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REMINISCENCES

BY

THOMAS CARLYLE

EDITED BY

CHARLES ELIOT NORTON

IN TWO VOLUMES

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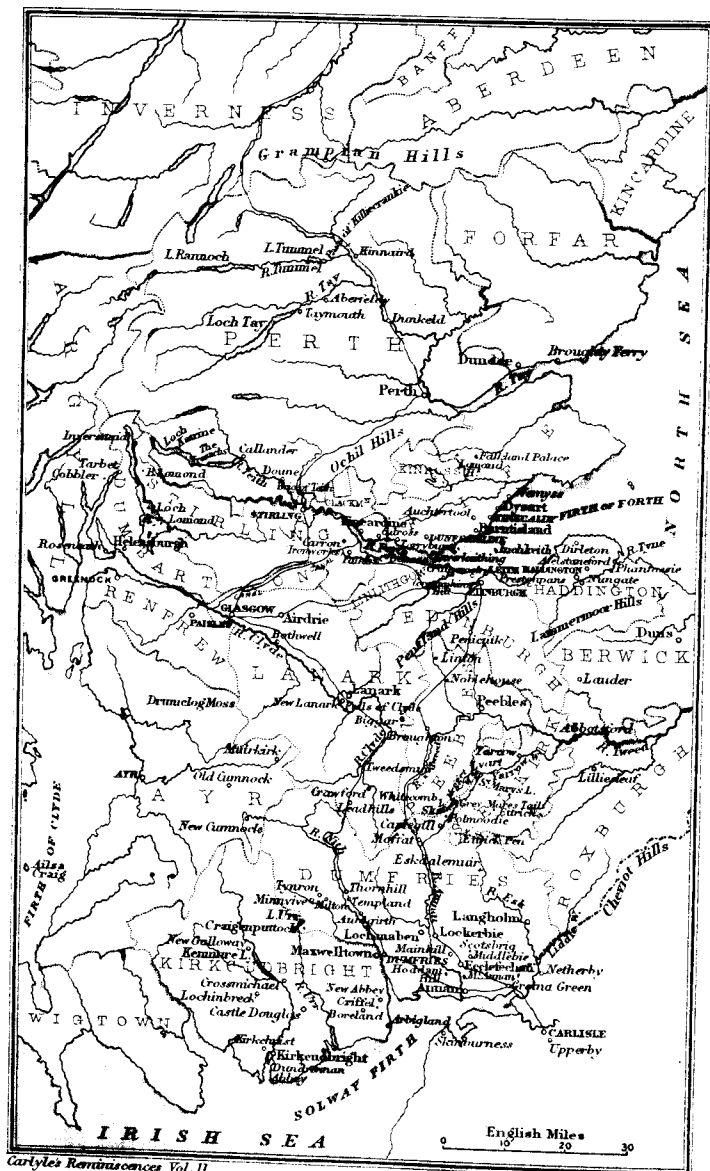
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REMINISCENCES

EDWARD IRVING

[Cheyne Row, Autumn 1866.]

EDWARD IRVING died thirty-two years ago (December 1834), in the first months of our adventurous settlement here; the memory of him is still clear and vivid with me, in all points,—that of his first and only visit to us in this House, in this room, just before leaving for Glasgow (October¹ 1834), which was the last we saw of him, is still as fresh as if it had been yesterday;—and he has a solemn, massive, sad and even pitiable, though not much blamable, or in heart *ever* blamable, and to me always dear and most friendly aspect, in those vacant Kingdoms of the Past. He was scornfully forgotten at the time of his death; having indeed sunk a good while before out of the notice of the more intelligent classes. There has since been and now is, in the new theological generation, a kind of revival of him, on rather weak and questionable terms, sentimental mainly, and grounded on no really correct knowledge or insight; which, however, seems to bespeak

¹ It must have been before October, for Irving had already set out on his journey to Glasgow early in September.

some continuance of vague remembrance, for a good while yet, by that class of people and the many that hang by them.—Being very solitary, and except for converse with the Spirits of my Vanished Ones, very idle in these hours and days, I have bethought me of throwing down (the more rapidly the *better*) something of my recollections of this to me very memorable man; in hopes they may by possibility be worth something by-and-by to some,—not worth *less* than nothing to anybody (*viz.* not true and candid according to my best thoughts), if I can help it. *Pergamus*, therefore;—and be a great deal *swifter*, if you please!—

The Irvings, Edward's father and uncles, lived all within a few miles of my native place, and were of my Father's acquaintance. Two of the uncles, whose little Farm-establishments lay close upon Ecclefechan, were of his familiars, and became mine more or less, especially one of them ("George of Bogside") who was further a co-religionist of ours (a "*Burgher* Seceder," not a "*Kirkman*," as the other was). They were all cheerfully quiet, rational and honest people, of a good-natured and prudent turn,—something of what might be called a kindly vanity, a very harmless self-esteem, doing pleasure to the proprietor and hurt to nobody else, was traceable in all of them. They were not distinguished by intellect, any of them; except it might be intellect in the *unconscious* or instinctive condition (coming out as prudence of conduct, etc.), of which there were good indications;—and of Uncle George, who was prudent enough and

successfully diligent in his affairs (no bad proof of "intellect" in some shape), though otherwise a most taciturn, dull, and almost stupid-looking man, I remember this other fact, that he had one of the *largest heads* in the district, and that my Father, he, and a clever and original Dr. Little, their neighbour, never could be fitted in a Hat-shop of the village, but had always to send their measure to Dumfries to a Hat-maker there. Whether George had a round head or a long I do not recollect. There was a fine little spice of innocent, faint, but genuine and kindly banter in him, now and then. Otherwise I recollect him only as heavy, hebetated, elderly or old, and more inclined to quiescence and silence than to talk of or care about anything exterior to his own interests temporal or spiritual.

Gavin, Edward's Father (name pronounced Ga-yin = Guyon, as Edward once remarked to me), a tallish man, of rugged countenance, which broke out oftenest into some innocent fleer of merriment, or readiness to be merry, when you addressed him, was a prudent, honest-hearted, rational person, but made no pretension to superior gifts of mind; though he too perhaps may have had such in the undeveloped form,—thus, on ending his apprenticeship, or by some other lucky opportunity, he had formed a determination of seeing a little of England in the first place; and actually got mounted on a stout pony, accoutrements succinctly complete (road-money "in a belt round his own body"); and rode, and wandered at his will, deliberate southward, I think for about six weeks; as far as Wiltshire at least, for I have heard him speak of Devizes, "*The Devizes*" he

called it, as one of his halting-places. What his precise amount of profit from this was, I know not at all; but it bespeaks something ingenuous and adventurous in the young man. He was by craft a Tanner; had settled in Annan, soon began to be prosperous, wedded well, and continued all his life there. He was among the younger of those brothers; but was clearly the head of them, and indeed had been the making of the principal two, George and John, whom we knew. Gavin was Bailie in Annan, when the furious *Election* sung by Burns ('There were five carlins in the South,'—five burghs, namely) took place; Gavin voted the right way (Duke of Queensberry's way); and got for his two brothers, each the lease of a snug Queensberry Farm, which grew ever the snugger, as dissolute "Old Q." developed himself more and more into a cynical egoist, sensualist, and hater of his next heir (the Buccleuch, not a Douglas but a Scott, who now holds both Dukedoms): a story well known over Scotland, and of altogether lively interest in Annandale (where it meant "entail-leases" and large sums of money) during several years of my youth.

These people, "the Queensberry Farmers," seem to me to have been the happiest set of Yeomen I ever came to see; not only because they sat easy as to rent, but because they *knew* fully *how* to sit so, and were pious, modest, thrifty men, who neither fell into laggard relaxation of diligence, nor were stung by any madness of ambition; but faithfully continued to turn all their bits of worldly success into *real* profit for soul and body. They disappeared (in Chancery Lawsuit) fifty years ago. I have seen

various kinds of Farmers, cultivated, monied, scientific etc. etc.; but as desirable a set, not since.

Gavin had married well, perhaps rather above his rank; a tall, black-eyed handsome woman, Sister of certain Lowthers in that neighbourhood, who did most of the inconsiderable Corn-trade of those parts, and were considered a stiff-necked faithful kind of people, apter to do than to speak,—originally from Cumberland, I believe. For her own share, the Mother of Edward Irving had much of fluent speech in her, and of management; thrifty, assiduous, wise, if somewhat fussy; for the rest, an excellent house-mother, I believe, full of affection and tender anxiety for her children and husband. By degrees she had developed the modest prosperity of her household into something of decidedly "genteel" (Annan "gentility"); and, having left the rest of the Irving kindred to their rustic solidities, had probably but little practical familiarity with most of them, though never any quarrel or estrangement that I heard of: her Gavin was never careful of gentility, a roomy simplicity and freedom (as of a man in dressing-gown) his chief aim; in my time, he seemed mostly to lounge about; superintended his tanning only from afar, and at length gave it up altogether. There were four other Brothers, three of them small farmers (the two eldest near Ecclefechan, and known to me), and a fourth who followed some cattle-traffic in Annan, and was well esteemed there for his honest simple ways. No Sister of theirs did I ever hear of; nor what their father had been,—some honest little farmer, he too, I conclude.

Their mother, Edward Irving's aged grandmother,