

## Six

# THAT HISTORY HAS LASTED ON (1894-1895)

*What a difference these last five years have made in my life & my way of life. My mother's death has made me feel like an old woman. Till then I felt ill but not old.*

Annie's Journal  
1894

Half a century had passed, a whole lifetime since Thackeray had concluded that it was no longer possible for Isabella to continue living at home with him. For all of these years she had been separated from her family, forgotten by all but Annie who visited regularly. She was not institutionalised, so in that sense was more humanely treated than Laura, who became an inmate at the Earlswood Asylum for Idiots and Imbeciles. It is quite possible that grandmother and eldest granddaughter never met. Isabella's dangerously unpredictable behaviour after Minny's birth seems not to have been repeated in later years, and she lived out her time peacefully and simply in the home of the Thompsons, her permanent carers, in Leigh-on-Sea, near Southend.

Only Annie documents this continuing life, noting her own visits as well as the times when Isabella, accompanied by Mrs Thompson, would come to stay. There are also letters, gentle communications of great affection, giving her mother news of Hester and Billy, of her writing projects, her holiday plans, sending thanks for birthday wishes or for Mrs Thompson's 'most delicious jam'. They are optimistic and encouraging, conscious of their fragile, unworldly recipient, although Annie did touch on Tennyson's death, inviting her child-like mother to recall memories of earlier times. 'We all feel very sad to have lost our dear poet our dear old friend Tennyson. You must remember him young & with thick brown hair – but indeed until he was near 80 he remained young, as Browning did. Poets don't grow old somehow & drink in new spiritual life & youth from the nature around them.'<sup>1</sup>

Much had happened since those early married years, when Isabella had doubted her domestic skills as she struggled to meet Thackeray's expectations of his young wife. Much had happened, that is to say, in the lives of husband and children, whereas for Isabella nothing had happened at all, not for fifty years. Overwhelmed by post-natal depression, the charming and naïve voice had fallen silent as life moved ahead without her. We know virtually nothing of the intervening years, neither her reaction to her husband's death, nor to Minny's – assuming that she was told of either, or that she was capable of understanding what they meant. Years later, Hester remembered an occasion when some dim flickering of memory prompted her grandmother to say that 'once I had a little daughter just like you'.<sup>2</sup> Yet the tone of Annie's letters suggest that her mother was capable of rational understanding, and that her mental health actually stabilised as she grew older. A few previously unknown letters in Isabella's own hand, prompted perhaps by Mrs Thompson, indicate a sketchy grasp of the world beyond her own, without showing any desire to rejoin it. She writes, for instance, with affection and a studied formality at Christmas 1887. 'I read with great pleasure the account of your expedition across the common with the blessed merry skittish Donkey. You put me in mind of Moore's ballad of Love with a humour. Mrs Thompson begs your acceptance of two of her prettiest cards for Hester & Billy. With our united best wishes for the year to come and for a happy Christmas and prayers for your health and prosperity. I remain ever your affectionate Mammy.'<sup>3</sup> Her last surviving letter shows a quiet contentment in her small routines, and a continuing interest in the doings of her grandchildren.

I am sorry to say that we have been tormented here with a very nasty cough. I am advising barley water or gruel & nitre to get rid of it.... So Billy has attained his 9<sup>th</sup> year and Hester will have attained her 11<sup>th</sup> next year, and so he is learning the Carpenters art. It must be very interesting. I recollect having 2 country hats made for me of wood shavings!!! This is just the dull part of the year for Leigh. We had 2 visits from South End last week and 2 today from Town....

We have been employed making all sorts of shirts and chemises and planting our usual potatoes, and a good many sticks for future fruit. And now the eveng. shades prevent me so with love & kisses I must conclude ever your

aff. Mammy

I G C Thackeray<sup>4</sup>

Annie hints in a later letter that her mother was susceptible to depression and anxiety, which perhaps made it impossible for her to cope with living unassisted. 'I am so grieved you are saddened by the sad things & storms in the papers. You see they dont put the happy little things in, only the catastrophes! If they had described Billy waking up at 6 this morning & rushing to see what birthday presents were there I think it would have made you laugh.'<sup>5</sup>

In the summer of 1892, Isabella's increasing frailty caused Annie to visit her twice within a fortnight. On the first occasion, she found her mother 'very rational & sweet but I saw the D' who said she only just missed a stroke – However with care & quiet & calm so much can be done & M<sup>rs</sup> Thompson is about again & admirable – What a blessing those good people are.'<sup>6</sup> The costs of her care were met from Thackeray's estate by twice-yearly dividends derived from a lump sum invested on her behalf. In practice this may not have proved sufficient, for Annie and Richmond sought court approval to realise some of the capital to cover the excess. Their lawyers requested clarification about the arrangements for Isabella's upkeep.

The Judge's chief clerk seems to be under the impression that the dividend on the Bank stock paid to you and M<sup>rs</sup> Ritchie half yearly ought to be amply sufficient for the maintenance and support of M<sup>rs</sup> Thackeray, and under these circumstances we shall be obliged to trouble you to make another affidavit. Will you be good enough to supply us with the following information to enable us to prepare the affidavit

Where does M<sup>rs</sup> Thackeray live. In a private house or a private Lunatic asylum?

The name of the Person at that House who is responsible for the custody & safety of M<sup>rs</sup> Thackeray.

Amount paid for her maintenance during the last year, and whether such amount has increased or decreased during the time she has been at the house.

Is M<sup>rs</sup> Thackeray entitled to any further money (the income of which is paid to you for her maintenance) besides the sum of £5565.13.5 India Stock paid into Court in the administration action on the death of M<sup>r</sup> Thackeray. The dividend on this sum is roughly speaking £108 odd a half year.<sup>7</sup>

During her 1892 visits, the Thompsons revealed to Annie that they had received an offer for their house, Eden Lodge (now demolished), as they were considering a move to a smaller, more manageable

property. Annie was sure that the offer was lower than the market value, and urged them to hold out for more, but she also wondered whether it might not be sensible for Isabella herself to buy the house and its substantial plot of land so that the Thompsons could continue to look after her there. 'I told them [£1000] wasn't eno' & I said that they had better let Mama buy it than turn her out – I don't know if she could – but it w<sup>d</sup>. be a very nice thing to leave Billy.' Should the time come when Mrs Thompson had to stop caring for her mother, Annie and Richmond planned to pay her an annual pension of £12, just as they – and Thackeray before them – had provided for Isabella's former carer, Mrs Bakewell. 'You can get a lovely little old fashioned cottage at Leigh for £12 a year.'<sup>8</sup> In fact, when Isabella's estate was finally wound up, Julia Stephen stepped in to share the costs of the pension with Annie, presumably with Leslie's approval.

Visits to Leigh did not distress Annie, who drew comfort from her mother's gentle, guileless temperament. She was still able to draw upon the innate musicality which had so attracted Thackeray to the young Irish girl in Paris, and even after her stroke-like symptoms continued to play Gluck and Handel on the piano 'most beautifully – better than I have ever heard her'. Annie told her mother about a dinner with Millais, Leighton and Joachim, when the great violinist played Schumann (with Pinkie accompanying him at the piano), after which Annie had told him that 'I ought to love music for you were a real musician'.<sup>9</sup> During 1893, at the height of her concerns about Richmond's poor health and Billy's schooling, a visit to Leigh triggered a powerful emotional release as Annie experienced a rare role reversal, surrendering with an almost childlike dependence to the simple, trusting presence of the mother for whom she had been responsible for so many years. 'I was really floored one day with worry & nerves when I went to Mamas & lay on the sofa there while she played her sweet hymn tunes & I felt like a child again & all unlocked & cried & cried.'

After this lifetime of waiting, the end came quickly. Early in January 1894 a telegram summoned Annie, and by the time she arrived at midday Isabella was already unconscious and breathing heavily. She had suffered the threatened stroke. Annie took her mother's hand, and it 'felt like her & me together thro' it all'. Julia Stephen came for a while to be with Annie, who that night took turns with Mrs Thompson and the nurse to sit up. Writing to Margie in India later, Annie calmly records something of Isabella's last hours, privileged to have been with her at the end, something denied her when her father and Minny had died. This untroubled departure helped to make some sense of those earlier, frightful ones.

Pinkie will have told you that I was telegraphed for on Wednesday & that when I got to Leigh my dear little mama no longer knew me. She lay on her bed but she was not conscious any more. She had been quite well & playing the piano for some children to dance on Monday, & she was sewing on Tuesday evening when M<sup>r</sup> Thompson came in with that picture of Sedbergh w<sup>h</sup>. she liked & w<sup>h</sup>. he had had framed and she looked at it & said 'very pretty' & then suddenly she fainted. They carried her up to her room & sent for help but tho' she rallied at first unconsciousness came on. Thank God she was spared all suffering, for she might have been paralysed had she lived. It was apoplexy of the heart....

About 5 o'clock in the morning I went for a rest for I did not think her end so near. In about an hour I awoke & came back & she lay quite still breathing heavily with Mary Anne the lady help they have had of late attending to her & wiping her face & putting hot bottles to her dear feet. About 8 in the morning the doctor came by the train from Southend & we pulled up the blinds. As he came into the room some change seemed to come. Something so quiet & so mighty a light an infinite revelation I thought the sunlight was dazzling my eyes & I looked up at the window by her bed but there was only dull dull grey & this glorious brightness & radiance in her face.

Nothing has ever made me realise the hope of hopes & the Kingdom beyond as that minute did & what my sweet meek mother taught me, as if she had looked into the secrets of God & lingered to tell them.

She looked very wise & stern in her coffin with a sort of smile & a new face fine & different altogether. I should not have known her but it seemed to me as if all a whole lifetime of mind & power spoke though she was silent.<sup>10</sup>

Isabella, 'my kind, sweet, patient mother',<sup>11</sup> died on 11 January, aged seventy-six. Before returning home, Annie agreed that the funeral should proceed without delay, for 'the strain was great for the poor kind Thompsons and I too longed that there should be no more agitation'. Mr Thompson took charge of the burial arrangements which would be at the Leigh cemetery, for Annie had decided against returning her mother's body to join Thackeray at Kensal Green. It was right to have decided in favour of Leigh, where her mother's last

contented years had been spent with her constant companions, and appropriate that Thackeray should rest undisturbed with his mother, whom Isabella had never really succeeded in replacing. Richmond met Annie at Fenchurch Street station, and on their way to Wimbledon they saw at Earl's Court the billboards already announcing the 'Death of Mrs Thackeray', surprising news to those unaware of her survival so many years after her husband's death. Most touching of all for Annie was the greeting from Hester and Billy. 'They really loved her & they cried & cried for two nights – Darling Hester reproaching herself & sweet little Bill breaking down utterly.'

In her several accounts of Isabella's last moments, Annie dwells on the wisdom which seemed to come at the end, a reward for a life lived so purely and so simply, the damaged mind made whole again. 'I saw her dear face so changed. Stern & tender & noble. I could hardly have known her. All her sense was there.' 'When my mother died I realised what she was and how little the shadow of her life had touched her dear radiant spirit. Her face was like the face of one who knew and was made great.' 'Her death was something far beyond peace. It seemed to me like a reality of Life and Knowledge, and her dear face looked translated, supreme. I have no words to tell you how great she seemed to me.'<sup>12</sup> They took the children to Leigh two days later for the funeral service at St Clement's church, and Julia Stephen and Margie's father, Edward Thackeray, also attended. 'As I went down in the train I found myself longing for Minnie & your mother & when y<sup>r</sup> Father came in it seemed like a dream & all so natural.'<sup>13</sup> Mrs Thompson, the companion of many years, was inconsolable, 'quite broken and overcome'.<sup>14</sup> Her husband played the organ, and the choir sang 'O rest in the Lord' from Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. A few months later, Annie arranged for an Irish cross to mark her mother's grave in the Leigh cemetery. With parents, grandparents and sister all dead, she was now the only survivor from her own childhood, yet as she tried to explain to Mrs Hart, her own children somehow carried that past forward within their lives. 'And my dear Mama's death seemed to make us realise only the more how the children have grown up to understand and share our lives, and even things which they could only guess at. Bill came with us to her dear funeral and Hester and somehow now I feel that the future inevitable partings won't be quite such partings for them.'

A few months later, after the brother of an old friend had died, Annie drew on the image of Isabella's face transfigured in death to give some meaning to the troubled years of her father's marriage. 'I felt that if my dearest Father could have seen her peaceful radiant look the bitter past w<sup>d</sup>. have seemed less sad to him, & that one does

not know – ever – ever what secret blessing & reassurance may be in store for the mourners or for those suffering under the dispensations of life.’<sup>15</sup> Only a few people fully understood the poignancy for her. Leslie reached out an affectionate hand. ‘It seems very sad and strange.... It is a pang to see the old links snapping & feel that we are growing more solitary – let us keep the closer.’<sup>16</sup> For Henry James too, who had always admired Thackeray and by now was close to Annie, it was the link with her father’s personal history which was here brought to mind. He read the announcement of Isabella’s death. ‘I can scarcely tell you in how friendly – in how affectionate a spirit, I enter into that sense, which I know must be strong in you today of the sadness of feeling that so long an interest has ended, so immemorial an element of your life.... All good lovers of your great father, too, must surely have been moved at thinking that something could still happen to-day to what was left of his so personal history. It makes us feel, that that history has lasted on – and that he himself might have remained.’<sup>17</sup>

During her mother’s lifetime, Annie could never have written freely about her father’s early life, and particularly of their marriage. As it was, she would only touch discreetly on Isabella’s breakdown and removal from the family home, stressing instead the simple happiness of the early years of marriage, but it was at last something which could emerge, now that her mother’s own story was complete. Yet the death knocked her back, and the good resolutions set out just days before Isabella’s final illness – ‘Determined to go on with the Edition sorting papers &ct’ – were set aside. In any case, Richmond’s abandoned Amherst book still needed some final work, after which her introductions to a clutch of Maria Edgeworth’s novels preoccupied her. She would go with Hester to Ireland at the end of May, having contacted various Edgeworth relations. ‘I thought I should realise it all so much better if I could see the places & spaces mentioned that I determined to take this little journey with my child.’<sup>18</sup> Twenty years later she was decidedly ambivalent about her own Irish inheritance, conscious of her father’s difficulties with his mother-in-law during Isabella’s decline into illness. ‘I love Ireland & the Irish but I have absolutely no sympathy with my Irish half or their wild untidy cold blooded genius.’<sup>19</sup>

She had reached an agreement in 1893 with a dealer to sell the manuscript of Thackeray’s *Philip* for £100 to a Mr Skeffington, part of the bargain being that for an additional £40 she would herself copy out those portions of the book which did not survive in her father’s hand. She took the chore with them when she and Richmond visited Billy at Sedbergh late in February 1894. From there they travelled on to St



*Isabella Thackeray's grave at Leigh-on-Sea*

Andrews for the golf, Richmond having taken sick leave because of the depression brought on by constant bouts of nauseating giddiness, symptomatic of Ménière's disease. His doctor urged an extended period of specialist care in Switzerland as 'the nerves are concerned', which suggests that he was close to complete breakdown, but the golf at St Andrews certainly assisted him towards a short-term recovery. Annie sat up at night copying in hotel rooms – 'I am going on writing



out Philip w<sup>h</sup> I like doing very much but it takes a most enormous long time'<sup>20</sup> – the £40 reward driving her to complete it on 15 March.

She rejoiced in Richmond's steady improvement at St Andrews, where a new friendship began in confused circumstances. He and Annie had yet to meet, but the admiration of the young Scottish writer J.M. Barrie for Thackeray had led her to invite him to Wimbledon. His reply, forwarded to St Andrews, warns of his likely shyness at their first meeting, reinforces his Thackerayan credentials, and concludes with the promise of a private entertainment for Billy.

You had better be told in advance that for the first hour or so I shall present a semi-terrified appearance, as it will take me that time to get used to the great shade your name alone conjures up. That heading in Esmond 'I go to Cambridge & do but little good there' was the motto of my college days (with Edinburgh for Cambridge) except that I can add 'But read Thackeray about 16 times'. I used to wonder in the streets if people passing had read him, & cd scarcely resist raising my hat politely & saying 'Excuse me, sir or madam, but have you read 'The Newcomes'. But for all that it was for their own sake that I got to love your books. What an exquisite touch the eyeglass is to the picture of you & your boy ... I am rather good at boys when I get them alone (mum before their parents as another boy wd be), & look forward to teaching this one certain Thrums revels that will give his mother fits, and probably spoil his father's hat.<sup>21</sup>

On the day that she received this, Annie was walking with Richmond around the old parts of St Andrews when they came upon Andrew Lang with a stranger, 'a short pale tiny silent little person & he mumbled something'. They all went on together, but it was some time before Richmond realised that this was Barrie himself. 'M<sup>r</sup> Barrie gave a faint cry of horror & said "I thought you were in Yorkshire – I thought you must be some other M<sup>rs</sup> Ritchie" – I like him very much but he is hardly bigger than a quill pen & most horribly pale with a little hair & two nice kind eyes.'<sup>22</sup> In this letter to Hester, who was staying with Leslie and Julia in her parents' absence, Annie adds a special message for the young Virginia Stephen, with whom she shared a taste for the absurd. 'Tell Ginia there are two epitaphs in the cathedral here so & so fell off the top mizzen into Jesu's arms, & then another. Here we lie horizontal like a ship in stays.'

During this same trip north Annie found herself dreaming frequently of her mother, 'always peaceful & tender. Oh my darling what a

good invention daughters & mothers are'.<sup>23</sup> They read of FitzJames Stephen's death while they were away, which left Annie very sad, for Fitzzy had been especially fond of both Thackeray sisters. She heard from Leslie two days later, a 'dear sad kind letter'.

How good he always was – I remember how he tried to be kind in those dark days in 75 and how I always felt him to be a tower of strength to me.... The world is different for me henceforth. He has not really been here for a long time; but the final separation makes me feel the solitude. I have lost many of my best friends & but for the children it would be a desert I live in. That, however, is a large exception.

Well, I hope that I love better all who are left. I think of you very often & I never think of you without a tenderness wh. I cannot always show.<sup>24</sup>

They returned to Sedbergh on their way south, in time for Billy's fourteenth birthday. As usual, they were financially stretched, the costs of the new house a particular drain this year. She would write to Billy in May about his hopes for a camera, regretting having to deny him anything. 'I always feel that to refuse you or Hester things is a real practise in self-education for Pop & me. We shall have to be very economical till we have paid for the move.'<sup>25</sup> But two years later, he received for his sixteenth birthday not just a microscope but his own bicycle, which Richmond and Hester took all the way to Sedbergh from where the three of them went on ambitious cycling expeditions.

Annie longed for building work on the End House to be completed, so that a new start might be made. 'I do feel we have gone on too long at the same groove, for our house is like a medical boarding house rather than a gentlemans suburban villa.'<sup>26</sup> The improvement in Richmond's health seen at St Andrews was only temporary, and his attacks began again after he returned to work and continued through the early summer. Just before they moved to the End House in June, Annie was called to the India Office to bring him home, although by August she struck an optimistic note. But she did not gloss over the reality of the debilitating symptoms of Ménière's disease, and was concerned to ease his comfort at work. 'I think if he gets a sofa there & can lie down flat the moment these giddinesses seize him he will be able to avoid better these horrid breakdowns which are such a handicap upon him & which certainly do spoil everything while they last.'<sup>27</sup>

There were other worries too. Laura's condition deteriorated, and Annie's visits to the Earlswood asylum troubled her. On 24 April she found 'my darling Laura very very ill. Home dreadfully

shaken & perturbed', and both in June and at the end of October she returned 'very sad'. It really seemed that there was nothing to be done, although a year later, when Annie took Stella Duckworth with her, the sweet nature of Leslie's stepdaughter acted like a balm on Laura. Annie recognised that if there was to be anything like a hopeful future for Minny's daughter, it had to be as part of her new family. After Stella's sudden death, she amended her account of the visit, for even that possibility had now been lost. 'Went with Stella to see Laureli at Earlswood. She was terribly excited at first, but when her *attaque de nerfs* was over she began to listen to Stella looking at her as if her little heart would break out of her body. It went to mine – came home tired, jealous, thankful; Laura has so longed after them all. Stella has all along been so wise & sweet about her, there seems a hope of better things (It was but a flash. Laura has never come back quite again).'<sup>28</sup>

Having despatched the last of the Maria Edgeworth introductions to Macmillans and able to enjoy the prospect of 'going back to my dear Papa today with a long breath of relief',<sup>29</sup> Annie was struck down by flu in the autumn which left her exhausted for some weeks. Jane Strachey helped out with the Edgeworth proof-reading. For a moment Annie became convinced that the Edition would never be completed, but at the end of the year, on another visit to the Bells at Redcar, she was able to record that work on its first two volumes was at last under way. 'Dec 7<sup>th</sup>. To Redcar viâ the George Smiths. Review of my memoirs in P.M.G. Began Edition Vanity Fair ... Began Pendennis.' But still no publishing agreement had been reached with Smith, and instead she was planning to write a series of prefaces to the novels for America, where a lively interest in Thackeray had been sustained ever since his two lecture tours in the 1850s. Lunch with the Harpers' agent Richard Bowker in March 1895 led to a suggestion that she should try to publish the prefaces simultaneously in America and the *Cornhill*. This can only mean that Bowker envisaged that they might be detached so as to appear in succeeding *Cornhill* numbers, and is interesting only for indicating that whereas an American deal for the Edition at this stage was Annie's principal target, nothing had yet been agreed with Smith, Elder for the home market.

Word got around that Annie was contemplating a major new project. She heard from George Grove, the former editor of *Macmillan's Magazine*, who offered to correct Thackeray's textual errors in any new edition of his works, not realising that these kinds of details were frankly of little concern to Annie. Strictly speaking, she was not proposing to 'edit' the works at all. She must have blanched at his list

of amendments, it never having occurred to her that such pedestrian matters might be part of what editing could involve.

I hear that you are going to do a new edition of your fathers immortal books. May I help you? – in a very small way – but I want – & have wanted for an immense time – to get the text correct; and if you would allow me should like to read it all right through again and show you what I think are the mistakes. There are a few that I have already noticed – but there must be more. To give you an instance in chap lxvii of *Pendennis* is the following sentence ‘and he rather respected his adversary, and his courage in facing him, as of old days in the fencing-room; he would have admired the opponent who hit him’. This must be wrong. Of course the semi colon should come, not after ‘fencing-room’ but, after ‘him’ – There are worse errors in *V. Fair* – but for the sake of your father and of you I should be very much honoured if you wd. let me point them all out to you.<sup>30</sup>

On New Year’s day 1895 Annie sat high up in a packed Albert Hall listening enraptured to Clara Butt in Handel’s *Messiah*. Ten days later came the first anniversary of ‘dear Mamas day’, but it did not distress her, and she sat sleepily in the hall of the End House waiting for Hester and Billy to return from a dance, just as years before she had sat up half the night for Minny, leaning out of the window at Onslow Square to watch as the dawn crept in. In the evenings, Richmond read aloud Stevenson’s last novel, *The Ebb-Tide*, and a couple of days later they maintained a seasonal ritual of all going to the pantomime, at the Lyceum Theatre. Then it was time for Billy to return to Sedbergh, a moment which Annie always dreaded, though this time he left in good spirits.

The calm start to the year seemed hopeful, but within a month or so there were money panics. She was still in bed when Richmond came to her room and they had an ‘agitating talk’, as he believed that they were not living within their income. It can have been neither a startling nor an unfamiliar conclusion. They made their usual promises to each other to keep regular household accounts, and as Annie wryly noted in her journal five years later, ‘1899 ditto’. More cryptically, she described a change in her behaviour towards their domestic staff in terms which suggest that she had been too informal with them hitherto. ‘Determined to allow more company down stairs, to be more mysterious in my dealings with the Servants.’<sup>31</sup> She and Hester went to Sedbergh at the beginning of March where the snow-covered hills

were dazzling, and seeing Billy again was like ‘a delicious gulp of cold water’. She kept from her original diary the words she wrote whilst still in bed the next morning. ‘How happy am I at this moment after my long bout of depression & discontent. Not yet up. Expecting Billy.’<sup>32</sup> It was touching to be told by one of his Sedbergh friends that ‘I confide everything to Billy’. For the rest of her life her love for her son had a special intensity, so that being in his presence was always ‘a blessing’. A few days after they had returned to Wimbledon she sent him a few lines copied from an early Thackeray letter, written before his marriage. ‘He says to his Mother “When I marry I shall have more amusing things to tell you & all about Billy cutting his teeth & so forth”. It looks quite natural tho’ it was only a joke.’<sup>33</sup> It seemed like a magic connection across the generations.

Billy in turn adored her, something which his own children noticed in future years. His daughter recalls how ‘he said she was so real. I think with others she laid on her Irish charm but with him she was entirely at her ease.’<sup>34</sup> As if to balance this, Hester drew unusually close to Richmond, offering him unquestioning devotion such that during one of his difficult periods of illness in 1894 Annie seriously contemplated removing Hester from school at Allenswood so that she might spend more time with her father. Marie Souvestre managed to dissuade her from doing this. This tendency for each child to side with one parent, perhaps prompted by Annie and Richmond themselves indicating an occasional partiality, led to tensions during Richmond’s last years, causing Annie some unhappiness.

The death of Charles (Cheri) Carmichael in March resurrected memories of early days with Minny in Paris, for the birth of the Carmichael-Smyths’ nephew in 1844 had been a moment of great excitement. Annie visited Cheri’s widow a few weeks later and was immediately surrounded by ghosts. ‘It was like a scene in Balzac all the old familiar faces on the walls.’<sup>35</sup> More shattering was the sudden death of Julia Stephen, news of which came by telegram on 5 May. Annie went to Hyde Park Gate two days later to lay her flowers on Julia’s coffin, telling Billy of the prevailing sadness. ‘Poor Thoby & Adrian are very brave & good & the little girls comfort their Father. I have lost the dearest friend that ever lived.’<sup>36</sup> As always, she gave herself up to the needs of others, looking after the younger children in the garden of the Hyde Park Gate house while Richmond and Hester attended the funeral, which Gussie wrote about later. ‘It was all very simple & dignified with crowds of friends who cared. Henry James looked so kind so sad so understanding. I saw his face once & never liked him so much.’<sup>37</sup> Leslie was crushed by his loss and Annie

did her best for him in the early days, knowing that he clung to her in his misery.

It seems so sad now at H.P.G. that I hardly like to go, for I feel they are best alone tho' at first Leslie seemed to hanker after me a little – at least to ask for me. Stella is I fear quite overdone but the boys seem full of pluck & goodness indescribable. Trouble in the world seems to bring its own special goodness [and] unselfishness. Henry James wrote something Leslie liked. 'In this horrible world' he said 'the only happiness we really hold safe is that which is over.' But Leslie has those dear good children to see happy again, & started in life & then at least he will have fulfilled his mission.<sup>38</sup>

She was sensitive to the needs of the one person likely to be overlooked at such a time, but it was evident that Laura comprehended nothing of what had happened. 'On Wed<sup>d</sup>. I went to see Laura who was much better & ran to meet me & threw her arms round my neck. But she cannot understand about dear Aunt Julia & I did not try to make her understand.'<sup>39</sup>

Through all of this she was determinedly putting together the early versions of the three first prefaces of the Biographical Edition, *Vanity Fair*, *Pendennis* and the *Yellowplush Papers*. A supreme irony underpins this vital shaping of the Thackeray legacy, undertaken over thirty years after his death and for which Annie's appropriateness was self-evident, it being work for which temperamentally and technically she could scarcely be less well equipped, requiring organizing skills which were almost beyond her. She seemed no more confident several years into the project than at its outset, and did not conceal her self-doubts, setting them out like a moment of confession by Mrs Hilbery in Virginia Woolf's *Night and Day*. 'I am not very good at facts & few people can feel more incapable than I do of following up a clear & sustained thread of history & dates combined.'<sup>40</sup> She lacked the eye for detail with which George Grove could triumphantly trap the errors in a text, and even the process of sorting her father's papers and assembling them into a coherent order threatened to defeat her. There are despairing notes in the journal, but fortunately Hester could be relied upon to sort things out.

18 [April] Writing h.ache & nervous. E.F.G. book. Hester helped me. I in a cobweb over it & rather despairing

19 Hopelessly confused. Got Hester to help. Cheered. She worked carefully sorted 1829. 30. 31. 32.

But she staged something of a coup when in sending off these first three drafts to Smith, Elder, she made it clear that it was her wish to publish the new edition in America whether or not it appeared at home. If they had been equivocal thus far about the enterprise, the firm now swiftly committed to her. In recent years, George Smith had handed over much daily business to his son-in-law, Reginald Smith, whose detailed reply to Annie tried to protect the firm's copyright interests whilst maintaining its customary generous dealings with her. The idea that the prefaces might be published as stand-alone essays 'in periodical and book form' is touched on – the point that Richard Bowker had put to Annie – but more important is the firm's implicit agreement to an entirely new Thackeray edition and an insistence that this should appear simultaneously with any American one. It signals Annie's most significant business triumph in stubbornly pursuing her 'little dream of an edition'. Reginald Smith thanked her for what he called the 'biographies', claiming to have read them with great interest.

I found that nearly half of the MSS which you have sent consists of extracts from your Father's letters and diaries. These are clearly our copyright, as you will see from a quotation which I enclose from the deed of assignment executed in 1864. I think it is necessary to call your attention to this fact before you enter into any arrangement for the publication of your MSS.

Our position is briefly as follows:– whatever may be our rights, we have no wish to interfere with the publication of your Father's letters and diaries in America so long as that publication does not interfere with our own copyright in this country. And in order that it may not do so, it will be necessary that publication should take place simultaneously in this country and in America.

Nor have we any wish to assert our rights in respect of the publication of the extracts from letters and diaries in this country so long as our copyright is not impugned, – I mean that we could not consent to any publication as a part of your Father's works which would injure our existing editions.

Having made this avowal, I wish to say that we are prepared to make such arrangements with you as we should make if we had no exceptional rights. We are ready either to pay you a sum for your entire rights in the series of papers, or else to publish them or arrange for their publication in

periodical and book form, and perhaps as a part of a new edition of your Father's works in which you might have an interest at all events covering the volume in which your introductory matter appears. I think I can see the way of dealing with the MSS which is most to your interest, and I should be glad if we could exchange our views upon the subject.

I may add that we were misled by the agent of an American firm when we told you that there was no room for a new Edition of your Father's works. We are now satisfied that there is room for a new Edition.<sup>41</sup>

And then there was the good news of a promotion for Richmond. With the collapse of Lord Rosebery's Liberal administration at the end of June and its replacement by the Conservatives under Lord Salisbury, Lord George Hamilton was appointed Secretary of State for India. As always with a change of administration there was an initial uncertainty about how jobs would be apportioned, but Sir Arthur Godley, the Permanent Under-Secretary, thought it likely that Richmond would be invited to be Private Secretary to the new Secretary of State. Annie had some doubts about this prospect, for Richmond had not entirely shaken off the bouts of depression. When the news of the appointment came she felt 'nervous excited glad anxious', having already confided in Billy that 'I dont know if I hope he will get it or not',<sup>42</sup> but as Richmond had pointed out, 'as likely as not the new Gov'. will be in for 6 years, & £300 a year is a great difference'.<sup>43</sup> She took Hester and Billy with their cousins Arthur and Charles, sons of Willie and Magdalene Ritchie, to Brighton in August, planning to stay a fortnight but returning early because Richmond was 'profoundly depressed'. The Edition was now creating its own momentum, for although the interest of Smith, Elder had only lately been stirred, American prospects were altogether more encouraging. In mid-August the British agent for the Boston firm of Houghton, Mifflin wrote directly to ask 'what chance there is of their securing the introduction and notes by you for their edition'.<sup>44</sup>

This was not the only interest from across the Atlantic. She had already begun to explore with Macmillans the possibility of their American house taking on the Edition, for which they would offer an advance of £1,000 and royalties on sales. When visiting Europe with his wife, the writer and critic Charles Dudley Warner met Annie in September and recommended that she should consider Harpers as the best American publisher, undertaking to explore the possibilities on



her behalf. After returning home he fleshed out their ideas into a very precise prospectus, upon which he urged her to stand firm.

In pursuance of my promise in our conversations regarding a new Edition of Thackeray, I have had a long talk with Mr. J. Henry Harper, of Harper Brothers, who has just returned from England. I detailed to him my plan for you, as I opined it to you, and I may say, in a general way, that I found him heartily in favor of it, as a good move for you, for the sale of Thackeray's works, and for his firm. I found however that his firm had had some correspondence, or communication, with you on this subject through Osgood, McIlvain of London, and that Harper and Brothers have been ready and anxious to make an arrangement with you for whatever you may do.

The plan, however, that I presented to you, in its fullness, had elements of newness, and it is this plan that I beg you now to understand, has the full approval of the Harpers. And I feel sure that they are ready to carry it out in a manner to be greatly to the benefit of you and your children. In speaking of this to you I think my communication should be regarded as confidential, and that you and Mr Ritchie should decide the matter for yourselves, and not complicate it with partial contracts, for single volumes, or with any reference to existing editions.

Let me re-sketch the plan. A new and complete edition of Thackeray, containing everything that you would like to preserve of his for a final edition. To be illustrated fully and richly, not only with the old pictures, but with portraits and with views of houses and studio's [*sic*] connected with his work, and by a perfect reproduction of his drawings by a new process – a great improvement of them as at present engraved. (Take as an illustration the drawings in *The Rose and the Ring*. This, by the way, would make a splendid looking book, produced in fac simile, hand-writing and drawings. And this the Harpers would also undertake, I think).

Each volume to have the sort of introduction you are now writing for special volumes, with notes by you, and as full details of his literary life as you can give. This would really be a sufficient biography of the writer, and such an account, incidentally, of the man, as would satisfy any legitimate public curiosity.

This new material, so interspersed, would enable you to preserve on all the works a new and remunerative copyright. It would not forestall, of course, other editions, or single volumes, but it would in a manner protect itself, by being the most desirable and popular edition.

He urged her to act, believing that if she did not do so, someone else would, for enterprising publishers were on the lookout for reissues of classic authors.

Suppose you, in a pure business way, state this plan for a new, complete, fully illustrated edition, to Smith, Elder & Co, as a plan you have fully determined on and will carry out. Give them the opportunity to take it up as the English publishers, to be executed, if they choose, in connection with Harper Brothers, upon terms as to expence that they can agree on. Do not be put off by tact, nor be pressured to drop the full new edition, and bring out from time to time detached volumes of the chief fiction. Do not throw away your splendid chance and materials in this dribbling way.

If S. & E. decline, then drop the English market for the present altogether. Make a contract with Harpers for an American edition. You have full moral and legal rights to do that. And when the American edition is under way, you may be sure some English publisher will be glad to come into the arrangement. It is a very big market over here.<sup>45</sup>

It is to their September conversation and this subsequent proposal that the Biographical Edition owes much of its final format. Warner offered a belief in the worthwhileness of the project that had not initially been forthcoming from the Smith, Elder stable.

By the end of May 1895, Leslie had completed the first draft of what would become known as the Mausoleum Book, and during July continued to review his earlier life by going through old letters and papers. He reconsidered his role in the business of Annie's engagement, seeming to want reassurance that he had acted properly by her. '[O]n the whole, I was satisfied that I had substantially done my best to help you.... Naturally, at this time I feel as if I might die – though it is not a bit likely – and that suggests a desire that you should distinctly remember what we were to each other. I think these letters show it.' He also collected together for Annie a large group of Minny's letters to him, knowing just what they would mean to her – 'I am touched by their sweetness and by the affection for us'.<sup>46</sup>

In August he took the children to Freshwater, from where he wrote again in a mood of deep despair, Annie having urged him to discover something of Julia in the love of their children.

I had a strangely vivid dream last night – strange for me who seldom dream. I met Julia & found that it had all been a mistake. She was going to explain to me how it had happened – the mistake, I mean – when I awoke to my misery. – That represents my waking state too.... I not only lose her but lose all that was most delightful in the rest of the world. I did not know before how much she made up my whole feelings, even when she was not directly concerned. I am getting stronger, though slowly, but even the strength makes me feel the blank.... Why should I tell you all this? Partly because I can tell it to no one else.... I feel, as you imply, the love of my children & a few more is the thing wh. may in time make the grief endurable; but at present it brings about as much pain as happiness.<sup>47</sup>

It was of course inevitable, but still painful for Annie to have to accept that the times of Leslie's former happiness with Minny had been erased from the record once he had become so intensely dependent upon Julia, his rescuer from that earlier loss.

Richmond's acquisition of a bicycle at the end of the summer became a new passion for him, to some extent even temporarily pushing golf to one side. It was the ideal counterbalance to the long, sedentary hours at the India Office, and he would go for long rides from Wimbledon, often at night, refreshing himself after hours at his desk. It lifted him and provided some respite from the episodes of physical collapse and mental exhaustion. On one day at the end of September, Annie made a particular note that 'R came home & cycled by moonlight. It is delightful to see his enjoyment of his work.... Sat in garden with R. Everything indescribably starry & beautiful.' But within a fortnight, immediately before leaving for Holland and Germany with Richmond and Hester, she complained of nervous exhaustion, what she customarily described as being 'overdone'. A month abroad was just what they needed. They spent their days in galleries and most evenings at the opera, at Amsterdam (for the Rembrandts), then Dresden (where during a performance of a long-forgotten opera, 'I was thinking of everything else I had ever thought about Papa & Minny & the old days'), and finally Berlin, where towards the end of their stay they were invited by Joachim to attend his rehearsals with a student orchestra. Richmond could not get too much music, sending Pinkie

detailed critiques of the Berlin performances of *Orfeo*, *Prometheus*, *Oberon* and *Die Zauberflöte*, for she was the one member of the family whose musical sensibility was equal to his. For Annie, it was the small details of their journeying which prompted a kind of childlike wonder, such as Richmond's command of the tram system in Amsterdam, or the way in which the streets of the Hague were crowded with 'soldiers children messengers carters', or simply when she got her first sight of the 'quaint flat fields, houses, cows in flannel jackets, quaint gables, distant spires'.

They arrived back in England in time for Annie and Hester to hurry to Sedbergh for Billy's confirmation in the school chapel, an occasion of spiritual significance despite doubts about its traditional sacramental meaning. 'He looked like Papa – He looked like Richmond at his age – Very dear pale shining eyed with high shoulders well set up. After tea we sat by the fire. I never can face great emotions but they are there & this was a great emotion – all the things it wasnt for me as well as all it really meant.'<sup>48</sup> A harder duty followed. On 28 November, the twentieth anniversary of Minny's death, she went to Hyde Park Gate to see Leslie 'in his den', and as she tried to lift him from his gloom her thoughts went back across the years which had done little to blunt the sharpness of the memories. And for Leslie too, freshly bruised by his second loss, there was added poignancy as he and Annie, the survivors and now sole witnesses of former happiness, sat together in his study 'remembering that awful day – now 20 years ago but present still minute by minute'.<sup>49</sup>