

‘Twin Loyalties’: John Buchan’s England

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John Buchan’s contributions to Scottish culture are well known and have been widely celebrated. In his multifarious roles of poet, anthologist, novelist, journalist, businessman, committee-man and politician, he saw to it that Scotland maintained, and was seen to have maintained, a distinctive cultural identity. His historical fiction and biography were reminders of Scotland’s distinctive past, as was his active membership of Scottish historical, antiquarian and literary societies and his editorship of the *Scottish Review*. His Scottish novels offered explorations of particular aspects of the national psyche, while his work in poetry – in his own writing and in an anthology like *The Northern Muse* – showed his commitment to the Scots language and its traditions. It is hardly surprising, then, that he has been considered an important figure in the foundation of the Scottish literary revival of the inter-war years and that Hugh MacDiarmid, the movement’s godfather hailed him as ‘the Dean of the Faculty of Contemporary Scottish Letters’.¹

But to characterise him as a Scottish writer is to tell only half – perhaps less than half – the story. For Buchan was also deeply concerned with the larger national and international contexts in which his life was lived. Buchan’s Scottish birth and upbringing were foundational to his thinking, and would always remain central to his concerns, but he chose to live most of his life outside Scotland and engage with the wider culture and politics of Britain and its empire. In most practical senses this involved a long-term

¹ Hugh MacDiarmid, *Contemporary Scottish Studies*, ed. Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995), p. 8.

engagement with the nation that provided him with the completion of his formal education and his home as an adult: England. England properly became a subject in his fiction after the First World War, and in a series of novels that were principally set in the country, from *Mr Standfast* (1918) to *The Free Fishers* (1934), Buchan put himself to the task of exploring the nation and its history. Just as he had done in his early Scottish writing, in *Sir Quixote of the Moors* and *John Burnet of Barns* and the short stories of *Grey Weather* and *The Watcher by the Threshold*, in which had attempted to account for the historical, topographical, and religious qualities that combined to form a distinctive Scottish national identity and temperament, so too in his English fiction he set himself to uncovering the elements that made for a specific, independently English *genius loci*.

What is most interesting about Buchan's engagement with England in these books is the way that he seems to view the country not as a disinterested foreigner but as an enthusiastic convert – as one who is prepared to explore, invest in, and ultimately to identify with its national historical culture. This might in other circumstances be seen as an act of submission – a Scotsman yielding to the hegemonic interests of the larger southern neighbour and senior partner in union. But it is abundantly clear from Buchan's work, and especially his continued commitment to Scotland that this is far from being the case. For what is interesting about Buchan, and is something that makes him perhaps unique in this period, is his willingness to acknowledge two distinct literary and cultural traditions and to try to work within each while furthering the ends of both. Some were perplexed or bemused when in 1935 Buchan chose to take the title Baron Tweedsmuir of Elsfield, seeing its use of an Scottish and an English place as either capitulation or self-contradiction. Seen in the light of his post-war fiction it makes perfect sense, as an

example not of divided loyalty but of what Buchan himself called ‘twin loyalties’ – a phrase that he used in the prefatory poem to perhaps his best book on England, *Midwinter*, in which he professes, tellingly, to ‘love with equal mind / The southern sun, the northern wind, / The lilled lowland water-mead / And the grey hills that cradle Tweed’. It is this sense of equal-mindedness that characterises Buchan’s engagement with England: his attempt to create a mutually-respectful relationship between English and Scottish cultures; to celebrate each in its distinctness and independence from, but also in its accessibility to, the other.

England had featured as a place in Buchan’s fiction before the war, but it was only with the publication of *Mr Standfast* in 1918 that it became an idea and an ideal. The England of Buchan’s earlier fiction was a series of locations dispersed around the metropolitan centre of power. In *Mr Standfast* it becomes a countryside in which is embedded a whole national disposition and temperament. If this sounds a little fanciful it’s worth remembering the ecstatic terms in which the novel’s narrator, Richard Hannay, depicts the Oxfordshire landscape of the final year of the First World War. Towards the beginning of the narrative, Hannay finds himself overlooking the ancient Fosse Manor, having traversed an idyllic pastoral country to a hill top, and promptly experiences what he describes as ‘a kind of revelation’. It is a moment of conversion, in which he moves instantly from an allegiance to the wide-open spaces of his native South-African veld to the subtler, homelier corners of an England characterised by ‘little fields enclosed with walls of grey stone and full of dim sheep’, streams slipping among water-meadows and ‘the plash of the weir’, church towers that sound the hours ‘with a curiously sweet

chime’, and the ‘twitter of small birds and the night wind in the tops of the beeches’. In this landscape, which bears on its light winds more than a little whiff of Rupert Brooke, Hannay awakens to his new life and new sense of purpose:

now I realized that I had a new home. I understood what a precious thing this little England was, how old and kindly and comforting, how wholly worth striving for. The freedom of an acre of her soil was cheaply bought by the blood of the best of us. I knew what it meant to be a poet, though for the life of me I could not have made a line of verse. For in that hour I had a prospect as if from a hilltop which made all the present troubles of the road seem of no account. I saw not only victory after war, but a new and happier world after victory, when I should inherit something of this English peace and wrap myself up in it till the end of my days.²

The idea of ‘home’ is important here. This is partly because it can be seen as the iteration of a discourse identified by Raymond Williams, in which the servants of empire in the nineteenth century cultivated an idea of the English countryside as a ‘home’ that sustained them in their exile– as in Browning’s ‘Home Thoughts from Abroad’ – and to which they aspired to return on retirement.³ But, more directly, it can be seen to mark Buchan’s own personal identification with a new home, for this novel more or less coincides with an idyllic holiday in the Cotswolds with his wife in 1917 and his subsequent purchase in 1919 of Elsfield, which lies not far from the fictional Fosse

² John Buchan, *Mr Standfast* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 14-15.

³ See Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1993), pp. 281-2.

Manor on the other side of Oxford.⁴ *Mr Standfast* is a novel that deals with many things other than this, and moves swiftly in typical Buchan fashion from the Scottish Islands to Switzerland and the Western Front, but it has at its heart Hannay's vision of a redeeming English countryside – identified closely with the English Rose, Mary Lamington, who will domesticate Hannay in other ways – which stands a symbol for all the qualities of decency, temperateness, and tradition for which the war is being fought. The novel's main structural device is a series of extended comparisons with *Pilgrim's Progress*, and Buchan clearly blends Hannay's vision of a home in the English countryside with Bunyan's Land of Beulah, the hard-won earthly paradise of 'orchards and vineyards and gardens' in which weary pilgrims await their call to the Celestial City:

at the thought of Mary a flight of warm and happy hopes seemed to settle on my mind. I was looking again beyond the war to that peace which she and I would some day inherit. I had a vision of a green English landscape, with its far-flung scents of wood and meadow and garden. . . . And that face of all my dreams, with the eyes so childlike and brave and honest, as if they, too, saw beyond the dark to a radiant country.⁵

Buchan would never again be quite so ecstatic or so overtly spiritual in his celebrations of the southern landscape: effects, perhaps, of the war and the severe pressures it had placed on him and on the British sense of national identity more generally. But in several works

⁴ See Andrew Lownie, *John Buchan: The Presbyterian Cavalier* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1995), pp. 145-6.

⁵ Buchan, *Mr Standfast*, pp. 324-5.

of the following fifteen years his writing ranged over this landscape in which, like Hannay, he had found a resting place and a home, seeking the history and the cultural traditions that had shaped its character. A typical example is the essay, ‘Thoughts on a Distant Prospect of Oxford’, first published in *Blackwood’s Magazine* in October 1923, which is written from the perspective of a spectator viewing from the high ridge of Elsfield the historical development of the city from the times of the Roman occupation. The emphasis is on domestication and settlement, beginning in a vision of an industrious peasantry taming swamp and lagoon in an early manifestation of the civilising impulse that will flow evenly on to the establishment of the city’s seat of learning. The topographical and cultural history here is fundamental, because as Buchan puts it, ‘the spiritual Oxford can only be truly understood when considered in regard to her setting—which is the people of England. The people of England have begun to awake to a sense of their heritage.’⁶ This sense of heritage is, for Buchan, clearly a good thing and one that, as a Scotsman, he clearly doesn’t resent or feel inhibited from exploring. His writing, in historical novels such as *Midwinter* and *The Free Fishers* and in stories such as ‘Fullcircle’, shows instead a clear commitment to uncovering that heritage, particularly as it is manifested in the relationship between the people and the land as it has developed over centuries of habitation.

What is worth remarking at the outset is just how different the landscapes of his English fiction are from those of his Scottish, and not merely in their topographical features. Buchan’s English landscape is characteristically softer, more habitable – it is not, as his Scottish land tends to be, the site of a hard-won compromise between doughty

⁶ John Buchan, *Homilies and Recreations* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1926), p. 375.

subsistence farmers and an intractable land but is rather a place in which a temperate nature and moderate people co-exist more or less in contentment. It offers, in short, a more meliorative psycho-geography. What Buchan's English countryside lacks, in particular, is the sense of spiritual malevolence that is often found hanging over his Scottish scenes. While his emphasis in his English writing is on the homely, the *heimisch*, his stress in his many of his Scottish stories is on the uncanny, the *unheimlich* – what he described in *Memory-Hold-the-Door* as 'the harsh Gothic of most of the Scots landscape'.⁷

Such a distinction does not hold absolutely, for Buchan also dwelt on Scotland's homelier corners, such as the valley of the Tweed, in which are enshrined the 'mellow habitable charm' that makes them suitable subjects for traditional pastoral – although, one suspects that his veneration for such pastoral landscapes is precisely due to the fact that they exist in such a precarious situation, under the threat of obliteration by the wilderness: something that perhaps unites his native Tweeddale with the natural sanctuaries found in works like *A Lodge in the Wilderness* and *Sick Heart River*. But in stories such as 'The Watcher by the Threshold' the historical landscape is experienced mainly as a brooding, unsettling presence; in this case a malign remnant of the Pictish 'Manann', that takes possession of Bob Laidlaw and drives him out of his mind. So, too, in 'No-Man's Land' the existence of a Pictish remnant, literally inhabiting the landscape, is enough to unhinge and end the career and eventually the life of the aptly-named Graves, an Oxford don and specialist in 'Northern Antiquities'. In spite of his bookish enthusiasms for its history, Graves finds in Glen Aller a landscape that overwhelms him,

⁷ John Buchan, *Memory Hold-the-Door* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1940), p. 35.

that 'began to take me in thrall and crush me'. Feeling only its oppressive otherworldliness it becomes, in his view, 'a *temenos* sacred to some old-world god'.⁸

Such old world gods are not infrequent in Buchan's Scotland – in, for example, the valley of the Fawn in 'The Green Glen', haunted by a 'ancient *aura*' that 'brooded over its greenness and compelled men's souls' – just as they are found in the Africa of 'The Grove of Ashtaroth' and the Greece of *The Dancing Floor*.⁹ But they seldom have a place in his England. Where there is a sense of threat in Buchan's England it tends to reside in the built rather than the natural environment – at Brightwell in *Midwinter*, the castle of Minster Lovell in *The Blanket of the Dark*, or the Merry Mouth inn in *The Free Fishers* – and is usually the product of human error rather than supernatural agency. The old gods are not entirely forgotten, but where they remain in Buchan's England, they are naturalised and their mystery is minimised. The first encounter the reader has with the 'Naked Men', the representatives of old England in *Midwinter*, for example, is at a place that might in other circumstances and in another land be a characteristic Buchan *temenos*. *Midwinter* informs the Scottish traveller Alastair Maclean that the obelisk at its centre, 'Jacob's Stone', was 'an altar where the Romans sacrificed to fierce gods and pretty goddesses'. It is clear, however, that the Naked Men experience little sense of the place's magic powers: for them it is merely a trysting spot consecrated by use rather than spiritual immanence. *Midwinter*'s feeling for the place is more the respectfulness of the canny pragmatist than the awe of the believer:

⁸ 'No-Man's Land', Andrew Lownie (ed.), *John Buchan: The Complete Short Stories* 3 vols. (1; London: Thistle Publishing, 1996), p. 186.

⁹ 'The Green Glen', Andrew Lownie (ed.), *John Buchan: The Complete Short Stories* 3 vols. (2; London: Thistle Publishing, 1997), p. 201.

We Christian men have forsworn Apollo, but maybe he still lingers, and the savour of our little cooking fires may please him. I am one that takes no chances with the old gods . . . Here there is safety for the honest law-breaker, and confidence for the friend, for we are reverent souls.¹⁰

Midwinter's gentle agnosticism about the old gods is re-emphasised a little later, when he introduces Maclean to the song that figures as one the book's leitmotifs, 'Diana and her darling crew'. Midwinter employs the song as a means to explain to Maclean the law that governs Old England 'Hers is the law', he tells Maclean, 'Diana, or as some say, Proserpina. Old folk call her the Queen of Elfhame.' The key point in Midwinter's discourse, however, is that the charms of such a figure exercise little actual power over the landscape and the minds of its inhabitants; the imperatives of Proserpina, once something to be feared, have been tamed and domesticated in the temperate English countryside. As Midwinter puts it: 'over you and me, as baptized souls, she has no spell but persuasion. You can hear her weeping at midnight because her power is gone.'¹¹

This suggestion of once-sacred Roman remains that imbue the English countryside with a wistfulness and melancholy is returned to in *The Blanket of the Dark*. In this instance, the remains are those of a 'painted floor', a Roman mosaic discovered by Peter Pentecost in an Oxfordshire wood, which features at its centre 'a figure of some goddess – Ceres perhaps or Proserpina'. Pentecost treats it 'as a sacred place' visiting it secretly in the hope of discovering there some woodland magic: imagining himself

¹⁰ John Buchan, *Midwinter: Certain Travellers in Old England* (Edinburgh: B&W, 1993), pp. 20-21.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

waking from drowsiness to see ‘the shimmer of a woman’s gown and to hear the call of an elfin flageolet.’ But he is disappointed, ‘it was only fancy. The Floor was dim with dusk, and the wood was silent but for homing birds.’¹² When eventually he does experience something like a moment of sylvan revelation there, witnessing the moonlit dance of Sabine Beauforest, it is clear that the emotions engendered have a profane rather than a sacred source.

It was a mortal who danced below him – of that he had instant and complete assurance. The misty back world of Peter’s mind, for all his schooling, held a motley of queer folk, nymphs, fays, witch-wives, who had their being on the edge of credence. But this was not of that kind. It was a mortal with blood in her veins [. . .] every movement spoke of youth and a rich, throbbing, exultant life.¹³

These examples tell us much about Buchan’s attitude towards the spirit of the English countryside, and particularly his assumption of its benevolent character – a landscape not entirely free of pagan elements but with an inherent reasonableness that triumphs over more credulous and terrible forms of folkish supernaturalism. In both these examples we find a strong urge towards demystification that Buchan rarely allows himself in his Scottish landscapes. This is seen most clearly, perhaps, in a comparison with *Witch Wood*, a novel that was written between *Midwinter* and *The Blanket of the Dark* and in which are found several of their plot elements, most notably a young man who encounters a folk culture that shakes his principles and his faith, an elf-like woman

¹² John Buchan, *The Blanket of the Dark* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1964), p. 19.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-2.

discovered in the woods for whom the young man yearns but whom he ultimately loses, and an alluring ancient Roman ritual site. But where the Oxfordshire Wychwood of *The Blanket of the Dark* is alive with the spirit of a cooperative people, characterised in its parliament of beggars and the folk wisdom of Solomon Darkling, the Scottish *Witch Wood* is a place of silence and darkness – a vestigial fragment of the ancient pinewood of Melanudrigill, incidentally on the edge of the Pictish province of Manaan that taken hold of Bob Laidlaw and cast him adrift from his senses in ‘The Watcher by the Threshold’.¹⁴ Such differences in nature and supernature mean that in *Witch Wood*, the folk are seen as fearful and isolated and we are presented with a Roman altar that has not been naturalised and assimilated by them, as in *Midwinter*, but has rather, under the influence of a form of Christian mania, become the setting for the rituals of black magic.

In exploring the differences between Scottish and English nature, Buchan is working in two distinct traditions. In novels like *Witch Wood* he draws on the supernatural tales heard during his childhood, on the twilit mood of the Celtic revival and the folkloric and psychical researches of the likes of Andrew Lang. Novels like *Midwinter*, on the other hand, can be placed firmly within a distinctive English tradition in which the supernatural is treated more whimsically and where the emphasis is on *Natura Benigna* rather than *Natura Maligna*. Kenneth Grahame is an influence here, especially his *Pagan Papers* and ‘The Piper at the Gates of Dawn’ episode of *Wind in the Willows*, and Rudyard Kipling is plainly another.¹⁵ Kipling’s treatment of the Picts in

¹⁴ See John Buchan, *Witch Wood* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1988), p. 3

¹⁵ For a discussion of the influence of Grahame’s paganism on Buchan, see Janet Adam Smith, *John Buchan: A Biography* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1965), pp. 93-4.

Puck of Pook's Hill is of particular relevance here. Like Buchan, Kipling holds a rather dim view of the Picts: in *Puck of Pook's Hill* – they are the ‘worm in the wood . . . the rot in the root . . . the germ in the blood . . . the thorn in the foot’.¹⁶ What is interesting, however, is the way they are excluded from its historic England. As Kipling makes clear, the Picts are part of the wild world from which England has historically separated itself and against which it defines its identity and builds its character – in this case, a part of the savage universe excluded by the civilising cordon of Hadrian’s Wall. The qualities they manifest are thus not repressed in the English character, but are rather forcibly and physically excluded at an early stage of its historical development; they are, in practice, the world against which civilised modern England defines itself rather than a buried historical self with which it must come to terms. England has no place for their malevolence within its pale, just as it has no place for the fairies and ‘People o’ the Hills’ after the Reformation.¹⁷ But if modern English culture can be said to begin with the Romans, what then of Scotland where they never established a firm foothold? In Kipling the consequences are only implicit, but in Buchan they are more overt: never having forcibly excluded the Pictish influence with all its supernatural baggage, the Scots have instead interiorised and repressed it. Such influences remain below the boundaries of the conscious and the visible but require only the slightest jolt to come creeping back into the mind and into view.

This is not the only part of the English tradition that Buchan picks up on in his English writing. *The Blanket of the Dark* carries a powerful message that the moral power of a people living close to the land is superior to that of kings. This is far from Whiggery,

¹⁶ ‘A Pict Song’, Rudyard Kipling, *Puck of Pook's Hill* (London: Penguin, 1987), 165.

¹⁷ See ‘Dymchurch Flit’, *Ibid.*, pp. 181-93.

for it is not about political or parliamentary power, but is rather about the understated wisdom of a folk who may never aspire to power individually but on whose values any legitimate authority must always be founded. This sense that the legitimation of power rests ultimately in the hands of an obscure and often politically weak folk is a key feature of the debate between Peter Penetecost and Henry VIII in *The Blanket of the Dark* and is symbolised by Peter, the heir of Bohun, renouncing his claim to power and disappearing into and becoming absorbed by the dark blanket of the Greenwood. There are echoes in this of the likes of Gray's 'Elegy written in a Country Church Yard' and Kipling's 'Cities and Thrones and Powers', but it also chimes with a more contemporary mood in the 1920s and 30s in which the political state was actively being identified with the values of a perceived 'Old England' of the type found in Kipling and Rupert Brooke, and in Henry Newbolt's *The Old Country*, H. V. Morton's *In Search of England*, and the pageant histories of Arthur Bryant.¹⁸ Patrick Wright has noted this common strain running through the work of conservative thinkers such as Stanley Baldwin (to whom Buchan was, of course, close in this period), G. K. Chesterton and H. A. L. Fisher, and has characterised it sceptically as a search for 'Deep England': a form of 'invisible heritage' that is shared 'as a kind of sacrament' between 'true members of the ancestral nation'.¹⁹ This conservative 'Deep England' is essentially a flight from the contemporary troubles of strike and slump – an attempt to diminish the realities of the present by placing them in the long, mythical perspectives of the rural nation and its folk. It is this deep England that Richard Hannay stumbles across on the hill above Fosse Manor and decides to make his

¹⁸ For the influence of Newbolt on Buchan, see Michael Redley, 'Henry Newbolt and John Buchan: A Literary Friendship?' *John Buchan Journal*, 28 (Spring 2003), pp. 26-7.

¹⁹ Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (London: Verso, 1985), pp. 81-7.

home, and it is the England to which Buchan dedicates his subsequent English historical fiction.

Even when there is something wrong in that deep England, as there is in *The Free Fishers*, it turns out not to controvert the myth but eventually to reinforce it. In this novel, the Northumbrian Yonderdale is immediately identified as a blasted, malign countryside. To the driver who takes the Scottish Mr Dott to the valley, it is one of ‘the sour bits in England’, a ‘queer’ place with ‘sudden deaths up thereaways that nae coroner sits on’.²⁰ Dott’s own view of that landscape stands for all who see it in the novel: we are told that he ‘had been wont to look on a pastoral upland as a thing homely and kindly, but this place had a horrible savagery, a chill sharper than the April rain’.²¹ Buchan paints its landscape with the full Gothic palette; endowing it, as befits a man who had once edited Edgar Allan Poe, with a rain-lashed countryside of ravines and stunted trees, a furtive, surly peasantry, a mysterious inn, and a large house of ‘extreme shabbiness’: ‘a place not of death and emptiness, but crowded with a maleficent life’.²²

Yet, on further acquaintance it becomes clear that the malignity comes not from something inherent in the historical landscape, some lurking old-world gods, but rather from the more recent incursions of the diabolic Jacobin landlord, Justin Cranmer. The steadfast elderly shepherd Nickson is reported to have told Bob Muschat that once the valley ‘was the bonniest bit God ever made,’ but that it ‘is sair defiled by man.’²³ This is reinforced by Gabriel Cranmer who describes having ‘lived in Arcady’ there, ‘among streams and flowers and country faces’ before her husband’s true nature had revealed

²⁰ John Buchan, *The Free Fishers* (Edinburgh: B&W, 1994), pp. 68-9.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 75.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 116 .

itself.²⁴ This notion, that it is the presence and influence of Cranmer, and not an inherent spirit of place, that has made the valley so unwelcoming, is cemented when he abandons it for the last time and it returns almost instantaneously to a pristine beauty. Nanty Lammas is not the only one who feels that, with Cranmer's flight,

the glen had a new atmosphere. It had lost that oppression which had weighed on his spirits from his first entrance into it. Except for the high tops it had seemed a tainted land. But now it was a hilly valley in all the sweetness of the spring night, a place of running waters and sleeping birds and springing flowers.²⁵

The threat to the English – albeit Northern border English – landscape here does not come from within: what Yonderdale represents is an English countryside at the mercy of a man whose views and character have been formed in the shadier corners of continental Europe. Justin Cranmer is an Englishman, but his is an Englishness perverted by its exposure to European decadence: a point made by his repeatedly being compared to Byron's Childe Harold. The character who mirrors him in the novel's schema and who is a much healthier, if somewhat flawed, example of Englishness is Sir Turnour Wyse. Sir Turnour is a type common in Buchan's fiction: a man who is intellectually limited and humourless, rather pompous and inflexible in his punctilio, but who has an unerring moral compass and an unflappable common decency. He is, tellingly, an accomplished country sportsman who embodies all that is best in the Englishman's easy relationship with his natural environment: a master in the field and an excellent judge equally of

²⁴ Ibid., p. 135.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 163.

sound horses and sound countrymen. It is this skill in the field, particularly as a driver of horses, that saves the day at the narrative's conclusion; so while he begins the novel as a somewhat risible character he ends it with the full respect of his Scottish comrades in arms:

It was Jock Kinloch who had delivered the final judgement. 'Yon's England,' he had told Nanty. 'We don't breed them like that in the north. We're maybe cleverer and quicker, and we're just as brave when it comes to the pinch, but we're cockleshells compared to yon even keel. If I saw much of him I'd always be differing from him, but, man, I should also be dumb with admiration.'²⁶

Buchan himself was never dumb with admiration for this England – quite the opposite, in fact – but what he does here is make quite vocally two significant claims concerning it. The first is the conservative argument about 'deep England': that while the English may sometimes lack the imagination and the passionate fire of their neighbours, they have soaked up from prolonged habitation in a temperate landscape such quantities of reasonableness and solid horse-sense that they will never be prey to passing political fads or dangerous forms of enthusiasm imported from the continent. England preserves itself from Jacobinism here in much the same way as it saves itself from Modernism and Prussianism in *Mr Standfast* and Jacobitism in *Midwinter*. The second claim is of a slightly different order: it is a claim for the need to respect the mutual differences of the English and the Scots. The lesson that Nanty Lammas and his countrymen learn in the

²⁶ Ibid., p. 260.

course of their adventures is that can admire the qualities they find in an Englishman like Sir Turnour without losing their own distinctive sense of identity: that difference is no bar to cooperation, and that to learn about and respect the Other brings no diminishment to oneself.

This second element is a regular theme in Buchan's literary treatments of historical England. What it implies is that neither nation has the right to impose its values on the other, whether these are the Presbyterian values of the Covenanters or the Catholic ones of the Jacobites. This is what Alastair Maclean realises in his encounters with General Oglethorpe, a man whom he resembles closely in everything but his political and national affiliations. As he interviews Oglethorpe, and sees that he is cut from the same English broadcloth as Midwinter, is honourable and implacably neutral, he realises the impossibility of the Jacobite cause in England: feeling 'himself suddenly and in very truth a stranger and alone. The Prince, the chiefs, the army – they were all of them strangers here. How could they ask for loyalty from what they so little understood?'²⁷ This is reinforced by the novel's ending, in which Maclean and Samuel Johnson part on the Scottish border: each has learned something important from the other, but in the final reckoning it is the responsibility of each to find their way within the confines of their own nations. 'You offer me Old England', Maclean has told Johnson a little earlier, 'but I am of another race and land. I must follow the road of my fathers.'²⁸

The crossing of national borders is a common feature of Buchan's stories. In his Scottish tales the protagonist is often an Englishman or an Anglified Scot whose

²⁷ Buchan, *Midwinter*, pp. 146-7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

metropolitan complacencies are shaken by an uncanny countryside, while his English novels often feature Scots who have crossed the border into an equally unfamiliar and disorienting, but ultimately more welcoming and homely, landscape. His heroes, too, are rarely pure in their national backgrounds and affiliations: Richard Hannay, for example, is a South-African Scot who becomes an unequivocal Englishman, while Edward Leithen (like Buchan) is a Scot who spends his working life in England and eventually discovers his life's purpose in Canada. At first glance, this tendency, often found in Buchan's work, might be seen to be the antithesis of nationalism – a desire on Buchan's part for the perfect integration and homogenisation of an imperial identity. And this is certainly one strand of the didactic and polemical elements that creep into his fiction: why, for example, does he bring together in *Mr Standfast* such a nationally-diverse group of allies – Hannay, Pienaar, Blenkiron, Macgillivray, Amos, Mary Lamington – if not to show the common heritage, attitudes, and purpose of the British empire and its English-speaking friends that can successfully resist the Modernism and tyranny of continental Europe?

But if one side of Buchan's work is all about emphasising union and homogeneity, in the form of the common historical and cultural bonds that hold together the English-speaking peoples, there is another side to his thinking in which national differences and discrete national identities are valued and celebrated. This is a paradox that has sometime troubled commentators on Buchan: the co-existence of separatist and integrationist tendencies that make him a Conservative and Unionist who can argue powerfully for Scottish national self-determination, or an eager imperialist who actively cultivates Canada's sense of itself as a nation with its own distinct history and culture.

Such apparent double-mindedness might be said to come from Buchan's Scottish formation, from that inherent sense of Scottish dualism, explored by the likes of James Hogg in his *Confessions of Justified Sinner* and Robert Louis Stevenson in *Jekyll and Hyde*, and defined famously by G. Gregory Smith in 1919 as the 'Caledonian antisyzygy'.²⁹ Or it may be seen as an instance of what Christopher Smout has identified as 'concentric loyalties': the ability developed by Scots to inhabit and assimilate the competing and sometimes conflicting demands of their various personal, regional, Scottish, and British affiliations.³⁰ But it can also be located more specifically in Buchan's own time as a particular attitude prevalent in British national and imperial culture. Recent scholarship in Scottish history has identified a paradox in nineteenth-century Scotland in the number of individuals who professed a strong British political nationalism while manifesting a keen Scottish cultural nationalism – most markedly visible in the vigour with which Scottish national monuments were built in the early-Victorian period.³¹ The term coined for this tendency, 'unionist nationalism', is one that has particular resonance in Buchan's case. For unionist nationalists, British Imperial identity was not a threat to constituent minor nations but was rather a guarantee of their continued vitality: a proper union being one in which partner nations maintain separate identities, combining the strengths of their diverse and discrete histories and cultures, rather than one in which differences are subsumed into a larger, undifferentiated group

²⁹ G. Gregory Smith, *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (London: Macmillan, 1919), p. 4; see also Edward J. Cowan and Douglas Gifford (eds.), *The Polar Twins* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1999).

³⁰ See T. C. Smout, 'Perspectives on the Scottish Identity', *Scottish Affairs*, 6 (Winter 1994), pp. 101-13.

³¹ See Graeme Morton, *Unionist-Nationalism: Governing Urban Scotland, 1830-1860* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1999).

identity. Sir Walter Scott had rehearsed many of these arguments in his fiction, welcoming union and its benefits while fearing its diluting effects on the national culture, and in the *Letters of Malachi Malagrowth* of 1826 had made one of the defining statements for the necessity of the maintenance of strong, distinctive identities within union:

For God's sake, sir, let us remain as Nature made us, Englishmen, Irishmen, and Scotchmen, with something like the impress of our several countries upon each! We would not become better subjects, or more valuable members of the common empire, if we all resembled each other like so many smooth shillings. Let us love and cherish each other's virtues – bear with each other's failings – be tender to each other's prejudices – be scrupulously regardful of each other's rights. Lastly, let us borrow each other's improvements, but never before they are needed and demanded. The degree of national diversity between different countries, is but an instance of that general variety which Nature seems to have adopted as a principle through all her works, as anxious, apparently, to avoid, as modern statesmen to enforce, any thing like an approach to absolute 'uniformity.'³²

Such ideas were frequently reiterated in the period of unionist nationalism and by later advocates of a distinctive Scottish identity within a strong union.³³ One such, the

³² Sir Walter Scott, *The Letters of Malachi Malagrowth* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1981), pp. 143-4.

³³ See, for example, 'Sir Walter Scott as Patriot', *Scotia*, 1/3 (Lammas 1907), pp. 204-7 and James Ferguson, 'Scottish Patriotism and Imperial Duty', *Scotia*, 2/3 (Lammas 1908),

Reverend John Ker, arguing that ‘a great people is stronger, and more permanently fertile, from the variety of its component parts, and from the friendly play of the electric currents that have their origin in a diversity that is held in friendship.’³⁴

The term ‘unionist nationalism’ is one that Buchan would probably not have recognised, although the idea, as we have seen, is manifest throughout his work. A term he did know, however, was ‘colonial nationalism’, which shares many of the same attributes as ‘unionist nationalism’, offering an extension of its principles into the imperial sphere. Colonial nationalism was a development of, and a movement away from, the ideas of Imperial Federation that had circulated since the 1880s. It is most closely identified with Richard Jebb, a contemporary of Buchan’s at Oxford, who crystallized the idea in his influential *Studies in Colonial Nationalism* of 1905. There is no direct evidence that Buchan knew Jebb or his work on colonial nationalism, but it would be very surprising if he didn’t.³⁵ Jebb’s time at New College in Oxford overlapped for two years with Buchan’s at Brasenose. New College was where Alfred Milner had been a fellow, and where many of Buchan’s fellow ‘Kindergarten’, many of them friends of Jebb, had been educated.³⁶ Buchan was certainly familiar with the term – he has one of his characters, George Soulden, in ‘Tendebant Manus’, write ‘a book on the meaning of colonial nationalism’ – and puts many of its arguments into the mouths of his characters

pp. 145-8. See also David Goldie, 'The British Invention of Scottish Culture: World War One and Before', *Review of Scottish Culture*, 18 (2006), pp. 128-48.

³⁴ John Ker, *Scottish Nationality: and Other Papers* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1887), p. 5.

³⁵ Although Jebb isn’t mentioned by Juanita Kruse in *John Buchan and the Idea of Empire* (1989).

³⁶ See Deryck Schreuder, ‘The Making of the Idea of Colonial Nationalism, 1898-1905’, in John Eddy and Deryck Schreuder (eds.), *The Rise of Colonial Nationalism: Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa First Assert their Nationalities, 1880-1914* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1988), p. 63.

in *A Lodge in the Wilderness*, the work in which his ideas of a benevolent and pluralistic imperialism are explored and expounded at greatest length.³⁷ In one of the book's many debates, the Canadian statesman Ebenezer Wakefield puts the case for colonial nationalism powerfully, arguing that far from disturbing imperial harmony and diluting the movement's aims, 'national pride' is, in fact, 'the chief incentive to union'.³⁸ Just how well-attuned Buchan was to the contemporary Canadian mood on this matter can be seen by comparing this with the views of the founder of Canadian modern history, George M. Wrong. In an address on 'The Growth of Nationalism in the British Empire' in 1915 Wrong suggested that it would never occur to the 'average Canadian, even when his country reached national stature, that he could not remain both a Canadian and a Briton'. The reason for this, according to Wrong, is the recognition that 'the Empire is not an English Empire, and the English are only one of many peoples in it'. 'The union of the British Empire', he goes on, 'is best assured by building up the various centres of strength, one, if you will, in each continent, rejoicing in its independence and perfect freedom'.³⁹ This not only chimes with the ideas that Buchan was advancing in his fiction, but also prefigures the kinds of arguments he would go on to make about Canadian nationalism as Governor-General in the late 1930s. These were arguments that were strong in their defence of empire and commonwealth but which also recognised the legitimacy of nationalist yearnings and assisted in their propagation, as when he told a Canadian audience that their country 'is a sovereign nation and cannot take her attitude to

³⁷ John Buchan, *The Runagates Club* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1928), p. 265.

³⁸ John Buchan, *A Lodge in the Wilderness* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, [1916]), p. 79.

³⁹ George M. Wrong, 'The Growth of Nationalism in the British Empire', *The American Historical Review* 22, 21 (October 1916), pp. 49-53; quoted in Eddy and Schreuder (eds.), *The Rise of Colonial Nationalism*, p. 6.

the world docilely from Britain, or from the United States, or from anybody else. A Canadian's first loyalty is not to the British Commonwealth of Nations, but to Canada and to Canada's King'.⁴⁰

It is arguable that Buchan was able to understand Canadian aspirations so well, and was thus seen to be a capable and sympathetic Governor-General, not simply because he was a Scotsman, and therefore well-used to the idea of dividing his allegiances between his various masters, but more particularly because he was the inheritor of a set of beliefs, subsequently given the name of unionist nationalism, according to which he might actively celebrate two distinct cultures with little sense of contradiction. The idea of twin loyalties that he had explored in the fiction he wrote about England was an important part of this: it was a gesture of magnanimity at a time of growing nationalist separatism and an enactment of a desirable multiculturalism within Britain in preference to a unionist or imperialist monoculture. Sir Walter Scott once wrote to an English correspondent that 'if you *unscotch* us, you will find us damned mischievous Englishmen'.⁴¹ Buchan employed this quotation in a speech in parliament in November 1932, using it to support his contention that 'Britain cannot afford, the Empire cannot afford, I do not think the world can afford, a de-nationalized Scotland.'⁴² The fact that Buchan was never 'unscotched', that he remained an ardent advocate of a 'nationalized' Scotland for all the time that he lived and worked in England, meant that his attitudes to Englishness were far from mischievous. They were instead respectful and often

⁴⁰ John Buchan, *Canadian Occasions: Addresses by Lord Tweedsmuir* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1940), pp. 82-3.

⁴¹ J. G. Lockhart, *Memoirs of Sir Walter Scott*, 5 vols. (4; London: Macmillan, 1900), p. 483.

⁴² *Parliamentary Debates*, 272 H.C. Deb. 5 s., cols 266-7.

reverential. This was a sign not of weakness but of strength – by being able to explore and celebrate Englishness fully he was not diminishing his Scottish identity but was rather enhancing and strengthening it. His maintenance of twin loyalties meant that he was no North Briton, allowing his native traditions to be watered down in a weak solution of Britishness. He remained instead a proud native Scotsman – and adoptive Englishman.