

THE NOVELS OF JOHN GALT.

MR CROCKETT was very happily inspired when he suggested a re-issue of the best of Galt's novels to the publishers, and they on their part have done full justice to the suggestion in an edition which is at once beautiful in form and moderate in price. To the readers of 'Maga' especially, the appearance of this new edition ought to be of interest. Three generations now have been winnowing the sixty volumes—the plays and tales and essays innumerable—which were Galt's literary output, until there are left only the six novels reissued here, and perhaps 'Lawrie Todd'; and most of these appeared in the pages of the 'Magazine,' or at any rate had its friendly send-off. And that is not all. At a distance of eighty years it may be allowable for us to recall that it was the editor of 'Maga' who discovered for the hither-and-thither writer his true province, and confirmed him in it. "It is due to Mr Blackwood," Galt wrote, "to ascribe to him the peculiarities of that production ['The Annals']; for although unacquainted with 'The Annals of the Parish,' his reception of my first contribution to his 'Magazine' of 'The Ayrshire Legatees' encouraged me to proceed with the manner in which it is composed, and thus, if there is any originality in my Scottish class of composition, he is entitled to be the first person who discovered it." In this reissue, therefore, and in the interest it has aroused, there is something in the

nature of a compliment to an old friend, at once pleasing to our knowledge of his worth and gratifying to our judgment in the early recognition of it.

It is not to those who feel thus, however,—they did not need the revival,—but to the present generation, which assuredly knew not its Galt, that this edition has given so great a delight. A great delight and a great surprise! To the generation of to-day, unacquainted with the literature its fathers read, the discovery by the inimitable art of Mr Barrie of the humour and pathos of life in Lowland Scotland seemed a new discovery, for prose at any rate. And thus to some the existence of Galt's earlier picture of the same life has come as a surprise, disconcerting them, as if a personal loyalty to the modern Scottish novelist were at stake in this claim of the earlier; and the 'Annals' and the 'Provost' have become a kind of a challenge, inciting some to lower their estimate of the modern work, and others to pitch it still higher, all apparently agreeing to seek in old and new a similarity, where in truth there is no similarity, but only a want of it. From that endeavour no knowledge of Galt at least can come. The uses of this comparison, which the fashion of the moment forces upon us now, if it has any uses at all, lie in its leading us to discriminate between his range and their range, between his attitude and method and theirs, the better to appreciate

how wide is the difference between them.

It is in their range, first and chiefly, that we must look for the difference. This edition of Galt, fixing, as we may hold, the verdict of eighty years, determines his place among our great novelists. It is an inadequate estimate of Galt, however, which considers him as a novelist merely, or as performing merely the ordinary functions of a novelist. Galt was far more, did far more. He was more than the chronicler of the various humours, civil and parochial, of the Scots Renaissance in the second half of the eighteenth century. He was its historian also.

If we are to understand all that is contained in this claim for Galt, the Renaissance itself must be understood. Its nature and extent have been strangely overlooked. With the Union, England brought to the Scots ideas and opportunities necessary for their further progress and development. These ideas, of course, afforded no new motive power to England, to whom they had long been familiar. And thus it was for Scotland alone (when she accepted them) that they were fresh and vivifying influences. Their effect, in bringing her into line with England, was to render their own workings of merely local interest, to be passed over by the historian whose business was a United Kingdom now. But the historian of Scotland cannot pass them over so. For here in Scotland, long before the general quickening of thought by the French Revolution, was a great national development; not a great spiritual Renaissance like that other, indeed, but one of far more importance to the people immediately concerned.

Consider the condition of Scotland in the middle of the eighteenth century. One has only to read Johnson's 'Journey to the Hebrides' or Fullarton's 'Agricultural Survey' to see that she had no commerce, no agriculture, as we understand them now. The pools of her social life lay, as they had lain for a century, undisturbed save for the sounds of war and rebellion that echoed over them. But in the second half of the century all was changed. The stagnant waters were stirred. Great tides of energy moved them. Capital, and the enterprise to use capital, both lying idle through the cessation of American trade during the War of Independence, were given the outlet now for which they had been waiting, by the mechanical inventions of a Compton, a Hargreaves, an Arkwright. Estates, grown wildernesses, passed out of the hands of decrepit families into those of new men with money and energy to work them. And the change was not material only—or, at least, the material change made a way for the aspirations which poverty had so long held back. The education which Scotland had enjoyed for generations found opportunity of action now; now was laid the democratic basis of Scottish literature which allowed the material development, so to speak, of a Hogg, a Leyden, a Carlyle. The people, conscious of a new independence, flung their arms wide to face the world; so that Burns, though he was not made by his environment, at least consorted with it, and is not to be considered, as most will have it, as a remarkable appearance in his generation, but rather as its fullest expression, a man who in the new relief rose with a great bound, his own spontaneity itself the reflec-

tion of the national wonder at the lifting of the horizon. Scotland was revived. In it, years before the French Revolution, the true battle-cry of that Revolution, as many think, was sounded—*La carrière ouverte aux talents!* As Mr Balwhidder says, "A new genius, as it were, had descended on the earth, and there was an erect and outlooking spirit abroad that was not to be satisfied with the taciturn regularity of ancient affairs."

"As Mr Balwhidder says,"—therein is the claim for Galt. For Micah Balwhidder and Provost Pawkie are the true chroniclers of all these changes and transmutations. Of the great Renaissance, the pulses of which we hear beating in Scotland still, Galt is the only, and a very adequate, historian.

Observation, a very genius of observation as we shall hope to show, was the root-quality of his work, as a historian no less than as a novelist. Apart from this gift of observation, however, there were conditions in his life which fitted him to be the historian of the Scotland of this Renaissance. He was at once of it and outside of it. He was born in 1779 and died in 1839, and these dates may be taken generally as the limits of the Renaissance period. And he was a true product of his country, typical of his times. The new energy that was throbbing in his country was throbbing in him. His life, as we know it, was an unceasing endeavour. Rhyming, music, mechanism, antiquarian research, volunteering, the bar, commerce, literature, colonisation,—there was no region of knowledge or accomplishment that he did not enter upon, master to some extent, write about voluminously. There is a passage in the 'Auto-

biography' which illustrates this singular energy of mind:—

"I was a sort of a fisher," he writes of his youth, "but never distinguished. The scene of my reveries was a considerable stream in the moors behind the mountains above the town. It has since been brought round the shoulder of the hill, and being dammed up, it now by a canal gives to the town a valuable water-power. Among my fishing dreams, this very improvement, in a different manner, was one of the earliest. I brought forth to myself a notable plan,—no other than to tunnel the mountain by the drain and lead it into the Shaws Water,—for exactly the same purpose as the canal has since been executed. . . .

"In the Firth, opposite to Greenock, there is a large sandbank often dry at low water. When it was proposed to enlarge the harbour it occurred to me that this bank might be converted into land, and I have still a very cheap and feasible plan for gradually doing it, but unfortunately the bank belonged to the Crown, and was too sacred to be improved. In contriving schemes such as these my youth was spent, but they were all of too grand a calibre to obtain any attention, and I doubt if there yet be any one among my contemporaries capable of appreciating their importance."

There, was Galt running over with the new energy that filled Scotland. On the other hand, he spent the greater part of his life out of Scotland, travelling widely, mixing with men and women of all degrees, watching in their established order those great forces which in his own country were intermittent still, and uncontrolled. And thus he came to look upon Scotland from without also, with an eye trained to note change and the causes of change.

The Scotland of the Scottish writers of to-day is a Scotland nearer to us than Galt's; nevertheless, it is one far removed. And far removed in spirit rather

than in time. It would be true in a sense to say of Mr Barrie that he is of the Auld Lichts himself, learned in their ways and beliefs; but the world of Thrums is not to him what Gudetown and Dalmailing were to Galt. Gudetown and Dalmailing Galt had seen, and what we see of them is the dead-sure result of his observation. Not so the Thrums of the 'Auld Licht Idylls,' to Mr Barrie or to us. It has passed away; the generation that can remember it has passed away also; and what of it has been rescued for us is the fragments of that generation's reminiscences of it, restored and transmuted by Mr Barrie's art. So, with the other Scottish writers: their Scotland is a Scotland seen through the glass of pathetic and humorous reminiscence.

And here let us note, always as throwing light on Galt's range, that the present-day writers see their Scotland through still another glass, the spiritually idealising glass through which their readers demand that they shall look. For the modern novel of Scottish life has been, to a great extent, the manufacture and the property of a religious public: not wholly,—the genius and art of Mr Barrie have compelled a recognition far beyond it,—but to an extent that has influenced it greatly. That religious public must not be taken to represent religious Scotland, as the English reader may be led by the 'Bonnie Brier Bush' to believe. But the true stream of religious life in Scotland is lost to-day in the waters of "Kirkiness"—and drummer waters never were; and at the bidding of this too powerful religiosity, many of the modern writers have ignored something in Scottish life as real and characteristic in our day as in Galt's or

in Dunbar's: a materialism, an animalism, not entirely ignoble, but to be transformed by this spiritual emotion with which some present writers so wholly concern themselves that with them it becomes akin to the fugitive and cloistered virtue that aroused the grave and lofty scorn of Milton. And in this way, in the picture of a Scottish life which is nothing but spiritual, there is contained a half-truth, worse than a lie,—a triple lie, indeed, deceiving the writer and deceiving the reader and a libel on the life itself. Far otherwise it is with Galt, in whose work, always historically true, the spirituality of the people appears less, as, we may believe, in his day it showed less. He carries on the traditions of the vernacular literature, not missing the common or unclean, but painting a rounded and complete picture.

Thus, whatever it may lose by the absence of this idealism, Galt's work remains, as the present-day reminiscent and falsely spiritual writers' can never be, of value historically; and more, of a historical value that is maturing, being greater to us than to his contemporaries, and becoming greater still as the years go on. This is not because there is no truth in Mr Dishart, say, and others in Thrums, but because, howsoever true these may be, they are but facets of the whole truth. They may be true portraiture, but at any rate the Thrums that is compact of them is not a true picture. There never was a village like Thrums, there never was a glen like Drumtochty; whereas we are convinced that Dalmailing and Gudetown are the true Dalmailing and Gudetown of Galt's day, and at the same time the truest pictures we possess of the Scottish village and burgh-town of our day. And this is

because they were seen whole, complete, not only by a contemporary chronicler but by a chronicler who noted, with an observation that amounts to philosophic insight, the developmental forces beneath contemporary events.

This historic insight, which differentiates Galt from the writers of to-day who glorify a characteristic—the most noble and marked—of the Scottish people, also differentiates him from Scott, his great contemporary, who has painted this transition period. From the historical point of view Scott, too, is less valuable than Galt, and that just because he was far greater than Galt, his own mind being more to him. his subject less. Scott's novels of the Renaissance are not documents of it, as Galt's are. Even as he writes of the transition, he heightens, transmutes, by imaginative power; taking away from fact, as when he shows the breaking-up of feudalism in '45; inventing, not mirroring the plain fact, so that the character of Dandie Dinmont, the infinitely greater character, is less the real thing than Kebbuck or Coulter of the 'Annals.'

The 'Annals' and the 'Provost,' then, occupy a place of their own in our literature. In them local and parochial annals are informed with the dignity of philosophic history. Galt has interested us in Dalmailing or Gudetown because it is real, human, made up of men and women; and in the same presentment in which he does this, the emergent types come up so luminously, so wholly, that they are the nation in miniature. And to achieve dramatic history in this way, embodying the general in the particular, is, perhaps, what has been done by no one else.

Galt did not reach this singular position without some conscious

intention of achieving it. "To myself," he says, "the 'Annals' has ever been a kind of treatise on the history of Society in the West of Scotland during the reign of King George the Third; and when it was written I had no idea it would ever have been received as a novel. Fables are often a better way of illustrating abstract truths than philosophical reasoning, and it is in this class of compositions I would place the 'Annals of the Parish.'" That is interesting as showing that the author of the 'Annals' and the 'Provost' was a deliberate student of sociology. Nevertheless it is to be believed that his historic grasp owes little to the conscious intention, and almost all to a perfectly uncanny observation: uncanny, because outside of him, as it were, a thing by itself, working apart from him, so that he can stand aside and watch its operations.

Galt's observation discovers itself in such a contingent quality as his mastery of dialect. His mother, we know, had the command of an incomparable Scottish phraseology and a habit of queer metaphorical expression, to which, no doubt, we owe the rich excursions of the Leddy Grippy's tongue. The sayings of the carlins in Irvine closes, among whom he spent much of his youth, remembered after many years,—for of course his observation was compound of memory,—would find a place in his pages. In his slovenly fashion, he uses local variants of words—"Keelevin" and "Keelevine," for example—showing that these had been noted by him. At the same time, so keenly observed was it, his Scotch always is more than words and phrases recalled: it is an adequate speech, Mr Balwhidder's being exactly that of the old clerical fogie, Provost Pawkie's

exactly that of the consequential burgh dignitary. In its particularity, it is different from Scott's, Galt's, the observer's, being nearer the real thing. Sir Walter, on the other hand, not of the people but a man of birth and bookishness, always the gentleman, the fine romancer, gets a twang, an unmistakable something of style, unborn of observation, which makes his Scotch the greatest ever written. For Scott, writing by ear, and, without doubt, often led thereby into slovenly English, has informed his Scotch with a great style, coming at it by the feel of his finger-tips, himself smiling as he culled the racy idioms.

Of this tremendous observation, too, comes the sense of fine richness of material of which we are conscious in the 'Entail,' the 'Provost,' the 'Annals of the Parish.' There is no feeling there, as with so many jejune moderns, that heaven and earth have been ransacked to bombast out a book. Galt has not, like the decadent poet, the decadent novelist, cultivated his own mental emotions to produce the material of psychology. In the 'Annals,' besides Mr Balwhidder, and his three wives, and Mrs Malcolm and her family, and Lady Macadam,—leisurely, intimately discovered,—there are some fifty others, shown in thumb-nail sketches, each linked to inevitable, character-displaying incident, each incident, again, fitted with perfect relevance into the complete historic picture. In the 'Provost,' with

the same frugality of means to the end, the career of Mr Pawkie is laid bare, from his setting up in the corner-shop at the Cross, facing the Tolbooth, to his "going to his repose as a private citizen, with a very handsome silver cup, bearing an inscription in the Latin tongue, of the time he had been in the Council, Guildry, and Magistracy"; each body in the burgh-town—not a type amissing—impinging on that career, making it what it was, yet each true to himself; not an incident awaiting to develop it; not one present which does not also develop the larger progress of the municipal government "from the ancient, dexterous ways of corruption" to the order of "the purer spirit which the great mutations of the age had conjured into public affairs." And all this material was cast into these books with a generous hand by one who had attained to a fulness of knowledge, not through passion, not through reflection, but by a wide and penetrating observation.

An observation so wide and penetrating surely must have reached the springs of pathos and of humour. The verdict of three generations is that it has, and one wonders that any should deny either pathos or humour to the author of the "Execution" chapter in the 'Provost' and of the Leddy Grippy. Yet we know that there is something in Galt's presentation of these, even at their best, that causes them to fail in touching many readers of to-day.¹ Well, one can see how far behind

¹ Galt's humour was evidently to Carlyle's liking. In an article on "Carlyle in Society and at Home," Mr Venables says: "He [Carlyle] sometimes derived extreme amusement from the most extravagant forms of humour. In two or three days he repeated a dozen or a score of times, with bursts of inextinguishable laughter, a story which he had, I think, heard from Mr Tennyson, of some Scotch gentlemen who in the good old times had a three days' bout of steady drinking. Late on the third day one of the party, pointing to another, said to his neighbour, 'The laird looks unco gash.' 'Gash,' was the answer, 'he may weel look

the popular writers of our time Galt is in setting forth that observed humour and pathos popularly. The great mass of the reading public now is in the grip of the literature of Tit-bit—Tit-bit being not a class, but a method, applicable to any. News, even of the police court, must not lie in the column to be read for, but must be placarded in headlines; and so, be the matter what it may—regeneration of the human soul itself—focus it to some glittering point you must.¹ It is literary pemmican that the reader of to-day must have: in every sentence a *punctum saliens* of emotion or of wit. Galt is no author for such a reader. Yet, although he never forces the phrase, he is not behind the Tit-bitites in close and insistent interest. Only, where they explain, he presents; and so, in spite of the vulgar nature of his theme, in spite of the lack of artistic consciousness, he delights the cultivated reader, who will not abdicate his own powers of imagination and humour and emotion to become the passive recipient of what the author cares to prepare, babe to be fed with his spoonfuls, but asks that something shall be left for his own constructive faculty to do.

And, further, for a full appreciation of Galt, not only must the reader do much for himself—he must know much of himself also. If the 'Annals' and the 'Provost'

are not to be accounted merely as shedding light on burgh and country life in Scotland, if they are to be enjoyed to the full measure of their value as a revelation of it, the reader must himself be acquainted with that life as it is and as it was. He misses much if he is not being constantly surprised into a delighted recognition. English readers have laughed and cried over the pictures of Thrums,—and therein is a proof of Mr Barrie's genius; still, every Scot knows that there must have been lost to them much over which both to laugh and to cry. But this is far more true of the 'Annals' and the 'Provost'; not because Galt wrote of an older Scotland, not because he did not write for an English audience, but because he was more purely the observer and less the idealiser. With him, it is the life itself, not his presentation of it, that must move us; and how shall it move us utterly if we have not within us chords of association and memory? And not only does so appreciative a critic as Canon Ainger fail for want of these to sound Galt to the bottom, but among Scots themselves there is disagreement as to whether the 'Provost' or the 'Annals' is the greater work, each, according as he was bred in town or in country, making choice of the book in which he finds most of the life he knows.

In spite of these limitations to

gash, as he has been deid these twa days.' I heard the story for the last time as we came away from a house where we had been dining, and Carlyle must have surprised his fellow-passengers in a Chelsea omnibus which he entered before he had done laughing." The story, of course, is from the 'Last of the Lairds.'

¹ Mr Stead supplies a perfect illustration in vol. xxix. of the "Penny Poets." That accomplished server-up to the public insists that it was "little short of a high crime and misdemeanour" when Clough chose "The Bothie of Tobernavuolich" as the title of his poem, and, with a chuckle of prescience which the Tit-bitite must admire, he has reissued it as—"The Love Story of a Young Man"!

the number of his readers to-day, Galt still presents for most a wide range of humour and pathos: humour, subtle and gentle, as in the affairs of Micah Balwhidder, rich and shrewd, in the 'Provost,' roaring, often, there and in the 'Entail,' passing into excellent farce in the 'Last of the Lairds'; and a pathos not less wide in its range.

We have spoken of Galt's lack of artistic consciousness as being likely to lessen for some readers their pleasure in his work. Galt, true product of his country, like it was untrained and immature. May we not say that there is in the Scottish character still, when set beside the English, something angular and intense, something almost fierce at times? In that most democratic of countries, we may explain it, the constant rush of new blood prevents the old from clarifying. Galt lived at a period when, as we have shown, Scotland was running riot in the new possibilities opened up for it. Think for a moment of his life; of the Greenock period, for example, with his fury in the pursuit of knowledge, his schemes of a calibre too grand for his contemporaries to appreciate, his lack of a standard whereby to judge himself and them. When he carried his pursuits and schemes into the greater world, even in that extended circle of his contemporaries there still were wanting any to appreciate him; while he himself was so deficient in a standard for judging them, that, with them all to choose from, he declared his young Greenock friend, Park, to be "far more accomplished than any other person I have ever known, and I do not except Lord Byron when I say so." It is an exhibition of an unwearied spirit in a good and honest and loyal man; but an exhibition also of immaturity, of a failure to shed

the amateur, of a "splairger," of the "gausy Greenock man," as Carlyle described him, getting beneath the externals with his intuitive flash. In his evident pride in such a character as his own Sir Andrew Wylie,—and see how he demeans Mary Cunningham by lowering her pride at the end, whereas she ought to have condescended to the Baronet even in marrying him,—we seem to detect a certain indelicacy of perception in Galt. Devoid of self-consciousness, and with a spirit the bearing strain of which was enormous, he was ready for any task, evidently more ambitious for the output than for a record without failure. He was the extensive, not the intensive, worker.

And thus he could never be the pure artist. He did not handle language lovingly, like an instrument. It was nothing in itself save a means to a practical end. His narrative, therefore, is often a slovenly march between the points where it is quickened by emotion. We do not remember that Mr R. L. Stevenson ever made a reference to Galt showing that he had studied him. The author of the Edinburgh scenes in the 'Wrecker' could not have read the 'Provost' without recognition of the great penetration there into the fastnesses of the Scottish nature. But, remembering the criticism in 'Memories and Portraits' of Sir Walter's shortcomings as a craftsman, one can imagine how Galt's slovenliness of artistic structure would strike the novelist who was for ever stripping his theme of irrelevancies. Take the 'Entail' as an example. The first part of the book is woven round the really great character of old Claud Walkinshaw. His death in the middle of the story is artistically

right: it was necessary that the effects of his entail should declare themselves most fully after his death of remorse for it. When Claud died, and this great central figure was removed, there was a gap, a barrenness, in the story which had to be filled, and Galt filled it with the Leddy Grippy. She is the great character of the second part. But this Leddy Grippy of the second part is not the Leddy Grippy, the Girzy Hypel, of the first. Galt had felt the artistic necessity of heightening the effect of Leddy Grippy, and to do so he changed her, but he did not revise the first part of the story, apparently did not feel the necessity of revising it, to bring the Leddy's character into a consequence throughout.

Galt was at once more and less artificial than Stevenson. His ideas, feelings, personal preferences, the matter, with all its side issues, as opposed to the manner, weighed more with him. Therein he was less artificial. On the other hand he was more artificial because he was infinitely less conscious than was Stevenson of the dignity of subject,—its demands to be treated with all respect and restraint, to be charged with nothing belittling to it, to be set upon a pinnacle alone, with all the petty accessories severely stripped. Thus in Galt we constantly find a certain familiarity between the writer and the reader: not a vulgar familiarity, but rather an understanding that, after all, this matter between them is at best only a story and the telling of it.

"But why should we expatiate on such particulars? Let the manners and virtues of the family speak for themselves, while we proceed to relate what ensued."

Can one imagine that, from the 'Entail,' in the 'Master of Ballantrae'?

Here again, however, Galt's observation came to his aid, making up for what was wanting in him of the artist. Extreme self-consciousness, extreme subject-consciousness, in art, are negative rather than positive qualities, showing themselves in what they keep out of a book rather than in what they put into it. Had Galt had these, we should not have known the Sandfords. For want of the deliberative, lopping hand of the artist, the effect of the 'Entail,' which might have been his greatest book, is almost spoiled. But in the work of Galt that is great,—wheresoever, that is, his observation ranged free,—we do not miss the deliberative artist, although there, too, he is wanting. There is a deliberate art and there is an instinctive art; and whenever Galt is back in Greenock and in Irvine, his measure of instinctive art is full. He is like a man who has never been outside his own parish; when he crosses the march-dyke, he stumbles, loses his head, is forewandered: let him come again within the familiar circle, and he steps the road with confidence, never halting, yet never thinking of the way, because he knows every foot of it. It is this surefooted Galt that we find in the 'Annals,' in the 'Provost,' in great portions of the 'Entail,' in small portions of 'Sir Andrew Wylie,' in the 'Last of the Lairds.' There,—with what a tact!—Galt conforms his style to his subject, becoming softer, for example, when Micah Balwhidder tells about a Sabbath year of his ministry; by a fine instinct (which makes us like the man) writing gently of sunny landscapes, of grasses, of buds, of flowers:—

"Contentment within the bosom lent a livelier grace to the countenance of Nature; and everybody said that in this year the hedges were greener than common, the gowans brighter on the brae, and the heads of the statelier trees adorned with a richer coronal of leaves and blossoms. All things were animated with the gladness of thankfulness, and testified to the goodness of their Maker."

With what a gusto, and with what a petty spitefulness as well, Provost Pawkie recounts the tricks of the divor, Robin Boss; with what a masterful air of efficiency, his off-come with that "pompous trifle," Mr Peevie! The high-water mark of Galt's work is reached in the ninth chapter of the 'Provost,' where his really terrible observation is mixed with a wonderful tenderness. Who does not recognise the different effects of their shame upon the two laddies of the donsie mother? "The one of them had gone off with the soldiers some time before; the other, a douce, well-behaved callan, was in my lord's servitude as a stable-boy at the Castle." And now the daughter, Jean Gaisling, "the bonniest lassie in the whole town, but light-headed, and fonder of out-gait and blether in the causey than was discreet of one of her uncertain parentage," has murdered her bastard bairn. From the hour she did the deed she never spoke.

"It was thought by many that her advocate might have made great use of her visible consternation, and pled that she was by herself; for in truth she had every appearance of being so. He was, however, a dure man, no doubt versed well enough in the particulars and punctualities of the law for an ordinary plea; but no of the right sort of knowledge and talent to take up the case of a forlorn lassie, misled by ill example and a winsome nature, and clothed in the allurements of loveliness, as the judge himself said to the jury."

When the girl in the tolbooth is waiting the coming on of the hour of doom, her wanton mother, that has been trolloping in Glasgow, comes to the door, making a dreadful wally-waeing, and the ladies who had sat up all night with Jean, and prayed for her, were obligated to bid her be let in.

"The wicked mother first tried to rouse her by weeping and distraction, and then she took to upbraiding, but Jeannie seemed to heed her not, save only once, and then she but looked at the misleart tinkler, and shook her head."

What profound observation that change in the mother shows!

"At the hour appointed, Jeannie, dressed in white, was led out by the town-officers, and in the midst of the magistrates from among the ladies, with her hands tied behind her with a black riband. At the first sight of her at the tolbooth stair-head, a universal sob rose from all the multitude, and the sternest e'e couldna refrain from shedding a tear. We marched slowly down the stair, and on to the foot of the scaffold, where her younger brother, Willy, that was stable-boy at my lord's, was standing by himself, in an open ring made round him in the crowd; every one compassionating the dejected laddie, for he was a fine youth, and of an orderly spirit.

"As his sister came towards the foot of the ladder, he ran towards her, and embraced her with a wail of sorrow that melted every heart, and made us all stop in the middle of our solemnity. Jeannie looked at him (for her hands were tied), and a silent tear was seen to drop from her cheek. But in the course of little more than a minute all was quiet, and we proceeded to ascend the scaffold. Willy, who had by this time dried his eyes, went up with us, and when Mr Pittle had said the prayer and sung the psalm, in which the whole multitude joined, as it were with the contrition of sorrow, the hangman stepped forward to put on the fatal cap, but

Willy took it out of his hand, and placed it on his sister himself, and then kneeling down, with his back towards her, closing his eyes, and shutting his ears with his hands, he saw not nor heard when she was launched into eternity.

"When the awful act was over, and the stir was for the magistrates to return and the body to be cut down, poor Willy rose, and without looking round, went down the steps of the scaffold; the multitude made a lane for him to pass, and he went on through them, hiding his face, and gaed straight out of the town. As for the mother, we were obligated, in the course of the same year, to drum her out of the town for stealing thirteen choppin bottles from William Gallon's, the vintner's, and selling them for whisky to Maggy Picken, that was tried at the same time for the reset."

There, certainly, is a great triumph of art for Galt's observation; and it had a greater. For the historic grasp to which it led him gave to the 'Annals' and to the 'Provost,' and not merely to special chapters in them, a structural quality. Micah Balwhidder is content to record all things,—he was the minister of the parish,—Tam Pawkie has a bailie's eye for those things only that affected his personal policy; yet both the 'Annals' and the 'Provost' have a binding interest, the development of rural and municipal Scotland. No deliberative artist could have better created and sustained an atmosphere than Galt, by sheer observation and tact, has created and sustained it in the 'Annals'; Stevenson himself could not have been closer, more relevant, than Galt is in the 'Provost,'—and could he ever have been so adequate? Adequacy, arising out of the fulness of his observation, giving to each of these works its own large integrity,—therein,

rather than in the many contingent excellences discoverable in him, lies the greatness of Galt.

If it is in his rare observation that we find Galt's power, to it we must look for his weakness also. For Galt's achievement, great as it is, is not of the greatest. We are ever saying, as we read him, What a gift of seeing! ever, as we leave him, This is only seeing, after all! Between these two opinions our judgment keeps flying, now amazed at the great powers we discover in him, now conscious that the Something of greatness is wanting. And when we try, not indeed to recover this inexplicable Something, but to define our disappointment in Galt, we are brought back again to the quality of his observation.

Our constantly recurring wonder, as we read the 'Annals' and the 'Provost,' seems, if we consider it, to be less at a wide sweep of the human intellect than at a marvel of nature,—as if Galt's gift had been, say, a power of seeing objects with the naked eye at twice the distance at which other men can see them. This view of his observation as a power, almost freakish, working outside and beyond him, is borne out by what we know of it. It is singularly at variance with all the other qualities of his mind. Its working was confined to Scotland, we might almost say to Ayrshire. When he was in England, Galt could not observe at all; elsewhere in Scotland than in Greenock or Irvine, he invented—and invented atrociously. And even in Ayrshire, apparently, it existed only in his youth. He was over forty when he wrote the 'Annals' and the 'Provost,' and all that they contain, as the careful student of Galt might demonstrate, was the outcome of observation

twenty years before. The deservedly highly praised "Windy Yule" chapter describes a storm which he saw when he was eight years old; yet look at the freshness of the impression after forty years, as seen in a touch like this:—

"As the day dawned, the wind began to abate in its violence, and to wear away from the sou'-west into the norit, but it was soon discovered that some of the vessels with the corn had perished, for the first thing seen was a long fringe of tangle and grain along the line of the high-water mark, and every one strained with greedy and grieved eyes as the daylight brightened, to discover which had suffered."

There is more in the 'Annals' and the 'Provost' than observation, of course: Galt is too big a man to be explained by any formula. There is selection, for example. Mr Cayenne makes rare appearances in the 'Annals,' six or seven at the most. But in these six or seven strokes, what a character! Still, this selection, without stretch perhaps, may be attributed to the very fineness of the observation, even as an unconscious art lay in its breadth and wholeness.

Such an observation we should expect to be lacking in animation, and it is the want of animation that disappoints us in Galt,—the want of glow, of exaltation. The

world, Galt's world, lay out before him, on the flat, as it were, complete, to be taken in by him in a great, calm gaze. What others would have seen as a matter of wonder, he saw as a matter of course. Had the wonder of his seeing touched him more, it would have touched us more. The 'Annals' and the 'Provost' are greater than Galt, who at best, perhaps, was only a sterling, likeable, friendly man; nevertheless they should be greater than they are had they more taste of his own quality, whatsoever it may have been. The speculative, creative genius, looking abroad upon the world, itself elevated above it by impassioned imagination, comes with a swoop to the heart of things. Galt's was not a speculative, intuitive genius. His approach is always from the under side. At first, it seems that he has reached from below what the other reaches from above, for the life lay bare to him, in every mood of it; until we discover that there is an ultimate innerness in things that reveals itself only to the passion with which it is sought. We are speaking of the defects of great qualities now. Where, as in Galt, everything is laid bare, there is not likely to be passionate search; and a dead-sure observation will show few marks of the empyrean from which great genius descends.