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Edward Irving, a Shooting Star in a Presbyterian Pulpit

So how did this educated Presbyterian son of an Annan tanner achieve the transitory glory of a 'shooting star' in the London of the post-Regency period?

Edward Irving himself at the start of his meteoric career would have had no doubts. On his eighteenth birthday, the 4th of August 1810, he observed in his Diary, "It is at present my intention to become a Clergyman of the Church of Scotland – and with this view I have studied at the University four successive winters."

In 1821 the congregation of the struggling Caledonian Chapel at Cross Street, Hatton Garden were in need of a new minister.

By this time Irving was a not altogether successful assistant to the pre-eminent Dr Thomas Chalmers at the Tron Church in Glasgow. Although a hardworking and sympathetic visitor of the poor, his preaching was not to the taste of the congregation and it was not unknown for people to exit the church on hearing that Edward Irving was to take the service.

Edward must have felt truly tested. There seemed no prospect of him getting a church in Glasgow, and he was aware of his unpopularity as a preacher. At this low ebb came deliverance which he described in the dedication of his book *The Last Days*: "Well do I remember the morning when, as I sat in my lonely apartment, meditating the uncertainties of a preacher's calling, and revolving in my mind the purposes of missionary work, this stranger stepped in upon my musing, and opened to me the commission with which he had been charged". The stranger was Mr Laurie, one of the elders of the Caledonian Chapel, who, while on business in Glasgow had 'talent spotted' him. The charge was to ask Edward to undertake a four-week trial as minister at the Chapel in London.

This is not to say that Irving did not have some slight doubts. After all London was a long way from home but the fact that it was the London elders who had approached him, endorsed his belief that this was his genuine call from God, because "Your invitation has come without any endeavour on my part ..."

Needless to say the trial was a success, and he was offered the job. Indeed, so keen were they to have him that the obligatory need for the pastor to preach in Gaelic was obviated by the Elders getting a Bill passed to annul this requirement.

If he had had any doubts they surely must have been assuaged by the increasing congregation, with the approval of his preaching, and a doubled stipend, which he was only too eager to share with his life-long friend, Thomas Carlyle. "I have received the call most respectably signed, and what with subscriptions and the first of the Seat-rents, the security of £500 a year, so that I trust being able to entertain you yet in London as every honest hearted

fellow should be entertained." And so on the 16th October, 1822 he was inducted into the Caledonian Chapel.

princes and people, with an unsparing hand.” Great fun providing you were not the target of his castigations.

In addition to this new found fame, a new church was being built in Regent Square,



In 1830 he published *The Orthodox and Christian Doctrine of Our Lord's Human Nature*, which caused further great controversy and expanded the opposition against him.

At this point the London Presbytery tried to proceed against him, but as Irving had been ordained in Scotland they held no authority over him and on October 19th he simply voluntarily withdrew his membership of it. Although the Presbytery determined to try him in absentia, and condemned him for holding heretical views, at this point he still had the support of his own congregation and the Kirk Session of Regent Square countered the

Alternative premises were found in the painter Benjamin West's old exhibition