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John Galt: An Addition to His Bibliography

No bibliography of the works of John Galt includes the series of essays that he wrote for the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1829 and 1830, "Letters from New York."¹ Although the series appeared signed only with the initial "A," a letter from Galt to Cyrus Redding, then sub-editor of the *New Monthly*, contains the evidence of Galt's authorship.

I am myself desirous of going on with the letters from New York. I intended them for a volume, having a great collection of statistical matter to go with them. I think you have one unpublished—if so, perhaps you can insert it in next number, and I shall then resume the series. It is only to the borders of Canada that Captain Hall and I clash [Basil Hall's *Travels in North America in 1827 and 1828*]; my voyage and journey connected with the exploring part of the coast of lake Huron will be new.²

For an unexplained reason Galt abandoned his plans. The series was never reprinted; the "statistical matter" to which Galt referred probably appeared either in his own *Bogle Corbet* or *The Canadas*, edited by Andrew Picken. Furthermore, the essays projected on his Canadian adventures were either never written or never published in the magazine.

The five essays that appeared in the *New Monthly* relate Galt's experiences in New York.³ In letters addressed to a British friend,

1. R. K. Gordon, *John Galt*, University of Toronto Studies, Philological Series, No. 5 (Toronto, 1920), pp. 118-121; Harry Lumsden, "The Bibliography of John Galt," *Records of the Glasgow Bibliographical Society*, IX (1931), 1-41; Jennie Aberdein, *John Galt* (London, 1936), pp. 198-201; Bradford A. Booth, "Bibliography of John Galt," *Bulletin of Bibliography*, XVI (1936), 7-9; William M. Parker, *Susan Ferrier and John Galt* (London, 1965), pp. 46-47.

2. *Yesterday and Today* (London, 1863), III, 197-198. It is difficult to date the letter with certainty. Redding observes that Galt wrote to him "about the time of the last Polish insurrection." This occurred November 29, 1830 (W. F. Reddway, et al., eds., *Cambridge History of Poland* [Cambridge, 1951], p. 295). But Redding ceased to be affiliated with the *New Monthly* in September 1830. Galt's comments seem to suggest that the letter was written in 1829. Galt emphasized his "long absence from this country"; he had returned to England in May 1829. He promised to call on Redding "as soon as it is in my power"; Galt was detained in King's Bench for debts from July until November 1829.

3. "Letters from New York," No. I, *New Monthly Magazine*, XXVI (1829), 131-133; No. II, XXVI (1829), 280-282; No. III, XXVI (1829), 449-451; No. IV, XXVIII (1830), 48-55; No. V, XXVIII (1830), 239-244. Citations to material found in these essays henceforth will be included in the text.

"D—," Galt described his travels through the state. His arrival on Long Island and a subsequent trip up the Hudson on a steamboat were the subject of the first letter. Then in the second he retraced his steps to give a more complete portrait of New York City. His visit to Albany, his meetings with state officials there including Governor DeWitt Clinton, and his observations of smaller towns through which he traveled—Schoenectady, Little Falls, Utica, Salina, and Auburn—were the subjects of the remaining essays.⁴

Although the "Letters from New York" have little literary value, they do have biographical, critical, and even historical significance. As an agent for the Canada Company from 1824 to 1829, Galt traveled from New York City to Upper Canada many times. The account of these journeys through America found in his *Autobiography* is brief. Thus far biographers have relied chiefly on unpublished letters and journals for information about this period of Galt's life. Future biographers may find that the "Letters from New York" offer details not found in the unpublished materials; at least the essays are a more accessible source of information about Galt's visits to New York.

Knowledge of his experiences in and his opinions of the state is especially important because his novel *Laurie Todd* is set there. Galt was at work on this novel while he was writing the first few essays of the series for the *New Monthly*. Soon after his creditors forced him to take refuge in King's Bench in July 1829, Galt agreed to write a novel for the publishers Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley.⁵ *Laurie Todd* was completed by mid October,⁶ the first two installments of the series appeared in the *New Monthly* in August and September. Despite the similarity in subject matter, a comparison between the novel and the autobiographical essays reveals that few of Galt's experiences recorded in the "Letters" appear in *Laurie Todd*. Lawrie traveled as did Galt from New York City to Albany by steamboat and then overland to Utica,⁷ but narrative similarities between Galt's essays and the novel end there.

The two works are similar in theme. Galt's attitude toward America in the novel parallels his attitude in the essays. Charles Shain has praised Galt calling him "an energetic friend of the United States during a period in the nineteenth century when American democracy

4. Three poems—"On the Entrance to the American Woods," "The Chopping," and "The Clearing"—appear in Letter No. V. These were not reprinted in the *Autobiography or Poems* (1833).

5. Margaret Oliphant, *Annals of a Publishing House: William Blackwood and His Sons* (New York, 1897), I, 466.

6. Jennie Aberdein, *John Galt* (London, 1936), p. 166.

7. *Laurie Todd* (London, 1830), I, 164-180.

and the American people seemed to have only querulous critics among the best-known writers."⁸ In *Lawrie Todd* Galt depicted America as a hospitable place, not exactly like England, but rich in opportunities for the industrious. Presumably the hope of financial success compensated for whatever shortcomings it might have. The hero of the novel, however, neither praised nor criticized life in America. "One afternoon, during which there had been a contentious conversation in the store among some of the settlers, chiefly Americans, as to whether Great Britain or the United States was the most refined nation; I thought with myself, in walking home in the evening, what a wastrie of time was caused by the inconsiderate talk of uninformed men. . . ." ⁹ Lawrie was far too concerned with the success of his store and the development of the community to be much interested in such matters.

But in the "Letters" Galt was concerned with the very questions Lawrie refused to consider. He commented on the unfortunate traits of the Americans—the "drawling unaccentuated style of their conversation," "their phlegmatic character," and their primitive cuisine (XXVI,132-133). Several times he criticized their choices in clothing and furnishings: ". . . A predilection for show may be fairly said to be one of the faults of American taste" (XXVI,132). But Galt was careful to contradict those unfavorable pictures of American life given by British travelers which he believed to be false. Of criticism of the social gatherings of Americans, Galt said that "there must be a great deal of affectation in the guests from your side of the Atlantic, who would pretend to deny the epithets of elegance and delicacy to the entertainments" (XXVI,281). He described the courtesy shown himself and his family by the customs officials "because the civilities shown by the Americans to British travellers, have not, in many instances, been properly acknowledged nor sufficiently appreciated" (XXVI, 449-450). He noted the continuing improvements in accommodations for travelers and reminded the readers that "nothing can be more absurd than to expect in a newly-settled country the delicacies of England . . ." (XXVIII, 450). In his most extended defense of the Americans in the series, he replied to two common criticisms of them—their belief that "the country is farther advanced in refinement than Europeans will be disposed to allow, and a solicitude to hear what strangers think of it, seemingly dictated by a thirst of praise." Galt found no particular "weakness or vanity" in this. They have made great progress in establishing their cities and they are eager to measure this rather than to

8. Charles E. Shain, "John Galt's America," *American Quarterly*, VIII (1956), 254.

9. *Lawrie Todd*, I, 282.

solicit praise. Some do seek flattery, but "are there not others as foolish, who withhold from the Americans the commendations to which they are justly entitled" (XXVIII, 450-451).

The series of essays expressed Galt's admiration for Americans more strongly and was more widely read than *Lawrie Todd*. Shain noted that *Lawrie Todd* was "successful enough to have influenced the way a large group of British readers understood and felt about America."¹⁰ Yet the circulation of the magazine exceeded the sale of the novel. During the 1820's about 5,000 copies of the *New Monthly* were printed regularly.¹¹ Only 2,000 copies of *Lawrie Todd* were published.¹² The knowledge that Galt's essays on America appeared in the *New Monthly* indicates that perhaps Galt influenced the attitudes of more Englishmen than has been thought.

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10. *American Quarterly*, VIII (1956), 254.

11. Cyrus Redding, *Fifty Years' Recollections* (London, 1858), II, 293.

12. The first printing of *Lawrie Todd* numbered 1,250 copies. When these were sold, 750 more were printed; of these, however, 467 were remaindered (Royal A. Gettmann, *A Victorian Publisher* [Cambridge, 1960], p. 86).