Edward Irving: Coleridge, Sign, and Symbol

Peter J.Manning

> It is among the miseries of the present age that it recognizes no medium between literal and metaphorical. Faith is either to be buried in the dead letter, or its name and honors usurped by a counterfeit product of the mechanical understanding, which in the blindness of self-complacency confounds symbols with allegories. *The Statesman's Manual*

THE FOURTH FIGURE IN WILLIAM HAZLITT'S *The Spirit of the Age, or Contemporary Portraits*, after Jeremy Bentham, William Godwin, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, is Edward Irving. This essay originated in ignorance: who was Irving to be placed in such company? And it begins with a disclaimer: I write from outside the theological concerns that animate the career of Edward Irving, and will welcome the correction that will surely be needed. My perspective is not, however, on Irving himself so much as it is on the constitutive strains within Romanticism that his career exemplifies. It brings into focus debates between natural and supernatural, material or literal and figurative, sincerity and performance, inspiration and institutional structure, fanaticism and celebrity, the temporal and the timeless, even as it discloses the continuing tensions between England and Scotland in that imagined community, the United Kingdom of Great Britain. The merits of Irving and his writings are therefore less the subject than how his contemporaries William Hazlitt, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Thomas Carlyle, Thomas De Quincey, and to a lesser extent, Margaret Oliphant, whose two-volume *Life* (1862) was supported by his surviving family, represented his significance.

Irving was born in 1792 in Annan. The minister of Annan being, as Carlyle bluntly put it, "drunken," from his boyhood on Irving walked six or more miles on Sundays to services at a seceder church at Ecclefechan, the congregation in which Carlyle grew up.[1] "[A]ll Dissent in Scotland," Carlyle epitomized, "is merely a stricter adherence to the National Kirk at all points" (*Reminiscences*, 208); Oliphant likewise emphasizes that across "the south of Scotland" these "humble attempts to restore the church to herself" were popularly identified with the heroic Covenanters of the "unforgotten persecuting times."[2] Irving went up to Edinburgh University at thirteen in 1805, taking his Arts degree in 1809—the library records show his reading of the *Arabian Nights*, and a classmate recalled that he "used to carry continually in his waistcoat pocket a miniature copy of Ossian, passages from which he read or recited in his walks in the country, or delivered with sonorous elocution and vehement gesticulation" (Oliphant, qtd. 19). In 1810 he began

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1 Thomas Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, ed. K. J. Fielding and Ian Campbell (Oxford: OUP, 1997), 207. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

2 Margaret Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving*, fifth edition (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), 12. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

his studies in Divinity, supporting himself by teaching first at Haddington, where he tutored Jane Welsh, and then from 1812 at the newly-founded Academy in Kirkcaldy, where shortly thereafter Carlyle was recruited to head a rival school. Irving welcomed him "with a friendliness which, on wider scenes, might have been called chivalrous" (*Reminiscences*, 216).

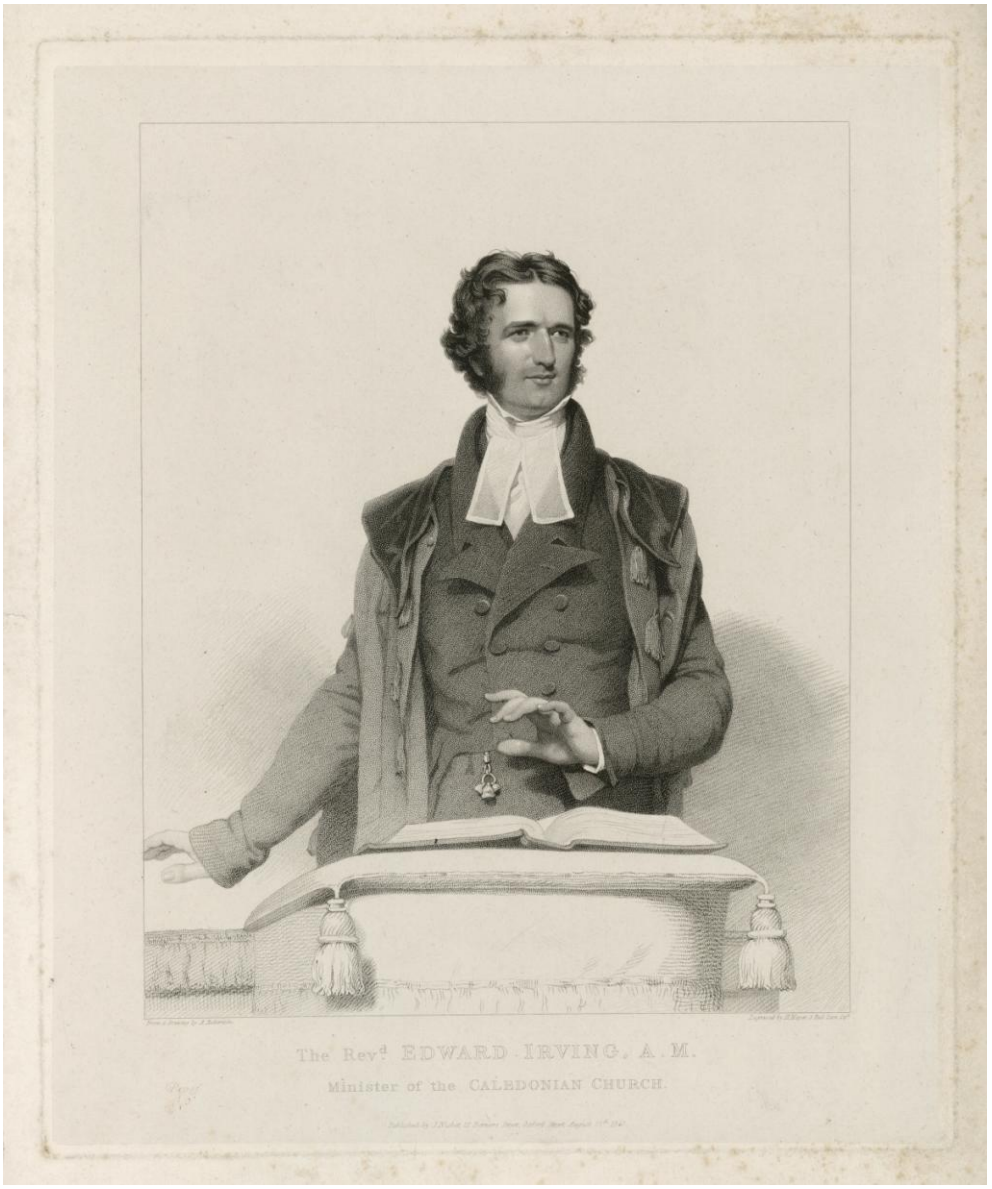
The intimate relationship with Irving that makes Carlyle a rich, if interested, witness to Irving's later career deepened. In 1818 Irving returned to Edinburgh to seek appointment as a minister. There he met once again his former pupil Jane Welsh, and the two appear to have fallen in love, though as Irving was by then engaged to the daughter of the minister who had hired him in Haddington the honorable course, chosen by both of them, was to proceed no further.[3] In 1821 Irving introduced Carlyle to Jane Welsh, becoming the agent of one of the famous marriages of the nineteenth century. Despite invitations to preach Irving failed to secure a call, a limbo from which he was rescued by an invitation in 1819 from Thomas Chalmers to serve as his assistant in Glasgow at St. John's, the parish Chalmers had created to minister to the urban poor. In a confession that marks the cultural divide between (unemployed weavers and factory hands in) Scotland and the élite who flocked to him in London, Irving is reported to have said "I will preach to them if you think fit … but if they bear with my preaching, they will be the first people who have borne with it!" (Oliphant, 51).

In 1821 the call came: to take over the faltering Caledonian chapel in Hatton Garden, London. In June 1822 Irving was ordained at Annan: he conducted a final service in Glasgow, and appeared before his new congregation in July. The position was adventurous, and anomalous: Irving had become a minister of the Church of Scotland, but he preached in London amid the Church of England. Even in Scotland Irving's appearance led people to suppose that he "maun be a Highland chief … a cavalry officer … a brigand chief" (Oliphant, 51); later in London he was mistaken for the demonic violinist Niccolo Paganini (*Reminiscences*, 334*)*. His physical presence and his unfamiliar manner of preaching became a sensation at a time when "Pulpit Eloquence" was a regular topic in the papers. (Figure 1) Carlyle praised and hesitated:

> 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 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 delivery which seemed elaborate and of fore-thought, or might be suspected of being so. He always read, but not in the least slavishly; and made abundant rather strong gesticulation in the right places; voice one of the

[3] See Tim Grass, *The Lord's Watchman: A Life of Edward Irving* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 36ff. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

> finest and powerfullest,—but not a power quite on the heart, as Chalmers's was, which you felt to be coming direct *from* the heart.
>
> (*Reminiscences*, 252)



1. Edward Irving by Henry Meyer, published by James Nisbet, after Andrew Robertson, 1823. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

Many of those who rushed to attend were Presbyterians who joined the congregation; many more were not. James Mackintosh praised Irving to George Canning, the Foreign Secretary, who came with him the following

week; Henry Brougham, William Godwin, Basil Montagu, Lady Jersey, Lord Liverpool, the Duke of Sussex, name after name, week after week, the titled and the powerful as well as the merely curious were drawn to Hatton Garden, their numbers swelled by an advertising circular the Chapel distributed. Admission was by ticket only; requests far exceeded capacity. A lock of carriages blocked the streets, and the poor were relegated to the side. On the strength of Irving's popularity the congregation resolved in 1823 to build a grand church in Regent Square, incurring £21,000 of debt to do so.

The most brilliant account of Irving's effect is Hazlitt's in *The Spirit of the Age*:

> Few circumstances shew the prevailing and preposterous rage for novelty in a more striking point of view, than the success of Mr. Irving's oratory. People go to hear him in crowds, and come away with a mixture of delight and astonishment—they go again to see if the effect will continue, and send others to try to find out the mystery—and in the noisy conflict between extravagant encomiums and splenetic objections, the true secret escapes observation, which is, that the whole thing is, nearly from beginning to end, a *transposition of ideas*. If the subject of these remarks had come out as a player, with all his advantages of figure, voice, and action, we think he would have failed; if, as a preacher, he had kept within the strict bounds of pulpit-oratory, he would scarcely have been much distinguished among his Calvinistic brethren: as a mere author, he would have excited attention rather by his quaintness and affectation of an obsolete style and mode of thinking, than by anything else. But he has contrived to jumble these several characters together in an unheard-of and unwarranted manner, and the fascination is altogether irresistible. Our Caledonian divine is equally an anomaly in religion, and literature, in personal appearance, and in public speaking.[4]

For Hazlitt Irving's appeal lies in this genre-bending performance, which in turn gives rise to a further paradox. Hazlitt shifts attention from the speaker to his audience:

> He has found out the secret of attracting by repelling. Those whom he is

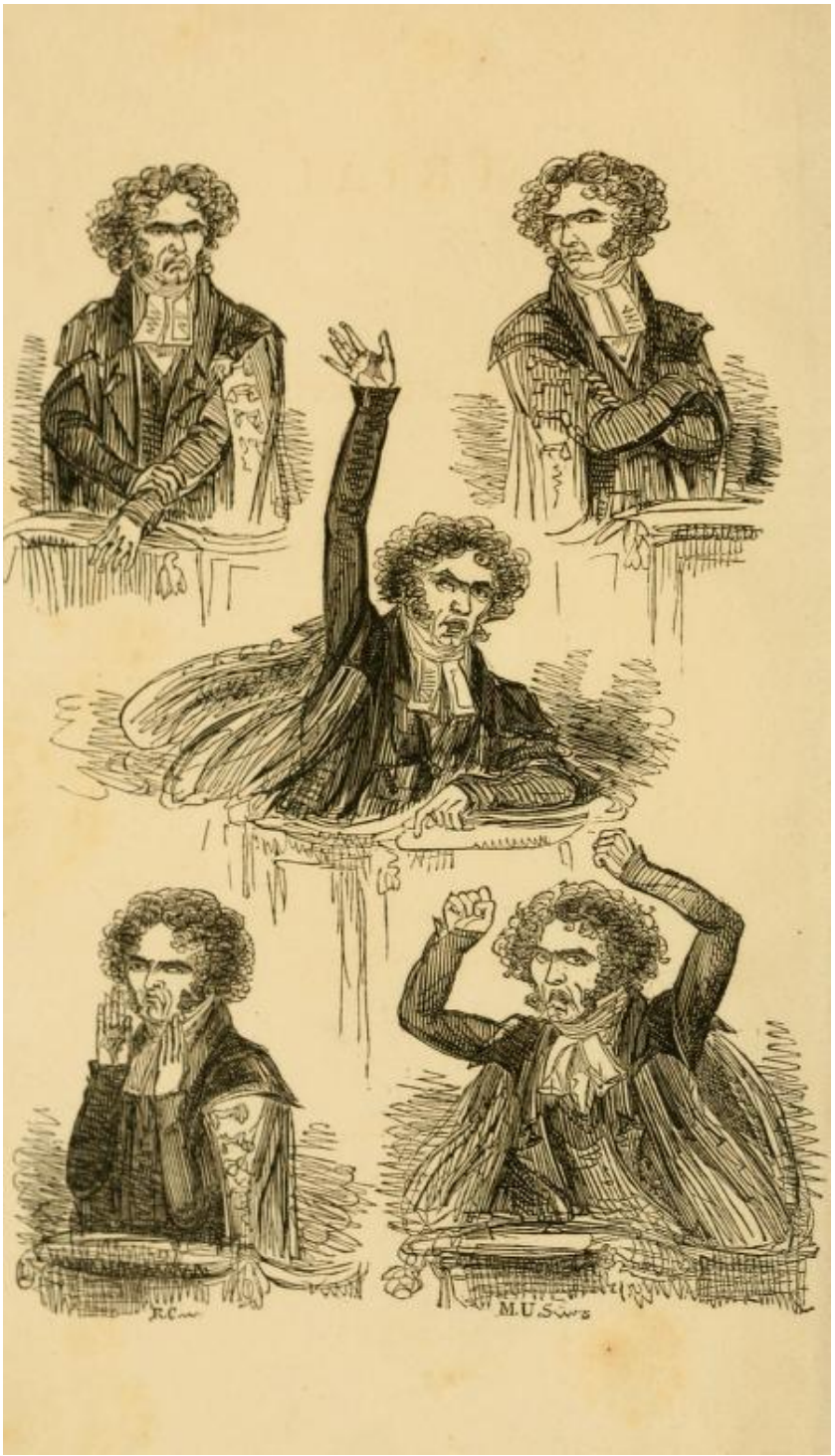
[4] William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age*, in *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. Duncan Wu, 9 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), 7:106. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *Spirit*. This is Hazlitt's third essay on Irving: it was first printed in *The New Monthly Magazine*, v. 10 (1824), and a previous essay appeared in the fourth number of *The Liberal* in 1823. Before printing Hazlitt's essay *The New Monthly Magazine* had already published another in v. 8 (1823). That essay observes that "as mere reporters of passing novelties, we consider ourselves fully justified in giving a faithful summary" and continues: "The whole concern has a theatrical air. You must have a ticket of admission. When . . you cast your eyes upon the scene , you at once perceive that the persons around you are strangers to the place and to the sentiment that should prevail there–that they have come, not to say their prayers, but to have it to say that they have heard Mr. Irving" (193). It is a measure of Irving's lapse from general awareness that even in the trenchant sub-chapter of *England in 1819* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) in which James Chandler finds the conceptual strength of *The Spirit of the Age* to lie in Hazlitt's effort "to block the identification of a simple contradiction to which his representation of his age could be said to reduce," the "topsy-turvy" (141) mobile, multiple "anomal[ies]" (135) and "heterogene[ities]" (136) that Hazlitt identifies in Irving do not earn him a mention.

> likely to attack are curious to hear what he says of them: they go again, to show that they do not mind it. It is no less interesting to the by-standers, who like to witness this sort of *onslaught*—like a charge of cavalry, the shock, and the resistance … . Our spirited polemic is not contented to defend the citadel of orthodoxy against all impugners, and shut himself up in texts of Scripture and huge volumes of the Commentators as an impregnable fortress;—he merely makes use of the strong-hold of religion as a resting-place, from which he sallies forth, armed with modern topics and with penal fire, like Achilles of old rushing from the Grecian tents, against the adversaries of God and man … . Mr. Irving keeps the public in awe by insulting all their favourite idols. He does not spare their politicians, their rulers, their moralists, their poets, their players, their critics, their reviewers, their magazine-writers; he levels their resorts of business, their places of amusement, at a blow—their cities, churches, palaces, ranks and professions, refinements, and elegances—and leaves nothing standing but himself, a mighty landmark in a degenerate age, overlooking the wide havoc he has made! He makes war upon all arts and sciences, upon the faculties and nature of man, on his vices and his virtues, on all existing institutions, and all possible improvements, that nothing may be left but the Kirk of Scotland, and that he may be the head of it … . [He] would get rid of all we have done in the way of improvement on a state of barbarous ignorance, or still more barbarous prejudice, in order to begin again on a *tabula rasa* of Calvinism, and have a world of his own making. (*Spirit*, 109)

Irving's denunciations erupt into, and interrupt, any smooth nineteenth-century narrative of improvement; in returning to the Calvinist fervor of the Covenanters they stand as the perpetual potential of anachronism, a Romantic rupture of unidirectional temporal flow. Yet the jeremiad against modernity is itself a symptom of modernity's replacement of a seventeenth-century religious culture of grave political implications with a culture of celebrity. Irving's targets "do not mind" his assaults. The tirades do not drive the élite to convert as Irving hoped; they only aggrandize him into the mythic instance of the muddled transposition of ideas and hunger for spectacle of the age. If the comparison of Irving to Achilles lends some dignity, the earlier one to "a Neat or a Spring set-to," invoking a famous fight between two contemporary boxers that had attracted "upwards of 30,000 spectators," likens church-going to violent sport (*Spirit*, 284 n.5).

Two aspects of Hazlitt's critique are particularly telling. Hazlitt concedes that Irving possesses "talents and acquirements beyond the ordinary run of every-day preachers," but, he continues:

> Put the case that Mr Irving had been five feet high—would he ever have been heard of, or, as he does now, have 'bestrode the world like a Colossus?' No, the thing speaks for itself. He would in vain have lifted his Lilliputian arm to Heaven, people would have laughed at his monkey-tricks. (Figure 2)



2. Isaac R. Cruikshank, frontispiece to *Trial of Rev. Edward Irving, M. A.: A Cento of Criticism* (London: E. Brain, 1823).

Despite his contempt for the values of his London hearers, Irving plays to their superficialities:

> Conceive a rough, ugly, shock-headed Scotchman, standing up in the Caledonian chapel, and dealing 'damnation round the land' in a broad northern dialect, and with a harsh, screaking voice, what ear polite, what smile serene would have hailed the barbarous prodigy, or not consigned him to utter neglect and derision? But the Rev. Edward Irving, with all his native wildness, 'hath a smooth aspect framed to make women' saints[6] … .Farther, give him all his remarkable advantages of body and mind … yet with all these, and without a little charlatanery to set them off, he had been nothing. (*Spirit,* 107-08)

The conjoined self-magnification and "scout[ing]" of values widely held, the physicality, the seductiveness, and the charlatanry transform Irving into a double of the Byron whom he excoriated.[7]

Hazlitt closes his essay by comparing Irving to Chalmers, enforcing the comparison by turning from preaching to publication, setting Chalmers's *Astronomical Discourses* (1817) against Irving's *Four Orations* (1823):

> We believe the fairest and fondest of his admirers would rather see and hear Mr Irving than read him. The reason is, that the groundwork of his compositions is trashy and hackneyed, though set off by extravagant metaphors and affected phraseology; that without the turn of his head and wave of his hand; his periods have nothing in them; and that he himself is the only *idea* with which he has yet enriched the public!

"If Mr Irving is an example of what can be done by the help of external advantages," Hazlitt pithily sums up, "Dr Chalmers is a proof of what can be done without them. The one is most indebted to his mind, the other to his body" (*Spirit*, 113).

Hazlitt concluded that Irving "shines by patches and in bursts" but "wants … continuity" in argument. That perceived shortcoming may have spurred Irving's turn to Coleridge, to whom he was introduced by Basil Montagu in 1823. Two years later Charles Lamb characterized the relationship:

> Irving has prefixed a dedication (of a Missionary Subject 1st part) to Coleridge, the most beautiful cordial and sincere. He there acknowledges his obligation to S. T. C. for his knowledge of Gospel truths, the nature

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[6] Wu's note makes the clear the sting in the echo of *Othello* I.iii.397-8: "He hath a person and a smooth dispose . . . to make women false."

[7] In 1823 Irving published his first book, *For the Oracles of God, four Orations. For Judgment to Come, an Argument, in nine Parts*. In the latter he stigmatized Southey's *A Vision of Judgement* (1821) and Byron's response to the Poet Laureate, *The Vision of Judgment* (1822) as "two most nauseous and unformed abortions, vile, unprincipled, and unmeaning–the one a brazen-faced piece of political cant, the other an abandoned parody of solemn judgment … with the one, judgment to come is the stalking-horse of loyalty; with the other it is the food and spice of jest-making" (2nd edition, London: T . Hamilton, 325). Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

> of a Xtian Church, etc., to the talk of S. T. C. (at whose Gamaliel feet he sits weekly) [more] than to that of all the men living.[8] This from him—The great dandled and petted Sectarian-to a religious character so equivocal in the world's Eye as that of S. T. C., so foreign to the Kirk's estimate!-Can this man be a Quack? The language is as affecting as the Spirit of the Dedication. Some friend told him, "This dedication will do you no Good," i.e. not in the world's repute, or with your own People. "That is a reason for doing it," quoth Irving. I am thoroughly pleased with him. He is firm, outspeaking, intrepid-and docile as a pupil of Pythagoras.[9]

In May 1827 Irving brought his first and second mentors together. Chalmers—evangelical, social activist, mathematician, political economist as well as theologian—recorded in his journal:

> Mr. and Mrs. Montague [*sic*] took us out in their carriage to Highgate, where we spent three hours with the great Coleridge … . His conversation , which flowed in a mighty unremitting stream, is most astonishing, but, I must confess, to me still unintelligible. I caught occasional glimpses of what he would be at, but mainly he was very far out of all sight and all sympathy. I hold it, however, a great acquisition to have become acquainted with him. You know that Irving sits at his feet, and drinks in the inspiration of every syllable that falls from him.[10]

On the return home Chalmers stigmatized Coleridge's obscurity, indicating that he "'liked to see all sides of an idea before taking up with it.'Ha!' said Mr Irving in reply, 'you Scotchmen would handle an idea as a butcher handles an ox. For my part, I love to see an idea looming through the mist'" (Hanna, 168).

I am fascinated by that "you Scotchmen," as if Irving himself were not a Scotchman, as if he could not fully negotiate the conflict between his Scots roots and his new London identity and philosophical milieu. I am also fascinated by the conventional binary into which he falls, the opposition between an analytic intelligence and a misty suggestiveness, as if it weren't the mistily suggestive that must call forth the most intense engagement. That challenge occupies the remainder of this essay.

The volume to which Lamb refers in the letter just quoted is *For Missionaries After the Apostolical School : a series of orations.* Published in 1825, it grew from the first scandal of Irving's career. Invited to preach an anniversary sermon to the London Missionary Society in May 1824, Irving,

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[8] The Jewish scholar at whose feet St. Peter sat: "I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day" (Acts 22.3, King James version).

[9] Letter to Bernard Barton, 23 March 1825. *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb: Letters*, ed. E. V. Lucas (London: Methuen, 1905); electronic edition (CATH: Virginia Tech) VII: 672-73.

[10] *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Chalmers*, ed. William Hanna, 3 vols. (New York: Harper, 1857), 3:167-68. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

instead of the expected bland congratulations on the work of the Society, delivered a three and a half hour attack on its low conception of its task:

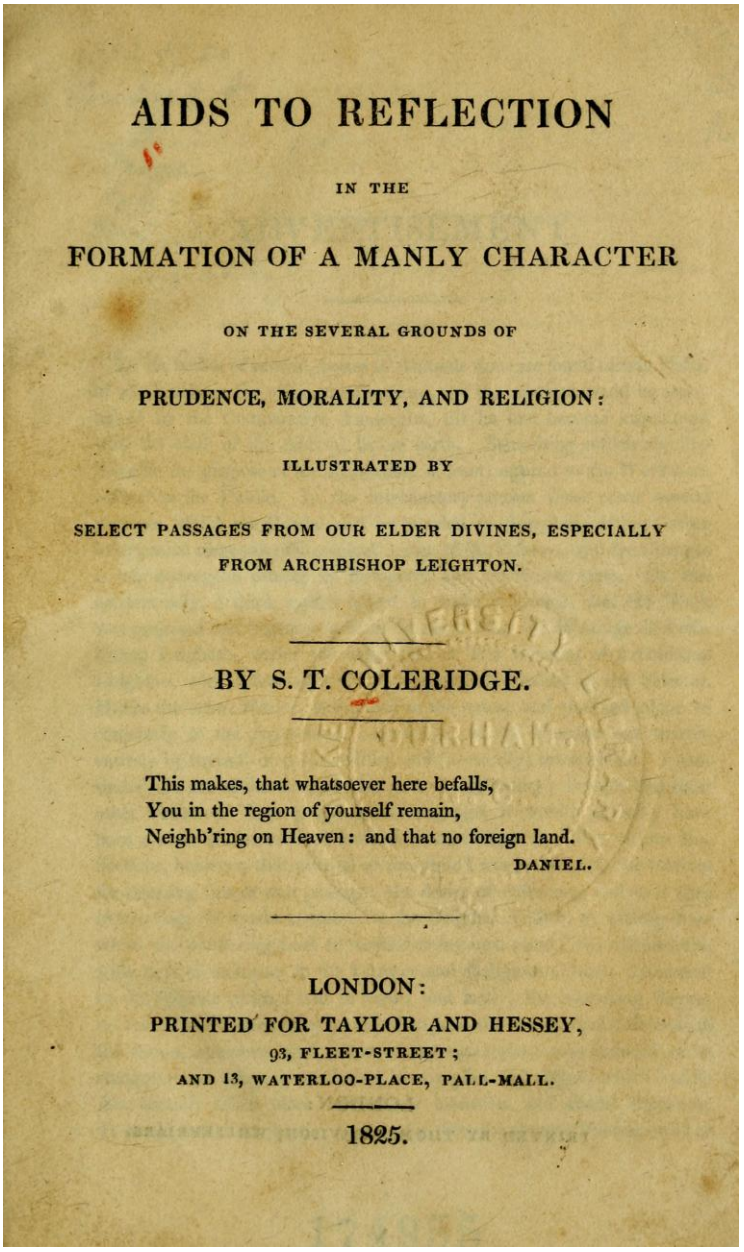
> This is the age of expediency, both in the Church and out of the Church, and all institutions are modelled upon the principles of expediency, and carried into effect by the rules of prudence. I remember, in this metropolis, to have heard it uttered with great applause in a public meeting, where the heads and leaders of the religious world were present, "If I were asked what was the first qualification for a missionary, I would say Prudence; and what the second? Prudence; and what the third? Still I would answer Prudence." I trembled while I heard, not with indignation but with horror and apprehension, what the end would be of a spirit which I have since found to be the presiding genius of our activity, the ruler of the ascendant.[11]

For Irving, "prudence" and "expedience," those pre-eminent Burkean values, are the antipodes of faith: "Faith and prudence are opposite poles in the soul, the one attracting to it all things spiritual and divine, the other all things sensual and earthy" (xv). The rigid antithesis Irving renders as a divinely-conducted sequence: God "emptied" his apostolic missionaries "of self-dependence and dependence on human strength and prudence to fill them with wisdom and truth" (26). It reflects a high kenotic conception of the missionary, but on an occasion intended to raise funds for sending missionaries world-wide, Irving insisted that Christ had denied the missionaries money, "the scrip …the accumulation or use of property in any form" and all worldly comforts (23). "I cannot understand, therefore, in any way, how the condition of the Missionary work should be changed," Irving pronounced, "when the work itself remaineth the same" (96). The missionaries were to subsist, as the Apostles had done, on the charity of those among whom they moved. The outcry was immediate and intense. The secretary of the London Missionary Society charged Irving with confusing the character and the office of the missionary, observing as well that contemporary missionaries did not occupy the Apostolic office. He also reminded the advocate of unsupported missionaries that he was free to renounce his stipend and undertake a mission, an *ad hominem* rejoinder that Irving by his excessive performance had invited. Coleridge likewise noted in his copy of the text that the Apostles had miraculous gifts, as contemporary missionaries did not. The nineteenth century was not the first.[12]

The marginal note was private; Coleridge responded publicly, if obliquely, to Irving with the publication of *Aids to Reflection* in the same year. (Figure 3) For more than two decades Coleridge had been turning to the writings of Archbishop Robert Leighton, a seventeenth-century minister whom Charles II appointed in the hopes of reconciling the differences between Presbyterians and Episcopalians in the Church of Scotland. Originally conceiving a volume

[11] Edward Irving, *For Missionaries after the Apostolical School* (New York: Bliss and White, 1825), p. xiv.
[12] Both examples in Grass, 98-99.

of excerpts from Leighton with commentary, Coleridge eventually produced a formally inventive and generative text that wielded increasing influence across the nineteenth century in Britain and the United States.[13]



AIDS TO REFLECTION

IN THE

FORMATION OF A MANLY CHARACTER

ON THE SEVERAL GROUNDS OF

PRUDENCE, MORALITY, AND RELIGION:

ILLUSTRATED BY

SELECT PASSAGES FROM OUR ELDER DIVINES, ESPECIALLY FROM ARCHBISHOP LEIGHTON.

BY S. T. COLERIDGE.

This makes, that whatsoever here befalls,
You in the region of yourself remain,
Neighb'ring on Heaven: and that no foreign land.
DANIEL.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR TAYLOR AND HESSEY,
93, FLEET-STREET;
AND 13, WATERLOO-PLACE, PALL-MALL.

1825.

3. Title-page, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection* (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1825)

In the Preface Coleridge defined the purpose, audience, and reading practice he

[13] *Aids to Reflection* (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1825), v. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

sought: the book was intended for those who "wish for aid in disciplining their minds to habits of reflection" … "*especially* the studious Young … more particularly to Students intended for the Ministry" (vi) and then, in what seems a glance at Irving, to those "who have dedicated their future lives to the cultivation of their Race, as Pastors, Preachers, Missionaries, or instructors of Youth" (vii). Last: Coleridge defined his Objects: "to direct the Reader's attention to the value of the Science of Words … and the incalculable advantages attached to the habit of using them appropriately, and with a distinct knowledge of their primary, derivative, and metaphorical senses" (vii). In so doing Coleridge enlarges his appeal from those concerned with education to all those who employ language and are concerned to live an examined life. His mode exemplifies his maxim, that to distinguish is not to divide: "to establish the *distinct* characters of Prudence, Morality, and Religion: and to impress the conviction, that though the second requires the first, and the third contains and supposes both the former; yet still Moral Goodness is other and more than Prudence, or the Principle of Expediency; and Religion more and higher than Morality" (viii). Following the section of Introductory Aphorisms, *Aids to Reflection* accordingly proceeds from Prudential Aphorisms, to Reflections respecting Morality to Moral and Religious Aphorisms to Aphorisms on Spiritual Religion.

A reader moving from Irving's categorical declaration that "Faith and prudence are opposite poles in the soul" to *Aids to Reflection* could not miss the contrast with Coleridge's multi-page parsing of "Prudence" into evil prudence, neutral prudence, commendable prudence, and "Holy Prudence, the steward faithful and discreet (… Luke xii.42)" (21-25). The instance, which seems an almost comic hypertrophy of Coleridge's instinct to distinguish and desynonymize, represents the method of the whole.

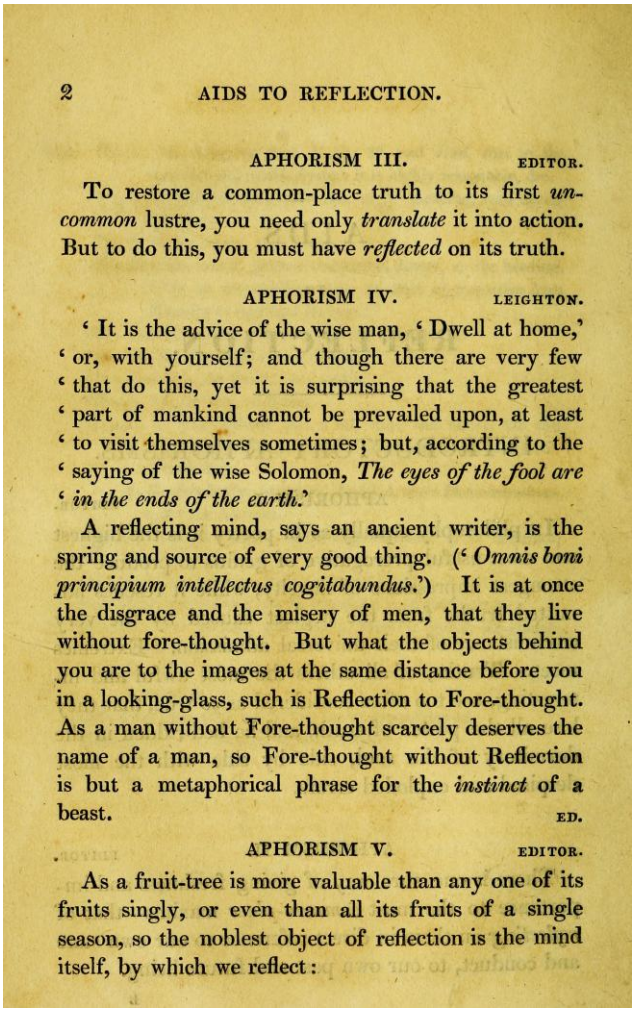
At the conclusion of the Preface Coleridge addresses the "Reader!":

> [T]here is one art, of which every man should be master, the art of reflection. If you are not a *thinking* man, to what purpose are you a man at all? In like manner, there is one knowledge, which it is every man's interest and duty to acquire, namely, *self-knowledge*; or to what end was man alone, of all animals, indued by the Creator with the faculty of *self-consciousness?* (x-xi)

Rather than seeking to stun his audience, as Irving did in a mutual incitement of preacher and hearer, Coleridge urges the reader to rely on his own mental power: "Reflect on your own thoughts, actions, circumstances, and … accustom yourself to reflect on the words you use, hear, or read, their birth, derivation, and history." He continues: "For if words are not things, they are living powers, by which the things of most importance to mankind are actuated, combined, and humanized" (xi).[14]

[14] Compare the earlier *Statesman's Manual* (London, Gale and Fenner, 1816): the histories of the Scriptures "are the living *educts* of the imagination; of that reconciling and mediatory power, which incorporating the Reason in Images

"Actuating" and "combin[ing]" point to the construction of *Aids to Reflection*. The Aphorisms from Leighton which it revives and disseminates were not aphorisms in the original; Leighton printed nothing in his lifetime, and forebade the posthumous publication of his manuscripts, but his command was over-ruled by his family. Coleridge reformulates extracts from longer works into aphorisms, and assembles an argument from the fragments. But to call it an argument, or even a narrative, seems inadequate to the hybrid form. The aphorisms in any given sequence may be by the editor, by Leighton, or by Leighton and the editor combined (Figure 4, below, and Figure 5, opposite). Virtuosically, Coleridge here deploys what Jerome Christensen identified as the "marginal method" of the *Biographia Literaria*.[15] He appears as the anonymous editor, not the overbearing preacher, and as he refashions Leighton so reflecting readers must make new not only the individual aphorisms but also the relationships across the gaps between them, agilely negotiating between aphorisms and the lengthy notes and comments that they trail at the foot of the page and across pages. As the aphorisms expand to include Jeremy Taylor and Henry More the text builds a multi-voiced conversation between past and present, developed over years, on central issues of interpretation and faith from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth. *Aids to Reflection* is idiosyncratically, Coleridgean, the "I-representative," and dialogic; not a



2 AIDS TO REFLECTION.

APHORISM III. EDITOR.

To restore a common-place truth to its first *uncommon* lustre, you need only *translate* it into action. But to do this, you must have *reflected* on its truth.

APHORISM IV. LEIGHTON.

'It is the advice of the wise man, 'Dwell at home,' 'or, with yourself; and though there are very few 'that do this, yet it is surprising that the greatest 'part of mankind cannot be prevailed upon, at least 'to visit themselves sometimes; but, according to the 'saying of the wise Solomon, *The eyes of the fool are* 'in the ends of the earth.'

A reflecting mind, says an ancient writer, is the spring and source of every good thing. ('*Omnis boni principium intellectus cogitabundus.*') It is at once the disgrace and the misery of men, that they live without fore-thought. But what the objects behind you are to the images at the same distance before you in a looking-glass, such is Reflection to Fore-thought. As a man without Fore-thought scarcely deserves the name of a man, so Fore-thought without Reflection is but a metaphorical phrase for the *instinct* of a beast. ED.

APHORISM V. EDITOR.

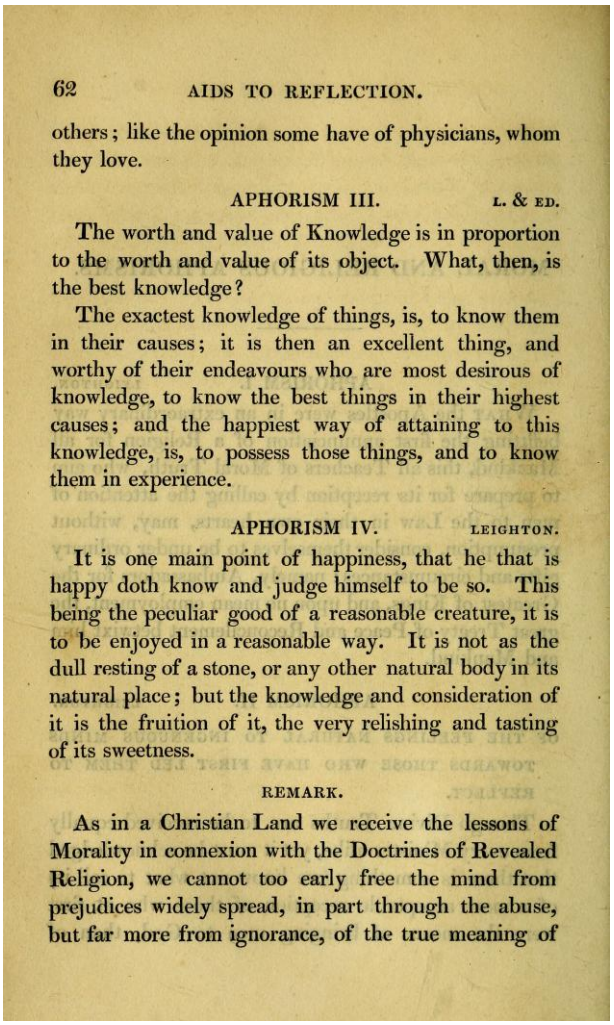
As a fruit-tree is more valuable than any one of its fruits singly, or even than all its fruits of a single season, so the noblest object of reflection is the mind itself, by which we reflect:

of the Sense, and organizing (as it were) the flux of the Senses by the permanence and self-circling energies of the Reason, gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves, and consubstantial with the truths, of which they are the *conductors*" (35). Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

[15] Jerome Christensen, "Coleridge's Marginal Method in the *Biographia Literaria*," *PMLA* 92 (1977): 928-4 rpt. revised as Chapter 3 of his *Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981.

thunderous declamation or dogma, but the reflections and associations of one well-stocked and meditative intelligence, a modest "aid" and provocation to others. To return to Coleridge's language, each of us must decide how to weigh the "primary, derivative, and metaphorical senses" of the words with which we engage.

Coleridge and Irving were to diverge still further. In 1825 Henry Drummond asked Irving to address the Continental Society, which he had co-founded to support Protestant teachings in European Catholic countries. Carlyle anatomized Drummond as "a man of elastic pungent decisive nature; full of fine qualities and capabilities,—but well-nigh cracked with an enormous conceit of himself" that "render[ed] his life a restless inconsistency." Immensely wealthy, Drummond became a major force on Irving, or, as Carlyle judged: "He, without unkindness of intention, did my poor Irving a great deal of ill" (*Reminiscences*, 334). At the same time Irving came under the influence of James Hatley Frere, a clerk in the Army Pay Office who had established his reputation as an authority on Biblical Prophecy with the publication of *A Combined View of the Prophecies of Daniel, Esdras, and St. John* in 1815, republished corrected and enlarged in 1826 as *A Combined View of the Prophecies of Daniel, Ezra, and St. John; Shewing that All the Prophetic Writings Are Formed Upon One Plan. Accompanied By An Explanatory Chart. Also. A Minute Explanation of The Prophecies of Daniel.* This title-page signals the method of the book. Irving, "docile," as Lamb reported, with those who made "[him] ashamed of [his] own ignorance," was taken. He wrote of Frere "that I had no rest in my spirit until I waited on you and offered myself as your pupil, to be instructed in prophecy according to your ideas thereof" (see below).



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others; like the opinion some have of physicians, whom they love.

APHORISM III. L. & ED.

The worth and value of Knowledge is in proportion to the worth and value of its object. What, then, is the best knowledge?

The exactest knowledge of things, is, to know them in their causes; it is then an excellent thing, and worthy of their endeavours who are most desirous of knowledge, to know the best things in their highest causes; and the happiest way of attaining to this knowledge, is, to possess those things, and to know them in experience.

APHORISM IV. LEIGHTON.

It is one main point of happiness, that he that is happy doth know and judge himself to be so. This being the peculiar good of a reasonable creature, it is to be enjoyed in a reasonable way. It is not as the dull resting of a stone, or any other natural body in its natural place; but the knowledge and consideration of it is the fruition of it, the very relishing and tasting of its sweetness.

REMARK.

As in a Christian Land we receive the lessons of Morality in connexion with the Doctrines of Revealed Religion, we cannot too early free the mind from prejudices widely spread, in part through the abuse, but far more from ignorance, of the true meaning of

Coleridge and Carlyle were unimpressed by Frere. Carlyle recalled being taken to meet

> an elderly official little gentleman … seated within rails, busy in the red-tape line. This was the Honourable Something or other, great in Scripture Prophecy … . The Honourable Something had a look of perfect politeness, perfect silliness; his face, heavily wrinkled, went smiling and shuttling about, at a wonderful rate, and in the smile there seemed to be to be lodged a frozen sorrow, as if bordering on craze. On coming out I asked Irving, perhaps too markedly, 'Do you really think that gentleman can throw any light to you on anything whatever?' To which he answered, good-naturedly, but in a grave tone, "Yes, I do."
>
> (*Reminiscences*, 318).

In 1826 Irving published his first study of Prophecy, *Babylon and infidelity foredoomed of God: a discourse on the prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse, which relate to these latter times, and until the second Advent* (Glasgow: Chalmers and Collins), which reviewers treated as a rehash of Frere, to whom the volume was dedicated (just quoted). Coleridge "felt that he was going wrong, & intreated him to beware," but that "affected by Hatley Frere's solemn and intense earnestness" he "mistook the vividness of the impression for the force of truth" and had been "quite swallowed up in the quicksands of conjectural prophecy—translating Ezekiel, Zachariah, Daniel and the Apocalypse into Journals and Gazettes."[16]

The letter deserves both context and analysis. In 1823 Coleridge named Irving "the present idol of the world of fashion' (*CLSTC*, 5:280), but his hold had diminished. In April 1824 in a breathless account of her doings in London Dorothy Wordsworth listed Irving amid other attractions: the Diorama, the Swiss Giantess, the Mexican Curiosities including a live Mexican, the *Antient* Curiosities (more expensive), the Panorama of Pompeii, and the British Museum.[17] Carlyle was more pungent, and mournful: "the first sublime rush of what had once seemed more than popularity, and *had been* nothing more" was over; "the crowd of people flocking round him continued, but it was not of the old high quality any more, the thought that Christian religion was again to dominate all minds, and the world to become an Eden by his dream. And he could not consent to believe it such; never he! That was the secret of his inward quasi-desperate resolutions, breaking out into the wild struggles, and clutchings, towards the unattainable, the unregainable" (*Reminiscences*, 291-92).

A celebrity undone by changes in fashion makes a familiar story but it is particularly painful to the degree that Irving was undone by his own success.

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[16] I have excerpted and rearranged Coleridge's letter of 8 February 1826 from *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956-71), 6:554-67). The edition is hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

[17] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, 2nd edn., *III. The Later Years, Part I 1821-1828,* ed. Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 258-63.

The new Church in Regent Square with a capacity of two thousand that the trustees had authorized in 1823 when Irving was at his zenith opened in 1827. Writing of Irving in 1840 DeQuincey placed him as "unquestionably, by many, many degrees, the greatest orator of our times … the only man of our times who realized one's idea of Paul preaching at Athens, or defending himself before King Agrippa." De Quincey shrewdly specified the contribution made by the confined Hatton Garden chapel to this initial effect: "The smaller was the disposable accommodation, so much the hotter was the contest [to gain entry]: and thus a small chapel, and a small congregation told more effectually in his favor, more emphatically proclaimed his sudden popularity, than the largest could have done." Once the new church was built the "extra auditors were no longer numerous enough, now that they were diffused through a large chapel, to create the tumultuous contests for admission." The grand church that was the emblem of Irving's triumph destroyed the close, electric mirroring of preacher and audience:

> The want of correspondence which he found between the public zeal to be taught or moved and his own to teach or move; this it was, I can hardly doubt which drove him into those crazy speculations … he attempted to secure the same end by extravagance. The whole extent of this extravagance, it is true that he did not perceive; for his mind was unhinged. Disappointment, vexation of heart, wounded pride … all combined, with the constitutional fever in his blood, to sap his health and spirits."[18]

So Carlyle: "Cruelly blasted all those hopes soon were; but Irving never, to the end of his life, could consent to give them up" (*Reminiscences*, 292).

By this interpretation Irving's invocation of the cosmic drama of *imminent* Apocalypse was the means to arouse in his hearers the urgency of his moral concerns. Frere had set the Second Coming in 1862; Irving expected that the Jews would return to Palestine by 1847 and that Christ would come back by 1868, adding that he would do so in Britain. Once more triangulating Irving, Chalmers, and Coleridge clarifies the gaping conceptual differences that had developed between them. Motivated by his "aversion to the *Arbitrary*" Coleridge vigorously restated his objection to "translating" the Prophets and the Apocalypse "into Journals and Gazettes" and strove to make Irving examine his *"Premises*":

> Now, Sir! … you assume the Apocalypse to contain a series of events in an historico-chronological Arrangement—not simply first, A, second B, third C, & fourth , D,—but A so many years, B so many—in short not as the Prophets predicted but as the Annalist in the Books of Samuel, Kings or Chronicles *narrated*—nay with an exactness not even attempted

[18] Thomas De Quincey, *Literary Reminiscences*, vol 2. *De Quincey's Writings*, 7 vols.. (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1851), 236-41.

> by the latter, but to be paralleled only in modern Chronicles.
>
> (*CLSTC*, 6:557)

Hearing Irving in Edinburgh in 1828 Chalmers was also distressed by the change in his former assistant. He found Irving's address "quite woeful. There is power and richnesss, and gleams of exquisite beauty, but withal, a mysterious and extreme allegorization which, I am sure, must be pernicious to the general cause" (Oliphant, 239). David Malcolm Bennett comments: "It is striking that Chalmers should twice charge Irving with allegorizing the Scriptures, for Irving would have insisted that he and his associates at Albury interpreted the Bible literally, not allegorically."[19] That a single mode of interpretation should seem literal to its champions and allegorical to its skeptics points straight to the heart of the dispute, and Bennett's allusion to the "associates at Albury" is the key. In 1826 Irving and Frere were among the founders of the Society for the Investigation of Prophecy. From that year until 1830 members of the society and specially invited sympathizers met for a week at Albury, the estate of Henry Drummond, to study the prophecies from eight in the morning until eleven at night; a record of their sessions appeared as *Dialogues on Prophecy* in three volumes edited by Drummond (London: James Nisbet, 1828-29); after 1830 the work continued in *The Morning Watch*, a periodical owned by Drummond. He had effectively created a subsidized, closed interpretive community, a reading practice of the like-minded, whose "historico-chronological" "Premises," to use Coleridge's terms, went unchallenged. The "literal" was the product of an interpretive practice that ignored its own basis in speculation and reduced the complex play between the "primary, derivative, and metaphorical senses" of words on which Coleridge insisted in *Aids to Reflection* to a single thematic, a decoding not an imaginative response. *Aids to Reflection* was open to "as many in all classes as wish for aid in disciplining their minds to habits of reflection" (vi) and enfranchised readers to explore the words, the "living powers," of the text in connection with their "own thoughts, actions, circumstances" (xi). Coleridge had proleptically rejected Irving's position in *The Statesman's Manual* more than a decade earlier:

> It is among the miseries of the present age that it recognizes no medium between Literal and Metaphorical. Faith is either to be buried in the dead letter, or its name and honors usurped by a counterfeit product of the mechanical understanding, which in the blindness of self-complacency confounds symbols with allegories. (36)

The medium, "the intermediate faculty,"[20] is imagination, and one mode of its operation is "a hovering between images": when the mind "is fixed on one

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[19] David Malcolm Bennett, *Edward Irving Reconsidered: The Man, His Controversies, and the Pentecostal Movement* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2014), Chapter 11.

[20] The phrase in *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), I:124.

image, it becomes [mere] understanding; but while it is unfixed and wavering between them, attaching itself permanently to none, it is imagination."[21] Frere's desire to produce an "explanatory chart" and "a minute examination" of the prophecies, and Irving's determination to schedule the return of the Jews to Palestine, the stages of the rapture, and the Second Coming suggest an incapacity to sustain that uncertainty, and for Coleridge the consequence is a loss of human freedom.

The failure is the more surprising because it seems at odds with Irving's doctrine of the Incarnation, and yet it was that doctrine that precipitated his downfall. Irving steadily asserted in *The Doctrine of the Incarnation Opened* (1828), that Christ "took unto Himself a true body and a reasonable soul; and that the flesh of Christ, like my flesh, was in its proper nature mortal and corruptible" but that he never sinned because upheld by the Holy Ghost. Moreover, for Irving it was absolutely necessary if Christ is to be the "captain" of salvation that his struggles be human struggles and that his triumph be a model for human triumph:

> Besides, if Christ had not a reasonable soul, His human feelings and affections were but an assumed fiction … and His sufferings and His death were a phantasmagoria played off before the eyes of men, but by no means entering into the vitals of human sympathy, nor proceeding from the love of human kind, nor answering any end of comforting human suffering, and interceding for human weakness, and bringing up again the fallen creature to stand before the throne of the grace of God.[22]

It is no surprise that Irving's dynamic understanding of Christ—sinful flesh, reasonable human soul, sustained by the Holy Ghost—fits Coleridge's definition of the symbol:

> a Symbol … is characterized by a translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the the Especial or of the Universal in the General. Above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal, It always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part of that Unity, of which it is the representative. (*SM*, 37)

The rigidity of Irving's studies in Prophecy seems inconsistent with this view of the Incarnation; that Irving should there have chosen schematism over a comparably nuanced mode of reading measures how desperately he sought to revive his audience's fervor, and his own. His view of Christ's sinful flesh, however, set off a furor among those who felt that he was traducing the purity of, as one of them said, "our adorable Saviour." Irving responded to J. A.

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[21] *Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism*, ed. T. M. Raysor, 2nd edition, 2 vols. (London: Dent, 1960), 2:103.

[22] *The Doctrine of The Incarnation Opened* was published in 1828, but based on sermons from 1825. My text is from *Edward Irving's Collected Writings,* ed. Gavin Carlyle, 5 vols. (London: Alexander Strahan, 1865), 5:116,118.

Haldane 's *Refutation of Mr. Irving's Heretical Doctrine* of 1828 by reaffirming his position in *The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of Our Lord's Human Nature* (1830). Carlyle, who had regretfully dismissed Irving's prophetic studies, rejoined him on this head:

> In my humble opinion, if the common interpretation of the Bible is to be followed, our friend is perfectly right, nay indubitably and palpably so: at all events, the gainsayers are utterly, hopelessly, and stone-blindly wrong. My Mother who is a better judge than I, declared it to be soundest doctrine, often preached in her hearing[.][23]

The modern biographers and critics of Irving whom I have read side with Carlyle's mother.[24] The attack on Irving's humane appeal to Christ's sinful flesh seems like the uncanny dark return of the role of the body in the success of Irving's preaching, the theological dispute a displaced hostility to the seductiveness of Irving in the pulpit.

Coincident with the increasing resistance to Irving's Christology an outbreak of speaking in tongues occurred in Port Glasgow, Scotland. Irving had begun his ministry in the conventional opinion that "The vision is shut up, and the testimony is sealed, and the word of the Lord is ended" (*Oracles*, 13) but since 1827 he had been arguing that the supernatural gifts had been lost through man's infidelity, and therefore might be recovered. In 1828 and 1829 he had toured Scotland preaching to crowds, and before the controversial Alexander Scott left Scotland to become Irving's assistant in London he had urged his congregation in nearby Paisley to pray for a restoration of the gifts; in 1829 and 1830 he had preached in the neighborhood and instructed one of the women later to burst out in tongues. Depending on one's perspective, the preaching either prepared the ground for an outpouring of the spirit or created an atmosphere for contagious imposture. The Regent Square Church sent a delegation including the lawyer John Cardale to investigate the gifts, and concluded that they were genuine. In contrast, after initial enthusiasm the local ministers grew skeptical, but Irving from a distance remained unshaken; he wrote Chalmers:

> The substance of Mary Campbell's and Margaret Macdonald's visions or revelations, given in their papers, carry to me a spiritual conviction and a

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[23] *The Carlyle Letters Online*, Duke University Press / Center for Digital Humanities, University of South Carolina. Carlyle to his brother Jack, 1 May 1830. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

[24] In addition to those already cited in the text see Arnold Dallimore, *Forerunner of the Charismatic Movement: The Life of Edward Irving* (Peabody, MA.: Moody Press, 1983); A. L. Drummond, *Edward Irving and His Circle* (London: Clarke, 1937); David W. Dorries, *Edward Irving's Incarnational Theology* (Fairfax, VA: Xulon Press, 2002), Peter Elliott, *Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2013); Graham McFarlane, *Christ and the Spirit: Doctrine of the Incarnation According to Edward Irving* (Milton Keynes, UK; Paternoster Press, 1996). I should have known sooner than I did the searching analysis of the theological positions of Coleridge and Irving by Suzanne Webster in Chapter 3, "The Crux of the Dilemma: The Incarnation, Humanity, and 'Obnoxious Body' of Christ," of her *Body and Soul in Coleridge's Notebooks 1827-1834* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

> spiritual reproof which I cannot express ….Oh! My friend! Oh, my dear master! There are works of the Spirit which few of us ever dream of! Let us not resist them when we see them in another. (Oliphant, 293)

The London presbytery, meanwhile, prompted by complaints, had begun to investigate the propriety of Irving's description of the sinfulness of Christ's flesh; Irving responded by haughtily withdrawing from the jurisdiction of the presbytery, the authority to which his ordination vow obligated him, and referred himself directly to the Church of Scotland. In December 1830 the presbytery expelled him, to be readmitted only if he renounced his errors and acknowledged its authority. In May 1831 the National Assembly of the Church of Scotland likewise declared Irving's doctrines heretical and authorized any presbytery in which he sought a position to inquire into his authorship of the condemned works and to proceed as it saw fit (Grass, 226). The battle between individual (or Spirit) and institution would become clearer still. The gifts in Scotland that Irving had defended appeared in his own church in April 1831, in the Cardale family. At first Irving confined them to the small morning services, but so long as he believed in their authenticity he could not, by his own logic, restrict them. In the Fall of 1831 they broke out in the public services on Sunday. The scandal packed the church once again, with those who had come to hear Irving and those who had come to experience the speakers in tongues who disrupted the services. Hecklers shouting "Blasphemy!" also appeared: the combination of suspect theological views, the tongues, speakers in the power, and the attendant disturbances discomfited many of the long-time members of the church. James Nisbet, an elder and the publisher of Drummond's *Dialogues on Prophecy* and of the majestic engraving of Irving (Figure 1), contemplated resignation; others simply stayed away. The July revolution in France and the Captain Swing riots and burnings across the south of England in the previous year and the tumults leading up to the Reform Bill of 1832 had raised anxieties about public disorder, and the *Times* printed ominous accounts of the doings at the Church.

Opinion about Irving and other figures was violently divided at the time, and is impossible to gauge now. Those who knew him most closely never doubted the sincerity of his belief in the speakers in the spirit, but as Coleridge observed of his admiration of Frere, Irving could mistake "the vividness of the impression for the force of truth." All of us may be deluded in the same way, but it is hard not to wonder how much Irving's persistence, even when the speakers themselves confessed that they had been deluded or even behaved falsely, as several of them did, was owing to his own investments. The revival of the gifts would be evidence of the imminence of the Second Coming, thus validating his prophetic teachings, and would also vindicate his missionary address against those who had charged he had failed to recognize the difference between the gifts of the apostles and the conditions of the nineteenth century.

In November 1831 Irving replied to the dismay of the Trustees over his

handling of the charismatic eruptions by summarizing his procedures but also declaring that "it lies with the … minister of the church to order all things connected with the public worship. For this duty I am responsible to the Great Head of the Church … . I entreat you not to let or withstand, lest haply ye be found to be fighting against God" (Oliphant, 335-36). Faced with an intransigent minister (Coleridge's "wise prudence" would have been emollient) whose discipline and beliefs had become incompatible with the local presbytery and the Church of Scotland in which the church had been founded, and perhaps mindful also of the debt that that founding had incurred, the Trustees sought a legal opinion from the Solicitor General on their responsibilities. The legal and the spiritual cannot be disentangled in this dispute but the legal determination was unambiguous: "The Trustees ought to proceed immediately to remove Mr. Irving from his charge by making complaint to the London Presbytery in the manner pointed out by the deed" (qtd. Grass, 252). The trial was set for late April; interrupted by an outbreak of the tongues it became a magnet for spectators. On May 2 the Presbytery, proceeding from the narrow legal grounds, ruled that Irving "has rendered himself unfit to remain the minister of the National Scotch Church … and ought to be removed therefrom, in pursuance of the conditions of the trust-deed of the said church" (qtd. Oliphant, 367). The next day the Trustees locked Irving out of the Church that they had built for him.

The child who had attended a seceder church now led one. Irving rented a room at the Horse Bazaar on Gray's Inn Road, incongruously sharing the building with Robert Owen, the socialist labor reformer. About eight hundred of Irving's parishioners followed him, but there were significant defections. David Brown, the assistant who succeeded Alexander Scott (who had already been deposed for heresy by the Scotch General Assembly), had left during the trial; when a prominent speaker in the power admitted that he had been (self-) deluded Brown concluded that there was "no shadow of ground to think that this work was Divine." According to Brown Irving replied

> with a good deal of suppressed feeling, "Your intellect, sir, has destroyed you." "Yes, sir, I confess it; my intellect *has* done the deed, whatever that may mean; I am responsible for the use of my intellect, and I have used it."

Brown's "mingled reverence and love" for the "grand man" is touching; the repeated unwillingness of Irving to integrate intellect and what lies beyond it as Coleridge strove to do saddens.[25] Because the rented room was too small for the congregation Irving also preached outdoors to large audiences—including pickpockets working the crowd—a mode that to a worried establishment was paradigmatic of anarchic forces. In October 1832 the congregation found a new home in Newman Street.

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[25] David Brown, "Personal Reminiscences of Edward Irving," *The Expositor*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, 3rd series, v. 6 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1887), 273.

The Church, however, had changed. The prominence of the gifts, which Irving never claimed for himself, led to a structure of governance by a group of Apostles in which the minister was marginalized. There was not even a pulpit for the formerly central preacher. Though the group was popularly known as the Irvingites (on its way to becoming the Catholic Apostolic Church) Irving had been displaced by the gifted whom he had defended, and by the maneuverings of Cardale and Drummond, who confirmed each other as Apostles. Irving, who had figured as the charismatic opponent to authority of all kinds in the outside world, had had his own authority usurped by even more disruptive forces in the church, professedly the vessels of a higher inspiration. Concurrently the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland directed the Presbytery of Annan to initiate the proceedings against Irving resolved on the previous year. In replying to their inquiry in October he avowed authorship of the condemned works—and "declared himself able henceforth 'to make no relationship but that of open and avowed enmity'" to the General Assembly (Oliphant, 385). The Church had rejected him, but so too did he reject the Church. As early as 1828 Irving had parted from Carlyle by declaring "I must go, then,—and suffer persecution, as my fathers have done!"; now he fulfilled what he evidently saw as his destiny (*Reminiscences*, 325). The trial was set for 13 March 1833 and Irving voluntarily appeared; two thousand spectators overflowed the church. Carlyle was in Edinburgh, and wrote to his brother Jack at the time:

> [P]oor Edward Irving … came to Annan to be deposed; made a heroico-distracted Speech there, Dow finishing off with a Holy-Ghost shriek or two; wher[e]upon Irving calling on them to "hear that" indignantly withdrew. He says in a Letter printed in the Newspapers that he "did purpose to tarry in those parts certain days, and publish in the towns of the coast the great name of the Lord"; which purpose it appears he did accomplish; "publishing" everywhere a variety of things. He was at Ecclefechan Jean writes us: gray, toilworn, haggard, with "an immense cravat the size of a sowing-sheet covering all his breast": the country people are full of zeal for him; but everywhere else his very name is an offence to decent society. "Publish in the towns of the coast"! … Oh, it is a *Pickleherring Tragedy*, the accursedest thing one's eye could light on. As for Dow he must surely ere long end in the madhouse: for our poor friend one knows not what to predict.
>
> (*CLO*, 29 March 1833)

The account in the *Reminiscences*, largely derived from newspapers. conveys Irving's staging of his martyrdom more magniloquently:

> A poor aggregate of reverend *sticks* in black gown, sitting in Presbytery, to pass formal condemnation on a Man and a Cause which might have been tried in Patmos, under Presidency of St. John, without the right

> truth of it being got at! … . Irving was rebuked with the "Remember where you are, Sir!" and got answer , "I have not forgotten where I am: it is the Church where I was baptized; where I was consecrated to preach Christ; where the bones of my dear ones lie buried!"—Condemnation, under any circumstances, had to follow … The feeling of the population was strong and general for Irving … My brother Jamie … who much admired and pitied the great Irving, gave me the last notice I ever had of that tragic matter … The Preacher stood on some table or chair which was fixed against the trunk of a huge, high, strong and many-branched tree 'Plane-tree' (*Elm*, well known to me and to every one that passes that way); the weather was proper February [March] quality, grim, fierce, with windy snow-showers flying; Irving had a woollen comforter about his neck; skirts of comforter, hair, cloak, tossing in the storms; eloquent voice well audible under the groaning of the boughs and the piping of the winds. (340-42)

Carlyle thought Oliphant's biography was too hagiographic, but described the "grand close" as "true and touching … of almost *Apocalyptic* impressiveness" (*Reminiscences*, 346) and what tells as much as his sublime is a humbler but signifying incident when the "sad and weary" Irving (Oliphant, 397) returned to Newman Street. On 31 March he was receiving an infant into the church "when Cardale (in his capacity as apostle) caught his hand and stopped him" on the grounds that the previous week prophecy had stated that as he had been deposed as a minister "he should not administer the Sacraments until he had again received ordination." Grass observes that Irving did not seem to take the foreclosure as humiliating, but even though it accorded with his belief in the primacy of the gifts it is hard not to feel that there was at least some indignity in being re-ordained through the Apostolic laying-on of hands by his lawyer (Grass, 276-77).

The strain of these last years of furious activity and ceaseless contention, further darkened by the deaths of his children, eroded Irving's health. Carlyle wrote Drummond to plead that he take Irving to some country in Europe where "the language was unknown to him," persuaded that "unless carried into some element of *perfect silence*, poor Irving would soon die, " but he never mailed the letter (*Reminiscences,* 345). Silence and the space of reflection did not replace the fret of notoriety. What mixture of motives led Irving to head north to Scotland in the autumn of 1834 remains mysterious: to escape a difficult situation at Newman Street or to carry out its work? An agent of the Church or an embarrassment that the leaders wished to remove? To fulfill his mission as prophet in his native land or to see his home country once more before he died? He preached his way across Shropshire and Wales, and up to Liverpool, where, confessing that he was unwell, he asked his wife to meet him. Together they sailed to Glasgow, where his physical decline alarmed those who met him. By the end of November he was largely bedridden, surrounded by his mother and sister and friends from Kirkcaldy. He "died

hourly" and became "delirious," Oliphant narrates from the memories of his physician: "The last thing like a sentence we could make out was 'If I die, I die unto the Lord. Amen'" (426). Irving passed away on 7 December 1834, at forty-two; he was buried on the 12th in the crypt of Glasgow Cathedral.

Oliphant quotes an orthodox newspaper, the *Scottish Guardian*: "Every other consideration was forgotten, in the universal and profound sympathy" (427). Irving welcomed into the church that had scorned him and that he had denounced as corrupt provides Oliphant with a triumphant conclusion, but it may also be seen as the iconic embodiment of the unsettled questions of authority with which this paper is concerned: the newspaper may declare that all other considerations are forgotten, but in doing so it raises them anew. In praising Irving in a note in *On The Constitution of Church and State* (1830) Coleridge too articulates the tensions that his career exemplifies:

> That he possesses my unqualified esteem as a man, is only saying that I know him … and in proof of my confidence in his regard, I have not the least apprehension of forfeiting it by a frank declaration of what I think. Well, then! I have no faith in his prophesyings; small sympathy with his fulminations; and in certain peculiarities of his *theological* system, as distinct from his religious principles, I cannot see my way. But I hold withal … that Edward Irving possesses more of the spirit and purpose of the first Reformers, that he has more of the Head and the Heart, the Life, the Unction, and the genial power of Martin Luther, than any man now alive; yea, than any man of this and the last century.[26]

Coleridge represents Irving as a figure of a previous century, not his own; as a man, not a thinker, distinguishing between his religious principles and his theological formulations. If Irving sat at Coleridge's feet, Coleridge reciprocally developed his positions through critique of his counterpart's. So too Margaret Oliphant inscribed her biography "to all who love the memory of Edward Irving, which the writer has found by much experiment to mean all who ever knew him" (*Dedication*), sidestepping much of the theological controversy, as indeed her engagement with his family and living successors in his church pressured her to do. In the account of his enduring friendship with Irving Carlyle inseparably yokes "great" to "poor," the sublime qualities of the man eaten away by muddled ideas and entrapment in his vision of reforming the world. The paradoxes that exasperated Hazlitt these writers cherish, together conveying more than Irving himself could the symbolic figure he had become.

[26] *On the Constitution of Church and State*, ed. John Colmer (London: Routledge, 1976), 142-43.