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Presbyterian Ethos and Environment in the Novels of John Buchan: A Religious and Historical Study

by

Edwin Roughton Lee M.A. (Edin.)

A thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, Faculty of Arts, Deakin University, Geelong Campus, September, 1996.
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CANDIDATE'S CERTIFICATE

I certify that the thesis entitled Presbyterian Ethos and Environment in the Novels of John Buchan: A Religious and Historical Study submitted for the degree of: MASTER OF ARTS

is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this thesis in whole or in part has not been submitted for an award including a higher degree to any other university or institution.

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to establish, from a historical and religious perspective, that the Presbyterian ethos and environment in which John Buchan was reared was the predominating influence in the writing of his novels.

Presbyterianism was not the only influence on Buchan that determined the character of his stories. Buchan was by temperament a romantic, and this had considerable influence on his literature. His novels are romances, peopled by romantic figures who pursue romantic adventures. There are the signs of Buchan’s romantic nature in the contents of the novels: creative imagination, sensitivity to nature, and expectations of the intrusion of other worlds, with destiny-determining events to follow. But Buchan had also an acquired classicism. His studies at Glasgow and Oxford Universities brought him in touch with a whole range of the master-pieces of classical literature, especially the works of Plato and Virgil. This discipline gave him clarity and conciseness in style, and balanced the romantic element in him, keeping his work within the bounds of reason.

At the heart of Buchan’s life and work, however, was his deeply religious nature and this, while influenced by romanticism and classicism, was the dominant force behind his work. Buchan did not accept in its entirety the Presbyterian doctrine conveyed to him by his father and his Church. He was moderate by temperament and shrank from excesses in religious matters, and, being a romantic, he shied away from any fixed creeds. He
did embrace the fundamentals of Christianity, however, which he learned from his father and his Church, even if he did put aside the Rev. John’s orthodox Calvinism. The basic Christianity which underlies all Buchan’s novels has the stamp of Presbyterianism upon it, and that stamp is evident in his characters and their adventures.

The expression of Christianity which Buchan embraced was the Christian Platonism of seventeenth century theologians, who taught and preached at Cambridge University. They gave prominence to the place of reason and conscience in man’s search for God. They believed that reason and conscience were the ‘candle of the Lord’ which was existed every one. It was their conviction that, if that light was followed, it would lead men and women to God. They were against superstition and fanaticism in religion, against all forms of persecution for religious beliefs, and insisted that God could only be known by renouncing evil and setting oneself to live according to God’s will. This teaching Buchan received, but the stamp of his Presbyterianism was not obliterated.

The basic doctrines which arose from his father’s Presbyterianism and are to be found in Buchan’s novels are as follows:

a. the fear (or awe) of God, as life’s basic religious attitude;

b. the Providence of God as the ultimate determinative force in the outcome of events;

c. the reality, malignity and universality of evil which must be forcefully and constantly resisted;

d. the dignity of human beings in bearing God’s image;

e. the conviction that life has meaning and that its ultimate goal, therefore, is a spiritual one – as opposed to the accumulation of wealth,
the achieving of recognition from society, and the gaining access to power;

f. the necessity of challenge in life for growth and fulfilment, and the importance of fortitude in successfully meeting such challenge;
g. the belief that, in the purpose of God, the weak confound the strong.

These emphases of Presbyterianism are to be found in all Buchan's novels, to a greater or lesser degree. All his characters are serious people, with a moral purpose in life. Like the pilgrims of the Bible, they seek a country: true fulfilment. This quest becomes more spiritual and more clearly defined as Buchan grows in age and maturity. The progress is to be traced from his early novels, where fulfilment is sought in honour and self-approving competence, as advocated by classicism; to the novels of his middle years, where fulfilment is sought in adventures suggested by romanticism. In his final novel *Sick Heart River*, Buchan appears to have moved somewhat from his earlier classicism and his romanticism as the road to fulfilment.

In this novel, Buchan expresses what, for him, is ultimate fulfilment: a conversion to God that produces self-sacrificing love for others. The terminally-ill Edward Leithen sets out on a romantic adventure that will enable him to die with dignity, and so, in classic style, justify his existence. He has a belief in God, but in a God who is almighty, distant and largely irrelevant to Leithen's life. In the frozen North of Canada, where he expects to find his meagre beliefs in God's absolute power confirmed by the icy majesty of mountain and plain, he finds instead God's mercy and it melts his heart. In a Christ-like way, he brings life to others through his death, believing that, through death, he will find life.
There is sufficient evidence to give plausibility to the view that Buchan is describing in Leithen his own pilgrimage. If so, it means that Buchan found his way back to the fundamental experience of the Christian life, conversion, so strongly emphasised in his orthodox Presbyterianism home and Church. However, Buchan reaches this conclusion in a Christian Platonist way, through the natural world, rather than through the more orthodox pathway of Scripture.
Summary

Candidate: Edwin Roughton Lee
Degree: Master of Arts
Supervisor: Dr. Ian Weeks

This thesis establishes, through historical and religious study, that the Presbyterianism in which John Buchan was raised was the predominating influence on his novels. Chapter 1 describes other influences on Buchan, particularly romanticism and classicism. The tensions produced in him by his parents, and the predilections of his temperament and the world view given at university are explored. The origins and form of the Presbyterianism in which he was reared are seen in chapter 2, with special emphasis on the Free Church (Presbyterian) milieu. In chapter 3, the parental home in which he grew up is described, with attention to the character of his parents and their influence on him.

Buchan's religious creed and indebtedness to seventeenth century Christian Platonism are to be found in chapter 4, as are the distinctive emphases of Presbyterianism which remained to influence his novels. In chapter 5, the impact of Buchan's Presbyterianism on his novels is examined in detail with examples. In chapter 6, Buchan's own experience is viewed through the lens of Sir Edward Leithen, the pilgrim who reaches his goal of true fulfilment. Chapter 7 concludes by recapitulating the main thrust of the thesis.
Acknowledgements

There are a number of people to whom I am indebted for the completion of this thesis. I wish to mention my wife for her patience, understanding and encouragement in the process of carrying out this work. There are librarians in various centres who have been helpful: at Melbourne and Armidale Universities, in the Joint Theological Library, Parkville, at the Central Libraries in Melbourne and Edinburgh, and in the Scottish National Library and New College Library, Edinburgh.

I am indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Ian Weeks, for his patience and wisdom, and to his able assistant, Dr. Cliff Cumming, for his insights and direction. I owe thanks to Fr. John Honner SJ for his competent proof-reading of the final script. Above all, I am indebted to my daughter, Dr. Dorothy Lee, for her constant encouragement and the time she has spent in helping me to present my material as a thesis. I am also indebted to a gracious Providence which has sustained me in what has been a challenging undertaking.
Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

The religious atmosphere in which John Buchan was reared was that of Scottish Presbyterianism. When appointed the Lord High Commissioner of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland by King George V in 1933, he addressed the Assembly as follows:

I come to you today with a full heart, for I am one of yourselves and I have in my bones the tradition of Scottish Presbyterianism... I have been for a quarter of a century an elder of the Church of Scotland in Saint Columba's Church in London, but my upbringing was in the historic Free Church... will you permit me to pay my tribute to that high tradition which has been one of the most sacred things in my life?

Buchan went on to mention four men, including his own father, who had been most influential in his religious life. They were all Presbyterian ministers.¹

The aim of this thesis is to establish that the Presbyterian ethos and environment in which John Buchan was raised was the predominating influence in the writing of his novels. This Presbyterian background did not just provide a context from which Buchan could extract ideas, expressions, characterisations, and so on, for his books – though he did make use of his background, to some degree, in this kind of way. More importantly, his religious background made its impact on his writings because of his strong religious convictions. These convictions determined the way he viewed life and expressed himself as a novelist. As we will

¹ Minutes of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Church of Scotland Publications, Edinburgh, 1933.
see, Buchan's religious outlook permeates all his novels, though clearly more pronounced in some than in others.²

Buchan's religious convictions were compiled largely from the fundamental teachings of Christianity as taught by the Presbyterian Church and his father. They appealed to him and he accepted them. Thus quite commonly in his novels, Buchan expresses, through the words and activities of his characters, his own convictions. The Presbyterian, Calvinistic form of Christianity in which he was reared, by its clearly defined creed and its uncompromising nature, conflicted with the more liberal ideas that Buchan was to imbibe through his studies in the classics at Glasgow and Oxford Universities. From this tension flowed much of his work, as he sought to reconcile two seemingly contradictory systems of thought.

Buchan's endeavour to reconcile his Christianity with the classics is exemplified by Philip of Beaumanoir, one of the characters in his novel, The Path of the King. Philip discovers Livy, Lucretius and the letters of Cicero, and learns Greek in Paris. He copies large parts of Plato and Aristotle, becoming an adherent of the Platonic school. He hires a Jew to teach him Hebrew to find a way of reconciling the Scriptures and the classics which Philo the Jew and early Christian Fathers had tried to do many years before. "Plato's Banquet was his Gospel where the quest of youth did not lack the warmth of desire."³ For Buchan, as we shall see, that quest to find a via media between the humanism and the classics of the university, and the Calvinism of his home and Church, was resolved in his discovery of the writings of the seventeenth century 'Cambridge Platonists'.

In his critique of Buchan's novels, David Daniell has given a very positive assessment of Buchan's style and his skill in character portrayal.⁴ In a similar vein, Janet Adam Smith, in her definitive biography of

Buchan, has commended Buchan’s skill as a writer, as has Andrew Lownie in his recent biography of Buchan.5 Others like Martin Green and Richard Usborne, have reached more negative conclusions about Buchan’s literary abilities,6 while Gertrude Himmelfarb has both commended Buchan’s skill as a novelist while criticising what she sees as his anti-liberal ideas.7 It is not intended in this thesis to emulate these literary studies, or to engage in literary criticism, but rather to set out, from a religious and historical point of view, the evidence that Buchan’s Presbyterian ethos was the predominant influence in the formation of his novels.

The Presbyterian ethos in which Buchan was raised was not the only influence in his life and on his novels. It is arguable that Buchan was the epitome of all that represented the best in the Western culture of his day. He was the perfect blend of the romantic, the classical and the Christian, and the Christian in Buchan, although influenced and even modified by the classical and the romantic, nevertheless predominated in his life and writings. In this sense, he was a Christian romantic and a Christian classicist.

**Buchan’s Romanticism**

Buchan’s ‘romanticism’ was inherited.8 He tells us that he was born with the same temperament as the seventeenth century Platonists, who possessed a sensuous love of the unseen and who combined a passion for the unseen and eternal with a delight in the seen and temporal.9 He also had a romantically-minded father. His father’s love for the old Scottish ballads and the novels of Walter Scott, as well as his predilection for the romantic figures of Scottish history – Mary Queen of Scots, Montrose, the

---


8 The term ‘romanticism’, as will become obvious, is not restricted to the movement of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but is used in a broader sense.

Covenanter and Bonnie Prince Charlie – reveal the tenor of his mind. Furthermore, Buchan was a Scot and, on his own acknowledgement, the Scots have more than their share of romance.\textsuperscript{10}

Buchan’s romanticism was a considerable influence on his life. In his foreword to the Penguin series of John Buchan’s novels, William Buchan writes that the theme of his father’s life is that of a passionate romanticism.\textsuperscript{11} Buchan’s friend, the novelist Catherine Carswell, writes of him, “He was indeed romantic . . . generating action continually from romance. Romance was at the source of his activity . . . romance and religion. That pietas by which he was throughout informed and directed, derived from both.”\textsuperscript{12} Even as a child, his strongly romantic nature was evident. It determined the nature of the games that he and his siblings played in the manse gardens at Pathhead and Glasgow, and at Broughton on the Borders. That they were highly imaginative activities can be seen in a poem that Buchan wrote in memory of his brother William, to whom he dedicated his biography on Montrose:

\begin{quote}
When we were little wandering boys,
And every hill was blue and high,
On ballad days 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.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

\textbf{Buchan’s Understanding of Romanticism}

According to Charles Williams, romanticism defines an attitude, a manner of receiving experience. He instances Dante who, on seeing Beatrice in Florence, was filled with reverence and the desire to know


more of her. All Dante’s work thereafter consisted in his attempts to increase his worship and knowledge of the image created through the romantic love which he felt for the girl. The image conveyed to him was that of “nobility, of virtue, of the redeemed life and in some sense of Almighty God himself.”¹⁴ This is Coleridge’s “primary imagination, ‘creating’ its own world from visible stimuli” and the very essence of romanticism.¹⁵ It is the sense of wonder and curiosity aroused in the mind by the beholding of a person, nature, a building, place or event. An image is conveyed that is not to be identified with the object viewed but yet does not exist without it. Like a true romantic, Dante looked not on the physical Beatrice only but beyond her. He saw the things which, for him, she represented: things in the moral and spiritual realms.

This was also the experience of Charles Williams himself. R.J. Reilly affirms that the work of Williams (along with that of others) is a “deliberate and conscious attempt to revive certain well-known doctrines and attitudes of romanticism and to justify these by showing that they have not merely literary but religious validity.” He goes further than this, claiming that Williams creates a literary and religious construct whose purpose “is to defend romanticism by showing it to be religious.”¹⁶

For Dante, beholding Beatrice was the experience that aroused his sense of wonder and curiosity, and she became, for him, the image of things in the world of religious truth. For Wordsworth, nature in her various forms and moods provided the same kind of image. One of his major works, The Prelude, makes it clear that, for Wordsworth, nature was the image by which his fertile imagination perceived the good and noble life, and the being and character of God himself.¹⁷ Wordsworth’s sense of awe and curiosity was aroused by nature and with his imagination he could see within and beyond her. For Wordsworth, communion with nature was a religious experience, a sanctifying experience. In his poetry, it transforms

his attitude to life, determines his values and provides the source of his strength and joy. It is not mere nature that lies at the heart of the poet's experience but rather the unseen things that lie beyond it.

For Robert Louis Stevenson, romanticism is 'the poetry of circumstances.' He means by this the pleasures, longings and anticipations called up by the circumstances in which one is placed at any particular time. He finds his images in places, buildings and scenery:

The sight of a pleasant arbor puts it in our mind to sit there. One place suggests work, another idleness, a third early rising and long rambles in the dew. The effect of night, of any flowing water, of lighted cities, of ships, of the open ocean, calls up in the mind an army of anonymous desires and pleasures. Something, we feel, should happen; we know not what, yet we proceed in quest of it . . . Some places speak distinctly. Certain dank gardens cry aloud for a murder; certain old houses demand to be haunted; certain coasts are set aside for shipwreck . . . The old Hawes Inn at the Queen's Ferry makes a similar call upon my fancy . . . There is some story, unrecorded or not yet complete which must express the meaning of that inn more fully. So it is with names and faces.18

We have cited these three examples of the romantic temperament because Buchan's romanticism encompassed all three. He found his images in people, nature and places. Buchan, like Dante, found a primary image in an historical individual, namely, Montrose, the Presbyterian Cavalier of the seventeenth century. In him, Buchan saw a romantic figure, the complete paladin, full of grace and courtesy. He fights against odds and scribbles immortal songs in his leisure; he is a great leader; the ideal of manhood: the 'moderate' man who thinks deeply about the issues of life and, seeing his way clear, acts decisively; he eschews fanaticism, on the one hand, and weak compromise, on the other; he is the man who, appreciating the past, will build on it for the future; he is tolerant of the opinions and convictions of others and would have unity among Christians – the burning issue of the day – on the basis of the

essentials of Christianity; he dies, in the end, like an ancient hero. Such is the figure of John Graham, Marquis of Montrose, in Buchan’s eyes. According to Janet Adam Smith, “Buchan’s Montrose, was a shining symbol of a life lived with intelligence, conviction, force and grace – and with an assurance of a world beyond.”\textsuperscript{19} In \textit{Witch Wood}, Montrose is more than a symbol of the ideal man, he is a Christ figure. The reverence and devotion given to him by Katrine Yester and David Sempill are more than that usually afforded to ordinary humans.

For Buchan, nature also functioned as a symbol of the good life, the unseen world and the God that lay behind both. His autobiography reveals the profound effect that his natural surroundings had upon him. The natural features surrounding the manse at Pathhead became images to conjure up the characters and concepts Buchan found in the Bible and \textit{The Pilgrim’s Progress} with which he was so familiar.\textsuperscript{20} In their play, he and the other Buchan children named features and objects after the places and people found in the Scriptures and Bunyan’s Christian classic. The seashore and the Firth of Forth also stirred the vivid imaginations of the Buchan children. The border country of Scotland especially evoked romantic images in Buchan. The hills, burns and meadows became images of other things and other worlds. For example, Buchan tells of a tramp along a drove-road in the teeth of the wind and rain, while mists swirled down the glens. He felt he was “contending joyfully with something kindly at heart, something to stir the blood”.\textsuperscript{21} Through the natural world, he experiences anticipations of events that are about to happen, sees visions of eternity and enjoys the peace of other worlds. At times, through certain ‘triggers’, he has the illusion of living in another age.\textsuperscript{22}

When Buchan describes the effect upon Anthony Lammass of his surroundings in \textit{The Free Fishers}, he is telling us something about himself. Looking on his companions and their activities on the boat as

\textsuperscript{19} Smith, \textit{Biography}, p.235.
\textsuperscript{21} Buchan, \textit{Memory}, p.29.
\textsuperscript{22} Buchan, \textit{Memory}, pp.119-123.
they are sailing for their great adventure, 'Nancy' feels as though he has slipped back through a crack in time to a life which he once tried a hundred years ago; it is comforting and familiar, yet desperately exciting. When they reach land and disembark,

there descended upon Nancy an afflatus of which he was half ashamed. When he stretched his legs over the first miles of furry common he could have sung; when before moonrise the darkness closed in thicker upon them and they all stumbled over ditches and tussocks, he wanted to roar with laughter . . . there were moments when he longed to run, so compelling did he feel the vitality in blood and sinew.23

In contrast to romantic experiences of pleasure, Buchan records moments of terror. On the Bavarian mountains both he and the guide were seized with uncontrollable fear. Both fled the mountain in panic. Buchan thought that the guide had seen Pan.24 There is no doubt that, in Witch Wood, when describing the terror that overtakes David Sempill in the glade of the wood before the pagan altar — a terror that causes David to flee in panic — Buchan is saying something about his own experience.25 His daughter Alice writes that her father,

often experienced when walking alone on the moors an intimation of the power of the lonely hills that would send him headlong in search of running water or grazing sheep, in medical language called agoraphobia. Frontiers like this can be stumbled on unawares, passing a point no more than a line, a sheet of glass that divided the here and now from the unknowable.26

There were other images beside that of nature. Giving his own impressions of romanticism, Buchan in Book of Escapes and Hurried Journeys — a book full of romantic characters and the deeds which evoke a sense of wonder (the escape of Bonnie Prince Charlie after Culloden, the deeds of 'The Great Montrose' in Scotland, the ride of Dick King from

24 Buchan, Memory, pp.135-136.
Durban to Grahamstown) writes:

I have never yet seen an adequate definition of Romance . . . 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."

Then there were towns and habitations, in Buchan’s experience, whose appearance unleashed the imagination, conveying the anticipation of wonderful things about to happen, or begged for a story to interpret them. Of the former, Buchan gives an unmistakable example in his collection of short stories, The Moon Endureth. The impressions of the narrator in “The Company of the Marjolaine”, on entering Santa Chiora after marching for hours along a very dusty road, are almost numinous:

The little town had an air of mystery which foretells adventure. Why is it, that a dwelling or a countenance catches the fancy with the promise of some strange destiny? I have houses in my mind which I know will some day and somehow be intertwined oddly with my life . . . My first glimpse of Santa Chiora gave me this earnest of Romance . . . I forgot my grievous thirst and my tired feet in admiration and a vague expectation of wonders. Here, ran my thoughts, it is fated that Romance and I shall at last compass a meeting. Perhaps some Princess in need of my strong arm, or some affair of high policy is afoot in this jumble of old masonry.

The narrator is to meet the pathetic menage of the former ‘Bonnie Prince Charley’ who is in his decay. He is to witness also the visit of the politicians from the Americas who have come to invite ‘Charlie’ to be king of their now independent states. They depart in dismay after seeing the drunken decrepitude of the last of the Stewarts.

Of places begging for a story to interpret them, Buchan, acknowledging

the influence of Robert Louis Stevenson, writes in similar vein:

Being equally sensitive to the spells of time and of space, to a tract of years and a tract of landscape, I tried to discover the historical moment which best interpreted the ethos of a particular countryside and to devise the appropriate legend. Just as certain old houses... cried to Robert Louis Stevenson to tell their tales, so I felt the clamour of certain places for an interpreter.29

This concept comes to the fore in Witch Wood, a story that Buchan considered to be the best of his romances.30 In this novel, he writes of Broughton on Tweedside, under the name of Woodilee, and sets the romance in the seventeenth century at the time when the old Caledonian forest still covers much of Scotland, and when the zeal of the new Calvinism is contending with the ancient secret rites of Diana. Here Buchan has chosen a particular period in history, and created a particular legend, in order to give expression to the feelings and anticipations evoked by the remnants of the old Caledonian forest and by the old ruined church which lingered in his childhood haunts on the Borders of Scotland.

Romanticism, for Buchan the writer, is the sense of wonder and/or anticipations of extraordinary events and adventures evoked through the medium of certain people, deeds, scenery, places and even buildings. Such evocative stimuli are regarded, in the romantic imagination, as the intrusion of the unseen world into the world of time, sense and reason. Awareness of the intrusion of the unseen spiritual world comes about through the creative imagination, but it is not something unreal, a mere figment. It has the potency to determine one's course in life, the outcome of events, and one's destiny.

Illustrating the potency of such romance, the narrator in The Dancing Floor, Edward Leithen, states that romance is something in life that happens with "an exquisite aptness and a splendid finality, as if fate had

29 Buchan, Memory, p.196.
30 Buchan, Memory, p.196.
suddenly turned artist" – something which catches the breath because it seems so wholly right. It must happen to youth. Leithen, therefore, goes about life expecting remarkable things to happen, "waiting like an old pagan for the descent of the goddess."31 Once only has he caught the shimmer of her wings. Leithen is not a Christian at this time of his life, so the power that ‘shapes our ends’ is Fate the Artist. With a believer like Dickson McCunn, an elder of the Kirk, it is Providence that ordains what shall happen, and Providence determines the success of adventures, having the power to change one’s destiny.

Intimation of the intervention of romance might be given by a stretch of country such as is afforded to Dickson McCunn. This retired grocer, who first appears in Hunting Tower, has gone out on a hiking trip looking for romance, and the sight of The Cruives, a peninsula with a village set in its midst and a stream on either side, arouses in his mind images and anticipations of adventures that are to affect his life and destiny. He is not disappointed.32 On the other hand, such intimations might come through no identifiable source, as in the case of Jakie Galt. Fate, it appears, has given him intimations of a great adventure that lies just around the corner. He becomes conscious of a faint but growing and delicious sense of excitement; he crosses the border of the humdrum world and is in a land of enchantments; he is awaiting something – or something is awaiting him.33

Romantic characters, therefore, such as Leithen and McCunn, go about life looking for impressions and expecting adventures. They believe in transcendent influences which determine events and shape destiny. Intimation of such events may come through a house, a face, a country scene or river, and through such ‘images’, one’s imagination may be fired, one’s awareness intensified, to a fever of expectation. The same images stimulate the imagination to comprehend spiritual realities. According to C.S. Lewis, the romantic’s awareness of other worlds is “not of religion

but of imagination; the land of longing, the earthly paradise, the garden east of the sun and west of the moon,”34 but because of his Christian background, Buchan’s awareness of other worlds had a depth not found in the secular romantic.

Buchan’s novels are redolent with romanticism. His main characters are romantics and their adventures are romances. As romanticism is a reaction against cold rationalism and seeks freedom unhindered by the rigidities of dogma, whether in religion or the arts, Buchan’s romanticism was bound to create tensions when it came up against the well-defined Calvinism of his father and his Church. Much of the orthodox Calvinism that he learned from the Presbyterian creeds and his father’s teaching, he filtered through his romantic mind. Buchan responded like his character Philip of Beaumanoir, who takes the mysteries of the Church as food for his bold fancy, reshapes them and strips them of all their terrors.35

Therefore, the Calvinism which Buchan professed to hold was a Calvinism coloured by romanticism. The latter determined to a considerable degree his religious outlook. He could not as a romantic subscribe to a fixed creed. Romantics are not realists, they interpret what they see. They put their own colouring on what they observe. This is what Buchan did with the Christianity that he found at home, in the Bible and in The Pilgrim’s Progress.

His romanticism inclined him to the Christian Platonism of the seventeenth century Divines, as we shall see in a further chapter. In this way, he endeavoured to come to terms with his Christianity.

Classical Influence
Buchan was a classical scholar and influenced deeply, not only by the philosophy of the ancient writers, but also, and especially, by their style. Buchan’s son, William, says that the contents of his father’s novels were “encompassed and kept in place by ideals of moderation, taste and sense which belonged, perhaps, more to the Golden Age of Rome rather than to

35 Buchan, Path of the King, p.112.
the Scotland of John Knox".36 Buchan seems to have fallen under the spell of the classics at Hutchinson's Grammar School in Glasgow in his seventeenth year. He was influenced by an outstanding teacher, James Cadell, who awakened Buchan to an interest in Greek and Latin literature. For Cadell, the classics were the humanities in the broadest sense and he conveyed to his pupils "a sense of their intrinsic greatness and their continuing significance."37

With his appetite whetted for the classics, Buchan went to Glasgow University. There he came under the influence of the young, dynamic and innovative Gilbert Murray, Professor of Ancient Greek Language and Literature. His lectures were "kindling of the mornings" for Buchan.38 The young Professor was to have a profound influence on the lad from the Scottish manse. They developed a close friendship and Buchan dedicated his first novel, Sir Quixote of the Moors, to his mentor and friend. Murray was a 'Greek', specialising in Ancient Greek language and literature, while Buchan was a 'Roman'. In his History of Rome, Cyril E. Robinson sets out the difference between a 'Greek' and a 'Roman'. It is important to bear in mind this difference, since it has much to do with Buchan's temperament and has a bearing on Buchan's novels:

Where men seek to solve the problems of existence by an intellectual effort to understand more fully the mysteries of their own selves or of the world around them, there consciously or unconsciously they are following in the wake of the Greek Pioneers of thought, and such an effort will tend inevitably to produce the old result — a reasoned distrust of traditional beliefs and conventions, an opposition of the individual judgement to the dictates of authority, and a reaching forth to fresh and often disturbing experiments for the enlightening or improving the world. Where, on the other hand, they prefer the more secure but less adventurous guidance of some well-established system of discipline and habit, where the moulding of character is held of more importance than the unfettered exercise of intellectual

36 See 'Note on the Author' in the Penguin series of Buchan's novels, published in 1956. William Buchan was the unattributed author of this Note; see William Buchan, Memoir, p. 3.
37 Smith, Biography, p. 27.
38 Buchan, Memory, p. 34.
powers, where above all, the independence of the individual is kept in strict subordination to the claims of community or State or Church, there – sometimes to our advantage, and sometimes to our bane – breathes the spirit of Ancient Rome."\textsuperscript{39}

The difference in the inclinations of Murray and Buchan did not hinder their close friendship or prevent Murray from inspiring Buchan to pursue studies in Greek. In any case, Buchan was not a pure ‘Roman’; there was a considerable amount of the ‘Greek’ in him. The traits of the Greek mind, as outlined above by Robinson, were in evidence in Buchan, and he was too fond of Plato, and too much of a romantic, to be otherwise than disposed towards Greek thought. Murray first knew the ‘treasure’ he had in his class when Buchan came to him to ask why Bacon had quoted the Greek philosopher Democritus in Latin. The seventeen-year old Buchan was editing a new edition of Bacon’s essays for a London publisher and wanted to know where Bacon would have obtained a translation of Democritus in Latin!\textsuperscript{40}

While Buchan was fairly proficient in Latin, thanks to his father’s tuition, his knowledge of the Greek language was rudimentary. Through Murray, however, he was able to understand something of the Greek spirit and to come under the spell of the classic discipline in letters and life. Under his professor’s “delicate critical sense, his imaginative insight into high matters and his gentle and scrupulous humanism,”\textsuperscript{41} Buchan read widely in both literatures, not confining himself to prescribed texts. The Border country of Scotland, where he spent his long holidays with his relatives, also helped. It had been given an aura of classical convention by Nicole Burne the Violer, and “Pan playing on his aiten reed” was always present to Buchan’s imagination in the green valleys of the Border country.\textsuperscript{42} So stimulated was he by his fancy, that he read with gusto classical poetry while on holiday.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{41} Buchan, \textit{Memory}, p.34.
\textsuperscript{42} Buchan, \textit{Memory}, p.34.
\textsuperscript{43} Buchan, \textit{Memory}, p.35.
When Buchan went up to Oxford in 1895 and entered Brasenose College, he specialised in the classics as he had done at Glasgow. In studying for his Oxford Classical Moderations, Buchan had to concentrate on both Roman and Greek texts. He studied with H.F. Fox as tutor in preparing for his Honour Moderations and found the Greek somewhat difficult. He made progress but only attained to Second Class in the examinations. This made him work harder for the Greats. He was placed in the First Class after his successful completion of the final examinations. Much of his reading in the ancient literature of Greece and Rome was done over the long vacations at Broughton and elsewhere.

Buchan was persuaded that his preoccupation with the classics was the happiest thing that could have happened to him. He considered that it gave him a standard of values, and that to live close to great minds for a while was the best kind of education. The classics enjoined humility; they widened one’s sense of the joy of life and taught one its littleness and transience; they exalted the dignity of human nature and “insisted on its frailties and the aídos with which the temporal must regard the eternal.”\textsuperscript{44} Buchan believed that here he lost the chance of becoming a rebel, and instead became profoundly convinced of the dominion of an unalterable law. His conclusion was that he could not think of a “more precious viaticum than the classics of Greece and Rome, or a happier fate than that one’s youth should be intertwined with their world of clear mellow lights, gracious images and fruitful thoughts.”\textsuperscript{45} He made a minute study of Plato’s \textit{Republic} and Aristotle’s \textit{Ethics}, a training which he considered to be one of the best in the world.\textsuperscript{46}

Buchan maintained that classical literature was especially valuable to those who believed that time enshrines and does not destroy, and to those who wished to interpret rightly the past.\textsuperscript{47} Here we note the influence of the Roman classics, for, as Robinson’s definition implies, the

\textsuperscript{44} Buchan, \textit{Memory}, pp.35-36.
\textsuperscript{45} Buchan, \textit{Memory}, p.36.
\textsuperscript{47} Buchan, \textit{Memory}, p.36.
'Roman' is conservative in matters of the family and the State, and Buchan thought highly of Rome's statecraft and regarded it as the model to follow and build upon. Buchan's biography of Augustine bears this out.48 He was convinced that there was no other literature like the classics, able to furnish the same totality of life — a complete world recognisable as such, a humane world, yet one untouchable by decay and death.49 In consequence, during the First World War, Buchan found consolation from its futility by reading Thucydides, Virgil and Plato.50

The classics had great influence on the style and narration of Buchan's literature. He tells us himself that they corrected a young man's passion for rhetoric, and that he learned sound doctrine — "the virtue of a clean bare style, of simplicity, of a hard substance and an austere pattern."51 Buchan's son, William, asserts that his father's romanticism was voluntarily curbed by classical discipline: that his reverence for ancient Rome and Roman thought kept his ambition as a creative writer within bounds and enabled him first to conceive and then to execute plans which were Roman in their reasonableness. According to William, this can be seen in Buchan's novels where he "tells of characters of pre-eminent strangeness and of wild and desperate adventures, in a style as balanced, economical and lucid as the most fastidious Latinist could wish."52 William believes that his father's success was due to the qualities of romanticism and classicism; that he had an undimmed belief in the grandeur of the human spirit, a passion for contest and high adventure, all kept in place by the ideals of moderation, taste and a sense which he learned from ancient Rome.53

As to the spiritual and moral influence of the classics, A.C. Turner, in his short but perceptive biography of Buchan, maintains that Buchan possessed the Roman qualities which Cicero defined as gravitas, pietas.

49 Buchan, Memory, pp.32-36.
50 Buchan, Memory, p.167.
51 Buchan, Memory, p.35.
52 Note on the Author in Penguin edition of Buchan's novels, p.3.
53 William Buchan, Memoir, p.11.
and simplicitas.54 These qualities are to be found in the characters of his novels. Certainly, Anthony Lammas, Professor of Logic and Rhetoric at Saint Andrew’s University, and hero of The Free Fishers, possesses them in a high degree. He takes a serious view of life, and has tremendous loyalty to the social, academic and ecclesiastical grouping to which he belongs; he is single-minded, sincere and without duplicity. Buchan had seen these same qualities in his own father.

The Platonic philosophy of life, as interpreted by the Cambridge Platonists – that one should live in harmony with nature, aim at a balanced life, avoiding the extremes that promote inner conflict, and so possess inward tranquillity – appealed to Buchan.55 It suited his temperament. He was averse to all extremes and shied away from conflict situations. The Calvinism of his Church and his father was confrontational in its essence. It was uncompromising. The ‘Five Points of Calvinism’ stab to the heart of any form of humanism. According to these, human beings are ruined, lost and helpless, entirely dependent on the sovereign grace of God for salvation. These teachings of Calvin along with the doctrine of eternal judgement – the wrath of God to be visited on the unbelieving and impenitent – are bound to provoke reactions of anger and rejection. The consistent Calvinist believed in the saying of Jesus that he came not to bring peace but a sword (Matthew 10:34), the sword being Jesus’ word, his doctrines. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Buchan, “sloughed off his father’s Calvinism theologically in the sense of a belief in predestination and of the Saved-Damned alternatives that inspired his father’s preaching in the rain outside the John Knox Free Kirk.”56 They were ‘conflict’ doctrines anathema to Christian Platonism.

When Buchan assures us that his boyhood Calvinism was broadened, mellowed and confirmed by his reading of the classics, we have to ask what he meant by Calvinism. It certainly does not mean the Calvinism of his father or of his Church. Buchan’s Calvinism would be the ‘Calvinism’ of the Cambridge Christian Platonists, as he saw it, including the concept

55 See below, chap. 4, pp 61-67.
56 Smith, Biography, p.286.
of the majesty of God – his omnipotence and omnipresence which the Genevan Reformer taught and the Presbyterian creed defined so clearly. It was the creed believed in by the unenlightened Leithen of Sick Heart River. Buchan believed, along with others, that similar teaching was found in the writings of Plato and his successors. As we have already suggested above, Buchan as a romantic had filtered his father’s Calvinistic doctrines through his imagination, reshaped them and “stripped them of all terrors.” Buchan had taken or modified Calvinist doctrines to suite his Platonic temperament. He detected a similar emphasis in both Calvin and Plato on such concepts as the dignity of man, the transitory nature of human existence and the transcendence of the eternal over the temporary.

As Paul Elmer More understands him, Plato adopted Socrates’ philosophy that identified virtue with knowledge. Also that no man sinned or erred willingly. More concludes, “Thus we have two theses, the identification with ignorance and the involuntariness of evil. ‘We know that no soul is voluntarily ignorant of anything.’ Involuntary ignorance lies behind all evil.” This is not the view of evil that Buchan present in his novels. For him, evil is wilful, deliberately chosen. It is not to be overcome, as More predicates of Plato, by instruction, but by the crushing of the evil doers. As will be seen in a later chapter, Buchan expresses in his novels a concept of evil that is not Platonic and a doctrine of salvation that is uniquely Christian. In spite of the accommodations made to his romanticism and classicism, Buchan’s basic Christianity remained and there are religious concepts expressed in his novels, particularly through his characters, for which he is indebted to none except his Christian faith and his Presbyterian background. It is intended in this thesis to argue such a case.

**The Tensions in Buchan**

It was not only Buchan’s temperament and his Platonist-modified

60 See below, chap. 5, pp.92-97.
Presbyterian creed that determined the character of his novels. There are also conflicting aspects of his character which are in tension, and they assist in producing the rich variety of his characters and plots. His Presbyterian ethos nurtured such tensions.

First of all, there is the tension between reason and intuition. Buchan was a man who lived by reason, and it appears in the many non-fiction books and articles that he produced, and in the way he conducted his life. But there is also the intuitive side, the inclination to the supernatural in his nature that appears in his novels and short stories. Peter Haining has collected fifteen short stories on the supernatural from Buchan's pen, and they are all about a side of human experience that has little to do with reason. There are stories of devil possession; of evil influences; even of the possession of one man by the spirit of a dead brother; of unnatural, fantastic creatures which are inimical to human well-being. Most of the stories are in the 'horror' category.

Similarly, David Daniell has edited two volumes of Buchan short stories taken from various sources. There is the same smack of the occult in some of them. Even in Buchan's autobiography the occult appears in his experiences. He tells of strange, ecstatic experiences in South Africa, of terror in the Swiss Alps, of being transported in time back to the days of the Jacobite rebellion in Scotland. This tension between reason and the world of the supernatural appears in his novels. The Gap in the Curtain has the element of horror. The poor Robert Goodeve, the intelligent, successful politician, is driven mercilessly to his end through a modern version of the pointing of the bone. He is obsessed by fear coming from a reading of his obituary in The Times dated a year ahead. Trying in desperation every form of escapism to be rid of his fears, he brings on a fatal heart attack on the predicted date. Paul Galliard, in Sick Heart River, the brilliant financier and socialite is more fortunate. He is

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63 Buchan, Memory. pp.119-123.
wrenched from his milieu of success and comfort by the call of his conscience and driven out of his mind and almost out of his existence by the fear, or horror, of the North. He is saved by a love that drives out fear.  

Secondly, there is the tension in Buchan which arose from what he inherited from the widely differing personalities of his parents. He received from his father a deeply romantic nature, drawn to wonders and transcendent experiences in life, and from his mother, economic common sense. This tension is exemplified in the character of Dickson McCunn in *Hunting Tower*. McCunn is a grocer by trade and keeps firmly to the road of commercial enterprise, yet he is a passionate romantic whose literature feeds his romantic fancy. He meets his destiny on a romantic tramp in the south of Scotland. His creative imagination and his business sense both contribute to the success of his adventure. Anthony Lammas, Professor of Logic and Rhetoric at St. Andrews in *The Free Fishers*, is similar. He is so competent in business that he is put in charge of the finances of the university and does much of its work in this field. However, he is a passionate romantic, taken up with a sense of adventure, intensely affected by natural surroundings and involved in a romantic brotherhood. Buchan himself can have transcendent experiences on the green haughs of the Border, and elsewhere, and can carefully plan his economic future and work like a beaver to accomplish it. This tension is in much of his work.

A third tension in Buchan was that between the ‘Bohemian’ in him, expressed in his *Scholar Gypsies* – describing one who has forsaken society to travel the roads – and his willing commitment to formal and traditional roles. He undertook the offices of Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and Governor General of Canada with such style that his love of pomp and ceremony was obvious. The other side of his nature is seen in characters like Midwinter,

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in the novel of that name. He has been a gentleman and scholar but has resigned his station and renounced society to live close to nature on the edge of the woods and the moors. He has no commitment to King, Church or Party. He is one of the ‘naked’ men. Another character that sets this dualism in Buchan is Sandy Arbuthnot, or Clanroyden as he comes to be known, a character who appears in several novels. A member of the upper classes, and well received in polite society, he is, at the same time, a man who can forsake the company of the genteel and be quite at home with the riffraff of the world.

Lastly, there is the tension that existed between the teachings that Buchan received in his orthodox Calvinistic, Presbyterian home, and the teachings that he received and the literature that he read, in connection with his studies at the Universities of Glasgow and Oxford. We have noted that Buchan endeavoured to find a via media in Christian Platonism but there is a dualism in his work. Fate and Providence go hand in hand; Zeno and Plato ride side by side with St. John and St. Paul; humanist competence and self-sufficiency and Calvinistic total dependence upon the Almighty jostle each other in the narratives; the seeking of self-approval, and the acting from the love of God and for others, are contrasting motivations in the heroes. This tension – as with the other tensions – produced good stories and fascinating characters. Richard Hannay, who appears in five novels, is one such. The ‘horse’ that carries him to success in his adventures, is called fatalism one day, and Providence on the day after.

It is a well known that tensions in writers are productive of much literature. With the rise of romanticism, and the tensions that it created, there came a flood of literature. What is true of a literary movement, is true of the individual writer. Salman Rushdie, for example, author of The Satanic Verses, maintains that the stimulus for his books comes from the tension between the two cultures in his background, East and West.69 The tensions that were in Buchan had a similar effect upon him and were responsible in part for his prolific output of literature, its richness and

diversity. So an old Bible riddle receives a new application, "Out of the strong came forth sweetness" (Judges 14:14).

**Buchan's Novels**

Over the span of some forty-five years (1895-1941), Buchan published a total of twenty-seven novels, in addition to various other publications (biographies, essays, histories, journalistic articles). The novels and their year of publication are listed below, in chronological order:

1895  Sir Quixote of the Moors
1898  John Burnet of Barnes
1899  A Lost Lady of Old Years
1900  The Half Hearted
1906  A Lodge in the Wilderness
1910  Prester John
1915  The Thirty Nine Steps
1916  Salute To Adventurers
      The Power House
      Greenmantle
1919  Mr. Standfast
1921  The Path of the King
1922  Hunting Tower
1923  Midwinter
1924  The Three Hostages
1925  John Macnab
1926  The Dancing Floor
1927  Witch Wood
1929  The Courts of the Morning
1930  Castle Gay
1931  The Blanket of the Dark
1932  The Gap in the Curtain
1933  A Prince of the Captivity
1934  The Free Fishers
1935  The House of the Four Winds
1936  The Island of Sheep
1941  Sick Heart River
There are several points worthy of note from this list of novels before we proceed to demonstrate the profound influence of Buchan's Presbyterian milieu on these narratives.

1. Our estimation of the effect of this milieu on Buchan's novels is made easier since he put so much of himself and his experiences into his stories. He told his sister Anna that when he wrote stories, he himself invented, while she in her writing was always remembering. This, however, is not strictly true. Invent he did, and Buchan's imagination soars in his narratives, but he also remembers, as we shall see in a later analysis of the novels. Buchan wrote much of himself into Edward Leithen, many of his experiences on the Borders into The Thirty Nine Steps and Castle Gay, and a good deal of his background into Prester John and other novels.

2. While using Christian themes for his stories, Buchan gives them a mundane application, in contrast to the application given in his father's preaching. The spiritual aspirations of Buchan's characters find their fulfilment in this present life and society rather than in the life and society of the heavenly New Jerusalem. For example, in the novel The Path of the King, the words of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, meant for those who seek a heavenly country, are applied on a mundane level: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on earth" (Hebrews 11:31). These words are given to the dying Nancy Linkhorn (Lincoln). In her vision she sees her uncouth son, Abraham, as the true seeker, the pilgrim, who has found what others have not. He is to be the saviour of mankind. What Abraham Lincoln seeks and finds however, is not the heavenly New Jerusalem but true democracy here on earth. In some respects, therefore, Buchan resembles the writers of the Old Testament whose hopes and aspirations, however spiritual, apply largely

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71 Buchan, Path of the King, p.269.
to this present life; it is the life here and now which occupies their
attention, despite hints of immortality.

3. Buchan regarded some of his novels as 'pot-boilers', and never
intended them to be representative of his religious creed. However, his
religious background comes out even in them. He thought otherwise of
his historical novels and especially Witch Wood which he regarded as his
best. In the latter — as well as in his biographies — much of his creed is to
be found.

4. There is a change in atmosphere in Buchan's novels with the passage of
time. This is because he puts so much of himself into his novels and is, in
one sense, recording his response to a changing society. The early novels
— Sir Quixote of the Moors, John Burnet of Barnes, A Lost Lady of Old
Years and The Half-Hearted — written at the end of the last century, or the
beginning of the present one, have the atmosphere of gentlemen in the
pursuit of honour. M. de Rohaine, the French Knight, John Burnet,
Francis Birkenshaw and Lewis Haystoun, seek honour above all things.
The next two novels begin to show a change in focus: The Lodge in the
Wilderness and Prester John both have an ethos of Empire in their
narrative content. With the advent of the First World War, however, we
find an atmosphere of spies and traitors seeking to overthrow the Allied
cause and civilisation (The Power House, The Thirty Nine Steps,
Greenmantle, Mr. Standfast). During this period also, interwoven with
these novels, Buchan wrote an historical novel, Salute to Adventurers.
This is the pattern Buchan is to follow in his writing career. He will
interweave his adventure stories, or his 'pot-boilers', with serious
historical novels.

Following the end of the First World War, there are novels with an
atmosphere of a post-traumatic, unsettled society, threatened by
unscrupulous men who are attempting to overthrow established
institutions and order. Hunting Tower, The Three Hostages, and even
John Macnab — in as far as it deals with post-War ennui — and The
Dancing Floor, comprise this group. As usual there are serious historical
novenls interwoven – *Midwinter* and *The Path of the King*.

Following this sequence of novels, we find in the next chronological grouping an atmosphere suggestive of the threat of ideologies, such as Communism, in the novels, *The Courts of the Morning*, *Castle Gay*, *The Prince of the Captivity* and *The House of the Four Winds*. Interwoven as usual are the historical novels: *Witch Wood*, *The Blanket of the Dark*, *The Three Fishers*. Included in this section also is a quasi science-fiction novel, *The Gap in the Curtain*, reflecting the growing interest in time-travel.

The final two novels, *The Island of Sheep* and *Sick Heart River*, have a powerful sense of commitment. They reflect the seriousness of the political situation of the period leading up to the Second World War. Richard Hannay is brought out of an easy, pleasant life to face hardship and danger in order to meet a long-standing commitment to a former colleague in Africa. Edward Leithen makes the ultimate commitment, giving his own life to save the lives of others and doing it from love to God and to man. Similar commitment would be called for, in Buchan’s view, under the growing threat from dictators and in the face of the outbreak of a new struggle against resurgent evil as epitomised, for Buchan, in the Second World War.

**Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis argues that the ethos and environment of Presbyterianism is the crucible out of which Buchan’s narratives flow. In order to demonstrate this, we need to examine the way in which Presbyterianism unfolds alongside other major influences on Buchan’s life and writing. Having so far outlined the basic issue involved in this discussion, and briefly considered the scope of Buchan’s novels in the Introduction, the structure of the remaining chapters is as follows:

**Chapter Two. The Origins of Buchan’s Presbyterian Milieu.** The coming and development of Presbyterianism in Scotland is briefly dealt with in this chapter. The purpose of this chapter is to build up the background of
Buchan’s milieu and to explore the ethos which he inherited and which considerably influenced his thinking and outlook.

Chapter Three. The Presbyterian Home. This chapter describes Buchan’s home life and the character of his mother and father. It treats also of the influence of his home as a manse, the centre of church activity. It also describes the nature and influence of the congregational life to which he was exposed.

Chapter Four. Creating the Model. The purpose of this chapter is to discover the outlook of Buchan, and the convictions and values which determined the characteristic climate of his novels. To this end, the nature of the teaching which Buchan would have received in his Presbyterian milieu, the modifications he made to that teaching and the creed he adopted in adult life, are examined. The Presbyterian ethos that remained to influence his novels, and the tensions that arose in Buchan which helped to produce and shape his novels, are set out.

Chapter Five. The Model Applied. This chapter applies the model created in the previous chapter and shows how Buchan’s convictions and values unfold in the stories he wrote.

Chapter Six. The Pilgrim’s Rest. This chapter endeavours to demonstrate that in his last novel, Sick Heart River, Buchan’s philosophy of life and his religious creed find their ultimate expression, and his tensions their ultimate resolution.

Chapter Seven. Recapitulation. In the final chapter, the contents of the thesis, its themes and its aims are summarised and its thrust underlined. It is stated that in his character Sir Edward Leithen of Sick Heart River, Buchan has the archetype of all his heroes and the symbol of his own fulfilment.
Chapter 2
THE ORIGINS OF BUCHAN’S PRESBYTERIAN MILIEU

It is proposed in this chapter to examine the origins and spiritual characteristics, first, of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, and secondly, of the Free Church of Scotland. From this examination, we will discover the rock from which Buchan was hewn. We will perceive something of the atmosphere in which Buchan was reared, and the particular teaching to which he was exposed. Much of this was not congruent with his temperament and, later, he passed it by, since it meant nothing to him.1 At the same time, as we shall see in later chapters, there were certain religious teachings peculiar to Presbyterianism that nevertheless adhered to him and significantly influenced his novels.

It should be noted that while it can be said that John Buchan was reared in the atmosphere of Scottish Presbyterianism, it was Scottish Free Church Presbyterianism that was his immediate milieu. Much of that upbringing is expressed in his novels, in his use of religious concepts of the Free Church and his experiences within the Church, prior to his going up to Oxford. For example, the Gorbals Diehards in Hunting Tower are modelled on his Sunday School class in the John Knox Free Church in the Gorbals district of Glasgow.2 The opening chapter of Prester John is based on his experiences in the Free Kirk congregation at Pathhead, and could only have been written by someone brought up in that milieu.3

The Origins of Scottish Presbyterianism

In considering the origins of Scottish Presbyterianism, there is one name which stands our above all others, John Knox (1513-72). Initially a priest in the Roman Catholic Church, Knox came under the influence of George Wishart, the Reformer. He took on the role of body-guard to this itinerant preacher of Protestant doctrine. After Wishart’s arrest and martyrdom at St. Andrew’s, Scotland, Knox – at the time a tutor of a nobleman’s sons – took refuge in St. Andrew’s Castle with his young charges. The castle was held by Protestant extremists who had murdered the Roman Catholic Primate, Cardinal Beaton, holding him responsible for the death of Wishart. The French allies of the widowed Queen mother, Mary Regent of Scotland, sent ships to demolish the castle. On surrender, Knox, along with others, was dispatched to the French Galleys. Released after eighteen months through political influence, he served as a minister in the Church of England, assisting the English Reformers who flourished under the young king, Edward VI.

With the demise of Edward and the accession of Mary I, Knox fled from the fierce persecution of Protestants to the Continent. Eventually he settled in Geneva, came under the spell of John Calvin, and found in Geneva what he describes as ‘the perfect School of Christ’. He was strengthened in the teachings of Paul and Augustine which later Protestants were to call ‘the doctrines of grace’. Knox embraced the teaching of Calvin that nothing was to be admitted into the Church’s creed, polity, worship or practice but what was laid down explicitly or could be lawfully deduced, from the writings of the Old and New Testaments. Two other far-reaching doctrines rounded off Knox’s Calvinism: the priesthood of all believers and the participation in the Church’s government and administration by the laity in the office of

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elder.  

After an initial abortive visit to Scotland, Knox, armed with teachings that would affect the history and shape the destiny of Scotland, arrived on his native soil in 1559. His return was a response to an invitation from Scottish nobles desirous of religious reform. These nobles assisted him in his fight to establish Presbyterianism in Scotland. The Reformers had the Queen Mother (Mary of Guise) and her French allies to contend with. According to Norman Walker, the motives of some of these reforming nobles, Lords of the Congregation as they were later called, were by no means pure. Some genuinely wanted religious reform, others were politically motivated and others again had their eyes on the lands of the old Roman Catholic Church.

Under the influence of Knox's forceful preaching, and with the assistance of English troops (sent by a reluctant Elizabeth not yet recovered from the deafening effect of Knox's First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women), the Protestant nobles overcame the opposition and secured the withdrawal of the French troops to France. In 1560, the Scots Confession, a statement of Protestant doctrine and Presbyterian polity, was drawn up by Knox and his colleagues. In August of that year it was accepted and endorsed by the Scottish Parliament as expressing the religion of the Scottish people. A second document, a treatise on Church polity called The First Book of Discipline, was not endorsed by the Parliament. It had among other things the proposal that the patrimony of the Old Roman Church be used to provide for a minister of religion, a school, and a system of poor relief in every parish in the land. To implement this scheme the nobles would have had to give up lands that they had already seized. They were not so

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8 Renwick, Scottish Reformation, p.62.
9 Barnet, Makers of the Kirk, p.85.
11 A pamphlet written by Knox aimed at Mary of England, and Mary of Guise, regent of Scotland.
13 T.M. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1907, p.305.
enthusiastic for reform as to do this. However, the basic doctrines and the
elementary polity of the Presbyterian system were adopted and became
the distinguishing feature of the Scottish Church.

While Knox was the undoubted leader and inspiration for the
establishment of Presbyterianism in Scotland, the ground for it had
already been laid. Professor Renwick has drawn attention to several pre-
Reformation influences:

- the spiritual heritage left by the old Celtic Church;
- the influence of Lollardy brought back from Oxford by Scottish students;
- the teachings of John Hus brought home by Scottish travellers from
  the Continent;
- the steady percolation of Lutheran ideas;
- the perceived depravity of the Catholic clergy.14

Two other factors doubtless contributed to the success of the Reformed
movement: the public burning of Reformers, such as George Wishart and
Patrick Hamilton, which aroused public sympathy for the Reformed
cause, and the independent spirit of the Scottish people who resented
greatly what they saw as the the presumptuous claims of the Roman
papacy.

The Reformers had further conflict when the heir to the Scottish throne,
the young, recently widowed Mary, returned from France to claim her
throne. Her undoubted charm and pathetic situation won over to her side
some of the Protestant nobles. She was determined to return her country
to the Old Faith. Knox strongly resisted her efforts and became unpopular
in certain quarters for what was regarded as his unbending attitude to the
young Queen. Mary's undoing however, came about mainly through her
own behaviour. Her intimate relationship with Ritzio, her private
secretary; her alleged connivance in her husband Darnley's murder; and
her marriage to Boswell, the suspected assassin of her husband; all these
undid her fortunes. The crowds that cheered so enthusiastically when she

arrived from France were now crying, "burn the Whore".\textsuperscript{15} Mary was defeated in battle by the Protestant party and fled to England to cast herself on the unpredictable mercies of her jealous cousin, Queen Elizabeth I. The Protestants were left to continue their work.

**Completing the Task**

It was the second generation of Reformers who completed the task of establishing Presbyterianism in Scotland. Led by Andrew Melville, they produced *The Second Book of Discipline*, in which the fully graded system of Presbyterianism was set out. The Church was to be administered and governed by the General Assembly, Provincial Synods, Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions respectively. Elders were to assist in the government of the church.\textsuperscript{16} Leading ministers such as Andrew Melville and John Welch had their troubles. They had to battle with Mary's son, James VI, who, while a Protestant, was imbued with the doctrine of the 'Divine Right of Kings'.\textsuperscript{17} He considered himself supreme in the Church as well as in the State. He contended with the Reformers for control of the Church. He took affront at the independent-minded churchmen who took him by the sleeve, and reminded him that there were two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland: while he was the Head of the earthly kingdom, he was only a member in the heavenly one.\textsuperscript{18}

When Elizabeth of England died, James became King of England (as he already was of Scotland) and, with the power of the southern kingdom behind him, was able to exile the leading dissident Scottish ministers, appoint bishops in Presbytery, and gain some measure of control over the Kirk. James had enough sense not to push the Kirk and the Scottish people too far.\textsuperscript{19} It was otherwise with his son, Charles. Sincerely religious, Charles I, nevertheless, lacked both political understanding and integrity. Aided by his zealous and conformist henchmen, Archbishop Laud and the Earl of Strafford, he began a policy of political and religious

\textsuperscript{15} Antonia Fraser, *Mary Queen of Scots*, Methuen, London, 1985, p.397.
\textsuperscript{17} Barnet, *Makers of the Kirk*, p. 111.
coercion which was known as ‘thorough’. He introduced a Prayer Book into the Scottish Church as the first step to Anglicising it. The ensuing riot in Edinburgh, allegedly triggered off by the stool of one Jennie Geddes, became a catalyst for the Scots to draw up and sign (some with their blood) a National Covenant. All the subscribers pledged to uphold the Presbyterian Church and Religion with their lives. The Scots were roused to action and Charles, having severe difficulties with the English Parliament, was forced to back down. The offending legislation was withdrawn.

In the Civil War that followed, the Scots took the side of the English Parliament in which there was considerable Presbyterian sympathy, and assisted in the defeat of the King. However, when the Cromwell-dominated Parliament condemned and beheaded Charles I in 1649, the Scots proclaimed his son, Charles II, as sovereign. The Scots’ Presbyterian Army was shattered by Cromwell at Dunbar in 1650. When the Scots army invaded England to install their Charles II as monarch of both kingdoms, Cromwell received his “crowning mercy”. At Worcester, he utterly crushed the Scots under Leslie and their allies, the English Royalists. Until the year 1660, the year of the Restoration, the Scottish Kirk lay under the lenient hand of Cromwell, although its General Assembly was muzzled.

After the restoration of Charles II, the Scottish Kirk suffered from the Anglican reaction to Presbyterian zeal. The royal prerogative was used to establish Episcopacy in Scotland. Bishops and Archbishops were installed. Curates of the Anglican persuasion were ordained in vacant charges and all ministers of the Presbyterian Kirk were required to submit to the bishops. Those who would not submit were ejected from their charges. Thirty years of persecution followed for the non-conformists to the new

21 Collins, Heritage, pp.16-17.
regime. Ruinous fines, imprisonment, often with torture, transportation and even death were inflicted for non-compliance. It has been estimated that up to 18,000 people suffered severely in one way or another under the persecuting policy of the Scottish Council. Their orders to stamp out the Covenanting movement was carried out with ruthless severity by military commanders like Dalziel and Claverhouse.

James II, who succeeded his brother Charles II, through his over-zealous activity to restore the Roman faith to Britain provoked a reaction which unnerved him, and he fled the land. William of Orange landed at Torbay, Devon, to champion the Protestant cause, and even more so, to further his own political, anti-French ambitions. He became joint-Sovereign with his wife. This brought relief to the Scottish Kirk. The Revolution Settlement of 1690 guaranteed that Presbyterianism would be the religion of Scotland. It established the religious system and its ethos which was to have considerable effect on John Buchan the writer.

**Ethos of Scottish Presbyterianism**

Scottish Presbyterianism was neither just a theological system nor merely a distinctive ecclesiastical polity; it also carried its own ethos, its own brand of piety. It shaped one’s attitude to life. The fear of God lay at the heart of its piety. John Calvin, to whom the founding fathers of the Scottish Presbyterian Church, and their successors, owed so much, stressed in his teaching his belief in both the majesty and the mercy of God. In his commentary on Colossians 1:12, Calvin sets out these twin poles of his theology:

> As the name ‘God’ expresses majesty more strongly, so the name ‘Father’ conveys clemency and benevolence. It becomes us to contemplate both in God, that his majesty may inspire us with fear and reverence and that his fatherly love may win our confidence.

It was the working out of this dual emphasis that produced such a serious and devout spirit in Presbyterians. Life was thus lived under the eye of the Almighty and the deepest reverence was due to him. Life was pregnant with meaning and purpose. A casual attitude to life was unthinkable to such a Presbyterian. Under this influence, John Buchan had some difficulty when going to Oxford, in accommodating the 'laid-back' lifestyle of the English undergraduates. On one occasion he delivered a 'sermon' worthy of Knox to a group of inebriated first year undergraduates who were endeavouring to intimidate the Principal of Brasenose College.29

In the ethos of Presbyterianism, predestinarianism played its part. It was not intended to encourage fatalism in those who held it seriously. On the contrary its aim was to stimulate endeavour, for the believer was encouraged in the knowledge that he or she was engaged in an eternal purpose and that he or she would be sustained by an unchangeable and merciful Redeemer. In this worldview, all one's powers could be engaged in the task knowing that one would ultimately be successful. Buchan himself confesses that what he calls 'Calvin's unbending fatalism' does not make its votaries apathetic but moves them to a girded energy.30

Furthermore, we cannot overlook the part played by the teaching that every believer was a priest. It was seen as giving worth and dignity to the believer however lowly his station in life. The corollary to this, that there should be lay participation in the government of the Church, was intended to enhance the importance of those not in the ranks of the official clergy. Both these teachings appealed to, and fostered, the egalitarian and independent spirit of the Scottish people.

John Buchan was heir to these things. His plots, his characters and his resolutions of their dilemmas bear witness to that continuing

29 Smith, Biography, p.53.
inheritance. There is a seriousness in his heroes and heroines and purpose in their lives. Buchan believes, through his villains, that man's will is pitted against that of God. He endeavours to convince us that the individual's search for salvation through the world's philosophies is misdirected. The tension between the human search for 'salvation' through human powers and achievements, and the notion of 'salvation' as a sovereign act of God, forms a continuous thread throughout much of Buchan's writing. This could well reflect the personal tension which was intellectually created through Buchan's attempt to accommodate his Calvinism (as it related to humanity totally fallen) to the other philosophies which he had studied. These philosophies held a more optimistic view of man and his ability to achieve the balance of passions within himself, thus creating a 'good' individual and society.

The Scottish Church from the Seventeenth Century
The Revolution Settlement did not please everyone in the Kirk. Carstairs, the Presbyterian Chaplain to William of Orange who advised his Sovereign on Scottish Church affairs, got the best deal he could get in the circumstances. The followers of Richard Cameron, known as 'Cameronians' or 'Covenanters', were staunch supporters of the National Covenant. They had resisted to the death the attempt of the Stewart Monarchs to stamp out the movement. They were so displeased at the want of recognition of the National Covenant in the Settlement that they seceded from the National Church. They formed the first of what was to be several dissenting bodies in the Presbyterian Church in Scotland. They were later known as The Reformed Presbyterian Church.

The history of the Church of Scotland in the eighteenth century is mixed. On the one hand there are the positive aspects of the work of the Scottish Church. It promoted learning, and ensured that even the poorest, with ability, could get a good education and equip themselves for life. It encouraged enterprise and the pursuit of honourable ambition. Scots became international migrants taking their initiative and drive all over the world. It had a system of poor relief which, particularly in country

parishes, assisted the needy. It fostered a culture and literature based on the best models. The Church provided a forum in its General Assembly for the voice of Scotland to be heard, one in which the issues of the day could be debated. On the other hand, however, it became very intrusive into the lives of the people, meted out punishments more fitting for the State to inflict and took a negative attitude towards the innocent pleasures of life. It was severe towards deviants from the Faith.

The Origin of the Free Church of Scotland
In order to trace the origin of the Disruption of 1843, from which the Free Church of Scotland emerged as the viable alternative to the Established Church, and in whose ethos John Buchan was raised, we have to consider the strife that arose in the post-Revolution, Scottish Kirk. The Kirk's rulers, ministers and elders, were divided into two parties, the Moderates and the Evangelicals.

The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church concisely describes the Moderates of the Church of Scotland as:

the party in the ascendant in the second half of the eighteenth century, which held a more moderate conception of doctrine and discipline than their opponents (the 'Evangelicals'). They sought to be the friends of learning, culture and order and emphasised morality rather than dogma. They were opposed to the abolition of lay patronage, insisting that Presbyteries should induct patrons' presentees according to the law of the land, whether people called them of not.32

The Moderates regarded the Evangelicals as extremists referring to their opponents as 'High-Flyers'. Among the Moderates were men of great ability such as Hugh Blair, William Robertson and Alexander Carlyle.33 These men, with others of their party, were outstanding preachers and men of culture and learning. They mixed with the upper classes in

Scottish society and sought to excel in literature and the arts. They were ecclesiastics also with considerable administrative skills. They 'managed' the General Assembly in the interests of their own party. The Moderates, having the majority in the General Assembly the second half of the eighteenth century, used such strong measures in their opposition to the Evangelicals, that two secessions occurred. One led by the Erskine brothers, Ebenezer and Ralph, which became known as 'The Original Secession' and the other by Robert Gillespie, called 'The Relief Synod'. John Buchan expressed his opinion about the Moderates as follows: "The dominant party, the Moderates, made religion a thing of social decency and private virtues and their sober, if shallow creed was a stabilising factor in a difficult time." 34

The Evangelicals were men after the model of Christian in Pilgrim's Progress. They were Calvinists and Puritans, followers of John Knox. In their ministry, they emphasised the need for conversion through faith in Jesus Christ; for an ensuing life of piety including the abstinence from worldly pleasures and devotion to the means of grace. There were men of ability in their ranks, John Erskine, Andrew Thompson and later, Thomas Chalmers. The Evangelicals gradually gained the ascendancy in the Assembly and endeavoured to originate a Church of Scotland overseas mission. They were defeated in this by the Moderates. 35

It is relevant to this thesis to examine briefly the life and career of Thomas Chalmers, who may be rightly regarded as the father of the Free Church of Scotland. Chalmers began his ministry as a Moderate. When presented to the Parish of Kilmany, he continued as a lecturer in mathematics at the University of St. Andrew's, spending his week-ends in the parish. Chalmers underwent a remarkable conversion and began an intensive ministry among his parishioners. He was not doctrinaire in his Calvinism, and he stressed practical piety from the pulpit. He possessed considerable evangelistic zeal and missionary fervour, but his great passion was the 'Christian Commonwealth'.

35 Walker, Scottish Church History, p.124.
Chalmers envisioned a society imbued with a Christian spirit and Christian principles, through the ministry of the Church and the education of the Christian School. He saw in his mind an educated and godly peasantry, hardworking, thrifty, excelling in their callings, supporting each other on the day of trouble, especially their own kin. He wanted all his fellow Scots to be truly pious, respectable, independent and self-supporting. He loathed the very idea of the State intervening with Poor Relief. He believed it bred dependence on State handouts and discouraged the virtues of hard work, wise and proper management of resources and charity towards others. He believed that the State system made men and women slaves whereas the Christian Commonwealth made them free. Chalmers worked out his ideal in the country parish of Kilmany and then in a Glasgow city parish and finally, after the Disruption, in the West Port, Edinburgh.36

There is one event of the eighteenth century that cannot be overlooked for its relevance to this history. In 1712, the English-dominated Union Parliament passed a Patronage Act which gave Scottish landowners and others the privilege of presenting ministers to certain vacant parishes. This was a clear breach of the Revolution Settlement with the Church of Scotland and was to be the source of much trouble and conflict in the Kirk. The Moderates on the whole supported the Act, for they inclined towards the political establishment. The Evangelicals opposed it, on the grounds that it denied Christian people their right to elect a minister of their choice and because it fostered so many defections from the Old Kirk.37

In 1834, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, under the leadership of Chalmers, passed the Veto Act. This gave the ‘Heads of Families’ the right to refuse the presentee of the patron of a vacant parish

charge, if they considered him unsuitable. The passing of the Act appeared to the Moderates to be illegal, since they considered that it went contrary to the Patronage Act of 1712. This strong difference of opinion was to create a storm in the Church which led to the Disruption of 1843. Rejected presentees appealed to the Law Courts for vindication of their rights. The Courts upheld their appeals and, in one case, instructed a Presbytery to ordain and induct the Patron’s presentee. The General Assembly ordered the Presbytery to induct the man preferred by the people. On doing so, the Presbytery members narrowly escaped imprisonment for contempt of court.

The issue was clear enough. The majority of the Assembly regarded ordination and induction as a purely spiritual act in which the State had no say. The Evangelicals saw themselves as upholding the doctrine that Christ was the only head of the Church. They maintained that it was a principle which had been upheld by the Reformers in the days of Knox. The State’s position was given by Lord Justice Hope of the Scottish Bench, who judged that: “Parliament is the temporal Head of the Church from whose Acts alone it exists as the National Church and from which alone it derives its powers.” The Evangelicals saw this as Erastianism. It made them more determined to stand their ground. Cases multiplied before the courts, and court Interdicts, prohibiting certain men from attending the higher courts of the Church were issued. The representative nature of the General Assembly was affected. On one occasion, a magistrate interdicted ministers from preaching in a certain locality. The Church defied the order. From the conflict between the church and the courts, an impasse eventuated. The Government refused to pass legislation to ease the situation.

Led by younger men such as Robert Candlish, William Cunningham and Thomas Guthrie, a majority in the General Assembly drew up and endorsed a ‘Claim of Right’. In this Bill, which was directed at the

38 Fleming, History, p.20.
40 Erastus, a Zwinglian, taught that the Church was subject to the State.
Government, the Church asserted her spiritual independence, giving the historical precedents and Biblical grounds for her action. The Government ignored it, believing that all the fuss was caused by a few hotheads and would subside.

On May 12, 1843, Dr. David Welsh, the Moderator, opened the General Assembly with prayer and then read, and laid on the table, a protest, and left the Assembly. He was followed by Dr. Chalmers and many other members of the Assembly. In a nearby hall, over four hundred and seventy ministers signed a ‘Deed of Demission’, severing their connection with the Church of Scotland as it was then constituted. The Free Church of Scotland was constituted with Dr. Thomas Chalmers as its Moderator. So the second act of the drama of Buchan's heritage was concluded. Within a few years the Free Church of Scotland built seven hundred and thirty church buildings, and put a minister in every one of them. It set up an entire Presbyterial system over the whole of Scotland; erected five hundred schools and provided six hundred school teachers; erected two Teacher-Training Colleges and one Divinity Hall; took over and extended the Foreign Mission personnel and stations of the Old Kirk.

The Free Church Fathers appear to have been unwavering adherents to the Confession of Faith, Evangelical in their ministry and missionary orientated. They held to the Establishment of Religion by the State, on the one hand, and to the Church’s spiritual independence, on the other. They believed in the exclusive use of Psalms in the worship of the Church, and excluded the use of organs and other musical instruments. They maintained the non-intrusion principle, that ministers should not be intruded on a congregation without its consent. In Buchan’s younger days, there would be some in the church who had ‘come out’ in 1843 and the memory of what they had done and why they had done it would

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still be strong.

John Buchan senior was ordained into the Free Church of Scotland in 1874, and he was very much in the mould of the Founding Fathers. He was a pious Christian of the stamp of Christian in Pilgrim’s Progress; a conservative in Reformed Theology and an evangelist. Some might have seen a tension in these two latter positions but he did not. He no doubt held the Reformed position, that the sovereignty of God and human responsibility are parallel lines which meet in infinity.

The Church into which John Buchan senior was ordained was changing by the time John junior was born (1875). Most of the founding ‘Fathers and Brethren’ had passed from the scene of Church activity, being either deceased or retired. The new generation of ministers wanted change. They were influenced by prevailing philosophies in society. Liberal ideas were abroad, and men and women were moving away from what they saw as rigid, doctrinaire statements of the Church’s creed that restricted the freedom of human thought and expression. The leaven of Darwinism was at work and nature, human existence and moral standards were seen, not as the result of direct Divine intervention or of revelation, but as the product of natural forces and social development.

The Churches were open to these influences, and not least the Free Church which wished to be in the van of progressive thought. The younger generation in the Church wanted to hold and to proclaim a faith that would incorporate the new ideas in society. They wanted a relevant Church. Furthermore, German theological liberalism was current and students coming back from German universities brought with them the anti-supernaturalism of the German theological schools. It was the Reformation process with a new twist. There was a desire for freedom of investigation and expression in the Free Church, plus the desire to unite with another Presbyterian body, the United Presbyterian Church, which was not so strict in its adherence to the Confession of Faith as the old Free Kirk. These pressures acted as a catalyst to move the Free Church from its

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45 Ross, Church and Creed, pp.154-156.
former moorings. Led by the able, scholarly and flexible Principal Robert Rainy, whose spell over the Assembly was without effective challenge, the Free Church by-passed the Establishment Principle and the social philosophy so dear to Chalmers; changed its attitude to the Bible as the infallible Word of God; slackened its adherence to the Confession of Faith; modified the old Presbyterian form of worship; and recast the expression of its piety. John Buchan senior was not pleased with these changes. He resisted in the Assembly what he considered to be heresy. He was not happy with the innovations in worship and the new priorities in the Church’s activities.

John junior was to be brought up in a Church where he heard orthodox Calvinistic preaching from his father, and others, and where he witnessed intense evangelism. At the same time he experienced the changing ethos within the Free Church. The union of the Free Church with the United Presbyterian Church in 1900 to form the United Free Church, accelerated the change. Buchan’s father and his congregation went into the union. When within a few years of the union, the newly-formed Church affirmed its right to change its creed as it saw fit, the old, orthodox Free Church Presbyterianism received its death-blow. It lingered fitfully in some of the senior ministers and people but died with them. The Disruption Presbyterianism remained in the continuing Free Church of Scotland which was formed by a small minority who refused to enter the union.

The Church in which John Buchan was to serve as an elder no longer adhered to an infallible Bible, an unchanging creed, the Establishment Principle and Calvin’s principle of worship. Chalmer’s vision of the Christian Commonwealth disappeared. Cultural activities were challenging and displacing the Prayer Meeting and Bible Study. Anthems and hymns took over from the Psalms of David. The fervent, single-

47 Ross, *Church and Creed*, pp.235-238
48 Anna Buchan, *Unforgettable, Unforgotten*, p.44.
49 Smith, *Biography*, p.22.
minded spirit of the founding Free Church Fathers, who saw themselves as participants in Pilgrim’s Progress, gave way to an atmosphere in which the pilgrims appeared to be more concerned with the attractions of the roadside than in the goal to which they were heading. It was a new expression of Presbyterianism which some welcomed but others abhorred.

We may take the lovable, Dickson McCunn of Buchan’s Hunting Tower as one of the new Presbyterians. Though an elder in the Guthrie Memorial Kirk, a Presbyterian Congregation, he appears to prefer the classics of English literature to the Bible; he takes not the New Testament but Walton’s Compleat Angler on his trek. The Church’s Literary Society appears to be more important to him than the Prayer Meeting; and this present world more relevant than the one to come. This is in contrast to Christian in Pilgrim’s Progress and to the old Free Kirk elder living in the fear of God and under the theology of John Calvin.

We have covered the origin of both the Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland in this chapter. We have examined, in particular, the ethos of the Free Church in which Buchan was reared. We have seen how that ethos changed in the Free Church. However, the change did not penetrate the Buchan home. His father was of the old school and maintained a conservative position. The ethos and teachings of his home which Buchan calls ‘the elder Calvinism’,50 Buchan himself was to bypass under the influence of his own temperament and his studies. The life of the manse lost its attraction for him. In the following chapter, it is intended to examine Buchan’s home life, the character of his parents, and their influence upon him. We shall see how Buchan became increasingly alienated from the life of the manse, although he always remained devoted to his parents. He developed a different worldview, entered a different social atmosphere and found wider academic interests.

50 Buchan, Memory, p.36.
Chapter 3
THE PRESBYTERIAN HOME

In this chapter we turn to the milieu in which Buchan was reared, examining its atmosphere, its belief-system and its effects on Buchan’s later life and writing. John Buchan was born in 1875 in the Scottish town of Perth, in a Free Church of Scotland home, of an eighteen-year-old mother, and brought up by devout Presbyterian parents. Since the life of a Free Church of Scotland minister and his family revolved around the congregation – for all were expected to participate in its activities – John’s early life was bounded by the ‘manse’ (the minister’s house) and the Church.

Home and Manse
We have already noted that John Buchan was brought up in a Free Church of Scotland home. His father was a Free Church minister of the old school. He was conservative in theology and zealous in the work of evangelism. He was what one might term an ‘Evangelical Calvinist’ who sided with the minority in the Free Church and resisted the radical changes which the younger generation of ministers wished to implement. John Buchan senior was ready to attack popular preachers and professors of theology in the Free Church General Assembly whom he considered to be guilty of heresy.¹ He was by no means impressed with the innovations in public worship nor the change in priorities in congregational activities. He was a very serious-minded Christian and an earnest evangelist who not only initiated fervent evangelistic campaigns at Broughton and Pathhead, but who also preached in the open air outside the John Knox Church in the Gorbals area of Glasgow. His message was that his hearers should flee from wrath to come.²

John Buchan senior combined firm adherence to the theology of John Calvin and earnest evangelicalism with great sweetness of temper and a cultured mind. He read his favourite theologian Jonathan Edwards, an American Puritan, theologian and philosopher, with great delight, but he also loved the novels of Walter Scott. He had a passion for the Scottish Border Ballads and knew many of the Border poems and songs. These, along with the fairy stories learned from his mother, he taught his children. He entertained his family by means of a Penny Whistle which he played expertly. He also was familiar with Scottish history and was so successful in stirring up the children’s fervour for their race and their antipathy to the English, that a visiting English relative received a very cool reception from the Buchan bairns. Buchan senior was also a poet as well as a botanist with a great love of plants and flowers. He was far from being the stern and unbending father, supposed to be typical of the Victorian age, nor was he anywhere near the popularly conceived caricature of the Calvinist. He allowed his children great freedom in expressing themselves in the home, even to making fun of certain members of the congregation. His children were mischievous and got into scrapes and John junior was nearly always the ring-leader in their sometimes disturbing antics. Unlike his wife, John senior was not unduly concerned about their mischief. He humorously invited those who doubted the doctrine of depravity to look at his own family! He looked beyond the present and saw what the children would become when they settled down in later years, just as he saw the dirty, ragged children in the John Knox Band of Hope as those who in the future would make all things new.

Buchan records that his father seldom preached to them in the home. What he did do was to set them an example of how a Christian should live. On the one hand, John Buchan senior’s heart was on spiritual and heavenly

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4 Smith, *Biography*, p.22.
7 Smith, *Biography*, p.17.
matters, on the other, he enjoyed to the full the good things of life as they came his way. He loved his garden and the flowers and shrubs. He could often be seen hand in hand with his younger daughter, Violet, walking among the garden blooms and talking to them. Her death at the tender age of five was a great blow to all the family, but especially to the father.

The Reverend John Buchan's mind was much abstracted by heavenly things. This had two consequences. He had no idea of the management of money and he would sometimes pass his church members in the street without recognition. It was left to his practically-minded wife to look after all his finances, even to providing his tram fares, and to smooth out the congregational feathers ruffled by the abstractions of her husband.

Martin Green presents another picture of the Buchan home, which should be read in conjunction with the biography and novels of Anna and the autobiography of Buchan. He presents John senior as a "vague and unworldly man, inefficient in practical matters, indifferent to money, tactless with parishioners, habitually abstracted." On the other hand, Mrs Buchan, according to Green, was "energetic, and authoritative, made all the decisions and took over all the responsibility."

According to Buchan's son William, his newly-wedded mother, Susan Buchan (nee Grosvenor), on coming into the family as an outsider warmed immediately to the intrinsically happy Buchan senior, with his wide knowledge and his great simplicity. Susan Grosvenor's impression of Mr. Buchan on her first visit to Scotland was that:

He has the most heavenly, good-tempered way with him. He laughs and is laughed at by his family. He plays the Penny Whistle delightfully. I had never come into contact with any family who economised so much and gave away money so unsparingly.

10 Anna Buchan, *Unforgettable, Unforgotten*, p.41.
12 Smith, *Biography*, p.165.
Concerning his grandfather, William Buchan maintains that he “came against every kind of misery, crime and despair yet nothing impaired his belief in the goodness of God nor his certainty that all was somehow tending towards the best.” He quotes his father’s testimony that John Buchan senior had had his troubles like other people, but, “his message to the world was one of serious joy. His optimism was never assumed, it flowed naturally from the benignancy of his heart and the sureness of his faith.”

William Buchan describes the complex intellectual and romantic atmosphere that was to shape his father’s character, under the influence of John senior:

Part of John Buchan was made by Scottish History, part by his upbringing, with its insistence on the need for effective living, its strong emphasis on scholarship, and its coloured background of fairy story and historical romance. There was nothing mean or impositive in the personalities among whom he came to manhood.

The influence of his father’s religious outlook was likewise strong and inspiring for the young John:

The idea of going out into the world to seek a fortune or make a living was in the air during John Buchan’s childhood and youth. Continual exposure to the teachings of the Bible—faith without works is dead and the parable of the talents—would have provided a strong stimulus to endeavour in any normally affectionate and dutiful boy. The clue to his single-mindedness lies in his early discipline, his family’s and his own. To the strict observances of religious life, the irrefragable demands of Church and charity must be added the bracing, striving atmosphere of Hutchesons’ and Glasgow University.

It is possible that William, like the rest of the Buchans, engages in hagiography when recalling his grandfather’s character. One gets the impression almost of an unconscious conspiracy in the family to present the

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ideal, rather than the real, Rev. John Buchan. The picture given in the
biographies is one of an outstanding scholar and a lovable, faultless man.
Martin Green has another point of view. He quotes a Dr. Gavin White of the
University of Glasgow who describes Buchan senior's career as "strikingly
unsuccessful, passed in obscure places, due to a dogged adherence to a
narrow creed which made him unacceptable elsewhere". 16

However Green's views, like those of the Buchan family, need to be read
with some caution. There are factual errors in his work. 17 He appears to have
extracted a good deal of the Buchan family history from Anna Buchan's
novels, without allowing for authorial freedom. Anna's novels, while
undoubtedly influenced by the Buchan family ethos, do not present an exact
replica of her childhood. For example, in The Setons, the father, a minister, is
a widower, there is no mother in the home. 18

It was from their father that the Buchan children derived a love of books. His
library was extensive and they were encouraged to use his study and read
good literature. Indeed some of their happiest hours were spent in the study,
especially on winter evenings, where they were not only entertained by Mr.
Buchan's songs, the Penny Whistle and stories of far off days but were able
to read the best of English and Scottish authors. John Buchan was later to say
publicly that he learned culture where it should be learned, in the home. 19

It was also from his father that Buchan learned of the two books that were
not only the source of his religious and ethical convictions but were to

16 Green, Biography, p.38.
17 Green maintains, for example, that Buchan explicitly abhorred the Covenanters
(Biography, p.36). One has only to read Buchan's John Burnet of Barnes, p.181, to see that
Green has overstated his case. As to factual errors, Green states that in the union of 1929,
Presbyterians in Scotland were joined in the one United Free Church (Biography, p.163). In
fact, the United Free Church was absorbed into the Church of Scotland in 1929, except for
a small minority. Some of Green's judgements are also questionable. He declares that
Buchan lost confidence in himself as a serious novelist after writing The Half-Hearted
(Biography, p.124). Apart from any other consideration, Buchan regarded Witch Wood as his
favourite novel, and it was written twenty seven years after The Half-Hearted. His other
novels following The Half-Hearted were so popular that his confidence could hardly have
been lost. See Lownie, John Buchan, p.178.
influence his style and colour his narratives. These books were the Authorised Version of the Bible (1611) and The Pilgrim’s Progress (1678).20 The prose style of both these books fascinated John and their stories and characters stimulated his fertile imagination. They featured largely in the games he played with Anna his sister and his brothers William and Walter. Favourite spots for their leisure and amusement were named and identified from these sources.21

The Authorised Version of the Bible and the Pilgrim’s Progress were not peculiar to the Buchan household, for they were to be found in the homes of every serious-minded Presbyterian. The one was the basis for all that a Christian should believe and do, the other laid out in some detail the sanctified path that the earnest Christian should follow. From his father’s reading and preaching in the Church and from the father’s conduct of family worship in the home where the Bible was read each day, John Buchan became familiar with the words and teachings of what the Scots would often call, ‘Holy Writ’. His writings in later life were to reveal his thorough acquaintence with the Authorised Version text, for his references are sometimes taken from little known parts of the Old Testament.22 Additional to these sources of information of Scottish Christianity, there was “The Westminster Shorter Catechism” (1647).23 It contained the theology and ethics of the Scottish Reformed Church set down for young people to understand and learn. John Buchan would be required to know this by heart, as remains the practice of the Free Church of Scotland. He refers to the Catechism as still being in his make-up after concluding his studies at Oxford University.24

The Calvinism of Mr. Buchan produced no violent reaction in his son. The sweetness and playfulness of his father’s disposition tempered what others

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21 Buchan, Memory, pp.17-18.
22 For examples, see below, chap. 5, pp. 83-87.
24 Buchan, Memory, pp.86-87.
may have turned into a repugnant theology. John Buchan recognised that the
theology of John Calvin was capable of distortion but claimed that in the case
of himself and the other Buchan children it became a veritable tree of life.25 It
was his emotional assent to Calvinism as part of the family ethos, and his
intellectual difficulties with Calvin’s system, that was to produce the
tensions in Buchan with which struggled and which he finally resolved.

Helen Buchan, John’s mother, was a complete contrast to his father. While
Buchan’s father was a romantic and sentimental to a fault, especially in
Scottish affairs, his mother was a down-to-earth, practical woman. The
picture we gain from Janet Adam Smith – who knew the Buchan family
personally – is of a woman who loved to organise both the home and
congregation. Helen had to run the home on a slender budget but she did it
in such a way that, not only did the family live in reasonable comfort, but
there was enough left over to assist the poor and needy. While her husband
was impractical in money matters, Helen Buchan was an efficient manager.
She put her hand to every task in the home and managed as well with one
maid servant, as other homes did with several; her favourite chore was
spring-cleaning, when she went from the top to the bottom of the house,
 renewing paint work, scrubbing floors, rearranging drawers and cupboards,
and washing curtains; she rose early in the morning and worked until bed-
time; she could not endure laziness or slackness in attending to outstanding
duties; she admonished her children to do what had to be done at once.26

Helen Buchan, it would seem, was the same in the congregation. She
organised women’s meetings and fellowships, raised funds by sales of work
and, in her dynamic way, harnessed all whom she could in the work of the
church. She assured her husband, who sometimes protested at the tasks she
foisted upon him—finding speakers, for example, to open her sales of work—
that administering and organising were more important than preaching. Her
outlook was typical of many women in her era. Outside the home, her
horizons were bounded by the church and its related activities. For her, all
other interests, with the exception of domestic ones, were of little

26 Smith, Biography, p. 23.
importance. Helen’s ambitions, moreover, were church-related. She wanted her husband to become the Moderator of the General Assembly and her oldest boy to become an ordained minister of the Kirk.\footnote{Smith, \textit{Biography}, p.23.}

Buchan tells us that, although his mother was a great ‘worrier’ – pessimistic about the future of her children and the church, and believing that disaster was always just around the corner – when calamity did come, she faced it without a tremor.\footnote{Buchan, \textit{Memory}, p.251.} Helen seems to have been narrow in her religious views, considering the Free Kirk to be the true Church. She looked with suspicion on non-Presbyterian Christian Churches and constantly reminded John, when he left home, of the ‘peril’ of associating with such. Alice, her grand-daughter, describes her grandmother as “a Bible Searcher which is a rewarding occupation there being a comminatory phrase in it for every permutation of human frailty”.\footnote{Alice Buchan, \textit{A Scrap Screen}, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1979, pp.135-136.} Alice believes that Helen Buchan made her son’s life a bed of nails with her barbed comments on his Presbyterian backslidings – for example, taking his children to the ‘House of Rimmon’, the local Anglican Church at Elsfield. She admits that she was fond of her grandmother, that she was a good cook and had known how to live in genteel poverty as the wife of a Presbyterian minister, but concludes that ‘gran’ was like a piece of irritating grit in the eye.\footnote{Alice’s brother, William, agrees with his sister: “Gran was adept at creating moral discomfort over almost any matter”\footnote{William Buchan, \textit{Memoir}, p.73.}. To balance this perspective on Mrs. Helen Buchan, one needs to read also the glowing tribute to her by John himself in his autobiography, and his words to Anna after receiving news of her death.\footnote{Buchan, \textit{Memory}, pp.249-254, and William Buchan, \textit{Memoir}, p.233.}}

From the biographical material available, it would appear that, in their home, the Buchan children, and not least John, were encouraged to develop both intellect and imagination, and to acquire a sense of responsibility to God and other people. They gained the impression that life was a serious business, and that time and opportunity must be utilised. An example of consideration for the needs of the poor and unfortunate was given to them
by their parents, especially by their mother. They grew up to be aware that
life was a challenge and that it must be lived on the terms that it was given.
To sum up, in the home, John Buchan was exposed to the influence of a
spiritedly-minded father, a man of culture as well as of faith, and to an
intensely practically-minded mother whose interests never strayed from the
home or the Kirk. Describing the influence of Buchan’s parents upon him,
Janet Adam Smith comments:

From both came a sense of purpose and responsibility. No
child of Mr. Buchan could have seen life as anything but a
highly serious affair. However light and gay the surface
texture, underlying it was a sense that, every day, choices
must be made, decisions taken, that were a matter of
spiritual life and death. No child of Mrs. Buchan could have
failed to realise that, with vigour and competence you could
have a comfortable home on very little money. From their
father the Buchans received a moral lifeline; from their
mother a strong, practical, good sense.32

The influence of the Buchan home on the children appears to have been a
positive one, although the information available has come in the main from
partial sources. From what we are told, the Buchan children appear to have
had a deep sense of security, knowing themselves loved and wanted.33 From
the example of their father, they were taught that they lived in a world of
beauty made by God, and that cultural activities and recreations were a
lawful part of Christian joy. The children were encouraged to discuss with
their parents all manner of things and even to disagree; their faults, we are
told, were corrected sensibly and mildly. The effect of their home life seems
to have been positive, as far as Buchan was concerned. According to Lownie,
the verdict of a German specialist who examined Buchan was that he had
never met anyone before so free of neuroses.34

The stability of Buchan’s home life possibly accounted for his ability to

32 Smith, Biography, p. 26. As noted above (p. 48), the atmosphere of the Buchan home and
the character of the parents, John and Helen Buchan, can be deduced, at least in part, from
Anna Buchan’s novels, especially The Setons, Ann and her Mother and Eliza for Common.
33 Anna Buchan, Unforgettable, Unforgotten, p. 90.
appreciate all kinds of people, to utilise his time and gifts to their best advantage, and to take the setbacks of life without being twisted or soured by them. He had, according to his son William, a strong religious sense, a real humanity and great delight in the beauty of the world.\cite{35} This can be attributed at least in part, as we have seen, to the impress of his home.

The Buchans appear to have been a closely-knit family, all members having a deep affection for one another. From what Buchan and Anna, and even William, have written, the Buchan children had great affection for their parents and for one another. After his adolescence, Buchan's attitude and behaviour towards his parents was exemplary. In the home, he was in every sense the older brother. His ascendancy was assured, not just by his precedence in birth but by his outstanding gifts and success. Anna's attachment to him was just this side of worship. In her biographical memoirs, Unforgettable, Unforgotten, and in her novel, \textit{Olivia in India}, Anna reveals how close she was to her other brothers. She went to India to visit William, who worked in the administration. She lived with Walter, her surviving brother, until the time of her death (1948). The closeness of the family ties was expressed by the child Alistair – later killed at Arras on the Western Front in 1917\cite{36} – when, in defiance of good grammar, he exclaimed, "We is the Buchans!" \cite{37}

We must not overlook the importance of the influence of the manse on the children, not only as their home and centre of their family life, but also as a place of social activity and pastoral counselling. The children must have been in contact with many people who visited the manse for various reasons, to say nothing of visiting clergymen preaching for their father. One of the latter, the highly respected Rev. Dr. Begg, gave John junior a beating for deliberately interrupting his meditations in the study. When Buchan, as Lord High Commissioner, paid a visit to the Free Church of Scotland General Assembly in May 1933, he related this incident.\cite{38}

\footnote{35 William Buchan, \textit{Memoir}, p.248.}
\footnote{36 Anna Buchan, \textit{Unforgettable, Unforgotten}, p.149.}
\footnote{37 William Buchan, \textit{Memoir}, p.70.}
\footnote{38 Editorial comment, \textit{Free Church Record} (Free Church of Scotland magazine), June 1933, p.144.
William Buchan describes the role and influence of a typical Presbyterian manse in this period, a role fulfilled, in his view, by his parents:

the manse was an important focal point in the life of the parish . . . the manse was not only the fountain head of religious orthodoxy but was also a political and social centre of great importance. People went to it for worldly as well as for spiritual advice, for guidance on their children’s careers, for comfort in bereavement, for help in every kind of trouble. It was the co-ordinating agency for charity, the centre of evangelism and religious education and the provider of innocent entertainment. The minister was respected for his learning and spiritual quality; his wife for her practical good sense and her tireless work among the poor and the sick; his children were approved of for the work they did for the parish and the work they did at home, for the promise they showed of growing up to be worthy of their parents . . . In every country parish the manse and its inhabitants received a meed of respect not generally granted to ordinary human beings.39

The Congregation

Closely associated with the home, and indivisible from it, was the influence of the congregation. Mr. Buchan’s preaching and pastoral activities absorbed much of his time. Mrs. Buchan, as well as attending her Sunday School class on ‘The Lord’s Day’, spent three evenings a week in the Kirk.40 The children were expected to participate in the life of the congregation. John was given a Sunday School class to teach.41 The family spent the whole of Sunday in the church, at services and Fellowships. Lunch was taken in the vestry and the afternoon was spent in distributing the Church’s brochure in the surrounding tenements. Other activities followed in the late afternoon and evening.42 It says much for the love and freedom that were in the home that none of the children appear to have been embittered by this strict congregational regime. It is acknowledged, however, that they found the

40 Anna Buchan, Unforgettable Unforgotten, pp 43-46.
41 Anna Buchan, Unforgettable Unforgotten, p.71
42 Anna Buchan, Unforgettable Unforgotten, p.71.
long services trying.43

In the congregation, the Buchan children learned to mix with all kinds of people. They were exposed, through church visiting, to the evidences of the dissolute lifestyle often found in city slums and also to the cheerfulness, courage and humour with which many of the poor coped with their cheerless circumstances.44 They had first hand contact with the deprived children of the Gorbals area taking Sunday School classes and participating in the Band of Hope meetings. They mixed with the middle classes in the congregation, the merchants and professional people. Buchan's belated acknowledgement of the middle classes comes out in the Dickson McCunn series of novels.

The training received in his Presbyterian milieu enabled Buchan, when he reached the climax of his life as Governor General of Canada, to relate to all classes in society and to identify with the difficulties and problems of the ordinary working people of Canada. A.L. Rouse summarises the advantages of Buchan's upbringing:

One can see what he owed to his distinctive background. It was a great advantage to brought up in a Manse; he knew what it was to be poor, to work hard and to share the life of the people. At the same time the standards that he imbibed from childhood were the educated standards of ministry and gentlefolk. All doors were open to him, the ways of life of all classes. There was too, the freshness and vividness of the Border country - the sense of its soil and its life; the love of its solitary spaces and historic memories and associations with which it is crowded; nor should one forget the importance attached to intellect and the things of the mind, to appreciate learning, scholarship.45

In the Presbyterian milieu of home, manse and congregation in which he was raised, Buchan had great advantages. Nevertheless, he was to be increasingly alienated from its environment. This was due, not to any diminution in

43 Smith, Biography, p.16.
44 Anna Buchan. Unforgettable Unforgotten, pp.70-71.
family affection, but rather to his adoption of a different philosophical, religious and social outlook than that found in his parents, home and Church. Buchan was bound in his affections to the old milieu but, intellectually, as he came under the influence of the Platonic humanism of the Classics at Glasgow and Oxford Universities, he moved away from it. As Lownie notes:

Buchan's studies at the university ... made him more aware of the parochialism of his family life. Much as he loved his parents he felt constricted by their limited horizons and ambitions which tended to centre around the John Knox Church. There was a tension in his life between the preachings of his father and the teachings of his university professors.46

Janet Adam Smith is more explicit in describing the way that University life stretched and stimulated Buchan and that, while he had a happy home life and belonged to a close-knit family, this did not exclude tension:

He may have felt the growing gap between the Calvinism preached at John Knox and the addresses of Caird in the Bute Hall. The questions raised by Murray about ancient religions, by Jones about the nature of reality were not to find answers in the senior Buchan's mixture of emotional revivalism and theological rigidity. His shining sincerity and intellectual unsophistication made him a difficult person for a sharp-witted son to argue with.

Smith goes on to quote Buchan, "My father has not the proper turn for speculation. He cares too little about logic and sees things in a pictorial way."47 Perhaps we can see something of the intellectual differences between Buchan and his father in the words of the Rev. Mr. Blackstock to Mr. Dott, the Writer, characters in The Free Fishers. Blackstock relates that his father, a Presbyterian minister of the old school, reprehended his son for quoting the classical authors, and was only concerned with those pillars of orthodox Presbyterianism thought. Alexander Henderson, George Gillespie or Samuel Rutherford. He regarded his son as being not quite sound in the

46 Lownie, John Buchan, p.37.
47 Smith, Biography, p.43.
fundamentals. Mr. Blackstock was a Christian Platonist after the manner of Buchan himself.

Buchan also moved away from his family, socially and culturally. While his affection and practical concern for his family remained constant, his outlook, interests and ambitions, changed. He married into the English upper class and his wife belonged to the Church of England. They were married in the Church of England in a ceremony in which his father was not allowed to participate. Buchan became ‘anglicised’ and the English Cotswolds became a rival to the Scottish Borders in his affections when he and his wife and children settled at Elsfield, near Oxford. He attended the local Church of England. From that time on, he spent less and less time with his family, even when on holiday.

Buchan’s attitude in later life to his boyhood Presbyterianism is summed up by his daughter, Alice, who writes that her father’s Presbyterianism came to be worn more lightly as he grew older and moved away from his mother’s rigid conformism: “It was rather like an old coat comfortable to resume, with affectionate recognition of the quality and durability of the cloth.”

In this chapter we have seen that, despite moving away from his home and its ethos, Buchan retained a deep affection for his parents and his home environment, even his father’s Calvinism. Perhaps as a romantic, he idealised his background. Alice has summed up his attitude to his religious upbringing by her analogy of the old coat. Even though his father’s Calvinism and Puritanism were not his, Buchan appreciated their quality, and their value in human life. In the following chapter, the model of Buchan’s creed will be set out, and the worldview which he adopted. This worldview includes that part of his Presbyterian teaching which remained to influence his novels. In the model provided, we have a litmus test to apply to his novels, in order to assess the Presbyterian influence on them.

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Chapter 4
CREATING THE MODEL

This thesis maintains that that the character and content of Buchan’s novels were, to a great degree, determined by his Calvinistic, Presbyterian upbringing. The influence of this milieu, however, was not unchallenged. Temperamentally, Buchan was not drawn to the Calvinistic Presbyterianism of his father. While accepting the fundamentals of the Christian Faith as taught in his home, his strong romanticism, on the one hand, and his rational way of thinking, on the other, inclined him toward what he considered to be a less intense and a less rigid interpretation of Christianity. He was greatly attracted to classical philosophy, not as a system as such, but as an attitude to life. This brought him in conflict with the Calvinism of his father. He found his via media in the Christian Platonism of the seventeenth century Anglican ‘divines’.

What is purposed in this chapter is:
a) an examination of the teachings that Buchan received in his home;
b) a review of the creed which he adopted, Christian Platonism;
c) an estimate of the substantial Presbyterian influence which remained to influence his novels.

By this means, a model will be created, comprising Buchan’s religious principles and outlook on life, from which it will be possible to demonstrate, in the following chapters, how his Presbyterianism determined the character and content of his novels.

The Teaching of Buchan’s Presbyterian Home
The religious teachings that were impressed on Buchan in his
Presbyterian home and Church can be ascertained, in the first place, from “The Westminster Confession of Faith” (1646) and “The Westminster Shorter Catechism” (1647). These are a compendium of what the Presbyterian Church regarded as the essential teachings of the Bible. Pilgrim’s Progress, on which Buchan was nurtured, as we have seen, is an expression of Puritan piety and a useful repository of the outlook and values of a Presbyterian home.

The teachings which Buchan received would have included the basic Presbyterian tenet that men and women should live in the fear of God and keep his commandments. Buchan would have learned at a tender age that “man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” He was taught that the human race had fallen into sin and was alienated from God; that while ruined by the ‘fall’, the human race was a noble ruin, since people were made in the image of God; that there was evil in the world to be constantly resisted. His father would be insistent that God in his love had sent his son, Jesus Christ, into the world to offer an atonement for sin; that, through faith in Christ, all could be restored to God’s favour and be renewed in spirit to live a new life and to have a new hope.

It would be impressed on the young Buchan that repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ was required of him, if he was to become a Christian; that as such, he must set his face to the New Jerusalem and persevere in the pilgrim way, loving his fellow-Christians, and showing justice and mercy to all people, especially the poor and disadvantaged.

From the “Shorter Catechism”, Buchan would learn of two mysteries that appear in his novels: the mystery of the divine fore-ordination of all

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3 “Shorter Catechism”, qu. 1.
things; and the mystery of Providence, defined as God's "most holy, wise and powerful preserving of all his creatures and all their actions."\(^5\)

Other Christian beliefs that Buchan senior would impress on his son, were that the Bible is the infallible word of God and contains all that the Christian is to believe and do in order to please God; that the Church is the community of believers which is intended to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13-14); that all people are responsible to God for the way they live, and that they also have responsibility toward others.\(^6\)

These teachings, with others, were at the heart of the Evangelical Calvinism in the Presbyterian home where Buchan was reared. They were to be challenged as Buchan went into the outer world, to university at Glasgow and Oxford. The humanities, with the study of the classical authors of Rome and Greece at their centre, presented a different view of the meaning and purpose of life, and how one should conduct oneself to find fulfilment. The young and impressionable Buchan was to find himself questioning his father's Calvinistic teaching as he was drawn to the philosophy of Plato and the ethics of Aristotle. He found in Plato his basic, romanticised, Christian convictions confirmed - the greatness of people and their wretchedness, their search for union with God and the duty of labouring for the good of others.

However, Buchan obviously did not find in the Classical writers the more challenging teachings of Calvin or his well-defined, theological creed. A tension was created in his mind between what appeared to him to be two incompatible systems. This tension was resolved for Buchan by his embracing of Christian Platonism. In it he found what satisfied his romantic and rational nature, as well as his Christian convictions. In Christian Platonism, Buchan's reason, romanticism and aversion to

\(^4\) "Catechism", qu. 7. See also Anna Buchan (O. Douglas), The House that is our Own, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1946, pp.176-177, where fore-ordination and human responsibility are discussed.

\(^5\) "Catechism", qu. 11.

\(^6\) "Confession of Faith", chap. 1, pars. 1-10, and chap. 25, pars. 1-6.
extremes, found their rest; his love of the temporal and of the eternal were joined; and John Calvin, at least in Buchan's mind, was successfully rehabilitated.

**The Creed which Buchan Adopted: Christian Platonism**

Buchan was introduced to Christian Platonism through reading the literature of the Cambridge Platonists. He was engaging in research into seventeenth century literature for his initial work on Montrose, prior to the First World War. He became familiar with the writings of men such as Benjamin Whichcote, John Smith, Ralph Cudworth and Henry More, who were 'divines' of Cambridge University. The basic philosophy of these Cambridge men was that of Plato, as interpreted by Plotinus and, doubtless, Plotinus as interpreted by themselves.

Not only did Buchan's natural romanticism play its part in his sympathy with the Cambridge men – for they were of a similar disposition – but also their teachings suited his temperament. He was against extremes of any kind, as we have noted. The Christian Platonists had two pet aversions: what they considered to be 'superstition' and what they termed 'enthusiasm'. They considered both extreme, since each, in their view, denied reason its rightful place in the religious life. The Christian Platonists believed that the adherents of Rome exemplified the former, while the adherents of Geneva the latter. The place that the Cambridge men gave to reason in religion was congenial to Buchan's rational approach to life. He accepted the fundamentals of the Christian faith because, as he said, they were entwined with his nature and seemed completely rational to him.\(^7\)

Reason played a large part in the Cambridge Platonists' Christianity. It was the fundamental view of Whichcote – the apostle of the Cambridge Platonists – that "to go against reason was to go against God... Reason is the Divine Governor of Man's Life; it is the very voice of God."\(^9\) The

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Cambridge Platonists believed that God had equipped people to receive the truth and to find their deepest satisfaction in it. They believed also that reason played a very necessary role in religion: "it provided the measure by which any system of belief was to be judged."\textsuperscript{10} In apportioning such a high place to reason in their teaching, these men were not rationalists, for they included conscience in the faculty of reason and they believed that "Reason discovers what is natural; and Reason receives what is supernatural."\textsuperscript{11} What they meant by ‘reason’ is not the mere rational faculties of human beings, but rather reason as informed by a holy life. Powicke, for example, writes in reference to Henry Moore, that reason, as the oracle of God, "is not to be heard but in his holy temple – that is to say, in a good and holy man, thoroughly sanctified in spirit, soul and body." Powicke sees this as the mystic element of the Cambridge men coming into view, which is not opposed to reason, but the fruit of its noblest activity. He concludes:

‘Spiritual things are spiritually discerned’, i.e. are discerned by the spiritualised reason for whose normal and efficient development there is need of both logic and life – keen logic, if you will, but also a pure and holy life. If thou beest it, thou seest it, said Moore.\textsuperscript{12}

The Cambridge Platonists insisted on the validity and truth of natural revelation – a knowledge of God that people could reach by use of reason and conscience. They held that God had not forsaken human beings, even though they were fallen, that Plato and Plotinus had true religious insights and that these two ancient philosophers, in as far as they followed their light, were ’saints’. The Cambridge Platonists believed that the special revelation found in the Bible did not contradict the insights of the ancient philosophers but rather confirmed and expanded them.\textsuperscript{13} Since the Cambridge Platonists regarded reason and conscience as paramount in the search for truth,

they were strongly against the persecution of people for beliefs arising from reason and conscience. Reason and conscience, they thought, could not be forced. Consequently, they would have unity in the Church on the very basic things of Christianity. It did not matter whether one worshipped in a cathedral or a barn, whether the Church was governed by bishops or presbyters. They had their preferences, but they considered that these things should not divide Christians and certainly should not be the grounds of persecution of one by the other. These views found a ready response in Buchan. He, too, believed strongly in the part that reason and conscience must play in the discovery of truth, and the toleration that must ensue from such a premise.

Whichcote and his colleagues saw themselves up against ‘hardshell’ Calvinists, Antinomians and Puritans who allegedly stressed negative predestination, regarded themselves as being free to sin as God’s elect, frowned on the innocent pleasures of life, respectively, and believed in the persecution of those who were deviants from the faith. These supposed defections from the Christian faith, along with the contentious spirit of the age, account for the stance of Christian Platonism. As well as emphasising the place of reason in the religious life, as opposed to fanaticism and superstition, they underlined the need for personal sanctity. They were insistent on the necessity for moral effort in seeking to know God. For them, knowing God was more than mere subscription to a creed or support for a cause. In their mind, seekers after God must, by the use of reason, conscience and moral effort, become like him and then they could say, ‘I know him’.

As a corollary of their teaching on the virtue of tolerance toward other people in religious matters, the Cambridge Platonists insisted that the cause of religion must be defended and advanced in a religious spirit. These men, too, were sensitive to the joys of the natural world which to them were gifts of the good God. Buchan testifies that the religion of the Cambridge Platonists was, “warmed by a love of humanity and of all

things good and beautiful."\(^{15}\)

While the Christian Platonists had a love of Platonic philosophy and sought to reconcile it with Christianity, which was exactly what Buchan attempted to do, they were not pure Platonists. They adopted the spirit of Platonism and its ideals of human conduct, but their convictions were based on Christian revelation. Powicke rightly notes that:

> The dependence . . . of the Cambridge men on Neo-Platonism was by no means slavish. It did not mould the substance, or even the forms, of their thought, to any great extent. They drew far more from the Bible; and their acknowledged Master was Christ. In this respect they repeated the experience of Augustine whose vivid accounts of his relations to the Neo-Platonists . . . must have been known to them. On the whole we may say what interested them in Neo-Platonism was not its metaphysics but its religious spirit and its ethical idealism.\(^{16}\)

Buchan has a similar point to make in referring to his studies of Plato:

> Plato, not the system maker but the poet, had a profound influence on my mind. Platonism to me was not a creed but a climate of opinion, the atmosphere in which my thoughts moved. Such an atmosphere is largely the consequence of temperament, and I think I was born with the same temperament as the Platonists of the early seventeenth century.\(^{17}\)

It is the spirit of these men that is found in some Buchan novels and comes to its finest expression, as we shall see, in Sick Heart River.

It isarguable that the Cambridge Platonists caricatured Calvinism and Puritanism and that they over-reacted to a minority of extremists. The eloquent and powerful sermon of Cudworth before the House of Commons in 1647, in which he expresses much of the Christian Platonist

\(^{16}\)Powicke, Christian Platonists, p.21. See also Cragg, Cambridge Platonists, p.16.
\(^{17}\)Buchan, Memory, pp.38-39.
position,¹⁸ is denunciatory and may suggest an over-reaction. However, the views of these men struck a chord within Buchan and he was drawn to, and embraced, their interpretation of Christianity. His son, William, maintains that his father found the Calvinism of his upbringing a gentle and joyful thing; that he accepted his religious inheritance, yet modified it with Platonism and "let it be seen to be his guide all his days."¹⁹

Buchan informs us that his creed is to be found in his biographies,²⁰ and a judicious examination of these texts reveals the nature of that creed. Some gleanings from these writings that we will explore are: his commitment to Christian ethics; his loathing of Church interference in politics; his abhorrence of the use of Old Testament models to justify violence and cruelty against deviants from the Christian faith; and his repudiation of a narrow-minded puritanism which regarded natural pleasure as evil. From the biographies, we may gather also that he had a substantial quarrel with the seventeenth century Scottish Presbyterian Church for what he saw as its arrogance, intolerance and legalism.²¹

There are several of Buchan's novels that clearly reveal his Christian Platonist creed. For example, Witch Wood is strongly Platonic, and not only is this creed advanced in the novel but also its corollary – the aversion Buchan had to the attitudes and practices of the old Scottish Presbyterian Kirk.²² The religious atmosphere of the novel is formed by the conflict between Christian Platonism and 'hard-shell' Covenant Presbyterianism. David Sempill, newly ordained to the parish at Woodilee, is a Christian Platonist. He reads the works of Clement of Alexandria, one of the early Church Fathers who was himself a Christian Platonist. As an adherent of this system, David confines himself in his preaching to the fundamental Christian truths and duties. He avoids the intricacies of Covenant theology. In the same way, his ministry is one mercy and mild correction rather than the stirring up of people

²⁰ Buchan, Memory, p.199.
²¹ See below, pp.67-73.
concerning the politico-ecclesiastical issues of the times. David opposes cruelty, especially when done in the name of religion, and firmly confronts religious hypocrisy. He finds himself up against similar people to those against whom the Cambridge Platonists fought.

Only one of his colleagues on the Presbytery, James Fordyce, a man of insight and compassion and a Christian Platonist, befriends him. All that Fordyce says is modelled on the teachings of the Cambridge men. He believes that the church is too negative in its attitude to men and women, and that, if there is original sin, there is also original righteousness. Fordyce charges the Church with driving people into illicit activities through prohibiting innocent recreations and pleasures. The other members of the Presbytery are 'high' Presbyterians, unquestioning supporters of the Solemn League and Covenant, and are either bigoted or stupid, or both. Christian Platonism is put into the mouth of the Marquis of Montrose, King Charles' General in Scotland, who appears briefly in the novel as a Presbyterian Cavalier.

As for David’s elders and people, the majority of them are painted as the dregs of Christianity. The chief elder, Ephraim Caird, is a hypocrite after the style of ‘Holy Willie’ in Burns’ poem. He is a ‘sermon taster’, convinced that he is one of the elect, since he bears office and is engaged in the activities of the Church. On the other hand, he acts the part of the chief devil in the idolatrous revelries in the Wood, and takes a leading role in the cruelties of the witch hunt. The other Kirk elders are not much better.

Witch Wood covers more ground than the Presbytery and the local congregation of Woodilee; the seventeenth century Scottish Presbyterian Church as a whole is encompassed within its bounds and placed in a very poor light. The Kirk interferes in politics; it is cruel and vindictive, calling for the blood of those taken prisoner in the wars; it is oppressive to the

people, driving them into unlawful pleasures by denying them innocent recreations; it brainwashes people into adopting its political attitudes; it uses the Old Testament to justify cruelty to its opponents; it closes its eyes to reason, its heart to the milk of human kindness and opens its mouth to cant and religious cliches; it promotes witch hunts with all their attendant cruelty.

All the reason and reasonableness, and all the virtue recorded in the novel, are found either in the Christian Platonists, or in unbelievers, or in those few church members who are outside the mainstream of church life. As the novel unfolds, we see that there are two great evils that overcome David Sempill – Melanudrigull, the dark wood, and the Kirk of Scotland.

It is possible that Buchan, like his Cambridge mentors, has over-reacted to views and practices of extremists in the Church and presented what is a caricature of Calvinism and Presbyterianism in this novel. Contemporary with the setting of the novel, there were men in the Scottish Presbyterian Church such as William Guthrie, whose kindness and humour were proverbial. Alexander Smellie records that Guthrie was lovable, high-minded and a natural Christian. He was known for his courtesy. According to Smellie, he laughed out of court the caricature that the Covenanters were jaundiced and fault-finding, and was himself a Covenanter full of merriment. Guthrie must have been a man after Buchan's own heart, since to carry a rod and cast a line and land a fish were among his chief pleasures. That there were ministers, elders and people in the Church of Scotland who were doctrinaire, bigoted and intolerant, is likely, but it is also likely that there were others of the opposite disposition. Yet the only ministers with the milk of human kindness in Witch Wood are Christian Platonists.

The words of Buchan himself, in which he cautions his readers against one-sidedness in presenting their views, are particularly apposite here:

Every man has his creed, but in his soul he knows that that creed has another side, possibly not less logical, which it does not suit him to produce. Our most honest convictions are not the children of pure reason, but of temperament, environment, necessity and interest. Most of us take sides in life and forget the one we reject. But our conscience tells us that it is there, and we can on occasions state it with a fairness and fullness which proves that it is not totally repellent to our reason.  

The biography of the Duke of Montrose contains something of Buchan’s creed. It is largely taken up with Montrose’s brilliance as a general and his successful campaigns against the Presbyterian, Covenanting armies in Scotland, but in the opening chapters and the conclusion there is a delineation of Montrose’s character and outlook. From this, we can gather something of Buchan’s creed. Montrose is held to be a fellow-traveller with the Cambridge Christian Platonists. According to Buchan, Montrose’s personal religion was the Calvinism of his age and he reached it, not by the rigid schedule laid down by the Scottish divines, but by the gentler Platonic method “whereby God reveals himself insensibly through the riches of his world and piety crowns like a flower the natural growth of mind and soul.” Montrose’s affinities were with men like Whichcote, whose Calvinism was “mellowed and warmed by the love of humanity and of all things true and beautiful.” For Buchan, Montrose had Whichcote’s stalwart respect for the freedom of the mind. Here Buchan’s strong prejudice against the old Scottish Kirk is expressed:

Wielding the most awful powers and penalties, acting under the most august sanctions, inspired by a narrow and absolute creed, cunningly articulated so that the whole nation was embodied under its dominion, the Kirk in Scotland was well able to speak with its adversaries in the gate.

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28 Buchan, Montrose, p. 146.
29 Buchan, Montrose, p. 146.
30 Buchan, Montrose, p. 57.
The same temperament that drew Buchan to Whitchcote and Montrose also drew him to Cromwell, who, ecclesiastically and politically, appears to have had little in common with the Cambridge divines. Yet Buchan’s biography of Cromwell shows his sympathy with, and even reverence for, the man. Cromwell, as Buchan saw him, had much in common with the Christian Platonists. He was a tolerant man in religious matters, within the limits that current politics allowed. He had to use the power of the army to prevent the Presbyterian-dominated Parliament forcing its ecclesiastical system on the Independents who formed the backbone of his army. According to Buchan, the prime defect of the Kirk of Scotland was its intolerance; it regarded toleration as a vice. Cromwell alone, he adjudged, among the leaders of the time, practised the virtue of tolerance. Buchan quotes Cromwell’s appeal to the Barebone Parliament:

We should be pitiful . . . and tender towards all though of different judgements . . . Love all, tender all, cherish and countenance all, in all things that are good . . . and if the poorest Christian, the most mistaken Christian, shall desire to live peaceably and quietly under you – I say if any shall desire but to lead a life of godliness and honesty, let him be protected.31

Buchan’s attraction to Cromwell was fostered also because he believed Cromwell’s Christianity was not dogmatic. As Buchan saw it, Cromwell’s religion was based on an experience of the heart and not a prescribed formula. Buchan asserts that Cromwell, while having to go through all the items of the grim Calvinistic schedule, found Christ, “not by any process of reasoning but by an intense personal experience in which his whole being was caught up in an ecstasy of adoration and love”.32 The religion that flowed from Cromwell’s conversion, according to Buchan, was not:

that narrow legal compact with the Almighty, tinctured with emotion, which belongs to a shallow later

32 Buchan, Cromwell, p.67.
evangelicalism; nor was it . . . a creed based on prudential fears. It had more in common with Ralph Cudworth’s famous sermon, or the Calvinism of the Cambridge Platonists.\textsuperscript{33}

Buchan concludes that this made Cromwell impatient of minor dogmatic differences among Christians, since his own faith was based on personal experience.\textsuperscript{34}

Another feature of Cromwell’s religious outlook that drew the Christian-Platonist Buchan to him, was what Buchan saw as his humanity. Buchan was convinced that Cromwell carried with his toleration a strange tenderness; that he was a man of a profound emotional nature who demanded food for his affections; that Cromwell’s religion was based on love not fear, and that this made him infinitely compassionate towards others. According to Buchan, sudden anger might drive Cromwell into harshness, but he repented instantly of his fault. Buchan finds no parallel in history to this man of action who had so strong an instinct for mercy and kindness, springing directly from his religion.\textsuperscript{35} The religion of love, tenderness and mercy was the religion preached by the Cambridge Platonists. Whichcote insists that true religion is the religion which makes people loving and not hard-hearted; which makes people kind, not harsh and cruel.\textsuperscript{36}

Thus it is plain that, in relevant Buchan texts, there is a strong dislike of the seventeenth century Scottish Kirk. The student of Buchan may well ask what influenced him in this way, given his willingness to serve the Presbyterian Church of his own day. He remained a Presbyterian to the end of his life, and made a contribution to the uniting of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church. Why the difference in attitude? The obvious answer is that, by the twentieth century, the Kirk had purged itself of what Buchan saw as its bigotry and intolerance, its zealous, orthodox Calvinism, and its literal interpretation of the Bible.

\textsuperscript{33} Buchan, \textit{Cromwell}, p.67.
\textsuperscript{34} Buchan, \textit{Cromwell}, p.68.
\textsuperscript{35} Buchan, \textit{Cromwell}, p.68.
\textsuperscript{36} Powicke, \textit{Christian Platonists}, p.81.
One might deduce from this that Buchan’s condemnation of the seventeenth century Kirk arose, at least in part, from the fact that he shrank from its zealous Calvinism and Evangelicalism, just as he shrank from it in his father’s manse. We have seen how Buchan reacted against what he perceived to be extreme positions. According to William, Buchan shared his uncle William’s distaste for “a certain religiosity which sometimes showed itself among adherents of the Presbyterian Church.”37 William further maintains that his father, in removing himself from the narrow, if devoted evangelism of his family life, and the lip-tightening and head-shaking and general nosy parkering of some who thought themselves the “Elect”, was obeying instincts which more readily responded to a cool classicism than to the heats and ferments and immoderation of his native church.38

While perhaps overstating the case against adherents of the Presbyterian Church, William rightly highlights his father’s temperament as one of the basic reasons for the hostile way that Buchan wrote of the old Kirk. The same temperament which coincided with that of Montrose and the Cambridge men who “combined a passion for the unseen and eternal with a delight in the seen and temporal” would also bias William’s father against the Kirk, if he thought that its practice of labelling innocent pleasures as sins was driving people into error. In Witch Wood, the indulgence of church people in the orgiastic rites of corrupted paganism is seen as the fault of the Kirk and extreme Calvinism, which have denied the people of harmless enjoyments.

However, Buchan’s aversion to the seventeenth century Scottish Church went beyond mere irrational prejudice. It was occasioned by his sincerely held Christian Platonist principles and his persuasion that the Scottish Kirk was acting contrary to them. As a Christian Platonist, as we have just seen, Buchan believed in the part that reason and conscience play in the

37 William Buchan, Memoir, pp.64-65.
38 William Buchan, Memoir, pp. 64-65.
discovery of truth and the toleration that must ensue from such a
premise. On this basis, he rejected what he saw as the cruel literalism of
the Kirk's reading of the Old Testament; he rejected its demand for
conformity to a rigid creed and what he saw as its dogmatism, arrogance
and inhumanity.

Furthermore, following the emphasis of Montrose and the Cambridge
men, that Christianity should be concerned mainly with the
development of personal piety and good works rather than politics,
Buchan resented what he considered to be the attempt of the Church to
meddle in politics, and to make politics the staple diet of its pulpit
ministry. This meddling in politics came to its height, according to
Buchan, in the Solemn League and Covenant by which Presbyterianism
was to be the established religion of England. This was the price that the
English Presbyterian Parliament was to pay for Scottish military assistance
against Charles I. It was this perceived attempt to interfere in politics that
decided Montrose to throw in his lot with the King. According to Buchan,
Montrose saw the tyranny of Scottish Kirk and nobles as a greater threat
to the people than the power of the monarch.

The same strong aversion is present in other works, such as The Kirk in
Scotland, which Buchan wrote in conjunction with George Adam
Smith.\textsuperscript{39} It is also expressed in "The Moderate Man", where Buchan puts
John Knox among the fanatics of history who worked more from
intuition than from reason, who was incapable of ordinary logic and who,
while he did good, caused also an infinity of mischief.\textsuperscript{40} If this is true, one
wonders why Knox was able to produce a document like "The Scots
Confession", which is so closely reasoned and characterised by what is
arguably the virtue of humility.\textsuperscript{41} One also wonders why Buchan,
especially in his biography of Montrose, so often looks back to the days of

\textsuperscript{39} John Buchan & George Adam Smith, The Kirk in Scotland, Hodder & Stoughton,
Edinburgh, 1930.

\textsuperscript{40} John Buchan, "The Moderate Man" in Canadian Occasions, Hodder & Stoughton,

\textsuperscript{41} Scots Confession 1560; and Negative Confession 1581, Church of Scotland Committee
the early Reformers in Scotland as the golden era of the Reformation. Knox was the leading early Reformer.

Buchan's Christianity was not modelled on that of his father. They both subscribed to the essentials of the Christian faith but in how they reached their convictions they differed considerably. Buchan, as one would expect from his intense romanticism, had a strong element of the mystic in him. This is what drew him to men such as the Cambridge Platonists, to Montrose and Cromwell. What he saw to be the mystical side, particularly of Cromwell, was very attractive him. As we have noted, Buchan sees Cromwell's conversion as a mystical one, his faith in Christ coming through the warmth of personal experience. The mysticism of Cromwell, as Buchan perceived it, was indicated also in Cromwell's impatience of minor dogmatic differences among Christians, since his own faith was based on subjective experience. The mystic sees creeds as secondary to direct communications of the heart through contemplation.

Buchan senior's faith was different. It was based on what he considered to be the inspired word of God, the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. What he believed about the teachings of the Scriptures was systematised in the "Confession of Faith" and Catechisms. "The Westminster Confession" teaches that the Holy Spirit is not only the author of the Scriptures but gives to the believer, through the Scriptures, the conviction that they are the word of God.42

However, Buchan, the Christian Platonist, believed that God revealed himself to people not only in the Scriptures but in and through nature. As a Christian Platonist, he was convinced that all communications of truth, from whatever source, must conform to reason and conscience. This was a basic difference between himself and his father. For Buchan, Scripture was truth because, and when, it was consonant with reason and conscience. For his father, Scripture was truth because it was Scripture.

Buchan's father would arguably reckon that his son's Christianity was subjectively based while his was objectively based. This was no trivial difference of belief; from an orthodox Presbyterian perspective, it was profound.

Buchan had no quarrel with his father's Evangelicalism, for he believed in conversion to God. In his address, "Presbyterianism Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow", Buchan says that the essentials of religion can never change "the need for conversion in the evangelical sense is still the great fact in any life."\textsuperscript{43} But he held to the gentler Platonic, mystical way of conversion rather than to what he calls the grim Calvinistic schedule which Oliver Cromwell and others of his day had to undergo.

Buchan did not hold to the verbal inspiration of the Bible, but he did believe that the word of God was contained in the Bible. In referring to the help that Oliver Cromwell received from this source, Buchan writes that the Bible, "in its English form was great poetry as well as divine truth, for the translators by the beauty of their rhythms had done something to moralise even the crudest tribal legends of the Old Testament."\textsuperscript{44} In that same context, Buchan adds that Cromwell believed, with Calvin, that "we do not seek God anywhere except in his Word and we speak nothing of him save through his Word". However, Buchan insists, that "that Word is not a bare letter, but a living thing from which the meaning had to be wrestled as Jacob wrestled a blessing from the angel."\textsuperscript{45} Here it is evident that Buchan's mysticism is at work. The relevance of Scripture is not to be found in the plain words, but in the message that God may speak through the words, a message that would be consonant with reason and conscience.

Buchan's theological position here is somewhat Barthian. The Swiss theologian, Karl Barth (1886-1968), while reacting against the liberal theologians of nineteenth century Protestantism, drew a distinction

\textsuperscript{44} Buchan, \textit{Cromwell}, p.526 (emphasis mine).
\textsuperscript{45} Buchan, \textit{Cromwell}, pp.526-527.
between the word of God and the actual words of the Old and New Testaments. According to Barth, the Bible contains the Word of God (Jesus Christ), and in the face of its humanness and fallibility, it is the means God uses to bring people to an experience of Christ, the living Word. It has been said of Barth that Scripture was unified for him, because all of it told the story of Christ. Barth accepted biblical criticism but he did not make much use of it. He could use the texts just as they stood because their function was to serve as a catalyst whereby a person, through reading or hearing the written word, might experience an encounter with the living Word, Jesus Christ.46

Buchan refers to Barth in his autobiography and expresses the wish that his father could have lived to read him; he thinks they had much in common.47 One wonders whether Buchan realised that Barth’s theological position contradicted one of the basic tenets of the Christian Platonist creed, that one could find God through the use of natural reason and conscience. Barth was opposed to the idea that people could find God through natural means. His emphasis on the transcendence of God as ‘wholly other’ precluded any way of knowing God except by divine revelation through the word of God.48 In his earliest writings, Barth was indebted to Søren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher (1813-1855), for his understanding of the Christian faith. Kierkegaard regarded it as reasonable to speak of the reasonableness of Christianity. For him, Christian truth was a scandal for the human mind. One must take the ‘leap of faith’ and accept what the word of God says.49

Buchan retained the teachings of his father about the strenuousness of the Christian life. The lesson of Pilgrim’s Progress, that the Christian life is a strenuous pilgrimage to be pursued daily, lay deep in Buchan’s heart. He believed that Christian pilgrims must persevere to the end in

47 Buchan, Memory, p.247.
49 Latourette, Christianity in a Revolutionary Age, pp.142-144.
the fight against evil. This was also a strong emphasis of Whichcote and his colleagues. They repudiated the idea that Christians may live as they please, since salvation is by grace through faith, or that 'the elect' may sin with impunity.

Buchan also retained the idea of sin and evil, although his father's Calvinistic belief in the 'fall' of men and women, and the consequent sin and evil in the world, was modified by his Christian Platonism. The Christian Platonists, as we have observed, believed in original sin but they also believed in original righteousness. They believed that, while evil had entered human experience, reason and conscience held their integrity; human beings remained free agents. Buchan shared these views.

In addition, Buchan did not believe in a personal devil. He rather made fun of the Evil One after the manner of Robert Burns.\(^5^0\) He did believe that evil became incarnate in men and women. Not a few of Buchan's novels are built around the theme of a wide conspiracy of evil bent on overthrowing civilisation. Behind this conspiracy is a human devil, a very gifted person with charm and personal magnetism who desires to dominate his or her fellows. Having deliberately chosen the path of evil, these 'devils' aim at destroying existing liberal political and social institutions in order to achieve dominance. In Buchan's thought evil arises from human sources; there are no objective evil spirits seducing man or woman to evil.

**Surviving Presbyterian Teachings**

We have seen that Buchan did not follow the Calvinistic Christianity of his father. He modified it with Platonism and mysticism, after the manner of the seventeenth century Cambridge divines. However, certain teachings of his Presbyterian home and church did remain with him and they are strong in their influence on his novels. These can summarised as follows:

\(^5^0\) See, for example, "Tam o' Shanter" in Burns, *Poems*, pp.153-160.
1. Evil is a reality and is endemic in human society. It is always raising its head and has to be constantly resisted.

2. The Providence of God exists for the ordering of affairs and events so as to bring the good to their destiny.

3. Life has a purpose. It is not an aimless jaunt but a walk to a goal. That goal is not mere success in acquiring money, or attaining to high social status, or gaining recognition for one's gifts and achievements. It has a spiritual dimension. Buchan calls this dimension the 'making of one's soul'. In Buchan's novels, there is a growth in this concept, from *The Half-Hearted*, where the concept of making one's soul is proving one's competence in the face of life-threatening challenges, to *Sick Heart River*, where making one's soul means exhibiting a self-sacrificing service of love for others that springs from faith in God.\(^5\)

4. Human nature has dignity, since men and women are made in the image of God. Buchan had a high regard for human personality and this emerges in his novels. Even the worst of Buchan's villains are regarded as fallen angels with worth and dignity, in spite of their crimes. He writes of this human dignity that:

   While I was conscious of man's littleness in the face of the eternal, I believed profoundly in his high destiny. Human beings were compounded of both heavenly and hellish elements, with infinite possibilities of sorrow and joy. In consequence I had an acute sense of sin, and a strong hatred of whatever debased human nature. The conception of mankind, current in some quarters, as a herd of guzzling lecherous little mammals seemed to me the last impiety.\(^6\)

5. There is necessity for courage and resourcefulness in the face of experiences that challenge one's faith. This concept, which is found in the Bible and *Pilgrim's Progress*, was emphasised in Buchan's Presbyterian

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\(^5\) See below, chap. 6, pp.117-132.

\(^6\) Buchan, *Memory*, p.87.
home. Challenges are necessary for the making of the soul for they produce maturity of character and hope, according to the apostle Paul (Romans 5:3-4). The idea of the necessity for challenge in life is found in nearly all Buchan’s novels. So is its corollary, that without challenge the soul becomes possessed of ennui and degenerates.53

6. In the fulfilment of the divine purpose, the weak confound the strong. This concept is very much emphasised in Calvinistic and Presbyterian theology, since God, “chooses the foolish things of the world to confound the wise and the weak things of the world to confound the strong” (1 Corinthians 1:27). This appealed greatly to Buchan’s romantic nature. In Book of Escapes and Hurried Journeys, Buchan writes that romance is “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.”54 Buchan’s heroes overcome the villains not by the ‘strong’ way of superior intelligence or force, but by the ‘weak’ way of the exercise of the imagination, the use of common sense and the refusal to give up.

7. In living his or her life, the Christian has a responsibility to God and to others. In the Buchan home, one of the fundamental lessons of Christian teaching inculcated was that, if one has been given much in life, much is required. A sense of responsibility for one’s abilities, possessions and privileges is illustrated in the parable of the talents told by Jesus (Matthew 25:14-25). Buchan’s version of this in his novels is that we can only justify our possession of wealth, rank and privilege by using them in the service of others. The sentiments of the best of Buchan’s characters, including people of rank, wealth and ability, coincide with this biblical view.55

8. Fortitude is necessary in life. The value and necessity of fortitude in life is strongly underlined in the books on which Buchan’s spiritual life was

55 See, for example, Buchan, John Macnab, p.198.
nurtured, the Bible and Pilgrim’s Progress. According to the teaching of these books, Christians must show fortitude in the face of life’s challenges. They must face responsibilities, failures and frustrations; they must endure their sufferings and overcome evil with good; they must keep on going when it is the last thing in the world that they feel like doing. Fortitude is among Buchan’s favourite virtues; all his heroes and heroines possess it. In Buchan’s novels, Providence walks hand-in-hand with human endeavour. While the end is predetermined, the goal is achieved through human fortitude and perseverance, and often in the face of discouragement and apparently hopeless odds. This is Calvin’s Calvinism; it is not a form of fatalism.

9. There is a believing community living in a hostile environment, bound together by common foes, values and mutual love, and working together for the advancement of humanity. In the Bible, this community refers to Israel and the Christian Church, but Buchan was to give it a wider application in his novels, where it included the empire and secret brotherhoods.

We have now established, in this chapter, the creed that Buchan adopted – Christian Platonism – and shown that, while this led to the modification of the Presbyterian Calvinism of his father, it did not obliterate the profound influence of his Presbyterian upbringing. Much remained to influence his novels. Buchan was convinced that the teachings which he learned in his home and Church were confirmed in the classics and certainly by the Cambridge Platonists. At no time did he consider that these were thrown into question; but modified they certainly were. In the following chapter, the model will be applied and the effect of the modified teachings on Buchan’s characters and their adventures will be explored.
Chapter 5
APPLYING THE MODEL

In this chapter, we examine the way in which the atmosphere imbibed by Buchan in his Presbyterian home influenced the content of his novels. There are two aspects of this: first, the influence of the Free Church milieu, its distinctive literary and ecclesiastical environment; and secondly, the theology and ethics of Presbyterianism. We have already seen that Buchan modified the religion he received in the home, under the influence both of his own temperament and of the teachings of the Cambridge Christian Platonists of the seventeenth century. However, sufficient Presbyterian/Calvinistic influence remained to affect substantially the content of his novels. Buchan at no stage speaks of Platonism as being an alternative to the Calvinism on which he was reared. He himself maintains that it was confirmed, broadened and mellowed by his being exposed to the world of the ancient teacher.¹

In studying the influence of Buchan’s Presbyterian background on his novels, we must remember, as we have noted on a number of occasions, that there were two books, in particular, that had an outstanding effect upon Buchan and his work. These were the Authorised Version of the Bible and Pilgrim’s Progress. On these two texts, Buchan cut his religious and cultural teeth.²

The Authorised Version of the Bible
Buchan was brought up in a home where the King James, or Authorised Version, of the Bible was read every day at family worship, and in a

¹ John Buchan, Memory Hold The Door, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1941, pp.35-36.
Church where it was preached from the pulpit each Sunday. It was also taught in the Sunday School and Bible Class. The Bible was regarded by the orthodox believer as the inspired, inerrant and infallible Word of God. We have already noted that Buchan himself did not accept such a position, but took the view that the Bible contained the Word of God. Buchan believed that Scripture needed to be interpreted in the light of modern thought. He tells of the profound effect the Authorised Version had in shaping his imaginative world as a child:

A child has a natural love of rhetoric, and the noble scriptural cadences had their own meaning for me, quite apart from their proper interpretation. The consequence was that I built up a Bible world of my own.  

His estimation of the effects of the Authorised Version on English language and literature is a powerful one: he sees it as a masterpiece, exercising an incalculable influence on the English-speaking peoples:

Take our own people . . . There is one masterpiece which for more than three centuries has been their constant study, the English translation of the Bible. It has influenced their lives, it has dominated their thoughts and it has coloured their speech. . . Familiarity with the noble rhythms of the Authorised Version made the plain man in a moment of emotion, a great orator. It enabled an unlettered man like John Bunyan to produce his Pilgrim's Progress which apart from its other merits, is a well of undefiled English. It gave the speech of our people, gentle and simple alike, the Roman virtues of gravitas and pietas . . . the Border people of Scotland having the Border Ballads and The English Bible, were in possession of a treasure-house of great literature.

It is possible that Buchan over-estimates the effect of the Bible as literature on the British people, even on his own Scottish Border folk. C.S. Lewis maintains that few people would have read the Bible as literature. Certainly the Authorised Version had a profound effect on some people religiously, and undoubtedly it influenced the religious

3 Buchan, Memory, p.15.
content of Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Even in this case, Lewis maintains that Bunyan wrote, not in the language of the Bible, but in the language commonly in use in Bedfordshire – language from the fireside, the shop and the lane.\(^5\)

However Buchan is clearly recording the effect the Bible had upon him – an unsurprising view, given Buchan’s personality as a passionate romantic and an imaginative and emotionally sensitive man. Lewis argues that such a view of the Bible (as Buchan held) stems from the romantic movement, “with its taste for the primitive and the passionate.”\(^6\) Here he makes a helpful distinction between the Bible as *source* and the Bible as *influence*.\(^7\) As source, the Bible becomes the means for an author to adorn his style; as influence, it must determine the writer’s style, as Homer and Virgil influenced Milton and determined his style in *Paradise Lost*.\(^8\) If this is true, it is as source rather than influence that the Authorised Version has affected Buchan’s novels.

Whether Buchan’s views on the impact of the Authorised Version on the speech of English-speaking people are accurate or not, its effect on him is undeniable. Buchan makes considerable use of the text and language of the Authorised Version in his novels. Quotations from, and allusions to, the Bible are used naturally and effectively. Not only are they put into the mouths of his religious characters, but they are also used in descriptive passages portraying natural scenery and phenomena, and human character. While it could be considered somewhat fanciful, David Daniell pays tribute to the effect of the Bible on Buchan’s novels, in particular reference to the novel, *Salute to Adventurers*:

> The language though steadily in keeping, is also remarkably varied, and maintains its unity by echoing the Bible in a host of different contexts. If there is a colour tone

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6 Lewis, *Authorised Version*, p.27.  
which is constant for the book, it is that of a mixture of Biblical force and an eager setting-out; just as Laputa was given stature by the unobtrusive Covenanting references, so here the whole novel has a freshness from the sense of morning and release, which come from a deeply felt Biblical groundwork which itself underlies the language. The Bible harmonies of many kinds, in Salute to Adventurers, rise up themselves from the deeps of what the bible is all about – cities and frontiers and calls of nations; the attacks of the Enemy; sacrifice and grace and release and resurrection.9

With regard to quotations from the Bible, there is not a novel without numerous references. We may venture to suggest that there is hardly another modern novelist who makes as much use of the text of the Bible in his writings as Buchan. Buchan’s use of the Authorised Version shows his mastery of the Biblical text. Not a few of these allusions are overlooked by the modern reader because of unfamiliarity with the Bible, and, in particular, the Authorised Version. Some of the more obscure references likely to be missed by contemporary readers are given below, as examples of Buchan’s pervasive use of Scripture. These are but a handful of the many references to be found.

a) In Greenmantle, Peter Pienaar takes twenty pounds from an official for travelling expenses, it being his rule never to miss an opportunity to “spoil the Egyptians”.10 Compare God’s instructions to Moses, concerning the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt: “But every woman shall borrow of her neighbour, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye shall put them upon your sons, and upon your daughters: and ye shall spoil the Egyptians” (Exodus 3:22).

b) In Mr. Standfast, the pacifist Wake replies to Richard Hannay, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a combatant”.11 Compare the words of King Agrippa in response to the apostle Paul: “Then Agrippa said unto Paul,

Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28).

c) In The Three Hostages, Richard, having discovered that Medina is the villain behind the taking of the three hostages, has to wait for things to happen, and he waits like “the sick folk by the pool of Bethesda”. Compare the description of the sick in the story of Jesus’ healing of the disabled man: “Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water” (John 5:2-3).

d) In The Island of Sheep, Richard thinks that Lombard was settled like “Moab on his lees”, a Biblical expression for complacency, and a reference to Jeremiah’s lament against the land of Moab in the face of a national crisis: “Moab hath been at ease since his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed” (Jeremiah 48: 11). In the same novel, Sandy Clanroyden, explaining what he has been doing in his absence, describes himself as “going to and fro on the earth”, a reference to Satan’s answer to God who asks, “Whence comest thou?” and Satan replies: “From going to and fro in the earth” (Job 1:7; see also Zechariah’s vision of horses (6:7): “And the bay went forth, and sought to go that they might walk to and fro through the earth: and he said, Get you hence, walk to and fro through the earth. So they walked to and fro through the earth”). Likewise Richard, mediating on the shift of quarters on the Island of Sheep, concludes that, like the wicked, “they had fled with no man pursuing”, an allusion to the proverb: “The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion” (Proverbs 28:1).

e) A Lodge in the Wilderness teems with Scriptural references. For

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14 Buchan, Island of Sheep, p.155.
15 Buchan, Island of Sheep, p.179.
example, Carey, the host of the party at Musuru for the Conference on Empire, declares, "If we cannot create a new heavens we can create a new earth. The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for us", a mixed quotation from the Book of Isaiah, referring to God's eschatological restoration of Israel: "For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind" (Isaiah 65:17) and "The wilderness and the solitary pace shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose" (Isaiah 35:1). Wakefield, one of the representatives attending the Conference, claims that, if Britain does not create tariff preferences for the colonies, they will create treaties with other countries for "where the treasure is there will the heart be also", which comes from the Sermon on the Mount, in a passage contrasting material with spiritual wealth: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21).

f) In Hunting Tower, Alexis Nicolson exhorts the Russian serfs who are being sent to Melbourne to begin a new life, with the words, "You have the task before you of working out your own salvation", which is a reference to Paul's injunction to the Church at Philippi: "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

g) In Witch Wood, David Sempill, in not refuting the arguments of the followers of Montrose (who profess to be soldiers of Leven), thinks that he may be guilty of "the sin of Meroz", an allusion from the Song of Deborah to a town, or possibly clan, which did not fight against the Philistines: "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord against the mighty" (Judges 5:23). Later in the novel, Isobel, David's housekeeper, is sure that, if search is made of the manse, she can speak

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17 Buchan, Lodge in the Wilderness, p.120.
the soldiers "fair in the gate", a phrase that recalls the psalmist's blessing on the man with many sons: "Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate" (Psalm 127:5).

h) In The Power House, Jenkinson, the Collector, tells Leithen that there is "a balm in Gilead", an expression taken from Jeremiah's lament over Israel: "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of my people recovered?" (Jeremiah 8:22).

i) In A Prince of the Captivity, Falconet, referring to the United States, exclaims, "O I know that we are richer than Croesus - fat as Jeshurun and consequently kicking", an allusion to the Song of Moses and its description of Israel's prosperity and subsequent disobedience: "But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked; thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation" (Deuteronomy 32:15).

There are not only quotations from Scripture in Buchan's novels, as noted above; there are also Biblical models to describe the state of mind, activities and destinies of the characters. The arch-villain Medina, for example, has great gifts of personality and many accomplishments; he is attractive in appearance, and directed by ruthless ambition that he pursues with a cool and calculating mind; he loves but one, his mother. Medina's character is arguably based on that of Absalom, son of King David, who possesses the same potential, similar gifts and abilities, the same ruthless ambition and the same cool, calculating mind and has, too, but one love - his sister. Both come to a violent end.

20 Buchan, Witch Wood, p.162. The Biblical expression 'to speak with one's enemies in the gate' is used by Buchan in more than one place in his novels; it signifies the ability to face one's opponents and overcome them. The place of justice was outside the town gate in ancient Israel, where the elders met to dispense justice. See Hans-Joachim Kraus, Psalms 60-150: A Continental Commentary. Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1993, p.455.


23 Buchan, Three Hostages. p.. For the tragic story of Absalom's rebellion against his father David, see the narrative in 2 Samuel 13-18.
The action of the old Covenanter, in *John Burnet of Barnes*, in pulling down the pillars of the cave to kill the dragoons from Gilbert Burnet’s company, is probably based on the action of Samson in the Book of Judges, who, as the blinded captive of the Philistines, pulls down the temple of the Philistine god Dagon, killing himself and large numbers of the enemy (Judges 16:21-30).

The moor to which Bonnie Prince Charlie and his army march in *Midwinter*, where they will meet their appointed end, is called their ‘Ramoth Gilead’. This is a reference to the place where Ahab, King of Israel, meets his appointed end. His defiance of the warning of God’s prophet, and his attempt to evade his destiny by disguising himself in battle, are of no avail. At the assigned spot, an archer draws his bow and “shot at a venture”, piercing the only weak point in Ahab’s armour and mortally wounding him (1 Kings 22:29-35).

There are various Scriptural themes in the novels, such as redemption, undertaken by Dickson McCunn; predestination, as believed in by Richard Hannay, Dickson McCunn, David Crawford, Anthony Lammas, and others; Providence, which is found in nearly every novel; the necessity of confronting and overcoming evil, as accomplished by Richard and Mary Hannay, and Sandy Arbuthnot; victory over death, as Edward Leithen discovers it; self-sacrificing service, as demonstrated by David Sempill and Edward Leithen; laying down one’s life for one’s friends, as exemplified by Lewis Haystoun and Adam Melfort. From these and other examples of Buchan’s use of Scripture, one can justifiably describe the Bible in the Authorised Version as the deep well from which he drew much of his water.

**Pilgrim’s Progress**
Buchan knew *Pilgrim’s Progress* thoroughly. He tells us that the book

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became his constant companion, and that if the text were lost he could restore most of it from memory. His delight in it came partly from the rhythm of its prose, but its spell arose chiefly from:

Its plain narrative, its picture of life as a pilgrimage over hill and dale, where surprising adventures lurked by the roadside, a hard road with now and then long views to cheer the traveller and a great brightness at the end of it.\textsuperscript{25}

This in a nutshell is the pattern of the majority of Buchan's novels. Even in the more sombre tale, \textit{Witch Wood}, the pattern is not entirely lost, for while David Sempill has a hard road to travel, now and then there are long views to encourage him, and, although Katrine is in her grave, he has the brightness of the hope of sharing immortality with her.

In an address on John Bunyan, Buchan states that \textit{Pilgrim's Progress} had been more constantly in his mind than any other written word. He assures his listeners that he always interpreted the book in his own way, not caring to think what Bunyan literally meant, but rather what his sentences meant for him (Buchan) in a world three centuries later.\textsuperscript{26}

There are repeated references to the text of \textit{Pilgrim's Progress} in Buchan's novels. For example, Charles Ottery, on learning that his beloved Pamela has recovered from dangerous illness, has in his eyes a radiant serenity; he has come out of the Valley of the Shadow to the Delectable Mountains.\textsuperscript{27} David Crawfurd, on gaining his first view of Blauwildebeestfontein, is reminded of \textit{Pilgrim's Progress} and the Delectable Mountains.\textsuperscript{28} The boy, Abraham Lincoln, reads to his dying mother an extract from \textit{Pilgrim's Progress}, and in the vision that follows shortly after, Nancy sees a white road on which the pilgrims had

\textsuperscript{25} Buchan, \textit{Memory}, p. 18

\textsuperscript{26} John Buchan, "John Bunyan", Scottish National Library, Edinburgh, Mss. Number Acc. 9058/5/6, unpublished article.


travelled, and on that road was a pilgrim.29

The novel Mr. Standfast is dominated by Pilgrim's Progress. Just as Buchan gave character and identity to the features of his youthful playing environment at Pathhead, with people, places and scenes from Pilgrim's Progress, so he has done a similar thing in this story. Mr. Standfast is a mundane interpretation of Bunyan's classic allegory. Not only is the title of the novel taken from Bunyan's book, and chapter headings likewise borrowed; not only is the text used in the plot as a code for conveying message; but the plot itself follows that of Pilgrim's Progress. There is the Wicket Gate through which Richard has to go to begin his pilgrimage. This is his renunciation of the command of his division on the Western Front to take up the role of a pacifist among what he calls, 'half-baked people'. This he must do in order to discover a master spy and his lines of communication.30

There is the village named Morality, which is Biggleswicke, the town of the culturally pretentious; it is also referred to as Vanity Fair.31 There is the Hill Difficulty, which is Richard's arduous task in the Scottish Highlands. There is Mary's Doubting Castle and Giant Despair in the Picardy Chateau which Richard, on the other hand, thinks is the Interpreter's House. There are the Delectable Mountains, which represent Richard and Mary's love, and the married bliss they will enjoy in post-war England. There is the Valley of Humiliation,32 which is Richard's temporary defeat at the hands of the villain, Moxon Ivery; he is Apollyon. There is the Valley of the Shadow of Death through which Richard and Peter Pienaar must go, though only Richard will emerge. There is Faithful, Peter, the best of them all, who must die.

In Buchan's narrative, Pilgrim's Progress has a marked effect on Peter Pienaar, Richard Hannay's old friend and colleague from South Africa.

30 See, for example, chap. 1 of Mr. Standfast, headed 'The Wicket Gate', pp.13-30.
31 Buchan, Mr. Standfast, pp.31-47.
32 Buchan, Mr. Standfast, pp.166-178
Captured by the Germans and made a prisoner of war, after being shot down and crippled in aerial combat, Peter finds consolation in the Bible and *Pilgrim's Progress.* He takes both it and the Bible literally, and finds great comfort from them during his time of captivity. His consequent cheerfulness, as a prisoner of war and as a cripple, rebukes Richard for his negative mood. Peter has found in Paul the apostle and Mr. Valiant-for-Truth the supreme models for the virtue which he, as a pilgrim, most needs: fortitude. After laying down his life to ensure that the Allies triumph over the Boche, Peter is buried in an apple orchard. While he has always likened himself to the pilgrim, Mr. Standfast, rather than Mr. Valiant-for-Truth, of whom he feels unworthy, it is the latter's valediction that is read by Richard at the simple burial service.

In addition to the influence of these two books, we cannot overlook the influence of Buchan's ecclesiastical background on the novels. Buchan's Presbyterian background is very marked in the contents of the novel, *Prester John.* It is difficult to imagine anyone writing the first chapter unless brought up in the Presbyterian Free Kirk of Scotland. The story expresses the ethos of the Scottish Church; there are references to the Scottish custom of having a visiting preacher for the Communion; there is mention of the gallery where non-communicant members could sit; there is reference to the prominent place which preaching held in Scottish Presbyterian worship, with very long sermons; there is description of the ecclesiastical situation of the Free Kirk and the Parish Kirk existing in the same town, and subtle touches emphasising the Free Kirk's intense interest in missions (for example, having a black preacher from Africa to take the services); the rivalry between the Kirks is hinted at - the Free Kirk minister has married a widow of substance and can keep a horse, a cut above the Parish Kirk minister!

Equally strong is the Presbyterian ethos in the character and actions of David Crawfurd, the hero of the novel. He is a God-fearing Presbyterian.

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33 Buchan, *Mr. Standfast,* p.20.
34 Buchan, *Mr. Standfast,* p.348.
He is aware of God's presence in all the situations of peril and challenge that confront him. He prays when in mortal danger and gives fervent thanks when rescued. Like a good Presbyterian, he prays extempore - he does not read prayers.\textsuperscript{36} In later years, David is to build a hall for the parish Kirk, out of reverence for God and in gratitude for deliverance from all his perils.\textsuperscript{37} When faced by impending danger through the information of Peter Japp, he gives a Presbyterian answer: "We are in God's hand and must wait on his will." This answer is reminiscent of the Psalms with which Presbyterians were so familiar. Until the late nineteenth century, the Scottish Free Kirk sang from the Psalter exclusively in public worship.

David remembers the sermons of his father and the element of predestination that was in them. This is typical of old-style, Presbyterian preaching. The sermons interpret for David the remarkable things that are happening to him, and the apparently miraculous deliverances from dangers. David comes to see himself as one whose actions are fore-ordained by God, and who has been chosen to fulfill God's purposes in thwarting the plans of Laputa and saving Africa from a blood-bath. The thought of being fore-ordained by God to do these things gives David great comfort and initiative. He must succeed, if it has been fore-ordained by God that he should do so.\textsuperscript{38} In later life, and on reflection, David thinks that this has been arrogance on his part. David's father, as a devout Calvinist, would not reach such a conclusion. He would regard fore-ordination as a matter for profound humility and gratitude; he would maintain that the God of the Presbyterians is immanent as well as transcendent; that the one who is 'high and holy, inhabiting eternity', has numbered the very hairs of the heads of his people.

Another subtle touch of Free Kirk Presbyterian in the same novel is that the oration of John Laputa to his people in the cave, prior to their departure to overthrow the white people, is studded with words from the

\textsuperscript{36} Buchan, \textit{Prester John}, pp. 159 & 194.
\textsuperscript{37} Buchan, \textit{Prester John}, p. 100.
prophet Isaiah. This Old Testament book was very much in use by Free Kirk ministers because of what they perceived as its Evangelical content.39

**Influential Presbyterian Teachings**

Having considered something of the effect of Buchan’s Free Church milieu (the Bible and *Pilgrim's Progress*, as well as the ecclesiastical atmosphere), we now turn to demonstrate how the doctrines and ethics of Presbyterianism influenced the content of the novels. There are a number of aspects to this teaching which will be dealt with in turn: evil, Providence, the meaningfulness of life, human worth and dignity, the necessity for challenge, belief in the weak confounding the strong, responsibility, the Church, Christian experience, and messianic perspectives. Some of these we have already noted in the previous chapter;40 now we see how these, and other teachings, are present in the novels.

1. As we have seen, the teaching that evil is a reality endemic to human society, and must be resolutely and constantly resisted, was a strong emphasis in Buchan’s religious education. William, Buchan’s son, outlines his father’s profound awareness of evil and its pervasive presence:

   His acute appreciation of evil and its perpetual presence — his intense perception of it, not only in people and politics, but in landscape also and even buildings — and the need to combat it by all means form a salient feature of all his writings. He saw life as something lived on a frontier, a constantly changing frontier, which must be guarded and fought for if evil were not to triumph. Obviously a Calvinist upbringing could easily set a romantic mind in such a mould and thus, for a writer, provide an inexhaustible theme to be worked over, turned about, examined from a hundred different points of view . . . . His childhood in the Tweed Valley provided all the symbols JB needed to confirm his apprehensions. The kindly landscape which had seen such bloody deeds yet which

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40 See above, chap. 4, pp. 76-79.
nurtured such sturdy people; the golden days which, in that least predictable of climates could turn dramatically to a savage storm... held messages for John which suited his particular morality.41

The contradictions that exist between a creation that is full of beauty and goodness, on the one hand, and destruction and evil, on the other, was bound to disturb and perplex a sensitive, religious man like Buchan. He attempts no explanation for the contradiction, but he does recognise and record evil in his novels. One prominent form of the evil-motif that Buchan employs is an international conspiracy, plotting to destroy democracy and ordered society, in order to seize power and exercise control over people. The conspirators aim at mental, as well as physical control of men and women. To achieve their goal, they intend to overthrow civilisation by anarchy, and replace it with a totalitarian system in which they exercise complete power. This theme first appears in the first of the Leithen series of novels, The Power House.

Andrew Lumley, one of the characters in the novel, is a typical Buchan villain. He has a perfect disguise for his villainy, including a dignified and agreeable appearance, a full soft voice that proclaims him a gentleman, and a library that proclaims him a scholar. He has the gift of an outstanding intellect, and the mystique and magnetism of personality that give him unique power over his fellow mortals. But he is pure intelligence; he has a brain stripped of all humanity.42

It is Lumley who makes the penetrating comment to Leithen: “You think that a wall as solid as the earth separates civilisation from barbarism. I tell you the division is a thread, a sheet of glass. A touch here and a push there and you bring back the reign of Saturn.”43 Lumley’s intention is to organise the yet unorganised forces of change, to bring about the touching and pushing, and the reign of Saturn. He makes Leithen feel his vulnerability, even in the London that Leithen knows and loves so well.

42 See, for example, Buchan, Power House, pp.32-43.
43 Buchan, Power House, p.35.
Janet Adam Smith's comment is that Buchan, in this novel, worked out a formula that was to serve him, as a novelist, for twenty years.44

Other Buchan villains were to follow, including, as we have seen, the arch-villain, Dominic Medina, who appears in The Three Hostages. Medina has an even more thorough disguise than Lumley. He is a successful politician, a brilliant host, an outstanding sportsman and a coveted guest at any party. His brilliant mind is accompanied by impeccable taste in art and considerable poetic gifts. He enjoys wealth and possessions, but lusts for power above everything else. To this end, he takes lessons from an Eastern mystic on how to control the minds of others. He feels superior to all his contemporaries and has nothing but contempt for civilisation, human nature and human life. He aspires to reign over everyone, especially over the upper classes to which he belongs. The ultimate in power, according to him, lies in renunciation. To reign over all people, and then show one's contempt for human beings and human values by renouncing the kingdom, taking a begging bowl and slipping away from the ken of men and women: this to him is the ultimate in power. Such a person accomplishing this, is, according to Medina, a god. Having achieved such dominance and control of society, this 'god' would then show his or her contempt for the world by renouncing his position of power.45

In examining these two villains of Buchan – only two of several others – we see Buchan's concept of evil. It comes from perverted personalities who are so obsessed with their own superiority, and have such contempt for others, that they need to control them, subject them to their dominance and destroy them in the assertion of that dominance. The villains pose a threat to human well-being, freedom, and the sacredness of human personality. Buchan seems to have had almost a gift of prophecy, for within his own lifetime, and after the writing of most of his novels in which this theme appears, the great 'villains' of the twentieth

45 Buchan, Three Hostages, pp.223-224.
century, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and the Japanese imperialists, led by their emperor, stepped out onto the world’s stage. These men exemplified the evil of which Buchan wrote in his novels.

There are other villains in Buchan’s novels who do not operate on an international, or even national scale, but the same principles of evil are present in them. Gilbert Burnet, the cousin of John Burnet, the leading character of John Burnet of Barnes, is a villain on a smaller scale, but has the same sense of superiority towards, and contempt of others. This unscrupulous villain earns the admiration of John Burnet for his bearing and geniality.46 Like all Buchan’s villains, he has great potential for good but has gone off the rails; he is a fallen angel with qualities that are to be admired. Hilda von Einem of Greenmantle is mad and bad, but she is great; she may be a devil but she has the soul of a Napoleon.47 In Power House, Lumley has remnants of greatness which evoke the admiration of Leithen. The latter is robbed of any sense of triumph when he overcomes Lumley, because of the latter’s courage in the face of defeat. Leithen feels he is “in the presence of something big, as if a small barbarian was desecrating the colossal Zeus of Pheidias with a coal hammer.”48 In his fight against Medina in The Three Hostages, Richard knows he is contending with a devil but he knows also it is a great devil.49 This attitude of Buchan’s to his villains stems directly from the Presbyterian view that, while the human race is fallen, it still retains something of the divine image in which it has been created.

The unremitting struggle against evil is found in all Buchan’s novels, no matter in what century or country they are set. Only by resolute resistance, and often only at great cost, can such evil be overcome – and that is only until the next time. The deaths of Lewis Haystoun (The Half Hearted), Peter Piennaar (Mr. Standfast), Adam Melfort (A Prince of the Captivity), and Edward Leithen (Sick Heart River) are part of the price to be paid for

46 Buchan, John Burnet, p.295.
47 Buchan, Greenmantle, pp.174 & 182.
48 Buchan, Power House, p.106.
49 Buchan, Three Hostages, p.224.
overcoming evil. The idea that evil has to be constantly resisted, since it constantly raises its head, and that such resistance may be costly, is found in both the Bible and Pilgrim’s Progress on which, as we have seen, Buchan was reared in his Presbyterian home. According to the Bible, the fight against evil costs the life of Jesus, and is the cause of the deaths of the prophets and martyrs (see, for example, Hebrews 11:32-38). In Pilgrim’s Progress, the fight with evil costs the life of Faithful in Vanity Fair. David Daniell observes that, in Buchan’s thought, keeping evil in place is likely to involve crisis and the ultimate sacrifice by one person. He argues that New Testament theology is never far away and that Buchan’s novels need to be understood in the light of St. Paul.50

Buchan held the view that evil resides not only in people but also in nature. Natura benigna can become natura maligna, and not just in the destructive power of the storm, the menace of flood or the threat of the bitter cold. Natura maligna can play havoc with human psychology; it can destroy the soul. The fear of the North, as we will see in the next chapter, is a dominant theme in Sick Heart River. It drives human beings mad, and, unless overcome, it can lead ultimately to their demise. Such evil is found in the forest that hugs the skirts of Woodilee, called Melanudriggil. In Witch Wood, the malign influence of the forest affects David Sempill, sending a cold chill through his spirit and filling him with fear when he rides through it at night. The same fear possesses his horse which breaks out into a cold sweat and becomes almost unmanageable.51 The fear of Melanudriggil is in the village natural, Daft Gibbie, and also in the villagers, who will not venture into it to gather firewood. It casts its shadow over the whole community. The fear of the wood is intensified by the pagan rites observed at its heart on the old Roman altar on Beltane’s Eve. David goes into a panic flight on his first encounter with these observances and it is reminiscent of Buchan’s experience on the Bavarian Alps when he and his guide fled in panic from a mysterious presence.52 It must be stated here, however, that something about this

50 Daniell, Interpreter’s House, p.31.
52 Buchan, Memory, pp.135-136.
aspect of evil in nature comes more from Celtic traditions than from Presbyterianism. According to the Bible and Pilgrim’s Progress, evil, while affecting nature, does not reside in nature but rather in intelligent beings, whether human or demonic.

2. The doctrine of divine Providence comes out strongly in Buchan’s novels. The way things turn out is never attributed to luck in Buchan’s stories. It is the result of some predetermination. That predetermination is either fate or Providence. The latter, in Presbyterian thought, means the government of God over all his creatures and their actions. In the early novels, Buchan seems to use the two terms interchangeably which is not surprising, since he appeared to regard Free Kirk Calvinism as a form of fatalism. In Presbyterian theology, Providence is the divine work operating within time, to accomplish what has been purposed in eternity.

The novel Greenmantle is redolent with this concept of Providence, especially as the story incorporates the Middle East and Islam. Sometimes Richard refers to predetermination as fate or Kismet; he appears to make no difference between these and the Bible’s Providence. According to the Scriptures, Providence is the activity of a gracious God which operates in conjunction with human responsibility. Richard becomes confused between the three concepts (fate, Kismet, and Providence) and ascribes the fall-out of circumstances to any one of the three – but soldiers are not always good theologians! Richard also finds the doctrine of fate very comfortable. It may well be in certain circumstances, but it can be otherwise: Buchan’s view of fate in The Gap in the Curtain is anything but comforting; it is deeply disturbing and even terrifying, as poor Robert Goodeve discovers; the die is cast and no matter what he does, Robert cannot change it; even his efforts to escape what is decreed are the very means by which fate is encountered. In this novel, in particular, Buchan, despite the theological influence of his home teaching, appears to have lost something of the delicate balance, in Calvin’s theology.

53 See, for example, Buchan, Greenmantle, pp 140, 187.
54 Buchan, Greenmantle, p 190.
55 Buchan, Gap in the Curtain, pp 271-274.
between God's sovereign decrees and human freedom of choice.

In his dedication to Tommy Nelson in The Thirty-Nine Steps, Buchan refers to their mutual love of the 'shocker' in which "the incidents defy the probabilities and march just within the borders of the possible". This description is certainly true of Greenmantle. It is Providence that enables such incidents to occur. It is Providence that preserves Richard in his adventures, gives him the dreams of the castrol, and guides him to it when most he needs it. Providence gives Richard the chance to rob Stumm of the vital plan of the defences of Ezerum, preserves Peter Pienaar in his mission to the Russian lines and keeps Richard safe in the heat of the battle. The same Providence, and the sense of its operations, gives Richard the confidence and courage to persist in his duty, and bring his quest to a successful conclusion. Though facing death, Richard remembers his many mercies, and the part he has been permitted to play in the enterprise, and is filled with humble gratitude to God. After the success of his mission, Richard's theological tangle unravels, and he gives thanks, not to impersonal fate but to the God who has shown him goodness in the land of the living. Buchan's understanding of Providence at the end of this novel is true to his native Calvinism.

Richard Hannay is not the only character in Buchan's novels who believes in Providence. When McCunn is captured by the Tinkers in Hunting Tower and is in deadly peril, 'Wee Jackie' unties his bonds and permits him to escape from his captors. The Tinkers are prepared to kill McCunn when the order is given. McCunn reflects on the fact that Providence has intervened on his behalf through Jackie; it is a token that Providence means to see him through the whole business; his spirits soar for he has the assurance of ultimate success. In The House of the Four Winds, McCunn, within the besieged castle of Prince Odalchini, contemplates the challenge of the situation in Evalonia and casts his

57 Buchan, Greenmantle, p.264.
58 Buchan, Greenmantle, pp.270-271.
59 Buchan, Hunting Tower, p.146.
mind back ten years to the other great house, Hunting Tower. As McCunn sees it, he left his shop to go on a walking tour because he was needed at the other house. Looking back, he realises that it has all been predestined. He wonders if his restoration to health and fitness, at the hands of Dr. Christoph, has been predestined too, so that he would come and help in Evalonia. The comment of the narrator – which is verging on the syncretistic, but still essentially Presbyterian – is that McCunn “had that Calvinistic belief in the guidance of Allah which is stronger than any Moslem’s.”

It is predestination and Providence that bring not only McCunn, but all Buchan’s heroes and heroines, to the successful conclusion of their respective missions. In a typically Presbyterian-Calvinistic way, the effort and fortitude of the participants are called for, but success is guaranteed through divine Providence, sometimes loosely called ‘fate’ by Buchan. Romance – that expectation of remarkable and destiny-determining events – from a Presbyterian view originates in predestination and is brought to fruition by Providence. This, despite some theological confusion, is the essential thought conveyed in Buchan’s novels.

3. The ethical doctrine that life has a purpose, and is not an aimless jaunt but a walk to a goal, is another common theme in Buchan’s novels. His characters are serious men and women, having a purpose for which to live. Buchan learned in his Presbyterian home that life was a serious business. It had to be lived under the eye of the Almighty, and there were goals to be pursued; life had a purpose. Buchan’s characters are serious people who seek a goal. Sandison tells us that Buchan, in his novels, “conducts an unremitting search for a synthetic philosophy which will satisfy all man’s aspirations and accord him the completest self-fulfilment and that this gives a moral basis to the slightest of his adventures.” This is a true insight. There runs through all of Buchan’s novels the quest for self-fulfilment. The idea is clearly expressed in one of Buchan’s early

novels, *A Lodge in the Wilderness*, in which Hugh Summerville tells Lady Flora that she must find a philosophy that is the key to life, an ideal that will leave out nothing and completely satisfy the hunger of her heart. This, he says, can only be found for ourselves and grows gradually out of human experience. It cannot be a conscious philosophy, "for it is psychological rather than logical. The nexus is the human character."\(^{62}\)

In addition to the quest for self-fulfilment found in Buchan’s characters, there is also the concept that, through the divine ordering of things, it is possible to possess this fulfilment. So life has purpose and meaning for Buchan and for his characters. They are pilgrims on a journey. Their fulfilment is not to be found in mere success, and certainly not in material possessions or rank in society, but in the things of the spirit. Buchan emphasises that people must ‘make their soul’—that is, they must prove, by the way they respond to the challenges of life, that they are competent and worthy of the dignity of their God-given nature. Buchan’s heroes and heroines seek to ‘make their soul’. In following their quest, they encounter opposition, they endure physical and mental stress, they are tested by the powers of evil and their weaknesses are exposed. However, in overcoming opposition and discouragements with perseverance and fortitude, they prove their competence, make their souls and so attain fulfilment—even if they lose their lives in the process! Lewis Haystoun, for example, makes his soul, overcoming his ‘half-heartedness’ by dying to save India from invasion on the North-West Frontier.\(^{63}\) Richard Hannay makes his soul by leaving his cherished command on the Western Front, to serve in a more irregular but more dangerous fashion.\(^{64}\) He makes it again by leaving the comfortable life at Fosse, risking life and limb, first to rescue three hostages from the grip of Dominic Medina,\(^{65}\) and then again to confront villains on the Island of Sheep.\(^{66}\)

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\(^{64}\) Buchan, *Mr. Standfast*.

\(^{65}\) Buchan, *Three Hostages*.

\(^{66}\) Buchan, *Island of Sheep*. 
In Buchan’s novels there is a growth in this concept of making one’s soul, from *The Half Hearted*, where the concept of making one’s soul for Lewis Haystoun is proving one’s competence in the face of life-threatening situation, to *Sick Heart River*, where, as we shall see, making one’s soul is exhibiting a self-sacrificing service of love for others that springs from faith in God.\(^67\)

A positive attitude to fulfilment was inculcated in Buchan’s Presbyterian home. The writers of the Bible impress on their readers that they must seek true fulfilment. Jesus promises those who believe in him, that they will neither thirst nor hunger – that is, they will be fulfilled in the finding of ‘eternal life’ (John 6:35). Fulfilment, according to the Bible, is found in fellowship with God and with his son, Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3), in the life of righteousness that is attendant upon such fellowship and the attaining of the New Jerusalem (see, for example, Psalm 16, Isaiah 2:2-5, John 17:3, Romans 5:1-11, Revelation 21:9-22:5). The Bible supports Sommerville’s view that character is the nexus to fulfilment, maintaining that a character that conforms to the divine pattern is the key to true satisfaction (for example, Matthew 5:3-12, 1 John 3:2). This, as we have seen, was one of the emphases of the Cambridge Platonists.

3. Ethical teaching on the dignity and worth of human beings is very marked in Buchan’s novels. If there is one aspect of Christianity on which Buchan is not merely emphatic but dogmatic, it is the worth of the individual. Buchan had a high regard for human personality and this emerges in his novels. Even the worst of Buchan’s villains, as we have noted, are regarded as fallen angels with worth and dignity in spite of their crimes. His conviction came from the teaching of his Presbyterian home where, while on the one hand, mankind was regarded as ‘ruined by the fall’, yet still remained, on the other hand, a noble ruin in need of redemption.

\(^{67}\) See below, chap. 6, pp.117-132.
redemption in *Hunting Tower*, and in the other novels of the series. The Gorbals’ boys prove their worth in the part they play in overthrowing the villains who are seeking to capture Saskia, the Russian princess, and in saving McCunn’s life. They are adopted by the retired grocer as his own ‘bairns’, and are given a chance in life. Redeemed from poverty, ignorance and homelessness, they all succeed in their callings or professions. While contemplating the Gorbals’ boys, Dickson McCunn gives expression to Buchan’s high estimation of human worth. Having considered the background of the Gorbals Diehards, their disadvantaged social milieu, and their recent achievements, McCunn believes there is a heavenly spark in them: “He had always thought nobly of the soul; now he wants to get on his knees before the queer greatness of humanity.”68 He declares his intention of adopting them and giving them a chance in life; he thinks the stuff of generals, provosts and prime ministers is in them. The thoughts of McCunn are typical of Free Church ethical teaching on human dignity.

4. Ethical teaching on the necessity for challenge is another strand in the rope of Buchan’s novels. In his autobiography, Buchan writes that, just as his walks were not random saunters “but attempts to get somewhere, so a worthy life seemed to me to be a series of efforts to conquer intractable matter, to achieve something difficult and perhaps dangerous.”69 With such an attitude, we would expect Buchan’s novels to be mainly taken up with hazards and challenging adventures. We are not disappointed. Challenge is one of the essential ingredients in the novels, and not only to compile a gripping story. The challenge is necessary for the making of the souls of the heroes and heroines involved. Challenge has a moral purpose. It delivers people from that soul-destroying affliction, ennui. Challenge arouses one from a self-centred, cosseted life. The deprivation and hardship involved in meeting the challenge give rise to a zest for life, gratitude and the capacity to enjoy one’s mercies.

69 Buchan, *Memory*, p.86.
The novel John Macnab is about the device used by three friends – Edward Leithen, Charles Lamancha and Palliser-Yeats – to rid themselves of ennui. They are successful in their respective careers, but too successful, too competent. They have no struggle and are in need of the tonic of difficulty. One of them is advised by his doctor to go out and steal a horse! They hear from a young man, Archie Roylance, of someone who rid himself of boredom and lethargy by poaching a stag, after warning the landlord that he was going to do it. They decide on a similar exploit. Each will carry out his poaching escapade on adjacent properties, having forewarned the respective landlords, but they will do so under a common name, 'John Macnab'. Taking up the challenge, they express Buchan’s philosophy of the necessity of struggle for fulfilment: men and women must fight for what they have or what they would possess. Life without challenge or struggle, leads to boredom, loss of zest for life, and lack of appreciation for what one has. It destroys the soul.\(^7_0\)

The same theme figures largely in the novel, The Island of Sheep. Both Richard Hannay and his former colleague in Africa, Lombard, are vegetating in their respective, unchallenging situations. Lombard, as we have already seen, is like Moab on his lees.\(^7_1\) They take up the challenge to help the son of a man, Haraldsen, whom they promised to aid many years before. They go to a northern island in order to confront the villains. They save Haraldsen’s son and, having made their souls, return to enjoy their blessings. This theme of challenge, emphasised in Buchan’s home life and intrinsic to traditional Presbyterian spirituality and ethics, is taken up and developed in this and other Buchan novels.

5. The moral and theological teaching that, in the purpose of the Almighty, the weak confound the strong, is another theme popular in Buchan’s narratives. The concept greatly appealed to Buchan’s romantic nature, and it was commended in his Presbyterian home. In Salute to Adventurers, Andrew Carval is a very ordinary person in origin, social status, appearance, social graces and attainments (except for pistol

\(^7_0\) See above, chap. 4, p.78.
\(^7_1\) See above, p.84.
shooting). The only things in his favour are that he has the ability to grasp simple truths that elude clever men, and a desperate obstinacy that is reluctant to admit defeat. Such abilities are not lauded in polite society. Yet it is not through the young bloods of Tidewater, with all their genteel breeding and polished manners, not through the swashbuckling, accomplished, uncrowned king of the buccaneers, Red Ringan, nor through the knowledgeable and competent Simon Frew, that God saves the community. It is through the lowly, unexceptional Andrew. Being numbered among the meek ones who trust in God and keep their powder dry, Andrew inherits the earth. He proves his manhood, wins the fair Elspeth, gains the gratitude and respect of his contemporaries, and prospers considerably in the things of this life.

The same theme is found in the Hannay series, especially Mr. Standfast and The Three Hostages. In the former novel, Ivery Moxon, or Graf Von Schwabing, to give him his full name, the German agent par excellence, is the ‘strong’ man. He is brilliantly intelligent. He is a genius in plots and a master of disguises. He has endless resources and a vast organisation. His spy net-work, consisting of the ‘Wild Birds’ and the ‘Caged Birds’, covers the whole of Western intelligence. He has his ‘Underground Railway’ which provides him with a transport system enabling him to go anywhere, at any time. He is, in short, a Master Mind, able to accomplish everything he sets his heart to do. But he is overthrown by the imagination and persistence of the comparatively unaccomplished Richard Hannay. Similarly, the German hordes, mustering on the Western Front for their final and overwhelming onslaught, are thwarted by the insignificant Peter Pienaar. He sacrifices himself by crashing into the German scout plane which carries crucial intelligence to the German lines.

In the same way, the international villain of The Three Hostages, Dominic Medina, with all his brilliance of mind and personality, his

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73 Buchan, Three Hostages. p.219.
74 Buchan, Three Hostages. p.255.
cunning and vast resources, is thwarted by the combined determination
and imagination of Richard Hannay and his wife Mary. It is, in fact, Mary
who gives Medina’s plans the coup de grâce. She does so through strength
of spirit by her pretended threat to mar the villain’s features with acid, if
he does not restore the hostage boy, David Warcliff, from his trance.75
Likewise in Hunting Tower, the Russian villains and their accomplices in
Scotland, with all their resources and proficiency in crime, are thwarted,
in the main, by a group of disadvantaged children and a retired grocer.

Once again, in The Dancing Floor, the weak things overcome the strong.
Leithen is on the Island of Plakos to rescue Kore, the late owner’s
daughter. The islanders have lapsed into ancient Greek paganism and
intend to sacrifice Kore Arabin, who is the scapegoat for her late father’s
misdeeds. She is in deadly peril and Leithen is helpless to do anything. He
is full of anger at the blinded villagers, at Kore’s obstinacy and at his own
feebleness. To find relief, he rummages around in the Church in which
he has taken refuge from an angry mob; there he finds the shrouded
figure of Christ used in the Easter ritual, which gives him new hope.
Now he realises he has the faith behind him, the faith deep in the hearts
of the peasants. The shabby Church and the ignorant priest are a visible
token of the creed that all hold dumbly – the belief in the ultimate
omnipotence of purity and meekness.76 It is this power that finally
overthrows the forces of evil on the Island. The power enshrined in the
festival of Easter and inherent in its ceremonies, which is dormant in the
hearts of the delinquent parishioners, finally comes into its own through
the fantasy played by Vernon Milburne and Kore Arabin at the height of
the pagan ceremony. The same power which has helped Leithen to keep
his spiritual equilibrium, banishes the time of horror, restores the
Dancing Floor to its primitive innocence and the deviant villagers to
their Church.

6. The ethical belief in the necessity for a sense of responsibility to God

75 Buchan, Three Hostages, pp. 247-249.
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and to others was deeply embedded in Buchan from his Presbyterian upbringing. It is found in the characters of his novels. These characters are revenants of the Middle Ages, Christian knights with a deep sense of duty and responsibility to protect the weak and vulnerable, and to confront the social predators who threaten human freedom and dignity. Trevor Royle confirms this in his introduction to *Sick Heart River*.\(^{77}\) He notes that Buchan, in visiting the North of Canada as Governor General, found in the men of the North that which complemented his own philosophy – no privilege without responsibility, a recurring motif in Buchan’s fiction. This is an attitude that is fundamental to Biblical morality. Buchan’s milieu was shot through with a sense of responsibility towards others. His father wore himself out, with resulting premature death, in carrying out his responsibilities to his congregation. Buchan’s mother, as we have seen, was unremitting in her care of the poor and deprived, the sorrowing and the sick. That sense of responsibility appears in all his novels.

The ethic of responsibility is aptly illustrated in the attitudes and utterances of Samuel Johnson who appears in *Mid Winter*. While the appearance of Johnson in such a situation is obviously fictitious, the character of the man portrayed in the story is true to life. In Johnson, Buchan has portrayed one whom he considers a truly devout Christian. Johnson has the fear of God and profound humility before the Almighty, selfless love that serves to the utmost, deep loyalty to friends and spiritual insight; he reminds Alastair Maclean that the Master has not placed us in this world to win even honest happiness, but to shape and purify our immortal souls.\(^{78}\)

It is is Johnson who discerns the true motive of Alastair Maclean, as Alastair pursues the traitor to Prince Charlie, John Norreys. Alastair has fallen deeply in love with Claudia, the young wife of Norreys. With Norreys dead, he could marry the widow. It is Johnson who faces Alastair with his hidden agenda and reminds him that the lover always has the

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beloved’s well-being in mind. Johnson points out that if Alastair exposes Norreys, Claudia will be shattered and will never trust another man; if he kills Norreys, she will be heart-broken and never marry again. By his non-too-gentle persistence, Johnson persuades his young friend to go the way of Christian duty and to carry out his responsibility to the young woman whom he professes to love so deeply. Having pursued Norreys, Alastair disarms him in a fight but spares his life and sends him back, unexposed, to his gullible but adoring wife and to his estate.

The young captain, having thus carried out his Christian duty to his beloved, fulfils his responsibility to his Prince by joining him on the pathetic field of Culloden Moor. It is there that the Stewart cause meets its ‘Ramothe Gilead’ – its predestined end. That end is in accordance with divine Providence, over which Alastair has no control, but meantime he has made his soul. He has conquered his passions and acted for the good of another, putting her well-being before his own desires. He may have lost in politics and war, but he has had a glorious victory in the realm of the spirit. He has acted responsibly and revealed what lies behind all responsible behaviour, and what makes men and women most God-like – that is, Christian love.

A sense of responsibility is found in A Lodge in the Wilderness, in which the nature, functions and obligations of Empire are discussed at length. The delegates to the Conference – convened by Carey, a rich colonialist, at his lodge Musuru, East Africa – are all agreed that the Empire is not a stage for exhibiting Britain’s glory. Chauvinism is renounced. The colonies and dependencies are not for commercial exploitation. The Empire exists for the spread of civilisation, Christian civilisation, through the political, social and economic advancement of all its members. Lord Appin declares that the imperialist is bowed down with the burden of his duties and the complexity of the task before him. A dependence is not a possession but a trust. The glory of England is not the

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79 Buchan, Midwinter, p.255.
80 Buchan, Lodge in the Wilderness, p.4; on Carey’s idealism, see p.35.
mileage of her territory, but the state into which she is welding it.\textsuperscript{81} Equality of representation in an Imperial Council for all parts of the Empire is one of the goals aimed at. The Empire is to be held together, not by force, but by loyalty to the crown and the sharing of a common culture. It is to be a salutary influence on the world.

The love of Alastair Maclean for Claudia, which puts her well being before his own desires, is found here at Musuru, only this time it is a love that puts the well-being of the colonies before that of Imperial Britain. Such an ideal a must lead, inevitably, to the independence of the colonies – including the Black races, although their status in the Empire is left rather vague in the discussions of the Conference members. This sense of responsibility to the various races in the Empire, in particular to Black peoples, may seem patronising and presumptuous to modern eyes. It may appear as the product of an unconscious sense of racial superiority. But, for our purposes here, it reveals that, in Buchan’s mind, there had to be a sense of responsibility to others in any concept of Empire.

8. Theological teaching about the Church as a community of believers, bound together by a common faith and mutual love, was familiar to Buchan. The Church was meant to be a leaven affecting the surrounding society. The same vision Buchan took and applied to his ideal of Empire. Sandison, in his examination of Buchan’s views of Empire, points out that Buchan, in his idealism, has ‘ecclesiasticised’ the concept. Sandison cites the words of Lord Appin from \textit{A Lodge in the Wilderness}, at the Conference at Musuru Lodge, which, he argues, summarises Buchan’s creed at the time: “We do not profess to teach religion, but, if we are not theologians, we are in a sense ecclesiastics. The state, remember, has now taken the place of the mediaeval church.”\textsuperscript{82} Appin points out that the old mediaeval church crumbled because it tried to imprison the longings of the human spirit within the narrow walls of creed and ritual. The Empire, he maintains, is the modern form of the church; it is religion in a relevant guise. The Empire has all the characteristics of the old Church: a

\textsuperscript{81} Buchan, \textit{Lodge in the Wilderness}, p.341.
\textsuperscript{82} Sandison, \textit{Wheel of Empire}, p.187.
brotherhood bound together by a common faith, an ideal that is spiritual, and, in a hostile environment, the stimulus to bind all together for action. Appin assures his audience that we must have a Church, as we must have religion, but we have learned that the true and lasting work for which such an organisation is fitted is political rather than doctrinal. He concludes: "Our view of empire gives that empire something of the character of a church... our empire will be another, and more truly Catholic church."\textsuperscript{83}

The same 'ecclesiastical' spirit of Empire is found in \textit{Prester John} where the Company Agent, Aitken, having found the diamond pipe and with it a great fortune, lays down a large fund for the education and amelioration of the native races. He establishes a great native training college, intended to fit the Kaffirs to be good citizens of the State.\textsuperscript{84}

9. Theological and ethical teaching on fundamental experiences of the Christian life, from a Presbyterian perspective, is found at the heart of a number of Buchan's novels. There is, for example, the experience of conversion. Buchan was brought up in an atmosphere of revivalism. While not only Buchan but his siblings found personal revivalism somewhat offensive, and objected to personal questions being asked about their souls,\textsuperscript{85} Buchan did believe in conversion in the Evangelical sense and it crops up in his novels.

In \textit{The Courts of the Morning}, for example, Sandy Clanroyden, with the help of Janet, saves the soul of Castor the Gobenador. The latter confesses his conversion: he has learned humility at the Courts of the Morning; he has been arrogant, self-centred, friendless and inhuman, but, in the mountain eyrie, he has found a juster perspective, a revelation has been given him, and many things, including himself, now take on different proportions.\textsuperscript{86} After Castor is murdered by the 'Conquistadors', Sandy is

\textsuperscript{83} Sandison, \textit{Wheel of Empire}, p. 188.
comforted by the fact that they saved the soul of Castor before he died.\textsuperscript{87} Peter Pienaar, as we have seen, experiences conversion in a German prison camp. He thereafter lives by the Bible and \textit{Pilgrim's Progress}.\textsuperscript{88}

Adam Melfort has an experience of conversion to God while in prison paying the penalty for his wife’s forgery, in \textit{A Prince of the Captivity}. Through his imprisonment, Adam is brought to an end of himself rather like the Prodigal Son; he feels himself, “naked, stripped to the buff, without a rag to call his own” and he humbles himself before God.\textsuperscript{89} He accepts the divine ordering of things. He dedicates himself humbly to do whatever service may be asked of him and rises from his knees in prison with the certainty that his vow has been accepted.\textsuperscript{90} Even when Adam apparently fails, through the backslidings of the men of quality whom he has discovered and assisted – Ulaw, the labour politician, Alban, the minister of religion and Kenneth Warmestre, the mayor of Birkpool, all of whom desert their posts of usefulness – his faith remains strong. He rests in the divine purpose. He is but a subalterm obeying a command; the setting of the battle is with the General-in-Chief.\textsuperscript{91} Similarly, in \textit{Sick Heart River}, Edward Leithen undergoes a religious conversion in the frozen North of Canada. It is noteworthy that Buchan’s converts, in these and other novels, are not converted in a revivalist manner, nor do they become orthodox after the strict Presbyterian fashion.

Similarly, the corollary of conversion, regeneration (or renewal) is a subject that appears in the Buchan novels. Craw, the very worldly and self-centred news magnate of \textit{Castle Gay}, is regenerated, even if it is after a romantic mode. Through his hard trekking and physical privations, as he journeys with ‘Jakie’ in the Canonry on their way to Castle Gay, Craw, very much given to querulousness if deprived of his comforts and luxuries, begins to enjoy the coarse food and demanding exercise. He starts to appreciate his natural surroundings, and to sleep well at night.

\textsuperscript{87} Buchan, \textit{Courts of the Morning}, p.402.
\textsuperscript{88} Buchan, \textit{Mr. Standfast}, p.20, see above, p.90.
\textsuperscript{89} Buchan, \textit{Prince of the Captivity}, p.21.
\textsuperscript{90} Buchan, \textit{Prince of the Captivity}, pp.22-23.
\textsuperscript{91} Buchan, \textit{Prince of the Captivity}, p.174.
He loses his hypochondria and his fear of death, and takes on a far more positive attitude to life. So far is he changed that he is successful in espousing the formidable widow, Mrs. Brisbane-Brown, the arch-defender of ancient families.92

The Gobornader Castor, in *Courts of the Morning*, as we have seen, is regenerated and has a new mind and outlook on life. The Gorbals Diehards are renewed through the endeavours of Dickson McCunn; they take on, and successfully complete, new careers.93 Charles Ottery is renewed by love for his fiancée who is sick; his overwhelming fear is cast out and he forgets himself in his love and concern for his beloved; his life is changed.94 We have seen how Alastair Maclean, in *Midwinter*, is renewed to grasp the concept of true love, under the tuition of his friend Samuel Johnson; his attitude and behaviour take a new turn.95

Sanctification, or growth in Christian holiness, also features in Buchan’s novels. Dickson McCunn, through his adventure with John Heritage and Dougal and his gang of Diehards, in the village of Dalquharter, is equipped by divine Providence for further work in confronting villains such as Melina in Evalonia.96 Adam Melfort is similarly trained by providential experiences for his ultimate life’s work in saving Warren Creevey, a genius who is destined with Loeffler to be the financial saviour of Europe.97

Peter Pentecost is sanctified and saved from earthly ambitions through profound Providential experiences. He is a direct descendant of the Bohuns, the hidden but true heir to the throne. Peter is at first inclined to earthly ambitions, and to the unseating of the usurper, Henry VIII. Through the lessons from heaven, he is purged of his folly. He learns of the ephemeral nature of earthly glory in seeing the decayed corpse of a

95 See above, p.106.
former great noble, trapped in a cellar while hiding from his foes.98 His worship of the beautiful Sabina, his intended bride, is checked as she reveals that her attachment to him is conditional: he must commit everything to the venture for earthly glory.99 However, he receives a vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary which sets his heart on heaven rather than mundane rewards.100 The saving of his soul, and the securing of his eternal well-being, become the absorbing goal of his life. Peter is still prepared to challenge Henry for the throne, but only for the sake of preserving the true Church and helping the poor. When the plan to put him on the throne goes awry, through freak weather, he sees it as the will of God. Sent to execution by the ruthless but able Henry VIII, whose life Peter has saved, he escapes from custody and disappears, cheerfully, into obscurity. Thus the Presbyterian emphasis on the experiences of conversion, regeneration and sanctification is found throughout numerous novels of Buchan.

10. Christological teaching about Jesus as Messiah, closely connected to Christian experience, is a feature of several of Buchan’s novels. That Jesus Christ alone could save humanity was the main theme of his father’s discourses, his mother’s exhortations, the hymns which Buchan sang and the Scriptures which he read. A number of Buchan’s narratives have, as their theme, the need of society for a saviour. Buchan’s solution for the world’s problems is the finding of the right kind of persons who, equipped by Providence for the task, would become the ‘saviours’ of their generation. Some of these ‘saviours’ are Christ-like in their attitudes and abilities, and are regarded with great deference.

Buchan’s great hero, the Duke of Montrose, appears fleetingly in Buchan’s novels but where he does appear, he is given messianic status. At Calidon Tower, the Duke, disguised as a groom, is greeted by Katrine with a curtsy that takes her near to the ground,101 while David Sempill is captivated on

99 Buchan, Blanket of the Dark, pp. 190-191.
100 Buchan, Blanket of the Dark, pp. 207-208.
101 Buchan, Witch Wood, p. 44.
meeting him. In after thoughts, David avidly longs to see him again, to be with him, to follow him, to serve him. He is distressed at the thought of never seeing him again. He concludes that he could joyfully follow the man to the cannon’s mouth.\footnote{102 Buchan, \textit{Witch Wood}, p.47.}

There is a messianic element in the character and activities of Sandy Clanroyden. The saviour in Sandy is conveyed through his dedication to the salvation of the soul of Castor the Gobernador, by his superb qualities of leadership, his super-human endurance, his capacity to cope with any eventuality and the mystique he enjoys among his colleagues and subordinates. He is El Obro to the Indians. There is a touch of the messianic about Sandy’s triumphal entry into Olifa City. Like Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem (Mark 11:1-11), Sandy is mounted on an animal, bedecked with tokens of acknowledgement and regarded with awe by the multitude who recognise him as the one who might be their king.\footnote{103 Buchan, \textit{Courts of the Morning}, p.403.}

Abraham Lincoln is also presented as a messiah-figure. He appears as the Great Leader – the last of the kings – who brings the people to the Kingdom of God, that is, to true democracy and political fulfilment. Lincoln’s mother, Nancy Linkhorn, dying in her squalid cabin, tormented by the dashing of all her dreams, by a sense of failure and her poverty, is comforted by a vision of her son’s future greatness. She sees ancestral pilgrims treading a road and seeking a country. They wear the family ring. She notices the eyes of her predecessors as they seek fulfilment but do not find it. She remembers a verse from the scriptures, “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims upon the earth” (Hebrews 11:13).\footnote{104 Buchan, \textit{Path of the King}, p.269.} It is in Abraham, her son, that the dream is realised and mankind reaches its destined goal. He is the one who proves that democracies can rule themselves. By his decision to prosecute the Civil War, and by bringing the war to a successful conclusion, he saves democracy from making a
fool of itself.

The dying Nancy knows that she has won everything from life, for she has given the world a master. She seems to hear the words, “Bethink you of the blessedness. Every wife is like the mother of God and has the hope of bearing a saviour of mankind.”¹⁰⁵ Nancy dies happily, knowing that she has given a great leader to the world. It is a similar message that the Maid of Orleans gives to Catherine Beaumanoir in the same novel. To deter Catherine from forgoing her marriage, and becoming a nun in order to do the will of God, Joan of Arc tells her that every wife is like the mother of God – she has the hope of bearing a saviour of mankind. She is the channel of the eternal purpose of Heaven.¹⁰⁶

It is in the character of Adam Melfort that Buchan’s messianic theme reaches its climax. Like Jesus, Adam suffers for the sins of others. When his frivolous and spendthrift wife forges a cheque, and is in danger of trial and imprisonment, he takes the blame and goes to prison in her place. The environment of prison is “the wheel that would have broken the butterfly”.¹⁰⁷ Like Jesus too, Adam heals people and drives the ‘demon’ out of the distracted Marrish, who is about to murder his rival and then commit suicide. He tells Marrish that he is going to take charge of him, that he is a healer of souls, and intends to make a good job of him. This is not arrogance on Adam’s part. Like Jesus, he acts in the power of another. He is but an instrument of the Almighty and is deeply conscious of this fact. Humility is a strong feature of his character. This is another of his Christ-like qualities. Like Jesus, Adam gives his life for those who hate him. He saves Creevy, the financial and administrative genius who hates him, and effects Creevy’s escape from his enemies, but at the cost of his own life. In saving the financier, Adam makes a new man of him, and Creevey returns to society to help Loeffler, the German leader of genius and quality, to put Europe on its feet.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Buchan, Path of the King, pp.270-271.
¹⁰⁶ Buchan, Path of the King, p.105.
¹⁰⁷ Buchan, Prince of the Captivity, p.13.
¹⁰⁸ Buchan, Prince of the Captivity, pp.270-271.
Other messianic qualities in Adam include his power to make disciples who will follow him anywhere, including the beautiful Lady Jacqueline Warmestre. Adam’s association with her is non-sexual, like Jesus with Mary Magdalene. She does not love him in a sexual way, since “love did not belong to his austere world but he had come to represent for her all the dreams and longings which made up her religion.”

She feels honoured to be treated as an equal by him, and to be asked to assist him. She is ready to face extreme peril for his sake. Her eyes are lit like a bride as they say farewell at the inn of the Val d’Arras. With a similar attachment, Creevey, at the climax of his escape from his enemies, entreats Adam to be with him always. Adam stirs in the international financier a feeling that no human being has ever evoked before. Now he assures Creevey, as Jesus assured his disciples at the point of his departure, that he will be with him always – even though Adam knows he is about to die for Creevey’s sake.

Here, as elsewhere, theological messianism is apparent in the novels of Buchan.

**Summary**

The strong Christian/Presbyterian influence in Buchan’s novels is unmistakable. They are permeated and moulded by the teachings of Buchan’s Presbyterian home, however much they have been modified by Christian Platonism. The stories are inspired by romanticism, and restrained by Roman reasonableness, but they are based on Christian values, contain Christian themes and are strongly influenced by Christian theology, especially in its Presbyterian form.

While not acting as theological propaganda, nor having an evangelistic thrust, Buchan’s novels are thus essentially Christian in tone and expression. The thoughts, spiritual values and expressions of the Bible and Pilgrim’s Progress lie at the heart of these narratives. Christian knights, imbued with Christian ideals, ride forth on Christian missions –

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to fight evil and establish those social conditions in society that ensure men and women the opportunity to live in freedom and dignity, and so strive for, and attain, true fulfilment. This is only a part of the Christian goal, and probably the only part appropriate for popular novels of this kind. While the supra-mundane is hinted at in several of his novels, it is explicit only in Buchan’s final novel, Sick Heart River. In this story, Buchan forcefully reminds his readers that the Christian’s goal is a transcendent one, going beyond the mundane, finding its consummation in eternity, in the new heavens and the new earth, “wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13). It is to this novel that we now turn.
Chapter 6

SICK HEART RIVER – THE PILGRIM’S REST

We have taken this final chapter heading from Buchan’s last uncompleted work, Pilgrim’s Rest. This series of reflections was published after his death and only two chapters are extant. However, Buchan’s last novel Sick Heart River, is the story of how Buchan the pilgrim, through his main character, Edward Leithen, came to his own religious and philosophical rest. In the Leithen of Sick Heart River, Buchan brings to consummation his concept of fulfilment and his philosophy of life. Here Buchan’s Christianity finds its clearest expression. This chapter will show how Leithen travels from a Stoic to a Christian understanding of life. We will see how Buchan articulates most fully that religious experience which lies at the heart of Presbyterian religion.

All the great principles of religion and morals which Buchan was taught in his Presbyterian home and church, even though somewhat modified by Christian Platonism, are found in this novel, and found in their most unambiguous form. David Daniell regards the novel as the climax of a process begun twenty-seven years before with the creation of the

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1 For the extant text, see Pilgrim’s Rest, Valleys of Springs of Rivers, in John Buchan, Memory Hold the Door, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1941, pp. 295-320, the work, as far as it goes, is about fishing.
3 See the helpful and profound discussion of this theme in the novel in Alan Sandison, The Wheel of Empire. A Study of the Imperial Idea in Some Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Fiction, Macmillan, London, 1967, pp. 170-179. Sandison’s point is an ironical one: whereas Leithen previously sought God in the grandeur of nature, he finally finds God in ministering to the Hare Indians in their poverty and misery.
character, Leithen. The novel, in his view, is thought-provoking and challenging for the reader: “It is less strange than deeply disturbing. It is a moving narrative more like St. John than St. Luke, deeply meditative rather than classically cool.” It is disturbing because it is the story of Leithen’s journey from being merely a religious man to becoming a committed Christian – or, to use the terminology of the apostle Paul, it is the story of how he who was under law, came to be under grace (for example, Romans 6:14). Furthermore, the novel reveals the final resolution of tensions that existed in Buchan himself because of what he was taught and what was expected of him in his Christian home, and what he was by temperament. Buchan, as we have seen, was a romantic and, therefore, was impatient of any strictly defined faith; he was a moderate, and therefore shrank from what he considered to be any undue enthusiasm in religion. There is also the resolution of the tension which existed in Buchan because of the Calvinism of his background, and the teachings to which he was exposed at the Universities of Glasgow and Oxford.

Leithen of Sick Heart River

a) Leithen’s religion

Leithen is portrayed in Sick Heart River as a man who has a naturally strong religious instinct. Like Buchan, Leithen has been brought up in a Calvinistic household and its atmosphere still clings to him. He has an acute sense of sin and his lifestyle is conducted on Puritan lines. He firmly believes in God but a God of ineffable purity and power. In the light of that, he has no undue reverence for man and is conscious of his own insignificance and imperfections. On the one hand, he does not rebel at the misfortunes of life, and on the other, he is thankful for his mercies, Leithen, we are told, 7 is not a religious man in the ordinary sense of the word. We can only take this latter statement to mean that he neither


6 See above, chaps. 1-2, pp.1-26, 27-43.

7 Buchan, Sick Heart River, pp.18-19.
belongs to a Church, nor attends Church regularly, nor subscribes to a recognised creed – yet Leithen’s beliefs and attitudes reveal him to be a religious man. When he comes face-to-face with his religion in the Sick Heart River valley, when the majesty of God fills his universe, Leithen reflects that he has always been, in his own way, religious: “Brought up under the Calvinistic shadow, he had accepted a simple evangel which, as he grew older had mellowed and broadened.”

At Oxford, Leithen has rationalised this religion in his philosophical studies, but has never troubled to make it a self-sufficing logical creed. Certain facts have been the buttress of his faith, the chief of them being the omnipotence and omnipresence of God. In the light of this, he “always detested the glib, little humanism of most of his contemporaries.” Leithen recalls that he had no communion with the transcendent God in whom he believed, and no craving for it: “It rarely impinged on his daily experience.” He felt gratitude and resignation, respectively, before Omnipotence when things went well or badly. It was different in the war, for in times of stress he sensed a relationship that was almost communion; he felt, not merely under God’s ultimate command, but under God’s direct care; his nerves were steady for he did not worry about what was pre-ordained. The war was followed by years of spiritual sloth and, borrowing from Wordsworth, Leithen concludes that the world was “too much with him”. He still continues to praise God for the pleasures of life, and to take meekly his disappointments, as part of the divine plan. He is aware that he is a puppet in almighty hands.

What we may have here is a description of Buchan’s own religious views and progress. He too, as we have seen, was brought up under the shadow of Calvinism and went to Oxford and pursued philosophical studies, including the philosophies of ancient Greece and Roman. In the classics, Buchan found an emphasis on the transcendence and majesty of God, as

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8 Buchan, *Sick Heart River*, p.113.
9 Buchan, *Sick Heart River*, p.113.
10 Buchan, *Sick Heart River*, p.113.
also found in Calvin’s writings. Leithen apparently finds these teachings in the classics too, for he firmly holds to them. Whether Leithen’s religious experience is identical with Buchan’s own religious pilgrimage in every particular, is another question. David Daniell admittedly gives a warning against reading too much of Buchan’s experience into Leithen; he argues that Graham Green and Janet Adam Smith make this mistake.\footnote{David Daniell, \textit{Interpreter’s House}, Thomas Nelson, London, 1975, p.194.}

While there may be an element of truth in Daniell’s criticism, there is, nevertheless, an undeniable parallel between the religious milieu and spirituality of both Buchan and his offspring, Leithen. Alan Sandison makes this identification complete, taking the view that Buchan is describing his own pilgrimage.\footnote{Alan Sandison, \textit{The Wheel of Empire}, MacMillan, London, 1967, pp.170-171.} Sandison is convincing in his moving account of Buchan’s journey to fulfilment and he may well be right. His central idea is that Buchan’s search for fulfilment in his former novels has been unsatisfactory since he has sought it in self-related activities. Through his heroes, Buchan has expressed his attempt to find relief from accidiae in challenging adventures; to find meaning to life through stoical attitudes to adversities and death; and has tried to find communion with God in the majestic atmosphere of mountain or desert.\footnote{Sandison, \textit{Wheel of Empire}, p.173.} Following Sandison’s thoughts, we can deduce that Buchan, in Leithen, finds God, and fulfilment, where he least expects to find them – in the lifeless and unimposing atmosphere of the valley of the Sick Heart River and its surrounds, in the ministration to himself of the guides, the brothers Frizel, and especially in the needy Indians, so inferior to himself in social caste, position and ability.\footnote{Sandison, \textit{Wheel of Empire}, pp.173-179.}

In the Sick Heart Valley, and in the light of his terminal illness, Leithen’s ‘paste-board castle’ of plans and hopes falls down. He has no continuing city, and a dark shadow is over him. However, he wants to keep his head up, not in revolt or defiance, but because the God who made Leithen in his image, expects such courage from him. Leithen’s attitude is, “Though
thou slay me yet will I trust thee” (Job 13: 15). This attitude, and these words alone, prove that Leithen, however mixed with Stoicism his views might be, is not a pure Stoic at heart; he believes in the God of his Calvinistic home. He adapts the words of Job to express his feelings in the situation, and they express a high degree of trust in God. Leithen’s feeling of being “an atom in infinite space, and the humblest of slaves waiting on the commands of an august master”, are the product of an awe and reverence uninformed by the mercy of God. Though influenced greatly by his Calvinistic background, Leithen is hindered in his religious life by the want of a whole perspective on God. His view of God is distorted and so is his attitude towards other people. When he receives the revelation of the mercy of God in the harsh environment of the Canadian North, Leithen’s life is transformed. He becomes aware of the love of God; he sees a new beauty in nature; he begins to love his fellow-men and women and he is prepared to sacrifice his life for the least worthy of them; he anticipates immortality.

What Buchan describes in Leithen is, in the terms of Bible and Church, the effects of supernatural grace. Buchan seems to accept the idea that, through the use of reason and conscience, people can comprehend certain aspects of God, especially if brought up in a religious atmosphere. Those aspects, if accepted, will have an influence on a person’s life, and possibly a deleterious influence. However, to know God in a personal way that will change one’s attitudes and behaviour towards God and others, requires revelation from God, however that may be given. In drawing the distinction between Leithen before and after his conversion, Buchan employs the Puritan method of experimental religion, dissection of the soul. This dissection seeks to distinguish between people who attempt to serve God in a legalistic spirit and those who serve him through grace and from love. This reveals the influence of his father’s preaching, for his father’s Presbyterianism was, in a sense, Puritanism with a Scottish accent. It should be noted that the revelation given to Leithen comes to him in a Christian-Platonist way, through nature, and not through the word of God, the Bible. Buchan’s Scottish Presbyterian forebears, and

17 Buchan, Sick Heart River, p.114.
18 Buchan, Sick Heart River, p.114.
his own father, would have insisted that the truth about the love of God is to be looked for, not in nature, but in the Scriptures. Buchan senior may well have quoted the words of St. John as the testimony to God’s love: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Thus Leithen has held a one-sided view of God because he sees only one aspect of Calvin’s theology, the majesty of God. The other aspect, the mercy of God, he has failed to grasp. In the Institutes, Calvin, stressing this latter aspect of his theology, describes something of the pattern for what is to be Leithen’s experience:

Moreover if it be asked what caused Him to create all things at first, and now inclines Him to preserve them, we shall find that there could be no other cause than His own goodness. But if this is the only cause, nothing more should be required to draw forth our love towards Him; every creature, as the Psalmist reminds us, participating in His mercy. ‘His tender mercies are over all his works’ (Psalm. 145:9).19

It is this tender mercy that Leithen discovers in the novel, and it turns his life upside down. However defective his views, the disposition of his heart is not altogether the product of Stoicism. He possesses something of what his Puritan and Calvinistic heritage bequeaths to him: the fear of God, an awareness of sin and a consciousness of the all-pervading Providence of God. In this he might well reflect the experience of Buchan himself.

b) Leithen’s Conversion

Leithen finds true balance in his religious life, when, like the Psalmist, he mediates on God in the night watches (Psalm 63:6). As he lies as a passive object in the hands of Omnipotence, there comes to him, like sunrise, a sense of God’s mercy, “deeper than the fore-ordination of things, like a great mercifulness”.20 Behind the harshness of the North, he sees the

20 Buchan, Sick Heart River, p.133.
mercy of God. He perceives this divine mercy in the way birds, beasts and human beings are equipped to cope with the winter of death; in the ministrations of Lew Fritzel to himself, a desperately sick man whom Lew hardly knows; in the work of the Hare guides who are with them; in Johnny’s adherence to present duty when he is concerned for his brother. Leithen concludes: “Behind the reign of law and the coercion of power, there was a deep purpose of mercy.”21 This thought induces a tenderness that Leithen has never known before. In Presbyterian terms, Leithen has encountered the mercy of God in his Providence. The Presbyterian “Confession of Faith” defines Providence as the means by which “God the Creator . . . doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures . . . to the praise of the glory of his . . . mercy.”22

Leithen recalls that when he left England, he reasoned himself into a grim resignation. Life was good to him and he could only show gratitude by maintaining a stout front to death. He was content to be a pawn in the hands of the Almighty; however he was also a man, and must die standing. He assumed a task that did not interest him but which would keep him on his feet. Success or failure did not matter; what matters is that he relaxed no effort. Then comes a time when his interest in the task becomes real. He wants to succeed, partly because of his liking for a completed job, and partly because the human element has asserted itself. Galliard is no longer a cipher in a game, but a human being and the husband of Felicity; Lew is a benefactor and friend. But yet the overpowering thought in his mind, in this “iron and icy world where man was a pygmy and God was all in all”,23 is the majesty of God. He submits himself to this God of majesty, to be disposed of as Omnipotence sees fit. When divine mercy breaks upon him, Leithen becomes aware of the love of God and begins to love all God’s creatures, especially those human beings for whom he is responsible. Now his death, when it comes, will be like dying in the spring.24 In this description of the ‘rise

21 Buchan, *Sick Heart River*, p.133.
23 Buchan, *Sick Heart River*, p.133.
and progress of religion in the soul', we see again the influence of Puritanism and the soul therapy of the old Scottish divines.

So important is Leithen's conversion to the story – so much is it the hinge – that there are several references throughout the narrative to the thawing of Leithen's heart. This may be compared to the three accounts given in the Acts of the Apostles of the conversion of Paul (Acts 9:1-19; 22:1-16; 26:1-18). Two of these accounts come from Leithen himself.25 In the first of these reflections, Leithen recounts his experience of God on his journey from Sick Heart River to the camp of the stricken Hare Indians. He has come to Canada with a sullen, hopeless fortitude, a grim waiting upon death. There has been a sense of his own smallness and the omnipotence of God, and a resignation like Job's to the divine purpose. Then follows a nobler mood, when he becomes conscious, not only of the greatness but also the kindness of God; he realises the vein of tenderness in the hard rock of fate. He responds again to life.26

We have his own thoughts again after his arrival in the Hares' encampment. He sees that his creed on leaving England has been a barren one: "Its foundation had been pride of defiance, keeping a stiff neck under the blows of fate. He had been abject but without true humility."27 He recalls how the change in himself came about; he reflects on the evening in the snow pit. There comes to him

the realisation of the tenderness behind the iron front of Nature, and after that had come thankfulness for plain human affection. The North had not frozen him but melted the ice in his heart. God was not only almighty but all-loving... He felt himself safe in the hands of a power that was both God and friend.28

A further re-telling of Leithen's conversion comes from Father Duplessis who, in his journal, records that Leithen was frozen by hard Stoicism

25 Buchan, Sick Heart River, pp. 167 & 190-191; the story of Leithen's conversion is recounted on p.133
26 Buchan, Sick Heart River, p.167.
27 Buchan, Sick Heart River, p.190.
28 Buchan, Sick Heart River, p.191.
which sprang partly from his upbringing and partly from his temperament. He stands up to death with a resolution that is more Roman than Christian. Father Duplessis witnesses the thawing of the ice. He recalls that Leithen always bowed himself before the awful majesty of God... he discovered that tenderness and compassion which Our Lord had come into the world to preach, and in sympathy with others, he lost all care for himself. His noble, frosty egoism was merged in something nobler. He had meant to die in the cold cathedral of the North... Now he welcomed the humblest human environment, for he had come to love his kind, indeed to love everything that God had made.  

Leithen now has all the ingredients of a full Christian experience that his Presbyterian background would vindicate: a faith in God that comprehends not only divine majesty but also mercy, and a love for God and for his fellows which expresses itself in self-sacrificing love. Though these come to him in a more mystical way than his father would have considered sound, the language of Leithen’s reflections is the language of Presbyterian worship, and its underlying theology the creed of his Presbyterian home: “Leithen’s meditations are cast in the phrases and cadences of Presbyterian worship... The creed he confesses smacks less of Eton than of the manse in Queen Mary Drive.”

Nevertheless, there appears to be some confusion in the account of Leithen’s religious state prior to his conversion. At this early stage, we are told that, at Sick Heart River, he comes face-to-face with his religion. He has been brought up under the shadow of Calvinism and has accepted a simple evangel that, as he grows older, has mellowed and broadened. We are also told that, in the face of the dark shadow now hanging over him, Leithen resolves not to flinch but to “keep his head high not in revolt nor in defiance but because He who made him in His image

31 Buchan, *Sick Heart River*, p.113.
expected such courage".\textsuperscript{32} At this point, as we have seen, Leithen repeats an adaption of the words of Job which express profound trust.\textsuperscript{33} But later, after his conversion, we are told that Leithen’s pre-conversion creed has, as its foundation, \textit{pride of defiance}, keeping a stiff neck under the blows of fate.\textsuperscript{34} This is Swinburne’s \textit{Invicta} Stoicism with a vengeance, but it is not the attitude of Leithen under the blows of fate as described in the novel before his actual conversion.\textsuperscript{35} There we learn that he submitted to God, whatever might happen, and trusted him like Job.

Thus Leithen is represented before his conversion in two contradictory moods. On the one hand, as a man influenced by his Calvinistic background, he has the fear of God, accepts the evangels, submits meekly to God’s Providence, whether good or bad, and handles his set-backs with courage in order to please God. On the other hand, Leithen is portrayed as a Stoic who acts with the courage of a dumb animal in the face of calamity. He knows nothing of the love of God, lives in proud defiance of God’s Providence and is concerned only to maintain dignity in life and death.

These two pictures of Leithen prior to his conversion are not easy to reconcile. He is presented as a Stoic, proud and defiant, and, at the same time, as one who has a reverence for God and has undergone significant preparation to receive the Gospel. We can only assume that the author feels that Leithen’s reverence and submission is for a distant, transcendent God who has no deep, personal love for his creatures and who, in turn, can be feared but not loved, or communed with, by his distant worshippers. Nevertheless, the contradiction remains.\textsuperscript{36}

\textbf{Sick Heart River and Presbyterian Thought}

The influence of Presbyterian thought on the narrative of \textit{Sick Heart River} is marked. Buchan heard much of the majesty of God in his

\textsuperscript{32} Buchan, \textit{Sick Heart River}, p. 114 (emphasis mine).

\textsuperscript{33} Buchan, \textit{Sick Heart River}, p. 114.

\textsuperscript{34} Buchan, \textit{Sick Heart River}, p. 190 (emphasis mine).

\textsuperscript{35} Buchan, \textit{Sick Heart River}, p. 113.

\textsuperscript{36} Note that Buchan here, as elsewhere, shows a lack of theological acumen and inconsistency – a deficiency, incidentally, not shared by his sister Anna.
Presbyterian home. The attributes of God that he puts into Leithen’s mind – God’s omnipotence and omnipresence – would have been found in his father’s sermons, and certainly in the creed of his Church. Tutored in the “Westminster Catechism”, Buchan learned that, “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.” Such teaching on the majesty of God comes to clear expression in Sick Heart River.

Buchan also learned of the love and mercy of God. His father, as we have already seen, was an evangelist, both inside and outside the Church. Not only did he, like John the Baptist, warn sinners to “flee from the wrath to come” (Matthew 3:7; Luke 3:7), he also tried to woo them with the love of God. Buchan saw the love of God at work in his own father, as he laboured unstintingly for the physically and spiritually deprived in his parish. His father believed, as did the greatest of the Free Church Founders, Dr. Thomas Chalmers, in ‘the expulsive power of a new affection’. That expulsive power, the expulsive power of love, is the heart of Buchan’s novel. It is love that expels the chill from the heart of Leithen and changes the relationship between him and his God, and that between him and his fellows. It is love that expels Leithen’s self-centred concern to live out his remaining days, and to die, in a manner becoming his dignity. Love enables him to count it a privilege to sacrifice his newly-gained health, and his life with it, for the Hares. It is love that expels the fear of the North in Galliard and restores him to sanity. The latter is so concerned for, and devoted to, the dying Leithen, that he forgets his own fears. It is love that brings in life and overcomes death in the Hares’ camp. Through the power of love, Leithen, Galliard, the Fritzel brothers and the Hare Indians are enabled, “like Jacob to wrestle with the dark angel and extort a blessing.”

In Sick Heart River, the reader comes face-to-face with the theology of St. John whose words, both in the Gospel and the First Epistle, have a direct bearing on the novel:

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38 Buchan, Sick Heart River, p.191.
Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends . . . Hereby we perceive the love of God because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren . . . If God so loved us we ought to love one another . . . There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear (John 15:13; 1 John 3:16; 4:11; 4:18).

John also insists, throughout his First Epistle, that the essential ingredients of Christianity are faith and love. These graces are at work in the novel. The theology expressed in the novel is also the theology of the apostle Paul who told the Christians in Galatia that in Christ Jesus – that is, in the Christian religion – the only thing that avails is “faith which worketh through love” (Galatians 5:6). The Johannine and Pauline writings would be very much in evidence in a Scottish Presbyterian Evangelical home and church. They have left their mark on this novel of Buchan.

There are other teachings characteristic of Evangelical Presbyterianism present in the novel. There is the concept, for example, of the overriding, eternal purpose of God. Even in his pre-conversion state, Leithen believes that events in his life were foreordained by God, and he is aware that his mission is part of the eternal purpose of God.

The concept of perseverance is also prominent in the story. As we have seen, the teaching that a Christian must persevere in his or her pilgrimage is prominent in the Bible and Pilgrim’s Progress. Leithen’s perseverance in his mission is portrayed as commendable. At first most inadequately motivated, his perseverance or fortitude, in the face of great physical weakness and oft-times mental lethargy, is noble. It receives a new depth when, armed with faith and love, he perseveres in his mission at the cost of his life.

39 On these teachings in relation to the other Buchan novels, see above, chap. 5, pp. 80-116.
40 Buchan, Sick Heart River, p.114.
41 Buchan, Sick Heart River, p.192.
42 See above, chap. 4, p.78.
The sense of responsibility emphasised in the Buchan household plays a
significant part in the story. At first thinking only of himself and of his
desire to 'make his soul' by living and dying heroically, Leithen, through
the revelation of the mercy of God, begins to love humanity in general
and those with whom he is associated, in particular. He takes his
responsibility toward them very seriously. Leithen's sense of
responsibility is derived from genuine concern for its objects — Galliard
and the Hare Indians — and it holds nothing back, not even health or life.
Leithen's life is given deliberately, intelligently, ungrudgingly and
entirely, such is his sense of responsibility to his fellows. There is also a
sense of responsibility toward God, for he feels the compunction to do
God's work, to fight death and overcome it with life. To this end he gives
his energies, his abilities and his life. Through his supreme sacrifice,
thereby giving life and hope to others, Leithen becomes a Christ-like
figure.

The concept of the reality of evil which, in Presbyterian theology, is
endemic in humanity and nature is a strong influence on the novel, an
influenced derived, as we have noted, from Calvinism. The evil in
nature is the fear of the North which unhinges the mind of Galliard, and
brings the Hare tribe to the verge of extinction. In humanity, evil is seen
in the self-centred philosophy of Leithen which regards others as mere
ciphers in his purpose to make his soul; in the selfish obsession of Lew
who callously deserts Galliard and leaves him to die; in the despondent
male Hare Indians who 'drop their bundles' and leave their women and
children to fend for themselves; and in men in general for starting, once
more, the meaningless slaughter and senseless misery of an international
war. Evil has to be resisted and at a cost. Resistance to evil calls for
strenuous effort from the band of brothers under the command of
Leithen, and it demands the life of their captain.

The teaching beloved of Presbyterians, namely, the weak overcoming the
strong, is also found in the novel. The North with its terror is a
formidable foe. Even the strong men of the North, Lew and Johnny, dare
not challenge it, but live humbly before it and avoid confrontation.
Galliard and the Hare Indians are overwhelmed and the priest, with all the power of the Church behind him, is helpless to arrest its maraudings among his parishioners. Nevertheless, it is overthrown by a man armed only with faith and love, conscious that he is doing the work of God.

The theme of challenge is very strong in *Sick Heart River*. It is strong in all Buchan's novels but here it is present in its sublimest form. Leithen goes out to the Canadian North to make his soul but is thinking of himself; his pride lies behind what appears to be a noble gesture. Then the real challenge confronts him. He is on the way to recovery from his disease and can, by carefully conserving his physical resources, have a considerable number of years to his credit. The challenge comes to him to spend the resources he has, in one great effort, in order to save others who are in danger of perishing. Filled with the love of God, he takes up the challenge. Leithen spends his energies, and the days that remain to him, in bringing the Hares back from the verge of extinction to life. In meeting the challenge, he demonstrates the meaning of Jesus' words: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 16:25).

Finally, the truth that meant so much to Buchan from his Presbyterian home – the dignity and worth of human beings who are made in the image of God – is writ large in the novel. We have seen that the significance of Leithen's conversion is that, after grasping the presence of the mercy of God in creation, he then begins to value his fellows. He puts such worth upon them that he is prepared to sacrifice all he has for their benefit. We have had occasion already to write of Buchan's thoughts on the dignity and worth of men and women. These thoughts are repeated in this novel:

> The cold, infernal North had magnified instead of dwarfing humanity. What a marvel was this clot of vivified dust! The universe with its immense distances was lit and dominated by a Divine spark which was man... Man precariously perched on this rotating scrap heap yet so much a master of it that he could mould it to his

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43 See above, chap. 5, pp.101-102.
transient uses and while struggling to live could entertain thoughts and dreams beyond its bounds of time and space. Man so weak and yet so great, the chief work of the Power that hung the stars in the universe.  

Buchan appears to find the resolution of his tensions in *Sick Heart River*. As we noted at the beginning of this study, the tensions in Buchan arose from the contrasting elements in his nature and from the conflicting systems of thought to which he was exposed. This novel has a strong element of Christian Platonism, and in this interpretation of Christianity, Buchan found the conflicting world-views of Plato and Calvin reconciled. Resolved too is the tension between the conflicting ideas of reason and the occult. The horror of the North with its evil potential is exorcised by love and love is no enemy of a reason informed by conscience. The contrast between the bohemian way of life and the fulfilling of formal duties and established mores is submerged in the service of love. The tension arising over the fundamental religious difference between Buchan and his father is resolved too, for Leithen experiences that grace about which Buchan’s father preached and by which he lived. Thus in the novel, we see how Buchan has moved closer to the faith of his father, and, correspondingly, somewhat away from the romantic and classical influences of his life.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have traced the pilgrimage of Edward Leithen in *Sick Heart River* from Stoicism to Christianity. We have established that the doctrines and ethics of Presbyterianism underlie the construction of this, the last and greatest of Buchan’s novels. Here, more than ever, we see the signs of Buchan’s Calvinist origins reasserting themselves, still dynamic despite their modification by other ideas. In the inspiring story of Leithen, we detect the traces of Buchan’s own journey from the romantic pursuit of honour to a deeper and more selfless version of Christianity, a version ultimately derived from his Presbyterian home.

Thus the pilgrim Buchan has reached his rest. From his perspective, in

45 See above, chap. 1, pp. 18-22.
Leithen, Buchan has transcended the noble but inadequate philosophy of Zeno and Plato, and, through Leithen, he professes to have found the grace of God, the fulfilling life, lived in faith and love, victory over death, and the path to immortality. Buchan has found what Christianity regards as a genuine experience of God, even if his understanding and expression are somewhat different from his father. He makes his soul -- motivated, not by pride of moral achievement, but by delight in God and deep affection and concern for others. Buchan, along with his character Edward Leithen, has found the pilgrim's rest.
Chapter 7
RECAPITULATION

In this study, we have established, from a religious and historical point of view, that the predominating influence on Buchan's novels was the Presbyterian ethos in which he grew up. We have examined the influence of his temperament and his native romanticism on his work, and also the effect of Buchan's classical studies at the Universities of Glasgow and Oxford on his outlook. To appreciate the religious ethos in which he was reared, we have reviewed the origins of Scottish Presbyterianism in general, and of the Free Church of Scotland in particular. Buchan's parental home has come under our scrutiny, and the character of his parents and the atmosphere of his home and congregation have been assessed.

We have learned that, owing to his temperament, which was both romantic and moderate, Buchan could not accept the orthodox Calvinism and fervent Evangelicalism of his father. Being deeply religious, he could not be content with a purely naturalistic romanticism, nor a Platonic humanism. He sought what to him was a more moderate form of Christianity. He found his via media in the teachings of the Christian Platonists of the seventeenth century. He was drawn to them because of the place of reason in their system of religious thought; their emphasis on religious tolerance and their abhorrence of all forms of cruelty in the name of religion; their insistence that personal piety rather than politics should be the main concern of Christians; their love of beauty and all God's creatures; and their emphasis on spiritual and moral effort if one would know God. We have looked at some of the writings of Buchan in which his Christian Platonism emerges - in particular, Witch Wood,
Montrose and Oliver Cromwell.

We have seen that Buchan's adoption of Christian Platonism led to a modification of the teachings that he received in his home and Church. This modification did not remove the influence of his Presbyterian ethos. Sufficient of its doctrines remained to influence his novels considerably. Some of these teachings have been reviewed: the reality of evil; the Providence of God; the conviction that life has a purpose, and there is a spiritual goal to be pursued; the necessity of challenge for spiritual development; the dignity of human nature; the belief in the weak confounding the strong; human responsibility to others and to God; the necessity for fortitude in life; and the existence of the Christian community and its function as the salt of the earth. The influence of these principles, in particular, on Buchan's novels has been demonstrated, and various characters and quotations have been examined to establish this.

Finally, we have examined Buchan's last and arguably best novel, Sick Heart River. We have taken the viewpoint that the story is substantially a description of Buchan's own pilgrimage. The novel expresses Buchan's transition from a romanticism and classicism that failed to satisfy his deepest religious longings. Like Leithen, Buchan finds his God, not in nature, after the manner of the romantics, nor in the effort to become the just or balanced man, after the classical manner, but rather in a humility that perceives the love of God in all creation and in a communion with God expressed in loving service of others.

We see in Sick Heart River not just a recapitulation of Buchan's own pilgrimage, but a recapitulation of the whole corpus of Buchan's novels and the fulfilment of the aspirations of all his heroes. In the early novels (1895-1900), we encounter characters such as the French Knight, Seigneur de Rohaine of Sir Quixote of the Moors, John Burnet of John Burnet of Barnes, Frances Birkenshaw of A Lost Lady of Old Years and Lewis Haystoun of The Half-Hearted. These men have something in common: they all seek the goal of honour; they tread the path of difficulty and self-
denial in order to be true to themselves; and they attain self respect and self-acceptance in the knowledge that they are competent to handle the challenges of life. John Burnet is their spokesman:

As I look and think, I seem to learn the lesson of the years and deep in all ... shines forth the golden star of honour, which if a man follow, though it be through quagmire and desert, fierce faces and poignant sorrow, 'twill bring him at length to a place of peace.¹

The attitudes of these heroes, as we have noted, is reminiscent of Stoicism rather than Christianity.

Following the appearance of men seeking honour, altruistic heroes come on the scene. David Crawford of *Prester John* saves the white colonists from Laputa's avenging Impi; Andrew Carvald of *Salute to Adventurers* saves the settlers of Tidewater from the western Indians; Richard Hannay in his various adventures – *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, *Greenmantle*, *Mr. Standfast*, *The Three Hostages* and *The Island of Sheep* – rescues a nation and individuals from the hands of villains; Dickson McCunn of *Hunting Tower*, *Castle Gay* and the *House of the Four Winds* saves the Russian Princess from her enemies, and also rescues his helpers, the Gorbals Diehards, from a life of poverty and social degradation; he also assists in the rescue of Evalonia from its enemies; Sandy Clanroyden of *Courts of the Morning* saves the people of Olifa from exploitation by greedy councillors and a misguided Godernador.

Next we find the soul-saving heroes: Adam Melfort in *A Prince of the Captivity*, who saves the soul of Warren Creevy among others; the aforementioned Sandy Clanroyden, who saves the soul of the Godernador in *Courts of the Morning*; and Peter Pentecost in *The Blanket of the Dark*, who saves his own soul from worldly ambition. There are heroes like Alastair McLean of *Midwinter* and Anthony Lamas of *The Free Fishers*, who sacrifice their own inclinations in the interest of the women they have come to love.

Finally we come to Edward Leithen of *The Power House, The Dancing Floor, John Macnab, The Gap in the Curtain* and *Sick Heart River* who is the archetype of them all. He is the ultimate Buchan hero. He too has Stoicism in him, like the Seigneur and Lewis Haystoun, and initially seeks honour before all; he too in his adventures, like Richard Hannay and Sandy Clanroyden, is engaged in rescuing a nation or individuals from the hands of villains. Leithen also saves souls, as does Adam Melfort – Lew Fritzel, Paul Galliard and the Hare Indians. He too, like Alastair and Anthony, puts the needs of others before his own desires.

Recapitulating the experiences of all the other heroes, Leithen becomes the definitive expression of a Buchan hero. He finds the love of God and, from his faith, comes Christ-like love of others. He sacrifices himself, even to death, for people who have no claim on him and are far beneath him in rank and privilege. He finds true fulfilment, attains to the ultimate competence and makes his soul. However, the making of his soul has not been his great preoccupation. He has been occupied instead with the restoration of Galliard to his right mind, to his wife and country, and with saving the Hare Indians for whom he gives his life, counting it a privilege to do so. Living in faith and love, and dying in hope, Leithen has become a Christian patterned, at least in part, on Buchan’s own father. From a Presbyterian point of view, Leithen has reached the summit of growth as a human being, and has had the ultimate human experience – the experience of the transforming love of God. Like Christian in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, he has crossed the river and the trumpets have sounded for him on the other side.

At Leithen’s graveside in the Clairefontaine valley, Galliard turns to his wife and exclaims: “When I think of Leithen I feel triumphant. He fought a good fight but he hasn’t finished his course. I remember what Father Duplessis said – he knew that he would die but he knew that he would live.” ² It is on this note of the Christian hope of immortality that Buchan concludes his novels and confirms the abiding effects of his Christian-Presbyterian upbringing.

Appendix

CHRONOLOGY OF BUCHAN’S LIFE AND NOVELS

1875  John Buchan born at Perth, Scotland, 26 August
1876  Buchan family moves to Pathhead, Fife
1888  Family move to Glasgow
1888-92 Attends Hutcheson’s Grammar School
1892-1895 Attends Glasgow University
1895-1899 Attends Brasenose College, Oxford
1895  Sir Quixote of the Moors
1898  John Burnet of Barnes
1899  A Lost Lady of Old Years
1899  President of the Oxford Union and obtains a ‘First’
1900  The Half Hearted
1901  Called to the Bar
1901-1903  Lord Milner’s Private Secretary in South Africa
1903-1906  Practising Law
1906  Joins Nelson Publishers
1906  A Lodge in the Wilderness
1907  Marries Susan Grosvenor
1910  Prester John
1911  Selected as Unionist Candidate for Peeblesshire and Selkirk
1915  Becomes war correspondent for The Times and Daily News
1915  The Thirty Nine Steps
1916  Salute to Adventurers
1916  The Power House
1917  Greenmantle
1917  Appointed Director of Information

1919  Buys Elsfield Manor near Oxford  
        Mr. Standfast
1921  The Path of the King
1922  Hunting Tower
1923  Appointed Deputy-Chairman of Reuters  
        Midwinter
1924  The Three Hostages
1925  John McNabb
1926  The Dancing Floor
1927  Elected Member of Parliament for the Scottish Universities  
        Witch Wood
1929  The Courts of the Morning
1930  Castle Gay
1931  The Blanket of the Dark
1932  Created Companion of Honour  
        The Gap in the Curtain
1933-1934  Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the  
        Church of Scotland
1933  A Prince of the Captivity
1934  The Free Fishers
1935  Governor General of Canada and enobled as  
        Lord Tweedsmuir of Elsfield  
        The House of the Four Winds
1936  The Island of Sheep
1937  Elected Chancellor of Edinburgh University and made  
        Privy Councillor
1939  Invested GCVO after the Royal Tour of Canada  
1940  Dies in Canada, on 12 February
1941  Sick Heart River
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