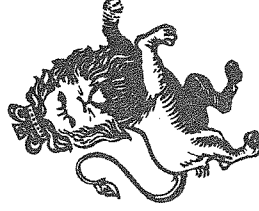


# JOHN GALT

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way of illustrating philosophical truths, a kind of treatise on the history of society in the West of Scotland in the reign of George III, and, perhaps best, a theoretical history of society limited to the events of a circumscribed locality. He thus fits the book into a specific genre rather than considering it as a mere piece of fiction.

The chronicle of events in Dalmailing in Ayr is recorded as a "faithful account" by the Reverend Micah Balwhidder (apparently a cousin of Mrs. Campbell of *Glenfell*), probably during 1811, since he retired from his parish at the close of 1810. Galt had first planned to use a village schoolmaster as the narrator and later introduced a specimen of the schoolmaster's record into *Eben Erskine*,<sup>1</sup> but he was most fortunate in his final selection of a man who through his profession possessed both a natural interest in all the villagers and exerted some influence on parish events.

#### A. Structure

Not a "common novel," *Annals* has no true plot. It is rather a series of episodes recounted by a single recorder, held together by setting and the passing of time, sometimes linked by cause and effect, and sustained by the interest in the characters, of whom some fifty can be clearly distinguished. Apart from Balwhidder himself and the slow shift of his ideas toward tolerance and magnanimity, the main figures are probably Mrs. Malcolm and her five children. However, other villagers age, change, and die, and familiarity with their lives produces a strong sense of continuity. Alterations in the village itself and a growing perception of the wider world without provide a complementary background.

The structure is straightforward and chronological. Balwhidder determines to relate the happenings of the parish, "this book being for a witness and testimony of my ministry."<sup>2</sup> He points out that he is not concerned with the business of the kingdom; "my task is to describe what happened within the narrow bound of the pasturage of the Lord's flock, of which . . . He made me the . . . shepherd" (*An*, I, 114). Later he comes to realize that he is testifying to "the great changes that have happened in my day and generation—a period which all the best-informed writers say has not had its match in the history of the world since the beginning of time" (*An*, II, 62). This becomes his chronicle, with a section devoted to every year from 1760 through 1810. An artificial and yet perfectly credible unity is added to the work by the use of the 1760-1810 period, for Balwhidder came to his parish on the same day that George III came

## CHAPTER 5

### The Major Scottish Novels

IN 1820, at the age of forty, Galt could be characterized as an unsuccessful businessman and a competent, minor writer of any type of work which would bring in an income. But in that year (the year of *Glenfell* and *The Earthquake*) he published the first installment of *The Ayrshire Legatees* in *Blackwood's Magazine* in June, 1820; followed this series with *The Steam-Boat* (the last section of *The Ayrshire Legatees* and the first section of *The Steam-Boat* appeared together in the issue of February, 1821); published in book form within two years *Annals of the Parish*, *The Ayrshire Legatees*, *Sir Andrew Wylie*, *The Provost*, *The Steam-Boat*, and *The Entail*; and continued this burst of creativity with three novels in 1823, *The Gathering of the West*, *Ringan Gilhaize*, and *The Spaewife*. Four of these works ran to three volumes each. By the end of 1823 *The Ayrshire Legatees*, *Annals of the Parish*, *Sir Andrew Wylie*, and *The Provost* had gone into second editions. Not merely in quantity but in quality this is a record of production hardly to be equaled.

#### I Annals of the Parish

*Annals of the Parish*, published in 1821 by William Blackwood on the strength of the serial popularity of *The Ayrshire Legatees*, was actually an earlier novel. Galt explains that he began it in the summer of 1813 and that it was offered to Archibald Constable but was rejected on the ground that there was no demand for Scottish novels. Like Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley*, Galt's manuscript remained forgotten in a drawer, from which it was rescued after the success of *The Ayrshire Legatees*. Galt's letters to Blackwood show that Blackwood shortened the manuscript and altered some passages over Galt's objections to changing Balwhidder's "garrulous humor."

Galt never regarded *Annals of the Parish* as a "common novel" and employed several terms to define it: a philosophical sketch, a

to the throne and left it at the end of the year in which the Regency was established.

A number of the episodes are based on fact, as Galt details in his *Literary Life*, while the actual setting is Dregghorn, Ayrshire. Examples of the use of fact are the burning of the house called the Breadland, taken from the burning of a cousin's home; the accounts of smuggling, drawn from those Galt heard when a boy; Mr. Balwhidder's difficulty in first entering his kirk, related by Galt's grandmother; and the shooting of Lord Eaglesham, actually the murder of Lord Eglinton by the exciseman Mungo Campbell in 1769.

#### B. Characters

The main character of *Annals* is the Reverend Micah Balwhidder. Although Galt stated that when very young he once had in mind a Scottish version of Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*, there is little similarity between the unworldly clergymen narrators of these two novels, Dr. Primrose being both brisker and less practical. Parson Adams of Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* might well come to mind, but he is far dreamier, more innocent of the world, less dedicated to his congregation, and more physically active than Balwhidder. Balwhidder, educated at the University of Glasgow, is wholly credible: naive, kind, sensible, "innocent" in the best sense of the adjective, quaintly proud and ambitious (as in his hope to write another "orthodox poem" like Milton's *Paradise Lost*), stoutly taking his rightful part in the affairs of the community, curious of but not tempted by the greater world outside Dalmailing, and gifted with a sense of humor. Indeed, one of the best episodes, the congregation's taunting in church of Miss Betty Wudrife and her new mantle, is followed by the revelation of Balwhidder's human reaction: "I was really overcome, and could not keep my gravity, and laughed loud out among the graves, and in the face of all my people" (*An*, I, 112). Occasionally simple (he interprets one of his dreams as prophesying the French Revolution and the execution of Louis XVI), he is astute in the affairs of his parishioners, whom he wins through sympathy, shrewdness, tolerance, and excellent practical advice. His placid, homely spirit pervades the volumes. S. R. Crockett says, "There is no doubt that Micah Balwhidder is the author's masterpiece. . . . Every part of the minister's character is allowed to emerge with an inevitableness and simplicity which is beyond all art."<sup>3</sup>

Many other characters, though they may appear in only four or five episodes, are fully realized. The Malcolm family, with its three sons and two daughters, comes to Dalmailing in the same year as the Reverend Mr. Balwhidder; Mrs. Malcolm dies in 1799, and between those years the family is connected with many of the village's events and changes. In 1765 Mrs. Malcolm opens a shop; in 1782 her son Charles is killed in a naval engagement with the French fleet; both daughters marry well above their economic station. Mrs. Malcolm is, however, too passive and too perfect to be of real interest as a personality. The three successive Mrs. Balwhidders, sketched briefly in excellent condensed portraits, are distinct individuals, particularly the bustling, thrifty second wife. They also emphasize the minister's own character and the life of Dalmailing. The eccentric and appealing Lady Macadam (sufficiently alive in the few incidents in which she appears to create a desire for more knowledge of her younger days); Miss Girzie Gilchrist, known to the villagers as "Lady Skimmilk"; Miss Sabrina Hooky, the schoolmistress; and the poverty-stricken "naturals," Meg and Jenny Gaffaw, are also unmistakable figures. Among the men Mr. Macskipnish, the dancing master, is given a short but vivid vignette, and Mr. Cayenne, the wealthy American Loyalist, is second in interest only to Balwhidder himself. Another character, undoubtedly introduced as a touch of private humor, is the village poet, Colin Mavis, who clearly represents Galt as a young man publishing in the *Scots Magazine*.

To a considerable extent Galt succeeds in combining the individual and the type in a somewhat idealized form; this is true even of Balwhidder. The two schoolmistresses form a contrast, as do the several widows, and so too do the varied figures of the village poor. None are overly exaggerated, and if some cause laughter, it is not coarse or sarcastic laughter.

#### C. Style

In technique and tone *Annals* remains one of Galt's best novels. His choice of the memoir form was fortunate, since artificial plot had been his greatest weakness in *The Major* and *The Earthquake*. In addition, the form provides full opportunity for the narrator's unconscious revelation of his own character, sometimes in a self-betraying or humorous way. (For example, Balwhidder quotes an elder of the church who describes him as "a man of a guileless heart,

and a spiritual simplicity.") Pushing the events into the past rather than the daily present of a diary throws over them the nostalgia and appeal of what is lost, although, since naturally Balwhidder recalls only those episodes significant to him, whether local or national, they are described vividly. The framework justifies the introduction of any type of material without logical connection, but often such connection is provided. The sole weakness, perhaps, is the lack of any physical description of Balwhidder.

In tone Balwhidder's sincerity, kindness, simplicity, and occasional naïveté are fully distinguishable in the long sentences, with their frequent "ands" and "buts," and in the many biblical phrases and words used without the slightest suggestion of artificiality and often combined with Scottish, as in "having placed her reliance on Him who is the orphan's stay and widow's trust, she resigned her bairn into His hands" (*An*, I, 76). His tone, rhythm, and words are exactly right for a village preacher; so are the colloquial and biblical proverbs with which he sprinkles his chapters. His figures of speech are largely taken from nature; not once does he fall into industrial or urban imagery. He does not hesitate to quote passages of dialogue, which add to the realism. The conversations with Mr. Cayenne are among the best examples. Those with Mrs. Malcolm, however, are somewhat too sentimental. There is little overt moral instruction, and that which appears, as in the scene of Mr. Cayenne's death, is perfectly natural. Galt succeeds in shifting easily from pathos to humor, from narration to reflection. Much of the pathos is understated and moving. An excellent illustration is Balwhidder's sermon after the death of Charles Malcolm, which brings out his linked human and priestly character and shows Galt's use of visual detail.

A final and most typical Galt touch lies in the names of many characters, which may suggest profession (Mr. Macskipnish, dancing master), personality (Mr. Cayenne, Mr. Heckdetext), actual personages of the time (Lord Eaglesham for Lord Eglinton), or simply humor (Mr. Auld, an elder of the church; James Banes, the gravedigger's helper).<sup>4</sup>

#### D. Significance

Apart from its absolute credibility, human appeal, and combination of humor and pathos, *Annals* possesses the value of preserving a way of life that had passed away even before Galt described it. This fact, indeed, led Galt to write the tale: he tells us that during a walk

in the village of Inverkip he noticed the changes that had occurred. "The alteration was undoubtedly a great improvement, but the place seemed to me neither so picturesque nor so primitive as the old town, and I could not refrain from lamenting the change. . . . While looking at the various improvements around, my intention of writing a minister's sedate adventures returned upon me suddenly. . . ." (*LL*, I, 153).

Seldom indeed has the gradual social and economic shift of eighteenth-century village life been so well portrayed in fiction. G. M. Trevelyan, the historian, declared that *Annals* "still remains the most intimate and human picture of Scotland during her period of change in the reign of George III."<sup>5</sup> All is here: the effect of the American war on the economy of even so distant a spot, the change in girls' names as sophistication develops, the financial result of building a new toll road, the coming of the tavern and the bookstore and the Saturday market with the luxuries which before could not have been found in the whole parish. Mr. Cayenne's new cotton mill brings new types of workers with radical ideas. Changes slowly begin to take place in the gentry, with Lady Macadam's house, The Place, used as an inn, The Cross-Keys, after her death, the son of a weaver becoming a Glasgow manufacturer, the decline of the ancient families as the young laird's Breadland is rebuilt by a well-to-do farmer. Here are touches that the histories do not detail: the wooden bowls of the poor who lacked cups and saucers, the theft of the green serge pew lining for a winter mantle, the group subscription to a London newspaper, the universal jam and jelly making which formerly had been limited to the gentry, the spread of tea-drinking. The village types, too, are preserved: the exciseman, the schoolmistress, the Indian nabob (who was to become so important a figure in Victorian fiction), and the rising new industrialist. Galt has written the first English novel that takes a whole community as its subject rather than an individual or a single family.<sup>6</sup> He has also preserved words: "wally-wallying" for lamentation, "black cuffs" for soldiers, "cocker-nut" for coconut. John Stuart Mill acknowledged that he took the now famous word "utilitarian" from *Annals*. Galt recorded facts of human nature as well: that even the Meg and Jenny Gaffaws possess pride and dignity, that war brings a decline in morality, that man does not perceive change approaching, but is struck suddenly by the accomplished fact.

For all Balwhidder's preoccupation with his village and its



families, with his sermons and his immediate relatives, he still shows us the world outside. True, Napoleon is merely mentioned, the French Revolution is felt only in its drain of the young men, and the American colonies only through the trade between Glasgow and Virginia. But Glasgow and London are brought nearer Dalmating through the new stagecoach route and the newspaper, and the stopping of the cotton mill as an effect of the Napoleonic War takes the bread from a thousand mouths. As Balwhidder approaches the end of his ministry in 1808, he sums up the growth of Dalmating:

Through all the wars that have raged from the time of the King's accession to the throne, there has been a gradually coming nearer and nearer to our gates, which is a very alarming thing to think of. In the first, at the time he came to the crown, we suffered nothing. Not one belonging to the parish was engaged in the battles thereof, and the news of victories, before they reached us, which was generally by word of mouth, were old tales. In the American war, as I have related at length, we had an immediate participation, but those that suffered were only a few individuals, and the evil was done at a distance, and reached us not until the worst of its effects were spent. And during the first term of the present just and necessary contest for all that is dear to us as a people, although, by the offswarming of some of our restless youth, we had our part and portion in common with the rest of the Christian world; yet still there was at home a great augmentation of prosperity, and every thing had thriven in a surprising manner; somewhat, however, to the detriment of our country simplicity. By the building of the cotton-mill, and the rising up of the new town of Cayenneville, we had intronned so much with concerns of trade, that we were become a part of the great web of commercial reciprocities, and felt in our corner and extremity, every touch or stir that was made on any part of the texture (*An*, II, 56-57).

#### E. Critical Reception

*Annals* was received with universal applause. Henry Mackenzie, author of *The Man of Feeling*, requested permission to write the review for *Blackwood's*, and praised the work's realism. Sir Walter Scott called it excellent. The Countess of Blessington said that Byron highly admired the novel, while George Gilfillan, usually a critic of Galt, drew a comparison between Galt's narrative and George Crabbe's poetic tales.

Francis Jeffrey, in the *Edinburgh Review*, compared Galt and Sir Walter Scott. He found Scott the master novelist, but the character

of Balwhidder both happily conceived and admirably executed, innocent, sincere, and instinctively sagacious. Of the novel's content Jeffrey wrote: "With very considerable powers of humour, the ludicrous incidents are never dwelt upon with any tediousness, nor pushed to the length of burlesque or caricature—and the more seducing touches of pathos with which the work abounds, are intermingled and cut short with the same sparing and judicious hand."<sup>7</sup> In a letter of 1850, nearly thirty years later, Jeffrey wrote of a new novel: "Nothing half so true or so touching (in the delineation of Scottish character) has appeared since Galt published his *Annals* of the Parish."<sup>8</sup> *Annals* was given high praise also by John Wilson Croker in the *Quarterly Review*, although he objected to Mr. Cayenne's "brutal" and "shocking" expressions as well as to several of the anecdotes as either melancholy or nonsensical.<sup>9</sup>

The one reader who viewed the book with disapproval was Galt's compatriot and rival novelist James Hogg, to whom William Blackwood wrote rather drily on May 15, 1821: "I am surprised at your having such a very humble opinion of the 'Parish Annals,' but I am happy to tell you that it is very differently estimated by Mr. Henry Mackenzie, Sir Walter Scott, Professor Wilson, Mr. Lockhart, and fifty others, who are all loud in its praises. I am also happy to say that you are mistaken as to its sale, but in three or four days there were nearly 500 copies sold in London, and I have already sold here nearly 400 copies. In short, I have seldom published a more popular or valuable book."<sup>10</sup>

#### II The Ayrshire Legatees

Galt's great novel writing period began with the installment publication of *The Ayrshire Legatees*, for if *Annals* was the first to be written and to be published in book form, *The Ayrshire Legatees* was the first to appear in print, running serially in *Blackwood's Magazine* from June, 1820, to February, 1821, skipping the month of November, 1820. The plan for the tale was sent to William Blackwood in March, 1820, and accepted on March 28.<sup>11</sup> It was published in book form in June, 1821, with a second edition in 1822. Both serial publication and first edition were anonymous. According to Galt, the source of the book was his own fondness for showing strangers about London, especially eccentric persons or naive country visitors, whose remarks about the capital and its sights amused him. While in structure the novel's most obvious prototype is Tobias

Pringle's absence. Galt cleverly uses scenes showing the reading of the letters to this group and to additional minor characters without overly stretching coincidence to bring them together, and not only describes the reaction of the villagers at home to the events in London but also gives the reader a detailed picture of Scottish village life.

Unity and a thin plot are provided through both the travelers and the home group. Rachel, on the trip to London, meets Captain Sabre and at the close of the novel marries him and leaves on a honeymoon in Paris accompanied by Andrew, while her parents return to a warm welcome in Garnock. During their absence Charles Snodgrass becomes fond of Isabella Todd and a marriage is clearly foreseen; and as the book ends Mr. Craig, a church elder, is apparently to wed the severe Mrs. Glibbans. There are no forced coincidences such as in *The Earthquake* and *Glenfell*; the pace is slow, as there is nothing to be resolved, since it is clear from the first that the legacy is a genuine one; and as there is no true climax, Galt's typical haste at the end of his novels, in which he tends to compress and hurry over important scenes, does not occur.

#### B. Characters

Galt wrote William Blackwood concerning the characters: "Perhaps I ought to warn you that whatever change I may give to names and professions the persons described are all portraits, and I doubt not that some of those in the first part will be recognized by your Ayrshire readers. . . ."<sup>13</sup> Two distinct groups of Scottish characters are portrayed, the Pringles and their Garnock friends. Both groups range from young to old and from simple to intelligent or sophisticated, and the members of both, with the possible exceptions of Charles Snodgrass and Andrew Pringle, represent village life. The four travelers reveal themselves through their own mouths or at least pens, and comment frankly on each other; their occasional different accounts of the same episode are valuable. In the scenes in Garnock, Galt himself intervenes with explanatory statements, while conversations and the varied reactions to the letters and to village occurrences show the personalities of the recipients.

The dissimilarity of Dr. Pringle and Micah Balwhidder proves that Galt was capable of sharp differentiation in the same profession. Pringle is far brisker, livelier, more knowledgeable than Balwhidder, more "worldly," with wider interests and, perhaps, less con-

Smollett's *Humphry Clinker* (Mrs. Pringle's misspellings clearly derive from those of Tabitha Bramble and Winifred Jenkins in that work), Galt makes more use of topical allusions, provides the barest bones of a plot, and most effectively adds scenes with the Garnock villagers. John Lockhart's *Peter's Letters to His Kinsfolk* (1819) is also a possible influence, considering its date and its publication by Blackwood.

#### A. Summary of Events

As with *Annals*, Galt was firm in not considering *The Ayrshire Legatees* a typical novel. He wrote to William Blackwood in May, 1820: "I send you the first part of 'The Ayrshire Legatees' which I have called my London sketches—It was necessary, in order to prepare the reader for the tone of the observations that I mean to ascribe to the several characters, to frame somewhat more of a story than I at first intended."<sup>12</sup> The events form a single tale, its interest sharpened through the device of moving the Scottish characters to London, thus contrasting the manners and the attitudes of two closely linked nations. Dr. Zachariah Pringle, minister of the parish of Garnock, is the residuary legatee of his cousin, Colonel Armour, who died at Hyderabad, India. To receive his legacy of over a hundred thousand pounds and to protect his interests, Dr. Pringle goes to London by coach, steamboat, and smack (a sailing vessel) with his wife Janet, his daughter Rachel, and his son Andrew, who has just been called to the bar. In London the group attends church service, goes to the funeral of George III at Windsor Castle, attends the coronation of George IV, comments on the trial of Queen Caroline, hears an oratorio, visits Brighton, and compares the merits of Irvine and Edinburgh with those of London. Dr. Pringle meets with "godly" politicians, including William Wilberforce, the opponent of the slave trade, but has his eyes opened to their lack of spiritual qualities; Mrs. Pringle learns much about London servants and cookery, Rachel much about fashions and balls; Andrew discusses on political matters and joins a group of fashionable young men.

All four write letters to their friends at Garnock and Irvine, these recipients being Miss Mally Glencairn, spinster; Mrs. Glibbans, widow, a rigidly devout Presbyterian; Miss Isabella Todd, a girl of Rachel's age; Mr. Mickleham, schoolmaster and session clerk; and the young Reverend Charles Snodgrass, officiating during Dr.