

THE UNIVERSITY OF DETROIT

JOHN BUCHAN THE ROMANTIC

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

BY

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DETROIT, MICHIGAN

JUNE, 1954

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the preparation of this thesis I have received valuable assistance from the Faculty of the University of Detroit and also from a number of close friends. To these I wish to extend my deep appreciation. Likewise I am indebted to the officials of The Ottawa Public Library, and to Mr. Francis A. Hardy, the Parliamentary Librarian in Ottawa.

I wish to acknowledge assistance from Susan, Lady Tweedsmuir, widow of John Buchan, and Mr. Alastair Buchan, his son, who favored me with their correspondence.

I am especially grateful to Professor Michael G. Furlong, who read each chapter as it was being written, all the while offering constructive criticism and encouragement. Without Dr. Furlong's friendly and painstaking aid, the loan of his books, and his gracious interest, the work would not have been possible.

Above all, I acknowledge that I am indebted to "Jesus and Mary," the patrons of our Institute, without whose help this thesis could never have been written.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: JOHN BUCHAN, THE MAN

When Lord Tweedsmuir came to Canada in the Fall of 1935 as Governor General, he was a noted man of letters, author of many popular novels, a biographer, poet, and historian. While many will remember his achievements in public life, especially his contributions to Canadian politics, there can be little doubt that posterity will know him as John Buchan, and not as first Baron Tweedsmuir. His work in the world of literature, his keen mind, his sound practical judgment and warm human sympathy will endure.

In his Preface to the book, John Buchan by His Wife and Friends, George Trevelyan writes: "Some men are great by what they do, others by what they are. . . . And even in the world of letters, what a man is inspires what he writes."¹ However, John Buchan can be placed in both categories of greatness, for "The man and his work run an even race. And the two seem inseparable."² It is in the capacity of a writer, and more specifically as a writer of

1. George Trevelyan, John Buchan by His Wife and Friends, Preface.

2. Ibid.

romance, that we shall be concerned with John Buchan, for we feel that as such, he has left upon his age a definite imprint.

The present chapter will provide the biographical background and romantic influences in the life of Buchan which prepared and inspired him to write the way he did. Subsequent chapters will deal with the history of romance, its general characteristics, and more particularly, with those elements exhibited by our author in his writing of biography, poetry and adventure fiction.

John Buchan was born in Perth, Scotland in late August 1876. He came of an old Border family of average means but one which enjoyed the esteem of the countryside. The boy was reared in an intensely romantic setting, among the rolling hills, the gorse-grown moors and quiet fertile valleys of the Scottish moorlands where his father, John Masterton Buchan, was minister of the Church at Broughton Green, in Peebles-shire, a small village pastorate. It was a country whose history teemed with theological tradition; hence the Buchan household was ruled by the old Calvinistic discipline which did not, however, dim the beauty and interest of the surrounding earth. For it was a picturesque world dominated by magic woodlands of witches, and sylvan corners where there lurked stolen princesses and robber lords. As a child in such surroundings, the young John became virtually a child of nature, as wood, sea and hill cast a spell which was never lost. By intimate contact with the Borderland, he

imbibed that love of nature which was to express itself in his subsequent writings, and here too, his romantic imagination was fed by the legends and ancient glories of Scotland.

Summer holidays were spent at the home of the maternal grandparents in an old farmhouse close to the Edinburgh-Carlisle road in the moorlands of the Tweed valley. This playground of desert and heath was John's delight. Tiny nooks of meadow woodland and hill held the magic of enchantment and adventure, the influence of which went deep. It was the ideal countryside to nurture romance, and the young Buchan brought a ready responsive soul to all that environment had to offer. The Tweed has ever been a haunting stream famous for such associations as Merlin, Thomas of Ercildoune, and that master romance-writer, Sir Walter Scott. Many of his books show the love and enthusiasm with which the young Buchan fished in this stream and climbed the hills about this infant valley, explored its glens and took as much as he could hold of its ancient lore. In fact, such memories were centered around his favorite Tweedside that in later years he could write: ". . . if Paradise be a renewal of what was happy and innocent in our earthly days, mine will be some such golden afternoon within sight and sound of Tweed."³

3. John Buchan, Memory Hold-the-Door, p. 28.

Besides, those upper glens known as the "Muir's" held those potent figures of romance, shepherds whom Buchan describes somewhat in the same way as Wordsworth might, "God-fearing, decent in all relations of life and supreme masters of their craft."⁴ Through his shepherd acquaintances Buchan was introduced into that long-forgotten and secret world of pastoral, and no doubt from them he acquired that love of "plain people" which was such an outstanding and winning characteristic. From them, too, he probably learned that soft idiomatic Border speech which he so often put into the mouths of his endearing characters.

Early influences of a religious, happy home amid books from a well-stocked library had all the desirable effects on the young Buchan. The highly-imaginative child thrilled to the fairy-tales and border-ballads recounted by his father when the family gathered joyously round the hearth fires of a solemn winter evening. Little wonder is it that he created a world of his own from folk stories and Bible episodes. Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress was early a favorite of his and forever a companion. He found constant delight in its rhythmic prose, plain narrative, and surprising adventures. Indeed, his favorite adventure heroes like Mr. Hannay and Peter Pienaar were born of this pilgrimage-book.

4. Buchan, op. cit., p. 22.

Nor were religious influences lacking. Family prayers of a Sabbath evening as well as Bible-reading developed an inner vision of understanding and sympathy wherein lay the secret of his strength of character.

At the age of seventeen, John passed with the aid of bursaries, from a Glasgow Grammar school to the University in the same city. Here his inherent talents came to the fore and his wealth of intellect won further scholarships which permitted him to enter Oxford. Two influences emerged from his studies here. The first was what Buchan terms "a passion for the unseen and the eternal with a delight in the seen and the temporal; the second was a distrust of generalities."⁵ Here too, he became a "pure scholar," prominent in classical literature, in history, and in philosophy. That great mind was wholly receptive to the intellectual vistas which were opening before him. Oxford uncovered Scottish literature to Buchan. Hitherto he had explored his native land mostly in fact, now he was to be brought to an appreciative knowledge of her writers. Robert Burns became a favorite, and William Dunbar was greatly admired. It was while he was still at Oxford, that Buchan wrote his first book, Scholar Gypsies, a prose pastoral of his native Tweedside expressing a love of nature and a quality of writing which was but the prelude to a constant procession of

5. Buchan, op. cit., p. 38.

romances, histories and biographies destined to enhance the value of modern English Literature. From Oxford, too, Buchan carried off the Stanhope Historical Prize and the Newdigate Prize for English verse. In 1899, he was elected President of the Oxford union, a debating society which has given to Britain many brilliant names.

Oxford had enabled Buchan to discover his talents and he was gradually leaning toward the profession of law. Two years later he was admitted to the English bar in the Middle Temple. Minor details of law practice he learned with a firm of solicitors and came to value the friendship of great lawyers. During this time of apprenticeship he read avidly and became an enthusiast for all legal technicalities. This profession served him in good stead and because of it fragments of legal phraseology appear in his Leithen stories. Unconsciously, the spirit of London was penetrating his being. He was becoming a student of eighteenth-century memoirs, as well as an accepted member of the better clubs of contemporary society. This gave him the opportunity of meeting people, a hobby which he maintained throughout his busy public life.

But it was not in the capacity of a lawyer that John Buchan was destined to serve his country. In August of 1901, another life was opened to him. On the invitation of Lord Milner, an administrator of great ability, Buchan set out for South Africa as the latter's secretary. The Boer War had been raging for some time, and the after-math

demanding some ingenious and tactful handling. It was a serious undertaking dealing in part with repatriation of Boer inhabitants, concentration camps, and schemes of land settlement. Needless to say, the task was gigantic, it but proved a rich experience for Buchan. An intimate knowledge of the country and its peoples made him consider the time as profitably spent.

Moreover, the fascinating land of Africa caused him to re-live his childhood experiences with nature, and to appreciate her many moods. The cause, no doubt, was the long morning treks during which he seemed to recapture those hours of pleasure spent in exploring the Scottish homeland. More important still, Buchan discovered himself. He found that practical wisdom lurking in the material world and in human nature which cannot be found in books, and hereafter he longed to make "some corner of the desert blossom and some solitary place glad."⁶

In 1903, Buchan returned to England and resumed his law profession. But the former zest had gone; Africa had unsettled him. Hence, on the promptings of an Oxford friend, Thomas A. Nelson, he joined the publishing firm of Thomas Nelson & Son, London. This proved to be a happy change, and Buchan came into his own--the world of books. Besides contributing to the active management of the company, he still found time to write. Histories, novels, and

6. Buchan, op. cit., p. 125.

biographies poured from his tireless pen. This same year, 1907, Buchan married Susan Grosvenor, an author of some note.

Convinced that his duty as citizen demanded some sort of public service, Buchan offered himself as Conservative candidate for the counties of Peebles and Selkirk. As a parliamentarian, however, he did not achieve the limelight for his was a reserved nature and he spoke only rarely.

At the outbreak of World War I, Buchan was thirty-nine years old and a sick man. A rest cure was prescribed after which he became well enough to act as The Times war correspondent at the Front. In 1917 he was recalled to England and became Minister of Information under Lloyd George. Nevertheless, his business connections continued, and the close of the War found him again in a physically weakened condition. It was only in the Spring of 1919 that he again resumed his duties. But it was a changed world to which Buchan recovered. His friend and publisher, Thomas Nelson, had been killed at Arras on the same day as death claimed his brother, Alastair Buchan.

Gastric trouble had prevented Buchan from active war-service. But the intervening years had not been idle ones. At least one novel, a detective story entitled The Thirty-Nine Steps, had been written to amuse the soldiers. Thus, the war-years and those following saw him thoroughly established as an author of unquestionable repute, and his monumental History of the Great War bears witness to his untiring

energy and human interest.

The war left Buchan with an intense longing for country life. The horrors and losses entailed by the struggle he had bitterly resented. It was mainly to seek quiet after the turmoil that he purchased his manor house at Elsfield, four miles from the city of Oxford. The historic dwelling and picturesque environment did much to revive his drooping spirits and intellectual ability. Here Buchan turned out many of his best-loved books and gave full vent to his mythical romantic hero, Richard Hannay. Buchan affirmed again and again that these years at Elsfield were his happiest. Here he tramped unfettered throughout the countryside and more distant shires. Week-days found him in his busy London office, but week-ends were spent in that hallowed sanctuary at Elsfield.

Buchan was beginning to deserve the name of "man of letters." The natural story-teller was weaving tales of exquisite romance and plunging his characters into remote and unpleasant places from which they were forever emerging triumphant. Tales of adventure were followed by another type of romance--historic scenes were coming to life and clamoring for an interpreter with a creative imagination. Buchan had just that quality and so we are the richer by so many books, some serious, some adventurous, all thrilling.

For six years, Buchan continued at Nelson's and kept at his writing, but he was growing restless. His "social conscience" was pricking him. In 1927, his opportunity came

and he was elected to the House of Commons as Conservative member for the Scottish Universities. Despite his poor ability as a speaker he was given a ready ear, especially when he addressed the Assembly on educational and social questions.

In 1935, John Buchan received from George V the assignment of Governor-General of Canada, and was raised by him to the Rank of baron with the title "First Baron Tweedsmuir of Elsfield"; thus combining the names of his two homes, Tweedsmuir, a quiet hamlet in Peebles-shire, Scotland near the River Tweed, and Elsfield, his residence in Oxfordshire.

Lord Tweedsmuir came to Canada in November 1935. "His appointment was welcomed with expressions of the highest satisfaction from the press and the public of Canada."⁷ In memory of that arrival, when the boat steamed into the Quebec harbor, Lady Tweedsmuir writes that "romance seemed to come to us that evening with arms outstretched."⁸

This was but the awakening of a love for Canada and Canadians, which was to deepen with the years. His Scottish origin and background were to prove an immense asset in this country where so many of its people have a strain of Scottish blood. Everything about this adopted land was of particular interest to him. "From the beginning his Excellency

7. Globe and Mail (Toronto), February 12, 1940.

8. Susan, Lady Tweedsmuir, John Buchan by His Wife and Friends, p. 218.

revealed that side of his nature which explained his success. Nothing was too small or too unimportant to interest him."⁹

"Whether he was speaking to learned societies, to professional organizations, to old Canadians in the East, or to-day's Canadians in the West, he gave them an inspired vision of the strength of democracy and the true meaning of nationhood."¹⁰

In the words of the Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, "Canada was proud to have such a man in her midst, a great scholar, who touched life at so many places and who touched nothing which he did not adorn."¹¹

The richness and spaciousness of the Canadian scene appealed strongly to his romantic spirit. The unexplored resources and the physical frontiers of the great expanses of the North stimulated his love for adventure.

No Governor-General ever travelled so extensively, journeying even to the Far North to visit out-of-the-way trading settlements on the Arctic Ocean. Canadian landscapes fascinated him. On the occasion of a visit to the Pacific Coast, Buchan glanced with amazement at the towering snow-capped mountains and then said to Guy Rhodes, a Canadian Press staff-officer: "By Jove, Guy, I have traveled a tremendous part of the world, and I have never seen

9. Globe and Mail (Toronto), February 12, 1940.

10. Charles Bishop, "A Grand Person and a Kindly Man," The Ottawa Evening Citizen, February 12, 1940.

11. Ibid.

anything to equal this."¹²

During his term of office, Baron Tweedsmuir was in constant demand for state functions and addressed many diverse groups across the Dominion. His exact knowledge and scholarly treatment of varied subjects is a striking illustration of the deep and wide-spread interest which he took in Canadian affairs. In fact, "he often surprised Canadians by his meticulous knowledge of obscure episodes in the story of their country."¹³

Tweedsmuir had unbounded confidence in the future of Canada and spoke of this nation not as being in the pioneering stage, but in that of "romantic adolescence,"¹⁴ possessing besides, "the balance and perspective of maturity."¹⁵ He spoke often of Canadian-American relationship and was convinced that tightening the bonds of friendship between the two could have a beneficial effect on both. A good-neighbor policy was his constant theme. "We are neighbors and friends, and we are all colleagues,"¹⁶ he said in a speech on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of Canada's Federation. He even ventured the opinion, that upon this close understanding between the British

12. Ottawa Evening Journal, February 12, 1940.

13. Round Table, XXX (1939-1940), 669.

14. Buchan, "Canada Club Dinner," Canadian Occasions, p. 11.

15. Ibid.

16. New York Times, February 12, 1940.

Commonwealth and the United States, depends the peace and freedom of the world.

I have always believed that the secrets of the future of civilization lie in the hands of the English-speaking people . . . and the strength of an alliance between the two nations lies in the fact they should be complementary to each other and give each other something new.¹⁷

Lord Tweedsmuir was honored for his attainments in public life and in literature by several universities, including Columbia, where he was made honorary Doctor of Literature. On this occasion Doctor Nicholas Murray Butler, President of the University summed up his achievements and lauded him as a brilliant Scot, a historian of great learning and a novelist of note.

Extensive traveling and the bewildering round of duties took a heavy toll of physical strength, already weakened by ill health. For physically, Lord Tweedsmuir was by no means robust. He is described as "a small, lean, frail man. But the lines and features of his face, his manners and his voice, all reflected the high and natural gentility of his birth and descent."¹⁸

He was a wholly simple man, without vanity or grandiosity or cant. He was a home man, full of homely good humor and homely common sense. Above all, Lord Tweedsmuir was a Christian gentleman, staunch in the simple faith of his Scots' fathers.¹⁹

17. New York Times, February 12, 1940.

18. Bishop, op. cit.

19. Ottawa Evening Journal, February 12, 1940.

"He stood for truth, for integrity and intellectual honesty, for high idealism, for the building of the Kingdom of God."²⁰

On February eleventh, 1940, in spite of the supreme efforts of the best doctors, Lord Tweedsmuir passed away, leaving the Canadian population and a host of friends to mourn the passing of a great statesman, a great scholar, and a great friend.

He was the rare product of any age, a man whose brilliance of thought and study has not lessened his value as a citizen and servant of the state, but made it of more practical use to his time.²¹

In the words of Monsignor Hildebrando Antoniutti, the Apostolic Delegate to Canada, he was "a perfect gentleman, a keen psychologist, a scholar of the highest rank and brilliance, a wise and prudent diplomat."²² He died as His Excellency, the Governor-General of Canada, but he lives as John Buchan. His friend, Hilaire Belloc, puts the truth beautifully:

He does not die who can bequeath some influence to
the land he knows,
Who dares, persistent, interwreath Love permanent
with the wild hedge-rows;
He does not die, but still remains
Substantiate with his darling plains.²³

20. Queen's Quarterly, "In Memoriam," Spring, 1940.

21. Kathleen Woodward, "The King's Choice," Canadian Home Journal, XXXI (October, 1935), 8.

22. Ottawa Evening Journal, February 12, 1940.

23. Ibid., February 15, 1940.

CHAPTER II

ROMANTICISM

To venture a thorough and scholarly definition of "Romanticism" would be to presume what so many critics and men of letters have been reluctant to attempt. For one of the few things certain about the subject is that its mere mention offers one of the most complicated yet fascinating questions of semantics. Indeed, "no more persistent problem forces itself upon the student of Literature and the historian of thought at the present time than the interpretation of the term "Romanticism."¹ And this is in keeping with another idea on the subject expressed by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch when he recently remarked that "it may help our minds to earn an honest living if we dismiss the terms 'Classical' and 'Romantic' out of our vocabulary for awhile."² Even the subject of this thesis, John Buchan, admitted that romance was a word he was shy of using.

Hence, we cannot here hope to settle on anything final concerning this question. Nevertheless, in this chapter we

1. Paul Kaufman, "Defining Romanticism: A Survey And a Program," Modern Language Notes, XL (April, 1925), 193.

2. Ibid.

shall attempt to trace the history of Romanticism and see its workings in different countries like France, Germany and particularly in England. The political, philosophical, industrial and social background of the movement will be briefly explored, and an attempt will be made to examine the nature and value of romanticism and its place in world literature. The exploration should serve to give us a fuller insight into the forces at work which probably inspired John Buchan to write the way he did. Only certain general characteristics can be studied in this regard, and emphasis placed on those phases which we expect to find in our author.

Originally, a "Romance" was a composition written in a romance language called romanice, which was formed by the fusion of Latin as spoken by the common people of Italy with the native tongue of the northern barbarians who invaded the country. This "romance" speech naturally assumed a variety of forms, but it reached its highest development in Provence, in southern France, where it became an important instrument of popular literary expression, especially during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. These literary productions became known by the French term roman. The compositions which appeared in this vernacular tongue were generally tales and ballads in which the adventures of knights in pursuit of honor, or in devotion to the Christian religion, or the enthusiastic deeds of chivalry and the spirit of loyalty and reverence for women were portrayed. Absence of a central

plot, tragic and farcical incidents, use of the supernatural, a love theme, as well as adventure, generally characterize this particular type.

Now, it may be argued, all these qualities appear to some extent at least, in many forms of literature. Even the Odyssey which, according to Paul Elmer More, "is shot through and through with the wonder of beauty,"³ might be placed in this category. Even as Greek-Roman civilization was spreading North and East, matter which readily lends itself to romantic treatment was met again and again. Homer gave us the Island of Lotus-Eaters; Virgil made almost a complete romance of the story of Aeneas and Dido; while Ovid was romancing a great body of mythology. In fine, it may be said that during the late semi-classical times of the Dark Ages, things were gradually shaping themselves to fuller romance.

One cannot point to one particular work and say "this is the first romance." Is it to be the saga or the Volsungs or that of the Nibelungs story?

But when it has grown to certain achievement, then it can be more easily recognized. Such is the case with the following: (1) Lives of certain Saints, (2) the Norse Sagas, (3) The French Chansons De Geste, (4) the Old English and the Old German stories of various kinds, (5) the Arthurian

3. Paul Elmer More, The Drift of Romanticism, Preface.

Cycle, (6) classical and legendary tales of Alexander and of Troy, (7) certain fragments of Eastern stories, crusades and pilgrimages. These classes possess the fundamental qualities which characterize that type of romance we are attempting to study and eventually to define.

First of all, we have the lives of such saints as Saint Mary of Egypt, of Saint Margaret and the Dragon, of Saint Dorothea, all stories which manifest a certain heroism and mystery which are almost legendary. Then in the Sagas, those ancient mythical Teutonic stories, both form and content are strongly romantic. Their high romantic sense of honor and courage probably permit them to be classified as "Romance."

The French Chansons De Geste date back to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and were a form of popular epic chanted by the jongleurs and other strolling minstrels and were composed in order to furnish a picturesque account of certain traditional heroes. M. Bedier, who has made a thoroughgoing inquiry into the origin of the whole family of Chansons de Geste, tersely puts it thus: "These fictions took the shape of a story of adventure and strife, at once religious and heroic."⁴

In the Medieval English and German stories we find French themes constantly worked up afresh and exhibiting an amount of story-telling power. The famous Der arme Heinrich

4. Buchan, History of English Literature, p. 633.

of Hartmann von Aue, the original of Longfellow's Golden Legend, is one of the greatest triumphs and examples of romance. While the English minstrels tried their hand at the current French romances, they found the Chansons forming an immense body of literature. Side by side with the chansons, came the romans d'aventure, narrative poems, more varied in interest, less severe, and more romantic than the chansons both in tone and treatment.

"But the true roots of romance, the chiefest manifestations of which was the 'Matiere de Bretagne,' otherwise the Arthurian Cycle, were sunk in a period still older than its own."⁵ In these stories we find all the elements of romance --war, love, and religion--with the extension of the character of Arthur in marvelous adventure and chivalrous ideal.

The last of the cycles are the classical, in which the subjects are Alexander the Great, and the Trojan heroes. The further growth of this legendary history was stimulated by the Crusades and acquaintance with Oriental as well as Byzantine and Alexandrine Romance. This type was mythical in foundation and thoroughly imbued with the ideas of chivalry and lust for the marvelous.

The name "romance" then, first applied to the languages in which these compositions were written, came afterwards to refer to the prevailing characteristics which they displayed,

5. Lewis Spence, Dictionary of Medieval Romance, p. 322.

as contrasted with the works written in Latin which were termed "classical."

Nor is it true to say that a chasm exists between the romance we have traced thus far and that which found its full flowering in the so-called Romantic Movement in the early nineteenth century. Even Shakespeare can be termed a "Romantic." The trees in the forest of Arden drooping and rustling about Rosalind, and Hamlet waiting feverishly for the ghost on the platform at Elsinore, may be cited as "romantic" episodes.

Strong and romantic curiosity about unexplored parts of the earth, about periods of the past not hitherto understood, about the mysteries and beauties of nature, about man in his natural state, assert themselves from Dryden on, with increasing power.⁶

In Walter Pater's words, "Romanticism is rather a spirit which shows itself at all times in various degrees . . . than the peculiarity of a time or a school."⁷ The term, therefore, has infinite elasticity.

Joseph Warton's poem The Enthusiast, 1740, is typical of a great deal of the so-called "romanticism" before the seventeen-nineties.

It is a romanticism, which whatever further characteristics it may have had, was based upon naturalism, wild, spontaneous and irregular, but also the simple, the naïf, the unsophisticated.⁸

6. Charles Grosvenor Osgood, The Voice of England, p. 388.

7. C. Watt, A Dictionary of English Literature, p. 387.

Thus we see that the romantic spirit is not a radical novelty. Although it reached its triumph at the beginning of the nineteenth century, certain of its qualities are common to all literature, and its ultimate development was a normal process just as one era reflects and builds on another. The experiences of mankind are basically the same, but their expression depends on the background. Literature shows the soul of nations. It is the written expression of the feelings, ideas, imaginings and the ideals of mankind.

During the eighteenth century, which delighted to term itself the "Augustan Age," and which prided itself on the purity and refinement of its taste, the old classical models were re-examined and explored and considered as alone capable of furnishing a norm of correctness. On the other hand, the literature and art of the Middle Ages were considered unworthy of the attention of a cultivated man. At the close of this century, however, and during the early decades of the next, a marked change manifested itself in the whole tone and tendency of the intellectual life of the time. The mental revolution which took place is termed the "Romantic Movement," which affected all phases of thought and all literary taste and methods of expression. But this "Romantic Movement, before its coming to fullness, greatness and self-consciousness, in the nineteenth century, was prepared for

8. A. O. Lovejoy, "On the Discriminations of Romanticisms," P.M.L.A., XXXIX (1924), 229-253.

by an infinite number of intellectual and aesthetic impulses.⁹

It was a period of upheaval in governmental ideas, of storm and stress in industrial life, and a general dissatisfaction with contemporary civilization as well as a refusal to accept the limitations it imposed. In France, in the immense social struggle of the French Revolution, the monarchy was overthrown. In Germany, it chiefly affected philosophy, and in England, it disclosed itself in a literary way.

The French Revolution brought to Europe the hope of political freedom and social reconstruction and led to the predominance of the middle class. From this period emerged the spirit of romance, a laying aside of realism to a speculation of individual ideas. The cry of the French Revolution, "Liberty, Brotherhood, and Equality," became also the cry of the romantics.

The chief exponent of the new Romanticism in France was Jean Jaques Rousseau who is largely responsible for that particular phase known as "Primitivism"--"a return to origins, historically, artistically and psychologically."¹⁰ Rousseau preached the philosophy of the superiority of instinct over intellect and of the imagination over reason.

9. Ernest Bernbaum, Guide and Anthology of Romanticism, p. 466.

10. Victor Hamm, The Pattern of Criticism, p. 61.

The Romantics appropriated the Rousseau of the Confessions as the symbol and sanction of their new movement in so far as it represented the spirit of revolt against convention and the exaltation of passion with the result that "Rousseauism" has almost become a synonym for "Romanticism." The Romantic ideal was also fostered and reached by Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Madame de Stael, Victor Hugo and others.

In Germany, Scheller, Burger, Novalis and Friedrich von Schlegel were leaders in the romantic revolt. The philosophy preached by Kant, who held that "reason should control the imagination, without at the same time disturbing its free play,"¹¹ resulted in an attempt to comprehend in more adequate terms God, nature, and the significance of man's life in the universe. In fact, it was likely the Germans who first contrasted "romantic" and "classical." In his Conversations with Eckermann, Goethe tells us: "I call the classic 'healthy,' the romantic, 'sickly.'"¹²

This bias betrayed by Goethe, however, was not long in losing face, because the term gained in popularity and favor in the nineteenth century.

English Romanticism, moreover, took its roots in political, industrial and social changes occurring simultaneously

11. Irving Babbitt, Rousseau and Romanticism, p. 42.

12. Hamm, op. cit., p. 61.

with it. England was experiencing many changes and new events. Napoleon had been defeated and English fears thereby calmed; slave trade was abolished; the penal code was reformed; and liberty had gained another victory in the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829.

Besides, England was going through a marked growth industrially. The population was increasing in industrial centres, due to the new inventions. Although this growth brought wealth, nevertheless with the factory system came degradation, poverty and suffering for the poor who endured bad conditions in factory, prison, poorhouse, and schools. Moreover, agriculturally England was losing ground and was gradually passing into the modern industrial society of today.

Needless to say, these influences were felt and expressed by the youthful enthusiasm of the writers generally. Hence it is that the primary basis of romantic literature may be considered as a revolt and an intellectual exploration which are expressed imaginatively and emotionally. From the cold, regular, self-satisfied literature of the early eighteenth century classicists, we come to the fiery, individualized and often rebellious writings of the romantics. "Whatever is, is right" wrote Pope; but Shelley now says "Wail, for the world is wrong." Consequently, the romantic movement is marked throughout its course by a great unrest, a wandering, questing disease, a nostalgia of soul,

that sent its votaries up and down the face of the earth, either actually into far places, into wild and solitary neighborhoods and the sad vicinity of ruins, or spiritually from pillar to post into the desert places of the mind, from one sad philosophy to another. Professor Hamm expresses it as a "Romanticism of Escape, physically and imaginatively."¹³

The time has come now for an attempted definition of terms. "The source of our difficulty here is the unfortunate two-fold burden which is imposed upon 'romantic' when it serves as the adjective for both 'romance' and 'romanticism.'"¹⁴ The adjective "romantic" occurs in the seventeenth century with the meaning "like a romance," usually with a harmful meaning, as "fanciful" or "extravagant." As taste began to change in the course of the eighteenth century, the word took on favorable connotations: "picturesque," "pleasingly melancholy," "imaginative." But:

" . . . in general a thing is romantic, when as Aristotle would say, it is wonderful rather than probable; in other words, when it violates the normal sequence of cause and effect in favor of adventure. . . . A thing is romantic, when it is strange, intense, superlative, extreme, unique."¹⁵

John Foster's fundamental definition of romantic is "the

13. Hamm, op. cit., p. 61.

14. Paul Kaufman, "Defining Romanticism: A Survey And A Program," Modern Language Notes, XL (April, 1925), 198.

15. Babbitt, op. cit., p. 4.

ascendency of imagination over judgment."¹⁶

"Romanticism" is hard to define, just as the spirit of the Renaissance, or Puritanism, or Classicism is hard to define. It can but be recognized by its accompanying elements or symptoms. For logic, it substituted imagination; for reason, it gave feeling and emotion. Individualism was preferred to rules and regulations. Idealism and humanitarianism, the worth of the personality, and the belief in the perfectibility of man--all these were substituted for the more rational attitudes and ideals of the eighteenth century.

Their subject-matter was remote and strange; and human brotherhood and humble, rustic life were exalted. The poets and prose writers emphasized passion and imagination, revived the free verse forms, like the Spenserian stanza and the ode, or wrote in impassioned poetic prose. They wrote with less artificiality and more spontaneity.

Various definitions of Romanticism have been on trial through the years. The following are typical: "A movement to honor whatever Classicism rejected" (Brunetiere), "The revival of the life and thought of the Middle Ages," (Beers). "An effort to escape from reality" (Waterhouse), "The renaissance of wonder" (Watts-Dunton), "The addition of strangeness to beauty" (Pater) and "The fairy way of writing" (Ker).

16. John Foster, "Romanticism," M.L.N., XXXVI (1923), 3.

The classic attitude and the romantic are both necessary to complete living, and manifestations of both are to be found in every phase of life. Hence, romanticism is omnipresent; it does not belong to any one period. Being a highly complex movement, it has contributed largely to the world's sum of beauty and sublimity.

In the absolute sense of the word there are works in the literature of antiquity which are as romantic as any to be found in that of the nineteenth century. The type here considered, however, even when accentuated by the medieval, did not simply revert to the older types which we have traced historically. Nor has the romantic movement wholly spent itself. Strong and romantic curiosity about unexplored parts of the world, about periods of the past not hitherto understood, about the mysteries and beauties of nature assert themselves in our own day and reflect the unchangeableness of human nature. Even today's craving for "the romance of crime" is understandable and justifiable and a good detective story can be highly romantic.

It is the aim of this thesis to point out certain characteristics in the writings of John Buchan which would warrant his being called a "romantic." He is a romantic because his works are filled with a sense of mystery and wonder, with a love of adventure and discovery and with a buoyant spirit of aspiration. He is a romantic in his love of the picturesque, for his interest in themes of chivalrous

love, for his predilection for the fictitious and fanciful. Buchan's heroes manifest that restlessness of the world which characterizes the true romantic. His characters are "unquestionably worldlings but they have the same spirit that sent Sir Galahad in search of the Holy Grail."¹⁷

It might be well at this point to quote John Buchan's own notion of romance, which he puts into the mouth of his famous character Sir Edward Leithen in the book The Dancing Floor:

But, dry stick that I am, I hanker after my own notion of romance. I suppose it is the lawyer in me, but I define it as something in life which happens with an exquisite aptness and a splendid finality, as if Fate had suddenly turned artist--something which catches the breath because it is so wholly right. Also for me it must happen to youth. I do not complain of growing old, but I like to keep my faith that at one stage in our mortal existence nothing is impossible. It is part of my belief that the universe is on the whole friendly to man and that the ordering of the world is in the main benevolent. So I go about expecting things, waiting like an old pagan for the descent of the goddess.¹⁸

Alastair Buchan, son of John Buchan, in a personal letter addressed to the writer of this thesis says:

. . . I believe that 'romantic' is a better definition than 'romanticism' in speaking of my father. My father was strongly influenced by Scott's romanticism in his boyhood. This is an entirely different thing from the English Romantic Movement of the nineteenth century. My father drew no

17. Michael G. Furlong, John Buchan's Contribution to Literature, Doctoral Thesis, University of Montreal, (1948), p. 210.

18. Buchan, The Dancing Floor, p. 9.

inspiration from Byron or his imitators. I believe that his great model was Robert Louis Stevenson, who was still a powerful literary force in Scotland in his boyhood. To this he added a new vogue of story-telling current at the beginning of the century. John Buchan was an undeviating romantic, and his literary form remained very little changed although his books span an era --roughly from 1910 to 1940--in which the popular taste changed from that of the romantic novel to the sociological novel, roughly the gulf between the end of Stevenson and the rise of Graham Greene.

Speaking of Stevenson, Buchan has this to say:

Stevenson is one of the purest types in literature of the romantic adventurer. Romance to him was whatever was happening round the next turn of the road and beyond the next bend of the river.¹⁹

This is also the romanticism of Buchan, a romanticism in which there are strains of idealism and realism intermingled. He has the power of taking one to the summits, and yet keeping one always cognizant of the valleys below. It is a Romanticism in keeping with his own definition: "The kernel of romance is contrast, beauty, and valor flowering in unlikely places, the heavenly rubbing shoulders with the earthly."²⁰

Nor must one neglect to mention the king of the romantics, Sir Walter Scott. The latter was a great model and idol of Buchan. The romance and splendor of the highlands were captured and enshrined in the stories of both. Speaking of the eighteenth-century reading public as having lost

19. Buchan, History of English Literature, p. 563.

20. Buchan, Sir Walter Scott, p. 343.

the fine world of fabling, Buchan says: " . . . the public appetite for the stranger and more colored aspects of life, the subjects which we call 'romantic,' had never ceased, but it had been satisfied with indifferent fare."²¹ It was in connection with the romance of Scott that these words were written, and he continues:

What was needed was a writer who could unite both strains, for in the medieval world the two had been inseparable, the mystery and the fact, credulity and incredulity, the love of the marvelous and the descent into jovial common sense; who could make credible beauty and terror in their strangest forms by showing them as the natural outcome of the clash of human character; who could satisfy a secular popular craving with fare in which the most delicate palate could also delight.²²

In this chapter an attempt has been made to trace the history and meaning of the terms "romance," "romantic," and "romanticism," in order to verify the stand that John Buchan may be considered a true "romantic." His works will be brought to witness the fact in subsequent chapters. Suffice it to say that his romanticism is that which has just been outlined in detail and which might be spoken of as "the picturesque motif" with characters drawn from the upper strata of society especially. They are those who seek to make the world a better place in which to live, "unmindful of the personal price they may have to pay."²³

21. Buchan, op. cit., p. 129.

22. Ibid.

23. Furlong, op. cit., p. 213.

CHAPTER III

JOHN BUCHAN, ROMANTIC HISTORIAN AND BIOGRAPHER

Sir Walter Scott, a master story-teller, may be considered the founder of the modern historical novel. True, there had been innumerable attempts made to write historical novels before his time, but most of these, like the French heroic romances of the seventeenth century, had not even survived their own generation. The reasons vary from dullness and lack of reality to undue preference for one period or another in history. Buchan explains the situation thus:

Hitherto [before Scott] all the great novels had been studies of contemporary life; the historical tale was a lifeless thing, smothered in tinsel conventions, something beneath the dignity of literature.¹

Scott rarely, if ever, expressed his views directly. He maintained, and rightly so, that the historical novelist would defeat his purpose by trying to reproduce the past literally.

An historical novel, in other words, was not to be a fabrication like Chatterton's Rowley Poems pretending to be a story told by a modern author

1. Buchan, Sir Walter Scott, p. 130.

which, in language intelligible to his contemporaries, should attempt to evoke the life of the past in their imaginations.²

The soundness and workability of these theories are evident from the vast number of advocates and successful imitators Scott has guided for more than a hundred years. Moreover, this type has been a favorite means of expressing the romantic attitude. John Buchan is not the least of Scott's successors in the field of the historical novel. Indeed, all forms of history held a strong appeal and George Trevelyan ranks Buchan's historical biographies among the greatest of all his works. The first tastes in this direction were probably acquired at Oxford, and were stimulated and intensified by his great reading habits. Even as an undergraduate, he had tried his hand at historical novels, and he himself admits that it became his great ambition "to write fiction in the grand manner by interpreting and clarifying a large piece of life."³ And thus were born such biographies as Montrose, Julius Caesar, Cromwell and Sir Walter Scott. These books were, he says,

. . . confessions of faith, for they enabled me to define my own creed on many matters of doctrine and practice and thereby cleared my mind. They were a kind of diary too, a chronicle of my successive interests and occupations. They were laborious affairs compared with my facile novels, but they were also a relaxation, for they gave me a background into which I could escape from

2. Bernbaum, Guide Through the Romantic Movement, p. 215.

3. Buchan, Memory Hold-the-Door, p. 194.

contemporary futilities, a watch-tower from which I had a long prospect and could see modern problems in juster proportion. That is the supreme value of history.⁴

In his biography of Sir Walter Scott, Buchan has set down in a clear and precise manner the merits and literary qualities of the historical novel. It will be useful to quote the passage here:

An historical novel is simply a novel which attempts to reconstruct the life, and recapture the atmosphere, of an age other than that of the writer. The age may be distant a couple of generations or a thousand years; the novel may find its drama in swift external incident, or in some conflict of the spirit; it may be picaresque or domestic, a story of manners, or of action, or of the heart; its technique may be any one of the twenty different ways in which tribal lays and other things are constructed. The point of difference is that in every case the writer has to construct for himself, imaginatively, not only the drama, but an atmosphere and modes of life and thought with which he cannot be personally familiar. So, it may be said, has the novelist of contemporary life, whenever he strays outside the narrow orbit of his experience. But there is a difference. The man who deals with contemporary life has the key nearer to hand. He is concerned with things which are roughly within his world of experience; the details may be strange, but access to them is simple. The historical novelist has to think himself into an alien world before he can expound its humanity.⁵

Needless to say, a strong, independent imagination must be brought to such a task, and the writer must possess a keen sense of truth. Nor did Buchan fall short of the ideal he had traced for such as would adhere to this type of

4. Buchan, op. cit., p. 199.

5. Buchan, Sir Walter Scott, p. 130.

novel. Further examination of his historical works, taken each in turn, will convince one of the accuracy and skill with which he followed his code, borrowed largely from his idol romancer Sir Walter Scott.

First there is Montrose, that gallant and romantic figure out of the Scottish past. Buchan had been fascinated by his military genius and the sorrows of his life and had read much of this period of history. For his purpose, Buchan selected primary material and devoted much of his time and effort in studying this hero he had admired so much in his youth. It is therefore not surprising that he has left us an authentic portrait. Moreover, the Scottish countryside and background of his story were familiar places to Buchan, and he has described them remarkably well. Put this Scottish romantic hero against the romantic Scottish landscape, and Buchan says "the figure must always haunt those who travel the rough roads of Scottish history."⁶ Trevelyan holds that the story has "a Greek flavor, as of an early historic age."⁷

Notice the skill with which he writes of Montrose:

Few careers have such romantic unity. In one aspect he is the complete paladin, full of courtesy and grace, a Volcker of Alsace with his sword-fiddlebow, whose every stroke is a note of music. He wins fights against odds, and scribbles immortal songs in his leisure, and dies in the end

6. Buchan, Montrose, p. 395.

7. Ibid., Preface.

like some antique hero, with the lights burning low in the skies and the stage darkened. In another he is the thinker, who read, as no one else did, the riddle of his times, and preached a doctrine of government which had to wait for nearly two hundred years till it found an audience . . . He saw life clearly and calmly, and his spiritual force did not come, as it often comes from a hectic imagination or a fevered brain. The springs of his being were a pellucid reasonableness of soul, joined to a power of absorption in duty which is commonly found only in the ranks of fanaticism.⁸

Who will deny that Buchan has caught here the romance of heroes who win against odds, and who die for their idea of patriotism?

Here again, Buchan shows even a romantic devotion in his understanding of the searching and introspective intellect and character of a figure hitherto not the subject of such warm sympathy. He no doubt saw the confusion and unhappy politics of the time through the eyes of Montrose; nevertheless one must admit he has done an admirable work and was perhaps in advance of his time in seeing that the ideals of Montrose are in the warp and woof of much of the constitutional fabric of our own day.

Then follows Cromwell, and as Buchan says, "Cromwell was bound to follow." This character, too, was open to much controversy, but to Buchan he was an extraordinary man who evoked in him an inner sympathy to which he had to give expression. Here again the author knew his subject, Trevelyan

8. Buchan, op. cit., p. 394.

says:

The book sprang out of his deep and abiding interest in the seventeenth century, which he had made his own chosen period of history, where he was most at home. He read, conscientiously and critically, all the sources and authorities; he visited, as a historian should, the places and studied the battlefields. He had a very good understanding of military history.⁹

Buchan himself states his admiration for the man in these words: "Cromwell with all his imperfections seemed to me not only admirable but lovable, and I tried in my book to present the warm human side of him."¹⁰ That he succeeded in doing so, is evident from these lines:

Oliver was a man of profound emotional nature who demanded food for his affections. His religion, being based not on fear but on love, for fear had little place in his heart, made him infinitely compassionate towards others. A sudden anger might drive him into harshness, but he repented instantly of his fault. Tears were never far from his eyes. I can find no parallel in history to this man of action who had so strong an instinct for mercy and kindness, even for what in any other would have been womanish sentiment and it sprang directly from his religion.¹¹

Nor is his physical description less noteworthy:

He stood about five feet ten in height, his shoulders were massive, and he had a noble head thatched with thick brown hair which fell below his collar. There was vitality, and passion, too, in the long thick nose with the wide nostrils, and determination in the large, full-lipped mouth; yet

9. Lady Tweedsmuir, John Buchan by His Wife and Friends, p. 182.

10. Buchan, Memory Hold-the-Door, p. 198.

11. Buchan, Oliver Cromwell, p. 68.

it was an attractive face, for it left a dominant impression of kindly sagacity.¹²

It is evident that Buchan has a profound respect and admiration for that romantic man-of-action type of which Cromwell provides a fair example. Nor was Buchan unaware of Cromwell's shortcomings, which he attributes to dreams born out of due season. He insists that it is for this reason that he left no permanent construction behind him; however, it cannot be denied that he does stand out in history as "the great improviser, desperately trying expedient after expedient, and finding every tool cracking in his hand."¹³

It was indeed a difficult task, the favorable presentation of this Puritan, for whom so many had scant sympathy, but Buchan "has thread his way with fairness and understanding through the maze of sects and sectaries, the parties and factions and cliques."¹⁴ And from it has emerged a character the basic stuff of which is the same as the ordinary English countryman, but perhaps of more delicate texture than most. Cromwell is represented, not as the superman seeking a pedestal apart from humanity, but rather as always within hearing of the common voices of life.

Buchan lived most willingly in the realm of the historical imagination, indispensable to the writer of great

12. Buchan, op. cit., p. 69.

13. Ibid., p. 521.

14. Lady Tweedsmuir, op. cit., p. 183.

history. Returning from Oxford, having just parted with the manuscript of Oliver Cromwell, Buchan was feeling sad, he said, at parting with someone with whom he had lived for two years. No word was uttered of the fatigue and labor entailed in the work, the painstaking efforts with which he checked authentic documents, the tedious writing by hand. When the book appeared simultaneously with Hilaire Belloc's work on the same subject, Buchan was the first to marvel at the favorable criticism his own book received, and he was filled with that humility which is the source of true greatness when Belloc wrote to him saying that his work was by far the greater. He was content to call himself "a fair craftsman."

Of his classical biographies Julius Caesar and Augustus Buchan says: "I have rarely found more enjoyment in a task for I was going over again carefully the ground which I had scampered across in my youth!" Writers innumerable have alternately lauded and derided these two romantic figures out of the Roman past, but perhaps no writer has ever treated them with such fascination shrouded in mystery. The publication of Augustus, provoked some criticism in view of the fact that it praised a dictator of the Roman Age, and appeared at a time when Democracy lamented the Mussolini regime.

Of Julius Caesar, Buchan says:

Combined in him in the highest degree were the realism of the man of action, the sensitiveness of the artist, and the imagination of the creative dreamer--a union not, I think, to be paralleled elsewhere.¹⁶

And what could be more romantic than this?

He emerges from the clouds of mythology, lives his life in clear air, and then disappears in a divine mist. He was sprung from the ancient kings of Rome, and had the Goddess of Love herself as an ancestress.¹⁷

Buchan continues by pointing out that in the Middle Ages he was "a fairy legend," and yet his military exploits are authentic and exact according to his Gallic memoirs.

Speaking further of Caesar as a romantic hero and man of extraordinary activity, Buchan says: "a desperate crisis only increased his coolness and the precision of his thoughts."¹⁸ And again, "he had a kind of boyish gusto which infected his troops with his own daring and speed."¹⁹

It has been pointed out elsewhere that Buchan had a profound devotion for those capable of rapid action, in fact this might even be said to be his first criterion for a romantic figure. He says:

I was especially fascinated by the notion of hurried journeys. In the great romances of literature

16. Lady Tweedsmuir, "Portraits," The Clearing House, p. 10.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

they provide some of the chief dramatic moments, and since the theme is common to Homer and the penny reciter it must appeal to a very ancient instinct in human nature. We live our lives under the twin categories of time and space, and when the two come into conflict we get the great moment. Whether failure or success is the result, life is sharpened, intensified, idealised.²⁰

Sir Walter Scott was published in 1932, the centenary year of Scott's death. Good judges have maintained that this is the best of all Buchan's books. "There he had a magnificent subject to which all his impulses, his very heart-strings responded."²¹

It was a book which Buchan was bound to write sooner or later, for both men had so much in common.

Both were men from the Border; both studied and practiced law; both were men of letters who were very much more than purely that. To a certain degree both men had the same range of interest, the same humanity outlook, the same manly and robust preference for what was true, honest and of good report.²²

In this volume Buchan

. . . gave expression to the Scottish side of what he was--the loyal, pious and self-disciplined child of the manse and the romantic lover of Scottish history and of the Border country with the large heart and out-of-doors affections of the Shirra.²³

20. Buchan, Memory Hold-the-Door, p. 194.

21. Lady Tweedsmuir, John Buchan by His Wife and Friends, p. 181.

22. Arthur Turner, Mr. Buchan--Writer, p. 82.

23. Lady Tweedsmuir, op. cit., Preface, p. 11.

It is a great portrait of a great romantic figure against a lively and romantic historical setting. Hugh Walpole said that the book "seemed to be written with the hand of Scott resting on the writer's shoulder."²⁴

The Scottish Borders and Oxford landscapes had charmed both Scott and Buchan in turn, and the latter gives full vent to this double magic--the country of ancient pastoral, of clear waters and green hills, and the man who stood at the very heart of life. This Tweedside landscape had captured his heart and remained his abiding passion. It was an ideal background for the writer of poetry and romance, and both Scott and Buchan possessed that intimate knowledge of every class and condition of men and enough education to broaden the outlook, not dim it.

Buchan's admiration for Scott, his idol and model, is evident from these lines in which he praises him as a writer of historical romance:

By the coincidence of personal genius and the circumstances of his training with the intellectual current of the age, it was his lot to gather up the different threads of romanticism, combine them with Fielding's realism, and produce a type of fiction epitomizing the finer characteristics of both. . . . Scott united the antiquarian zeal of the ordinary historical romancer and an immensely superior knowledge of history and antiquities. His imagination, his fertility and romantic stage-craft, could only be rivalled by a Dumas and a Victor Hugo combined.²⁵

24. Anna Buchan (O. Douglas), Unforgettable, Unforgotten, p. 184.

25. John Buchan, History of Literature, p. 452.

Besides, Buchan was like Scott, "a spinner of tales, a maker of phrases, a dreamer of dreams, who was often carried away by his fancies."²⁶ Like him, he was continually weaving stories. Of Scott he says: "Had he never put pen to paper, he would still have told himself stories,"²⁷ and of himself,

I suppose I was a natural story-teller, the kind of man who for the sake of his yarns would in pre-historic days have been given a seat by the fire and a special chunk of mammoth. I was always telling myself stories when I had nothing else to do, or rather, being told stories, for they seemed to work themselves out independently.²⁸

Ever mindful of the magic of Tweedside, Buchan says of Scott's work, what might well be said of his own:

Legend and ballad were linked to every field and burn, and the landscape most exquisitely conformed to its human associations for that corner of Tweedside seems to me especially in tune with Border romance. It is at once wild and habitable, the savagery of nature is tempered by a quality of gracious pastoral, and Tweed, with its pools and runs and gleaming shallows, has not lost its mountain magic.²⁹

How could a man whose soul is not attuned to Scott's romance write so glowingly of this aspect of his master's writing? Buchan is a modern follower and imitator of that great romancer who brought authentic magic and enduring

26. Buchan, Sir Walter Scott, p. 33.

27. Ibid., p. 35.

28. Buchan, Memory Hold-the-Door, p. 193.

29. Buchan, Sir Walter Scott, p. 68.

romance to literature. As Scott had done a century before, Buchan supplied the tonic which the nation needed to strengthen its heart and to enchant the common reader.

Besides giving an authentic portrait of Scott, Buchan has in the same volume outlined his literary standards and criteria of the ideal historical novelist, laws which he himself followed with exactitude.

Besides his five major biographies, Buchan has also written lesser ones like Sir Walter Raleigh, Lord Minto, and George V; the latter is entitled The King's Grace, and although not strictly a biography, it provides a picture and survey of the reign of this king from his accession to the throne in 1910, until his silver jubilee in 1935.

The book is more a tribute to the English throne and kingship than to a personal monarch, although Buchan had a profound respect and admiration for this sovereign. Included herein is the historical background of the World War and the triumph of the British Commonwealth partly because of the leadership of the king.

Lord Minto is of special interest to Canadians and shows Buchan's remarkable knowledge of people and of Canadian politics. Lord Minto was of a Border clan, and so Buchan may have undertaken the work for sentimental reasons; nevertheless an otherwise unpopular Governor is exposed as a man of profound human sensibilities obscured by a strong, even severe character. Buchan's testimony may be summed up

in one staunch sentence. "No son, adoptive or native, ever loved Canada more deeply."³⁰ It is a memoir which presents a living portrait of a most attractive personality and of a most eventful life.

Witch Wood, a brilliant piece of magic-doings as well as an accurate historical picture of the Old Wood of Caledon where Montrose fought, may be included here. Whether it be regarded as a historical novel, a tale of adventure, or a romance of the supernatural, it has all the power and charm of an enthralling and captivating story.

Here, as perhaps nowhere else, Buchan has given evidence of his ability to hold the heart in suspense and to stir desire for the mysterious. The wood holds all the romance and enchantment one could hope for. "This was the Silva Caledonia of which old writers spoke, the wood which once covered all the land and in whose glades King Arthur had dwelt."³¹ For his purposes Buchan has created the romantic figure of the minister David, who typifies the struggle which the Church of Scotland was facing at this time when the rigors of the new Calvinism were contending with the ancient secret rites of Diana. "The mysteries of the heathen had been here and David felt the simplicity of the woodland violated and its peace ravished."³² Then again

30. Buchan, Lord Minto, p. 63.

31. Buchan, Witch Wood, p. 30.

32. Ibid., p. 115.

he was the young adventurer in love with life, for "He leapt the stream and scrambled up the bank with an odd feeling of expectation. He was called to adventure on this day of days."³³ On another occasion,

He stood and gazed, struck silent by its beauty. Here, in truth, was a dancing-floor for wood nymphs, a playground for the Good Folk. . . . He stood poised like a runner, his blood throbbing in sudden rapture. He had adventured into the wood and found magic there, and the spell was tugging at his heart-strings.³⁴

This book must be considered as one of the most revealing presentations of the writer's native land. The descriptions throughout are charming, and the story holds all the old high gloss of romance. Buchan must have lost himself completely in the magic spell of the wood. It would be well worth while to quote but a few. "Each evening the skies cleared, and the night was an amethyst dome sprinkled with stars;"³⁵ or, "the moonshine flowed like a tide;"³⁶ again, the hill itself was yellow like old velvet, but green was mantling beside the brimming streams; the birches were still only a pale vapor, but there were buds on the saughs and the hazels."³⁷

33. Buchan, Witch Wood, p. 93.

34. Ibid., p. 105.

35. Ibid., p. 164.

36. Ibid., p. 114.

37. Ibid., p. 87.

The story is skilfully told with all the heightening suspense and mystery of a real artist. The deep, pure love which exists between David and his Lady Katrine is beautifully told, and, in spite of the death of the lady, one finishes the book with a deep sense of satisfaction born of our admiration for David and his high sense of duty, for he cuts a gallant figure indeed against that weird and awe-inspiring background.

Midwinter is a romantic adventure story of Alastair Mac Lean, a Scotch gentleman who goes on a delicate mission to Lord Conbury, but turns to ride north with Samuel Johnson to find a lady who has eloped, and who aids him to bring important news to the Stuart Prince. It is the old theme of circumstances proving favorable after overwhelming odds. But it is a tale to stir the blood and play a tune of high romance on the strings of the imagination. It is, moreover, a brilliant piece of historical analysis which displays Buchan's versatility as well as his ability to spin a good yarn. Here again Buchan has caught the spell of the woods, this time the great midland forests of Old England. History and fiction, romance and adventure are blended to revive a theme of romantic Jacobite venture.

Of all his books, Memory Hold-the-Door, Buchan's autobiography, is the most revealing of his broad vision and philosophy of life. It was originally not intended for publication, but merely to be a "journal of certain experiences, not written in the experiencing moment, but

rebuilt out of memory."³⁸ The title is taken from the Poem "Our Lady of the Snow" by Robert Louis Stevenson, and the American edition of the same book is called Pilgrim's Way, taken no doubt from Pilgrim's Progress, by John Bunyan. For both of these writers Buchan had a lasting admiration.

The book is indeed a fascinating diary of the reminiscences and impressions of men and things. It is characterized by his well-known humor, shrewdness, tolerance and sincerity. It is the personal journal of a man of breadth, the record of an informed and highly cultivated mind of wide interests. Among the many noteworthy passages in the book are the heart-warming character sketches of his good friends, Lord Milner, the Prime Minister Mr. Asquith, Lord Rosebery, Ramsay MacDonald, Frederick Scott Oliver, and a host of others. Buchan loved people and his expression of it is sincere. One chapter entitled "My America," is especially heart-warming, and we feel that he has given this country a fine testimonial of candid appreciation.

Orlo Williams in a review of the book says:

The book is lively, varied, sympathetic, brilliant in description of persons, charming in depicting of nature, informative without dullness, personal without egoism, moving easily from the public stage on which great figures walk, to the private world of the hills, the rivers which he loved, the home, the mind. . . . He had a hard head, a sound sense, and was not afraid to admit the limits of his appreciations. With these qualities in maturity, he judged the world, sensing the

38. Buchan, Memory Hold-the-Door, Preface.

immediate dangers--particularly in the shrinkage of opportunity for young men--but he refused to abandon optimism.³⁹

And W. E. Garrison points out two notable features of the book:

The first is the series of portraits of the men with whom the author had contact as politician or as publisher, . . . the other and even more extraordinary feature of the autobiography is its indirect but brilliant delineation of the author's own personality.⁴⁰

Judging from the number and the quality of Buchan's contributions to historical fiction, his powers of expression in this field are truly remarkable, even discounting the fact that he was such a prominent political figure with so many demands on his time. To all his works, however, he has brought that rich imagination, painstaking accuracy, tireless industry, indicative of the true scholar and man of letters.

Buchan possessed, moreover, an historian's art in separating the true from the fanciful where fact was concerned, and even his most romantic historical novels have a factual framework which his imagination has developed into good serious fiction.⁴¹

For cleverness of expression and ability to weave the magic and mysterious around actual historical figures,

39. Orlo Williams, National Review, CXV (October, 1940), 49.

40. W. E. Garrison, "Pilgrim's Way," Christian Century, LVII (October 16, 1940), 281.

41. Furlong, John Buchan's Contribution to Literature, Doctoral Thesis, University of Montreal, (1948), p. 144.

Buchan has achieved greatness. His romantic heroes and men of action usually move in an authentic and picturesque background of Scottish hills and moors which he knew and loved. Truly he possessed according to Ferris Greenslet, his American friend, the two best gifts of the historical novelist and Romance writer, "love of place and sense of wonder."⁴²

42. F. Greenslet, Under the Bridge, p. 206.

CHAPTER IV

JOHN BUCHAN, ROMANTIC POET

Buchan's literary fame is chiefly derived from his writings as a novelist, biographer, and essayist, which have been so voluminous as to almost completely obscure his merits as a poet of some repute. His poetic writings are not extensive, confined as they are to one small book of verse, Poems, Scots and English, half of which are written in the Lowland Scottish dialect. But this scholar and man of letters was acutely conscious of the merits of good poetry. A modest man, he himself would have been the first to deny that he wrote great poetry, yet he has penned several pieces which are worthy of note and which reveal something of the divine poetic fire. However, good poetry and the romantic standards thereof could be considered briefly before determining Buchan's place as a Romantic poet.

When discussing poetry, most critics refer to Shelley's Defence of Poetry, to Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, or to Arnold's Essays in Criticism. According to the first, "Poetry is the expression of the imagination," and a "poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth." Again Shelley says, "Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden

beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar." Coleridge insists that "the immediate object is pleasure," and he adopts the principle of Aristotle that poetry is "essentially ideal." Arnold is convinced that poetry must assume the function of religion to bind life into a whole. For the poet, he thinks, sees life in its entirety. In this sense Arnold teaches that, "Poetry is a criticism of life."

True, there may be great poetry in great prose, but in this chapter we are concerned with the narrower definition of poetry--as involving some kind of ordered rhythmical pattern. Buchan defines it as "the best words in the best order," and great poetry as "the only possible words in the only possible order." He goes on to explain that

Poetry is the earliest and most natural expression of the spirit of man, for it represents primarily an instinct, whereas prose is a considered affair which demands a more elaborate background.¹

Buchan always had a great respect for the great masterpieces and frequently recommended a return to and a more intimate knowledge of the great masters. He gives two reasons for this study; the first concerns its character and its mind, "great accents, thoughts deep and grave in the literature of a nation will produce gravity and dignity both in

1. Buchan, "Return to Masterpieces," Canadian Occasions, p. 239.

the character and in the speech of the ordinary citizen."²

The second reason which he gives for this return to the masters is a literary one: "they give us a standard of values."³ This seems to be in conformity with Matthew Arnold's principle, that every lover of poetry should also be a critic if he is to have full enjoyment of it.

John Buchan's poetry, moreover, is characterized by certain aspects of universal romanticism, such as strangeness and wonder, predilection for the fictitious and the fanciful and interest in themes of chivalry. The rolling hills, foreboding moors, rippling streams, and quiet fertile valleys of the Scottish borderlands awakened the Muse of poetry and inspired a number of genuine romantic poems.

The poetic writings of John Buchan are not, as has been said, extensive, but their high quality induces a regret that they are not more numerous. A Scot, "pur sang," he was steeped to the core in the romantic history and traditions of his native land, and it might be said that few people were so familiar with the daily life, social habits and idiosyncrasies of its people. His acquaintances included all classes in Scotland: the high nobility, lawyers, farmers, shepherds and fishers, and there are few phases of Scottish life and few types of Scottish character which have

2. Buchan, op. cit., p. 240.

3. Ibid.

not been encountered in one type or another of his writings. Moreover, he possessed a fine command of the "vernacular which is spoken in the hill country of the Lowlands, from the Cheviots to Galloway."⁴ This is the dialect used in the first part of his little volume of poems. As a result their appeal is restricted to that small and now diminishing race of people who could fully appreciate all the nuances of this tongue. Besides, Buchan grew up deeply immersed in the religion of his father; hence much of his poetry has a religious flavor. Others reveal his abiding passion for his native countryside and particularly for the Borderland which he, like Scott, knew and loved so well.

In his poem, "The South Countrie," he reproduces the delicate charm of this favorite landscape and its people, expressing a love of nature and a quality of writing which Wordsworth might have possessed, had he been a Scot:

Yon are the hills that my hert kens weel,
Hame for the weary, rest for the auld,
Braid and high as the Aprile sky,
Blue on the taps and green i' the fauld;
At ilka turn a bit wanderin' burn,
And a canty biggin' on ilka lea--
There's nocht sae braw in the wide world's schaw
As the heughs and holms o' the South Countrie.⁵

"The Fishers," which is in the Scot's dialect is modeled on the twenty-first idyll of Theocritus and reveals Buchan's fondness for fishing. It might well have been

4. Buchan, Poems Scots and English, Foreword.

5. Ibid., p. 32.

"Curlew Linn," his favorite spot for trout fishing.

I claucht him in baith airms and peched
Ashore--he was a mighty wecht;
Nor stopped till I had him shure
Amang the threshes on the muir.

.
Wi' that I woke; nae fish was there--
Juist the burnside and empty muir,
Noo tell me honest, Geordie lad,
Think ye yon daftlike aith will haud?⁶

In "Fisher Jamie," Buchan tells us of a Border poacher who has been killed in the Great War, and now in his fancy he sees him in heaven.

If Heaven is a' that man can dream
And a' that honest herts can wish,
It maun provide some muirland stream,
For Jamie dreamed o' nocht but fish.⁷

John Buchan served in the Great War in the Intelligence Department at General Headquarters of the British army, and his war poems reflect the grim tragedy that the struggle brought to his soul. "On Leave" is typical of this inner sentiment as we follow the musings of a young Scots private at home in the calm peace of the lovely Lammermuir Hills in Scotland after spending months of misery and terror in the trenches of France. Buchan laments all the horrors of war, but he is not in sympathy with Byron, who steeps his blase hero in the unreasonable melancholy of youth. Rather, communion with Nature brings reunion with God.

6. Buchan, op. cit., p. 47.

7. Ibid., p. 70.

I had auchteen months o' the war,
 Steel and pouter and reek,
 Fitsore, weary and wauf,--
 Syne I got hame for a week.

 I wasna the man I had been,--
 Juist a gangrel dozin' in fits;--
 The pin had faun oot o' the world,
 And I doddered amang the bits.⁸

Then comes the hour of peace. Little wonder is it that
 on another occasion Buchan was able to exclaim,

He findeth God, who finds the Earth He made.⁹

Here the idea is the same:

But up in that gloamin' hour,
 On the heather and thymy sod,
 Wi' the sun gaun down in the West
 I made my peace wi' God.

 Kneelin' aside the cairn
 On the heather and thymy sod,
 The place I had kenned as a bairn,
 I made my peace wi' God.¹⁰

In the English poems in the second half of the book,
 Buchan reveals a vein of deep sentiment for people and
 places--a hobby which he was to practice all his life. This
 group, moreover, is superior to the Scottish collection in
 the ardent passion, soul and intimate feelings of their
 author, a man of deep emotion and sensibility. Here, too,
 we have greater evidence of the true romantic at work.

8. Buchan, Poems, Scots and English, p. 55.

9. Stevenson, Home Book of Quotations, p. 511.

10. Buchan, op. cit., p. 56.

In "Fratrī Dilectissimo," Buchan pays a moving tribute to his brother, William Buchan, a brilliant civil servant, who had served in India and later became the fatal victim of a dread disease. The poem is touching in its description of boyhood days and the sense of loneliness which now envelopes his surviving brother. It is strangely reminiscent of "Elegiac Stanzas," in which Wordsworth mourns over a like loss.

When we were little wandering boys
 And every hill was blue and high,
 On ballad ways and martial joys
 We fed our fancies, you and I.
 With Bruce we crouched in bracken shade,
 With Douglas charged the Paynim foes;
 And oft in moorland noons I played
 Colkitto to your grave Montrose.

 In perfect honor, perfect truth,
 And gentleness to all mankind,
 You trod the golden paths of youth,
 Then left the world and youth behind.¹¹

With Wordsworth, Buchan would have us know that, "Not without hope we suffer and we mourn."¹² And so, his belief in immortality is beautifully expressed in the following:

Dear heart, in that serener air,
 If blessed souls may backward gaze,
 Some slender nook of memory spare
 For our old happy moorland days.
 I sit alone, and musing fills
 My breast with pain that shall not die,
 Till once again o'er greener hills
 We ride together, you and I.¹³

11. Buchan, op. cit., p. 75.

12. William Wordsworth, Elegiac Stanzas, l. 60.

13. Buchan, Poems Scots and English, p. 75.

"Avognon" tells of the nostalgia of a Jacobite exile pining for his Scottish glens.

Weep not the dead, for they have sleep
Who lie at home; but ah, for me
In the deep grave my heart will weep
With longing for my lost countrie.¹⁴

"The Gypsy's Song to the Lady Cassillis" revives a famous folk romance of Scotland, of the enchanting power of the Faas to so bewitch a lady that she forgets home and kin to follow the piper. The poem is strongly romantic:

When morning cleaves the eastern grey,
And the lone hills are red;
When sunsets light the evening way
And the birds are quieted;
In autumn noon and springtide dawn,
By hill and dale and sea,
The world shall sing its ancient song
Of hope and joy for thee,
My love,
Of hope and joy for thee.¹⁵

"Wood Magic" discloses again that necromantic witchcraft of the woods, so often present in Buchan's works of fiction, but now revived with a special mystic strain in strange poetic language.

I will walk warily in the wise woods on the
fringes of eventide,
For the covert is full of noises and the stir of
nameless things.
I have seen in the dusk of the beeches the shapes
of the lords that ride,
And down in the marish hollow I have heard the
lady who sings.¹⁶

14. Buchan, op. cit., p. 94.

15. Ibid., p. 95.

16. Ibid., p. 97.

The poem "Processional," taken from A Lodge in the Wilderness, reveals the longing for solitude and quiet so characteristic of Buchan. We find here additional romantic traits in the desire for peace and home and the natural beauty of earth. It reminds one of William Butler Yeats' "Lake Isle of Innisfree."

I will arise and get me beyond this country of
 dreams,
 Where all is ancient and ordered and hoar with the
 frost of years,
 To the land where loftier mountains cradle their
 wilder streams,
 And the fruitful earth is blessed with more bounti-
 ful smiles and tears:

Like most romantic poets, Buchan looks with suspicion on the city. To him nature brings peaceful repose:

I am weary of men and cities and the service of
 little things
 Where the flame-like glories of life are shrunk to
 a candle's ray.
 Smite me, my God, with Thy presence, blind my eyes
 with Thy wings
 In the heart of Thy virgin earth show me Thy
 secret way!¹⁷

"The Echo of Meleager," brings to life an ancient Greek hero and that eternal topic--love. In a romantic spirit, which is at once calm and melodic, the author sets his imagination to work.

Scorn not my love, proud child. The summers wane.
 Long ere the topmost mountain snows have gone
 The spring is fleeting: 'neath the April rain
 For one brief day flowers laugh on Helicon.

17. Buchan, op. cit., p. 91.

The breeze that fans thy honeyed cheek this noon,
 To-morrow will be blasts that scourge the main,
 And youth and joy and laughter fleet too soon.--
 Scorn not my love, proud child. The summers wane.¹⁸

"The Long Traverse," written in Canada and recounting our noble country's history, was written for children, but it contains some fine philosophy in the form of several poems which the romantic landscape and picturesque regions had inspired. One of these is entitled "Qu' Appelle," and reflects the echo-world of the North where sounds are uncanny and inexplicable.

Qu' Appelle?
 What is it stirs the cedars high,
 When there is no wind in all the sky,
 And plays queer tunes
 On the saskatoons,
 Subtler airs than the ear can tell?
 The evening breeze? But wise men warn
 That the tune and the wind are elfin-born,
 And lure the soul to uncanny things,
 Who sings?¹⁹

It is the opinion of many good critics that John Buchan's best poem is the one entitled "From the Pentlands Looking North and South," in which he gives full rein to his Muse in a description of varied panorama unfolded to the eye from the top of the Pentland Hills, that countryside of which he says "my roots went deep." He might have exclaimed with Keats, "I stood tip-toe upon a little hill." The poem opens with this picture of the scene which meets his eye

18. Buchan, op. cit., p. 106.

19. Lady Tweedsmuir, The Clearing House, p. 197.

from this vantage, a scene which includes the ancient city of Edinburgh:

Around my feet the clouds are drawn
 In the cold mystery of the dawn;
 No breezes cheer, no guests intrude
 My mossy, mist-clad solitude;

 Before me lie the lists of strife,
 The caravanserai of life,
 Whence from the gates the merchants go
 On the world's highways; to and fro
 Sail laden ships;

And like the typical romantic poet, he is inspired through nature by eternal longings that penetrate back through all time and forward to eternity. The world of the romanticist is truly one of eternal becoming and change and death. The idea is conveyed beautifully in the following:

Grant me the happy moorland peace;
 That in my heart's depth ever lie
 That ancient land of heath and sky,
 Where the old rhymes and stories fall
 In kindly soothing pastoral.
 There in the hills grave silence lies,
 And Death himself wears friendly guise;
 There be my lot, my twilight stage;
 Dear city of my pilgrimage.²⁰

Wordsworth sought loveliness and quiet nature, Scott lived in the stirring days of the past, Coleridge created a world of the supernatural, and Buchan is chiefly concerned with the romance of the commonplace. He bears witness to his love of unspoiled country and unspoiled people who live in it, to his passion for rivers and mountains and moorlands, and to his enthusiasm for fishing. Throughout his

20. Buchan, Poems Scots and English, p. 75.

more serious poetry, there runs a vein of deep religious reverence for nature and the Creator.

John Buchan will probably never rank as a major poet, but in spite of some faulty technique the genuine poetic touch is there with delicate skill. Moreover, his themes are varied and of lasting interest. The natural beauties and romantic history of his native land provided the inspiration for poetry of simplicity, of feeling, of wonder; poetry which is romantic, since

. . . the quality which distinguished the poetry of the beginning of the nineteenth century, the poetry which we can roughly group together as the Romantic Movement, is the quality of its imagination, and this quality is seen clearly as a kind of atmosphere which adds strangeness to wonder.²¹

21. A. Symons, The Romantic Movement in English Poetry, p. 14.

CHAPTER V

JOHN BUCHAN, ROMANTIC NOVELIST

Tennyson in his dramatic monologue "Ulysses," gives us the romantic conception of the restless spirit, the never-ending pursuit after the ever-fleeting object of desire that is the very essence of the romantic quest:

Come my friends
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.

John Buchan, in the Preface to his Book of Escapes expresses the same idea:

I have never yet seen an adequate definition of Romance, and I am not going to attempt one. But I take it that it means in the widest sense that which affects the mind with a sense of wonder--the surprises of life, fights against odds, weak things confounding the strong, beauty and courage flowering in unlikely places.¹

Such hurried journeys, difficult situations and challenging tasks always held a special fascination for John Buchan and in his works depicting the operations of war, there is adventure galore. The most famous hurried journeys have been made by soldiers--by Alexander, by Julius

1. Buchan, The Book of Escapes, Preface.

Caesar, by Napoleon, by Montrose. These movements of course were mainly military, and consequently not strictly speaking, personal. However, Buchan wrote another type of adventure-romance where the pursuer is either hot-foot on the trail, or the fugitive is moving through an atmosphere of imminent peril.

In his lighter works of fiction, more perhaps than elsewhere, may be found this idea of romance in all its excellence. It is the romance of life, of wonder, of fight against odds, of courage and beauty blossoming in the out-of-way places. Buchan is continually concerned with a man of action, given a difficult task to perform, setting himself staunchly about it despite the perils, and forever emerging triumphant after a number of narrow escapes and thrilling breath-taking adventures.

In his autobiography, Memory Hold-the-Door, Buchan discloses how the first of these characters, Richard Hannay, came to exist:

Then, while pinned to my bed during the first months of war and compelled to keep my mind off too tragic realities, I gave myself to stories of adventure. I invented a young South African called Richard Hannay, who had traits copied from my friends, and I amused myself with considering what he would do in various emergencies.²

He gave Hannay certain companions, and the escapes and high adventures of these braves spread gradually to fill

2. Buchan, Memory Hold-the-Door, p. 195.

numerous books of romance and induced their author to invent new heroes. These romances may be conveniently grouped into three series: The Greenmantle Series, or the Hannay Books which include The Thirty-Nine Steps, Greenmantle, Mr. Standfast, The Three Hostages, The Courts of the Morning, and The Island of Sheep. The second series, known as the Huntingtower Trilogy, consists of Huntingtower, Castle Gay and The House of the Four Winds. The third group is frequently referred to as the Leithen Books, because Sir Edward Leithen is the chief figure of The Power House, John Macnab, The Dancing Floor, The Gap in the Curtain and Sick Heart River.

To those who have come under the spell of these romances there is nothing to equal them. They are not only exciting adventures through wild places, country lanes or city streets of London or Constantinople, Berlin or Glasgow, but they are a challenge that in the midst of the dullest prose of life may be found sublime moments of exhilaration and devotion to a cause.

Besides the great story-telling power at work in these books, there is a fascination which comes chiefly from the characters of the men Buchan has endowed with life. They are men, healthy and honest in spirit and gifted with the poetry of life.

His first creation, Sir Richard Hannay, has already been mentioned, and Buchan himself explains the far-reaching missions upon which he sent him:

In the Thirty-Nine Steps he was spy-hunting in Britain; in Greenmantle he was on a mission in the East; and in Mr. Standfast he was busy in Scotland and France. The first had an immediate success, and since that kind of thing seemed to amuse my friends in the trenches I was encouraged to continue. I gave Hannay certain companions--Peter Pienaar, a Dutch Hunter; Sandy Arbuthnot, who was reminiscent of Aubrey Herbert; and an American gentleman, Mr. John S. Blenkiron. Soon these people became so real to me that I had to keep a constant eye on their doings. They slowly aged in my hands, and the tale of their more recent deeds will be found in The Three Hostages, The Courts of the Morning, and The Island of Sheep.³

The first of the series, The Thirty-Nine Steps, is a thriller novel of the secret service, which years later was made into a highly successful motion picture. Buchan dedicated it to Thomas Arthur Nelson, his partner in the publishing business. In this dedication, he clearly classifies the book and points out what type of romance he intended to write:

My dear Tommy,

You and I, have long cherished an affection for that elementary type of tale which Americans call the 'dime novel,' and which we know as the 'shocker'--the romance where the incidents defy the probabilities, and march just inside the borders of the possible.⁴

That he succeeded herein is evident to any reader. The romantic qualities become more evident as the panorama of conflict is unrolled.

Young Hannay, newly returned from the colonies, finds life helplessly boring until things begin to happen to him,

3. Buchan, op. cit., p. 195.

4. Buchan, The Thirty-Nine Steps, p. 7.

that is, until he comes back to his flat in Portland Place to find the American stranger, Scudder, waiting for him. The latter tells him secrets of international intrigue of immense importance to England. Shortly afterwards, Scudder is murdered and Hannay is wanted not only by the law, but also by England's enemies for the secret cipher now in his possession. It is not Hannay's courage and resourceful scheming which are most gripping. He is in conflict with the forces of evil seeking to destroy a world which he, Hannay, had but lately so despised. This same world becomes suddenly beautiful. He sees "the hawthorn flowering on every hedge,"⁵ and his ear is attuned to "a continual sound of larks and curlews and falling streams."⁶ He feels new life and new zest for living and says:

I might have been a boy out for a spring holiday tramp instead of a man of thirty-seven very much wanted by the police. I felt just as I used to feel when I was starting for a big trek on a frosty morning on the high veld.⁷

But there is also in Hannay that other human quality. He feels the terror of the hunted, the loneliness of the forsaken and the sudden waves of depression and surrender that all men know. This is because Buchan wanted his heroes to be real men as well as extraordinary braves.

5. Buchan, op. cit., p. 53.

6. Ibid., p. 172.

7. Ibid., p. 57.

His success in outwitting his opponents and carrying his information to headquarters makes up the theme of the story. There are moments of intense suspense, but one feels that somehow Hannay will find his way out of apparently impossible situations. There was the time when he was hopelessly imprisoned in the storeroom. Then came this sudden luck:

But as I circumnavigated the room I found a handle in the wall which seemed worth investigating . . . it was a mighty risk but against it was an absolute black certainty. If I used it the odds were, as I reckoned about five to one in favor of my blowing myself into the tree-tops; but if I didn't I should very likely be occupying a six-foot hole in the garden by the evening.⁸

The life-saver or escape-provider is forever turning up in unlikely circumstances, and Hannay is forever emerging triumphant.

In Greenmantle, the same romantic man-of-action returns, this time entrusted with an important mission in the East--to investigate the sources of the Holy War said to be organizing in Constantinople under the direction of Germany. It was a challenging task, as all Hannay's missions were, but it appealed to his patriotism and adventure for which Buchan had so well qualified him. He puts it this way:

I was asked to go off into the enemy's lands on a quest for which I believed I was manifestly unfitted--a business of lonely days and nights of

8. Buchan, op. cit., p. 151.

nerve-racking strain, of deadly peril shrouding
me like a garment.⁹

In spite of his forebodings one knows he is going to accept:

I swear that when I turned round to speak I meant
to refuse. But my answer was Yes, and I had
crossed the rubicon.¹⁰

And thus begins the story of disguise and intrigue
which brings Hannay and his three companions all over Europe,
from Germany to the Near East.

In this book Buchan has displayed extraordinary power
of characterization. The German Strumm is a Buchan master-
piece of cruelty and tyranny, and one feels that the creator
wishes him to be typical of most military figures of that
nation:

He was a perfect mountain of a fellow, six
and a half feet if he was an inch, with shoulders
on him like a shorthorn bull. He was in uniform,
and the black-and-white ribbon of the Iron Cross
showed at a button-hole . . . His tunic was all
wrinkled and stained as if it could scarcely con-
tain his huge chest, and mighty hands were clasped
over his stomach. That man must have had the
length of reach of a gorilla. He had a great,
lazy, smiling face, with a square left chin which
stuck out beyond the rest. His brow retreated and
the stubby back of his head ran forward to meet it,
while his neck below bulged out over his collar.
His head was exactly the shape of a pear with the
sharp end topmost . . . Here was the German of
caricature, the real German, the fellow we were up
against. He was as hideous as a hippopotamus but
effective . . . ¹¹

9. Buchan, Greenmantle, p. 20.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., p. 67.

And Buchan puts into the mouth of Sandy his astounding prophetic utterance concerning the Germans he is fighting and that England fought against in 1939:

Germany's simplicity is that of the neurotic, not the primitive. It is megalomania and egotism and the pride of the man in the Bible that waxed fat and kicked. But the results are the same. She wants to destroy and simplify; but it isn't the simplicity of the ascetic, which is of the spirit, but the simplicity of the madman that grinds down all the contrivances of civilisation to a featureless monotony. The prophet wants to save the souls of his people; Germany wants to rule the inanimate corpse of the world . . . ¹²

By journeys and escapes, perils and trickery, they do succeed in insinuating themselves into the very heart of the plot. Being discovered they are tracked down in the East, and against the greatest of odds in breath-taking episodes, the four missionaries finally find what they are seeking, "the lady of the mantilla,"¹³ the chief agent in fomenting rebellion in India. Even she is a romantic figure, "mad and bad," Blenkiron called her. There was besides, something eerie about Hilda von Einem--"strange, uncanny, wonderful . . . devil and queen,"¹⁴ Hannay describes her. This is in keeping with the supernatural nature of the tale, the religious mystery of Turkish prophecy revealed by the woman "Greenmantle."

12. Buchan, op. cit., p. 251.

13. Ibid., p. 236.

14. Ibid., p. 352.

By no means an ordinary war story, Greenmantle has all the ruse and risk, adventure and wonder of a dramatic and exciting romance.

Mr. Standfast, the next of the series, takes its name from that character in Pilgrim's Progress which Peter Pienaar is supposed to resemble. Like Buchan's other books, it is replete with adventure and full of baffling mystery and excitement. Peter, absurdly over-age, has joined the Royal Flying Corps; having been taken prisoner, he writes to Hannay casually mentioning the loss of a leg. Of course this was just the incentive needed to send Dick on another errand of rescue and mercy. Assuming the old alias of a German spy, he goes to Switzerland to nurse Peter and to track down his enemies. The scenes of brotherhood and affection here depicted are as moving and romantic as anything in literature:

As I looked at him the remembrance of all we had been through together flooded back upon me, and I could have cried with joy at being beside him. Women, bless their hearts! can never know what long comradeship means to men; it is something not in their lives, something that belongs only to that wild undomesticated world which we forswear when we find our mates . . . ¹⁵

And the heart-warming scenes by the fireside, when, their adventures accomplished, they exchange stories of previous comradeship and memories of the days of their reckless strength are truly characteristic of Buchan's own love

15. Buchan, Mr. Standfast, p. 280.

for people--indeed friendship was a hobby with him.

It is in this book, that Dick falls in love with Mary Lamington, a worthy mate for an adventurous hero. Fiery, ingenious and in love with life, she was nevertheless womanly and gentle withal. When Dick first saw her he said: "she smiled demurely as she arranged the tea things, and I thought I had never seen eyes at once so merry and so grave."¹⁶ And Blenkiron said of her, "she can't scare and she can't soil."¹⁷

It has been charged that Buchan's genius in creating men who are real and memorable, does not extend to his women. Nevertheless, the most real of Buchan's women is undoubtedly Mary Lamington.

In spite of the victory of Dick and his success in wooing Mary, the death of Peter at the close of the book, in one last gesture of self-sacrifice and loyalty is especially touching as Mr. Standfast becomes virtually Mr. Valiant-for-Truth. And Buchan pays him the same tribute as his namesake: "So he passed over and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side."¹⁸

The Three Hostages again stars Richard Hannay. Five years have elapsed since his last adventure, and he is

16. Buchan, op. cit., p. 22.

17. Ibid., p. 303.

18. Ibid., p. 412.

peacefully settled at Fosse Manor with his wife Mary and their son Peter John. The descriptions of that quiet life in rural England are as romantic and beautiful as any to be found, and they are strangely reminiscent of Buchan's own life at Elsfield. Indeed Hannay was Buchan himself in many ways, perhaps most of all in his intense craving for country life and solitude after the war. Both acquired a new-found delight in the rhythm of nature and in small homely things after so many alien immensities. Spring was Buchan's favorite time of year and in this book he loses himself in its ecstasy:

The season was absurdly early, for the blackthorn was in flower and the hedge roots were full of primroses . . . It was jolly to see the world coming to life again, and to remember that this patch of England was my own, and that all these wild things, so to speak, members of my own household . . . As we went downstairs, I remember we stopped to look out of the long staircase window which showed a segment of lawn, a corner of the lake, and through a gap in the woods a vista of green downland . . . 19

But such domestic peace, as Mary remarked, was too good to last. It was indeed interrupted by a note from Bullivant asking for help in recovering three hostages: Astela Victor, daughter of a wealthy American Jew; Lord Mercot, an Oxford undergraduate; and a ten-year-old boy, David, the son of Sir Arthur Warcliff.

Reluctantly Dick emerges from his solitude, but determines to right a wrong, and to outwit Medina, a master hypnotist and a famous figure in London's political and social life. Sandy Arbuthnot and Hannay fight against the powers of darkness and finally conquer through sheer courage and clever intrigue.

With great danger to himself, Dick allows Medina to use his sorcery on him at the same time straining his will almost to the breaking point. The atmosphere is one of uncanny wickedness which reminds one of Coleridge's "Christabel," with its witchery and mystical romance:

I was inside one of those massive sheltered houses, and lo and behold! it was as mysterious as the aisles of a forest . . . The couch seemed to travel very smoothly on rails, and I was conscious that I had passed through the folding doors and was now in another room . . . Then the atmosphere of the place changed. There was a scent in the air which anywhere else I would have sworn was due to peat and smoke, and mixed with it another intangible savor which I could not put a name to, but which did not seem to belong to London at all, or to any dwelling, but to some wild out-of-doors.²⁰

Throughout the book this trance state predominates transcending even the imagination, so that one is reminded of Coleridge's lines in "Kubla Khan":

Weave a circle round him thrice
And close your eyes with holy dread.²¹

20. Buchan, op. cit., p. 90.

21. Samuel Coleridge, "Kubla Khan," l. 51.

The power of romance is heightened by the sudden intervention and arrival of Mary on the perilous scene. Her ingenuity and contriving aid her husband and add to the growing suspense.

In describing the scenes of witchcraft in the shuttered curiosity shop, Buchan reverts to the old romantic themes of sinister magic and of wonder and fancy lurking in out-of-the way places. This description is typical:

The shop was as dark as the inside of a nut, not a crack of light coming through the closely-shuttered windows. I felt very eerie, as I tiptoed cautiously among the rugs and tables.²²

Even the weird music and dancing strike a note of wonder:

The music, as I opened the door, came in a great swelling volume of sound . . . The babble of laughter and talk which rose added a further discord to the ugly music, but there was a fierce raucous gaiety about it all, an overpowering sense of something which might be vulgar but was also alive and ardent . . . The dancing was madder and livelier than on the last occasion²³

And here again the romance is dependent on the time element. Buchan has crowded a host of episodes into a short time, from Mid-March to June. Moreover, the idea of the deadline intensifies the suspense, and that is just what Buchan intended it should do. He says in his Book of Escapes:

22. Buchan, The Three Hostages, p. 194.

23. Ibid., p. 199.

A long journey even with the most lofty purpose may be a dull thing to read of, if it is made at leisure; but a hundred yards may be a breathless business if only a few seconds are granted to complete it.²⁴

The Courts of the Morning, the next of the series, is perhaps one of the novels in which Buchan has most clearly expressed his feeling about the romance of life. Sandy Arbuthnot, now Lord Clanroyden, Hannay's staunch companion, is the modern Ulysses, "crazed by the spell of far Arabia," and "like an Englishman, forever hunting romance."²⁵

The opportunity comes shortly after the Roylances, Janet and Archie, start for South America on a belated honeymoon. Arriving at Olifa, a country without problems or whose problems had been solved by the vast mineral production of the Gran Seco, and by its governor Castor, they become involved in difficulties when they insist on visiting the mines and learning administrative secrets.

The choice of far away and unknown places as subject matter for a story is another romantic trait. "The Gran Seco has not often appeared in the world's literature. . . . It is the port for missing ships."²⁶

Castor is actually a dictator and the workers are dying of poison in this country of "The Great Thirst":

24. Buchan, The Book of Escapes, Preface.

25. Buchan, The Courts of the Morning, p. 20.

26. Ibid., p. 108.

There is poison here in earth and water, in a hundred plants, in a thousand insects, in the very air we breathe . . . The place seemed a crucible in some infernal laboratory, where through the ages Natura Maligna had been distilling her dreadful potions.²⁷

Castor's plans are to make trouble for the United States and thereby ridicule democracy. Here Blenkiron appears on the scene as the American official and is aided by his old friend Sandy as secret service agent in disguise. Hannay serves only to introduce this story and to get it under way.

Their purpose is to kidnap Castor, to head a revolt against Olifa and thereby to save Castor's soul as well as that of the country. The reason given is that they hate what Castor stands for,--machine-made scientific creeds.

Aside from the fascinating quality of Sandy's character the most stirring human situation of the story is the slow, convincing conversion of Castor. Slowly through love and suffering, he advances by the stages of human wisdom,

. . . spernere mundum, spernere sese, spernere nullum . . . 'I have gone through the first stage,' he said, 'I have despised the world. I think I have reached the second--I am coming to despise myself . . . and I am afraid . . .'²⁸

As the story unravels, the two-fold goal is reached, the deliverance of Olifa and the remaking of Castor. Before the final triumph, Castor dies splendidly to save Janet from

27. Buchan, op. cit., p. 100.

28. Ibid., p. 259.

the assassins of his own body guard. The death scene is deeply human and touching:

He was beyond speech, and his eyes were vacant and innocent like a child's. She pressed her face to his and kissed him on the lips. . . . A fresh lamp seemed to have been lit behind her, and by its aid she saw the glazing eyes wake for a second, and through them the soul struggle to send a last message. There was peace on the face.²⁹

The last of the Hannay adventures is recounted in The Island of Sheep, published in 1936. Here the pleasant country-gentleman's existence has grown decrepit and he longs again for a difficult job. The restless adventurer is not happy unless he is occupied in some quest or in some dangerous enterprise. The occasion, of course, comes this time in the defense of one young Haraldsen, son of an old friend. Haraldsen's person and property are being blackmailed by a group of London gangsters.

Even the theme, loyalty to the memory of another, is typical of the old romances. This time it is active fidelity to a promise made long ago to old Haraldsen. "He wanted the three of us to swear that if he called for us we would come to his aid wherever in the world we might be. More, we must be ready to come to his son's help . . . "³⁰

Convinced of the certainty of the threat and extortion facing Haraldsen, Dick and Clanroyden muster all their old

29. Buchan, op. cit., p. 396.

30. Buchan, The Island of Sheep, p. 79.

power of intrigue and activity and in company with Dick's son, Peter John, now fourteen years of age, they set out again on another episode of peril and adventure. When the gang of blackmailers strike for Haraldsen's daughter, Anna, the scene moves to the Island of Sheep in the northern ocean near Iceland, and Haraldsen's old mansion there becomes the stronghold for much excitement and daring.

The ancient castle shrouded in mystery strikes another note of romanticism--interest in the past, legendary history, and ancient architecture. Buchan describes it thus:

The House itself was of three storeys sheltered on three sides by a half moon of hills . . . the ground floor was mainly store-rooms, as in a Border keep, with the living-rooms above them, and the bed-rooms in the top storey . . . This, according to a tale, had been the home of an Irish hermit, who in the dark ages had found refuge here till the heathen were the death of him . . . This had been constructed I suppose, on the model of a Viking hall, and in it one seemed to cheat the ages. Where the old Haraldsen had got the timbers I do not know, but they were hoar-ancient, and the black-oak panelling was carved in wild grotesque. The furniture was ancient and immense; there was a long dining-table which would have accommodated fifty Vikings, and gigantic chairs which only Falstaff could have decently filled. For decorations there were some wonderful old pieces of tapestry, and a multitude of ship models of every age in silver and ivory and horn and teak which must have been worth a ransom . . . 31

Here they wait for the enemy to strike, and typical of Buchan, it is Haraldsen himself who wins the final triumph and even saves the life of Lord Clanroyden. The description

of the last match is tense.

Out from the cell came Haraldsen. His figure was lit up by the blazing roof and every detail was clear. He was wearing his queer Norland clothes, and his silver buckles and buttons caught the glint of fire. One part of his face was scorched black, the rest was of a ghostly pallor. His shaggy hair was like a coronet of leaves on a tall pine . . . He took great leaps among the hags and boulders and by some trick of light his figure seemed to increase instead of diminish with distance, so that when he came out on the cliff edge and was silhouetted against the sky, it was gigantic . . . ³²

Speaking of the novel and the fairy tale, Buchan once said: "my argument is that only in so far as the novel is a development of and akin to the folk and fairy tale does it fully succeed."³³ Ever conscious of this fact, he seems to be making constant reference to fairy-tale characters.

Speaking of Anna, Haraldsen's daughter, he says: "Here was the fairy-tale princess, the Queen of the North;"³⁴ and of the steward: "he looked like Rumpelstilzkin in the fairy tale."³⁵

The second series of Novels, mentioned earlier, is called The Huntingtower Trilogy and includes Huntingtower, Castle Gay and The House of the Four Winds. Herein Buchan has created another group of equally interesting and unusual

32. Buchan, op. cit., p. 307.

33. Buchan, "The Novel and the Fairy Tale," The English Association, July, 1931.

34. Buchan, The Island of Sheep, p. 316.

35. Ibid., p. 226.

characters and expressed certain of his philosophies.

Dickson McCunn is the hero, and a group of "Die-Hards," come to life. Monarchism, Democracy, Communism, Nazism and Capitalism are clearly defined and expressed by various characters.

Buchan's own discovery of the joys of a safety razor started a train of thought which launched Dickson McCunn on his career of middle-age romance in Huntingtower.

McCunn is like his creator, "an incurable romantic,"³⁶ who, having become bored with the humdrum life of a grocer, finally decides to take that oft-thought-of journey of adventure. On a special spring morning, McCunn was "a very fountain of music,"³⁷ and his plans began to take form. As he plunges into a most thrilling adventure and romance, "he moved in an atmosphere of pastoral, serene and contented. Dickson's heart glowed within him. Here was Romance."³⁸

Starting out alone, he soon comes upon a companion, a modern poet, named Heritage. Together they come to the "Dark Tower," a romantic castle much like the one to which Childe Roland must have journeyed.

Shuttered, silent, abandoned, it stood like a harsh memento of human hopes But there was a mysterious life in it, for it seemed to

36. Buchan, Huntingtower, p. 18.

37. Ibid., p. 17.

38. Ibid., p. 29.

enshrine a personality and to wear a sinister aura.³⁹

Here indeed was romance--an old mansion, extinct family, village deserted of men, an innkeeper villain and an imprisoned Russian princess guarding jewels, the precious heritage of her family and her country.

With the valuable help of six Gorbals Die-Hards, a group of unscrupulous and rough boys in the vicinity, Dickson succeeds in outwitting and overthrowing the villains.

Buchan has also contributed the love-element to this story, and it is told in his familiar respectful manner. Heritage, who embodies the Greek classical ideal, was in love with Saskia, the well-nigh unattainable. However, "the desire of the moth for the star," seemed to him a reasonable thing, since hopeless loyalty and unrequited passion were the stock-in-trade of romance."⁴⁰ Is this not the old romantic courtly love theme? "To think that he was serving his lady was rapture--ecstasy that for her he was single-handed venturing all."⁴¹

Buchan has here dipped into old familiar romance themes, and produced a story which modernizes them against a southern suburb of Glasgow.

39. Buchan, op. cit., p. 65.

40. Ibid., p. 218.

41. Ibid., p. 246.

The book, moreover, is a triumph of the Middle-Class and expresses Buchan's views in a manner which is at once unobtrusive and clear. Speaking of Dickson he says:

He is unbelievable. He is what we call the middle-class which we who were foolish used to laugh at. But he is the stuff which above all others, makes a great people. He will endure when aristocracies crack and proletariats crumble.⁴²

Castle Gay, the second of this series is a case of mistaken identity and seems to prove what Buchan states early in the book, that "it is the foible of a Scot that he can never cut the bonds which bind him to his own country."⁴³

The story centres around a certain Thomas Craw, an eminent newspaper editor, who insists on hiding his identity, and attempts to live a secluded life in Castle Gay. Just why he chooses this secrecy is explained thus by Buchan: "It is the old passion for romance, the sense of power is generally accompanied by a taste for grandeur."⁴⁴

When Craw is kidnapped by mistake, Dickson McCunn impersonates him and confounds Craw's enemies. Politics, the power of the press and the joys of country-side hiking are all well depicted.

Of special note here is the romantic description of the castle grounds, reminding us of one of Coleridge's lines:

42. Ibid., p. 312.

43. Buchan, Castle Gay, p. 40.

44. Ibid., p. 135.

. And I know a grove
Of large extent, hard by a castle huge.⁴⁵

The place was so magical that one of the two forgot his errand. It was a cup among high hills, but, seen in that light, the hills were dwarfed, and Jaikie with a start realised that the comb of mountain, which seemed little more than an adjacent hillock, must be a ridge of the great Muneraw, twenty miles distant. The patches of wood were black as ink against the pale mystery of the moonlit sward. The river was dark too, except where a shallow reflected the moon. The silence was broken only by the small noises of wild animals, the ripple of the stream, and an occasional splash of a running salmon.⁴⁶

We have also in this book another characteristic of romance, namely, respect for ancient families. Herein Buchan brings to light his ideas on Communism and his fears that such a plague, once rooted in a country, tends to destroy not only old names and princely characters, but man's basic rights. The author seems to imply that the world needs men like Dickson McCunn, men who can be trusted with their country's secrets:

What we want is some real, representative, practical man who would come down like a sledge hammer on their notions--somebody they would be compelled to believe--somebody that they couldn't help admitting as typical of the British Nation.⁴⁷

The House of the Four Winds centres its plot around a mysterious many-roomed castle. But unlike the former stories whose settings are in Scotland, Buchan this time

45. Coleridge, "The Nightingale," l. 49.

46. Buchan, Castle Gay, p. 40.

47. Ibid., p. 136.

transports us to the mythical country of Evallonia. The hero of the book is Jaikie Galt, at one time a "Die-Hard," but now a Cambridge graduate. McCunn again assumes a disguise, this time that of an Archduke, and once again through intrigue and skill escapes detection. Though older, he still enjoys the impersonations, strange journeys and stirring adventures.

He realized that he was about to enjoy the peace of soul which he had known long ago at Huntingtower on the morning after the fight.

But this time there was more than peace. He cast an eye over his shoulder down the wooded gorge--all was quiet--he had escaped from his pursuers. The great adventure had succeeded. Far ahead beyond the treetops he saw the cleft of the Wolf's Throat sharp against the sunset. His spirit was exalted. . . . Well, he was a sedentary man, and he was not dreaming of an adventure, but in the heart of one. Never had his wildest fancies envisaged anything like this.⁴⁸

The character of Sir Edward Leithen, the chief figure of The Power House, John Macnab, The Dancing Floor, The Gap in the Curtain and Sick Heart River develops through this third series.

In The Power House, Sir Leithen himself is the narrator of a novel of international crime, set in a London of "Sherlock Holmes," before the war of 1914.

In the book John Buchan by His Wife and Friends, Lady Tweedsmuir says: "Leithen, the scholarly lawyer, the bachelor, the dry stick was his first love and his last."⁴⁹

48. Buchan, op. cit., p. 315.

49. Lady Tweedsmuir, John Buchan by His Wife and Friends, p. 139.

During the thirty years we see Leithen, he is a man of action like Hannay and McCunn, he can do spectacular things, but he is the "most sensitive to the presence of things unseen and to the end that awaits all men."⁵⁰

The story of The Power House has to do with the sudden disappearance of the rich Charles Pitt-Heron from London. His friend, Deloraine, sets out after him. It is in London, however, that the secret of his flight lies, and it is Leithen who has more to do with the rescue than Deloraine. Only through sheer accident, does Leithen meet Andrew Lumley, the elderly genius who is directing a conspiracy to overthrow civilization. It is a quiet June night when Lumley begins his series of talks, marvelous prophetic attacks on civilization, which all the evil conspirators of the romances voice in one form or another:

Civilization is a conspiracy. . . . Take the business of Government. When all is said, we are ruled by the amateurs and the second-rate. . . . And you do not want a Napoleon. All that is needed is direction, which could be given by men of far lower gifts than a Bonaparte. In a word, you want a Power House, and then the age of miracles will begin . . . ⁵¹

Finally, aided by a Labor member, Leithen triumphs over Lumley, who commits suicide because his plots have failed. Referring to this adventure, Leithen claims that exciting

50. Furlong, John Buchan's Contribution to Literature, Doctoral Thesis, University of Montreal, (1948), p. 187.

51. Buchan, The Power House, p. 81.

business can be had without actual flight, by simply "pulling the strings."

John Macnab has been the subject of much favorable and unfavorable criticism. It does take three men--Sir Edward Leithen, the lawyer, Mr. Pallister-Yeates, the banker and Lord Lamancha, the statesman--all three bored with life, on a strange tour of excitement, danger and sporting crime.

The challenges, usually depicted as being humanly impossible, of course always succeed, and this is due to the unexpected circumstances, the unimaginable event forever saving the situation. It is the old familiar theme of victory over incident through cunning and cleverness. The theme here is the gaming challenge to kill a deer or catch a salmon on property prohibited to the public:

There were many streams where Jim Tarras's feat might be achieved, but he had chosen the one stretch in all Scotland where it was starkly impossible.⁵²

Just when things appear well-nigh impossible of fulfillment, another element is introduced to save the situation for the hero. However, it must be said that Buchan has aptly chosen these incidents; for example, in this story the introduction of excavators busy with dynamite relays the attention from the rifle shot fired at the deer.

It is a Robin-Hood type of romance of hazard and adventure, lawless mystery and competitive sport. Moreover, the

52. Buchan, John Macnab, p. 52.

scenes are set in romantic places like Haripole and Inverlarrig. Buchan has described the latter thus:

The sea at Inverlarrig was molten silver running to the translucent blue of the horizon, the shore woods gleamed with a thousand jewels, the abundant waters plashing in every hollow were channels of living light.⁵³

Leithen had promoted an enterprise, packed with comedy and adventure, through sheer apathy, and had emerged cured and convinced that "nothing could happen wrong in this spacious and rosy world."⁵⁴

The Dancing Floor is another Leithen story of romance, set principally on an island in the Aegean. In it Buchan has succeeded in conjuring up an atmosphere of ancient lore and mystery:

It was a strange, haunted world, bathed in a twilight of gold and amethyst, filled with a thousand aromatic scents, and very silent except for the wash of the waves and a far-off bleating of goats.⁵⁵

Leithen strikes up a close friendship with Vernon Milburne, an Oxford friend of his nephew Charles. Milburne tells him of the strange dream he has had every year since childhood, and out of that dream and an Easter myth in an Aegean island, comes this strange and haunting story. Leithen is not usually captivated by women, but when he

53. Buchan, op. cit., p. 261.

54. Ibid., p. 252.

55. Buchan, The Dancing Floor, p. 41.

meets the young and fascinating Kore Arabin, there blossoms a tender love between this girl and a maturer man and he admits that he could not get her out of his thoughts. But when he follows her to her island home and is able to save her from becoming a human sacrifice to appease the gods, he can think kindly of her approaching marriage with Vernon Milburne.

The book is reminiscent of that same mysterious magic that filled Witch Wood. Here, too, the author is seeking to destroy the forces of evil lurking in paganistic devil-worship.

Buchan's descriptions are in keeping with the note of the supernatural:

Behind me was the Dancing Floor, and in front a flood of translucent colour, the shimmer of gold, the rarest tints of sapphire and amethyst, fading into the pale infinity of the sky This place was not idyllic, it was magical and unearthly. Above me was a walled mystery, within which evil had once been followed and a greater evil might soon be done, and there were men with quaking hearts bent upon ancient devilries . . .56

The spell of romance that is strange and mysterious is well exemplified in these lines:

But as I looked, the unfeatured darkness beyond changed also into faces--faces spectral in the soft moonshine. I seemed to be standing between two worlds, one crimson with terror and the other golden with a stranger spell, but both far removed from the kindly work of men.⁵⁷

56. Buchan, op. cit., p. 172.

57. Ibid., p. 303.

In describing Kore, Buchan seems to attribute to her some mythical divine power:

It seemed the fitting robe for youth and innocence--divine youth, heavenly innocence--clothing but scarcely veiling the young Grace who walked like Persephone among the spring meadows. . . . It was not Kore I was looking at, but the Kore, the immortal maiden who brings to earth its annual redemption . . . 58

The book is one of genuine romance in an atmosphere of ancient mysteries. It is the triumph of courage over fear and of religion over devil-worship, told with extraordinary skill and sentiment.

The Gap in the Curtain is a very unusual story with Leithen again as narrator. He is now a tired man and only reluctantly does he accept to be present at a certain house party. Professor Moe, a dying man with a new theory of time, is also there, and Leithen becomes thoroughly interested in him. The scientist holds that "the future is with us now, if only we knew how to look for it."⁵⁹ In spite of his weariness and skepticism, Leithen's interest is aroused especially in the experiment which is proposed. Five men enter into the proposition and agree to glance at a paragraph of the London Times of a year later. At the moment of the revelation the professor dies, but all the others, Leithen excepted, see next year's paper. What they saw

58. Buchan, op. cit., p. 304.

59. Buchan, The Gap in the Curtain, p. 33.

forms the substance of Leithen's story of politics, business and love, told in Buchan's characteristic easy and fine style.

Buchan's last novel, Sick Heart River, is probably his best. All the skill, long experience and power of characterization were packed into this, his last attempt. For we must remember that when writing it, Buchan was a sick man. He has undoubtedly projected himself and his own life into it, and Leithen's death is but a forecast of his own. There is no doubt but that he wished to make known the last brave efforts of a man whose days were numbered. It is besides a tribute to Canada, the country Buchan had come to love, and where he died:

He fell in love with the Canadian Far North--the barrens of the Arctic shore, the mountains more cruel than the fangs of wolves, the courses of mysterious and almost mythical rivers, the flicker of the aurora at the onset of winter, the modes of travel and subsistence, the primitive expedients and adaptations and skills of eternally vigilant men who keep their blood coursing at 60 below, knowing every minute that their first mistake may be their last.⁶⁰

The title of the book is symbolical: "Sick Heart River," the valley where men went to be healed of weariness of spirit, and were healed, though in a fashion they did not foresee. Buchan was deeply interested in Canada's future and believed in the possibility of vigorous Canadian youth undertaking the gigantic task of exploring those

60. Atlantic Monthly, LXI (April, 1941), 3.

enormous spaces of the Far Northland, subjecting them to human ideals and human tasks.

Sir Edward Leithen has just been told that he has but a year or two to live. With the shadow of eternity deepening over him he was determined "not to sit down and twiddle his thumbs and await death."⁶¹ The chance of dying "in his boots" is given to him by Blenkiron, who asks him to find a man of great financial standing who has just disappeared from New York. And so it is that Leithen starts out on his last quest.

Leithen suspects that Galliard, the man whom he is seeking, has returned to his native wilderness to find that peace of soul of which Wall Street had robbed him. And so the hunt goes into the unknown North, with Leithen gambling his failing bodily strength against wind and weather across Canadian wilds until he looks on the Arctic Ocean. This sight affected Leithen as it had affected Buchan and he says:

Here there was no mist, and he could look far into the North over still waters eerily lit by the thin pale evening sunlight. It was like no ocean he had ever seen, for it seemed to be without form or reason. The tide licked the shore without purpose. It was simply water filling a void, a treacherous deathly waste, pale like a snake's belly, a thing beyond humanity and beyond time. Delta and sea looked as if here the Demiurge had let His creative vigor slacken and ebb into nothingness. He

61. Buchan, Sick Heart River, p. 62.

had wearied of the world which He had made and left this end of it to ancient Chaos.⁶²

But this is not the end. The trail continues to Sick Heart River, across the Yukon watershed. The many exciting incidents of the chase are breath-taking, and the nature descriptions are accurate. But these are the less important parts of the story. Indeed they are but symbols of Leithen's own search for the meaning of life. It is in the subjugation of matter to the uses and ends of the spirit that the quest really lies. The book is replete with the true spirit of romanticism, the conviction that "the world is too much with us," and the consequent desire to take flight, be it in fact or in imagination, to find a real anchor for the heart's strivings. Leithen is the embodiment of this romantic type.

Isolated in an Indian camp with Galliard, two half-breeds and a Catholic missionary, the former statesman and celebrity thinks himself into clarity. Certain facts were the buttresses of his faith, and the chief of them was the omnipresence and the omnipotence of God. Thus "his noble, frosty egoism was merged into something nobler."⁶³

And thus was accomplished a two-fold mission: the true man-at-arms had found not only Galliard's mental health, but something far greater--he had found himself, for worn out

62. Buchan, op. cit., p. 119.

63. Ibid., p. 316.

through his labors and ministrations to others, he had made his soul.

This unexpected feat obscured the fact that he had also found Galliard, for, setting out on one task, he had accidentally accomplished a greater, like Saul, the son of Kish, who, seeking his father's asses, stumbled upon a kingdom.⁶⁴

It is evident throughout the book that Leithen's reflections and innermost convictions are those of Buchan himself. Lady Tweedsmuir recalls that he put into Sick Heart River many of his thoughts about physical pain and weariness. She says that once or twice in the last year of his life he told her, "I am like a Red Indian; I am in constant pain and don't show it."⁶⁵ The quasi-autobiographical aspects of the book, in the light of this exceptional man on the brink of eternity are deeply moving.

The fascinating quality of these books is due in part to the prophetic note they strike, and to the scenic descriptions of region and dwellings, but especially to the men portrayed. Buchan's gift for weather and landscape has been cited to point out the romantic quality of love of nature, that is at once a balm for tired spirits and a benevolent means of escape.

For Buchan, wood, sea and hill were intimacies of childhood, and they never lost their spell for him. All his

64. Buchan, op. cit., p. 187.

65. Lady Tweedsmuir, John Buchan by His Wife and Friends, p. 287.

life he cherished certain pictures of landscapes of which he had caught glimpses in his extensive travels. That is why his descriptions of nature are so accurate and so varied. Sometimes one is captured by the natural magic of the Witch Wood, or by the eerie strangeness of The Dancing Floor; at other times, it is a mountain stream running through a flat stretch of heather, or a white road winding down to some enchanting valley; again it might be an ancient Viking hall set in a corner of Iceland, or an abandoned homely hut in the mountains of Switzerland. Strange wildernesses, wide horizons, green fields and silver seas, in fact all aspects of earth's loveliness cast their spell and add to the beauty of his romances. Always there is the same freshness and exhilaration, felt only by the enthusiast whose heart is attuned to nature's wonders and whose spirit is young and free.

Buchan's character creations, and more especially his men, are memorable romantic figures. Nor is it simply their bravery which makes them so; their moments of intense enthusiasm are followed by moments of fear, and they very often exhibit mortal frailty. But they throw open a glamorous world of deeds and adventure, with all the thrills of tense situations, sudden changes and final triumphs of manly virtue. His hero is a modern Ulysses who "cannot rest from travel," and who must "drink life to the lees."

John Buchan carried a merry heart, and wherever there was adventure to be found, his imagination was there. His heroes are attractive, vigorous fellows, chivalrous, romantic, patriotic and full of resourcefulness. They become entangled in all manner of intricate difficulties and conspiracies, but like true romantic warrior spirits, always emerge triumphant, extricated by their own stout hearts and lofty qualities. They love close to another world, and they think bravely of death--they have poetry and heroism in them and a great unworldliness. They have marvelous spirits and plenty of joys and triumphs, but they also have their hours of black gloom. Their lives are like the weather--storm and sun. One thing they never fear--Death. For they are filled with the romance of life and seem to have as motto "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."⁶⁶ And Father Duplessis' tribute to Leithen might well be applied to Hannay, to Sandy, to McCunn, and indeed to Buchan himself: "He knew that he would die; but he knew also that he would live."⁶⁷ For

The writer of romances swims in tossing waters between the swift current of artificiality and the incoming tide of realism. All but the strongest swimmers sink there. John Buchan would be joyful, if he knew that those on the shore still see a head high above water, . . . ⁶⁸

--even now when Lord Tweedsmuir is dead.

66. Alfred Tennyson, "Ulysses," l. 70.

67. Buchan, Sick Heart River, p. 322.

68. Boston Globe, "Tribute," February 12, 1940.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Throughout this thesis, an attempt has been made to point out the romantic traits in John Buchan's writings which would justify his being styled a "writer of romance."

Susan Lady Tweedsmuir, widow of John Buchan, in a letter addressed to the writer of this thesis states: "I would call my husband a romantic writer in the sense that he had the strongest possible feeling about the romance of life."¹

It is in this sense that romance is to be understood in speaking of John Buchan's works. Sensitive and intelligent, warm-hearted and sincere, he lived a full life, combining the talents of scholar and publisher, historian and biographer, politician and diplomat, poet and teller of tales, but never once forgetting that the true end of literature is "the notation of the human heart."² With characteristic romantic zest for adventure, John Buchan's heroes transport the reader to the world of the imagination where the

1. Lady Tweedsmuir, letter to the author, Linton Lodge Hotel, Oxford, England, January 12, 1954.

2. Ottawa Evening Citizen, February 12, 1940.

fantastic becomes the commonplace.

It has been remarked that Buchan is a minor poet with a genuine poetic ability which might have been developed, had he not felt that his best medium was prose. He belongs to the Romantic School of poetry and is strongly Wordsworthian with a like poetic creed that "sweet is the lore than nature brings."³ His poems are sometimes purely romantic, like "The Gypsy's Song to Lady Cassilis." At other times he writes lyrics about his own countryside dealing with shepherds and fishermen--the same simple folk admired by Wordsworth and to whom he attributed a "more comprehensive soul."

Buchan's biographies were the fruit of years of the most complete research and thought. The results were stories of substantial fragments of the past with its life recreated for us, its moods and forms of thought re-constructed and its figures strongly represented against an authentic background. Always interested in nature, he was able to catch the atmosphere of the times about which he wrote. Still more could he weave an air of mystery around his characters and present the correct landscape against which these figures move. Thus he has brought back to life with vivid beauty and power, such historical characters as Montrose, Augustus, Cromwell and Sir Walter Scott. Of the last

3. William Wordsworth, The Tables Turned, l. 25.

mentioned, for whom he had a life-long admiration, he said:

He seems to me the greatest, because the most representative of Scotsmen, since in his mind and character he sums up more fully than any other the idiomatic qualities of his countrymen and translates them into a universal tongue.⁴

Compared with his excursions in biography, his adventure stories were almost a relaxation. In fact, he called his romances "his recreation" and took the habit of interspersing tales of adventure with more serious fiction.

It is in his adventure fiction especially, that John Buchan shows his romanticism. His novels are characterized by strangeness and wonder, predilection for the fictitious and the fanciful, and interest in themes of chivalrous love and adventure. He shows extreme regard for human nature in all its manifestations, in feeling and in imagination. His preference is for the spontaneous and free, the mysterious, the remote in nature. Again there is a certain fondness for fleeting pictures and a love of nature that is innate. For Buchan was a typical Scotsman and his devotion to his native land is intense.

It is almost a mystery how a country so dour, so bleak, so gray and barren as Scotland should fascinate the rest of the world as it does, and hold the hearts of its people in a patriotism that is proverbial. Yet amid its austerities are places where one may come into intimate contact with Nature

4. Buchan, Sir Walter Scott, p. 372.

as almost nowhere else on earth. Like country, like people --morally and religiously austere, inflexible, inscrutable, canny, yet on occasion warm, and tender, and understanding of heart as no other, full of sensible fun, loyal, dependable, home-loving, winsome. Such are the Scots. Such were Burns, and Scott, and Buchan. The last is never better than when, with loving realistic detail he sets his stories in his native Scotland. Yet they are usually in out-of-way places, unknown and unvisited generally, thus lending a remarkable romantic remoteness to the familiar.

However, Scotland is not by any means the only landscape and background for his stories. The diversified character of his experience, his wide knowledge of all classes of people, his extensive travels, all equipped him to present authentic portraits of almost every country of Europe, as well as of South America and Canada. Each one carries his story-telling skill and breathless zest for the adventure of life, and is presented in an atmosphere of ancient lore and mystery which is at once exquisite and strange.

In the chapter on Romanticism, it was pointed out that the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, and the progress of domestic reform enlarged the boundaries and enriched the content of English Romanticism, although the origin of the movement was found elsewhere. In fact, the sources of Romanticism are to be sought in the very nature of the human spirit. The word "romantic" first appeared in English in

the Seventeenth Century and was used to describe the extravagant, the unreal, the fictitious and the fabulous. It was rescued from this disrepute during the next one hundred years by being used to describe pleasing scenes and situations such as appeared in current "romantic" fiction and poetry. Although writers often rebelled against Classical rules and strict forms, romanticism is really not merely a matter of technique. In recognition of the necessity for discrimination among these tendencies, it has been proposed that "romanticisms" might be a more adequate term. However, some of the underlying principles can be found on the basis of thought and emotion, and various traits exhibited by a writer can be subtracted from these fundamental elements. An attempt has been made to do just this in regard to John Buchan's writings. Certain aspects of his romanticism have been pointed out and an endeavor made to classify them.

In common with other Romanticists, Buchan was "amorous of the far." He seeks at times to escape from familiar experience and from the limitations of reality. He delights in the marvelous and the abnormal. Moreover, the motive of these adventures is not always the bored restlessness one finds in John Macnab, but sometimes, as in Huntingtower, it is an honorable desire to get face to face with the hardest kind of human experience. At other times there is a "withdrawal from outer experience in order to concentrate upon

the inner experience."⁵ This type of escape is particularly noticeable in Buchan's masterpiece Sick Heart River, where in inimitable prose he conjures up unforgettable pictures of the Canadian Arctic, blending the mystic with the actual, in a quest which is more divine than human.

It has been said that the attraction for the remote, another characteristic of Romanticism, is evident in Buchan's books. In The Courts of the Morning and Midwinter, his cult of mountains and great Midland forests is noticeable, in The Island of Sheep and The Dancing Floor it is the magic of desert islands, and in Sick Heart River the attraction is the hinterland and far-away places of the almost unexplored New World. All may be said to be unstained by the slow contagion of civilization. This form of primitivism is the touchstone of romanticism. It is the creed that "modern civilization is too complicated and artificial to allow the spirit of man the freedom and joy which are his birth-right."⁶ Thus Buchan sends his men of the world, Hannay the secret-service agent, Peter Pienaar the Dutch hunter, John Blenkiron the engineer, Sir Edward Leithen the lawyer, Lord Lamancha the politician, Sir Archibald Roylance the airman, Dickson McCunn the grocer, and other very real flesh and blood figures, into various parts of the universe.

5. L. Abercrombie, Romanticism, p. 51.

6. Hamm, The Pattern of Criticism, p. 61.

This remoteness in place offered an appeal similar to that of the remote in time, and sometimes the two are combined. Then we have the haunted castles and magic casements of Castle Gay, where one is reminded of those lines of Keats:

Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in fairy lands forlorn.⁷

Again we are in mysterious storied towers in mythical lands, in The House of the Four Winds; or we hear the Moslem's strange and fantastic prophecies in Eastern regions as in Greenmantle. As such we have the true "Renaissance of wonder," which according to Watts-Dunton, is the true definition of romanticism.

In a personal interview, which the writer of this thesis had with the wife of Colonel Willis O'Connor, the chief aide-de-camp of Lord Tweedsmuir, it was learned that the children were very fond of his stories, and whenever John Buchan had any leisure time it was spent unraveling tales of the magic kind. Once, on the occasion of a staff dinner, an endearing episode of fatherly love and story-telling genius were witnessed. The children sat on the floor near by, captivated, while the elders were more than entertained by the story later published under the title of The Magic Walking Stick.

7. John Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale," l. 69.

Buchan had a great liking for fairy tales, not only because of their romance, but because they contained some profound philosophy, originating as they did in the depths of human experience. They belonged to the people, not to any privileged class, and Buchan knew and loved these simple folk, as well as the aristocratic. Besides, the fairy tales contain the philosophy he later translated into his romances, the superiority of quality over quantity. "The stories picture weakness winning against might, gentleness and courtesy against brutality, brains against mere animal strength, the once chance in a hundred succeeding."⁸ Such is the theory of his novels--that mass is nothing, that spirit is everything and that quality will always win. The result is the romantic sensation of perilous close-calls and breathtaking moments of suspense.

There is an eternal impulse in human nature to enliven the actual working life by the invention of tales of another kind of life, recognizable by its likeness to ordinary life, but so arranged that things happen more dramatically and pleasingly, which indeed is the familiar world in a glorified and idealized form. Buchan's heroes enjoy such excursions, and prove that there is something unconquerable in the human spirit. They are a glorification of the soul in man, an epic of the resurgence of the divine in human

8. Buchan, "The Novel and the Fairy Tale," published by the English Association, July, 1931.

nature.

The appeal of such romance, whether in the fairy-tale, or in the manner we have them from the pen of John Buchan, has not been lessened by time, their charm is for every class and age. Poets and artists have borrowed from them and made elaborate artistic creations out of their simplicities.

From Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, Buchan once selected this passage to illustrate his own philosophy of the art of fiction: "To give the charm of novelty . . . to things which we neither feel nor understand." He explains that this is the purpose of fiction,

To deal with ordinary life; but without ever losing touch with the ground, it must somehow lift it into the skies. It must give it for us an air of novelty and strangeness and wonder, by showing beauty in unlikely places, courage where one would not have looked for it, the jewel in the pig's snout, the flower on the dunghill.⁹

This is indeed the standard he set and followed, a standard which is romantic. It is a theory which is not only sound but effective, as has been pointed out.

Whether Buchan rejoiced most in his reputation as a historian, or as a writer of mystery and romance fiction would be hard to say. Certainly his biographies of Montrose and Cromwell and Sir Walter Scott will endure, and even if his lighter works are not likely to take a place in belles-

9. Buchan, op. cit.

lettres, they do succeed in accomplishing what he intended, namely, to afford pleasure. They fulfilled his insistence, that stories should be written primarily to transport via amusement and entertainment into another world. Moreover, they attain the requirements of romance and bear witness to his own romantic creed that "all romance, all tragedy must be within hailing distance of our humdrum lives."¹⁰

10. Buchan, Sir Walter Scott, p. 343.

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