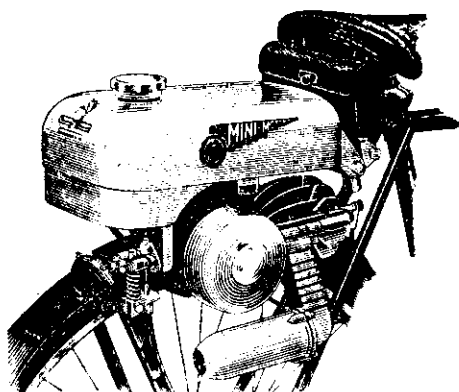


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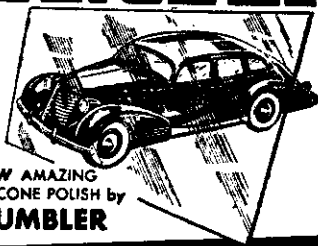
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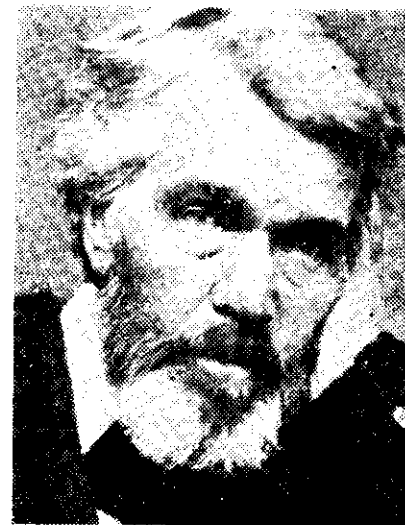
THOMAS CARLYLE, by Julian Symonds
Victor Gollancz. English price, 21/-.

(Reviewed by M.H.H.)

CARLYLE would have been deeply shocked if he had known that interest in him today would be slanted to his private life rather than to his writings. It is true that *Sartor Resartus*, *The French Revolution* and *Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* are still being read. A few people may even be bold enough to grapple with *Frederick the Great*, though enjoyment of the battle scenes and the sharp portrayals of character are likely to be offset by the discovery that many of the author's judgments have been refuted, and that his hero-worshipping attitude to Frederick has no support from history. But the man lives on, with a vitality which demands attention.

Carlyle's prose, disastrous though it may be as an influence for young writers, is the instrument of a powerful mind. To open one of his books is to feel his presence, immediate and urgent, and perhaps a little disconcerting. It is hard to touch him without wanting to know him better; and few writers have disclosed themselves more obligingly. Carlyle and his wife were both industrious and brilliant letter-writers. Most of their letters have been saved. Carlyle also wrote his *Reminiscences*, an emotional narrative which drew back all the curtains of the house in Cheyne Row. Ample material was therefore to be had by biographers, and early use was made of it by James Anthony Froude, whose massive work remains one of the best biographies in the language. Present-day readers, however, may find Julian Symonds a more congenial guide. He has written an excellent book—clear, perceptive and restrained.

Perhaps the best indication of its value is the feeling it leaves with the reader that judgment of Carlyle should be careful, even compassionate. Here was a man of genius who fought his way doggedly from a peasant home in Scotland to a high place in English letters. He was both rugged and neuro-



THOMAS CARLYLE

"A curmudgeon with fine and sensitive feelings"

tic, endlessly complaining about his dyspepsia, which Mr. Symonds thinks was "a functional gastric disorder set up by various frustrations in his life, the desire to love, the desire to write, the desire for acknowledgment of his talent..." His wife's health was worse than his own, and although Carlyle undoubtedly loved her, they seemed to share more misery than happiness. Mr. Symonds points to one possible explanation. After weighing the evidence he thinks it probable that Carlyle was "a highly unsatisfactory lover, and that this lack of physical affection caused Jane much unhappiness."

They were both difficult persons. It is possible, as Mr. Symonds suggests, that Carlyle now seems to be much worse than he was in the flesh. He was incurably verbose, and in speaking and writing he exaggerated everything. His character and his work were full of contrasts and contradictions. The prophet who moved from Chartism to a naive faith in the aristocracy was also a man who preached silence while talking so loudly and furiously that argument with him was impossible. He was economical to the edge of parsimony (Jane had to write a long and amusing statement before she could get a small increase for her household budget), but he was unfailingly generous to kinsmen, friends and total strangers. He cried out in anguish about his health, and yet was so strong that in old age his death was almost unbearably gradual. He was a curmudgeon with fine and sensitive feelings.

A man like this cannot be neatly labelled and forgotten, especially if he is also a genius. The argument, like the man himself, will be a long time dying. "Ah me! Ah me!"

ARS LONGA

SIGNPOST TO ART, by Edward C. Simpson;
New Zealand University Press; 15/-.

MR. SIMPSON'S work as an adult-education lecturer on art is well known, and this short book shows very clearly the qualities of lucidity, clarity and penetration which have given him deserved popularity and authority in this field. He does, however, at times



JANE CARLYLE

From the miniature by Kenneth Macleay, painted in the year of her marriage

N.Z. LISTENER, APRIL 24, 1952.