VI

A Wife Ere Noon

1842

Far from finding better health, Henry and his party in Italy had been suffering aggravated illness. During six weeks at Naples, he, with a prolonged "sort of fever" and Emily with "cold and rheumatic fever," had been visited by a physician twice daily: "Getting ill and getting well have been our sole occupations." It was early January before they began recovering, and enjoying the view of Vesuvius "half way down in white snow." If only the old volcano would provide an eruption, or even merely "flame—the lighting up that snow shroud with flashes of infernal fire—that would be worth seeing—but it will only smoke as hard as Alfred Tennyson: wasting itself as he does himself in cigars." But Tennyson's "promised volume" would soon, "if God wishes . . . come out at last."¹

The Deity evidently concurred. Soon Tennyson's "ten years' silence" would finally be broken. When he wrote early in 1842 to acknowledge Edmund's Greek translation of his "Oenone," he had "not yet taken my book to Moxon" (his publisher), but intended to "get it out shortly." He had not been doing "what you professors call 'working' at it, that indeed is not my way. I take my pipe and the muse descends in a fume, not like your modern ladies who shriek at a pipe as if they saw a 'Splacknuck.' "² With occasional assistance from Edward FitzGerald, Tennyson would work alone in James Spedding's rooms at 60 Lincoln's Inn Fields, Spedding having departed about 9 February for North
America as secretary to the Ashburton Commission to settle the U.S.-Canadian dispute over the Maine border.¹

Down in Italy, Henry, later to be praised by Tennyson as his best practical critic, had lost the opportunity to watch his friend complete one of the century's greatest poem collections. He may have assisted with a few poems before leaving for Italy, but there is no good basis for supposing so. Most probably, his contributions to Tennyson's revisions were confined to *The Princess*, and possibly a few later alterations of the 1842 text.

By mid-April, Tennyson had settled into almost constant readying of his poems, continuing to alter some of them before returning the proof sheets to the printer a few poems at a time. He had turned for assistance to Venables, who like himself had won the Chancellor's Medal for English verse at Cambridge. On 8 April, Venables called on Alfred Tennyson at Spedding's rooms, & found proof sheets lying about. Read several things, most of *Morte d'Arthur, Locksley Hall, Talking Oak*, &c. He thinks they do not look so well in print.” Soon Frederick Pollock dropped by, and the three walked to “the printer's in Whitefriar,” meeting with another Apostle, Stephen Spring Rice, in Fleet Street, “who joined us.”

On 12 April, Tennyson came with proof sheets “of parts of the suicide["The Two Voices"], & discussed some alterations.” Venables thought the poem “in some places too long, in some obscure,” but in “discussing particular passages I cannot trust my own judgment much.” Tennyson stayed “rather late talking about it.” On the next day Tennyson returned and “made the alterations proposed in The Two Voices.” He had with him also “Godiva which I was not very familiar with. I should think the subject has never been nearly so well treated.” Venables went back with Tennyson to his rooms: “Looked over the Daydream, read Lady Clara, & the Vision of Sin; which perhaps he is right in thinking the finest of all.” On the fourteenth the two went over “the Envoi & Epilogue of the Daydream, Amphion, which is a good piece of criticism. St. Agnes & Sir Galahad.” But there had been no “material alteration to consider since the passage in the Two Voices.” On the fifteenth Tennyson had not “made up his mind about the Epilogue. . . . looked over the new version of the Miller’s Daughter, the Lady of Shalott, Mariana, & one or two others which are on the whole improved. I do little good by this looking at his things, & it is burdensome for fear of being a burden.” On the seventeenth “A.T. called at night with a new sheet”; on the eighteenth Venables went to “A.T. to discuss the choice of poems to be inserted”; on the nineteenth they “read the altered Oenone”; on the twentieth “Had the Vision of Sin printed. Liked the blackbird much better than before. Sat rather late.” It was the twenty-ninth before Tennyson “called with Lady of Shalott & part of Mariana in the South”; on 2 May “A.T. called
with the revise of the Lady of Shalott &c”; on the fifth, “reading Lotos Eaters &c.” The poems came out in two volumes on 14 May.

When Edmund arrived from Glasgow on 9 May, Venables found him “very agreeable”—naturally enough, since it appears he had already become engaged to marry Cecilia Tennyson. On the tenth, while together with Edmund and Tennyson, Venables “made a discovery by a few expressions used.” Then three days later he went to “A.T.’s & heard account confirming previous guesses.”

To say the least, Edmund and Cecilia seem to have had comparatively few opportunities to become closely acquainted. Had they met twice or only once during the summer of 1840? Edmund’s chronology, in his reminiscences written in 1893, shortly before he died, remains tantalizingly ambiguous:

I believe the first time [Tennyson] visited me in my own house was in the summer of 1840 when he came to stay a few days. . . . A day or two later I went over with him to pay a short visit . . . at Tunbridge Wells. . . . Not long after this visit [how long is “not long”—a few weeks later or the following summer?] he came over with his mother and two younger sisters to stay some days at Park House, which they partly spent in looking about the neighbouring country at . . . houses. . . . They eventually settled before long upon engaging a house . . . in Boxley Parish, to which they removed before the winter of 1841-42.

It is a virtual certainty that at least some of the Tennysons were house-hunting around Maidstone in the summer of 1841, and they did not move to Boxley until that fall. With Edmund invariably spending his winters at Glasgow, he and Cecilia may actually have met only twice before the Christmas holiday of 1841, when his family (possibly excepting Maria and Ellen, who may have come down with him from Glasgow) were all away from Park House.

No doubt there were exchanges of letters after that Christmas, and Edmund’s proposal of marriage and Cecilia’s acceptance could even have been exchanged by post. But courtship letters are seldom very reliable instruments for exploring ultimate compatibility, unless both correspondents are earnestly attempting to do just that; and Cecilia, by such indications as we have, was not a profound letter-writer, although she could be impulsively sympathetic, affectionate, and entertaining.

Cecilia, born on 10 October, 1817, was the eleventh of the twelve Tennyson children (the first-born had died in infancy). Her childhood had coincided with the stormiest years of her parents’ troubled marriage. Her brilliant wreck of a clergyman father, Doctor George Clayton Tennyson, nursing grievances both real and imagined against his own father, was drinking heavily, behaving violently, and perhaps undergoing epileptic seizures. Alfred Tennyson’s latest
biographer declares that by 1820 (when he was only eleven and Cecilia was three), Alfred was “acting as virtual head of the family . . . his mother was loving but ineffectual, and his father was constantly aggravating his epilepsy by drink until his mind seemed to be cracking.” More plausibly for Alfred’s purported role, Sir Charles Tennyson’s account seems to place this stage in the Doctor’s deterioration three or four years later, when Cecilia would have been six or seven. She was barely ten when her mother wrote that “poor George’s violence . . . I fear increases. We had a terrible evening on Sunday.” He had forbidden her to take the children to visit his father, “nor will he let me have the Carriage unless I promise to stay from home half a year.” A few weeks later Alfred was matter-of-factly referring to his father’s “unhinged state of mind.” When Cecilia was eleven, the parents both had decided upon a separation. He was determined that “the Children must not be under her care; I will . . . send all except my two elder daughters from under her superintendence.” (That was not done.) On her part she complained of his “ungovernable violence . . . I do not feel it safe either for myself or my children to remain any longer in the house with him.” Wisely, she was fearing “the impression which his conduct,” including “the perpetual . . . degrading epithets to myself and children,” might “produce upon the minds of his family.” He had flourished a loaded gun and a knife, threatening to stab his son Frederick “in the jugular vein and in the heart.” In the relatively small, overcrowded rectory, young Cecilia could not have remained unaffected by such scenes.

The father went off to the Continent to recover his health, returning the next year to resume the marriage, although his wife had “little hope of any permanent tranquillity. . . . You know . . . that when under the influence of liquor George is dreadfully violent.” But the end came otherwise: on 16 March 1831, at home, the unhappy Doctor died, purportedly of typhus fever but, as Martin argues, more probably of a cerebral hemorrhage. He was about fifty-three. Cecilia, only thirteen, could have had few if any memories of her father at his best.

Across a narrow lane from the rectory and up a stubby path to the churchyard the body was taken for burial. Close by were other graves where, fleeing the Doctor’s outbursts, the boy Alfred had “many a time,” as his wife would tell her sons, “gone out in the dark and cast himself . . . nearby longing to be beneath.”

Meanwhile, stimulating occasions in the young country girl’s life, out in those remote Lincolnshire wolds, would have been the periodic arrivals of her three brothers with news from Cambridge; their emergence, however obscurely, as published poets in 1827; Alfred’s winning of the Chancellor’s Medal at Cambridge for his patched-together visionary “Timbuctoo” in 1829; and the
FIG. V. Cecilia (Tennyson) Lushington. Circa 1865. Photograph by De Ath & Dunk, Maidstone. Courtesy of the Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, by permission of Lincoln Library Service.
publication of his memorable Poems, Chiefly Lyrical in 1830. Into adolescence Cecilia would go, carrying in her ears the melancholy melodies of Alfred’s “Mariana” and “A spirit haunts the year’s last hours,” and perhaps puzzling over the disturbing introspections of his “Supposed Confessions of a Second-Rate Sensitive Mind.”

The spring of 1830, when Cecilia was twelve, had brought the first visit to Somersby of Alfred’s ineffable confidant Arthur Henry Hallam, who would become the fiancée of her sister Emily, and be near-idolized by the family. When the terrible news of Arthur’s sudden death from a cerebral hemorrhage in Vienna descended upon the already bereaved Somersby family in the autumn of 1833, Cecilia, then approaching sixteen, would share the grief that numbed them all for months. The previous year in the parsonage had been blighted by the final mental breakdown, never to be reversed, of the fifth son, Edward, four years older than she. Her world had early taken on its pattern of successive calamities, repeated shocks to the nerves, from which throughout her elongated life she would seldom for long be free.

By age sixteen she must have been strikingly beautiful and appealing. (Sir Henry Craik, Scottish educational official, twenty-nine years her junior, wrote that even “in later years,” her “jet-black hair and brilliant clearness of complexion were still marvellously preserved,” and her “fine contralto” singing voice had “something of the music that one felt in the Poet’s rich tones.”) Edmund could have first become aware of her through entranced reports from his closest Cambridge friend, Robert Tennant, who had visited the Tennysons at Somersby in July 1834 and fallen for a time hopelessly in love with her. When Mrs. Tennyson opposed the courtship by an impecunious scholar seven years older, Tennant agreed to “bear my affliction in a proper spirit,” so long as “the esteem of those whom next to herself I most love [the Tennyson family] does not even now fail me.”

We next encounter Cecilia in her twentieth year, immediately after the Tennysons had moved from Somersby to High Beech in Epping Forest near London. Sir Charles Tennyson tells us that she and at least two older sisters, Mary and Emily, had apparently by then “become the centre of a small group of young bluestockings called the ‘Husks,’ ” who met in one another’s homes to discuss the poems of their favorite Romantics, “Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and, of course, Alfred Tennyson.” From High Beech, and later Tunbridge Wells, during the next three years Cecilia wrote at least seven remarkably lively and affectionate letters (surviving at the Tennyson Research Centre at Lincoln and now published in the new edition of Alfred’s letters) to a fellow Husk, Susan Haddlesey, back in the ancient wolds town of Caistor, where Cecilia’s brother, Charles Tennyson Turner, and his wife Louisa were
living. At their best, the letters, and another one of the same period to her
cousin Lewis Fytche excerpted by Sir Charles, display a terse descriptiveness
coupled with lightness of phrasing and touches of apparently effortless irony
unmatched in the letters of any of the other Tennysons. One sees here, as in
nothing else anywhere in the pitifully few surviving letters from Cecilia, traces
of the personality that might have captivated Edmund two or three years later.

Unfortunately, other characteristics already foreshadow ultimate incompat­
ibility with a perfectionistic linguist like Edmund. Although Cecilia’s spelling
is generally accurate, her impetuous letters rush along in manuscript largely
without benefit of punctuation:

I ought to have answered before this thy very affectionate letter what wilt
thou think of me surely not that I have forgotten thee which really is not
the case I have only been idle that is all and thou must forgive me Mamma
says I am to ask thee when thou canst best come and see us canst thou come
and see us any time next month. Write and tell us I ride every day now
Susan on a nice black pony we have bought so come and see us and thou
shalt ride too we have given 9 pounds for it [et cetera]. . . .

(Lang and Shannon blandly state that “in all of Cecilia Tennyson’s let­
ters . . . printed here most of the punctuation and capital letters have been
supplied by the editors.”)

More ominous in light of what we know about Cecilia’s later life are fre­
quent vague reports of illnesses, including painful headaches, that she, perhaps
with sufficient cause, mentions as reasons for not writing more regularly. From
several of Edmund’s letters in later years, it seems that some of her headaches
were the extremely painful tic douloureux (spasmodic facial neuralgia). In late
November 1837 she had been to London to consult

Dr Marshall Hall (a famous physician) for my Headaches which I have had
repeatedly lately. He is a very gentlemanlike man and has a kind manner
which I like much in a medical man He has given me some medicine to
take, but I was to continue it for a long time. These were his words to me
“You must continue this medicine for years” (very pleasant to hear was it
not) however there is no help for it, and anything is better than these
headaches.

Hall was probably the leading physician in England in the treatment of dis­
orders of the nervous system. His ultimately voluminous medical writings al­
ready included Lectures on the Nervous System and Its Diseases (1836), and he would
later publish several other neurological treatises. But his writings, generally
descriptive, stop short of reliably indicating what medicines he would have
prescribed for such long-continued use, or their possible undesirable effects. Clearly, in any case, Edmund in 1842 would be marrying a person already marked for a life of illness which in time (if not already by 1837) would include more or less prolonged periods of lassitude and depression.

Off in Italy that spring, Henry with his family party had been thrown into mental anguish by terrible news from India. The ill-considered British occupation of Afghanistan, begun more than three years earlier, had suddenly suffered a nearly incredible catastrophe. British Army forces and miscellaneous camp followers totaling some 16,500 persons had attempted a desperate mid-winter retreat, and a week later all but a few were dead, killed by weather or ambush or both. As Henry later wrote, "every mail brought intelligence of disasters so new and so terrible, that it was difficult to replace the involuntary incredulity...with a sense of their reality." Greater numbers have perished in less time; but no similar force of civilized men was ever so utterly overwhelmed." Venables declared that Henry's always delicate health was "seriously affected" by the news. He had cherished an idealistic view of the British presence in India, of which Lushington family members had been a part for nearly a hundred years. One of his half-uncles had been governor of Madras, another the chairman of the Indian Court of Directors when the Afghan war began, still another a member of the Indian Council. The governor general of India was his father's first cousin, the second Lord Ellenborough. With an imaginative compassion for human suffering Henry combined an extraordinary sensitivity to immoral political action. It was "not indifferent whether all that had been done so ineffectually, so disastrously, had also been done wickedly and wrongly." For the next two years, the Afghanistan question would never for long be out of his mind; from extensive reading and intense brooding about the subject would emerge the longest piece of writing, and possibly the best, that he would ever do. That book will be discussed in our next chapter.

By mid-June he and his party were home from Italy. In coming weeks he would be much in the company of Tennyson, who was living again at Boxley. Even when Henry, looking "pale, thin & out of spirits," traveled to London for a reunion with Venables, Tennyson was accompanying him. Only two days later, Venables was obliged to go off on circuit, continuing a generally wretched summer. He would receive so few briefs that he despaired of ever succeeding at the bar. Just then Jesus College, Cambridge, was offering him another tutorship, and he was going through a crisis of indecision. His discontents were nourished by letters from the ever-excitable B. L. Chapman, apparently insinuating that Tennyson was supplanting Venables as Henry's best friend; but by that time Venables, with Henry's advice, had turned down the tutorship offer. After Henry in August, still looking "tired & on the whole unwell," had
come out to Wales, Venables felt more reassured that Chapman’s intimations were groundless. He and Henry would go on sharing the Mitre Court chambers, at least when Henry was in town, for another five years.

At some point, probably in July or August, Henry bravely enough began to compose a review of Tennyson’s two new volumes. On 15 August, during his visit with Venables in Wales, “H.L. did a very little of his review”—probably this one. The Lushington family papers have a fragmentary manuscript in Henry’s hand that, before abruptly breaking off, has several substantial though inconclusive paragraphs interspersed with about a dozen unfilled blank areas. Ironically now, it is headed, “The Review which must be completed.” It may have been intended for the Apostle J. M. Kemble’s British and Foreign Review, which might have been expected to review Tennyson’s book but for whatever reason never did. Not only was Henry physically ailing that summer but, along with other distractions, was perhaps spending too much time with Tennyson himself to spare the hours for writing about him. And then as he came to know the poet better, he may have grown the more reluctant to risk alienating a cherished friend who was always sensitive about his reviewers.

Apparently Henry was hoping to show that the newer, previously unpublished poems in Tennyson’s second volume represented a definable advance in vision and technique over the more palpably captivating earlier poems in the first volume. But that would have been a formidable thesis to demonstrate, and Henry may ultimately have failed even to convince himself. His theoretical undergirding, in its leisurely nineteenth-century pace, is clear and sufficiently persuasive. An older poet, “thinking differently from the youth will write differently in proportion as his poetry is a genuine utterance of his state of mind (& no other poetry is worth much).” “He cannot write as he once could without imitating himself[,] one of the worst errors & worst failures possible for real genius—without producing the effect of falseness.” A young writer’s “original bent of mind . . . shows itself prominently in various exuberances, beautiful in themselves, but faulty in their connection”; later, that bent will “exhibit itself in the peculiarity & individuality of his manner, in all that constitutes style, all that makes it possible to distinguish one writer from another.” The young poet’s luxuriance too often obscures his thought; “the thing is beautiful but out of its place,” like “a rose garland hung on the branches of an oak.” With growing maturity he “leaves roses where they are” and “lets his oak speak or stand for itself,” not wishing “to deck with flowers the beauty & strength of a tree of the forest.” The supreme example of such development was Shakespeare, whose “profuse unbridled fancy” in his early poems and plays ripened into the tightly controlled language of the late tragedies, “where every word tells—if you change it you alter the meaning.” Unfortunately, though,
such salutary development had too rarely occurred. Most poets during the past half-century had written "their best books before 25, & . . . after 35 very few ever wrote anything worth reading." Not only did countless once-promising youngsters fail to develop at all ("a few years hardening and the sensitive poet steps forth the defaming reviewer"); but not even the giants of the age—Southey, Coleridge, Byron, Wordsworth—had surpassed their early achievements.

Tennyson, Henry wished to argue, was one of the few who had "victoriously" made that "necessary transition." But the manuscript hardly shows at all how that opinion would have been sustained. Henry mentions only three post-1833 poems—"Audley Court," a "proof" that the eclogue, "this very beautiful form of poetry[,] has greater capacities than we have been used to attribute to it, in relation to our own country & times"; another eclogue "Walking to the Mail," mentioned without comment; and "Dora," a "simple story told with a perfect and touching simplicity," although too prosy and sometimes imperfectly versified. We can only speculate how Henry would have treated such outstanding newly published poems as "Ulysses," "Morte d'Arthur," "Locksley Hall," and "The Vision of Sin." Or what feats of close reading he might have performed with a few well-controlled displays of Tennyson's revisions in "The Lotos Eaters" and "The Lady of Shalott."

The best thing in the manuscript—some might say the only solidly practical thing—is Henry's discussion of "Mariana." Tennyson's "distinguishing characteristic" had always been "a singular power of embodying states of mind & emotion in natural imagery."

. . . With him images taken from external nature are not introduced merely as illustrations to explain the thought or heighten the emotion by combining with it the impression of some beautiful object—they are the very form in which the thought is embodied, not a separate aid to its forcible expression—an idea is transfused through the imagery, & the idea & the picture strike the mind as inseparably one.

So it was in the "beautiful & touching" "Mariana":

Desolation, sadness, loneliness are the ideas which it is intended to convey & they are conveyed by the description of the old house in the middle of the dreary land more than by any full expression of the feelings of the deserted maiden. It is a picture of which every part every minute accessory aids in telling the story of the solitary and central figure—"She only said, my life is weary"—It is the entire reality which is given to this by the scenes around that make its simplicity so touching. Much might have been
said of her feelings, much would have been said by many writers—but it is better to convey those feelings through the medium of nature by making us see the scene as Mariana herself might have seen it.

Obviously no one can tell from such a fragment what the completed review would have contained, but nothing actually in it seems very auspicious for its success. Hindsight tells us now that the hour had hardly yet come for a review directly posing an older Tennyson against a younger. Henry himself would probably have known much of what we learn from Professor Christopher Ricks's edition of Tennyson, that nearly every notable poem in the 1842 volumes had been first composed within the five years following the appearance of the December 1832 collection, and several of the most memorable ones—"The Two Voices," "St Simeon Stylites," "Ulysses," "Morte d'Arthur," "Break, Break, Break," "Sir Galahad"—probably before 1835. Tennyson himself, for all his "ten years' silence," was not yet thirty-three when his 1842 volumes came out. Not yet written were most of the richly varied triumphs of his post-1840 style: much of In Memoriam; most if not all of The Princess, including its matchless songs: Maud; "The Holy Grail" and so much more of the Idylls of the King; the sermon, and the final lines of Aylmer's Field; the supremely perfected "Tithonus": "In the Garden at Swainston" with its tribute to Henry ("Three dead men have I loved") along with Hallam and Simeon. Although the review remained unfinished, Henry's premonitory critical instinct would later be vindicated many times over. Tennyson was indeed "victoriously" making the "transition." But it saddens us to be left standing so close, yet so far, from a live demonstration of what with better direction, or firmer resoluteness, Tennyson's "best critic" might have been able to do.

On 6 July occurred the first of the year's two events centering around Park House that live on in poems by Tennyson. That summer day Edmund opened his grounds for the annual festival of the Maidstone Mechanics Institution. It was one of numerous such organizations flourishing in England since the latter 1830s, encouraged by Owenist and other Socialist elements, and dedicated to the educational and moral improvement of the laboring classes. At a typical festival the people participated in games, heard music, joined in group dancing, and saw educational demonstrations of electrical and other scientific innovations. The Maidstone and Kentish Advertiser described the goings-on at Park House: two bands, "one for quadrille, and one for country dancing"; "cricketing, trap bat and ball," and other games; a "cannon . . . occasionally fired off, ignited by a spark from an Electrical Machine about 20 yards away"; "a model of a steam engine . . . turning a circular saw with great rapidity, and . . . of a steam boat plying round a light house"; a table displaying such "philosophical instruments" as "telescopes, microscopes, etc. etc." A "capacious
booth erected for the occasion” seated eight hundred persons for tea. After­ward “a large fire balloon ascended,” and finally, in the evening, a bell sum­moned everyone to “assemble on the summit of the hill in front of the house,” where they voted appreciation to Edmund for his hospitality and heard his “appropriate” expression of delight for “the interesting manner in which the company had amused themselves, and the decorum which had prevailed throughout the day.”

In well-honed blank verse, the Prologue to The Princess, published five years later, immortalized the day, apparently with few if any invented details:

For all the sloping pasture murmured, sown  
With happy faces and with holiday.
There moved the multitude, a thousand heads:  
The patient leaders of their Institute
Taught them with facts. One reared a font of stone  
And drew, from butts of water on the slope,
The fountain of the moment, playing, now  
A twisted snake, and now a rain of pearls,
Or steep-up spout whereon the gilded ball  
Danced like a wisp: and somewhat lower down
A man with knobs and wires and vials fired  
A cannon: Echo answered in her sleep
From hollow fields: and here were telescopes  
For azure views; and there a group of girls
In circle waited, whom the electric shock  
Dislinked with shrieks and laughter: round the lake
A little clock-work steamer paddling plied  
And shook the lilies: perched about the knolls
A dozen angry models jetted steam:  
A petty railway ran: a fire-balloon
Rose gem-like up before the dusky groves  
And dropt a fairy parachute and past:
And there through twenty posts of telegraph  
They flashed a saucy message to and fro
Between the mimic stations; so that sport  
Went hand in hand with Science.

We can imagine a shyly smiling Edmund—along with a radiant Cecilia and other Tennysons, including Alfred, and various younger Lushingtons—moving with reserved cordiality (his father would have brought it off more heartily) among his motley guests. Imagine him we must, for Tennyson does not present
Edmund in the Prologue. Certainly he was not the middle-aged Sir Walter Vivian, stage stereotype of a titled landowner descending from a line of knights extending back to Agincourt and Ascalon. Nor does a thirty-one-year-old Greek professor meet the specifications for young Walter, home with six comrades from college. If any Lushington, this Walter would have been nineteen-year-old Franklin. And if so, then the "petulant" sister Lilia, "wild with sport, / Half child, half woman," would have been Louisa Sophia ("Louy"), a year younger and Franklin's sibling companion since their earliest childhood. From other indications, Louy seems to have been the sister most like her studious brothers, the one who would most have excelled if universities had admitted women. We can picture the two late adolescents, as in the poem, reclining on the grass comfortably close together at the picnic "feast" set out for the family and friends, including "lady friends from neighbouring seats" (the Tennyson sisters among others). If Franklin had ever patronizingly patted Louy's head while making a slighting remark about women, he would have been disappointed if she had not fired back:

. . . 'There are thousands now
Such women, but convention beats them down:
It is but bringing up; no more than that:
You men have done it: how I hate you all!
Ah, were I something great! I wish I were
Some mighty poetess, I would shame you then,
That love to keep us children! O I wish
That I were some great princess, I would build
Far off from men a college like a man's,
And I would teach them all that men are taught;
We are twice as quick!' And here she shook aside
The hand that played the patron with her curls.

Lilia's role in the Prologue was to motivate the framing device for the succeeding seven books, whereby the seven college boys would successively extemporize a tale of a preposterous "female university" ruled rigidly by the larger-than-life Princess Ida. Ida is not Lilia (or Louy), but only what Tennyson's seven romanticists contrive to make of the "great princess" of Lilia's dreams.

On 14 October—not the tenth as sometimes incorrectly stated—came the wedding in Boxley Church of Edmund and Cecilia, four days after her twenty-fifth birthday. The Epilogue to In Memoriam, addressed to Edmund, ecstatically describes the event, and releases Alfred's delight: "Nor have I felt so much of bliss / Since first he [Hallam] told me that he loved / A daughter of our house."
The poet, who had "danced" his infant sister "on my knee," "watched her on her nurse's arms," and "shielded" her "all her life" from danger, now succinctly eulogizes her bridegroom:

And thou art worthy; full of power;
As gentle; liberal-minded, great,
Consistent; wearing all that weight
Of learning lightly like a flower.

The bride "enters, glowing like the moon / Of Eden on its bridal bower." Her "blissful eyes" see first Alfred, then Edmund, and brighten "like the star that shook / Betwixt the palms of paradise." Standing before the altar, "Her feet, my darling, on the dead; / Their pensive tablets round her head" (one of these at Boxley memorializes the poet, travel writer, and Virginian colonist George Sandys; another the family of Sir Thomas Wyatt, poet and reputed lover of Anne Boleyn), Cecilia exchanges vows with Edmund and joins him in signing the register. The bells overhead begin

. . . the clash and clang that tells
   The joy to every wandering breeze;
The blind wall rocks, and on the trees
The dead leaf trembles to the bells.

On the porch the "maiden of the place" (these would include Mary and Matilda Tennyson and the four Lushington sisters) "pelt" the party with flowers. But "white-favoured horses wait" for the newlyweds, who exchange farewell kisses with loved ones, "and they are gone." There is more—the subsequent "feast, the speech, the glee."

Then Tennyson reaches, or overreaches, for a prophetic climax to In Memoriam, an epitomizing of the optimistic postulates of his sections 106 to 131, that would justify his resolution to end with the apparently irrelevant wedding. A son born to Edmund and Cecilia might pick up the mantle of the fallen Hallam and help advance the race along a divinely directed evolutionary scale toward ultimate moral perfection ("the Christ that is to be").

A soul shall draw from out the vast
And strike his being into bounds,
And, moved through life of lower phase,
Result in man, be born and think,
And act and love, a closer link
Betwixt us and the crowning race
No longer half-akin to brute,
    For all we thought and loved and did,
    And hoped, and suffered, is but seed
Of what in them is flower and fruit:
Whereof the man [Hallam] that with me trod
    This planet, was a nobler type
    Appearing ere the times were ripe,
That friend of mine who lives in God,
That God, which ever lives and loves
    One God, one law, one element,
    And one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves

In retrospect the unanticipated irony of these visionary lines is almost unendurably bitter. Fourteen years and six days after that wedding day, on 20 October 1856, the only son of Edmund and Cecilia, a sweet-tempered boy not yet thirteen, would finally die from a terrible lingering illness. One wishes the stanzas had not been written. Indeed, interesting as the entire Epilogue is to a biography of the Lushingtons, Tennyson's masterpiece might have been a more unified work without it.

Even with a joyous wedding and with his poems selling gratifyingly, these were unhappy months for Tennyson himself. By the summer of 1842, Dr. Allen's wood-carving speculation, in which Tennyson had sunk his patrimony, was facing imminent collapse. Tennyson wrote at least two heated letters (one now lost) to the doctor attempting to disengage his mother and sisters from the risk. Lawyers had advised the family that after Cecilia's marriage Edmund might be "liable to the debts of his wife" if she was involved in a failed enterprise. Mary Tennyson wrote Mrs. Allen on 21 July that the Tennysons had heard "strange and dismal accounts" of the speculation lately from several quarters, "and the anxiety it creates amongst the house circle is painful." Alfred "fidgets himself to death"; she feared he might relapse into a "complaint" he had recently suffered which might endanger his heart. On 15 October, the day following the wedding, Tennyson wrote Mrs. Allen demanding that she stop her husband from borrowing £1000 from Septimus Tennyson, then staying in the asylum, who probably did not have "another thousand in the world." Allen had "already at different times received from our family about £8000," so that Mrs. Tennyson and the daughters were now "living upon my brother Charles" and Alfred himself was "a penniless beggar and deeply in debt besides."

How nearly penniless he actually was remains a matter of conjecture. Robert
Bernard Martin, not very confidently, estimates a comparatively comfortable £500 to £600 for his income in 1843. But half or more of that total is £300 a year that Martin believes FitzGerald gave him between 1843 and 1845. Martin’s source is a statement by Carlyle in his old age to Charles Eliot Norton—a story rejected, with Lang and Shannon “emphatically” concurring, by the editors of FitzGerald’s correspondence.

By the final weeks of 1843, Tennyson’s health had become so deranged by nearly “two years” of “perpetual panic and horror” that he was nearing total nervous exhaustion. Having to “write a letter on that accursed business threw me into a kind of convulsion.” It must have been very early in December that he voluntarily entered a water-cure establishment at Prestbury near Cheltenham, where he would remain for more than six months. (He wrote to FitzGerald on 2 February, “I have been here already upwards of two months.”

The letter that induced the convulsion was almost undoubtedly one now recently published for the first time. Tennyson wrote it from Cheltenham, where his family had moved from Boxley, and dated it on 30 November, no more than a day or two before he began the water cure. It should materially alter our perception of what Edmund did when he paid for an insurance policy payable on the death of Dr. Matthew Allen. Tennyson wrote to a London solicitor, Joshua Julian Allen (apparently the doctor’s solicitor, probably not a relative), informing him that “Mr. Edmund Lushington of the College, Glasgow will this year advance the money to be paid on the life assurance in case it is impossible to procure it from the right quarter.”

The right quarter would have been the doctor himself, who three years earlier (23 November 1840) had given Tennyson “the Policy of my life for two thousand pounds as security . . . for the sum of nine hundred pounds and the sum remaining to be paid over to Mrs. Allen, unless a further sum be lent me, then to receive the amount of such further sum as may have been advanced.” Since Hallam Tennyson’s Memoir, Tennyson biography has known that Edmund “in 1844 [apparently in 1843] generously insured Dr. Allen’s life for part of the debt.” But the transaction has seemed faintly surreptitious, if not downright shady (Christopher Ricks carefully calls it “a shrewd act of kindness”), not less so for Cecilia’s declaration on 11 December 1844 that “Old Allen still lives—it is a sad thing one is obliged to wish for the death of any man—I suppose thou knowest that Alfred will get most of his money back when that desirable event takes place—to secure this Edmund pays some eighty pounds a year for him.” Surely Ricks was not the first to reflect that such a letter “might have attracted the attention of the police”? But now we can be assured that Edmund was quite openly maintaining a policy that the doctor himself had taken out for Tennyson and
renewed two times. Unexpectedly, the doctor died in early January 1845, and Tennyson regained his £2,000. The protection had cost Edmund £160.

From cryptic entries in Venables's journal, it appears that the marriage at Boxley may not have come off without creating tensions in the Lushington family. Having been away from London for four months, Venables returned in late October to find a mass of letters including some from Chapman "containing most of the curious episode of the past six weeks. His intent for writing is such that I think if it was known it would be generally admired." Possibly, but not necessarily so. Chapman seems to have been less than squeamish about casting unflattering reflections or imposing extreme interpretations. Yet he was a recurrent visitor at Park House, being closer to Henry and probably also to the sisters than to Edmund, and would later be, if not already, in love with Emily Lushington. He would be keenly sensitive concerning the younger Lushingtons' prerogatives. Venables himself, whom Tennyson had informed of the engagement in mid-May, had been disappointed by Edmund's prolonged secretiveness. Not even Henry had mentioned the engagement until late August. "Probably one ought to be glad" about the marriage, Venables then wrote, "& I can hardly say I am sorry, but how unwise it is in such cases not to enlist those who will be losers, in the cause, by a little confidence & appeal to their sympathy." He may have been recording personal worries only, no longer so assured of ready welcome to Park House, under a new mistress he had not met. Or his potential "losers" might have included other Lushingtons. At the least, there were latent strains that would soon enough become actual. It could hardly be otherwise when the mistress, absent along with the master half of each year, would for the other half be sharing her home with four sisters-in-law of her own generation who had lived there since childhood and would still do so the year around. Although varying from year to year, at times with two of the sisters at Malta, at others with Cecilia and her children not returning with Edmund to Glasgow, the situation would remain trying to the nerves of all. And Cecilia's nerves were never strong.