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John Buchan from the "Borders" to the "Berg": Nature, Empire and White South African Identity, 1901–1910[1]

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John Buchan, most famous today as the author of *Prester John* and *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, also played a part in shaping some of the ideological foundations of the Union of South Africa.[2] As a member of Lord Milner's "Kindergarten", as a journalist and as a novelist, he helped to promote a new "national" identity for the white population of the country established in 1910 as a self-governing dominion within the British empire.[3] As a life-long enthusiast of empire, it might be thought that he would have encouraged the suppression of Afrikaner and other local cultures, and promoted the predominance of a globe-spanning British identity amongst white Southern Africans. He himself confessed to having "dreamed of a world-wide brotherhood with a background of a common race and creed" (Buchan 1940: 124) Moreover, from 1901 to 1903 he was a senior official in Milner's administration of the newly conquered "Boer republics" — an administration notorious for its single-minded determination to "denationalise" the Afrikaner population of the Transvaal and Orange Free State, and to swamp them with new British immigrants. It might also be thought that Buchan would have encouraged a national identity designed above all to appeal to an urban and industrial population, since the majority of British settlers in Southern Africa were concentrated in towns and had been drawn there directly or indirectly by the gold-mining industry. Yet Buchan was not in Southern Africa long before he began to articulate a conception of South African nationalism in which rural life and the local natural environment had pre-eminent significance.[4]

He did so as a consequence of his own Southern African experiences, in combination with his preconceived ideas about nature, culture, and empire — ideas rooted in his Scottish up-bringing and British background. The natural landscapes and wilderness of Southern Africa had a profound and transforming impact on this young imperial administrator. He was particularly attracted to the Highveld and the Drakensberg — the rugged and sometimes rolling escarpment that divided the temperate open Highveld from the more tropical low-lying areas to the east. During his extensive travels, he also gained a strong respect and

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affection for rural Afrikaners. With their close attachment to the land and their Calvinist ways, they reminded him of the Lowlanders of the Scottish Borders where his own family had its roots. His encounters with Southern Africa's landscapes and people prompted him to think about Southern Africa in ways that he had previously thought about Scotland. In Buchan's mind, the coalescing of Highlanders and Lowlanders in Scotland showed how people divided by language, religion, and custom could forge a common identity through shared experience of nature; while the union of Scotland and England showed how separate cultural identities could co-exist with a new national one. By 1903, instead of calling for the assimilation of Afrikaners and a straight-forward domination by British settlers loyal to the empire, Buchan began to urge that the two groups seek strength, unity and a common South African identity through their shared engagement with nature. In doing so, he was perhaps the first member of the Kindergarten to explain why a shared British and Afrikaner identity should be sought, and how it might be secured.

I

The transformation of Buchan's thinking about Southern Africa can be readily traced through his writing on the subject before and after he left Britain to work as one of Milner's private secretaries. Buchan's regular contributions to the *Spectator* in 1900 and 1901 make clear that prior to joining the High Commissioner's staff he shared Milner's views on all-important aspects of the Southern African situation, not least the belief that there should be a new British dominion there securely linked to a more united empire. He had begun writing for the *Spectator* after taking degrees at Glasgow and Oxford Universities, and his articles on diverse subjects all reflected the conservative imperial vision with which he had become imbued as a young man. In print, he defended Milner unashamedly. In January 1901 Buchan was "confident that so far as any individual can further the work" of reconstruction in Southern Africa, "it will be furthered by Milner".[5] Milner, for his own part, was certain that Southern Africa could only be secured for the British empire if British settlers and culture predominated. As the High Commissioner himself put it confidentially in December 1900: "If, ten years hence, there are three men of British race to two of Dutch, the country will be safe and prosperous. If there are three of Dutch to two of British we shall have perpetual difficulty." "Next to the composition of the population", he noted further, "the thing that matters most is education ... Dutch should only be used to teach English, and English to teach everything else."[6] Milner's contemporary critics (as well as historians writing long after) decried his strategy of "swamping" Afrikaners through immigration and "denationalising" them through anglicisation. (See Pyrah 1955: 182–84; Thompson 1960: 19–20; Hancock 1962: 176–79; Denoon 1973: 75–79, 95; Katzenallenbogen1980: 341–61) At first Buchan supported this blunt policy, arguing in the *Spectator* that "the Dutch and British in South Africa will be fused into one loyal and prosperous people". The British empire was, he argued, adept at assimilating non-British people: "Britain has shown in a peculiar degree in the

past a power of making nations out of heterogeneous mixtures and giving her own impress to fortuitous settlers" (*Spectator*, 26 Jan. 1901). Initially, then, Buchan saw little place either for Afrikaner culture or for local landscape in the development of a white national identity in Southern Africa; but, after encountering the people, problems and landscapes of Southern Africa, his ideas began to change.

Buchan had assumed that British ascendancy in Southern Africa could be secured by doing little more than ensuring that a majority of the local electorate were British, while handling Afrikaners as the French population had been handled in Canada. Unencumbered by any first-hand experience or real understanding of either place, he thought that a "common patriotism" could be fostered in Southern Africa by following Lord Durham's formula for Canada. A legislative union of the two former "Boer Republics" with Britain's Cape and Natal colonies "would deprive the old race distinctions of their force, since it would render meaningless for separatist purposes the political and geographical distinctions which keep their memories alive". The problems of "disloyal" Afrikaners in the countryside could, he thought, be readily counteracted by the "loyal" elements in the towns and cities: "It is not the town Boer but the country Boer who has been our most dangerous enemy" (*Spectator* 14 July 1900, unsigned letter to the editor by J. Buchan). Proceeding from such simplistic assumptions as these, Buchan concluded that the establishment of a Southern African dominion loyal to the empire entailed little more than increasing the proportion of British settlers. As he put it privately shortly after arriving in Johannesburg, "we shall make the Transvaal so overwhelmingly English, that in the parliament of a Federated South Africa we shall easily be able to control the disloyal elements".[7]

The emphasis by Buchan and others on the development of white South African "patriotism" rather than "nationalism" was significant, and reflected a desire to discount local attachments in favour of a pan-imperial British identity. He later admitted that he had, at this time, "regarded the Dominions patronisingly as distant settlements of our people who were making a creditable effort under difficulties to carry on the British tradition". (Buchan 1940: 111) His initial aim was to encourage in Southern Africa a sense of "patriotism", by which he meant a simultaneous sense of loyalty to a dominion, to Britain, and to the empire. The suitably vague idea of patriotism seemed more adaptable to the cause of greater imperial unity than the idea of nationalism, which implied territorial limitations and a destiny of ultimate independence. Patriotism also glossed over the ethnic or racial aspect of imperial ideology — the widespread belief that the empire was pre-eminently a union of people of British blood. Such a conception of empire dominated Buchan's early thinking, when he believed fervently in the empire and in the idea of a "common race and creed" — "I was more than a convert, I was a fanatic." (Buchan 1940: 124) He advocated imperial federation and looked hopefully for signs of commitment to empire by overseas settlers —

or for "Colonial Imperialism", "whose existence some may deny but all must hope for" (*Spectator*, 2 March 1901, unsigned review by Buchan). It thus seems clear that Buchan left for Southern African thinking that his objective was the establishment of a British dominion dominated by a white identity or patriotism characterised above all by loyalty to Britain and to the empire as a whole.

His experience of the people, landscapes and problems of Southern African rapidly changed this. He arrived in Johannesburg to work for Milner in September 1901, in the midst of the South African War. His work as an administrator responsible for the concentration camps, Afrikaner resettlement and rural settlement by British immigrants led him to travel widely and deal directly with the people, politics and geography of the region. His efforts to provide a public justification for Milner's policies — through both the drafting of despatches and the anonymous publication of articles in the British press — forced him to consider how to answer local and British critics. He had direct dealings with whites of all sorts — from mine magnates to domestic workers, from the urban Afrikaner elite to isolated "backvelders", from generals to privates and burghers. In rural Afrikaners, he recognised many qualities of Lowland Scots, and saw that Afrikaners would not succumb to any crude policy of assimilation. In the many displaced Scots he encountered, he saw that old identities could persist even as new locally grounded identities were acquired. In the many soldiers he met from the settler colonies, he found strong dominion identities co-existing with a belief in the empire. He was no less surprised by the strength of existing settler identities than he was by his own attraction to the landscapes of the Highveld and Berg. These landscapes could, he soon realised, provide the basis for a shared British and Afrikaner identity, and hence for a more politically acceptable approach to "dominion-building" in Southern Africa.[8]

Buchan had expected rural Afrikaners to be the most difficult to reconcile to British rule, yet it was to precisely those Afrikaners that he was most attracted. It was an attraction born of some intimacy, for he gradually learned to speak Dutch and Afrikaans, and he not infrequently lodged in Afrikaner homesteads during his travels. As he later wrote:

> I had little love for the sleek Afrikaner of the towns, but for the veld farmer I acquired a sincere liking and respect. He had many of the traits of my Lowland Scots ... I was a Scot, a Presbyterian, and a countryman, and therefore was half-way to being a kinsman. (Buchan 1940: 114)

In admitting the Scottish qualities of Afrikaners, Buchan could even express some affinity for the most irreconcilable of them: "These old rascals, the Dutch Reformed Church, give me a great deal of trouble just now. They lie just like the Scots ministers in the 17th century."[9] The equation of Lowland Scots with Afrikaners helped to draw Buchan towards a more sympathetic approach towards the latter's culture.

He was drawn further in this direction by his recognition of the persistence of old identities and cultures amongst British settlers — particularly the Scots, and particularly amongst those settlers in the countryside. Soon after arriving in Johannesburg, Buchan recorded that: "The place is full of Scotch people. One hears every variety of accent from Aberdeen to Hawick."[10] In letters to his family, Buchan reported frequently on his meetings with Scots in Southern Africa. Noteworthy was his guide on a trek to Swaziland, "who in spite of having been born in S. Africa, speaks broad Scots".[11] In later years, he liked to repeat the story of finding "a Scottish family who for several generations had been settled in a remote part of the veld. They did not know one word of English, but they still spoke Dutch with a strong Paisley accent." For all the "stubborn national individuality" of the Scots, he argued, they could still "take on the colour of a new people and a new land".[12] If Afrikaners were like Scots, there seemed no reason why they too could not acquire a new British identity, even as they maintained their old cultural ways.

Buchan's belief in the possibilities of multiple, overlapping and globe-spanning identities was also increased by his recognition of the physical vitality and strength of national feeling in the soldiers he met from around the empire. Troops from Southern Africa, Canada, Australia and New Zealand "combined a passionate devotion to their own countries with a vision of a great brotherhood based on race and a common culture". (Buchan 1940:112) These "colonial" troops also affirmed Buchan's belief in the value of a close connection between people and nature, since he was convinced that this connection explained both their effectiveness as soldiers (more useful by far than men recruited from urban Britain), and their devotion to their respective dominions. As he put it: "the country population of the larger Colonies, the backwoodsmen of Canada and the Bushmen of Australia, settled in vast solitudes, living very close to nature, ...were possessed of all those habits and instincts which are essential" (Buchan 1903a: 996).[13] Canada, he wrote, "is essentially a country of the larger air, where men can face the old primeval forces of Nature and be braced into vigour, and withal so beautiful that it can readily inspire that romantic patriotism which is one of the most priceless assets of a people" (*Spectator*, 6 July 1901, unsigned article by J. Buchan). Buchan came to believe that "nature" in Southern Africa could, as in the other dominions, be the foundation of a vigorous people with a strong local loyalty, yet firmly attached to the empire.

Perhaps as much as anything else, though, it was the actual character of Southern Africa's natural landscapes — and their likeness to Scotland — that stimulated this belief of Buchan's. He was powerfully drawn to some of these landscapes, to the open, undulating terrain of the Highveld and the rugged peaks and rolling hills of the Drakensberg. Describing the area around Johannesburg, he wrote: "The country, now that spring is here, is very beautiful — rather like the Scottish Border, except that there are no burns, and the air and sunsets are perfectly amazing."[14] "Riding home in the twilight, the country might have been

Peebleshire" where he spent many happy summers as a youth.[15] Buchan shared a house in the Parktown district of Johannesburg "with a view over 40 miles of veldt" to the Magaliesberg, "a great range of jagged blue mountains which might be the Coolins" in the Western Isles of Scotland.[16] The area of the south-eastern Transvaal, where the countryside descended towards Swaziland, he described as being "a country just like Scotland"[17]: "In some of the farmhouses I found clean scrubbed flours, and an old woman in mutches, just like Scotland. The landscape, too, is very Scotch. You ride up long green glens, with blue mountains at the top, and a fine full stream in the valley bottom."[18] But the landscape that made the most profound impact on Buchan was further north along the Drakensberg escarpment, in an area east of Pietersberg called the Woodbush: "I have never been in such an earthly paradise in my life. You mount up tiers of mountain ridge, barren stony places, and then suddenly come on a country like Glenholm" near Broughton, in the Borders. "The soil is very rich: the climate misty and invigorating, just like Scotland. I went in the hottest season of the year, and the air was like a Highland June."[19] So impressed was Buchan that he "resolved to go back in his old age, build a dwelling, and leave my bones there" (Buchan 1940: 120). His conviction that these natural landscapes could provide the basis for a strong new dominion identity sprang in no small measure from his own profound attraction towards them.

Buchan's personal experiences played an important part in his move away from advocating a policy of straightforward British domination in Southern Africa. He developed a genuine respect for rural Afrikaners and recognised that that they had a strong cultural identity rooted in the landscape. He saw that Scottish and other British identities also persisted strongly in the countryside and that settlers in the dominions readily acquired new local loyalties without shedding old identities. Above all, he acquired an abiding passion for Southern African landscapes and came to believe that they could provide the basis for a new and distinctive identity embracing both Afrikaners and British settlers.

II

Whatever impact these personal experiences had on his thinking, Buchan was able to give extensive public expression to his ideas about nature and identity in Southern Africa because in 1902 he was given responsibility not only for directing British land settlement in the Transvaal, but also for writing propaganda in its defence. Milner was convinced that Southern Africa's allegiance to empire could never be secure after the return to local white rule unless British settlers clearly outnumbered Afrikaners, and unless the Afrikaner political stranglehold in the rural Transvaal and Orange Free State was broken. The settlement of British farmers in the former Boer republics was promoted above all to serve these local political and broader geopolitical aims. Settlement by British and empire soldiers had the further and more immediate advantages of

strengthening the British tactical position in the guerrilla campaign and of augmenting any occupying garrison that remained after the end of hostilities. Despite these attractions, Milner's policy of government-assisted rural settlement encountered widespread opposition from a whole range of British sources. And, of course, it was denounced by Afrikaners themselves who were angered both by the loss of land to British newcomers and by a policy clearly intended to subvert their political influence. It was in response to the ongoing and intensive criticism of Milner's land settlement policy that Buchan evolved an approach to dominion-building that combined an emphasis on nature as the foundation of a new white identity in Southern Africa, with a more accommodating approach to Afrikaners.

Buchan began his work on land settlement in January 1902 and, before the month was out, he had drafted a key despatch on the subject. The despatch was sent out under Milner's name on 25 January. It was ostensibly a confidential communication between the High Commissioner in Johannesburg and the Colonial Secretary in London but, as with so many other despatches of its kind, it was written with its eventual publication in mind. The despatch's purpose was to explain the political and imperial rationale for spending large sums of money to establish British settlers as farmers in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony. As the despatch put it:

> The principal consideration is the necessity of avoiding a sharp contrast and antagonism in the character and sentiments of the population between the country districts and the towns. If we do nothing, we shall be confronted sooner or later with an industrial urban population, rapidly increasing, and almost wholly British in sentiment, and, on the other hand, a rural population wholly Dutch, agriculturally unprogresssive.[20]

The despatch explained that the influx of "a selected British population" would "do much to consolidate South African sentiment in the general interests of the Empire". This "British population" included settlers (mainly veterans of the South African War) not only from Britain but also from the overseas empire. Stress was placed on settling men with farming experience in the dominions or in the area of Scotland with which Buchan was most familiar: "Australian ranchers seem peculiarly suited to the high veld, while the corn lands of the conquered territory could have no better occupants than the young progressive farmers of the Scottish lowlands." These were the sort of men Buchan had in mind when he wrote that "the judicious settlement of a large number of colonists of the best class is of first class importance for the economic development of the country, and for the gradual and peaceful solution of the race difficulty in South Africa". The "race difficulty" was, of course, the tension between Afrikaners and the local British population. As the despatch made clear, "land settlement must be undertaken on a large scale; otherwise, however useful, it will be *politically* unimportant".[21]

Buchan elaborated some of these arguments in two articles published anonymously just as the South African War drew to a close in May 1902. His article in the *National Review*, entitled "The reconstruction of South Africa", argued that rural settlement and development was needed for three sets of material reasons. Economically, agriculture was "perhaps the most permanent of South African assets". Agricultural and pastoral wealth was thought to be "in embryo at the moment, even as the wealth of Australian sheep runs was a hundred years ago and the fields of lower Egypt in our own time". Without British settlement, this asset would remain largely undeveloped, leaving Southern Africa's economy overly dependent on mineral resources that soon might be exhausted. Strategically, the settlement of British and dominion soldiers on the land would be valuable in combating the Boer guerrilla campaign, in policing the countryside once hostilities ended, and in providing men for an effective militia. Socially and geopolitically, British emigration to rural Southern Africa was also thought to valuable to Britain, and to the empire generally. To neglect such emigration was to "give up the finest field for serious and well-considered schemes of emigration that has been afforded us since we first planted a colony". Such emigration was also vital for securing British ascendancy in Southern Africa. It was "a golden opportunity for increasing the British element", particularly in the Transvaal. The "safety" of Southern Africa was thought to lie in federation, "and when the day of federation comes it will be well to have a Transvaal overwhelmingly English, which in any federated parliament may turn the balance against the necessarily Dutch element in the Western Cape Colony" (Buchan 1902a). The establishment of a British rural population was especially important because "We must prevent an absolute cleavage between English town and Dutch country":

> A hard-and-fast division between town and country is always to be feared; but when the barrier is one of race, wealth, and civilisation between white men it seems to us a dire calamity. We cannot rear up for our children a race of helots, and by our very exclusiveness solidify for all time an irreconcilable race hatred. (Buchan 1902a: 319)

For Buchan, however, a "profounder reason" for British rural settlement was that it would ensure that Southern Africa remained part of the empire. City dwellers would drift away from the British connection more readily than "the country settler" who "retains to many generations his affection for the mother-land. An influx of such a class would consolidate South African sentiment, and, when self-government comes, protect Imperial interests better than any constitutional guarantee." (Buchan 1902a: 320) Such were Buchan's material arguments for British land settlement, arguments that all emphasised the centrality of nature and rural life.

Nature gained even greater significance when Buchan explained its place in the cultural development of the new dominion. He did this in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, in an article published in May 1902. "Evening on the Veld", was perhaps the first published call by a member of the Kindergarten for the

development of unique artistic and literary forms in Southern Africa. As Buchan put it, Afrikaner culture had "acquired the stamp of the soil". The British population of Southern Africa should strive to do likewise, not least by becoming farmers but also by a more general cultural engagement with nature: "All great institutions are rooted and grounded in the soil. There is an art, a literature, a school of thought implicit here for the understanding heart, — no tarnished European importation, but the natural, spontaneous fruit of the land." (Buchan 1902b: 593) "Here", he insisted, "is a virgin soil for art ... If the art arises ... It will be the chronicle of the veld, the song of the cycle of Nature ..." Just as settlement on the imperial frontier might save the British population from social decay, so an artistic engagement with the Southern African landscape could avert a decline in British culture: "Who can say that from this new land some dew of freshness may not descend upon a jaded literature, and world be the richer by a new Wordsworth ..." (Buchan 1902b: 596). For Buchan, the cultural potential of Southern Africa was heightened by the region's position on the frontier of civilisation, its proximity to "primitive" African societies and unknown tracts of the continent. As he put it, "here civilisation will march with barbarism":

> A man would have but to walk northward ... to reach the country of the oldest earth-dwellers, the untameable heart of the continent. It is much for a civilisation to have its background — the Egyptian against the Ethiopian, Greek against Thracian, Rome against Gaul. It is also much for a race to have an outlook, a far horizon to which its fancy can turn. Even so strong men are knit and art preserved from domesticity. (Buchan 1902b: 595)

The idea that British people could find a form of cultural salvation through an engagement with the natural and peopled landscapes of Southern Africa was thus a further reason for the encouragement of rural settlement and the development of a new nature-based identity there.

As such writing suggests, Buchan had begun to move away from simple ideas about anglicising Afrikaners and imposing an imported British culture in Southern Africa. And he soon found himself in conflict with the proponents of straightforward British domination. In February 1902 he complained that:

> the violent men out here will tell you I am a pro-Boer, merely because I insist that no reconciliation is possible without taking account of the Boer. I believe that the fangs are drawn and that in future he will be the least dangerous element in S. Africa. So thinks Lord K. [Kitchener, the British commander-in-chief], and so thinks H.E. [His Excellency, Lord Milner] at the bottom of his heart.[22]

This may have been an overestimate of Milner's support for Buchan's approach at this stage. After all, Milner was said to have been "deeply suspicious of the imperialist reliability of Scots, on the grounds that an earlier generation of Presbyterian ministers had been absorbed into the Afrikaner community instead of anglicising it" (Denoon 1973: 78). Milner may eventually have been swayed in the other direction by Buchan's influence, but there was little sign of this in

1902. Moreover, it was not until 1903 that Buchan made his first clear call for a white Southern African culture that drew heavily on an Afrikaner contribution, even though this was implicit in the logic of his 1902 arguments about the value of a culture rooted in the local landscape.

Such arguments, however, had limited circulation and did little to deter critics of Milner's land settlement policy. Criticism came from all directions. In Southern Africa, the Dutch press used "language of bitter hostility" to attack the policy, arguing that the intention was to expropriate Afrikaners and swamp them with as many as 240,000 British settlers. "Behoudt uw Grondt!" (Hold your Ground!) became the cry of *Die Volkstem* (6 May 1903, quoted in Streak 1969: 66). Visiting Britain soon after the war's end, Louis Botha — surrendered Boer general and future prime minister of South Africa — asked: "Is some vast colonisation scheme being matured, and if so why are we eliminated from it? Evidently because we are distrusted."(Botha 1902) British Liberals focused their attack on Milner's (and Buchan's) admission that land settlement was needed for political reasons. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, leader of the opposition British Liberal party, insisted that "when colonisation … is designed to pack the country", the result was likely to be "most disastrous": "Economically, sentimentally, and politically alike, Ireland is at hand to show us what the result of a "plantation" policy may be."[23] James Bryce, Liberal M.P., Oxford Professor and author of *Impressions of South Africa*, warned that the proposed settlement policy could readily "aggravate the racial troubles in South Africa".[24] Officials in Whitehall questioned the policy's cost and its chances of success. The Treasury entertained "grave doubts whether arable cultivation is likely to be successfully carried on, even by the most carefully selected British settlers, in a country so liable to drought as South Africa".[25] The Colonial Office was similarly doubtful that large-scale British settlement could succeed in Southern Africa "with its droughts, its Dutchmen, its Kaffirs and its locusts".[26] Urban and gold mining interest in the Transvaal accused the Milner administration of "squandering money" on agricultural development.[27] Finally, there were the British hard-liners who thought that not enough was being done to further British settlement. In the House of Lords, Lord Lovat complained that "there is little or no inducement offered to the soldierly element to settle in the country".[28] Faced with criticism from such disparate sources, the Milner administration needed a considerable propaganda effort to defend its land settlement policy.

This need underlay the writing of Buchan's book *The African Colony: Studies in the Reconstruction*. He wrote most of it while he was still in Southern Africa. It was published by Blackwoods and circulated by *The Times* Book Club late in 1903, soon after his return to Britain. (Buchan 1903b).[29] It was part history, part travelogue and part political tract, and included slightly modified versions of his earlier anonymous writings on Southern Africa. But it was, above all, a comprehensive defence of Milner's programme for reconstruction and for the eventual political unification of Southern Africa as a British dominion.[30]

In the course of making this defence, Buchan proposed an ideological framework for a united South Africa which included a shared white identity founded on an engagement with nature. *The African Colony* included new arguments explaining why it was important, first, to allow Afrikaners to preserve their culture and traditions; and, secondly, to intermix them with a British population who were themselves closely linked to the land. In a further elaboration of his earlier statements about the need for a close connection between society and nature, Buchan insisted that "any South African civilisation must grow up on the soil, and must borrow from the Dutch race, else it was no true growth but a frail exotic". (Buchan 1903b: 389). A permanent and vital British settler population would be influenced by local landscapes and peoples just as Afrikaners had been shaped by their long encounter with Africa. The achievement of cultural and political unity amongst whites in Southern Africa would, he argued, require "a wide toleration for local customs and religions" there (Buchan 1903b: 397). In putting forward this argument, Buchan deployed the analogy of Scotland's relationship to Britain, perhaps partly in order to make his ideas more palatable to British hard-liners. (The application of a Scottish gloss was a technique that Buchan would later use to good effect in Canada when, as governor-general, he sought to promote a more inclusive multicultural approach to national identity.) (Henshaw 2002) As he put it:

> we cannot fuse the races by destroying the sacred places of one of them, but only by giving the future generations some common heritage. 'If you unscotch us', wrote Sir Walter Scott to Croker, 'you will find us damned mischievous Englishmen', and it will be a very mischievous Dutchman who is coerced into unsuitable English ways. (Buchan 1903b: 390)

White unity depended both on respect for Afrikaner culture and on a shared engagement with nature. This engagement included agricultural development: "The two races will be joined not by any trivial sentimental devices, but by the partnership of Dutch and British farmers in the enlightened development of the land." (Buchan 1903b: 271) It also included the management and protection of wildlife. Unity would be found in the common love of "nature and wild things", in game preservation, and in the sports of hunting and fishing: "when we find the two races united in common purpose, which touches not politics or dogma but the primitive instincts of humankind, something will have been done towards unity" (Buchan 1903b: 185). Perhaps, if we acknowledge Buchan's deeply religious background, this call for game reserves can be seen as another example of the influence of Scottish evangelical thinking on conservationist ideas in Southern Africa.[31] *The African Colony* thus contains a clear statement of the need to put nature and cultural accommodation at the ideological centre of the dominion-building project.

It also contained additional elaborations of his cultural, economic and political arguments for the centrality of nature and rural development in this project. Whites in Southern Africa had "the chance of an indigenous culture, born of the

old, … and the freshening influences of their new land and their strenuous life" (1903b: 391). Such a culture would be the foundation of future dominion unity: "When a people arise who have a common culture bequeathed from their fathers, and who look back on Ladysmith and Colenso, the Great Trek and the Peninsular War, as incidents in a common pedigree, then we shall have fusion indeed, a union in spirit and in truth." (1903b: 390) Without further British rural settlement, not only was the development of a shared indigenous culture unlikely. There was also little chance that a Southern African dominion would develop into a strong, politically-united part of the empire. As Buchan put it: "No race or kingdom can endure which is not rooted in the soil, drawing sustenance from natural forces." (1903b: 32) Farmers obviously had the strongest connection with the land, and the long-term future of a British dominion in Southern Africa depended, in Buchan's mind, on the establishment of a substantial British farming class. This was especially true because it was assumed by Buchan, along with many others at this time, that mining would before long cease to be the mainstay of the local economy. He accepted that miners and manufactures also had a connection with the "productive energy of the land". But, the "trader pure and simple" was "too cosmopolitan and adventitious to be the staple of a strong race" — a clear challenge to anyone who thought that Britain could rely on urban capitalist and merchant classes to offset rural Afrikaner influence (1903b: 32). It would be disastrous to allow the local British population to be concentrated in urban areas while the countryside remained dominated by Afrikaners. The "unleavened Dutch rural districts would become centres to collect and focus and stereotype the old unfaltering dislike" — a warning vindicated by the Afrikaner Nationalists' electoral victory in 1948, won on the back of the rural vote (1903b: 271). A large British farming community intermixed with Afrikaners was also needed to ensure political stability. A strong, inherently-conservative and politically influential farming class would restrain the more radical tendencies of urban middle and working classes: "for in every commonwealth there is need of the rural forces of persistence to counteract the urban forces of change" (1903b: 281):

> A country party is wanted which can look beyond the dorp and the mine-head, and view South African interests broadly and soberly. It must, in the first instance, be a British party; but if this party is to become a South African party, it must first stand for interests common to both races and to all classes. (1903b: 275)

Finally, British settlers were needed in rural areas because, in retaining "a longer and simpler affection" for Britain, they would provide the best assurance that the new dominion would remain loyal to the empire (1903b: 272). So, for specific political, economic and imperial reasons, as well as for more general cultural ones, Buchan thought it vital that a more substantial rural British settler population should be closely linked with rural Afrikaners, with the two groups coalescing around a shared engagement with nature.

Spurred by the need to provide a public justification for Milner's reconstruction policies, and recognising the capacity of Southern African landscapes to unite Afrikaners and British settlers, Buchan worked out an approach to dominion-building which made nature the foundation of a new local white identity. This approach seemed to provide a way of reconciling the contradictory aims of enlarging the British rural population and of accommodating Afrikaners to British rule. It was an approach calculated to serve as an ideological foundation for the prospective Union of South Africa — one that would be further promoted and elaborated by other members of Milner's Kindergarten in the years that followed. The approach had been formulated by Buchan to meet the particular circumstances of British Southern Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century. But it was also one that had deep roots in Buchan's Scottish background and conservative cosmology.

III

While Buchan's Southern African experiences undoubtedly played a key part in shaping his thinking about significance of nature in constructing a new British dominion there, it also seems apparent that he applied to Southern Africa ideas about the connection between nature and culture which were well-known, yet hitherto applied mainly to Britain and other "northern lands". It also seems apparent that these experiences prompted a shift in his thinking about identity and empire, a shift away from the idea that there should be a dominant pan-imperial British identity and towards a more multicultural, nature-based approach where separate cultural identities would coexist with distinctive national and transnational identities. Buchan began to think that just as a strong Scottish identity grounded in the Scottish landscape could co-exist with a British or dominion identity, so could Afrikaner and British identities coexist with a distinctive Southern African identity. When Buchan argued that "any South African civilisation must grow upon in the soil and borrow from the Dutch race", he was drawing on a set of ideas that he believed explained the vitality of Scots and the British "race", and the strength of the British empire (1903b: 389).

He was convinced that rural life was everywhere the foundation of cultural vigour and national vitality. This was an ancient idea powerfully revived in Victorian times, most famously by Matthew Arnold and John Ruskin. In common with a wide range of British thinkers, Buchan thought that without an ongoing and energetic engagement with the countryside and wilderness, Britain would slip into irretrievable moral and material decline. The association of rural life with cultural vigour, and of urban life with social decay resonated deeply with his own Scottish upbringing. Growing up, he had experienced two starkly different sides of Scotland. One was the heavy industry, pollution and social decay first of Pathead — where he spent his early childhood, and then of Glasgow — where his father ministered to a Calvinist congregation in the

depressed Gorbals district. The other was the unspoilt rural Borders around the upper Tweed River where he spent most of his summers as a youth. From his grandparents' home in Broughton, Buchan explored the surrounding Peebleshire countryside. He hiked its many hills, fished its waters, and conversed with its inhabitants, hearing the tales of farmers and townspeople, masters and servants, gamekeepers and poachers. The contrast between the green hills, clear waters and fresh air of the Borders, and the factories and tenements, pollution and decay of industrial Scotland was stark. Early in life Buchan concluded that rural life generated and sustained the admirable and distinguishing qualities of the Scots, while urban life tended only to subvert them.[32]

Many of his ideas about the relationship between nature and culture seem to have been worked out in connection with Scotland. Writing in the 1890s of his beloved Borders, Buchan insisted that the inhabitants of Tweedside, the "Men of the Uplands", were "akin to their countryside" and were a vigorous and admirable people because their incessant fighting had brought them into close contact with nature:

> Days and nights of riding, when a false step may be death, make a man's senses wonderfully acute. He learns to use his wits, which is well-nigh a lost art amongst us; he becomes versed in the lore of woodcraft and hillcraft ... Such a trade is not over-good for morality ... but it is the very finest school in the world for the natural man. (Buchan 1896: 39)[33]

For Buchan, as for many others of his time, the value of the empire lay above all in the opportunities it offered for such challenging encounters with nature, opportunities no longer available in the British Isles. As he warned in 1895 in connection with the "Men of the Uplands":

> we can scarcely hope for the long continuance of the old freshness and vigour of the people, the old unsullied beauty of the valley; for the process of ruin is even now beginning. The old men are dying out, and the younger seek the cities, and so a new race is fast springing up which knows not the land. (Buchan 1896: 56–57)

Buchan initially believed that such encounters were best sought on the imperial frontier of Canada's northern landscapes: "To men whose root stock is Saxon, or at least Northern, some vigour in the elements and the landscape is necessary for true moral and physical manhood." This belief underpinned his description of the Canadian troops who passed through Britain on their way to and from the South African War: "The tall men in the Canadian contingents, with their curious brightness of eye, which comes from looking over vast prospects of country, were more than mere Volunteers or Manitoba stock-riders. They were to the observant man the visible sign of a masculine and unwearied nation." (*Spectator* 6 July 1901, unsigned letter by Buchan) But, after seeing Southern Africa for himself, he concluded that it possessed landscapes no less suited than Canada's to sustaining the vitality of the British "race" and empire.

Another set of ideas previously articulated by Buchan in connection with the Borders, but then applied to Southern Africa, was that cultural fitness, group identity and social cohesion could be fostered by shared interest in "sport" — by which he meant principally hunting and fishing — and in the associated interest in nature. Writing about the Borders, Buchan argued that sport was a way for men (for he thought of it as a primarily male activity) to retain contact with the land and to preserve primeval physical and mental skills. Sport also encouraged a sense of social unity previously engendered by warfare. Sport in Scotland, he wrote, "brings out all the virile and sterling qualities of a man" and "keeps the ground against the more unmanly vices". The true sportsman was "a prince of a good fellow ... a man who has a love of motion and the open air, and the two valuable qualities of courage and self-repression". Sportsman gained a "love for danger and enterprise" and "skill of hand and love of nature". "It will be a blessing for this land", he wrote of Scotland, "if this love were infused into all sorts and conditions of men" since it set "all classes on a level" (Buchan 1896: 40–50). Buchan later said almost identical things about sport in Southern Africa (Buchan 1903b: 170–86).

Buchan's call for "South African civilisation" to "borrow from the Dutch race" also had close connection to his previous thinking about the Borders and to his subsequent understanding of Scotland (Buchan 1903b: 389). The Scots were no culturally or ethnically pure group. His own family had a mixture of Highland and Lowland ancestry, and he recognised that there was a long history of ethnic mixing even in the predominantly Saxon areas of the Borders. In some of his early published essays and stories, Buchan described the Borders as having witnessed successive invasions of peoples: "Britons" driving Picts from the Lowlands, Gaels from Ireland doing the same to Britons, and finally, in places, the Saxons gaining predominance (Buchan 1896: 39; Buchan 1899a). "Celtic and Saxon meet here" in his "Men of the Uplands". These "Uplanders" became one people in the course of living in and fighting across the countryside. (Buchan 1896: 39.) Influenced, perhaps, by his thinking about Southern Africa, Buchan later described Scotland's history in terms of a relatively recent coalescing of distinct Highland and Lowland cultures, cultures divided by both language and religion. Neither culture was based blood or ethnicity: "It is not a question of Celtic and Saxon, or Celtic and Norseman. Let us get rid of the word Celtic altogether. Every part of Scotland is more or less of a racial mixture", he wrote in 1927. Highlanders were predominantly Gaelic-speaking Catholics. Lowlanders were typically Scots-speaking Calvinists. Until the eighteenth century Scotland had been sharply divided: "Two hostile peoples, with utterly different traditions and with a long record of ill-will between them, had to wait till a century or two ago till the barriers were broken down." A shared sense of Scottish identity emerged from a mingling of peoples after the Highland clearances, a shared attachment to the Scottish landscape, and the unifying force of literature, most notably the poetry and prose of Robert Burns and Sir Walter

Scott. At one level, Scottish national identity was a product of cultural amalgamation. Yet to a significant extent, the two cultures remained distinct, each continuing to influence the other. Highlanders and Lowlanders were originally no more homogenous than were Afrikaners and British settlers, but these Scots had been united by a shared engagement with Scotland's natural landscapes, landscapes upon which the country's distinctive and unifying literature was founded.[34]

Buchan's Scottish background and outlook were further in evidence in his opposition to coercive policies of assimilation, and in his belief in the unifying possibilities of multiple identities. The strength of Scotland's commitment to the British national and imperial project had not, he believed, derived from the crude imposition of English culture and institutions on Scots. This commitment was instead the product of a willing adoption of new British and imperial identities, ones that opened doors to material and cultural advantages. Buchan's own family were English and Scots-speaking Lowlanders. They considered themselves unquestionably Scottish, though they were not Gaelic-speakers, kilt-wearers or caber-tossers — not, in short, Scots in the mould of English caricature. Buchan himself was nineteen before he made his first real visit to England. He was twenty before he entered Oxford University. There he strove to shed his Scottish accent and identify himself as British, although others naturally labelled him a Scot. Being British was undeniably attractive to an ambitious Scot like Buchan. It was a more inclusive identity that facilitated entry in into the social and political elite that led not only Britain but also a globe-spanning empire. The adoption of a British identity did not, however, mean that he wished to forget his Scottish heritage.[35] Indeed, he thought that old identities rooted in natural landscapes would inevitably persist, and that they could do so for generations.

Some of these ideas appeared in *The Far Islands*, a story he published in 1899. Its main character — Colin Raden — was of Scots and English ancestry. He had an English identity founded on his love for "the soft English landscape", and he was initially disparaged by Scots for being "denationalised and degenerate". But he also had a "rugged northern strength" inherited from his Scottish warrior forebears, and revived by his encounters with the wilds of Scotland's Western Isles.(Buchan 1899b.) Buchan's ideas about the connection between nature and identity, about multiple identities, and the value of physically challenging landscapes were thus well-established at an early age.

His own experience and understanding of Scottish identity in a British context encouraged him to believe that white Southern Africans could forge a common identity without erasing old identities, and that persistent identities amongst British settlers were the key to imperial unity. There was thus far more to Buchan's emphasis on nature as a defining and unifying feature of settler identity in Southern Africa than the need to defend Milner's land settlement policies. Buchan's discourses on Southern Africa also owed much to his personal

experiences there, his conservative ideological preconceptions, and, not least, his Scottish background and outlook. Perhaps the most significant consequence of his Southern African experiences was that they led him to see that his sacrosanct beliefs about the relationship between nature and culture would hold true in Southern Africa no less than in Scotland.

IV

Buchan's ideas about nature and culture had a considerable influence on the construction of a white identity for the Union of South Africa in the years leading to its establishment as a dominion in 1910. While his precise influence is difficult to document, it seems clear that he was the first member of the Kindergarten to publish an ideological framework for the prospective dominion — a framework in which the white population's relationship with nature would define the national identity. Milner, and those members of the Kindergarten who encouraged the development of the Union, seem to have drawn on ideas and rhetoric first articulated in the Southern African context by Buchan. And they drew, not least, on his arguments for seeking unity between Afrikaners and British settlers through the development of a local identity rooted in the natural environment. The influence of Buchan's fiction on the construction of white identity in Southern Africa was also significant, but this influence belongs to the period beginning in 1910, starting with the publication that year of *Prester John*. During Buchan's lifetime (he died in 1940) white identity in South Africa generally developed along lines that Buchan had helped to lay at the beginning of the century. It was only in the decades after his death, with the resurgence of an exclusivist Afrikaner nationalism, that his vision for South Africa lost its ascendancy.

Once recognition is given to Buchan's early work as an official propagandist for Milner from 1901 to 1903, Buchan's influence on Milner's later public pronouncements seems obvious. The influence of *The African Colony* is certainly evident in Milner's best known statement about the development of a shared Afrikaner-British identity, a statement included in his farewell address in Johannesburg in 1905:

> The Dutch can never own a perfect allegiance merely to Great Britain. The British can never, without moral injury, accept allegiance to any body politic which excludes their motherland. But British and Dutch alike could, without loss of dignity, unite in loyal devotion to an empire-state, in which Great Britain and South Africa would be partners, and could work cordially together for the good of South Africa as a member of that great whole. The true Imperialist is also the best South African.[36]

The emphasis here on a shared local identity, and on the potential for multiple identities to sustain dominion and imperial unity, clearly reflects some of the central themes of Buchan's earlier writing.

Buchan's influence is also evident in some of the Kindergarten's efforts to promote the unification of British Southern Africa, not least in the "Selborne Memorandum". This authoritative statement of the rationale and ideology of Union was published in 1907 in the name of Lord Selborne, Milner's successor as High Commissioner. But it was drafted during the last third of 1906 by members of the Kindergarten under the direction first of Lionel Curtis, and later by Selborne himself.[37] An important inspiration for the Memorandum has long said to have been F.S. Oliver's biography of Alexander Hamilton (Nimcocks 1968: 129; Lavin 1995: 68–71; Torrence 1996: 146). Oliver — like Buchan, a Scot from the Borders — was also an admirer of Buchan's writings.[38] And it is perhaps no coincidence that *Alexander Hamilton* concludes by insisting that Scotland's relationship with England proved that distinct cultural identities were no obstacle to political union within Britain, Southern Africa, or the empire as a whole. (Oliver 1906: 484–88.) The Selborne Memorandum was an extended rehearsal of arguments for unification, most of which had already been discussed in detail in *The African Colony*.[39] Buchan's rhetoric about the connection between nature and culture, and about different peoples coalescing through an engagement with nature, can be seen in the Memorandum's description of Southern Africa's white population as well as in the call for a new white culture shared by Afrikaners and British settlers. According to the Memorandum, prior to advent of British rule in the Cape Colony, Dutch and Huguenot families "took root in the soil". By the mid-nineteenth century, after the arrival of British settlers, a "European society had taken root in the soil of Southern Africa, regarding itself as an end to be considered in itself" (Williams 1925: 28–29). The Memorandum went on to conclude that:

> the South African nation of the future will be compounded of two strong ingredients, just as the Boer himself is the joint product of those tough qualities in the Dutch and Huguenot character ... Every thoughtful South African looks forward to a fusion of thought, aim and blood between the British and Boer stock which will develop a national type as strong as all mixtures of the western peoples of Europe have ever proved. (Williams 1925: 173)

Then, in a statement reminiscent of Buchan's assertions in *The African Colony* and other writings, the Memorandum proclaimed that "the true mission of the British Empire" is "to foster the growth of vigorous nations, adapted to the continent and country in which they live, distinguished by marked characteristics from other peoples" (Williams 1925: 173). Buchan's influence comes out even more clearly in R.H. Brand's 1909 book *The Union of South Africa*. Here, Buchan's good friend and travelling companion in the Transvaal further rehearsed the arguments for Union, explaining in his introductory remarks: "Apart from their passionate attachment to the soil itself, South Africans of both races love their country for her varied and romantic history, and both English and Dutch cherish a common patriotism which springs from a pride in the many deeds of courage recorded in her annals." (Brand 1909: 9) These rather wishful

remarks, in common with similar passages in the Selborne Memorandum, bear the mark of Buchan's earlier writings about nature and identity in Southern Africa.

Buchan's influence can also be detected in some of the Kindergarten's other efforts to promote an identity reflecting both Afrikaner and British cultures, most notably in *The State* — an illustrated periodical produced by the Kindergarten from 1909 to 1912.[40] Cape Dutch architecture was promoted as a "national" style by *The State* and by the Kindergarten architect Herbert Baker, but Buchan helped to lay the ground for this development through his encouragement of local cultural influences. In the *Spectator* in January 1904 Buchan endorsed "that old Dutch architecture which so perfectly fits the landscape", noting that "Anything which tends to make the people of a Colony interested in their own traditions and their indigenous art is to be warmly welcomed." (*Spectator*, 16 Jan. 1904, review of A.F. Trotter) Whatever his precise relationship with the Kindergarten may have been in the years 1904 to 1910, there is no doubt that many of the ideas they promoted had been given early published expression by Buchan.

The neglect of Buchan's influence on the Kindergarten requires some explanation. Part of it arises from his physical absence from Southern Africa after the end of his official work for Milner in August 1903, apart from a secretive four month return visit in 1905. Buchan did not play an obvious or public role in the Kindergarten's activities after 1903. But, in the years that followed, Buchan remained in close contact with Milner and with other powerful associates of the Kindergarten such as Lionel Phillips. Copies of *The African Colony* were sent personally by Buchan to his friends in the Milner administration.[41] Moreover, Buchan used his position as a journalist and publisher to further the Kindergarten's aim of establishing a British dominion in Southern Africa.[42] There thus can be little doubt that Kindergarten members were in close contact with Buchan, even if only indirectly through their familiarity with his published writings.

More significant, perhaps, in explaining the neglect of Buchan's influence was the fact that he was too closely associated with Milner and with the aim of British domination in the Transvaal, to be useful as a *publicly acknowledged* inspiration for Union. Much of the blame for this must rest with Buchan. Even if *The African Colony* had had a more inspirational title — or at least one suggesting that there was more to Southern Africa's future than unity as a British dependency — the book itself contains passages that were never calculated to win Afrikaners to the cause of Union. D.F. Malan, long-serving Afrikaner nationalist cabinet minister and the first prime minister of the apartheid era, had a file on Buchan cataloguing *The African Colony*'s objectionable remarks. These included the statement that the Boer "would as soon die for an ideal, ... as sell his farm for a sixpence". There was also the suggestion that: "It is worth

considering the Boer in sport, for it is there that he is seen at his worst. Without tradition of fair play, soured and harassed by want and disaster, his sport [hunting] became a matter of commerce, and he held no device unworthy of the game." Even more damning were Buchan's admissions that Britain's paramount objective was political domination: "we have not been fighting for the love of it or for fine sentiment, but to conquer the land and give our people mastery. The last word in all matters must rest with us — that is, with the people of British blood and British loyalties."[43] This statement alone was enough to ensure that neither Buchan nor *The African Colony* could ever be advertised as inspirations for Union.

The African Colony's value as an acknowledged founding-text of Union was further undermined by its forthright prescriptions for both economic development and the treatment of black Africans, prescriptions no less objectionable to Afrikaners than to many English-speaking whites in Southern Africa. The book included an extended argument for the importation of Chinese labour to work in the gold mines. This was to be a temporary measure designed to prepare the way for the introduction of a largely white labour force for the mines. No less radically, *The African Colony* also called for far-reaching adjustments to economic relations with Africans, and urged that they be brought into closer contact with the modern capitalist economy, not artificially separated from it. The book rejected the ideas that Africans should be a subservient labouring class and that any significant number should long remain in reserves under traditional rule; and it opposed any extensive reliance on migrant labour. It also opposed African labour tenancy on white farms, arguing that it oppressed African tenants and corrupted white landlords: "The old vicious system of allowing natives to farm his land in return for a certain amount of compulsory labour" made the Boer "unthrifty and improvident" (1903b: 259). It argued that Africans would always be able to farm more successfully than whites in certain areas of Southern Africa, and that the land available for black ownership or independent tenure should be increased. The plan of economic development outlined in *The African Colony* would therefore have been anathema to a whole range of white interests: the critics of Asian labour; the opponents of African urbanisation and land ownership, and, above all, mine owners and farmers who wished to rely on cheap African labour (Buchan 1903b: ch. 12, ch. 13).

The programme of African political and social development advocated by *The African Colony* would have been viewed with even greater alarm by many white Southern Africans. The book included a clear warning that grave dangers would attend any arrangement that forced Africans into a permanently inferior or subservient position. "Permanently" is the key word here, for Buchan opposed any immediate grant of political equality to Africans. He was sure, however, that limited political rights should be granted from the outset and that the way must be left open to fuller rights in future. Any denial of legal rights was dangerous since it:

> tends in the long run to degrade the value of human life, and deprecate moral currency, — a result so deadly for true progress that the consensus of civilised races has utterly condemned it. The denial of social and political rights is almost equally dangerous, since … there follows necessarily a depreciation of those political truths upon which all free societies are based. (Buchan 1903b: 289.)

It is thus hardly surprising that *The African Colony* was not remembered as an inspiration for Union when its prescriptions for the country's development were so sharply at odds with the thinking that would dominate white Southern African politics for most the twentieth century.

While the impact of Buchan's political writings about nature and culture in Southern Africa has been little explored and largely underestimated, the same cannot be said of his fiction. The novel *Prester John* has drawn particular attention. This is the story of an African uprising in Southern Africa foiled by a young Scottish settler. Paul Rich has argued that this novel "was as important in the ideological underpinning behind South African Union in 1910 … as *The State …*" (Rich 1983). For Craig Smith it was: "The blueprint for the perfect apartheid colony …" (C. Smith 1995). According to Tim Couzens, *Prester John* should be read as a founding text of segregation and apartheid (Couzens 1981). Such assessments have been disputed by David Daniell, who has argued that "it is wrong to see in *Prester John* simply the outcropping of familiar, and now hateful, notions about white and black in the Africa of the time" (Daniell 1985: 136). In the most balanced and nuanced appreciation of *Prester John*, Bill Schwarz explained how this novel powerfully and widely reinforced distinctions between white and black, civilisation and barbarism, and masculine and feminine — all within a context in which landscape had a powerful symbolic and practical significance for individual and group identity (Schwarz 1997).

However else one chooses to interpret his fiction, Buchan's novels were certainly a potent vehicle for the dissemination of his ideas about nature, culture and empire. His description of Southern African landscapes and their positive influence on the white builders of empire dominates *Prester John*, a story set in Buchan's beloved Eastern Transvaal, in the area above and below the Berg escarpment around Woodbush. These and other Southern African landscapes also feature significantly in the series of novels centred around another Scottish-born hero — Richard Hannay. In none of these novels– *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, *Greenmantle*, *Mr Standfast*, *The Three Hostages*, and *The Island of Sheep* — is Southern Africa the setting for the main narrative. Yet Southern African landscapes turn up repeatedly as descriptive reference points: as the setting for flashbacks involving Hannay, or as the bond tying him to Peter Pienaar — the Afrikaner who comes to Hannay's aid and who almost single-handedly saves the Allied cause in the Great War. Buchan makes it clear that it was through encounters with Southern African landscapes that Hannay developed the moral and physical strength to save British civilization and the empire from threats posed by foreign governments, intriguers or criminals. Buchan also made clear

that those landscapes were the foundation of Hannay's identification both with Southern Africa and with Afrikaners in the shape of Pienaar.[44]

The evolution of Hannay's "national" identity in Buchan's fiction also reveals something about Buchan's ideas about the white nation-building project in Southern Africa, as well as about multiple identities. Intriguingly, Hannay was introduced in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* in 1914 as a "colonial" from Rhodesia; by 1916, with the publication *Greenmantle*, Hannay's South African identity gained greater prominence. By 1919, in *Mr Standfast*, he was finally and unequivocally labelled a "South African". This pattern may reflect Buchan's early doubts about a South Africa in which Afrikaners held the upper hand politically, and which at the time he was writing *The Thirty-Nine Steps* was facing an armed rebellion by some irreconcilable Boers. By 1916, after so many Afrikaners had demonstrated their support for the empire's war effort, Buchan wrote more positively about South Africa and the partnership of British settlers and Afrikaners there. This was the year that Peter Pienaar appeared in *Greenmantle* as the wilely and unflappable Afrikaner hunter who had honed his war-winning skills on the veld. In *Greenmantle*, Hannay goes as far as agreeing with Pienaar that "There is only one white man's land, and that is South Africa." (Buchan 1956: 130) Hannay was also adept at acquiring new identities, each linked to distinctive landscapes. Although he knew himself to be a Scot, Hannay also thought of himself as being South African, and later British. In *Mr Standfast*, Hannay came to describe England as "home" after his experiences in the countryside of the Cotswolds (Buchan 1993: 28). Although Buchan's confidence in the Union of South Africa may have varied along with the fortunes of pro-imperial forces there, he never wavered in his belief in the significance of natural landscapes for identity as well as moral and physical fortitude. Hannay in particular epitomised Buchan's philosophy of landscape, identity and empire: the landscapes of the imperial frontier were supposed to develop and energise Scots (or other Britons) who would take on new identities founded on local natural environments even as they retained old national identities, all to the good of a united empire.

To a remarkable extent, the Union of South Africa fulfilled its promise during Buchan's lifetime. During the Great War, Louis Botha and Jan Smuts were hailed by Buchan as heroes of the imperial cause. So too were the ordinary white South Africans who fought on the Western Front. Even black South Africans were praised in *Mr Standfast* for their part in saving the Western Front by constructing key defences (Buchan 1993: 309). As Buchan recorded: "In the Great War I was much with the South African Infantry Brigade, a superb fighting unit. … About one third of its members were Dutch and most of them had fought against Britain." (Buchan 1940: 115) With its mixed white make-up, the South African Infantry Brigade "was a microcosm of what South Africa may yet become if the fates are kind. It was a living example of true race integration" (Buchan 1920: 261). In 1935, when he was offered the post of governor-general

of Canada, his initial reaction to Buckingham Palace was "to say quite openly and frankly that he would really like to be appointed Governor-General of South Africa, as he loved the country, knew the people and could talk Dutch" (Lownie 1997: 243). South Africa's entry into the Second World War alongside Britain and the other dominions merely confirmed his confidence in the Union as an imperial partner. But this war also helped to intensify the division between Afrikaner nationalists and the adherents of the Afrikaner-British national ideal led by Jan Smuts; and it thereby contributed to the ultimate failure of Buchan's vision for South Africa. As he had foreseen, the chief threat to his vision was the formation by Afrikaners of a culturally-based political movement, secure in its rural base, and drawing strength from the historical animosity towards Britain. As he said in 1903: "The greatest constitutional calamity which could befall South Africa would be for the Dutch ... to go as a race into opposition." (Buchan 1903b: 342) But this is precisely what happened with the National Party gaining power in 1948, supported almost exclusively by Afrikaners and sweeping most of the rural constituencies. The land settlement policies of the reconstruction period had failed to introduce more than a small number of British settlers into the countryside of the Transvaal and Orange Free State and had merely furnished a further example of British perfidy. The National Party also benefited from the cultural mobilisation of Afrikaners, a mobilisation that grew in strength as South Africa modernised. This possibility had also been foreseen in *The African Colony*: "The very advance of civilisation may militate against us by vivifying historical memories and rekindling a clearer flame of racial resentment." (Buchan 1903b: 271) Ironically, the National Party made highly effective use of ideas about nature, identity and indigenous culture to rally Afrikaners to the apartheid and republican cause. Moreover, after the prized goals of the republic and the end of the Commonwealth connection had been achieved, the National Party used some of these same ideas to unite whites *under Afrikaner leadership*. In so doing they appropriated and perpetuated a nature-centric nation-building project that Buchan had hoped would serve British and imperial ends, not Afrikaner and isolationist ones.

V

Buchan's Southern African experiences had a transformative impact on his ideas about the connection between nature and identity within the British empire. Before he left Britain to work for Milner, Buchan thought that the main challenge in Southern Africa was to ensure the loyalty of a new dominion there by increasing the number of British settlers, overcoming the influence of "backward" rural Afrikaners, and fostering a pan-imperial "patriotism". After he encountered the Highveld and Berg, and met rural Afrikaners, he was deeply attracted to these landscapes and people, not least because of their Scottish character. As a consequence, his thinking shifted decisively. In the course of defending Milner's reconstruction policies, he began to advocate a more accom-

modating approach towards Afrikaners and urge the development of a distinctive new white identity in Southern Africa, one that combined Afrikaner and British cultural influences and in which the local natural environment would be a key unifying force. After he saw how Scots in Southern Africa were able to sustain old identities even as they acquired new local ones, Buchan also concluded that the development of a distinctive dominion identity need not rest on blunt policies of assimilation. Indeed, Buchan came to argue that it was the persistence of old landscape-based identities, rather than the development of a dominant pan-imperial patriotism, that would hold the empire together.

To some extent Buchan did no more than apply to Southern Africa ideas that he had previously considered in relation to Scotland and other parts of the empire. The most significant of these was the idea that all strong identities and cultures were founded on a close attachment to nature. The invigorating qualities of Southern African landscapes, and the logic of his belief in the connection between nature and culture, led Buchan to conclude that a strong new white identity could develop there. It followed that Afrikaner culture, with a strength derived from a close attachment to the land, would necessarily make an important contribution to this new identity. It also followed that large-scale British rural settlement was vital if this identity were going to be predominantly British in character. Such settlement was also needed because, in Buchan's view, the rural population was a politically conservative force and therefore a desirable counterweight to the urban forces of social instability. Finally, and perhaps most vitally, Buchan urged British rural settlement in Southern Africa because it would enable an otherwise urban British population to engage with nature and thereby avoid degeneracy. For this was another key preconception carried by Buchan to Southern Africa–that the principal utility of the empire's rural and wilderness frontier lay in the opportunities it provided for British people to escape the decay inherent in urban life. So, for a whole series of reasons — relating to the impact of Southern Africa's geography and demography on Buchan's thinking, his preconceived ideas about the relationship between nature and culture, his understanding of Scotland and of the possibilities of multiple identities, and his fears about the future of Britain and the empire — Buchan promoted a conception of white identity in Southern Africa in which the local natural environment was central.

Can Buchan's ideas be said to have had any lasting impact on the construction of South African national identity? It would be difficult to make a strong case for this. The hope that empire unity could be preserved by multiple, landscape-based identities proved to be almost entirely illusory. As did the belief that the rise and fall of peoples, countries and empires would be determined by the strength of a people's connection with the land. Perhaps the most that can be said is that, through his early writing on Southern Africa, he helped to promote the idea that the local landscape was a key part of the new dominion's national

identity. Some remnants of this white identity, notably the use of the springbok as a national symbol, persisted throughout the twentieth century. But, as Buchan feared, the construction of a British-dominated shared-white identity failed in the end. Perhaps, as he argued, the roots of the failure lay in the lack of success in settling British people on the land, or in the failure to accommodate African political rights that Buchan predicted would lead to the political and moral degeneration of white South Africa. Perhaps, too, the roots of that failure included the historical link between the construction of such an identity and Milner's hated polices. In any case, as Buchan anticipated, Afrikaner nationalists used their rural base to gain political ascendancy, drawing strength from their appropriation of the history of the struggle for the land. The white regime's success in using such things as Great Trek and the springbok as symbols of nation building ensured that they would be discarded by post-1994 multiracial South Africa. Even so, landscape and wilderness icons have had renewed utility in the post-apartheid efforts to build a inclusive, multiethnic "rainbow" nationalism. The protea has replaced the springbok, while wild animals now adorn stamps and coins which once showed the heroes and heroic events first of British and later of Afrikaner mythology. The wilderness experience, nature and game conservation have been called upon once again by a new generation of nation builders. Buchan, a devoted disciple of Izaak Walton's *Compleat angler*, would have been particularly cheered by the story of how, in the early 1990s, an encounter between Cyril Ramaphosa and Roelf Meyer on a trout fishing trip helped to break an impasse in the negotiations to create the "New South Africa".[45] If some of Buchan's ideas about landscape and identity live on, they will do so most prominently in multiracial remnants of the British empire like South Africa.

Notes

1. Research for this paper was made possible by the Jules and Gabrielle Léger research fellowship, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at two conferences: "African Environments Past and Present", St Antony's College, Oxford, 1999; and "Historical geographies of Southern Africa symposium", University of Sussex, 2002. I wish to thank everyone at those conferences who commented on my work. Particular thanks go to Jeremy Foster and the anonymous referee for *African Studies* for their detailed critiques.
2. *Prester John* was first published in 1910, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* in 1915.
3. There is some confusion and debate about whether Buchan was a true member of Milner's Kindergarten. Buchan, himself, sometimes said that he was. In his memoirs he wrote: "In those days we were a very young company, which Johannesburg, not unkindly, labelled the 'Kindergarten"' (see Buchan 1940: 103). One of Buchan's biographers also thought that he was a member, citing Leo Amery as a source. (See J.A. Smith 1965: 124.) J.X. Merriman, who first popularised this use of the term "kindergarten" in speech in the Cape House of Assembly on 11 September 1902 certainly would have had Buchan mind at this time when he complained about the activities of Milner's young administrators. (See Lewsen 1966: 468.)

A more recent biography follows Buchan's own lead in describing him as a member of Milner's "creche". (See Lownie 1995: 72.) While it seems reasonable to describe Buchan as being part of the early Kindergarten, it remains true that he did not remain in Southern Africa long enough to be considered a core member of the group. Nor did he support some of the Kindergarten's later activities, particularly the Round Table movement. The ideological distance that developed between Buchan and the Kindergarten after 1910 may be a reason why Buchan, in 1933, said that "I did not ever belong to the Kindergarten but to an earlier vintage called the Creche". (See HoC Deb. vol. 283, col. 1896, 7 Dec. 1933; see also Lownie 1997: 55–63, I.R. Smith 1997: 35–63.)

4. The most important biographies of Buchan are: Smith 1965 and Lownie 1995. For an analysis of Buchan as a writer see Daniell 1975. One of the most provocative and insightful assessments of Buchan's relationship with Southern Africa is found in Schwarz 1997. For the development of a new white identity in Southern Africa see S. Dubow 1997. Dubow's assessment largely coincides with mine, but Dubow's focus is broader and concentrates mainly on the period after Buchan's departure. See also S. Dubow 2002. My more narrowly focused assessment of Buchan's contribution to this development supports Dubow's main arguments.
5. *Spectator*, 26 Jan. 1901, "The 'Edinburgh' on South Africa", unsigned article by Buchan. *Spectator*, 20 July 1900, unsigned review by Buchan of E.T. Cook, *Rights and Wrongs of the Transvaal War*. Buchan's unsigned contributions to the *Spectator* are detailed in Blanchard 1981.
6. A. Milner to H. Williams, 27 Dec. 1900 in C. Headlam 1933: 242–243.
7. NLS, J.A. Smith papers, Acc. 11164/17, Buchan to Mrs Malcolm, 17 Oct. 1901.
8. The impact of Southern African landscapes on Buchan has been discussed in greater detail by Jeremy Foster (1998). Foster discusses Buchan's relationship with Southern Africa both in terms of his ideological and cultural preconceptions and in terms of the landscape's lasting impact on Buchan. Foster argues that the impact was profound and lasting and that there was no simple "appropriation" of a colonial landscape by a detached imperial observer. My paper agrees with Foster's arguments but devotes more attention both to the Scottish dimension of Buchan's thinking and to the political ramifications of his ideas.
9. NLS, Acc. 11164/17, John Buchan to Anna Buchan, 17 May 1903.
10. NLS, Acc. 11164/17, John Buchan to Aunt Agnes, 13 Oct. 1901.
11. NLS, Acc. 11164/17, John Buchan to Anna Buchan, 5 April 1903.
12. NLS, John Buchan Papers, Acc. 9058/5/1, "Highland and Lowland", unpublished speech delivered in Scotland on 26 Jan. 1927 and 18 Feb. 1928.
13. This article was signed A. Cuthbert Medd, but was written by Buchan while he was still working in Johannesburg for Milner. (See Blanchard 1981: 183.)
14. NLS, Acc. 11164/17, J. Buchan to Mrs Malcolm, 17 Oct. 1901.
15. NLS, Acc. 11164/17, J. Buchan to Nan, 7 Oct.1901.
16. NLS, Acc. 11164/17, J. Buchan to Stair Gillon, 15 Oct.1901.
17. NLS, Acc. 11164/17, J. Buchan to Anna Buchan, 20 Sept. 1902. "Mutches" were women's close-fitting linen caps.
18. NLS, Acc. 11164/17, J. Buchan to Anna Buchan, Oct. 1902.
19. NLS, Acc. 11164/17, J. Buchan to Anna Buchan, 4 Jan. 1903.
20. Milner to J. Chamberlain, 25 Jan. 1902, published in Britain, Parliament, Cd. 1163, *Further correspondence relating to affairs in South Africa* (July 1902). Part of this despatch was later republished in Headlam 1933, vol. II: 282–85.
21. Milner to J. Chamberlain, 25 Jan. 1902, Cd. 1163.
22. NLS, Acc. 11164/17, John Buchan to Anna Buchan, 10 Feb. 1902.
23. HoC Deb., 112, cols 28-29, 29 July 1902. Campbell-Bannerman's statement is also quoted in R. Hyam 1968: 165.
24. HoC Deb., 112, col. 78, 29 July 1902.

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25. PRO, Colonial Office, "Confidential print", CO 879/75, Treasury to Colonial Office, 22 May 1902.
26. PRO, Colonial Office, High Commissioner in South Africa papers, CO 417/348, H. Lambert to F. Graham, 25 Jan. 1902, quoted in Streak 1969: 34.
27. Buchan's recollections of the "tremendous row" in the Transvaal over agricultural development are recorded in HoC Deb., 283, col. 1896, 7 Dec. 1933.
28. Britain, Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, 111, col. 25, 15 July 1902.
29. It was published in November 1903 and sold 500 copies in its first two years. See Blanchard 1981: 16–17 and J.A.Smith 1965: 134–35.
30. According to Denoon, *The African Colony* was written at Milner's instigation. (Denoon 1973: 58).
31. For a discussion of the Scottish origins of conservationist thought in Southern Africa see: Grove 1989 and Grove 1997. Buchan's ideas about hunting and conservation tie in neatly with John Mackenzie's arguments in *Empire and Nature* (Mackenzie 1988).
32. For Buchan's Scottish upbringing see: J. Smith 1965: chs 1 and 2; Lownie 1995: chs 1 and 2.
33. Buchan first published "The Men of the Uplands" in *MacMillan's Magazine* in August 1895.
34. NLS, Acc. 9058/5/1, "Highland and Lowland", unpublished speech delivered in Scotland on 26 Jan. 1927 and 18 Feb. 1928.
35. For an assessment of Buchan's Scottishness see Harvie 1991. For the wider historical context of Scotland's relationship to the empire see: Mackenzie 1993.
36. Buchan quoted this part of Milner's speech in Buchan 1905: 296. The full text of the speech can be found in Milner 1913: 77–91. It is rarely recognised that Buchan was in Southern Africa in 1905 at the time of this speech. He may even have written it. The copy of Milner's speech presented to Buchan "from the speaker" is annotated in a way suggesting that Buchan was indeed the author. See Kingston, Queen's University, Douglas Library, Buchan collection, Milner, "Speeches delivered by His Excellency Viscount Milner at the public banquets given in his honour at Pretoria, Johannesburg, and Germiston on the eve of his departure from South Africa" (Westminster: Imperial South African Association, 1905).
37. For the origins and writing of the Selborne Memoradum see: Torrance 1996: ch. 8; Lavin 1995: ch. 4; Nimcocks 1968: ch. 5.
38. Oliver particularly liked Buchan's extended pamphlet on empire, *A Lodge in the Wilderness*, published anonymously in December 1906: "I haven't told you half one quarter of the joy it gave me." (QUA, Buchan papers, Box 2, F.S. Oliver to J. Buchan, 23 Dec. 1906) In this fictionalised discourse set in an African "country house" "in the Cape Dutch style", Buchan continued to promote his ideas about nature and identity, noting in relation to the dominions that: "These new lands are themselves a great moulding force as regards national character." (Buchan 1917: 17, 77)
39. The Selborne Memorandum was first published as Britain, Parliament, Cd. 3564, *Federation of the South African Colonies*, (July 1907). It can also be found in Williams 1925.
40. For a discussion of *The State's* nation-building efforts see: Merrington 1997.
41. QUA, Buchan papers, box 12, A. Jameson, Commissioner of Lands, Pretoria, to J. Buchan, 15 Jan. 1904.
42. Buchan was a director of the publishing firm "Thomas Nelson" when it produced a pocket edition of Oliver's *Alexander Hamilton*. Buchan also helped to produce a British edition of Lionel Curtis's *The Government of South Africa*. See Lavin 1995: 90.
43. Stellenbosch University, J.S. Gericke Library, D.F. Malan papers, file 1/1/6, 'Buchan'. Extracts from Buchan 1903b: 74, 49, and 338.
44. *Greenmantle* (1916), *Mr Standfast* (1919), *The Three Hostages* (1924), and *The Island of Sheep* (1936).
45. Buchan wrote a twenty-two page introduction to a popular edition of Walton and Cotton's *Compleat Angler* 1901.

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