

## THE CANADA COMPANY

been an author, but would have followed the promptings and impulses of my own taste instead of thinking what might be profitable. . . . It has only been when I had nothing else to do that I have had recourse to these secondary pursuits."<sup>2</sup> It is very doubtful whether the world of readers would have been better off had Galt been entirely free to follow the promptings of his own taste. The hard compulsion of earning a living forced him to write much hack work, compilations of travels, and revamped biographies, but it also led him to write the stories of contemporary Scottish life on which his permanent fame is based. His own inclinations ran to composing grandiloquent tragedies, not without admirable passages, but on the whole deserving Scott's judgment as "the worst ever seen," or else elaborately articulated but lifeless historical or mystery romances. His works on the Levant and certain of his biographies, notably the life of West, brought him well deserved reputation, but it was not until 1820, when Blackwood published *The Ayrshire Legatees*, that Galt scored his first popular success and permanent achievement. In rapid succession followed *The Annals of the Parish*—begun eight years before, rejected by a publisher on the ground that Scotch novels would not pay, and revived when the magic success of the Waverley novels proved the contrary—*The Provost*, *Sir Andrew Wylie*, and *The Entail*.

In these and later pictures of West Country Scottish life, a definite but far from narrow field, Galt's modest talents rose to undoubted genius. It seemed curious that it was only many years after he had left Scotland, and had tried his hand at almost every other literary task, that he found his bent. But the years that had passed

<sup>2</sup>*Autobiography*, I, p. 84.