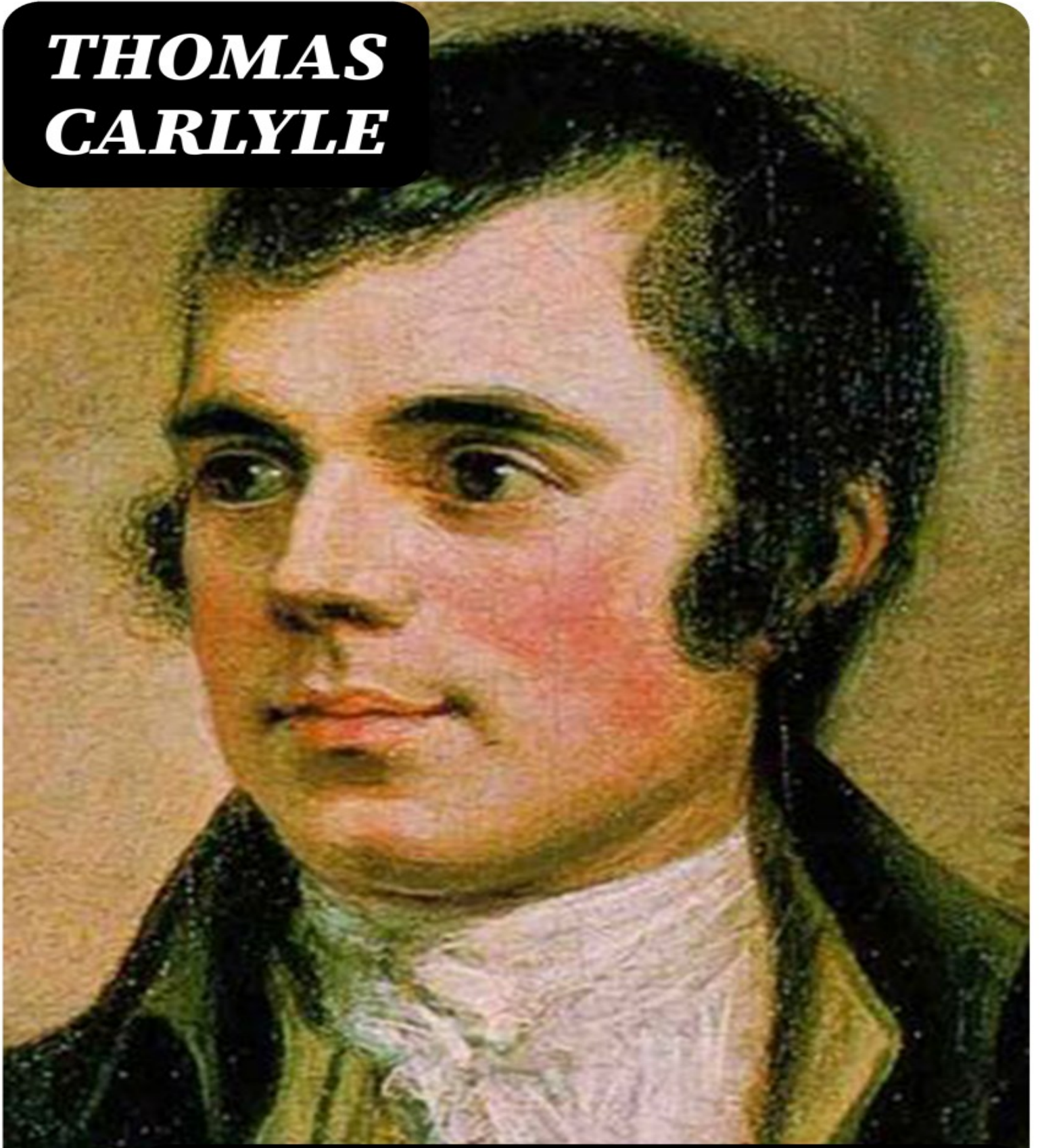
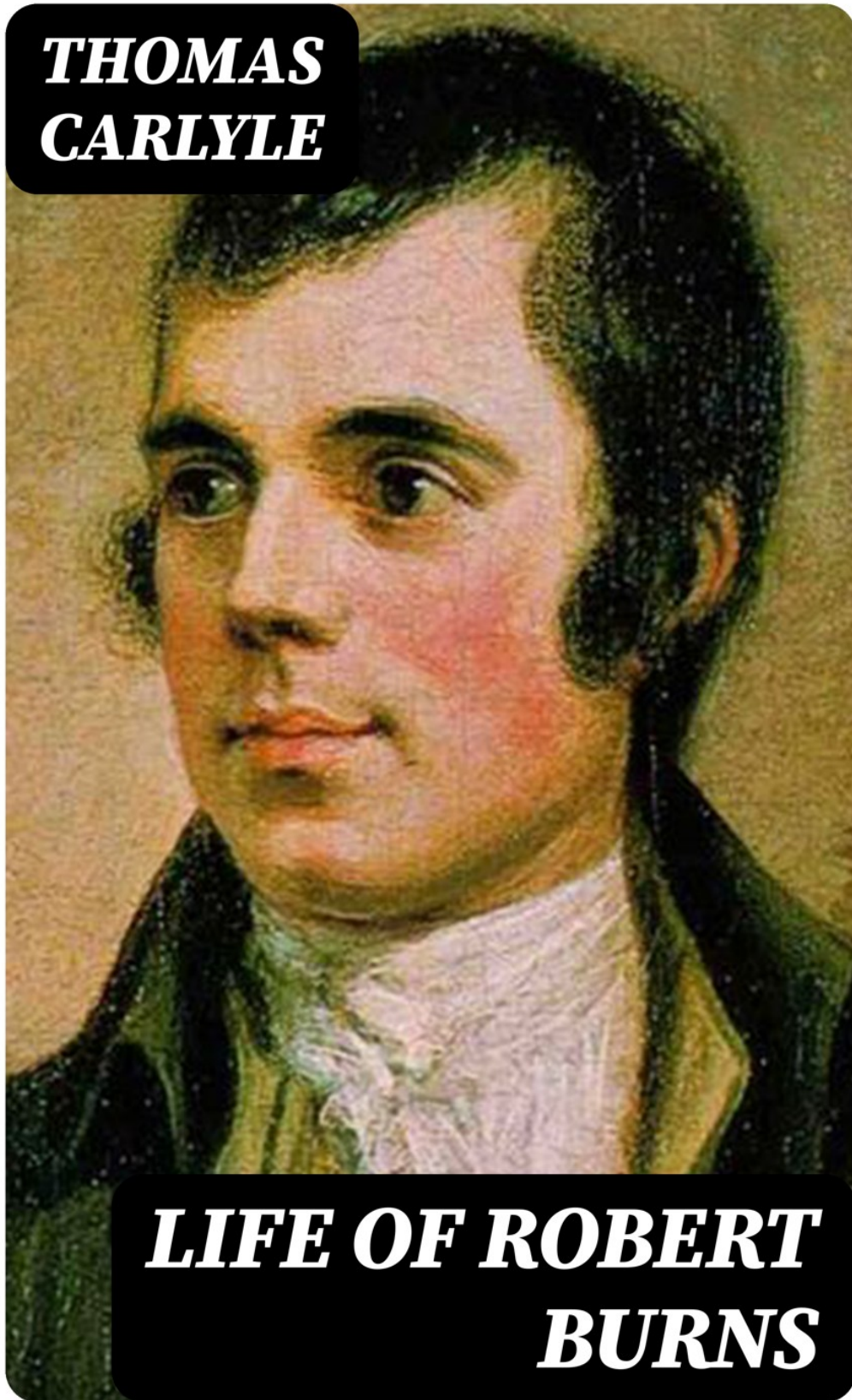


***THOMAS
CARLYLE***



***LIFE OF ROBERT
BURNS***

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Thomas Carlyle

Life of Robert Burns

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The readers of the "Household Library" will certainly welcome a Life of Burns. That his soul was of the real heroic stamp, no one who is familiar with his imperishable lyric poetry, will deny.

This Life of the great Scottish bard is composed of two parts. The first part, which is brief, and gives merely his external life, is taken from the "Encyclopedia Britannica." The principle object of it, in this place, is to prepare the reader for what follows. The second part is a grand spiritual portrait of Burns, the like of which the ages have scarcely produced; the equal of which, in our opinion, does not exist. In fact, since men began to write and publish their thoughts in this world, no one has appeared who equals Carlyle as a spiritual-portrait painter; and, taken all in all, this of his gifted countryman Burns is his master-piece. I should not dare to say how many times I have perused it, and always with new wonder and delight. I once read it in the Manfrini Palace, at Venice, sitting before Titian's portrait of Ariosto. Great is the contrast between the Songs of Burns and the *Rime* of the Italian poet, between the fine spiritual perception of Carlyle's mind and the delicate touch of Titian's hand, between picturesque expression and an expressive picture; yet this very antithesis seemed to prepare my mind for the full enjoyment of both these famous portraits; the sombre majesty of northern genius seemed to heighten and be heightened by the sunset glow of the genius of the south.

Besides giving the article from the "Encyclopedia Britannica," as a kind of frame for the portrait of Burns, we will here add, from the "English Cyclopaedia," a sketch of Carlyle's life. A severe taste may find it a little out of place, yet we must be allowed to consult the wishes of those for whom these little volumes are designed.

Carlyle, (Thomas,) a thinker and writer, confessedly among the most original and influential that Britain has produced, was born in the parish of Middlebie, near the village of Ecclefechan, in Dumfries-shire, Scotland, on the 4th of December, 1795. His father, a man of remarkable force of character, was a small farmer in comfortable circumstances; his mother was also no ordinary person. The eldest son of a considerable family, he received an education the best in its kind that Scotland could then afford—the education of a pious and industrious home, supplemented by that of school and college. (Another son of the family, Dr. John A. Carlyle, a younger brother of Thomas, was educated in a similar manner, and, after practising for many years as a physician in Germany and Rome, has recently become known in British literature as the author of the best prose translation of Dante.) After a few years spent at the ordinary parish school, Thomas was sent, in his thirteenth or fourteenth year, to the grammar school of the neighboring town of Annan; and here it was that he first became acquainted with a man destined, like himself, to a career of great celebrity. "The first time I saw Edward Irving," writes Mr. Carlyle in 1835, "was six-and-twenty years ago, in his native town, Annan. He was fresh from Edinburgh, with college prizes,

high character, and promise: he had come to see our school-master, who had also been his. We heard of famed professors—of high matters, classical, mathematical—a whole Wonderland of knowledge; nothing but joy, health, hopefulness without end, looked out from the blooming young man.” Irving was then sixteen years of age, Carlyle fourteen; and from that time till Irving’s sad and premature death, the two were intimate and constant friends. It was not long before Carlyle followed Irving to that “Wonderland of Knowledge,” the University of Edinburgh, of which, and its “famed professors,” he had received such tidings. If the description of the nameless German university, however, in “Sartor Resartus,” is to be supposed as allusive also to Mr. Carlyle’s own reminiscences of his training at Edinburgh, he seems afterwards to have held the more formal or academic part of that training in no very high respect. “What vain jargon of controversial metaphysic, etymology, and mechanical manipulation, falsely named science, was current there,” says Teufelsdröckh; “I indeed learned better perhaps than most.” At Edinburgh, the professor of “controversial metaphysic” in Carlyle’s day, was Dr. Thomas Brown, Dugald Stewart having then just retired; physical science and mathematics, were represented by Playfair and Sir John Leslie, and classical studies by men less known to fame. While at college, Carlyle’s special bent, so far as the work of the classes was concerned, seems to have been to mathematics and natural philosophy. But it is rather by his voluntary studies and readings, apart from the work of the classes, that Mr. Carlyle, in his youth, laid the foundation of his vast and varied knowledge. The college session in

Edinburgh extends over about half the year, from November to April; and during these months, the college library, and other such libraries as were accessible, were laid under contribution by him to an extent till then hardly paralleled by any Scottish student. Works on science and mathematics, works on philosophy, histories of all ages, and the great classics of British literature, were read by him miscellaneously or in orderly succession; and it was at this period, also, if we are not mistaken, he commenced his studies—not very usual then in Scotland—in the foreign languages of modern Europe. With the same diligence, and in very much the same way, were the summer vacations employed, during which he generally returned to his father's house in Dumfries-shire, or rambled among the hills and moors of that neighborhood.

Mr. Carlyle had begun his studies with a view to entering the Scottish Church. About the time, however, when these studies were nearly ended, and when, according to the ordinary routine, he might have become a preacher, a change of views induced him to abandon the intended profession. This appears to have been about the year 1819 or 1820, when he was twenty-four years of age. For some time, he seems to have been uncertain as to his future course. Along with Irving, he employed himself for a year or two, as a teacher in Fifeshire; but gradually it became clear to him, that his true vocation was that of literature. Accordingly, parting from Irving, about the year 1822, the younger Scot of Annandale, deliberately embraced the alternative open to him, and became a general man of letters. Probably few have ever embraced that profession

with qualifications so wide, or with aims so high and severe. Apart altogether from his diligence in learning, and from the extraordinary amount of acquired knowledge of all kinds, which was the fruit of it, there had been remarked in him, from the first, a strong originality of character, a noble earnestness and fervor in all that he said or did, and a vein of inherent constitutional contempt for the mean and the frivolous, inclining him, in some degree, to a life of isolation and solitude. Add to this, that his acquaintance with German literature, in particular, had familiarized him with ideas, modes of thinking, and types of literary character, not then generally known in this country, and yet, in his opinion, more deserving of being known than much of a corresponding kind that was occupying and ruling British thought.

The first period of Mr. Carlyle's literary life may be said to extend from 1822 to 1827, or from his twenty-sixth to his thirty-second year. It was during this period that he produced (besides a translation of Legendre's "Geometry," to which he prefixed an "Essay on Proportion,") his numerous well-known translations from German writers, and also his "Life of Schiller." The latter and a considerable proportion of the former, were written by him during the leisure afforded him by an engagement he had formed in 1823, as tutor to Charles Buller, whose subsequent brilliant though brief career in the politics of Britain, gives interest to this connection. The first part of the "Life of Schiller" appeared originally in the "London Magazine," of which John Scott was editor, and Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, Allan Cunningham, De Quincey, and Hood, were the best known

supporters; and the second and third parts, were published in the same magazine in 1824. In this year appeared also the translation of Göthe's "Wilhelm Meister," which was published by Messrs. Oliver and Boyd, of Edinburgh, without the translator's name. This translation, the first real introduction of Göthe to the reading world of Great Britain, attracted much notice. "The translator," said a critic in "Blackwood," "is, we understand, a young gentleman in this city, who now for the first time appears before the public. We congratulate him on his very promising debut; and would fain hope to receive a series of really good translations from his hand. He has evidently a perfect knowledge of German; he already writes English better than is at all common, even at this time; and we know of no exercise more likely to produce effects of permanent advantage upon a young mind of intellectual ambition." The advice here given to Mr. Carlyle by his critic, was followed by him in so far that, in 1827, he published in Edinburgh, his "Specimens of German Romance," in four volumes; one of these containing "Wilhelm Meister's Wanderjahre," as a fresh specimen of Göthe; the others containing tales from Jean Paul, Tieck, Musæus, and Hoffman. Meanwhile, in 1825, Mr. Carlyle had revised and enlarged his "Life of Schiller," and given it to the world in a separate form, through the press of Messrs. Taylor and Hessay, the proprietors of the "London Magazine." In the same year, quitting his tutorship of Charles Buller, he had married a lady fitted in a pre-eminent degree to be the wife of such a man. (It is interesting to know that Mrs. Carlyle, originally Miss Welch, is a lineal descendent of the Scottish Reformer, Knox.) For

some time after the marriage, Mr. Carlyle continued to reside in Edinburgh; but before 1827 he removed to Craigenputtoch, a small property in the most solitary part of Dumfries-shire.

The second period of Mr. Carlyle's literary life, extending from 1827 to 1834, or from his thirty-second to his thirty-ninth year, was the period of the first decided manifestations of his extraordinary originality as a thinker. Probably the very seclusion in which he lived helped to develop, in stronger proportions, his native and peculiar tendencies. The following account of his place and mode of life at this time was sent by him, in 1828, to Göthe, with whom he was then in correspondence, and was published by the great German in the preface to a German translation of the "Life of Schiller," executed under his immediate care:—"Dumfries is a pleasant town, containing about fifteen thousand inhabitants, and to be considered the centre of the trade and judicial system of a district which possesses some importance in the sphere of Scottish activity. Our residence is not in the town itself, but fifteen miles to the northwest of it, among the granite hills and the black morasses which stretch westward through Galloway almost to the Irish Sea. In this wilderness of heath and rock, our estate stands forth a green oasis, a tract of ploughed, partly inclosed and planted ground, where corn ripens and trees afford a shade, although surrounded by sea-mews and rough-woolled sheep. Here, with no small effort, have we built and furnished a neat, substantial dwelling; here, in the absence of a professional or other office, we live to cultivate literature according to our strength, and in our own peculiar