; these constitute the earliest surviving samples of Thornton's penmanship and are the only available primary source on his education and youthful travels. They are reproduced in full in the appendix.

Overall, these crucial documents and records remain the most valuable historical resource for advancing our understanding of William Thornton's ancestry, family, and early years. It is the purpose of this essay, then, to lay out chronologically certain hitherto-unknown facets of these biographical details, as has now been made possible by the recent discovery of the Thornton family papers. Unless otherwise noted, quotations in what follows are from items in the papers. See figure 1 for a Thornton family tree.

## 1. Beginnings

In the spring of 1790, a young Englishman by the name of Thomas Thornton (1762–1814) set sail from the heaving East India Company docks on the Thames River in search of destiny and fortune in the Near East. Ultimately bound for the Ottoman capital of Constantinople, the ship started toward the Mediterranean Sea, where it would almost certainly have temporarily dropped anchor at the British naval base of Gibraltar, loading victuals and mail before continuing eastward toward the ancient biblical city of Smyrna on the Aegean coast. Thomas Thornton disembarked

**THE THORNTONS**



**Figure 1** Thornton family tree, created by author

at Smyrna and remained onshore for about two months. He found comfortable lodgings on Frank Street, where he seems to have whiled away time either paying “a visit to every family of distinction either in town or in the country” or attending the lavish evening balls thrown by the various European consulates. Despite having been fortunate enough to “have seen the pillars of Hercules, the famous Mount Etna, the birth place of Venus and many other places celebrated by the ancients,” Thomas Thornton felt that Smyrna had little to recommend it. Describing in a letter from May 1790 the soldiers in the city as “the most lawless set of scoundrels that ever I heard of,” he was clearly anxious to reach his final port of destination, the Ottoman capital of Constantinople, in search of a new beginning. He sailed from Smyrna and, finally, late in November 1790, Thomas Thornton caught his first sight of the magnificent Church of St. Sophia, standing out in bold relief against the jumbled rooflines of Constantinople, a riveting spectacle from any perspective but particularly so from the harbor.

Thomas Thornton was the eldest son and first child of William Thornton (1738–1769), a native of the town of Hull in the historic East Riding of Yorkshire, who moved to London where he kept an inn, establishing himself as a freeman, and Dorothy Thompson (d.1769), who is described in an autobiographical memoir by their son Sir Edward Thornton (1766–1852) as “a countrywoman of his own, a native of the same East Riding, of a very respectable family.” William Thornton (our William’s grandfather), having moved to London with a view to bettering himself, was in fact prospering as an innkeeper when, “at the age of thirty or thirty-one years, in the latter half of 1769,” he was suddenly taken ill, eventually succumbing to the illness. In the same biographical account, Dorothy Thompson is said to have “preceded him to the grave eight months before, scarcely three months after giving birth to a daughter.” William Thornton and Dorothy Thompson had five children: Thomas (1762–1814), Elizabeth (1762–c.1845), the aforementioned Edward, William (1767–1798), and Dolly (b.1768).<sup>3</sup>

3. The most prominent of the Thornton children of this generation was undoubtedly Edward Thornton, who followed his eldest brother to Christ’s Hospital, where he achieved considerable academic distinction. He then went on to Cambridge, becoming third wrangler in 1789 and eventually becoming a fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge, in 1798. Edward enjoyed a long and successful diplomatic career, playing an important role in international affairs during stirring Napoleonic times. On 18 July 1812 he had the distinction of negotiating treaties of alliance with Sweden and Russia during the Napoleonic War, which were the first steps toward the union of the Northern Powers against Napoleon. (The negotiations took place on Lord Nelson’s flagship *Victory*.) In 1817 he was appointed His Majesty’s Ambassador to Portugal, and on 10 October 1825 the king of Portugal made him Count de Cassilhas of Portugal, a title that could be

Following the premature deaths of their parents, the Thornton children's interests were vested in a guardian, a family friend, whose connections allowed Thomas (who at seven years old was "exactly of the requisite age for admission") to attend Christ's Hospital, a boys' boarding school in the city of London. Its express purpose was the provision of mathematical and scientific skills to disadvantaged boys who went on to use these skills in navigation and trade as well as in apprenticeships to merchant and trading companies involved in the exploration and mercantile expansion of the emerging British Empire. Thomas's education at "that noble foundation" certainly prepared him for a career in one of the many flourishing English trading houses of the time; in 1790, aged 28, he was appointed consul to the Levant Company, one of the great merchant firms trading in the Near East. In the next fifteen years, spent in Constantinople, he successfully amassed a wealth of material for a book he intended to write on Turkish customs, habits, and institutions. This eventually culminated in the publication in 1807 of a valuable study of the Ottoman Empire, titled *The Present State of Turkey*, a work that established his reputation as something of an authority on the Near East.<sup>4</sup>

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conferred on three "descendants in a direct and legitimate line." In 1822 he was made a knight grand cross of the Order of the Bath (G.C.B.). Edward married Magdalena Wilhelmina Kohp, a Hanoverian, in 1812. They had a daughter and six sons, one of whom, also christened Edward, was born on 13 July 1817. He inherited the title Count de Cassilhas when his father died. Like his father, he also attended Pembroke College, Cambridge, and was a senior optime. In 1842, having completed his studies, he entered the diplomatic service, becoming ambassador extraordinary to the Emperor of Russia from 1881 to 1884 and minister plenipotentiary to the Sultan of Turkey from 1884 to 1887. He was also made G.C.B. He married Mary Maitland on 15 August 1854. Edward Thornton and Mary Maitland had a son, another Edward, born on 19 June 1856. The second Edward Thornton died on 26 January 1906. The third Edward Thornton was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, and later entered the diplomatic service, serving as secretary of the legation at Buenos Aires from 1894 to 1898 and at Lisbon from 1899 to 1902. He married Emma Jessie Rawson on 25 June 1889 and had with her a son and a daughter. In 1902 he received an appointment as minister plenipotentiary in Central America. He died at his post in Nicaragua on 26 August 1904. As the third Edward Thornton predeceased his father, he never inherited the title Count de Cassilhas, which passed to his only son, a fourth Edward, who later joined the Royal Air Force.

4. A comprehensive review of Thomas Thornton's *The Present State of Turkey* lies beyond the scope of this essay. Yet Thornton's "valuable contemporary study of the Ottoman empire" offers in fact an "extremely favourable" treatment of the political and social institutions of the Turkish empire. According to the *Dictionary of National Biography* (Carlyle 1917), from which the quotations in this note are taken, his "intimate knowledge" of the subject was derived both from his "long residence in Constantinople and from his friendship with the European ambassadors." Thornton also used the study as a vehicle to launch a forceful attack upon what was in his opinion a flawed treatment of the fortunes and failures of the Ottoman Empire as presented in William Eton's *Survey of the Turkish Empire* (1798).



Throughout his fifteen years of residence in Constantinople, Thomas Thornton (our William's father), despite his self-avowed "extreme aversion to familiar letter-writing," kept up a lively correspondence with his twin sister Elizabeth ("Betsy"). Their letters provide a vivid record of daily life in the Ottoman capital, where people within the European legation lived, on the whole, a peaceful and leisurely life. He does write, however, of the trials and tribulations of simultaneously learning several European languages (including Turkish), as well as of his favorable impressions of "the famous mosque (anciently the Church of Saint Sophia)." He speaks of the desertion of English sailors from Royal Navy frigates, and of the differences between Christianity and "Mahometanism." He gives unflattering descriptions of social engagements within the European diplomatic community, and provides details of excursions taken in the Caucasus as welcome respites from the hurly-burly of Constantinople.

He also conveys personal insights into events concerning family life in England: the disappointment on learning that his brother Bill had been "neglecting the education of his children," delight on learning of his brother Ned's academic success at Cambridge in 1791 (preceding his appointment in 1793 as British vice-consul to the United States), distress that his "sister Dolly is so alarmingly ill," and the "melancholy accounts" of his "dear aunt's health." Thomas Thornton, to be sure, derived overwhelming pleasure on receiving news from England, particularly from his "dear sister," to whom he was deeply devoted. He was under no illusions about making his fortune in Constantinople, yet all the years he spent there were dedicated to one cause: the hope of returning to England as a man of means. As one of his letters says, "I hope even before I am wrinkled & while I walk without crutches to shake the dust of Constantinople from off my feet," and then "if my affairs turn out so that I can return at the beginning of the next century I shall not regret the time I shall have passed here." This was a familiar refrain in his early letters.

Certainly the most common topic of conversation between Thomas and Elizabeth was the question of her future. While Thomas was absorbing the tantalizing sights and sounds of life in Constantinople, Elizabeth was living in London with her elderly uncle and aunt. Elizabeth seemed very unhappy most of the time, largely because her life revolved around nursing her aunt, whose health was rapidly deteriorating. Indeed, the correspondence reveals that her decision to remain with her uncle and aunt was a constant source of friction between brother and sister. In a letter dated 1 October 1794, Thomas pleads with his sister to "quit the state of cheer-

less celibacy as soon as you can with decency and propriety"; Elizabeth, then in the blossom of youth, had received several attractive marriage proposals, all of which she had chosen to decline. Thomas considered her "confoundedly mealy-mouthed not to have married any of them." The same letter implores her to choose one of her suitors: "My wish is that you should have a husband, a reasonable, cheerful, even-tempered man, a man endowed with such capacities by nature; & not too old to improve, would become in time, under your management, all that a human should be." In a subsequent letter dated 9 January 1796, Thomas tells his sister how miserable he feels about her "unhappiness" and instructs her to "leave Mr. Hodgson's house immediately, place yourself in some respectable family and be cheerful." He tries to allay her feelings of guilt, adding, "the obligations you give to your aunt prevent your quitting a house where you are continually exposed to ill-treatment, & deprived of all the comforts, without which life, particularly at your age, is scarcely tolerable. What absurd reasoning is this!" Thomas, who made special arrangements with a family friend, Mr. George Liddell (1769–c.1863), a banker and secretary to the Levant Company, for his sister's financial security, questions the decision to remain loyal to their aunt: "Does the care my aunt took of some of our family in our infancy, & which by the bye was certainly not detrimental to her own interests, require the sacrifice of the most valuable part of your life?" This continuous badgering seems to have made little impression; Elizabeth remained with her uncle and aunt for many more years before finally marrying Mr. George Moore, a servant of the East India Company, in 1800.<sup>5</sup> The couple appears not to have had any children. Elizabeth survived her husband, living to a ripe old age, a permanent fixture in the lives of her nieces and nephews.

The question of marriage was, however, very much on the mind of Thomas Thornton. In the same letter dated 9 January 1796, he mentions that he may "contrive to come home in the autumn, though perhaps but for a few weeks." His intention, however, was certainly not "to look for a wife." He then declares: "I don't like English women, neither their persons, nor their manners, nor their education, nor their cookery, nor anything that they have, but their goods & chattels, and even those I don't much care about." This was the first occasion on which Thomas had raised with his sister the subject of his own marriage. Evidently he was attempting

5. In a letter dated 26 July 1800 to her sister-in-law, Sophie Thornton congratulates Elizabeth Thornton on her recent marriage and presents her husband's compliments to Mr. Moore.

to disclose his decision to marry “out of England,” but it is not until much later in the year that he mustered the courage to write to Elizabeth informing her of his decision “to marry in this country” (Turkey). “It is not hastily,” he writes, “that I have formed my resolution.” Concerned that his sister might believe, because of his earlier dalliance with his Italian landlady, that he was becoming involved with an unsuitable young woman, he went on to reassure her that, while “my wife is without a fortune . . . she is young, & of a temper well suited to my own.” He suspected the decision might nonetheless displease his sister, who was perpetually concerned that she might never again see her twin brother. As Thomas explains, “My wife is a girl whose attachment to this country is by no means strong, so that the connection will not operate in the least as an impediment to my return to England, or alienate my affections from my country relations.” Before signing off, Thomas reaffirms his attachment to his sister: “It will always be among the first of my wishes to see you happy,” adding, “nothing is capable of making any change in my affection for you.” Thomas Thornton was at the time thirty-four years of age. He married his fiancée Sophie Zohrab in Constantinople in 1797 (see T. Thornton 1807, vii).

Despite Sophie’s youth, it appears that her maturity, even temper, and sensibility made her a suitable match for Thomas. She was by all accounts resourceful, unswervingly supportive of her family, and steadfast through personal traumas, financial austerity, and the most arduous journeys she took with her husband.

## 2. Sophie Zohrab Thornton

It has been speculated that Sophie Zohrab was the daughter of a Greek merchant (Norgate 1909, 790–91; Pastrello 2004, 1207; Vint 2004, 647). This is completely incorrect. The name *Zohrab* is Persian (meaning “glaring with red”), not Greek, in origin. Sophie Zohrab was in fact a member of the Armenian church. Her family was, therefore, of the orthodox Christian religion. The Zohrabs had risen to prominence in their native land, but in the late eighteenth century Aga Mohammed Khan, the Shah of Persia, took a dislike to the family, perceiving them as a direct threat to his rule in Armenia.<sup>6</sup> Thus the Zohrabs were forced to emigrate to neigh-

6. Further evidence of Sophie Zohrab’s Persian ancestry is provided by the publication in 1854 of *Zohrab; or, A Midsummer Day’s Dream: And Other Poems*, a work that marked William Thornton’s initial foray into the world of poetry. The purpose of re-creating the tragic story of how “Zohrab was slain” lay in paying homage to his mother’s “old historic name,” the only

boring countries as refugees fleeing religious persecution (see Maddocks 1989, 50–51, for further details). In 1795, in hopes of bettering their lot, Sophie, her parents, and two brothers fled to Turkey, crossing the border near Mount Ararat, once a part of historic Armenia.<sup>7</sup> They journeyed westward before settling in Constantinople. Sophie's father, Paul Zohrab (d.1798), eventually found employment as an interpreter or *dragoman* "in the service of His Danish Majesty" in Constantinople, where it seems he made the acquaintance of Thomas Thornton. Sophie's brother, Constantine Zohrab, settled in Constantinople too, becoming the first dragoman to the Dutch legation. He married Mary de Serpos, daughter of the Marquis Joseph de Serpos. Sophie's other brother, Peter, was also a dragoman. He left Turkey and for a time resided in England, subsequently marrying Elizabeth Hitchins, an English woman, on 17 September 1807 in St. Pancras Old Church in London. In 1816 he remarried, eventually settling in Malta, where he raised a large family with his second wife, Frances Williams (1793–1862). Peter Zohrab died in Malta in 1852.

On Christmas 1797, in the first year of their marriage, Thomas and Sophie found themselves stranded in the newly founded city of Nicolaef, in a country "formerly called Little Tartary," along the Black Sea coast. In a letter dated 23 December 1797 to his sister, Thomas communicated the exciting news that Sophie had given birth on the nineteenth to their first child, "a boy who appears strong & healthy." He also informed Elizabeth of his firm intention to return home in the spring of 1798 for a short visit. Thomas duly arrived in London in April the following year, his first time on English soil since his departure in the spring of 1790. He was of course accompanied by Sophie and their son, who had been "given the name of his father." Their visit home, as exciting as the reunion should have been

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time William mentioned his mother's family, in print, by name. The first poem, which lent its title to the whole collection, is a romanticized adaptation of the celebrated Persian epic, *Sohrab and Rustum* (*Zohrab and Rustum*). It retells the tragic story of a duel between a father (Rustum) and his son (Sohrab). Aside from its significance to Persian mythology, the poem in question is relevant in the claim Thornton makes in its final stanzas that he, the poet, is the descendant of the "antique stock of Asian kings." No material evidence, however, is presented to corroborate this claim (see Lipkes 1999, 205–6, n. 42). Nevertheless the poem is notable, at the very least, for being the only occasion on which Thornton publicly acknowledged his Persian heritage. Notable also are the circumstances under which one of the poems in this collection caused a temporary rift with John Stuart Mill (see Donoghue 2004, 309).

7. The Zohrabs lived in the plains of Mazanderan (meaning "within the mountains"), north of Teheran and south of the Caspian Sea. Their capital was Asterabad (see Maddocks 1989, 50).

for Thomas and his family, was tinged with sadness: Thomas's younger brother William had recently passed away, leaving behind a young family. His other brother Edward, having been successfully elected to a fellowship at Pembroke College, Cambridge, in the same year, was still away in the United States, having been appointed in 1796 secretary of the legation under Mr. (later, Sir) Robert Liston.

It seems likely that Thomas, Sophie, and their baby boy stayed in London for the duration of a month before safely returning to Constantinople in May 1798. Thomas had a great deal on his mind: the welfare of his brother's orphaned family, supporting his own young family, work-related absences from Constantinople much of the time, all contributing to his worries. As he confided to his sister in a letter dated 25 May 1798, "the subject nearest my heart & and the cause of the uneasiness is the state of my brother's family," in particular "the expense of maintaining & educating the children." Thomas feared that the additional financial responsibilities "will bear heavy upon me unless there is peace very soon." At the time, Britain and her allies were at war with Napoleonic France, and the economic implications of the conflict were such that, in Thomas's words, "at this time were I to send home money it would cost me half as much more as it did a few years ago." The depreciation in the value of sterling had made it relatively more expensive to remit funds to England. Nevertheless, Thomas felt that as the eldest brother it was his responsibility to support his "brother's orphan family": "do not suppose I mean to shrink from what I feel to be my duty." He requested Elizabeth to reassure his sister-in-law of his "unalterable affection for her, & of my endeavours to console her to the utmost of my power for the loss she has sustained in my dear brother." In the same letter, he informs his sister that it is his every intention "to return & settle in England as soon as I can, which I hope will be in less than five years, so that perhaps we may meet again."

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Sophie Zohrab wrote to her sister-in-law with news of the birth of a second son, Edward (1799–1874), whom she described as being "much more robust than Thomas although both enjoy perfect health." Thomas and Sophie Thornton remained in Constantinople for another four years. In 1804, just as he had earlier promised his sister, Thomas and his young family returned permanently to England. Before their departure, however, Thomas Thornton made representations to Sir Robert Liston, a career diplomat in the British foreign service, on behalf of Sophie's two brothers, Constantine and Peter Zohrab, to obtain

Danish naturalization papers. In a letter dated 15 August 1803, he wrote: "I avail of the opportunity of your being at Copenhagen to request you will oblige me by obtaining for my Brothers-in-law letters of Naturalisation, as Danish subjects, in virtue of the grant to their father, of which a literal translation is annexed." It seems unlikely that Sir Robert was able to assist with the request, as there is no evidence to suggest that either brother had ever lived in Denmark.

Several months later, Thomas Thornton, in a letter acknowledging Sir Robert's reply, recounted a dramatic heist of which he had been a victim during a journey by stagecoach from Vienna to Constantinople. He recounts the ordeal as follows: "My journey through Turkey has been unfortunate. I was met by robbers soon after the Danube who took from me, besides my own property, more than £10,000 in jewellery which I was carrying to Constantinople to the address of Mr Drummond." Having been threatened with his life if he didn't turn over the valuables, and having lived to tell the tale, Thomas was under no illusion as to the fortuity in his near escape from death. Fate had intervened on this occasion; it might not be so kind on the next. In any case, he had grown weary of life in Constantinople, as evidenced in his letters to his sister Elizabeth. Its climate still agreed with him, and its bazaars bulging with exotic wares from distant lands continued to fascinate him, and yet he now referred to it as "barbarous Turkey, the acropolis of despotism." With a young family to take care of now and the sirens of "Merry Olde England" beckoning him home, Thomas packed his bags, boarded a tall ship, and departed Constantinople, never to return.

Sophie had departed earlier, traveling first to Holland by mail coach and onward to Germany, where she boarded a small mail packet crossing the North Sea to Falmouth, an English coastal port. There she was received by her brother-in-law, Mr. George Moore (the husband of Thomas's sister Elizabeth), who had arranged for her overland journey to London, where she hoped to be reunited with her husband and children. Thomas Thornton and the children had arrived together in London prior to Sophie. She arrived in London in September 1804. This was the family's first Christmas in England. There is some evidence in the Thornton papers suggesting Thomas's continued employment, after his return to England, in the Levant Company.

His brother Edward, appointed in 1807 as Britain's envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to Sweden, received from Thomas on 14 January 1810 a letter requesting assistance in connection with a damning

accusation leveled against Thomas by Sir John Warren.<sup>8</sup> The charge against Thomas pertained to his having had the audacity to open Warren's private correspondence. Thomas also forwarded a letter from a mutual friend, Mr. Liddell, secretary to the Levant Company, as evidence of "Mr. Eton's" hand in the matter. Evidently this serious allegation had for some time weighed heavily on Thomas's mind; in closing he wrote to his brother, "Let me, however, beg of you to bear in mind that we have now an opportunity, which I have long sought and almost despaired of finding, of clearing my character from the chief, if not even the whole of the calumnies which have done me much injury and have given me more uneasiness than all the other misfortunes of my life."

Also apparent from his correspondence to his brother and his brother-in-law, George Moore, is the fact that Thomas and his family had at some stage between 1805 and 1810 taken up residence in the English town of Burnham, Buckinghamshire, where it seems they lived in straitened but not harsh conditions. The choice of Burnham was not an obvious one: the Thornton family had no family ties or existing friends to draw them to this small but prosperous provincial town. Perhaps it was chosen as a more salubrious, not to say less expensive, location in which to raise a large, young family. In any case, Sophie Zohrab gave birth to several children in England: four girls—Mary, Polly, Sophie, and Eliza—and two boys—John and William.<sup>9</sup> Thomas and his wife probably found the leisurely pace of rural life more conducive to raising such a large family.

Sophie Thornton and Elizabeth Moore continued to exchange letters as well as jars of preserved fruit. Indeed, the two families appear to have

8. Sir John Borlase Warren (1753–1822) was, at the time, an admiral in the Royal Navy, where he served for many years with distinction, assisting in the late eighteenth century to foil a French naval invasion of Ireland.

9. Eliza Amelia Thornton (c.1807–1889) and Sophie Cecilia Thornton (c.1810–1885) both survived their younger brother William. According to the England censuses of 1871 and 1881, respectively, neither sister ever married. Eliza Thornton's existence is further confirmed by a letter dated 10 December 1880 that she wrote to her nephew Edward Zohrab Thornton, in which an invitation is extended to Edward and his family to "come over some day soon and lunch with us." John Thornton was born around 1812. It has not been possible to pinpoint his date of death. Despite an exhaustive search, the exact birth and death dates of Polly Thornton have not been found. It seems likely that she was born in the first decade of the nineteenth century, probably in England. However, Polly Thornton fades from the family records after 1830. Mary Thornton (b.1809), having inherited something of the wanderlust from her father, traveled to Malta, Ireland, and even the Dutch East Indies during the 1820s and 1830s before settling down in England (see the discussion of the correspondence between Elizabeth Moore and the Liddells in section 3, below). In the 1841 England census, Mary and Sophie Thornton are recorded as living with Elizabeth Moore at 12 Homerton Terrace, Hackney. It is not known whether William Thornton's sisters received any formal education.

maintained close ties, a fact that seems to have eased Thomas's transition through the period of financial reversal he perhaps suffered in late 1812 or early 1813.<sup>10</sup> In a letter dated 18 February 1813, he thanks his brother-in-law George Moore "for the trouble I have given you in paying my last bill." The same letter also conveys the happy news of Sophie's delivery four days earlier of baby William: "My wife was safely delivered on Sunday evening of a healthy boy—whom we call William, in memory of my dear brother. She herself is well and begs now to make her kindest remembrances to you and my sister." William Thomas Thornton—the main subject of our interest—was born on 14 February 1813.

In late 1813, Thomas was appointed consul to the Levant Company, an appointment that required his journeying to Egypt, then still part of the Ottoman Empire under the charismatic governor Mehmet Ali. The precise motive underlying his decision to journey abroad, leaving his wife and family behind in England, remains unknown; perhaps it was with a view to refurbishing his fluctuating personal finances. On 19 November he wrote to George Moore from Burnham mentioning a change in his travel plans; it was now his intention, "instead of coming to town, to set off for Ryde in the Isle of Wight and to wait there till a convoy sails." Sadly, Thomas was never allowed the opportunities of marveling at the magnificent Sphinx or exploring the narrow lanes and twisting alleyways of Cairo. He had been suffering from chronic ill health for some time, but it was continually downplayed. In order not to cause alarm, Thomas insisted that Elizabeth be kept in the dark. "I think myself to be better both in health and appetite," he wrote, adding, "The night sweats, she will be glad to hear, have left me, and I have not quite the death's head appearance that I had in town." The illness, however, took its toll. In early 1814, while he was preparing to set sail for Alexandria, Thomas Thornton died suddenly, leaving behind his newborn son—barely a year old and already deprived of a father. Thomas's sudden death shocked and grieved the entire family.

### 3. Early Years

With her husband's untimely death in 1814, Sophie suddenly found herself shouldering the responsibility of providing for eight children. She appears to have received support from her extended family. Her sister- and brother-in-law, Elizabeth and George Moore, almost certainly lent Sophie assistance, perhaps even agreeing to support her and the children until such

10. The nature of the financial reversal, if any, is unknown.



time as she could cope on her own. It is not known whether Sophie and her children remained in Burnham, Buckinghamshire, or whether they were dispersed among other family members. Perhaps some of the younger siblings were taken in by close family members, while the elder children were enrolled in a boarding school. Unfortunately, the likelihood of retrieving these important biographical details through historical research appears remote. There are very few surviving Thornton family letters covering the period from 1814 (Thomas Thornton's death) to 1835, when William Thornton returned to England after residing for many years in Malta and Constantinople. Of the extant letters, two are in William Thornton's hand, addressed to his aunt Elizabeth Moore. Her enduring bond with her nieces and nephews (probably formed shortly after Thomas and Sophie's return to England with their children) developed in the months and years following her brother's unfortunate death.

Regrettably, the Thornton family papers lack documents shedding further light on the fates of Sophie Zohrab and the Thornton children immediately following the death of Thomas Thornton. There does exist, however, an important series of letters addressed to Elizabeth Moore dating from the second half of the 1820s. Composed by Mary Liddell (c.1775–1842), wife of the banker whose services had some years earlier been retained by Thomas Thornton, this correspondence contains a voluminous amount of information on the later activities of the Thornton children. Even a cursory perusal of the letters leaves the reader with the impression that Elizabeth Moore had become, after her twin brother's untimely demise, a more or less permanent fixture in the children's lives, fulfilling the role perhaps of a surrogate parent. At the time, Elizabeth was residing in modest lodgings at 12 Homerton Terrace, Hackney, an area of East London immortalized by its famous horse-drawn coaches. A letter to Elizabeth dated 7 July 1826 confirms that William Thornton's eldest sister, Mary Thornton, was then residing in what Mrs. Liddell described as "the most agreeable part of Ireland." The letter goes on to describe Mary Thornton as "very good tempered and obliging." It also mentions Thornton's other sisters, Eliza and Sophie, as "comfortable and happy" and "going on very well" in their lives.<sup>11</sup> Mrs. Liddell assumes, however, that Elizabeth Moore is in low spirits, owing to "the loss of the

11. William Thornton's sisters Mary, Eliza, and Sophie are mentioned regularly in the letters Elizabeth Moore received from Mary and George Liddell between 1826 and 1845. However, there is no reference to Polly Thornton in any of that correspondence, nor has it been possible to determine her fate.

society of your nieces," who had recently taken leave of their aunt's place of residence.

Another letter to Elizabeth from Mary Liddell, dated 28 March 1828, conveys more detailed information on the activities of the Thornton children, including William. It appears that Mary Thornton has attracted the attention of an admirer and is "happily situated,"<sup>12</sup> while William, then resident in Malta, is said to be "doing well, and happy [living abroad] with his cousins." The eldest sister, Eliza, is mentioned as being disappointed "in not going to Constantinople." Undeterred by this setback, however, Eliza has found herself "thrown among good and superior people." The letter goes on to add that "to a clever girl like her . . . [a] thinking, pensive girl," a social network comprising of "the good, the gifted, and the polite, must be a great advantage." Referring to the youngest sister, Sophie, Mrs. Liddell hopes that she "will soon meet with a situation suitable for her, with a salary proportioned to her merits, and that she will then become all you wish her in every respect." The letter then acknowledges Elizabeth Moore as having "so nobly performed many arduous duties," while adding, "may you be rewarded also by the gratitude and affection of those who owe everything to your care and attention." As far as the care of the Thornton children was concerned, Elizabeth had dutifully carried out the responsibilities that had so suddenly been thrust upon her.

There is a gap in the correspondence between the two women, with almost a decade elapsing without any surviving letters to continue the narrative. The next available letter is dated 25 July 1838. On this occasion (and on all future ones), the letter was written by Mr. George Liddell on behalf of his wife Mary, whose increasing frailty and failing sight prevented her from corresponding in her own hand. It begins with Mr. Liddell congratulating Mrs. Moore on her robust health, and continues with a fairly innocuous passage confirming Elizabeth Moore's parental role in relation to her nieces and nephews. "We are happy to learn that you continue to enjoy good health and the full use of all your senses. May it be so to the end of your life. And may that end be still far off, not for your sake but for that of others to whom you have been and are father and mother as well as aunt." The letter goes on to mention a recent journey made by one of the Thornton sisters to Batavia, in what was then known as the Dutch East Indies. The passage continues: "Your niece . . . is at Batavia is she not? What human being ever thrived there, or thereabouts long? Whoever

12. It should be noted, however, that there is no record of her ever having been married.

aspires to martyrdom may be sure of obtaining it at Batavia.” Whatever the identity of the young lady in question (most likely Mary), Mr Liddell had clearly formed the opinion that Batavia was not an appropriate destination for a young, God-fearing English woman. Passing reference is also made to the “successes” of both William Thornton and his elder brother Edward, who was “first placed in the India House for the benefit of the family.”<sup>13</sup> It appears that their uncle Sir Edward Thornton, then in retirement, played a supporting role in securing his nephew’s employment in India House.

Elizabeth Moore and George Liddell continued their correspondence throughout the early 1840s, keeping each other abreast of family news. Liddell’s letters often descend into painful descriptions of the physical decline of his bedridden wife, who is described as being “blind, very weak, and helpless, but not failed in mind.” A letter dated 25 November 1841 carries the news that his wife’s behavior has become increasingly erratic. By all accounts, she has become “very peevish” toward her daughters, “who zealous and kind as ever are suffering much.” His letters also acknowledge the continuing bonds between Mrs. Moore and her “young ladies.” Then eighty years old, Elizabeth’s health had also begun to deteriorate. In particular, a “weakness of the optic nerve” had compromised her eyesight. A letter dated 24 May 1843 from Liddell (whose own vision had been impaired for some time due to cataracts) advises her against reading and writing “by candlelight” and suggests bathing her eyes in the “coldest water,” a home remedy consisting of plunging the “face into it until your nose reaches the bottom . . . of the wash hand basin . . . then open and close your eyes repeatedly.” It is not known whether Elizabeth ever experimented with this novel remedy. In the very same letter, Liddell mentions that Sophie Thornton “drinks much water . . . now the fashion-

13. Edward Thornton (1799–1874), William’s elder brother, entered the service of the home establishment of the East India Company in 1814 and, by 1847, had risen to become head of its statistical department. He retired in 1857. In 1829 he married Caroline Coningham Danvers (1807–1880) at St. Pancras. The 1861 census records indicate that Edward and Caroline lived in Leecroft Cottage in the village of Hurstpierpoint, Sussex. The 1861 census records also reveal that William Thornton’s youngest daughter, Evelyn, was staying with her uncle and aunt at the time, further evidence that Edward and William remained close. At least the two brothers shared similar tastes in literature. In a letter from William Thornton to John Stuart Mill dated 8 January 1869, Edward is referred to as having enjoyed reading James Mill’s *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*. The letter goes on to say that Edward had “made himself master of its contents when he was a young man” (see Donoghue 2000, 334). Edward died in Brighton in 1874.

able remedy for all ills," while adding, "no doubt a powerful one, but me thinks drinking it may be overdone."

It is equally apparent from the content of the same letter that Mary Thornton, William Thornton's elder sister, had been composing her aunt's letters on her behalf. Liddell acknowledges, "Miss Mary I know is an excellent secretary," and "I thank her for her kind letter." A similar refrain is found in a letter dated 16 May 1844, which begins: "Your Miss Mary's letter of the 30th October written for you reached me punctually—a most kind letter it was." All of this suggests that Elizabeth Moore's health was failing rapidly, making her increasingly reliant upon her "daughters" to perform simple tasks. Nevertheless, the Liddells and Elizabeth Moore continued corresponding with each other for another eighteen months; the final letter from Mr. Liddell is dated 3 November 1845. After this date no further correspondence survives.<sup>14</sup> It seems probable that Elizabeth Moore, aged 83 and no longer physically robust, passed away in 1845 or 1846.<sup>15</sup> She was an attractive and strong-minded woman, and by all accounts her love for the Thornton children was boundless. She remained a family

14. Another interesting facet of these letters is the story of the resumption in the friendship between George Liddell and Sir Edward Thornton. Evidently in response to news that Elizabeth's brother, Sir Edward Thornton, "has lost another of his sons," George Liddell, in a lengthy epistle dated 25 November 1841, offered her his sincere condolences. As mentioned above, Sir Edward Thornton and Magdalena Wilhelmina Kohp had one daughter and six sons, five of whom passed away at various times during Sir Edward's lifetime (the identity of the son the letter refers to is not given). The latest tragedy seemed to provide the impetus for the renewal of the two men's friendship after they had been estranged for twenty years. The two men seemingly fell out over a misunderstanding when Sir Edward was employed within His Majesty's diplomatic service. In a letter from around 1842, Liddell decided to contact Sir Edward "to suggest a domestick [*sic*] remedy of great efficacy in many cases of consumptive-like symptoms." In a letter dated 8 July 1842 Liddell happily reports that Sir Edward had duly replied, "the kindest [letters] that were ever written." Their friendship, he informs Elizabeth, "is restored." All future letters to Elizabeth Moore from Liddell contain snippets of information on the activities of her younger brother. The reason for their initial separation is briefly relayed in Liddell's last letter to Elizabeth Moore dated 3 November 1845. He writes: "I had another reason for desiring to see your Brother at leisure and alone. It was to pray him to tell me frankly if he believed in the truth of the imputations cast on my character, cruelly and unjustly some 40 years ago by one who of all living it least became to do so, and which I have always considered the great cause of our separation. His answer was most satisfactory. He never believed him." The nature of the slander is not spelt out. Nor is it clear who was involved. What is apparent, though, is that the Thorntons and Liddells maintained close family links as well as business ties spanning many years. George Liddell admits as much in the same letter quoted from above in which he states, "Strange indeed was the influence of you Thorntons on my former life."

15. In 1863 George Liddell was past his ninety-third year when he died at his home in the English town of Winchester.

figure of great importance in their lives, perhaps in her own mind repaying the debt she felt she owed her twin for securing *her* financial independence many years earlier.

#### 4. Moravian Education

The Thornton family papers contain early correspondence between the Thornton brothers, William and John, both roughly of an age, and their Aunt Moore. These letters reinforce the impression of a close bond between the Thornton children and the aunt who became something of a surrogate parent to them. Two of the letters are particularly important because they are the only source of information concerning (1) William's education at a Moravian settlement and (2) the period of his subsequent residence in Constantinople. In the early 1820s, William Thornton and his older brother John were sent to boarding school on the Moravian settlement at Ockbrook, near Derby. Their letters contain important, albeit brief, descriptions of their school life as full-time boarders. William apparently took longer to settle down to his studies, as is detailed in a short note attached to William's letter to his Aunt Moore, wherein the school principal, Mr. O'Connor, informs Mrs. Moore that both boys "afford us much satisfaction by their general conduct and attention to their studies," while continuing that "William is much more diligent than he was."<sup>16</sup>

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a history of the Moravian Church in England, the reader might find useful a brief discussion of the beliefs and practices of that church and the Moravian school in England at that time. The Moravian Church is an early Protestant church originally established in Moravia and Bohemia in the mid-fifteenth century by Bohemian Hussites. Flourishing in the early years, the Moravian Church was destroyed in the Thirty Years' War when the Holy Roman Empire persecuted those who preached its faith and embraced its teachings. By the early seventeenth century, little remained of the teachings and beliefs of the original Moravian brethren. There was, however, something of a Moravian revival in the early eighteenth century, thanks largely to the zeal and perseverance of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, a Saxon nobleman described as one of the most prolific of Protestant hymn writers. Zinzendorf permitted members of the sect to establish a Moravian

16. Unfortunately the records from the period when William and his brother attended the Moravian school are no longer extant.

settlement on his estate at Berthelsdorf in Upper Lusain. From there, the renewed church grew steadily, and Moravian communities were established in other parts of Europe and in England.<sup>17</sup>

Moravian missionaries had been present in England since the late 1720s and early 1730s, although the first Moravian chapel in England was established in 1740 off Fetter Lane, near Fleet Street, in London. The Moravian Society at Ockbrook, Derbyshire, was established in 1744. In 1750, Bishop Peter Boehler came to settle the congregation, and he returned two years later to consecrate the chapel and burial grounds. The estate was bought from a local farmer. The Moravian settlement at Ockbrook was economically self-sufficient. It consisted of a row of delightful red brick Georgian buildings: the chapel stood at the center, family and choir houses were constructed, and cottage industries, workshops, an inn, and open day schools for boys and girls eventually established. In 1799, a boarding school for girls was opened, with a boarding school for boys, where William and John Thornton received their formal education, established a few years later.<sup>18</sup> All property was owned and administered by the Ockbrook Elders Conference: there was no collective ownership.

Evidence points to the Thornton brothers having entered the Moravian school when William was either seven or eight years old. According to John Thornton, in a letter to Aunt Moore dated 3 May 1822, there were “now 34 boys” in the boarding school “divided into two rooms,” further evidence of the communal approach to education within the Moravian church schools. The Ockbrook Church School attempted to create a culture reflecting both secular and religious values. Emphasis was laid on spelling and writing, Bible study, music, and the hymns of the Moravian Church. In his letter dated 30 April 1822 to Aunt Moore, William mentions “an examination every quarter, at which time we are examined in whatever we are instructed.” After an initially slow start, William immersed himself wholeheartedly into his studies, increasingly appreciating the importance of the learning process. He writes, “To the instructions which I now enjoy, I trust I shall give my entire attention, ever remembering their great importance.” He concludes by reiterating a desire to “do everything according to your pleasure, and also hope that I may improve in all the various branches of my education.” There is evidence, then, that

17. For further information on the establishment of the Moravian Church in England, on Moravian church schools, and on Moravian beliefs and practices, see Mason 2001 and Podmore 1998.

18. It exists to this day, but as an independent boarding school for girls.

William was quite an able pupil who could conceivably have proceeded to Cambridge or Oxford had the family's finances permitted this as an option.<sup>19</sup> Both letters hint at Aunt Moore's having made, by then, her home with the Thornton children, while their mother Sophie ceases to be mentioned. In closing, William writes of his intention "to meet with your esteem and approbation when I return home," while John beseeches his "dear aunt" to "give my love to my Brother and Sisters, and accept the same yourself," while adding, "I hope I shall soon hear from my sisters and beg to be kindly remembered to them, and to all my friends, who I hope are quite well." Also apparent from John's letter is that one of his two older brothers (Thomas) had passed away.

It is not known whether the Moravian education Thornton received at Ockbrook made a lasting impression; no references to Moravian teachings occur in his published writings, nor is there any evidence to suggest that he continued his association with the Moravian Church. The undercurrents of Christian faith and belief, however, remained with him for the rest of his life, as documented by some of his later writings, inspired as they were by theological experiences. His religiosity remained anchored to a Victorian moral code driven by the principles of duty, moral uplift, and good deeds. At the time, acting on these principles was believed to affirm one's commitment to God.

## 5. Setting Out

William stayed at the Moravian settlement until he was fifteen years of age. In 1827, having completed his formal schooling at the Moravian Boys' School, he was sent to live in Valetta with his well-connected cousin Sir William Henry Thornton (1786–1859), the auditor-general of Malta.<sup>20</sup> The family resided at 61 Strada Britannica, in an accommodation paid for by the local government. Unfortunately no records remain of young William's sea passage to Malta, his initial impressions of Valetta, or the

19. In the early 1860s, William Thornton often visited Cambridge at the invitation of Henry Fawcett, whose circle of Cambridge friends invariably extended Thornton a warm welcome when he visited, even though he displayed a penchant for meandering monologues on his favorite topics (see Stephen 1900, 3:187 n. 2; 1977, 8, for further comment). For further discussion of Thornton's participation in the Fawcett-Clarke-Stephen circle see Moore 2006, 580, 607–10).

20. Sir William Henry Thornton wrote a biographical memoir of his experience in Malta, *Memoir of the Finances of Malta* (1836). He was a member of the Council of Government for thirty years and is buried at the Msida Bastion Cemetery in Malta.

details of his daily life in the British colony. Nevertheless, it is fair to assume that during his three-year stint in Malta he occupied a junior administrative post in the auditor-general's office, learning the ropes of the civil service bureaucracy, with which he later needed to be familiar in his position at India House. It is also apparent that William came to know his mother's brother Peter Zohrab, who, having migrated to Malta from England some years earlier, married and subsequently raised a family there. Beyond these scattered biographical fragments, however, there is no further information detailing this formative phase of William's life on the tiny Mediterranean island.

In 1830, having resided in Malta for three years, young William decided to try his fortunes elsewhere. The teenager packed his bags and journeyed east to the Ottoman capital of Constantinople, securing employment on the staff of the British consul-general, John Cartwright.<sup>21</sup> The opportunity presented itself thanks to a letter of introduction from General Ponsonby of Malta "to the English ambassador here, Sir Robert Gordon." From Constantinople, William wrote a letter dated 19 June 1830, providing his Aunt Moore with a full and frank account of his sea journey from Malta to Turkey. The letter describes a chance meeting with an Italian nobleman en route to Constantinople, their brief excursion on shore "almost as far as the plains of Troy," and their visit "to a miserable Greek village" where they enjoyed a short respite before setting sail again. Upon disembarking in Constantinople, Thornton stayed with his cousin Edward Zohrab, whom he described as an "excellent young man."<sup>22</sup> He also met another uncle, Constantine Zohrab, Sophie's second brother,

21. John Cartwright spent much of his working life in the British Levant. It appears that Thomas Thornton and John Cartwright had earlier been acquaintances. In a letter Thomas Thornton wrote to Sir Robert Liston dated 5 October 1795, he refers to a "dispute between Mr Abbott and Mr Cartwright." (The letter is in the Liston papers.) Thomas Thornton attempted to enlist Sir Robert's assistance in resolving the dispute between the two men.

22. Some years later, William Thornton dedicated his first book of poetry, *Zohrab; or, A Midsummer Day's Dream: And Other Poems*, to his cousin Edward Zohrab, Esq., Turkish consul-general in London. Edward worked for both the Ottoman government in London and the British government in Tblisi (in present-day Georgia). Further evidence of the Zohrab family's Persian heritage is provided by Edward Zohrab's employment in the Turkish diplomatic service, a position a Greek would never have held, neither in Thornton's day nor in our own. Also notable is the fact that William Thornton's first son was named after this cousin, a common tactic among families at this time to show their close associations with a more prestigious extended family. The use of *Zohrab* in this context once again reveals the depth of feeling Thornton displayed toward his mother's family name. It should also be emphasized that this must have been a relatively brave act in days of religious and racial intolerance.



and immediately formed a very positive impression of Constantine and his family, an impression in sharp contrast to one he had formed of Peter Zohrab and his family in Malta, so much so “that one can scarcely believe that they are so nearly related.” He went on to say that Constantine’s family were “generous, good-natured and industrious which certainly is not the character of the others.”

Soon after disembarking at Constantinople, William tells his aunt, he received an invitation from Sir Robert Gordon asking William “to dine with him . . . which of course I did.” The account goes further to say that “the rooms of the Palace are magnificent, and beautifully furnished.” They “ate at dinner off solid silver, there was not a plate or dish at table of anything else.” At one point during the course of their dinner, Ambassador Gordon asked Thornton “a few civil questions; among others, as an Italian performer was singing and playing on the guitar, ‘Mr. Thornton, do you sing?’ ‘No Sir,’” William replied, although he “could not help laughing at the oddity of the question.”

The letter ends with William’s pleading with his aunt to write to him as well as encourage his sisters to put pen to paper. This important letter is the first unambiguous evidence of the existence of William Thornton’s previously unmentioned siblings Polly, Eliza, and Sophie Thornton. “Don’t you think, dear Aunt, that . . . both you and my dear sisters might write to me so much oftener.” He goes on to say that his last letter from Eliza mentioned that “poor dear Sophie . . . was very ill,” and he beseeches his aunt for details: “Tell me how she is . . . you can’t think how anxious I am about her.” The letter is loving and good humored in spirit. Polly is addressed as “my dear little Poetical Polly” and, in signing off, William instructs his aunt to “give my love to dear Polly and Sophey and give them everyday three kisses more than their usual quantum as coming from me.” The same letter urgently requests information on the precise whereabouts of his brother John, his childhood companion at the boarding school on the Moravian settlement. John, it seems, had been living in Tobago (West Indies) for two years. Beyond that, however, William confesses ignorance as to “why he is gone, what he is doing, what salary he received, not in short anything more than the bare fact that he is gone.”

It is highly likely that the communication between William and his Aunt Elizabeth continued, although sadly none of the correspondence has been preserved for posterity. A solitary letter, however, from William’s

cousin Th. Thornton survives. Written from Valetta to William's elder sister Eliza, then residing in Corfu, and dated 1 March 1831, the letter makes several references to William, by then resident in the Ottoman capital for ten months. The letter recounts that William seems content with life in Constantinople, is getting along well with his mother's family, the Zohrabs, and is diligently pursuing horse-riding lessons in his leisure time: his employer, Mr Cartwright, "lets him ride whenever he likes. . . . he hopes soon to be a tolerable rider." The letter further reveals that William had been invited by the British ambassador to Turkey, Sir Robert Gordon, to attend the 1831 New Year's celebration, of which "he was not a little proud." It also mentions Elizabeth Moore's having written earlier to her nephew "on the subject of your William going out to Constantinople which she fully approved of." Although William spent five years in the Ottoman capital, there is no further documentation concerning his life there. The most that can be said is that the earlier period in Thornton's life passed in Constantinople solidified, perhaps, his own intense political and cultural attachment to the Ottoman cause, which almost certainly derived from members of his mother's side of the family, several of whom rose to prominence in their adopted homeland (Lipkes 1999, 116–17).<sup>23</sup>

In 1835 Thornton returned to London, doubtless eager to be reunited with family and friends whom he had not seen in many years and to make a career for himself. In the following year, he secured through family connections a junior clerkship in the East India Company. In accordance with company policy at the time, he was required to serve a three-year probationary period in the marine branch of the secretary's office, spending most of his early years performing mundane clerical and administrative tasks—such as the filing of documents, the retrieving of correspondence, and précis writing. Upon completion of the probationary period, Thornton's salary rose to a very respectable £500. In 1848 it rose to £600 and remained at that level until 1856. It was during these early years that he met his future wife, Elizabeth Evelyn Danvers, with whom he eventually raised four children. It was also during this period that Thornton formed a vital professional and personal relationship with John Stuart Mill.

23. This attachment found expression in a second volume of poetry Thornton published in 1854, *The Siege of Silistria: A Poem*, the title of which was taken from the longest poem in the collection. The volume contains three poems, each deployed as a rhetorical device to press the case for Britain's involvement in the Crimean War, which took place from 1853 to 1856.

## 6. Family Life

At some stage during William Thornton's mandatory three-year probation period at the East India Company, he made the acquaintance of his future wife, Elizabeth Evelyn Danvers (1820–1903). Elizabeth was the daughter of Charles Danvers (1789–1865) and Elizabeth Nockells (1793–c.1878), who had themselves met and married in the West Indies. The Danvers, whose family name is derived from the French village of Alvers in the Cotentin, have a long and distinguished family history. Tradition has it that the family are descended from a Roland d'Alvers, who fought at the Battle of Hastings and acquired large landholdings, "chiefly about the Northants-Oxfordshire border." Over the centuries, family members consolidated their landholdings by marrying into other notable landowning families in Oxfordshire. Several family members achieved considerable distinction, others notoriety. In the fifteenth century, a John Danvers was involved in the foundation of All Souls College, Oxford. William Danvers, also known as "Danvers of Culworth," claimed to be "Founder's Kin at Winchester," while a descendent of John Danvers (who married Anne Stradling of Dauntsey in 1487) sat on the commission responsible for the trial of King Charles I and signed his death warrant. Many family members matriculated from Oxford or "entered at one or other of the Inns of Court." By the seventeenth century, however, the branch of the Danvers family to which Elizabeth Evelyn Danvers belonged had ceased to be landed gentry. Instead, members of this branch of the Danvers family steadily made their way in the commercial world, sometimes founding business concerns in the City or entering the ranks of the professions, thereby establishing themselves as comfortable and solid middle-class families.<sup>24</sup> Thus, if not rich, the family was not without means and their social standing was secure.

It is not known when William and Elizabeth were first introduced to each other; sadly, no letters between them exist to illumine the origins and progress of their relationship. It should be noted, however, that the Danvers and Thornton families were very closely knit as a result of a succession of intermarriages, not untypical within Victorian middle-class society.<sup>25</sup> In any case, the young couple married on 15 April 1841

24. For a detailed history of the Danvers family, see MacNamara 1895.

25. The families were professionally connected through various civil service positions held within the East India Company and the India Office. For instance Juland Danvers, Elizabeth Evelyn's first cousin, worked with William Thornton at the India Office, where he was

in the English county of Herefordshire. An unpublished manuscript describes Elizabeth Danvers as “a lady who had eight hundred years of tradition behind her, of which she never boasted, but which was in her very bones and marrow.” “She was in no sense a *grande dame*,” the account continues, “her family had long ceased to be landed gentry and were most of them comfortably off people in the professions.” By all accounts she was “a most competent house-keeper and an excellent hostess,” almost certainly a great social asset to her husband. Evidently William and Elizabeth “had to entertain a great deal,” and “up to the very end of her life she had a wonderful capacity for making a spread.” She survived her husband by more than two decades. When William passed away in June 1880, Elizabeth Evelyn was left with an annual pension worth £400.<sup>26</sup> She died in 1903.

It was not long before Elizabeth gave birth to Ellen Aird (1842–1851), the first of four children. Subsequent children were Edward Zohrab (1844–1910), Stanhope William (1846–1859), and Evelyn Danvers (1853–1876).<sup>27</sup> Although the Thornton family papers do not contain any correspondence between William and Elizabeth from this period, the collection does include letters from other family members conveying details of their domestic life, the characters of their children, family rivalries and feelings, and the general atmosphere in the family home. A letter to William from his Aunt Moore dated 22 July 1842, for example, portrays one such scene. “Anticipating the time when your dear little Ellen will sit at your table, and solace and delight you, with her cheerful prattle,” wrote Aunt Moore, “I have sent for her use, knife, fork and spoon. Accept them . . . as a token of one who loved her father and her father’s father.” Ellen Aird Thornton’s existence is corroborated in another letter from William’s eldest sister, Mary Thornton (at the time resident in Malta), dated 12 October 1847. Mary inquires of Aunt Moore, “I suppose little Ellen is a great amusement to you,” adding, “William wrote word how much she was improved since she had been with you.” Sadly, Ellen Aird

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secretary of the railway department and government director of Indian state railway companies. In addition to William Thornton’s marriage to Elizabeth Evelyn Danvers, Edward Thornton, William’s brother, married a Danvers as did Edward Zohrab, William’s son.

26. From 1839, Thornton contributed annually to the East India Company’s and India Office’s Widows’ Fund. When Elizabeth Thornton died in 1903, the balance of her fund was paid to Edward Zohrab Thornton, the surviving son.

27. In mid-Victorian England, there was no “typical” complement of children, yet any fewer than seven children born alive would have been considered a small family (Hoppen 1998, 317).

died at the age of nine, almost certainly of tuberculosis. An account of the tragedy was acknowledged in Thornton's first volume of poetry, *Zohrab; or, A Midsummer Day's Dream: And Other Poems* (1854b). The poem in question, "Stanzas Written in Kensal Green Cemetery," is a sentimental piece dedicated to the memory of his daughter. Seeking, whether consciously or not, to fill the emptiness in his life caused by the loss of a beloved daughter, Thornton found some solace in poetry. Here, verse was a device of consolation capable of easing his feelings, a form of literary catharsis, all while he attempted to rationalize a life so cruelly shortened. The following stanza strikes the note of a grieving father coping with the loss of a beloved daughter. He speaks

Of my lost Ellen's greeting, when, with glee,  
Like warbled wood-notes wildly musical,  
She hailed my coming, tripping joyously  
Across the lawn in answer to my call.

These lines, touching on Ellen directly, are infused with a sense of the vanished past. The loss is expressed with equal poignancy in the following:

My Ellen! in my bosom's worn recess  
Still do affection's tendrils freshly twine,  
For still do children round their father press,  
Claiming the share of love which once was thine.

Aside from its expression of sorrow and loss, the poem further reveals that Thornton had turned to his faith for comfort and strength. For, in the midst of human sorrow, he said there was a lesson to be learned from the tragic death of a family member. Its timing and manner revealed the mysterious workings of God in the most awesome way and prepared other family members spiritually for the possibility of their own untimely departures. This poem remains the only extant record of the sorrow and shock Thornton suffered at his daughter's passing.<sup>28</sup>

Little is known about Stanhope William Thornton other than that he attended Repton School in Derbyshire between January and April 1859

28. The Victorian middle-class and upper-class obsession with the paraphernalia of mourning and death manifested itself in several ways, such as letters of condolence, grand funerals, and grieving rituals. These observances were deeply valued, and considerable energy was devoted to them. Family relatives and close friends would rally around the bereaved. For many, religion also offered considerable solace in their hour of need. Thornton himself was sustained by a network of family support and close friends.

and passed away in his early teens, probably of tuberculosis. His elder brother Edward subsequently named one of his own children after him.

Edward Zohrab Thornton, William's "soldier-son," was born in 1844. Like his siblings, he was frequently in poor health. Just before his sixteenth birthday, he was taken seriously ill with a lung complaint, as is detailed in a letter dated 28 January 1860 from John Stuart Mill (1972, 15:660) to Helen Taylor: "I was very glad to find that Thornton has again high hopes for his poor boy—who appears to have gone through a crisis, evacuated the contents of an abscess or an ulcer in the lungs, and to be now better." Educated at Wimbledon School from August 1857 to August 1859, Edward Zohrab subsequently enrolled at Cheltenham College from October 1859, receiving instruction in classics and mathematics. According to the school's headmaster, a Mr. Southwood, Edward Zohrab's general conduct "has been very satisfactory." The second half of 1860 saw his successful entry into the Royal Military College at Addiscombe, his nomination as a cadet having been provided by Captain J. Eastwick, a close family friend.

Edward Zohrab went on to serve in the British Indian army in the post-Indian Mutiny period when the concentration of European personnel had been increased. He journeyed to British India in 1861 as a seventeen-year-old ensign, joining the Bengal Fusiliers, 104th Foot Infantry, a regiment of British infantry raised from the 2nd Bengal European Fusiliers.<sup>29</sup> On 26 July 1862, while serving with the Bengal Fusiliers, he was commissioned as a lieutenant. In 1866 he was transferred to the 36th Native Infantry, at the same rank. On 29 August 1866 he married Georgina Danvers, his first cousin, who subsequently gave birth to two sons—Edward Evelyn and Stanhope Evelyn—and a daughter, Evelyn.<sup>30</sup> All three children were born in the northwest frontier of India. Unfortunately, Edward Zohrab

29. The 2nd Bengal European Fusiliers served during the Indian Mutiny. When the regiment was redesignated the 104th Bengal Fusiliers, it continued to serve in various parts of India until 1871, when it returned to England. Further particulars concerning the military career of Edward Zohrab Thornton can be obtained from Military Department Records, Oriental and India Office Collections, L/MIL/9/251/543–53.

30. Edward Evelyn Thornton (1867–1900), following his father's example, joined the army and rose to become a captain in the Royal Munster Fusiliers. In 1895 he received a commendation for military service in Ashanti (Ghana). He fought in the Boer War and died of enteric fever at Wynberg (South Africa) on 10 March 1900, aged 32. Edward Zohrab's second son, Stanhope Evelyn Thornton (b.1869), was named after his uncle who died in childhood. He trained as a civil engineer and established a reputation as a "considerable amateur artist and connoisseur." Neither of Edward Zohrab's sons married. Little is known about Edward Zohrab's only daughter, Evelyn Thornton (b.1868), other than she died in England at a young age.

never wrote about his encounter with the Raj, although his wife Georgina Danvers, who was somewhat of an amateur artist, left to posterity a series of delightful watercolors and sketches that depicted scenes of everyday life in India. By September 1872 Edward, now a major in the Royal Lancashire Regiment (retired),<sup>31</sup> had brought his family back to England. At some point during his military career, he “assisted to form an army for the Sultan of Morocco who presented him with a sword of honour.” Edward Zohrab Thornton survived both his parents and died in 1910 of coronary thrombosis.

Thornton’s youngest daughter, Evelyn Danvers Thornton, born in 1853, married Thomas William Carmalt Jones (1847–1898), then a surgeon in London. Their only son, Dudley William Carmalt Jones (1874–1957), attended Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, later establishing a career as the distinguished Mary Glendining Professor of Systematic Medicine, Otago University, New Zealand, during the interwar years. During her second pregnancy, Evelyn Danvers developed “galloping consumption.”<sup>32</sup> On 28 February 1876, at the age of 22, she died in childbirth. Dudley William Carmalt Jones was then sent to live with his maternal grandparents, William Thomas and Elizabeth. According to his unpublished autobiography, Carmalt Jones was six years old when his grandfather passed away. In the same manuscript, he says that while living in his grandparents’ house he was “under his grandmother’s care.” He believes that she was responsible for “all my early upbringing,” adding, “her influence, in matters of conduct and manners was beyond question excellent, in physical matters perhaps not so good.” Carmalt Jones wrote that his grandmother “had an inherited standard of conduct which she did all

31. There are discrepancies in the rank attributed to Edward Thornton in three sources. At the time of his father’s death, the *Times* (23 July 1880) named “Captain Edward Zohrab Thornton, the son, and Thomas C. W. Jones, the executors” of William Thornton’s personal estate (which was valued at less than £8000). The Army List for January 1903 contains a brief entry on Edward Zohrab Thornton and records his rank at the time of his retirement in May 1872 as major. An unpublished manuscript says that Edward Zohrab “retired as Lieutenant Colonel and was afterwards Secretary of an Indian Railway.” After his father’s death, Edward Zohrab kept in touch with some of his father’s friends, including Henry Fawcett, who lent “Captain Edward Thornton” assistance in relation to obtaining a position within the London Metropolitan Police. See Henry Fawcett to Edward Zohrab Thornton, 18 November 1880, Thornton Family Papers. It should be further noted that the Thornton family papers contain several letters to Edward Zohrab Thornton from notable Victorians who had been friends of William Thornton, including Leonard Courtney, Alexander Bain, Henry Fawcett, and the Duke of Argyll.

32. Now known as pulmonary tuberculosis, this disease was a major cause of death in the mid-nineteenth century. It “consumed” lung tissue at an alarming rate, hence the name.

she could to instil into me. *Fort en loyalte* is the family motto and *fort en loyalte* she was, if ever a Danvers deserved the description.”

Following the death of their daughter Elizabeth Evelyn (Carmalt's mother), William Thornton and his wife received several letters of condolence, including one from John Stuart Mill's stepdaughter Helen Taylor.<sup>33</sup> She assured them that William and Elizabeth were among “those who will find in the disinterested care for the happiness of others and the progress of our fellow creatures the only comfort, the consolation, or at least the anodyne for grief.” Her letter seemed momentarily to lift Thornton's spirits. He wrote thanking Helen Taylor for the sympathy offered, describing it as “one of the few that have soothed instead of grating upon our feelings,” although another passage in the same letter says, “the colour has gone out of our lives.” Filled with the pain of bereavement, Thornton expressed his grief: “How impossible for us must be any approach to happiness in this world, now that she, in whom all our joy and hopes were centred, has passed away.” Thornton also received a letter (dated 13 March 1876) of condolence from the duke of Argyll, who devoted considerable effort in writing to him, an indication not only of his sympathy but of the high esteem in which the duke held him: “The duchess and I are sincerely distressed to hear of your sorrow, and that of your wife. Pray don't think of troubling yourself to call here one day sooner than you like or than is good for you. Of course we shall always be glad to see you.”<sup>34</sup> Thornton battled on stoically, but the death of his youngest child had left him a broken man.

It has been possible, using England census records and other related documents, to trace the various residential addresses of the Thornton family home as well as the corresponding composition of the household. The physical location of a Victorian family's residence speaks volumes about the environment in which the children were raised, the sort of education they received, the household income, the number of servants employed, and so forth. In the mid-1840s, the Thornton family found themselves residing in a comfortable bungalow on Millfield Lane, Kentish Town, immediately adjacent to Hampstead Heath and a short stroll

33. The quotations in this paragraph come from correspondence between Helen Taylor and William Thornton held in the Mill-Taylor Collection.

34. In November 1878, the Duke of Argyll wrote to Thornton to thank him for his letter of condolence upon learning of the death of the duchess. It seems that Thornton was particularly well liked by the duchess, prompting Argyll's reminiscence to Thornton that, “you never left her society that she did not say to me ‘I like him so much.’”



from Highgate Village, the location a sign of their upwardly mobile social status. This was the sort of comfortable, representative lower middle-class neighborhood that individuals occupying relatively minor clerical positions within the British civil service might aspire to. Although the earliest records concerning their habitation are incomplete, the family most certainly employed household servants to perform everyday chores.

The 1851 England census records William Thornton, his wife, two sons, and three servants—a cook, a maid, and a nanny—as then residing at No. 10 Marlborough Hill NW in the borough of St. Marylebone. Situated between Hampstead and Kensington not far from Regent's Park, the new residence was closer to Thornton's workplace in the City of London. There is no record of Thornton's oldest daughter Ellen Aird in the census, owing to her death earlier that year. Ellen Aird was laid to rest at Kensal Green cemetery, then the closest cemetery to the Thornton residence. Sometime in the mid- to late 1850s, the Thorntons moved into 84 Cadogan Place, Chelsea. The move into this exclusive district in West London was almost certainly a result of William Thornton's promotions at India House. Thereafter the Thorntons remained in West London, moving on two further occasions, first into a commodious residence at 23 Queen's Gardens, immediately behind Kensington Palace, a house situated in a row of three-story Victorian terraces. The larger residence boasted numerous rooms besides the spacious basement and pantry accommodation. Located in a desirable area of London, it is further evidence of the solid, comfortable, middle-class credentials that the Thornton family had by then achieved. According to the 1861 census records, William and Elizabeth Thornton were still living at this address at that time, and employed three servants. Ellen Aird and Stanhope William had both passed away, Edward was stationed in India with the army, and their youngest daughter Evelyn, who normally lived with them, was staying at the time with her uncle Edward and aunt Caroline in Sussex. The 1871 records show that William, Elizabeth, and their daughter "Eve" were still resident at the same address. They employed four household servants. Within a few years, however, the Thornton family moved again. Their final address was 7 Cadogan Place, near Sloan Square, a fashionable West London address between Belgravia and Knightsbridge, quite befitting a Victorian gentleman. In fact the Thornton family had lived very near here in the late 1850s immediately before moving to Queen's Gardens. The gradual improvement in the location of the Thornton family residence mirrored the course of the steady promotions William earned at the India Office, all of which enabled the Thornton family to live in a very comfortable situation, employ several

household servants to take care of day-to-day chores, and to educate their children at reputable boarding schools.

The decades of the 1830s and 1840s, before the deaths of Ellen and Stanhope, were, therefore, a relatively happy and successful period in William Thornton's life. He was earning between £500 and £600 a year at India House, was married to a delightful young woman from a respectable English family, and had three children—the picture of a warm and stable family was almost complete. The 1840s were marked by Thornton's meeting with and befriending John Stuart Mill. Their first discussion resulted from the publishing in 1846 of an economic tract by Thornton (*Over-Population and Its Remedy*), an event with profound implications for the future direction of his life. However, interspersed among the quiet successes Thornton enjoyed at both the India Office and in the literary world during the 1840s and 1850s, were several torturous occasions, namely, the deaths of two of his four young children: his eldest daughter Ellen and youngest son Stanhope, both of whom succumbed to pulmonary tuberculosis. The darkening shadow of tuberculosis was perhaps the greatest trial endured by family life in the Victorian age. It loomed over every quarter of Victorian society, indiscriminately afflicting victims irrespective of age, wealth, or social background. It was the commonest cause of death in young adults in late-nineteenth-century Europe, killing rapidly in weeks or months, or lingering chronically for years. It was, without doubt, the most feared affliction within Victorian society. The loss of the Thornton's youngest daughter, Elizabeth Evelyn, later in life was another devastating blow from which Thornton never seems to have fully recovered. Not even the presence of his young grandson, Dudley William Carmalt Jones (Evelyn's son), was able to provide him with solace.

## 7. Conclusion

The reconstruction of the basic outline of William Thornton's family background, childhood and adolescence, immediate family, and early years as husband and father has been made possible by the new material preserved within the Thornton family papers. The numerous unpublished materials that have been drawn upon in this study include the only surviving correspondence between William Thornton and Elizabeth Moore, letters to and from Thornton family members, several pieces of autobiographical writing, correspondence from William's father Thomas and mother Sophie Zohrab to Elizabeth Moore, letters from Thomas Thornton to Sir Robert Liston (now preserved in the National Library of Scotland),

and relevant biographical material held in the Oriental and India Office Library. New material continues to come to light, as it has during the preparation of this essay, all of which has enabled a completely fresh account of Thornton's family background and upbringing, education and affiliations, youthful travels, and family life. It also corrects several factual errors in existing views of Thornton, especially in relation to the characters of his immediate family, details of his marriage and family life, and additional information concerning a number of key influences on Thornton's personal development during his childhood and adolescence, not least of which was Elizabeth Moore.

From a biographical point of view, the Thornton family letters used in the preparation of this essay form invaluable additions and yield important clues that assist in linking together the various stages of William Thornton's life. Be that as it may, some glaring absences continue to mark the biographical record, most crucially from the time of his father's death in 1814 through the 1820s when he was a schoolboy on the Moravian settlement and even through the time of his return to London from the Levant in the mid-1830s. Certainly, details of Thornton's personal and professional lives can be elicited from available correspondence; important aspects of his life—notably his relationships and professional affiliations with several interesting Victorian personalities and his marriage and subsequent family life—fall into sharper focus through these letters. This of course includes a better understanding of the way in which his social background contributed to the shaping of his professional career. For example, the decision to send William abroad to live and work, first to Malta and then to Turkey, followed much the same path trodden by his father and his uncles on both sides of the family. Probably through the guiding hand and potent influence of his uncle Sir Edward Thornton, William and his two surviving brothers, John and Edward, were able to obtain positions as minor civil servants within the great trading houses of the day. The motive was largely financial. When Thomas Thornton died in 1814, the family had lost its main breadwinner, and the Thornton males, once they had completed their formal education, were found suitable employment in order to lend support to other members of the family, notably their mother and sisters. Yet for all this, several important questions remain unanswered.

Perhaps the most beguiling question arising from this study concerns the fate of William Thornton's mother, Sophie Zohrab—a shadowy figure whose relationship with her children in the years following her husband's death remains opaque. William has left no direct reference to his mother.

Neither he nor other members of the family have left any reminiscences of her. At the time of their father's death, William Thornton (who had then barely turned one) and his brothers and sisters would have been totally dependent upon their mother. Yet the letters he wrote home, both as a schoolboy and during his residence in Constantinople, were always addressed to his Aunt Moore. His siblings followed suit. Sophie Zohrab, it seems, vanished completely from the family record. Whether the omission was intentional, or the result of normal erosion of the details of family history, is now impossible to ascertain. Be that as it may, the absence makes it difficult to comment upon the relationship between mother and child.

Thornton did of course make an oblique reference to his mother's name in *Zohrab; or, A Midsummer Day's Dream: And Other Poems*, suggesting he took pride in his family heritage and entertained a healthy interest in his more distant ancestry (even if his knowledge of the latter was at best incomplete). At times it seems possibilities of connections between himself and famous historical figures would catch his imagination. He liked to think that his lineage could be traced to the Persian warrior Sohrab, slain tragically (though unwittingly) by his own father on the battlefield. Perhaps he entertained such thoughts in order to expiate his lingering remorse and ease his conscience over a mother who struggled to cope with the new responsibilities thrust upon her in the period following her husband's death. Given that the letters Sophie penned to Elizabeth Moore do *not* create the impression of someone deficient of maternal feeling, but rather reveal her affectionate feelings toward her family, it is hard to fathom her complete absence from the Thornton family register in the period after her husband's death.

The discovery of unpublished letters, manuscripts, diaries, and other family ephemera not previously thought to exist always provides a welcome (not to mention fortuitous) opportunity to reevaluate and, if necessary, correct the historical record. It should be further noted, however, that the Thornton family papers include several other important historical documents not utilized in this essay. These include the correspondence between Thornton and notable Victorian figures such as Lord John Russell, Richard Cobden, William Gladstone, the Duke of Rutland, Benjamin Disraeli, Sir Edwin Chadwick, the Duke of Argyll, the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava, Lord Stanley, and Viscount Cranbourne, connections that testify to the elevated professional circles in which he later circulated at India House. This is hardly surprising in light of the fact that Thornton served as secretary of the Department of Public Works from 1858 to 1880, during which time he formed close personal ties with some of the

most important figures in the government of India during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Mention should likewise be made of the letters between Thornton and some of the leading political economists of the age. In addition to the correspondence already mentioned between Thornton and Mill and between Thornton and Cairnes, there are several letters from the French political thinker Louis Blanc,<sup>35</sup> as well as correspondence from well-known Victorian personalities Leonard Courtney, Henry Fawcett, and Alexander Bain, all containing valuable insights into their attitudes toward William Thornton, assisting in the unveiling of his inner nature, the persona that defined the man. All of these important historical documents contain information that fosters a more coherent, rounded, sensitive, and accurate portrait of William Thornton than the portraits in earlier biographical accounts. The unrestrained and often spontaneous tone of these documents reveals William Thornton as a competent and versatile personality sustained by a naturally buoyant temperament, strong religious faith, and a dedicated, dependable, and trustworthy wife, all of which is brought to light in these sources. An ebullient character, William Thornton possessed a lively and sociable disposition and a charm that subsequently won him many friends and admirers within the upper echelons of polite Victorian society.

**Appendix:**  
**Letters from William Thomas Thornton**  
**to Elizabeth Moore**

Letter 1: From Moravian School at Ockbrook

Ockbrook, April 30, 1822

Dear Aunt,

I was much pleased with the letter which you sent me, and hope that I shall do everything according to your pleasure, and also hope that I may improve in all the various branches of my education, so as to meet with your esteem and approbation when I return home.

35. Thornton was first introduced to Louis Blanc at a dinner hosted by Mill at his home in Blackheath. Mill's (1972, 2:760) invitation to Thornton reads as follows: "Louis Blanc is coming to dine with us on Sunday, and it would give us great pleasure if you could come and meet him."

We have an examination every quarter, at which time we are examined in whatever we are instructed. To the instructions which I now enjoy, I trust I shall give my entire attention, ever remembering their great importance, and always keeping in mind, and accept the same yourself. I am, dear Aunt, your very affectionate nephew, William Thornton

[A note dated 6 May 1822 from the school headmaster, Mr. Connor, is appended]:

Dear Madam, I cannot let slip the present opportunity without doing myself the pleasure, and your nephews the justice of informing you that they both afford us much satisfaction by their general conduct and attention to their studies. William is much more diligent than he was. Mrs Connor unites in . . . respects to you. With yours truly, S. Connor.

Letter 2: From Constantinople

Constantinople 19 June 1830

My dear Aunt,

I had finished a letter for you some time ago, intending to send it by the courier when I found that the postage would be too heavy that I could not think of putting you to such an expense, and there is no person here to whom I could have paid it. However, as there is at present a merchant vessel going direct to England I take this opportunity of sending you a few lines by her. I arrived here on the 5<sup>th</sup> of last month after a very tedious voyage of thirty days. There was only one passenger beside myself the Marchese d'Amorini Bolognini, an Italian nobleman. Perhaps my dear little Poetical Polly may like to know that when we were at the entrance of the Dardanelles, the Marquis and I went on shore and walked almost as far as the plains of Troy. I can assure her that I should not have been contented with "almost," if I could have persuaded my companion to go a little farther with me, but as all my efforts could not inspire his phlegmatic soul with a spark of poetical fire, I was obliged to yield. During our walk we came to a miserable Greek village and as we were tired, we went into one of the huts to rest a little. I saw a few books on a shelf and being rather anxious to see what they might be, I took one of them down and found it was a modern Greek testament published by the London missionary society. I was surprised to find that the owner of them read them with ease, though where he could have learnt to do so I can't conceive. I'm pretty

sure that few men of his station in life in England even know their letters. I'm living at present in the house of my cousin Edward Zohrab. He is a very excellent young man, and indeed every member of my Uncle Constantine's family is so entirely different in disposition from my Uncle Peter's, that one can scarcely believe that they are so nearly related. They are generous, good-natured and industrious which certainly is not the character of the others. My Uncle Peter is now at Smyrna with his family living in the house and at the expense of Mr Sandison, who has married one of my Uncle Constantine's daughters. He himself is expected here everyday to go on to Trebizond in the Black Sea where through the interest of my patron Mr Cartwright he has obtained a situation. The fixed salary is not more than 100 pounds which is no great income for a family of nine persons, but I believe he may be able to earn something else. Though he is no great favourite of mine, I ardently hope he may get on. I forgot to tell you that when I left Malta, General Ponsonby gave me a letter of introduction to the English ambassador here, Sir Robert Gordon. Sir Robert asked me to dine with him a short time after my arrival, which of course I did. The rooms of the Palace are magnificent, and beautifully furnished. We ate at dinner off solid silver, there was not a plate or dish at table of anything else. The ambassador asked me a few civil questions; among others, as an Italian performer was singing and playing on the guitar, he said, "Mr Thornton, do you sing?" "No Sir," I said, though I could not help laughing at the oddity of the question. Don't you think dear aunt that you might forward me a letter through Mr Tomlinson, he must have a great many ships coming here, and if you could, both you and my sisters might write to me so much oftener. How is poor dear Sophey? The last letter from Eliza said she was very ill. Do pray dear aunt not to forget to tell me how she is. You can't think how anxious I am about her. Have you any news of John? If you do know anything about him, be so kind as to tell me all. Though he has been gone to Tobago now almost two years, I neither know why he is gone, what he is doing, what salary he received, not in short anything more than the bare fact that he is gone. Be so good as to write to me by the very first opportunity and see if Mr Tomlinson can forward a letter. Give my love to dear Polly and Sophey and give them everyday three kisses more than their usual quantum as coming from me. I hope it will not be many years ere I shall have the pleasure of kissing them in *propria persona*, I beg pardon for the Latin. Love to Miss Aird's and believe me Dear Aunt, Your affectionate, W. T. Thornton

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