

LIFE AND TIMES OF SIR A. T. GALT

had not weakened a memory stored with minutely detailed pictures of men and manners, and they had brought a knowledge of the world, a detachment and disillusionment, that enabled him to set the life of the little towns and countryside of Ayr in proper perspective and to make the reader see, below the surface peculiarities, the comedies and tragedies common to human life the great world over. In kindly, pompous, self-revealing Micah Balwhidder,³ and his three wives, at last gathered to his and Abraham's bosom, in the grafting, face-keeping Provost, in Andrew Wylie, first of the bang-went-saxpence Scots in literature, in shrewd, talkative Mrs. Pringle—a portrait of his own mother—and in scores of other characters of his creation, Galt gave not merely characters, but men and women whom we seem to have seen and known ourselves. To a rare gift of straightforward narrative, Galt added a power of vivid realism that Turgeniev has not surpassed, a delicate playful irony, a kindly sentiment too restrained and robust ever to sink into the sentimentalism of his Kailyard followers, a grey sense of the transitoriness of life that gives to his best work a strange touch of inevitableness. In the writings of John Galt, one of the most prolific of authors, there was much dross, but the gold was pure gold.

Galt now seemed definitely committed to the uneventful life of a man of letters. Yet the man of affairs, who in him always struggled for mastery, had still a stirring

³ "I am not surprised at Bonaparte's agent taking the *Annals* for a credible story, for even here some people have viewed them in the same light. Among the others my worthy old mother read the book with great delight and thought Micah an honest and upright minister of the gospel. But unfortunately one of my little boys told her it was a novel, and thus it lost all its charms and she was very angry with us for having deceived her."—William Blackwood to John Galt, June 25, 1821, in Mrs. Oliphant's *William Blackwood and His Circle*.