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Ann Roberts Divine

The Changing Village:
Loss of Community in John Galt's *Annals of the Parish*



Urban life provided the background, and in some cases the theme, for many nineteenth-century works of fiction—most of Dickens' canon, *Vanity Fair*, *Daniel Deronda*, *New Grub Street*. Long before any of those novels appeared, however, Scottish novelist John Galt dealt masterfully with the fundamental theme of urbanization. *Annals of the Parish*,¹ which appeared in 1821, is set in a remote Scottish village and appears at first to be an uncomplicated tale of simple village life. Actually, it is about how the city is becoming dominant in society, eventually affecting and entangling even the most remote corners of Great Britain. Galt deals in imaginative and subtle ways with urbanization and its near-relative, industrialization. He carefully develops this apparently naive story into what is no less than a thoughtful analysis of the painful birth of the modern world.

Galt overturns the myth of the village as a stable, safe refuge from the concerns and challenges of the great world. This village is not immune from the social shocks and commercial currents of society; on the contrary, it is drawn irresistibly and irrevocably into them. When the narrator

¹This nearly-forgotten work may receive more attention in future, since a new paperback edition has recently been published: John Galt, *Annals of the Parish*, edited with an introduction by James Kinsley (Oxford University Press, 1986). All parenthetical page references are to this edition.

of *Annals of the Parish*, the Reverend Micah Balwhidder, remarks that "What happened in my parish was but a type and index to the rest of the world" (p. 186), he is speaking specifically of the religious revival of 1804, but his words lay bare the heart of the book. For Galt makes the tiny, isolated village of Dalmailing a microcosm of the world and demonstrates how even it contains the storms of change that blew through the early nineteenth century.

A large, rapidly changing city, characterized by the constant roar of movement and filled with swirls of faces, is difficult to grasp imaginatively. But presented with the effects of change here on the outer reaches of society, we can imagine how chaotic and uncertain life must be toward the center of the whirlpool. The village is changing, but at a slower rate than the city; through Balwhidder, Galt can observe society under near-laboratory conditions. In Dalmailing he can isolate and observe minutely each development as it occurs.

However, Dalmailing is not so isolated and remote that it represents idyllic pastoral life. While *Annals of the Parish* traces the breakdown of the village's long independence and its entry into a new world of connection and dependence, it is clear that the village has never offered an escape from the ordinary cares of life. Galt is at pains to make Dalmailing a realistic village and to refute soundly the stereotype of village as pastoral idyll. To that end, he fills the book with human and natural disasters, a variety of characters, and an abundance of realistic detail. But, while Dalmailing is no rural paradise, it is different from the city; the diminishing of that difference—and the tightening of bonds between the two—is what *Annals of the Parish* chronicles.

Balwhidder's memoirs begin at the end, providing in the "Introduction" the one scene in the book that *is* idyllic, his last day as minister and his farewell message to the community:

in the churchyard all the congregation was assembled, young and old, and they made a lane for me to the back-yett [gate] that opened into the manse-garden. Some of them put out their hands and touched me as I passed, followed by the elders, and some of them wept (p. 4).

Thus we begin with perfect unity and common sentiment, both born of years of peace and stability. But in Chapter 1, this pastoral scene gives way immediately to its very opposite—civil disorder. The almost Biblical introductory scene of reverence and affection is followed by an account of that same minister's first Sunday, fifty years earlier, when the entire parish, jealous of its independence and angry at the appointment of an outsider, nails up the church door and engages in such unruly behavior that soldiers must be called in to protect him.

This picture of mob fury and confusion prefigures the disintegrating society that will be the concern of later books like *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*. But, more immediately, it anticipates disturbances to come in *Annals of the Parish* itself. For the civil authorities will again assert themselves over the parishioners, and "the drum beating and the fife playing" (p. 5) that accompany the entrance of the soldiers will again be heard in the village. The behavior of the parishioners in the first year of these annals banishes at once any idyllic pastoral notions that may have been encouraged by the introductory account of his last sermon. This disruption of the village will claim Galt's attention in the rest of the work.

Galt's audience might well have expected the rustic "clachan" to be an idyllic refuge, a storybook hamlet where peace and harmony reign and time stands still. That notion is soundly dispelled, however, by the events recorded, which include fire, flood, violent accidents, murder, and suicide. Moreover, Galt particularly uses the characters of Colin Mavis and Meg Gaffaw to demonstrate the less-than-idyllic nature of the village.

If this were a pastoral work, it could be expected to include a poetic shepherd. At first glance, this role seems to be held by Colin Mavis, but it develops that he serves less to embody than to refute pastoral ideas. Colin has always been considered something of an oddity; as Balwhidder says, "He could not be called a dolt, for he was observant and thoughtful, and given to asking sagacious questions; but there was a sleepiness about him" (p. 172). The parish predicts that Colin will be a "do-nae-gude" (p. 174) because he is so different from his peers. The real key to Colin, however, is to understand that he is a shepherd poet misplaced in an industrial age. He has a "wonderful proficiency" (p. 173) on an unnamed musical instrument, probably some kind of pipe. And Balwhidder often comes upon him in shepherd postures, but sheepless: "sitting alone on the brae by the water-side, and sometimes lying on the grass, with his hands under his head" (p. 173). In this world that has no need for pastoral swains, Colin must take a clerk's job in the mill. While that might seem a low course for a swain, it actually has a liberating effect on Colin's creative power. He begins to write poetry; some verses first appear in the Scots Magazine, and later he publishes a book. In reality, Colin is no more a pastoral poet than he is a pastoral shepherd. Thwarted in these roles, he must adapt to the realistic world of Dalmailing. He is a symbol, not of the idyllic serenity of life, but rather of how Dalmailing is becoming like the rest of the world: "Thus has our parish walked sidy for sidy with all the national improvements, having an author of its own, and getting a literary character in the ancient and famous republic of letters" (p. 174).

Colin is one way Galt overturns expectations about the "pastoral" village; Meg Gaffaw is another. Less adaptable than Colin, she suffers ac-

cordingly. Meg and her mother, Jenny, are Dalmailing's "village idiots." But Meg is also, to a greater degree than Colin, a representative of an older age and a symbol of the old ways that are vanishing from the village. Balwhidder introduces them as "a daft woman, Jenny Gaffaw, and her idiot daughter" (p. 70). In fact, they are more eccentric and unrestrained than crazy. Although Meg and Jenny try hard to conform, they fall outside the conventional pattern of village behavior and, therefore, become comic. They are, for instance, no more vain in their fashionably-styled new mantles than is Betty Wudrife in hers, but their finery is of scraps and rags:

...they put on the pageantry, and walked away to the kirk like peacocks, and took their place on the bench...where they sat, spreading their feathers and picking their wings, stroking down and setting right their finery with such an air as no living soul could see and withstand (p. 77).

And, in 1780, "having heard of the luminations that were lighted up through the country on the ending of the Popish Bill" (p. 103), they travel by themselves to Glasgow, buy candles, and return to illuminate their cabin so that the other villagers think it must be on fire.

In the tradition of the wise fool, neither Jenny nor Meg can be dismissed as a simple idiot; sometimes they are not only more truthful but also more sensible than their more conventional neighbors. On the occasion of the illumination, when the villagers rush to what they think is a burning cabin to help, Jenny's greeting is "is na it for the glory of God and the Protestant religion? d'ye think I will be a pope as long as light can put out darkness?" (p. 103). She may not have the details quite right, but it is difficult to fault her motivation. Similarly, Meg cannot be answered when she admits that she tore the lining out of Lord Eaglesham's church pew to make a cloak for her mother because "her mother's poor back had mair need of claes than the kirk-boards" (p. 70). Like other literary madwomen, such as Ophelia, William Wordsworth's wild-eyed woman, and Madge Wildfire, Meg cannot be easily dismissed.

In the course of the book, she develops into a symbol in the community of an older, simpler way of life that was more in touch with nature and with truth. Unaware of social conventions, she acts instinctively and often with more dignity than her detractors, and she keeps alive traditions that the rest of the community have forgotten. For example, when Jenny dies, Balwhidder, although he is the minister, apparently has no intention of paying Meg a condolence visit. Then he hears that she is going through the proper mourning rites, and, drawn by curiosity rather than duty, he goes to the house. Meg is indeed behaving properly. She ceremoniously serves refreshments, even if they are only water and stale bread. And she speaks the words of consolation with which he, as minister, should be com-

forting her, "we maun a' come to this—we maun pay the debt o' nature—death is a grim creditor, and a doctor but brittle bail when the hour of reckoning's at han'!" (p. 111). Balwhidder is too short-sighted to realize that she has acted more gracefully than he. But he is impressed by her behavior when he remarks, "some spirits are gifted with a faculty of observation that, by the strength of a little fancy, enables them to make a wonderful and truth-like semblance of things and events which they never saw; and poor Meg seemed to have this gift" (p. 112). Again, in her final misfortune, Meg seems to be the fool, but she emerges with great dignity. She falls in love with Henry Melcombe, who is kind and polite to her when he comes to the parish to marry another young woman. She takes his civility for love and is devastated by the wedding. After bride and bridegroom drive away, Meg announces her intention to die in language more poetic than any Colin Mavis is likely to employ:

"The worm—the worm is my bonny bridegroom, and Jenny with the many-feet my bridal maid. The mill-dam water's the wine o' the wedding, and the clay and clod shall be my bedding. A lang night is meet for a bridal, but none shall be langer than mine" (p. 160).

Meg thus carries out her own destruction with personal and poetic dignity.

Meg is important to her fellows because she is a "natural," not restrained by the artificial conventions of society. She is also a link with a world of tradition and folk wisdom that is rapidly vanishing. At her mother's funeral, for example, she revives the custom, abandoned by almost everyone else, of placing a plate of earth and salt on the body, "an admonitory type of mortality and eternal life" (p. 111). When Melcombe marries (and his bride is, ironically, a daughter of the man who brought the industrial age to Dalmailing in the form of the cotton mill), it is as if Meg realizes that there is no place for her in the modern world. Her death is emblematic of the old ways, of which she is both practitioner and symbol; significantly she dies by drowning herself "in the deepest plumb of the cotton-mill dam" (p. 160), the symbol of the new ways. "Few deaths," says Balwhidder,

had for many a day happened in the parish to cause to much sorrow as that of this poor silly creature. She was a sort of household familiar among us; and there was much like the inner side of wisdom in the pattern of her sayings, many of which are still preserved as proverbs (p. 160).

Meg's death represents more than the passing of a crazy woman, just as in the ceremony of Balwhidder's last Sunday, the parishioners are saying goodbye to a way of life as well as to their minister. In Dalmailing,

Meg can no more survive as a wild, rustic savant than Colin can survive as a pastoral poet. In the sheer ordinariness of the emerging industrial village, both are anachronisms.

While it can no longer support Meg and Colin, the village has remained stable, the "knowable community" of which Raymond Williams speaks. It follows a pre-industrial pattern in which time went on for decades without real change. But before the minister's eyes, life speeds up so that the changes come so hard and fast that the very attitude toward change is changed.

It is often to me very curious food for meditation, that as the parish increased in population, there should have been less cause for matter to record. . . . Things that in former days would have occasioned great discourse and cogitation, are forgotten with the day in which they happen (p. 172).

The relationship between time and change has altered: time has come to mean change. Balwhidder is baffled by this, but Galt understands, and the modern idea that change is inevitable with time is at the heart of *Annals of the Parish*. The social and economic changes that intrude upon the village are powerful because they are unpredictable, unplanned, and irreversible; they are unknown and uncontrollable. They first entice, then drag, Dalmailing from secure isolation into the unsettled modern world.

Change encroaches on Dalmailing slowly but inevitably. Concentrating on a few basic areas—transportation, war, commerce—Galt uses the village to demonstrate the sweeping and pervasive nature of the changes that affected the United Kingdom in the early nineteenth century. These forces invade the village from the outside, from the city-centered world. They can be seen clearly because the village is still enough of a small and controlled environment that their effects may be seen sharply; every nuance stands out. Moreover, he comes to recognize the central drama of this era—or of any other characterized by rapid social change: that change is at once beneficial and malevolent. Every improvement is ultimately also a loss; what may first appear to be unmitigated progress can also constitute irreversible destruction.

In short, change, for better or worse, is catastrophic, and it is these catastrophes of change in Dalmailing that Galt examines. Each of the changes that he chronicles has its peculiar effects and benefits, but together they alter fundamentally the nature of the village. To be sure, they may bring material comforts and conveniences, but they also disrupt the village's communal life, threaten its religious faith, and thrust upon it a kind of poverty it had never known before. Above all, these new developments wrest away from the once-isolated village any control over its

own destiny and make it part of the larger, interconnected world. It is that loss of independence and control that Galt finds most alarming.

The first sign of this movement toward connection with the world is the consequences of smuggling, an old and familiar practice which Galt uses as an early instance, and a warning, of what connections with the outside world can do to the village. Smuggling is irresistibly attractive to many Dalmailing residents, as an apparently easy and relatively safe way of securing plentiful and cheap tea and brandy. But as the trafficking in contraband grows—the dark side of this silver cloud becomes visible: an exciseman is sent to Dalmailing. The presence of this representative of the national government is the village's first tangible evidence that it is no longer independent but part of a large system that can impose its will. The first appointee is the likeable Robin Bicker, who manages to see only the most obvious offenses. Robin is soon replaced by the more diligent Mungo Argyle, and smuggling is no longer a subject for humor. But, whatever the personality of the individual tax man, his very existence represents the permanent presence of the established authorities of the outside world that had seem so remote.

Smuggling is, however, only a prototype for the more comprehensive changes typical of the early nineteenth century. The most prominent of these is improved transportation, which counteracts Dalmailing's physical isolation. It is also the first demonstration of the two-sided nature of change. The village carefully and cautiously begins the toll-road in 1767, but the actual road soon outgrows village control. Almost immediately, Dalmailing is firmly linked not only with the rest of Scotland but also with the entire world, and, consequently, village life becomes more interesting, fast-paced, and exotic: "By the opening of new roads, and the traffic thereon with carts and carriers, and by our young men that were sailors going to the Clyde, and sailing to Jamaica and the West Indies, heaps of sugar and coffee-beans were brought home" (p. 124). Balwhidder benefits personally when his wife uses the coach to establish a successful butter and egg business with the Glasgow market.

But before long the negative aspects of the road and the coach become apparent. The coach requires an inn, which serves, says Balwhidder, "to bring, as it were, the evil practices of towns into the heart of the country. All sort of license was allowed as to drink and hours" (p. 124). It offers a meeting place for "several unsatisfied and ambitious spirits" (p. 128) who order a London paper, which the coach brings, and discuss political developments as well as the "unsettled notions of religion" (p. 129) found therein. The road encourages the village to grow in new directions, and Lady Macadam's old house, previously a symbol of culture and aristocracy, is now at the center of town and thus becomes the inn. The old village is

disappearing, physically and metaphorically, as it becomes more closely tied to the rest of the world.

If the opening of the toll-road is an important step in Dalmailing's growing association with the town, the two greatest influences on the village are not tangible commodities that can be transported by the stage-coach. The forces by which Dalmailing is most firmly grasped and permanently changed are war and commerce.

The American Revolution is the first real disruption of the village's peace and isolation. And it is not announced so much as it is slipped into the village's awareness. No newspapers are received in Dalmailing at the time, but the grocer, on a shopping trip to Glasgow, learns that the price of tobacco has risen because of the rebellion in the colonies. The village believes itself insulated; "as Charles Malcolm, in the King's ship, was the only one belonging to the parish that was likely to be art or part in the business, we were in a manner little troubled at the time with this first gasp of the monster of war" (p. 52). But before long, the parish is going out, as it were, to meet that monster, as several young men enlist. Then comes the inevitable: people are killed, including Charles Malcolm, the finest and most successful young man of the parish. The parish is shocked and helpless in the face of the buffeting storms of the outside world. Before Balwhidder's account is over, the forces of war have actually reached the clachan, if only symbolically, when an army recruiting party sets up shop in the village itself.

Even more alarming, and more directly influential in the village than the signs of war, are the forces of modern commerce and the effects of industrial capitalism. Commercial development in the parish and its far-reaching effects are at the heart of *Annals of the Parish*. While war never actually reaches Dalmailing, capitalism comes to thrive at its very center, changing it irreversibly. Balwhidder's second wife and Mr. Cayenne, the American refugee who builds the cotton mill, are the two foremost figures for commerce, she on the small scale, he on the large. As Costain has demonstrated, they are both representative of the "new men" of the modern commercial city.² Mrs. Balwhidder may confine her activities to the domestic sphere, but she is a capitalistic whirlwind of butter-churning, cheese-making, and blanket-weaving. Her husband appreciates the prosperity her work brings his household, but since it disquiets his life with its "jangle and din" (p. 32), he appreciates it most after her death; then, thanks to her efforts, he can live comfortably and quietly with his third wife.

²Kenneth Costain, "Early Remembrances: Pastoral in the Fictional World of John Galt," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 47 (1978), 301.

While the second Mrs. Balwhidder's commercial activity is only domestic, Mr. Cayenne's ventures into industry affect the entire parish. A Tory refugee from Virginia, he arrives in 1785, exactly halfway through the chronicle, and is destined to change Dalmailing forever. The original proposal for the cotton-mill comes, significantly, from Glasgow, but Cayenne eagerly assents and becomes a partner. Establishment of the mill is the most stirring event recounted in all the *Annals*: "The minds of men were excited to new enterprizes; a new genius, as it were, had descended upon the earth, and there was an erect and out-looking spirit abroad that was not to be satisfied with the taciturn regularity of ancient affairs" (p. 128). The prosperity of the mill stimulates other businesses; an inn, a pub, and a bookseller are all soon established. All this activity actually takes place not in the old village itself, but in an adjacent raw, new milltown, Cayenneville, later corrupted to Canaille. Thus the village can maintain a technical separation, which Balwhidder tries to exploit. The truth, however, is that Dalmailing is profoundly affected by its new neighbor; it soon becomes apparent that an "out-looking spirit" and material prosperity are only part of the bargain. The mill animates the sleepy village as nothing has done before, but it also brings it face to face with the new commercial world where traditional values do not apply. It introduces a new prosperity, but also a new poverty. And it connects the village irreversibly with the outside world of economics and industry, over which it has no control.

The first evidence of fundamental change is social and political. The mill workers are not just newcomers but a new social and political class, who threaten the status quo represented by the parish gentry:

During the tempestuous times that ensued, from the death of the King of France, by the hands of the executioner, in 1793, there had been a political schism among my people that often made me very uneasy. The folk belonging to the cotton-mill, and the muslin-weavers of Cayenneville, were afflicted with the itch of jacobinism, but those of the village were staunch and true to King and Country (p. 179).

There are also religious differences. Beginning with their "unsettled notions," the weavers eventually divide the congregation; in the penultimate year of Balwhidder's tenure, a number of his congregation leave to establish their own meeting-house—another step in the disintegration of traditional village ways. Throughout *Annals of the Parish*, Balwhidder must notice that the church and what it represents are becoming less important in the life of the village:

The Christian religion was attempted to be brought into disrepute; the rising generation were taught to gibe at its holiest ordinances; and the kirk was more

frequented as a place to while away the time on a rainy Sunday than for any insight of the admonitions and revelations of the sacred book (pp. 146-7).

The weavers argue with Balwhidder, as he reports: "[T]hey confounded me with their objections, and used my arguments, which were the old and orthodox proven opinions of the Divinity Hall, as if they had been the light sayings of a vain man" (p. 129). Old and orthodox arguments are no longer persuasive, as Galt, if not Balwhidder, recognizes. And when the Canaille defectors return to honor Balwhidder upon his retirement, they are paying tribute only to his importance as a vestige of unity and tradition which, with his departure, will cease to exist even symbolically.

The advantages of industrialization are numerous; the village enjoys the material benefits that greater economic prosperity can provide—a local market, cheaper food, better wine. The extraordinary prosperity that industry makes possible is seen in 1798, when the local harvest falls short. Mr. Cayenne, that thorough capitalist, had predicted the disaster and with his mill profits had brought much foreign grain "by which he made a terrible power of money, clearing thousands on thousands" (p. 162). In the parish, however, he gives away grain to the poor and sells the rest cheaply. His ability to serve the parish represents the triumph of industry over agriculture—the way of the future.

But even as Balwhidder is impressed with these remarkable benefits of the progress that has come to Dalmailing, he is increasingly skeptical that the commercial system has genuine, long-range advantages. He has immediate misgivings about the mill and the threat it poses to spiritual values. The very year the mill is built, he reports, brought "a visible increase among us of worldly prosperity" (p. 129), as well as "signs of decay in the wonted simplicity of our country ways" (p. 128). Just a few years later, on one of his rare excursions outside the parish, a trip to Glasgow, he comes literally face to face with the eventual consequences of industrialization:

I thought the looks of the population were impaired, and that there was a greater proportion of long white faces in the Trongate, than when I attended the Divinity class. These, I was told, were the weavers and others concerned in the cotton trade, which I could well believe, for they were very like in their looks to the men of Cayenneville; but from living in a crowded town and not breathing a wholesome country air between their tasks, they had a stronger cast of unhealthy melancholy (p. 137).

Balwhidder had been wary; now he truly realizes that the benefits of "improvement" are mitigated. He sees that among the disadvantages is a growing worldliness which undermines spirituality: "for in that same spirit

of improvement, which was so busy everywhere, I could discern something like a shadow, that showed it was not altogether of that pure advantage which avarice led all so eagerly to believe" (p. 137). And he resolves, as he says, to "do all in my power to keep my people contented with their lowly estate" (p. 137). Of course, as Galt knows and makes clear, he has no such power. Balwhidder's response to the growing materialism is to preach a series of sermons on the vanity of riches. Not only are his ideas misinterpreted as "levelling doctrines" (p. 137), but they are no more influential than his earlier sermons against smuggling. Galt, with a wider perspective, knows that this tide will not be stemmed, certainly not by orthodoxies and sermons. If Cayenneville is prosperous enough to support a bookshop, that bookshop is likely to help disseminate new and unsettling ideas. If the people have enough money, they may very well spend it on whiskey and radical newspapers. And, always, there will be jealousy between those who benefit from the new ways and those who do not.

The final destructive blow of material progress comes in 1808 when international economic developments bring on the failure of the mill and the subsequent general disaster in the parish. The parish has had its troubles—fire, flood, famine—but this catastrophe is on a scale previously unimagined in Dalmailing. Not only do the mill manager and his wife commit suicide, but also the traditional parish system for dealing with the poor is overwhelmed, because hundreds of people are unemployed and hungry. Balwhidder, a man from the traditional village that knew neither commerce nor industry, throws up his hands in the face of the crisis. When the unemployed workers and their families start leaving town, he hides in his closet and prays "to the Lord to mitigate a calamity which seemed to me past the capacity of man to remedy; for what could our parish fund do in the way of helping a whole town thus suddenly thrown out of bread?" (p. 198) Where once the mill fed the parish, now it starves it. The consequences of Dalmailing's connection with the larger world have become painfully clear. Balwhidder himself was the first imposition on the independence of the village. The pattern begun then is now complete, and that appointment pales, as these new intrusions strike at the heart of the community. The village can no longer think itself protected and independent; instead, as Balwhidder says,

we had intromitted [in Scots law, had pecuniary dealings³] 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 (p. 197).

³"Explanatory Notes" to Galt, *The Provost.*, ed. Ian Gordon (Oxford, 1982), 145.

Annals of the Parish describes the weaving of those threads that tie Dalmailing into the great web of the world, rendering it forever dependent and obliterating much of its uniqueness and traditional life. The village welcomes these outside forces, even collaborates with them. Only when it is too late to turn back does it become clear that improvement is also destruction, that gain is also loss.

Galt sees clearly the destructive side of the changes that affect Dalmailing but cannot simply condemn them, because the benefits are real. Better transportation provides the opportunity for travel, "one of the best means of opening the faculty of the mind, and giving clear and correct notions of men and things" (p. 178). The mill does bring "a wonderful prosperity" (p. 162). Even after its catastrophic collapse, it recovers—and the village learns a lesson in modern economics: "that commercial prosperity, flush as it might be, was but a perishable commodity" (p. 199). Finally, these changes carry psychological as well as material benefits. Although he has found the influx of new political and religious ideas disturbing, Balwhidder must finally admit that it also has the effect of making men more tolerant:

the progress of book-learning and education has been wonderful since [the beginning of his ministry], and with it has come a spirit of greater liberality than the world knew before: bringing men of adverse principles and doctrines into a more human communion with each other (p. 204).

So, in the final analysis, Galt allows Balwhidder a positive attitude; Galt himself cannot be so optimistic. He has before him the example of Balwhidder, a village leader incapable of leading in changing times, a man unable to adapt to the modern world. Because of Galt's broader experience and greater perceptivity, he recognizes that, whatever the material and psychological benefits, the inevitable consequence is the breakdown of the village community. Galt mourns that breakdown, as well as the losses in British culture generally that it represents. Balwhidder accepts the final scene in the *Annals* as simply the loving farewell of his parishioners. Galt knows that the final scene, that single moment of true community, is an obituary for a traditional society that is fast disappearing.

Annals of the Parish demonstrates that no corner—however isolated, however traditional—can withstand the pressure of a society increasingly urban, industrial, and unstable. It documents the social changes that were becoming obvious even in this apparently safe and solid community. And, examined under Galt's microscope, Dalmailing serves, to return to Balwhidder's phrase, as "a type and index" to the rest of the world—a type because the changes in the village are the same as elsewhere, an index be-

cause, as unsettling as their effects are here, they must be even more disturbing in society's mainstream.

Disguised as a simple, comic tale told by an ingenuous bumbler, *Annals of the Parish* is in actuality a serious, thoughtful social study. Before most nineteenth-century Britons became aware that their rural society was rapidly changing into an urban one in which a few cities would dominate the entire culture, Galt saw clearly what was happening and that the change was irreversible. Long unrecognized for its true worth, his is one of the first treatments of the agonizing development of the urban society which we inherited and which, in this century, dominates not just one culture but the entire world.

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