

For those who knew of Arthur's engagement, the initial shock of his death quickly gave way to concern about Emily. "But in truth our loss is but secondary," Gladstone wrote to Gaskell—"let us think of poor Miss Tennyson! What is hers, and what must be her feelings now!" Donne felt "poor Miss Tennyson and Mr. Hallam" to be "the most afflicted at this heavy time," and Trench drew a distinction between Emily's grief and Alfred's reaction: "Tennyson has I hear so far recovered from the catastrophe in which his sister was involved, as to have written some poems and they say fine ones."¹

And descriptions of Emily in the year after Arthur's death seem to confirm that she felt the greatest sense of loss. Hallam Tennyson is characteristically vague:

In consequence of this sudden and terrible grief my Aunt Emily was ill for many months, and very slowly recovered. "We were waiting for her," writes a friend of hers, "one day in the drawing-room, and she came down to us at last, dressed in deep mourning, a shadow of her former self, but with one white rose in her black hair as her Arthur loved to see her." (*Materials*, 1:127)

But on 28 November 1833, one of George Tennyson d'Eyncourt's sisters wrote to her brother that "poor Emily . . . has not at all recovered from Hallam's death, this was indeed a melancholy thing" (LAO). And one month earlier, Rashdall met Frederick Tennyson for the first time after Arthur's death: "His sister is of course in deepest misery. . . . A Tour abroad would be desireable to occupy her mind." Though other members of the family soon became involved with social activities outside the rectory—including devouring nearly a barrel of oysters at Rashdall's on 26 December 1833—Emily remained

at Somersby, where Rashdall saw her on 14 February 1834: "She does not look ill, but fearfully soul sick" (diary at Bodleian).

Prompt and lasting consolation came, somewhat ironically, from the source that had opposed Arthur's marriage. Nine days after the letter announcing his son's death was sent to Somersby, Henry Hallam himself wrote to Alfred, requesting that they meet in London the following Thursday:

I beg you to give my kindest regards to your mother, but especially to assure your poor sister Emily of my heart-full & lasting affection. All that remains to me now is to cherish his memory, & to love those whom he loved. She above all is ever a sacred object of my thoughts. God knows how much we have felt for her & for you. (TRC)

And on 9 December 1833, Ellen Hallam looked forward to a friendship which was to link and sustain Arthur's two loves:

My dearest Emily,

Your sweet letter is the greatest comfort to me. I longed to hear from you, as, knowing the great delicacy of your health, I could not help feeling very anxious. I need not tell you how often you are in my thoughts for I am persuaded that in this respect we feel alike. I can never cease through life to think of you with fond affection and to cherish the humble hope, that through the mercy of God we shall know and love each other through a blessed eternity when, reunited to the angelic spirit of our beloved Arthur, we shall look back upon the sorrow and anguish suffered here as upon a short and painful dream.

My dearest Emily, you will, I am sure allow us to keep the locket, which he wore always, a glove, a lock of hair, and other little memorials which were so very precious to him. (TRC)

Emily's poor health prevented her from visiting the Hallams until October 1834; she spent four months with them in London. She was, as Ellen's journal joyfully recorded, immediately accepted into the family circle—even Henry Hallam's sister Elizabeth liked her. The transforming effect upon Emily can be seen most clearly in the contrast between her morose, subdued 12 July 1834 letter to Alfred (*Memoir*, 1:135–36) and her nine surviving letters to Ellen (Trinity). In this correspondence (February–June 1835), Emily emerges in her own personality, not as an adjunct to Arthur. The letters are witty, articulate, full of warmth and spontaneous feeling, and sentiments (not surprisingly) parallel to those of her betrothed:

Thou enquirest, "didst thou think of me Tuesday night?" When is the time thou art not present to my thoughts, waking and sleeping thy form is ever pictured in memory's eye—in listening to thee imagination has often led me to suppose 'twas the voice of my beloved Arthur, thy sentiments and manner are so like his, that I loved when sitting by thy side to close my eyes, and lose myself in this delicious dream—Dear, dear, Ellen, how could I part from thee.—how could I find strength of mind sufficient to tear myself from thy embrace, and to look my last on those eyes of tender light!—absence, far from diminishing my love for thee only increases it tenfold,—Thy letters are an immense comfort, but these, alas! have an end and when I have read them through and through till I know them thoroughly, and finally close the paper; then it is almost like a second parting—thou wilt think me the most insatiable being in the world with respect to letters, for though a sheet comes to me filled on each side with thy inmost thoughts, I no sooner come to a conclusion than I begin to count the days when a similar clumpy epistle is likely to arrive.

Perhaps significantly, this is Emily's only mention of Arthur in these letters: her friendship with Ellen quickly found its own independent basis. Indeed, Ellen's death must have been nearly as great a loss to Emily as Arthur's. Nevertheless, she continued to visit and correspond with Mrs. Hallam and Arthur's younger sister. She cared for Harry Hallam at Somersby during his mother's last illness. Julia Elton Hallam's private journal reflects the intimacy between them: though troubled by imperfections in the faith of her "widowed daughter," Arthur's mother rejoiced in seeing Emily and hearing the sound of her voice—"The Beloved of my two dear children who are gone" (23 February 1838 entry).

It was perhaps as a result of Emily's first visit that Henry Hallam determined to settle £300 a year on her, during his lifetime. Yet this settlement ultimately proved a mixed blessing. The circumstances leading up to Emily's engagement to Lieutenant Richard Jesse (1815-89?) are unknown. But according to Arthur's cousin, Jane Octavia Elton, their decision to marry (on 24 January 1842) was unexpected and shocking:

What do you think? Only *conceive* Emily Tennyson (I really can hardly even now believe it) Emily Tennyson is actually going to be married—and to whom after such a man as Arthur Hallam. To a boy in the Navy, supposed to be a Midshipman. It is a *state secret* that Uncle H. allows Emily anything per annum, so don't mention it to anyone. Is it not

extraordinary—painful—unbelievable, this intended marriage? Poor Julia felt it dreadfully at first—I remember her saying Emily would never *dream* of marrying—that she was a kind of *Nun* now, and that nothing was more *impossible* than her marrying—she had felt Arthur's death so much—it had even injured her health; and can you conceive anyone whom he had loved, putting up with another? I feel so distressed about this, really it quite *hurts* me, I had such a romantic admiration for her, looked at her with such pity, and now all my feeling about her is *bouleverséd*—and Alfred Tennyson falls headlong into the abyss with her—but I cannot think he would like her to marry. Julia Hallam always considered her quite as her own sister, and of course Uncle H. could never have contemplated her marrying again (it is just the same thing as marrying again). She wrote and told them of her intentions when they were at Brussels, which cast rather a damp over their stay there. Her letter was evidently written in great trepidation, Caroline [Elton] said, and of course she must have felt dreadfully in writing it. If the Gentleman were a man of astounding talents one would try and get over it, but all one hears is that he is R.N.

Three days later Jane Octavia Elton expressed her approval at Brookfield's astonishment:

[Emily] appears to have written such a very "flummery" letter to Julia Hallam—to be sure it was a very difficult one to write, but I dislike the humbug of saying "My beloved Mother—I feel I cannot disguise it from myself—*must* ere very long be taken from us, and I have felt much influenced in my intended marriage by the thought of my future unprotected state," etc., when her £300 per annum was expressly intended to render her quite independent, and of course, to obviate her marrying merely for a comfortable home. Mrs. Tennyson is in excellent health and not (as from Emily's letter one would suppose) in a rapid consumption, so altogether the excuse was a bad one. Uncle H. told Caroline he was sure E.T. would not have ventured upon the marriage had my Aunt been alive,—but that "as to her allowance, it should of course, make no difference in that." The Tennysons are reckoned *proud*, and I suppose Emily felt twinges in having to say "I must leave it, of course, entirely to you whether or not you continue the annuity you have so generously allowed me" . . . Caroline says it is to be kept secret at present, this engagement.

Later that month, Jane Elton reported to her own fiancé that Julia Hallam was now "more resigned" to Emily's marriage with a letter from Julia Heath supporting Emily's position, "but still Julia says if he had only been some very talented and prominent person it would have been better, instead of one nobody had ever heard of."²

Naval records show that Jesse was commissioned lieutenant in November 1841, and had a respectable if not outstanding record prior to that time. But his rank failed to placate those who felt Emily to have disgraced herself. The news of the marriage quickly spread beyond the Hallam family; Elizabeth Barrett's reaction was typical:

Miss Tennyson is a very radically prosaic sister for the great poet,— does her best to take away the cadence & rhymes of the sentiment of life. What a disgrace to womanhood! The whole is a climax of *badness*—! to marry at all—bad!—to keep the annuity, having married—worse! to conglomerate & perpetuate the infidelity & indelicacy, by giving the sacred name to the offspring of the "lubberly lieutenant"—worst of all!! That last was a desperate grasp at "a sentiment"—& missed.—I am sorry for Tennyson's sake, & also for Mr. Hallam's, who behaved nobly both in conferring the annuity & in suffering her to retain it under those changed & grievous circumstances. There wd. have been a deficiency in tender consideration for his son's memory, had he resumed the money—as if he had given it as a special retainer of her fidelity. No—it was right to let her keep it. How she *could* keep it, is the wonder—& how the lieutenant, lubberly or not, could accept a wife & three hundred a year with an incumbrance of such recollections & a willingness to compound with them by giving the name of her first lover to his own first child, is a wonder scarcely of the second class—"Can such things be?" Not without disgusting us, *I hope*.³

It is difficult to know how accurately Jane Elton and Elizabeth Barrett judged the motives, to say nothing of the real positions, of Emily, Alfred, and the Hallams. The evidence suggests at least some exaggeration. Emily continued to receive her allowance until Henry Hallam's death in 1859. On 10 January 1842, he sent her "a small present, in token of my affection, on the occasion of your marriage" with the hope that the union might prove "the source of as much happiness as in this chequered & precarious world, we can hope to attain!" (TRC). Henry agreed to stand as godfather to Arthur Hallam Jesse, and in his will left Emily (or, in the case of her predeceasing him, her first son) £1000. Only a brief note—from Emily to Julia Hallam Lennard—survives in the Hallam papers at Christ Church after 1842, and it may reflect the disintegration of the bonds between them:

Dearest Juy,

[17 October 1844]

In the course of a few days, I shall pass through London on my way to Plymouth—when I hope to have the satisfaction of getting a glimpse

of thee and thine. It is such a long time since I have seen any of ye—
Canst send me a line—do so please—

Ever thy very affectionate
Emily Jesse

But Emily's isolation from the Hallam family may have been due at least in part to a characteristic Tennysonian failing, as the excerpt from Henry Hallam's 24 September 1845 letter to Alfred suggests: "We want to learn more about Emily's health. Mr. J[esse] has twice written; but can she not ever write herself? The last we heard was from Mr. D. [unidentified] that she had left Cheltenham—yet this can hardly be" (transcript at TRC). About 1875, Emily sold her copy of Arthur's *Remains*, inscribed to her by Henry Hallam, and Alfred was forced to buy it back. Hallam Tennyson's note in the copy (at TRC) states that it was "sold by accident."

It would not be fair to allow Emily to go undefended, and in her granddaughter, Fryn Tennyson Jesse, novelist and playwright (d. 1958), she found an articulate advocate. Fryn Jesse's 1940 letter to Motter (Princeton) provides perhaps the most authoritative, and certainly the most delightful account of Emily's later life:

I am afraid I can tell you very little about my grandmother as she died before my parents were married! (P.S. My maternal aunt was in yesterday and says I am wrong about this: my grandmother was at my parents' wedding-breakfast and it was suddenly discovered that they were thirteen at table. My grandmother, laughing, said that she was not superstitious and she got up first and died within the year. Which only shows coincidences will occur). But I will try and remember a few things my father has told me, and I am sending you copies of two love-letters from Arthur Hallam to her which are bound in my copy of Tennyson [109 and 215]. I think he was a pretty frigid lover if you ask me, certainly if these letters are to be taken as any criterion and I believe the rest are the same. . . . I know that when my grandmother was in Italy she was enormously admired because they said she had "Una bella testa Romana." My father always told me that she was not quite tall enough for her head. She also seems to have been a fairly chilly person, as he says that never in his whole life from his babyhood onwards does he remember her having caressed him, although to judge from his photographs he was a very lovely little boy and she was apparently very proud of his looks. He was certainly the handsomest man I have ever seen in my life.

My grandmother Emily had two sons, the first was ten years older than my father and she had him christened Arthur Hallam—how my

grandfather liked this I don't know. He never married. He was a man, I believe, of brilliant attainments but he succeeded in wasting his life. First he held a commission in the army when commissions went by purchase and he was so short-sighted he couldn't tell his own regiment. He was once reproved by his Colonel for leaving his regiment when he was parading it, or whatever it is that you do with regiments, to carry a heavy basket for an old market woman and help her over a stile. My grandfather, Captain Richard Jesse, R. N. of whom I have a photograph but whom also I never saw, was magnificently handsome. The Jesses apparently were quite as handsome as the Tennysons and in much the same way. He also was short-sighted though his eyes were of a brilliant sea-blue. He once did something unconventional which was disapproved of, down in South Atlantic waters, and he came back under arrest in a Man-o'-War and said he had never spent such a nice trip in his life: he spent the whole time in a basket-chair on the bridge reading novels. When he reached home he was triumphantly acquitted. As a little side-show he was a Polar explorer. The legend of him in the family is that he was entirely without fear. Apparently he used to say in a puzzled voice as though rather afraid he had missed something: "Fear, my dears? Yes, I have often heard of it. I do wonder what it feels like." As he was a very simple man, this was not boasting. He was genuinely puzzled by this curious phenomenon known to some people but not to him.

When he retired he and my grandmother went to a tiny little house at Margate. This was in the days before there was a regular lifeboat and on the occasion of three wrecks he called together the fishermen, launched a boat and himself taking the tiller saved on each occasion all the crews of the three ships in appalling weather. The ships were a French ship, an English ship and a Spanish ship. When he boarded the French ship which was foundering, he took off his own lifebelt though he could not swim and put it round the little *mousse* or cabin boy. The Emperor Napoleon III had struck for him the *Medaille de Sauvetage en Or*, which apparently is very rare. . . . For saving the British ship the Royal Humane Society gave him their silver medal, about the size of a dinner plate, and when he saved the crew of the Spanish ship, they all called on him next morning, thanked him warmly, filled his tiny house with the smoke of their cigarettes and then went away, and that was the last he heard of them!

I believe my great-uncle Alfred was extremely annoyed at the marriage, which is understandable considering he had written "To her perpetual maidenhood and unto me no second friend." One must admit it made him look rather silly. The Jesses were quite as good a family as the Tennysons, an old coat-armour family of country gentlemen and "Jesse books" as they are known in the trade still always command their prices. Captain William Jesse wrote the life of Beau

Brummel, John Heneage Jesse, a friend of the Regent's, was the first boy to steal the swishing-block at Eton, and also wrote memoirs. Edward Jesse, who I suppose was my great-great-great-grandfather, was a very well-known naturalist. My grandmother, I have always heard, took up spiritualism ardently when at Margate and used to hold séances, but my great-uncle Alfred soon refused to have anything to do with them on the rather sensible grounds that he did not believe the Almighty communicated with you by means of table legs! Also I have heard that the messages rapped out by the spirits were so obscene and filthy that the séances had to be abandoned. They knew nothing of the sub-conscious in those days and whether this threw a light on what went on in the depths of my grandmother's mind or not I cannot tell you. One spirit, I have always heard, told my grandmother that in the future life she would be re-united to Arthur Hallam, whereupon she turned to my grandfather and said indignantly: "Richard, we may not always have got on together and our marriage may not have been a success, but I consider that an extremely unfair arrangement and shall have nothing to do with it. We have been through bad times together in this world and I consider it only decent to share our good times, presuming we have them, in the next."

I have seen her grave at Margate churchyard. On it is simply the date of her death and "Emily, wife of Captain Richard Jesse, R. N." No mention of any Tennyson, you observe.

I am afraid this is all I can tell you and that it won't be of much use to you, but such as it is, it is authentic. . . . Speaking simply as one woman of another, I imagine that she grew tired of being a thing enskied and sainted as the dead Arthur Hallam's fiancée by the Brookfields and their circle and decided to have a life of her own. She was, I believe, a most unworldly creature and as the Jesses are the same, it was a poor look-out for their children. . . .

By the way there is rather an amusing story that I always heard my father relate: My grandfather and grandmother were apparently living in Paris at the time of the Revolution of 1848 and every day, undisturbed by shot and shell, my grandmother took her walks abroad and sat on a seat in a certain square. Every day a Frenchman who was attracted by her sat down and talked to her and she responded amiably. One day he produced two opera tickets and asked her if she would go to the opera with him that night and on to supper. In her English manner, she had never expected the affair to go further than a few pleasant words daily. And the Frenchman, seeing her hesitation, said "With whom do you live, Mademoiselle?" My grandmother replied: "With my aunt, you must come home and see her." Enchanted, the Frenchman went back with her to her apartment and she knocked on the study door and called out "Richard, I want you." The door opened and my grandfather with his fierce sea-blue eyes, his little imperial and

his wide shoulders stood in front of them. "Ma tante," said my grandmother simply, turning to the Frenchman. He said "Oh, mon Dieu!!" dropped the tickets and fled. But the cream of the story is that my grandfather and grandmother went to the opera that night on the tickets. This has always rather endeared them to me.

1. Transcript of Gladstone's 6 October 1833 letter, property of James Milnes Gaskell; Donne's 23 October 1833 letter to Trench and Trench's 22 January 1834 letter to Donne are property of Miss Johnson.

2. Jane Octavia Elton to W. H. Brookfield, 7, 10, and 26 October 1841, published in *Mrs. Brookfield and Her Circle*, pp. 102-10.

3. 8 July 1843 letter to George Barrett, published in *Letters of the Brownings to George Barrett*, ed. Paul Landis with Ronald Freeman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1958), p. 99.

