

the archway were two still more diminutive windows, side by side. It was a double house of the dwarf variety, and the one at the north end, where the strong lunged sorners sang, was the birth-place of Thomas Carlyle.

The bellowing had brought mutch-capped guidwives to various windows and alley entrances, at safe distances. I loitered near enough to hear them discuss the matin-song of the tramps as well as the house and its former occupants.

"They needna fash (trouble) theirsels tae sing there," croaked one old dame with a gentle swaying of her head betokening a reminiscental vein of remark. "They're like mecht roar theirsels black i' the face, afore they e'er wrang bluid frae that neep (turnip!)"

"Oh aye," crooned a still older old woman, "its weel kent nae puir body iver saw, syne or soon, the recht side o' Carlyles' siller!"

How Carlyle's hosts of adorers would have groaned to hear these his old neighbors go on! One hinted at their pride with, "They thocht theirsels nae sheep-shanks!" Another, of their thrift with, "They ne'er sell'e their hens on a rainy day." Another, of miserliness with, "They gae their banes to nae dogs." Another, of their austerity with, "They warna guid to neebor wi'." And another bent old body summed up the feeling of many of the testy villagers with the crisp epitome "They were ill to thole!" That is, it was hard to get along with the Carlyles. And it is historic that others besides these dim old souls, some who lived in the same houses with them, found it just that way.

The tramps got nothing for their offer-tory, and, after a few vigorous kicks at the door, departed, giving me opportunity to reach the house just as the huge form and red, veinous face of Mrs. John Gourley, caretaker, appeared at the door. Shaking a fine bludgeon after the vanishing vagrants she relieved her indignation with: "Hoots! It's a weary day for auld Scotland when there's nae body t' fend a hoose like this frae the low English beggars!" and then, in radiant expectancy of low English "sax-pences," bade me enter.

I doubt if there ever lived a writer about whom more has been written by little and great writers than has been penned in criticism or praise of Thomas Carlyle. And I am just as much in doubt whether any one or all of these, from passing essayist to stately biographer, ever really visited the birth-place of this rare and royally rampant genius. Yet that should have been every serious biographer's first duty. Interesting as may be every little detail in the maturer career of the man of genius, when we have learned each one by heart, and have been given standards by which to find his place, measure his personality and weigh his influence, we are still unsatisfied. What made this man what he was? What were the potent forces which sent him on his way, or which were overcome, in his upbuilding? Out of what manner of mold did he come? What was the actual environment of the babe, the child, the youth? We wish to be shown the ultimate perspective. It is not to be found in any biography of Carlyle.

And so I think there is an unusual fascination in coming to this hard little hamlet and seeing with your own eyes pretty nearly the same sort of folk and

precisely the same scenes as those the boy Carlyle knew, hard as it is to believe from his biographers he ever was a boy; and, in sympathy and feeling, getting as far as possible into the same framing and setting as those through which his eyes had their earliest outlook upon the close material and spiritual horizon about him. No truer hint of all this could be given than in that morning incident of the grim old dames and their tongue-wagging about the singing beggars and the house before which they sung. It was in itself simply a bit out of Carlyle's family's time. I almost felt the Carlyle folk were "glowerin' ahint th' door." It is but two years less than one hundred since Thomas Carlyle was born in that little stone cottage. There is no place in Britain where less change has come in that period than in stern and tiny Ecclefechan.

Indeed the changelessness of all these ancient border towns and hamlets is one of their most impressive characteristics. From Yetholm to Dumfries along the Scottish border, and from Berwick to Carlyle along the English border it is just the same. They are all as they were, only a little more asleep. The railway stations are about all the structures in them that have large windows or smell of paint. They remain chiefly as they stood when the border raids were ended. They are gray, battle-scarred, ancient. They were built in fighting times and they have their records in their hard old faces. To wander among them is like being whisked back two or three centuries and set down face to face with the grimness and cruelties of feudal times; and I sometimes think that the nature of the lowly folk, beaten to savage hardness in those sorry times, is in this borderland of both kingdoms a long time taking on the gentler touch of our time. Scotland is richest in these weird old border relics of a sorry age. The Scotch crowded close to the border; built more and stronger places of sally, even the tiniest of hamlets having likeness in sturdiness and strength to the larger towns, and then, being the liveliest on their legs, "harried" the English in such a brisk and occupying way, that they had little time on their hands, after chasing the raiders home, for building important border towns.

The quaint hamlet stands in a little hollow of the champaign land of south-eastern Annandale. The same old post-road which leads north from England through Carlisle and grewsome Gretna Green passes through it, forming its principal and almost its only street. From the south this highway lead through a pleasant country, well watered and wooded and charmingly broken by clumps of ancient trees or newer plantations and small, well tilled fields. Beyond the hamlet the road winds upward for a mile or more to a bleak, suggestively dreary and hopeless a horizon as you will often come upon in Normandy, or as are seen in the peasant pictures of Brittany by the master hand of Millet. To the northeast there are dim outlines of the Hartfell and other mountain ranges. Away to the southwest are the misty vales of lovely Annandale and to the northwest, but four miles distant, the legend-haunted hill of Brunswark, where the boy Carlyle often wandered, lifts its Roman-capped head into the fleecy, vagrant clouds.

Ecclefechan has great age but little history, aside from having produced this one famous man. At about the centre of the village, where a highway leaves the old Carlisle and Glasgow post-road to wander through the valley of Annan to the Solway-side town of that name, a little cross-street, formed by this road, runs a few rods with it and stops short by an ancient grave yard. In this lies Carlyle, his father and mother and other members of the family. It has also hundreds of unnamed graves; for half a thousand years before the Carlyle line had crossed the border into Scotland from Carlisle with the adherents of returning King David II it was the site of a then ancient church called *Ecclesie S. Fochani*, or the Church of St. Fechan. Fechan was an Irish abbot of the seventh century from Iona, who was canonized, his day being the 20th of January. Hence the curious name of Ecclefechan.

Border war brought the ancient church to ruin. The split of the covenanters' time effaced what remained. But the churchyard of a thousand years ago is Ecclefechan's grave-yard of today; and all the stern descendants of those who swore to "endeavour the extirpation of popery, prelacy, superstition, heresy, schism, profaneness, etc.," who have departed life in little Ecclefechan, are lying here in "consecrated ground." In Carlyle's boyhood time there were many hand-loom weavers here. There stone cottages stood along the highway interspersed with a few shops and inns. The cottages remain, housing folk of the same social order, comfortable laborers among the surrounding farms. At least three of the inns are still standing. Two have been transformed into humble habitations. One, the Bush Hotel—a little, long, low, rambling structure jutting out into the highway invitingly, and presided over by a brisk, bonnie landlady, Mistress Kilgour, who is not afraid to tell you that she has no love for "Yankee" pilgrims and their sneering ways—contains most of the life of the sleepy hamlet; and, with ministering to cyclists on their northern tours, modern coaching parties and occasional pilgrims to Carlyle's birthplace and grave, is almost as breezy and bustling as in the times of the packers and carters, when the olden post coaches changed their steaming horses, after the dash from Gretna, before its hospitable door.

So this was the spot and these the physical surroundings of Thomas Carlyle from his birth in 1795, until his stone-mason father, James Carlyle, who "hammered on at Ecclefechan, making in his best year £100," removed to the bleak farmstead of Mainhill, near Cock-erbie, about ten miles north of his native hamlet, and still alongside the old Carlisle and Glasgow post road. This comprised the first fourteen years of his life. During this time all the boyhood, boyhood home and home surroundings he ever knew were his; for he had already felt the terrors of schoolboy life at Annan; and just after the family removal to Mainhill he was sent away to Edinburgh to the University, walking the whole distance, through Moffat, in company with a senior student in the University named Tom Smail.

There are none living here or here-about now who knew Thomas Carlyle as a boy; but I found very many old, old folk whose parents were his youthful companions, or his parents' "neebors,"