

**JOHN BUCHAN (1875-1940): A REASSESSMENT OF  
HIS CHRISTIAN FAITH AND PRACTICE**

**David Weekes**



**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St Andrews**

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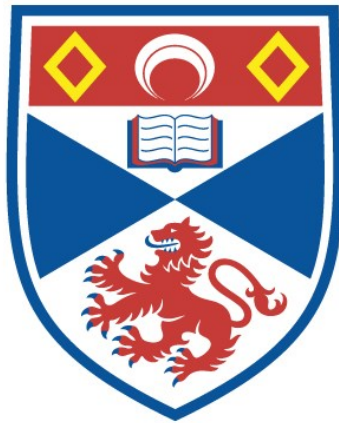
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## Abstract

This thesis emphasises, as paramount, Buchan's little explored life-long and deeply held Christian faith and practice. Much on-going discussion of his life and character ignores or misrepresents this essential motivation, favouring interpretations that stress his desire for fame or fortune. This is not, however, a full-scale presentation of Buchan's doctrinal beliefs, perhaps impossible to achieve with so private a man.

Many influences around Buchan, and choices he made throughout life, indicate that he remained faithful to his early experience of commitment to Christ. Neglected parts of books, articles, and sermons, together with archived letters, documents and papers, in Oxford, Glasgow, London, Elsfeld, Edinburgh, and Queen's Library, Kingston, Ontario, are used to inform Buchan's Christianity.

An examination of writings by Buchan's father and sister revises the extent of a suggested alienation between father and son over expressions of the faith. Subsequent chapters consider how older friends, and youthful contemporaries encouraged Christian faith throughout his life. Most appear as rather shadowy figures in what has been written. Greater attention to little published biographical material clarifies their importance. Using local reminiscences of the inter-war years when the Buchans were very prominent in Elsfeld, for the first time the absorbing significance of their involvement in village life receives the attention it deserves.

Those arguing that Buchan's more racist or anti-clerical fictional characters voice his own beliefs are challenged by closer examination of some of his historical and fictional writings, and other activities. It has been claimed that one of Buchan's greatest novels, *Sick Heart River*, reveals his own spiritual pilgrimage, lacking a fully satisfying conversion experience until the close of life. This book is given a new interpretation.

All the matters addressed more thoroughly here trenchantly focus Buchan's life-long faith, wonderfully expressed in Greek on his grave, 'Christ shall overcome'.

## Acknowledgements

In 2013, the Head of Department in the School of Divinity, Dr (now Professor) Mark Elliott, kindly accepted me as a potential student. I am most grateful to him and the Principal of St Mary's, the Very Reverend Dr (since Professor) Ian Bradley, for their patient and generous supervision.

The Reverend Tony Baker (once a fellow student) and Canon John Young (ditto) have been very supportive. Since 1980, members of The John Buchan Society provided much stimulation. After my books were destroyed by fire, Lady Stewartby (then Chairman), very kindly supplied a complete set of the *Journal*. Buchan's biographer, Andrew Lownie (a former pupil, and kindness itself), replaced many books, and engaged in profitable discussion over his generous hospitality. Andrew Gilhooley (a fellow doctoral student) kindly read the draft and made helpful comments. Heather Home, of Queen's, Ontario, was initially helpful over microfilm of Buchan's Papers. Some other individuals are thanked within the text. Frequent references to Sir George Adam Smith (Chapter Two) stir memories of seven happy years with my close colleague, and his eldest grandson, the Reverend and Honourable George Adam Buchanan-Smith (1929-1983).

Within the family, untold assistance came from my sons Dr Richard and the Reverend Robin (including much chaperoning when seriously ill in 2015); from my daughter-in-law, Dr Ursula of The Courtauld Institute, and her father, Professor Henry Mayr-Harting (both providing a better understanding of the mysteries of academic minds and interpreting their comments); from my daughter, Catriona, deprived of the company of her husband, Professor Saleem Bhatti, over long hours when he gave me unstinting help over practicalities, and the nightmare word of computing. Their elder daughter, Iona, and son, Alistair, have not been behind in assisting either, the one a classicist, the other a computerist.

To those who I have made antagonists, let me express indebtedness for their great stimulation. After all, we are all on the same side in trying better to understand a man of intriguingly varied genius, who did much to cover his tracts and confuse us. I cannot apologise for my views, but do so most sincerely for any offence given.

Recipient of so much help, I am, of course, entirely responsible for any errors.

## **DEDICATION**

**To**  
**My ever Beloved**  
**Jean**

who long before it was fashionable, had occasion to describe herself as  
‘a genealogical widow’;  
but with greater love and patience  
has endured neglect over a much longer period as  
‘a Buchan widow’.



### Abbreviations

- LJB* Lownie, Andrew. *John Buchan The Presbyterian Cavalier*. London: Pimlico, 1995.
- SJB* Smith, Janet Adam. *John Buchan*. London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1965.
- DNB* *Dictionary of National Biography*.
- ODNB* Matthew, H. Colin G. (ed.). *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- WB* Buchan, William. *John Buchan a Memoir*. London: Buchan and Enright, 1982.
- DD* Daniell, David. *The Interpreter's House*. London: Nelson, 1975.
- MHD* Buchan, John. *Memory Hold the Door*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940
- CMF* Macdonald, Kate. *John Buchan A Companion to the Mystery Fiction*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2008.
- DF* Buchan, John. *The Dancing Floor*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1926.
- WF* Tweedsmuir, Lady. *John Buchan by his Wife and Friends*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1948.
- MG* Green, Martin B. *John Buchan and his Sister Anna*. Lampeter: Edwin Mellon, 1990.
- JBM* Buchan, John. *Montrose*. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1928.
- JBOC* Buchan, John. *Oliver Cromwell*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1934.
- SHR* Buchan, John. *Sick Heart River*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1941.
- NLS.1 National Library of Scotland. Acc.7214 microfilm Mf MSS 312 John Buchan Papers: Speeches (a) 1903-1935.
- NLS.2 National Library of Scotland. Acc.7214 microfilm Mf MSS 303-309 John Buchan Papers: General Correspondence 1895-07/02/1940.
- UU* Buchan, Anna. *Unforgettable, Unforgotten*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1945.
- WW* Buchan, John. *Witch Wood*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1927.

## CONTENTS

### **Introduction** **12-20**

1. Buchan Was More Than His Books – 2. His Posthumous Reputation – 3. Neglect of Buchan’s Christian Faith – 4. A Problem with The Buchan Family Books – 5. Christian Influences – 6. John Buchan’s Christianity – 7. The Purpose of This Thesis – 8. Some General Critical Difficulties

### **Chapter One: The Reverend John Buchan (1847-1911), Buchan’s Father** **21-42**

1. The Critical Problem Explained – 2. Sources for Mr Buchan’s Life – 3. Early Life and Call – 4. His Ministries: Perth, Pathhead, Glasgow – 5. *In Memoriam* (Anna Buchan) – 6. Preacher – 7. His Own Two Books – 8. The Walkers – 9. Travel – 10. Retirement and Death – 11. What Manner of Man Was He? – 12. Supposed Lack of Ambition – 13. Differences in Belief Between Father And Son – 14. Buchan’s Rejection of Some of His Father’s Calvinism – 15. Similarities – 16. At Home, Including His Own – 17. The Father’s Influence on His Children – 18. ‘Mr Standfast’ – 19. Conclusion

### **Chapter Two: Buchan and the ‘Believing Critics’** **43-69**

1. Introductory Note: Buchan’s Use of Hyperbole – 2. The Inspiration Controversy – 3. Mr Buchan’s Evangelicalism is Challenged – 4. Gilbert Murray and George Adam Smith – 5. Buchan: Reason and Dogma – 6. The Liberal Dilemma – 7. Buchan’s Father as Controversialist – 8. Friendship Between Smith and Buchan – 9. Mansfield College and Its Chapel – 10. Smith and Buchan: Shared Interests – 11. The Influence of Karl Barth’s ‘Bombshell’ – 12. Barth and Mr Buchan – 13. Buchan and the Appeal of Barth – 14. The War and Flight from Liberalism – 15. Predestination and Free Will – 16. Buchan and Conversion – 17. Conclusion

### **Chapter Three: Christian Friends among Buchan's Contemporaries** **70-91**

1. Buchan and Friendship – 2. Two School Friends: Dick and Edgar – 3. Gilbert Murray, O.M. (1866-1957) – 4. Buchan's Oxford Environment – 5. Oxford Friends (1): Asquith and Baker – 6. Oxford Friends (2) 'Taffy' Boulter and Stair Gillon – 7. Oxford Friends: (3): Johnny Jameson, Ardwall, and Hilaire Belloc – 8. South Africa – 9. Conclusion

### **Chapter Four: Christian Influences Among Older Men** **92-105**

1. The Temple Church – 2. Sir Alfred (later Viscount) Milner (1854-1925) – 3. Prominent Public Figures after Returning to London – 4. The Fifth Earl of Rosebery (1847-1929) – 5. Viscount Haldane (1856-1928) – 6. The Cecils – 7. Arthur (afterwards Earl) Balfour (1848-1930) – 8. The Reverend Dr Archibald Fleming (1863-1941) – 9. Others – 10. Conclusion

### **Chapter Five: The Buchans at Elsfield** **106-122**

1. Why Elsfield? – 2. A Place of Worship? – 3. His Wider Christian Interests – 4. Deep Local Involvement – 5. Involvement of the Whole Buchan family – 6. Mr Elkington – 7. Churchwarden – 8. Buchan's Tolerance – 9. Conclusion

### **Chapter Six: The Representation of the Clergy in Buchan's Fiction** **123-141**

1. Origins of Error – 2. Is Anti-clericalism the Right Word? – 3. What Buchan Says He Intended in His Historical Novels – 4. The Covenants of 1638 and 1643 – 5. Buchan's Supposed Anti-clericalism – 6. The Four Novels to Be Considered – 7. *Sir Quixote of the Moors* (1895) – 8. *John Burnet of Barns* (1898) – 9. *Salute to Adventurers* (1915) – 10. Conclusion

### **Chapter Seven: *Witch Wood* and the Covenants** **142-160**

1. *Witch Wood* (1927) – 2. Summary of Clergy in Covenanting Times – 3. Buchan's Portrayal of Ministers – 4. *Midian's Evil Day* (1904) – 5. *The Watcher by the Threshold* (1900) – 6. *The Moor Song* (1897) – 7. Covenanter and Government Excesses – 8. Conclusion: Buchan's Own Relationships with the Clergy

**Chapter Eight: Race and Christian Missions****161-187**

(A) Race – 1. The Hierarchical View of Race – 2. The Paternalistic View of Race – 3. Racial Superiority – 4. Growing Up in Glasgow – 5. ‘Kaffirs’ and ‘Niggers’ – 6. Anomalies in Buchan’s Racism – 7. The Development in Buchan’s Views on Race – 8. Juanita Kruse: Race and Empire – 9. Islam and the East – 10. Conclusion on Race – (B) Christian Missions – 11. Buchan’s Biblical and Mission Background – 12. Beyond His Own Family – 13. Buchan’s Expressed Views on Missions – 14. Conclusion on Mission

**Chapter Nine: Buchan’s Intention in Sick Heart River****188-207**

1. Preamble – 2. Leithen: the Character – 3. Who Said Buchan was Leithen? – 4. The Case for Leithen Being Buchan – 5. The Case Against – 6. Lapsed Christian, but with a Biblical Background – 7. *Sick Heart River* – 8. Buchan ‘Making His Soul’ – 9. Conclusion: Buchan’s Purpose in *Sick Heart River*

**Chapter Ten: Conclusion: John Buchan’s Faith****208-216**

1. Difficulty Writing About the Faith of Others – 2. Over-Stressing Rejection of His Father’s Faith – 3. Lack of Detailed Study of Buchan’s Faith – 4. The Paradoxes in Buchan’s Toleration – 5. Buchan and Cromwell – 6. Salient Points Made in This Thesis – 7. Buchan’s Spiritual Graph – 8. ‘The Rock on Which He Stood’

**Bibliography****217-244**

## INTRODUCTION

‘Lord Tweedsmuir made his Governorship of Canada an asset to Canada and to the Empire because he was John Buchan, eager to explore every scene, and giving the best of himself to all whom he chanced to meet. His romances are popular because they embody that zest for the adventure of life which was the most characteristic quality of their author. The part he played as Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland [...] gave expression to that Scottish side of what he was – the loyal, pious, self-disciplined son of the Manse, and the romantic lover of Scottish history and of the Border country.’

(Trevelyan, ‘Preface’, 11)

**Nota bene:** Throughout what follows the Reverend John Buchan is referred to as Mr Buchan, and his son John, as Buchan.

### 1. Buchan Was More Than His Books

Any popular reputation John Buchan retains more than seven decades after his death is because he wrote *The Thirty Nine Steps*; yet this was only one of many achievements.

The eldest son of the Reverend John Buchan (1847-1911), he was born on 26 August 1875 at 20 York Place, Perth, the Manse of Knox Free Church. Helen Masterton (1857-1937), his mother, was the daughter of a farmer in Broughton, while his father had been born and brought up a few miles away in the county town of Peebles. When Buchan was three months old, his father accepted a call to Pathhead, by Kirkcaldy, on the Fife coast. Soon after his thirteenth birthday, they moved to Glasgow when his father became minister of John Knox Church in the Gorbals. For the next seven years, he attended Hutcheson’s Grammar School and then the University of Glasgow.

Thus for the first twenty years Buchan lived in his parental home, deeply involved with the whole family under his father’s ministry at the local church. His sister, Anna, remembers as children enjoying being among such interesting people. Buchan taught a Sunday School class at his parents’ bidding, perhaps with a touch of rebelliousness. Having dealt with the passage of

Scripture, he would embark on telling them stories, albeit with missionary heroes.<sup>1</sup> This gift came to him directly from his father.<sup>2</sup>

Buchan encountered wider influences at the University of Glasgow. Teachers like Gilbert Murray and Henry Jones greatly impressed him and remained life-long friends. Without taking a degree, he went up to Brasenose College, Oxford where he not only achieved scholarships and prizes, but also became President of the Union and wrote articles, short stories, two novels, and his College history to help fund himself. He then worked as a barrister, served in the South African administration (1901–03), and became a key director of Nelson's publishing house for twenty years. Overtaken by war, but unfit to fight, he served with distinction in intelligence and then in propaganda. Returning to publishing, he also became, very actively, Deputy Chairman of Reuters, before becoming a Member of Parliament for the Scottish Universities (1927). Raised to the peerage (1935), his closing years were spent as Governor-General of Canada, dying there in office.

A bare recital of his full-time occupations and honours (The Right Honourable Baron Tweedsmuir of Elsfield, P.C., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O., C.H., DLitt, DD, Bencher of The Inner Temple, etc., etc.) shows that he was so much more than a popular novelist. He was also an Elder in the Church of Scotland from 1912 until his death.

Buchan wrote or edited over one hundred books including fiction, both contemporary and historical, biography, war history, reminiscences, poetry, children's books, and a multitude of articles in the press. More than enough for one full-time literary career, this was only a side-line while he was fully engaged in demanding occupations. He achieved all this despite enduring much painful ill-health over the last thirty years of his life.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. His Posthumous Reputation

In the decade after his death, family endeavoured to keep his memory alive through a number of books, and his first biographer was Arthur Turner who wrote that:

He cut so great a figure in the world of his lifetime that it was, no doubt, inevitable that the trough should follow the crest, and in the decade since his death his fame and reputation have certainly diminished more rapidly than one would have expected.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *UU*, 69, 71-72.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter One.

<sup>3</sup> Buchan, U., 'John Buchan's Health.' 49-57.

<sup>4</sup> 'John Buchan', 4.

Andrew Lownie does not entirely endorse this trough, noting that there were radio or television adaptations of novels almost every year after 1940.<sup>5</sup> While the reading public clearly retained an appetite for his books, critics did the diminishing. Turner was a young academic, like Buchan educated at Glasgow and Oxford. He did not know him personally, but expressed much indebtedness to Lady Tweedsmuir.

Excellent as Turner's brief work was, it did not arrest the decline in Buchan's reputation and his further work on him was never published.<sup>6</sup> Renewed attention began after the appearance of Janet Adam Smith's full-length biography in 1965.<sup>7</sup> Slowly thereafter critical interest was awakened, greatly aided by David Daniell's literary appreciation in 1975.<sup>8</sup> Four years later, the John Buchan Society was founded, and in 1982 one of Buchan's own sons published a book on his father.<sup>9</sup> Since those beginnings, interest in Buchan has continued to grow. This was furthered by the activities of the Society and the publication of Andrew Lownie's new biography in 1995.<sup>10</sup> That interest has not abated, with further scholarly books appearing and at least two more biographies in preparation. There is a good résumé of the critical work in Kate Macdonald's annotated 'Bibliography'.<sup>11</sup>

Buchan filled 'the unforgiving minute.' Beside professional and literary activities, he engaged in country pursuits including Alpine Club membership, was very happily married, and had a remarkable gift for friendship, being at ease with 'all sorts and conditions of men,' unstinting in giving help to Prime Ministers, or to 'lame dogs' and particularly to the young. When he died, he left an acute sense of loss. Churchill had not approved of Buchan's Canadian appointment, but said that his death was the greatest loss in the war so far.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Lownie, 'On the Trail,' 3.

<sup>6</sup> Turner, 'John Buchan'.

<sup>7</sup> *SJB*

<sup>8</sup> *DD*

<sup>9</sup> *WB*

<sup>10</sup> *LJB*

<sup>11</sup> *CMF*, 197-212.

<sup>12</sup> Personal communication from Suzanna Rowntree, 14/09/2015.

### 3. Neglect of Buchan's Christian Faith

One of his biographers has written of 'my journey of discovery in search of this elusive and mysterious man.'<sup>13</sup> It has become a trope that Buchan was complex, not easy to know.<sup>14</sup> This is true also of the nature of his Christianity. Though private about himself, he has left us with indications of his deepest beliefs. He was most open about them in *Memory Hold the Door*, the memoir nearest to an autobiography that he wrote. He had a generous tolerance and wide friendships, some with those who did not share his faith. The leaders who captivated him into writing biography were on the one hand Christian and, less often, Roman men.<sup>15</sup> His education in the Classics immersed him in ways of thinking which have led others to abandon the faith in which they were brought up. A son, William, believed that Buchan's 'Calvinism was modified by Platonism' while his daughter, Alice, thought that his 'Presbyterianism came to be worn more lightly as he grew older and moved away from his mother's rigid conformism.' It was 'like an old coat comfortable to resume, with affectionate recognition of the quality and durability of its cloth.'<sup>16</sup>

Does all this mean that his Christianity (which terms like Presbyterianism, Platonism, and Calvinism may rather veil) came to be little more than a loosely held convention based on earlier experiences? Some like his biographer, Janet Adam Smith, took his Christianity for granted from their own knowledge of him. Her father, sometime Free Church of Scotland Moderator, co-authored *The Kirk in Scotland* with Buchan. That may not mean much to those who never knew him, for some professions of faith may be more nominal than others, and it is possible to write about Christianity without being personally committed to it.

Because of the nature of his family background, it will be instructive to enquire further into the beliefs and character of his father and the nature of the world in which he grew up. All his biographers have touched on this, but with necessary brevity.

Nevertheless, the faith that was at the centre of Buchan's life and motivation is often curiously neglected. One of his granddaughters has recently written that his 'fundamental seriousness of purpose is evident in his poetry, his biographies, and, indeed, in his novels, as his

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<sup>13</sup> Lownie, 'On the Trail,' 2.

<sup>14</sup> *WB*, 255 and 258, strongly endorsed in *LJB*, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Augustus and Julius Caesar on the one hand, Raleigh, Montrose, Cromwell, Scott, Gordon, Ardwall, and Minto on the other.

<sup>16</sup> *WB*, 254; Fairfax-Lucy, *Scrap Screen*, 157.



concern grew about the survival of Western civilization – physical, moral, and, above all, spiritual.’ This is commendably said in the brief ‘Foreword’ to a long book by William Galbraith about an important political period of Buchan’s life as Governor-General of Canada. Though this does not concern his ‘spirituality’, such a discussion requires an engagement with the personality brought to high office. Galbraith only claims that because of ‘his energy and ability to operate effectively’ and ‘to accomplish so much’ Buchan continues to inspire, which is ‘testimony to his ability, to his classical humanist character, and to his enduring, even endearing, qualities.’<sup>17</sup>

It is not wrong to write about Buchan’s classical humanism, but it is a distortion of his character to describe Buchan solely in those terms. Moreover, there seems to have been so little intellectual curiosity about this key aspect of Buchan’s life. For instance, what more do we know about his father and his religion, beside the little Buchan tells us? What was the nature of Buchan’s own theology?<sup>18</sup> What was it really like for him to have his home in London, Elsfield, and Canada from 1903-1940, far from his Scottish roots? How far had he really thought through what he believed so strongly that it was the basis upon which he lived his life? The bedrock of his Christian faith is so often side-stepped or veiled, as it seems to be by Galbraith.

#### 4. A Problem with the Buchan Family Books

It is surprising to find reference to his Christianity lacking in the volumes produced by his immediate family a few years after his death, once peace had been restored. *The Clearing House* is a selection from Buchan’s published work arranged by his widow and prefaced by his friend and teacher, Gilbert Murray. It first appeared as early as October 1945, and the nine sections do not include one on religion. Indeed, it is hard to find anything about his Christian faith anywhere there. Even the section entitled ‘Autobiographical’ does not provide it. It is much the same with *John Buchan by his Wife and Friends* published two years later.<sup>19</sup> Anna’s *Unforgettable, Unforgotten* is more Christian but does not go out of the way to stress the importance of Christian core belief.

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<sup>17</sup> Galbraith, *Buchan Model Governor*, 13, 410.

<sup>18</sup> A few clues are revealed in his memoirs, and his lecture reprinted as *Presbyterianism*.

<sup>19</sup> The slim volume by Lady Tweedsmuir, *Life’s Adventure*, does have a short section on ‘Christianity.’

There are obvious reasons for this neglect. Those who knew him best would not necessarily have thought it important to stress something too well known publicly at the time. For those today who omit this essential at the centre of Buchan's life, there is other excuse. The world has changed greatly, and Britain has undergone a transformation. There has long been an element of multi-culturalism, but this, together with secularism, has greatly increased since Buchan's time, with a sharp decline in Christian knowledge and understanding existing and naturally assumed in his day, though he had been greatly concerned that it was under threat. His fears have been realised, so that many do not deliberately ignore his faith, but do not comprehend it as the mainstay of his being.<sup>20</sup> This extends to a lack of understanding of Scottish Church history and leads to confusion, supposing Buchan to be represented where he is subtly portraying others.

Turner was not in this circle and perceptively saw the need to stress that 'the Christian faith was the rock on which Buchan stood.'<sup>21</sup> But when it comes to Janet Adam Smith, Buchan's first full-length biographer, who knew him as did her father, his Christianity is more assumed than explicitly expressed. Though her book was published nearly two decades later than Turner, she says nothing as sharply defined as that quotation from his conclusion. So Turner, early on, clarified what those who knew Buchan tended not stress because it was true, and others who later, and for whatever reason, missed what had not been stressed, failing to take proper account of it.

## 5. Christian Influences

Though Buchan mixed freely with people of different faiths and of none, there were many influences to help him maintain a vigorous Christian faith throughout his life. These need further exploration. Early on, there were Free Church ministers; Christian friends at school and university in Glasgow like Charlie Dick and John Edgar; at Oxford there were 'Taffy' Boulter, Johnny Jameson, Stair Gillon, and Edgar among others. After that, there were men, often very prominent, who shared the Christian faith or ethic like Milner, Prime Ministers Rosebery and Balfour, Lord Chancellors Finlay and Haldane. There were nearer contemporaries like Baldwin,

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<sup>20</sup> A law lecturer found 'Lessons from John Buchan for Today' in reading *The Prince of the Captivity*, but complained of the 'need for an old Oxford dictionary, a biblical and a classical reference work every few pages', Kiron Reid, Blog.

<sup>21</sup> *Mr Buchan, Writer*, 110.

and Fleming of St Columba's. Among Christian writers, besides the Cambridge Platonists as maintained by Lee,<sup>22</sup> were John Bunyan, Jonathan Edwards, Cotton Mather, and other devotional writers introduced by his father or thrown up in his historical researches; contemporary Liberal Evangelicals like George Adam Smith; and theologians such as Karl Barth. He found inspiration in the lives of Christian men like Cromwell, Montrose, and Chalmers. His father's teaching and example were foundational, coupled with regular weekly worship, family prayers, a profound knowledge and respect for the Bible, with a belief in the Christian fundamentals.

## 6. John Buchan's Christianity

As we consider his Christianity, there are some factors which need to be kept in mind: individually, we have our own lenses through which we may see different versions of the same thing; as we journey through life, it is likely that personal views will change, and mature; some critics project paradigmatically their own ideas onto a concept of Buchan which they then portray; it may be questioned how much we can really understand someone else's spiritual faith.

Despite these reservations, the attempt can be made as objectively as possible. We shall later discuss Buchan's Free Church parentage and up-bringing, his deputising twice for the King as Lord High Commissioner at the General Assembly of the re-united Church of Scotland, and his continuing affection for *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Though such things do not necessarily reveal the nature of his own Christian belief, Andrew Lownie entitled his biography *The Presbyterian Cavalier*, and there has been much comment about his last novel, *Sick Heart River*, which describes a spiritual journey often, wrongly, thought to be his own. At the inaugural meeting of The John Buchan Society (1979), Eileen Stewart left undeveloped her claim that Buchan's 'belief in man is undoubtedly that stated in the first proposition of *The Shorter Catechism*' ('Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever').<sup>23</sup>

Two decades ago, Jon Parry noted the importance of Buchan's Christian faith 'which remained at the heart of his world-view' but had 'not received much attention.'<sup>24</sup> Some years later Robert Kernohan agreed that 'Buchan's Christian faith' is 'the missing dimension' in 'the

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<sup>22</sup> See Bibliography: his four works.

<sup>23</sup> 'Memory of Buchan,' 8; cf. *MHD*, 86.

<sup>24</sup> Parry, 'Thirty-Nine Articles', 210.

rehabilitation of the man and his books.’ Little has been published since to rectify this. A lack of spiritual awareness is found in some critics also, which means that too often his Christianity has been ‘insufficiently emphasised even in some of the very good writing about Buchan.’<sup>25</sup>

## 7. The Purpose of This Thesis

Rather than engaging in misleading speculation, or trying to extract his profoundest beliefs from what he gave to his characters in books, the aim here is to reassess some features of Buchan’s Christian belief which have either been neglected or misunderstood, to inform some of the under-estimation, and redress other misrepresentations about his spiritual experience.

In particular, a suggested antagonism with his father has been overplayed, especially by Martin Green, and particular differences misunderstood (Chapters One and Two). The importance of friendships with other Christians has not been much explored (Chapters Three and Four). The depth of his involvement in village life at Elsfield has not been properly appreciated, nor has his involvement with Anglicans; other aspects of his ecumenism have been neglected (Chapter Five). Kate Macdonald has propagated an unfounded charge of anti-clericalism (Chapters Six and Seven). Some, like Lisa Hopkins have argued his supposed Racism from unsound presuppositions and anachronistic views. His understanding of Islam has been denigrated by Ahmed Al-Rawi; his keen interest in the spreading the Christian message denied (Chapter Eight). An errant stress has been laid upon *Sick Heart River* as an expression of his own spiritual pilgrimage (Chapter Nine). All this matters because Green is not a minor commentator; Macdonald has been called ‘the world’s leading authority on Buchan’;<sup>26</sup> and there are others. The Conclusion follows (Chapter Ten).

The most academic of his three sons, Alastair, warned against being ‘misled by accounts of his many activities and even by his own writings, for his importance lay rather in what he was than in what he did.’<sup>27</sup> There have been three very recent, but brief, expositions which have emphasised the importance of his Christian commitment. This is encouraging, and they show the way for critics to be more perceptive.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Kernohan, *Nutshell*, 4.

<sup>26</sup> *The Times*, 28/10/2015, 28.

<sup>27</sup> Alastair Buchan, *WF*, 289, 37.

<sup>28</sup> See Bibliography under Ian Bradley, Ursula Buchan and Harry Reid.

The world in which Buchan lived was often threatened by mortal danger, yet his Christian commitment seemed never to waver, and much can still be learnt from his writings and his example.

### 8. Some General Critical Difficulties

With the harshness of hindsight, which Mark Goldie called the ‘original sin’ of the historian,<sup>29</sup> some forms of expression, unexceptional in Buchan’s day now seem objectionable. The views of critics like Martin Green and Ahmed Al-Rawi have been paradigmatic, or like Macdonald have failed to grapple successfully with the complexities of Scottish history. This has been compounded by an obsession to look for autobiographical material in so much of Buchan’s fiction. Personal views are often assumed to be found in words he put into the mouths of characters. The line between innocent, amusing speculation, and permanent distortion can be fine. He warned that, if at all, the place to look for him was in his biographies.<sup>30</sup>

Buchan’s grave at Elsfield has a Latin inscription to honour him, but it is dominated by an unusual and striking Christian affirmation in Greek, (Christ shall overcome).<sup>31</sup> Since Buchan was a Classicist, but above all a Christian, this provides the key to understanding the profound convictions of this complex man.

A deeply committed Christian throughout his life, Buchan’s faith was the mainspring of his motivation.

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<sup>29</sup> Delap, ‘History’, 12.

<sup>30</sup> *MHD*, 199.

<sup>31</sup> Weekes, *XPICTOC*.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE REVEREND JOHN BUCHAN (1847-1911),

#### BUCHAN'S FATHER,

‘An endless benediction were his days [...]  
From the deep fountains of Eternal love  
He drew his faith.’  
(*Mem.* ‘In Peebles Churchyard 1912,’ by Buchan,  
subtitled ‘To My Father’)

#### 1. The Critical Problem Explained

Buchan first acquired his Christian faith through his father. They had many other traits in common, most importantly a deep commitment to Christ motivated their lives.

However, some critics have assumed that, as Buchan was exposed to wider influences at the Universities, a great gulf developed between him and his parents, and he rebelled against his upbringing in the traditionally conservative wing of the Free Church of Scotland into which his father was ordained. This led on to the assumption that he rejected everything to do with that Church. Buchan himself is partly responsible through sometimes expressing himself in over-dramatic terms,<sup>32</sup> giving grounds for a conclusion which we shall find is wide of the mark. Stereotyping of such a clergyman might give the impression of a dour, and humourless character largely taken up with preaching a Gospel of damnation to the many and salvation to the small number of the elect.

Buchan can readily be imagined reacting against such a narrow and cheerless view, and as a result the antithesis between father and son has been critically overplayed. This is particularly true of Martin Green who saw John, and his sister Anna (who wrote as O. Douglas), as ‘indifferent and even resentful towards the Church which was the Ark of the Covenant to their parents.’ He claimed that Anna and John ‘tore away [the] moral melodrama’ of ‘death and the after life, sin and salvation’ and ‘let the sun shine in’, though his first tales came ‘when he

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<sup>32</sup> See Chapter Two - Buchan's Use of Hyperbole.

was forbidden to think seriously about anything.’ Whatever that may mean, the Buchan children were brought up noticeably free from restraint.<sup>33</sup>

There are others, too, like Macdonald, for whom ‘it seems obvious to conclude that in rejecting the narrow minded Presbyterian ministers in his fiction, Buchan was rejecting his own background and upbringing.’<sup>34</sup> These statements are neither credible nor fair to Mr Buchan, whose character and beliefs have been insufficiently studied for a better understanding of the father and son relationship. This is undertaken below. The way Macdonald writes about ‘Presbyterian cant’ is suggestive of a failure to understand their church culture.<sup>35</sup> The sketch of Mr Buchan found in Burnett and MacKay (2014) is accurately sympathetic.<sup>36</sup>

## 2. Sources for Mr Buchan’s Life

There are five-fold sources for Mr Buchan: the commemorative volume produced by the family shortly after his death;<sup>37</sup> the reminiscences in Buchan’s *Memory Hold the Door*, and in *Unforgettable, Unforgotten* by his sister Anna, who also says that ‘in *Ann and Her Mother* [1922] I wrote my mother’s life’;<sup>38</sup> his two published books (1881, 1902); references in publications by the Free Church, and the United Free Church; and lastly, mentions of him in books about his son.

Most of what we know comes from Mr Buchan’s own pen, those of two of his children, or close friends. Their views are not wholly uncritical, but were strongly empathetic. Allowance must also be made for the pietistic terms in which much was written, but that does not mean it is not sincere. Most of what they tell us is simply factual. In any case, Mr Buchan is a character to whom it is easy to warm. Just as some may scorn the unsophistication of one whose life can be seen as at best ‘obscurely great,’ others will find attractive his single-minded simplicity of calling and character.

A cautionary word must be added about Anna Buchan’s *Memoir*. Written during a time of bereavement, there might be reservations about its emotional or ‘rose-tinted’ view. However,

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<sup>33</sup> *MG*, 162, 6, 14, 6; even the Sabbath did not irk them. Anna reacted strongly: ‘But what of the Sabbath? Was it really such a day of profound gloom as it has been pictured? Not to us; most certainly not to us.’ *UU*, 23. Buchan observed it, imposing it on his children.

<sup>34</sup> *CMF*, 145. Her doctoral supervisor wrote of ‘Buchan’s hatred for rant and cant.’ *DD*, 106.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>36</sup> *Thirty-Nine Steps*, xi-xv.

<sup>37</sup> *In Memoriam (Mem.)*

<sup>38</sup> *UU*, 177; see also *The Setons* (1917).

in *Unforgettable, Unforgotten*, written thirty years later in more sober language, she has the same positive assessment of her father's character and influence.

### 3. Early Life and Call

Mr Buchan was born in Peebles on 23 April 1847, son of Violet Henderson, and a prominent citizen, lawyer and banker (also John), whose brass plate on the Bank House still proclaims 'Mr Buchan, Writer.' Probably first educated at the Burgh School, instead of boarding in Edinburgh, he went on to a private school on the edge of Peebles, Bonnington Park Academy, for boarders and day boys (founded 1858). As an eleven-year-old, he may have been among the first pupils at this short-lived enterprise. Within a generation, the local authority acquired it to replace the old Peebles Grammar School. He went on to study law, expecting to follow his father, 'but while serving his apprenticeship he came under the influence of the late Mr [Robert] Romanes of Craigerne, an elder in the Free Church, and a man of peculiar saintliness.'<sup>39</sup> A partner in Romanes and Paterson of Edinburgh, kilt makers to the Queen, he lived in a large house and grounds on the edge of Peebles. As a boy, Robert Louis Stevenson spent a summer in Peebles and became friendly with a wild son of Romanes, 'brought up in a repressive, over-religious household.' They fought a duel with real weapons but fortunately blank ammunition.<sup>40</sup>

Mr Romanes' influence was entirely different over the young Mr Buchan, who 'from that time [...] felt called to the ministry.' So with his father's consent, and to his mother's satisfaction, he went enthusiastically to Edinburgh.<sup>41</sup> Once there, other strongly evangelical activities influenced him. 'Richard Weaver, the evangelist, came to the city, and he delighted in his meetings and in the atmosphere of burning earnestness.' Weaver was a converted collier with an extraordinary ministry in Merseyside and beyond, very greatly regarded by both Spurgeon and Barnardo.<sup>42</sup> Another strong influence was 'a great friend' Helen, daughter of Thomas Chalmers, a spiritual hero for both Buchans. Working together in the Edinburgh slums, he helped at her meetings, telling stories about the Covenanters, 'and in stormy winter nights [...] a lantern in his hand, he would go with her [...] in search of the hopeless and the fallen.'<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Mem.*, 4-5.

<sup>40</sup> Hodges. 'Lamplit', Chapter Two; see Brown, *A Heaven to Me*, and Campbell, 'School and College'.

<sup>41</sup> *Mem.*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> Paterson, *Weaver's Story*, 21, 239-43.

<sup>43</sup> *Mem.*, 5.



He did not take a degree, presumably eager to enter the ministry, moving to New College to complete his training.<sup>44</sup>

In the spring of 1873 Mr Buchan was licensed by the Free Church Presbytery of Peebles and Biggar and ‘spent a happy summer in the Melrose district.’ There he got to know, and ‘much appreciated the friendship’ of Anne Ross Cousin, the wife of the Free Church minister. She was already the noted writer of hymns, including ‘The sands of time are sinking’ inspired by the last words of Samuel Rutherford.<sup>45</sup> The winter of 1873-74 was spent supplying Broughton for its minister, Dr William Welsh. Anna Buchan describes this faithfully in depicting the fictional new minister Mark Dewar, ‘so young and ardent; he went through the district like a flame.’<sup>46</sup> Moreover, ‘it was the memorable year when the American evangelists, Messrs Moody and Sankey, came to Edinburgh, and Mr Buchan introduced their hymns into Broughton.’<sup>47</sup> Singing hymns, not just Psalms, was a radical departure within the Free Church inspired by those like Mrs Cousin. The young man may not have been quite prepared for the revivalist atmosphere which then broke out. ‘Night after night all that winter the little church was open for meetings, conducted with so much zeal and so much freshness that people walked miles after a hard day’s work.’ Many looked back to this as the time of their conversion, and he endeared himself by ‘going from cottage to cottage or standing - sometimes at the burnside’ preaching to shepherds and farm hands.<sup>48</sup> We shall see that Buchan had reservations about this ministry, though his father’s ‘evangel had neither the hysteria nor the smugness of ordinary revivalism.’<sup>49</sup> This was not the only time that Mr Buchan was caught up in such happenings.

#### **4. His Ministries: Perth, Pathhead, Glasgow**

Altogether, Mr Buchan had three Free Church of Scotland congregations: The Knox Church, Perth from July 1874 to November 1875; Pathhead Free Church, near Kirkcaldy in Fife, from December 1875 to 1888; and John Knox Church, Glasgow until retiring in May 1910. Again Anna Buchan uses their mother’s reminiscences when she writes fictionally, ‘As a young man he was like a sword-blade, pure and keen’ yet ‘as he grew older he grew not less earnest,

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<sup>44</sup> *SJB*, 13, says graduate, but Ewing, *Annals* lists both Colleges without any degree.

<sup>45</sup> *Mem.*, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Douglas, *Ann and Mother*, 31.

<sup>47</sup> *Mem.*, 5-6.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>49</sup> *MHD*, 247.

but more tolerant – mellower, perhaps, is the word.<sup>50</sup> He was a much loved pastor and preacher, though some criticised him for leaving his first charge after only eighteen months. His very young wife, brought up in rural surroundings, was unhappy in city life, but Pathhead was industrial. Moreover, the Elders there lobbied intensely, and no doubt Mr Buchan felt the Call.<sup>51</sup> After a dozen years he left there exhausted, eighteen months into a revival. John Knox Church, Glasgow, ‘was a difficult sphere.’<sup>52</sup> Buchan believed that the work would lead to his father being ‘worn out by unceasing toil in a slum parish, an endless round of sermons and addresses, and visits at all hours to the sick and sorrowful.’<sup>53</sup> After his death, a past Moderator, Dr Wells, said in the Glasgow Church:

His life was enriched by the most enviable and satisfying forms of ministerial popularity. As one of yourselves phrased it, he gained the undying gratitude of the afflicted, and, consequently, the entire confidence and devotion of the whole flock.<sup>54</sup>

In both Pathhead and Glasgow his work among young people was especially remembered and commended.<sup>55</sup>

### **5. *In Memoriam* (Anna Buchan)**

Fortunately, for an understanding of Mr Buchan, the family published this brief memoir (1912), immediately after his death, together with an extensive anthology of his writing. This memoir bears no author’s name, runs to well over three hundred pages, and begins with a seventeen-page ‘Life’. The initials ‘AB’ are printed at the end of this, and evidently his daughter, Anna, took responsibility for it. However, Buchan was already well known as a writer, and in her own later authorship she always deferred to her older brother and sought his advice. No doubt his influence guided the contents. Indeed, some ascribe it to them both.<sup>56</sup> The bulk of the volume contains extracts mainly from the father’s own writings, which Buchan indicates in a footnote had been prepared for publication, and ‘they are printed here as they were written.’<sup>57</sup>

The memoir includes ‘The Apostolic Evangel’ (fifteen Gospel Sermons) over one

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<sup>50</sup> Douglas, *ibid.*, 32.

<sup>51</sup> *Mem.*, 317.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

<sup>53</sup> *MHD*, 245.

<sup>54</sup> *Renfrewshire Advertiser*.

<sup>55</sup> *Mem.*, 317, 315.

<sup>56</sup> Lownie, *Buchan’s Poems*, 105.

<sup>57</sup> *Mem.*, 31.

hundred and seventy pages, and prefaced with Buchan's 'In Peebles Churchyard'; a further hundred pages taken up with some of Mr Buchan's other writings and poems; finally an Appendix has appreciations from a brother minister, Charles Shaw, a fellow student at New College and sometime incumbent at Kinghorn during the Pathhead days; from W. G. Livingstone, the last remaining elder from Pathhead who appointed Mr Buchan; and from David Honeyman, one of the John Knox elders and family friend. Anna also mentioned the Reverend Dr Norman Walker (1826-1905), considered later.

The eighth address, 'The Teaching of St Paul – The Person and Work of Christ' exemplifies the standard, and is no 'cant of narrow-minded Presbyterian ministers.'<sup>58</sup> It is a reasoned and well thought out presentation. His thorough knowledge of the text of the Pauline epistles is evident. Moreover, he showed an awareness of German theologians, among whom are those who propounded the thesis that Jesus was simply 'the heavenly man.' He is fully aware of the teachings of the Gnostics, and understood that Paul was contending against them in his presentation of the risen and glorified Christ. He quotes Bishop Lightfoot (1828-89) with approval.

The address has the rigour of a competent conservative biblical expositor. It is only surprising that such a meaty discourse was suited to Mr Buchan's Glasgow congregation. Buchan himself says, his father's religion was 'well girded,'<sup>59</sup> and as the son moved further into intellectual circles within the universities, here was a father with whom it was possible to engage in profitable debate. Buchan had a deep respect and affection for his father whom he would not have wished to hurt, and we do not know how much the two ever entered into intellectual discussion about the Christian faith. All that we need to note here is that the father was thoroughly intellectually aware and well able to defend his views. Those who speak of 'Presbyterian cant' do not envisage a man with a mind so well equipped with scholarly sincerity. Buchan made clear his own view:

By cant I mean undigested dogmas which are never thought out, which appeal to the emotions and not the reason. Formulas, empty formulas, are taken as divine revelations and advocated as the last word in wisdom. Now one of the duties of an educated man is to prick these bubbles.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *CMF*, 145.

<sup>59</sup> *MHD*, 247.

<sup>60</sup> NLS.1 'McGill Graduates, Montreal', 1936, 1-2.

While his father, too, ‘had a strong distaste’ for ‘cant’ and ‘indeed all rhetoric,’ by the 1930s Buchan believed that this had never been ‘more evident’.<sup>61</sup>

Following the addresses on the Evangel are seven sermons: ‘Christ the First-Fruits’; ‘The Reality of the Gospel’; ‘The Great Opportunity’; ‘Christianity and Free Thought’; ‘The Psalmist’s Account of his Conversion’; ‘The Failure of the Brook’; and ‘What St Paul says of Himself’. The last exemplifies them.

He discussed the names Saul and Paul, compared their actions, explained ‘bond-slave’ and ‘apostle’, distinguishing between being called and putting oneself forward. Paul, separated unto the Gospel, was no recluse. In an illustration which might surprise, a woman would not help with a New Year entertainment because she had consecrated herself to God. ‘That woman’s idea of consecration was a complete segregation from all pleasure, however innocent. Her songs must be all hymns, and no meeting was for her that was not intended for religious edification.’ St Paul ‘would have had no sympathy with any such position,’ being ‘just as much separated unto the Gospel when he was making tents with Aquila and Priscilla, as he was when preaching in the hall of Tyrannus.’ He taught ‘this lesson to the world – that of sanctified toil.’<sup>62</sup>

After counting the cost comes the brief concluding challenge – ‘Which would you be – Saul or Paul.’<sup>63</sup> Thus the sermons, too, are rational, well thought out, clear and challenging.

## 6. Preacher

Mr Buchan’s friend, Shaw, wrote that ‘he had none of the graces of pulpit oratory’ but was ‘plain, direct, and forcible’ with nothing in his style, manner, or thought intended ‘to catch the populace.’<sup>64</sup> Livingstone remembered him differently as ‘a powerful preacher, using no MS.’ ‘A voice of uncommon melody’ made his preaching ‘particularly winning.’ His illustrations were ‘exceedingly helpful, especially while addressing young people.’<sup>65</sup> Honeyman agreed, testifying that Mr Buchan’s ‘was no dry-as-dust orthodoxy, but a living potent force, a gospel of hope and cheer, and yet of free grace.’ He could ‘quote stanzas of poetry with fine effect.’ In contrast, as street evangelist ‘at open-air meetings in Bedford Lane’, he ‘could always

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<sup>61</sup> *MHD*, 183-84, 285.

<sup>62</sup> *Mem.*, 270-71.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 275-76.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.

draw a crowd, and hold them fast with his clear presentment of the gospel, and when we were hard put to it sometimes for want of singers, it was fine to hear him leading off the hymns. Open-air speaking is no pastime, it is hard work, but he [...] would not shirk the work.’<sup>66</sup>

Shaw could see another side to his rigourism – ‘always grand when he touched on the Covenanters’ being ‘filled with the spirit of that heroic period’, for ‘he was himself a Covenanter, born out of due time.’<sup>67</sup>

Smith suggests that Buchan ‘sloughed off his father’s Calvinism theologically, in the sense of a belief in predestination and of the Saved-Damned alternative that had inspired his father’s preaching in the open-air.’<sup>68</sup> This is debatable, for Buchan still spoke of ‘the old fight for [one’s] soul’s salvation’ and ‘the great decision between the broad path and the narrow path’.<sup>69</sup> Predestination of events was a common theme in his novels.<sup>70</sup>

Though Buchan said his father could ‘preach a tough doctrinal sermon with anybody,’<sup>71</sup> members of his congregation found no ranting in his preaching which was delivered *extempore*. They could not ‘readily forget the eloquence, the fervour, the poetic fancy’, his ‘earnestness’ and ‘his eager appeal, as if he would fain bear us all in his arms to the feet of Jesus.’ Similarly his family remembered how in ‘his beautiful voice’ he made his appeal, ‘as a dying man to dying men’, saying that he dared not ‘preach a sermon without offering Christ and Him crucified, nor did he ever make the mistake of presenting Christianity as an easy thing.’<sup>72</sup>

Moreover he did not fit the stereotype: long sermons and perhaps an hourglass. Almost every sermon and address included in *In Memoriam* is preachable within twenty minutes; he delivered without notes.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Mem.*, 322-23.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

<sup>68</sup> *SJB*, 286.

<sup>69</sup> NLS.1 ‘Opening of Cathcart Church,’ 24/03/1925 where Buchan quoted from Jesus’s words: ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.’ John 14:6.

<sup>70</sup> *Mr Standfast*, 392; *Island of Sheep*. 28; et. al.

<sup>71</sup> *MHD*, 248.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, *SJB*, 22.

## 7. His Own Two Books

The family described him in the *Memoir* as ‘very widely read, and something of a scholar.’ Nearly thirty years later, Buchan uses almost the same words.<sup>74</sup> *Tweedside Echoes and Moorland Musings* was a volume of poems, or verses, as he preferred to call them,<sup>75</sup> published locally in Peebles (1881). Shaw viewed it favourably as ‘sweet and modest’ containing ‘some exquisite little gems of poetry. His love of Nature, of the Tweed, of the town of Peebles and its ancient worthies, simply charm the reader.’ He thought the writer could be ‘one of Scotland’s minor bards.’<sup>76</sup> One can imagine it having a vogue at the time among a sympathetic audience, with Professor Stalker, a fellow student, re-reading them often,<sup>77</sup> but it comes as no surprise that Alan Bold, the left wing Scottish poet, biographer, and journalist, dismissed them as ‘twee’ (1995).<sup>78</sup> Some later verses reflect his aspirations for his sons. Buchan followed with his own and other poetry.

*The First Things: Studies in the Embryology of Religion and Natural Theology* was published by Blackwood in 1902. This substantial volume is something of a surprise from one supposedly so entirely taken up with his ministerial duties. Coming out more than half way through his Glasgow incumbency, it demonstrated much thought and care, though indifferently reviewed in *The Spectator*.<sup>79</sup> Its inspiration owed something to the cultural activities at the church. Clearly, he was troubled about the influence of Darwin, and makes his stand. As in his addresses, Mr Buchan showed evidence of wide reading and quoted many authors from Classical times, through the middle ages, and right down to contemporaries.

In retirement he was writing about the poets of the shire of Peebles.

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<sup>74</sup> *Mem.*, 18; *MHD*, 245.

<sup>75</sup> *Mem.*, 18.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

<sup>77</sup> ‘Obituary.’

<sup>78</sup> Bold, ‘Racism and snobbery’, 1.

<sup>79</sup> 10/05/1902, 23: ‘Mr Buchan’s book is thoughtful and candid; but we feel that many of his positions are very insecure.’

## 8. The Walkers

Dr Norman Walker, who had long been Free Church minister at nearby Dysart, befriended Mr Buchan at Pathhead. This close colleague was twenty years older, editor of the *Free Church Monthly*, and author of more than a dozen books. Among their mutual interests were the Covenanters and Thomas Chalmers. Walker also shared in editing for publication the Cunningham Lectures delivered in Edinburgh in 1870-71 by his brother the Reverend James Walker, DD, taken ill almost immediately afterwards. *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland 1560-1750* lacks both references and footnotes, but it is the product of wide reading and a scholarly mind. Mr Buchan may have heard these lectures as a student, and almost certainly had the book.

It contains some important correctives to the negative view of the Scottish church, singling out a number of ministers well known for their moderation in those times. Buchan was amused by some of his father's prejudices over supporting Jacobites in one century and Covenanters in the previous one, 'admitting no flaw in their perfection'. Those with 'something of the Cavalier romance' appealed, especially three, all men of war rather than divines – Hackston of Rathillet, James (the Black) MacMichael and Paton of Meadowhead.<sup>80</sup> We shall see elsewhere that Buchan himself was not free from rather similar conflicting loyalties.<sup>81</sup>

We get a personal glimpse of the Walkers through Anna who boarded with them while at school in Edinburgh, and 'was happy.' She became 'honestly attached'<sup>82</sup> to them, finding 'theirs was a delightful house to live in' and 'was very much at home' there. Although 'the D.D.' could be a little severe, she could not 'imagine a better person [than Mrs Walker] to bring up children. Life to her was so teeming with interest.'<sup>83</sup> It is very clear that Anna's clergy couple, the Dewars in *Ann and her Mother*, (Chapter IX) were based on the Walkers. As Buchan said, she remembered and he invented.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *MHD*, 246.

<sup>81</sup> Dalyell, 'Introduction'; see below, 134.

<sup>82</sup> *UU*, 65.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 57, 59.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 5; *MG*, v.

## 9. Travel

‘For several summers he and Dr Walker travelled on the Continent together, and came home brimful of travellers’ tales and odd experiences.’<sup>85</sup> After taking the services at Interlaken during the summer of 1884, Shaw tell us that

he delivered a lecture on his travels to various audiences. His boldness in climbing one mountain without a guide nearly cost him his life, for the mist came down, and he climbed along a narrow shelf of rock overhanging a precipice [impossible but] for his youthful adventures among the Border hills.<sup>86</sup>

Later, he travelled further afield, for ‘in 1901 he had an opportunity of visiting South Africa for eight months. His wife and the youngest boy went with him, and the trip, besides giving him a much-needed change, was a tremendous pleasure and interest to him.’<sup>87</sup> Buchan, working there in Government reconstruction after the War, did not share this family eulogy. He regarded coming unnecessarily into a situation of martial law, as ‘an unhallowed ploy’, especially after his father misunderstood his remarks about Milner’s anti-Dutch feeling, and passed them on.<sup>88</sup> (Chapter Two for Mr Buchan’s involvement in Scottish controversies.)

## 10. Retirement and Death

The atmosphere at the church in Glasgow seems to have been of a close-knit and generous family. ‘We were a poor people, but as each of the minister’s sons left his father’s house, the congregation presented him with a gold watch and chain.’<sup>89</sup> Beside the full round of Sunday activities, the mid-week ones included Prayer meetings, cultural activities, and a full opportunity for the minister to entertain with his stories.

Anna has given a brief glimpse of Mr Buchan’s ability to speak to children. She described a badly led Band of Hope meeting (to encourage temperance) packed with children, many with bare feet. Soon ‘pandemonium reigned’ and she was trying to separate two fighting boys ‘when the door opened and Father came in. What a yell of welcome from

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<sup>85</sup> *Mem.*, 7.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>88</sup> *SJB*, 126-27.

<sup>89</sup> *Mem.*, 10.



the children!’ Then ‘the joyful whisper goes round, “Mr Buchan’s going to tell a story.”’  
‘And when he began to speak, what a blessed calm.’<sup>90</sup>

When Mr Buchan’s health began to fail, ‘his family prevailed on him to resign his charge, so in May 1910 he left Glasgow to settle in Peebles.’ He looked forward to an active retirement when it would ‘be fine to preach without being paid for it.’ Reality would be otherwise, for setting out on holiday to Switzerland ‘a fortnight later, while in London with his wife and family [...] he was taken suddenly ill with a heart attack.’ Thereafter

his last months were quiet and spacious, and full of a sunny peace. It was a great joy to him to be back in Peebles; to take his walks [...] through the fields he had played in as a boy; to feast his eyes on the hills he could no longer climb; to come in and write a chapter in his book on *Peeblesshire Poets*, or read his little brown Baxter’s *Saint’s Rest*; to enjoy the family life, and laugh like a boy at the foolish family jokes. Such was his gentle life, and he asked nothing better.

Then, ‘there came forth a summons for Mr Standfast.’ He died ‘with his loved ones beside him, in the old house that had been the family home’ with ‘the sound of Tweed over its pebbles in his ear.’<sup>91</sup> The comparison from Bunyan is endorsed again. ‘The one great fact in his life was Christ. He could say with Mr Standfast – “I have loved to hear my Lord spoken of, and wherever I have seen the print of His shoe in the earth, there I have coveted to set my foot too.”’<sup>92</sup>

There had always been a strong protective streak in Buchan’s feelings for his father.

(“Poor old canny man, I wish I could do something to cheer him”), as if a character so unworldly needed special care; and now he felt that after the rough and tumble of the Gorbals he had steered his father into quiet waters only to loose him.<sup>93</sup>

## 11. What Manner of Man Was He?

His son agrees that he had ‘no belief in compromise,’<sup>94</sup> nor in facile liberalism; he never cherished the illusion that the Christian life was an easy thing, and on this score he had to testify against many false prophets.’ For forty years, his father preached ‘a very simple and comforting gospel.’ While believing whole-heartedly in conversion, ‘the turning of the face to a new course

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<sup>90</sup> *UU*, 72-73; *Mem.*, 10.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>93</sup> *SJB*, 190.

<sup>94</sup> The earlier Buchan would have encouraged compromise, but later shared his father’s view ‘that there must be no compromise.’ (See Chapter Six).

[....] he would insist upon the arduousness of the pilgrimage and as well upon the moments of high vision and its ultimate reward. His religion was tender and humane, but it was also well-girded. He had no love for those who took their ease in Zion.’<sup>95</sup>

He ‘had been a good classical scholar and remained a voracious reader’ including ‘much history’, seeing the past as ‘one long contest between villains of admitted villainy and honest men.’ He had a notable memory for poetry, and for Border ballads many of them never printed. He also had ‘a profound knowledge’ of the words and tunes of Scottish songs, many also unpublished. ‘Wholly without class-consciousness’, he was ‘quite incapable of deferring to anybody except the very old and the very poor.’<sup>96</sup>

## 12. Supposed Lack of Ambition

Responding to God’s vocation for him, Mr Buchan chose the narrow path, and was fulfilled. Despite the challenges, opportunities and limitations which followed, he clearly experienced contentment in the Pauline sense (Philippians, 4: 11). His son was much more actively ambitious, and what he put into the mouth of his character John Burnet of Barns has been applied equally to himself. ‘Nor do I think it altogether evil to have many desires and even many regrets, for it keeps a man’s spirit active, and urges him on to valiant effort. Of this I am sure, that contentment is the least of the virtues.’<sup>97</sup> This was written by a very young man, although both father and son had much cause for contentment at many stages in their lives. Mature Buchan rejoiced that ‘I have never learnt the art of discontent.’<sup>98</sup> His family believed that father

was not one who cared to have his praises extolled [....] Many thought his talents should have had wider recognition in the Church, but little cared he, absolutely content as he was in his work and his home.’<sup>99</sup>

‘Like many of his friends’ the sometime Moderator, Wells, ‘often wondered why he did not receive fuller recognition. The rewards of public opinion are very mysterious, especially in the case of men as modest as John Buchan.’<sup>100</sup> Despite such affectionate homage and high regard,

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<sup>95</sup> *MHD*, 247. Neither did his son.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 245-46, 249.

<sup>97</sup> *John Burnet*, VIII/135.

<sup>98</sup> *MHD*, 275.

<sup>99</sup> *Mem.*, 17.

<sup>100</sup> *Renfrewshire Advertiser*.

others later were scornfully critical of him as an obscure backwoodsman.<sup>101</sup> Of his mother's hopes, Buchan wrote that 'my father's lack of ambition was to her, I think, a sorrow.'<sup>102</sup> She had dreamt of him becoming Moderator with her attendant place in the gallery. His friend Shaw makes the interesting suggestion that at one time he was spoken of as successor to Dr James Begg (1808-1883).<sup>103</sup> Considering when he died, this must relate to the early years of Mr Buchan's ministry when he was becoming known within the Free Church. However, Begg had been a key figure from the time of the Disruption of 1843, had been Free Church Moderator in 1865, edited some church publications, and written frequently for *The Witness* edited by Hugh Miller. He had also collaborated with Chalmers over social issues including the Edinburgh colony houses in Stockbridge.<sup>104</sup> Later, he was prominent in the ten-year controversy, ending in 1873, which aborted Union between the Free Church and the United Presbyterians.

All this was before Mr Buchan was ordained, and he had nothing of the high profile and widespread involvement of Begg. Shaw's suggestion can hardly have been more than a passing thought perhaps inspired by the strength of 'the conservative bent of Mr Buchan's mind.'<sup>105</sup> It is interesting that when union between these denominations, earlier opposed by Begg, took place (1900), Mr Buchan, along with his fellow controversialist Macaskill,<sup>106</sup> became part of the United Free Church and did not stay with the continuing Free Church.

Helen Buchan transferred her hopes to her children, again dreaming that at least one of her sons would be ordained and become Moderator. Curiously, her unworldly husband also 'at times viewed life as an affair of effort and competition' and envisaged a prominence unknown to him accorded to his children, having said, 'I wouldn't wonder if Willie gets to the top first.'<sup>107</sup>

All of this veils the fact that Mr Buchan's ambition was lacking in the usual sense, but fully fulfilled spiritually as an ordained minister. In his rather oblique way, Buchan acknowledged this in saying:

He was not, I suppose, the conventional saint, for he was not over interested in his own soul. But he was something of the apostle, and if it be a virtue to diffuse a

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<sup>101</sup> *MG*, 38.

<sup>102</sup> *MHD*, 250.

<sup>103</sup> *Mem*, 315.

<sup>104</sup> Gifford, *Edinburgh*, 420.

<sup>105</sup> *Mem.*, 315.

<sup>106</sup> Ewing, *Annals*, 1, 124.

<sup>107</sup> *SJB*, 60.

healing grace and to lighten the load of all who cross your path, then he was the best man I have ever known.<sup>108</sup>

The ‘other world was entirely real to him’ for ‘He set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem.’<sup>109</sup>

### 13. Differences in Belief Between Father and Son

Even in their Christianity, the differences have been exaggerated, partly through Buchan’s own comments in *Memory Hold the Door*. Certainly he had some criticism of his father’s beliefs and initially expressed himself as ‘sceptical of dogmas.’<sup>110</sup> Buchan was strong on experience when it came to faith, and against formulas and the ‘Five Points of Calvinism’ approach. He claimed the supreme place for reason and seemed to be averse to ‘enthusiasm’. The last eighteen months of his father’s ministry in Pathhead were dominated by a revival, with his father ‘in church every night.’ Buchan was a boy of eleven or twelve at this time. Apart from anything else he may have been put off by seeing his father so consumed and worn down by what was happening there, and no doubt having less time for family involvement. Indeed, this may be the point at which Buchan felt that his father was too busy to be able to engage in the kind of intellectual discussion that he would later find with adults holding other views.

Another point of sensitivity might have been about his parents and their narrow parochial world. Certainly as his own horizons widened he grew away from this, but was assiduous in keeping up with his family. For instance, he was keen to bring those of them who could get away to meet his undergraduate friends in Oxford, and when he took his fiancée to meet his Masterton cousins at Broughton, she could barely understand them. There is no indication of embarrassment. While there were not then the same opportunities for women, his mother was intelligent, very capable within the narrow field of home and church in which she was contented and fulfilled, and was deeply concerned for the children’s spiritual welfare.

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<sup>108</sup> *MHD*, 249.

<sup>109</sup> *SJB*, 22.

<sup>110</sup> *MHD*, 86.

#### 14. Buchan's Rejection of Some of His Father's Calvinism

Buchan differed with his father over the inspiration of the Scriptures (Chapter Two). Temperamentally averse to revivalism, he still believed conversion was the greatest thing in anyone's life (Chapter Nine). The influence of philosophy and other religions taught by Murray and Jones at Glasgow, was countered by his own assured faith taught by his father, his regular devotions, the support of other Christians and reading authors like the Christian Platonists, and many others.

Nevertheless, he was challenged by friendship with attractive Oxford contemporaries like Raymond Asquith and Harold Baker whose secular attitude to life was in sharp contrast to his own seriousness.<sup>111</sup> Nevertheless, he did not succumb. There were always others who shared his Christian faith like Johnny Jameson and 'Taffy' Boulter. Perhaps, too, he was later helped by his marriage into that class, by having a Christian bride whose circle included Virginia Woolf (their fathers were friends), and the Bloomsbury set contained very mixed attitudes towards Christianity. Some had world-views greatly differing from his parents yet he continued to retain their Christian fundamentals.

#### 15. Similarities: Father and Son

They had many traits and experiences in common. The following quotations might describe Buchan's boyhood in Pathhead and especially in Broughton.

One could hardly imagine a better place for a boy to be brought up [...] woods in plenty for bird-nesting, hills to climb, and walks of infinite variety [...] true Scots worthies, who could tell stories and repeat old ballads to delight a boyish audience.<sup>112</sup>

John Buchan was a very human boy. One of a noisy cheery family [...] he was the ring leader in all mischief. He loved to tell his children tales of these boyish escapades.

In summer the family went to [...] that lonely moorland place, living out of doors from morning till night, he learned to love Nature. To him the hills were friends.<sup>113</sup>

The boy's 'great passions were fishing and walking'.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> See Ch.3:79.

<sup>112</sup> *Mem.*, 3.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *LJB*, 23.

Yet these anecdotes do not refer to Buchan, but to his father growing up in Peebles and Skellknowe, near Leadburn.

Then, again, both loved Nature and walking in the countryside, and Mr Buchan was an excellent field botanist.<sup>115</sup> Both climbed mountains. Both loved growing flowers, and Buchan arranging them.<sup>116</sup> Both had a background in the Classics. Both first sought to be lawyers. Both read much and were intellectually aware. Both loved history. Both published their own verse as well as prose. Both were romantics and loved Scott. Both were great story-tellers. Both were politically conservative. Both made deep friendships and were happily married. Both loved old ways and old things. Both treasured the Christian faith above everything, and felt themselves to be in ‘the beleaguered city of the Faith.’<sup>117</sup> Both were very tolerant.<sup>118</sup> Both revered Thomas Chalmers of the Disruption, a hallowed figure in Buchan’s upbringing, and to the end of his life.

His father ‘had no belief in compromises and a facile liberalism’ and ‘had a complete distrust of current fashions [...] the “spirit of the age” and other fetishes.’ Buchan joins forces with him in acknowledging a taste ‘for things old and unpopular and shabby’, for in this he was ‘as his children.’ Indeed, ‘believing that the majority was usually wrong [...] he would have been terrified to find himself on a side which was superior in numbers.’ Buchan might not have been quite as extreme, but especially after the First World War he greatly regretted the frivolity of the age, and its effect on his children.<sup>119</sup>

It would be interesting to know how much Mr Buchan was influenced by Conservative Evangelicals outside his own communion. For one apparently as widely read, it seems unlikely that he would have been unaware of the works of the contemporary first Bishop of Liverpool, J. C. Ryle and other like-minded Anglicans, but his wife’s prejudice was clear. She regarded theirs as the one true church and often warned against bowing down ‘in the house of Rimmon.’<sup>120</sup> However, the son’s toleration and ecumenism would be in stark contrast to his mother. Mr Buchan may not have been as ecumenically gregarious as his eldest son, but he had friends outside his own circle. Surprisingly, among them was Augustine Birrell, Chief Secretary for Ireland. When he died, Buchan told his wife, Susan, that ‘he is a link with my earliest youth and

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<sup>115</sup> *MHD*, 246.

<sup>116</sup> *Mem.* 4, 324; *WF*, 280.

<sup>117</sup> *MHD*, 247.

<sup>118</sup> *SJB*, 24; see Chapter Five: 8.

<sup>119</sup> *MG*, 200-03.

<sup>120</sup> Fairfax-Lucy, *Scrap Screen*, 137.

a great friend of my father's,<sup>121</sup> being politically active in West Fife when Mr Buchan was still a Liberal.

## 16. At Home, Including His Own

In practical and business matters, Mr Buchan was

of the child-like. His personal demands were always upon joys that are simple, innocent, and quiet, and he never faltered in his task of happiness. He was the despair of those who look for the reality of things in minute books and financial statements.<sup>122</sup>

Within the family, his wife even gave him his bus fare, though he probably walked home having given it to a beggar.<sup>123</sup>

Nevertheless, there is more than one comment about his effectiveness in the home. Anna cites a young man's admiration for Mr Buchan's godly character: 'his was one of the most gifted intellects' he had met. 'I like best to remember him in the visitation of our home.' Honeyman says a visitor's experience 'was always a delight', and the debt [his children] owe to their father (and their mother too) will never be known to them.' The family, too, remembered him as 'the presence which was a benediction' and as a figure of fun.<sup>124</sup>

## 17. The Father's Influence on His Children

Having established the positive influence that Buchan's parents had on their children, his father was, no doubt, the principal religious guide, both in the home, including daily family prayers, and at church. Buchan recalled that 'to his children he was a companion rather than a mentor; or to put it otherwise, his life was the example, not his precepts, for he rarely preached to us.' He clearly loved children and had considerable wisdom in guiding them. 'He could judge sternly but never harshly.' With nothing exceptional in his hatred of 'lying and cowardice', he 'was nervous about the value of youthful piety.'<sup>125</sup> This is an interesting comment from one who as a boy of eleven had written a hymn which had been sung by his father's congregation.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> NLS.2 to Susan, 2/11/1933; see Blanchard, 114, for Buchan's own involvement as his 'friend'.

<sup>122</sup> *Mem.*, 18.

<sup>123</sup> Fairfax-Lucy, *ibid.*; *LJB*, 27.

<sup>124</sup> *Mem.*, 15, 325, 16.

<sup>125</sup> *MHD*, 247-48.

<sup>126</sup> Lownie, *Buchan's Poems*, 8; see below 213.

Anna said ‘his children remember him as Christ’s ambassador’ for ‘any good work they have been enabled to do in the world, any small success they may have gained, has been largely due to their father’s influence.’ Her eulogy is widely evident in other reminiscences, and in fiction like *Ann and Her Mother*. Her brothers expressed their gratitude differently. William wrote from India: ‘The best man in Scotland and the kindest father is gone [...] no man ever lived more consistently the religion that he preached. I know something of what the influence of his life has meant to me in India.’<sup>127</sup> Walter did not reminisce, and Alastair died too young but shared the faith, for his last days on the battlefield were characterised by a strong Christian conviction.<sup>128</sup> Buchan himself did not have the same obvious Christian effect on his children.

Mr Buchan trusted his children to his Lord and Saviour and will have been constantly in prayer for them, according to the injunction in John, 17.<sup>129</sup> He put his aspirations for their spiritual weal into rhyme. Young John spent the August in which he was eight (1883) with his grandparents in Broughton. On a Monday in Fife, father composed ‘To John, aged 8 years’ in which twenty-four lines are taken up with family news and humour, followed by six in more serious vein:

*Johnnie, one word, and I have done:  
Thank God for the best gift, His Son,  
And when you kneel in fading light  
To ask His care throughout the night,  
Ask Him, besides, that He should take  
Your sins away, for Jesus sake.*<sup>130</sup>

Though not set in the same mould as himself, the next six decades would have shown Mr Buchan that he had no cause to doubt the sincerity of his son’s commitment. Smith tells us

The Calvinism that Mr Buchan transmitted was a sense of a life lived under the eye of Almighty God in a world ruled by unalterable law; a sense which stayed with John to the end of his life. It did not teach them to despise the world – the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof – but it taught them to set the world in perspective, and to accept the existence of a mystery beyond it.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> *Mem.*, 17.

<sup>128</sup> Anna Buchan, *Alastair Buchan*.

<sup>129</sup> ‘I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one.’ (vs.15)

<sup>130</sup> *Mem.*, 304-05 – noteworthy that Buchan ensured this was included.

<sup>131</sup> *SJB*, 16.



It did much more, and Smith is inadequate here. She could almost describe Leithen's view earlier in *Sick Heart River* where he retains a belief in God's Sovereignty and Justice, but as yet knows nothing of the Gospel and God's mercy. Buchan did not believe that was his father's faith, nor was it his own. We have seen him expressing their belief:

*From the deep fountains of Eternal love  
He drew his faith...*

To his young children he was almost an older one of themselves, more than a friend.<sup>132</sup> So, was Mr Buchan later too busy in the evenings after John had returned home from lectures in Glasgow? Or rather was John too busy? He tells us that 'I returned home early each afternoon and thereafter was at my books until midnight.'<sup>133</sup> Indeed, in his portrait of his father Buchan recalled that 'The picture in my memory belongs to my childhood, amplified a little by the reflections of adolescence'<sup>134</sup> though he was twenty when he left home.

Smith comments that Mr Buchan's 'shining sincerity and his intellectual unsophistication made him a difficult person for an affectionate but sharp-witted son to argue with,'<sup>135</sup> but Anna could do so despite her deep affection. Aged sixteen, she returned from being briefly schooled in Edinburgh, and was almost always at home until she and Walter took over Bank House when their uncle died in 1905. In contrast to her elder brother, she recalled a theological discussion with her father, apposite because it concerned dogmatics. She reminisced later that 'there was no constraint between parents and children.'

When I was arguing with my father one day about the doctrines of Freewill and Foreordination he got very bored with me and remarked as he rose from the table, "I sometimes think you are a very ignorant creature" [and now she agreed that she "was, too!"]<sup>136</sup>

As for Buchan, it may have been more of a question of methodology than 'intellectual unsophistication': 'My good father has not the proper turn for speculation. He cares too little about logic and sees things in a pictorial way.'<sup>137</sup> Anyway, having left home Buchan could not correspond with a father who hated writing letters.<sup>138</sup> Thus, he knew him best in the Pathhead

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<sup>132</sup> Buchan agreed: 'companion rather than a mentor.' *MHD*, 247.

<sup>133</sup> *MHD*, 34.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>135</sup> *SJB*, 43.

<sup>136</sup> *UU*, 89-90.

<sup>137</sup> *SJB*, 43.

<sup>138</sup> *UU*, 94; as did Buchan, *WF*, 278.

years. There, Mr Buchan, an exemplary parent in the manner just quoted, shared in their adventures, story-telling every evening, and giving them freedom.

Buchan's 'studies were mainly classical and historical, and the compactness of his literary style, the shape and balance of his sentences, may be largely attributed to a solid grounding in Latin' first taught by his father.<sup>139</sup> 'Straitened means and a laborious life did not weaken Mr Buchan's relish for common joys.'<sup>140</sup> Buchan always retained a deep love, admiration and concern for the welfare of his father as long as he lived. Though realistic about what he saw as imperfections, Buchan's own glowing assessment of his father should be treated as genuine.

## 18. 'Mr Standfast'

*The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come*, (1678) by Bunyan was second only to the Bible, for Buchan virtually knew this by heart as he grew up.<sup>141</sup> Its obvious influence is scattered throughout his writings, especially in *Mr Standfast* (1919). There, Peter Pienaar seeks to emulate Mr Standfast, thinking himself not good enough to be Mr Valiant-for-truth, though he receives his valedictory at the end. Recently, Ian Bradley has suggested parallels between Buchan, his character Peter Pienaar and Mr Standfast.<sup>142</sup>

What is sure is that Buchan's father is, like Pienaar, Mr Standfast, and his son reminisces that the death of Mr Valiant was always 'music in my ear.'<sup>143</sup> It is how the Buchan family thought of him. They recalled that in life he never made 'the mistake of presenting Christianity as an easy thing [...] "the Way was still the Way, narrow and hard and comfortless",' the very words that Pienaar quoted to Hannay.<sup>144</sup> Both men's deaths were regarded as 'a summons for Mr Standfast' and they believed that, with Valiant, 'all the trumpets sounded for him'.<sup>145</sup> What Buchan put into the story of Pienaar came directly from Buchan's family remembrance. When

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<sup>139</sup> Buchan, W., 'Introduction', viii: *MHD*, 34.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 248-49.

<sup>141</sup> *MHD*, 17.

<sup>142</sup> Sermon in Broughton Parish Church, 27/08/2016.

<sup>143</sup> *MHD*, 18.

<sup>144</sup> *Mr Standfast*, Chapter 22 (title), and 352; *Mem.*, 14.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 12, 13.

Buchan died, William read Valiant's valedictory in Elsfield Church on 17 February 1940 and 'Bunyan's Pilgrim Hymn was sung.'<sup>146</sup>

## 19. Conclusion

Before exploring any rebelliousness in, and rift with, his children, and having established something of the lasting closeness between them, the family should have the last word here. On first meeting him in Scotland, Susan wrote to her mother:

John's father is such a joy. He has the most heavenly good-tempered way with him – and laughs and is laughed at by his family all the time. He plays the penny whistle delightfully [...] They all talk very well – so intelligently and keenly and the amount of poetry quoted is amazing. One feels very alive and invigorated.<sup>147</sup>

There is no sense of strained relations here. A new, and nervous, fiancée would surely have been conscious of such tensions in this very private account.

Buchan remembered 'above all things a happy man', who 'found acute delight in the simplest things' and 'like the old preacher he could exclaim, "All this - and heaven, too."<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Deneke, 'Elsfield Remembers', 46.

<sup>147</sup> *LJB*, 97.

<sup>148</sup> *MHD*, 248.

## CHAPTER TWO

### BUCHAN AND THE 'BELIEVING CRITICS'

‘I became sceptical of dogmas,  
looking upon them as questions rather than answers.’  
(*MHD*, 86)

#### 1. Introductory Note: Buchan's Use of Hyperbole

Buchan said some odd things in *Memory Hold the Door*. Smith observed that he ‘was rather fond of adding a tang of the rash or wild to some perfectly respectable affair.’<sup>149</sup> He wrote fast and sometimes, perhaps unconsciously lapsed into hyperbole.

Though Richard Usborne, in *Clubland Heroes*, ‘rather deprecates the public school “success ethic” in his novels’,<sup>150</sup> Buchan did not go to an independent boarding school like so many close friends. Grateful for his education at Hutcheson's Grammar School, he still commented that he never went to school in ‘the conventional sense,’<sup>151</sup> but would not have intended a snub. Thus, dramatic exaggeration can lead to misunderstanding, as we shall find when chronicling his father in theological debate.

Reminiscences of youthful changing attitudes were not comments on his whole life. He tells us that ‘formerly I had regarded life as a pilgrimage along a strait and steep path on which the pilgrim must keep his eyes fixed’<sup>152</sup> but his horizons widened, though the American edition of his memoirs was rightly called *Pilgrim's Way* (1940).

#### 2. The Inspiration Controversy

The evidence that Buchan rebelled against the Free Church of his upbringing is not convincing.<sup>153</sup> The difference between father and son, concerning biblical inspiration, developed within that church and the theological atmosphere in Scotland in which Buchan grew up. He

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<sup>149</sup> *SJB*, 153.

<sup>150</sup> Kimball, ‘Rereading John Buchan,’ 102.

<sup>151</sup> *MHD*, 30.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>153</sup> J. A. Smith to Colin Matthew, 10/04/1998 (NLS Acc.12342/107), gives her mature judgment on his *ODNB* draft: ‘JB never “abandoned” the Free Kirk of his youth.’

could have stayed within the Free Church like his father, only leaving because there were no Free churches in London.

The founding fathers of the Free Church accepted the traditional view of verbal inspiration of the Bible, but had raised certain questions which had not been answered.<sup>154</sup> At the same time, a critical school developed in Germany which advocated studying the Bible like any other book without any presupposition that it was divinely inspired. The issue was, and is, how far can the proclamation of the Gospel from the inspired Word of God survive along with the results of the Higher (or Historical) Criticism, which goes beyond the text's literal meaning to rediscover the historical context of author and hearers obscured by later redactors. Evangelicals, like Mr Buchan used this in a devotional sense, but objected that it can too readily lapse into a secular, destructive view of Holy Scripture.

Particularly within the Free Church of Scotland ministry of the next generation there arose a group of men since dubbed the 'Believing Critics.' Completing their studies in Scotland, they usually continued them in Germany. Adhering to the evangelical tradition of their denomination, they preached for conversion to Christ as Saviour and Lord. Some, like George Adam Smith, were whole heartened supporters of the Moody and Sankey campaigns in the 1870s, as was Mr Buchan.

Typically, such men would go on to have wide parochial experience, often serving for many years before accepting chairs in one of the Free Church Colleges in Edinburgh, Glasgow, or Aberdeen. Advocates of Higher Criticism, they occupied middle ground in the wider debate between the sceptical views promoted by the complete academic freedom demanded in Germany and the traditional orthodoxy of verbal inspiration.

Whenever Buchan's 'rebellion' against his father's theology began, he said that at Glasgow University 'the semi-religious Hegelianism then in vogue, first preached by Edward Caird, and continued by Jones, did not greatly attract me, and I owed allegiance to no school.' Though not 'greatly attracted', Buchan came to accept that Christianity was a revelation of reason, but did not doubt it, finding it 'completely rational.'<sup>155</sup>

Caird's 'own speculative idealism' sought to 'reconcile different elements of the spiritual life, such as subject and object, religion and science, freedom and determination' since

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<sup>154</sup> For Candlish on Inspiration, Riesen, 'Higher Criticism', 129.

<sup>155</sup> *MHD*, 37.

‘there are no antagonisms which “cannot be reconciled”’. He ‘avoided religious controversy’ but ‘many of his students were destined to be clergymen’ adopting ‘the thought that Christianity was a revelation of reason’ and ‘disposed to reject the principle of authority, and the opposition of faith and reason enshrined in the ultra-Calvinism of the leading Protestant denominations in Scotland.’<sup>156</sup>

This last is too strong; Mr Buchan must be distanced from ultra-Calvinism, which, as C. H. Spurgeon defined,

goes vastly beyond the teaching of Christ, or the enlightened ministry of Calvin could warrant, [and] gets some of its support from a wrong view of God. To the ultra-Calvinist his absolute sovereignty is delightfully conspicuous. He is awe-stricken with the great and glorious attributes of the most high. His omnipotence appals him, and his sovereignty astonishes him, and he at once submits as by a stern necessity to the will of God. He, however, too much forgets that God is love.<sup>157</sup>

Mr Buchan was not an ultra-Calvinist, who ‘too much forgets that God is love.’ That portrays Leithen’s earlier Theism in *Sick Heart River* (Chapter Nine), until he finally comes to a living Christian faith by responding to God’s love. Buchan exposed it within most of the Presbytery in *Witch Wood* (Chapter Seven), but he was not brought up starved of awareness of God’s love. Neither erred into ultra-Calvinism.

### 3. Mr Buchan’s Evangelicalism is Challenged

The critic, George Adam Smith, remarked: ‘the Christian faith and love of hard work [...] I owe to my father and mother.’<sup>158</sup> Buchan would have acknowledged the same. Yet, united over these essentials, Mr Buchan was at odds with Smith and Buchan over the Higher Criticism.

Even at school, and through his reading, Buchan was being introduced to new concepts of thought. Nevertheless, he said that ‘Hutcheson’s was only a minor episode’ for ‘the atmosphere I lived in was always that of my home.’<sup>159</sup>

A wider critical faculty was developed in the University. However, Sunday by Sunday he still sat under his father’s ministry and was a dutiful son in playing his part at John Knox Church. Smith’s daughter writes of the possible dichotomy for Buchan so that he

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<sup>156</sup> Brown, *Biographical Dictionary*, 120-22.

<sup>157</sup> Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Pulpit*, 91-92.

<sup>158</sup> Riesen, *Criticism and Faith*, 11.

<sup>159</sup> *MHD*, 30.

may have felt a growing gap between the Calvinism – however gentle – preached at John Knox and the addresses given in the Bute Hall by Principal Caird, for whom ‘religion and philosophy are not enemies,’ who discussed Erasmus, Galileo, Bacon, Hume, in the light of great general principles. The questions raised by Murray about ancient religions, by Jones about the nature of reality, were not to find satisfactory answers in the senior Buchan’s mixture of emotional revivalism and theological rigidity.<sup>160</sup>

These comments can mislead us. Her strictures about Mr Buchan probably arose from distaste for his criticism of her father, to which she refers (see below under 8.),<sup>161</sup> though ‘Buchan may have felt’ introduces a proper note of caution. She well described the new influences and intellectual challenges to the faith in which Buchan had been reared and accepted for himself. Certainly, amid such discussion of ideas Buchan was well able to maintain a robust independence of mind, and a strong Christian faith, not following Caird, whose teaching ‘did not greatly attracted’ him, owing ‘allegiance to no school.’<sup>162</sup>

A more balanced view of Mr Buchan is found a quarter of a century before Smith wrote, when Buchan told the world that his father’s ‘evangel had neither the hysteria nor the smugness of ordinary revivalism.’ Even his inability to cope adequately with ‘religion and philosophy’ is misleading. One of the curious statements made by Buchan is that ‘it was odd that [Mr Buchan] should have been by profession a theologian, for he was wholly lacking in philosophical interest or aptitude.’ Then he adds ‘but a stalwart theologian of the old school he was.’ So he was a theologian but not a philosophical one, indeed he rejoiced ‘in the cramped and riveted Calvinistic logic.’<sup>163</sup> There is something of an inconsistency here, for Mr Buchan’s published writings show that he was philosophically aware, and Buchan did not need to go to philosophy to find a faith, any more than his father had done. Both equally accepted the Christian fundamentals, though Buchan did not maintain the same kind of Calvinist logic.

Moreover, Mr Buchan had made a different deliberate choice than Buchan. He did not graduate in Law through lack of ability, but believed he had received a higher calling to the Christian ministry and proclaiming Christ as Saviour. Thereafter, he faithfully ‘drew all his studies this way,’ and one does not need to be a philosopher to be a pastor. We have seen that

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<sup>160</sup> *SJB*, 43.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 43 note †. See also below under ‘8. The Near Trial of Smith’.

<sup>162</sup> *MHD*, 37.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 246-47.

Mr Buchan's surviving sermons and teaching are well thought through intellectually and he was aware of the German critics.

Buchan's comments probably arose from a temperamental dislike of the street soap-box oratory by which his father endeavoured in Bedford Lane to win souls for Christ by warning them 'to flee from the wrath to come.'<sup>164</sup> Indeed, Buchan may have been subjected to well-intentioned attempts at personal evangelism by older people during his growing years. Later, he created Adam Milburne, hero of *The Dancing Floor*, born into an evangelical home yet maintaining that faith despite having been orphaned when very young. As an older man, Leithen (one of Buchan's 'Three Musketeers'<sup>165</sup> who grew up in a similar home) remembered these parents who were friends of his mother. The father had embarrassed the boy by asking questions about his spiritual state.<sup>166</sup> While firmly maintaining the need for conversion, Buchan did not like such forms of directly personal evangelism.

#### 4. Gilbert Murray and George Adam Smith

Two professors arrived in Glasgow when Buchan matriculated at the University. The one, Gilbert Murray (1866-1957), had a major and lasting influence on Buchan which was not Christian, but did not shake his faith. Indeed, he tells us that 'this preoccupation with the classics [first taught by his father] was the happiest thing that could have befallen me', for 'it gave me a standard of values'; but 'above all the Calvinism of my boyhood was broadened, mellowed, and also confirmed' so 'I lost then any chance of being a rebel.'<sup>167</sup>

The other, George Adam Smith (1856-1942) Professor of Old Testament at the Free Church of Scotland Trinity College, had no direct involvement in Buchan's studies. Buchan may have been familiar with him from contemporaries. During his ministry<sup>168</sup> at Queen's Cross Church in Aberdeen from 1882-92, Smith acquired a reputation as an evangelical preacher, and a controversial Biblical critic nicknamed 'Isaiah' from his first major book in two volumes (1888 and 1892). This caused Mr Buchan great concern (see below 7.)

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<sup>164</sup> *SJB*, 22.

<sup>165</sup> Leithen, Hannay and McCunn.

<sup>166</sup> *DF*, 10.

<sup>167</sup> *MHD*, 35-36.

<sup>168</sup> Useful sources on Smith: the article in the *ODNB*; Riesen, *Criticism and Faith*; particularly Campbell, 'Fact not Dogma'; and *Fixing Indemnity*.



## 5. Buchan: Reason and Dogma

Smith crossed the line between a devotional critical approach and one that was secular, for he held that the Old Testament could no longer be accepted simply because it was the Word of God. It must be critically examined to tease out what was revelation and what was no more than historical accretion or scribal error. In this sense, human reason became the arbiter, and the result subjective. Buchan's youthful mindset became rather similar. No doubt this was an area where encouragement could be found in his classical and philosophical studies, as well as in the 'Believing Critics.' Yet, curiously, it could, perhaps, also be found in his mother who in theology 'had no real interest, and her religion depended little upon dogma and much on her generous human instincts.'<sup>169</sup> Later, he defined dogma as 'a deduction from facts which is only valid under certain conditions, and which becomes untrue if the conditions change.' He preferred principles, an eternal and universal truth.<sup>170</sup>

Buchan wrote that 'Though [Raymond Asquith] might scoff at dogmas, he had a great reverence for the problems behind them.'<sup>171</sup> This was true of himself, but for different reasons. In also reading about Smith, there are repeated links with Buchan's own beliefs and interests, and shared inconsistencies. Smith stood by 'Fact not Dogma.'<sup>172</sup> He believed that accepting formulas deadened, while experience was the essential. The sceptics, Asquith and Baker (Chapter Three), pushed Buchan in the same direction. Thirty years later he still felt that 'their urbanity put to shame my angularity. Their humanism confounded my dogmatism. They were certain of only one thing – that all things were uncertain [...] They were interested in the value of things and not the prize.'<sup>173</sup>

However, Buchan's attitude was somewhat equivocal, 'More and more I became sceptical of dogmas, looking upon them as questions rather than answers.'<sup>174</sup> He came to see the danger of dogma leading on to cant, and in *Witch Wood* created adverse portrayals in Murdo Muirhead, minister of the township of Kirk Aller and moderator of the local Presbytery, and

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<sup>169</sup> MHD, 250.

<sup>170</sup> *Canadian Occasions*, 126.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>172</sup> Smith's concept of 'the sound of running history' should have pleased Buchan, Campbell, *Fixing Indemnity*, 86.

<sup>173</sup> SJB, 60; NLS.1 'Address at Winchester College' 1935.

<sup>174</sup> MHD, 86.

more so in Ebenezer Proudfoot of the moorland parish of Bold. Even in the kind personality of his own father, he criticised those dogmatic views which he considered to be extreme. Nevertheless, despite his disclaimers, he still had his own Christian dogma to which he adhered. Prescient in many things, perhaps Buchan had not at first fully thought through his strong condemnation of dogma, and where it might lead. Smith believed and taught such a view, but it has been demonstrated that believing the Christian fundamentals he was not free of dogma himself.<sup>175</sup> In reality any evangelical preaching requires both experience and dogma.

Looking back to younger days, in most subjects Buchan developed

a kind of relativism – a belief in degrees of truth and differing levels of reality – which made me judge systems by their historical influence and practical efficiency rather than by their logical perfections [...] There were eternal truths, I decided, but not very many, and even these required frequent spring-cleanings. I became tolerant of most human moods, except intolerance.

Buchan recognised early inconsistency, so that ‘it was a point of view which I have since seen cause to modify.’<sup>176</sup> His mature thinking on Christianity is expressed less than three years before his death, in the lengthy address published as *Presbyterianism*. He still put up a spirited defence of critical views when discussing the ‘Question of Creed’, for Theology is not static ‘and antiquarian accretions are no part of the essence’.<sup>177</sup> Here, and in a number of his books, Buchan stressed ‘the essence’ of Christian belief and practice, while the non-essentials should always be recognised as such, quoting his heroes Cromwell, Montrose, and Bunyan in support. ‘Religion is not a thing the forms of which have been established once for all by a divine decree, and which admit of no fresh interpretations. It is a spiritual conception of life, and therefore of the universe in which life is lived.’<sup>178</sup>

There are hints of the influence of another ‘Believing Critic’, Henry Drummond (1851-97), Smith’s close friend in Glasgow, whose work on the post-Darwinian accommodation between Christianity and Science, *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* (1883), was widely known. Buchan quoted A. N. Whitehead with approval: ‘The progress of science must result in the unceasing modification of religious thought, to the great advantage of religion’ reflecting that ‘Theology is an attempt to systematise the divine revelation and bring it into accord with

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<sup>175</sup> Campbell, *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>176</sup> *MHD*, 39.

<sup>177</sup> *Pres.*, 6.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

every aspect of life.’<sup>179</sup>

Later Buchan had found it ‘very clear that reason could be enchained.’<sup>180</sup> His mature thinking assessed the paradox produced by the Reformation, i.e. that ‘the Bible, and not an historic Church, was the palladium of Christianity’ but that it ‘was subject to the ultimate test of conscience and reason.’ He regarded Calvin, as ‘a very great man laying down an absolute canon of scripture teaching, a doctrine outside of which there could be no salvation.’ The ‘view of liberal theologians [...] was condemned as the ultimate heresy.’ Buchan, reporting rather than testifying, expressed Mr Buchan’s view of authority. With Buchan, reason was paramount, but with reservations.<sup>181</sup>

The dominant authority of reason in Buchan’s early adult life turned sour. ‘The belief in the perfectibility of man, the omnipotence of reason, and the certainty of progress which began with the French Encyclopaedists, and flourished among the brisk dogmatists of the nineteenth century, had more or less ended with the war.’<sup>182</sup> In the light of this, Buchan adjusted his thinking:

For nine-tenths of life is capable of analysis and judgment by the human reason, and in such cases to refuse reason its right is a crime against humanity. In some form or other the process which Hegel has defined as thesis, antithesis, synthesis must be gone through if we are to reach truth. Intuitions which claim the sanctity of religious faith and decline the test of reason will almost inevitably land us in trouble. They may transcend any rational process, but we must make certain of that fact by first of all submitting to the test of reason.<sup>183</sup>

Moreover, it must never be forgotten that ‘the essentials of religion can never change.’<sup>184</sup> Therefore ‘no Presbyterian will forget the need for dogma’ for ‘there are certain fundamentals in our Christian Faith which are beyond time and change.’<sup>185</sup> Because ‘we base ourselves upon a great historical fact’ he strongly criticised ‘the tendency to smooth away all concrete Christian dogmas into a vague theism or a vaguer pantheism, and to flatten out the firm lines of Christian

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<sup>179</sup> *Pres.*, 6.

<sup>180</sup> *MHD*, 184.

<sup>181</sup> NLS.1 ‘Address at Queen’s, Kingston’, 07/11/36, 4.

<sup>182</sup> *MHD*, 184.

<sup>183</sup> NLS.1, *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>184</sup> *Pres.* 6.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

ethics into a pious sentiment.’ Buchan believed that must be strongly opposed, and stated unequivocally that

the foundation of our faith is not only “God is love.” It is the still more tremendous historical fact that “God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”<sup>186</sup>

There is nothing here that Mr Buchan would have disagreed with. The problem for him was what all this rested on. Was it that human reason might conclude (in the believer) that this was God’s revelation, or was it divine revelation regardless of human reason, but addressed to it? In later life, Buchan seems to leave room for his father’s supernatural interpretation.

To be fair to Smith, and Buchan in so far as he followed him, he was an Old Testament critic. Whatever revision of the text might be both desirable and necessary, he fully accepted that in the Old Testament there was to be found the revelation of God which culminated in the coming of Jesus. It was no part of his brief to dissect the New Testament, but to preach the Gospel, including what he believed to be authentic in the Old.

Buchan himself was liberal and evangelical in the manner of Smith, who at Queen’s Cross Church in Aberdeen had a powerful evangelical ministry; the congregation grew to over seven hundred. Alasdair Macleod suggested Smith as a research subject to Iain Campbell and prefaced his book *Fixing the Indemnity*, making this pertinent reflection on reading some of William Robertson Smith’s

sermon manuscripts and being amazed to find them impeccably orthodox and warmly evangelistic [...] We find the same phenomenon in Smith. According to their own profession these men were not liberals denying the gospel, but evangelicals who insisted that the new view of Scripture and the conclusions of critical scholarship were perfectly consonant with evangelical belief, and indeed were essential to the integrity of contemporary gospel preaching.<sup>187</sup>

Much that Smith said, or is said about him, finds an echo in what Buchan said or wrote about his own beliefs. For instance, Smith described the early life of Henry Drummond, who came to reject ‘Evangelical Christianity of a doctrinal form.’ Smith was concerned to foster a less dogmatic and obscurantist evangelicalism, one which ‘distinguished between complicated

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<sup>186</sup> *Pres.*, 8.

<sup>187</sup> Campbell, *Fixing Indemnity*, xiv.

inessentials and simple essentials.’<sup>188</sup> Buchan held such views in his early manhood, and was fond of quoting, to that effect, men like Montrose and Cromwell who shared with Smith a belief in Christian fundamentals, but felt the dangers in dogmatism, as did Buchan. He expressed this in a well-known passage:

The cosmology of the elder Calvinism, with its anthropomorphism and its material penalties and rewards, I never consciously rejected. It simply faded out of the air, since it meant nothing to me. I remember that an ancient relative assured me that Sir Walter Scott, having neglected certain evangelical experiences, was no doubt in torment; the news gave me much satisfaction, for the prospect of such company removed for me any fear of the infernal regions; therefore like Dante’s *Farinata degli Uberti*,<sup>189</sup> I “entertained great scorn for Hell.”

Buchan was not alone in believing this:

Of all the articles of accepted Christian orthodoxy that troubled the consciences of Victorian churchmen, none caused more anxiety than the everlasting punishment of the wicked. The flames of hell illuminated vividly the tensions of an age in which men felt that old certainties were being eroded by new knowledge, and in which an optimistic faith in progress co-existed uneasily with forebodings of the consequences of rapid social change. A Bible whose Divine authority had been accepted rather than argued about was battered by the blasts of Germanic criticism and scientific theory, and the pattern of Christian orthodoxy which it had been assumed to uphold no longer carried full conviction<sup>190</sup>

with him, though it did with Mr Buchan. Nevertheless, Buchan continued by affirming that ‘the fundamentals of the Christian religion were so ‘entwined with my nature that I never found occasion to question them. I wanted no philosophy to rationalise them, for they seemed to me completely rational.’<sup>191</sup> Despite his claim to have given up ‘the elder Calvinism’ and to abjure dogma, he later said that ‘no Presbyterian will forget the necessity of dogma.’<sup>192</sup>

He described his father as an example of what ‘was commoner among the Puritans than is generally supposed – a stiff dogmatic theology’ but ‘mellowed by common sense and kindness [...] conjoined with a perpetual delight in the innocent pleasures of life.’ Much as he admired his father, Buchan reacted against ‘a stiff dogmatic theology’ based upon biblical

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<sup>188</sup> Campbell, *Ibid.*, 54, quoting Cheyne, *Transforming*, 82.

<sup>189</sup> A heretic denying the immortality of the soul (*Inferno*) – another example of Buchan’s hyperbole, for he believed in the resurrection of the dead. To doubt hell is something else.

<sup>190</sup> Rowell, *Hell and Victorians*, vii.

<sup>191</sup> *MHD*, 337.

<sup>192</sup> *Pres.*, 7.

inerrancy. Smith's watchword, 'Fact not Dogma', stressed that conversion to Christ is experiential and not the acceptance of a creedal statement. In a different Christian context, Buchan was profoundly moved by the experience of receiving, and administering as an elder, the sacrament of Holy Communion. His father

could preach a tough doctrinal sermon with anybody; but his discourses which remain in my memory were those spoken at the close of the half-yearly Communion, when he invited his hearers, very simply and solemnly, to share his own happiness.<sup>193</sup>

Perhaps an analogy in the generally Protestant view of the sacrament of Holy Communion is helpful, too, if applied to receiving the Word of God. As the elements are received humbly and faithfully, they become in a mystical way the Body and Blood of Jesus. This is open to interpretation, but nevertheless, it is what the faithful believe. Perhaps for Buchan something similar was true with the Word. As it was read humbly and faithfully, so it became the divine revelation and Word of God.

Smith remained an evangelical despite his Higher Criticism. Alasdair Macleod wrote of the 'Believing Critics'

that they could live with this tension because they had the gospel before the criticism and so were always drawing on the capital of their evangelical heritage. But the trajectory of their critical work would lead subsequent generations to draw very different theological conclusions from fragmented texts and dubious histories.<sup>194</sup>

In following Smith, Buchan shared in creating such potential dangers, but could be said to have 'had the gospel before the criticism.' He had the gospel from within his family, and when the criticism came from elsewhere it did not cause him to lose faith; rather, he seems to have become aware, and somewhat modified his position. Then 'dogmas which had only been vague inclinations took definite shape when they were controverted, and the most tolerant were forced into a confession of faith.'<sup>195</sup>

## 6. The Liberal Dilemma

Iain Campbell (2000) has summed up Smith's dilemma. He could hold Evangelicalism and criticism in parallel without them intersecting; hold a scholarly, but not wholly objective

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<sup>193</sup> *MHD*, 248.

<sup>194</sup> Campbell, *Fixing Indemnity*, xiv.

<sup>195</sup> *JBOC*, 38.

view of Scripture; or hold to Evangelicalism by disregarding the results of criticism. The first he says is dualistic, the second naïve, and the third cowardly.<sup>196</sup> He did not suppose that Smith would have recognised himself in these caricatures, but maintained that whether critical views undercut or underpinned evangelism remains a relevant question. Smith himself believed that his faith and his criticism cohered and that they supported each other, being ‘more concerned to employ criticism to cast light for men on the meaning of Scripture than to pursue scientific criticism for its own sake.’ Criticism was ‘introductory, and not terminal; it was the first question but not the last.’ Therefore ‘critical evaluations of the Old Testament were, in his view, preachable, and not simply the preserve of aimless scholarship. They served the purpose of the evangel’,<sup>197</sup> rendering Evangelicals better able to proclaim the Gospel relevantly.

Marcus Dods, one of these critics, was sure: ‘there will be a grand turn up in matters theological’ for ‘the churches won’t know themselves fifty years hence.’ He hoped ‘some little rag of faith will be left when all’s done.’ On another occasion he wished ‘somebody would stop the criticism and say something about a personal God.’<sup>198</sup>

Another tension within the Free Church concerned the Westminster divines. Buchan regarded their Confession of Faith as ‘the one worthy fruit’ becoming ‘the doctrinal base of Scottish Presbytery.’<sup>199</sup> He shared ‘its distinctively Calvinist view of the institutional Church’. He, too, was a ‘High Churchman in his view of the authoritarian nature of the Church, a true heir of Melville and Chalmers in his insistence on the independence of the Church, and a Reformer in his acceptance of the fallibility of the institutions which express the human face of the divinely-instituted society.’<sup>200</sup>

The Free Church Declaratory Act (1892) eased the stringency of adherence to traditional formulas. Many in the Church were deeply suspicious of this and the New Evangelicalism which denied the verbal inspiration of the whole Bible. Together, these issues led to a schism, some forming the Free Presbyterian Church. Mr Buchan was among those deeply uneasy, but who remained in the Free Church, perhaps because disunity was the greater problem. Similar tensions led to ‘Trials’, starting with the dismissal of William Robertson Smith from his

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<sup>196</sup> Campbell, ‘Fact not Dogma,’ 6.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>198</sup> Dods, *Letters*, 67 (1902), 87 (1903).

<sup>199</sup> *Kirk in Scotland*, 44.

<sup>200</sup> Kernohan, *Nutshell*, 16.

Aberdeen professorship in 1881. A few other cases followed, culminating in the attempt against George Adam Smith in 1901-02, shortly after the United Free Church was established.<sup>201</sup> Confrontation was one aspect of the controversy in Scotland. The critics were portrayed as undermining the faith of those in the congregations. Equally, the traditionalists were dismissed as obscurantist, unwilling to face the intellectual challenge of critical scholarship.

### 7. Buchan's Father as Controversialist

Remaining loyal to traditional orthodoxy, but not in any unthinking way, Mr Buchan cannot be simply classed among the obscurantists. Though he had not studied in Germany, he was very much aware of what was happening there and was able to respond with argument, rather than with simple prejudice. This is evident in his book which includes sermons and addresses.<sup>202</sup> It is likely that such understanding was fuelled by his long and close friendship with Dr Norman Walker, another intelligent traditionalist deeply involved over the years with Free Church journalism.

Mr Buchan became engaged in the work of the local Presbytery which he enjoyed, and 'for many years was a member of the Standing Committees, latterly being Secretary to the Sabbath Observance Committee.' Professor Stalker commended him for this.<sup>203</sup> Perhaps rather surprisingly, he was prepared to join in with the union of 1900 when the Free Church came together with the United Presbyterians. Buchan noted the influence of a speech at the Free Church Assembly of 1899. Like many others, Andrew Jameson, afterwards the judge, Lord Ardwall, still had reservations about union, but was convinced by the accumulated force of argument:<sup>204</sup> constitutionally, both churches were ruled by a majority for union; no essential principle was involved; Establishment was now no great issue; the Gospel calls for oneness. Both men shared a similar theology. Mr Buchan, who was probably one of the 'many [who] would be guided by his words',<sup>205</sup> would have been saddened that union proved ineffective in purging the new denomination of the liberal elements growing within it. Honeyman believed that 'he had to suffer much' because of 'his advocacy of the doctrines of the founders of the

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<sup>201</sup> Issues fully discussed in Riesen, *Criticism and Faith*.

<sup>202</sup> *First Things*.

<sup>203</sup> *Mem.*, 9; 'Obituary'.

<sup>204</sup> Buchan, *Ardwall*, 92-117.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.



Free Church.<sup>206</sup>

‘It was his delight, when a member of the Annual Assembly, to stir up all the strife he could by indicting for heresy some popular preacher or professor.’<sup>207</sup> Buchan’s assertion is not greatly endorsed by evidence. His father’s close friend Dr Walker annually wrote up the Assembly proceedings in daily letters published in the *Free Church Monthly Record* each July. Mr Buchan’s name does not appear much in these, which does not mean that he was not strongly supportive of such public stances. Concerning ‘The Near Trial of Smith’ (1902), the process began with the adverse Memorial (September 1901), though Mr Buchan was no more than ‘one of the party’,<sup>208</sup> leaving for South Africa in December. We can reasonably assume that he endorsed Walker’s reaction in the press that the church at large rejected Smith’s critical views; condemned the rashness of scholars publishing ‘debatable hypotheses’; and ‘while regarding Professor Smith with admiration and affection as one of their best, most scholarly, and most earnestly evangelical men, they cannot but think that he has been guilty of serious inconsideration.’<sup>209</sup>

Nevertheless, at the 1892 Assembly it was Mr Buchan who proposed delaying the appointment to the Hebrew chair in Glasgow because of ‘unsoundness’ in one of the candidates (Smith), the other’s views (Harper of Melbourne) being unknown.<sup>210</sup> His seconder was Murdoch Macaskill of Dingwall, who appears more frequently in Walker’s record of proceedings.<sup>211</sup> Mr Buchan’s side defended traditional belief by asserting the spiritual view that those who approached the Bible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit would find it was the Word of God. Still living at home, perhaps this incident inspired Buchan to suppose that it was typical.

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<sup>206</sup> *Mem.*, 322.

<sup>207</sup> *MHD*, 246.

<sup>208</sup> *SJB*, 43, 126.

<sup>209</sup> Quoted by ‘Scottish Presbyterian’ (pseud.); *Glasgow Herald*, 24/05/03, Walker reported fully.

<sup>210</sup> ‘Strong opposition was offered [...] but Mr Buchan was ruled to be in order, and [...] allowed to finish his speech’ – Macaskill seconded. Presumably this was when a stranger asked Mrs Buchan, ‘Who is that disagreeable minister?’, receiving the cold reply ‘He comes from Glasgow.’ *UU*, 90; Walker, *Free Church Monthly*, 163. He seconded a motion (withdrawn) favouring Disestablishment as a prelude to union, *ibid.* (1895), 161, and moved adopting the Report on Romanism and Ritualism, *ibid.* (1898), 165.

<sup>211</sup> Macaskill objected to a book by Dr Bruce, *ibid.*, (1883), 156–57. Two days after Mr Buchan’s intervention about Professor Smith, Macaskill made a speech on erring over Holy Scripture, felt by many to be based on ‘unreliable grounds’, and leading to ‘the most regrettable’ scenes. Though the speakers ‘kept their heads’ a large proportion ‘lost for a time all control of themselves.’ (1892), 167. Three years later Macaskill led, attacking Drummond’s *Ascent of Man*, (1895), 160. Mr Buchan is unnamed in any of these interventions.

Buchan believed that his father's combativeness was partly intellectual, as he 'liked a clear pattern and a clean logic'; partly the 'love of old ways and a fast vanishing world'; partly reaction 'against two things [he] whole-heartedly disliked – a glib modernism and the worship of fashion.' The last two attitudes were as true of Buchan himself, but we may wonder about his failing to mention that his father opposed radical teaching on the inspiration of the Scriptures because of spiritual conviction. He told us that, while engaging in controversy, his father profoundly respected 'the heretic', but 'he conceived it his duty to defend the faith of his fathers against every innovator.'<sup>212</sup> Shaw agreed that 'his thoughts of men were always generous.'<sup>213</sup> Buchan comforted himself that 'in the beleaguered city of the Faith' his father spent more time in 'easing the life of the civilians and strengthening their hope' than in manning 'a gun on the dogmatic ramparts.'<sup>214</sup>

Buchan's leaving for Oxford (autumn 1895) was almost a clean break from living in Glasgow. Only returning home for short visits, thereafter he would faithfully hear his father preach. There was no emotional rift, but very little opportunity for Mr Buchan to counter with argument the other influences upon his son, even if that had been sought.

Buchan came to accept a critical view of the Bible similar to that of the 'Believing Critics', forming a different view of Smith than his Father and leading to a variant view of the inspiration of Scripture. Charles Dick may have opened up the way, for the United Presbyterian Church was notably more liberal in theology than the Free Church.

## 8. Friendship Between Smith and Buchan

Father and son may have had a common regard for Smith's *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*. Both were deeply interested in nature, countryside, and the Bible. Published the year Buchan left home (1894), it had an enormous influence on evangelical interest in the restoration of Israel. Buchan had an extraordinary ability to imagine himself in, and describe, landscape he had never seen,<sup>215</sup> and would become a Zionist.

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<sup>212</sup> MHD, 246.

<sup>213</sup> Mem., 315.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid, 247.

<sup>215</sup> 'Buchan was remarkable in writing 'about places he had never visited, and warfare he had never experienced', Webb, *Companion*, 24; Usborne, *Clubland Heroes*, 85; in *Salute to Adventures* reading about the Civil War provided vivid descriptions not yet having visited Virginian, DD, 115.

Like Smith, Buchan no longer accepted biblical inerrancy, though, in a real sense, they both remained evangelical. Nevertheless, it would be helpful to establish when this little explored relationship commenced. In 1918, they had considerable contact when Buchan invited Smith to undertake a propaganda tour of the United States. An invitation for a similar purpose arrived simultaneously from an American Christian group, and an association headed by former President Taft, aiming to defeat Prussian militarism and found a League of Nations for peace. Such conjoined initiatives make it likely that Buchan had been engineering this for some while.<sup>216</sup>

That the two men were already on very familiar terms is reflected in greetings in their correspondence.<sup>217</sup> Smith's widow reveals that 'our friend, John Buchan', was instrumental in getting permission for their daughter to travel as her father's secretary.<sup>218</sup> They were more closely involved co-authoring their book on Union, Buchan representing the Auld Kirk and Smith the Free Church. This did not arise spontaneously out of the Union Assembly of October 1929, when ministers of the two churches met together for the first time. Buchan was not present,<sup>219</sup> though he was a delegate at the Church of Scotland Assembly in May when this had been announced. Smith was then at the last United Free Church Assembly, and they may have discussed matters then. Successful collaboration came about because they already knew and had confidence in each other. On Buchan's second term as Lord High Commissioner (1934), the Smiths were guests, with daughter, Margaret, resident as a Maid of Honour at Holyroodhouse.<sup>220</sup>

However, there were much more long-standing connections. As early as 1904, Dick enquired about theological reviewing in *The Spectator* where Buchan was Assistant Editor. 'Gore or the Bishop of Durham [Handley Moule] or Professor Gibb of Cambridge' reviewed the more important books. Knowing Gore personally, he cited him familiarly without a title. Then

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<sup>216</sup> NLS Acc. 9446 'Correspondence of George Adam Smith' – 'American Tour 1918'.

<sup>217</sup> Buchan addressed him 'out of the blue', as 'My dear Sir George' and ends with 'kindest regards, Yours very sincerely'. Similarly, Smith's reply is to 'My dear Colonel Buchan' and ends with similar warm greetings. Customary correspondence at the time would have had nothing more than 'Dear Mr....Yours sincerely.'

<sup>218</sup> Lilian A. Smith, *George Adam Smith*, 169.

<sup>219</sup> Perhaps because he was ill that autumn. Ursula Buchan, 'Buchan's Health', 51.

<sup>220</sup> Smith, *George Adam Smith*, 237.

he adds ‘sometimes also George Adam Smith’ again without including the title.<sup>221</sup> Both young men had known of Smith in Glasgow, but there is a more certain starting point.

As far as preachers go, we have considerable knowledge of their influence upon Buchan in Oxford. On weekdays and Sunday evening he attended the Brasenose Chapel. Dr Bussell, tutor and Chaplain, reminisced: ‘I was especially grateful to him for his excellent example in attending our Chapel and showing a respect, Presbyterian as he was, for our Anglican creed and observancy’, and ‘after his loyalty and piety I recall his thirst for knowledge.’ He acknowledges Buchan’s early fascination with the seventeenth century for ‘one day on which he was never absent from prayers was the day of King Charles’s execution.’ This youthful enthusiasm for Charles is interesting. Though more muted than his father’s, we shall find his respect for the Covenanters could be held together with Jacobite loyalties. Buchan kept up with Bussell, telling him as late as 1939 of his devotion to the King and Queen, but ‘confessing himself an ex-Jacobite.’<sup>222</sup>

On Sunday mornings, he sometimes heard the University sermon, listening to Gore and Scott Holland among others, but went regularly to the Congregational Chapel at Mansfield College, there being then no Presbyterian presence in Oxford.<sup>223</sup> It was nearly a decade since this had been relocated to the city (1886), facilitated by the removal of the requirement that members of the University must be communicant Anglicans (1871).

## 9. Mansfield College and its Chapel

The Mansfield connection is worth exploring. Termly lists of preachers were published in the College *Record*. During Buchan’s four years at Brasenose, Principal Fairbairn, himself a Scot and a Critic, attracted a Dean of the Thistle, noted Non-conformists, Baptists, and a number of Free Church of Scotland ministers. Preachers from Scotland sometimes amounted to twenty-five per cent a term. Among those from the Free Church were notable ‘Believing Critics’ including A. B. Davidson, Smith’s great mentor in his views of scripture, ‘the subject of more idolatry than the kings of Israel’ among his students.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> NLS .2 to Dick, 3 Temple Gns., 25/08/1904.

<sup>222</sup> The Buchans had been as children. *SJB*, 17; see below 134. These personal reminiscences are quoted in *The Brazen Nose*, 41. Bussell outlived Buchan.

<sup>223</sup> An attempt to plant a Church of Scotland had not been endorsed, Hicks, *Henry Bazeley*.

<sup>224</sup> In academic years 1895-99, Scottish preachers also included A. B. Davidson, James Denny, Marcus Dods, and T.

George Adam Smith himself was another. With secure Scottish roots, Buchan is likely to have ensured that he heard his fellow countrymen whenever possible. The last preacher before Buchan went down was John Marshall Lang. Newly made Principal of Aberdeen University, his son, Cosmo (afterwards Archbishop), was well known to Buchan, later officiating at his wedding.

Although a Congregationalist foundation, there was a desire to nurture others. In Buchan's years, there were appointments to 'the office of College pastor' from outside Oxford. 'These all resided for short periods in the College, preaching on Sundays, delivering lectures, both formal and informal, assisting weekly sermon-classes, giving personal instruction', and 'endeavouring to be of some service to Free Churchman generally throughout the University.' Four ministers were appointed to this pastoral role.<sup>225</sup>

Smith appears to have been the most active of these. He preached at Mansfield thrice during his first pastoral visit in May 1895, another three during Buchan's time, more than anyone except the Principal. Buchan must have heard him in Oxford and, given the more general brief to encourage others within the whole University, will very likely have met him then, if not in Glasgow. Smith's widow recalls that at Mansfield 'he came into contact with a large number of undergraduates.' A student heard him preach in the Chapel so crowded that some were sitting on the floor, appreciating 'his keen sense of literary values, his deep insight into personality, and, above all, his remarkable gift for applying the ancient Scriptures to our modern needs.'<sup>226</sup> Buchan may have been among those sitting on the floor.

Buchan's familiarity with Smith in 1904 must have originated in Oxford, or possibly earlier. Another reason why Buchan may have known Smith in Glasgow stems from his enduring friendship with the Gilbert Murrays begun there, for they were Smith's friends.<sup>227</sup> Even before Buchan's time, Smith had been coming to preach at Mansfield. The link continued and he was among those considered to succeed Principal Fairbairn in 1909. In the same year, he began twenty-five years as Principal of the University of Aberdeen.

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M. Lindsay. Dr Hugh Black, assistant to Alexander Whyte at Free St George's, Edinburgh, stayed with Buchan's friend, at Balliol; Buchan dined with them and promised to look Black up in Edinburgh: NLS.2 to Mother, 03/12/1898.

<sup>225</sup> *Report of the Council of Mansfield College Oxford 1893-94*: 9-10.

<sup>226</sup> Smith, *George Adam Smith*, 72.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

## 10. Smith and Buchan: Shared Interests

Smith and Buchan had in common many things besides the gospel and a critical view of the Old Testament. Both found relaxation in mountaineering and were elected to The Alpine Club; were good with young people; had many friends; shared an interest in topography and a brilliance in describing it; were ecumenically tolerant but remained convinced Presbyterians; believed in the War that the Allied cause was just; were not deterred by bereavement though Smith lost two sons, Buchan a brother and close friends; worked hard to win support in the U.S.A.; were wrong in supposing that World Wars would bring religious revival, Smith particularly in the First;<sup>228</sup> Buchan still hoped for it in the Second<sup>229</sup> and believed, after 1919 that

there was a steady drift towards some kind of faith. A proof was the number of distinguished converts to the Catholic Church; at the other end of the scale the Calvinism of Karl Barth; the revival of Thomism; the embittered puritanism of certain men of letters; and a variety of new evangels, some of them foolish enough, but all involving a stumbling quest for God. The glib Agnostic had gone out of fashion.<sup>230</sup>

They had a love of the United States and enjoyed visiting them; were strong supporters of the Empire, the League of Nations and Zionism; were elected to The Athenaeum in 1916; were Presidents of the Walter Scott Club, Buchan (1923), Smith (1930); co-authored a book; were married in London, long and happily by, and to, Anglicans; and were loved by their children.

## 11. The Influence of Karl Barth's 'Bombshell'

During Buchan's later years, scholars increasingly placed the New Testament under critical scrutiny, with even more distasteful results for many believers. In Canada, Buchan quoted F. H. Bradley saying: 'I find myself now taking more and more as literal fact what I used in my youth to admire and love as poetry.'<sup>231</sup> Thus, his view of religion became more absolute

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<sup>228</sup> Campbell, *Fixing Indemnity*, 173.

<sup>229</sup> *MHD*, 292-93: 'Our peril has been indifference [...] I believe – and this is my crowning optimism – that the challenge with which we are faced may restore to us that manly humility which alone gives power. It may bring us back to God. In that case victory is assured. The Faith is an anvil which has worn out many hammers.'

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>231</sup> *Pres.*, 8, quoting F. H. Bradley.

than relative. Convinced that the only hope for the world lay in the propagation of the Christian Gospel world-wide, he said so.

The work of Karl Barth (1886-1968), the Swiss theologian, became another ‘key’, having a considerable effect upon Buchan. His *Der Römerbrief* (thoroughly re-written second edition, 1922) had been described as ‘the bombshell that fell into the playground of the theologians.’<sup>232</sup> After the publication of Hoskyns’ translation, *The Epistle to the Romans* (1933), this influence was more widely disseminated. With close links to Oxford University during the Elsfeld years, Buchan soon had an awareness of this less liberal and more dogmatic approach to studying the Bible. It ran counter to the theology that he had come to accept.

From 1933 onwards, he used suitable public occasions to recommend Barth. Smith wrote of Buchan being able to discuss him with ‘the professors’ when he was Lord High Commissioner (1933, 1934), having mentioned Barth in his addresses.<sup>233</sup> He commended him when he visited the Free Church Assembly in those years. When in Canada, he spoke of finding in ‘the teaching of Karl Barth’ that ‘which though we may differ from many of its details, is firm in the fundamentals’,<sup>234</sup> though Buchan did not elaborate on his reservations. Finally, he wrote that ‘except as regards dogma, [his father] had little of the conventional Calvinistic temper’ having ‘no sympathy with the legalism of that creed, the notion of a contract between God and man drawn up by some celestial conveyancer’.<sup>235</sup>

## 12. Barth and Mr Buchan

Buchan ended by ‘wishing that [his father] had lived to read Karl Barth, for their views had much in common.’ It is likely that this was an over-optimistic hope. While Mr Buchan would have welcomed a return to the serious study of the Scriptures as received, he would not have applauded other aspects of Barth’s theology such as his view of inspiration and his tendency towards universalism. We do not know whether Buchan’s own reservations about Barth had anything to do with such issues. Yet his statement raises questions about how far he really understood his father’s theology of inspiration, rather than simply reacting against it. He can give the impression that his theology is not always very consistently well thought out. Just

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<sup>232</sup> Karl Adam, quoted in McConnachie, ‘Teaching of Karl Barth,’ 385.

<sup>233</sup> *SJB*, 364.

<sup>234</sup> *Pres.*, 10.

<sup>235</sup> *MHD*, 247.

as he had found it surprising that his father was a theologian because he was no philosopher, perhaps the counter charge can be made that though Buchan was a philosopher and a believer, he was no theologian. To be a Christian, one does not need to be either, and for Buchan Philosophy was ‘always an intellectual exercise, not a quest for a faith’; his Christianity was secure and unshaken by philosophical enquiry,<sup>236</sup> This is another instance of Buchan’s Christianity being similar to that of his father, who in his sermons and writings certainly shows an awareness of the work of philosophers, for he was no blind and unthinking dogmatist.

### 13. Buchan and the Appeal of Barth

It is not hard to seek out why Buchan was attracted to Barth. In his later years, Buchan moved to a more dogmatic view of Christian belief, using phrases like ‘the Word is final’ rather than human reason. Greig has discussed Barth’s effect on Buchan,<sup>237</sup> and issues over which Buchan would have found Barth attractive.

Barth had rediscovered the study of the biblical text without seeing it through the same lenses as liberal critics. Transmitted through human agency, it contained the possibility of error, but its message could only be discerned with divine help. God could not be known except through Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

There was also some change in Buchan towards the ‘Believing Critics’ and their rational views. However, in the accounts of Smith’s life by both his widow and later biographer, there is virtually no mention of Barth, while Buchan took note and was moved to re-think. In the Introduction to the English edition, Barth states his message to those who read his work. ‘It was, and is to direct them to Holy Scripture, to the Epistle of Paul to the Romans,’ so that ‘they may at least be brought face to face with the subject matter of the Scriptures’, for ‘above all else, it must serve the other Book where Jesus is present in His Church. Theology is *ministerium verbi divini*. It is nothing more nor less.’<sup>238</sup> Buchan saw that if such a purpose was faithfully adhered to, it would be bound to please his father.

Greig also pointed out a shared social concern. Buchan first had this from the Calvinism of his parents’ upbringing, and later ‘was never so thirled to his own [Conservative] party label’

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<sup>236</sup> MHD, 37.

<sup>237</sup> Greig, ‘Buchan and Calvinism,’ 7-16.

<sup>238</sup> Barth, *Romans*, x.



to ignore it. He concluded that ‘Barth’s relevance in both religious and social issues, and in his political concern was important to Buchan the public figure.’<sup>239</sup>

#### **14. The War and the Flight from Liberalism**

Both men were profoundly influenced by the effects of the First World War. Barth, the neutral Swiss trained in Germany, was appalled to see his liberal theological mentors readily embracing their country’s militarism. This led him to renewed study, and inspired him to rework his beliefs, becoming disenchanted with much of the liberalism to which he had previously adhered.

There is evidence that Buchan was also greatly sobered by that experience, having had to cope with devastating personal losses. Rather than driving him away from God, his Christian faith was strengthened. The War, with its terrible slaughter, was an indictment of the ability of human reason to act wisely. Moreover, Smith’s rather triumphalist endorsement of the Allied cause, useful though it undoubtedly was in propaganda, was inadequate as a Christian response.<sup>240</sup>

Buchan would have applauded Barth’s stand against the Nazis. This cost him his Professorship at Bonn after the Barmen Declaration (1934), and Buchan’s opposition put him on the Nazi hit list had Germany won the war.<sup>241</sup>

As the outbreak of the Second World War overwhelmed his final days, Buchan saw the Christian faith, and not human endeavour, as the only real hope for mankind. In thus becoming less tolerant he was brought closer to his father’s views. Mr Buchan would have approved such a shift away from liberalism.

#### **15. Predestination and Free Will**

It is also evident that Buchan had been unconvinced about Predestination and Hell: the ‘material rewards and penalties’ of the Elder Calvinism ‘meant nothing to me.’<sup>242</sup> This is a complex matter, for

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<sup>239</sup> Greig, *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>240</sup> Campbell, *Fixing Indemnity*, 173.

<sup>241</sup> *LJB*, 197.

<sup>242</sup> *MHD*, 36.

the issue of hell and universalism is closely interconnected with other difficult and debated theological issues, such as predestination and free will, the validity of retributive punishment, the authority of the Bible, and (most centrally) the nature of God, the meaning of and the relationship between His love and His justice.<sup>243</sup>

Greig held that Barth's commentary on Romans 'presented an exegesis less legalistic and more "spiritualised" than that of the theologically "liberal" Protestants whom Barth disowned' and summarises his fresh view of predestination as

A kind of universalistic salvation, in that God is represented in all his absolute otherness as revealing himself 'in' Jesus Christ in an act of grace. Jesus is at once the unique Reprobate for human beings (he was crucified) and (as being resurrected) uniquely the Elect One for them.<sup>244</sup>

We do not know if this was one of Buchan's reservations, but it is doubtful whether Mr Buchan would have been convinced, or found much in Barth to applaud apart from disenchantment with liberal theology.

## 16. Buchan and Conversion

We cannot doubt that Buchan was acquainted with the call to Christian conversion from his early years. This was the chief burden of his father's ministry. It certainly included the alternatives of heaven or hell from which one needed to be 'saved'. Looking back, Buchan said of his father that while believing

Profoundly in the fact of 'conversion', the turning of the face to a new course [...] he would insist upon the arduousness of the pilgrimage as well as upon the moments of high vision and its ultimate reward. His religion was tender and humane, but it was also well-girded. He had no love for those who took their ease in Zion.<sup>245</sup>

The 'Believing Critics' also preached for conversion, but how much did he reject or share this view?

We have seen (above, 52) that Buchan 'entertained great scorn for hell.'<sup>246</sup> That, and his great sense of toleration, making deep friendships with some who were not believers like Murray and Asquith, and feeling himself temperamentally drawn to the Platonists, might indicate that he tended towards some kind of Christian universalism. Bauckham summarised

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<sup>243</sup> Bauckham, 'Universalism,' 47.

<sup>244</sup> 'Buchan and Calvinism,' 13.

<sup>245</sup> *MHD*, 247.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-37.

this as ‘a far cry from Jesus’ message of present salvation to be apprehended or lost in immediate response to his preaching.’<sup>247</sup> Would Buchan have been troubled by this? The evidence is not clear.

In ‘the incarnationist Christianity which Buchan developed,’ he ‘did not think a narrow atonement-based theology sufficient to succour humanity. For him, religion was a ‘spiritual concept of life’ based on the love of our fellow-men, the sinking of ourselves in a higher interest.’<sup>248</sup>

What has exalted our conception of humanity far beyond anything dreamed of by the philosophers of Greece and Rome [...] is the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation [...] for nineteen centuries men have believed that for their sake the Word became flesh, and the Eternal took upon Himself our mortality.<sup>249</sup>

What is certain is that Buchan wrote about conversion to Christ more especially after the end of the War. This may simply be because there were then occasions, which had not arisen before, when it was suitable to raise it. Lee’s rather cynical conclusion to explain Buchan’s inconsistencies is that he told his audience what it wanted to hear.<sup>250</sup> A more charitable, and more plausible, view would be that his attitudes changed over the years, or that he used words in different ways. Nevertheless, the modus of Buchan’s writing with understanding about conversion is consistent with him having experienced this himself.

There are clear instances of Buchan proclaiming the need for conversion. At the opening of Cathcart Church in 1925 he declared, ‘within these walls human beings will fight the old fight for their soul’s salvation, and will make the great decision between the broad path and the narrow path’ and ended with the motto of Glasgow University. It quotes the words of Jesus being ‘the way, the truth, and the life’, which Buchan called ‘the greatest words ever spoken in the hearing of mankind’; they continue with ‘no one comes to the Father but by me.’ (John 14:6)

Though he believed that ‘the Gospel of Christ will have to be re-stated with fresh applications in each succeeding age’, he was also sure that ‘the essential testimony [...] will remain the same.’ He told the Religious Tract Society (1927) that ‘there is something magnificent’ in their stated aim ‘that if a person were to read a tract, even of the smallest size,

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<sup>247</sup> Bauckham, ‘Universalism,’ 54.

<sup>248</sup> Parry, ‘Thirty-Nine Articles’, 212.

<sup>249</sup> *Canadian Occasions*, 129-30.

<sup>250</sup> Lee, ‘Buchan and Christian Platonism,’ 35.

and should never have an opportunity of seeing another, he might be plainly taught the way of salvation.’<sup>251</sup>

In 1929, he wrote that ‘missionary work [...] can no longer be treated as a *parergon* of the Christian Church; it is one of its most urgent practical duties.’<sup>252</sup> Again, in his closing Address to the General Assembly (1933): ‘The Church dare not, in its preoccupation with current duties, forget its essential mission, which is the preaching of the Gospel.’

In *Cromwell* (1934), he seems to draw back a little. Though describing Cromwell’s conversion to Christ, he wrote of ‘the experience which theology calls “conversion”, and which, in some form or other, is the destiny of every thinking man. “Wilt thou join with the dragons; wilt thou join with the Gods?”’ That view includes Christian conversion, but not exclusively. One could equally well be ‘converted’ to any ‘ism’, to Communism or to Islam. Presumably, one would have found a light by which to live and die, and thereby ‘made one’s soul’ as Buchan liked to say. Parry also saw ‘an allegory of the conversion experience’ in man ‘mastering the savagery of nature’ and ‘crusty bookworms’ made ‘new men’ by ‘open-air adventure’,<sup>253</sup> presumably because they also involved turning points.

Elsewhere, Buchan was quite specific about the need for Christian conversion as an absolute. Sometimes he would make the distinction by adding a qualification, such as in the old fashioned ‘evangelical sense.’ In Canada, he said, ‘life is always changing and enlarging its content, and the divine effluence which illuminates it must pass through new lenses.’ Nevertheless

the essentials of religion can never change. There is still for every man the choice of two paths and “conversion in its plain evangelical sense is still the greatest factor in any life”. Bunyan’s mountain gate has still to be passed, which “has room for body and soul, but not for body and soul and sin.”<sup>254</sup>

He continued: ‘there are certain fundamentals in our Christian faith which are beyond time and change. We base ourselves upon a great historical fact’ (above, 50). His quoting of John 3:16 is indicative of his continuing belief in individual salvation through conversion to faith in Christ.

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<sup>251</sup> NLS.1, 02/04/1925; the parish of Buchan’s youthful home; the minister J. A. C. McKellar, a school friend, not Dick as Lee states.

<sup>252</sup> *Kirk in Scotland*, 228.

<sup>253</sup> *JBOC*, 67; Parry, ‘Thirty-Nine Articles’, 216.

<sup>254</sup> *Pres.*, 6.

Such statements do not guarantee that Buchan did not tend towards universalism. However, at the end of *Memory Hold the Door*, he chose some words from Blake's 'Jerusalem: To the Deists'. Given Blake's unorthodox views on religion, he is a strange authority to quote, but Buchan does not do so to endorse the poet's views. The very words are memorable and express Buchan's own belief, just the kind of brief quotation to put into a commonplace book: 'Man must and will have some religion; if he has not the religion of Jesus he will have the religion of Satan, and will erect a synagogue of Satan.' Buchan surely expressed a very strong belief in the urgent need to proclaim the gospel, leading to conversion.<sup>255</sup> His view is now focused.

## 17. Conclusion

What the 'Believing Critics' were beginning to teach as early as Buchan's boyhood explains the attitude to the Bible he came to adopt instead of the traditional orthodoxy of his father. Among such men, only Smith had a continuing relationship with Buchan over many years and was probably the most influential. In the second of his Lyman Beecher lectures at Yale (1899), Smith was wrongly triumphant: 'Modern Criticism had won its war against the Traditional Theories. It only remains to fix the amount of the indemnity.'<sup>256</sup> Even a supporter like Principal Rainy was unhappy, since criticism of this kind would not remain solely in the hands of believers, and scientific conclusions were not assured or likely to endure without modification and challenge. The 'war' was not won, and 'the indemnity' was never fixed. Critical views in the long run were likely to militate against the Evangel that Smith sought to preserve and proclaim. Mr Buchan believed that he was standing upon the solid rock of enduring divine revelation. In a different way, Smith and Buchan thought so too.

Smith's biographer, Iain Campbell, is among those for whom the critical views of the Bible as taught by scholars like Smith, and accepted by laymen like Buchan, contributed to the undermining and decline of Christian belief in Scotland, while it was their sincere desire and intention that it should only be furthered by such means. Buchan, who is very much inclined to cover his tracks and does not tell us much that we would like to know about himself, showed

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<sup>255</sup> Some of Buchan's conversion emphasis sounds more like D. L. Moody or even Charles Finney, 'a practical Arminianism' where people are free to choose for or against Christ. Bebbington, 'Moody'.

<sup>256</sup> Quoted in Campbell, *Fixing Indemnity*, 130.

some awareness of this, drawing nearer again to his father's position on the Scriptures. This will be discussed later. In the end, it is no surprise that he could write so movingly and appreciatively about his father in his memoirs, while not entirely abandoning his criticism.

Mr Buchan provided the deep paternal relationship through which Buchan adopted the Christian faith. Though Smith assisted him in his intellectual rationale, there were so many others who would encourage him in his Christian pilgrimage. Lord Ardwall, father of his friend Johnny Jameson, was firmly in the same Free Church tradition as Mr Buchan, but much more a man of the world. He was a larger than life personality within the county and legal establishment.<sup>257</sup> Buchan found him immensely attractive as 'the last of the great "characters" on the Scottish Bench and a figure who might have stepped straight out of a Raeburn canvas.'<sup>258</sup> What Buchan wrote of Ardwall is as true of himself:

[Calvinism] is a strong creed, – capable of grievous distortion sometimes, too apt, perhaps, to run wild in dark and vehement emotions, or in the other extreme to dwarf to a harsh formality; but those of us who have been brought up under its shadow know that to happier souls it can be the very tree of life, with leaves for the healing of the nations.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> In partial emulation, Buchan acquired Elsfield Manor and became a Bencher of the Inner Temple.

<sup>258</sup> *MHD*, 83.

<sup>259</sup> Buchan, *Lord Ardwall*, 153; *DD*, 113.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CHRISTIAN FRIENDS AMONG BUCHAN'S CONTEMPORARIES

‘The foundation of [Buchan's] life was  
the principle of Christian love. He really loved people.’  
(Rowse, *WF*, 176)

#### 1. Buchan and Friendship

From the early Elsfield years, the Buchans entertained to tea on Sunday afternoons undergraduate children of friends<sup>260</sup> and others, including a radical and truculent young man, A. L. Rowse (1903-97). From a poor home in Cornwall, Rowse had received much encouragement from another Christian friend of Buchan, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch (1863-1944).<sup>261</sup> Soon after graduating, he ‘ceased to believe in the Christian religion’ and later did ‘not hold with religious belief.’<sup>262</sup> Differing over politics, too, Rowse believed that ‘it was a special recommendation with him that one was on the other side’ and ‘with one young neophyte of the Left, ardent, impatient, fanatical, touchy, he was patience and courtesy itself.’<sup>263</sup> This kindness and hospitality continued.<sup>264</sup> When Buchan died ‘the Editor of *The Times* [...] had never received so many tributes to a public figure, sheaves of them pouring in from men of all walks and condition of life.’<sup>265</sup>

Buchan's close life-long friends included contemporaries who shared his Christian faith. All were important for understanding Buchan's enduring commitment, and not only the Christians. His great capacity for friendship embraced some whom he much admired, enjoying their company without being influenced into rejecting his deepest beliefs. Besides such lasting relationships, others were, of necessity, superficial and ephemeral, involving people of all

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<sup>260</sup> *SJB*, 225.

<sup>261</sup> Rowse, *Quiller-Couch*, 3: ‘Q believed that writing was only part of life; life in the round came first.’ Like Buchan, ‘by nature rather than by conviction’, he enjoyed ‘adventure and the romance of life’, of the other school than the aesthetes.

<sup>262</sup> Ollard, *Diaries of Rowse*, 147, 187.

<sup>263</sup> *WF*, 175.

<sup>264</sup> Rowse, *Man of Thirties*, ‘dined with the hospitable Buchans at Elsfield’, 25; ‘good friends to me’, 112: ‘Buchans regularly asked me [...] to Dinner each term’, 154.

<sup>265</sup> *WF*, 174.

backgrounds and differing attitudes towards religious faith. It is necessary to be selective. Few have been explored in depth.

For Walter Elliot (1888-1958), Buchan's fellow Borderer and Parliamentary Christian friend, he was 'interested, appreciative, receptive'; 'was interested in you'; 'liked to know your name, even your nickname, whether he got it right or not'; 'would stand and faced you and discuss endlessly'; 'eager to speak, eager to listen.' 'I do not remember that he ever broke off a conversation'; 'when he could not meet people he invented them.'<sup>266</sup>

## 2. Two School Friends: Dick and Edgar

Charles Hill Dick (1874–1952), whose clerical background was well sprinkled with Non-conformists and an Anglican, followed his father (a United Presbyterian) into the ministry of the United Free Church. He and Buchan were very close at school and university, going on long walking and cycling tours together.<sup>267</sup>

When Buchan left Glasgow, Dick stayed on, graduating in Arts, and in Divinity (1901). There are twenty-five surviving letters to Dick in the Buchan Archive from 1893-95, and having gone to Oxford Buchan sent him seven in his first term. This dependence on his old friend lessened as he got settled, with sixteen letters in 1896, ten in 1897, and only three in 1898, when Buchan threatened to come to Galloway and hear Dick's first student sermon, and cycled seventy miles to do so.<sup>268</sup>

So beware of airing any heretical opinions, for I am strictly orthodox. When I was young and godless and intended to go in for the Church, I used to resolve that my first sermon would be on Prince Charles from the text in Jeremiah – 'Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.' I make you a present of the suggestion. By the way, who is the 1st Isaiah? Was the 2nd a sort of Second Mrs Tanqueray or anything of that sort?<sup>269</sup>

Buchan added: 'If you preach about the Blessed Virgin, you'll get shot out of the Unreformed Presbyterian Kirk. So be warned; or better still, leave the U.P.K. and join the Reformed Presbyterians, like J. Edgar and myself.'<sup>270</sup> More chaffing, for Dick was being trained to follow

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<sup>266</sup> *WF*, 134.

<sup>267</sup> *SJB*, 39.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 69. NLS.2 to Dick, Broughton Green, 26/07/1898.

<sup>269</sup> Quoted in *SJB*, 69, but without comment.

<sup>270</sup> NLS.2 to Dick, Broughton Green, 26/07/1898 (see above).



his father into the United Presbyterians, while Edgar's father had been ordained (1863) into the Reformed Presbyterian Church<sup>271</sup> which united with Mr Buchan's Free Church (1876). Thus Buchan's fictional Unreformed Presbyterian Kirk bore the same initials as the denomination in which Dick was training. The Union of 1900 brought him and all three fathers into the United Free Church. A more national Presbyterian Church was achieved by the Union of 1929, which Buchan supported and wrote about.<sup>272</sup>

Soon after leaving Oxford, he encouraged Dick: 'May you prosper meanwhile, and unsettle the easy faith of the Unreformed Presbyterians',<sup>273</sup> and from South Africa:

Delighted to hear that your heart is so much in your work-profession [...] how very poor any work is in the long run which only leads to self-aggrandisement. Indeed, in any work it is only when we forget ourselves and our little careers that we do any good.

He also asked him to 'put up a petition for a wandering Scot the next time you tread Galloway or Tweeddale.'<sup>274</sup> Soon he taxed Dick for not writing: 'beginning to think that you had become a Moderator or some other exalted ecclesiastical dignitary, and disdained to correspond with the secular power.'<sup>275</sup>

In 1903, Buchan encouraged him to settle in a charge: 'you must, for you have abilities so far beyond the average minister,'<sup>276</sup> and hoped they would have another walking holiday when he returned that autumn. In 1904, he was commenting about the Scottish Church case,<sup>277</sup> while Dick followed up several Assistantships by being ordained into the United Free Church at Bellshill East (1906). Buchan regretted not being present, saying 'there is nothing I should have liked better than to give your flock an unvarnished account of your merits from the point of view of a boon-companion.' He sent 'my warmest wishes,'<sup>278</sup> having two months previously written, 'I am longing to have another crack with you.'<sup>279</sup> The following year, Buchan wrote about the 'great scandal' of 'Derelict Churches and the obstructive policy of the Wee Frees'

<sup>271</sup> Ewing, *Annals*, 1, 146; Lamb, J. A., *Fasti United Free Church*: The Reverend John Edgar, MA (ordained 1863, died 1904) minister of Barrowfield, Glasgow (SE of Mr Buchan in The Gorbals).

<sup>272</sup> For example, in *Kirk in Scotland*, 64-65.

<sup>273</sup> NLS.2, *ibid.*, Royal Thames Yacht Club, 22/04/1900 - again teasing Dick who belonged to the United Presbyterian Church.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, High Commissioner's Office, Johannesburg, 13/01/1902.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 20/09/1902.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, to Dick, Governor's House, Johannesburg, 16/03/03.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 Temple Gardens, 25/08/04.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, B.N.C., 29/04/06.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, Dick, 3 Temple Gardens, 21/02/1906.

much in 'the Scotch papers,' asking Dick for relevant cuttings and an occasional article for *The Scottish Review*.<sup>280</sup>

His friend moved to St Mary's, Moffat (1910), combining ministry with teaching at Moffat Academy when war broke out. Later he enlisted in the RASC and would have been commissioned but for the Armistice. From 1919 to 1924 he served the Church of Greyfriars, Port of Spain in Trinidad, but was then invalided home, interestingly having spent part of 1923 at Standard Oil's field in Eastern Venezuela, the knowledge of which may have helped Buchan with *The Courts of the Morning* (1929). Thereafter, he spent the rest of his life in Shetland, marrying a local schoolmistress after Buchan's death and dying there (1952). The Buchans visited him (1926).

After 1895, they spent the rest of their lives in widely different places, and by the time Buchan left Oxford their correspondence was declining. Indeed, there were no letters during Buchan's last academic year, with one late in 1899. In the following year, Buchan articulated that 'it seemed to me that we were drifting lamentably out of acquaintance.'<sup>281</sup> Nevertheless, they ensured that so strong a youthful and Christian friendship endured, despite only eighteen letters in the twenty years (1900-1919), only four from Elsfield and four from Canada.

'Lownie makes it clear from his extensive references to the Dick-Buchan correspondence that the friendship continued throughout their lives' for Buchan 'confided in Dick on most of the important political, personal, and literary events of his life.'<sup>282</sup> In reality, there were many more contacts than surviving correspondence suggests. It cloaks the Shetland visit (1926), and Buchan preaching in Church.<sup>283</sup> He appointed Dick as his Chaplain for successive occasions as Lord High Commissioner.<sup>284</sup> The intimacy endured to the end. Dick was immediately invited to stay at Elsfield Manor once the move there had been made, and he went to Canada during Buchan's first summer, preaching in the church where Buchan was an elder.

Both men had experience of church unions. Following that of 1900, Dick was ordained into the United Free Church in which Buchan's father was then serving. Buchan had some part

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<sup>280</sup> NLS.2, 36 Paternoster Row, 24/11/1907.

<sup>281</sup> Quoted in *SJB*, 69.

<sup>282</sup> Muir-Watt, 'Introductory Memoir,' iv.

<sup>283</sup> Harwood, 'Buchans in Shetland,' 61 gives some details of Buchan's sermon.

<sup>284</sup> *LJB*, 229.

in the 1929 Union of the United Free Church with the Church of Scotland. Dick's involvement was local, presiding over stormy kirk sessions in Shetland.

Both had been undergraduate editors. Buchan enabled Dick to begin with *The Compleat Angler* (1895). His major work was *Highways and Byways in Galloway and Carrick* (1916) which, reflecting their boyhood enthusiasm, Buchan said:

has been a great refreshment to me. To read those blessed names again recalls all the jolly days we used to have and makes one feel young again. I spent some very happy hours last night over it. [...] It must have been as delightful to write as it is to read - - not like my own damned screeds.<sup>285</sup>

This guidebook went through five editions over the next eighty-five years culminating in a memorial edition (2001).<sup>286</sup>

Lownie has warned that the volume of surviving letters between them does not necessarily imply that this was his closest male friendship.<sup>287</sup> It seems fair to say, however, that it was probably his longest, stretching from secondary schooldays throughout the rest of life and maintained thoroughly, if spasmodically.

John Edgar (born 1878) was another school and university friend in Glasgow. He went up to Balliol<sup>288</sup> the term after Buchan arrived at Brasenose so that the two were close contemporaries there also. Edgar was important as the catalyst introducing his friend to undergraduates at Balliol with its strong Scottish connections. They had their youthful dreams of a shooting-box in the Highlands, and also went on one long expedition together (spring 1898). During this Buchan experienced his first serious climb in Glencoe.<sup>289</sup>

Having graduated with a double First (Mods and History), Edgar went to Cairo, lecturing at the Khedivial College.<sup>290</sup> Shortly before going to South Africa Buchan told Dick from London that 'John Edgar writes to me often in great spirits. I think he has found work which

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<sup>285</sup> NLS.2, Foreign Office, 11/09/16.

<sup>286</sup> Dick, *Highways and Byways in Galloway*; Julia Muir-Watt's 'Introduction' states that Dick was 'almost deliberately self-effacing' and 'his own biography has been particularly difficult to trace.' Much of the biographical detail above is from her account.

<sup>287</sup> 'On the Trail', 4.

<sup>288</sup> Elliott, *Balliol*, 48.

<sup>289</sup> *SJB*, 151; *LJB*, 91.

<sup>290</sup> 'One of only three secondary schools in Egypt, managed like a barracks, disciplined by English teachers who used military commands and punishments.' Mūsā, *Education*, 27. If this report by a pupil at the College (1903-1907) is fair, it sufficiently explains Edgar's very brief tenure.

suits him.’ He hoped Dick would join them when Edgar passed through on his way home.<sup>291</sup> In 1903 he became Prince of Wales Professor of History at South Africa College, Cape Town, (essentially an examining agency for Oxford and Cambridge), later part of the University of the Cape of Good Hope. Buchan told Dick that he “is doing well. He has a fine chance if he does not behave foolishly and get mixed up in political intrigues.”<sup>292</sup> He married (1906), and wrote a number of educational books.

In a career change he became editor of the *Transvaal Leader* (1911-1914), which closed by agreement with the *Rand Daily Mail*. Thereafter, he returned to the Egyptian Education Department as Senior English Inspector. Appointed to the Third Class (there were five) of the Order of the Nile<sup>293</sup> in 1931, he returned home in the following year.<sup>294</sup> They had kept in touch during these long years abroad, and now Buchan was particularly kind to him. Edgar suffered a nervous breakdown and was unhappy in hospital. Buchan had him moved to the Warneford in Headington, at considerable cost to himself visiting every Friday, bringing books, and taking him for drives. The historian, G. M. Trevelyan, very suitably wrote to Buchan: ‘You are the man of all the world for backing your friends, and that is one of the many reasons why we all love you.’<sup>295</sup> They kept in touch, and Buchan told Dick (November 1939) that ‘John Edgar has completely recovered, as you know.’<sup>296</sup> Still corresponding shortly before he died, Susan later wrote asking for return of letters.

### 3. Gilbert Murray, O.M. (1866-1957)

Buchan’s son, William, has written that on youthful explorations in Tweeddale ‘he made friends as he went with shepherds, farmers, road menders, bagmen - every one who came his way’, nevertheless ‘he probably did not give of his best to his Glasgow contemporaries’ because of his schedule of work.<sup>297</sup> Nevertheless, schoolboy friendships with Charles Dick and John Edgar flourished there.

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<sup>291</sup> Buchan to Dick, 3 temple Gardens, 9th June 1901.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., Governor’s House, Johannesburg, 16th May 1903.

<sup>293</sup> *The London Gazette*, 21st August 1931, p.5466: detail supplied by Mrs Kate Keter, Archivist, Hutcheson’s School, Glasgow, March 2015.

<sup>294</sup> Edgar’s brief biographical details, see Elliott, *Balliol*, 48.

<sup>295</sup> *SJB*, 341.

<sup>296</sup> Buchan to Dick, Ottawa, 3rd November 1939.

<sup>297</sup> *WB*, 89.

On entering the University of Glasgow at seventeen, Buchan came under the influence of Murray, whose father was an easy-going, tolerant Catholic; his Protestant mother was similarly inclined. Gilbert was baptised a Catholic, and his father died when he was seven, leaving clear instructions that his children were to be brought up within a broad Christian environment and not a sectarian one. By the time Buchan met the twenty-six year old Professor of Greek at Glasgow he had rejected Christianity for Humanism. Murray, only nine years older than Buchan, taught him much, and a close and lasting friendship developed.

Next to the Christian faith, the second most important impetus in Buchan's life was the study of the Classics.<sup>298</sup> Murray was crucial in this as Buchan tells us, and through him acquired his love of Greek, and much else. He formed a close bond with his mentor's wife, Lady Mary. Lownie goes so far as to say that she became a kind of 'surrogate mother.'<sup>299</sup> They often corresponded, and in his younger days he stayed with them and sometimes holidayed also.

Because of the influence on Buchan, we can note that religious matters within Murray's household were complex. His own attitude to Christianity was not a virulent agnosticism. Lady Mary later became a Quaker, and a daughter was a strong Catholic advocate.<sup>300</sup> It was disputed among surviving members of the family whether Murray returned to his Catholic roots on his deathbed, after he had been visited by a priest.<sup>301</sup> Though dazzled by the Murrays, within this complexity of attitudes towards religion, Buchan was well able to maintain his own beliefs.

As a young man at Oxford, Murray had formed a lasting friendship with Charles Gore, later the well-known Anglican Bishop of Oxford. A decade after they met Murray would have liked him to officiate at his wedding.<sup>302</sup> From Gore he learnt to be more tolerant of formal religion. Early in his second year at Oxford, Buchan wrote to Murray about having been to church, and for the first time hearing Gore preach, thinking him 'very fine.'<sup>303</sup>

Murray's attitude was characterised by his son-in-law, Arnold Toynbee, as a mixture, sometimes uneasy, of 'polemical rationalism' and 'tolerant agnosticism reaching out toward something beyond itself.' He was 'attracted by the moral earnestness of many religious teachers,

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<sup>298</sup> For Buchan and the Classics, see Bibliography under Haslett.

<sup>299</sup> *LJB*, 65.

<sup>300</sup> Wilson, *Gilbert Murray*, 339-40, 346.

<sup>301</sup> Crozier, 'The Faith and Dr Murray', 188-193.

<sup>302</sup> Wilson, *ibid.*, 22, 38.

<sup>303</sup> NLS.2 to Murray, BNC, 10/11/1895.

including even St Paul, who most unusually for a classical scholar, he once declared to be next to the Greek poets almost my favourite author.'<sup>304</sup> Buchan also planned a book on St Paul.<sup>305</sup>

Both were intrigued by the unseen spiritual world. Murray became one of the leading members of the group known as the Cambridge Ritualists. Through classical philology they sought to explain ancient myth and drama arising out of ritual, particularly the seasonal killing of the Year-King. Influences on the group were as diverse as Darwin, Freud, Frazer, and the Christian academic, William Robertson Smith, the last two having collaborated.

Certainly there are a number of sacrificial characters in Buchan's fiction, Laurence Haystoun in *The Half-Hearted*, Laputa in *Prester John*, Pienaar in *Mr Standfast*, Milburne and Koré in *The Dancing Floor*, among others. Valuable though studies such as Christopher Harvie's article on Frazer and Buchan are,<sup>306</sup> there is always the question of whether the critic is super-imposing derivations upon the author. Buchan knew of *The Golden Bough*, but there is nothing in *Witch Wood*, cited by Harvie as 'the most overtly Frazerian,'<sup>307</sup> which could not be drawn from a close acquaintance with Scottish history. In discussing whether Buchan followed Frazer, he finds 'it more complex than it might appear.'<sup>308</sup> It was Dr Bussell (1862-1944), Buchan's Chaplain and Tutor at Brasenose, young enough to have been Buchan's older brother, who 'introduced him to the idea of the survival of pre-Christian cults, an idea used both in *Witch Wood* and *The Dancing Floor*.'<sup>309</sup>

Although Buchan did not follow the Ritualists to the same end, his awareness of their interests is evident in his writing, and in *The Dancing Floor* the islanders demand human sacrifice in the spring. Murray's researches also led him into séances. Again, Buchan does not follow, but is very much aware, as is shown when he creates Professor Moe, with his séance-like meetings in *The Gap in the Curtain*. Others have explored Buchan's awareness of

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<sup>304</sup> Stray, *Murray Reassessed*, 83-84.

<sup>305</sup> Confirmed in personal communications from Andrew Lownie and Michael Redley.

<sup>306</sup> Harvie, 'God's are Kittle Cattle,' 14-26: Andrew Lang, friendly with both Frazer and Buchan, probably recommended this work. Soon, in a breach with Frazer, Buchan would have backed Lang (theist) versus Frazer (agnostic). Harvie reveals that Frazer knew Murray's colleague, John Veitch, Professor of Logic and Metaphysics, known to Buchan in Peebles. His 'influence drew Buchan towards the academic study of philosophy.' Ibid, 16-17.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 38.

psychoanalysis,<sup>310</sup> but Peter Vansittart aptly states that Buchan ‘read Freudians with, one imagines, interest but detachment, keeping his head, and retaining his ego.’<sup>311</sup>

Later, both men supported women’s suffrage, Britain’s involvement in the First World War, and were active advocates of the League of Nations. At the same time, Murray was a Liberal, Buchan more of a Conservative. Murray did not drink alcohol or participate in blood sports. Had he known, Buchan would not have been happy at Murray’s quarrels with his wife, admitting (1908), of other women ‘that these rather emotional friendships do come drifting across my heart’ while ‘insisting on the right to act according to his own judgment.’<sup>312</sup>

As a student at Glasgow, Buchan looked up to other powerful minds which were not Christian like Sir Henry Jones, and Walter Pater who he hoped to meet in Oxford. Many young people would have fallen under the sway of such renowned academics to the extent of adopting their views for themselves, but not so Buchan. The way he later spoke and wrote about conversion indicates that he knew this reality for himself whatever form it may have taken.<sup>313</sup> His interest in philosophy might have led him to lecture in that after graduation,<sup>314</sup> but he was never like others who sought a faith from within that discipline. We shall see that exemplified in his friend Haldane (Chapter Four).

Murray and other freethinking intellectuals had a profound effect on Buchan, and though challenging his beliefs, his Christianity was very securely grounded from his father’s teaching.

#### 4. Buchan’s Oxford Environment

At Oxford, for the first time the twenty year old Buchan was separated from the regular worship at his father’s church. However, he was surrounded by other Christian influences including Dr Bussell. As well as attending the Chapel at Brasenose, he frequented the University Church of St Mary’s and Mansfield College Chapel (Congregationalist), as there were no Presbyterian services. Once Buchan was catapulted from Oxford into the teeming mass of Londoners he quickly found his feet among some prominent people, including Christians and at The Temple Church.

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<sup>310</sup> Etherington, ‘Imperialism and Psycho-analysis,’ 6 (1986), 17-24 & 7 (1987), 20-26; and Miller, ‘The Soul’s “Queer Corners,”’ 125-40.

<sup>311</sup> Vansittart, P. ‘Introduction,’ (13).

<sup>312</sup> *ODNB* article, 313.

<sup>313</sup> See the end of Chapter Two.

<sup>314</sup> *LJB*, 62; Haslett, ‘Buchan and Classics’, Part 1, 31.

All this created for Buchan an environment in which Christianity was intellectually tenable and practically expressed. The importance should not be under-estimated. However, such mainly cerebral authorities are unlikely to sustain faith without more personal encouragement, especially from one's own contemporaries. Buchan's 'really out-size gift for friendship', his son William believed, 'declared itself first at Oxford.' There were those 'who admired him, cherished him, frequently teased him, and predicted great things for him' while he 'gave them the treasures of his learning, his wit and his imagination, and, for all his life, a part of his heart.'<sup>315</sup>

However, when we seek information about Buchan's friends, the first limitation is that he only wrote about those who had pre-deceased him. This is true in *Memory Hold the Door* (1940), his backward look, and in *These for Remembrance* (1919) about six of his fallen friends where Buchan wrote eulogistically, still coming to terms with his losses only two or three years after these deaths. It helped him perhaps to view them as truly belonging to a better world than this, and having found it. He can be a little more critical of the dead in his memoirs, but there is the same tendency. It is hard to know the attitude of some towards the Christian faith, and others had rejected it.<sup>316</sup>

Little is said of religious belief in the War tributes, though he tells us that Tommy Nelson had 'reacted strongly from the evangelical atmosphere of his youth, was chary of creeds that protested too much and of people who were at ease in Zion.' Cecil Rawling and Buchan's brother Willie are described as 'comrades now in the high enterprises of immortal spirits.' Of Lucas he wrote, 'on that wild autumn morning Bron did not fly away; he came home.'<sup>317</sup> The use of such sentiments accords with the rather vague 'awareness of the unseen,' often attributed to his subjects, and is difficult to reconcile with the absolutes of Christianity which Buchan wrote and spoke about with conviction. There is a suggestion here of universalism, a view encouraged by the enormity of the slaughter which cast a long shadow over later years.

When his Oxford friend Cuthbert 'Cubby' Medd died at the end of 1902, Buchan wrote to his sister Anna that 'he was one of my nearest friends, and though I have a great many so-called friends, I haven't many real ones – 'Cubby' and Raymond [Asquith], John Edgar and

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<sup>315</sup> *WB*, 89.

<sup>316</sup> See Ch.3 and 4.

<sup>317</sup> *Remembrance*, 10, 38, 28.



Boulter, Sandy [Gillon] and John Jameson about make up the list.<sup>318</sup> Of these only the first two pre-deceased him. It seems very odd that Buchan omitted Charlie Dick. The six named were all Oxford contemporaries, with only Edgar additionally a contemporary from school and university in Glasgow. Perhaps the omission is because he is writing to his only surviving sister and closest sibling and she will have known how close he was to Dick, making inclusion unnecessary.

William's list of 'closest friends' is slightly different. He cites Edgar, Jameson, Gillon, Tommy Nelson, Boulter, the 'Herbert cousins, Aubrey and Auberon, and Raymond Asquith who came up in 1897.' For him, 'Buchan, Asquith, Medd and Harold Baker were the inner circle of this close, small world of friends' but presumably only because they were 'the real high-flyers.'<sup>319</sup> Buchan wrote fairly fully about those who died young, Medd, Asquith, Nelson, and the Herberts.

Here it is important to consider others who mostly outlived him. Perhaps those mentioned to Anna were ones who were known to her, for there are some odd omissions even if one thinks only of Oxford, and Baker is one. He was writing to Anna from South Africa where he first shared a cottage with an Oxford friend and Baker's contemporary at New College, the Honourable Hugh Wyndham, known as 'Archie'.<sup>320</sup>

There is a second caution. It is very clear that the letters, which survive in the Buchan Archive, are by no means an exhaustive record of his relationships with the individuals named therein. Andrew Lownie has noted that he did not always keep copies,<sup>321</sup> and there were doubtless many other letters. An example of this came to light recently over seventy years after Buchan's death, when twenty-one letters from Buchan to 'Taffy' Boulter were sold to the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Though most are from Oxford days, the last is from November 1939 when Buchan reflected that 'when I come home we shall be in the same country.'<sup>322</sup> Weeks later, Buchan died in Canada. Thus his friendship with Boulter, discussed below, and begun in youth, endured throughout life, as we shall see that it did with others – giving them 'for all his life, a part of his heart.'

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<sup>318</sup> Quoted in *SJB*, 132.

<sup>319</sup> *WB*, 89-90 for these quotes.

<sup>320</sup> Soon joined by Lord Basil Blackwood and Gerard Craig Sellar, *LJB*, 72; all among Milner's young men, so that Buchan was sharing with two Etonians and an Harrovian.

<sup>321</sup> Lownie, 'On the Trail', 2.

<sup>322</sup> 'Buchan to Boulter', 79-80.

Lownie also notes that Buchan was ‘a very private person who did not keep a diary and revealed little of himself in his papers.’<sup>323</sup> It is also inevitable that the conversations and encouragements, which may have derived from Christian friends, have gone unrecorded. Moreover, in that more reticent and more Christian age, it is not always easy to know individual religious views unless there was a particular reason for them to become apparent, though, again, Buchan will have known them. Church going was still the norm in many situations so that a sincere Christian commitment might not otherwise be revealed.

### 5. Oxford Friends (1): Asquith and Baker

At Oxford some of his close friends showed no Christian commitment, but there were others who did. The intimate Wykehamist friends, Raymond Asquith (1878-1916) and Harold Baker (1877-1960), illustrate the first group. They seemed to have a charmed and almost careless progress through life. Without appearing to work, they carried off the prizes, and Asquith obtained the All Souls’ Fellowship which Buchan, ‘whose feeling for him amounted almost to veneration’<sup>324</sup> had so much coveted. Perhaps the sudden death of his beloved mother from typhoid when he was twelve led to the ‘vigorous scepticism that was never to leave him.’<sup>325</sup> When Baker’s mother died (1899), Asquith’s letter of condolence was disparaging of any Christian comfort and, mentioning his own mother, said that the only consolation was time the healer which in his experience had been surprisingly quick in its effect.<sup>326</sup>

During Buchan’s last long vacation, Asquith was away in St Andrews with his family who had rented St Salvator’s. At 11.45 at night he wrote to Baker ‘after the rude assault of a Scottish Sabbath.’ Though it seems unlikely at such an hour ‘Men like baboons scream the name of Jesus 30 yards from the window where I am writing; the sounds of hysterical declaration mingled with the meagre flutings of a choir of thin-voiced anaemic maenads floats in.’ He ‘went to Church this morning, that being an essential factor in our political methods, and one not yet eliminated by the Corrupt Practices Act.’ For an antidote he read ‘the VIth bk. of Lucretius’ which was new to him, ‘much inimitably fine’.<sup>327</sup> On an earlier occasion, the ‘ambrosial’

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<sup>323</sup> Lownie, *ibid.*

<sup>324</sup> Jolliffe, *Asquith*, 18.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, 18, 22.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-62; NLS.2 Asquith to Baker, 04/10/1899.

<sup>327</sup> Jolliffe, 45. NLS.2 Asquith to Baker, from St Salvator’s, St Andrews, N B, 21/10/1898, 11.45.p.m.

atmosphere of the Chapel was marred by the 'Trinity sermon which consists of a mass of contradictions ingeniously put forward to prove that the object of life is to be a clergyman.'<sup>328</sup>

Despite the enormous adulation and affection that Asquith inspired, a hundred years on we only have comments by friends and what he wrote, mainly letters, to judge him by. Some of his comments about Africans and Jews make him seem less of a paragon, though President Kennedy gave Jackie *Memory Hold the Door* to show her 'what sort of person he was.'<sup>329</sup> His great gifts had not resulted in any notable achievement between his All Souls Fellowship and death in action shortly before he was thirty-eight. Against his much predicted greatness, there was 'the eternal lack of motive.'<sup>330</sup> After her father died, his wife inherited her family estate at Mells (still owned by the Asquiths), and also became a Roman Catholic. Buchan thought Asquith might have a future in politics, but had he survived the War, one can imagine him settling down to an idle life, and since he 'scarcely used his great gift for literature' doing something to fulfil it.<sup>331</sup>

Buchan says that Asquith 'chaffed' him 'unmercifully about my Calvinism, my love of rough moors in wild weather, my growing preference for what he called the Gothic over the Greek in life, and my crude passion for romance.' Asquith is quoted as saying, 'Depend upon it, my poor dear soul-starved pedlar, the English public school system is the only one which fits a man for life and ruins him for eternity.' Buchan makes a veiled reference to Asquith's religious views when he recalls that 'there was always a touch of scorn in him for obvious emotion, obvious creeds [...] That was a defect of his great qualities.' There were other things over which they disagreed. For Buchan, 'life was a pilgrimage', for Asquith 'a little abiding city,' so that 'he abominated my Imperialism and my craze for far countries.'<sup>332</sup>

Asquith's closest schoolmate, Harold Baker, was another brilliant student and friend of Buchan who failed to fulfil early promise. An MP at thirty-three, a Privy Counsellor five years later, he then stalled, achieving nothing more in his bachelor existence than the cosy haven of a

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<sup>328</sup> Quoted in Jolliffe, 22.

<sup>329</sup> Grier, 'Kennedy'.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid. 93. quoting NLS.2 from Asquith, 21/12/1902.

<sup>331</sup> *MHD*. 60. He would have inherited his father's earldom (1928).

<sup>332</sup> *Remembrance*, 72.

ten year Wardenship of his old school.<sup>333</sup> Baker, too, was noteworthy as another sceptic. At Elsfield, when the family went to Church on Sunday, he remained in the library with a book.<sup>334</sup>

Thirty years later Buchan still felt that ‘their urbanity put to shame my angularity. Their humanism confounded my dogmatism. They were certain of only one thing – that all things were uncertain [...] They were interested in the value of things and not the prize.’<sup>335</sup> Though as with Murray, Buchan was dazzled by Asquith and Baker, but kept his head, and did not follow blindly into unbelief.

## 6. Oxford Friends (2): ‘Taffy’ Boulter and Stair Gillon

A number of other friends were manifestly of the faith. ‘Taffy’ Boulter was one of his earliest, being in the same College and thus known before Buchan had made the link with Balliol. Benjamin Consitt Boulter was the son of a country parson in Worcestershire, educated at Westminster and deeply influenced in his youth by G. N. Whittingham, an extremely High Church incumbent, and by an artist, both living near his home. In on-going ways he derived much from both.

‘On sabbath’ in their second term ‘there was nobody of any importance preaching at Mansfield’ so Buchan walked with him to Dorchester Abbey. Despite his mother’s long held fears about him being influenced by Anglicanism,<sup>336</sup> he wrote amusingly to her very naturally and freely about this: ‘There was some detestable incense in the place which got up my nose and made me cough; otherwise it was very fine.’<sup>337</sup> Boulter cycled up from his Worcestershire home for an extensive walking tour into Galloway (1897), the one with his sketch pad and the other with the manuscript of a story.<sup>338</sup>

One glimpse of their shared Christian understanding survives from setting ‘our faces to the Wolf’s Stock’ and looking down on Loch Enoch, ‘one sheet of burnished silver with its wonderful milk-white sand, and islands glowing like jewels.’ Above, ‘Merrick, all swathed in white mist except his top’ looked ‘exactly as if a beacon had been lit.’ Boulter could find

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<sup>333</sup> *Who Was Who*.

<sup>334</sup> *WF*, 193.

<sup>335</sup> *SJB*, 60; NLS.1 ‘Address at Winchester College’ 1935.

<sup>336</sup> ‘She had a deep-rooted suspicion of the Church of England.’ *SJB*, 68.

<sup>337</sup> NLS.2 to mother, 19/02/1896; *SJB*, 53, without date or to whom addressed.

<sup>338</sup> *SJB*, 66-67, 100-01.

nothing to compare it to except the Heavenly City that John saw in Patmos.’ Buchan would ‘never forget the sight as long as I live.’<sup>339</sup>

Boulter spent thirty-five years on the staff of The Mercer’s School in Holborn. Under Whittingham, he was for many years a leading member of the congregation at St Silas the Martyr, Kentish Town, becoming a Lay Reader (1910). He published some Mystery Plays for use in churches, books about Pilgrim Places in England and the founders of the Oxford Movement, together with studies of Robert Grosseteste and Simon de Montfort. Artistically talented, he illustrated some of the series of Little Guides published by Methuen, books by Whittingham, and also wrote and illustrated a book about the Church of St Silas. During his years at Mercer’s, he lived in Bayswater, Lincoln’s Inn, and then Hampstead so that it was easy for the two men to keep up with each other. Correspondence continued until Buchan died, Boulter surviving for twenty years.<sup>340</sup>

Then there was Stair Agnew Gillon (1877-1954), from lands in West Lothian in the family for more than two centuries; his father was Vice-Lieutenant of the shire. Schooled at Haileybury, Gillon was at New College with Harold Baker, but it was another Scot there, Robert Rait, who introduced him to Buchan in 1897.<sup>341</sup> After Oxford, Gillon took a law degree in Edinburgh and was called to the Scottish Bar. In 1904, he proposed Buchan for membership of the Scottish Mountaineering Club. Thus they had on-going interests, and two years later Buchan came up and ‘poured out the prospect of an exciting marriage with one of the Grosvenors.’ Gillon heard ‘that sentence like a bell’ and ‘How my heart sank! For I knew we had lost him.’<sup>342</sup> Said by a friend who was still a bachelor, this was only partially true as a prophecy, for Buchan was about to spend much time over many years coming to Edinburgh through his work with Nelson’s. Gillon was at Buchan’s wedding the following year, and godfather to the Buchan’s eldest son.<sup>343</sup>

Sometimes he was Buchan’s climbing and walking companion, though more tours were planned than proved possible. After active service with the King’s Own Scottish Borderers, and

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<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>340</sup> The Church of St Silas the Martyr has much on Boulter.

<sup>341</sup> Gillon, ‘In Memoriam,’ 201. Sir Robert Rait (1874-1936), Principal, University of Glasgow; Buchan, President of the Oxford Union, proposed Rait as Secretary, but Jameson outvoted him (1898), *LJB*, 54; they later collaborated in some publishing.

<sup>342</sup> Cochrane, *Gillons of Wallhouse*, 63.

<sup>343</sup> *LJB*, 99.

being invalided, Gillon was Buchan's private secretary in the Department of Information (1917), continuing in intelligence until the end of the War. He did not stay long with Buchan, 'never given a responsible bit of work to devil or draft.'<sup>344</sup> Nevertheless, Buchan was present when he was married in Raughton Head Church by the Dean of Carlisle in April 1919<sup>345</sup> and Gillon then resumed his career within the Scottish Legal Service. After retiring as Senior Solicitor in 1942, he spent six years as Sheriff Substitute for parts of Dumfries and Galloway.

Both men wrote about participants in the Great War and about legal matters, though while Buchan wrote about fishing, Gillon's interest was in golf. The Gillons were among guests at Holyrood in both years. As late as a brief leave (1938) Buchan had planned walking with him in Tweeddale, but illness prevented it. Gillon wrote a moving tribute in the *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*, and he compiled the entry on Buchan in the *DNB*. There is no indication of his Christian conviction, but it seems inconceivable that Buchan would have chosen him as god-father had he not been able to give the boy spiritual encouragement. In his mountaineering tribute, he said: 'Mountains were part of the religion of a truly religious man, who lifted his eyes to the hills.'<sup>346</sup> Perhaps Buchan's complete fearlessness on mountains and in rock-climbing was due to his belief that life was ruled by 'unalterable law.'<sup>347</sup> That was not fatalism, but the belief that his 'times were in God's hands.' (Psalm 31:15)

When Gillon died (1954), Jameson followed a brief obituary in *The Scotsman* with his own letter there. Both men had spent their careers at the Scottish Bar and lived in Edinburgh. He reflects on the wonderful friend that Gillon had been to him, and believed that he was probably Buchan's closest friend. Gillon's Christian faith may have been too well known to mention in a short letter which extolled Gillon's gift of loyal friendship, though he noted great Christian virtues in him like forgiveness. There is a hint of active church going and 'his good old minister.'<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Cochrane, *ibid*.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid*, 68.

<sup>346</sup> Gillon, 'In Memoriam,' 200, adding that spiritually (the dominating part), Buchan 'belonged inseparably to the land of his birth, upbringing, early friends, church, and characteristic activities.' 205.

<sup>347</sup> Parry, 'Thirty-Nine Articles,' 212: 'Calvinism also taught the "littleness and transience" of life and the "dominion of unalterable law"; it enjoined a fatalism in the face of God's revealed purpose, and the duty of using free will to "strive to the uttermost."'

<sup>348</sup> *SJB*, 403.

### 7. Oxford Friends (3): Johnny Jameson, Ardwall, and Hilaire Belloc

John Gordon Jameson (1878-1955) was Unionist MP for Edinburgh West (1918-1922), a political commentator and Christian evangelist.<sup>349</sup> A daughter described his life as a ‘series of undistinguished failures,’ though for over twenty years from 1923 he was a much respected Sheriff Substitute for the Lothians and Peebles. This gave him on-going links with places where Buchan was closely connected all his life. Introduced by John Edgar, Jameson’s widow recalled that

his friends John Buchan, Stair Gillon, Alec Maitland and Noel Skelton most certainly spent a good deal of their time in each other’s colleges [...] climbing in and out when necessary, and sitting over their wine discussing everything beneath the sun,

so that ‘his autobiography should be called “With Bible and Bottle through Balliol” – the Bible being as essential and regular a part of his equipment as the bottle.’<sup>350</sup>

He was the Oxford friend who probably most resembled Buchan in his background, born of strongly committed Free Church parents. As a layman, a lawyer and a believer, his father was even more fully involved in the Free Church General Assemblies than Buchan’s father. As Sheriff Substitute for many years in various shires, he was raised to the judicial bench as Lord Ardwall (1905), taking his title from his country seat in Galloway. Buchan was very warmly welcomed at Ardwall and had much affection for the family, including the father who with his strong language, ‘infinite good humour, and his freedom from the pedantries of the elderly, “destroyed all barriers of age.”’<sup>351</sup>

Jameson’s sister recalled that he made ‘many life-long friends, Stair Gillon, John Buchan, John Edgar.’ His mother thought the happiest time of her life was when his ‘undergraduate friends were coming to Ardwall.’<sup>352</sup> Many recalled ‘that their visits to Ardwall were among the happiest recollections.’<sup>353</sup> ‘The young men would be out all day, hill-climbing, bathing in the lovely Pool of Ness near Dromore; fishing, shooting and riding’ and the ‘conversation at dinner was brilliant.’ They ‘were as devoted to mother as she was to them and they idolised father.’<sup>354</sup> Buchan’s own home at the Queen Mary Avenue manse was a happy

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<sup>349</sup> Jameson, *Memories*, 3.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.; *SJB*, 65 calls him Johnnie.

<sup>351</sup> *SJB*, 66.

<sup>352</sup> Jameson, *Memories*, 48.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., 48.

one, far from the siren Wykehamist-dominated banter and cynicism of young Asquith and Baker, but at Ardwall he was in a thoroughly Christian home among those friends who shared his deepest beliefs, and favourite recreations.

Buchan kept up with Johnny after Oxford. He was one of those to whom his fiancée, Susan, was introduced in Edinburgh, and then both young men were Parliamentary candidates, one in Edinburgh East, the other for Peebles and Selkirk. Jameson came and spoke for Buchan at a political rally. When Ardwall died, it was natural that Buchan, already known as a writer, should be asked to write a memoir. He accepted, perhaps partly due to the fact that the judge died two days after Mr Buchan. Moreover, both men had shared much the same theological outlook. Politically, too, both abandoned Gladstone in 1885 and become Unionists. Ardwall also shared Mr Buchan's passion for Scott, becoming the second President of the Edinburgh Scott Association.<sup>355</sup> The book came out (1913), the year after the memorial volume to Mr Buchan. His own father will have been much in mind.

Jameson's larger than life 'idolised' father was great fun, and had rethought his faith long before. Buchan wrote of him that 'No man would spend himself more readily for a friend, or had a heart more tender to suffering. His joy in nature was part of his religion, an earnest of immortality.' He again expressed sentiments like 'religion in the deepest sense' and a 'consciousness of the Unseen', adding 'a childlike trust in the wisdom and benigance of his God.' Yet here he is much more specific, quoting Ardwall's words to a friend. 'I die in my childhood's faith in my Saviour, and I hope to meet many who have gone before.'<sup>356</sup> All of this could equally be said of his own father, and indeed of himself.

In that same year, 1913, Johnny became an Elder at Edinburgh's Free St George's West Church, and at his Oxford wedding, Buchan, though not Best Man, gave him much support when he married a daughter of A. L. Smith who had tutored him at Balliol and later became Master. It was said of her father that 'as one of Oxford's first married dons, free of the pressure to be ordained, he was none the less as pastoral a tutor as any cleric.' Among Smith's many admirable qualities were selflessness in helping others and welcoming African and Asian

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<sup>355</sup> *ODNB*, 29: 752.

<sup>356</sup> Buchan, *Ardwall*, 154-55.



students into his home.<sup>357</sup> Continuing to correspond, Buchan called him 'Jock', with opportunities to meet in London and Edinburgh.

When Jameson lost his seat in the Commons (1922), he was appointed a Sheriff Substitute, following many forebears. This office was only relinquished prior to standing again (unsuccessfully) for Parliament (1946). He was one of the most committed of Buchan's Christian friends, and both were concerned about evangelism. Buchan's encouragement was mainly in things he said and support he gave. Jameson's was in the manner of Buchan's father.

Living in Edinburgh, he became a noted eccentric, largely because of his Christian activities. An experience in 1920 deepened his faith. Hoping to become an itinerant preacher, family commitments kept him in his profession. Unusually for one of his legal standing, he was wont to set up his soapbox in places like the Mound, the Scottish Speaker's Corner, preaching the Gospel especially among those outside the churches. Within his family, he was regarded as a saint, a view shared in many appreciations after his death.

There was a slightly older figure who had graduated from Balliol just before Buchan arrived, was married, and stayed in Oxford over the next few years. As Buchan himself says, 'there was always with us the stalwart figure of Hilaire Belloc' (1870-1953) 'whose kindness and charity were of the early Christian pattern.'<sup>358</sup> This may well have been the first Roman Catholic that he knew well. The couple were great friends with some in Buchan's circle including Asquith. Like Buchan, he would be accused of anti-Semitism.<sup>359</sup> Keeping in touch over the years, Buchan secured him as a contributor to the *Scottish Review* along with other friends like Haldane, Andrew Lang, and Robert Rait, and got Nelson to publish an edition of Belloc's commercially most successful book, *The Path to Rome*, first published in 1902. During the War, he was involved in Buchan's propaganda work in the French chateau where American journalists and politicians came to see for themselves.<sup>360</sup> Later still, he contributed to *Great Hours in Sport*.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> ODNB, 51: 4344.

<sup>358</sup> MHD, 56.

<sup>359</sup> Wilson, *Hilaire Belloc*, 188, exemplifies uninformed prejudice. Of the Jews: 'Buchan, Kipling and Rupert Brooke all loathed and feared them.' Belloc 'claimed to the end of his life to have good relations' with them. Wilson completely overlooks what is true of Buchan: Lionel Phillips, a close friend in South Africa, lent his Hampshire country house for their honeymoon. *LJB*, 98. 'When he liked a Jew – as he liked Lionel Phillips, Alfred Beit, Moritz Bonn, Chaim Weizmann – he was not inhibited by any prejudice about race.' *SJB*, 157.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 170, 203.

<sup>361</sup> *LJB*, 154.

## 8. South Africa

Another Oxford friend, the Honourable Hugh Archibald Wyndham, a younger son of Lord Leconfield, shared a house in South Africa. This ‘high churchman’ lacked Buchan’s sympathy for the Boers, as ‘there were the religious differences [with] the Calvinist, a problem Buchan did not face.’ Having known Oxford Anglicanism with Wyndham and Boulter, rural Calvinism in the Scottish Borders, and with the defeated, Buchan was at ease. Friendship between the two young men endured, though in Buchan’s view ‘I think a Scotsman is always more adaptable than an Englishman - he is more of a humanist.’<sup>362</sup> That reflects colleagues brought up in a privileged background, mostly Etonians. In comparison, Buchan had mixed intimately with a wide spectrum of humanity. There was a similar contrast in his marriage, he being greatest friends with his Masterton relatives, she hardly able to understand what they said.<sup>363</sup>

Lownie describes Wyndham as ‘one of [Buchan’s] best friends’ and notes how often the names Hugh and Archibald occurred in his fiction.<sup>364</sup> Buchan met with him when he was in London, dedicated *The African Colony* (1903) to him in memory of ‘our house-keeping’, and secured him as his best man (1907). Perhaps it was helpful for a child of the Manse to have the support of this son of Petworth when the bride was arriving at St George’s, Hanover Square in the Duke of Westminster’s coach. Wyndham stayed in South Africa until 1923, engaging in politics and the military, but returned disillusioned. They corresponded in 1924, and the Wyndhams visited the Tweedsmuir in Canada.<sup>365</sup> A dozen years after Buchan’s death, this old friend succeeded his brother as fourth Lord Leconfield.

Soon after Cuthbert Medd died, Buchan commented that ‘I keep pretty well, though’ visiting ‘many infected places, I often run a great risk’ with ‘two attacks of dysentery and fever, which left me weak; but that is all.’<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> For these quotes, see Van Der Waag, ‘Wyndham’ 55, reprinted in Bridge, *British World*, 140: ‘Buchan could put his heart into his work because, on the whole, he liked the Boers and got on well with them. Wyndham did not share this admiration but instead, like Milner, saw their shiftiness and farming manners which were not those of polite society: he saw the unruly peasant instead of the republican farmer.’

<sup>363</sup> *WF*, 37.

<sup>364</sup> Lownie, ‘On the Trail’, 3.

<sup>365</sup> *SJB*, 431

<sup>366</sup> NLS.2 to Dick, High Commissioner’s Office, Johannesburg, 13/01/1902.

From his time in South Africa, there was also Gerard Hay Craig Sellar (1871-1929) of Ardtornish, who 'had hoped at one time to spend his life in his country's service.'<sup>367</sup> After Eton, he was a Balliol contemporary of another of Buchan's South African colleagues, Lord Basil Blackwood, 'a scarcely-believing Protestant of the Established Church.'<sup>368</sup> Blackwood was soon illustrating some of Belloc's books. Sellar served in the Colonial Office under Chamberlain, and then worked under Milner (where he and Buchan shared a house). In 1909 he inherited large landed estates in the Highlands with 'leisure for the profession of friendship.' The following year, the Buchans went by rail to Constantinople and spent a month with Sellar on his yacht cruising among the Greek Islands, visiting Athens and ending up in Venice.<sup>369</sup> He was at the Foreign Office during the War. Godfather to the Buchan first born, Alice, (1908) and closely involved with his local church, Buchan describes a rather Christ-like character without specifically mentioning his creed. Despite many years of ill-health, 'his first thought was always for other people', especially the young. 'He had a host of protégés in every rank of life, on whose interests he spent an infinity of patience and thought' loving 'to help in the shaping of human material,'<sup>370</sup> very like Buchan himself. In later life, the couple stayed with him and his mother most years on his Scottish promontory reached by boat.<sup>371</sup>

Buchan's Oxford friend, Alec Maitland (1877-1965), an advocate and King's Counsel, married Sellar's sister, Rosalind, and lived in Edinburgh's Heriot Row. Susan wrote very warmly of staying there. Alec she thought 'benevolent and shrewd (with his pretty wife)',<sup>372</sup> The Maitlands became very noted art collectors, especially after Sellar's death (1929) when, no doubt, they inherited a considerable fortune. Sir Alexander's very long career ended as Deputy-Governor of the Royal Bank of Scotland when he was eighty-five. His wife died childless shortly before he gave important works to major Edinburgh galleries in her memory. His bequest formed the founding nucleus for the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art.

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<sup>367</sup> *Spectator*, 30/11/1929, 19.

<sup>368</sup> Wilson, *Gilbert Murray*, 51.

<sup>369</sup> *SJB*, 177; *LJB*, 116.

<sup>370</sup> 'Obituary'.

<sup>371</sup> *SJB*, 238; *LJB*, 157.

<sup>372</sup> *WF*, 38, 50-53.

## 9. Conclusion

Thirty years on, Buchan was perhaps mimicking his young self when he created Reggie Daker, who ‘went down from the University with a larger equipment of friends – not acquaintances merely, but friends – than any of his contemporaries.’<sup>373</sup>

The circle of young Christian contemporaries explored in this chapter survived the War. Remaining close to these fellow pilgrims throughout his life, Buchan was fortunate to enjoy so richly this essential part of the norm of Christian encouragement as, in this and other ways, he continued steadfastly ‘in the Apostles’ teaching and fellowship....’ (Acts 2: 42).

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<sup>373</sup> Buchan, *Gap in Curtain*, 177(1<sup>st</sup>).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CHRISTIAN INFLUENCES AMONG OLDER MEN

‘Youth and age were not segregated then [...] a young man had the chance of talking to his seniors and betters.’  
(*MHD*, 93)

#### 1. The Temple Church

On leaving Brasenose for the Inner Temple (1899), Buchan again established a close link with the ‘College Chapel’. Canon Alfred Ainger (1837-1904), the Master, was incumbent at the Temple Church. Buchan dined with him often and returned the hospitality with tea in his rooms.<sup>374</sup> Ainger had strong literary interests, having known Dickens and Thackeray and written about Lamb, Cragge, Hood and Tennyson. He was humorous, and a noted preacher, ‘professing an unaggressive, moderate evangelicalism.’<sup>375</sup> Clearly, each was drawn to the other.

At the same time, through his Oxford friendships with men like Asquith and the Herbert cousins, Buchan soon found himself invited to social occasions where he quickly got to know older people among leading figures in the pre-War imperial Britain of his young manhood. One connection led to another; intimacy with some influenced him considerably.

#### 2. Sir Alfred (later Viscount) Milner (1854-1925)

Buchan’s early involvement with pro-consular affairs came in 1901 when he undertook a two year appointment as private secretary to the Governor-General, soon to be High Commissioner, for South Africa. Milner had invited Leo Amery, who could not go and suggested Buchan.<sup>376</sup> He worked hard and travelled much, but saw a great deal of Milner carrying out his official duties at close quarters. Buchan’s own later gubernatorial role would be different, but he gave to it the same single-eyed dedication that he had seen modelled earlier.

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<sup>374</sup> NLS.2 to home, 19/12/1900.

<sup>375</sup> *ODNB*, 494.

<sup>376</sup> *SJB*, 107.

Moreover, it was a crucial time for an untried young man to be deeply involved in administration from the closing months of a bitter war, with its tragic realities and unfulfilled hopes, into laying the foundations of reconstruction and union.

Though not uncritical,<sup>377</sup> Buchan had a very great regard for Milner, and found him the most loyal of friends. Just having returned to London, Buchan wrote to Dick that he felt very melancholy when he said good bye to a leader ‘who has been kindness itself.’<sup>378</sup> Milner’s widow testified that his mother had remained his ‘ideal woman. Brave, cheerful, deeply religious [Christian], perfectly unselfish [...] with a splendid gaiety [...] he lived all his life by the torch she lit.’ His biographer, O’Brien commented that ‘in a reticent age he was more reticent than most about matters which he felt deeply. This makes it hard to judge whether he was, like his mother, religious,’<sup>379</sup> neither does Buchan enlighten us. ‘A great character’ and ‘the most selfless man’ he had known, he thought ‘never of himself.’ He described Haldane as ‘almost as unworldly as Milner.’<sup>380</sup> Doing much good by stealth, such characteristics were in accord with Buchan’s own Christian practice, and Milner’s great regard for his believing mother will have led to sympathy and understanding towards Buchan’s Christian position.

### 3. Prominent Public Figures after Returning to London

One of the things that Buchan acknowledged to have been lost during his lifetime, though he tried to encourage at Elsfield, was the easy intercourse between distinguished elders and the young. Having gone south, Buchan began to meet prominent people and not only in Oxford. There were publishers and editors like John Lane, who had rooms in the Albany (in company with the fictional Andrew Lumley), and St Loe Strachey. Once he had gone down and began to live permanently in London, the circle widened. In his first spring in London (1900) he told Dick about a Whitsuntide party at Lord Cowper’s house (Panshanger - Oxford friend, Auberon Herbert, was his heir) with ‘Arthur Balfour, several of the Cecils and Lady Cuzon’<sup>381</sup> and he knew Cosmo Lang, the future Archbishop. He did not much savour these events but used

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<sup>377</sup> *MHD*, 97-103; Oxley, ‘Milner’, 23-28.

<sup>378</sup> NLS.2 to Dick, 3 Temple Gardens, 03/12/1903.

<sup>379</sup> O’Brien, *Milner*, 392.

<sup>380</sup> *MHD*, 102, 133.

<sup>381</sup> NLS.2 to Dick, *Ibid.*, 09/061901.

them to advantage, getting to know older noted men of the day surprisingly well, maintaining a lasting relationship with some.

#### 4. The Fifth Earl of Rosebery (1847-1929)

Rosebery, formerly Prime Minister, whose sister was the mother of ‘Algy’ Wyndham, knew Buchan pretty well during the last thirty years of his life.<sup>382</sup> It is doubtful that he was so much of a Christian support, as Wyndham’s mother would have been, but they had ample in common. The same age as Mr Buchan, Lownie goes so far as to say that he became a kind of ‘surrogate father’ as ‘an important mentor and inspiration.’<sup>383</sup> Buchan enjoyed his company, ‘intrigued by the duality of Rosebery, the polished eighteenth century grandee who loved the apparatus of life, and the seventeenth century Scottish Calvinist who saw only its triviality.’<sup>384</sup> The *ODNB* stresses that by ‘Calvinist’ Buchan meant that Rosebery possessed, in no theological sense, a melancholy side to his personality. They had a love of Scotland<sup>385</sup> and ‘walking the green confines of Lothian and Tweeddale,’ books, politics, enthusiasm for the Empire, and feeling that civilisation was on ‘a razor edge.’ Nevertheless, Buchan, an optimist, thought the last decade of his life truly tragic, finding ‘he was deeply pessimistic’.<sup>386</sup>

Rosebery was not devoid of interest in Christianity. ‘He was an eager if amateur theologian: and through a long life, patient, and even omnivorous of sermons.’<sup>387</sup> Again he was ‘an acute but generous critic, and a good friend of the Church of Scotland, though never “churchy”’.<sup>388</sup> On those rare occasions when Sunday church-going from Dalmeny was

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<sup>382</sup> *SJB*, 239-41.

<sup>383</sup> *LJB*, 192.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>385</sup> Buchan, *Men and Deeds*, 283, quotes Rosebery on the 1707 Union: ‘Our ancestors [...] wielded two great nations into one great Empire, and moulded local jealousies into a common patriotism. On such an achievement we must look with awe and astonishment, the means so adverse and the truth so surprising. But we should look on it with emulous eyes.’

<sup>386</sup> *MHD*, 156-57.

<sup>387</sup> Gammie, *Archibald Fleming*, 159, attributes the remarks to Fleming who knew Rosebery well; for Fleming’s assessment, 155-61.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

impossible, he would take family prayers in the evening and ‘a carefully selected sermon would form part of the observance.’<sup>389</sup>

Buchan believed that ‘on the note of mortality [...] Rosebery’s prose reaches its highest levels’ contemplating, ‘the vanity of fame’, watching ‘a great career pass from light to shadow’, but ‘in a happier faith, he sees in death a sowing into life.’<sup>390</sup> Commenting on Rosebery’s address as Rector to students at Aberdeen in 1880, Buchan noted a man who could ‘force his hearers to view a topic *sub specie aeternitatis*’, and who ‘next to the New Testament, held Sir Walter Scott’s *Journal* to be the most comforting book in the world.’<sup>391</sup> Dr Fleming of St Columba’s put it tactfully when he said that ‘to the end, even if a little lackadaisically, he followed the fitful gleam.’<sup>392</sup>

## 5. Viscount Haldane (1856-1928)

Richard Burdon Haldane was another politician of great stature, slightly younger than Rosebery. Buchan met him in London through the residue of the ‘Souls’<sup>393</sup> as a noted Barrister and rising Liberal parliamentarian soon to become Secretary for War (1905-12)<sup>394</sup> and Lord Chancellor (1912-15). Lownie described the things the two men had in common. One was a ‘Scottish Presbyterian background’ which is misleading, Buchan sharing in this confusion.<sup>395</sup> Two things he does not mention are that both men were greatly devoted to their mothers, writing to them daily,<sup>396</sup> and that both died within two or three years of them. Buchan often stayed at Cloan, Haldane’s country house in Perthshire during early years in London. There is also a curious link with Canada since Eugene Forsey, a leading constitutionalist, dubbed Haldane ‘The Wicked God-father of the Canadian Constitution’ because of his judgments in legal cases.<sup>397</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> Gammie, 159.

<sup>390</sup> Buchan’s address on ‘Rosebery’, *LJB*, 189, reprinted *Men and Deeds*, 293.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*, 283, 296.

<sup>392</sup> Gammie, *Fleming*, 161.

<sup>393</sup> *MHD*, 128. The ‘Souls’, a small group of intellectuals and politicians in London, meeting without arousing tensions caused by Irish Home Rule Debate.

<sup>394</sup> Buchan’s friend, Auberon Herbert was his private secretary from 1907-08, and continued the association as Under Secretary for War until 1911.

<sup>395</sup> *LJB*, 86–87; ‘we both came of Presbyterian stock’; *MHD*, 128. Haldane’s father was ‘a convinced Baptist’; Haldane, *Autobiography*, 21

<sup>396</sup> Sommer, *Haldane*, 40.

<sup>397</sup> Vaughan, *Haldane*, xii.



Haldane was brought up a Calvinist and his father was a devout Baptist. Long before, he had submitted to adult baptism by immersion to please his parents, expecting a private ceremony. Finding a church congregation, he still submitted, but immediately retracted saying, 'I could not accept their doctrines' and 'for the future I had no connection with the church, or its teaching, or with any other church.'<sup>398</sup>

A friend wrote that, 'he philosophised to satisfy a religious need' holding his conclusions 'with all the intensity which religious convictions possess for the ordinary man.'<sup>399</sup> He was quite unlike Buchan, also no 'ordinary man', but that would not impede their friendship for Buchan was the most gregarious of men, and Haldane retained 'a deep respect for the religious beliefs of others' ready to discuss 'the ultimate nature of things with his friends.' Later he 'found particular delight in his friendship' with Archbishops Davidson and Lang, and Dean Inge.<sup>400</sup> Apart from elsewhere, he would meet the Archbishops at the exclusive dinners of The Club to which he was elected (1902); Buchan followed (1918).<sup>401</sup>

Knowing him very well, Buchan may mislead the unwary. He portrays a figure who might have been 'at mid-night conclaves in an archiepiscopal palace', differing from him 'seemed to be denying the existence of God.' Like Buchan, he lived 'as one who had a continuing vision of the unseen',<sup>402</sup> but their visions were different.

Both were theists, but while Buchan's vision was centred upon Christ, Haldane's was on 'the God within.' Buchan recognised this when he wrote that he 'had a religion in the deepest sense'<sup>403</sup> but it was not the Christian. Haldane later expressed his belief in these words: 'We have to think of how to live before we can learn how to die. God is not outside us, but is within our breasts, an almighty, ever-present Deity.'<sup>404</sup> Even so, when dying, he called for Fleming of St Columba's, and after they had talked, asked for his blessing which was given.<sup>405</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> Sommer, *ibid.*, 46-47, quoting Haldane.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, quoting Pringle-Pattison's condescending words.

<sup>400</sup> Sommer, *Haldane*.

<sup>401</sup> *SJB*, 305; *LJB*, 136. This exclusive dining club, strictly limited (originally nine) originated with Samuel Johnson.

<sup>402</sup> *MHD*, 129, 130, 133.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>404</sup> Haldane, *Autobiography*, 344.

<sup>405</sup> Gammie, *Fleming*, 161-62.

## 6. The Cecils

The third Marquess of Salisbury (1830-1903) was Prime Minister throughout Buchan's Oxford years and until after he had gone to South Africa. A sincere Christian, he persistently discouraged 'religious speculation, especially with regard to Anglican tenets.' His 'powerful mind depended upon unquestioning belief. He took the attitude that the Anglican faith, like Christianity in general, was not basically a rational matter.' He had five sons who 'despite their highly intellectual upbringing, themselves never seriously questioned the validity of the Anglican faith.'<sup>406</sup> Two of them particularly became Buchan's close friends for life, the third son, Robert, who was later Lord Cecil of Chelwood (1864-1958), and the fifth, Hugh, who became Lord Quickswood (1869-1956).<sup>407</sup> Of an age to have been his older brothers, they are included here as members of their father's family.

Perhaps too little remembered now, Lord Robert Cecil was a colossus on the British, and even the World stage in the years between the wars. Too old to fight in 1914, he joined the Red Cross, and being appalled at the suffering resulting from war, became among the great advocates for peace whose collective endeavours led to the founding of the League of Nations (January 1920). Buchan also avidly embraced this enterprise, as did Gilbert Murray. Cecil worked tirelessly in this cause throughout all the dismal years finally engulfed by the second world-wide war, being awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace (1937) and later becoming a foundational Life President of the United Nations Association.

Yet behind all this powerful motivation was the bedrock of his Christian faith. Among the many tributes to Cecil came one from Salvador de Madariaga, the Spanish advocate for European integration and Anglophile, who had been a delegate at the League of Nations. Perhaps having known him during his years as Professor of Spanish at Oxford (1928-1931), Buchan quoted him with approval on the folly of democracy going to war, prefacing this with his own view that 'force is democracy's eternal foe.'<sup>408</sup> The Spaniard said of Cecil: 'The gaunt, stooping, clerical figure of Robert Cecil seemed ever drawn forward by an eager zest.' The 'cross hanging from his waistcoat pocket witnessed to the religious basis of his political faith,'

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<sup>406</sup> Mackay, *Balfour*, 14.

<sup>407</sup> The others were James, Salisbury's heir, William, afterwards Bishop of Exeter, and Edward, whose widow married Milner.

<sup>408</sup> *MHD*, 220.

but ‘proud towards men if humble before God, [...] in that tall figure striding through the thronged corridors of the League, the levels of Christian charity were kept high above the plane of fools.’<sup>409</sup>

Both Cecil and Buchan publically summarised their Christian faith, the former at a conference in Edinburgh (1936), where he spoke at the request of Archbishop Temple<sup>410</sup> and the latter as a Presbyterian in Montreal a year later.<sup>411</sup> Here again there was much common ground including belief in an established church, though nothing should deter its main task of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ.

There is similarity between the Christian upbringing of the two men. Though in different denominations, Cecil believed that every Christian’s allegiance to the worldwide Catholic (universal) Church took priority over membership of any one part of it. Though his parents were sympathetic to the Tractarian Movement they were totally opposed to auricular confession and anything like ‘ritualism was regarded as dangerously near insincerity.’ Again, “‘modernism”, with its attribution of infallibility to scientific theory or to the so-called “higher criticism” was extremely repugnant.’ He saw three positive features in his religious nurturing. Within the assumed acceptance of the ‘distinctive doctrines of Christianity’ there was ‘an evangelical insistence on personal and individual responsibility to God,’ and ‘liberty of thought was in principle regarded as absolute.’ No books were banned and though a high standard of Christian conduct and belief were ‘commended and encouraged [...] rejection or acceptance were from a very early age left to the individual conscience.’ The other two features had to do with observance. Taught to read the Bible regularly and particularly the New Testament, no objection was raised to neglecting sermons. Once confirmed, ‘the utmost importance was attached to the weekly reception of the Eucharist.’<sup>412</sup>

Saving the regularity of this and their different denominational backgrounds, there is little here to distinguish the views of the Cecils’ father who had a ‘robust and intellectually non-conformist temperament’ from those of Mr Buchan. In addition to any correspondence, Buchan had ample opportunity to keep up with the Cecils in later years in London. Robert was a

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<sup>409</sup> Smith, *Gilbert Murray*, 178-79; Murray was ‘a candid friend.’ Rose, *The Later Cecils*, 182-83.

<sup>410</sup> Cecil, *All the Way*, 226-33, ‘Some Religious Topics’, esp. 230-33.

<sup>411</sup> *Presbyterianism (Pres)*.

<sup>412</sup> Cecil, *All the Way*, 230-31.

godfather to the Buchans' eldest son, and he and his wife came to dinner early in their married life.<sup>413</sup> They had in common The Athenaeum and Buchan was in the Commons with Hugh, and member of the exclusive fellowship of The Club with him from 1918, while Robert was in the Commons and then the Lords from 1923. The month before he died, Buchan's last letter to Robert was on a memorandum for a peace conference.<sup>414</sup>

### **7. Arthur (afterwards Earl) Balfour (1848-1930)**

Another Christian in the same circle was their cousin, Arthur Balfour, who succeeded their father and his uncle as Prime Minister (1902). His mother, Salisbury's sister, took a different view of religious discussion and encouraged it. She was 'a woman of profound religious [Christian] convictions' and 'in an atmosphere saturated' with these her children were brought up in Scotland. There, sectarian differences between Presbyterians and Anglicans were quietly ignored and Arthur remained a life-long communicant in both churches. Later, Buchan would have this in common, but there was much else to attract the younger man, and Balfour was a philosopher.

He had grown up in a home where the 'conflict between a religious view of the universe and a naturalistic view' was discussed a great deal. (Buchan's father was so concerned about this that he published a book on it.) Balfour adhered to his mother's view, and Buchan may have believed something similar. Lady Blanche 'was never tempted to discourage scientific study: she never treated it as dangerous to the higher life; she never took refuge in bad science when good science appeared to raise awkward problems' but 'she never surrendered her own convictions as to the inestimable value of her central religious [Christian] beliefs.' For Balfour, this 'may have lacked theoretic finish, but it appealed to me in 1866, and after more than sixty years' reflection, it appeals to me still.'<sup>415</sup>

As a philosopher, Balfour questioned whether the intellectual respectability of Christianity could be established by rational processes. Darwinism had raised what many people took to be a mortal challenge to Christian integrity. He decided to combat the threat posed to religious belief by showing that the intellectual basis of science was equally open to doubt. 'He

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<sup>413</sup> *LJB*, 99-100.

<sup>414</sup> NLS.2 to Cecil, 24/01/1940.

<sup>415</sup> Mackay, *Balfour*, 2-3.

felt at the time that, if he could not demonstrate that religious belief could be held as confidently as the beliefs underpinning science, life would be meaningless for him, nothing but a cosmic joke.<sup>416</sup> He therefore wrote *A Defence of Philosophic Doubt* (1879) and after a long interval *The Foundations of Belief* (1895). Buchan read both.<sup>417</sup> Such an older and eminent man (a year younger than his father) will have been an encouragement to the young, and still believing Buchan after his years of exposure to the scepticism of some of the philosophers. Moreover, Balfour placed great value on individual freedom. Looking back he reflected that

there are some things about which I have been keen; for instance the clause in the Scotch Free Church Bill enabling the established Church of Scotland to change its formulas – freeing it from the dead hand – I worked very hard to secure that.<sup>418</sup>

That helped to prepare the way for Union, and is another matter where Buchan would have been in accord with Balfour, but not with his own father.

Christopher Hitchens wrote that ‘Buchan greatly disliked as a person the most anti-Jewish and pro-Zionist figure of his day, Arthur Balfour. Indeed, Balfour was the basis for the villain Andrew Lumley in Buchan’s first thriller.’<sup>419</sup> This seems unlikely. Buchan gave him a long eulogy, and it is very hard to see great dislike in ‘the only man in public life for whom [Buchan] felt a disciple’s loyalty’ and ‘the best talker [he had] ever known,’ one who on his death-bed ‘looked forward to the end calmly and hopefully as the gateway to an ampler world.’<sup>420</sup> Buchan shared that belief.

Both were posthumously charged with being simultaneously Anti-Semitic and Pro-Zionist, probably because of statements which would have seemed innocuous in their time, and reflecting the British ambivalence towards the re-creation of a Jewish state. The rather surprising allegation is explained by distinguishing between support for the political concept of a Jewish homeland, which both clearly endorsed, and perceived antipathy towards the Jewish race in some of their other comments.<sup>421</sup>

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<sup>416</sup> Mackay, 15.

<sup>417</sup> *MHD*, 39.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*, 18: Churches (Scotland) Act 1905.

<sup>419</sup> Hitchens, ‘Great Scot’, 106.

<sup>420</sup> *MHD*, 158, 163.

<sup>421</sup> Also Christian Zionism saw Jews as a means to an end, but there is no evidence that this was Buchan’s view.

## 8. The Reverend Dr Archibald Fleming (1863-1941)

Over the decades, Buchan looked for Christian encouragement from the clergy under whom he sat on Sundays. On his first opportunity as Lord High Commissioner, he mentioned his debt to four Free Church ministers, in places where his family had lived: Pathhead (Norman Walker at nearby Dysart, and his own father), Broughton (William Welch), and John Knox, Glasgow (Ralph Colley Smith, and again his father). ‘From their teaching and their lives I learned the beauty of holiness and the greatness of Christ's Kirk in Scotland.’<sup>422</sup>

Later it was particularly Fleming in London for fifteen years until 1919 (and to a lesser extent until he went to Canada), Elington for another fifteen (Chapter Five), and the Ministers at St Andrew’s, Ottawa for the short remainder of his life. Similarly he was an encouragement to many by example, writing and sometimes by what he said in addresses or individually.

Buchan first knew Fleming, who was twelve years older and had been inducted (1902), when he returned to London (1903), still in his twenties. The minister was by then a well-established and widely known man of forty. His growing friendship with Buchan extended over nearly forty years. A family connection existed even before then. Though of ‘the Auld Kirk’, his parents were kind to the newly married Buchans when they arrived at their Free Church manse in Perth (1875) only months before John was born. Buchan’s mother would have been mindful of this when she took the sacrament at St Columba’s from her son’s hands during the family’s annual venture south in the Elsfield years (Chapter Five).

After University, Fleming intended to study for the Bar<sup>423</sup> (another link with Buchan). In fact, he became well known in Scotland as a popular preacher. After an Assistantship at St Cuthbert’s, Edinburgh, his first ministry was at Newton (1888-1897), a mixed rural and mining parish between Edinburgh and Dalkeith. Then after less than five years at the Tron in Edinburgh, where he was also Editor of *Life and Work* from 1898,<sup>424</sup> the call came to St Columba’s in London. His first sermon emphasised that he came to minister to Scots representing their national church, and not a sect or denomination.<sup>425</sup> This fact would have eased Buchan’s transition from the Free Church to the Auld Kirk when he moved to London.

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<sup>422</sup> NLS.1, Lord High Commissioner’s Opening Address, 23/05/1933.

<sup>423</sup> Gammie, *Fleming*, 36.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>425</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 03/07/1941, 3.

Besides the link with Fleming, St Columba's was the obvious place there for a Scot to go,<sup>426</sup> and certainly in his mother's eyes far better than him joining the Anglicans.<sup>427</sup> London lacked any Free Churches. Had he begun in Edinburgh, he would probably have found happy lodgement in a Free Church like St George's West, along with Johnny Jameson.

A biography of Fleming was published (1932), well before his incumbency ended, though it marked thirty years at the church and he was in his seventieth year. The author, Alexander Gammie, a prolific writer on contemporary preachers, included extensive quotations from Fleming's addresses. Though inevitably eulogistic, he is a mine of information about the man who some considered to be 'the Patriarch of London Scots'<sup>428</sup> or even 'the greatest Scot' then in London,<sup>429</sup> an interesting claim when there was a Scot in Lambeth Palace, there would soon again be one in Downing Street, and at the powerful new British Broadcasting Corporation.

Certainly his ministry had a wide influence and appeal and he was a pioneer in religious radio, beginning from the Marconi offices, heard by 20,000 people in the British Isles (1922). During his first thirty years the congregational roll quadrupled. Sir Arthur Steel-Maitland presented a 20 horsepower car to Fleming when his semi-jubilee was celebrated (1927). As Arthur Steel, he been one of Buchan's Balliol friends, and was made an elder at the same time (1912.) In London, he seldom felt outside 'the ken of my minister.' If he went to a Dinner, he would be saying the grace, if he switched on the radio, giving the message. 'One of the things I most value is that I hear the Word of God preached by him with a breadth of sympathy and real intellectual force.'<sup>430</sup> No doubt Buchan felt the same.

Fleming had ministered to Freemasons in Scotland, and for the first twenty years in London was a Territorial Army Chaplain, but without active war service. He had long worked for the Union of 1929, taking Buchan with him to the crucial Assembly in May. Two years later, Fleming was unanimously invited to be the Moderator of the General Assembly, significantly

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<sup>426</sup> Founded in 1884, it superseded Crown Court in Covent Garden as the major, of only two, Scottish Presbyterian churches in Central London.

<sup>427</sup> *LJB*, 96: 'one of her greatest prejudices'; though when she came south in early years of their marriage, she preferred staying with family in Clapham, worshipping at Regent Square Presbyterian Church, *SJB*, 174.

<sup>428</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 03/07/1941, 3.

<sup>429</sup> Gammie, *Fleming*, 9: comment by Lord Balfour of Burleigh (1849-1921) 'in his later years [...] perhaps the most outstanding figure in Scotland.' *ODNB*.

<sup>430</sup> Gammie, *Fleming*, 120-21, 96, 113-14.

endorsed by former United Free Church members. Single-eyed on his London responsibilities, he declined a preferment that many have avidly desired. He moved in the same circles of great men entered into by the young Buchan. His Kirk Session read like entries in *Who's Who*, with peers like the Duke of Atholl, the Earls of Haddo (Marquess of Aberdeen) and Stair, a number of MPs. Knowing them, he said that 'three outstanding statesmen of our time [...] could never keep away from theology, and metaphysics generally, for long: [...] Rosebery, Arthur Balfour, and Haldane. And they were all Scotsmen.' When Buchan said that he had known six of the last seven Prime Ministers, it was no idle boast. Presumably, he was excepting Campbell-Bannerman, yet there were links with his brother, a senior and much respected elder in Buchan's early years at St Columba's. Bonar Law was a pew holder at the Church,<sup>431</sup> and Ramsay Macdonald another Presbyterian.

Fleming became Senior Minister in 1938 when Robin Scott was appointed, but remained very active. However, he only survived by a couple of months the destruction of St Columba's during the Blitz.<sup>432</sup> For one who was evidently so widely regarded by contemporaries, his reputation has been ephemeral, attracting no assessment in the biographical dictionaries. Nevertheless, his very long and friendly relationship with Buchan again clearly refutes Green's claim that Buchan could not stand the clergy. (Chapters Six, Seven).

## 9. Others

Some of the later Christian friendships are seen in other chapters. They were not only with those contemporary or older than Buchan, some of those at Elsfield tea parties were, or became, Christians. Among the soldiers, Buchan greatly respected Haig of Bemersyde and Byng of Vimy who he had first met in South Africa.<sup>433</sup> He writes of both having a profound religion.<sup>434</sup> In June 1916, he arrived at Haig's GHQ in France where he was brought in to draft communiqués. This was soon after the vitality of Haig's faith had been rekindled.<sup>435</sup> In 1921, he joined Buchan as an Elder at St Columba's.

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<sup>431</sup> Discounting Chamberlain (the incumbent), these were Balfour, Campbell-Bannerman, Asquith, Lloyd George, Bonar Law, Macdonald, and Baldwin. Presumably the exception was 'CB'; Gammie, 153, 97.

<sup>432</sup> 10/05/1941.

<sup>433</sup> *LJB*, 71, 124-125.

<sup>434</sup> *MHD*, 174, 177.

<sup>435</sup> See, 193-94.



When at the height of his involvement in public affairs in London, Buchan was thrown together with Stanley Baldwin who also shared his belief, for ‘Both men’s notion of the responsible personality was explicitly Christian, and owed a lot to the Nonconformist tradition.’<sup>436</sup> In his Canadian lecture on *Presbyteria/nism*, Buchan quoted Baldwin with approval (and might have said the words himself): ‘To elevate every desire, however obscene, into a good, because it is desired, may be the way of all flesh, but it is not the way of the Cross.’<sup>437</sup> Their intimacy was shown when Buchan took leave of Prime Minister Baldwin (1935): ‘he had no words to say of what [Buchan] had been to him in the last eight years’,<sup>438</sup> that is while they had been colleagues in the Commons. Baldwin visited the Tweedsmuir in Canada in the spring of 1939.<sup>439</sup> As Prime Ministers, ‘Gladstone [...] Baldwin [were] strongly influenced by their religious [Christian] beliefs.’<sup>440</sup>

Others came from all walks of life, and some were royal. Both George V and George VI are sometimes denigrated now, but that was not Buchan’s contemporary view of them. He felt the death of the first ‘like a personal bereavement, for he was an old and kind friend to me, as well as a beloved master.’<sup>441</sup> Then again, he was enormously impressed by the Royal couple who visited Canada in 1939. Of King George and Queen Elizabeth he wrote to Charles Dick: ‘she has a quiet, serene radiance which everyone feels, and he is one of the best of good fellows and very wise.’<sup>442</sup> Later, he will have heard the King’s 1939 Christmas broadcast including the quotation about putting one’s ‘hand into the hand of God’ and that ‘being better than light, and safer than a known way.’<sup>443</sup>

Buchan’s surviving letters tend to be of an immediate nature concerning current activities, so it cannot be proved that he wrote long letters to close friends about spiritual matters. In his younger days, that would not have been possible over the telephone either. Moreover, it was probably not in the nature of this private man.

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<sup>436</sup> Parry, ‘Thirty-Nine Articles,’ 211;

<sup>437</sup> *Pres.*, 9.

<sup>438</sup> *SJB*, 374.

<sup>439</sup> *LJB*, 275.

<sup>440</sup> Theakston, ‘Doing God’. 2.

<sup>441</sup> NLS.2 to Dick, Ottawa, 03/02/1936: Buchan wrote about George V: *King’s Grace*, and tribute in *MHD*, 240-43.

<sup>442</sup> To Dick, Quebec, 30/06/1939.

<sup>443</sup> Quoting words from ‘God Knows’, later popularly known as ‘The Gate of the Year’, from *The Desert* by Haskins, (1912).

## 10. Conclusion

In his memoirs he tells us that ‘I am not conscious of ever having argued about religion, or about politics, except professionally.’<sup>444</sup> That statement respects the old adage which was then probably much more strictly adhered to than now. In his time the word religion was often synonymous with Christianity where today it would be necessary to specify a particular faith for accuracy. However, since philosophical discussion so often encroaches on concepts which are religious, it seems unlikely that he never discussed religion, but perhaps he was drawing a proper distinction between argument and discussion.

Buchan had a great capacity for friendship and such relationships were wide and very important to him. In some of them it was not just a matter of shared interests. As quoted above, Milner modelled for him the single minded devotion to public duty which Buchan would emulate; Rosebery was almost a ‘surrogate father’ and ‘important mentor and inspiration’; for Balfour he felt a disciple’s loyalty.’

We know that he spent a great deal of time talking to friends, the very nature of such activity leading to no lasting record. It has been shown that he had intimate life-long links with contemporaries who shared his Christian commitment, and also with some able and older men, holding similar beliefs, through whom he entered into the corridors of power. Just as with his contemporary Christian friends the most important thing was the encouragement in the faith he will have gained from these fellow believers.

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<sup>444</sup> *MHD*, 38.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE BUCHANS AT ELSFIELD

‘Elsfield is the only hill-top village  
within sight of Oxford.’  
(Clark, *Elsfield Church and Village*, 1)

In 1919, John Buchan purchased ‘the Manor house and gardens with Pond Close and the adjoining meadows’ from Christ Church, Oxford<sup>445</sup> and it remained the family home until thirteen years after he died. For the purposes of this chapter, we can take Buchan’s years there as being from the beginning of 1920 until his death (1940), for his home was always there. There has been plenty of coverage of his work and his writing during those years, but his life there has never been sufficiently researched in detail. Moreover, it was there that his ecumenism had its full flowering.

#### 1. Why Elsfield?

When the Buchans were married (1907), Susan had always lived in London, while John was already working there and would continue to do so for nearly thirty years. Nevertheless, the longest period of their married life was spent in Elsfield. Why they came to settle in rural Oxfordshire at the beginning of 1920 needs to be explained. The origins of this move can be traced in his own love of the Cotswolds, acquired during his undergraduate days at the end of the previous century. Smith tells us that this countryside, ‘to her entirely new’, was introduced by Buchan to his wife on a four day holiday in September 1917, leading them to decide to come to live there once the First World War ended.<sup>446</sup> However, Lownie shows that already in January 1911 the couple had visited and looked at houses in the area<sup>447</sup> so that seed thoughts were in their minds over longer years. During the War, holidays spent in Kent with their growing family added to the desire to bring up children outside London, and the stresses and bereavements of the conflict increased the need for a peaceful retreat. With this in mind Buchan had just written

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<sup>445</sup> Steane, *Elsfield*.

<sup>446</sup> *SJB*, 218–20.

<sup>447</sup> *LJB*, 146.

fictionally that Hannay saw ‘a new and happier world after victory, when I should inherit something of this English peace and wrap myself in it till the end of my days.’<sup>448</sup> After the Armistice, John began to search in earnest for a house close to Oxford’s good rail link with London. Susan’s recently married sister lived near there. In the spring of 1919, he heard from his friend G. N. Hutchinson, the Treasurer, that Christ Church was buying the estate which included the village of Elsfield. He told his mother that he ‘fell desperately in love with it.’<sup>449</sup>

## 2. A Place of Worship?

By the beginning of the Elsfield years, Buchan had behind him not only his upbringing in the Free Church of his father, where there were those who pressed him to become a deacon,<sup>450</sup> but also his Eldership within the established Church of Scotland to which he had been ordained (1912). Once Buchan and his family had removed from London to Elsfield, his mother had worried, and was justified in asking, ‘How would he fare with no Presbyterian church nearer than Oxford, and that operating only in term-time?’<sup>451</sup>

Buchan’s first detailed biographer, Janet Adam Smith, correctly states that when writing to his mother ‘Buchan firmly claimed his right to worship’ in the Church of England parish church of Elsfield. At the same time he ‘tried to make her see that *none of us are or ever will be Episcopalians*.’<sup>452</sup> Like a number of other pithy, and memorable phrases penned by Buchan, this statement has led to considerable misunderstanding about what he meant. Indeed, this church-going aspect of Buchan’s life in Elsfield has never been fully understood in what has been written about him, and is sometimes totally misrepresented. A quarter of a century after Smith, Martin Green wrote that ‘the family must either attend Church of England services, or none at all. John had to vow that none of them were, or would become, Anglicans.’ By inserting ‘Anglicans’ for ‘Episcopalians’ he misquotes Buchan and so becomes very misleading. We shall see that Buchan kept his promise to his mother and maintained his right.

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<sup>448</sup> *Mr Standfast*, 24.

<sup>449</sup> *SJB*, 220.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*, my italics. Note Buchan’s careful use of ‘Episcopalians’, Scottish members of the world-wide Anglican Communion, including the Church of England in Elsfield. Thus Buchan did not become an Episcopalian.

Without ready access to a Church of Scotland place of worship, one possibility was to allow his regular church-going to lapse. Assuming this, in suggested rebellion against his Free Church upbringing, Green tells us that during the Elsfield years ‘it does not seem that they [the Buchans] were committed members of any church’. He added that ‘there were morning prayers only when he was at home to conduct them, for his wife had breakfast in bed.’<sup>453</sup> That gratuitous comment is very ill-founded.<sup>454</sup> Greater consideration should be given to the actual time Buchan spent in Elsfield during these years. ‘Until he became a Member of Parliament [1927] he rarely slept a night in London, but would travel up and down from Oxford in a day.’<sup>455</sup> Even after that, his routine normally allowed the weekend at home.<sup>456</sup>

It is unwise ever to underestimate Buchan’s life-long commitment to the Christian faith, its effect upon him, and the response in his activities. From his armchair speculation Green, of course, did not know Buchan, and did not take enough trouble to enquire. Those with first-hand knowledge regarded him quite differently and they can speak for themselves, as Buchan can too. James Cosh had known him well at the 1934 General Assembly, and considered that ‘his Christian witness was like a lamp lit in the holy places. His faith lay at the back of his noble character, and his high-toned and high-souled utterances.’<sup>457</sup>

Such comments during the Elsfield years do not sound like a man with such a lapsed or uncertain faith that only in the latter year did he set out in a Christian sense ‘to make his soul’. Some have erroneously suggested (Chapter Nine) that this process was not complete until the writing of *Sick Heart River* (1940), by which time he had discovered a God of love rather than a God of wrath.

### 3. His Wider Christian Interests

Once resident in Elsfield, and spending most weekends there, Buchan could not be a regular worshipper in London, though he continued to be an Elder. He also responded to invitations to speak fairly regularly at the meetings of a number of evangelical organisations (Chapter Nine). Christian unity was a matter close to Buchan’s heart, and he was a member of

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<sup>453</sup> *MG*, 143.

<sup>454</sup> Green also instigated the misleading claim that Buchan was anti-clerical (Chapters Six and Seven).

<sup>455</sup> Tweedsmuir, *Always a Countryman*, 22; *SJB*, 220.

<sup>456</sup> *MHD*, 193.

<sup>457</sup> James Cosh, ‘Buchan’s Devotion to Church,’ 6.

the General Assembly of 1929, as an Elder from England. This led to the ratification of the Union by which the majority of the Scottish Free Church reversed the Disruption of 1843 by returning to the established Church of Scotland.

There is no record that Buchan spoke at this. He claimed ‘a small part’,<sup>458</sup> largely behind the scenes, apart from two publications. His address to committee members from both denominations was published (1929)<sup>459</sup> and he wrote *The Kirk in Scotland* (1930), collaborating with Smith, who had been Moderator of the Free Church and was the father of Buchan’s biographer, Janet. He was a representative Elder again (1933, 1934), when Lord High Commissioner. This duty he was very willing to repeat, and he might perhaps have done so again after leaving Canada.<sup>460</sup> Such an appointment was obviously given to a committed Christian. None of these facts squares with Green’s comment about a lapsed worshipper. Writing of Buchan enthroned at the Church of Scotland General Assembly, and without any corroborative evidence, he adds that ‘it must have been a grain of bitterness in [the cup of Buchan’s mother that Buchan] and his sister – were indifferent and even resentful towards the Church which had been the Ark of the Covenant to her and her husband.’<sup>461</sup> Admittedly, Buchan necessarily had adhered to the Auld Kirk more than twenty years before this celebrated Union, but Green’s comments are wholly at variance with those Buchan made about it, while his mother revelled in seeing ‘her paragon publicly acclaimed.’<sup>462</sup> Things changed with the accord of 1929, but the memories remained.

#### 4. Deep Local Involvement

Rather than wilfully or ignorantly making things up, it is perhaps best to enquire about Elsfield in that very place. In writing of these years the biographers have, no doubt inevitably, concentrated mainly on his endeavours, professional and literary,<sup>463</sup> with little ‘bottom-up’ view. Janet Adam Smith recognised that Buchan felt at once that ‘Elsfield is curiously like Broughton Green’, that Amos Webb ‘was his chauffeur and became his close friend,’ and that he ‘talked

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<sup>458</sup> *MHD*, 231.

<sup>459</sup> ‘What the Union of the Churches means to Scotland.’

<sup>460</sup> *LJB*, 230.

<sup>461</sup> *MG*, 162-63.

<sup>462</sup> *SJB*, 364-65.

<sup>463</sup> In *SJB*, the only Index entries under ‘Buchan, John’ are literary.

endlessly about the countryside' with him and with Tom Basson, his old gardener.<sup>464</sup> It occasions no surprise that these employees were empathetic, but his youthful Border roamings had introduced him to a wide variety of rural characters whose language he learned.<sup>465</sup> He was therefore adept at transferring this ability to rural Oxfordshire. Moreover, such ease was not just with retainers, for how warmly remembered the Buchans were in the folklore of the village has not been sufficiently noted.

John and Susan Buchan assumed the responsibilities of the incumbent of the Manor with the energy and dedication they had demonstrated in other walks of life. They continued the system which the Parsons family [their predecessors] had begun, taking on board the welfare of their employees and taking an important part in village life. In return, villagers took the whole family to their hearts, basking in the reflected glory of being connected to such an illustrious family. They were 'comers-in' but had every intention of being accepted by the residents.<sup>466</sup>

Mildred Clinkard had grown up as a child on Forest Farm in the 1920s and early 1930s. Half a century later as Mrs Masheder, she wrote to Buchan's heir arranging an interview because she wanted 'to create a picture of some of the village folk seen through my child-like eyes and indeed the whole way of life in the twenties, especially the caring side.'<sup>467</sup> Thus, she was something of a latter day Flora Thompson who, a generation before, had written of her own Oxfordshire childhood many years after the event in the *Larkrise to Candleford* trilogy. Mildred wrote to, and was remembered by Johnnie Tweedsmuir half a century later, received a ready response, and her parents were recalled with 'great admiration.'<sup>468</sup> Thus the Buchans were by no means aloof from the villagers during the Elsfield years, even Johnnie, who spent much of the time away at the Dragon School, Eton, Brasenose, and in serving overseas.

Smith pointed out other salient facts about the Buchans after January 1920 when they finally moved in.

It was the success of his thrillers<sup>469</sup> that enabled Buchan to buy Elsfield, but he had no wish to extend his property or his house, and no ambition to play the squire. He liked joining in certain village activities, like the rook shooting; he read the lessons in church; he would talk to the village club on politics if they invited him, as he would

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<sup>464</sup> *SJB*, 222-23.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-39.

<sup>466</sup> Curtis, 'Elsfield Village.'

<sup>467</sup> NLS Ac.11628/4 Letters and Papers, Elsfield Manor 1932-1994: Letter, 26/11/1987.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*, reply of even date.

<sup>469</sup> Mainly initial profits from the first three Hannay novels.

talk to an undergraduate club; but he had no wish to run the village just because he lived in the Manor, and certainly expected no particular deference.<sup>470</sup>

These are interesting and importance caveats but they do not make Buchan appear as a very intimate figure among the local inhabitants, perhaps with only an occasional sally into that world at his doorstep. Once again, the village worthies recalled more about the Buchan's involvement in the village:

there were housemaids from the village, Mabel and Dorothy Chaulk being two of them, sisters recruited during the 1930s. Mabel remembers that they had to be "quiet as mice" as they did their work so as not to interrupt John Buchan's writing. They were allowed Sunday off every other week but were obliged to go to church. If they failed to do so, they were severely reprimanded. John Buchan sat at the front of the church surrounded by his household and always did the readings.<sup>471</sup>

So here is John Buchan regularly in Elsfield Church Sunday by Sunday, and actively participating.

'He had not the slightest wish to make a splash, to cut a dash in county society',<sup>472</sup> though this did not debar him in time from being a Justice of the Peace (Bullington bench), where his role was advisory rather than judicial, and also a Deputy Lieutenant for Oxfordshire, just as in Peebles. Janet Adam Smith was one of the undergraduates who visited the Buchans, and she admits that her Aberdeenshire Scottishness left her ill-at-ease in English country houses, though not at Elsfield. While there, she may have perhaps even heard Buchan reading the lessons in the Church, and this is probably a personal reminiscence, but without realising that this had a greater implication. Moreover, she overstated Buchan's reluctance to take on any public role in the locality when she added controversially that 'he never served on the parish council.'<sup>473</sup> Elsfield was too small for a secular one; John and Susan were elected to the Parochial Church Council (1920). Professor Clark wrote about Elsfield (1927) having encouraged the schoolboy, Johnnie to contribute on the *fauna*. In a second account (1975), he says of Buchan that though

there are not a few books in which his life and hospitality have been described, let it be recorded that this many-sided man, always over-taxed with work, was the first

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<sup>470</sup> *SJB*, 223.

<sup>471</sup> Curtis, 'Elsfield Village, 1-2.

<sup>472</sup> *SJB*, 223.

<sup>473</sup> *Oxford Times*, 23/02/1940 for the service at Elsfield Church, and comments by Mr Sing, Chairman, Bullington magistrates; *SJB*, 223.



President of the Marston and District Branch of the British Legion. To this unadvertised work for his neighbours he gave of his best.<sup>474</sup>

## 5. Involvement of the Whole Buchan Family

Local memory further clarifies: 'He and his family played a very active part in the village life and this was altogether new, as although the Parsons family participated in the village, theirs was a much more authoritarian regime, tempered with benevolence.' Then again

The whole Buchan family made themselves an integral part of the community and went to great lengths to play an active part in the village life. Mrs Buchan was president of the Women's Institute and the meetings had a special aura, being held in the august Manor drawing room. This was also the venue for the thriving amateur dramatic society, which had such success in the county competitions.<sup>475</sup>

It is worth remembering that Buchan was in a difficult position as owner of the Manor House but not also Lord of the Manor like his predecessor. Even though that ownership had been taken over by the impersonal and non-resident foundation of Christ Church, Miss Parsons represented the recent owners, and still living in the parish, had justification in continuing to carry out some of the seigniorial duties, daily attending at the school, 'to give an acknowledgement of her presence.' Indeed, 'some unspoken rivalry between the old and the new regimes'<sup>476</sup> was expressed in the Christmas and Easter parties which both provided, to the obvious advantage of the village children. Despite living with this duality, the Buchans seem to have played their part well, carrying

out their obligations to the village as a sort of benign presence and their largesse reached its zenith in the festive seasons [...] But it was all the year round that their obvious appreciation of the Oxfordshire countryside made a bond between us, even if the still rigid class system meant that we did not share it on an equal footing. We had no idea, for instance, that the motorbike often seen outside the Manor actually belonged to the famous Lawrence of Arabia; in any case we had never heard of him.<sup>477</sup>

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<sup>474</sup> Clark, *Elsfield*, 13-14 - Johnnie Buchan (*Always a Countryman*) wrote the best thing about Elsfield.

<sup>475</sup> Curtis, 'Elsfield Village,' 1: 'Not only was Susan Buchan concerned to support her husband in all his varied responsibilities, she also turned her face towards the village, involving herself with not just the physical well being of the residents, but the social and educational aspects of the women's lives. She did this through the Women's Institute, the Elsfield branch of which she founded the year after her arrival in the village.' Ibid., 2; Mashedor, *Carrier's Cart*, 83.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid., 83. Lawrence, always coming unannounced, 'a man in Air Force uniform on a motor-cycle, wanted to see Buchan one Sunday morning, the family all at Church; not stating his business, the butler sent him away, to Buchan's consternation when he returned shortly afterwards: *SJB*, 241-42.

Though not in their home but the school, they still gave the children's party which one recalled as 'the highlight of Christmas' and 'the presents were lavish.' In addition

there was always a pair of sheets for the farm workers' families; these were made of unbleached calico and, although they looked brown, in the end they bleached in the sun and became softer as time went by. The Buchan boys used to get out the pony and trap and distribute Mrs Charlock's puddings labelled, 'Happy Christmas and please return the basin.' There was also a half pound of tea per family, which was still quite expensive in those days.

Then there were the village concerts:

First on the scene was Mrs Buchan, who would give a heart rendering [*sic*] version of, "You must rise and call me early mother, for I'm to be queen of the May, mother, for I'm to be queen of the May." I can still recall the rapture on her face, as she made the tears flow. Her daughter Alice's speciality was the song, "For I would be a dancer, a dancer all in yellow-o, Said the frog to the fish, again-eo." The Buchans spoke with an aristocratic accent, far removed from the broad Oxfordshire that most of us were brought up to speak. So when [...] the blacksmith got up to sing with gusto, "Give I lots of pudding..." there was quite a contrast.<sup>478</sup>

Drama was another 'integral part of village life and like the concerts it seemed to cut across class barriers. The initiative came from Mrs Buchan and later, Alice, her daughter.' Oxfordshire was noted for its local competitive drama, with the finalists performing at Summertown. Among the judges was the young Tyrone Guthrie, then a BBC producer. In one finalist play Mrs Buchan reversed roles

when she played a country yokel, with a battered hat and a straw in his mouth. She entered into the part wholeheartedly and with much aplomb, however Tyrone Guthrie did spot an incongruous gold bracelet showing from under her (or his) smock with the electric light reflecting on it.<sup>479</sup>

Buchan himself also played a real part in all this local involvement. Of course, he did not have the same time to give to such activity, but he did not stand aloof from it either. In 1933, he appeared as Sir Francis Tresham in his daughter's play 'The Fifth of November' which was produced in Elsfield and won first place in the Oxford Drama Festival.

As a childhood eye-witness Mildred Masheder had this revealing paragraph which shows Buchan's intimacy with those living just around him: 'Mr Buchan was a familiar figure

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<sup>478</sup> Masheder, 123, 113.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid., 115-16.

riding round the countryside on his beautiful bay horse, always passing the time with the villagers, who had nothing to fear from his ascendancy.’

That ‘he would attend church every Sunday in the very front pew with his wife and his family of four’<sup>480</sup> provides a striking demonstration of his ecumenical approach to the practice of regular weekly Christian worship. Moreover, to Buchan’s supposed modest and retiring involvement there would be one other notable exception. His regular commitment would rapidly lead on to office-bearing.

## 6. Mr Elkington

The Vicar throughout Buchan’s time in the village was The Reverend William Hardwicke Goodall Elkington (1864-1939).<sup>481</sup> He died thirteen months before him after fifty years in the ministry and three months short of forty in this parish of less than two hundred inhabitants.<sup>482</sup> The son of a Surgeon-General, he was educated at St Paul’s and then at New Inn Hall, an historic Oxford College which was later incorporated into St Peter’s, though he did not take a degree before training for the ministry at St Bees.<sup>483</sup> The personality of the Vicar takes shape through local reminiscences with a

special tribute to Mr Elkington. He provided a link between the formality of worship and our every day life. He was a cheery soul and we called him Daddy Elkington. He would often be seen making his way over the fields to the White Horse pub at Headington and back, and this seemed to be a bond with the village folk.

### The Elsfield boys

had good memories of his generosity. “When we went to Marston on foot to catch the bus to go to Oxford [...] we used to meet him on the way back and, before we got to him, he would be looking in his pockets, and when we got up to him, he would throw out some coins on the road for us to scramble over. He was a good old chap.”<sup>484</sup>

They made their favourable assessment despite the fact that one of the Vicar’s tasks every weekday was to attend the village school to inflict chastisement on any boys who had

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<sup>480</sup> Masheder, 83.

<sup>481</sup> Elkington’s obituary, *Oxford Times*, 27/01/1939.

<sup>482</sup> Clark (1975) lists Incumbents; *Crockford’s Clerical Directory* records Elsfield parish populations: 141 (1903 edition) and 163 (1939).

<sup>483</sup> *Oxford Times*, *ibid.*

<sup>484</sup> Masheder, 88.

misbehaved the day before. However, it was noted that the cane often hit the thigh and not the hand, the Vicar being tolerant of the ruse to snatch away the hand before the blow struck.<sup>485</sup> The two men must have come to know each other well as the ‘only two gentlemen in the village’ (a phrase from *The Watcher by the Threshold*).<sup>486</sup> They had a shared interest in the young, Buchan through the University, he through his work with the Y.M.C.A. ‘He always took a keen interest in the young men in the parish and often assisted at the village dances with his violin.’<sup>487</sup> The word went round, as did every word in the village, that [Buchan] appreciated the vicar’s sermons and Mr Elkington made great efforts to be worthy of such high praise. Moreover, St Thomas’s, Elsfield ‘was so Low Church that it could not have been lower.’<sup>488</sup> He sounds like a man with whom Buchan would get on.

Sunday worship was a key element in Buchan’s life and, for over fifteen years he found it conducive to sit under Elkington, as much his minister as Fleming had been. The Vicar’s character and ministry are relevant to our discussion of the Christian influences on Buchan. That there is no record of correspondence between the two is unsurprising; they met at least on Sundays and lived on either side of the Church. The Tweedsmuir family were in Canada when Elkington died, but they sent flowers and two of their children attended the funeral, with his successor, W. M. Aste, conducting the simple memorial service after Buchan’s ashes were brought home.

The service was ‘mainly for villagers’; ‘two of his oldest friends’, the parishioners ‘Mr W. F. G. Watts, a well-known farmer, and Mr G. J. [Jack] Brown’ who was [briefly] ‘fellow warden with Lord Tweedsmuir, showed the congregation to their seats.’<sup>489</sup> Even here Buchan’s ecumenism is revealed, for while Brown, the tenant of Sescut farm ‘down the fields near the river Cherwell’ was a pillar of the Parish Church, the Watts family were the only dissenters in the parish. Hill Farm was the largest of the Christ Church tenancies and Watts, a stalwart Methodist who never normally entered the parish church, took his family every Sunday into Oxford to worship.<sup>490</sup> United now in their respect for Buchan, he would have enjoyed this local, though temporary, Christian act of unity brought about on his behalf. ‘The Reverend I. L. R.

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<sup>485</sup> Masheder, 57.

<sup>486</sup> The two ‘gentlemen’ in the parish, the laird, Ladlaw and the minister, Oliphant.

<sup>487</sup> *Oxford Times*, 27/01/1939.

<sup>488</sup> Fairfax-Lucy, *Scrap Screen*, 136.

<sup>489</sup> *Oxford Times*, *ibid.* Deneke, ‘Watts was a great friend.’

<sup>490</sup> Masheder, 92

[sic] Miller, minister of St Columba's Church, Oxford and Presbyterian Chaplain to the University'<sup>491</sup> assisted, not because Buchan was associated with that Church, but perhaps standing in for Fleming. Moreover, Miller had only come to Oxford from Newcastle the previous year and it is unlikely that he had known Buchan any more than Aste had done. His involvement made the service suitably ecumenical, but many of the parishioners will have sensed, in those who officiated, the lack of the personal link which they provided.

## 7. Churchwarden

At the time of Buchan's death, *The Scotsman* had stated a since neglected fact, that his ashes would lie at Elsfield where he 'was Churchwarden.'<sup>492</sup> The suggestion that Buchan's Christian commitment between the Wars was no more than nominal was thus discredited, but it is interesting to follow up these hints that he held a prominent church appointment with the Anglicans in Elsfield while maintaining his ordained office at St Columba's in London.

It seems to have gone previously unrecognised that Buchan was elected to this key role at the Parish Church shortly after he came to live in the village, and was re-elected every year until after the announcement of his appointment in Canada. A clear record survives. 'The Elsfield Churchwardens' Book from 1822' shows that Buchan paid his dues of fifteen shillings (1920), presumably a tithe for land. Sadly, the next entry is not until 20 May 1935 when a Vestry meeting was called to appoint as Churchwardens 'J. Buchan, Esq., Vicar's Warden and Mr Jack Brown [a local farmer], People's Warden.'<sup>493</sup> Such sparse evidence might point only to a brief tenure made almost immediately void by moving to Canada later that year. Even that would raise questions about ecumenical relations. Free Church baptism would have been acceptable, but surely not Free Church confirmation. Wardens had to be communicant members, in those days requiring episcopal laying on of hands.<sup>494</sup> He was not confirmed at Hanover Square for, or after his marriage, or at Elsfield. We do not know how this problem was surmounted. Gore resigned as Bishop of Oxford (1919) just as Buchan was buying Elsfield Manor, so it was not through friendship with him. Perhaps it is unlikely that any record survives.

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<sup>491</sup> *Oxford Times* 23/01/1940. Ian Robert Newton Miller, Glasgow graduate; minister of John Knox Church, Newcastle, 1931-1939; took a charge in Scotland (Scott, *Fasts* 9: 198).

<sup>492</sup> *The Scotsman* 19/03/1940, 4.

<sup>493</sup> Oxford History Centre at Cowley. PAR 94/4/F1/3: 'Elsfield Churchwardens' Book', thanks to Staff, especially Rachel Hancock who later provided references after my notes were burnt.

<sup>494</sup> *Year-book of Church of England*, 103.

Another manuscript, 'Vestry Book for Elsfield', has brief, but much more specific entries for almost all of Buchan's years at the Manor. Starting on Easter Monday 1922, these record that 'J. D. Hatt, Vicar's Warden, and Mr Buchan, People's Warden were elected. With the order of names reversed the following year, these two men were re-elected in every year up to, and including, 2 April 1934, and though there is no entry for 1933 the names were presumably the same. Brown was his colleague only in the last election before Buchan went to Canada.<sup>495</sup> Hatt was a gentleman farmer: his son ran the Sunday School and was later killed as a C.M.S. missionary doctor in India.<sup>496</sup> There is a third book that shows that Buchan was elected a warden, together with Hatt, on 20 April 1920, the very first opportunity after moving into the Manor in January.<sup>497</sup>

Thus, Buchan did not read lessons at Elsfield Church as a noted casual worshipper, but over fifteen years continuously as Churchwarden. A nominal, infrequent worshipper could not have held such office there. Green's picture of a rather lapsed Christian is fantasy.

## 8. Buchan's Tolerance

Mixing with 'all sorts and conditions' people, Buchan tolerated conflicting views. He was conscious of a change at Elsfield, becoming 'more charitable in my judgment of things and men.'<sup>498</sup> Only after Buchan's death did Rowse appreciate 'the limitless and unsleeping sense of duty, and the breadth and catholicism of his sympathy.'<sup>499</sup>

The title of one of Buchan's talks was 'The Moderate Man'<sup>500</sup> and Edwin Lee devoted himself to maintaining that such was Buchan, who was generously sympathetic and tolerant towards others. It was not the only description that Buchan used about 'the fortress of the personality',<sup>501</sup> which if 'secure' obtained 'life from its roots, from loyalties, memories and traditions, from small organisms such as family, companionship, Church, and locality.'<sup>502</sup> His reflections on moral anarchism related to 'half-understood philosophic doctrines about the right of each man to self-realisation and the development of the personality.' He sought the discipline

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<sup>495</sup> PAR94/2/A1/1: The 'Elsfield Vestry Book 1822' (to 1934).

<sup>496</sup> Mashedier, 85.

<sup>497</sup> Elsfield Vestry Minutes: PAR/94/2/A1/1.

<sup>498</sup> *MHD*, 86.

<sup>499</sup> *WF*, 176.

<sup>500</sup> NLS.1 Queen's, Kingston, 07/11/1936.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*, University of Toronto, 27/11/1935.

<sup>502</sup> Parry, 'Thirty-Nine Articles', 213.

of a broad, rational and humane morality, ‘the teaching of Christ’, and recognised that fidelity to conventions was no basis for virtue.<sup>503</sup> In politics and religion he was at one with Montrose:

If you have thought out your faith, and not swallowed it blindly, you will be tolerant of those who have passed through the same intellectual process, and reached different conclusions. But nonetheless you will be more firmly established in your own faith than the fanatic [...] secure against sceptical doubts [...] you will have raised the doubts and answered them. The moderate can never be a barren dogmatist.<sup>504</sup>

This explains some paradoxes in the Buchan archive. He had close, and lasting friendships with some who disagreed with his deepest beliefs (Chapters Three and Four). In politics, Buchan empathised with the Boers of South Africa, and later regarded the severity of the Peace of Versailles as mistaken. Clement Attlee remembered ‘a very broad-minded man’ who was ‘to a large extent aboe the battle.’<sup>505</sup> That Buchan was ‘uneasily conscious of the merits’ of opponents<sup>506</sup> was true of religion, too.

It is during these Elsfield years that his Christian ecumenism became more clearly apparent, though his previous experience is relevant. This was already being expressed as a young man of twenty-five in his *Spectator* article on the Free Church and Presbyterian union (1900). ‘In the new United Church considerable provision has been made for difference of opinion, and the articles of union have through the wisdom of their promoters, committed the Churches to no cast-iron theory.’<sup>507</sup>

Buchan went out of his way to commend the Free Church ‘for a missionary enterprise and evangelical earnestness difficult to surpass in the annals of any religious body.’ For him, this was balanced by the fact that ‘of late years she has made contributions to Biblical scholarship and shown a standard of culture in her clergy which have made her the intellectual leader of bodies outside the Establishment.’ He laid down certain ecumenical principles which he retained, believing that ‘it is undoubtedly the duty of Churches to unite when there is no radical difference in doctrine and no final divergence of views on Church government.’

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<sup>503</sup> Kernohan, *Nutshell*, 17.

<sup>504</sup> Buchan, ‘Montrose and Leadership’, 269-70. Buchan was moderate without identifying with ‘Moderatism’ which from 1750, was strong in the Church of Scotland, downplayed original sin and was suspicious of conversion.

<sup>505</sup> *SJB*, 324, 372.

<sup>506</sup> *MHD*, 144.

<sup>507</sup> ‘The Ecclesiastical Union in Scotland,’ 7.

From the time he first donned his white surplice in Brasenose Chapel, though a convinced Presbyterian, he worshipped regularly as an Anglican for a third of his life, identifying with the Church in that place.<sup>508</sup>

Buchan developed a desire to close the gap between the different denominations, hoping that The Church of Scotland could be ‘a bridge church’ on the path to Christian unity. That might seem to be unrealistic, but he had seen reunions within it, and Presbyterianism had sat with Episcopacy. Under James I, there had been ‘an opportunity for a true eirenicon’ with ‘real chance of union’ and that under Charles I the problem had not been episcopacy but prelacy.<sup>509</sup> Buchan’s friend, Bishop Henson did not even believe that episcopacy was vital in unity.<sup>510</sup> Later unions elsewhere, as in India, have shown what is possible retaining it.

Personally, he will have experienced such intimacy with individual Christians of a variety of denominations. Among Anglican clerics his friends included Bussell, Ainger, Gore, Lang, and Elkington. In Canada he became very friendly with Monsignor Camille Roy, Rector of Laval University.<sup>511</sup> Other Catholic friends were Ronald Knox and the Jesuit, Father Martin D’Arcy, who arrived in Oxford (1927) to join the staff at Campion Hall.<sup>512</sup> He said of Buchan, to whom he ‘had always been greatly drawn’, that he ‘made me feel that his friendship was given to me, and he was courteous and high-minded.’<sup>513</sup>

Buchan had a passage in *Presbyterianism* about Christian toleration, applauding ‘a freeing of religious energy from the obsession of lesser matters, like disputes about the niceties of orthodoxy and Church government’ and approving a ‘return to the simplicity and beauty of the first conception of our Church before a wise tolerance was replaced by a narrow sectarianism.’<sup>514</sup> Admiring Thomas Chalmers, Buchan would probably have agreed with ‘his belief that creeds and confessions were “out of their place [...] as magazines of truth” since they had generally come into existence as “mere landmarks against heresy” and he lamented their change of function into “insignia for different denominations”.’<sup>515</sup>

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<sup>508</sup> Brasenose 1895-99; The Temple Church, 1899-1901; Elsfeld 1920-35.

<sup>509</sup> *Kirk in Scotland*, 36-37.

<sup>510</sup> Henson, *Anglicanism and Reunion*, 18.

<sup>511</sup> Sire, *D’Arcy*, 62.

<sup>512</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>513</sup> *SJB*, 469.

<sup>514</sup> *Pres.*, 3-4.

<sup>515</sup> Roxborough, ‘Practice and Pious’, 177.



In his non-fiction writing, Buchan is warmly sympathetic to both Anglican Christian Platonists and Puritan Divines in his much favoured seventeenth century, being as keen to write about Cromwell as Montrose, and later Walter Scott the Presbyterian and Episcopalian, as Gordon the Plymouth Brother. It is therefore natural that such divergence should be reflected also in the Christian positions expressed in his fictional characterisation. A French Catholic was the hero of his first novel (1895). Peter Pienaar in *Mr Standfast*, was presumably from a Dutch Reformed background. In *The Dancing Floor*, Vernon Milburne is a devout Anglican evangelical, and Orthodox Christianity triumphs over what amounts to devil-worship. Posthumously in *Sick Heart River*, Leithen and Frizel were brought up Presbyterians, and the Oblate Fathers are featured sympathetically. Prior to his last illness, Buchan spent a 'Friday morning with the Sulspician Brotherhood', an enormously influential order. They 'went into the cathedral in state, and the organ played "God Save the King" and "Land of Hope and Glory" - a thing which must be almost unparalleled.'<sup>516</sup> Such incidents show how Buchan was able to generate and share in this sense of oneness within a broadly Christian framework so very different from his own Presbyterianism. He had been well prepared by his long involvement with the Church of England, and Catholic friends like D'Arcy.

Buchan found oneness in his reading of the seventeenth century divines, including Covenanters, who 'never unchurched their old enemy Rome, or treated her baptism as invalid. They were always unwilling separatists and longed for reunion – on their own terms.'<sup>517</sup> Now he realised that unity would be difficult enough with whoever accepted the fundamentals among Protestants, but ultimately hoped for it with Catholics too in a 'united Christendom'.<sup>518</sup>

The crying need today is for prophets who will enlarge the sphere of Christian duty and sharpen its purpose – men to whom there is nothing secular which is not also sacred, whose antagonists are not those who in a slightly different form profess the same faith, but the eternal enemy, sin and sorrow and pain.<sup>519</sup>

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<sup>516</sup> *SJB*, 469.

<sup>517</sup> *Kirk in Scotland*, 41.

<sup>518</sup> *Pres*, 16.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

## 9. Conclusion

Susan Buchan wrote of Elsfield Manor that ‘the front door opens on the village street and we are on intimate terms with our neighbours. Life in a village is full of excitement, and bubbles like a seething pot with dramas from the cradle to the grave.’<sup>520</sup> In the rural society of the time all that we have seen of the willingness of the Buchans to be so thoroughly involved in village life was in itself a Christian response. Such activities by his family good-naturedly supported the more formal role that Buchan played as Churchwarden throughout all the years spent there. Perhaps with more than a touch of nostalgia, Mabel Chaulk remembers Elsfield in those days as ‘one big happy family.’<sup>521</sup>

Elsfield became immensely important to Buchan, having fallen ‘desperately in love with it.’<sup>522</sup> Throughout his life he was greatly attached to successive rural environments. Beside the Cotswolds, these included the Scottish Borders (with thoughts of a shooting lodge there), the South African Wood Bush (with thoughts of ‘Buchansdorp’, in open country beyond Skellum Kloof),<sup>523</sup> and parts of Canada, but for the last twenty years of his life Elsfield was dominant. His sense of place, and the need to settle, were wholly realised at the manor house. This gave him all that he needed in both security and contentment:

I think those early years in Elsfield were the happiest of my life for I acquired a new loyalty and a new heritage, having added the South Midlands to the Scottish Borders [...] and felt amazingly rich in consequence.<sup>524</sup>

Elsfield had the edge, for his beloved Susie was at peace there, shown by her great reluctance to leave it for Canada.<sup>525</sup> Moreover, it was convenient for his daily work at Nelsons, Reuters, and later in the Commons. Proximity to Oxford could be a study in itself, exploring all the wealth of friendship and stimulus given by the University. There was never a hint that he would eventually move back to his beloved Borders. His only thought was to retire to Elsfield, end his days, and be buried there, as he expressly wished.<sup>526</sup>

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<sup>520</sup> *WF*, 92; cf. *MHD*, 187.

<sup>521</sup> Notes by Felicity, a local resident, interviewing Mabel Chaulk (1999), courtesy of Mavis Curtis, Elsfield Historian (2013). Mavis is more sceptical about the ‘one, big happy family.’

<sup>522</sup> *SJB*, 220.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*, 165, 130: *African Colony*, 119.

<sup>524</sup> *MHD*, 192.

<sup>525</sup> *LJB*, 261. Convenient, too, with sister nearby, mother in London.

<sup>526</sup> *UU*, 183.

Parry observed that Buchan ‘had absorbed himself in local life and history.’<sup>527</sup> The richness he felt there was threefold. He wanted to spend every weekend there, and when possible every night, since he gloried in the house and surrounding countryside; immersion in Elsfield and its people both stimulated and relaxed him mentally; his unstinted involvement in the Parish Church fulfilled him spiritually, while keeping up his office at St Columba’s, though rarely present. To suppose that it was just a convenient dormitory near Oxford, so that he could work in London is misleading..

Johnnie Tweedsmuir appreciated the importance of the Elsfield’s influence on his father, who had first loved it as an undergraduate in the nineties: ‘Now it had become his home and he could savour it as one who belonged there, with August every year in Scotland to take *seisin* once again of the land of his birth.’<sup>528</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> ‘Thirty-nine Articles’, 214.

<sup>528</sup> Tweedsmuir, *Always a Countryman*, 24.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE REPRESENTATION OF THE CLERGY IN BUCHAN'S FICTION

‘I love writers individually,  
but assembled in bulk they affect me  
with an overpowering repugnance,  
like a gathering of clerics.’  
(*SJB*, 178)

Critics have argued certain matters by quoting from characters in Buchan's fiction, often in a vague or random way. The only way to counter this in the following chapters is by specific quotation.

#### 1. Origins of Error

Early in their marriage Susan recalled that Buchan declined to go to a Dinner in aid of the Royal Literary Fund. She retold the anecdote about him not advocating a purely literary career, yet from this momentary memory a myth was made. Martin Green deduced that Buchan ‘could not stand the clergy.’<sup>529</sup> Avidly taken up by Macdonald, dressed up with vague and sweeping comments from characters in his novels, the belief has entered the mainstream as his ‘anti-clericalism’.<sup>530</sup> Buchan's son, William, wrote of the deep suspicion (of Buchan's writing) bred at the English Literature School (under F. R. Leavis), whence a cold, critical wind began to blow from the direction of Cambridge’, and Green was taught by Leavis.<sup>531</sup> Such error should be exposed before causing any further mischief.

The clergy among Buchan's fictional characters mainly occur momentarily in his stories,<sup>532</sup> and notably in Nanty Lammas, hero of *The Free Fishers*, (which also has Richie Blackstocks, below (211). They occur in detail in his historical novels about the covenanting

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<sup>529</sup> *MG*, 129; Green overlooked Buchan's son's comment that his father ‘found the Calvinism of his upbringing a gentle and a joyful thing’; ‘a source of strength.’ *WB*, 253-54.

<sup>530</sup> Similarly, American sleuth, Scudder (*Thirty-Nine Steps*) has the ‘real boss’ as ‘a little white-faced Jew with an eye like a rattlesnake’ stimulating the myth that Buchan was anti-Semitic.

<sup>531</sup> *WB*, 249; *MG*, iii.

<sup>532</sup> e.g. *Mr Standfast*, XVII/261(O.U.P.); *Island of Sheep*, X/142(P).

period of the seventeenth century. Although he gives a largely balanced presentation of the conflicting ecclesiastical and political attitudes which were then current, evidence will show that we can safely assume that Buchan would be astonished, and horrified to learn that he was thought to be anti-clerical, just as much as to be thought anti-Semitic.<sup>533</sup> Such a view is not to be found in anything before 1990. However, it does mean that any positive discussion of his fictional clerical characters must now keep this misunderstanding under review.

## 2. Is Anti-clericalism the Right Word for this Discussion?

Clericalism is essentially rule or undue influence by the clergy. Buchan was opposed to the first but certainly not against the second, favouring an established church. Much of the problem comes from widespread misunderstandings about, or ignorance of Scottish Church history since the Reformation. This was second nature to Buchan from his boyhood upward. In his historical stories about Covenanting times in seventeenth century Scotland, he set out to explore the varying attitudes within the Church during that troubled time, but that does not imply that he set out to be anti-clerical.

Although Buchan said that his friend Raymond Asquith ‘detested clericalism’,<sup>534</sup> the term is first used in relation to Buchan’s clergy by Macdonald, but has she the right word for what she thinks she is describing? Green forces Buchan’s chance remark into implying that Buchan did not like clergymen. If there were a term ‘anti-clergyism’ it might described that view, but such simple prejudice falls far short of what is usually meant by anti-clericalism. In any case, it is untrue. Far from disliking them, Buchan had friendships with ordained men from a number of Protestant denominations and among Roman Catholics. He corresponded with them and entertained them in his home.

Macdonald seems to add a more serious charge to what Green was implying, and infers that Buchan deliberately invented clerical characters in order to present them to the public in an adverse way. This not only imposes far too much deliberate intent upon ‘a teller of tales’, but again falls very far short of what is usually meant by anti-clericalism. In any case, the evidence which she cites does not support her conclusion, and thus it will be shown to be unjustified.

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<sup>533</sup> Anti-Semitic charges are summarised, addressed and refuted: *DD*, esp. 205-07; *LJB* esp. 196-98; *WB*, 250-51; Steyn, ‘Be Careful’, 43-48. The anti-clerical charge is made in *CMF*, ‘Religion,’ 145-48.

<sup>534</sup> *MHD*, 59.

If she had limited her article only to include those works which had to do with the seventeenth century she might properly have used the term Anti-Covenanter, but we shall see that she widens the field into Buchan's own time. Perhaps the generic term Anti-Calvinist would have suited her argument better except that Buchan himself remained an avowed Calvinist. So we are really only left with anti-clericalism in a very debased form, meaning little more than dislike of the clergy. Despite this unsatisfactory uncertainty about her thesis, Macdonald's evidence must now be considered critically. None of Buchan's biographers raised this, and citing no other source, it seems that Macdonald has formulated this charge about Buchan's aversion.

### 3. What Buchan Says He Intended in His Historical Novels

Rather than fabricating our own ideas of what Buchan was attempting in writing historical novels, it is well to heed the warning of his second son that his family 'had to read certain idiocies written about him in terms not only of his books, but of his life itself.'<sup>535</sup> This is especially likely when the author's own views are ignored. Far from setting out to use historical situations to promulgate his supposed views on anti-Semitism, anti-clericalism, toleration, snobbery, racism, women or any other matter for which he has been variously praised or blamed, he set himself a specific task. 'I was busy with a very different kind of romance. The desire to recover the sense of continuity [...] prompted my first really serious piece of fiction. It was called *The Path of the King*.'

This kind of writing was in sharp contrast to his 'shockers', (popular fiction, contemporary adventure stories). He went on to vary his 'tales of adventure with this kind of romance' over which he 'took a great deal of pains,' and he thought them

the most successful of my attempts at imaginative creation. Being equally sensitive to the spells of time and of space, to a tract of years and a tract of landscape, I tried to discover the historical moment which best interpreted the ethos of a particular countryside, and to devise the appropriate legend [...] I felt the clamour of certain scenes for an interpreter.<sup>536</sup>

Then he goes on to tell us what he thought he was doing in writing each of the following: *Midwinter* (1923), *Witch Wood* (1927), *The Blanket of the Dark* (1931), and *The Free Fishers*

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<sup>535</sup> *WB*, 249.

<sup>536</sup> *MHD*, 196; *CMF*, 157-58 discusses Buchan's use of 'shocker'.

(1934). ‘These were serious books and they must have puzzled’ readers ‘eager to follow the doings of Richard Hannay or Dickson McCunn.’<sup>537</sup> Indeed, and so they must be treated seriously, including the clergy in *Witch Wood* and in other works which he does not cite but which Macdonald selected.

#### 4. The Covenants of 1638 and 1643

The National Covenant in Scotland of 1638 was a call to purify the Established Church on the Presbyterian model. Montrose signed it and stood by it right up to his execution a dozen years later.<sup>538</sup> The Solemn League and Covenant of 1643 went much further in committing adherents to a theocratic form of unity throughout Scotland and England, ‘of which [in Buchan’s words] the price was armed rebellion.’<sup>539</sup> Kernohan, over-simplifying, comments that ‘the one is a Covenant of Grace and the other a Covenant of Works.’<sup>540</sup> Montrose would have none of it (1643), any more than Buchan would have done. The first allowed influence by the clergy, while the second ultimately demanded rule by the clergy. To put it simply, by identifying so closely with Montrose, Buchan was clerical, and only anti-clerical in being opposed to more extreme Covenanters and their excesses. In writing of the Solemn League, Buchan understood that this ‘new Covenant became a mystical compact with the Almighty, its acceptance the test of holiness, its rejection or breach a certain proof of damnation.’ Because of this, ‘Civil statesmanship disappears in such a mood, and all that remains is a frantic theocracy.’ Indeed, Buchan’s view might better be called ‘anti-theocracy’. Even so, he had great sympathy for the Reverend Alexander Henderson who became the acknowledged leader of the Kirk in Edinburgh from the time the Solemn League and Covenant was signed, and who was misled into believing that England, too, wanted Presbyterianism so that the League would bring about the great good of unity.<sup>541</sup>

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<sup>537</sup> *MHD*, 197.

<sup>538</sup> *JBM*, 372-73.

<sup>539</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>540</sup> Kernohan, *Nutshell*, 13. Bands or covenants, both private and public, had a long history among Reformers during the previous ninety years: Fleming, *Scottish Covenants in Outline*; Stevenson, *The Burning Bush*.

<sup>541</sup> *JBM*, 145-48; ‘From such a man as Alexander Henderson [Montrose] differed with profound reluctance.’

## 5. Buchan's Supposed Anti-clericalism

In Buchan's day clergy were prominent personalities on the local scene throughout Britain. Naturally he created such characters in a variety of situations. How far there is a danger in having a prejudice, and then assuming that the evidence supports it, can be seen in the article on 'Religion' by the Macdonald.<sup>542</sup> Having edited *The John Buchan Journal* for a decade, she ought to have been cautious for all previous writers on Buchan were unaware of anti-clericalism.<sup>543</sup> It is a new and false myth. A recent introduction rightly asserts that in the 1960s 'the legend was invented that [Buchan] was snobbish and pompous – and some commentators have said very silly things about him.' So critics are capable of invention and spawning nonsense. Macdonald distils her accumulated knowledge in her *Companion*. Although in his novels 'there are few ministers and fewer overtly pious folk',<sup>544</sup> she makes the extravagant claim that 'Buchan was pre-occupied with anti-clericalism and the role of ministers in religion from his earliest writing. This questioning of church ministers would have had a long gestation, growing up as he did in a Presbyterian minister's family.'<sup>545</sup> It is far too much to say that he was 'preoccupied' with it when his novels included 'few ministers.' Sometimes he wrote stories in which Christian ministers were likely to appear as characters, but that does not mean that he set out with the deliberate intention of being anti-clerical. Moreover, his only book really dominated by the role of ministers, *Witch Wood* (1927), was not among his early writing.

This leads on to Macdonald's supposition, held also by others, that it 'seems obvious to conclude that in rejecting the cant of narrow-minded Presbyterian ministers in his fiction, Buchan was rejecting his own background and up bringing.'<sup>546</sup> This only seems obvious to those who presuppose it. It is a *non sequitur* to suggest that his rejection of some of the attitudes of seventeenth century ministers has anything to do with a presumed rejection of his own late nineteenth century background. Macdonald immediately seems to distance herself a little from this claim by adding that

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<sup>542</sup> *CMF*, 145-48.

<sup>543</sup> *SJB*; *DD*; *WB*; *LJB*.

<sup>544</sup> Burnett, *Thirty-Nine Steps*, x.

<sup>545</sup> *CMF*, 145. Strongly maintaining this mistaken assertion, it is surprising to find in a book of edited essays in the same year, Macdonald's awareness of the very trap into which she falls here. 'The present generation, and several generations preceding them, simply do not have the intellectual and cultural training to read the religious aspects of Buchan's writing in the way that Buchan intended, or would have expected from his own generation.' *Reassessing Buchan*, 2. Why then be so dogmatic in *CMF* about what is not understood?

<sup>546</sup> We shall see below that Macdonald is fond of the word 'cant' in relation to aspects of Presbyterianism.



Buchan almost never rejects religious belief *per se* in his fiction, concentrating his anger on the restricted understanding of the less able ministers appointed to guide and teach their parishioners. There is nothing in the Buchan family's copious memoirs to suggest anything other than that the Reverend John Buchan was a gentle, vague, and much loved father and preacher.<sup>547</sup>

Of course, it was not a question of the ability of some ministers, but their attitude, and Mr Buchan was far from a vague preacher. Moreover, the retraction is short-lived, for she quickly adds that Buchan 'wrote most of his anti-clerical fiction while his father was still alive.' This should be seen as 'a testament to the open and forward thinking atmosphere in the Buchan home where essentials of human behaviour as directed by the church were not buried in the dogmas that Buchan satirised in his stories.' All this only begs the question of how much there is in these stories to which the elder Buchan would have objected.

## 6. The Four Novels to be Considered

Macdonald states that 'In *Sir Quixote of the Moors*, *John Burnet of Barns*, *Salute to Adventurers*, and *Witch Wood*, Buchan dissects the faults and excesses of the Covenanters and their ilk and picks apart the cant to reveal a basic and venal struggle for power.'<sup>548</sup> Buchan's stories are very difficult to comprehend in this analysis. He did not link these stories together, and Macdonald has done so to demonstrate that he is consistently anti-clerical: she implies a systematic approach in all four stories to expose Covenanters in general as having been engaged in a struggle for power in which the use of any means, however corrupt, was used or condoned by them, for how else is it venal?

Buchan touched on faults and excesses in some few 'Covenanters and their ilk', but his representation of them is varied. In *Sir Quixote* the two Covenanters are not struggling for power but longing to be freed from persecution. In *John Burnet* the hero, though not a Covenanter, is only freed to resume his life at home by the relaxation of oppression accompanying the news that James II has departed; it is not a conflict for power in which he is personally engaged. In *Salute to Adventures* the struggle against the Indian threat led by Gib, has really nothing to do with clergy. All these stories have in common a background of Covenanters and dragoons; only in *Witch Wood* can it be said that among some ministers there

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<sup>547</sup> *CMF*, 145-46.

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-47.

is perhaps a venal struggle for power, but it has much to do with spiritual forces, little to do with politics (see below, Ch.7.2)

Macdonald continues: 'It is exceedingly rare to find a Presbyterian minister in Buchan's work who does not have at least some negative features, and, most often they are narrow minded and ignorant individuals.'<sup>549</sup> Again, there is the implication that Buchan was thereby getting at his father who, apart from being single-eyed in his clerical calling, was by no means narrow-minded and certainly not ignorant, as has been shown (Chapter One). Moreover, in such a statement she dilutes her argument for 'anti-clericalism' as a term applies to all ordained clergy, not just to Presbyterians, and indeed historically describes opposition to the power of the Catholic Church. Anyway, the honest representation of any human being will include 'at least some negative features.'

Macdonald's final (and somewhat triumphant) flourish is that 'intriguingly the only ministers in Buchan's fiction who are unreservedly good and are treated with complete respect are the imams who follow the prophet called Greenmantle' while 'he gives the ministers of his own religion a much harder time.'<sup>550</sup> This dramatic and eye-catching ending is somewhat gratuitous when Buchan's sympathy extended even to the Kaiser, the arch-enemy.<sup>551</sup> Surely, the positive portrayal of imams is as much because Buchan could discuss his own church with a critical (though sympathetic) knowledge not mirrored in his unequal understanding of Islam. Much more significantly, it fits his plot to portray the prophet and his acolytes as other worldly and saintly, in contrast with the wholly evil Hilda von Einem who is making use of them for her own purposes. There are, of course, no Christian clergy anywhere in this novel.

Granted that these charges are contained within a short article, in what may otherwise be an admirable work, the premise that Buchan was anti-clerical is maintained despite all evidence to the contrary.

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<sup>549</sup> *CMF*, 147.

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>551</sup> Buchan, *Greenmantle*, VI/69-71(P). Hannay, alias the Dutchman Cornelius Brandt, meets the Kaiser at a railway station. Being introduced as a collaborator, he senses greatness, but 'I felt that I was looking on at a far bigger tragedy than any I had seen in action. Here was one that had loosed Hell, and the furies of Hell had got hold of him.'

### 7. *Sir Quixote of the Moors* (1895)

All the four books which Macdonald cites to support her claim are set in the Covenanting period of the middle or late seventeenth century. There is only one minister in *Sir Quixote of the Moors* (1895). He is elderly, but not ineffective. The Covenanters are portrayed as being sincere in their faith but mercilessly persecuted to the death by servants of the Crown such as the French Catholic hero's first Scottish host, Quentin Kennedy. His actions repel the Frenchman, who leaves him not knowing whither he will go. Eventually, the Sieur Jean de Rohaine is taken in at the Lindean manse of the Covenanting parish minister, Ephraim Lambert.

This clergyman has at first been left in peace at home but not allowed to preach. Old though he is, he is forced to flee for his life once it is known that he has preached at Callowa' Muir to fugitives in the hills. That in itself was a courageous action on the part of the old man. He has deep Christian convictions, is warmly hospitable in taking in a destitute French gentleman, and when he finds that he is a Catholic does not force a religious discussion upon his guest. He is loyal to his laird and friend, Henry Semple, devoted to his only child Anne and deeply solicitous for her welfare. Apart from sighing at his guest's spiritual state, his only negative quality is his occasional raging against his persecutors, more than understandable in the harsh circumstances. If this was a fault, he always immediately repents of such sentiments.<sup>552</sup> His godliness is so evident when taking family prayers that the reprobate hero, de Rohaine, who has foolishly lost his birthright through 'gaming and pleasuring'<sup>553</sup>, exclaims: 'Truly, when I arose from my knees, I felt more tempted to be devout than I have any remembrance of before.'<sup>554</sup>

This saying has particular importance in view of another statement by Macdonald. The story figures largely in her doctoral thesis where she has a close analysis of the plot, and says that, respecting the Frenchman, Lambert's daughter 'Anne is agreeable to him not only because of her beauty, but for the relative lack of Calvinist cant in her actions which in the minister and her suitor were a source of annoyance and evidence of hypocrisy to de Rohaine.'<sup>555</sup> Cant implies insincerity, as does hypocrisy, but Buchan's portrayal of Lambert is of someone who is nothing if he is not utterly sincere, and being sincere in the practice of his beliefs he cannot be charged

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<sup>552</sup> *Sir Quixote*, 38.

<sup>553</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>555</sup> Macdonald, 'Fiction of Buchan,' 92.

with hypocrisy. His guest understood that, and if Macdonald, or de Rohaine for that matter, disliked or disagreed with his religious views, that is a matter for themselves. Their disagreement does not make him a hypocrite, and just because they do not accept his views it does not turn them into cant. Her judgment probably tells us something about the critic, but nothing about Buchan's supposed anti-clericalism, and this book should not be cited in support of that thesis.

Macdonald's evaluation of this story is that it discusses a philosophical dilemma. That may be one interpretation, but when she comes to the religious aspects she is too sweeping. She, but not Buchan, tells us that he 'used the novel to work out his own religious doubts and resentments' and, here yet again, she maintains that 'in all his later work there is scarcely one positive portrait of a churchman; they are either fanatics or fools.' Then with great assurance we are told that 'Buchan's principal concern with *Sir Quixote* was to take apart the faults and excesses of the Covenanters and their cant to reveal a venal struggle for power, hidden under a violent religious fanaticism that had long since lost sight of the message of mercy and love from the New Testament.' This repeats a charge that is altogether too inclusive, and indeed inaccurate. If what she says is in any way true, he made a singularly bad job of it. Of course, the story is set in troubled times. Rather implausibly de Rohaine's knowledge of the two key men at Lindean manse is derived from only three days together after his recovery from exhaustion, which brought him to seek sanctuary at their door, and the sudden need for his male hosts to go into hiding. That apart, Buchan portrays Ephraim Lambert, the old Covenanting minister, as certainly no fool and no more a fanatic than Buchan's father, nor in any way violent. Lambert's way of life might seem narrow, but it is honourable, faithful and full of acts of loving-kindness. Buchan could not have given him any higher commendation than this, that he is so beloved by all the local inhabitants that two attempts to put another in his place as the minister have met with immediate failure each time. The attempt is not repeated.<sup>556</sup> There is no sign here of having abandoned the New Testament 'message of mercy and love.' Indeed both Lambert and Henry Semple have endearing qualities. 'I was amazed at the trusting nature of these men, who had habited all their day with honest folk till they conceived all to be as worthy as themselves.'<sup>557</sup> That is spoken by the Frenchman to describe sincere men, not hypocrites.

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<sup>556</sup> *Sir Quixote*, 36 (Valancourt).

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

Macdonald wrote the 2008 introduction to a shoddily produced American re-printing. The cover confidently states that the story is set in ‘the mid-*sixteenth* century.’ Later ‘he wanders until he comes to a *cottage* containing a beautiful and [not initially] *unprotected* young woman, Anne.’<sup>558</sup> She may have had no responsibility for these gaffes, but it is different with her ‘Introduction’. Much seems plausible enough until we come to the familiar mantra about cant which has just been quoted. Thereafter, her argument begins to unravel. There are some astonishing statements which show a sad disregard for the details of the story. Of Anne we are told that ‘she is not even given the dignity of a surname.’<sup>559</sup> But this comes in a paragraph which begins by telling us that she is the Minister’s daughter. Having been told that she is the only child of Ephraim Lambert, what further need does she have of a surname?

Again, ‘although Anne is ostensibly an engaged woman, Buchan ensures that she does not refer at all to her fiancé.’ No, but the author has left us in no doubt about her love for him. Thus, when we first find the couple together ‘’twas not hard to see the relationship between the two. The love light shone in his eye whenever he looked toward her, and she, for her part, seemed to thrill at his chance touch.’ Later, when Semple in danger of his life has to accompany the minister into hiding out on the moor, he takes ‘a still more tender farewell’ of Anne than her father, whose parental love could hardly have been stronger.<sup>560</sup> In the following days, Jean observes that

Of her lover I never heard, and, now that I think the matter over, ’twas no more than fitting. Once, indeed, I stumbled upon his name by chance in the course of talk, but as she blushed and started, I vowed to fight shy of it ever after.<sup>561</sup>

These quotations are important because during the course of the story Anne loses her love for Henry in his privation, without ever knowing the one thing that might have excused her, that his sufferings in hiding in the hills have, apparently for ever, deprived him of his reason.<sup>562</sup>

Anne is a truly reprehensible character, becoming cold and indifferent to her father’s afflictions<sup>563</sup> and faithless to her lover, all because she succumbs to the worldliness of Jean.

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<sup>558</sup> Italicised words indicate errors. If Americans thought ‘manse’ was too obscure, ‘house’ would have given some dignity, but ‘cottage’ is ridiculous. Webb is also careless: de Rohaine ‘ends up in a house owned by some Covenanters.’ *Companion*, 106. Semple was only a guest there and Lambert occupied tied accommodation dependent on his office. Indeed, had a new minister been appointed he would have lost possession.

<sup>559</sup> *Sir Quixote*, xv.

<sup>560</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>561</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>562</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-70.

Admittedly, she has been unintentionally led astray by him in his attempts to amuse her, but in the end it is he who justly rebukes her. With his horse saddled for imminent departure, he enters the Manse for the last time to bid farewell and picks up a loaf of bread for the journey into the unknown. Anne is puzzled by this act and questions whether he needs the bread to 'visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction.' With a scriptural knowledge rather surprising in such as he, Jean completes the quotation with: 'Nay [...] I would but keep myself unspotted from the world.'<sup>564</sup> Surely he can only have learnt those words through listening to Lambert's biblical exposition at family prayers some time previously.<sup>565</sup> It is the last thing he says to her apart from then briefly taking his leave.

As he weaves his story, Buchan is much more subtle than Macdonald with her sweeping statements about Calvinist cant, violent fanaticism, and venal struggles for power. He was not concerned with misleading generalisations. He knew that there were also sincere, even fanatical Covenanters who abhorred violence wanting only to live peaceably. Equally there are also rogues and hypocrites among them, just as there are in all religions and political parties. He is very even handed in his presentation of Lambert and Semple as Covenanters. Despite de Rohaine's brief acquaintance with them, there was nevertheless a rapid intimacy between them. On the one hand, his liking for Semple 'speedily ripened into a fast friendship. I found it in my heart to like this great serious man [...] a man of courage and kindliness.'<sup>566</sup> On the other, 'yet, withal, there was something sinister about the house and its folk [...] they were kindness and charity incarnate, but they were cold and gloomy to boot, lacking any grace or sprightliness in their lives.'<sup>567</sup> Then, again on the positive side: 'I think it no shame that my sympathy is all with these rebels, for had I not seen something of their misery myself.'<sup>568</sup>

It is significant that this and two of the other three novels cited by Macdonald are all set in the second half of the seventeenth century when the Covenanters were being persecuted. Introducing the 2008 edition of *John Burnet of Barns*, Sir Tam Dalyell reminisces about the

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<sup>563</sup> With Jean and Anne together in the manse 'she spoke of her father often, and always in such a way that I could judge of a great affection between them.' Only a little later 'her callousness to the danger of her father was awful to witness.' *Sir Quixote*, 49, 65.

<sup>564</sup> *Ibid.*, 79; *Jas.* 1: 27.

<sup>565</sup> On first attending family prayers at Lindean, Jean says of the Bible that Lambert 'read I know not what, for I am not so familiar with the Scriptures as I should be.' *Sir Quixote*, 35.

<sup>566</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>568</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

Tweedsmuir's visiting his home at The Binns when he was a very small child. His mother told him later that Buchan was keen to see the relicts of his ancestor, that 'General Tam' who had suppressed the Covenanters. He also wanted to know the family version of the story about Dalyell giving quarter-mercy to three hundred camp followers, women and children, after Rullion Green, although they were afterwards massacred on Lauderdale's orders. This butchery sounds all too familiar considering the treatment of the defeated Royalist Irish after Philiphaugh two decades earlier. We shall find that this greatly offended Buchan. Dalyell then records an interesting comment. 'My mother's feeling was that Buchan [...] while intrigued by the Royalist point of view had more than a sneaking sympathy with the cause of the Covenanters.'<sup>569</sup> Indeed, Buchan's father would have been among them.<sup>570</sup>

Macdonald sees significance in debating a philosophical problem of honour and duty. Buchan himself stated that at the time of writing, though it can all perhaps better be understood as a matter of spiritual responses, for he went on to say that 'I set about writing a tale which should be a study of temptation and victory.'<sup>571</sup> Daniell touches on this without ever quite following it through. He noted that 'The Sieur's approach is *via* the Angel's Ladder, as if some matter of high spiritual importance was inside the experience to come, as indeed it is.'<sup>572</sup> But is the spiritual experience no more than falling in love?

The root of the matter is the madness of Scotland which sends men into the bogs and deprives them of humanity, turning them into beasts. It is religion gone evil, turning men into two kinds of sub-human creatures: slaughterers of defenceless cottagers on the one hand [...] on the other gibbering cowards who would rather live in peat-bogs in the autumn and winter than fight, and who load all their responsibilities on to a stranger.<sup>573</sup>

It is questionable whether this is fair to Lambert and Semple. If they wait in the manse for the dragoons to arrest them the implication is that they will be taken to Edinburgh and probably perish there. That will not help in the defence of Anne. We have no evidence that they had the means with which to fight against soldiers. They might have engaged in a ridiculous show of

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<sup>569</sup> Dalyell, 'Introduction'. x. General Tam's atrocities elsewhere were particularly vicious according to contemporaries like Kirkton, 143.

<sup>570</sup> The assertion of the Reverend Charles Shaw: *Mem.*, 313.

<sup>571</sup> Buchan, *Good Reading*, 291-292.

<sup>572</sup> *DD*, 47.

<sup>573</sup> *Ibid.*, 49

force to resist arrest at home, but others might have been injured in an attempt that would have been futile. For many like themselves the only recourse was to take to the hills.<sup>574</sup>

Macdonald pays lip service to the fact that the story was published in October 1895, and therefore written while Buchan was still in Glasgow. This point is not followed through; its significance unrecognised. It means that he wrote it while still living in his father's manse, still teaching at his father's John Knox Church. He loved his parents deeply and would not consciously have hurt them. Surely, the spiritual interpretation is more likely. Lambert and Semple are faithful to their Christian calling no matter what, though Buchan rightly sets them as people of their time. de Rohaine has been something of a reprobate, but his Catholicity still gives him a conscience. Though somewhat irked by their Calvinistic ways, he still sympathises with his two hosts, and often thinks of their plight on the moors while he enjoys the comfort of their home. He had a sincere liking for the humanity in Semple. When Jean recognises that he has lost his reason (but not his unswerving love for Anne) he, unlike Daniell, observes that he had suffered in 'a valiant cause.'<sup>575</sup>

The situation Jean finds himself in might be perceived as resulting from Anne having been abandoned by her clergyman father, and it puts him on the horns of a dilemma. Does he leave the manse and his passion for Anne, thus breaking his word to stay and protect her? Does he flee with her and her fortune, thus in an unanticipated way keeping his promise to protect, but at the same time stealing another man's betrothed? Does he stay to protect, while suppressing his passion for Anne? Unable to trust himself, or her, to do the last he concludes that it is better to break his promise to protect and 'to keep himself unspotted from the world.' No critic seems to have commented on the significance of these words at this point in the story, or on those quoted earlier in which de Rohaine is so moved at prayers with Lambert. Having innocently, or at least unthinkingly, become the source of worldly temptation to Anne through their singing and dancing, she has now become the source of such temptation to Jean through their mutual

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<sup>574</sup> 'There'll be but a short lease of life for us unless we take to the hills this very night' *Sir Quixote*, 41. Perhaps Daniell was fortunate enough not to have lived under the martial law of a repressive regime, as the writer did in Idi Amin's Uganda, and did not know the powerlessness that such repression induces in law-abiding people. Failure to attempt by force to fight against the evils was not cowardice, for trying of ourselves to do so was futile. During the covenanting period, failed risings, ending at Rullion Green and Aird's Moss, give sufficient proof. Moreover, 'the powers that be are ordained of God' (Romans 13:1) and will be held responsible by Him. Buchan appears to have sensed this challenge to any Christian living under brutal repression. His view of both Lambert and Semple seems to be that they must look to God to aid them through their sorrows.

<sup>575</sup> *Sir Quixote*, 70.



passion for each other. As it seems that her father would have been forcibly taken away from the home long before when the dragoons came, we can discount her father's culpability as the cause of this predicament.

It is all very unsatisfactory, as real life often is, but one thing is certain. The American ending, in which two final sentences are added making Jean change his mind and return into the arms of Anne, is all wrong. Daniell concurs.<sup>576</sup> As Macdonald rightly points out, it was no doubt added without Buchan's knowledge. Here, far from working 'out his own religious doubts and resentments', Buchan is wrestling with a dilemma of his certainties. Both Buchan, and his father, recognised that there are many ways to Christ and that Christian discipleship was not an easy path.<sup>577</sup> Then there is Macdonald's claim that he set out to 'take apart the faults and excesses of the Covenanters and their cant.' Actually, Buchan is generally even handed in his treatment of the Covenanters here. The innkeeper, who speaks the language, is an obvious rogue and hypocrite seeing that he is bent on robbery or even murder while uttering such words falsely, call them cant if you will. On the other hand Lambert and Semple naturally use religious language, but are honest and sincere so that such talk is not cant. That Semple ends in mouthing religious nonsense, when he is mad, is clearly excusable.

As to their opponents, Kennedy represents much that is evil among the King's men while the captain of dragoons investing Clachlands is nothing but a bully and a coward. In contrast to them, de Rohaine is as honest as he can be. Anne begins as a bland acolyte of her father, and ends in a willingness to throw over her upbringing. In this she is presented as behaving shabbily. Then what of this 'venal struggle for power'? Lambert and Semple are not struggling for power. They are being persecuted and hunted down. If one is looking for corruption, it is more likely to be found with their opponents or the hypocritical innkeeper.

Of course, neither the standard ending nor that in the pirated American edition are the last of de Rohaine. Commentators have little regarded Buchan teasing us with his brief Preface. All that he needed to tell us is that de Rohaine wrote his story in English both because of his knowledge of it, and because he did not want it known by certain relations. Nevertheless, he goes on to add dark hints. What are we to make of the fact that de Rohaine ends his days heroically enduring the torments of incarceration in a prison? Admittedly, he was virtually

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<sup>576</sup> *DD*, 70.

<sup>577</sup> *MHD*, 247: 'the first step having been taken, he would insist upon the arduousness of the pilgrimage.'

destitute when he left Anne, but what can have brought this French gentleman to imprisonment and perhaps to execution? He wrote the tale ‘to wile away the time’ as though he knew of a fixed period before termination. It seems an unlikely end if he had managed to return to France. As a Catholic, he would not have been an outlaw there. The story is of one who ventures from the sunny south to the dark, even blackness of the north.<sup>578</sup> So it seems more likely that his end is in Scotland. A gentleman of honour is unlikely to have robbed. Can it be that he has returned and chanced upon some situation in which Covenanters were being butchered, and intervened to his own detriment? That would have accorded with his honour. Or did he somehow fall foul of his erstwhile friend, the ruthless Kennedy whom he had rebuked and abandoned? We cannot know, but we have been provoked into questioning. These hints show the stresses under which many lived, whether clergy or lay.

With this in mind, Buchan further puzzles us in the second story cited by Macdonald. John Burnet is portrayed as chancing upon de Rohaine in Leyden.<sup>579</sup> He is introduced as having ‘just come from Scotland, and was full of memories of the land.’ He is still as ready with his sword and as entertaining a companion, but ‘there was in his eyes a look of fixed melancholy as of one who had encountered much sorrow in his time and had little hope for more happiness in the world.’ The only new thing we learn about him concerns his departure which was sudden and after receiving ‘a letter from a kinsman bidding him return on urgent necessity.’<sup>580</sup> However, there is no hint of danger or that he died in France. Perhaps Buchan was toying with ideas for another book as sequel to *Sir Quixote*? Though that was never realised, it shows how intrigued he was with the challenges of life in Covenanting adversity, and this led him to produce two more novels on this subject in later years.

Daniell then raises another issue for Buchan. ‘How is he to relate the opposite natures of his own inner experience, in which senior, admirable religious men at home are felt to be capable of sub-human irresponsibility and the loading of all their conflicts on to a visitor whose true ambience is in the classical south?’ It seems a little far fetched for Daniell then to go on to say that ‘young John, the classical student under Gilbert Murray, must have had as one component in his normally complex feelings about his father, both protectiveness for someone

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<sup>578</sup> *DD*, 47.

<sup>579</sup> Buchan, too, is a little cavalier with details, describing Leyden as a ‘village’ when this Dutch city had a population of perhaps 70,000 (1670) and, as he implies, the seat of the oldest university in Holland.

<sup>580</sup> *John Burnet*, VII/127(P).

weak. [...] and a strong objection to someone who [...] could never remember his salary.’<sup>581</sup> Why ‘must have’? This is pure supposition. We do not know that Buchan put these two things together in his own mind, and why does a purely fictional tale have to contain veiled snatches of autobiography? Semple is weak because his home and his sustenance have been forcibly taken from him under martial law. Reduced to staying in a friend’s house, he is true to his friend. Lambert is weak because he is old and compromised through his faithfulness to his clerical calling. There can be no comparison with Mr Buchan who in the spring of 1895 was not yet fifty and freely fulfilling his vocation in his prime. We do not know that his son had any concerns about him at this time.

### 8. *John Burnet of Barns (1898)*

The spotlight is again shone on the religious and political uncertainties in the last days of the Stuart Restoration, and some of the worst days for the Covenanters. The Episcopalian minister, Master Porter, curate of Lyne and the young hero’s tutor, ‘has as much religion as an ox.’<sup>582</sup> He is typical of a number of poorly educated and godless men who filled some of the Church of Scotland parishes during that unhappy time. In contrast, though fleetingly drawn, the ‘parson of Peebles’ knew his flock by name and gave fair judgment in a dispute. He is both a spiritual guide and master of secular affairs according to the custom of the time. He is a good, solid, minister impartially getting on with his duties and showing a brave independence from the controversies of the day, ‘alien alike to Whig and Prelatist.’ Then there is the ‘scholar shrewd and profound’, Gilbert Burnet, ‘the devoutest Christian it has ever been my lot to fall in with.’<sup>583</sup> Burnet’s view of the religious controversy is made clear. ‘Is a man to suffer because he thinks one way of worshipping his God better than another? Rather let us rejoice when he worships God at all, whether it be at a dyke-side or in the King’s Chapel.’ Even here Buchan’s view of Covenanters is not hostile. When John Burnet has just been sheltered in the hills by fugitives

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<sup>581</sup> *DD*, 49-50

<sup>582</sup> *John Burnet*, II/11(P). At the Restoration, great shortage of clergy (resignations and deprivations) meant some parishes being filled with ‘young, unqualified men, most of them illiterate, and many of them of indifferent character’, nick-named ‘The Curates’: Macpherson, *History of Church of Scotland*, 233. For Bishop Burnet (also a character in Buchan’s book) ‘the worst preachers I ever heard, [...] ignorant to a reproach, [...] many openly vicious [...] a disgrace to their orders.’ *Ibid.*, 241. Significantly, Buchan called him ‘curate of Lyne’ - ‘minister’ properly described his appointment.

<sup>583</sup> For Burnet, (see the *ODNB* article) once a Church of Scotland minister (admittedly in Episcopalian times) and Professor at Glasgow, now Bishop of Salisbury.

whom General Veitch of Smitwood describes as ‘vile fanatics’, this even-handed comment follows: ‘Both were blind to the other’s excellencies; but were leal-hearted men in their own ways.’<sup>584</sup>

Then there is the minister of Biggar. Buchan pictures Captain William Baillie, his son Matthew, and John Burnet, all with drawn swords, having just ridden up and down the market place of the town in chastisement, scattering the people and overturning the stalls. ‘Then on our second ride, appeared at the Church gate the minister of the parish, a valiant man, who bade us halt. “Stop”, said he, “you men of blood, and cease from disturbing the town, or I will have you all clapt in the stocks for a week.”’<sup>585</sup> When he hears their grievance, the horsemen are dismissed with the promise that ‘it shall be seen to’ – so there is little wrong with him! Buchan’s father (died 1911), will only have known these two of the four books, and there is not much for him to object to in them.

### **9. *Salute to Adventurers* (1915)**

There are very few clerics here. The hero, young Andrew Garvald, becomes a trader. His father, a moorland laird, ‘fiery and unstable by nature,’ having fought as a Covenanter is now a fugitive. When imprisoned in the Tolbooth, Andrew finds in the old minister already incarcerated there ‘a welcome air of sobriety and sense.’ He seems to have much in common with Ephraim Lambert in the earlier story, and recognises that the Christ-less ranting sailor, Muckle John Gib has been ‘a thorn in the flesh of the blessed Mr Cargill’ a noted Covenanter minister.<sup>586</sup> Indeed, Buchan tells us, in a note prefacing the story, that ‘most of the characters in this tale and many of the incidents have good historical warrant. The figure of Muckle John Gib will be familiar to the readers of Patrick Walker.’

Though branded by the authorities along with Covenanters, Gib and his Sweet-Singers simply portray a man with manic delusions of godliness who has attracted a pathetic following. During the climax at the end of the book, Garvald tells him, ‘I came here yestereen to find you mouthing blasphemies, and howling like a mad tyke amid a parcel of heathen.’ When Gib remonstrates, ‘’Twas the Lord’s commands’, Garvald rounds on him,

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<sup>584</sup> *John Burnet*, III/212(P), VII/124-25(P).

<sup>585</sup> *Ibid.*, XVI/247-48.

<sup>586</sup> *Salute to Adventurers*, III/37.

Do you dare to speak blasphemy? [...] The Lord's commands! The devil's commands! The devil of your own sinful pride! You are like the false prophets that made Israel to sin. What brings you, a white man, at the head of murderous savages? [...] God forgive you, John Gib, for you are no Christian, and no Scot, and no man.

Read without care and understanding, a passage like this might be enlisted to support a view that Buchan was anti-clerical, or at least anti-clergy. However, it would be quite wrong to include Gib among the clergy, perhaps just because he had a following. He was not ordained, and had no official standing whatever in the church. Garvald's words here echo those of the old minister's lament back in the Tolbooth: 'Woe is the Kirk when her foes shall be of her own household, for it is with the words of the Gospel that he [Gib] seeks to overthrow the Gospel work.' That is not to credit Gib with any official church role. It is simply that he uses biblical words to give credence to his blasphemies. We shall find Buchan presenting Antinomianism<sup>587</sup> more clearly focused later through the outwardly conforming Elder of Chasehope in Woodilee.

Sincere in his beliefs, the imprisoned old minister inquired into Andrew's 'religious condition with so much fatherly consideration that I could take no offence.' Then the young man responds

Weary of all covenants and resolutions and excommunications and constraining of men's consciences either by Government or sectaries. Some day, and I pray that it may be soon, both sides may be dead of their wounds, and then will arise in Scotland men who will preach peace and tolerance and heal the grievously irritated sores of the land.

To the old man, such views are 'shaping for a Laodicean' but 'he was so old and gentle that I had no heart for disputation, and could only beseech his blessing' which he gave. This is hardly a hostile view of the old minister though Garvald might think him unenlightened. The only other cleric in the book is an Anglican who Andrew meets while attending church in Virginia. This was the commissary of the diocese of London, Dr Blair, who 'had a shrewd, kind face like a Scots dominie.' He is active and brave, and the only negative comment about him cannot be taken very seriously. It comes from the lips of the Receiver of Customs 'who feared God, and did not greatly fear much else.' Clearly, Dr Blair is not sufficiently fiery a preacher to find approval with him, but there is no anti-clericalism in this book and little about the Covenanters.

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<sup>587</sup> *Salute to Adventurers*, XXVII/379-80. In Christianity, Antinomianism describes one who believes that, having accepted Christ as Saviour, he is free to go on sinning having achieved salvation solely by faith in God's unmerited grace.

Indeed, towards the end Garvald tells John Gib that Virginia is ‘full of Scots, men of the covenant you have forsworn, who are living an honest life on their bits of farms, and worshipping the God you have forsaken.’<sup>588</sup>

## 10. Conclusion

In defending her belief that Buchan was anti-clerical, Macdonald also cites a fourth book, *Witch Wood*. This discussion of anti-clericalism is continued in the following chapter.

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<sup>588</sup> *Salute to Adventurers*, XXVII/380; the Laodiceans were neither hot nor cold in their practice of Christianity, i.e. they were half-hearted, cf. Revelation 3:14-22.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *WITCH WOOD AND THE COVENANTS*

‘*Witch Wood* is a deeply disturbing book,  
written by a Christian who understands the Devil.’  
(Reid, *Soul of Scotland*, 280)

#### 1. *Witch Wood* (1927)

Buchan evidently grew out of his youthful disclaimer that ‘the Calvinistic Devil [...] never worried me, for I could not take him seriously.’<sup>589</sup>

It is in this fourth book, highly regarded among Buchan’s novels,<sup>590</sup> that the most extensive consideration is given to the differing views of Presbyterian ministers during the covenanting times. Nevertheless, it is erroneous to suggest that he sets out to be anti-clerical. Much of the difficulty arises because many of the critics do not have knowledge of Scottish Church history which Buchan took for granted, and understood better than his father. Mr Buchan held the widespread nineteenth century eulogistic view of the Covenanters who, as the persecuted saints of God, nobly resisted the Romanising and secular influences under the Stuarts. Nevertheless, he was perceptive enough ‘to permit no criticism of Montrose.’<sup>591</sup>

Adopting the more critical view of the twentieth century, Buchan saw some Covenanters as deeply sincere Christians; some governed by expediency; others allowing suffering to distort their faith, embracing Old Testament patterns of reprisal upon their enemies; and still others presumed upon their salvation through Christ’s sacrifice, so that whatever wanton sins they committed would automatically be forgiven because their election (or title) in Christ was sure and secure. Moreover, Buchan explains his intention in writing *Witch Wood*:

I wrote of the Tweedside parish of my youth at the time when the old Wood of Caledon had not wholly disappeared, and when the rigours of the new Calvinism were contending with the ancient secret rites of Diana. I believe that my picture is historically true.<sup>592</sup>

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<sup>589</sup> *MHD*, 17.

<sup>590</sup> Buchan’s favourite, *MHD*, 196; *CMF*, 195: ‘Buchan’s greatest novel’; ‘praised by C. S. Lewis’, *DD*, 181-82.

<sup>591</sup> *MHD*, 246.

<sup>592</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

He was indebted to Scott and Stevenson,<sup>593</sup> pursuing a careful faithfulness to historical attitudes, not engaged in polemic.

David Sempill, the young minister of Woodilee and the older, sickly James Fordyce, minister of Cauldshaw, represent the faithful and sincere pastors of their day. Murdo Muirhead, moderator of the local Presbytery, saw it expedient that the Covenant in Scotland should be extended throughout all Britain. Thus, the Scottish Church must remain united at all costs. He consorts with the Reverend Ebenezer Proudfoot, who is very ready to invoke Old Testament precedents to ‘dangle men over the pit’ and to preach destruction to those opposed to the strictest adherence to the Covenant. The two are roundly condemned by Mark Kerr (alias Riddell) the fugitive brigadier of Montrose and friend of Sempill:

He told two pillars of the Kirk and a congregation of the devout that they had all utterly failed to interpret God’s word; that they were Pharisees faithful to an ill-understood letter and heedless of the spirit; that they were fools bemused with Jewish rites which they did not comprehend and Jewish names which they could not pronounce [...] ‘If ye take the bloodthirstiness and the hewing in pieces and the thrawnness of the auld Jews and ettle to shape yourselves on their pattern, what for do you no gang further? Wherefore d’ye no set up an altar and burn a wedder on’t? What kind o’ a kirk is this, when ye shuld have a temple with gopher and shittim wood and shew-bread and an ark o’ the covenant and branched candle sticks, and busk your minister in an ephod instead of a black gown? Ye canna pick and choose with the Word. If one thing is to be copied, wherefore not all?’<sup>594</sup>

The most heretical Antinomian position is practised by Ephraim Caird, tenant of Chasehope, who combines Eldership at Woodilee Kirk with his compact with the Devil in leading the coven in the Wood, believing that no matter what he does, he is secure in his election in Christ.

Buchan is writing an historical novel and seeking to re-create something of the reaction of individuals within congregations to the tensions and challenges facing them during tragic years in the seventeenth century. Greig agrees that a leader like Muirhead was ‘turning the Gospel upside down, being governed more by the literalism of the law than by the Spirit of Christ, so that the law replaced the Gospel.’<sup>595</sup> Buchan faithfully reflected the different stances, some woefully misguided or downright wicked to the point of denying the Saviour they claimed

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<sup>593</sup> Steele, ‘Witch Wood’, 22-23.

<sup>594</sup> *WW*, XXI/294-95(P).

<sup>595</sup> Greig, ‘Introduction,’ xiii: ‘Muirhead and his peers are not intentionally wicked.’



to trust, others remaining true. A wide variety of views characterised presbyteries throughout the history of the church in Scotland, and indeed among the clergy in other churches.

## 2. Summary of Clergy in Covenanting Times

Remembering Macdonald's claim that 'it is exceedingly rare to find a Presbyterian minister in Buchan's work who does not have at least some negative features,' being mostly 'narrow-minded and ignorant', a head count of ministers mentioned in her four chosen novels shows a different result. Lambert; the parson of Peebles; the parson of Biggar; the old minister in the Tolbooth; (Dr Blair and Bishop Burnet, Scottish Anglicans); Fordyce of Cauldshaw; and David Sempill are all positively presented, totalling eight (and the last is the hero of a novel); none is ignorant or violent and there is narrow-mindedness only in the sense of having the firm convictions which should be expected in a minister. Porter of Lyne, Muirhead, and Proudfoot, are on the negative side, totalling three, and each represents a recognised 'lapse' in the ministry at the time. What is really curious is the singling out of Fordyce as 'the best of Buchan's Christian ministers, but [...] old and frail' and dismissed as 'not a source of practical help at all.'<sup>596</sup> David Sempill is not mentioned here.

What can be made of this assessment? In the first place, it is a sad underestimation of the character Buchan gives to Fordyce. Knowing that his flesh is weak, he shows that his spirit is very much more than willing, consistently giving support to David. A minister of transparent Godliness, David tells him, 'you are nearer the Throne than the whole Presbytery of Aller and the Merse.' Told to preach on alternate Sundays at Woodilee in David's place, he still defies his colleagues by lunching at the manse with him.<sup>597</sup> He maintains his proper ministrations at Katrine Yester's bedside when David is too distressed to do so. Even in the last crisis at the Presbytery he appears in public with David. His very presence there is eloquent witness as he seizes David's hand in welcome when all other eyes are averted from him. When the last charge is brought against David of consorting with a woman because of private lusts, Fordyce can contain himself no longer. He bursts out in an impassioned defence of the Christian character of

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<sup>596</sup> *CMF*, 147.

<sup>597</sup> *WW*, XVII/229(P).

Katrine, betrothed to David and lately dead of fever induced by ministering with him to the plague stricken.<sup>598</sup> How can it be said that such a one ‘is no practical help at all’?

It is not his fault that the effort is too much for his feeble strength and he collapses in a fit of fainting. It is not his fault that the warped mind of the Moderator is able to use this to explain away the condemnation Fordyce has just pronounced upon his slanders. Moreover, we are given one further proof of Fordyce’s mettle. David’s preachings in the churchyard were recalled twenty years later when faithful men of the Covenant were driven to worship in conventicles in the open air. In extreme old age, Fordyce has the courage to defy the authorities and have himself driven ‘from Cauldshaw to hold preachings in the Deer Syke.’<sup>599</sup> Such faithfulness to his calling in those circumstances ran the risk of losing his home, his livelihood and his ministry, as Ephraim Lambert had done at Lindean. There were no pension entitlements in those days, and it could be a dire thing for self and dependents to lose one’s income. This is not the action of a weakling, but a man engaged in ‘practical help’ no matter what it might cost him. Buchan drops a broad hint that Fordyce probably ends his days being dispossessed, like young David, though in a different context.

Secondly, Sempill is another candidate for the best of Buchan’s ministers. He is young, intelligent, vigorous, clear about his role in winning souls for Christ, courageous in opposing any evil, compassionately tending his flock afflicted by the plague regardless of the risk to himself. Elsewhere, Macdonald approves of him as ‘endearingly serious [...] quietly steadfast in his duty to his flock and to his beliefs, but with a leavening of daftness about him that allows him to wander the hills to pick bunches of primroses for his buttonhole.’<sup>600</sup> If the last is a criticism, it is a characteristic shared by Buchan’s father the ‘field botanist’ and by Buchan himself, whose family knew how he could sometimes behave with all the fun that they knew as his ‘daftness’.<sup>601</sup>

The first edition of *Witch Wood*, (and some later ones), contain a postscript in which the facts are attributed to the Reverend John Dennistoun in the early eighteenth century. Buchan

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<sup>598</sup> *WW*, XX/275-76(P).

<sup>599</sup> *Ibid.*, XVII/229(P).

<sup>600</sup> *CMF*, 195. That daftness is reminiscent of Buchan’s father, the earnest preacher, with deep social concern, and yet a riveting teller of tales and performer on the penny whistle.

<sup>601</sup> See *LJB*, 295 for Buchan’s own daftness, quoting Anna Buchan: ‘within the family, every so often he would start singing songs and tell ridiculous stories [...] after long concentration, writing for hours, he would suddenly take what mother called a ‘daft turn’ and pour forth a stream of nonsense which reduced us all to helpless laughter.’

introduced us to this imaginary character long before in his story 'The Out-going of the Tide' (1902), supposedly taken 'from the unpublished remains' of Dennistoun, 'sometime minister of the Gospel in the parish of Caulds, and author of *Satan's Artifices against the Elect*.'<sup>602</sup> Now in *Witch Wood*, Buchan adds the amusing gloss that they were first published by Scott, 'whose heroic, well-rounded Cavaliers and Jacobites contrast vividly with his narrow, bigoted Presbyterians and Covenanters,' although he could also be more balanced as in *Guy Mannering*.<sup>603</sup> In Dennistoun's retrospective account, the notorious goings on in Woodilee as described in the novel are given a rationalistic gloss. In those later, more latitudinarian days, this revisionist explained and excused the sins of the parishioners, while it is David Sempill who is said to have been led astray by the devil, and Mark Kerr is seen as Satan incarnate. Thus, the lapses in grace of the immediate forebears of the present parishioners are concealed. Far from being anti-clerical in his representation of Dennistoun, Buchan is reflecting one kind of historical attitude, and having some fun with his tongue in his cheek by bringing Scott into it.

### 3. Buchan's Portrayal of Ministers

Critics accept that most of Buchan's negative portrayal of ministers comes in his description of the seventeenth century, and must be judged as such. What some seem to miss is the subtlety with which he discusses the theological differences within Scottish Presbyterianism at that time. How manifestly wrong Macdonald is to suggest that there are no 'unreservedly good' ministers in Buchan's fiction,<sup>604</sup> is seen even in the four novels she selects where the balance is firmly in the side of good. Two of his heroes are ministers of the Kirk: David Sempill (*Witch Wood*) and Nanty Lammas (*The Free Fishers*).

Sometimes, it is just a bit of fun as it was with Oliphant in *The Watcher*, and again *The Thirty-Nine Steps* has the stereotype of a minister 'with his reddish nose' who 'soliloquised on his influenza' when chairing the Radical meeting. He is no more typical of the bulk of his ordained characters than his own father. In contrast, there are the military ones, John Macmillan, minister of the parish in the Buchans' joint story of 1919, who as an Army Chaplain 'used to go over the top with the men and lay about him.'<sup>605</sup> There is the young minister with a Military

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<sup>602</sup> One of five Buchan stories published under the title of one of them, *Watcher by Threshold* (1902).

<sup>603</sup> Macleod, 'Dark Repressive Force,' 195, 199–200.

<sup>604</sup> *CMF*, 148.

<sup>605</sup> Cadmus and Harmonia, *Island of Sheep*, 20–21.

Cross who is commendably brief with a wedding on a hot day Even the fault of the Padre who is Private Wake's 'chief affliction' is 'wanting 'to be "too bloody helpful."'”<sup>606</sup> There is good reason why his portrayal of a small number of ministers was negative; he was being true to life and historical accuracy.

#### 4. *Midian's Evil Day* (1904)

There is humour, too, in Buchan's Scots poem, *Midian's Evil Day*.<sup>607</sup> The Scottish judgment on the Free Church Case (1904), was appealed before the House of Lords. Here, the Elder and farmer, Alexander Cargill, bravely represents the minister, Murdo Mucklethraw, who has 'ducked' the alien occasion in London:

*For though ye were of holy zeal,  
Ye stopped at hame.*

Cargill is astonished to find that there are men of 'faith and prayer' among the Sassenachs, for Lord Chancellor Halsbury guided the decision in favour of the Free Church.<sup>608</sup> Amazed and overjoyed, Cargill, reports to his minister. Overwhelmed, he decides to rename his prize bull, *Begg*. Called after the noted divine, who some had thought Buchan's father might succeed as a leader within the denomination,<sup>609</sup> that in itself was a rather comic thing to have done. Henceforth the bull is to be known as *The Chancellor*.

What some have missed is that Buchan's willingness at times to poke fun at the Scottish Church, whether Established or Free, was an expression of his deep affection and respect for it. He thoroughly believed that the Church was a divine institution but made of fallible human beings, and that at various times among them would be found what might be majestic or reprehensible, profound or comic. His is a benign and not a hostile humour. He is being playful with a thing he loves, even though he does not now fully endorse it in the Free Church form. His is the mirth of a sympathetic insider, not the carping of a critic.

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<sup>606</sup> *Mr Standfast*.

<sup>607</sup> Buchan, *Poems Scots and English*, 13-20.

<sup>608</sup> Ibid., 13 outlines the circumstances. Following the Union of the Free Church with United Presbyterians (1900), a small continuing rump claimed the Free Church property. The action, lost in the Scottish Courts, was overturned on appeal to the supreme authority.

<sup>609</sup> Aware of what was happening in the United Free Church and the continuing Free Church, Buchan mocks Oliphant, the liberal young minister in *Watcher*.

### 5. *The Watcher by the Threshold* (1900)

Macdonald cites four of the novels as expressions of Buchan's anti-clericalism, claiming that he took 'apart the faults and excesses of the Covenanters.' As well as the fallacy of the argument, the problem here is that those of Buchan's characters who might best be selected to support it were not clerics. In *Sir Quixote* it is the treacherous innkeeper, in *Salute to Adventurers* it is Muckle John Gib and in *Witch Wood* it is Chasehope.

From stories of more contemporary times, she also claims *The Watcher by the Threshold*,<sup>610</sup> coupled with *The Rime of True Thomas* as essays in anti-clericalism. 'They make it clear that, when faced with the supernatural, ministers know nothing of any practical use and that even the Bible is no help in their narrow minds because they do not listen to its message, only the words.'<sup>611</sup> Whatever this may mean, its basis seems wholly mistaken.

These stories come from the dawn of the twentieth century. Belief in the upward ascent of man had not yet been shattered by the First World War. In *The Watcher*, Buchan is having fun, and probably at his own expense. The comic figure is the local parish minister who is progressive and liberal in his theology.<sup>612</sup> However, far from being 'an essay in anti-clericalism', Buchan probably intended to amuse his father. Composed when Buchan was in London (1900) reading for the Bar at the Middle Temple, he tells us elsewhere that 'the cosmology of the elder Calvinism [...] meant nothing to me'<sup>613</sup> unlike his father as we have seen. The timing is significant, too, because Mr Buchan was already concerned, with others, over the critical views of one of their professors, George Adam Smith, and the attempt to proceed against him for heresy came to a head at the United Free Church General Assembly of 1902.

So here is *The Watcher by the Threshold*, which in Buchan's own words is 'a sort of gruesome comedy.'<sup>614</sup> All three main characters represent 'man come of age' suddenly faced with a terrifying mystery from the ancient occult. Because of old ties, Henry Grey, the well-

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<sup>610</sup> 'A first go at *Witch Wood*' exaggerates. *DD*, 62.

<sup>611</sup> *CMF*, 147.

<sup>612</sup> Similarly Lewis, *Fern-seed*, 86, note 2.

<sup>613</sup> *MHD*, 36.

<sup>614</sup> Hanning, *Best Short Stories*, 16.

established London barrister, is brought to the Perthshire country house of Ladlaw, the victim of this demon possession. Faced with it, Grey found ‘old tragic stories from my Calvinist upbringing returned to haunt me.’ Late at night he sees over his bed a reproduction of Christ and the demoniac, and writes that ‘the man dwelt in by a devil was no new fancy.’ He ‘believed that science had docketed and analysed and explained the devil out of the world’<sup>615</sup> but he became terrified of what was occurring and would fain escape.

Called away briefly to London on urgent legal business, Grey hit on the idea of importing the local minister for a couple of nights. This was as the only other ‘gentleman’ in the locality, and not with the remotest thought that he might be able to give any spiritual help. We are introduced to the Reverend Bruce Oliphant as one who ‘had been what they call a “brilliant student,”’<sup>616</sup> but we are not meant to like him. With ‘a large calf-like face, mildly arrogant eyes, and chin which fell sharply away’ from ‘a drooping blond moustache’, he ‘smoked cheap cigarettes incessantly, and spat.’ Grey humours him as ‘a man of education and common sense’ but soon despairs of one ‘too ignorant and unimaginative’ and who does not even know that Justinian was a Christian. When Oliphant protests that ‘My profession compels me to discourage such nonsense’, the worldly-wise Grey responds wearily, ‘So does mine.’

Oliphant was asked to come and stay with the Ladlaws solely to keep them company in their trial. Indeed, the invitation was given to protect the lady, not to help the laird. There is comedy in his portrayal as a modern liberal young minister whose scientific rejection of the Devil and the supernatural is shattered during the story. After this experience, he is determined at the end to ‘write to Dr Rentoul,’<sup>617</sup> the one who had taught him scepticism,’ for ‘I am a Christian man and I have been tempted. I thought we lived in a progressive age, but now I know that we d-d-don’t,’ he affirms through chattering teeth. Buchan will have known that his father would read the book, who may easily have seen a reflection of Professor Smith in both Oliphant and Rentoul.

There is comedy, too, in Oliphant’s encounters with Ladlaw in the library of the House of More after Grey has departed to London. Here the thoroughly secular Ladlaw quizzes Oliphant directly about belief in the Devil. When in response, the minister quotes Dr Rentoul on

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<sup>615</sup> *Watcher*, I/2/179(Nelson’16).

<sup>616</sup> All quotations following are taken from *ibid.*, Chapter 2.

<sup>617</sup> *Ibid.*, 223. This remark provides suitable finale and humorous twist to the story, expressing Oliphant’s disillusionment with his once trusted mentor.

this ‘old, false, anthropomorphic fiction,’ his host rounds on him. ‘Who the deuce are you to change the belief of centuries?’ Again, Ladlaw affirms that our forefathers believed in the Devil and ‘saw him at evening about the folds and peat-stacks, or wrapped in a black gown standing in the pulpit of the Kirk’ and then asking, ‘Are we wiser men than they?’ Not yet bowed, Oliphant ‘answered that culture had undoubtedly advanced in our day’, but the laird replied with blasphemous words about modern culture.<sup>618</sup> At this point Ladlaw (or the power within him) bursts out:

You are nothing but an ignorant parson [...] and you haven’t even the merits of your stupid profession. The old Scots ministers were Calvinists to the backbone, and they were strong men, strong men do you hear? - and they left their mark upon the nation. But you new tea-meeting kind of parson, who has nothing but a smattering of bad German to commend him, [much liberal theology having originated in Germany] is a nuisance to God and man. And they don’t believe in the Devil! Well he’ll get them safe enough some day.<sup>619</sup>

All of this will have delighted Mr Buchan and those many who shared his views, but it reduces Oliphant rather pathetically to imploring ‘him to remember my cloth and to curb his bad language.’ After that the minister, too, would fain escape but Ladlaw keeps him there.

There follows the nearest thing to a theological discussion in the whole story. Oliphant resolves to raise the question of demon possession ‘in the olden time, and quoted Pellingier’s theory on the Scriptural cases.’ When Ladlaw demurs, the minister responds, ‘I see that you hold the old interpretation [....] Nowadays, we tend to find the solution in natural causes.’ This only starts Ladlaw off again: ‘What do you mean by natural? You haven’t the most rudimentary knowledge of nature.’ This exchange is far from evidence that Oliphant had attempted to use the Bible ineffectually to drive out the demon. Far from seeking to do anything of the kind, this is no more than a failed attempt to discuss such cases in the Bible. Yet Lownie, too, rather surprisingly says this is a case of demon ‘possession which requires drastic treatment by the local minister.’<sup>620</sup> There is no trace of this in Buchan’s story. Oliphant may be thought a failure in not attempting a Biblical exorcism, but Macdonald accounts him a failure in what he did not attempt.

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<sup>618</sup> Mr Buchan, had he lived, would doubtless have endorsed T. S. Eliot’s words: ‘What have we to do but stand with empty hands and palms turned upwards in an age which advances steadily backwards?’ Chorus from *The Rock* (1934).

<sup>619</sup> *Watcher*, 197.

<sup>620</sup> *LJB*, 84.

There is a humorous twist when the tale ends with Grey and Oliphant searching for Ladlaw who is lost on the moor. As the minister approaches Ladlaw from behind, the demon moves across to him and the demented minister rushes away over the moor only to be finally restrained by the keepers who have also been engaged in the search. Thus unwittingly, and not through any spiritual counselling, the Christian minister is responsible for Ladlaw's cure. In all of this Buchan had his tongue in his cheek; there is nothing here on which to build theories about his own view of the clergy.

In her accompanying article on *The Watcher*, Macdonald notes that publication (1902) was in Edinburgh/London (Blackwood), and in America. She fails to note that there it appeared in a much truncated form<sup>621</sup> where everything about Oliphant is omitted, presumably because Americans would struggle to see the significance, unlike many of those who might then have bought the Blackwood version.

## 6. *The Moor Song* (1897)

Finally, there is the variously titled 'The Rime of True Thomas,' 'The Tale of the Respectable Whaup and the Great Godly Man,' or 'The Moor Song' (1897), which needs some further consideration. It is reading far too much into a fairy tale for Macdonald to claim that it shows 'the boundaries of religious belief and presents a scandalously cold interpretation of what the Presbyterian church offers to its followers', being wholly preoccupied 'with the forms of religion and not its substance.'<sup>622</sup> Far from that, Buchan is poking fun describing the 'grand sermon' from the minister as 'a fine discourse with fifteen heads and three parentheses.'<sup>623</sup> Surely it is equally absurd that the great godly man, and reputedly very shrewd countryman, is destabilised by a talking bird?<sup>624</sup> This leads him into abandoning his secure position as a shepherd who is regarded as having great skill, and esteemed the nicest judge of hogg and wether in all the countryside,<sup>625</sup> like Buchan's Masterton uncles,<sup>626</sup> in order to respond to the

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<sup>621</sup> Hanning, *Best Short Stories*, 16, noted the *Blackwood's Magazine* version (1897) reprinted in book form (1900), but reproduced a shorter version from the *Atlantic Magazine*, without any clergyman. Grey abandons Ladlaw, still possessed, in The House of More. The longer version has an echo of Jesus curing the Gadarene demoniac.

<sup>622</sup> *CMF*, 128.

<sup>623</sup> *Moon Endureth*, X/312(1<sup>st</sup>).

<sup>624</sup> Buchan took this straight from fantasy in ballads and folklore heard at his father's knee, Burnett, *Thirty-Nine Steps*, xiv.

<sup>625</sup> *Moon Endureth*, X/315(1<sup>st</sup>)

<sup>626</sup> *WF*, 37.



lure of the wider world by going off to Carlisle, or to ‘push on to the big toun or even the abroad.’<sup>627</sup>

Buchan thoroughly understood that spiritual responses are a matter of the will, and so there is nothing wrong with the minister’s advice ‘to watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation’ if he is the victim of witchcraft, whereas if he is self-deluded he ‘maun put a strict watch over a vagrom fancy.’<sup>628</sup> Once again, there is no reference here to the use of the Bible. Buchan had far too much respect for the Holy Bible, as the King James Version was always titled,<sup>629</sup> to ridicule its power in his fiction. Naturally, the man is free to make his own choice and exercises his will. In an increasingly secular age it is more likely that the subtleties will be missed, so that false views of Buchan’s intention will multiply. Here we are confidently told that he ‘confounds the small minded minister and discovers the real world that the vision has shown him.’<sup>630</sup> He does nothing of the kind. The shepherd has not discovered any ‘real world’ as Macdonald maintains. All he has done is to abandon his secure past and set out on a totally unknown future which may end in ‘triumph or disaster.’ We simply do not know what may befall.

It is curious to gain so much from a fairy-story when the narrator himself concludes that, ‘Whether this tale have a moral it is not for me to say.’ Therefore, the subtlety of it is that the reader is free to make of the story whatever he will. Some have even supposed that it is autobiographical and represents Buchan abandoning the narrow religion of his youth to discover the freedom of a wider world. Such an interpretation is fanciful, and anyway, the reader is not left quite free for the postscript ends with a stern warning not ‘to pray to have the full music; for it will make him who hears it a footsore traveller in the ways of the world and a masterless man till death.’<sup>631</sup> Presumably the shepherd has ‘heard the full music’ and so far from setting him free from the confines of his religion, it may well be that he has fallen for a ruse by occult forces using the medium of the talking bird, and having once ‘entered by the narrow gate’ he has been lured back onto ‘the broad path.’ He certainly risks exchanging the ‘perfect freedom’<sup>632</sup> found in

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<sup>627</sup> *Moon Endureth*, X/323(1<sup>st</sup>).

<sup>628</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

<sup>629</sup> The only other English version available to Buchan was the *Revised Version: New Testament* (1881), *Old Testament* (1885).

<sup>630</sup> *CMF*, 129.

<sup>631</sup> *Moon Endureth*, X/324(1<sup>st</sup>).

<sup>632</sup> Published (1897), two years after Buchan had gone to Oxford; brought up on the Bible, he was very familiar

following Christ for a whimsical errantry into the unknown, which will lead him who knows where? Buchan understood all this in a way that some critics may not. Of course, the story is set down by a very young man who did not know his future course. Interestingly, though, Buchan's later personal experience is at variance with the results of hearing 'the full music' for his own life demonstrates that one can go to the end of the world without abandoning one's Christian faith, for he never let it go, and was certainly not 'a masterless man till death.'

## 7. Covenanter and Government Excesses

So, Buchan cannot be seen to be anti-clerical in any of these stories. The one area where he might be regarded as having this prejudice, and rightly so, is in his aversion to some extreme beliefs and practices of so-called Covenanting ministers in the seventeenth century. In this, he stands in a strong Scottish literary tradition which embraces, among others, Burns, Scott and Hogg. David Daniell notes that

Montrose tried to live by another creed than that of the covenanting ministers his opponents. They, at the continued executions of their gentle prisoners [after his defeat at Philiphaugh], said "The work gangs merrily on" as the heads fell. This provoked Buchan's comment, "Only by blood could the wrath of the strange deity they worshipped be appeased."<sup>633</sup>

That is all very well, and if it be anti-clericalism it is justified, but it is unjust to isolate the Covenanters in practising such harshness. In the previous year, the English Parliament had pronounced death to all Irish taken in hostility; later sold captives into slavery abroad; and, of course, executed the King.<sup>634</sup> Here in this quotation, Daniell refers to the exception that may mislead the reader. The same James Hogg<sup>635</sup> notes that 'The work gangs merrily on' was said by an individual minister.

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with such words of Jesus as 'you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.' John 8:31. At Brasenose he encountered Anglican worship and the Second Collect at Morning Prayer which contains the lovely phrase, 'whose service is perfect freedom.'

<sup>633</sup> *DD*, 127, quoting *JBM*, 296.

<sup>634</sup> 24/10/1644 quoted - Hay Fleming, *Covenants*, 39n. Covenanters executing opponent leaders after Philiphaugh was unusual in the Civil Wars, (Cummins, 'Treatment of Prisoners') though matched later by Government culling leading Covenanters like Guthrie of Stirling, M'Kail, Cargill and Renwick.

<sup>635</sup> Hogg, *Jacobite Relics*, 165 doubtfully attributed the expression to the Reverend David Dickson in the presence of Leslie. Buchan probably read Hogg. J. King Hewison, attempting an impartial, history of *The Covenanters* (two volumes, 1908), prefaced the incident: 'Guthrie [Bishop of Dunkeld] in *Memoirs* tells the somewhat incredible story that when the poetic professor of divinity at the University of Glasgow, David Dickson, heard of these executions, he exclaimed' with the much quoted saying. He adds 'The Estates ordered all prisoners taken at and after Philiphaugh' to be executed 'without any assize or process'. (vol. 1, 430.) Dickson, a close colleague of Alexander

It is no justification of such comments to show that the butchering of prisoners was a characteristic of the times, especially so if they were the leaders of men, for such depletion effectively reduced the future prospects of the opposing forces. To give but one example from the other side, in the year after Montrose was executed, Monck massacred the Royal garrison at Dundee after they had surrendered. Led by their gallant commander, Lumsden of Mountquhanny, Ruling Elder in the parish of Kilmany, it was widely believed that in return for surrender they had been given safe conduct.<sup>636</sup> Buchan was repelled by similar such savagery when carried out by Covenanters after Philiphaugh (September 1645). It is natural now to be appalled by such brutality on either side, but what is particularly odious is that one who claimed to be a Christian minister should revel in such slaughter.

This distaste is seen most fully developed in *Witch Wood*. Here, some ministers are portrayed as the very ones who cross the line between the proper calling of a Christian minister, and an attempt by some clergy to control the whole of society. Buchan never opposed the influence rightly exercised by clergy, not only in spiritual things but also as a leaven for good within the whole of society. He wanted the Kingdom of Heaven to be nurtured on earth, but not by the institutionalised Church controlling society. He believed that once the moderating influence of Henderson had gone the Solemn League and Covenant was a threat: ‘Civil statesmanship disappears in such a mood, and all that remains is a frantic theocracy. The Kirk, whose spiritual rights had been threatened by Charles, was now, in the enthusiasm of a regained

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Henderson (elected Moderator for the third time [1643] but engaged in England, only returning to die in Scotland) was later Professor at Edinburgh, a Moderator who wrote much exposition of the Scriptures, ‘always spoken of with high respect by his contemporaries,’ Walker, *Theology and Theologians*, 15. The story is absent from Cowan, *Scottish Covenanters* and the *ODNB* entry on Dickson. Guthrie, Bishop of Dunkeld (1665-1676) will not have favoured Covenanters, and certainly regarded Henderson much more highly than Dickson. Massie, *Royal Stuarts*, 205 quotes the cry at the slaughter of 300 Irish camp followers after Montrose’s defeat at Philiphaugh. It is certainly a good piece of anti-Covenanter propaganda. *En route* to Edinburgh, Leslie is additionally charged with killing fifty men prisoners and drowning eighty women and children ‘without sentence or the least formality of Law.’ Hewison, vol. 1, 429.

<sup>636</sup> Millar, *Fife*, ii, 313. Robert Lumsden (Lumsdaine) held command under the Swedish king. Returning to Fife he bought this estate, before taking up arms again for Charles, taken prisoner at Dunbar (1650), ill-treated but eventually released. Hewison rightly asserted that ‘the campaigns of Montrose [...] merely tended to embitter all parties, who began to lose sight of Christian principle in their anxiety to overreach each other and to practise cruelty and intolerance wherever there was no chance of retaliation. The United Kingdom was in danger of losing all the first-fruits of the Reformation struggle, and the Covenanters, by forgetting their aims and distinctive teaching, laid themselves open to the taunt [from ‘old song, *You’re Welcome, Whigs*’] – ‘You lie, you lust, you break your trust, / And act all kinds of evil; / Your Covenant makes you a saint, / Although you live a Devil.’ (Ibid., vol.1, 433)

independence, proposing to encroach upon the sphere of secular government.<sup>637</sup> That would be clericalism and therefore Buchan's concern is explained.

Of course, it cannot be maintained that Buchan deliberately set out in some of his novels to balance good Platonist ministers against bad Covenanting ones, in a kind of balance sheet of account. He was writing fiction, although he took great pains with historical realism in doing so. We have seen that he could write of commendable Covenanters and that he had considerable admiration for someone like Henderson. Buchan was reared in a home where tales of the Covenanters were told with veneration by his father who was both intelligent and well read.

When Mr Buchan came to minster in Pathhead, his clerical friend at nearby Dysart was Norman Walker. In editing his brother's lectures, he has a chapter on 'Present Misrepresentation of Scottish Religion' which begins: 'It is a not an uncommon allegation that Scotch religion is harsh, austere, gloomy – a stern and frowning thing, revelling in the dark dread mysteries of a stern religion.'<sup>638</sup> He then enters into a detailed discussion of the flaws in such a view and shows that Scottish Calvinism was no different in its tenets than much of the rest of Christendom, and yet it has been so strongly attacked and vilified. He cites a number of ministers as examples of learned, kindly and courageous men. 'The types and representatives of the religion of their time, let us see really what manner of men they were, these Livingstones, Durhams, Rutherfords, Blairs.' He goes on very reasonably to 'affirm that, whatever peculiarities, or if you will, blemishes of their age, belonged to those good men, it certainly cannot be affirmed of them that the stern and the frowning was their distinguishing characteristic.' He cites Durham as the peacemaker, the love-element in Rutherford, the 'soft and gentle spirit' of John Livingstone, and Guthrie of Fenwick noted as 'the most genial of men, joyous, hearty, full of laughter; and his book is calm, and wise, and kindly,' who was 'not out of element taking a hawking excursion' with country gentlemen. Yet the claim is that in the collective memory the caricature (which it is admitted was not unknown) has become the real, and remembered as the type. Though not writing of ministers, Burns reflected the difference in *Holy Willie's Prayer* as the caricature and *The Cottar's Saturday Night* as an example of the genuine.

Walker's book is relevant here because it cannot but have been known and read by Buchan's father (who as a student in Edinburgh may have been at the lectures). From 1876, he

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<sup>637</sup> *JBM*, 148.

<sup>638</sup> *Theology and Theologians*, 157.

was Norman Walker's close neighbour and became an intimate friend (Chapter One). Therefore, it is more than possible that Buchan himself read it in his youth and it may have helped to inspire his interest in the seventeenth century.

Be that as it may, Donald Macleod re-issued the book in 1982 partly to 'introduce us to men to whose reputation history has done a gross disservice and enable us to judge them for ourselves.' He does not mince his words in countering the belief that Scottish Calvinism was 'a dark, repressive force.'<sup>639</sup> He regards this belief and the way in which Knox and 'the Covenanters have been pilloried as epitomes of bigotry and intolerance' as in itself an evidence that there was no repression, and that this savage reactive phenomenon towards the Scottish Church 'is unparalleled in any other part of the United Kingdom.'<sup>640</sup> Writing about James Hogg's central character in the *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, Robert Wringhim (who though a minister might be compared with Buchan's elder, Chasehope), he comments that 'it is difficult to trace within Scottish Presbyterianism anything like that represented by Wringhim.'<sup>641</sup> He rightly observes that 'it would certainly be hard to find a fun-loving Calvinist anywhere in Scottish literature' but 'it would be easy enough to invoke historical Calvinist figures who were the reverse of gloomy.'<sup>642</sup>

At the same time, Macleod also turns to one of the supposed under-lying themes of *Witch Wood*, the banning of innocent pleasures by the Kirk so that youth 'will dance in the murk wood to the Devil's piping'. Buchan has an interesting exploration of the survivals of paganism in which there was doubtless some truth, but Macleod rightly points out that he does not show the Kirk having banned Katrine Yester (who represents innocent free-spirited youth) and 'the reason why the native children do not play in the wood has little to do with Calvinism.'<sup>643</sup> However, Macleod also stresses the trauma inflicted on the Covenanters after the Restoration and its inevitable effect.

The injustice inflicted by Scott was suddenly to paint the Covenanters, sullen, bigoted and morose, on the virgin canvas of Romanticism, as if they were weeds generated inexplicably from the pristine landscapes of Scotland's south-west. They were not. They sprang from the rack, the boot, the bayonet, the hell-hole and the death-ship. If

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<sup>639</sup> 'Introduction', ix.

<sup>640</sup> Macleod, 195.

<sup>641</sup> Ibid.; Parry, 'Thirty-Nine Articles,' 213 tells us that 'one of the harshest criticisms which Buchan levelled at the old Calvinists was their tendency to antinomianism' and that 'such men were literally outside civilisation.'

<sup>642</sup> Macleod, 206.

<sup>643</sup> *ibid.*, 210.

opposition sometimes corroded their appreciation of the culture of the courtier that is understandable. If it sometimes drove them mad, that, too, is understandable.<sup>644</sup>

This is not the background to *Witch Wood*, but *Sir Quixote of the Moors*, *John Burnet of Barns*, and *Salute to Adventurers* are set in such times, and include the madness of Semple and Gib, both laymen. It is fair to explore this then for like Scott, Buchan, too, was a romantic<sup>645</sup> and was perhaps inclined to bear too heavily upon aberrations among some Covenanters.

When writing *Montrose*, he spent considerable time discussing the execution of some of the Captain-General's colleagues after the defeat at Philiphaugh. These condemnations were greatly encouraged by some of the Covenanter clergy, and Buchan observes that:

In a great civil struggle neither side has a monopoly of the virtues. There were many in the Covenant ranks in whom the fire of religious faith had burned up all human fears, and who were to give honourable proof of the manhood which was in them. It was a time of darkness and suffering, when men's minds were turning from the bleak world of sense to the dream of a better world beyond the grave, and in such seasons the homely virtues on which depends the conduct of our mortal life are apt to be forgotten. This forgetfulness was most marked in those who lived most constantly in the contemplation of a promised immortality; and in the matter of human charity and mercy there can be little comparison for the unbiased historian between the two parties. Montrose's army was guilty of acts of cruelty in hot blood, but never at its worst did it approach the consistent, deadly barbarity of the Kirk and the Estates [the Covenanters in the Church of Scotland backed by the legislative power of the Scottish Parliament]. Twenty years later, when the Covenant was the losing side, and the fanatics who now ruled Scotland had been driven to the mosses, there must have been many quiet, old-fashioned folk in the land, who, casting back their memories to the days after Philiphaugh, saw in the change the slow grinding of the mills of God.

Buchan concluded that 'the latter persecution, bad and indefensible as it was, fell short in grossness of the earlier, for its perpetrators in their evil work did not profane the name of the meek Gospel of Christ.'<sup>646</sup>

Buchan's judgment here, seemingly evenly balanced, is worthy of his 'parson of Peebles' or John Burnet at Smitwood but is still, perhaps, weighted a little too much against the men of the Solemn League and Covenant. He does not allow sufficiently for those like Archbishop Sharp, among the chief persecutors of the latter day Covenanters after the Restoration, who was so hated for his oppression and lost his life over it. Such as he, surely sullied the name of Christ as sorely. As President of the Court of High Commission he had

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<sup>644</sup> Macleod, 208.

<sup>645</sup> Daniell has a good deal to say about this, *DD*, xix–xx and 189–90, as does Kernohan, *Nutshell*, 20–23.

<sup>646</sup> *JBM*, 299–300.

arbitrary powers. Notoriously, he sentenced to death eleven prisoners who had been promised mercy after the Battle at Rullion Green in November 1666. Despite the assurance, Sharp condemned them with the words: 'You were pardoned as soldiers, but you are not acquitted as subjects.'<sup>647</sup>

From 1669, he was 'the creature' of Lauderdale, effectively the King's High Commissioner in Scotland, and Sharp 'hesitated at no severity in enforcing the annihilation of covenanting principles.' He was also known for empowering others in their persecution, and clearly committed perjury in denying having granted life to James Mitchell, his attempted murderer in 1668. Mitchell was duly hanged in 1678.<sup>648</sup> He also supported the indiscriminate brutalities of the 'Highland Host' in 1677-78 and shortly before his death introduced the legislation which led to the 'killing time' when anyone going armed to or from a conventicle meeting to hear one of the field preachers, could be summarily executed on the spot. As early as 1661 Sharp had been exposed in a satire beginning:

*Judas I am what ever Court may say  
Arch traitor false; for Christ I do betray.*<sup>649</sup>

James Kirkton believed him to be 'no better than a state atheist.'<sup>650</sup> It is impossible to give in exact measure the scale of atrocities committed by either side in this tragic period of bitter strife. However, it is difficult to see much difference between the ministers crying for blood after Philiphaugh and the blood-thirsty bishops after Pentland. In his brief assessment of those later times, and Sharp's betrayal of the true cause of Christ, as contemporaries believed, Buchan should not have passed over such brutalities by one who had the name of the most prominent Christian in Scotland.

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<sup>647</sup> The words are quoted under 'James Sharp, [http://www.thereformation.info/james\\_sharp/](http://www.thereformation.info/james_sharp/). Though Kirkton, *Church of Scotland*, does not, they fit naturally into his context: 'The Council made quick dispatch, and Bishop Sharp was willing president.' When the question of quarter granted [by Dalrymple for the King] was discussed 'Gilmoure, the greatest lawyer, declined to give his judgment, knowing that if he spoke for spareing he should offend the blood-thirsty bishops, and if he spoke for blood he should grieve his conscience.' Lord Lie believed that 'though the prisoners had the souldiers quarter in the field, it prejudiced not their trial by law; so to the bloody executions they went.' Kirkton, *ibid.*, 143. As president, Sharp would have pronounced sentence. Hewison, *Covenanters*, 2: 207, without quoting the words, recounts Sharp withholding the King's letter, ending executions, until after the young minister, Hew M'Kail had been hanged.

<sup>648</sup> *DNB*, 17: 1344; Buckroyd, *Life of Sharp*, 100-04.

<sup>649</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>650</sup> *ODNB*, 50: 22

## 8. Conclusion: Buchan's Own Relationships with Clergy

So much for Buchan and the critics, and what arises from the fiction, though the real problem with the views of critics like Macdonald will be discussed below (Chapter Nine). Now let us consider biography. How did this writer, who supposedly 'could not stand the clergy' and 'was preoccupied with anti-clericalism [...] from his earliest writing', conduct himself in real life? One has only to read Buchan's assessment of his father to find considerable similarities between them. If he had really rejected the religion of his home, it is odd to find him describing his father as 'the best man he had ever known.'<sup>651</sup> His representation of his mother is also far removed from the widely accepted view of her as narrow minded and perhaps bigoted.<sup>652</sup>

Against the claim that Buchan was averse to the company of clergy, week by week throughout his life he listened to individual spiritual mentors: his father, Dr Bussell, Canon Ainger, Dr Fleming, Mr Elkington, and the Canadian clergy. There was his life-long sense of indebtedness to Free Church divines he had known, and the close and lasting friendship with Charles Dick, the fellow student who became a minister.<sup>653</sup> Buchan enjoyed the company of Anglican clergy from his Oxford days onwards, as well as close friendship and associations with Presbyterian clergy throughout his life, and latterly with Roman Catholics. He respected the Covenanter, Henderson, 'yellow from the fever of the Leuchars marshes',<sup>654</sup> and even more the nineteenth century fellow Fifer, Thomas Chalmers,<sup>655</sup> who died in the year his own father was born. How was it that he so readily and enjoyably acted as the King's Commissioner at the General Assembly in successive years, and hoped for the possibility of a third after he returned from Canada?<sup>656</sup> Thus, Buchan was closely identified with the Church of his Fathers, and had the opportunity of meeting the representative ministers and elders both officially and socially.<sup>657</sup> Indeed, he remembered the two General Assemblies which he opened and closed for the Crown, as 'the Church and the World in the friendliest accord.'<sup>658</sup> Evidently, he had overcome any residual repugnance at meeting with clergy in bulk!

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<sup>651</sup> *MHD*, 249.

<sup>652</sup> Green, et al.; *MHD*, 249-54.

<sup>653</sup> See *LJB*, index references under Dick: schooldays to Canada.

<sup>654</sup> *JBM*, 89.

<sup>655</sup> NLS.1: LHC's Opening Address, 1933.

<sup>656</sup> *LJB*, 230.

<sup>657</sup> Cosh, 'Devotion to the Church,' 6.

<sup>658</sup> *MHD*, 253.



One who could not stand the clergy could not have so lived, or spoken so. Therefore in his relationships, Buchan cannot be shown to have been anti-clerical, or even averse to the clergy and it has already been shown that the premise that he showed this tendency in his fiction does not stand up to any close scrutiny of the novels cited to demonstrate it. Forty years ago Daniell attempted 'a literary analysis, offered to steer the necessary debate about [Buchan] off the territory of *canards* [...] on to a more understanding level.'<sup>659</sup> That has not been enhanced by the introduction of the charge of anti-clericalism. As in his own telling words about 'the Great Godly Man', it is 'vagrom fancy' and should be banished from the corpus of Buchan criticism.

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<sup>659</sup> *DD*, xiii.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### RACE AND CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

‘The old English way was to regard all foreigners  
as slightly childish and rather idiotic  
and ourselves as the only grown ups in a kindergarten world.’  
(Sandy, *Three Hostages*, V/61(P).)

Buchan was not a theologian. He accepted Christian beliefs as rational assumptions rather than arguments, and did not discuss Christian views about questions of race. This chapter is best tackled under two headings.

#### **(A) Race**

Buchan’s racism is supposedly apparent in his books and stories about Africa: *The African Colony* (1903), *A Lodge in the Wilderness* (1906), *Prester John* (1910), ‘The Green Wildebeest’ (1927); in Hannay’s African reminiscences in *The Island of Sheep* (1936); in other ways over Muslims in *Greenmantle* (1916), and the Negroid Irish in *The Three Hostages* (1924). Some of these will come under discussion here.

#### **1. The Hierarchical View of Race**

Racism seems to have arisen in America, early in the eighteenth century in the aftermath of the laws enslaving Africans on the plantations. Previously, Irish and Indians had proved unsatisfactory. With the focus now on one group, the concept of inferiority developed, with the added complication that slaves were both people and property. Darwinism soon encouraged the survival of the fittest, even anticipating the eventual dying out of Kipling’s ‘lesser breeds without the law.’ (*Recessional*) Africans were at the bottom of human development, with their simian features, Asians a little higher, and Aryans at the top. This hierarchical view of human development rapidly gained ground, ultimately leading to the belief that mankind was not one,

but multiple creations. Buchan gives a hint of this, calling ‘the bushmen, one of the lowest of created types.’<sup>660</sup> (See below, 7.)

Pilvi Rajamäe (University of Tartu, Estonia) describes in balanced terms the origins of nineteenth century British attitudes to race. She quotes a biographer of Prime Minister Salisbury, father of Buchan’s friends Robert and Hugh, saying that it was impossible to believe that ‘Africa for the Africans’ meant anything more than ‘the dead, effortless degradation’ existing before the coming of civilisation. ‘It was impossible for them to feel doubt – far less scruple – as to replacing it, wherever possible, by white domination.’<sup>661</sup>

Others maintain that traditional African life was a rural idyll, destroyed by the coming of alien powers. Accordingly, Buchan’s concept of Empire is condemned, (see 9. below). Juanita Kruse who has written persuasively about Buchan and Empire inclines towards this, but indigenous writers in places like interlacustrine Uganda belie it.<sup>662</sup> It is easy now to underestimate the extent of the gulf separating old and new, between larger industrialised countries and others left behind, some as far the Neolithic Age. Yet Buchan’s generation grew up with this reality, and he was personally engaged in close proximity from 1901-03. Until he went to Canada, this was his only personal involvement in the problems of under-developed people, although both places were atypical, with a long historical presence of European settlers. His nearest brother joined the Indian Civil Service.

There have been various responses. To suppose that under-developed countries could just be left alone is naïve, for more powerful outsiders would certainly exploit them. In Africa, by 1875 there was already some history of this by Europeans particularly in the north and south, and by Arab slave traders more centrally. Left unchecked, such depredations might have become even more ruthlessly destructive, and indigenous people left at the mercy of whoever came. That was true of any outside power, but inclusion in Empire hopefully meant some kind of outside accountability.

Buchan’s adult views on race were certainly ambivalent. For his early paternalism, Rajamäe quotes him on the native in South Africa:

Morally he has none of the traditions of self-discipline and order, which are implicit, though often in a degraded form, in white people [....] With all his merits, this

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<sup>660</sup> *African Colony*, 5.

<sup>661</sup> Rajamäe, ‘John Laputa: The “Ethiopian,”’ 19.

<sup>662</sup> *Ideas of Empire*, 54-56; Karugire, *History of Nkore*; Katate, *Abagabe b’Ankole*.

instability of character and intellectual childishness make him politically far more impossible that even the lowest class of Europeans.<sup>663</sup>

Much there offends and sounds like a defence of the hierarchical view. However, Buchan writes of lack of traditions, not of ability, and intellectual childishness can be taught greater maturity. Tribal people could not be thought able to embrace the scientific world or, having known only absolute governance, be capable of living democratically without time and help to learn. That problem still troubles people now. Rajamäe quotes Bernard Porter saying that nationalist leaders were seen as trouble-makers intent only on their own power while the ‘silent millions’ looked to better themselves ‘freed from the superstition and tyranny of their chiefs,’<sup>664</sup> The history of post-colonial times tends to support this.

Buchan appears even more racist in reviewing Dudley Kidd’s *The Essential Kafir* (1904), unknowingly making himself hostage to fortune and providing detractors with a marvellous weapon:

The common saying is that the native is a child, but the bed-rock element in his nature is less childish than animal. “They are highly evolved animals [...] and claim kinship with us through the lowest strands of our animal nature.”<sup>665</sup>

However jarring this sounds today, it is important to recognise that both writers used the word ‘animal’ because it was in sharing those characteristics that the two Europeans felt they had most in common with them, rather than in any moral or intellectual capacity. If you read the book and the review with care, it is, out of context, clearly an isolated quotation. Both meant something other than the bald fact: ‘the Kaf[f]irs instincts are those of the wild animals around them’,<sup>666</sup> and Buchan had his ‘dark men who live only for the day and for their bellies.’<sup>667</sup> Why otherwise are the Kaffirs treated as a people throughout the book? Neither was being truly hierarchical. This may not excuse, but does explain.

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<sup>663</sup> *African Colony*, 290.

<sup>664</sup> Porter, *British Imperialism*, 183-84.

<sup>665</sup> Clarke, 3/43; Buchan quoted Kidd, 62.

<sup>666</sup> *Ibid*, 3/46.

<sup>667</sup> Below 169.

## 2. The Paternalistic View of Race

In early manhood, Buchan accepted the more moderate view that all were one, but at different stages of development. Those more advanced had a duty to help other peoples through education, which would eventually prepare them for citizenship. Such paternalism was closely tied up with the concepts of colonisation and empire.

Buchan discussed this extensively in an early essay on race in *The African Colony* (1903).<sup>668</sup> Its tone is tentative; its conclusions open to question. In his limited experience in South Africa, the autochthonous were the Boers, who he knew best, and the native 'Kaffirs', who he knew mainly as 'servants and labourers'.<sup>669</sup> His approach to the latter is not theological but practical; his plea is to face the facts. 'The first is that the native is psychologically a child and must be treated as such [...] The second is that he is with us, a permanent factor that must be reckoned with.' His argument is economic: what is to be the 'destiny' of the 'Kaffirs', the subject black race? and moral: how are the dominant whites not to be corrupted by their ascendancy?<sup>670</sup>

There are only two logical policies towards the native. Either he must be put into 'some Central African reserve' and left to 'fight his wars', or brought 'into close and organic association with the forces of a high civilisation which must inevitably mend or end him.' His proposed solution is to embark on the latter experiment based on 'three forces already at work', 'a modified self-government', 'labour', and 'an enlightened education.'<sup>671</sup>

Only with education is there any real theological dimension. For 'Kaffirs', "'Humanities'" have little importance because they turn out pastors and schoolmasters' – 'unfortunate men who have no proper professional field and no footing in society to which their education might entitle them.' Native education should be confined to 'technical instruction',<sup>672</sup> a theme reinforced in *A Lodge in the Wilderness* (1906) and *Prester John* (1910).

Buchan ends this discourse by quoting a missionary: 'the elements of religion are honesty, cleanliness, and discipline.' Asked about dogma, he replied, 'I think we must be

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<sup>668</sup> *African Colony*, Ch.14 'The Subject Races'.

<sup>669</sup> *SJB*, 124

<sup>670</sup> *Ibid.*, 307, 285.

<sup>671</sup> *African Colony*, 295-96, 308.

<sup>672</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

content for the present with a few stories and hymns.<sup>673</sup> Buchan followed this up, expressing a variety of opposing paternalistic views:

Imperialism as the closer organic connexion under one Crown of a number of autonomous nations of the same blood, who can spare something of their vitality for the administration of vast tracks inhabited by lower races, - a racial aristocracy considered in their relation to the subject peoples, a democracy in their relation to each other. (29) Great realms we hold in trust for races who are unfit to struggle single-handed in the arena of the world. (118) Races for whom autonomy is unthinkable, at any rate for the next century or two. (165) To keep a people in political tutelage was to be guilty of slavery. (117) We claim a right to rule certain dark-skinned peoples, thereby offending against the oldest and most indisputable of human rights – the right to liberty. (278) It's the effort of a brave people rightly struggling to be free. (346) By engaging in native war 'They believe their country is degrading itself.' (348) I want to see every one of our daughter peoples grow into triumphant and self-conscious nationhood. (367)

One version of paternalism as expressed by Francis Carey, the host at Musuru, comes nearest to what Buchan held at the time

The native's mind is sharp and quick, his memory is often prodigious, and he has histrionic and mimetic gifts which may mislead his teachers. But for all that he [...] represents the first stage of humanity, and he has to travel a long way before he can reach that level which we roughly call our civilisation [for his mind] has been moving all the time in a world a thousand years distant from your own.<sup>674</sup>

Education, with provisos, is the key to progress. 'Your business is to inculcate in the native mind the elements of citizenship and Christian morality' and 'for heaven's sake begin with the truths that matter.' Thus 'get your foundations laid deep and solid. Preach the Kingdom of Heaven and the Fatherhood of God, and leave out your fancy dogmas.' So 'get these strange, sullen, childish, dark-skinned people hammered into a peaceable and prosperous society, and you have the foundation of all the virtues.' Imperialism should not at this stage be encouraging thorough-going evangelism to produce leaders like Laputa. At the same time Buchan believed in a similar need in Britain 'to educate and persuade, not to smear and override' the many whose qualifications for citizenship were inadequate. Again, the Empire was concerned with the well-being of people, for 'the glory of England is not in the mileage of her territory but the state into which she is welding it.'<sup>675</sup>

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<sup>673</sup> *African Colony*, 310.

<sup>674</sup> *Lodge*, 204-05. Contemporary African writers like Kingsley Chiedu Moghalu accept and wrestle with this fact.

<sup>675</sup> *Ibid*, 205, 341.

### 3. Racial Superiority?

A growing force, racism developed further in the twentieth century. Humanist and Christian ideas that all men were ontologically the same tended to be swept aside amid scientific debate, encouraged by Evolutionary theory, the study of craniology, and concepts of multiple creations. Popular culture embraced these, even in society so dominated by Biblical knowledge.<sup>676</sup> With the emancipation of the slaves, poor whites and Irish immigrants found themselves competing with freed blacks for the menial jobs. In the U.S.A. the Irish had a long struggle to free themselves from the prejudice that they shared many of the negroid features and characteristics of the ex-slaves as ‘white negroes.’<sup>677</sup> Buchan reflected this in *The Three Hostages* (1924) where Medina has a particularly round negroid head. His family background was Spanish, but his mother Irish, and through her these features descended. Additionally, Buchan has been accused of misrepresenting the people of the East, and in particular the Jews.

Racism was expressed both in the inferiority promulgated by pro-slavery supporters, and racial superiority. Buchan’s character, Considine, knew Lacey, ‘killed somewhere up Chitral way.’ With a handful of men against hundreds, he held a border fort for five days rather than negotiate freedom. That was not the way of ‘the white man’s pride.’ Leaving a record of his thinking, he was proved right; his death led to the end of conflict in that area, and lesser men ‘who killed him now burn offerings to his shade.’<sup>678</sup>

Considine then cites Gordon against the Muslims, saying that whatever the flaws, ‘his failure and the manner of it were worth a dozen successful wars and a whole regiment of impeccable statesmen. It put new faith into the race, and screwed us up for another century.’ Stressing the superiority of the British race and its duty to the lesser breeds, he even implies a major weakness in the French, with whom ‘everything is centralised and officially directed.’ In contrast the British trust their

younger sons and profit by their disobedience. As long as we have hundreds of young men who ask only the chance of danger, and are ready to take the whole world on their shoulders, we need have no fear for the future.<sup>679</sup>

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<sup>676</sup> Smedley, ‘Idea of Race,’ 2.

<sup>677</sup> Daniels, ‘Irish-Americans, Racism.’

<sup>678</sup> Lodge, 142-43.

<sup>679</sup> Ibid., 149-50.

One can see why Buchan got on with Newbolt.<sup>680</sup>

#### 4. Growing Up in Glasgow

Buchan encountered racism in South Africa. Working there clearly had a great influence. Nevertheless, it had been much in evidence among some of Buchan's close Oxford friends like Raymond Asquith, and inevitably he was influenced by that environment.

Nevertheless, it has been insufficiently noted that Buchan, aged thirteen to twenty (1888-95) lived in Glasgow and walked its streets. The effects of Irish and Jewish immigration were already widespread. He hinted this in *Castle Gay*, where Dickson taxes Dougal with believing: 'We've sold our souls to the English and the Irish.' Later, Dougal maintains his position: 'The cities filling up with Irish, the countryside losing its folk, our law and our letters and our language as decrepit as an old wife.'<sup>681</sup> Groups of boys chancing on a contemporary would issue the challenge: 'Billy, or a Dan or an Old Tin Can?' Answered not to their pleasing, a roughing up would follow.<sup>682</sup>

As late as 1923, the General Assembly of The Church of Scotland received a Report entitled 'The Menace of the Irish Race to our Scottish Nationality.'<sup>683</sup> Roman Catholics in Scotland were accused of being part of a Papist conspiracy to subvert Presbyterian values, being the principal cause of drunkenness, crime, and financial imprudence. Calling for the end of immigration of Irish Catholics, the deportation of those convicted of criminal offences, or living on state benefits, and urging a 'racially pure' Scotland, the Report declared that 'Today there is a movement throughout the world towards the rejection of non-native constituents and the crystallization of national life from native elements.'<sup>684</sup>

The main advocate of these views was John White, who in 1925 became Moderator, and was unanimously chosen again by both denominations at the Union Assembly of October 1929. Adopted nearly thirty years after Buchan had ceased to live in Glasgow, it showed the persistence of strong prejudice, despite loyal Irish Catholics in Scotland much praised in the

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<sup>680</sup> Redley, 'Newbolt and Buchan.'

<sup>681</sup> Buchan, *Castle Gay*, 25, 49 (1<sup>st</sup>).

<sup>682</sup> 'Protestant', 'Catholic' or 'Jew'; personal communication from William McCallum (1907-96), born and brought up in Glasgow, as was his father, Charles; see also Taylor, 'Billy or Dan', 13.

<sup>683</sup> Geoghegan, 'Scotland and Ireland': 'Catholic Scots only achieved occupational parity in the 1990s.'

<sup>684</sup> Forrester, 'Ecclesia Scotiana', 80-89. The Report's strictures noticeably excluded Scottish Catholics and Irish Protestants.



armed forces and ship building during the War. There is a fine line between racism and sectarianism: Protestant Irish tend to be descended from immigrants, Catholics from the indigenous, so that racism is not far away.

Buchan was involved, for he spoke in Parliament as late as 1932 about the influx of Irish Catholics. 'Our population is declining. We are losing some of the best of our stock through migration and their place is being taken by those who, whatever their merit, are not Scottish [...] the world cannot afford a denationalised Scotland.'<sup>685</sup> His point may have been subtly different from the Report, but eighteen months later he spoke at the pro-Jewish Shoreditch meeting on May Day.<sup>686</sup> Both such addresses tended towards racial exclusivity, but we shall find he revised that view, and was quicker than many to see where Fascism was leading.

## 5. 'Kaffirs' and 'Niggers'

Lisa Hopkins maintains that Buchan persistently associated the Irish with Blacks 'whom he also despised habitually terming them "kaffirs"'.<sup>687</sup> This is a gross misrepresentation. Buchan will have learnt the word in his duties in South Africa. Commonly used by the administration to describe some of the local population in reports and other documents during the Dutch and British colonial periods, it carried no derogatory meaning. To him they were one of the race families of the Bantu.<sup>688</sup> Academics, as well as missionaries, also used the word in a neutral way. Many exhibits in the Pitt-Rivers Museum in Oxford (founded in 1884) were first labelled as 'Kaffir' and as late as 1911 the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* had an article under that heading. There had been a colony and a Presbytery called Kaffraria. Buchan reviewed *The Essential Kafir* (1904) where Kidd states unequivocally that in its 'broadest sense' the word included all the dark-skinned races of South Africa, that is 'the Bantu.' There was nothing pejorative in Buchan's use of 'kaffir'.

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<sup>685</sup> Quoted by Finlay, 'National Identity,' 307.

<sup>686</sup> *SJB*, 317.

<sup>687</sup> 'Irish and Germans,' 71.

<sup>688</sup> 'The Ovampas and people of German South Africa; the Bechuanas and Basutos; and the great mixed race of the Zulus and Kaffirs of Eastern Cape Colony.' *African Colony*, 11.

However, in 1976 the South African Supreme Court ruled that the word 'has over the years taken on an additional meaning' for 'if you call a member of the Bantu race a kaffir this may well constitute an insult.'<sup>689</sup>

The word 'nigger', from 'negro', has similarly passed from simply meaning 'dark-skinned' in Buchan's day to an insulting term now. It is unthinking to ascribe today's meaning to Buchan: 'the past is a different country; they do things differently there.'<sup>690</sup> Agatha Christie's *Ten Little Niggers* (1939) was still being republished for The Crime Club forty years later, though soon afterwards the title was changed to *And Then There Were None*. Gertrude Himmelfarb expressed a common sense view:

Today, when differences of race have attained the status of problems - and tragic problems - writers with the best of motives and finest of sensibilities must often take refuge in evasion and subterfuge. Neutral, scientific words replace the old charged ones, and then, because even the neutral ones - "Negro" in place of "nigger" - often give offence [...] disingenuous euphemisms are invented - "non-white" in place of "Negro". It is at this stage that one may find a virtue even in Buchan: the virtue of candour, which has both an aesthetic and an ethical appeal.<sup>691</sup>

Seeing that 'there is in all men, even the basest, some kinship with the divine, something which is capable of rising superior to common passions and the lure of easy rewards'<sup>692</sup> Buchan implied a relevant question in *Prester John*: if people can worship the same God, how much difference can there be? For Buchan, 'Laputa is pulled in two by his African inheritance of Prester John and his colonial inheritance of Christianity.' These opposing demands ultimately destroy him. Buchan warned that the responsibility of Empire

must be borne by the white man, through Crawford. "That is the difference between white and black, the gift of responsibility, the power of being a little way a king; and so long as we know this and practise it, we will rule [...] wherever there are dark men who live only for the day and for their bellies."<sup>693</sup>

Two years in South Africa gave Buchan contact with Boer Christianity, much less with the work of Missions among the indigenous. He had greater empathy with Afrikaners than many of his countrymen. 'Britain can ill afford to lose [...] a force so masterful, persistent and

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<sup>689</sup> *South African Law Reports*, 4, 247 (1976): A disparaging meaning is recognised in Webster's *International Dictionary* (1966).'

<sup>690</sup> Hartley, *The Go-Between* (1953).

<sup>691</sup> Himmelfarb, *Victorian Minds*, 260.

<sup>692</sup> *Men and Deeds*, 278.

<sup>693</sup> Coyle, 'Images of Africa,' 20-21; Buchan, *Prester John*, 198.

sure,<sup>694</sup> since ‘for the Veld farmer I acquired a sincere liking and respect.’<sup>695</sup> That was less true of the black Africans who he classed as ‘mentally as crude and naïve as a child.’<sup>696</sup> While some might be fit for involvement in local affairs, it would take many years before they were ready for national politics. He also realised that African independence was then something to be feared,<sup>697</sup> and ‘He wrote on many occasions about the duty of man to develop a sense of brotherhood.’<sup>698</sup>

## 6. Anomalies in Buchan’s Racism

Examples of Buchan’s anomalies will be found elsewhere in this chapter. He created Laputa, an African in superb physical condition, with outstanding leadership qualities, educated and acceptable in the West, as an equal. Thus, Africans were capable of adapting to European ways. The myth of Prester John gave them an ancient cultural past. Yet in *The African Colony* (1903) Buchan presented Africans as child-like. Even as late as *Sick Heart River* (1941), Zacharias, the Chief of the Hare Indians, represented his people as ‘weak and they are also children.’<sup>699</sup>

As for the Irish, Medina’s head ‘was really, round, the roundest head I have ever seen except in a kaffir.’<sup>700</sup> Nevertheless, there is confusion between Scottishness and Irishness; between Medina and Sandy; between Lady Macbeth and Medina’s Irish mother; between Irish Celts and the Ulsterman, Macgillivray, an outspoken critic of the Irish who was no doubt originally Scottish and Celtic too.

## 7. The Development of Buchan’s Views on Race

Daniel Gorman maintains that ‘Buchan’s popular work [...] was crafted to the market place, and thus provides an especially good source for understanding the period’s conventional thought and prevailing wisdom’ and allowing a writer to express views other than his own through the words given to his characters. Nevertheless, Richard Finlay finds Buchan’s *Prester*

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<sup>694</sup> *African Colony*, 76.

<sup>695</sup> *MHD*, 114-15.

<sup>696</sup> *African Colony*, 290.

<sup>697</sup> Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, 192.

<sup>698</sup> Parry, ‘Thirty-Nine Articles’, 213

<sup>699</sup> (*I<sup>st</sup>*), PartIII/16/290.

<sup>700</sup> *Three Hostages*, IV/51(P).

*John* ‘rabbidly racist’,<sup>701</sup> while Gorman holds that Buchan ‘voiced the racially discriminatory language of his day’ particularly there and *A Lodge in the Wilderness*. However, this is moderated by Buchan’s changing views about race. He began by having embraced ‘the racially exclusive world-view of late-Victorian Britain’ where difference was rigid and unbridgeable. In *The African Colony*, the races were separated by a ‘radical mental dissimilarity.’ His struggle towards a ‘more cosmopolitan racial view’<sup>702</sup> is evident even in the four years between these two titles.

In *Prester John*, he represents a native who is ‘at once noble and child-like, honourable and unpredictable.’ Thus, hierarchical concepts of race are challenged and ‘all men, in potential if not in practice, are equals.’<sup>703</sup> In this way, Buchan expressed a paternalistic view, with further time needed before the more undeveloped races can attain independent nationhood. With typical balance, Smith observed that ‘it may be a paternalistic view, but by the lights of 1910 it is not mean.’<sup>704</sup> We shall find that Juanita Kruse disagreed.

Nevertheless, Himmelfarb says that Buchan held a descriptive, rather than a prescriptive world-view.<sup>705</sup> At least from early on, he rejected as degenerate any idea that Imperialism should rest on brute force, making this the collective view of those in conference at Francis Carey’s retreat in Musuru.<sup>706</sup>

## 8. Juanita Kruse: Race and Empire

Buchan’s long involvement in ideas of Empire have been widely discussed, the main critic being Kruse.<sup>707</sup> Among the more perceptive and spiritually aware, she sees a development in his complex and ambiguous ideas on race.<sup>708</sup> They were particularly raised under Milner by Buchan’s support for Chinese Indentured Labour, good enough to be a vital temporary work

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<sup>701</sup> Finlay, ‘National Identity,’ 292.

<sup>702</sup> Gorman, ‘Late-Victorian World View,’ 41-42.

<sup>703</sup> Ibid., 44-45.

<sup>704</sup> *SJB*, 144.

<sup>705</sup> Himmelfarb, ‘Last Victorian,’ 260.

<sup>706</sup> Kruse, *Idea of Empire*, 49 quotes *African Colony* to show that ‘In rare moments of candour [Buchan] admitted that Britain’s authority in South Africa rested on force.’

<sup>707</sup> Ibid., ‘The Problem of Race,’ 50-62, and Ch.XI: ‘The Search for God,’ 187-200 which includes ‘Opposition to Racism’.

<sup>708</sup> Ibid., 50-58.

force, but not suitable as settlers. When the interests of races conflicted he ‘instinctively sought the welfare of the white man.’<sup>709</sup> She makes these further points:

He was slack in his use of the word ‘race’. His was consciousness of difference, not because of superiority but applauding variety. He wanted people to keep these differences, within the unity of Empire. He saw pernicious stereotypes but did not always avoid them. He was not a biological racist, though at first there was an element of this in deploring the mixing of races to produce ‘hybrids’<sup>710</sup>, but later applauded them (Frizels in *Sick Heart River*). As culture and beliefs essentially imposed self-restraint, he was less concerned with colour. Though he portrayed all foreigners as somewhat childish, and needing British help, some like the Boers and the French participated as equals.

He began by accepting the racially selfish view that ‘white man’s country’ was any land where they could flourish. Kruse and others have found inadequate his justification that lands were either ‘barren’ or only recently occupied by others. Buchan clearly believed that because tribes were not autochthonous over a long period gave them little claim. He also believed that ‘the Kaffir owes his existence to the white man.’<sup>711</sup> The better class of Indians could mix as equals in British society (experienced first at Brasenose) but a people’s immaturity would prevent them from being autonomous. The white man had a moral duty to assist the natives by spreading civilisation through Trusteeship. (Seen, too, in his support for a Jewish homeland, but not for an independent state.<sup>712</sup>) Natives should be taught Christian morality, not Christian dogma (sitting strangely with Buchan’s later strong advocacy of Christian missions.) Laputa is admirable and heroic, but only if white could he have been a ‘second Napoleon’.

In Buchan’s paternalism, native welfare came second to the white man. Wanting legal equality for blacks was not unselfish because it was not good for whites to take punishment into their own hands, or to rely on others for labour. To prevent blacks from becoming a menace, he advocated some black representation at local government level, together with a national system of education.

Lady Warcliff advocated dividing the destitute in Britain ‘sharply into two classes –those who may be saved, and those who, being past hope should cease to exist.’ The horrified

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<sup>709</sup> Kruse, 51.

<sup>710</sup> *African Colony*, 8: ‘Nature [...] has care of races but not of hybrids.’

<sup>711</sup> Kruse, 86, 285-86; 292-93.

<sup>712</sup> Buchan, ‘Zionist Dinner,’ Montreal, 20/04/1936’.

Duchess calls this ‘the euthanasia of our social cripples.’<sup>713</sup> Buchan never supported the extinction of a people, but he did think that those who did not take the benefits of education might well die out. Kruse regarded this as almost equally callous<sup>714</sup>, but it was not unsupported by evidence. (Unless imported diseases were combatted by western medicine, tribes were very vulnerable to this threat.)<sup>715</sup>

The events of the First World War and the collapse of the ideal of Western civilisation greatly influenced Buchan; by the last decade of his life most of his attitudes had been modified. Earlier, Sandy Arbuthnot acknowledged that the days of his remarks at the beginning of this chapter were past. ‘Now we have to go into the nursery ourselves and are bear-fighting on the floor’ for ‘if you are *phil-* something or other you have got to be *-phobe* something else.’<sup>716</sup> Kruse concludes that it is more complex than that, and makes these points:<sup>717</sup>

By the 1930s Buchan’s attitude to race was losing its arrogance and selfishness. Britons were not above the law and could not just do as they pleased abroad. He later saw Biological racism and especially inter-marriage, as ‘unscientific and grossly unhistorical.’ Contacts with Indians and half-breeds led him to respect them. Northern Indians were degenerate, but only in comparison with those of the plains rather than with whites. He had come a long way from thinking in terms of ‘White man’s country.’ White characters lost their chilly dutifulness for a love of their fellow man.

*Sick Heart River* was not uniquely concerned with individual salvation. It was preceded by *The Blanket of the Dark* (1931), which ends with Peter Pentecost having a vision of the Virgin Mary offering him God’s love, the first Buchan hero to find relief in complete renunciation and turning to God. This was followed by *A Prince of the Captivity* (1933). At first, like Leithen, Adam Melfort thought he must earn such peace in ‘the cold service of an idea unenriched by humanity.’<sup>718</sup> In the end he died to save Creevey. In *Sick Heart River*, Leithen died to save an Indian tribe:

As he lived and worked among them, his relationship with the Hares was fatherly, but at least it was that of a kind, loving and selfless father [...] He did not die for the Hares

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<sup>713</sup> Lodge, 229.

<sup>714</sup> Kruse, 58.

<sup>715</sup> Personal knowledge.

<sup>716</sup> *Three Hostages*, V/61(P).

<sup>717</sup> Kruse, 187ff.

<sup>718</sup> Ibid., 193.

because it was his duty to share in the white man's burden; he saved them because he loved them and loved the God he believed had created them.'<sup>719</sup>

Kruse summed up the change which overcame Leithen when she wrote that, 'Before such an all-embracing humanity, racial and cultural differences faded into insignificance.'<sup>720</sup>

## 9. Islam and the East

In considering the influence of George Adam Smith, his recent biographer tells us that 'The Muslims he pitied, sensing in the silence of the mosques the Muslim apprehension of God', and concluding a letter of 1879, 'they cannot pray except they look to Mecca, and they look to Mecca not because they find God there, but a sinful man like themselves.'<sup>721</sup> Later, Buchan may have heard such views from him.

Islam and the East has not previously attracted much attention. The main discussion has been by Ahmed Al-Rawi (Majan University College in Muscat). He acknowledges help from Macdonald, publishing his first essay during her editorship of the *Journal*.<sup>722</sup>

He claims that 'one of the earliest fictional works to deform the image of Arab Muslims in the twentieth century was John Buchan's novel *Greenmantle* (1916)' presenting Islam as 'a merciless and militant religion'<sup>723</sup> and he objects to Macgillivray saying, 'Islam is a fighting creed, and the mullah still stands in the pulpit with the Koran in one hand and a drawn sword in the other.'<sup>724</sup> Buchan was exploring the dichotomy within Islam between the threat of *jihad* and the worthy challenge posed by taking Islamic teaching seriously. Sandy says:

The West knows nothing of the true Oriental [...] The Káf he longs for is an austere thing [...] The Turk and the Arab [...] degenerate into that appalling subtlety which is their ruling passion gone crooked. And then comes a new revelation and a great simplifying. They want to live face to face with God without a screen of ritual and images and priestcraft. They want to prune life of its foolish fringes and get back to the noble barrenness of the desert [...] It's the humanity of one part of the human race. It isn't ours, it isn't as good as ours, but it is jolly good all the same. There are times when it grips me so hard that I am inclined to forswear the gods of my fathers.<sup>725</sup>

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<sup>719</sup> Kruse, 197; *SHR*, Pt.II/22/203(1<sup>st</sup>).

<sup>720</sup> Ibid.

<sup>721</sup> Campbell, *Fixing Indemnity*, 38.

<sup>722</sup> Al-Rawi, 'Manipulating Muslims,' 18-32.

<sup>723</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>724</sup> *Greenmantle*, I/6(P); Phillips, 'A Religion of Peace?' 20.

<sup>725</sup> Ibid., XV/178-79(P).

Some will find this over generous, and Buchan invented good Muslims like ‘the imams who follow the prophet “Greenmantle”’.<sup>726</sup> Al-Rawi claims that Buchan’s understanding of Islam is deficient, yet he misunderstands the plot of *Greenmantle* as ‘a story of Muslim intrigue and fanaticism pitted against the civilising mission of the British Empire.’<sup>727</sup> It is not. As Hannay found out: ‘Germany’s in the heart of the plan. That is what I always thought.’<sup>728</sup> The author dropped many similar hints, and Stumm and von Einem are evil geniuses besides whom Greenmantle is sincere and benign in comparison. ‘*Prester John* and *Greenmantle* involve elemental uprisings of non-Christian peoples – Zulus and Arabs – aroused by a purifying fundamentalism but misdirected by manipulative and destructive forces.’<sup>729</sup> Buchan wrote that ‘those who manned Britain’s battleships “were modern crusaders, the true defenders of the faith, doing battle not only for home and race and fatherland, but for the citadel and sanctities of Christendom”’, but ‘the violator of the “sanctities of Christendom” was, of course, Germany’, not Islam.<sup>730</sup>

In his follow-up chapter,<sup>731</sup> Al-Rawi implies that Buchan’s concept of racial superiority ‘survived the changing times’, quoting Lombard’s vision of ‘an empire, that he calls “British Equatoria” or the “new kingdom of Prester John.”’ The opposite is true; Buchan did change. Al-Rawi quotes Lombard’s vision in the 1900s, not thirty years later. Now his thoughts are on a comfortable suburban life and the golf course!<sup>732</sup>

Stressing that Buchan’s only experience of the East was his cruise with Craig Sellar in 1910 which included Constantinople, he concludes that most information came to the author from others and might not be accurate. As far as India is concerned, he does not mention that Buchan’s two closest siblings had personal experience there, William through his dedicated decade in the Indian Civil Service and Anna from a long holiday she spent visiting him, funded by John. After William’s early death, his friend Cecil Rawling became an intimate of Buchan and together they planned a first attempt on Everest which was aborted by the outbreak of War.

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<sup>726</sup> *CMF*, 148.

<sup>727</sup> Al-Rawi, ‘Manipulating Muslims,’ 19, quoting Gavin Hambly.

<sup>728</sup> *Greenmantle*, XII/143(P).

<sup>729</sup> Parry, ‘Thirty-Nine Articles’, 214.

<sup>730</sup> Kruse, *Ideas of Empire*, 99.

<sup>731</sup> Macdonald, *Reassessing Buchan*, 129-40.

<sup>732</sup> *Island of Sheep*, I/5,9(P).



A noted explorer, Rawling certainly had an extensive knowledge of the East and they talked endlessly.<sup>733</sup>

It may be that Buchan had not come across Islam much until arriving at Brasenose where he found a younger son of the last *Nawab* of Bengal with rooms on the same staircase in Old Quad. *Nawabzada* Syud Ullee Meerza, known as ‘Prince’, had an English mother and, after the death of his father when he was ten, lived in London.<sup>734</sup> In a small College of about a hundred undergraduates, they must have known each other.<sup>735</sup>

There was Buchan’s Oxford friend, Aubrey Herbert (1880-1923). He had served in South Africa, and during the following years became a noted traveller (Middle and Far East, although much preferring the former). Herbert often dressed as a tramp on his travels, and spoke half a dozen languages, including Arabic. Through him, Buchan heard of T. E. Lawrence (1888-1935) before the War, and helped to publicise his activities in the Arab Revolt while Director of Information, though not meeting until 1920.<sup>736</sup> By then, Buchan was ensconced at Elsfield Manor, providing an occasional retreat for Lawrence from his post-war life, doubling as writer and serviceman.

Like Buchan, Lawrence had been reared in an evangelical Christian home, his interest in the Middle East aroused by Bible reading,<sup>737</sup> his mentor, Canon Christopher, and Mr Buchan akin in viewing Scripture. Unlike Buchan, he accepted the faith uncritically, and was not strong enough to withstand exposure to wider influences when in the East.<sup>738</sup> When Buchan met him he was probably an agnostic, though in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, re-written prior to publication in 1926, he is sympathetic to Christianity<sup>739</sup> especially so in Chapter 63, describing, as a ‘Christian’, his saving the life of Gasim of Maan.<sup>740</sup> ‘Eventually he ceased to believe in conventional Christianity [but] was permanently affected by religious concepts and sanctions.’<sup>741</sup> Buchan’s awareness of, and later friendship with, Lawrence was informative. Moreover, both men were greatly indebted to *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (1888) by Charles

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<sup>733</sup> *Remembrance*, 32-35.

<sup>734</sup> *LJB*, 39, named incorrectly – see BNC Archives.

<sup>735</sup> *Brazen Nose*, 37.

<sup>736</sup> *MHD*, 212.

<sup>737</sup> Tabachnick, *Lawrence of Arabia*, 35.

<sup>738</sup> Wilson, *Lawrence*, 713.

<sup>739</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>740</sup> Chapters 39 & 44.

<sup>741</sup> Brown, *Touch of Genius*, 8.

Doughty (1843-1926).<sup>742</sup> Buchan's reading of him pre-dated Lawrence's edition (1921). Al-Rawi's claim that Buchan's knowledge of the East was largely second hand is true, but his informants do not seem deficient.

He then treats of concepts of Empire, beginning with *The African Colony*. He sees Russia, well-known to Rawling, and containing many Muslims, as part of the East, and finds in *The Half-Hearted* support for the threat of them sweeping across Europe. 'When that day comes, my masters, we shall have a new Empire, the Holy Eastern Empire, and this rotten surface civilization of ours will be swept off.'<sup>743</sup> Buchan is critically aware of his own society, while Al-Rawi maintains that Buchan's 'perennial Western fear of a resurgent Islam, is part of the Western historical memory.'<sup>744</sup> He can hardly complain that Islam was a threat in Buchan's pre-War Britain, mentioning the Madhi, within Buchan's own memory, and the Indian Mutiny.<sup>745</sup> A knowledge of history included Turks at the gates of Vienna, not to mention the destruction of the Christian kingdoms right across North Africa and into Asia in the years after Mohammed's death. All showed the power of the sword in proselytising.

In *The Half-Hearted* Haystoun, standing for Parliament, is supported by a friend who would 'back Lewis if he were a Mohammedan or Anarchist. The man is sound metal, I tell you.' Al-Rawi sees negative connotations in 'this casual assigning of "a Mohammedan or Muslim" to the most extreme contrast to a white Scottish laird.'<sup>746</sup> In fact, any racial implication is modified by including 'anarchist', comparison being better understood as complimentary to those who are 'Other' – they could be 'sound metal, too,' like Haystoun.

However, the main thrust is in *Greenmantle* (1916). Having helpfully discussed possible derivations of the title, Al-Rawi claims that Buchan showed that Islam was a threat because the Ottoman Sultan had called all Muslims to *jihad* against the Allies in the Great War. That it proved to be ineffective, does not make it wrong to have considered it a real threat. *Jihad* was still 'in the air' and Islam on the march even more evidently when *Greenmantle* was published in 1916. In June, Husayn, Sharif of Mecca declared a *jihad* to liberate the Caliphate

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<sup>742</sup> Machin, 'Ministry of Information,' 68. Buchan reminisced: 'I have known one soldier of genius, only one [...] Lawrence of Arabia,' NLS 1. 'Canada Club, St John's, NB 1937'.

<sup>743</sup> *Half-Hearted*, XXIII/265(1<sup>st</sup>).

<sup>744</sup> Al-Rawi, 'Manipulating Muslims,' 21; Simon, 'The Middle East,' 52-53.

<sup>745</sup> 'Islam and the East,' 121.

<sup>746</sup> *Half-Hearted*, X/129(1<sup>st</sup>).

from the ‘atheistic regime in power in Turkey.’<sup>747</sup> Buchan simply used these well-attested facts, yet showed a sympathetic awareness of Islam and objectively recognised its great, and sometimes latent power, as a world force. So Bullivant remarks: ‘There is a dry wind blowing through the East, and the parched grasses wait the spark.’ Hannay responds: ‘It looks as if Islam had a bigger hand in the thing than we thought [...] I fancy religion is the only thing to knit up a scattered empire.’<sup>748</sup>

Again, Sir Walter says: ‘Islam is a fighting creed, and the mullah still stands in the pulpit with the Koran in one hand and a drawn sword in the other.’<sup>749</sup> In commenting, Al-Rawi claims that ‘this terrifying image suggests that even the religious man has a duty to fight the “Kaffirs” or the infidels. Islam is shown as an uncontrollable force’,<sup>750</sup> as many have experienced. There is nothing wrong with Hannay’s reply: ‘Then there will be hell let loose in those parts’, or with Bullivant’s response, ‘Hell which may spread.’ Again, ‘it is the austerity of the East which is its beauty and its terror.’<sup>751</sup> Later Sandy says:

Those religious revivals come in cycles, and one was due about now [...] A seer has arisen of the blood of the prophet, and will restore the Khalifate to its old glories and Islam to its old purity. His sayings are everywhere in the Moslem world. [...] They believe they are on the eve of a great deliverance.’<sup>752</sup>

These expressions have been discussed and criticised by Al-Rawi. Buchan showed himself to be sensitive to the decadence of the West, in contrast to a pure and undefiled religion, though for him that was best found in following Christ. Elsewhere Buchan admits some of the faults and aberrations which have characterised Christian history, but they cannot be justified in Christ’s name. That defence is not so readily open to Muslims. Despite alleged ignorance of Islam, Buchan seems the better commentator. He could appreciate its beauty and its terror, while Al-Rawi sees only the first, and seems blind to the second, presenting Islam uncritically as a pure and peaceable religion, maligned or misunderstood in the West.

To Buchan Arab fundamentalism aimed to destroy the decadence of supine urban life by imposing the austere simplicities of the desert, its “hot, strong, anti-septic sunlight.” The instinct is good – much better than a seedy stagnation in an artificial

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<sup>747</sup> Allen, *God’s Terrorists*, 248.

<sup>748</sup> *Greenmantle*, I/6(P).

<sup>749</sup> *Ibid.*, I/6&XV/178.

<sup>750</sup> ‘Islam and the East,’ 125.

<sup>751</sup> *Greenmantle*, I/6.

<sup>752</sup> *Ibid.*, XII/142.

and imposed town environment – and in any case cannot be checked; it must be directed to beneficial ends.<sup>753</sup>

Al-Rawi sees Buchan maintaining ‘the old prejudice’ which saw the East and Islam as exotic, unstable and decadent, something to marvel at as well as feared. Massie, like Al-Rawi, was writing after the events of ‘Nine-Eleven’ and other recent incidents, saying ‘we have grown accustomed again to the idea of Islamic *Jihad*.’<sup>754</sup> Thus, it is not unreasonable to ask whether Islam is really a religion of peace. In contrast to Al-Rawi’s reaction to *Greenmantle*, Massie finds that the Hannay books ‘offer pure enjoyment partly because they pose no disturbing questions,’ and were ‘a form of escapism for himself as well as his readers’ and ‘without ever striking a wrong note.’<sup>755</sup>

However, Buchan is mainly criticised for racism towards Jews (well covered by others) and to black Africans.

## 10. Conclusion on Race

For David Daniell, Laputa is a black Montrose.<sup>756</sup> For Andrew Lownie ‘in terms of race Buchan was not ahead of his contemporaries.’ His ‘views reflect a general candid attitude.’ He agrees with Himmelfarb that this is ‘an attempt to express differences of culture and colour in terms that had been unquestioned for generations.’ Buchan was already exploring ‘the thin dividing line between civilisation and savagery’ which characterised his later fiction, but ‘his sympathies seem to rest with both sides of the divide.’<sup>757</sup> That seems a fair assessment, if it is also accepted that Buchan’s views developed. For Rajamäe also, Buchan was not ahead of his contemporaries.<sup>758</sup> For her, Laputa is an ‘Ethiopian’, an African who is looking for an independent native form of Christianity. Buchan used the term.<sup>759</sup> Such were always to some extent rebels against European influence. Years before, Smith quoted George Shepperson as stressing this.<sup>760</sup>

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<sup>753</sup> Parry, ‘Thirty-Nine Articles’, 214, quoting *Greenmantle*, XV/179(P).

<sup>754</sup> Massie, ‘Introduction,’ vi.

<sup>755</sup> Ibid., vii, v, xii.

<sup>756</sup> *DD*, 112.

<sup>757</sup> *LJB*, 113, 114.

<sup>758</sup> Rajamäe, ‘John Laputa,’ 12-20.

<sup>759</sup> *Prester John*, II/31.

<sup>760</sup> *SJB*, 144-45.

A good point made by Green is the unfairness of criticising Buchan for racism when he makes ‘men of power talk to each other with unbuttoned ease’ because his own language was ‘excessively prim.’<sup>761</sup> Some critics have put up defences of Buchan, only to knock them down again as inadequate. Christopher MacLachlan, who is a genuine defender, finds it invalid to claim that Buchan ‘knew no better’ and simply reflected ‘attitudes of his time,’ while it is reasonable to say that attitudes which seem out-dated now are pronounced by characters rather than by Buchan himself. This is because it is unfair ‘to take statements made by his characters out of context as reflecting his own opinions.’ A writer may give characters limitations in outlook which may not be his own.

He then makes two unusual points. ‘Contrary to the views of his critics, Buchan was actually right’ about race and other prejudices because he described how attitudes ‘really work in society.’ Preconceived stereotypes are often used until we know individuals better, for we have ‘nothing else to go on.’ The question is whether we can rise above first impressions, and judge individuals for what they are. He claims that David Sempill does this in *Witch Wood* towards such others as Mark Kerr, while his shallow clerical opponents use such actions to condemn him.

Lastly, he questions whether such charges as racism against Buchan actually matter. The stories are entertainments, ‘not moral fables or statements of political belief.’ If expurgated to conform to some supposed ‘correctness’, he doubts they would be readable. There will never be a world in which all views are ‘correct’, but Buchan shows that individuals can still be worthy and honest, together with the inclination to treat those they meet on their merits rather than rejecting them on their stereotypes. Buchan’s stories contain another sort of moral message about honesty, respect, fairness, and a willingness to take some share in maintaining these values. Regardless of some critical reactions ‘Buchan remains widely read because he tells good stories.’<sup>762</sup> David Crackanthorpe has rightly said of Buchan that

It cannot reasonably be expected, even of a writer noted for his prescience in many things, that he so anticipate his time as to be free of contemporary assumptions on a condition as basic as race was then held to be.<sup>763</sup>

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<sup>761</sup> *MG*, 124.

<sup>762</sup> MacLachlan, *Scotnotes*, 46-50.

<sup>763</sup> Crackanthorpe, ‘Great Estate,’ 27.

An ecumenical view would be more acceptable nowadays, and Buchan at least was flexible enough to reject the rigid contemporary hierarchical view. He thought about the issue of race, was prepared to revise his attitude, and similarly sought to influence others. Change would come, though Buchan's generation did not think it would be fully realised in their day. Indeed, Buchan was proved wrong both about the timing (though some of the indigenous people thought that it still came too early), and sometimes about the possibility of self-government and independence for all. Nevertheless, greatly admiring Laputa, Crawford lets slip: 'God forgive me, but I think I said I hope to see the day when Africa would belong once more to its rightful owners.'<sup>764</sup> The vision was there.

Perhaps the furthest that Buchan went in fiction (1935) was to make Jaikie Galt say, 'human nature was much the same everywhere, and [...] one might dig out of the unlikely places surprising virtues.'<sup>765</sup> How far Buchan's thinking changed is shown in a passage published in 'Conquest!' (1927). Of Empire, as 'an alliance of sovereign states', he wrote that 'Thirty years ago it would have been inconceivable that India should have been brought within its scope.' Now

In the new theory of Empire, race and colour are irrelevant. Self-government is the ideal for every unit: with many it has been realised: with some it may take generations before the ground is duly prepared, but the same goal is at the end of every road.<sup>766</sup>

In the concluding pages of *Memory Hold the Door*, thirty years after *Prester John*, Buchan shows much more humility towards limitations in all human development. Gone is any sense of racial superiority when he quoted Hans Zinsser with approval:

The tragedy of man is that he has developed an intelligence eager to uncover mysteries, but not strong enough to penetrate them. With minds but slightly evolved beyond those of our animal relations, we are tortured with precocious desires, and pose questions which we are sometimes capable of asking but rarely able to answer.<sup>767</sup>

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<sup>764</sup> *Prester John*, VIII/115.

<sup>765</sup> *House of Four Winds*, I/33.

<sup>766</sup> Kruse, *Idea of Empire*, 143.

<sup>767</sup> *MHD*, 291; Zinsser, *Rats, Mice, History*, 34.

Buchan ends the main discussion in *A Lodge in the Wilderness* with a paraphrase of Numbers 24:17 which clearly greatly appealed to him: 'I shall see it, but not now: I shall behold it but not nigh.'<sup>768</sup>

## **(B) Christian Missions**

### **11. Buchan's Biblical and Mission Background**

Writing about Buchan's attitude towards Islam and the East in his novels, Al-Rawi included this statement:

His Christian sense of duty was not foreign to him because it was 'part of his Calvinist training' and his observation of the 'Free Church,' although he himself had no leanings towards missionary activity, or to supporting missionary work.<sup>769</sup>

This misguided judgment about Missions, unsupported by evidence, is grossly misleading. Similarly, Green had previously stated that Buchan and his sister were opposed to Free Church values, a key one of which was 'Foreign Missions'; that Anna showed this distaste in her novels; and by implication Buchan shared that view.<sup>770</sup>

Development can also be discerned in Buchan's attitude towards Christian Missions. Being born in a Free Church manse, he was very much aware of missionary work. In later years, his 'leanings towards missionary activity' led publicly to stressing this as an imperative.

Mr Buchan was a man familiar with a varied literature, and apart from this had a great intimacy with the Bible as his working tool. This had a deep impact on the minds of the Buchan children, and Smith has noted that for them

Even the round of church activities had its imaginative reward. Special collections in church, strange objects at missionary bazaars – toothbrushes made from tropical wood, grass mats of brilliant dyes brought far places like Calabar or Nyasaland within the Pathhead child's experience; and once a black minister came to preach.<sup>771</sup>

Supporting Christian Missions was taken for granted.

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<sup>768</sup> He used it again on a number of occasions, concluding *What Union of the Churches means* (1929) and *Presbyterianism* (1938).

<sup>769</sup> Macdonald, *Reassessing Buchan*, 122. For his quotations, Al-Rawi's note 41 acknowledges Mann, 'Buchan and First World War,' 8. It says nothing of Missions.

<sup>770</sup> *MG*, 99.

<sup>771</sup> *SJB*, 17.

However, it is important to clarify the attitude to race in the home in which Buchan grew up, not just stereotyping a Free Church minister. None of Mr Buchan's surviving sermons deal with this issue, but fortunately he wrote his book *First Things* (1902), published when Buchan was in South Africa. Strongly opposing Darwin on human origins, he never hinted that mankind is anything but one.

There can be no doubt that Buchan was reared in the New Testament teaching that the Gospel must be preached to all nations. (Mark 16:15) He will have learnt that God 'in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways' (Acts 14:16), but because 'God made of one blood all the nations to dwell on the face of the earth' (Acts, 17.26), the message of Salvation meant that 'All are one in Christ Jesus.' (Galatians, 3:28-29) and Mr Buchan quoted such words.<sup>772</sup> There are no second class citizens in the Kingdom of Heaven. His father had no blind prejudice, but reasoned the issues out. Occasionally quoting classical languages, and of course the Bible, he engages with many thinkers: Classical, Oriental, and Medieval, Enlightenment and contemporary, both European and British. Buchan will have heard something of this in his growing years. All 'were equal in the sight of God and in the eyes of the Reverend Mr Buchan.'<sup>773</sup>

In *Prester John* (1910), he quotes the Free Church boy, Tam Dyke, saying that Laputa had preached that 'a black man was as good as a white man in the sight of God', and that he should not have been allowed to speak in church because 'the Bible says that the children of Ham were to be our servants.'<sup>774</sup> Scripture does not say that the progeny of Ham were black, and it is clear that whatever foolishness the boy may have believed, he was not expressing the minister's view, who had been right not to muzzle Laputa on these grounds.

However, Buchan's experience of Christian Missions was not limited to what he heard at his father's churches, those from abroad he met there, or 'lesser breeds' overseas. Indeed, Christian mission belonged also to the streets around him as he will have known through his father preaching in the open air.

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<sup>772</sup> *First Things*, 163-64.

<sup>773</sup> Burnett, *Thirty-Nine Steps*, xv.

<sup>774</sup> *Prester John*, 1/8.



## 12. Beyond His Own Family

Hardly had a new century begun than Buchan found himself in South Africa. His wide travels took him within proximity of Christian missions. These experiences are reflected in *Prester John*. Echoing Buchan's experience in his father's church, Laputa, the African Christian minister, visits a church on the Fife coast. Moreover, Buchan was prescient in foreshadowing a real Laputa who would arise in Africa in the guise of a Christian minister, John Chitembe of Nyasaland.<sup>775</sup>

Membership of the regular congregation at St Columba's Church, Pont Street after Buchan's return in 1903 would have exposed him to on-going publicity about mission. Having become an Elder there in 1912, such involvement will have been raised at Kirk Sessions from time to time, though his own attitude towards it was then somewhat ambivalent. Such a central London location would also have attracted visitors from overseas and from the mission field. Moreover, his keen interest in ideas of Empire in the early years of the century included the presence of Christian mission. Naturally, the distracted years of the First World War caused interruption, but once settled in Elsfield there is documented evidence of his continuing active support for this aspect of the faith.<sup>776</sup>

Despite his South African conviction that missionaries should proceed slowly with the full Gospel message, and his contempt for 'commercial' ones, he still regarded theirs as 'one of the most heroic of human callings.'<sup>777</sup> Even in South Africa we have seen Buchan supporting Milner's essentially Christian view on civil rights. Enjoyment of these did not depend on race, but on being sufficiently equipped through education to act responsibly, both morally and intellectually. He believed equally that this was the necessary criterion among white people in Britain.<sup>778</sup> Thus there was no essential superiority or inequality, only the need for some to develop the skills for citizenship.

## 13. Buchan's Expressed Views on Mission

Addressing a Presbyterian Missionary meeting in 1932, he affirmed that 'The appeal to scripture is final. There is no duty [engaging in Christian mission] more unequivocally or more

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<sup>775</sup> *SJB*, 144-45. She also mentions Bambata's Zulu revolt of 1906.

<sup>776</sup> NLS.1.

<sup>777</sup> *African Colony*, 100-01.

<sup>778</sup> Above 165, note 674.

solemnly enjoined by the word of God' and 'It is important, in the first place, that we should emphasise the spiritual character of the Gospel of Christ. In a world of compromises it can make no compromise.'<sup>779</sup>

Believing that 'civilization must have a Christian basis and must ultimately rest on the Christian Church',<sup>780</sup> he repeatedly stressed the need for Christian mission. At the same time, he saw the propagation of the Gospel as the essential leavening in contact between the West and the wider world. To The Religious Tract Society he said:

The teaching of Christianity [...] makes a natural bridge between an old world and a new. It introduces Western ideas wisely and gradually, not as crude, half-understood war cries, but as a slow transforming of the whole outlook on life. The teaching of a profound spiritual religion, carrying on what was spiritual and enduring in native beliefs, is the best guarantor that the transit from the old to the new in politics and society will be accomplished humanely and peacefully.<sup>781</sup>

It was also a necessary corrective for

The culture and commercialism of the West have irrupted into remote and backward lands, bringing not peace but a sword. The only counter-active which the West can give is the Christian spirit, to transform and humanise the whole outlook of life. The West has given its poison and must provide the antidote. It has made the wound and must provide the healing. As I see it, the Christian faith in these remote lands is the only bridge between an old world and a new.<sup>782</sup>

Buchan summed up his attitude to race in believing that 'the Gospel of Christ is, above all things, a Gospel of freedom, and it is the Church's duty to testify at all times against anything that will cramp and confine the human spirit.'<sup>783</sup> He even applied this principle to the League of Nations, asserting that it would only succeed 'if, side by side with it there is another and spiritual League of Nations, a universal acceptance of the Gospel of peace.'

This other and more vital league [...] can only be realised if the duty of propagating Christianity is recognised not only by the churches, but by the peoples of every Christian land – if missionary work is seen, not as the enterprise of a remote ecclesiastical body, but as an intimate and urgent duty incumbent upon every man and woman who desires to see peace on earth and follow the direct command of our Lord.<sup>784</sup>

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<sup>779</sup> NLS.1, 25/05/1932.

<sup>780</sup> *MHD*, 292.

<sup>781</sup> NLS.1, 26/04/1927.

<sup>782</sup> *Ibid.*, PMM.

<sup>783</sup> *Pres.*, 14.

<sup>784</sup> NLS1: RTS, *ibid.*

His views on Mission embraced the needs of all peoples, and therefore attitudes to race.

Later he cited the Christian faith as having broken the Roman Empire's 'bondage, since as part of its gospel it taught the freedom of the individual and the transcendent worth of every soul in the sight of God.'<sup>785</sup> Moreover, Buchan's attitude to ethnicity was set in a global context. It was not inferiority of race that was the hindrance, but lack of development. Deliverance from that was one of the freedoms brought by Christianity, though being always mindful that the essential Christian freedom was peace with God through belief in Jesus; its main influence must always be spiritual, rather than secular.<sup>786</sup>

As was said earlier, Buchan rather assumes the importance of spiritual things. Thus, in his discussion of Empire in *A Lodge in the Wilderness* (1906) there is no overt plea for the Christian faith. Nevertheless, the missionary the Reverend Alexander Macdowall gets a good write up, and two of the delegates bring in the Gospel more than does Carey, their host. Lord Appin declares that through natural disasters 'We are shaken out of our ease, and know that the Lord is a jealous God, and that nature is careless of our pigmy life. And then at last comes the reconciliation in the domain of Reason, when we learn that God is made one with man.' Even clearer is Mrs Deloraine:

We may make a new earth, a prosperous and happy and civilised earth, but if our citizens can look no further they will be worse off than at the beginning. The poor man even now, broken by want and disease, who can declare in his last hours that his Redeemer liveth, has reached a spiritual height to which no ideal citizenship of itself can ever rise.<sup>787</sup>

#### 14. Conclusion on Missions

Caution is needed in declaring that Buchan was a life long supporter of Christian missions. His sister, Anna, has described the reluctance engendered by the tedium of having to engage in house to house collections for such causes, and it is likely that the other siblings shared this reluctance as they grew up.<sup>788</sup> There is something equivocal about Buchan's attitude in his early books on Africa. Francis Carey preaches that initially Africans should be taught only Christian morality for good citizenship, and Macdowall, the missionary admits that his work has

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<sup>785</sup> *Pres.*, 15.

<sup>786</sup> *Ibid*, 12: 'The Gospel is concerned primarily with spiritual redemption, not with social reform.'

<sup>787</sup> *Lodge*, 191-200, 329, 308.

<sup>788</sup> *MG*, 100.

resulted in that, more than in conversions. Though in his early days there had been ‘three massacres of Christians’ which sounds like pagan reaction to real conversions, later he says that ‘Our work has been much blessed – not in the ordinary sense, ye understand, for there were few converts of the real sort, but we have driven some habits of industry and decency into the people.’<sup>789</sup> Similarly, in *Prester John* the founding of the great College at Blaauwildebeestefontein, which provides the climax, was ‘no factory for making missionaries and black teachers, but an institution for giving the Kaffirs the kind of training which fits them to be good citizens of the state.’<sup>790</sup>

Buchan’s views on race changed between his youth and middle-life; it can be argued that there was a parallel development in his approach to Christian mission. He came to see that Mrs Deloraine was right. Perhaps moderated by experience in the War, we have seen him speaking out strongly in support of the propagation of the Gospel in general and specifically through missions overseas from the 1920s onwards. The scope had now definitely become world wide, and of urgent necessity. It was no longer enough to seek Carey’s Kingdom of God on earth. In this way he reverts to being again more at one with his parents.

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<sup>789</sup> *Lodge*, 193.

<sup>790</sup> *Prester John*, XXIII/282.

## CHAPTER NINE

### BUCHAN'S INTENTION IN *SICK HEART RIVER*

‘Leithen is also held to be the character  
Buchan wrote to represent himself.’  
(*CMF*, 109)

In these few words, Macdonald admirably expresses the issue. How far is Buchan's autobiography revealed through his character Edward Leithen? This question more especially arises over *Sick Heart River*, widely regarded as his most introspective piece of fiction.

Lownie confirms that *Sick Heart River* and *Memory Hold the Door* had both been contracted through his literary agent ‘several years before’ thus scotching the idea that they were conceived in the last year of his life. To us it is his last novel, but we cannot say that it was so for him. At his death, he had contracted five more novels and an historical study.<sup>791</sup> There is no doubt that he was still full of ideas, and expected to be able to continue to publish books in the years to come, after his anticipated return to Elsfield in the autumn of 1940.

The novel was published posthumously in 1941, a few months after *Memory Hold the Door*. Both were written during the last year of his life and have been treated by some as parallel pieces of personal testimony. On this view, *Sick Heart River* fictionally expressed Buchan finally coming to a vital Christian faith under the shadow of approaching death. This often stated understanding is now challenged.

#### 1. Preamble

In claiming that Buchan created Leithen deliberately to represent himself, critics overlook the fact that he has left us all the guidance we need. When it comes to understanding the main characters in his thrillers, he wanted us to know that he gave Hannay ‘traits copied from my friends, and amused myself considering what he would do in various emergencies.’ He did not think he was Leithen, one of his ‘musketeers’:

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<sup>791</sup> Lownie, ‘On the Trail,’ 3.

There was Dickson McCunn, the retired grocer, and his ragamuffin boys from the Gorbals [...] There was Sir Edward Leithen, an eminent lawyer, who is protagonist or narrator in *The Power House*, *John Macnab*, *The Dancing Floor* and *The Gap in the Curtain*; and in his particular group was the politician, Lord Lamancha, and Sir Archibald Roylance, airman, ornithologist and Scots laird. It was huge fun playing with my puppets, and to me they soon became very real flesh and blood. I never consciously invented with a pen in my hand; I waited until the story had told itself and then wrote it down, and, since it was already a finished thing, I wrote it fast. I always felt a little ashamed that profit should accrue from what had given me so much amusement.

Having no desire ‘except to please myself’, without a single reader ‘I would have felt amply repaid.’<sup>792</sup> Buchan tells us five key things about his thrillers which should never be forgotten.

His characters had ‘traits copied from his friends.’

The stories were written fast and so we should expect some inaccuracies.

They were written as fun to please himself and so should not be taken too seriously.

Buchan told his sister Anna that ‘when he wrote stories he invented,’ but that in her books she ‘was always remembering’,<sup>793</sup> so he was not being seriously autobiographical.

‘He spoke cheerfully in the summer of 1939 of killing off Leithen and the other familiar characters because they “have been on hand too long and I am getting bored with them.”’<sup>794</sup>

Taken together, and with the author’s authority, there is a strongly supported case that Buchan did not deliberately set out to represent himself in any of his characters. His heir agreed. ‘Most of my father’s characters were two or three real people, put together to create one character of fiction, very often undergoing the adventures that happened to several other real life figures.’<sup>795</sup> Nevertheless, some critics bent on creating him in an image of their own making, have taken little notice of what he said about his own work. Moreover, Smith said, he ‘would have thought it absurd that so much attention should be given to his “shockers” “tushery” [...] To himself he was a serious historian [...] but not a serious novelist except in *The Path of the King*, *Midwinter*, *Witch Wood* and *The Blanket of the Dark*,’<sup>796</sup> none featuring McCunn, Hannay, or Leithen.

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<sup>792</sup> *MHD*, 196.

<sup>793</sup> *UU*, ‘Introduction.’

<sup>794</sup> NLS.2 to Markham, *SJB*, 467.

<sup>795</sup> Usborne interviewing Johnnie Tweedsmuir, *Clubland Heroes*, 88.

<sup>796</sup> *SJB*, 289.

Of course, it is necessary to be aware of the ‘invented self’ tendency, whereby a person may represent themselves in a particular way. Buchan clearly did this at times in *Sick Heart River*, for every author puts something of himself into his characters, and he is definitely reflected in Leithen. His grandson, James, wisely wrote: ‘like many invalids, JB pressed out every drop from his experiences. The yachting cruise of 1910 was good for stories and two novels. Travelling down the Mackenzie in 1937, gave the background to *Sick Heart River*.’<sup>797</sup> Others may spot aspects of the writer’s personality, included as it were sub-consciously.

Buchan has only himself to blame for causing some confusion. He wrote no thorough-going autobiography and kept no detailed diary.<sup>798</sup> Family, friends, and strangers have found him difficult to know, and some have set out to try to find him. Clearly, there were ‘traits copied from his friends’ and their activities which inspired Buchan to invent imaginary people. Such identifications are mildly interesting, but not of any great significance, as long as they are not pushed too far. Having made these caveats, we can now address a number of questions.

## 2. Leithen: The Character

Lownie seems perceptive in supposing that Buchan’s first legal character, the shadowy Medway in ‘The Far Islands’ (1899), is probably inspired by his friend, Cubby Medd (1878-1902). Soon, apart from the loss of his beloved little sister, Violet (1888-93), Medd first broke the inner circle of Buchan’s contemporaries. Possibly, in creating Leithen, he gave Medd the life he never had.

There were five Leithen novels and four stories. *The Power House*, (in book form 1916) was first published in December 1913. After a decade in which Buchan concentrated his light fictional interest on Hannay, Leithen came rapidly to the fore again in *John Macnab* (1925), participating in a sporting contest with Lord Lamancha (another name from the Borders), and John Palliser-Yeates,. The third Leithen book, *The Dancing Floor* (1926), was described as ‘one of the first novels to owe its origin to *The Golden Bough*.’<sup>799</sup> Perhaps, but Buchan’s interest in

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<sup>797</sup> Introduction’.

<sup>798</sup> Lownie, ‘On the Trail’, 2.

<sup>799</sup> Probably introduced to Buchan by his Glasgow and Peebles friend, Professor Veitch, and Andrew Lang, close to Frazer, soon befriended Buchan, influences discussed by some, including Harvie, ‘God’s are Kittle Cattle,’ 14-26. In view of evidence for Leithen’s conversion, given in this Chapter, Harvie’s conclusion that Leithen ‘dies, still a half-believing Calvinist’ (ibid., 23) seems to assume too great an effect on Buchan by the atheist Frazer.

pre-Christian Religion was first kindled by his College Chaplain.<sup>800</sup> Was this renewed interest in Leithen reflecting Buchan's fresh hopes of entering Parliament? He did so in 1927. *The Gap in the Curtain* (1932) again has Leithen as narrator.

There is another pause before Buchan decides to kill Leithen off in *Sick Heart River* (1941). This last adventure has led to much speculation that Buchan is specifically using a dying man to reveal his own spiritual fulfilment.

### 3. Who Said Buchan Was Leithen?

Sir Edward Leithen is perhaps the most like John Buchan of any of the characters. I recognise in sentences which he gives to Sir Edward to say and in actions which he makes him perform, some touches of autobiography. But he never put portraits of real people wholesale into his books.<sup>801</sup>

Buchan's widow expressed this very carefully and cautiously, having the wit to emphasise differences. Note the 'perhaps' and 'never puts the real wholesale' into books. Moreover, she went on to clarify what she meant by 'some touches of autobiography', and explained how very limited she thought these were. Examples she cites, like Fish Benjie in *John McNab* who was a boy with a cart Buchan met in Ross-shire, are pretty minimal bits of autobiography compared with what some have looked for.

Usborne, in *Clubland Heroes*, was similarly reserved, though others have gone much further stumbling over seeing Buchan as a dying and disappointed man. The problem is that Leithen is not Buchan. Leithen spent his life pursuing worldly success, though not as vigorously as he might have done (others thought he might have been Lord Chancellor or Prime Minister.) Buchan's life-long bottom line was his Christian faith. He believed in 'inexorable law'. That did not mean that he was a passive spectator. Of course, he had his goals and ambitions, but ultimately he believed his 'times were in God's hands.' He was on a pilgrimage, and what mattered most was the certainty of the outcome. He was intent on using his gifts and abilities to the full, because that was the only way to honour God, but what resulted from so doing did not lie in his hands.<sup>802</sup>

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<sup>800</sup> The Chaplain, Dr Bussell, wrote a postscript to the College obituary with personal anecdotes revealing their shared interest in pre-Christian religions. Buchan had most of Bussell's books with him in Canada. *Brazen Nose*, 41.

<sup>801</sup> *WF*, 287.

<sup>802</sup> His wife, Susan, quite emphatically denies that he was 'ambitious and in love with success' but 'cared far more for getting things done' not 'whether he got any credit', *WF*, 285. Daniell is equally sure Smith and Graham Greene



Against Smith, Macdonald and William Buchan, his son, James, is much nearer the mark. Both were novelists but James comes with an interesting perspective. Remember also what Markham told us about Buchan's intention to kill off his popular characters. James has no truck with Leithen as Buchan. He says that in *Sick Heart River*, Buchan had the setting (the north), he had the theme (dying, though I would prefer faith and dying), so which character should he kill off in this story? It can't be Hannay 'too hale', or Lamancha 'too shadowy', or Roylance 'too boisterous', or Clanroyden 'too heroic', or McCunn 'too commercial.' That left the quiet, thoughtful Leithen to be chosen for the part. James rightly follows the principle of working from Buchan to Leithen.

In *Sick Heart River*, Buchan made him a dying man because he wanted to kill him off, not because he wanted to agonise about his own declining health. Nevertheless, having chosen Leithen for the part, his widow believed that he put 'many of his thoughts about physical pain and weariness' into this novel.<sup>803</sup>

#### 4. The Case for Leithen Being Buchan

Leithen is like his creator, but by 1912-13 Buchan's own life and contacts enabled him to be sure-footed in creating such a character. He had known many role models in able lawyers, among them his 'old friend' Sir Robert Finlay, Attorney-General and later Lord Chancellor, and his great friend Haldane of Cloan, in the Cabinet and soon to be Lord Chancellor.

However, there is a very clear divide in their attitude to Christianity. Leithen accepted that he was not religious, had a very nominal hold on the faith in which he was bred, and rarely went to church. Buchan was a lifelong and deeply committed Christian, always went to church unless circumstances prevented, and was an ordained Elder for the last twenty-eight years of his life.

If we asked how much Buchan's real autobiography was in his character, we have to consider the assertion, held by other critics, but admirably stated in its ultimate form by Macdonald, that Buchan made Leithen to represent himself. We must try to be fair and objective. There are some powerful similarities between the character and the author which must be stressed. The case is strong and persuasive, but also circumstantial. It has not been argued,

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err in supposing that not having been more successful disappointed him. *DD*, 194-95.

<sup>803</sup> *WF*, 287.

but is an assumption based on many similarities, for it is easy to find up to thirty, and conclude ‘case closed.’ But many superficial resemblances will not avail to make the case if the basic identification is erroneous.<sup>804</sup>

## 5. The Case Against

So it is now left to try to argue the case against. Remember, the issue is not whether there are any similarities between character and author, that would be unsurprising and is not in doubt; nor is the issue whether anything in the Leithen stories was drawn from something in Buchan’s own life, like his knowledge of the Leithen Water, a tributary of his beloved Tweed. The issue is whether Leithen was deliberately ‘the character Buchan wrote to represent himself.’

Lownie gave some credence to this belief, and Macdonald goes the whole way. Here are two quotations from the more measured Lownie. The first requires caution: ‘Leithen [...] is generally accepted as the character most closely modelled on Buchan himself.’<sup>805</sup> He gives no references for this any more than does Macdonald. The second is admirable:

It is interesting in tracing themes in Buchan’s work to see just how many of his own current interests or those of his family are ascribed to characters or are central to the books. They include mountaineering, fishing, birds, walking and the card game patience. As the critic Patrick Cosgrave has put it: “He did not metamorphose his personality when he came to write adventure stories: he merely relaxed, and indulged some of the whims of his temperament and imagination.”<sup>806</sup>

The line between seeing a general inspiration and looking for detailed autobiographical revelation is one which should only be crossed with the greatest care, and after the most thorough research. Even then it is wise not to be too dogmatic.

Had Buchan lived to be eighty, he might have given us another twenty books. He certainly contemplated other serious studies, more stories, and perhaps some ‘shockers’ among them, but there were witnesses to Leithen’s Arctic death; Conan Doyle’s drama at the Reichenbach Falls was an easier resuscitation to achieve.

So Leithen must not mislead us. Buchan’s friend, Walter Elliot, recalled that ‘when he could not meet people he invented them.’<sup>807</sup> There is a poignancy in that telling phrase. Though

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<sup>804</sup> Weekes, ‘Additional Notes’, 22-24.

<sup>805</sup> *LJB*, 137.

<sup>806</sup> Cosgrave, ‘Buchan’s Thrillers,’ 386; *LJB*, 203.

<sup>807</sup> *WF*, 134.

Buchan invented Leithen just before the War, development of his light fictional characters is contemporaneous with the terrible losses he suffered in the conflict. Smith comments that ‘He could recall the happiness of being one of a group of friends [but] there could be no such group now, too many had been killed.’<sup>808</sup>

Yet he could still fantasise about them in his fiction. Just as in the throw-away remark about Buchan in Leithen giving young Medd the life he never had, so Swiggett suggested that he gave further life to dead friends like Asquith and the Herberts in characters like Milburne, Clanroyden, and Pienaar.<sup>809</sup> We are back with Buchan’s own comment – ‘traits of many friends’ rather than with specific identification.

## 6. Lapsed Christian, but with Biblical Background

Usborne’s description, in *Clubland Heroes*, of what happened to the young Leithen seems pretty sound. ‘Oxford and post-Oxford reading gave him a sense of humility, but a distrust of religious dogma. He abhorred self pity. Did not much go to church.’<sup>810</sup>

When we first meet Leithen in ‘Space’, Hollond cites Traherne, and in the ensuing discussion both men quote the Bible: Leithen ‘the spirits of just men made perfect’ (Hebrews, 12:23), and Hollond ‘I am getting near the Abomination of the Desolation that the old prophet spoke of.’ (Daniel, 12:11, cf. Matthew, 24:15). When Leithen said the poet evidently took a cheerful view, Hollond replied: ‘He had religion, you see. He believed that everything was for the best. I am not a man of faith, and can only take comfort from what I know.’ Leithen isn’t able to add to that, and has previously told Hollond that

You may discover the meaning of Spirit. You may open up a new world, as rich as the old one but imperishable. You may prove to mankind their immortality and deliver them for ever from the fear of death. Why, man, you are picking at the lock of all the world’s mysteries.<sup>811</sup>

Now, that is not something a believing Christian would say, as it destroys the whole purpose of the death and resurrection of Christ. The story ends with the receipt of Hollond’s enigmatic postcard from Chamonix: – ‘I know at last – *God’s mercy* – HGH’. That can certainly bear more than one interpretation.

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<sup>808</sup> *SJB*, 290.

<sup>809</sup> Swiggett, ‘Introduction,’ vii–xi.

<sup>810</sup> 129.

<sup>811</sup> ‘Space,’ 155.

In the later books, Leithen appears little better aware spiritually. The two most overtly Christian of them are, of course, *The Dancing Floor* and *Sick Heart River*. Hear Usborne again. ‘When very frightened in Plakos he prayed desperately in the church there. He prayed again with the priest in Northern Canada.’ He further rightly comments that ‘though not religious’ his Calvinist background left him with an acute sense of sin,<sup>812</sup> but Buchan tells us that he did not share Milburne’s Calvinism.<sup>813</sup>

We will dwell more on *Sick Heart River* later, but in *The Dancing Floor* there is the comment about ‘waiting for a miracle [...] miracles are outside argument.’<sup>814</sup> Later, Leithen speaks about ‘The creed we all hold dumbly.’<sup>815</sup> In the little church, prepared for the Easter celebrations, Leithen was a congregation of one with the Priest on Good Friday, describing the ceremony as ‘a defiance’<sup>816</sup> of the pagan forces gathering outside. He tells us ‘I am not a religious man in the ordinary sense – only a half believer in the creed in which I was born’ but the instinct came to him from ‘believing generations’, and ‘the image of the dead Christ showed him where his gods lay.’<sup>817</sup> Finally when the islanders have been scared out of their paganism, the visitors are departing and the people shouting in the distance, Leithen ‘knew what the voices said, “Christ is risen – He is risen indeed.”’<sup>818</sup>

All this reads like a typical product of Public School religion. It gives you a rather general moral code, a certain knowledge of Christianity, but not much in the way of commitment. A sudden crisis may take you back to your grounding, but without leading on to any living faith. This seems to be true of Leithen. However, Buchan unconsciously sows a seed here which would bear fruit in the last Leithen novel: ‘Near prospect of death breaks down many barriers.’<sup>819</sup>

## 7. *Sick Heart River*

Usborne is sound again in saying that we ‘find clues to the inner soul of this fine Buchan gentleman in *Sick Heart River*.’ Macdonald is absolutely right, though too tentative, in

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<sup>812</sup> Cosgrave, ‘John Buchan’s Thrillers,’ 375-86.

<sup>813</sup> *DF*, I/22(P).

<sup>814</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>815</sup> *Ibid.*, 135-36.

<sup>816</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>817</sup> *Ibid.*, 158, 161.

<sup>818</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>819</sup> *DF*, XV/204(P).

suggesting that Buchan may 'have wanted to change the emphasis in Leithen's character to serve a different function in *Sick Heart River*.'<sup>820</sup> It becomes very clear that he did. Long before in *The Power House* there is an interesting exchange:

[Lumley:] In the Dark Ages you had one great power - the terror of God and His Church. Now you have a multiplicity of small things.  
 [Leithen:] You forget one thing - the fact that men really are agreed to keep the machine going. That is what I called the 'goodwill of civilisation.'<sup>821</sup>

Until the final Christian commitment, Leithen was a lapsed Christian, and really lived by 'the goodwill of civilisation.'

Leithen grew up in an evangelical Christian home. This meant that he really understood Vernon Milburne, who had the same background but kept the faith, despite being orphaned early. *Sick Heart River* is full of Leithen's attitude to religion. One can see how some have erroneously found too much of Buchan in Leithen. However, there are frequent references to Leithen, and later Galliard and even Lew, seeking to make their souls. There is a particularly enlightening section about Leithen.

He had always been in his way a religious man. Brought up under the Calvinist shadow, he had accepted a simple evangel, which, as he grew older, had mellowed and broadened. At Oxford he has rationalised it in his philosophical studies, but he had never troubled to make it a self-sufficing logical creed. Certain facts were the buttress of his faith, and the chief of them was the omnipotence and omnipresence of God.<sup>822</sup>

Too many have fallen into the trap set by this passage. This is the basis of Leithen's moral Theism, while Buchan's Christianity never left him. There are phrases which seem to echo what Buchan wrote about himself in *Memory Hold the Door*. Nevertheless, statements about Leithen when read superficially become wholly untrue when followed back to Buchan.

Let us probe deeper. Buchan never looked for, found, or 'rationalised' a creed in philosophy. His father's Calvinism was 'mellowed and broadened' by the Calvinism of the Cambridge Platonists, the Calvinism of the 'Believing Critics' like George Adam Smith, and probably later by the Calvinism of Karl Barth, but these were all Christian influences which fed the vitality of his faith, and he never had cause to question the fundamentals of Christianity

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<sup>820</sup> *CMF*, 110.

<sup>821</sup> *Power House*, III/32(P).

<sup>822</sup> *SHR*, Pt.II/17/172(1<sup>st</sup>).

learnt from his father. These produced Buchan's 'self-sufficing logical creed'. He continued by telling us that Leithen's 'creed had remained something aloof from his life.' Buchan's was integral throughout his. The claim that he only found a living Christian faith at the end of his life cannot stand closer examination.

Walter Elliot tells us that Buchan 'liked learning for its own sake.' But in going to Canada

he had left that world, and left it for good, - but he always felt, in his own way, a bit of deserter, and it was under the sign of the scholar that he fell in for his final parade. So he took down Leithen's wig and gown from the hook to explore the last journey.<sup>823</sup>

That seems sound and innocent enough, but implies that *Sick Heart River* was Buchan's swansong, and is the start of a false trail.

Some like Himmelfarb and Kruse have taken this up. The view emerging from such various critics can be summarised. In *Sick Heart River* Leithen is presented as Christian Stoic and this is a result of Buchan's own rejection of his Free Church background. He had come to accept a particular seventeenth century response to Calvinism, but is seen to abandon this, and later Stoicism, because he was not at ease in either. Instead, he adopted a different 'world view'. In this, God's Sovereignty and Justice are replaced by God's mercy. Providence is still there, but through works, Leithen is given a chance to co-operate with Providence and so finally finds salvation at the hands of a merciful God. Leithen's earlier comment that he had believed 'in conditional mortality', so that 'a further existence had to be earned in this one' may have encouraged this view.<sup>824</sup>

Speaking at the Buchan Society Dinner in 2011, John Haldane, developed a thesis he had published earlier. In this article (1998), he took up something Buchan said in a speech at Birkbeck College (1933) about 'a man's "making his soul"', and made these comments: 'it is only when we see a thing in its proper perspective in the scheme of the world that we find it easy to renounce and pass on.'<sup>825</sup>

*Sick Heart River* is, I believe, a work of broadly philosophical self-examination conducted through the character of Sir Edward Leithen. Buchan was ill, Leithen is told he is dying. Buchan had come to know the Canadian north through his occupancy

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<sup>823</sup> *WF*, 140.

<sup>824</sup> (1<sup>st</sup>), Pt.I/2/15.

<sup>825</sup> 'Scottish Philosopher Reflects,' 5-15.

of the Governor-Generalship; Leithen goes there in search of a man lost. Both men were in the process of making their souls, taking stock and coming to terms with death.<sup>826</sup>

Juanita Kruse similarly argued that, unsatisfied by worldly success, in the last decade of his life Buchan 'engaged in an intensely personal search for meaning' and seems to have found it in 'a vision of a loving and merciful God.'<sup>827</sup> For her, *Sick Heart River* is crucial. But only when we return from fiction to fact can we find the faith that Buchan held virtually all his life.

### 8. Buchan 'Making his Soul'

Haldane seems to miss an essential clue within the speech he quoted. Buchan says that 'making one's soul' should be a process 'going on all your days,' just as he had been doing, not a last minute death-bed conversion. Following seven criticisms of the belief that Buchan 'made his soul' only at the end of his life, an alternative view will be presented.

First, there is the claim that from a lapsed state, and discovering God's mercy, Buchan found a living faith in God and Christ in his last days which he expressed in *Sick Heart River*. There is an extended passage in which Leithen explains his attitude to religion. He retained a little from his Calvinist upbringing and had continued to be a Theist but 'his creed had remained something aloof from his life.' Later, there 'had come the long years of spiritual sloth' so that finally 'all his castles had been tumbled down' and in his heart he had always known they were paste-board.<sup>828</sup>

It is too facile to assume that this can equally describe Buchan in the 1930s before finding the living faith in which he died. A careful study of Buchan's Christian life between the Wars shows this view is wholly wrong. `

For many years before his death Buchan's Christianity was very active and public. The late conversion view belies many verifiable facts in Buchan's life which may not be sufficiently known. During Elsfeld years, ending with his appointment to Canada in 1935, Buchan responded regularly to invitations to speak at a variety of Christian evangelical gatherings. These included the Bible Society, Area missionary meetings, the Religious Tract Society, the opening of Churches, and the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland. More notably,

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<sup>826</sup> 'Scottish Philosopher Reflects,' 11.

<sup>827</sup> Kruse, *Idea of Empire*, 187.

<sup>828</sup> *SHR*, Pt.II/17/172-73(1<sup>st</sup>)

he also addressed the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland as the King's Commissioner (1933, 1934), as well as the Fifth world-wide General Council of Presbyterian Churches (1937) held in Canada.<sup>829</sup>

Over all these fifteen or more years, he was an advocate of the committed Christian discipleship which he followed, and throughout them he affirmed the problem of sin, the need for Jesus Christ as Saviour, the resultant necessity for repentance and faith. Buchan wrote: ““conversion” in the plain evangelical sense is still the greatest fact in any life’,<sup>830</sup> and the imperative was to preach the Gospel throughout the world.

Secondly, it misunderstands Calvinism in a way that Buchan did not. He knew that it could spawn aberrant forms, parodying such in other fictional characters. In some, especially in *Witch Wood*, God's justice is so over played that the resulting religion is Christless and without mercy, as with the Reverend Ebenezer Proudfoot; while in others God's mercy is so presumed upon that antinomianism is the result, and the Elder, Ephraim Caird of Chasehope exemplifies this.

Though Buchan realised these dangers, he remained a Calvinist and a Presbyterian. From his earliest days he knew that God's Sovereign Justice condemned human sinfulness, but that the sinner could be saved because the loving God in his mercy had provided the way back through acceptance of the atonement made by Christ's sacrifice. It is not that the works led to salvation, but they stemmed from it. To this end, he continued to believe that God's majesty and mercy must be preached, just as his father had done. Knowledge of God's love and mercy was not a late discovery, he learnt it at his father's knee.

Thirdly, evidence from the more intimate practices of his life of faith can be observed. He followed his father in making the celebration of the Holy Communion the most precious thing. At St Columba's, ‘Once a year – at a Celebration of Communion – he saw to it that the Buchan clan were summoned from all parts to share in this gesture of spiritual unity.’<sup>831</sup> As their Elder, he administered the elements.

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<sup>829</sup> NLS.1; *Pres.*

<sup>830</sup> *Pres.*, 6.

<sup>831</sup> *St Columba's Magazine*, 44-46. Thanks to Pam Ingram, then Church Secretary at St Columba's, who allowed me access on two occasions.



There was his daily reading of the Bible and prayer, regular weekly attendance in church,<sup>832</sup> his reading of Christian books,<sup>833</sup> conducting family prayers,<sup>834</sup> his very public willingness to be seen and known as a Christian through his speaking, writing, and a readiness to accept leadership in the congregations to which he belonged. Discounting his father's church, he held Christian Office in at least four different locations, totalling well over forty years; thirty two of them as an ordained Elder of the Kirk.

Then there is an intriguing touch of autobiography in *Sick Heart River*. Having had the fatal verdict from Acton Croke, 'the great doctor',<sup>835</sup> Leithen goes back to the Down Street flat. In having a bath before changing for dinner with Sandy, he caught a glimpse of 'himself naked in the long mirror.'<sup>836</sup> For Leithen, it was a casual moment emphasising the emaciation caused by his mortal sickness; for Buchan it was a habit, not confined to stricken years, and possibly inherited. He was too modest to have mentioned it himself, but his son William observed it, publishing it only after both parents were dead, and was puzzled.<sup>837</sup> Whatever the explanation, there is a reason for a Christian like Buchan or his forebears, to stand naked in the privacy of his dressing room in contemplation, and possibly in prayer. It was a regular reminder to Buchan of the challenge bound up in 1 Timothy, 6:7–12: (beginning, 'We brought nothing into this world, and we can take nothing out.')

Fourthly, it is not just intentions or incidents which can be misinterpreted by critics, but characters, too. Lord Ironside knew Buchan for forty years, but when Usborne enquired he gave no hint of knowing any connection with the creation of Hannay. When asked, Buchan's heir did not agree,<sup>838</sup> despite massive differences between the public school, regular Army officer, and the colonial who became a temporary soldier, between the artilleryman and the engineer, some similarities cannot be denied: the Scottish birth, the years in Southern Africa, the knowledge of Boer and German, and espionage.

Two of those Buchan knew personally provided a different example. Evelyn Waugh attended some of the tea-parties at Elsfield. He included Father Rothschild in *Vile Bodies*,

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<sup>832</sup> Attested by his minister in Canada, the Reverend Alexander Ferguson, at the funeral on 14/02/1940 (*Ottawa Journal* report).

<sup>833</sup> Reflected particularly in his biographies and in *Presbyterianism*.

<sup>834</sup> Referred to by his biographers.

<sup>835</sup> *SHR*, Pt.I/2/16(1<sup>st</sup>).

<sup>836</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>837</sup> *WB*, 19.

<sup>838</sup> *Clubland Heroes*, 87-88.

becoming a Catholic through Buchan's friend of those days, the Jesuit Father D'Arcy of Campion Hall. D'Arcy's biographer pointed out that 'no more than a few words are needed to refute the identification [...] as the original of Father Rothschild' because the book was published 'six months before' the two men ever met.<sup>839</sup> Such over-close attributions between authors and their characters or plots can thus lead to false views being propagated. Yet so many have fallen into such a trap by determining Buchan's personality by what he wrote as fiction.

Fifthly, Daniell shrewdly wrote, at the start of the resurgence of serious interest in Buchan, 'It is tempting to read [*Sick Heart River*] as a statement of Buchan's own situation' though 'it is a serious mistake to read a number of the conclusions to which Leithen arrives as representing Buchan.'<sup>840</sup> Unhappily, this essential caveat has not always followed. A variety of views about him, backed up by characters and quotations from his novels, have led to the fictional misrepresenting the real.

Sixthly, a great difficulty that many commentators have with *Sick Heart River* is that it was published posthumously as his last novel. They therefore treat it as a kind of fictional last will and testament expressing Buchan's own experience. It was nothing of the kind. Three of his books were first published in the year following his death. No further evidence is needed, that other books were planned, than the two chapters of *Pilgrim's Rest* included at the end of *Memory Hold the Door*.

*Sick Heart River* was written by a man who knew that he was slowing down, but did not think that he was dying, as Leithen knew. James Buchan falls into the trap of claiming that both men were under sentence of death, forgetting that we know only retrospectively that Buchan was dying.<sup>841</sup> Buchan began *Sick Heart River* expecting to live, Leithen expected to die. Some haunting passages show Leithen dreaming of a quiet old age. So did Buchan. Having been through the experience of recovery at Ruthin Castle in 1938, only to relapse in the face of the rigours of leading a nation into War, reversal was still anticipated. The first thing that he and Susan planned on returning home was for him to go back to Ruthin for another rest cure.<sup>842</sup> Buchan told Anna that he had finished two major books, *Memory Hold the Door* and *Sick Heart*

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<sup>839</sup> Sire, *Martin D'Arcy*, 72.

<sup>840</sup> *DD*, 194.

<sup>841</sup> 'Introduction,' viii-ix.

<sup>842</sup> *WF*, 286.

*River*, to embark on months of Canadian farewells.<sup>843</sup> Next day he collapsed. To Buchan, *Sick Heart River* was just another book in his varied output, expecting to publish more.

Lastly, though unknown in previous stories, two other men ‘made their soul’ in the course of the narrative, Galliard and Lew Frizel. When considering Buchan’s purpose in writing, they are as important as Leithen. Moreover, because *Sick Heart River* was not published as a book until 1941 it is taken to be Buchan’s last word, rather than *Memory Hold the Door* which appeared in 1940. In fact, both must have been written simultaneously and while the one is fiction the other is autobiographical. It is obvious which of them should have the higher status in aiding our understanding of the man. Memories informed the novel.

So, the evidence does not reveal a man who only found a living, vital Christian faith in the last year of his life. Over many years he was at heart an actively committed Christian who believed in the imperative to preach the Gospel to the end that individuals might come to a personal faith. As a by-product of the response to that invitation, the world would be changed. And there was an added urgency ‘in the last phase of his life’, for ‘the challenge of which Buchan was most conscious’ then ‘was the decline of the authority which mattered most to him: the authority of the Christian faith as the basis and inspiration both of the good life and of a culture and civilisation.’<sup>844</sup>

The fundamental mistake is to read from the story back to Buchan. What is needed is to read from Buchan to the story. *Sick Heart River* was not like his other novels with a general Christian background and ethos. It explicitly explores matters of death and faith, but his hero is straight out of his earlier ‘shockers.’ He told Charlie Dick that he would ‘finish *Reminiscences* and also a curious novel before I leave here’, but did not live to provide further clues. Perhaps the story was inspired by the dire state of current world affairs, with the prospect of more wholesale slaughter. Last time a brother and close friends died; now his sons enlisted, all saw action, might have fallen, and Buchan’s own health was becoming fragile. Suzannah Rowntree has written admirably about his other novels.

Buchan, like most devout Christian writers until this [21st] century, refused to turn his novels into tracts: instead of preaching to his audience, he draws them into a Lewisian Enjoyment of Christendom [...] And never does Buchan list or preach the attributes of a godly man. He simply depicts them ceaselessly: courage, valour, strength,

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<sup>843</sup> NLS.2 to Anna, 05/02/1940, *SJB*, 469.

<sup>844</sup> Kernohan, *Nutshell*, 15.

perseverance, fortitude, chastity, humility, loyalty, honesty. He depicts these virtues as admirable things, embodied by capable men, and then by casual references peppered throughout his works lets the reader know that the homeland of these good qualities is Christendom. It is Christian perseverance that gives Buchan's heroes the ability to stand fast and quit themselves like men.<sup>845</sup>

Even in Leithen's first appearance in 'Space' (1911), Buchan is challenging his readers about what they believe. In *Sick Heart River* (1941), he no longer does this in a veiled, enigmatic way, but overtly. Both are concerned with mystery: the hidden extra dimension, and vast uninhabited tracts. At first, the Christian response is left wholly enigmatic. Hollond admits he has no religion, and is alone. Leithen, the nominal Presbyterian speaks the language of *Hebrews*,<sup>846</sup> praying 'God send that he found rest' after his fatal fall. Hollond's last days are equally enigmatic, with his last scrawled message: 'I know at last – *God's mercy*.' In a plain understanding, he has found the reality of God's mercy and believes. Alternatively, he may be using a conventional expression, given the horrors he now faces. Unconvinced of the first, Leithen implies horror, that in falling from such a great height, Hollond would be so disfigured that 'those who found him might not see the look in his eyes.'<sup>847</sup>

Moreover, 'Space' appeared as Chapter Four in *The Moon Endureth* (1912), ending with 'Stocks and Stones' in which 'The Chief Topaiwari replieth to Sir Walter Raleigh who upbraideth him for idol worship.' The Indian's 'fears that drain the soul' are 'The unplumb'd Abyss, the drift of Space.' Gods of clay and wood he can handle,

*But fend me from the endless Wheel,  
The voids of Space, the gulfs of Night*

These overwhelmed Hollond, so that mystery is prolonged even beyond the end of 'Space.' The reader is left to wrestle with enigma.

Things are altogether different in *Sick Heart River*. Nothing is enigmatic, everything is focussed. Leithen's conversion to a living Christian faith is left in no doubt whatever. Other characters were Christians, but here we are told the process by which Leithen came to real faith, though Buchan is a little equivocal. Sometimes, Leithen is regarded as not religious, elsewhere he is given a little religious sensibility, but not in the committed Christian sense. He may have

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<sup>845</sup> Rowntree, 'Buchan Week: Envoi'.

<sup>846</sup> Above 183.

<sup>847</sup> 'Space', 159.

brought with him many of the moral trappings of his Christian upbringing, but he was not spiritually alive until he faces death, long and lingeringly, succeeds in his last adventure, and dies in the certainty of the faith. As Buchan said, “‘Conversion’ in the plain evangelical sense is the greatest thing in anyone’s life.’

It is curious how some critics shy away from acknowledging this spiritual reality. Green edited it out, as did Usborne who concluded that when dying it was ‘the meadow-spring of Clairefontane’ [from his ‘impecunious youth’] that Leithen sought “‘to shrive his soul of success.’”<sup>848</sup>

## 9. Conclusion: Buchan’s Purpose in *Sick Heart River*

Good novels are always open to more than one interpretation, sometimes indeed, quite legitimately, to an interpretation beyond that intended by their author.<sup>849</sup> ‘Buchan is Leithen’ is in the same category as ‘Buchan is Anti-Semitic, or Anti-Clerical.’ It is unlikely now that there will be any universally accepted resolution.

Of course there **is** autobiography in Leithen, but only at the lowly level recognised by Susan. That is no more than inevitable with any writer of fiction. In successfully ‘making their souls’, neither Leithen, Galliard, nor Frizel had a Billy Graham type of experience, but the whole book is undershot with coming to a living Christian faith. Indeed, whether at Church or at school or at Boys’ Brigade, or Bible Class, pretty well all Buchan’s contemporaries had had a strong exposure to Christianity when young. That was the world in which he operated. All his books assume a biblical knowledge which can no longer be presupposed in the British population.

Reminiscences of friends and other personal anecdotes were much in Buchan’s mind from *Memory Hold the Door* when he wrote *Sick Heart River*. Doubtless he used many people in re-creating Leithen, as he said he did with Hannay. Lownie’s clue about Medd probably means that Buchan’s long dead friend was some part of any of his lawyers. Those who must look for a human model for Leithen’s spiritual journey in *Sick Heart River* will not properly find it in Buchan, but there are better possibilities in two men he knew personally. Buchan was intimate with Haig. Taking over as Commander-in-Chief in December 1915, he found the

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<sup>848</sup> *Clubland Heroes*, 129.

<sup>849</sup> Massie, ‘Introduction,’ xiii.

ministrations of the Church of Scotland Chaplain, George Duncan, so helpful that he insisted on him staying at headquarters for the rest of the War. Later Haig would join Buchan among the Elders at St Columba's.

As others have shown, Haig had an early knowledge of Christianity. Later during 'years of sloth', he preferred to play golf on Sundays than go to Church. When the whole free Western world was under sentence of death in what Buchan regarded a fight to save civilisation, all that changed.<sup>850</sup> Here is a model for Leithen; someone who after years 'of sloth' discovered a vital faith to live and die with.

Haig is such a controversial figure, with much revision since Duncan, who knew, and later wrote about him, but we need not be embroiled in the 'Lions led by Donkeys' controversy. Among later writers, John Harris is paradoxical saying that until 'the Western Front his Christian observance seemed [...] of a formal rather than a particularly personal or passionate kind' and again 'it is not inconceivable that, even before the First World War, Haig's personal piety was more profound than was generally realised.'<sup>851</sup> Denis Winter saw renewed faith as 'an unhealthy development in a man already tending towards delusions of infallibility'<sup>852</sup> while Gary Sheffield concluded that 'some have seen Haig's faith as an aberration.'<sup>853</sup> It was not. Anyway, disputation casts no real doubt on the spiritual pattern.

Again, Buchan had longed to serve under Cromer, who old and ill, was asked to chair the nationally sensitive Dardanelles Enquiry (1916). He knew this would kill him but, 'young men are giving their lives for their country, so why should not I who am old?'<sup>854</sup> Investing his best into this last public duty, he was dead in six months. Here is a model of a man willing to die standing for the sake of others. Buchan might have drawn the later Leithen from the stories of these two men, but not from himself.

But if you really want to find Buchan in his writings, look beyond fictional characters like Leithen. He is most likely to be found in his biographies of others. Some things he wrote about Montrose (1928) and Cromwell (1934) are equally true of himself.

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<sup>850</sup> Duncan, *Haig, As I Knew Him*, 21-22, and chs. 14 and 15 'The Man of Faith'; Reid, *Douglas Haig*, 269-76; Terraine, *Douglas Haig*, 173-75.

<sup>851</sup> Harris, *Douglas Haig*, 8, 188.

<sup>852</sup> Winter, 275-76. *Haig's Command*, 165.

<sup>853</sup> Sheffield, *The Chief*, 132.

<sup>854</sup> Zetland, *Cromer*, 344.

Smith rightly quotes the end of Buchan's account of the life of Cromwell as coming 'as near as he ever allowed himself, in print,' to express his own beliefs.<sup>855</sup> Cromwell's 'theology was simple, like all theologies of crisis ['Buchan had been reading Karl Barth]. He accepted the Calvinist's unbending fatalism, which instead of making its votaries apathetic, moved them to a girded energy.'

His creed was the Christian fundamentals – a belief in God, and in His revelation through the Scriptures, in man's fall, in Christ's death and atonement for sin, in a new life on earth made possible by grace, in the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting – coloured by the Calvinist interpretation [...]. He never assented to the view that intellectual error was a sin to be implacably punished in this world and the next. The foundation was a personal experience, a revelation which he might have described in Luther's words: 'I do not know it, and I do not understand it, but, sounding from above and ringing in my ears, I hear what is beyond the thought of man' [...]. The majesty and transcendence of God is the rock of his faith.

Here as elsewhere, Smith is inclined to leave it there, giving fuel to those who suppose that as late as the early 1930s Buchan knew the majesty, but not the love of God, leaving a false impression on a generally theistic note. This is not Buchan, who continued:

In front of this background of eternal Omnipotence stood the figure of Christ, the revelation of the love and the fatherhood of God, the God-man, the world's redeemer [...]. Through Christ his relation to God became that of a son.<sup>856</sup>

In *Sick Heart River*, we do not see Buchan describing his own experience, finally coming to a living faith in a merciful God at the end of his life. What we see is Buchan through Leithen, more overtly than usual, challenging his readers to 'make their own soul', and hopefully doing so by finding Christ as their Saviour. The Catholic, Father Duplessis, says that Leithen 'was not of the Church, but beyond doubt he died in grace.' The last sentence in the book is quoted by Galliard, standing by Leithen's grave with its wooden cross, but was also from the priest: 'he knew that he would die, but he also knew that he would live', and it finds an echo in ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΝΙΚΗΣΕΙ on Buchan's grave.<sup>857</sup>

*Sick Heart River* is Buchan at one with his father. 'Good works express the Christian life but salvation is by grace, and there is need neither for last sacrament nor for any mediator but

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<sup>855</sup> *SJB*, 360.

<sup>856</sup> *JBOC*, 528-29.

<sup>857</sup> 'Christ shall overcome': see Weekes, *ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΝΙΚΗΣΕΙ*.

Christ.’<sup>858</sup> It does not show him proclaiming a new found Christian faith, but commending his long held certainty. This is not Buchan the confessor, but Buchan as evangelist.

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<sup>858</sup> Kernohan, *Nutshell*, 16.



## CHAPTER TEN

### CONCLUSION: JOHN BUCHAN'S FAITH

‘As we grow older we [...] lose that sense of relativity [...] and come more and more to acclaim absolute things – goodness, truth, beauty, [and] with the recognition of our limitations comes a glimpse of the majesty of the “Power not ourselves.”’  
(*MHD*, 291)

Is this enigmatic generalisation, or autobiography? Certainly, Buchan proclaimed Christianity to others with far greater clarity in his last two decades.

#### 1. Difficulty Writing About the Faith of Others

Lessons can be drawn from previous chapters for writing about someone like Buchan. George Duncan understood that unless this essentially private matter is revealed in detail by the individual, or those with intimate knowledge, ‘It may not be so easy for the student of history in the future to gather his facts, or to see them in their true setting and significance.’<sup>859</sup> Buchan thought the same.<sup>860</sup> Moreover, his faith ‘was not a cloak to be put on or off as occasion arose’ as some have implied, but ‘an essential part of the man himself.’<sup>861</sup>

In the Introduction, it was shown that his widow and sister, did not reveal much about what they knew so well, perhaps assuming it was evident. Of Cromwell, Buchan noted that ‘we have no record’ of the ‘grim communion with his soul’ leading to conversion.<sup>862</sup> In contrast, when writing about Cromwell’s spirituality (see below), Buchan could draw on the kind of intimate personal accounts unavailable to us about him. Even then he was cautious: ‘we can only see [...] spiritual struggles through a glass darkly’ for ‘no one can enter into the secret

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<sup>859</sup> Duncan, *Haig as I Knew Him*, 119.

<sup>860</sup> *JBOC*, 525-26.

<sup>861</sup> Duncan, *ibid.*, 123,

<sup>862</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

world of another who has not himself been through the same experiences, suffered the same agonies, and exulted in the same release.<sup>863</sup>

Another complication is the enormous quantity Buchan wrote: many books, myriads of articles, let alone manuscript remains, especially letters, with many having been lost. His handwriting was 'execrable', even 'sometimes difficult for him to decipher'.<sup>864</sup> Inevitably, there are apparent inconsistencies which may confuse, especially if quoted in isolation.

Then there is confusion wrought by error and misunderstanding strewn in the way by some critics. In any more detailed assessment of Buchan's faith, this must necessarily be cut away as it obscures this essentially Christian man and boy. Some pruning has been attempted here. His faith may stand out more clearly as a result.

## 2. Over-Stressing Rejection of His Father's Faith

After upwards of seventy years since his death, some engage in Lownie's 'quest for this man of fascinating paradoxes'.<sup>865</sup> They should recognise that the influence of his parental Free Church upbringing was always tugging at his sleeve. The Church they loved changed over the years, yet Buchan remained sympathetic and retained 'a kindness' for its narrower members and his father's part in it. After the 1929 Reunion, we have seen him breaking new ground by addressing the General Assembly of the rump of the Free Church (1933, 1934). As Lord High Commissioner in 1933, he had affectionate remembrance of the influence of his father, and three colleagues, travelling specially to Glasgow earlier that year to speak at the Jubilee of another.<sup>866</sup> These are not the actions of one who has renounced his birthright. They might seem to be just filial piety, but he did not have to say anything, and the trip to Glasgow goes further. Certainly he had moved beyond the humorous approach to the Free Church reflected in 'The Moor Song' (1897) and 'Midian's Evil Day' (1904). Had he lived to see the centenary of his father's Glasgow church, there is little doubt that he would have testified. The gold watch given him recalled the warmth of Christian fellowship experienced there.<sup>867</sup> Anna Buchan's saying rings true that Mr Buchan's children may have thought that they had grown out of their early

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<sup>863</sup> *JBOC*, 525.

<sup>864</sup> Grey, 'Introduction,' xviii.

<sup>865</sup> Lownie, 'On the Trail,' 2.

<sup>866</sup> NLS 1, 'Mr Forsyth's Jubilee,' 28/02/1934.

<sup>867</sup> *Mem.*, 10.

Christianity, but in their hearts they knew that they would always believe it. In the end, the discussion about theological points becomes secondary. This extraordinary man, some say genius, lived his whole life as a dedicated Christian, adhering to all the great fundamentals of the faith.

### 3. Lack of Detailed Study of Buchan's Faith

The nature of his Christianity has never been discussed in detail. There was certainly change and development in Buchan's understanding of aspects of the faith. Some have suggested labels hoping to clarify. Kernohan called him a 'conservative liberal' and 'evangelical';<sup>868</sup> Greig 'a liberal' and an 'ostensibly latitudinarian' Calvinist;<sup>869</sup> Lee a 'Christian Platonist'.<sup>870</sup> Such labels may fit Buchan's tolerant and moderate nature, but can confuse. Although he liked to speak about the 'Fundamentals', he was not what is usually called a 'Fundamentalist'. In discussing *Witch Wood*, Steele concludes that Buchan 'unflinchingly displays the effects of fundamentalist theology on the lives of those who live under it'<sup>871</sup> yet Buchan was discussing Antinomianism. Labels should be used with care.

Studies of Buchan as a Calvinist are mainly in Lee's theses; in Greig's short chapter; and Parry in part of one. Lee says that 'Buchan's attitude to Presbyterianism was mixed' (although more accurate to say 'attitude to the Free Church'), rightly drawing attention to Forbes Grey. Assisting in editing *The Scottish Review* (1906-08), he believed Buchan's attitude to Scottish ecclesiastical affairs 'was never cordial'. Undoubtedly, Buchan 'mellowed in his attitude' over the years, yet he always remained a Presbyterian, but at times 'had taken on a veneer of Anglicanism'.<sup>872</sup> Buchan may have been arrested by his father's death, becoming an Elder at St Columba's within a few months. In Canada, he called himself 'a loyal Presbyterian'.<sup>873</sup>

Greig presents the best type of Presbyterian clergyman as one whose classical studies have mellowed, but not obliterated, his Calvinism. Buchan acknowledged the same. A youthful aspiration to be a rural minister, shut in with his books on long winter evenings was later

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<sup>868</sup> Kernohan, *Nutshell*, 16.

<sup>869</sup> Greig in Macdonald, *Reassessing Buchan*, 7.

<sup>870</sup> Lee throughout both theses.

<sup>871</sup> Steele, *Witch Wood*, 22.

<sup>872</sup> Grey, *Comments and Characters*, xxiv; Lee, 'Buchan and Christian Platonists,' 35.

<sup>873</sup> *Pres.*, 5.

personified in old Richie Blackstocks, minister of Yonderdale, classicist and pastor (*Free Fishers*).<sup>874</sup>

Overall, we have seen Buchan giving the impression of being somewhat muddled in his theology. Some examples will suffice: he claimed still to be a Calvinist, but struggled with Predestination, so that he was, perhaps unconsciously, a closet Arminian; sometimes tending towards Universalism, he was so strong on the need for conversion in everyone; still maintaining in Canada that he was a 'bigoted Presbyterian', his devotion to Elsfield ensured that his days would end worshipping just across the lane as an Anglican; he claimed early on that the Devil meant nothing to him, yet this early became a preoccupation in his writing. Apart from firm adherence to the 'Fundamentals' as he ascribed them to Cromwell (above, 195), in much else he simply leaves us guessing.

#### 4. The Paradox in Buchan's Toleration

The element of toleration in Buchan's character (Chapter Five 8.); balanced by the firmness of his Christian conviction, must be re-affirmed in summing up. There were limits, for he was never tolerant of what he perceived as evil. At the end of *Memory Hold the Door*, he affirmed the strikingly exclusive words of Blake about either having the religion of Jesus or of Satan. This is evidence that his own attitudes hardened in response to the growing threat from Fascism. He concluded that 'Religion is born when we accept the ultimate frustration of mere human effort, and at the same time realise the strength which comes from union with superhuman reality.'<sup>875</sup> Though put in very general theistic terms (unless we take 'religion' to mean Christianity), Buchan could also proclaim the Gospel in the most challenging and specific way. Not content with a general theism, he really believed in the necessity of conversion to Christ (Chapter Two 17.).

#### 5. Buchan and Cromwell

After the novels and short stories, Buchan is best known for his biographies. Somewhere here, with real and not fictional people, we may be on surer ground for seeking parallels in his own experience. There are places in *Cromwell* where we can reasonably draw them.

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<sup>874</sup> *MHD*, 18; above 123.

<sup>875</sup> *Ibid*, 291.

The scene is set for the conflicts in Oliver's life: 'the ecclesiastical unrest was determined mainly by historical causes and by economic and political pressures.'<sup>876</sup> Young Buchan's unrest was caused when his home background was undermined by educational and social pressures from widening experience of more worldly interests. In this environment, he was one of the 'minds that sought the kernel and not the shell of truth.' Amid a new 'rationalism' his 'spirit was still almost wholly Christian.'<sup>877</sup>

Secondly, there was that which led on to a mature Christian faith. Buchan himself found in the writings of the seventeenth century academics known as the Cambridge Platonists that which helped him to adapt his Christian beliefs to the wider world he came to inhabit.<sup>878</sup> Many Christians have found something similar, some 'key' (Buchan called them 'aids')<sup>879</sup> which opens the door to a firmer Christian conviction or enables them to relate their faith to the world around them. It can be argued that Buchan found several 'aids' during his life-long Christian experience. Some, like affinity with the Cambridge Platonists, he regarded as temperamental ('not a creed, but a climate of opinion'.<sup>880</sup>) This was clearly an important aspect of his intellectual understanding of Christianity, as Lee has emphasised and Buchan told us himself. However, it was not alone, or necessarily primary. Others were adopted as he went along, but all were all 'aids.' After family influences, we have seen the crucial private devotion and public worship; wide reading in Christian literature; lasting Christian friendships; the 'Believing Critics'; Karl Barth.

All these were 'aids', not the thing itself. As some were superseded, others were held in parallel. He might not follow them all the way, rejecting some conservative Calvinism, troubled by the 'Critics' and hinting at reservations about Barth. Each served him well, and all released him from the strict Calvinism of his home, but still to be among those who 'are Christians according to ageless pattern of the saints.'<sup>881</sup>

Sometimes there was cross fertilisation. Buchan did not get his love of the outdoors from the Platonists, for that was encouraged in childhood by his 'field botanist' father, but they may have aided his ability to write so well about it. Cromwell 'found a new glory in a world in

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<sup>876</sup> *JBOC*, 37.

<sup>877</sup> *Ibid*, 37-38.

<sup>878</sup> *MHD*, 38-39.

<sup>879</sup> *JBOC*, 526.

<sup>880</sup> *MHD*, 38.

<sup>881</sup> *JBOC*, 48.

whose every detail he saw the love of his Creator.’ Moreover, both the ‘Critics’ and the Platonists ‘made him impatient of minor dogmatic differences among Christians, since his own faith was based on experience, and no man could look into another’s heart.’<sup>882</sup>

Thirdly, commitment became coupled with leadership, and led on to statesmanship. For Oliver, ‘as the years passed the struggle became more bitter and the antagonisms sharper.’ Then ‘the most tolerant were forced into a confession of faith.’<sup>883</sup> This surely echoed Buchan after the War, especially on the brink of the years in Canada and taking on the mantle of state, when the struggle became even fiercer. His world had been shattered by the rise of militarism, followed by the triumph of Communism in Russia and now, further to threaten a shaky world peace, came Nazism. Against such destructive challenges it is very clear that Buchan’s only antidote was an individual and lively commitment to Christ. His own became more absolute, regaining respect for dogma.

Throughout an extraordinarily productive and fulfilled life, Buchan never wavered from his New Year hymn (1887) where his eleven-year-old aspiration ends:

*The mercies, Lord, are great,  
Which Thou to us hast given;  
They meet us at each turn in life,  
To lead us on to heaven.*

*Like to the morning mist,  
Earth’s glory soon shall die;  
Oh, lead us onwards till we reach  
Our happy home on high.*

The opening line of the six verses reads: ‘To Thee our God and Friend.’<sup>884</sup> All this shows that even while growing up, he knew of the love and mercy of God,

## 6. Salient Points Made in this Thesis

Apart from going deeper into areas which have only previously been touched on superficially, these are the important new points argued.

A fuller understanding of Buchan’s father shows that he was intellectually able and grounded enough to have discussed deep matters of the Christian faith with his eldest son.

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<sup>882</sup> *JBOC*, 69, 68.

<sup>883</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>884</sup> Lownie, *Buchan’s Poems*, 8.

It is quite wrong to suppose that, on going to Oxford, Buchan left the Free Church in rebellion against his up-bringing. He had to worship elsewhere because there were no Scottish Free Churches in the England he came to inhabit.<sup>885</sup>

He was far more deeply involved in Elsfield's village life than has usually been recognised, under-playing ecumenism and Churchwardenship.

The supposition, initiated by Macdonald, that Buchan was Anti-clerical is unsustainable.

As his views on racism developed, he also strongly propounded the need for Christian Mission despite Al-Rawi's, and by implication Macdonald's, denial of this.

His Christianity was influenced and encouraged by 'aids', and it is falsely maintained that he came to believe in both the majesty and the mercy of God only at the end, expressing this autobiographically through his fictional character, Leithen, in *Sick Heart River*. Therein he drew on his personal experiences, but was not fictionally describing his own spiritual journey. Rather, he encourages readers to face up to the life changing fulfilment to be found in accepting Christ.

## 7. Buchan's Spiritual Graph

Buchan grew up as a Bible-believing Christian like his father. Over the years, though keeping what he called 'the Fundamentals' of the faith, some of his other beliefs varied. Change can be traced from his first going to university. Still living at home, and fully part of his father's church, his Classical studies placed him under charismatic unbelievers like Murray. Smith's Christian influence, with his belief in 'fact not dogma', may have begun there. This pattern continued at Oxford, especially through intimacy with contemporaries like Asquith and Baker. He concluded that Reason was the supreme authority for man, rather than Scripture. After coming down, still with plenty of Christian support, his studies shifted to Law. Then came the broadening experience of South Africa.

Returning to London he resumed the Law but also engaged in much journalism. Michael Redley has pointed out to me that he wrote a number of book reviews dealing with covenanting times, and clearly revised his opinion of the theological scene in Scotland. The study of history was beginning to supersede his earlier passion for classics and the law. In the decade before 1914 Buchan lost his youthful trust in Old Testament inspiration, becoming sceptical about

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<sup>885</sup> Weekes, 'Buchan and Ecumenism', unpublished MS.

some of the Christianity at the time of Covenanting heroes who he had been taught to revere, because it inclined towards aberrations.

Rather like Barth, he found that the First World War destroyed his trust in much liberal theology as a 'fair weather' faith. It brought him back to seeing the importance of dogma. During the 1920s, it is evident that he became increasingly evangelical, and ever more ecumenical. He accepted invitations to speak at Christian gatherings and much more openly supported mission. By the 1930s he was convinced that the propagation of the Christian faith was the only real hope for the world as it plunged ever nearer to war. Interest in Karl Barth brought him closer again to his father's view of scripture.

However, that this reversion was not complete is shown in *Presbyterianism* (1937), though his conviction that 'conversion was the greatest thing in any one's life' was amply confirmed in his quoting Blake (*MHD*).

## 8. 'The Rock on Which He Stood.'

Lownie found a 'sense of mystery, this inability to pin him down, this continual confounding of assumptions.'<sup>886</sup> Yet critics should recognise, as Duncan did of Haig's Christianity, that 'No estimate of [his] character or achievement is likely to be adequate or trustworthy, if it ignores, or what is worse, misinterprets [his] deep personal religious faith'.<sup>887</sup> These words should be at the elbow of every Buchan critic, to prevent propagating many falsehoods.

On the Sunday after Buchan died, Dr Fleming paid tribute to Buchan at St Columba's and commended him in prayer. Having known him well for over thirty-five years, especially in London, his pietism should not mar the sincerity, giving thanks

above all for his life-long devotion to our Lord and Master, whom he loved, and whom he served with heart and soul and strength and mind [...] and would make his noble life the pattern of our own, as our Lord's was the pattern of his.<sup>888</sup>

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<sup>886</sup> *LJB*, 11.

<sup>887</sup> Duncan, *Haig As I Knew Him*, 119.

<sup>888</sup> *St Columba's Church Magazine*, (March 1940), 44-46. The main Memorial Service was in Westminster Abbey.



Finally, there is Buchan again on Cromwell: 'While he was winning battles and dissolving parliaments and carrying on the burdens of a people, he was living an inner life' in comparison with which 'the outer world was the phantasmagoria of a dream.'<sup>889</sup>

Christian faith and commitment were the dominant determinators throughout Buchan's life.

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<sup>889</sup> *JBOC*, 525.

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