AT GLASGOW UNIVERSITY an era in classical education was ending. In April 1875 Edmund memorialized the University Court for permission to retire: he had "taught during thirty-seven sessions," had reached his sixty-fifth year, and as his physician, the beloved Dr. John Brown, duly certified, had become "permanently disabled for the performance of the duties of his office . . . from frequent and severe attacks of gout." The court, with the University Senate "unanimously and cordially concurring," voted him the honorary degree of LL.D.1 From 14 May he would receive an annual pension slightly above £62 (two-thirds of £1,293, his average annual earnings for his final five years, including the rental of £100 for his university house).2

Unfortunately, at Park House there was all too little likelihood of serene retirement for Edmund and Cecilia. Neither advancing age nor calendar-round propinquity was designed to charm away old tensions between the nominal mistress, nearing fifty-eight, and her three sisters-in-law, all in their mid- or later fifties. On 10 May, with the reunion looming, Venables could hardly believe it was his "last time of visiting Park House on the old footing which has lasted so many years."

But in reality, the next decade brought less of a change to either Cecilia or the others than might have been anticipated. She soon substantially removed herself, quietly residing most of the time at Dover with her maid and frequently
with her sister Matilda. Evidently, her emotional health remained least im-
paired when she could live, as she had done most of the time since 1860, with
only one or two other persons. Venables's journals and Edmund's letters reveal
the general pattern, although Cecilia may have sojourned at Park House during
certain gaps in the record.

She arrived with Edmund from Scotland on 20 May. By 19 June, when Vena-
bles and James Bryce came by the same train, she had left for Dover, where
Edmund joined her during part of July. She probably returned some time
around December, when Venables had a “distressing” letter from Ellen and
another from Franklin, “about P.H.” On the thirty-first Venables complained,
“The year closes very gloomily, P.H. shut to me”; and on New Year’s day,
“Everything wrong at P.H.” But by late April he felt free to visit, after being
away, including three months in Wales, for nine months, the “longest interval
since 1839.” On 31 July, Cecilia returned, but had left again before mid-
November, when Venables came for a week. On 3 May 1877 he wrote, “Mrs. L.
coming back at last”; she was still there on 20 June. Clues are lacking for the
remainder of that year. For the three years between March 1878 and June 1881,
there are no positive indications that Cecilia saw Park House at all. Venables
visited freely during March, April, June, and July 1878, never mentioning her;
Edmund was with her at Dover in November; she was absent from Park House
at Christmas. By Edmund’s own account she had remained at Dover through-
out the “long, bitter winter” of 1879, and was still there in May. He stayed
with her in parts of July and August, and again in November. Venables visited
Park House periodically through the spring and early summer of 1880. And so it
seems to have gone until 28 June 1881, when “Mrs. L. came home.” She was still
home, or there again, at the end of the year, when Venables spent ten days
there, but without seeing her once, since she was ill and keeping to her room.
During the first five months of 1882, Venables himself was dangerously ill in
Wales. When he returned to England, Cecilia was back at Dover. She and
Edmund visited the Tennysons at Farringford in August or September, after
which she seems to have been at Dover for most or all of 1883. Zilly was with
her during April, Edmund with her in July, and writing her at Dover in August.
At the end of that year, we lose our chronicler, when Venables’s surviving
journals cease. Cecilia and Edmund, in his first eight years of retirement, seem
to have lived apart no less, if not actually more, than previously.

Edmund’s honorary LL.D. from Glasgow was followed in 1876 by an hono-
rary D.C.L. from Oxford. By then he had become deeply immersed in a new
scholarly interest, Egyptology, a pursuit seriously begun before he left Glas-
gow. No later than 1872 he had joined the Society of Biblical Archaeology,
found ed by the eminent Egyptologist Samuel Birch (1813–85), of the British
Museum, under whose auspices Edmund eventually published six scholarly articles containing his own translations from the hieroglyphics. To his Park House library he brought an impressive array of German, French, and English books and journals about Egyptian antiquities, which his family enjoyed calling his "golden calves." When portions of his library were auctioned in 1929, the catalog listed no fewer than 185 volumes in Egyptology. And in 1980 Mr. Frank H. Mitchell of Sandling, near Park House, recalled that after the Lushington family sold the estate in 1936, a lot of old notebooks filled with hieroglyphics were left behind, perhaps inadvertently, and unceremoniously dumped by the new occupants into an old quarry pit.

While Edmund was passing through late middle age when he began studying the Egyptian language, the study itself was scarcely emerging from its infancy. The great pioneering works in the field, Jean François Champollion's *Grammaire Egyptienne* and *Dictionnaire Egyptienne*, were not published until after his death in 1832; and they remained under the shadow of fierce criticism until vindicated in the 1860s and later by scholars such as Karl Richard Lepsius (1810–84), and Gaston Gaspero (1846–1916). Not yet by anyone had the grammar of the language been adequately described. For a conscientious translator like Edmund, much remained at best conjectural. In the extensive notes appended to his translations, his forthright tentativeness is almost as interesting as the half-mythical battle histories emerging from the texts. "Of this usage," he writes, "no instance is known to me; still it suits the context." Or, "A phrase follows which perplexes me," and then forty-six lines discussing his perplexity and referring to the contributions of seven earlier scholars concerning various aspects of the problem. Again, "I cannot feel confident that the right interpretation is yet discovered. The words given above may vaguely convey the general meaning." Or even more frankly, "The text here is very obscure. . . . I doubt if my reading of Sallier can be right." Yet here and there he permits himself to disagree with established authorities, even with an H. K. Brugsch or Birch. Perhaps more than a century later these articles would retain for specialists little more than retrospective interest; but from a biographical perspective, their worth is immense. Since Edmund did not publish in his own field of Greek, these pieces document uniquely his admirable blend of intent concentration, unpretentious integrity, and wholehearted, if understated, affection for all the phenomena of ancient language.

In retirement Edmund entered all the more heartily into fraternal association with Cecilia's brothers and sisters. In October 1875 he wrote the eldest, Frederick, then briefly in England from his home on Jersey. Could he and his daughter spare a few days for Park House? "I have seen this year four brothers Charles Alfred Arthur Horatio—a pleasure now too seldom granted me—and should not
willingly miss the sight of the other one.” Frederick did not come, but until near the end of Edmund’s life, his letters to Frederick were frequent and full, conveying news not only about the Lushington family and old Cambridge friends but about the Tennyson brothers and sisters as well. In fact, Edmund, a Tennyson by adoption only, seems to have appointed himself a sort of clearing-house for informing Tennysons about other Tennysons.

A mutually amused epistolary camaraderie flourished between Edmund and Charles Tennyson Turner. Charles, at tiny Grasby in his remote wolds parsonage, remained the most conventionally scholarly of the Tennysons. Edmund could indulge a heavyhanded playfulness by sending him versified epistles alternating English doggerel with Greek, Latin, and German. He would twit Charles on his stodgy theological conservatism, and Charles would return goodnatured volleys at Edmund’s German-conditioned heterodoxy:

There was a wight what lost his sight at Tubingen & Bonn
And then avouched he’d not be couched—for oculist was none
In English parts, if it were so, but seeing as he did
As clear as Hegel Strauss or Baum he valued not a “quid”
The “crumbe” of old Mother Church, with which she fondly feeds
The addle-brains of British clerks, to keep them up to creeds.

“But,” Charles wrote, “you seem to have an attachment at times to really orthodox books—which puzzles me. Am I to judge you by ‘the Christ of History,’ St. Augustine, Thomas A Kempis or by your anti-Christian squibs?” In another interchange Edmund characterized Charles in pseudo-Byronic couplets:

His thousand virtues soil’d by but one crime—
The crime, indeed, was one that rightly shocks ye,
The man was deeply tinged with Orthodoxy.
Well—Orthodoxy the sole fault he had?
Bad—but for British parson not too bad.
Let’s hope he sometime of this sin repented,
And from his narrow bleareyed sect dissented.

More soberly, in the same letter Edmund remonstrated against Charles’s unjust censure of Frederick Temple: “I am curious & really anxious to know on what grounds you speak of Temple’s name as ‘out of tune with Xtian faith’—this is to me incomprehensible & I seek for light & think any one who has read his sermons wd be greatly surprised at such an expression.”

By early 1878 both Charles and his careworn Louisa, Emily Tennyson’s sister, had suffered breakdowns—Louisa’s involving mental depression—and
left Grasby for their last time. Martin writes that Charles “went slowly down­
hill from general debility to seizures and paralysis in the last month or two”
before dying on 25 April 1879.10 Both at Bristol, where at first he stayed, and
finally at Cheltenham, his physician had been Alfred’s old friend Dr. Ker,
brother-in-law of Mary Tennyson Ker. At first Harriet Tennyson, Arthur’s
wife, nursed him; and when she became disabled with bronchitis, Edmund
came out to relieve her.11 From his letters to the Tennysons, it appears that he
was again at the bedside when Charles died. “Dear Mary” Ker had been “ad­
mirable in her devoted attention.” Charles himself throughout had exhibited
“unfailing sweetness amid much suffering.” His nurse declared “she never saw
anyone so gentle & considerate of others, never knew anyone like him. His
tender gratitude for any little help was exquisitely beautiful, & his cheerfulness
& humour kept up its native grace to the last.” Charles had yearned that his
later sonnets might be published. “Every line,” as Edmund read them, “seemed
to bring himself before me with wonderful vividness; each word seems a living
utterance of his inmost being, alike in playful or solemn, always gracious
mood.” Louisa, confined at Salisbury, had not been informed: “We thought it
much better that the information should come from you.”12 In less than a
month, poor Louisa was buried beside her husband.

Enclosed in Edmund’s letter to Alfred and Emily was an elegy he had written
for Charles, in fifty-eight quiet couplet lines. “Sweet friendship” had given
him no dearer friend than this one, with his “rich rare wit,” his “heart’s pure
warmth,” his “unalloy’d” graciousness—one whose “childlike simpleness of
truth / Reveal’d his mind’s unfailing youth.” The elegy memorializes the dead
friend’s “grand thought weighted brow,” his ever guileless, never spiteful
manner of speech, his poetic gift—“lightnings of poetic thought,” fanciful,
tender, reverent. His face in death carried a “strange & awful loveliness/
Attuned by death’s grave earnestness / To holier beauty”—a “pure chill
beauty” that relieved sorrow and quickened “trust / That while thy dust de­
scends to dust, / Even now thy soul is glorified, / Friend, brother, lover, angel
guide.”

Since Dr. Ker had refused payment for his medical services, Edmund ini­
tiated and coordinated a Tennysonian group gift for him. “I think,” he wrote
Frederick, “if you and Alfred take part all the brothers & sisters will be glad to
contribute something—few things wd gratify me more.”13 Alfred broke ranks
and sent a set of his own works, but the others jointly sent a “handsomely bound
copy” of the nine-volume Dyce’s Shakespeare, which the doctor warmly ac­
knowledged. Since Franklin Lushington was one of the trustees of Charles’s
will, Edmund wrote Frederick several letters concerning the distribution
among the heirs and the disposal of the Grasby property.14
In 1875, soon after Alfred published his first play, *Queen Mary*, Edmund happily transmitted its commendations by two of his scholarly friends. The drama’s “simplicity,” “realism,” and “self-restraint” had surprised the professor of moral philosophy at Glasgow. The laureate had “resources that have never been shown.” And “leaving out of question Shakespeare’s endless luxuriance & life” (hardly trivial omissions), the professor thought the play came “nearer to Shakespeare in grasp of the situation than any other drama” he had seen in English. Also the formidably learned and hard-to-please Bishop Connop Thirlwall, whom Edmund had seen at Bath (then seventy-eight, almost totally blind, in the last year of his life), had “heard Q Mary read to him & hoped to hear it again & was rather sorry” Tennyson “had not tried the dramatic line sooner.”

Edmund himself in early 1877 hailed the second play, *Harold*: its “greatness” struck him “quite as forcibly as ever or more so—& its beauty—I shd only waste time in trying to say how much I feel & admire these.” But if Alfred would bear with him, could later editions not contrive to show “more of the struggle” in Harold’s mind before he “seems to yield too easily” and “half abandons Edith and takes Aldwyth” for his consort? Could the thing not be done with “some grand soliloquy here and there” to “make the change less abrupt & be in itself a further help to portray his nobleness?” The action was “almost too rapid & anything that wd make Harold’s weakness in the points in which he is weak less palpable wd make him more interesting as well as nobler.” Characteristically too, Edmund yearned for Tennyson to magnify his glorification of ideal womanhood. “Sweet and beautiful” as Edith was, one saw “too little of her to know her as she deserves to be known.”

In late February came the wedding of Lionel Tennyson to Eleanor Locker, daughter of Tennyson’s friend Frederick Locker (later Locker-Lampson), in Westminster Abbey, with Edmund and Cecilia present. A son was born before the end of the year, and before the next year ended, a second son, who would become Sir Charles Tennyson, barrister, businessman, biographer of Tennyson and his family, and warmhearted encourager of Tennysonian scholars. The godfather of the infant Charles was Edmund. It is ironical that Sir Charles, whose fine memory remained proverbial until his death in his ninety-eighth year, worried about having no recollection of Cecilia, although he was almost thirty before she died. Most probably he never saw her. She traveled very little during his boyhood, and evidently by the time of his adulthood, she seldom if ever left Park House.

Toward the end of 1879, Zilly at thirty-three became a published author when the firms of Griffith and Farran in London and E. P. Dutton in New York jointly issued her brief work of fiction, *Fifty Years in Sandbourne*, less chokingly
sentimental than its plot might have made it. Its theme is endurance of suffering: a young woman learns to bear the death of her new husband and years later the simultaneous drowning of twin sons, one of whom from his sagacious vicar had learned to bear the double loss of ability to walk and, consequently, of the woman he loved. Edmund explained to Frederick Tennyson that Zilly’s story was “her own,” the seaside town of Sandbourne being based upon Eastbourne, “a place familiar to her from early childhood, & to me from sixty years back.”

Frederick, preoccupied as always with Swedenborgianism, wrote to Zilly, acknowledging her “picturesque and pathetic sketches,” then launching into one of his compulsive theological disquisitions: “‘Trust in the Lord’ seems to be the keynote of your little book—the golden threads which run through the dark web of your village histories and thus redeem them from the outer darkness of gorgeous tragedy. . . . But who is this Lord?” To assist his niece with that supreme question, Frederick dispatched a book “which within the framework of a slight tale embodies in the form of a sort of Platonic dialogue the teachings of the Higher Christianity or New Church which is making its way slowly into all churches and must prevail being truth itself.”

Zilly’s response, affectionate but independent, paid tribute to her own liberal nurturing as daughter of the Lushingtons and of Park House. Frederick’s Swedenborgian book “might be useful to some persons who are, or fancy themselves to be, unbelievers,” but it was “hardly what I feel in any way fitted to my own needs.” The “narrow, bigoted tone against which it declaims never was in my bringing up or my belief.” She had “known too much of love and sorrow to be able to find comfort in any but the widest conception of the love of God.” To her, George Fox’s words, “I saw an ocean of darkness and death; but an infinite ocean of light and love which flowed over the ocean of darkness,” were “a grand expression of the one hope which makes life endurable with patience.”

One of the bitterest disappointments of Edmund’s retirement years was the fiasco of the botched attempt of the Conservative student faction at Glasgow in the spring of 1880 to nominate Tennyson to succeed Gladstone in the lord rectorship, ending in Tennyson’s embarrassed withdrawal and the election of John Bright. Hallam Tennyson’s terse account is, by the most charitable reckoning, an innocuous obfuscation of a complex sequence of events: “He [Tennyson] had understood that the invitation had come from the whole body of students irrespective of political party. The manifesto of the Glasgow Independent Club recognized his condition. He found however that he had been put forward as a nominee of the Conservative party and at once withdrew.” In reality, the Independent Club had become significant participants in the farce only after Tennyson’s withdrawal—not before. The documents, no fewer than fifteen letters and two telegrams at the Tennyson Research Centre, establish that
two members of the Conservative Club first visited Tennyson at Farringford, accurately presented themselves as spokesmen for the Conservatives, correctly informed him that the Liberals were nominating the controversial Bright, but succeeded in persuading the poet that he would be almost universally accepted on purely literary, rather than political, grounds. Several weeks after Tennyson's final refusal, Matthew Fraser, the Conservatives' chief spokesman, wrote to plead with him for a short statement vindicating Fraser and his associate of having dealt underhandedly:

I would respectfully ask you in a short note which might be published simply to state that the deputation which waited on you did not deceive you (1st) as to their being representatives of the Glasgow University Conservative Club (2nd) as to their wishing you to be the nominee of that Club and (3rd) as to Mr. Bright being already in the field. I would not have made this application to you had I not believed that it was my duty to do so in the interests of our Club, and I feel sure that you will not allow us to lie under the imputation of having acted deceitfully. 24

It seems improbable that Tennyson provided the statement; but it would have been sheer effrontery for Fraser to request it if the claims had been untrue.

The Conservatives had, nevertheless, been rash and obtuse, having returned to Glasgow and euphorically issued a hastily edited circular embellished with rhetoric that the Liberals would certainly construe as generally political and specifically anti-Bright:

Though mingling little in the turmoil of the world, the Poet-Laureate has never hesitated to give forcible expression to his opinions regarding England's place among the nations of Europe. With lofty scorn he has denounced that insular selfishness which would leave England without a foreign policy. His belief in those great constitutional principles which have made our country what it is is none the less unwavering because it is seldom openly declared. 25

After such baiting, the Liberals felt gloriously liberated to counterattack, both on the quadrangle and in Glasgow newspapers. They were not impeded by Fraser's belated announcement on 3 May that Tennyson had agreed to stand only if "we would promote his candidacy on purely literary grounds. Every one will at once admit that we could have no other object in view in nominating Mr. Tennyson, and we intend strictly to conform to his expressed intentions." One valiant Liberal, not much bolder than some others, volleyed back, "But since Mr. Tennyson has consented to be the nominee of a purely political party . . . he must be prepared to accept" a "crushing . . . defeat." Unwise
Tennysonian supporters began fiercely berating Bright as a preacher of “peace at any price,” a Philistine scorners of higher education, a demagogue outside the Commons and a propagandist within it for his own “opulent trading and manufacturing class.”

Tennyson withdrew in a letter to Fraser published in the *Times* (London). He could not “appear what I have steadfastly refused to be—a party candidate.” The “mere fact of a contest between . . . a nominee for a Liberal and . . . a Conservative Club leads, I suppose, inevitably to this conclusion in the minds of the public.” Furthermore, several years earlier he had declined to be the candidate of the Glasgow Liberals. (Strictly speaking, that claim was only partly true.) But he would “gladly accept a nomination . . . at anytime” from a “body of students, bearing no political name” or from “both Liberals and Conservatives” jointly recognizing only “the literary merits you are good enough to appreciate.” Thereupon, the Conservatives proposed to withdraw and turn over the poet’s cause to the Independent Club; but at that, the most activated Liberals hooted that transparently the Tories were pandering to the Independents by offering to fight under their colors.

It was Tennyson’s unwillingness to accept the sponsorship of the Independents that most painfully disappointed Edmund. “His letter said at any time, not another time . . . After the offer thrown out in the letter it will be very hard on his loyal supporters if he withdraws.” On 10 May, Edmund had begged Tennyson: “I say, earnestly, pray do not do this—it would have the worst effect possible; it would tend to damp the generous ardour felt for high literary achievement & it would grieve me deeply.” The university would “lose what would be an honour to herself, & proferred by the young men to you in a spirit of becoming & true admiration.” On the eleventh he argued: “If the honest feelings of the students is in favour of electing the Country’s highest name in literature, who has a right to say that the contest is made a political one?” Tennyson’s “retiring after giving his assent would absolutely be fatal to literary eminence being ever considered as the chief ground on which students might venture to bring forward a candidate.” To himself it would be “most painful,” both on “public and on personal grounds.”

On the twelfth an editorial writer in the *Glasgow Herald* wistfully summed up the case. Tennyson would have to “wait long for that halcyon period when strife of parties is silent in the College quadrangle, and the student youth of polemical and political Scotland emulate each other in recording their votes for men distinguished by learning and genius, and the peaceful arts.” Tennyson’s election would have been a great honor to the university, “but we cannot say that in withdrawing from a political contest he has taken a course in which any of his real friends will disagree with him.”
Even Edmund—and Tennyson never had any friend more real—achieved greater detachment by early June, admitting that the greatest offender had been the Conservatives' circular with its "phrases obviously . . . poking at the opposite side," giving "colour to the plea that the contest must take the form of political antagonism." Tennyson might have acted differently if the circular had only generally "described Mr. T's writings as inspired with noble and patriotic feeling." But "declarations . . . from all sides that it could not help being a party candidature . . . carried against what I could say."  

Early that October, Edmund's mellowed thoughts turned backward forty-two years when he found himself spending some pleasant hours with the two other men who in 1838 had most desired the Glasgow Greek professorship. One of them, A. C. Tait, archbishop of Canterbury, whom Edmund had several times briefly met, had invited him and Zilly to Addington Park, the archdiocesan palace. Then thoughtfully, Tait had invited his old Oxford friend Robert Lowe (Lord Sherbrooke), Edmund's former bitter rival. As Edmund informed Alfred, the three aging men, "Archy, Bob, & I drove under 3 umbrellas in a pony chaise. . . . The rain was steady & sharp enough to put out any lingering sparks of our ancient antagonisms." "Archy" had been "very kind & social, with a good deal of anecdote & humour, I like him very much, & Lowe was affable and pleasant."  To Hallam, Edmund ponderously quipped, " . . . You will at once admit the cogency of the argument that if I had not become Grk. Prof. I should probably have been either Archbishop of Canterbury or Chancellor of the Exchequer—or possibly both."  

Enthusiastically Edmund hailed Tennyson's admirably varied 1880 volume, Ballads and Other Poems, his first new collection in eight years. Edmund, perhaps predictably, preferred the contrived melodrama of "The Sisters" (classing it with "Enoch Arden wh I always thought one of your noblest poems in pathos & grandeur") to the starker, innovative "Rizpah," because the "real blank verse" in "The Sisters" pleased him more than "the other metre, however admirably managed." Predictably too he admired the metaphysical "De Profundis," comparing it with "sundry short poems of Gothe." He had no toleration for "shallow & narrow criticism" that objected to metaphysical ideas in verse: it might "just as fairly be said" that Hamlet had "no right to think or utter many of his speeches." He praised "all the little dedicatory poems . . . very tender & graceful," and "The Voyage of Maeldune"—"wonderfully fine and imaginative," with "a wizard roll in the verse suiting so wild a story." Such martial poems as "The Ballad of the Revenge" and "The Defence of Lucknow" reinforced his patriotic bellicosity against uncontrolled terrorism in Ireland and Gladstone's apparently spineless foreign policy around the world: "our sham Government, wh lets half Ireland be enslaved by the hatefulest tyranny,
& truckles to murderous ruffianism, blind to the shame & guilt of doing nothing to stop triumphant savagery." Some of "this volume might at least teach those who have forgotten it what brave men can do." In the same letter Edmund was the one to inform the Tennysons about Arthur Tennyson's recent illness and, indeed, the latest mailing address of Arthur and his wife, Harriet.33

In the spring of 1883, Venables, almost seventy-three, finally retired from the Parliamentary Bar, after having been honored at a Bar dinner. In September, Edmund and Zilly spent two weeks with him at the family estate at Llysdinam, Newbridge-on-Wye, where a new church built for the parish by Venables himself had recently been dedicated.

Tennyson that August had gone at the queen's invitation for a friendly conversation in her own room at Osborne. Edmund, receiving Alfred's account, wrote, "It makes one's love of the Queen still warmer if that were needed, to know how truly she can know & honour true greatness & nobleness when she has an opportunity of meeting them." When later that year Tennyson, probably at the direct behest of the queen, was raised to the peerage, Edmund rejoiced "that you are to keep your true name, the name loved & admired for 50 years, with no mean additions." Alfred had made unsuccessful overtures toward discomfiting his cousins by appropriating the name Tennyson d'Eye-court. Edmund felt a "profound . . . sense of relief" that it would not be so.35

Soon he had to turn from felicitating one Tennyson brother to consoling another, Frederick, upon the death of his wife, Maria. It was an uneasy task, so divergent were his own tentative views of the afterlife from Frederick's. He could only "offer my earnest wishes that all the earthly comfort possible may come to you from the love of those nearest you who are left, & that comfort from a higher source may not fail, as I trust it never does those who seek for it, as you will, in a true spirit." Cecilia, without inhibitions, poured out her heart: her brother's was "a sorrow which time can never really heal." It was nine years "since I lost my Lucy. No human being ever loved me as she loved me, except my Mother. Your loved one has met our Mother & my Lucy up above. Oh that we were there with them." Maria had been "all in all" to Frederick, as "Lucy was to me, therefore I know your sorrow. . . . 'Tis better to have loved and lost / Than never to have loved at all." 37

In April 1884 death came quickly to Mary Ker, the eldest Tennyson sister, three months after Frederick's Maria. "Words can say little," Edmund wrote the doubly bereaved old man. "Even if I had better mastery of thm, I could not express my deep sympathy with you." Within a few weeks all "the shadowy fleetingness of life, and at the same time its awful reality," had been pressed upon him through the deaths of three who had been "intimately known & dear." About a week before Mary, "there was Monteith," his friend through
fifty years "of intimacy," like Mary "seeming quite well a few days before, &
like her succumbing with strange swiftness to congestion of lungs." And poor
Francis Garden (son of Monteith's elder sister and a fellow Apostle) was "lin­
gering on, lying conscious but hardly able to speak, peacefully sinking." 38

Alfred's mediocre short plays The Cup and The Falcon left Edmund in a quan­
dary. It was never comfortable either to dispraise, or ignore, his sensitive
brother-in-law; but The Cup he could honestly commend only mildly, The Fal­
con hardly at all. It was "always a grief . . . not to be able wholly to sympa­
thize with & admire whatever you write, but I believe you would rather have
my true feelings exprest than mere vague compliments." Alfred had "accus­
tomed" him to "such an ideal of perfection that I feel intitled to look for what I
have almost universally found & love to find." 39

After the great crowd at the wedding of Hallam Tennyson and Audrey
Boyle in Westminster Abbey in June 1884 had blocked Edmund and Cecilia
from greeting the Tennysons, Edmund wrote to reassure them of his love. "It
was hard to bear not to be able to see & speak to you & Emmy. . . . See you
indeed I did & the two little boys in front of you, but I never did catch a glimpse
of her." Perhaps, though, it would be "easier to say this in writing than it would
have been to say anything in the midst of the crowd." He could express "but
feebly" all that he felt and wished for them, "all that the memory of quiet
Shiplake [the Tennysons' wedding] of that morning & of the years that have
past since brought before my mind during the solemn service." The "journey &
everything" had been "much of a trial" for Cecilia; she was not well, but he
trusted she might soon recover strength. 40

By then half through his seventy-fourth year and well into the tenth of his
uneventful retirement, Edmund would have harbored no aspirations beyond
the ancient rituals of routinely living, extending and receiving affection, grad­
ually aging, eventually dying. With his long-beloved studies to occupy his
thoughts, and nourish his soul, he could not have yearned for more. But fate was
reserving for him one final happy surprise. On 6 November that year, Henry
Fawcett, the elected lord rector of Glasgow University, a man who had risen
above the handicap of total blindness to become a respected economist and
public servant, died of congestion of the lungs within nine days of the statutory
date for a rectorial election. Thoughts at Glasgow may well have reverted four
years to the unfortunate contretemps when Tennyson might have accepted the
honor had it been extended nonpartisanly and unanimously. But could anybody
confidently depend upon the temperamental poet, now a peer, to make up his
mind on such brief notice to accept? Certainly he would not give the customary
rectorial address, for he had so stipulated in 1880. But from a sense of duty
would not his scholarly brother-in-law, beloved at Glasgow, accept and speak?
Unanimously, the students elected Edmund. He confided to a nephew of Ceci-
lia's that he would have "preferred remaining quiet & not coming again into this sort of publicity"; but it would be "a very great pleasure to meet so many of my old friends and colleagues together," perhaps for the last time.\(^{41}\)

As Edmund approached the podium on 26 March 1885, he seemed momentarily "dazed" (perhaps merely fighting back tears?), until his former student and longtime colleague William Thomson (later Lord Kelvin) stepped up to reassure him. One report years later claimed that inconsiderately noisy students drowned out parts of the speech; another report maintained that the noise was merely their "enthusiastic reception."\(^{42}\) The address\(^{43}\) carried echoes of Edmund's 1870 dedicatory speech, but the later, and shorter, discourse began more confidently and remained almost uniformly eloquent, conveying, as Lewis Campbell described it, "the experience and authority of age."\(^{44}\)

Edmund exhorted his hearers to fortify one another's zeal for learning: "Communion of mind with mind is the most powerful help to mental growth . . . in such intercourse he who gives receives, and is made richer in giving what awakens new life in another." Learning is progressive: "Every decad [sic], almost every year, opens new vistas through which the piercing eye . . . may look forward bright in the hope of adding something more to the store of accomplished good to mankind; for in knowledge as in nature, nothing is unfruitful."

"What," he asked, "is this being of ours which thinks, plans, and wills? What means it? Whither tends it? This, the question of questions, from far distant periods, souls possess with profound genius have dared to ask and yearned for a reply." The early Greek philosophers led to Plato and Aristotle, through whose "unsurpassed lucidity of diction . . . we are led into the very foundry of ideas, and can follow the subtle process of new-born thought growing clearer to itself, and shaping language into its close-fitting outward venture." In literature "the creations of imaginative art, in clear-eyed intelligence and vivid description of man's life and doings, in the mastery of potent words, spurring men on to noble deeds, in all outcomings of mental activity, we have models of high excellence preserved to us, which should deepen our obligation to the great minds of bygone eras."

The old classicist pleaded against innovative proposals to replace teaching of the ancient languages with study of the classics in translation. Surely not even the "best translation into a foreign tongue could do full justice either to Shakespeare or Burns." Only through the originals could one fully realize the "stormy concentrated strength" of the "battle-music" in Homer; the "stern and awful moral grandeur" of Aeschylus; the "calm, solemn, piously tender earnestness" of Sophocles; the "simple, open-eyed, truth-loving curiosity" of Herodotus; the "grave, lofty thoughtfulness" of Thucydides; or the "burning words in which the pure, high-souled Demosthenes strove to wake a noble, but
half-enervated and easily deluded community, to a living sense of their inherited glories and duties."

Knowledge was advancing dramatically through archaeological explorations, the "excavation of magnificent buildings, the discovery of sites and localities, long known and unsuspected," the unearthing and reading of "inscriptions in manifold dialects." Recent developments in comparative philology had enabled men to "trace in divers languages, by carefully analyzing their inmost form and structure, the brotherhood which comprehends us as members of one large family."

No less important was the burgeoning study of English literature. The "more we grow familiar with the life-teeming freshness of Chaucer, the better shall we be prepared to appreciate the peerless sovereignty of Shakespeare" and "the severe sublimity of Milton." Burns and Wordsworth were "two morning stars of a new dawn of poetry"; and the prematurely dying Shelley and Byron were succeeded by equally worthy youthful poets "who have created new forms of beauty and loftiness . . . teaching that the guiding light for poet and for man should be 'self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control' "(that quotation, of course, was from Tennyson's "Oenone"), and that "beauty is the most beautiful when it reflects the inner essence of goodness."

In all knowledge, "though 'the scale is infinite,' we may yet draw nearer to the light, and obtain in drawing nearer the assurance of an inexhaustible light beyond. The most expanded knowledge, gazing from afar towards the immeasurable height above, is also the most humbling." Students should "never forget that it is a sacred and humbling duty to improve and strengthen the faculties given you; that they are bestowed for a high purpose . . . extending beyond any limits of time; that every human soul bears the seed of a boundless destiny . . . for each one to nourish and rear into fulness of growth and make fruitful of abiding good, by faithful, unwavering devotion to truth and duty."

Four nights later at Maclean's Hotel, Edmund's old students gave him a dinner attended by more than 120 men. The printed toast list included a sonnet:

Our dear old Master! little changed the face
Which had such charm for us in vanished days,
How sweetly fell thy sparing words of praise,
How lashed thy tongue whate'er was mean or base!

Few were the students on whose hearts no trace
Was left of contact ever wont to raise;
The boldest shrank before thy quick eye's blaze,
And all revered thy dignity and grace!
And now there comes to thee in green old age
The crowning honour of an honoured life,
The choice of thee has blotted from the page
All politics and every dream of strife;
Lord Rectors may have boasted greater fame,
None ever bore a nearer or a dearer name.

The usual monotonous toasts lauded the queen; the army, navy, and volunteers; the Scottish universities; the professions (clergy, law, medicine, education); the commercial interests (so important to Glasgow); and the new lord rector himself. The chairman, James A. Campbell, M.P., declaimed that “under Professor Lushington we all learned from a living example what was meant by the enthusiasm of scholarship and the graces of culture.” His unanimous election by students who had never known him was “sufficient testimony” to his merits. From their fathers many had heard of the “professor who . . . had cast such lustre on the University.” Edmund, responding, expressed his pleasure in “grasping the hands of those whom I count as my friends.” If some of their names and faces had been forgotten, his “interest in their fortunes and their kindness” would “ever be unforgotten.” He memorialized his beloved late colleague William Ramsay, whose “kindly, benignant, and ever-ready and ever-wise help and counsel” had smoothed the way for him when he first arrived in Scotland. All the love and praise his listeners had extended would remain “a stimulus” to him. It would be “base to have received such affectionate and warm commendation without doing the utmost that lies within me to prove that it is not entirely without meaning.”

All the ceremonies concluded, Edmund worked his leisurely way back to Park House—first to Edinburgh, where he had “almost as many old friends to see as at Glasgow”; then to Northumberland to visit Venables’s widowed sister-in-law; thence to London for a few days with Franklin; on down to Bournemouth (“quite new to me, & interesting in many ways”), where Zilly had been staying for her health; finally to Alfred and Emily at Aldworth, their mainland home high on Blackdown in Sussex. Alfred was “very well,” Emily “undoubtedly much better than she has been,” and “Hallam & his bride seemed very happy in each other.”

Back at Park House in May, he felt obliged on principle to disappoint Cecilia’s sister, Emily Jesse, by refusing to contribute to her fervently cherished cause of antivivisection. Her letter to him probably resembled one she wrote Frederick at about the same time. She and Richard, her navy captain husband, had “lately been so thoroughly horrified and almost palsy stricken” by the findings of the Royal Commission on Vivisection that they had “begun the fight
against such devilish deeds direct from the mouth of Hell. I said the other day to Richard that if I could commit a murder the victim would be a vivisector.” Frederick contributed a sovereign (about ten shillings). Edmund sent an apology: “It grieves me to have to decline to accede to a request which I well know you make from pure benevolence.” But he was unconvinced that the antivivisectionist movement was “altogether right, or that wanton cruelties are in the habit of being practised by such men as Sir John Paget & others.” It seemed “a very difficult point to determine how far pain which we unscrupulously give in obtaining animal food for ourselves is permissible or otherwise for the sake of being able to relieve severe human suffering.” Not being “free from doubt,” he would have to abstain.

Edmund, then seventy-five, would live for another eight years, three of them as his old university’s lord rector, cheerfully free from duties to perform. Less agreeably, he suffered his share of financial losses as a rural landowner during the agricultural depression of the latter 1880s—plots of land unrented, tenants unable to pay, hops rotting on vines for want of a tolerable market price. “It is really a very serious business,” Franklin wrote Venables in 1887, “for so incapable an innocent as Edmund to have a 250 acre farm with 30 acres of hops thrown into his hands [unrented] at his time of life, and I don’t see how he is to be helped out of it.” Fortunately, during these years Cecilia, living less at Dover and more with him at Park House, seems to have been relatively undepressed although never physically healthy. Zilly’s health too was often precarious. Edmund himself, until his final two years, seems to have remained comparatively well except for recurrent lameness.

Of his three remaining sisters, Ellen, the youngest, was first to die, on 14 January 1886, after decades of semi-invalidism still only sixty-four. Replying to spiritistic consolations from Frederick, Edmund spoke merely of “a field for reverent loving hope” that “beloved beings who have past away from sight of our corporeal eyes” may be “yet present spiritually, wielding gracious & helpful influence to draw us on to good.” That possibility could hardly be denied by any one “who has felt the beneficent spell of the earthly intercourse with pure & noble characters.” Actually, “no science can explain how the miracle of soul communing with soul is effected,” even through “the medium of sense—how it is that certain pulses of the air convey to my mind the thoughts of another mind.” No “less” then, “without the evidence of sense this marvel of spiritual communion may be accepted & looked to as one of God’s methods of reaching our spirits, & drawing them up to Himself.” All of which was much too tentative for such a forthright supernaturalist as Frederick. On another occasion Frederick described a friend who had “proclaimed himself an Agnostic—and it would seem that all Agnostics—or sceptics—for they are convertible
terms—do not agree as to their scepticism.” This one was “not a Materialist but did not believe an iota of Spiritualism—for which he substituted a belief in Metaphysics—precisely resembling Edmund Lushington in that respect.”

Weak-eyed Maria, most serene of the sisters, would live on until 19 January 1891, eleven days short of her seventy-fifth birthday. For several months, as Edmund reported, she was bedridden, “but not often suffering pain or illness, cheerful & taking interest in everything around her, eager to help in any way that she possibly could, as in knitting woolen things for poor people, & our labourers.” Three days before the end, a stroke paralyzed her left side, impairing her speech. On her last evening she asked Edmund to read James Montgomery’s hymn “‘Forever with the Lord”—and indeed if ever those words may apply to a human being they may fitly be spoken of her whose life was so deeply loving & unselfish, actively devoted to the good of others, a beautiful & holy life, such as must purify & help Godward the spirits of those who knew her.”

Unfortunately, when Emily died on 3 April 1893 at seventy-five, Edmund himself would be too ill to pen her eulogy. The Kent Messenger only partially supplied the need: an “estimable lady, who though she led a rather retired life, was a keen sympathizer with the poor and needy in their troubles and trials.”

On 6 October 1888, as Edmund informed Frederick, death had taken Venables, “one of the truest friends & most genuine noble-hearted men that ever lived.” Although seventy-eight and gradually failing, he had spent a late-August week at Park House, driving daily with Edmund and walking vigorously two or three miles. He proceeded to the Tennysons at Aldworth, but almost immediately fell ill, hurried back to London, seemed to be improving, but had “a bad fall, & was unconscious . . . longer than . . . in 2 or 3 earlier falls,” then two days later died. “With no family was he for many years on terms of more intimate friendship than ours, the change & loss to us is exceeding great, & yet it is surpassing strange.” That Maria, recently quite ill, survived him “like many other surprises . . . presses upon us the mystery of life & death & of all things—a mystery to whose darkness we must bow till it be finally dissolved, as we hope it may, into reconciling light.”

Frederick, almost seventy-eight, had published no poems for three decades when Edmund in the spring of 1885 began urging him to do so: “I earnestly wish & exhort you to think of publishing another volume of poems. You must have plenty at hand well worthy of it.” Edmund had “seen some very beautiful ones, & wish I had seen more, but you have lived so remote from many who care for you. . . . You owe it to yourself & to the Power who bestowed the gift of poesy on you not to let it be hidden under a napkin.” On 17 November 1887, after Frederick had authorized Hallam Tennyson to ready a blank-verse volume based upon Sapphic materials, Edmund wrote Frederick to raise some
questions of Greek mythology and suggest greater compression—good advice for so profuse a poet—and even some omissions. By August 1888 the project, largely transferred from Hallam to Hardwick Rawnsley, was dragging on; the book remained unpublished; and Frederick had turned eighty-one. Edmund had urged Hallam to “quicken the Revd sonneteer [Rawnsley] in the business,” but had received no reply. It seemed “important that no time should be lost—it would be a most grievous loss if the whole were to come to nothing.”

Two months later Edmund had again urged Hallam “to poke up H. Rawnsley about your poems, & he promised to attend to it—people are sometimes unaccountably slow.” On 18 July 1889, with Frederick’s eyesight failing, Edmund sent him several pages of general criticisms, urging still further cutting and compressing.

By late October, with the Isles of Greece manuscript in some kind of shape at last and Walter Ker, Mary Tennyson’s son, seeing it through the press, Edmund was back urging the old poet to start preparing another volume.

With Frederick’s book finally published, Edmund could happily relay appreciations from his friends. He cheered Frederick on to anticipate later editions by rounding up all the typographical and other errors in the first, a list of which he enclosed. By then Edmund himself was eighty and his own health in decline. His letters to Frederick ceased, or have not survived. Frederick, fated to outlive him by almost five years, would publish two more new volumes (the last when eighty-eight), before dying in 1898 in his ninety-first year.

Alfred with his surprising poetic fecundity in old age required no prodding. Edmund could comment, generally with satisfaction, as each new book appeared. He rejoiced in the “undecaying strength” of Tiresias and Other Poems (1885)—“all . . . rich in power & grace.” “The Ancient Sage” was “the grandest & dearest poem of the volume.” He heartily welcomed two older poems, published at last: “Early Spring,” a “delicate flower of exquisite beauty wh in its earliest shape I had by heart between 40 & 50 years ago,” and “Tiresias,” enhanced by the new dedication and requiem, both for FitzGerald. “The Wreck” and “Despair,” with “all their deep pathos & beauty,” were “almost too painful” (a lenient verdict upon both). In “Balin and Balan” Edmund, characteristically squeamish about less-than-lovely female characters, “wd gladly have seen less of Vivien or dispensed with her presence altogether. She made herself hateful enough years ago in Merlin & needed not to be held up to detestation again.” (But as Alfred had projected the total Idylls, the newer poem, preceding the older, would be introducing Vivien.) Edmund, writing to Frederick, pronounced “Crossing the Bar” in Alfred’s 1889 volume “one of the sublimest utterances I know on the awful subject—his own line is applicable to it ‘In its simplicity sublime’—& all the poems are well worthy of him, tho’ the subject of some has a kind of ghostly weirdness wh almost checks the pleasure wh the skill & fineness of treatment call forth.” To Alfred himself in April...
1892 Edmund praised "The Foresters" as "a work of rich & strong imagination": "it would be no use attempting to dwell on passages here & there of remarkable beauty." Edmund himself had been ill and was just reaching the "point at wh I manage a walk out of doors for ¼ of an hour or so, at a very feeble pace. . . . You see I am not nearly up to what I could do when last at Aldworth, tedious enough, but it's no use grumbling." 65

In April 1886 Alfred, at age seventy-seven, had suffered one of the greatest sorrows of his life in the death at sea of his son Lionel. Edmund, so acquainted with such sorrows and their nuances, did not write until early June. His silence, he explained, had "been from no lack of the deepest sympathy, but from exceeding tenderness of sympathy . . . lest at such a time any words, even the most loving, might painfully jar upon you." But for himself "long silence" was "hard to bear when the heart overflows with affectionate longing for the relief & comfort of one surpassingly dear." Now he would "utter a brother's loving hope, that you have found an image comforting the mind, & that God given strength is yours to bear one of the bitterest griefs destined to life on earth." For himself Alfred's "words . . . spoken or written" had been "over & over again of blessed helpful virtue & strength . . . as to many others." He and Alfred "so rarely" met "now, & life is so uncertain, that I could not bear longer leaving unspoken something of my soul's inmost yearnings to be a very brother & friend to one who commands my entire reverence & love—much as I fall short of being what I would." 66

As improbable as it may seem, the mild Edmund's fierce loyalty to Alfred extending itself to Alfred's friends, prompted him in 1889 to contemplate publishing an undistinguished set of rhymes rebuking an emotional indiscretion committed by Robert Browning, another of Alfred's friends, against the recently deceased Edward FitzGerald. The story has several times been tediously told of how Browning, aging and tired, unfortunately discovered a thoughtlessly misogynist remark in an 1861 letter of old Fitz that Aldis Wright, editor of his letters, had inadvertently neglected to delete: "Mrs. Browning's Death is rather a relief to me, I must say: no more Aurora Leighs, thank God!" and more to the effect that female poets might better be employed minding "the Kitchen and their children; and perhaps the Poor." 67 In an understandable rage Browning fired off a tasteless rhymed squib to the Athenaeum, which he almost immediately, but too late, attempted to retrieve 68:

To Edward FitzGerald

I chanced upon a new book yesterday:
I opened it, and, where my finger lay
'Twixt page and uncut page, these words I read

To Edward FitzGerald

I chanced upon a new book yesterday:
I opened it, and, where my finger lay
'Twixt page and uncut page, these words I read
—Some six or seven at most—and learned thereby
That you, Fitzgerald, whom by ear and eye
She never knew, "thanked God my wife was dead."

Ay dead! and were yourself alive, good Fitz,
How to return you thanks would tax my wits:
Kicking you seems the common lot of curs—
While more appropriate greeting lends you grace:
Surely to spit there glorifies your face—
Spitting from lips once sanctified by Hers.

ROBERT BROWNING

Seeing the verses and "stirred" with "indignation" and "grief that a great man
should so degrade himself," Edmund penned some "lines" of his own:

Peace, angry Bard! can spitting ease thy pain?
Shall nobler minds such temper not disdain?
Homeric gods condemn’d when Hector bled,
Insensate vengeance on the senseless dead:
In outrage which serene Olympians blame
Can Christian born Achilles take no shame?
Back, with the scorpion poison sheath’d again,
Or plant its sting in thy own heart & brain.
On one dead man, who never sought to hurt,
What generous pen could savage rancour blurt?
Great as thou art, why stoop to be so small?
Thy phrenzied spite with chasten’d soul recall.

Edmund sent his piece to Hallam with instructions to send, or not send, it to
"the St. James or any other paper," but to keep it strictly anonymous. He later
told Frederick that Browning’s lines had offended him "as a gross outrage on
the feelings of all of" Fitz’s friends, "especially on Alfred considering the warm
regard shown in the dedication to Tiresias." But Alfred had "thought the sub­ject had better be let to rest."

No doubt Edmund was grateful for Alfred’s
wisdom a few weeks later when Browning died. He had been a "true & great
poet," Edmund wrote Frederick; "the wish that his faults were fewer" could
not "blind one to the splendour of all that was good & great in him, & he must
rank with those rare souls who are the salt of the earth."

For Alfred’s eighty-third, and last, birthday, 6 August 1892, Edmund wrote a
brief and beautiful greeting:

You will probably today be receiving many letters of friendly congratu­lation from divers quarters—none I am sure more loving and earnest than
this. May the day be blest to you and all who are dear to you and may the year bring more blessings as it goes forward must be the warm wish of all who have felt the knowledge of you and your writings to be among the greatest blessings of their life.

Year after year my deep love and admiration has grown, tho’ I have not often of late had the opportunity of expressing it, as we now so seldom meet—but I think you know how largely indebted to you I feel for whatever is best and truest in myself—a debt one cannot hope to repay.

Edmund was “sorry to learn from Arthur’s wife” that Alfred was again unwell, so soon after “the newspaper reports had so constantly spoken of your being perfectly well.” Cecilia had “pains in her knees which are troublesome, but she can take a fair amount of walking and is cheerful.” He himself could “only walk about 10 minutes after my drive and do not improve much. . . . Now I hope that before long I may hear of your being a great deal better. Hallam you will write and tell me, won’t you?”

When Alfred died at Aldworth on 6 October, exactly two months after his birthday, Hallam, no doubt overwhelmed with preparations for the mammoth funeral in Westminster Abbey, telegraphed Edmund. Would he communicate the news to the five surviving Tennyson brothers and sisters? The new Lord Tennyson was tacitly confirming the pivotal family position his affectionate uncle-by-marriage had gradually established by thoughtfully keeping the never very clannish Tennysons in touch with one another. Edmund wrote to Frederick and to the wives of Arthur and Horatio, who would know how best to tell their husbands. Zilly and her aunt Emily Lushington wrote to Matilda, whom Edmund had already written that morning after receiving a letter from Hallam’s wife, Audrey. “Your Aunt C,” he informed Hallam, was “greatly afflicted,” but bearing up “quite as well as I cd have expected.” Fortunately, she had been “for the last 3 or 4 days in somewhat better health than she often is—had she been as ill as she sometimes is the shock wd have been more intense & overwhelming.” She would “sometimes” say, “I foreboded it all,” and would “dwell on the comfort & support he was to her from earliest childhood—’he has never been out of my thoughts’ is one of her expressions.” Edmund wished Hallam to know “one little thing wh possibly may not be quite without inter­est.” Earlier that week he had dreamed of “walking & talking with your Father & I kissed him.” After waking he could recall “no other part of the dream, but this was perfectly clear to my memory, & I am glad to have had the dream.” In Greek, he added, “The dream is of God.”

From Cecilia herself a letter survives, as brief as it is earnest, to Emily Tennyson, dated only “Nov. 1892”: “Only a line to say that I know that God is helping you as he is helping me and Tilly [Matilda]. We both send dearest love.
I am so glad you have your Hallam with you. Tell him I hope to remember some past things, for the history." She enclosed some verses she had made on the day after Alfred died:

Oh my brother gone to where  
The Brother Christ and angels are,  
Our Christ will meet thee, thou wilt find  
One ever loving, tender, kind;  
To love him will be ecstasy  
No want in that bright destiny  
No longing for the past, for there  
All is joy, no pain, no care,  
The summit of thy bliss will be  
To love thy Lord with ecstasy.74

The purest of high-Victorian bardolatry, already outdated in that decade of Oscar Wilde, informed a letter from Zilly to Hallam, a fortnight after the death. "Hitherto the days" had been "too sacred" to "break in upon. . . . All these days our thoughts have been centred on your home—where that great soul—to whom were entrusted such mighty gifts of power and influence among men—was passing thro’ the Shadow into Light." When "the final tidings reached us," she had "felt thrilled thro' and thro' with holy awe and solemn triumph that one so nearly related to me, and so marvellously endowed, should have received the last great call into the last ocean of Everlasting Life." What a "glorious Destiny" it had been for "nearly 60 years to be a light and guide to human beings without number—helping them out of sin, out of misery, out of even suicide—helping them towards Truth, towards Holiness, towards Christ." And then she referred to Edmund. She could "enter deeply" into Hallam's "love and . . . loss—for, like yourself for so long, I am daily and hourly watching over a beloved father, whose hold on life seems to become more frail and precarious every week."75

Edmund by then was feebly advancing toward eighty-two. As his sister Emily wrote Emily Tennyson, he had "a good deal of business to attend to, but rest of mind & body" were "both very needful to him." She and "dear Zilly" were watching him constantly "lest he would do anything to hurt his heart or give him cold."76 (Evidently Emily and Zilly were agreed that Cecilia, who was "quite as well as one could at all hope" and "less excitable than we feared she might be," had enough to do in keeping well herself without trying to look after her husband. But there was nothing new in that: for decades the family, wrongly or rightly, had thus regarded Cecilia.)

On 10 January, Edmund entered his eighty-third year. Of his final months
few details survive. The Glasgow Herald later reported that a few months before his death he had fallen down a staircase in his house. In May he had written “hopefully of improvement to an old student in Glasgow,” but “unfavourable symptoms intervened.” His grief at Emily’s unanticipated dying in early April must have been compounded by his own inability as head of the family to attend her funeral. Now, of his parents’ twelve offspring, only Franklin and he, the firstborn, remained. It may have been after that, although possibly sooner, that his superb mind began breaking, leaving him with the delusion (as Zilly informed a cousin) “that someone was following him about trying to kill him.” Or the delusion may have been confined to the week of delirium preceding his death on 13 July.

The Maidstone newspapers reported the brightness of the weather on the afternoon of the funeral, and the freedom from “obtrusiveness or display.” Seven mourning carriages and seven private conveyances moved across the mile between Park House and Boxley churchyard. Cecilia was not in the party, nor evidently was Franklin, presumably ill, although his wife, Kate, rode in the first carriage with Zilly, Hallam Lord Tennyson, and Tom Lushington’s son, the Reverend Godfrey Lushington. A “number of the villagers and old retainers of the family were present in the church and at the graveside eager to show the esteem and respect for the deceased gentleman and his family.” After a simple service the coffin, “covered with beautiful white wreaths and crosses,” was placed in the family vault out in the churchyard, “a large brick structure containing already fourteen coffins,” including Emily’s, deposited there three months before. Inside the church, on the right wall near the altar, Edmund’s tablet, with others of his family, reads (in part): “For thirty-seven years Professor of Greek in Glasgow University and afterwards elected Lord Rector. . . . A man of vast learning, rare humility, and wonderful influence for good.”

Edmund’s obituary article in the Classical Review (7:425–28), which I have several times cited, was composed by his former Glasgow pupil and longtime friend, Lewis Campbell, for many years professor of Greek at St. Andrews University. Despite several peripheral inaccuracies, it is the best treatment of Edmund’s life that I have seen. On 1 October death claimed another of Campbell’s former Greek professors and personal friends, a man more eminent than Edmund, Benjamin Jowett, master of Balliol College, Oxford, and superb translator of Plato, Aristotle, and Thucydidés. For him too Campbell wrote the Classical Review memorial article (7:474–76). With affectionate admiration for his scholar-friends, Campbell essayed a comparison to set forth the peculiar strengths of both. Jowett, he had decided, “had far more alertness and elasticity of intellect, more fertility of resource, wider aims, more comprehensive
FIG. VII. Boxley Parish Church. 1971. Photograph by author.
sympathies,—though perhaps not more power of suspending judgment,—than Lushington had. But those who from 1845 to 1865 came from 'prelections' in the Glasgow private Greek class to the Balliol lecture room . . . did not feel the same certainty of touch, the same unfailing strength of presentation.”

Cecilia when widowed was three months short of seventy-six. Of all surviving documents throughout her life referring to her—letters, journal entries, or reminiscences—few are without some reference to her poor health. During her marriage, a long half-century, her valetudinarianism had been virtually perpetual. Yet, ironically, she would live on for nearly sixteen more years before dying, quite senile, in the spring of 1909 in her ninety-second year. The most interesting detail of Edmund’s will is a codicil requiring his widow, so long as she continued to live at Park House with their daughter (heir to the estate), to pay £200 a year “as a contribution . . . to the general expenses of keeping up the house.” Should she live elsewhere, the £200 would be paid to her in addition to the £400 she had always received under the marriage settlement. Expenses would “press far more heavily on my daughter than they did on me, as my yearly pension of £662 ceases with my life, & rents of late years have so greatly diminished.” Furthermore, his now deceased sisters had “regularly contributed to the general expenses, & it seems to me but fair that my widow should likewise in this way help to lighten the burden falling on my daughter.” The “£400 of the settlement” would help her meet various personal expenses” that he “used to defray for her,” including medicine, various Maidstone bills, and her maid’s wages.79

It is unfortunate that the only really vivid descriptions we have of Cecilia emanate from her extreme old age: a formidable figure clumping about Park House with her omnipresent walking stick, unintentionally terrifying the children (grandchildren of Tom), curiously prodding them with the stick, breaking into Zilly’s teas to point it at visitors while demanding to know who they were, complaining vaguely to Zilly that nights were dark, or pitifully talking to the Woolner bust of little Eddy while stroking its head.80 Death came mercifully. Her sister and longtime companion, Matilda, her senior by a year, would outlive her by four, finally dying in 1913 at approximately ninety-seven. Among the floral pieces at Cecilia’s funeral in Boxley church was one from Franklin’s widow and two daughters (last of his family, he had died in 1901, after having been knighted for his service as London’s chief metropolitan magistrate). Almost too painfully appropriate was the line of a quatrain accompanying the flowers: “Rest comes at last, though life be long and dreary.”81

Shortly after her mother’s death, Zilly turned over the Park House estate to her cousins, Tom’s sons. She died, aged seventy-four, in 1921 at her beloved Eastbourne. Finally, in 1936, the estate passed out of the Lushington family and
has since been taken over by the British Army, with Park House itself becoming a hospital during World War II, and subsequently an officers' mess.

When I was courteously conducted through it on a bright summer afternoon in 1979, I and my designated escort, the cultured and genial mess sergeant, were at that hour the only persons inside the spotlessly clean, eerily silent building. And were there no ghosts? No, none at all, not even in the room that once housed Edmund's assiduously accumulated, now irretrievably dispersed library, not even in that corner, whichever one it was, where he often settled himself to pen his restrained letters of heartfelt admiration to Tennyson. Biographers desiring ghosts must toil to assemble their own, recruited unwillingly from whatever documents chance to survive. Prosperos manqués most biographers are, whose reluctant actors melt away, all too nimbly, into the thinnest of air.

To literary historians Park House is most noteworthy, if at all, for Tennyson's frequent, occasionally extended, visits there. Yet during his final forty years, those of his eminence, he seldom came. Our biography of Edmund and Henry has attempted to return the place to the Lushingtons themselves, to bring them back and plant them there, however insubstantially, again. Laboring to receive them into one’s mind, contriving to live with them thus, one eventually comes to love them all, compassionately and fiercely love them, including Venables and the Tennysons. Various brands of otherworldly goodness seem to characterize each one.

Yet we forget at our peril that they themselves were not, any of them, expansively gregarious persons. The extraordinariness of Edmund's and Henry's and Venables's intellects, and the daunting genius of Tennyson, push them beyond our comfortable reach. And the year-round residents of Park House formed a tiny, self-contained world to which cards of admission were not freely obtained.

Edmund Henry, sire of the clan, one who had intimately experienced and outlived sore frustration and heartbreaking grief, sought for himself and his family a happy, love-permeated refuge from the rude world outside its flower-bordered gates. Even after his death (though his wife still lived), the atmosphere of the place, its gladdening “mode of life,” seemed so ideal to Venables as to make the ordinary world, after a visit to Park House, virtually unendurable. Yet from a different vantage point, in 1861, after the atmosphere had been recurrently weighted with death, Edward Lear, an overly devoted friend of Franklin but otherwise outside the circle, found them “a cold lot, the Park House Lushingtons—& being so are providentially spared much trouble. They have hearts for themselves. Let us hope they will sit in a happy circle in heaven—& admit nobody beyond the outside limit.”
The Lushington sisters emerge in the carefree morning of their lives, almost too euphoric with affection and fanciful humor. In their twilight (about 1885), old Arthur Tennyson's young second wife smugly perceived the three surviving sisters as nothing else but "doleful": "I am sure that if I stayed there long I should do something to startle those solemn old Miss Lushingtons [ages 69, 68, and 64], it is more like a house of the dead than anything else. I should think those old dames were never joyous children." One itches, of course, to choke the babbler for her dull insensitivity. Had her "old man," as she flippily called her husband, never informed her about Eddy and Emmy and Lucy—to say nothing of Louy and Henry and Tom? What reserves of love and diminishing energy those spinster aunts and sisters had expended upon those six bereavements! Yet Mrs. Arthur too, like the solemn oldsters she derided, has faded, secure from menacing biographical fingers, into air.

Two scenes among others remain etched in one's imagination, symbols of the brighter and darker surfaces of the Park House story. The first is the joyous "hubbub" on the day before Cecilia's and Edmund's "first great dinner party"—everybody talking at once, while Alfred Tennyson sat on his "corner of the sofa the only one perfectly quiet, deep in a book." In the second, nocturnal, scene, a senile Cecilia gropes in with her walking stick from wandering about the lawn: "'Very dark tonight, Zilly,' to which Zilly would invariably reply, 'Of course it is dear. The sun has gone down.'"