The John Buchan Collection at Queen's

BLAIR C. WILMOT
Queen's University Library

(Reprinted from the February Issue of the Ontario Library Review)
Toronto, 1958

Printed by the Printer to the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty

The John Buchan Collection at Queen's

BLAIR C. WILMOT, *Queen's University Library*

The John Buchan Collection was presented to the Douglas Library in 1955 by Colonel and Mrs. R. S. McLaughlin, of Oshawa. Formerly the private library of the late John Buchan, first Baron Tweedsmuir, the collection is now a memorial to him in the country where he served as Governor-General from 1935 to 1940. It is appropriate that his memorial should be placed in this university, for he was a Scot and Queen's is a Scottish-Canadian institution; and it is fitting that his monument should be a collection of books, for he was famous as a writer long before he came to Canada. His works have given pleasure to thousands of people all over the world, and are still coming out in new editions, seventeen years after his death.

John Buchan was born at Perth on August 26, 1875, the first child of the Reverend John Buchan and Helen Masterton Buchan. A few months after he was born, his father accepted a call to Fife, and there Buchan spent his earliest years. In 1888, the family moved to Glasgow, where Buchan attended Hutcheson's Grammar School and, later, the University. From Glasgow he went to Brasenose College in Oxford, where he took his degree in 1899.

He then became, successively, a lawyer, private secretary to the British High Commissioner in South Africa, and a partner in Nelson's, the publishing firm. After the outbreak of the first World War, he served as a war correspondent and, in 1916, was commissioned as a colonel in the Intelligence Corps. At the end of the war, he returned to Nelson's and stayed there until 1923, when he became Deputy Chairman of Reuter's, the news agency. He left this position in 1927 on being elected member of Parliament for the Scottish universities. In 1933 and again in 1934, he was appointed Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and in 1935, Governor-General of Canada. He died in Montreal on February 11, 1940.

Buchan grew up in a home where books were considered an essential part of everyday life. Before he was old enough to go to school, he had learned to read, and throughout his childhood, he eagerly absorbed whatever printed matter came his way. His earliest ambition was to become a minister, like his father, and to live in some quiet place where he could spend long winter evenings reading in his own well-stocked library. Only the last of these wishes came true. He did not enter the ministry or live always in quiet places, but he did acquire a "well-stocked library."

The John Buchan Collection includes not only books and pamphlets but letters, manuscripts, maps, photographs, and newspaper clippings—about 5,000 pieces altogether, dealing with a great number and variety of subjects. Almost half the collection consists of history, mostly British history, and English literature; the rest ranges from general works to bibliography. On the serious side, to name only a few subjects, there are books on the social sciences, religion, and law; and on the lighter side, gardening, travel, and hunting.

The collection includes much of the material with which Buchan documented such works as his biographies of Montrose, Cromwell, and Scott. There are, for example, several rare books and pamphlets on the Civil Wars in Great Britain, including every known edition of Wishart's famous work on Montrose, *The History of the Kings Majesties Affaires in Scotland.*

There are revealing gaps in the collection. Buchan had very few books on art or science, and those that he did own are chiefly of historical or religious interest. In the applied arts, for example, there is a book about embroidery executed by Mary Queen of Scots; in music, a collection of Jacobite songs and an English hymnal. Even in the section devoted to English literature there are conspicuous omissions: authors before the seventeenth century and the dramatists of all periods, Shakespeare excepted, are absent.

The most interesting material is Buchan's own work. The library has many of his manuscripts, written on plain foolscap and bound in thick folios. He often wrote a book completely in his mind, then set it down on paper, and, finally, handed the manuscript over

to a typist. His handwriting was tiny, almost microscopic, and, in his later years, illegible.

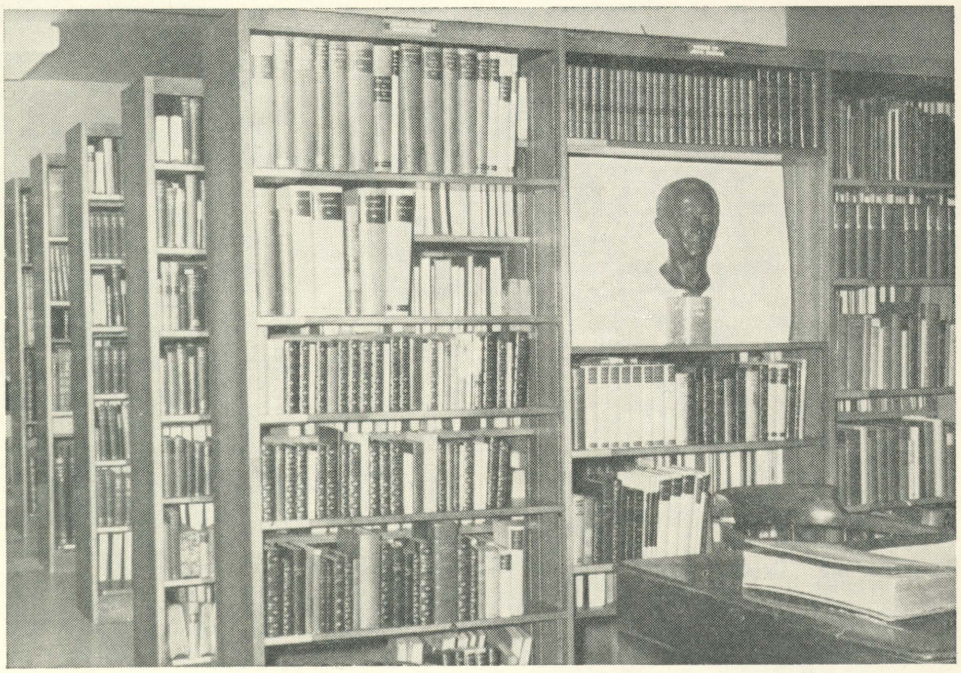
The library has, also, first editions of nearly everything that Buchan wrote, which amounts to a small library in itself. One bibliography lists no fewer than 456 items from his pen. From the age of seventeen on, he turned out essays, fiction, biography, history, and verse, and, in his most productive period, published as many as four books in one year.

Some of Buchan's works are in their original cloth bindings; others are specially bound in part or full morocco. His *History of the Royal Scots Fusiliers,* for example, is bound in full polished red levant with gold tooling and gilt edges. This copy was presented to the author by various officers of the regiment, whose autographs appear at the front of the book. The first signature is that of the Colonel-in-Chief, the Prince of Wales, later Duke of Windsor. This is one of several examples of fine binding in the collection.

When Buchan added an item to his library, he usually pasted a bookplate on the inside of the front cover. In most books, this is a small label measuring about one and a half by one and a quarter inches. The design consists of a single sunflower with Buchan's initials below, one on each side of the stalk, all enclosed by an oval border.

Sometimes, on the fly leaf facing the bookplate, Buchan left a record of his reading. This is part of a note in a copy of the *Carmina* of Theocritus: "Read through first partly in class (Glasgow, 1894) and partly at Stobs, Peeblesshire, under the hawthorn beside the Hopehead Burn & near Tweed (May, 1894). Read through a second time Oxford, November, Dec., January 1895-96." This is one of the few volumes in which Buchan made marginal notes. His notes are usually jotted down at the end of the book and are seldom critical or explanatory. More often than not, they are only a kind of index.

Many items are autographed. The rarest signature is that of Buchan's hero, the Marquis of Montrose, which appears on the title page of a French translation of Machiavelli's "Discourses," printed in Paris in 1517. Other autographs appear in books by Buchan's contemporaries. He received a great deal of material from friends and acquaintances and even from strangers who admired his work and wanted him to admire theirs. Among the



JOHN BUCHAN LIBRARY

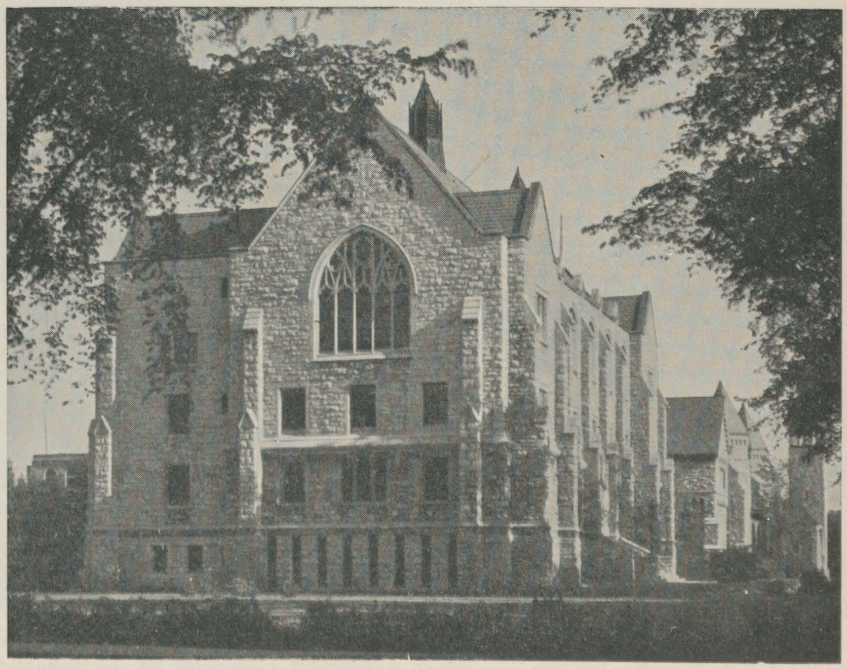
The bound folio volumes on the two top shelves are original manuscripts of works by Buchan, followed by first and later editions of his books. His desk and library chair are in the foreground.

famous writers who sent him signed copies of their books were Robert Graves, Hilaire Belloc, and John Masefield.

These gifts were often delivered with a note or letter of presentation. Sometimes Buchan carefully pasted the note into the book, but usually he left it loose. Everything that he failed to fix permanently into place has been removed and arranged in a special file with other correspondence. This file is, unfortunately, incomplete, since the library has few copies of letters that Buchan himself wrote. The most important group of letters is from the American poet Ezra Pound, dealing mostly with Social Credit and containing violent, often indecent, abuse of bankers and financiers.

Besides all this material, the Douglas Library owns the desk and chair that Buchan used in his home in Elsfield. These are on display in the Special Collections Room, together with three portraits: one a bronze bust by Thomas Clapperton; and the other two, photographs by Yousuf Karsh. In one of the photographs, Buchan appears alone; in the other, he is shown talking to the late Prime Minister Mackenzie King and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt at their meeting in Quebec City on July 31, 1936.

The collection is open to any member of the university who wishes to use it. Fresh material will be added from time to time, when new editions of Buchan and new works about him are published. The John Buchan Collection, then, is not a mass of paper in dead storage, but a useful, growing library and a permanent reminder of a remarkable man.



Douglas Library, Queen's University, Kingston