VII

An Ill-Fated Heir and a Stillborn Book

1843–1844

The best surviving specimen of Henry's practical criticism of poetry—a twenty-six-page review of Thomas Babington Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome*—appeared in February 1843 in the Anglo-Catholic *Christian Remembrancer*, edited by the "Apostle" Francis Garden. The final nineteen pages closely examine lines, stanzas, and passages Henry considered superb, merely good, or downright bad. Macaulay had tried in English verses to embody his conception of the long-lost primitive ballads, ultimate sources, he believed, for the early chroniclers, who in turn were sources for Livy's Roman history. Henry welcomed Macaulay's attempt, having himself since childhood possessed an enthusiasm for Roman history and Latin poetry that complemented Edmund's for the Greek. He was a keen student of prosody, and would always be attracted to the spirit and sound of ballads and other martial poems. Independently of Macaulay he was convinced that Livy's prose displayed vestiges of much older poems, with accentual rather than quantitative metres, faint traces of occasional rhyme, and "strong indications of the systematic use of alliteration," all presumably closer to modern European than to classical verse.

But Henry thought that Macaulay had too indistinctly perceived the "peculiar difficulties of his task": his battle poems should have tried not for "an ideal battle, but an ideal poem." Since it was innately impossible to create "a perfect illusion"—a faithful replica of a primitive Roman ballad—the poet should have
aimed at aiding us "to reduce into form" our "own vague conceptions of those forgotten poems." He should have strictly avoided "anything decidedly incongruous," such as his overly obvious echoes of Sir Walter Scott. In his best passages Macaulay had kept his mind "imbued with the characteristic colouring of his original, altogether renouncing Scott, and following, if any one, Livy." Through a "high and successful effort of imagination," he had "caught ... the very tone and spirit of the old legend.... The imagination of the poet has given life and reality to the knowledge of the antiquarian, and the two are harmoniously combined."

Straightforward, unadorned, uncluttered narration with just a hint of the teller's wonder was what Henry most commended when he found it in Macaulay—that "which reminds us sufficiently of Livy, not too much of our own ballads":

And with a mighty following,
To join the muster came,
The Tusculan Mamilius,
   Prince of the Latian name.

Henry's favorite stanzas in the book—"decidedly and far the best passage"—were two coming near the end:

They gave him of the corn land,
   That was of public right,
As much as two strong oxen
   Could plough from morn till night
And they made a molten image,
   And set it up on high,
And there it stands unto this day,
   To witness if I lie.

It stands in the Comitium,
   Plain for all folk to see,
Horatius in his harness,
   Halting upon one knee
And underneath is written,
   In letters all of gold,
How valiantly he kept the bridge
   In the brave days of old.

Through their simplicity the stanzas had triumphed:

By simply stating the traditional fact, but by stating it in the right tone and right spirit, by the sudden emphatic reference to the daily experience of
the poet's hearers, by the use of earnest, simple, antique, yet unaffected
diction (we are but giving prosaically the means which it required a high
effect of imagination to combine into the result,) Mr. Macaulay has in
these two plain grave stanzas attained his object. . . .

Macaulay's great fault, Henry felt, was hasty diffusiveness. Eight shorter bal-
lads instead of the four long ones would have been preferable. Macaulay had
gratuitously begotten and christened too many extraneous characters, rigging
them out with irrelevant histories simply to redeem them "from the reproach
of being merely First Etruscan, Second Etruscan, and so on." There was too
much pseudo-Homeric heaping on of details in descriptions of combat, too
much ineffective elaboration in some of the speeches. "The consul Aulus
answers in a 'bitter jest,' which might have been bitterer if it had been briefer."
"Icilius rushes forward and 'Poured thick and fast the burning words which
tyrants quake to hear'—that is, makes a long speech which, if here correctly
reported, might have been heard by the most timid of tyrants without causing
them to quake. . . ."

Seven "alarmingly raw-head-and-bloody-bone lines," probably the "worst
Mr. Macaulay has ever written, or ever will write," were these:

And from the ghastly entrance
Where those bold Romans stood,
All shrank like boys who, unaware, (!)
Ranging the woods to start a hare, (!!!)
Came to the mouth of the dark lair (!!!!)
Where, growling low, a fierce old bear (!!!!!)
Lies amid bones and blood.

The unintentional absurdity of the lines seemed almost beyond belief:

There is something perfectly irresistible in the long-continued scale, ever
rising with the rhyme, from the tranquil "unaware" to the comparative
animation of "hare," thence to the truculent "dark lair," culminating in
the growl of the "fierce old bear," and sinking down, under cover of that
fearful crash, into its bed of bones and blood. The temptation, moreover,
to transpose the two quadrupeds, "a fierce old hare," is one of which, Mr.
Macaulay may be sure, the many boys, full grown or not, who read these
poems will not be "unaware." We should doubt the goodness of that
man's heart who could read the passage aloud, from the boys to the bear,
without laughing.

The criticism was not inordinately cruel, considering its target. Macaulay's
own excoriating of other writers, most notoriously of the hapless poetaster
Robert Montgomery, had earned him an immunity from critical clemency. But Henry also accorded Macaulay's better works high and particularized praise. Of his speeches: "sentences of noble and perfect eloquence . . . each like a medal of enduring metal, stamped with a high thought at once and forever." Of his prose essays: "the well-known, unmistakable hand—the epigrammatic turns, the short, sharp sentences, the sparkling illustrations, the antithesis, always lively, and often (not always) just." Of his work in general: "Brilliant" was "the very word," although his reviews were occasionally marred by the "sacrifice of truth to point . . . the substitution of flashing cleverness for serious thought . . . the risks and temptations" of a writer who possesses "imagination, wit, and a dazzling power of language."

More than the typical early Victorian review, Henry's article exemplifies the merits of systematic normative criticism. It clearly enunciates and applies its criteria for a single genre—a cleanly imagined ancient Roman lay. It finds praiseworthy lines in generally dispraised passages, and inept ones in passages generally praised. Surely it must afford some intimations of Henry's critical acuity, so lauded by Tennyson, concerning particular lines or phrases. But necessarily it lacks the best of what Tennyson gratefully received: the tentativeness, the lowered voice and genuine smile that disarm constructive suggestion, all the pleasant informal exchanges between poet and trusted friend bending over a manuscript together.

Henry himself was growing increasingly discouraged from having no regular employment and no visible prospects. He had imbibed of his father's never-satisfied ideals of lastingly serving humanity, of leaving the world better for one's having lived. But now his life seemed permanently becalmed, an unpainted ship upon a faintly daubed ocean. Venables, lonely in a hotel room on circuit at Gloucester in early March, seeing no professional future for himself, felt that, even so, Henry's sense of failure was sadder than his: "I think with still more pain of H compelled as he is to adopt altogether a life as repugnant to his taste as this, which only occupies a short time, is to mine. He too has all my susceptibility to disgust, & fewer resources." (Henry's "taste" would have been for the public arena; the "resources" he lacked were vigor and bodily health.) Again on 24 June, Venables would record, "H . . . feeling very dissatisfied with the unmarked progress of time."

But for two or three months that spring, Henry did find urgent work—crucial, he believed, no less for Britain than for himself. Out of indignation against the rash perpetrators of the Afghanistan war and compassion for its victims he would construct two long articles for the Christian Remembrancer, exposing the war's indefensible beginnings and vividly recreating its inexorable course.² "We cannot undo the past [.]" he believed, "but a clear and just
judgment on the past is the best and only preparation against the difficulties of the future." These would not be ordinary review articles, tediously scratched out to support some built-for-the-occasion thesis or to extract payment from a publisher. They would enshrine his most encompassing convictions. How else could he hope just then to rise from physical debility and galling obscurity to help redeem his beloved nation from mortal sin? “Impolicy, error, want of judgment,—these are calm terms which trouble and shock no one; but the charge of shedding blood without just cause, is felt at once to be no trifle. Let it be felt so more and more.”

Several primary documents, eyewitness accounts by participants, had by then been published but inadequately evaluated. Henry would synthesize these and strike.

On 1 March, soon to leave on circuit, Venables recorded, “Looked at the beginning of H’s India review, which seems good.” Back from circuit on 14 April, he found “H occupied all day with his interminable article on Afghanistan”; the next day “H again working hard at his review”; on the seventeenth “H sent off part of his review”; on the eighteenth “H at last finished & sent his article.” But that was only the first article. On the twentieth he began the second, which he finished in about three weeks. The two together were a tour de force of seventy-five gripping pages, approximately forty-thousand words. On 13 June he read the proofsheets. Ten days later, as we have seen, he was feeling let down, naturally enough, “very little satisfied with the unmarked progress of time.”

That summer he briefly attempted to be a barrister without risking illness from the rigors of a circuit. At least twice in June, he held briefs in the county court at Maidstone, less than a mile from Park House; but in early July he experienced opposition to his holding Maidstone briefs (to the presumed disadvantage of others faithfully enduring the circuit?), and this seems to have closed that episode.

Edmund and Cecilia returned from Glasgow on 3 May. More than fifty years later, Edmund, probably working from a diary, recalled that journey, with the number of travel hours each day. “In those days little help was afforded to travellers in the north by railways. Our journeys were generally performed in coach or postchaises.” They consumed three days going from Glasgow to Lancaster, and on the fourth day reached London, “part at least no doubt by railway.” It would be Venables’s first glimpse of Cecilia, but he found her so unwell that it was “difficult to judge of her looks. . . . I scarcely conversed with her.” We know now that she was in the early months of pregnancy. And she, who never before had lived in a town larger than Tunbridge Wells, had suffered her first dismal winter on the slum-enveloped campus at Glasgow, which later she would describe: “black houses and thick fog is my almost daily
view made more hellish often by a red glow through it all—proceeding from the numerous fires in and about this city of dirt and dumps.” When she returned with Edmund to London on the twenty-ninth, Venables joined them at tea, where “she talked more than before”; but on the next day, he was still fretting: “There seems little chance of ever having an opportunity of becoming acquainted with” her. And, indeed, although he would see her frequently over the next forty-five years, his journal seldom indicates his ever trying very hard to understand her.

Tennyson would be seeing the Lushingtons through most of the summer and fall. His mother and her family moved away from Boxley to Cheltenham no later than September, but he did not join them immediately. Two Lushington family letters provide vivid glimpses of their poet visitor. On 26 September, Edmund and Cecilia gave “their first great dinner party.” On the day before, as Emily described it, the house was a hubbub. A child, “little Poddy,” was “hammering away on the piano, making double the noise that she would if I wanted her to play Fortissimo.” Ellen, “for once,” was “talking hard & energetically, appealing to everybody against Edmund’s shabbiness in having cheated her out of riding to make a call with him, & sent her instead in the carriage with Cissy [Cecilia].” Henry was “calling out every five minutes to come with him to shoot.” The butler was “demanding an answer to some questions about new dishes.” Edmund was “affecting great eagerness about shooting, solely to get rid of” Henry’s calling. Emily herself was sitting “at the table writing . . . and answering . . . innumerable questions that everybody keeps putting to me & each other.” But there sat “the poet at one corner of the sofa the only one perfectly quiet, deep in a book.”

A week or two earlier, several of the family had been at the seaside at St. Leonards (near Hastings). As Louy related it, they had sent “a sort of invitation” to “the poet” to join them, but “did not much expect him to come.” One day looking down from Hastings Castle, “on the road below we half recognized two persons walking up the hill . . . at a very quick pace.” Louy, “looking through a crevice in the wall, remarked to myself and Ellen ‘That man walks very much like the poet!’ ‘Yes,’ says Ellen, ‘and he looks about just in the same way.’” The other man, in “white trousers—cap,” was “rather like Edmund,” who was not expected at all. The girls hurried down the hill and “found we were right. The old fellow [Edmund] and the poet had walked 9 miles from Maidstone to meet a coach, and come to spend a day or two with us.” (Edmund fifty years later would single out that experience, how he and Alfred “walked the first 10 miles of the road carrying a bag between us, and then found the help of a coach for the remainder of our journey.”) But some of the greatest hilarity (again described by Louy) came after Edmund’s return to
Park House. The cliff at Beachy Head drops five hundred sheer feet to the sea. "The poet," not very seriously we may hope, expressed "a strong desire that we should all get into the phaeton and drive right over the most perpendicular part of the cliff and we have just been agreeing that when we are all tired of life we will set out perfectly coolly and all drive over." Two of the sisters that day had "donkeys which went at a marvellous slow pace in spite of Ellen's and our belabouring them. till when we returned home Ellen leapt on the laziest with astonishing energy and set it off trotting in a way which nearly killed Harry [Henry] and kept the walkers at a pretty considerable pace for some time."

During late October and early November, Tennyson alternated between Park House and London. Sometimes he stayed with Venables and at times took a room in a Charlotte Street lodging house. On 1 November, Venables "looked over many of A.T.'s Hallam elegies, some of them new, & all beautiful & touching." It was probably this same manuscript that nine months later, following his half-year stay at a water-cure establishment, Tennyson instructed Venables to keep "till I see you." He supposed he himself had "slipt it behind your books to keep it out of people's way, for I scarcely liked everyone who came in to overhaul those poems and moreover the volume itself was not fit to be seen, foul with the rust dust and mildew of innumerable moons."

Up in Scotland on the last day of the year, Cecilia gave birth to a son, much to the delight of all Lushingtons. Inevitably, he was named for his grandfather, Edmund Henry. Soon all the "working people" around Park House were calling him "the young squire." Edmund wrote: "It's very odd but I certainly get to care for that little wee baa, and to like him rather, and to think him less of a brute than most children. He coos and oos at his mama as if he were a bullfrog, where as he is but a human tiny absurdity." Cecilia declared simply that "his smile is quite beautiful." Returning from Glasgow in early May, both he and his mother "stood the journey capitally." Edmund was relieved that Cecilia, breathing again the fresh Kentish air so unlike the nauseous fumes of Glasgow, had "not been so well for many weeks, months I might perhaps say." At his christening in Boxley church, where in the churchyard twelve and half years later he would be buried, little Eddy "behaved decently, save that he laughed at the parson, which greatly scandalized the curate's eldest daughter, aged 4; she said it was very wrong of him indeed."

The early months of 1844 found Henry back at his desk, diligently readying his Afghanistan material for book publication. The publisher, John W. Parker, West Strand, felt—all too correctly, and even then too hopefully—that the peak of interest in the question had passed, but that a book might sell if it included a treatment of British India's more recent annexation of Sinde, which from Henry's viewpoint was no less iniquitous than the proceedings in Afghan-
istan. The discussion of Sinde, with appendix and notes, fills the last 136 pages of a 301-page volume that appeared at the end of May: *A Great Country's Little Wars; or, England, Afghanistan, and Sinde; Being a Sketch with Reference to Their Morality and Policy, of Recent Transactions on the North-Western Frontier of India*.

All the devious negotiations and mutual tergiversations of the Sinde conflict, ending in two brief bloody battles in 1843, have long ago been faithfully processed and prudently filed away in histories of the Empire, together with the more appalling accounts of the Afghanistan horrors. What matters here is the way Henry's book preserves the spirit of this almost forgotten young man. Here is a descriptive passage from the second Afghanistan section:

The third morning found them at the mouth of the Khoord Cabool Pass, a disorganized multitude of from fourteen to sixteen thousand human beings, having as yet suffered comparatively little loss from the direct attacks of the enemy. But the two dreadful nights of frost had already paralyzed them. “Only a few hundred serviceable fighting men remained.” At this point they were assailed in force by the savage Ghilzies. Losing men by their fire at each step, the column pressed on through the terrible defile. At the top of the pass they halted, leaving in it, according to Lieutenant Eyre, 3000 men, having in three days completed fifteen miles, and ascended to a still colder climate than they had left behind. . . . The next day, the fourth since leaving Cabool, was spent on the top of the Khoord Cabool, in negotiation and delay. Under the circumstances, this seems to have been sheer madness. One march more might have carried them clear of the snow. . . . [The delay] sealed the fate of the army, who must with the followers even now have amounted to more than 10,000 men, but most of them helpless, hopeless, and disabled; utterly without shelter, food, or fire; remaining day and night on the snow. The unfortunate natives of Hindostan suffered, of course, more than the English: hundreds of them were seen sitting on the snow, not sunk in the apathy of despair, but howling with pain.

On some pages the condemnation of Britain's international outlawry is ironic and epigrammatic. Defenses of wrongdoing often rest “upon the general but transparent error, that a good man in private life is incapable of injustice as a ruler. A man may be good and amiable towards Englishmen, and yet be unjust toward Affghans and Belooches.” Of the British ministers ultimately responsible: “The blood was shed far off,—[their] hands were never stained with it,—why should it be required at [their] hands?” “Since vice first paid to virtue the homage of hypocrisy, the conqueror has never wanted a pretext sufficient for all who chose to find it so.” “The Indian Government, however, were appar-
ently well satisfied with their own conduct towards Dost Mohamed; they wiped their mouth, and said they had done no evil.” “A conqueror, who renounces the harmlessness of the dove, should at least try to have a little more of the wisdom of the serpent.” “Surely, surely, we were not set up in India for this only: to teach its hundred nations once again the one lesson which it seems the world in six thousand years has perfectly learnt, that strength is strong.”

Other pages depend upon the building up and gentling down of rhetorical tension:

Many a worthy friend of civil liberty, who follows up with virtuous indignation the case of a drunken man, unjustly knocked down in the next street by a policeman, cares little whether it is with justice or injustice that we have slain our tens of thousands in Asia. Many a subscriber to Bible Societies, many a zealot in the cause of converting the heathen, hears with coldness, and considers with indifference, the recital of actions which may turn the hearts of countless millions against the very name of Christianity. This indifference is the cause, but it is part also the consequence, of ignorance, and of ignorance which is to a great sense unavoidable. . . .

A few words written in the Cabinet of England are like the sudden removal of a tiny bolt, setting free the complex forces of a great engine. The vast machinery of Oriental war stirs and works; armies march, artillery rolls, lands are wasted, cities are stormed, the thrones of Asia go down, half the human race is shaken with alarm. And for all this—the nation does not care. It must learn to care, if it would keep the right to be proud of its empire. . . .

It is an every-day remark, that the first step in wrong is often all. The man who has freely taken it finds himself no longer free. A second step must be taken, and then a third, each enforced by an increasing penalty. Nearly such is the progress of nations in a course of injustice; but with this difference, that to retract a criminal step is far more possible for an individual than for a statesman. At every stage of international transactions new interests spring up, new duties are contracted; and even if the right and wrong do not actually change sides, the result often is, that the nation cannot right its original wrong without wronging others whom it is bound to protect. This is part, and an appropriate part, of the penalty for national wrongs.

Paradoxically, we may think it now, all these apparently anticolonial sentences came from a man who still fervently believed in the idealist defense of colonialism, being convinced that even with “every drawback that can be
named, with all their faults, national and individual," the English represented to the Indian people "a something above . . . and better than themselves[,]" something to be respected and imitated, but "not if we place obstacles in the way: not if we teach them to make the significant distinction, 'We know that you are powerful; you say that you are just.'" England's "real mission" in India was "not to crush, but raise." Every "broken word, every gratuitous war, every unjust acquisition, not only stains the present indelibly, but retards or destroys some part of the promise of the future." All English persons indifferent to those considerations were "so far indifferent to their duties as English citizens"; persons in authority who failed to correct such abuses were "so far unfit to guide the destinies of England": and those who deliberately abused their power were "false to the best hopes of mankind, and ten times false to the highest glory of their country."

Henry had given his rhetorical all, and with no mere rhetoric. It was sufficient, but too late. The book sold scarcely at all. As Venables later recalled, "Henry Lushington's name was unknown, and he had allowed the height of flood to pass." The loss most regretted by Henry would not have been money. He never would have hoped for torrential sales, only for an audience fit though few. The theater, alas, was empty. Attention had shifted to other concerns, other sensations.

Fortunately in that summer of Henry's disappointed hope, Edmund as usual was present at Park House with Cecilia and the new child. Even more fortuitously, the beloved younger brother Tom returned in July on furlough from India after nearly thirteen years. Franklin, aged twenty-one, was home too; he had been only eight when Tom last saw him.

Additionally, a near-brother, Alfred Tennyson, would be around for much of the summer and fall. He had taken leave of the water-cure, saying he would return, but did not. By 29 July, after a jaunt into Wales, he was back in London, staying in Henry's and Venables's empty rooms in Mitre Court. About 15 August he abruptly turned up at Park House, visiting, among others, his sister and new nephew. On 19 September, Henry wrote Milnes that Alfred had come "down here one afternoon . . . bringing with him things for a day or so; and he is now entering the fifth week of his sojourn, with (I hope) every prospect of indefinite prolongation thereof." He seemed to have benefited "from the water treatment, or its concomitants. Yet he has been very unwell during the last three days." He would not exercise physically. "Indeed if one of the earlier set of Apostles were to heal him for the time ever so completely, he would not continue well—as long as he paid so little attention to the words of healing: 'arise and walk.' How can a man with such great natural strength of body live so indolently, & be well?" Henry, having himself almost no bodily strength, may
not have intuited what we may surmise: that his large-framed friend was undergoing some of the lassitude of depression, a condition periodically experienced by most if not all of Dr. Tennyson’s offspring—Edward the most grievously, but also indisputably Septimus and Arthur, as well as Cecilia Lushington.

Tennyson’s stay at Park House would not have extended much beyond mid-October. Cecilia and Edmund left early in the month. By 21 October, Henry had gone to visit Milnes at Fryston. Tennyson twice visited the Carlyles, in the early and middle parts of the month, while again staying in the Mitre Court rooms.\textsuperscript{14}

One would enjoy speculating that during those nearly two months at Park House, Tennyson had begun to write parts of The Princess, discussing them with Henry. Possibly, barely so, but evidence is lacking and probability seems poor. Park House was more than usually crowded just then, and Tennyson seems to have required relative solitude for composing, although afterward he could discuss revisions with those whose judgment he trusted. Martin, probably correctly, considers Tennyson’s health too poor during those weeks to produce much if any poetry.\textsuperscript{15} What he and Henry just then had in common, though not necessarily discussing it, was battered self-assurance. For six months Tennyson had shut himself away, much of the time proscribed from writing or reading, and had still not substantially recovered from his ailments. Henry had reached out to his fellow-Britons and had personally encountered that national deafness which his book had so forcefully condemned. Tennyson could give courage as well as receive. That had been his comradely way with Arthur Henry Hallam, who almost as much as Tennyson during their great four years of friendship had needed, and been accorded, a quality of reassurance that he was simultaneously reciprocating.