



The flag of Jesus College at Cambridge at half mast for Lord Stewartby's memorial service

Museum, both at Broughton and then in Peebles, and he gave unfailing support to his wife during her term as Chairman and then Vice-President of the Society.

As well as warm memories of Ian in the Society, I remember him from earlier encounters. I was a youthful and eager civil servant working for him when he was Economic Secretary to the Treasury during Mrs Thatcher's second government, from 1983 to 1987, with responsibilities which included the currency and the coinage. I remember we hunted high and low for a copy of Ian's book on the Scottish coinage when we heard he was arriving – a minister who actually knew the subject for which he was to be responsible. A copy was finally tracked down in the London Library. Our first meeting was awkward.

We were rather proud of ourselves for just having replace the £1 note with a coin. But Ian gave us to understand that Britain's coinage had been developed by recent governments entirely on the wrong lines. The model we should be aiming for was the Swiss currency, elegant and with a neat relationship of value to weight. So all you had to do to know how much value there was in any given collections of coins was to put them on a weighing machine. Only someone who knew coinage backwards would have come up with that one.

It was one of those "Yes Minister, but..." moments, which fortunately passed – perhaps more a way of testing his Treasury team than a serious proposition. Ian was a huge help with demonetising the 1/2p piece. It turned out that this coin, which had long since ceased to be of use in practical transactions and was ripe for abolition, was still being used to give change in post offices to purchasers of a dog licence, valued at 37½p. The answer was to abolish the dog licence as well. The Economic Secretary helpfully opined that this was entirely consistent with the deregulatory policies of the government, and in due course it happened. This was a great relief, as we had frankly forgotten all about it!

I always looked forward to meeting Ian at Society gatherings, catching up with his political news and sharing his fascination with coinage. He was a truly delightful person whom it is an honour to have known, and who will be sadly missed by the Society, to which, in his quiet and infinitely courteous way, he gave so much.

The Runagates Club: A new edition

Edited by Kate Macdonald. Handheld Press, softback, £11.00

Review by
Ursula Buchan



In 1927 and 1928, John Buchan wrote a number of short stories for the recently-revived *Pall Mall Magazine*, earning good money in the process. The 1920's was still a good era for the genre: there were plenty of periodicals prepared to take short fiction, especially if written by established novelists like JB. The first one that *Pall Mall* printed was 'The Green Wildebeeste', a supernatural tale set in South Africa and narrated by Richard Hannay, the most famous of JB's fictional characters even then. Never one to pass up a publishing opportunity, he may well have approached Hodder and Stoughton to ask them to gather together a collection of these stories, along with some others, that had been published earlier – in the case of 'Divus' Johnston' as early as 1913.

Whatever the spur, *The Runagates Club* was published in the summer of 1928 and dedicated to Lady Salisbury, a member of an aristocratic family with whom JB had excellent relations. The book was generally favourably reviewed, even if there is an ironic tone to Raymond Mortimer's critique in the *Nation and Athenaeum*: 'Mr Buchan has considerable invention, a good narrative style, and a pleasing affection for the aristocracy'. An anonymous

reviewer in *The Bookman* praised the collection for being

*...full of the ingenuity of plot, the swift action and the precision of character for which Mr Buchan is famous, the dozen stories which comprise this volume are as unerringly good as anything he has done [in] this class of fiction.*³

Although collections of short stories, chosen and introduced by David Daniell⁴ and Andrew Lowrie,⁵ have been published, there is enjoyment and value for the avid Buchan reader to see the short stories appear in collections made by the man himself. It is many years since a good-looking edition of *The Runagates Club* has appeared in print, and it is pleasing that we have Dr Kate Macdonald, one-time distinguished editor of this *Journal*, to thank for bringing out, from her own publishing company, Handheld Press, a handsome and sturdy paperback with, as its front cover illustration, a reproduction of the dust wrapper designed for the 1930 Thomas Nelson 2/- edition of the book. The print is clean and the fonts well-chosen. There is only the occasional typographical error, no doubt inserted by the Bad Fairy in the text the night before printing, an occurrence from which most authors and publishers suffer these days.

Although the individual short stories included in *The Runagates Club* initially stood alone, JB wrapped them up together as tales told of an evening in a fictional dining club, the Thursday Club. In so doing, he reproduced the atmosphere of relaxed masculine companionship that he loved, although even in his circle it must have been rare to hear such a collection of cracking tales.

There are a number of friends of Buchan readers amongst the tale-tellers - Sandy Arbuthnot, Richard Hannay, Edward Leithen, John Palliser-Yeates, Lord Lamancha, the Duke of Burminster - but others, like Major Oliver Pugh, Anthony Hurrell, Martin Peckwether and Henry Nightingale, do not appear again, sadly. Moreover, we never discover the name of the narrator, who deftly sets each scene. These men are, like JB, mostly classically educated men with a taste for the apposite Biblical quotation.

The title derives from Psalm 68 (verse 6, "He is the God that maketh men to be of one mind in an house, and bringeth the prisoners out of captivity; but letteth the runagates continue in scarceness"), which Lord Lamancha had in mind when, thinking of the 'execrable' food in the early days of the Club's meetings, he gave it the nickname. The Thursday Club's members are establishment figures, who can only be called renegades and vagabonds in the sense that they are not strictly conformist,

but they are certainly individuals with a strongly adventurous, and sometimes even subversive, streak in them. They are by no means the stereotypical, comfortably-off, self-satisfied club bores. For example, Dominick Medina, the man who nearly proved to be Hannay's nemesis in *The Three Hostages*, was, until his unfortunate and untimely fatal accident, a member of the Thursday Club.

Some of the narrators are scholars, others have had 'a good war', working under cover, but all can tell a story with pace, humour and psychological insight. As is often the way with JB, initial expectations are thoroughly confounded. In the Preface, JB wrote of them and the varied lives that they had led:

*"The War had flattened out grooves and set every man adventuring. So the lawyer and the financier were also soldiers; the Greek scholar had captained a Bedawin [sic] tribe; the traveller had dabbled in secret service; the journalist had commanded a battalion; the historian had been mate on a novel kind of tramp; the ornithologist had watched more perilous things than birds; the politician had handled a rougher humanity than an English electorate..."*⁶

This was the kind of paradox that ever appealed to JB, with his strong sense of the richness and variety of human experience and the folly of judging books by covers.

The thread running through the twelve stories, as Kate Macdonald tells us in the Introduction, is fear: fear of the self, of the supernatural, of social disgrace, of personal or military failure, or simply of fear itself. It is this that gives the stories their unity, their tension and their force. Courage, the conquering of fear, is, of course, a very strong theme in much of JB's fiction and indeed non-fiction. He considered gallantry in war a signal virtue: in childhood he had thrilled to the story of the 'ring of steel' around the King of Scotland at the battle of Flodden and, as a man, he chafed at being denied the chance to show his own physical mettle in the Great War. The 24 volumes of his *Nelson's History of the War* are shot through with admiring examples of individual or collective bravery. He was also impressed and heartened by the kind of cheerful pluck he saw exhibited by the wounded soldiers he met on the Western Front, and his own life from then onwards was an exemplar of studied endurance and courage in the face of periodic intense pain.

Kate Macdonald introduces each story, giving valuable insights into their genesis and composition, as we would expect from one of the foremost scholars of JB's literary work and career.

You may prefer to embark on the stories first and then go to the Introduction last, when your reactions may be either confirmed or confounded. That is certainly what I did.

Some of the stories have undoubtedly dated in the intervening century, but the best have an enduring interest and allure, and not just because, in the case of 'Dr Lartius' and 'The Loathly Opposite', they give clues to how much JB knew about spying and code-breaking during the Great War or, in the case of 'The Last Crusade', that he understood what we erroneously consider the modern phenomenon of 'fake news'. One of my favourites, 'The Frying Pan and the Fire', tells the story of 'Brummie', the Duke of Burminster, and his ridiculous adventures as a result of an even more ridiculous wager with the ever-game Sir Archie Roylance. JB's tongue is stuck firmly in his cheek, particularly when His Grace ('Mr Brown') hides from his pursuers in a circus, and acts as ringmaster for an evening's performance. Mr McGowan, his host, says to him:

*"Ye're a laird, Mr. Brown, but ye're a guid fellow, and this night ye've shown yourself to be a man and a brither. What do you and me care for mawgnates? We take no stock in your Andra Carnegies and your Dukes of Burminster." And as I dropped off to sleep he was obliging with a verse of 'A man's a man for a' that.'"*⁷

That is a passage that puts a dent in JB's posthumous reputation as a social snob.

Other stories I particularly enjoy include 'Fullcircle', which describes the effects (deleterious or beneficial – you decide) that a beautiful, seemingly perfect house has on its occupants, and was written soon after the Buchans failed to secure a very attractive little manor house, Weald Manor, at Bampton in Oxfordshire in 1919. It may be that JB wrote it to warn himself against the sin of hankering after something he could not have, but instead being content with the rather less convenient and certainly less good-looking Elsfield Manor.

There is a supernatural element to a number of the stories. For example, 'Tendebant Manus' tells the story of a man who cannot confront his brother's death, and begins to believe that he somehow continues to live on a different plane. This surely owes something to the strange attitude exhibited by Francis Grenfell, V.C., after his beloved identical twin brother, Riversdale, was killed in battle, which JB will have watched with the eyes of an anxious but helpless friend.

JB's need to make money was more urgent after 1920, once he had a country house to keep up, and one or two of these tales,

notably 'Sing a Song of Sixpence' and 'Ship to Tarshish', are not of his highest standard. There are better short stories than these in his 1912 collection, *The Moon Endureth*, for example 'The Company of the Mariolaine' and 'The Lemnian'. I do hope we can look forward one day soon to a new edition from Handheld Press of *The Moon Endureth*. The two collections would look very good together on the shelf.

ENDNOTES

1. You only have to think of masters of the craft, like Katherine Mansfield, P. G. Wodehouse and Rudyard Kipling.
2. *Nation and Atheneum*, 28 July 1928.
3. 'Novel notes', *The Bookman* 74: 433, August 1928, p. 277.
4. Daniell, D. (ed.), *The Best Short Stories of John Buchan*, Vols 1-2, Grafton Books, 1984.
5. Lowmie, A., (ed.), *John Buchan: The Complete Short Stories*, Vols 1-3, Thistle, 2013.
6. *The Runnagates Club*, 'Preface', p. 2.
7. *The Runnagates Club*, p. 53