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PART I.
THOMAS CARLYLE

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I.

THE real record of Carlyle's life will be a long task, employing not only many human hands, but even the hand of Time itself.

While writing his "History of Friedrich II.," Carlyle had prepared—as, indeed, the growth of the work had demanded—a special study at the top of his house in Chelsea, in which only that paper, book, or picture was admitted which was in some way connected with the subject in hand. One side of the room was covered from floor to ceiling with books; two others were adorned with pictures of persons or battles; and through these books and pictures was distributed the man he was trying to put together in comprehensible shape. But even more widely was Carlyle himself distributed. In what part of the earth have not his lines gone out and his labors extended? On how many hearts and minds, on how many lives, has he engraved passages which are

transcripts of his own life, without which it can never be fully told? To report this one life, precious contributions must be brought from the lives of Goethe, Emerson, Jeffrey, Brewster, Sterling, Leigh Hunt, Mill, Mazzini, Margaret Fuller, Harriet Martineau, Faraday. But how go on with the long catalogue? At its end, could that be reached, there would remain the equally important memories of lives less known, from which in the future may come incidents casting fresh light upon this central figure of two generations; and, were all told, time alone can bring the perspective through which his genius and character can be estimated. In one sense, Carlyle was as a city set upon a hill, that cannot be hid; in another, he was an "open secret," hid by the very simplicity of his unconscious disguises, the frank perversities whose meaning could be known only by those close enough to hear the heart-beat beneath them; and many who have fancied that they had him rightly labelled with some moody utterance, or safely pigeon-holed in some outbreak of a soul acquainted with grief, will be found to have measured the oak by its mistletoe.

Those who have listened to the wonderful conversation of Carlyle know well its impressiveness and its charm: the sympathetic voice now softening to the very gentlest, tenderest tone as it searched far into some sad life, little known or regarded, or

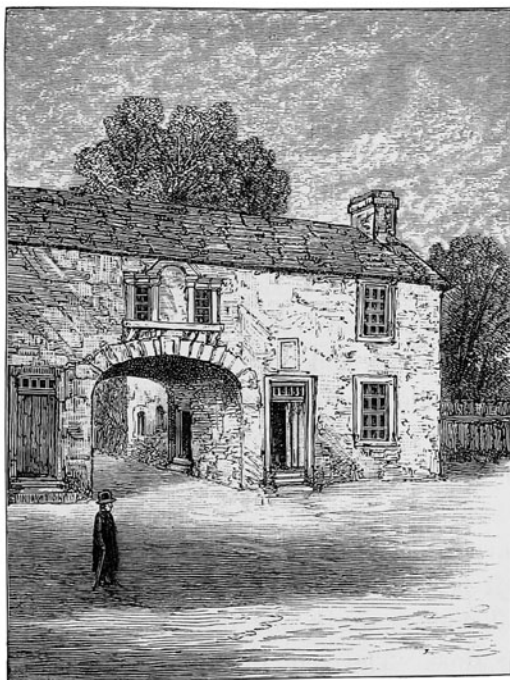
perhaps evil spoken of, and found there traits to be admired, or signs of nobleness,—then rising through all melodies in rehearsing the deeds of heroes; anon breaking out with illumined thunders against some special baseness or falsehood, till one trembled before the Sinai smoke and flame, and seemed to hear the tables break once more in his heart: all these, accompanied by the mounting, fading fires in his cheek, the light of the eye, now serene as heaven's blue, now flashing with wrath, or presently suffused with laughter, made the outer symbols of a genius so unique that to me it had been unimaginable had I not known its presence and power. His conversation was a spell; when I had listened and gone into the darkness, the enchantment continued; sometimes I could not sleep till the vivid thoughts and narratives were noted in writing. It is mainly from these records of conversations that the following pages are written out, with addition of some other materials obtained by personal inquiries made in Scotland and in London. I realized many years ago that my notes contained matter that might some day be useful, especially to my American countrymen, in forming a just estimate and judgment of one whose expressions were often unwelcome; and this conviction has made me increasingly careful, as the years went on, to remark any variations of his views, and his responses to crit-

icisms made so frequently upon statements of his which had been resented. I do not in the least modify, nor shall I set forth these things in such order or relation as to illustrate any theory of my own. He who spoke his mind through life must so speak on, though he be dead.

II.

Thomas Carlyle was born on the 4th of December, 1795, at Ecclefechan, Dumfriesshire. The small stone house still stands. It was a favorite saying of his that great men are not born among fools. "There was Robert Burns," he said one day; "I used often to hear from old people in Scotland of the good sense and wise conversation around that little fireside where Burns listened as a child. Notably there was a man named Murdoch who remembered all that; and I have the like impression about the early life of most of the notable men and women I have heard or read of. When a great soul rises up, it is generally in a place where there has been much hidden worth and intelligence at work for a long time. The vein runs on, as it were, beneath the surface for a generation or so, then bursts into the light in some man of genius, and oftenest that seems to be the end of it." Carlyle was thinking of other persons than himself, but there are few lives that could better point his thought. Nothing could

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BIRTHPLACE OF THOMAS CARLYLE.

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be more incongruous with the man and his life than the attempt once made to get up a Carlyle “pedigree.”

But the vigor of the lowly stock was proved by the strong individuality it steadily developed, and in none more notably than the father of Thomas. The humble stone-mason certainly “built better than he knew,” though he lived long enough to hear his son’s name pronounced with honor throughout the kingdom. An aged Scotch minister who knew him well told me that old James Carlyle was “a character.” “Earnest, energetic, of quick intellect, and in earlier life somewhat passionate and pugnacious, he was not just the man to be popular among his rustic neighbors of Annandale; but they respected his pronounced individuality, felt his strong will, and his terse, epigrammatic sayings were remembered and repeated many years after his death (1832). In the later years of his life he became a more decidedly religious character, and the natural asperities of his character and manner were much softened.”

Mr. James Routledge, in an Indian periodical, *Mookerjee’s Magazine*, October, 1872, says:

“I was interested enough in Mr. Carlyle the younger to make a special tour, some years ago, to learn something of Mr. Carlyle the elder; and from what I gathered the reader may be pleased with a

few scraps, as characteristic of the school of 'Sartor Resartus.' Mr. Carlyle's landlord was one General Sharpe, of whom little is now known, though he was a great man in those days. On one occasion James Carlyle and he had a quarrel, and James was heard to say, in a voice of thunder, 'I tell thee what, Matthew Sharpe'—a mode of salutation that doubtless astonished General Sharpe; but it was 'old James Carlyle's way,' and was not to be altered for any General in existence. There was much in the old man's manner of speaking that never failed to attract attention. A gentleman resident in the locality told me that he remembered meeting him one very stormy day, and saying, 'Here's a fearful day, James;' which drew forth the response, 'Man, it's a' that; it's roaring doon our glen like the cannon o' Quebec.' My informant added, 'I never could forget that sentence.' James had also a wondrous power of fixing upon characteristic names for all manner of persons, and nailing his names to the individuals for life. Samuel Johnson was 'Surly Sam,' and so on—a gift which has come among us in a more livable form from the pen of his son. Mr. Carlyle was a stern Presbyterian—a Burgher; held no terms with prelacy or any other ungodly offshoot from the Woman of Babylon, but clung to the 'auld Buke,' without note or comment, as his only guide to heaven. He was one of the elders of his church when

its pastor, having received a call from a church where his stipend would be better than that of Ecclefechan, applied for leave to remove. The church met, and lamentation was made for the irreparable loss. After much nonsense had been spoken, Mr. Carlyle's opinion was asked. 'Pay the hireling his wages and let him go,' said the old man; and it was done. Mr. Carlyle had a thorough contempt for any one who said, 'I can't.' 'Impossible' was not in his vocabulary. Once, during harvest-time, he was taken seriously ill. No going to the field, Mr. Carlyle, for weeks to come: water-gruel, doctor's bottles, visiting parson, special prayers — poor old James Carlyle! Pshaw! James was found crawling to the field early next morning, but still an idler among workers. He looked at the corn, provokingly ripe for the sickle; and then, stamping his foot fiercely to the ground, he said, 'I'll gar mysel' work at t' harvest.' And he did work at it like a man. On one occasion a reverend gentleman had been favoring the congregation of Mr. Carlyle's church with a terrible description of the last judgment. James listened to him calmly; but when the sermon was finished, he came out of his pew, and, placing himself before the reverend gentleman and all the congregation, he said, aloud, 'Ay, ye may thump and stare till yer een start frae their sockets, but you'll na gar me believe such stuff as that.'

“If the reader will now go back with me to those days, and view for a few minutes the little farm at Mainhill, after the fair, honest, and well-earned hours of evening rest have fully arrived, we shall, in all probability, find Mr. Carlyle reading from the Bible—not for fashion’s sake, not to be seen and praised by men, but for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; and his children will be listening, as children should. Refused his proper place in society for want of learning, we shall see this brave old man doing the next best thing to moulding the age—training his children to do that which he felt a power within him capable of performing, but for which the means—the mechanical means, the verb and pronoun kind of thing—were denied. Such was the father, and such the earliest school of Thomas Carlyle.”

Of the many anecdotes told of this elder Carlyle, one seems to be characteristic not only of the man, but of the outer environment amid which Thomas passed his earlier life. On the occasion of a marriage of one of the sons, the younger members of the household proposed that a coat of paint should be given the house; but the old man resisted this scheme for covering the plain walls with the varnish of falsehood. An attempt was made by the majority to set aside his will, but, unfortunately, old Mr. Carlyle was at home when the painters arrived, and planting him-