Two Editors

RECOLLECTIONS OF E. L. GODKIN AND W. P. GARRISON.

BY VISCOUNT BRUCE.

In 1870, when I first visited the United States and made the acquaintance of Ed- wina L. Godkin (to whom I had been intro- duced by Leslie Stephen), the New York Nation was still in the freshness of its youth. It was, to the best of my recollection, the only weekly journal of political importance in the Atlantic States, and its type was a new one in the country. Its founder had no doubt been influenced by the example of two weeklies that were then playing a great part in England. The Saturday Re- view, established in 1856, was for the first ten years of its life, and to a less degree for the first twenty, the most brilliant jour- nal that England had known. commanding the pens of an extraordinarily large num- ber of men of first-rate literary talent. It was, however, much stronger on its litera- rian than on its political side, for in politics it was always critical rather than con- structive, having no positive views to ad- vocate, and influential chiefly by its keenly destructive cynicism and air of intellectual superiority—attributes which made John Stuart call it the Saturday Revolter, and pro- voced Thackeray into dubbing it the Super- fine Review. The Spectator was a very differ- ent sort of organ. Unlike the Saturday Re- view, in which all sorts of different minds and cast of opinion were visible, the Spectator was written almost entirely by two men, Richard Holt Hutton and Mer- dith Townsend. Hutton was the greater of the two, and indeed one of the best Eng- lish public writers of the nineteenth cen- tury, but Townsend's vivacious and almost reckless Godkinism in writing his views al- ways ingenious and often paradoxical, help- ed to give the paper a distinctive character. Down till 1886, when it parted from Mr. Gladstone on the question of Irish Home Rule, it was a bulwark of the Liberal party.

The Nation resembled the Spectator in devoting its opening pages to comments on current events, and also in the definite- ness of its political programme, while it recalled the Saturday Review in the pun- gency of its tone as well as in the excel- lence of its literary criticism. It was, how- ever, no mere imitation, either of those journals or of any other, but a new crea- tion which brought new elements into the American press. The American journalism of those days had plenty of vigor. Horace Greeley was perhaps the most conspicuous single figure, but there were plenty of other strong men. The style of writing was, however, as a whole (for there were exceptions, such as Mr. Dana, of the Sun) less polished in style than it has since be- come, and based on a less solid foundation of knowledge than public writers in the first rank are now expected to possess. Lit- erary criticism in particular was at a rather low ebb. For careful reviews of books by competent scholars it was generally neces- sary to go to the few monthlies, and even there such reviews were not always to be found. One of the commonest complaints made was that there was little discrimina- tion in literary appréciations. But even the Nation had from the first three distinctive merits. It was brilliantly written. It was full of wit. It was conspicuously independent and individual. Though it started as a definite- ly Republican organ, it never obeyed any political leader, never laid itself out to de- fend any party platform, and always pre- sented a definite point of view or prin- ciples, as those which the editor held with full personal conviction. These principles reflect Godkin's mind. He was a stringent economist of that old orthodox type which has gone so much out of favor in the present century. No reader could ever doubt either his clearness or his cour- age. The paper was the man, and the man was the paper. This individual strain helped to give the Spectator a kind of pow- er, to the Nation, for we are all interested, by a strong individuality, even if we do not wholly like it.

E. L. Godkin was stringent in his crit- icisms, and as he made many friends (for he was a charming companion and a loyal comrade), so he made a good many enemies. The heritage of these enemies were to be found among those Tumany leaders whom the Incon- tinent evicted. Among men who had the same aims as his own and were working honestly for them, he sometimes dealt rather hardly. I used now and then to suggest to him that he did not make sufficient allowance for the difficulties in which honorable and public spirited men are placed by the exigencies of practical pol- itics. They must now and then consent to compromises. They have to work along with persons whose ideas are lower than their own, and cannot always say all they think about such persons, nor pursue the course which they personally prefer, when it becomes plain that success cannot be attained. It was the rigidity of his standard he applied that made his judg- ments severe, not any personal bitterness, still less any disappointed ambitions, for he had no axes to grind and never sought anything for himself. He was not, as some people thought, a cynic, for the cynic, tak- ing the world as he finds it, applies a low standard. Mr. Godkin was rather to be called a purist, because he applied a high standard. He worked constantly and ear- nestly for righteousness, and did a great deal. The influence which he exercised, because he applied a high standard. He worked constantly and ear-nestly for righteousness, and did a great deal through his newspaper to stimulate patri- otic efforts for reforms in government, espe- cially in municipal government, in days when reform was by no means so popular as it has happily become within the last fif- teen years.

When he assumed the editorship of the Evening Post he wrote there with his usual force and boldness. But he seemed to me to be less in his element in a daily paper had than he had been in a weekly, for his gifts