PERSONAL REMINISCENCES OF EDWARD IRVING.

IN the year 1827 I had occasion to spend a couple of months in London. Mr. Irving was then in the zenith of his popularity as a pulpit orator; and as I had only the year year before become a Licentiate of the Church of Scotland, I naturally felt eager to discover what might be the secret of a popularity so unequalled. Admission to his humble place of worship (Caledonian Chapel, Cross Street, Hatton Garden) was by ticket only—a step to which his office-bearers reluctantly resorted to prevent worse consequences, and even ticket-holders had to come long before the hour of service if they would find a seat. Having an introduction to Mr. Nisbet, the well-known publisher and one of his office-bearers, I got from him a right of entrance for the whole period of my stay in London. Coming early the first day, I found the whole of the street lined with carriages, and the church even then rapidly filling. To get a full view of the preacher I worked my way to the front of the gallery, the middle pew of which—treble the depth of the others—had been fitted up for the Caledonian Asylum boys, but was now occupied by people of note, for whom, as pretty constant worshippers, it was reserved. One day, for example, standing immediately behind this pew, I had before me the Duke of Sussex, Mr. Canning, Lord Brougham, Sir James Mackintosh, and others of aristocratic look, whose names I could not learn. All eyes were directed to the pulpit, watching the ascent of the portly figure that was to fill it. And no wonder, for a sight it certainly was. Rarely is such a figure to be seen in pulpit or platform. Isaac Taylor, whose guest he was that very year, took his profile, and having himself been bred an artist, the following is what he wrote underneath the engraving of that profile, prefixed to the first volume of

his *Collected Writings:* "The outline was made with very great care, and the engraving fairly represents it. The head measures one foot in both dimensions. Mr. Irving stood more than six feet in height. His strength was prodigious, and agility surprising." When I got my first sight of him as he stood up in the pulpit—erect, broad-shouldered, full-chested—I could have fancied him an athlete. The head, as it appears in Isaac Taylor's profile, would strike any one as that of no common man, but even the portrait prefixed to the first volume of Mrs. Oliphant's *Life* of him, when he was perhaps a year or two younger than when I first saw him, gives a fair idea of his appearance. His glossy black locks,[1] neatly shaded off in the middle of his broad forehead, added to his attractive appearance, and even the otherwise unpleasant cast in one of his eyes, owing to the benignity of his expression, only gave him a look quite his own.

So much for his personal appearance, which I only notice because it was impossible to dissociate it from his mental self. In fact, almost all who have written about him have felt it necessary to refer to it. As he read out the opening psalm, his clear sonorous voice and distinct articulation, but still more the dignified simplicity and elevated purity of his style in prayer, struck me at once.[2] But his reading of the Scriptures was to me something new. It was not his melodious voice, and the full compass of it, but the *life* which he threw into what he read that seemed to carry his hearers into the very scenes and circumstances of the passage before them, making what was familiar enough to them before seem new. Of the matter of his preaching I will speak in detail further on. At present I will only say

[1] "All his (father's) children," Carlyle says, "had beautifully coal-black hair." —*Reminiscences of Thomas Carlyle* (Froude), vol. i., p. 75.

[2] "Even in his last times, with their miserable troubles and confusion, he spoke always with a sonorous, deep tone, like the voice of a man frank and sincere addressing men."—*Reminiscences*, vol. i., p. 86.

that what for years continued to attract unparalleled crowds, largely of the most cultured classes and foremost ranks of society, holding them spell-bound under the voice of a humble Presbyterian minister from Scotland, must have been something very different from mere sensational oratory. Its character, as I shall have occasion to shew, changed considerably with the progress of his views of Divine truth, and not certainly for the better, though it never lost traces of what it was at its best. When I first heard him, it was such as made George Canning in the House of Commons say of one specimen of it, that it was the most eloquent sermon he had ever listened to.[1]

I was introduced to Mr. Irving by Mr. Nisbet, and at his own invitation called on him without delay. He received me so cordially and talked with me so unaffectedly that I felt immediately at home, and I gladly availed myself of his invitation to come again as often during my stay as I could find convenient. These calls seemed to be all the less of an intrusion and were of longer duration, as the subjects started happened to be those on which I had thought and read a good deal and in a line akin to his own.

Mr. Irving had scarcely been two years in London when it became plain to his office-bearers that they must set about the erection of a new church for him, of dimensions and a character very different from the humble chapel which till then had served them. A site was soon got, but owing to protracted difficulties, it was not completed till 1827, when on the 11th May—a few weeks after I had left London—it was opened by Dr. Chalmers. A thousand sittings were immediately taken, and the crowds that had rendered Cross Street, Hatton Garden, so stirring, transferred themselves to Regent's Square. It was said to be the handsomest place of worship which up to that time had been occupied by any Nonconformist minister, and Mr. Irving, who could not

[1] *Life*, by Mrs. Oliphant, vol i., p. 159.

endure to be regarded as a Dissenter, had it named *The National Scotch Church.*

In the summer of 1828, when Mr. Irving was in the beautiful parishes of Roseneath and Row, Dumbartonshire, and there preaching to immense crowds both in the open air and in church, important communications were held between him and Mr. A. J. Scott, a Licentiate of the Church of Scotland, and son of the Rev. Dr. Scott of Greenock, one of the most esteemed of the elder ministers of the Church. Mr. Irving had met with this young man before; but struck now with the force of his character and his manifest superiority as a thinker, he invited him to be his Assistant in London. This led to a frank disclosure of difficulties in the way of his occupying that position. Though his difficulties were of a doctrinal nature, they were not then, I believe, of a pronounced character, but rather those of a restless, dissatisfied inquirer. Mrs. Oliphant describes him very correctly as "a man whose powerful, wilful, and fastidious mind has produced upon all other capable minds an impression of force and ability which no practical result has yet (in 1862) adequately carried out—"[1] and to the last never did. For his mind, entirely unimaginative, was rather of the destructive than constructive kind —subtle, incisive, powerful in exposing weaknesses in the reigning conceptions of Bible truth and religious ideas, but never making clear what he would substitute in their room. Mrs. Oliphant wondered what could attract a mind like Irving's to one so totally dissimilar and unaccordant. But besides that these features of Mr. Scott's mind could hardly have discovered themselves at that time, Mr. Irving had a generous admiration of a mind of such independence and rare grasp, while the frankness with which the young man opened to him his difficulties could not fail to win the confidence of one who was himself so simple and open.

[1] *Life*, vol. ii., p. 28.

Accordingly, "notwithstanding this vast difference, so visible now-a-days (writes Mrs. Oliphant, referring to Mr. Scott's eventual *departure from Christianity*) these two dissimilar natures had somehow fallen into warm and sudden friendship; and Irving, all truthful and ingenuous, desiring no pledges about doctrine, and confident in the piety and truth of the young man, engaged the doubtful probationer to join him in London, and be his assistant in his ministerial labours." [1]

For a year and a half Mr. Scott continued in this position, when being called to assist the minister of the Scotch Church at Woolwich, he accepted the call, leaving Mr. Irving alone in his work.

Towards the close of the year 1829 a letter reached me, signed by Mr. Irving and all his office-bearers, inviting me to succeed Mr. Scott as Assistant in Regent's Square church —a position which my parents were not willing I should accept, as it might interfere with my prospects in the Church at home; but after some hesitation I wrote accepting it, and on the 3rd January, 1830, I preached for the first time in Regent's Square. From that time till the memorable morning of the 26th April, 1832—of which I shall have occasion to disclose some things known only to myself—my connexion with Mr. Irving continued unbroken. The events which took place during those two years and three months will be best understood in connexion with the changes which took place in Mr. Irving's views and mode of acting, carrying with them a corresponding change in his preaching.

The staple and style of that oratory which almost immediately after his arrival in London, drew ever-increasing crowds to Cross Street, Hatton Garden, can hardly be apprehended without knowing something of his previous history

[1] *Life*, vol. ii., p. 29.

and of the generous ambition and swelling emotions with which—as though at the long last he had now found his niche—he grasped the call to become minister of the humble Scotch congregation there. And as much of what I have to say in these papers is connected with facts in his early history, I must ask the indulgence of such as know them well, while, for the sake of those who do not, I recall as much as seems necessary for my purpose.

Mrs. Oliphant in her two volumes has made good use of family papers in recording the facts of Irving's early life. But the recent publication by Mr. Froude of Carlyle's *Reminiscences*—whatever may be thought of them in other respects—throws additional light on some of the best phases of Irving's character. In fact, "Reminiscences of Edward Irving" occupy the whole of the first volume of that work, except the first sixty-six pages. Spun out as these *Reminiscences* are by some rather garrulous details about other people, they have all the charm of that inimitable word-painter's style; and, what is remarkable, though that *littérateur* could hardly write about other notabilities of his acquaintance without a spice of cynicism, all that he says about Irving is full of fine feeling and generous estimation.

Edward Irving and Thomas Carlyle were born within a few miles of each other in the county of Dumfries, and both of humble parents; but they had little intercourse with each other till they met at the University of Edinburgh, and not much even then, as Irving was two years in advance of Carlyle. It was at Kirkcaldy that their close intimacy began. They were both teachers, but Irving had been two years there before Carlyle, whose coming to a different school might have excited Irving's jealousy; but he received the newcomer with open arms and made him welcome to his modest library, the best books of which Carlyle devoured. After their work was over, they

had walks and talks together over congenial subjects; and each having genius—though of a very different sort—and both a keen thirst for knowledge and capacity to take in any amount of it, it may easily be imagined how mutually stimulating this would be. "We never wanted," says Carlyle, "for instructive and pleasant talk while together. He had a most hearty, if not very refined sense of the ludicrous; a broad genial laugh in him always ready. His wide just sympathies, his native sagacities, honest heartedness and good humour made him the most delightful of companions. Such colloquies and such rovings about in bright scenes, in talk or silence, I have never had since." [1]

Carlyle, as well as Irving entered the Divinity Hall, with a view to the ministry of the Church of Scotland; but he soon tired of it and gave it up—from incipient dissatisfaction, probably, even then with what he would have to say he believed. Irving, though agreeing with Carlyle as to the low type of preaching then current, was bent on the pulpit as his proper sphere. Referring to the visits which he as well as his friend used to pay to the Edinburgh clergy, Carlyle says it was at one of these that "his last feeble totter of connexion with Divinity Hall affairs or clerical outlooks was allowed to snap itself and fall definitely to the ground." [2]

Irving's first pulpit efforts disappointed all but the very few who saw and appreciated high earnestness and real thought striving to find expression in forms quite new.

"Irving's preaching as a licentiate," says Carlyle, "was always interesting to whoever had acquaintance with him, especially to me who was his intimate. Mixed with but little of self-comparison or other dangerous ingredients, indeed with loyal recognition on the part of most of us, and without any grudging or hidden envy, we enjoyed the broad potency of his delineations, exhortations, and free-flowing eloquence, which had all a manly turn. From the first Irving read his discourses, but not in a servile manner; of attitude, gesture, elocution, there

[1] *Reminiscences*, vol. i., pp. 103, 104. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 115.

was no neglect. His voice was very fine; melodious depth, strength and clearness, its chief characteristic. He affected the Miltonic or old English Puritan style, and strove visibly to imitate it more and more till almost the end of his career, when indeed it had become his own, and was the language he used in utmost heat of business for expressing his meaning. We were all taught at that time by Coleridge, etc., that the old English dramatists, divines, philosophers—judicious Hooker, Milton, Sir Thomas Browne—were the genuine exemplars, which I also tried to believe, but never rightly could *as a whole*." [1]

"In Irving's preaching there was present or prefigured generous opulence of ability in all kinds (except perhaps the very highest kind not even prefigured)." [2]

Wonderfully accurate as well as graphic is the following:

"Irving's discourses were far more opulent in ingenious thought than Chalmers's [referring to the time when he was Dr. Chalmers's Assistant in Glasgow], which were usually the triumphant onrush of *one* idea, with its satellites and supporters. But Irving's wanted in definite *head* and *backbone*. That was mostly a defect one felt in traversing those grand forest-avenues of his, with their multifarious outlooks to right and left. He had many thoughts pregnantly expressed, but they did not tend all one way. The reason was, there were in him infinitely more thoughts than in Chalmers, and he took far less pains in setting them forth. The uniform custom was, he shut himself up all Saturday, became invisible all that day: and had his sermon ready before going to bed. Sermons an hour long or more; it could not be done in one day, except as a kind of *extempore* thing. It flowed along, not as a swift flowing river, but as a broad, deep, and bending or meandering one. Sometimes it left on you the impression almost of a fine noteworthy *lake*. Noteworthy always; nobody could mistake it for the discourse of other than an uncommon man. Originality and truth of purpose were undeniable in it, but there was, withal, both in the matter and in the manner, a something that might be suspected of affectation, a noticeable preference and search for striking quaint and ancient locutions; a style modelled on the Miltonic old Puritan. Something too in the delivering which seemed elaborate and of forethought, or might be suspected of seeming so. He (still) always read, but not in the least slavishly; and made abundant, rather strong gesticulations in the right places; voice of the finest and powerfullest," etc.[3] "Irving was very sanguine, I much the reverse; and had his consciousness of power and had his generous ambitions and forecastings. . . . No man that I have

[1] *Reminiscences*, pp. 119, 120. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 161, 162.
[3] *Ibid.*, vol. i., pp, 161-163.

known had a sunnier type of character, or so little of hatred towards any man or thing. . . . Noble Irving! he was the faithful elder brother of my life in those years; generous, wise, beneficent all his dealings and discoursings with me were. Well may I recollect as blessings in my existence those Annan and other visits [to their respective birthplaces], and feel that beyond all other men he was helpful to me when I most needed help."[1]

From such a pen this is high testimony; and how this love of Carlyle for Irving continued to the last I had a touching proof but a few weeks before I had to tear myself away from him. When it became evident that things were fast coming to a head between him and a combination of the trustees of his church and the Presbytery, and one could see in his countenance the sadness of his spirit, he showed me a letter he had just received from his old friend Carlyle, bidding him cheer up, and ending with a fine expression of his love for him and his admiration of those qualities which endeared him to all his friends—in contrast with the insignificance of his opponents.

Getting at length tired of teaching and bent on higher work, he gave up his post at Kirkcaldy, went to Edinburgh, attending science classes at the University and classes for modern languages, and became intimate with the best ministers, such as Mr. (afterwards the eminent Dr.) Gordon and Dr. Andrew Thomson, the latter of whom soon found him a man not to be lost sight of. Keeping steadily before him that high ideal of preaching which he was shaping out for himself, he first made a bonfire of all his old sermons, and then tried to make new ones on a higher model, but with so little success that he had begun to despair, when one day he received an unexpected invitation from Dr. Thomson to preach for him in St. George's, accompanied with the formidable intimation that Dr. Chalmers—who was looking for an assistant in the noble work he was organizing in

[1] *Reminiscences*, pp. 188–89.

Glasgow—was to be present. He preached accordingly, and as was believed with universal satisfaction; but nothing coming of it for some time, one of those fits of despondency —so well known to young licentiates—came over him, and he was about to start for the Continent, to perfect himself in the modern languages, and perhaps go on mission work to some foreign land. Having first gone to Ireland, he there received a packet of letters, readdressed from his native Annan, one of which was from Dr. Chalmers, inviting him to Glasgow. This issued in an invitation to be Dr. Chalmers's Assistant. "I will preach to them if you think fit (he is reported to have said), but if they bear with my preaching they will be the first people who have borne with it!"[1]

How well they bore with it and how he got on with the poor of the parish—some of them ill-favoured and ill enough inclined to religion as well as sunk in poverty, and how he won upon them by his kindly sympathy and lavish liberality —is well told by Mrs. Oliphant. The ungenial atmosphere which in this work he had to breathe during those winter months was fitted to take down the strength of his gigantic frame; but he made up wonderfully by his summer rambles, carrying his pack slung upon a stick over his broad shoulders, to the amusement of many, and among others his fellow student Mr. Story, whom he visited at the beautiful parish of Roseneath, Dumbartonshire, of which he had become the minister.

Matters went on quite smoothly with Dr. Chalmers, though the contrast between the licentiate and the idol of the Glasgow people was trying enough; and a change to anywhere out of this blaze seemed desirable. At length it came, and of a very unanticipated character. The Presbyterian congregation which worshipped in the Caledonian Chapel, Hatton Garden, was then vacant and reduced in numbers

[1] *Life*, vol. i., p. 98.

almost hopelessly. The father of the Session had been deputed to approach Mr. Irving, but with slender hope of his being willing to look at a call from such a handful. "To which (writes Mr. Irving) I answered: If the times permitted and your necessities required, I should not only preach the Gospel without being burdensome to you, but also by the labour of my hands would minister to your wants, and this would I esteem a more honourable degree than to be Archbishop of Canterbury. Being in such a spirit towards one another, the preliminaries were soon arranged—indeed I may say needed no arrangement—and I came up the day before the Christmas of 1821, to make trial of my gifts before the remnant of the congregation which still held together." [1]

Long as this sketch has been, of what Mr. Irving had to go through and how he developed into the great London orator, it will prepare the reader, I think, to apprehend the character of his early ministry there, to understand the fascination which it so quickly had for the crowds of distinguished persons who hung upon his lips for years, and at the same time account for the lashing severity with which hosts of critics came down upon him both as a preacher and a writer.

A word or two here about Mr. Irving's domestic life and habits of study. For nearly two years after his settlement in London Mr. Irving lived a single life. During that time his company was much sought after, particularly by one accomplished gentleman, Mr. Basil Montagu, the well-known editor of Bacon's works.[2] In his family Mr. Irving found a congenial home, and to him he owed his intro-

[1] *Life*, vol. i, p. 131.

[2] The dedication of his Lectures on the Parable of the Sower to Mr. and Mrs. Basil Montagu is one of those pieces of autobiography (which indeed all his

duction to Coleridge, at whose feet he may be said to have sat for years, drinking in those incomparable outpourings of a man of rarest genius on almost every subject of human thought. Towards the close of his second year in London he married, and ere I saw him he was the father of two children—his firstborn, however, living one year, and the other only two. These events opened in him springs of domestic joy and chastening sorrow which brought out some of the finest features of his character, which to me were very attractive as I watched them in such moments of freedom and familiarity as I then had with him. But during the first year of my assistancy (1830) I was too much occupied with my own duties to see much of him. Even when events brought us more together, his best time for seeing his friends—his breakfast hour, from about eight o'clock—was my worst, living, as we then did, far apart. At ten o'clock he retired to his study, and was no more to be seen till after his dinner-hour, or about three o'clock. He would then ask me to walk and chat with him; and the best talks I ever had with him were on these occasions, when, with hat in hand, in the open fields, he would give free play, not to his mind only, but his noble physique—which, being once or twice observed, was set down to a wish to attract attention, while our whole talk at such times convinced me that he was unconscious of any presence but our two selves. All subjects of common interest were then turned over, and he would try to draw me out; and when anything I happened to say struck him, he would drink it in with a humility that touched me. One such case I remember. He had quoted those words of our Lord: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you,

Prefaces are) in which he takes the public into his confidence with a childish simplicity (unpardonable egotism, his ill-natured critics called it), about all he was doing, thinking, and feeling at the time.

That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven" (Matt. xviii. 10); and he asked me what that might mean. After a pause, I said: "What would you say to this? None are allowed to enter without leave into the presence of our sovereign; but the nurses of the royal children have free access whenever they have anything to say about the children." "That's worth a talent of gold," he said. Of Mrs. Irving all I then saw was just enough to shew that she lived in the light of her husband's countenance; but to what extent she was able to enter intelligently into his ideas, I had no means of judging till long after.

DAVID BROWN.

DR. DELITZSCH'S ASSYRIAN DICTIONARY.

FOR ten long years has the little band of Assyrian students been waiting for Delitzsch's *Assyrische Wörterbuch;* [1] and now that the first part has actually appeared, it is a question whether it supplies any want known to Assyriologists. When we remember the many visits which Delitzsch has made to this country, ostensibly for the purpose of copying texts, verifying references, and collecting material generally, our expectation ran high upon the great benefits which we were to receive from his work. Judging by his reviews of books by other students, we all imagined that the advent of his work would mark the beginning of an Assyrian millennium, that crooked texts would be made straight, that all difficulties would be solved, and finally that our souls, hitherto vexed by comparative Semitic philology, might bask and rest themselves in the full light of the learning of the Leipzig professor. How sorely we are disappointed in our expectations we will now show.

The first part of this *Wörterbuch* consists of 168 autographed pages; the writing is plain, neat, and regular. Now the first use

[1] *Assyrisches Wörterbuch zur gesamten bisher veröffentlichten Keilschrift literatur unter Berücksichtigung zahlreicher unveröffentlichter Texte.* Von Friedrich Delitzsch. Erste Lieferung. Henrich's, Leipzig, 1887. 4to.