

ROBERT BUCHANAN (1841 - 1901)

ASSESSMENT
AN APPRECIATION OF HIS CAREER

BY

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of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts.



ABSTRACT

Robert Buchanan was widely regarded during his lifetime as a poet of distinction, a capable and powerful novelist, and a critic of some perception, yet his name is now associated only with one regrettable episode, while those of lesser men and women continue to be remembered for work inferior to his. A man possessing large reserves of energy, and pressed to write for a living at an early age, he produced much work that deserves the oblivion it has found; but his early verse, expressing his profound compassion for the sufferings of the unfortunate in the simplest language, some of his ballads, and not a little of his later more vatic verse, is still worthy of study. As a novelist his work is provocative and readable, but too often descends to the level of the sentimental melodrama which earned him, for a while, a very good income from the stage. As a critic he was not profound, but was quick to detect and praise expression of his own sympathy for humanity that came to represent for him art's highest aspiration; Dickens, Browning and Whitman were his heroes, and for the last two he did sterling work in helping them to gain widespread recognition. As a polemist he rushed into several arenas, for some of which his talents were not especially suited; but he publicly supported C.S. Parnell and Oscar Wilde when few found the courage to do so. An interesting man of impressive variety and undoubted talent has found an undeserved neglect, and a full-scale critical biography of Robert Buchanan is long overdue.

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Buchanan establishment doubtless sold tracts promoting the New Moral World. Eventually the Buchanans settled in Glasgow, where the father became editor of the Sentinel in 1836, and did remarkably well for almost a decade.

After being expelled for wild behaviour from a boarding school at Rothesay, Buchanan went to the Glasgow High School and the University. There he met David Gray, a weaver's son three years his senior, then studying to be a teacher. This was the one friendship in Buchanan's life that was unclouded by any misunderstandings (though, ironically, it was a misunderstanding of the most simple kind that became part of the cause of Gray's early death). Both Gray and Buchanan were passionately interested in poetry. Hours were spent together poring over Buchanan's edition of the English poets, and weekends were spent walking through the countryside around Glasgow and vying with each other in the versification of the landscape. Both had verses published in

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Buchanan Robert Williams Buchanan was born at Caverswall, Staffordshire in August 1841. His father, a socialist, free-thinker and orator of some repute, was one of Robert Owen's trusted lieutenants. His mother, Margaret Williams, was a daughter of a well-known radical solicitor from Stoke-on-Trent. Early in his life, Buchanan's parents moved from place to place in search of a good living. At one stage, Robert Buchanan senior even ran a bookshop in Holywell Street (off the Strand), then notorious for its sellers of pornography, though the Buchanan establishment doubtless sold tracts promoting the New Moral World. Eventually the Buchanans settled in Glasgow, where the father became editor of the Sentinel in 1850, and did remarkably well for almost a decade.

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the Glasgow papers (Buchanan's not in those run by his father), and both sent samples of their work to Sidney Dobell and G.H. Lewes, and received encouraging replies. When Buchanan's father, by now proprietor of three Glasgow papers, over-extended his business in 1859 and was declared a bankrupt, both young men resolved to try their literary fortune in London. They arranged to meet on a certain Saturday in May, 1860 at the mainline station. At that time two separate railway companies ran trains to London from Glasgow. Buchanan went to one, Gray to the other. Each boarded the train thinking that the other had decided against going. Buchanan only met Gray in London several weeks later, by which time Gray had contracted the chest condition (caused by sleeping out in Hyde Park) from which he subsequently died.

Never backward, or unduly modest, Buchanan soon found work for himself; Hepworth Dixon of the Athenaeum gave him books to review, as did John Morley (the same age as Buchanan) then editing the moribund Literary Gazette. Dickens published his work in All the Year Round, and G.A. Sala published his poems and essays in Temple Bar. J.R. Maxwell, husband of M.E. Braddon, gave him the weekly Welcome Guest to edit in 1862, and also published his poems and short stories in Saint James's Magazine (Buchanan tells of arming himself with a cudgel to beat out Maxwell's brains because of the off-hand manner in which he had been treated by his editor - the matter involved payment for copy published - but on his arrival at Maxwell's office, instead of the customary half-hour wait in the ante-room, Buchanan was immediately shown in to the editor, who, for once, was all politeness and concern at

the plight of his contributor, so the cudgel was not put to use). In those days Buchanan had to earn at least ten shillings a week to subsist; by his account there were many weeks when he did not achieve that amount. Brought up in a relatively prosperous home, an only child, Buchanan was deeply affected by his experience of real hardship in London in the early 1860s. He did work very hard, and after two years had begun to make a name for himself. He had, however, learnt to produce what his editors wanted with a minimum of effort. Hall Caine and G.R. Sims, thirty years later, were amazed at the speed at which Buchanan could write; a short novel was produced in a week, a play in three weeks. A lot of his work bears signs of this fatal fluency, but his earliest poetry was revised and rewritten with a care that much of his later work, to his loss, did not receive.

In 1862 and 1863 he met most of the influential men of letters of his time. At Westland Marston's Sunday evening dinners he met Lewes and George Eliot, Jean Ingelow, Dinah Muloch and must have seen, though apparently he never met, D.G. Rossetti, W.M. Rossetti and Swinburne and Morris. At George Eliot's he met Robert Browning, of whose work he was ever a keen admirer, and Tennyson, of whom he was less appreciative. He became almost a protégé of Thomas Love Peacock, under whose watchful eye at Lower Halliford in the summer of 1863 Buchanan completed his volume of "pseudo-classical" poems, Undertones. From 1863 onwards, work was easier to find; in the following spring, the Morning Star (edited by Justin McCarthy) sent him to Denmark as a war-correspondent to cover Bismarck's invasion of Schleswig-Holstein.

Privation, if not the fear of it, now ceased to be a dominant factor in his life.

Towards the end of 1861, before the death of his friend David Gray in December, Buchanan, just twenty, married the sixteen-year-old Mary Jay. The union was childless; within a few years of marriage, Mary Buchanan was so racked with rheumatism that she had to be carried from room to room. It may be speculated that his wife's perpetually delicate condition did not allow Buchanan full sexual expression, and his rigid morality should not have allowed him release elsewhere. At least one student of the Fleshly Controversy has noted his mind being

"itself diseased, obsessed with deep inhibitions, unnaturally familiar with a long tradition of scatological literature."¹

It seems reasonable to suggest that he saw and attacked in Rossetti's poetry tendencies which he recognized and feared in himself.

Mary Buchanan finally died, after much suffering, of cancer in 1881. In the late 1860s they had adopted Mary's sister Harriett as their daughter, and she lived in the Buchanan household until the poet's death in 1901, and published her biography of him two years later.

By 1866, Buchanan had conceived a profound dislike for Babylon, as he called London, partly because he realized that as a denizen of Grub Street he had lost much of his youthful ideals and innocence. For the next eleven years, as if to purify himself, he lived away from London; and after a short

1. Jerome Buckley, The Victorian Temper, p.162.

stay in Bexhill, when his father died, in 1866 he moved to Oban in Argyllshire, where he lived for seven years. In 1865 he had gone, figuratively (possibly literally) to Scotland, for the scene of his Idyls and Legends of Inverburn, and the following year (while at Bexhill) he produced London Poems, which became quite popular, and ran to three editions by 1870. Also in 1866 he produced a translation of Scandinavian poetry, and in the next two years, produced the Moxon edition of Longfellow's poetry, and edited the journals of the American ornithologist J.J. Audubon (much to Audubon's widow's dismay he made the artist-naturalist look vain and selfish). During this time he managed to offend Matthew Arnold, and thereby is treated with scathing irony in the penultimate chapter of Culture and Anarchy, and John Ruskin, who castigated him pretty severely in Fors Clavigera. Others, notably Swinburne, must have been annoyed at some verses, "The Session of the Poets", which appeared in the Spectator for September 15, 1866 (p.1029):

At the Session of Poets held lately in London,
 The Bard of Freshwater was voted the chair:
 With his tresses unbrush'd, and his shirt-collar undone,
 He loll'd at his ease like a good-humour'd bear;
 "Come, boys!" he exclaim'd, "we'll be merry together!"
 And lit up his pipe with a smile on his cheek; -
 While with eye, like a skipper's, cock'd up at the weather,
 Sat the Vice-Chairman Browning, thinking in Greek.

* * * * *

What was said? What was done? was there prosing or rhyming?

Was nothing noteworthy in deed or in word? -

Why, just as the hour of supper was chiming,

The only event of the evening occurred.

Up jumped, with his neck stretching out like a gander,

Master Swinburne, and squeal'd, glaring out thro' his hair,

"All Virtue is bosh! Hallelujah for Landor!

I disbelieve wholly in everything! - There!"

It was while he was living at Oban that Buchanan

With language so awful he dared then to treat 'em,
 Miss Ingelow fainted in Tennyson's arms,
 Poor Arnold rush'd out, crying "Soecl' inficetum!"
 And great bards and small bards were full of alarms;
 Till Tennyson, flaming and red as a gipsy,
 Struck his fist on the table and utter'd a shout:
 "To the door with the boy! Call a cab! He is tipsy!"
 And they carried the naughty young gentleman out.

Clearly the success of London Poems, had given Buchanan a certain bumptiousness, that some people must have considered unpleasant. At this time, too, he entered the lists as a champion of Walt Whitman, and wrote a warm critique of his work in Broadway. With North Coast and Other Poems (1868) being very favourably reviewed, Buchanan seemed well on the way to becoming a most successful poet. Forty years later Hall Caine could write that in the 1860s Buchanan was widely considered to be Tennyson's obvious successor as Laureate (Swinburne's Poems and Ballads being altogether too lurid for him to be considered for that honour). Had Buchanan died in his thirtieth year, there can be little doubt that his reputation as a poet would be much higher than it is. He had, however, another thirty years with which to be too prodigal with his talents, and instead of being carefully fostered they were squandered in frantic attempts to raise money. Even moderately careful management would have rendered such efforts unnecessary. Overspending quite freely, he was driven by 1869 to giving public readings of his works, which, apparently, were very successful; but the nervous strain was too great and the practice was dropped. In 1870, thanks to the good offices of Robert Browning, W.E. Gladstone granted Buchanan a Civil List pension of £100, which he received for the rest of his life.

It was while he was living at Oban that Buchanan

first read Rossetti's Poems of 1870. He had already been called a "pretentious poetaster" (quite uncharacteristically) by W.M. Rossetti, as a result of his unfavourable review of Poems and Ballads in the Athenaeum in August 1866. Indeed, salvoes had been exchanged between Buchanan on the one hand and Swinburne and W.M. Rossetti on the other for several years prior to 1870. It was because Rossetti feared Buchanan's hostile criticism that he so carefully "worked the oracle" when his Poems appeared. Buchanan was well aware of the dislike of Tennyson and Browning for Rossetti's poetry, and probably felt that he was only voicing what many intelligent people felt about it. But the fierce response by Rossetti's friends (Swinburne, H. Buxton Forman, Edmund Gosse and Sidney Colvin) to the original "Fleshly School of Poetry" in the Contemporary Review goaded Buchanan into the expansion of that article into the pamphlet, and the strident, nearly hysterical tone of The Fleshly School of Poetry and Other Phenomena of the Day, lost Buchanan the support of many of the uncommitted; and Rossetti's attempted suicide in June, 1872 (two months, at the most, after the pamphlet appeared), must have made Buchanan many enemies.

Knowing that he had lost the critics' goodwill he published his next two books, Saint Abe and his Seven Wives and White Rose and Red anonymously. Both were quite successful, and the first ran to five editions in the next few years. Becoming quite severely ill with neuralgia, Buchanan left Scotland and, ~~and~~ after trying several cures quite unsuccessfully, rented a house in the wilds of Connaught where he lived until 1877. Still trying to avoid the corruption of

'Babylon', in Ireland Buchanan produced an ambitious poetic work, Balder the Beautiful, and then turned his hand to fiction and wrote The Shadow of the Sword, his first-published and best novel, a powerful if slightly melodramatic indictment of war. Gradually he was drawn back to the centre, and in 1878 became owner and editor of a new journal, Light, which counted Mrs. Oliphant, R.D. Blackmore, Anthony Trollope, Thomas Hardy, Charles Reade and T.P. O'Connor among its contributors. In June 1876, the Fleshly Controversy had come to a head when Buchanan sued the proprietor of the Examiner for a libel of him, which appeared over Swinburne's name. Buchanan won £150 damages (which was widely regarded as a paltry sum) and suffered the indignity of hearing the judge pronounce his own work to be fleshly.

The 1880s were years of prodigious activity for Buchanan. Having come to the conclusion that he could not quite live by his verse,¹ because of the total failure of Balder in 1877, he had returned a year later, from the solitude of Connaught to the burly-burly of London. This represented a bitter defeat to him; London was the scene of his earliest failures and compromises in his battle for survival in the early 1860s; he might prosper there as a journalist, novelist, or, in time, as a dramatist; but he could never write poetry there; for that he always needed rural quiet and beauty. After those twelve years spent in Sussex, the Highlands,

1. Very few poets in the nineteenth century could, and most needed a private source of income, like Browning. Rossetti was agreeably surprised at the sales of his Poems in 1870.

or Ireland, when he had visited London quite infrequently, he now took a house there and maintained one there for the rest of his life, while sojourns in the country became as rare as those in Town once had been. At first his eager hopes to earn a lot of money were often dashed, and then, almost instinctively, he crept off to recuperate away from it all. In 1882 he wrote to his publisher Andrew Chatto (the reference is almost certainly to The Shadow of the Sword which opened at the Olympic Theatre on April 8)¹:

Dear Mr. Chatto,

The failure of my Drama, on which I had staked so much, has so broken my peace of mind, that I wish to go away at once into the wilderness, and see what solitude and quiet thought will do to restore me. The stage is a will-of-the-wisp, from which I want to ~~divert~~ ^{divert} my gaze, for some time at least.

He may have staked much in terms of energy and reputation, but he must also have staked a lot of money, which he could ill afford; he always saw the writing of plays as a gamble (with him it was hit or miss; he did not know enough of the craft or the public to be consistent, and he rarely re-wrote his work), and when he saw the golden results of producing successful plays, he was on occasion prepared to risk large amounts of money, not always his own, to gain them. He enjoyed several West End successes, but not until after several disheartening failures.

1. Buchanan's correspondence with Chatto, consisting of well over 100 letters, is the only extensive one known, and is now in the British Library (Additional MS 52480).

The unlooked-for sales of The Shadow of the Sword (which had reached four editions within a year of publication), had first drawn Buchanan to the profits to be made from fiction. He wrote only three novels between 1876 and 1881, but the next three years saw the publication of seven (and another, Rachel Dene, though serially published over his name in a provincial journal in 1884, was not by him). The low production at the beginning of this new career is partly due to his editing his journal for six months in 1878, but mainly to be attributed to his frantic excursions throughout England in search of a physician to cure his wife's cancer. When she died, he was faced with large debts, and he set to work with a will to reduce them. Three years later he planned a visit to the United States, and part of this frenetic activity was due to his attempts to finance it.¹ He and Harriett Jay, travelling as brother and sister, went to America in the summer of 1884, and, with the success of their melodrama, Alone in London (of which Buchanan was always heartily contemptuous, but which made more money, though not for him alas, than anything he ever wrote, Jay p. 236), in Philadelphia and New York, he discovered the riches the stage offered. While he was

1. A most unfortunate casualty of this period, which was made even more frenetic by Buchanan's adoption of Chatto and Windus as his publishers in 1881 (with the re-issue of several volumes of verse, a new issue of verse selections and one of essays), was the hurried publication of the collected Poetical Works before he left for America in 1884. Marred by many mis-prints, it became, uncorrected, the first volume of the posthumous Complete Poetical Works (1901). Unfortunately, improved versions of his best early poems issued in the Selected Poems (1882) were not incorporated in the 1884 issue. Buchanan's oft-repeated hope that posterity would accord the recognition his contemporaries denied him, was thus partly thwarted by his own carelessness in ensuring that his best works would be most easily available to later generations.

in America he went to see his old hero Walt Whitman in Camden, New Jersey; and he was tempted to stay in New York when offered the editorship of the North American Review at a generous salary. But he became ill, and hurried back to England in the summer of 1885, never to leave it again for so long a time.

On his return his energies were no longer devoted mainly to the writing of novels, and between 1886 and 1894, the year of his bankruptcy, he published only five (of which two were fictive versions of stage successes). During that period, Buchanan wrote, and often produced and stage-managed, thirty-two plays. Though begun partly as a means to make money quickly, his stage career was sufficiently successful for itself to become an escape from the repeated bouts of melancholy that he suffered during later life. In a letter to G.B. Shaw (March 7, 1896) he wrote, "It's only when I don't think that I 'enjoy myself immensely.' God bless the Theatre! If it hadn't been for that, for its infinite worries and trivialities, I should have gone crazy long ago."¹ The poet yearning for solitude in which to meditate, had been replaced by the busy entrepreneur who almost dreaded being along² with his thoughts.

As early as 1862 Buchanan had had a play of his performed in the West End, and his interest in drama had first begun with the free admission his father, as newspaper editor, had gained for him to the Glasgow theatres of his youth. There Buchanan had met Irving, and had

1. Shaw Papers. British Library.

admired and formed friendships with several other actors, some of whom helped him when he first arrived in London in 1860. His first plays were failures, but he persevered, and A Madcap Prince (August, 1874) did attract interest, Buckstone, who produced it, finding it very popular on a provincial tour. Buchanan had to sue for his fees, however, and the play never returned to London. It was Charles Reade who suggested that Harriett Jay's novel, The Queen of Connaught, would make a good play, and Buchanan's version did achieve moderate success early in 1877. From 1880 until his death, Buchanan wrote at least a play a year, with three in 1883 and 1884. Some of these were dramatisations of his novels (God and the Man was most successful as Storm Beaten), and one was loosely based on his anonymous verse success of nine years earlier, Saint Abe and his Seven Wives. On his return from America in 1885, he staged Alone in London at the Olympic, where it drew large audiences, and, for a short time, Buchanan was solvent.

In 1886 came one of his greatest successes in the theatre, Sophia, a dramatisation of Tom Jones. The play had awaited production for ten years, it being regarded as too daring by several producers. In the event, despite critical acclaim, it only just missed being withdrawn, eventually recovering to run for over 500 performances. Buchanan was rather free in his adaptation of Fielding's novel, making the distinctions cruder (there is no Thwackum to balance Square), the characterisation less subtle, and even having Blifil as

the lover of Molly Seagrim. Jones's "coarseness" was toned down, though Buchanan was true to the spirit of the novel. In a review of Joseph's Sweetheart (his adaptation of Joseph Andrews), Frederick Wedmore wrote

If Mr. Buchanan's pieces pose as substantially accurate stage versions of rollicking, and powerful eighteenth-century fiction, I hold them to pose unwarrantably. But if they assert themselves only as engaging "variations" on a theme which a greater master has supplied - and especially as variations suitable to the day, ... I accept them cheerfully, as such. Nay, notwithstanding here and there a common repartee and inappropriate retort, I think them, on the whole very dexterous and agreeable playwright's work, inasmuch as they do bring upon the stage effectively nearly all of Field's characters that can properly be brought there.¹

King

Having found the secret of success in the adaptation of classics for the stage, Buchanan turned to Crime and Punishment which appeared as The Sixth Commandment (1890) and Richardson's novel which, as Clarissa (1890), ended too tragically for audiences to bear. Rhoda Broughton's Sweet Nancy, Daudet's La Lutte pour la Vie, and many other sources were speedily plundered. The most successful of Buchanan's adaptations was that of Roger-La-Honte into A Man's Shadow (1889), of which Beerbohm Tree made a famous production at the Haymarket Theatre, thereby guaranteeing the success of his tenure there, at a time when it hung in the balance. In 1890 Buchanan entered into an agreement with G.R. Sims to write melodramas for the Adelphi Theatre (the Morning Post's critic had already declared The Sixth Commandment to be no more than "an

1. "Joseph's Sweetheart," Academy, XXXIII, March 24, 1888, p. 212.

ordinary melodrama of the old-fashioned type." (November 1, 1890, p. 5). Buchanan was a little ashamed of this new development, and tried to make his contribution to the partnership anonymous, as well he might, but his name was wanted as well as his expertise. An English Rose found the popular taste immediately, and Buchanan sold his share in it very soon for £2,500. The next, The Trumpet Call, "in which Mrs. Patrick Campbell practically made her London debut,"¹ was also successful, though Buchanan had to settle for less. The partnership continued for four years until the bankruptcy. It was in 1890 that his descent to that catastrophe began. He wrote a poetic play, based on the myth of Cupid and Psyche, called The Bride of Love, which, as was the custom, was tried out on a matinee audience. Harriett Jay played Psyche, not by any means her first role; Mr. Gladstone himself had written several years earlier to Buchanan asking when she next acted to be sent tickets, and on the first performance of this play a box was put at his disposal.² The resulting acclaim was sufficiently encouraging for Buchanan to lease the Lyric Theatre for an evening run of the play. No attempt was made to improve the makeshift scenery; and the play soon failed, with Buchanan losing thousands of pounds. From his affluence of only three years earlier he was now plunged into debt. At the same time as this failure, he was suing Lily Langtry for breach of contract, when she failed to use

1. G.R. Sims, Among my Autographs, p. 56.

2. Gladstone Papers, British Library.

his Lady Gladys in her latest New York season. He sued for £2,000, but received only £150 and costs. Indeed Mrs. Langtry became the cause of his appearance in the bankruptcy court. The success of another Buchanan vehicle designed for her, A Social Butterfly, depended upon her performing a certain dance; this she was unable to do, and, at the last minute, tableaux vivants had to be substituted. After a shaky beginning the play was just breaking even when a creditor insisted upon payment, and Buchanan's house of cards tumbled when no cash could be raised to meet it. In court in August 1894 he admitted losing £3,000 on The Bride of Love, £2,000 on Sweet Nancy, and smaller sums on other plays. He was declared bankrupt, and though he continued to write a play a year, none was successful. Sobered by this bitter lesson, he strove hard for the last years of his life to retrieve his literary reputation, and his last novels are much better than any from the previous ten years.

In 1896, disgusted at his publisher's failure to suppress Lady Kilpatrick at his earnest request, he opened his own bookshop and publishing house in Soho. As with his attempts at theatrical management it was not a success. Several titles appeared, and now are exceedingly scarce; few of them were deposited at the British Museum, and soon after the experiment was given up. He began his autobiography, wrote many articles for the newspapers (especially the Sunday Special), and was struggling to free himself from debt and give his beloved Harriett enough to live on after his death, when he suffered a stroke in October 1900. He died eight months later without regaining consciousness.

Harriett Jay had been adopted by Robert and Mary Buchanan (Harriett's sister) when she was about three years old in the mid 1860s. She lived in the Buchanan household until the poet's death in 1901, and published her biography, really the raw materials for one, two years later. In it she used only letters to his friends, and his published reminiscences, scrupulously avoiding any of his private and unpublished writings (particularly the autobiography). She died in 1932, leaving all her books and papers to her nephew, whose daughter, Elizabeth Jay, is now the sole survivor of the family. She knows little of Harriett or Buchanan, and nothing of the whereabouts of their library and papers (which, besides the autobiography, would have included, since Buchanan carefully kept such things, letters from such men as Browning, Tennyson, Whitman, Gladstone, Peacock, Dobell, Lewes, Reade, Shaw, Beerbohm Tree and many others). Elizabeth Jay steadfastly refuses to talk about her great-aunt or about Robert Buchanan.

Harriett Jay is an interesting study in her own right, being a novelist, an actress, and collaborating with Buchanan in several of his plays. After his death she wrote the very popular When Knights Were Bold, which played the provinces for many years, and probably gave Harriett the economic independence that Buchanan was vainly struggling in his last years to achieve.¹ The nature of her relationship with Buchanan is not known. It seems to have changed after Mary Buchanan's death in 1881 to something

1. After her death the copyright was sold to Emile Littler, the impresario.

other than that between father and daughter, though all the evidence for assuming that they became lovers is circumstantial and quite inconclusive. Buchanan often publicly avowed his love for Harriett particularly in "Fides Amantis" appended to The Outcast (1891); and in her disarming preface to her biography she, too, makes no secret of the fact that he was the centre of her life. No scandal is attached to their names, (but then, until recently, not very much was attached to those of D.G. Rossetti and Janey Morris.)

Since his death Buchanan has only received occasional passing recognition, but no major reconsideration of him or his work has yet been undertaken. It has long been thought that a full biography would be of great interest to students of Victorian literature. Though his own papers seem to be lost, there are several small collections of his letters still extant, besides the one large Chatto correspondence in the British Library, (which is invaluable). Much, too, may be garnered from many memoirs and biographies of the period, and from the several large collections of letters (notably Swinburne's) which contain references to him. Of his day-to-day existence not much is known, but there is probably enough material to give substance and colour to the portrait of this man of so many contradictions and so many talents.

Apart from the intrinsic value of his better work, sufficient reason in itself for a major study of the man, there are all the literary friendships that Buchanan struck up during the forty years he was in the world of letters. No biographer of Thomas Love Peacock can avoid using

Buchanan's published reminiscences of Peacock's last days on the banks of the Thames in Surrey. Buchanan's observations concerning the Lewes menage at North Bank Regent's Park are also very interesting, if faintly malicious - he did not like the superior airs George Eliot gave herself and was never sufficiently tactful to disguise such feelings. He was an intimate of Charles Reade, another irascible and litigious man; and at one time (due, says Buchanan quite accurately, to his very favourable reviews of Dramatis Personae and The Ring and the Book when few critics accorded Browning much attention), Robert Browning was a particularly valued friend. Later Browning's disapproval of Buchanan's squandering of his poetic talents led to a rift, but Buchanan always admired Browning as a poet (because he set the truth higher than his mere expression of it), even if he found it hard to believe that such an apparently commonplace mind could produce such superb poetry. He also knew Tennyson quite well, but deplored the lack of social commitment in his poetry. His published memoirs throw some light on a host of such minor figures as Dinah Craik (nee Muloch), Sidney Dobell, M.E. Braddon, Jean Ingelow, John Morley, William Black, Hall Caine, "Barry Cornwall", W.G. Wills, William Canton, J.S. Blackie, Edmund Yates and many of those connected with the London stage from 1880 onwards.

One of the unfortunate results of Buchanan's early successs in the 1860s, and which first became prominent with his attacks on Rossetti in 1871 and 1872, was his delight in controversy. He engaged in public debate with allcomers from both sides of the Atlantic on

the poetic excellence and material poverty of Walt Whitman in 1876, when the American literary establishment was virtually ignoring him. He wrote letters to the London press, surprisingly, on behalf of both Charles Stewart Parnell and Oscar Wilde at their moments of crisis; and, despite his profound dislike of Zola's realism, he championed that author's work when it was banned in Britain and its publisher gaoled. He concerned himself with the campaign to prohibit blood-sports; and wrote poems denouncing the slaughter of seals in the cause of fashion, and the vivisection of dogs in the name of progress. He called Kitchener "a rat-catcher killing Dervishes" when England was ringing with his praises. He abhorred all war, and spent his last few months of consciousness campaigning against that with the Boers. In one of his last letters, he deplored his failure to share the Christian's faith and trust in a beneficent deity, and could "only know 'that love and loving-kindness' are the only things to hope for in this world."

Brought up, as he described himself, in the "odour of infidelity," Buchanan never forgot his early persecution as a ten-year-old on the streets of Glasgow. Though street fights with jeering boys probably encouraged his native belligerence, they also developed in him a profound sense of not belonging to normal Christian society. At the time they made him lonely and rebellious, and for the rest of his life he was inclined to see himself as the embattled outcast, an Ishmael (his poetry and fiction contain such figures again and again). He was slightly, if

no more than slightly, paranoid, constantly aware of being sniped at; and his early Glasgow experience taught him that attack was the best method of defence. For attack he did, all his life. Rarely did a slight go unreturned (the genesis of the Fleshly School controversy is to be found in gibes made by Swinburne and W.M. Rossetti at Buchanan); rarely did a hostile review of his work go unanswered (often to some editor's delight but not to Buchanan's credit); and, more sadly, this perpetual vigilance for the new attack from the new enemy allowed Buchanan few friends, and those few needed uncommon reserves of tact and forbearance to remain on close terms.

For Buchanan's main faults did lie close to the surface, and one could not be long associated with him before they became apparent. He was vain: his work is full of allusions to himself and his poetry; and the relative speed of his success in the literary world could only have convinced him that it shared his high opinion of his abilities and his achievements.¹ He was self-righteous; and, sure of his set of values, saw himself as one of the stronger moral bulwarks against which the waves of licence would have to batter. He was not slow to condemn unethical behaviour of any kind; and it was also his "innate tendency ... to look almost entirely at the ethical value of any literary work;" to him "'a Poet was Prophet and a Propagandist or nothing'".² Brought up a puritan in things

1. His early success was remarkable. After all, none of Browning's works reached a second edition until Dramatis Personae in 1864 (thirty-one years after the appearance of Pauline), whereas Buchanan's first three books reached second editions within a year.

2. Henry Murray, Robert Buchanan and Other Essays, p. 11.

ethical, he was not an ascetic, for his mother denied him none of his material wants. Thus he ever had tastes likely to prove expensive, and never had to worry, in his youth, that those tastes would not be gratified. From his father, too, he inherited a weakness for speculation which was ultimately to bring his financial ruin. Yet in most matters he was a puritan, and a certain inflexibility of mind, an incapacity to see much more than one side to a question, and his forthrightness once his mind was made up, could only make him appear a bigot. Nor was he slow to judge, though slow to reconsider an opinion. He was inclined to be chauvinistic, with his occasional travels only bolstering his insular British sense of superiority. He had the quick temper and long memory of the Scottish clansmen from whom he sprang. He was a fighter, and when he fought he used any weapons to win. Adverse criticism of his poetry he affected, like Swinburne, not to be concerned about. Yet unfair criticism, as he considered it, went a long way in providing the motivation for his attack on Rossetti.

Having been brought up in his parents' Godless world, Buchanan discovered Christianity in his teens, and was, until the later part of the 1860s, an ardent Christian. But the harshness of a God who could gaze stonily on the vast extent of human misery (no little part of which having been wrought in His name) raised doubts in him that were never laid. For a man as dogmatic as himself such doubts were debilitating, and he swung from periods when he could accept all to periods of the most profound melancholy. Certainly this agnosticism mellowed Buchanan, and later in his life

tempered his militant moral zeal.

To his loss, all of his vices show in his writing, especially his polemics, while his virtues are not so immediately obvious. R.E. Francillon, a friend of Rossetti, and therefore not predisposed to be amicable towards Buchanan, has aptly summed him up as being 'the natural converse' of the German saying Strasz-Engel, Haus-Teufel (Jay, p. 209). At home he was generous and warm-hearted, and his early socialist upbringing gave him unfailing sympathy for the oppressed and unfortunate. He was loyal, and had a strong sense of justice, as his championing of his friend David Gray demonstrated. He was sincere and honest, if, at times, unaware of the real motives for his actions. He had, a feature that compensates for much unlovable in his character, a well-developed sense of humour. He admired Artemus Ward and Mark Twain (and early judged Huckleberry Finn to be a masterpiece), and he never took himself as seriously as he was often supposed to have done. At the height of the Fleshly Controversy (just after he had seen his rancid pamphlet through the press) he could write, under a pseudonym known to his assailants:

The Mutual Admiration School of Poetry is scarcely read out of London, and produces no impression whatever on the public; the fact being that sensualists and spooneys are not so common as some critics persist in telling us.¹

Twenty years later, he refused to discuss W.E. Henley's edition of Burns for fear of losing "that critical impartiality

1. "Criticism as One of the Fine Arts", Saint Paul's, ^{X (Apr. 1872)} p. 389.

for which he had always been distinguished."¹

Robert Buchanan was a man of some stature in the literary world of his day (both ~~with~~ Browning and Shaw kept all his letters), yet he is now remembered only for the episode involving his attack on Rossetti. His reputation suffered rapid eclipse on his death, partly because those critics who helped crystallize opinion of that Victorian world were, if not hostile, certainly not predisposed to be sympathetic towards Buchanan, the scourge of the Fleshly School of Poetry. Now that the passions that controversy caused have cooled, a fresh look at him is long overdue.

1. "Latter-Day Letters", The Sunday Special, October 30, 1898; p. 2.

CHAPTER TWO

VERSE

In the ten years between 1863, when he published his first mature volume of verse, Undertones, and 1873, which constitute Robert Buchanan's early phase as a poet, he produced ten volumes, including one of translation, and at least three of those were substantially revised on their republication in second editions. As one might expect from such a quantity the quality is uneven, and much of this early work does not bear close examination. There is, however, a wealth of variety in both form and matter, which shows how eager the young Buchanan was to try his hand at anything susceptible to poetic treatment: deft lyrics; intensely personal poems on poetry; exuberant attacks on other poets; dramatic monologues of vigour, and often subtle psychological insight; verse dramas; satirical narratives in a vernacular not his own; these, in an impressive array of verse forms are some of the shapes his poetry takes. His subject matter ranges from Greek to Celtic myth, from the mean streets of Seven Dials to the mountain haunts of elves and fairies; from Roman generals to Scottish dominies; from polygamy in Utah to deserted wives on the desolate coasts of Scotland; from the palace of Napoleon III to the courts of medieval Denmark. Infused in much of the verse are to be found the ideals of a young freethinking socialist, who, in London Poems, was avowedly trying to arouse the sympathies of the educated to the vast extent of human misery and the limited means open to many to

alleviate that misery in the slums of London, the capital city of a nation still undergoing the painful social adjustments brought by rapid industrialisation. Buchanan was at one with Dickens and Wordsworth (both heroes of his, as were Browning and Whitman) in his attempts to make art from the lives of the humble, and his compassion for human suffering is the dominant mood of much of his work.

In later years, Buchanan was inclined to dismiss Undertones, first published in 1863 and "enlarged and revised" in 1865, as a "pseudo-classical" exercise performed under the watchful eye of Thomas Love Peacock and basically alien to his poetic achievement. Yet in his carefully chosen and carefully revised Selected Poems (1882), in which much of his best early work is to be found, there are three poems from Undertones, one of which, "To David, in Heaven", is much improved in the later version. This elegy for David Gray gives the lie to Buchanan's description; though never again did he go to ancient Greece for his inspiration. Occasionally sentimental, one of Buchanan's besetting faults, occasionally melodramatic (as in the line "The City that slew you, David"), and too full of "ohs" and "ahs", the poem recreates the springtime of the young poets' literary ambition in Scotland, and ends with Buchanan's disillusion already apparent:

Is it fashion'd wisely,
To help us or to blind us,
That at each height we gain we turn,
and behold a heaven behind us? (CPW., I, 24)¹

1. All quotations from Buchanan's poetry will be taken, whenever possible, from The Complete Poetical Works, 2 vols.

Here, Buchanan's skill as a poet, with the pause in the ^{third}~~last~~ line admirably fusing sound and sense, is well demonstrated. There are many such signs of Buchanan the careful craftsman. The rhythm and the rush of consonants of "The Satyr", for example, seem admirably suited to its subject:

The trunk of this tree,
 Dusky-leaved, shaggy-rooted,
 Is a pillow well suited
 To a hybrid like me,
 Goat-bearded, goat-footed (CPW, I, 36)

In rather different mood and movement, "Selene the Moon" begins:

I hide myself in the cloud that flies
 From the west and drops on the hill's gray shoulder,
 And I gleam through the cloud with my panther-eyes,
 While the stars turn paler, the dew grows colder;
 I veil my naked glory in mist,
 Quivering downward and dewily glistening,
 Till his sleep is as pale as my lips unkist,
 And I tremble above him, panting and listening.
(CPW, I, 40)

Probably the most distinctive features of these poems are their striking imagery and sensuous warmth. "Antony in Arms" (republished nearly twenty years later in the Selected Poems as "Mark Antony") is the most successful poem in Undertones, and one of the best that Buchanan ever wrote:

Lo, we are side by side! - One dark arm furls
 Around me like a serpent warm and bare;
 The other, lifted 'mid a gleam of pearls,
 Holds a full golden goblet in the air:
 Her face is shining through her cloudy curls
 With light that makes me drunken unaware,
 And with my chin upon my breast I smile
 Upon her, darkening inwardly¹ the while.

* * * * *

1. Buchanan in his final version rightly omitted "all" here, and made up the line by changing "inward" to "inwardly."

And then she loosens from me, trembling still
 Like a bright throbbing snake,¹ and bids me 'go!' -
 When pearly tears her drooping eyelids fill,
 And her bold beauty saddens² into snow;
 And lost to use of life and hope and will,
 I gaze upon her with a warrior's woe,
 And turn, and watch her sidelong in annoy -
 Then snatch her to me, flush'd with shame and joy!

(CPW, I, 65)

Already a dramatist, it is in such monologues as this that Buchanan, following Browning (sometimes much too closely), developed the individual voice that could carry his message. In the early poems, unsure of his talents, he turns, as in that poem above, to a subject already imbued with its poetic force. Not long after Undertones was published, Buchanan could seek much more prosaic situations to render into verse, and by successfully treating the lives of the humble could attain an eminence not often gained as quickly as his. Even Browning, thirty-one years after Pauline, was only now just reaching the wider audience of his last years, with Dramatis Personae (1864) being his first book of Verse to reach a second edition, which, even then, did not sell at all briskly.

What reviews Undertones received were generous with their praise. One compared him to Keats; and, though another congratulated him on not being another imitator of

1. In the first two versions of the poem reprinted in the Complete Poetical Works, the word here was 'robe', but in the Selected Poems (1882), Buchanan substituted 'snake', which seems a much happier choice. For some unaccountable reason, not one of the emendations in the text of the Selected Poems found its way into the Poetical Works of 1884; which, unchanged, formed the first volume of the posthumous Complete Poetical Works.
2. In the original version this line ran:

And her swart beauty whitens into snow;

Tennyson, in "Pan" there are echoes of Keats and Shelley:

In Arcady,

I, sick of mine own envy, hollow'd out
 A valley, green and deep; then pouring forth
 From the great hollow of my hand a stream
 Sweeter than honey, bade it wander on
 In soft and rippling lapse to the far sea.
 Upon its banks grew flowers as thick as grass,
 Gum-dropping poplars and the purple vine,
 Slim willows dusty like the thighs of bees,
 And, further, stalks of corn and wheat and flax,
 And, even further, on the mountain sides
 White sheep and new-yeen'd lambs, and in the midst
 Mild-featured shepherds piping. Was not this
 An image of your grander ease, O Gods?

(CPW, I, 32)

Invariably the undertones of the title are the gods bewailing their fate: Pan his shape; Ades his need for a wife; the satyr his "being A thing wild, unholy, And foul to the seeing;" Venus pining for Adonis; and Selene for Endymion.

Later in his career, Buchanan despised the lyric gifts he was lucky enough to possess, and in one poem ("London, 1864") he asks

Why should the heart seem stiller,
 As the song grows stronger and surer?
 Why should the brain grow chiller,
 And the utterance clearer and purer?

(CPW, I, 182)

As he made his way through Grub Street and his youthful ideals were set aside in order to earn a living, he might well yearn for his years of poetic innocence in Scotland:

While the spirit of boyhood hath faded,
 And never again can be,
 And the singing seemeth degraded,
 Since the glory hath gone from me, -
 Though the glory around me and under,
 And the earth and the air and the sea,
 And the manifold music and wonder,
 Are grand as they used to be!

(CPW, I, 183)

A different temperament with his gifts might have led him into the van of the art for art's sake movement then being brought (by people like Swinburne) over from France, but the Calvinist in Buchanan rebelled against "metre-mongers", and the mellifluous was carefully excised from too much of his work.

Clearly in conscious revolt from the prosodic extravagances of Undertones, Idyls and Legends of Inverburn (1865) begins with "Willie Baird", the first of many dramatic monologues spoken by ordinary people in Buchanan's work. In blank verse and spoken by the dominie of a village school in rural Scotland, the poem scarcely escapes monotony at times, but can, on the whole, be accounted one of Buchanan's successes. It is unstrained, the natural speech of an ordinary man reliving the supreme crisis of his life. The situation in the poem, of a little boy's searching questions on the meaning of life forcing the dominie, once "half scoffer, half believer" to turn from his Euclid back to his Bible, would account for its appeal to many, as would the story of the little boy's death in a blizzard; but Buchanan manages to avoid sentimentality, and the poem closes with the old man and the boy's dog patiently awaiting their own end in the schoolhouse. "Willie Baird" was one of Buchanan's most popular poems, and R.H. Hutton, then editor of the Spectator, was one of the most eloquent of its admirers.

In the final version of Idyls and Legends of Inverburn, idyl and legend are alternated. The idyls, like "Willie Baird" are dramatic monologues spoken by

such people as the village minister, or a farmer's wife; while the legends, which do not have any organic relationship with the imagined village of Inverburn, are fantasies of the world of elves, fairies and gnomes. The two worlds are scarcely compatible; the collection does not create a rounded unity; it is almost as if Buchanan was trying to please two audiences at once. The fairy poetry, then most popular, seems a sugaring of the pill of the realism of his dramatic poetry. Not without some merit, only one of the legends seems to work. "The Dead Mother" begins

As I lay asleep, as I lay asleep,
Under the grass as I lay so deep,
As I lay asleep in my cotton serk
Under the shade of Our Lady's Kirk,
I waken'd up in the dead of night,
I waken'd up in my death-serk white,
And I heard a cry from far away,
And I knew the voice of my daughter May:
"Mother, mother, come hither to me!
Mother, mother, come hither and see!

(CPW, I, 105)

Another device inherent in Idyls and Legends of Inverburn is the use of the Lowland Scots dialect, which had already, of course, been sanctioned by the success of Robert Burns. "Poet Andrew," spoken by a village weaver in the vernacular, tells of the ambition, fiercely fought at home, of the weaver's son to become a poet, but dying before his poems are published. David Gray was the inspiration of some of Buchanan's best work in prose or verse (his prose "memorial" first published in Cornhill was widely admired for its simplicity and pathos, and led to Buchanan's first meeting with Robert Browning). Again it tells of a mature man being led to a greater appreciation of the world

about him by the heightened vision and poetic aspirations of his son, and of his first annoyance at the boy's throwing over of his hard-won teaching diploma in favour of the slender chance of survival as a poet. Imbedded in the poem is to be found Buchanan's unexceptionable creed that poetry's main purpose is to broaden and deepen the sensibilities of those who read it. Also, Buchanan's capacity for real insight into the complexities of human relationships is demonstrated frequently; here, for example, the father describes the rift developing between him and his poet son:

Myself' could get
 But little of his company or tongue;
 And when we talkt, atweel, a kind of frost, -
 My consciousness of silly ignorance,
 And worse, my knowledge that the lad himself
 Felt sorely, keenly, all my ignorant shame,
 Made talk a torture out of which we crept
 With burning faces. (CPW, I, 87)

"The English Huswife's Gossip" is a perceptive description of a 'natural'; "The Two Babes" is an unconventional love story with a happy ending; and "Hugh Sutherland's Pansies" describes those subtle links between man and nature/ which are ruptured at peril.

In Idyls and Legends of Inverburn, Buchanan is beginning to find his true poetic bent, and beginning to acquire the confidence necessary to realise fully his poetic gifts. Several years later, when he had had time to elaborate a rationale for what, in this volume, he first did almost instinctively, Buchanan explained why he chose the subjects he did with their latent dangers of vulgarity on the one hand or poetic idealisation (and hence falsification and bad art) on the other. The poet seizes, says Buchanan in a prose note to The Drama of Kings,

the divine moment when the creature under examination - be it Buonaparte or a street-walker, Bismarck or "Barbara Gray" - is at its highest and best, whether that "best" be intellectual beatification or the simple vicarious instinct which merges in the identity of another. He sees the nature spiritualised, in the dim, strange light of whatever soul the creature possesses [This] mystic approach to the creature at his highest point of spiritualisation ... is the only procedure possible to the present writer.¹

The defensive tone of this passage (besides reminding the reader that behind the belligerence lurked an insecure man) shows Buchanan to be aware of how radically unconventional he was, and led him to the serious poetic treatment of a subject hitherto ignored, and of an appreciation of man's spirituality where most Victorians saw only filth and squalor.

While Undertones and Idyls and Legends of Inverburn achieved a modest success, being republished in heavily revised second editions, it was not until 1866 with the publication of London Poems that Buchanan's verse began to reach a larger audience (it is a fact that copies of Idyls and Legends and London Poems are the easiest to find of all Buchanan's poetic works). Written mostly at Bexhill, when with his wife and his parents he could at last afford to live away from London, London Poems has been seen by many critics to be Buchanan's finest poetic achievement. By now he had found sufficient confidence to strike a distinctive note of his own, and to write of milliners, flower-girls, clerks, and costermongers whose lives he had seen and studied at close range for the last six years. The development from Idyls and Legends of Inverburn is clear. In the earlier work, Buchanan followed Wordsworth in making rural scenes and

1. The Drama of Kings, pp. 466-7.

rural people his subject, in London Poems he writes of those town dwellers whose lives (except possibly in Thomas Hood's "Bridge of Sighs") had never been regarded as the province of poetry. He had turned from the poetic countryside to the most prosaic and unpoetic part of town - the slums. There are obvious dangers in such material. How can one make articulate the normally inarticulate working man, without becoming false and precious or vulgar and coarse? Buchanan was wise enough to know that at moments of crisis even the most prosaic of people can be moved to utterance often uncharacteristic of them, and it is at such moments his subjects speak. There is more life in these poems / than in his earlier efforts. It is noteworthy that the most memorable are those spoken by women like "Liz" and "Nell", or those about women like "Jane Lewson". Indeed hereafter much of Buchanan's work, "Meg Blaine", St. Abe and his Seven Wives, Red Rose and White, and The Ballad of Mary the Mother, is about women (not to mention the bulk of his novels). Buchanan's understanding of the world of women, and his sympathies for their suffering are probably the source of much that is enduring in his work.

The opening poem "Bexhill, 1866" ends with a clear statement of Buchanan's achievement in London Poems:

I have wrought
No garland of the rose and passion-flower,
Grown in a careful garden in the sun;
But I have gather'd samphire dizzily,
Close to the hollow roaring of a Sea.

(CPW, I, 115)

Clearly he is here comparing himself (five years before the

conflict of the Fleshly Controversy) with such poets as Rossetti and Swinburne, perhaps even Tennyson; and in the introductory lines to his first poem about life in London, "The Little Milliner" he makes abundantly clear to what sea he refers:

Far away in the dark
Breaketh that living Sea
Wave upon wave; and hark!
The voices are blown to me (CPW, I, 115)

The most memorable voices are those of "Liz", "Nell", and "Barbara Gray", but there are several others of merit: "Edward Crowhurst" (the life of John Clare as spoken by a literary journeyman), "Attorney Sneak" (a Dickensian study of a grasping solicitor), and "Kitty Kemble" (the death-bed scene of a once-famous actress turned courtesan). There is evidence, too, of Buchanan's humour and sense of fun in the rollicking "Wake of Tim O'Hara":

Tho' the face of O'Hara
Lookt on so wan,
In the chimney-corner
The row began -
Lame Tony was in it
The oyster-man;
For a dirty low thief from the North came near,
And whistled 'Boyne Water' in his ear,
And Tony, with never a word of grace,
Flung out his fist in the blackguard's face;
And the girls and women scream'd out for fright,
And the men that were drunkest began to fight, -
Over the tables and chairs they threw, -
The corpse-light tumbled, - the grouble grew, -
The new-born joined in the hullabaloo, -
At the Wake of Tim O'Hara. (CPW, I, 167)

Buchanan also deploys his lyrical gifts admirably in the "Spring Song in the City", which begins

Who remains in London,
In the streets with me,
Now that Spring is blowing
Warm winds from the sea; (CPW, I, 162)

"To the Moon", also one of his most successful pieces, is in a more sombre, autumnal mood, and shows Buchanan asking the age-old questions about the purpose of human suffering, but in this, the most positive phase of his life, the moonlight can become the symbol of "God's white Peace", and the suffering is here accepted as part of the divine plan.

The dominant mood of London Poems is set by the best, "Barbara Gray", "Nell", and "Liz". None of these is faultless; all could be greatly improved by careful excision of unnecessary words; but it is in these that Buchanan is most original and at the same time most true to his own talent. The subjects of these poems lie outside the bounds of conventional morality. Barbara Gray, a plain woman, never having had a male friend in her life, is flattered and enlivened, becomes in Buchanan's terms a living soul, on the attentions of a cripple. When he was dying, she hesitated too long to make public her secret attachment for fear of what his housekeeper might say, but now he is dead she can passionately defend her illicit affair:

Woman, think rather of the shame and wrong
Of pining lonely in the dark so long;
Think of the comfort in the grief he brought,
The revelation in the love he taught.
Then, Barbara Gray!
Blush not, nor heed what the cold world will say;
But kiss him, kiss him, o'er and o'er again

(CPW, I, 156)

The message of this poem is, possibly, a little too overt, but D.H. Lawrence with a not dissimilar one was no more subtle fifty years later. Buchanan practically with his dying breath preached that human love was the nearest thing on this earth to God's love.

Probably Buchanan's humanity and concern for the plight of the working classes are best expressed in "Nell", which must have made many of his readers more uncomfortable than "Barbara Gray" had done. For Nell has just been delivered of a son, born dead, soon after her lover has been hung for manslaughter. Depicted against such a lurid background, hers is not a complex character, but her incidental comments on Christianity and capital punishment,

We loved each other true, though never wed
In church, like some who took him to his death:

(CPW, I, 149)

and on the nature of justice,

He was a poor man, and they're hard on such.

(CPW, I, 149)

seem in character. Again it is the story of true love, of, as B. Ifor Evans puts it, "a portrayal of the innate goodness of man, distorted by circumstance and environment".¹

Perhaps the rhyme scheme (couplets mixed with alternating rhymes) of "Nell" is a little facile, and certainly her whole situation is unreal, even if her language (Buchanan's prime concern) appears natural enough. In "Liz" there is little to find fault with, the soliloquy of a much more closely realized and intelligent individual. Here again Buchanan flouts conventional morality; because two can live as cheaply as one Liz has lived with a costermonger as lonely as herself. She is dying in childbirth and worries that her man will regret having a new, helpless mouth to feed. Her dying words express the hope

1. English Poetry in the Later Nineteenth Century, p. 338.

that Joe will soon find someone to take her place, an articulation of love quite counter to those usually heard at the sentimental and unreal deaths of the typical Victorian heroine. Buchanan, having fully realized the figure he is portraying, even dares to deny the conventional view (his own) of the beneficent effect of the clear air, warm sun and green grass of the country. Liz describes her only excursion out of London, and her feelings of loneliness and fear when in the country, safety and happiness replacing them only when she is back in the sordid and grimy streets of her home (where many of Buchanan's readers would never wish to venture).

Buchanan's next publication, in good time for the Christmas market of 1866 was Ballad Stories of the Affections, from the Scandinavian. It provides a marked contrast to London Poems. In the earlier work he is the serious poet, making no effort to soften outlines or disguise harsh facts. Here Buchanan is attempting to be the popular poet, and several compromises are made to bring the stark, earthy world of medieval balladry into the drawing-rooms of the Victorian middle-classes. The title itself gives a hint of Buchanan's purpose. A belated fruit of his visit to Denmark two years earlier, Ballad Stories of the Affections is the first of a series of elaborately and beautifully illustrated (by men like G.J. Pinwell, J.W. North, Frederick Walker and A.B. Houghton) gift-books, which now command fairly high prices in the auction room. Buchanan's work is essentially a popularization of a little-known aspect of European literature.

The translations of the medieval ballads and modern verse are, on the whole, quite good, though the sexual overtones of some are muted by Buchanan, and the dramatic suddenness of death or some other disaster is blurred in others. Occasionally, too, he mistranslates a word or phrases, thereby reducing the effect. In "Maid Mettelil", a tale of a bewitched maiden's attempts to deceive her lover, Buchanan's refrain "Under the linden wakens my dearest" compares unfavourably with the much more poignant and ironic "Under the linden awaits my dearest" of the original. In "Little Christina's Dance" the whole poem hinges on the fact that Christina knows that her suitor is the king's son, but will not dance with him until he offers her something better than new gowns or shoes - his hand in marriage. Buchanan's version of her oft-repeated refusal. "But I would not dance with the son of a king," makes such knowledge of his royal identity not at all clear. In "Signelil the Serving Maiden", Buchanan felt it necessary to disguise the fact that Signelil had been seduced by the son of her questioner. In the original, Signelil tells the mother that she is ill at ease because she has been tempted (and, it clearly transpires, has succumbed to the son's advances); Buchanan translates the line thus:

"Thy son hath plighted his vows to me!"

Hardly cause for the concern she and her questioner feel. Later in the poem, her lover rhetorically describes the consummation of their affair:

Har Du ei Siddet paa Sengen min,
Saa haver Du sovet i Armen min?

(Have you not stayed in bed with me,
Thus you have slept embraced by me?)

1. Abrahamson, W.H.F., Nyerup and Rahbek, Danske Viser fra Middelalderen, p. 10.

This is translated as,

Hast thou not kissed me tenderlie?¹
Dost thou not keep the gifts I gie?

"Aage and Elsie" is one of the best known of the ballads that Buchanan translated (Borrow, Longfellow and Prior had translated it before him, and William Morris, with several others, were to follow). A false and sentimental note is introduced by Buchanan's translation of the name Elselille as "little Elsie", in the starkest tale of a lover literally following her betrothed to the grave. Buchanan, too, shies away from having Aage die abruptly the Monday after the betrothal takes place, and translates that line, "But ere a month had come and gone," softening the impact of the poem quite unnecessarily.

But one should not be too severe on Buchanan's efforts. He undoubtedly saw Ballad Stories as an attempt to bring a valuable literature to the many who would not read a more scholarly work. His translations, despite a certain looseness, are often very good, and some did find their way into later anthologies of Scandinavian ballads. A comparison between the translations by Morris and Buchanan of "Aage and Elsie" shows the latter to have a genuine gift for the form:

Morris

O, she's taken up her comb of gold
And combed adown her [sic] hair,
And for every hair she combed adown
There fell a weary tear.

* * * * *

1. Ballad Stories of the Affections p. 10. These were not reprinted in the Complete Poetical Works, due to problems of copyright.

"But whenso thou art sorrowful
 And weary is thy mood,
 Then all within my coffin
 Is it dreadful with dark blood.¹

Buchanan

His dew-damp dripping ringlets
 She kaims with kaim of gold,
 And aye for every lock she curls
 Lets fall a tear-drop cold. (p.113)

"Whenever thou art weeping
 And thy bosom aches full sore,
 My grave in yonder dark kirkyard
 Is filled with living gore. (p.114)

Perhaps the purist might regret Buchanan's frequent use of alliteration; and, for some, his use of Scotticisms like 'kaim' might strike a false note, but he does get closer to the stark, simple world of these ballads than does Morris with his quaint archaisms.

Ballad Stories achieved the popularity Buchanan sought, running to three editions by 1869, but it has never been published since, and is now very scarce, which is a pity. For he was widely congratulated on his success at rendering the ballads into vital and elemental language (if, on occasion, not an absolutely accurate translation), and the work served to enhance his growing reputation as a poet.

Before Christmas 1867 appeared the elaborately illustrated North Coast and Other Poems (in green, blue, or red and gold binding). Apparently the publishers paid Buchanan £400 for the verse published in this book, and at least one critic took Buchanan to task for allowing his work to become debased by appearing in such a form.

1. Poems by the Way, p. 146.

London Poems had the occasional lyric to give some leaven to its harsh realism. North Coast does have the illustrations, perhaps, but apart from them there is little surface attraction to the work. Buchanan's style is further pared down; there is no showy poetical language, no profusion of imagery, and little break in the somewhat severe view of life presented. Already the poet's preoccupations with religious issues are becoming more apparent. "The Scottish Eclogue" is a perceptive delineation of the character of a hidebound, Scottish Presbyterian, assured of his place among the elect, discussing the likelihood that a lately deceased member of the church, a much better man clearly than the speaker, is now roasting in hell, because he had doubts and could question God's beneficence. The poem is in Scottish dialect, and has a ring to it that makes its satire all the more effective. A companion piece "An English Eclogue" is much milder in tone, though its effect is much the same. Set in springtime, with feminine rhymes and a sing-song trochaic rhythm to represent the commonplace and unthinking natures of the two speakers, the poem describes indirectly the fate of one Crewe who "got Methodism", and "lost his head through meddling so with things that don't concern us." In rural England, apparently, the parson is the one who is paid to ask questions, though this one is fonder of meat and drink than metaphysical discussion. The satire is neat and prefigures Saint Abe and his Seven Wives, where Mormonism is the butt of Buchanan's wit.

"The Scaith o' Bartle", popular in its day, is not of any particular merit, though it shows a fine sense

of place, and an insight into the problems of a marriage in which the young wife does not care for a middle-aged sea-captain who has given up a gentler mistress, the sea, for her. "The Glamour" is a better poem, spoken by a seer, damned to predict her every domestic tragedy, culminating, to her relief, in her death. The one light-hearted piece in the book is "The Northern Wooing", which tells, the narrator is again a woman, of superstition on Hallowe'en concerning the girl's search for a spouse, and the homely yet happy conclusion to her quest.

Unquestionably the best work in North Coast and Other Poems is the opening poem, "Meg Blane". The elements of the other poems: the mystic sense of coming events, the life of the Scottish fisherfolk, the troubled relations between man and woman, the faithful and accurate delineation of the aspirations of a well-realized human being in an environment made more real, possibly, than any that Buchanan had hitherto attempted; all these fuse to make the poem one of the most effective and affecting he ever wrote. It tells of a deserted woman, Meg Blane, bringing up her simple son, Angus, in the sure hope of his father's promised return. Fearless of the sea, she had acquired the strength of the elements she fought, and, in all weathers, goes fishing to support herself and her son. A storm wrecks a ship on the coast, and she succeeds in urging the fishermen to go out with her in the lifeboat to rescue any survivors. Only one is picked up, who, it transpires the next day, is her lover of twenty years before. He tells her he is married, and gradually all the force and vigour of her character, her

one hope gone, drain away. Drifting from a strong faith in God into apathy, she pines away and dies; not longer after, her son, incapable of supporting his own life, dies too. The sadness of the tale is relieved by Buchanan's Christianity; at this stage in his career, he can allow Meg, on her deathbed, to brighten as if briefly assured of future happiness. R.H. Hutton found the whole poem, if almost unrelievedly sad, illumined by "a visionary light behind [the] deepening gloom, giving the story a beauty and a glory in our eyes which we cannot indeed explain or interpret, but which is utterly inconsistent with the mood of scepticism and cynical despair" (Spectator, XL, October 26, 1867, pp. 1201-2).

As in "Poet Andrew", of the earlier work, some of Buchanan's aesthetics colour the poem. The boy, dull in some ways though he is, had the power, because of his unity with nature and particularly the sea, to make his mother's nature "deeper, more alive Unto the supernatural feet that walk Our dark and troubled waters". Almost like Buchanan's poet,

On his sense
Though sadden'd with his silent life, there stole
A motion and a murmur that at times
Brake through his lips, informing witless words
With strange sea-music.

(CPW, I, 212)

He too, like Buchanan, was an outcast in his youth:

In his infancy,
Children had mocked him: he had shunned their sports,
And haunted lonely places, nurturing
The bright, fierce, animal splendour of a soul
That ne'er was clouded by the mental mists
That darken oft the dreams of wiser men.

(CPW, I, 212)

That brief look at the forces that influenced Angus Blane's character makes an introduction to Buchanan's next work, The Book of Orm (1870), much easier than his few commentators have made it appear. To them, it represents a large swing from the realism of much of his work, London Poems especially, to the mysticism of his mature verse. Yet clearly there were many signs that in mysticism lay Buchanan's path. In The Book of Orm, Buchanan allows himself to become like Angus Blane a creature of the influences, mostly dark, of his environment, not "witless" or inarticulate. After four years of life in the Highlands of his ancestors, he lets the spirit of that desolate landscape speak through his poetry:

Ghostly and livid, robed with shadow, see!
 Each mighty Mountain silent on its throne,
 From foot to scalp one stretch of livid stone,
 Without one gleam of grass or greenery.
 Silent they take the immutable decree -
 Darkness or sunlight come, - they do not stir;
 Each bare brow lifted desolately free,
 Keepeth the silence of a death-chamber.
 Silent they watch each other until-doom [sic];¹
 They see each other's phantoms come and go,
 Yet stir not. Now the stormy hour brings gloom,
 Now all things grow confused and black below,
 Specific through the cloudy Drift they loom,
 And each accepts his individual woe.

(CPW, I, 251-2)

This is one of many sonnets, called "Coruiskén", composed by Buchanan in that bleak part of Skye at that stage in his own spiritual and intellectual development when God could no longer be accepted unquestioningly; though the questions he asks are answered affirmatively.

1. The hyphen printed in the CPW between 'until' and 'doom' is a misprint, and not to be found in The Book of Orm, p. 159.

The affirmations, however, are not often very convincing. In one of his first visions, Orm grieves at his wife's death, and then imagines a world without death with men and women just disappearing when their span is done; he concludes somewhat lamely that through God's mercy death, burial, and churchyards are a comfort, a sign of a continuing process. Just how the change is comforting he fails to say. In fact that is the chief fault of the book, the visions do not have the compelling power of the true mystic, they are nebulous and vague. This is no sharply imagined new world that Buchanan has created, no well-wrought unity. But it is not without memorable things within it. The "Coruisken Sonnets", which Buchanan later printed separately from the visions of Orm the Celt, have a unity and power of their own. And the last vision, that Of the Man Accurst, has a force and imaginative strength the rest of the book lacks. It is a restatement of Buchanan's creed that "utter self-sacrificing love is divine, and is alone capable of prevailing over evil". In this case it is the love of mother and wife for a man thoroughly evil, the sole out-cast from heaven at Judgment Day. Through their willingness to forgo everything to redeem this most miserable and despicable of men, the man is saved from eternal banishment. The Book of Orm represents what is best and worst in Robert Buchanan's muse. At his best a vivid imagination, arresting and provocative ideas, a dedication to the truth of the situation he seeks to communicate, and after a happy union of thought and expression all these

are too often vitiated by vague and nebulous statements, often in rough and uneven rhythms, and the final effect is certainly not memorable or even intellectually satisfying.

In one poem, "The Soul and the Dwelling", Buchanan does show how far he has travelled since the time of his careful delineations of character in dramatic monologue. He rightly states that

We cry
For God's face, who have never looked upon
The poorest Soul's face in the wonderful
Soul-haunted world. (CPW, I, 274)

And then has Orm give a long description of his married life, abundantly happy, yet only aware of the actuality of his wife's soul at the moment of its leaving:

'I am going away,'
The Spirit seemed to cry; and as it cried,
Stood still and dim and very beautiful
Up in the windows of the eyes - there linger'd,
First seen, last seen, a moment, silently
So different, more beautiful tenfold
Than all that I had dreamed (CPW, I, 274)

Perhaps in The Book of Orm, Buchanan reaches his ultimate in both poetic expression and poetic thought. There can be no more portrayal of character, for a man who finds that it is impossible to "know what secret faces hide away Within the neighbouring dwelling". The Book of Orm was the first of many books of visionary poetry from Buchanan's pen; in it he aspired to heights he could not reach, to thoughts he could not express.

As if in retreat from the shadowy heights tenuously gained in The Book of Orm, Buchanan composed a very different piece in 1871. His playfulness and gift for

satire had already been established by "The Session of the Poets" as early as 1866, and in North Coast and Other Poems the Scottish and English Ecolgues had used dramatic dialogue to satirize typical Scottish and English religious attitudes. Saint Abe and his Seven Wives is composed of monologues and dialogues with the purpose of exposing the inner life of Salt Lake City to public ridicule. What sources of information were open to Buchanan are not at all clear, but newspaper reports of the embarrassment of the U.S. Government at the polygamy rife in the community of Latterday Saints were common in the 1870s. Artemus Ward, a fore-runner of Mark Twain in his purveying of homespun backwoods humour, seems to be the source of Buchanan's somewhat dubious attempts at the American vernacular.

Saint Abe appeared in 1872, when feeling was at its height in the Fleshly Controversy, when Rossetti was beginning his painful recovery from his attempted suicide of the first days of June, and when Buchanan found himself the subject of one of the most deadly pieces of invective in the language, Swinburne's Under the Microscope. The book was published anonymously, mainly because Buchanan knew that now any new work of his would receive short shrift from Rossetti's friends and sympathisers, but also partly because he was striking out in a new direction and wanted to reach new readers untrammelled by any preconceptions about him as a poet. The Book of Orm was, quite probably, the beginning of a sharp decline in Buchanan's popularity. The public did not want such work, and even the large

success of Saint Abe did Buchanan little good in the long run, since it could not disguise the fact that it was in mystical religious speculation that his interest lay. For Saint Abe was the most popular thing that he ever wrote; it soon ran to several editions, was published in America, even despite its publisher's fears that feeling was running too high against the Mormons for jokes at their expense to be appreciated. All the reviewers speculated on the authorship of the poem, with most attributing it to J.R. Lowell, some to Bret Harte, and one even declaring that "were it not for the exquisite elegance of the verse we should think that some parts of the poem were by Robert Browning".¹ Perhaps the reviewer had the following in mind when he talked of the "exquisite elegance?" Brigham Young is delivering a sermon, which Buchanan punctuates by "feminine whispers":

The Prophet

Sisters and brothers who love the right,
 Saints whose hearts are divinely beating,
 Children rejoicing in the light,
 I reckon this is a pleasant meeting.
 Where's the face with a look of grief? -
 Jehovah's with us and leads the battle;
 We've had a harvest beyond belief,
 And the signs of fever have left the cattle;
 All still blesses the holy life
 Here in the land of milk and honey.

Feminine Whispers

Brother Shuttleworth's seventeenth wife, ...
 Her with heer brushed up so funny!

(CPW, I, 367)

1. The review was cited in later puffs for St. Abe and was published in The Freeman. It does, of course, give some indication of Browning's continuing failure to gain a reputation as a lyric poet; and it certainly indicates, if indirectly, one persistent influence on Buchanan's verse.

As with many of Buchanan's longer poems to do them justice a large extract is needed. Clearly for a man with so keen an insight into the feminine mind, a study of polygyny gives ample opportunity to deploy his special knowledge. The teamster, Joe Wilson, whose girl has been stolen from him by an evangelist says this:

Women is women! That's their style -
 Talk reason to them and they'll bile;
 But baste 'em soft as any pigeon,
 With lies and rubbish and religion;
 Don't talk of flesh and blood and feeling,
 But Holy Ghost and blessed healing;
 Don't name things in too plain a way,
 Look a heap warmer than you say,
 Make 'em believe they're serving true
 The Holy Spirit and not you,
 Prove all the world but you's damnation,
 And call your kisses jest salvation;
 Do this, and press 'em on the sly,
 You're safe to win 'em. Jest you try! ¹

(CPW, I, 352)

This excerpt accurately sums up the spirit and tone of Saint Abe; folksy, wry and with sufficient insight into character and situation to make it worth reading, it shows Buchanan, for once, demonstrating a not very subtle sense of humour, but which, after the heavy mysticism of Orm, is nonetheless most refreshing.

In the course of the poem, Buchanan can delineate the origin, growth, and internal weakness of the Mormon way of life. Immigrants from Europe are attracted to the obvious wealth of the community (apparent yet), but it is the polygyny in Salt Lake City that roused Buchanan's satiric purpose. For Abraham Clawson of the title,

1. Here is the genesis of his two novels Foxglove Manor and The New Abelard, published twelve years later.

Brigham Young's intellectual adviser, falls in love with one of his wives. The others cannot tolerate it, and eventually he runs away, leaving behind a long and apologetic letter to Young, which expresses the poet's indictment of Mormonism in an indirect way:

O listen to the tale of dread, thou Light
 that shines so brightly -
 Virtue's a horse that drops down dead if
 overloaded slightly!
 She's all the will, she wants to go, she'd
 carry every tittle;
 But when you see her flag and blow, just
 ease her of /sic/ a little!
One wife for me was near enough, two
 might have fixed me neatly,
Three made me shake, four made me puff,
 five settled me completely, -
 But when the sixth came, though I still was
 glad and never grumbled,
 I took the staggers, kick'd, went ill, and
 in the traces tumbled!

Ah, well may I compare my state into
 a beast's position -
 Unfit to bear a saintly weight, I sank
 and lost condition

(CPW, I, 372)

And on and on. Buchanan's irony, of course, is obvious enough; the verse little better than doggerel, and the humour wears a little thin at times. It is amazing that a man so fiercely denunciatory of the fleshliness of Rossetti's poetry, could attack something at least as distasteful ~~as~~ this in ~~an~~ indirect ~~a~~ way. The imaginative creation of the Mormon community, and the depiction of just what a houseful of wives would be like, seems a much better way of approaching his subject than the bitter invective of Buchanan's criticism. Buchanan the aspiring poet and Buchanan the indignant critic were two separate entities.

The next year saw the anonymous publication of White Rose and Red. A narrative, rather than a dramatic,

piece, it has none of the near-monotonous prosiness to be found in Saint Abe. White Rose and Red is in every way a more successful and more ambitious work. It has never received the close reading it deserves, and represents in many ways the high-water mark of Buchanan's poetic achievement. Later critics, like Hugh Walker, have docilely followed the humourless American E.C. Stedman in his statement that White Rose and Red succeeded "only in being faithful to a British ideal of American frontier life."¹ Buchanan's contemporaries, however, from Browning (Jay, p. 115) down regarded it as a remarkable tour de force ("a beautiful poem, a beautiful poem", Buchanan reports Browning repeating). It was published anonymously ("By the author of Saint Abe") for the same reasons that Saint Abe had been, and shared its popularity, though not running to so many editions (possibly because of a large printing); though, curiously, neither work is at all easy to obtain now.

Using more varied verse forms than Saint Abe, White Rose and Red is basically a contrast, as its title suggests, between two ways of life, that of the forest of the Indian and the artificial ways of the white settlers in Maine. The Indians live in the sub-tropical heat and glamour of the forests and clearings of the South:

The wild wood rings, the wild wood gleams,
 The wild wood laughs with echoes gay;
 Thro' its green heart a bright beck streams,
 Sparkling like gold in the sun's beams,
 But creeping, like a silvern ray,
 Where hanging boughs make dim the day.
 Hush'd, hot, and Eden-like all seems,
 And onward thro' the place of dreams
 Eureka Hart doth stray. (CPW, I, 385)

1. Victorian Poets, p. 355.

Whereas Drowsietown, Maine, is enervated by the heat of summer:

O so drowsy! In a daze
 Sweating 'mid the golden haze,
 With its smithy like an eye
 Glaring bloodshot at the sky,
 And its one white row of street
 Carpetted so green and sweet,
 And the loungers smoking still
 Over gate and window-sill;
 Nothing coming, nothing going,
 Locusts grating, one cock crowing,
 Few things moving up or down,
 All things drowsy - Drowsietown! (CPW, I, 397)

Against these backgrounds the story is simply told of the industrious, unintellectual, unimaginative, beaver-like, though tall and handsome, Eureka Hart, wandering through the southern forests and coming across a party of Indian maidens swimming in a woodland pool. He inadvertently gives his presence away, is captured by the women, taken to the village where he falls in love with the old chief's only grand-daughter, Red Rose, and their union is consummated. After a time Hart gets bored with Red Rose's grand passion, and promising to return one day (and meaning to keep his promise) Hart goes home to Drowsietown, where he soon falls in love with a prim, virtuous, highly domesticated, cool yet kind, white girl. In the following winter, having given birth to Hart's child, and fearing ostracism as a result, Red Rose makes her difficult way north to Maine, to arrive at the peak of the first great winter snowstorm. Once her initial hostility is softened by her unknown rival's plight, White Rose nurses the mother and child through the winter, and both mother and child die, she with her illusions concerning Hart still intact, and he,

dull and unimaginative, settles down to a humdrum, soulless existence and the poem ends.

Not overtly didactic or prophetic like The Book of Orm, White Rose and Red is really a remarkable poem, which subtly promulgates a morality and view of life quite alien to those of most of its readers. Again it is curious that it could have been written, in the fastnesses of Scotland, at the height of the Fleshly Controversy. Another reason that he kept the authorship of this work secret, is that it contains some of the most sensuous poetry that he ever wrote. Using the vitality and vividness of the forest and the humdrum, monotony of the town, as his backgrounds, Buchanan, consistent with such earlier statements on the power of love to waken the divine in us as "Barbara Gray", suggests that it is only Red Rose's passion for Eureka Hart that could have awakened his soul and turned him into a man. His name even suggests his fate: "Eureka" seems to indicate that he had this opportunity to realize his potential, whereas "Hart" suggests the stupid, animal-like side of his nature that finally wins in the battle for his soul. The early description of Hart (in suitably monotonous couplets which are not a parody of Hiawatha) concludes:

As waves run, and as clouds wander,
With small power to feel or ponder,
Roam'd this thing in human clothing,
Intellectually - nothing!
Further in his soul receding,
Certain signs of beaver-breeding
Kept his homely wits in see-saw;
Part was Jacob, part was Esau;
No revolter; a believer
In the dull creed of the beaver;
Strictly moral; seeing beauty
In the ploughshare line of duty;

Loving nature as beasts love it,
 Eating, drinking, tasting of it,
 With no wild poetic gleaming,
 Seldom shaping, never dreaming;
 Beaver with a wandering craze,
 Walked Eureka in God's ways. (CPW, I, 384)

Later Buchanan clearly states that his love for Red Rose is "a gleam of glory ... raising him ... to the stature of a SOUL!" It is a romantic yearning back to man's existence in an Eden, where the only snake is Hart's growing ennui, and a longing for a more placid existence. The conflict is between life and death, between nature and civilization, between passion and cosy domesticity.

This is the last time in his career that Buchanan allowed his lyrical gifts full play; the rhyming is facile occasionally but always light and spontaneous; the rhythms, too, are subtly varied; Buchanan does not shrink from a "Nuptial Song":

Where were they wedded? In no Temple of ice
 Built up by human fingers;
 The floor was strewn with flowers of fair device,
 The wood-birds were the singers.

* * * *

He kiss'd her lips, he drank her breath in bliss,
 He drew her to his bosom:
 As a clod kindles at the Spring's first kiss
 His being burst to blossom! (CPW, I, 392)

Over all, his sense of humour flickers lightly. After that "Nuptial Song", for example, he pays lipservice to Mrs. Grundy's objections. Later in the poem he celebrates the union of Hart and White Rose with their "Nuptial Song":

Where were they wedded? In the holy house
 Built up by busy fingers.
 All Drowsietown was quiet as a mouse
 To hear the village singers.

* * * *

What was the service? 'Twas the solemn, stale,
 Old fashioned, English measure:
 'Wilt thou this woman take? and thou this male?'
 'I will' - 'I will' - with pleasure.

(CPW, I, 404-5)

The descriptions of both the forest and the farmland are particularly fine, and the onset of the great snow, sees Buchanan, the poet of nature, at his best. There are fewer instances of hasty work, or of a poor ear, than in any other of his poems. His delineation of character is as sound as ever, and crowning all is the almost euphoric mood of the first two thirds of the poem. There is a gaiete du coeur in this work that is hard to connect with the dour, obdurate, humourless, moralist that is the conventional image, where there is one, of Robert Buchanan.

After the interlude in his main development as a poet that Saint Abe and White Rose and Red afforded him, with their popularity giving him fresh courage to continue to seek a similar response for his more profound works, Buchanan turned once again with Balder the Beautiful: A Song of Divine Death (1877) to the poetic treatment of the overwhelming question concerning man's immortality that beset him throughout his life. Twelve years later, he considered Balder, The City of Dream, and White Rose and Red to be the works upon which he would stake his reputation as a poet. Balder, however, failed lamentably, and Buchanan writing jocularly of the time in The Outcast (1891) in Byronic vein, described his mood at Christmas 1877:

My plans in life had all miscarried;
 My only friends were dead, or married;
 My book (that Epic you remember)
 Had gone to wrap up cheese and butter

(CPW, II, 163)

Before publication, Buchanan had written to two of his closest friends, William Canton and Roden Noel, boasting of "the finest conception of this generation", his most original work, "pregnant with subtle ideas" (Jay, pp. 209-210.) It is probable that Balder's failure marks the end of Buchanan's attempt to live off his poetry, and caused his return to London, with the hurly-burly of the theatre and novel-writing dramatically replacing the calm solitude he had enjoyed for four years in Connaught.

Buchanan was early recognised as the best nature poet of his generation, and it will be remembered that the natural descriptions of, or rather, Buchanan's spiritual response to, the bleak, wintry landscape of Skye, in The Book of Orm resulted in some impressive verse. In Balder, too, there is much natural description, but here it celebrates the joyful arrival of the spirit of summer as personified by Balder:

O who cometh sweetly
 With singing of showers? -
 The wild wind runs fleetly
 Before his soft tread,
 The sward stirs asunder
 To radiance of flowers,
 While o'er him and under
 A glory is spread -
 A white cloud above him
 Moves on thro' the blue,
 And all things that love him
 Are dim with its dew:
 The lark is upspringing,
 The merle whistles clear,
 There is sunlight and singing,
 For Balder is here! (CPW, I, 451)

In Balder, more successfully than in any of his other works, do the spiritual and the natural, the mystic

and the real, aspects of Buchanan's muse blend. Balder is a northern Apollo, but also a northern Christ. It has been prophesied that his coming will destroy the gods of Asgard, so his mother, Frea, bears him on earth, and allows him to grow up the foster-child of nature. As soon as he becomes aware of it, he is troubled by man's mortality and vows to kill death. He enters a contract with Odin (his father) to give his life so that man may become immortal. The gods, happy to see the runes prophesying their downfall thus thwarted, let this happen and Balder dies. But Jesus wandering the north seeking Balder eventually finds and revives him, and explains why the contract could not succeed in ridding man of his mortality:

'O Balder, those great gods to whom
 Thy radiant life was given,
 Were far too frail to keep their plight
 And summon Death to heaven.

'There is no god of all thy kin
 Dare name that name aloud;
 When his [i.e. Death's] cold hand was on thy heart,
 Each crouch'd within his cloud.

(CPW, I, 479-480)

Jesus has sought Balder, as he has sought other gods who have suffered for man (Prometheus and Buddha), to assure him of their brotherhood, and to bring him God's message, which provides a coda to the last third of the poem:

All that is beautiful shall abide,
 All that is base shall die! (CPW, I, 476)

This was the burden of "The Vision of the Man Accurst" at the end of The Book of Orm, where the one man too evil to be allowed entry to heaven on Judgment Day is eventually redeemed by the love of his wife and mother (both of whom

he had in life treated with the utmost cruelty). Here, too, human love, the supreme human beauty, is the only means of defeating death:

'And whosoe'er loves mortals most
 Shall conquer Death the best,
 Yea, whosoe'er grows beautiful
 Shall grow divinely blest.' (CPW, I, 479)

'We must love one another or die' was Buchanan's philosophy throughout his life,¹ but it probably never was more eloquently expressed than in Balder. At times of despair it became the frailest of hopes, as when his mother died in 1894 he wrote in his Diary: "O mother, mother, if we are never to meet again, the whole universe contains nothing to live for! But we must, we shall!" (Jay, p. 278)

One of the less subtle ideas, doubtless not too acceptable to Christian readers of Balder, was that to Buchanan all religions are "more or less divine, but no religion is supremely satisfying." To him there was no god but one, whom he conceived "dimly through the simulacra of the lesser or tutelary gods or ideals."² Another idea, expressed in an incantatory proem to his wife which, while containing some of Buchanan's most attractive rhythms, betrays a certain nebulosity of his thought, is that life is but a dream out of which we awaken into eternal life (if, presumably, our love for another is sufficiently perfect):

1. In a letter to Leslie Stephen in 1896 he wrote: "I always feel that this life is worthless without the idea of permanence in the affections, and I am afraid I reiterate the thought too often in my writings" (Jay, p. 21).

2. The Spectator, LXI, June 9, 1888, p. 786.

O what is this cry in our burning ears,
 And what is this light on our eyes, dear love?
 The cry is the cry of the rolling years,
 As they break on the sun-rock, far above;
 And the light is the light of that rock of gold
 As it burneth bright in a starry sea;
 And the cry is clearer a hundredfold,
 And the light more bright, when I gaze on thee.
 My weak eyes dazzle beneath that gleam,
 My sad ears deafen to hear that cry:
 I was born in a dream, and I dwell in a dream,
 And I go in a dream to die!

(CPW, I, 427)

Probably because of its radical departure from conventional beliefs about the supremacy of Christ as man's saviour, and because of Buchanan's insistence that we can only save ourselves through love and not by divine intervention at all, Balder failed to sell. Yet it contains much good work (as the quotations given should corroborate), though as is too often the case with Buchanan, a false note intrudes every few lines, whether it be trite imagery, poor or recurrent rhyme ("Heaven" and "bereaven" are all too often paired throughout Buchanan's work), or unhappy choice of word or phrase. The verse patterns are changed before they become monotonous, though the ballad stanza in which Christ invariably speaks is not the most effective vehicle for the profoundest thoughts in the poem. Yet Balder shows Buchanan's imaginative gifts at their strongest; there is a unity of conception and a coherence in this ambitious work that the later ones lack (with the possible exception of The City of Dream), and, blemishes apart, it is indeed a remarkable achievement.

To mark the initially happy occasion of his association with Chatto and Windus, from which appeared

eight works in verse in under two years (including the republication of his earlier successes), Buchanan published Ballads of Life, Love, and Humour early in 1882. This is a collection of popular verse, produced mainly during his sojourn in Ireland, which had first been published in various journals (including The Gentleman's Magazine and The Contemporary Review), and some of which had achieved remarkable popular acclaim; "The Wedding of Shon Maclean" and "Phil Blood's Leap" both, apparently, becoming recitation pieces throughout the country. At Birchington, Hall Caine read "The Lights of Leith" to the dying Rossetti, who was most impressed with Buchanan's skill at producing a ballad (originally published before "The King's Tragedy") almost as good as his own in a similar vein. Ballads contains some of the best things Buchanan ever wrote. One atypical piece is "The Faery Reaper" which Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch included (with "The Ballad of Judas Iscariot") in the Oxford Book of Victorian Verse. Suitable for such an anthology it certainly is, for it is one of the most finished pieces the poet ever wrote, altogether perfect of its kind, though not at all representative of Buchanan's true gifts, an insubstantial production. Closer, perhaps, is "The Ballad of Judas Iscariot", which like Orm, carries Buchanan's belief that at the last trump no man, however evil, shall be doomed. At times rising to real poetry, at other times reading as a pastiche of Coleridge ("Alone, alone, and all alone, Alone in a lonely place!" CPW, I, 495) at others like one of Rossetti ("and a thousand doves Made sweet sound". CPW, I, 496), the ballad became the

single most popular poem Buchanan ever wrote, probably because of its reassuring message, and a certain weird (if scarcely original) power. But it was by no means his best. "The Lights of Leith", anchored in the actual world and describing actual events, has a cumulative effect that raises it high indeed. It is a striking demonstration of Buchanan's superb technical virtuosity, but it also demonstrates the sad fact that Buchanan the realist is a better poet than Buchanan the mystic. It begins:

'The lights o' Leith! the lights o' Leith!'
 The skipper cried aloud -
 While the wintry gale with snow and hail
 Blew snell thro' sail and shroud.

'The lights o' Leith! the lights o' Leith!'
 As he paced the deck cried he -
 'How merrily bright they burn this night
 Thro' the reek o' the stormy sea!'

As the ship ran in thro' the surging spray
 Afire seemed all the town;
 They saw the glare from far away,
 And, safely steer'd to land-lock'd bay,
 They cast their anchor down.

(CPW, I, 496)

A striking narrative of witchcraft in seventeenth-century Scotland, the poem rises to its climax (the mate's discovery that the "merrily" burning fires are consuming the body of his mother, condemned as a witch at King James's behest) by the skilful use of dramatic dialogue, punctuated by frequent reference to the lurid glow of the fires on the quay. Here Buchanan's indignation at man's cruelty to man in the name of religion achieves safe and artistic outlet in his indirect castigation of the blind dogmatism of James VI. Unfortunately for him, his temperament could not deny him similar attacks on contemporary aberrations

in human behaviour; and from the gnawing bitterness of his later verse must his diminished reputation as a poet derive.

Three years after Ballads of Life, Love, and Humour, appeared The Earthquake: or Six Days and a Sabbath. Here one of Buchanan's principal weaknesses as a poet becomes apparent. The scheme of the book is a latter-day Decameron: an earthquake in southern England makes Lady Barbara retire with her court of poets, savants and philosophers to her residence on the Tweed. To pass the time the "plump pantheist, Spinoza Smith" suggests "some chronicle of those who, quick or dead, Have wander'd problem-haunted through the world", which Lady Barbara modifies to mean that the riddle of God Himself (CPW, II, 7) shall become the theme. In the course of their discussions certain people reveal themselves: "Verity" is clearly Ruskin; "Bishop Eglantine", Cardinal Newman; and "Dan Paumanok", Walt Whitman; But others, at this late date are not so obvious. Had W.H. Mallock's The New Republic, of eight years earlier, not been written, it is doubtful that Buchanan's experiment would have appeared in this form. Buchanan's weakness as a poet was his inability to find a structure for his longer works. Balder was to a certain extent a successful modification of an old myth for modern purposes, but even there, the old myth gave some external shape to his poem. Here neither the mechanical adaptation of Boccaccio nor the verse put into the mouths of his characters is particularly effective. Indeed the scheme is a transparently obvious effort to give some coherence to a random selection of poems (some of which,

again, like "Julia Cytherea", had been previously published in the journals) of uneven merit, and often with very little connection, if any, with the theme of the book. Worse, some of the poems are highly derivative. "The Soliloquy of the Grand Etre" is pure Swinburne:

I am God, who was Man. Lord of earth, sea, and sky,
I endure while men die;
The River of Life laps my feet, flowing by.

* * * *

I am Man, who was men. I am flesh, sense, and soul,
I was part who am Whole.
I am God, being Man, whom no god may control.

(CPW, II, 43)

"The Voyage of Magellan", written in the "Locksley Hall" metre, like the "Ballad of Judas Iscariot" has imagery reminiscent of "The Ancient Mariner", and very weak geography, but like most of Buchanan's verse it has a certain force and is eminently readable. There are overtones of Browning in "In a Fashionable Church", but the contrast between a vision of Christ and the actuality of a fashionable London preacher is pure Buchanan, and very well done:

What Shape is this with hands outreaching,
Walking the waters of Hell, and preaching?
The waves are rolling beneath and glistening,
Each breaking wave is a white face, listening!

* * * *

Up with a start I waken groaning,
And hear sweet Honeydew's voice intoning.
Only a dream! - and in church I am again,
Half asleep, in the midst of the sham again.

Hark! how the soft-eyed, soft-voiced creature
Preaches, with sweetness in every feature!
The ladies listen, the maids sit dutiful,
The spinsters quiver, and murmur, 'Beautiful'!

(CPW, II, 33-4)

Here, again, Buchanan puts to good satirical purpose one of

his favourite devices, the feminine rhyme. There are other good things in the book, notably "Pan at Hampton Court", where Buchanan joyously celebrates the gambols of the lower class Londoners on their May holiday in verses linking them with the pagan celebrations of rustic spring rites of Greece and Rome. The tone is that of the young Buchanan of the 1860s, and despite some characteristic blemishes the poem is a success. But, taken as a whole, The Earthquake is not satisfactory. Buchanan realized this, and though it formed but the first three days of a proposed week of discussion on the riddle of God, it was never followed by the second and concluding volume that Buchanan promised in his Prefatory Note.

After another interval of three years, Buchanan published, in the early months of 1888, The City of Dream. Written over a long period, and actually in type as early as 1884, it is an allegory based on Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. Again, unable to devise an original structure for his verse, Buchanan turns to that of someone else. By thus inviting comparison with Bunyan, Buchanan lays himself open to several serious charges. Bunyan's work is that of a profound believer and is based almost solely on the Bible; therefore the allegorical figures and situations that Christian encounters are well realised and immediately identifiable. Buchanan, with less faith and a broader purpose, sometimes fails to give his figures and situations sufficiently recognisable features for his pilgrim's wanderings to be accurately followed. Iconoclast, for example, who persuades Ishmael to take off the blindfold

given him by Evangelist and put down his Bible, is only just recognisable as Voltaire. It is Buchanan's purpose to show through Ishmael modern man's search for a wholly satisfying religion. Thus Bunyan's Bible is exchanged for a survey of world religions. Christianity is represented by the city of Christopolis, divided into two (to represent Roman Catholicism and Protestantism), though to Ishmael neither half of this superficially attractive city appeals, and the excesses described in both parts of the city, would certainly not win Buchanan any new readers, while losing him many of his old. "The Groves of Faun" is an evocation of the religion and way of life of the Greeks, and this too is easily comprehended, and is one of the best parts of the poem.

It is in the "City without God" that Ishmael's spiritual journey is best understood. Here is the ideal Victorian urban development:

Thus wandering on I joyfully discern'd
 The white and shining walls, the flashing roofs,
 Of that great City; not so fair, meseem'd,
 As far-off splendours of Christopolis,
 Yet stately, calm, and beautiful indeed,
 With marble palaces in stately squares,
 Broad streets with glad green trees on either side,
 Bright gardens, leaping fountains, temples, fanes,
 Observatories lifted high in air
 Near to the sun and stars, - all beauty and grace
 Of earthly cities builded up by hands

(CPW, II, 141)

It is the product of man's ingenuity at harnessing natural forces, a tribute to the knowledge of the scientist and the wisdom of Comte and the Positivists. Yet Ishmael rejects it, but not before Buchanan has given us a tantalising brief survey of the sort of worlds that Aldous

Huxley and George Orwell foresaw fifty or sixty years later. Here there is no sickness or ugliness; science has banished disease, and sickly or ill-formed children are destroyed at birth. No moral, intellectual, or spiritual deviation is tolerated, and there are hospitals for any so afflicted, who are treated by "approved physicians of the soul" (CPW, II, 142). Man is supreme in this world, and death the only certainty, but it is not feared, merely accepted as the logical end of life. In one of the temples of science Ishmael witnesses the vivisection of a rabbit and a hound, which becomes for him (in a passage at least one reviewer found quite blasphemous) the image of Christ crucified. As is often the case with Buchanan, his verse is most vivid when his anger or indignation is aroused, and, the most memorable parts of the whole work are those which deal with the desolation and despair of unbelief, whereas the ending of the poem, with Ishmael sitting on the shores of the Celestial Ocean of Death, calmly anticipating the voyage to the Deity on the other side is a typically weak piece of mystical landscape painting. Ishmael has heard truly eloquent assertions of God's divine love (even in the Humanist "City without God"), and the cumulative effect of these coupled with the final hopeful vision does make the poem's overall impression a positive one. But when it is compared to Bunyan's epic, The City of Dream seems little more than a piece of wishy-washy agnosticism.

As literature, it shows the true Buchanan characteristic of having pieces of pure poetry to be found in the

most turgid versification. Regrettably, after this poem, which does contain much fine thought well expressed, the poetic metal in Buchanan's ore becomes rarer and rarer. The tone, of a man crying out louder and louder to an audience he considered to be deaf to his pleas (to forget material gain and materialist philosophy and reconsider man's purpose on this planet) became more and more strident and less and less poetic. The City of Dream is the last reasonably successful long poem Buchanan wrote, and the success it achieves is due to such passages as the description of Eros (CPW, II, 109) or the exchange between Ishmael and the Herdboy, which has a simplicity and skill reminiscent of William Blake. Ishmael has asked the way to the City of God and the herdboy begins his reply:

Where the buttercups so sweet
Dust with gold my naked feet,
Where the grass grows green and long,
Sit I here and sing my song,
And the brown bird cries 'Cuckoo'
Under skies for ever blue!

Now and then, while I sing loud,
Flits a little fleecy cloud,
And uplooking I behold
How it turns to rain of gold,
Falling lightly, while around
Comes the stir of its soft sound! (CPW, II, 129)

The implication is that there are riches enough in nature for him, and he goes on to say that he never has seen any City. This too, perhaps, is part of Buchanan's message, that God is closest in nature and not to be found in the congregations of men. The poem ends with a fine apostrophe to death in which Buchanan sees it as part of the Divine Power controlling our lives, a mysterious transition which

will bring us back to the God mankind once knew face to face (CPW, II, 160-161).

The City of Dream is devoid of humour, which The Pilgrim's Progress certainly is not. As if to rectify this fault, and certainly to alter the tone of his spiritual works of which this was another, Buchanan published The Outcast: A Rhyme for the Time, which, like The Earthquake, was to be part of a larger whole in which the life and adventures of Philip Vanderdecken, the Flying Dutchman, were to be described, but as with The Earthquake, the promised sequel did not appear. The legend of the Flying Dutchman (another useful and ready-made form for his work) appealed to Buchanan. He could use him as an alter ego, as a mouthpiece for some of the more outrageous thoughts that occurred to him in a somewhat bitter and satirical look at the world of 1891, and the ruins of his once promising career as a poet.

Written in a loose Byronic metre, and certainly having a Byronic hero, The Outcast represents a Buchanan who no longer cares for literary decorum, for his carefully nurtured reputation as a poet. It has a freedom of thought and expression, which hitherto had needed the anonymity of the scurrilous "Session of the Poets" (quoted at length above, pp.5-6). Here Buchanan the virulent critic and controversialist and Buchanan the sober, sky-watching poet (hitherto usually kept well apart) come together, and the result makes good reading, if not great poetry. Having read Spinoza, Vanderdecken denies God, who punishes him for his unbelief by forcing

him to sail forever the stormy sea. The Virgin Mary intercedes, and once every ten years Vanderdecken may visit land to try to win the selfless love of a woman, the only redemption possible for him. One episode forms the first (and only published) part of the projected series, and this, quite daringly sensual, is very like Eureka Hart's idyllic sojourn with Red Rose in White Rose and Red; and this, too, is ended when the "serpent ennui" enters the tropical Eden Vanderdecken has found with a beautiful South Sea maiden. Giving Vanderdecken's spiritual development, allows Buchanan a breathless and witty tour of the intellectual ferment of his times (CPW, II, 168-9); and when approaching his description of the scene of Vanderdecken's possible redemption by feminine love and looking for some modern poet to whom to dedicate his own fleshly poetry he can score off his great contemporaries:

The theme is primitive at present -
 Nature undrest, without her stays:
 To Tennyson 'twould seem unpleasant -
 He blends no vine-leaves with his bays.
 Scorning the flesh and all things hot,
 Will Morris wanders sans culotte,
 And tries the hydra-mob to tame;
 While Patmore rocks a baby's cot
 And sings sweet nuptials void of blame.

* * * *

George Meredith might serve my turn
 For thoughts that breathe and words that burn,
 Or, better still, his master Browning,
 A sober'd Saul in evening dress;
 But both these bards could end by frowning
 At my mad Muse's gamesomeness.

(CPW, II, 177)

The Outcast thus offended many people; George Cotterell

in Academy found its rancorous tone most unpleasant; to scoff at men who have "nobly striven after high ideals ... to tolerate no one's ideals but one's own - is not the spirit one expects in a poet, and certainly not ... in a poet of Mr. Buchanan's rank."¹ Doubtless this reaction was typical of those whose view of the poet's role was circumscribed by the Victorian ideals of taste and decorum. But this was just the point Buchanan was making: the literary man had become respectable, he was no longer the free spirit of the Bohemia of the 1860s (and had not Buchanan himself in 1871-2 played a large part in this development, with his attacks on Rossetti and Swinburne?) The decadence of the 1890s was a disease not to be mistaken for the healthy joie de vivre of thirty years earlier:

Old friends, with whom in days less dark
 I roam'd thro' green Bohemia's glades,
 While 'tirra lirra' sang the lark
 And lovers listen'd in the shades,
 When Life was young and Song was merry,
 And Morals free, and Manners bold,
 When poets whistled 'Hey down derry',
 And toil'd for love in lieu of gold,
 When on the road we trode together
 Old honest hostels offered cheer,
 And halting in the sunny weather
 We gladden'd over pipes and beer,
 Where are you hiding now? and where
 Is the Bohemia of our playtime?
 Where are the heavens that once were fair,
 And where the blossoms of the Maytime?
 The trees are lopt by social sawyers,
 The grass is gone, the ways asphalted,
 Stone walls set up by ethic lawyers
 Replace the Stiles o'er which we vaulted!
 See! with rapidity surprising,
 Thro' jerry-building ministrations,
 Neat Literary Villas rising
 To shelter timid reputations;
 Each with its garden and its gravel,
 Its little lawn right trimly shaven,
 Its owner's name, quite clean, past cavil,
 Upon a brass plate neatly graven!

(CPW, II, 203-4)

1. Academy, XL, October 31, 1891, 375.

With this poem, Buchanan became the confirmed mutineer; no longer careful of his reputation as a poet (and even less careful than before of his reputation as a craftsman), he spoke out in his own voice loudly for the last ten years of his life. The young Bohemians of the day really admired The Outcast (it remains one of the more easily acquired of Buchanan's works) but to the older generations it confirmed them in their opinions of Buchanan's ill-considered levity, bad taste, and bumptiousness. Unfortunately Buchanan, too, seems to have regarded The Outcast as a mistake and that particular experiment was dropped (though The Devil's Case is a continuation of this Satanic phase).

One of the young Bohemians who admired The Outcast was Richard le Gallienne who, on the Publication of Buchanan's The Wandering Jew: A Christmas Carol in January 1893, sparked off a long controversy in the columns of the Daily Chronicle under the heading "Is Christianity Played Out?" Le Gallienne's answer to that question is to be found in his The Religion of a Literary Man. The controversy caused such an interest in Buchanan's book that the first edition was sold out in two weeks, and a second hastily prepared.

The poem had been begun as long before as 1866, and had been completed some years, but Buchanan superstitiously believed that with it his career as a poet would end. To a degree he was right. He did publish three more volumes of verse after 1893, but they are not brilliant and contain few examples of the talents that once he deployed with the ease of a master. Describing The Wandering Jew,

Buchanan says he was haunted by the vision of "a worn-out Saviour, snowed over with the sorrow of centuries, old, weary, despairing yet indignant at the enormities committed in his name". Buchanan "could not believe in his power to save the world or to discover the God of his promise", but he "did believe in his suffering, in the beauty of his character, in his supremely loving tenderness to human sorrow" (Jay, p. 262). Christ was ever the divine ideal of human behaviour for Buchanan, but the poem intended to show once and for all what man had done in the name of Christ. The gist of the poem was not to arraign Christ for those enormities, but to show Christ's own state of mind eighteen hundred years after he had died to save man.

The form of the poem is simple: a vision within a vision. Buchanan meets the terribly old, worn-out, decrepit Christ in London and is transferred to Golgotha to see His arraignment before legions of witnesses testifying Him to be the root cause of much suffering and evil in the world because of His promises being not yet kept by His Father. The vision of Christ, walking the earth for eighteen hundred years, is pathetic and terrible, as is the judgment passed upon Him in the name of humanity:

'Since thou hast quicken'd what thou canst not kill,
 Awaken'd famine thou canst never still,
 Spoken in madness, prophesied in vain,
 And promised what no thing of clay shall gain,
 Thou shalt abide while all things ebb and flow,
 Wake while the weary sleep, wait until they go,
 And treading paths no human feet have trod
 Search on still vainly for thy Father, God.'

* * * * *

And lo! while all men come and pass away,
The Phantom of the Christ, forlorn and grey,
Haunteth the Earth with desolate footfall

God help the Christ, that Christ may help us all!

(CPW, II, 242)

Buchanan shared with so many of his contemporaries the anguished struggle between the emotions and the intellect. Indeed, as the imagery of the passage from The Wandering Jew quoted above suggests, he veritably hungered for the eternal life of Christ's promise; but the scientific discovery of his time, the great advances made in understanding evolution and the working of natural laws, forced his intellect to be sceptical of such promises. What he wanted to believe and what he could believe presented too big a gap for him ever to bridge satisfactorily. His beliefs were constantly shifting. In his next works, The Devil's Case (1896) and The Ballad of Mary the Mother (1897),¹ Christ becomes the symbol of suffering humanity at war with an indifferent God, and against Nature, while the Devil becomes the unexpected precursor of Christ in his earlier revolt against the supreme Power.

As the last few remarks should show, with Buchanan's poetic maturation his ideas became more controversial and to some extent more interesting. And an early paradoxical objection to his work that he was too much a thinker to be a great poet and too much a poet to be a great thinker begins to assume validity. There was in him this dichotomy disastrous to his art: that his best work

1. His last volume of verse was The New Rome (1899) in which he collected the journal verse of his last decade as a poet, and which contains scarcely anything that might add to his stature as a poet.

was based on his profound understanding of the actual world of real men and women (he claimed in The Outcast to be a psychologic poet, CPW, II, 184), while he later aspired to versify the intellectual and spiritual turmoil of his time. For this he had less aptitude, and too little spiritual consolation to offer in an age when men and women were beginning to turn to poets to satisfy the cravings of the spirit that could no longer be satisfied in the Churches. Buchanan's best verse is that of his early years as a poet (before he came to despise what he could do so well, and aspired to do the difficult not as well), when he took a craftsman's care with it, and when the things he said were not undercut by religious doubt or intellectual indecision. His mystic verse, too, was weakened by the failure of his imagination to give a local habitation and a name to the particulars of his visions. On a lower level, as has been suggested, his sense of form was not strong, and often he had to turn to others' work for help. Also, he went to many poets for their rhythms and subjects, as, too, has been pointed out; there is often in his work an echo from Keats, or a line from Coleridge that blends ill with his own gifts for imagery or rhythm.

These objections are severe, no doubt, but there remains a body of work which would do credit to many poets of a much higher reputation than his.

Buchanan was a true poet¹ and a judicious selection of his works would show a range of subject and treatment of impressive proportions and ability. That he failed to catch the ear of succeeding generations may not be due to his poetry's intrinsic faults, but more to his failings as a man. Undoubtedly, too, the ideas he expressed in his latest works were too radical for his time, but few could cavil at the major theme of poem after poem: that only in selfless love of others (the heart, after all, of the Christian gospel) has man any chance of immortality at all. Buchanan preached unheard to a materialist audience: perhaps the change of values of the last thirty or forty years, might see a resurgence of interest in his poetry.

1. George Moore, who detested him as an individual, once wrote in an article unsympathetic to his dramatic ability that Buchanan was a minor poet, and as a poet "he was beyond all question outpaced by at least five men of his generation" Swinburne, Rossetti, Arnold, Morris, Patmore, "And possibly by Mr. George Meredith." No one would quibble with that judgment, but that such a statement could have been made indicates that even for Moore (who admired some of Buchanan's "charming" poems) Buchanan's reputation at the time was quite high, and makes his subsequent eclipse all the more surprising. "Our Dramatists and their Literature", Fortnightly Review, CCLXXV, November 1, 1889, 622.

CHAPTER THREE

FICTION

When Robert Buchanan first turned to the writing of prose fiction he was still very highly regarded as a poet; and was sufficiently jealous of his reputation not to want to imperil it by publishing anything unworthy of him. In a letter to William Canton concerning a proposed collaboration, he wrote in 1874, "In suggesting this, I bid for something very high indeed; a first-class theme, first-class work, and (I hope) a first-class success" (Jay, p. 183). The Shadow of the Sword was first planned as a verse romance in that year, and was subject to much revision before appearing serially (in The Gentleman's Magazine) throughout 1876. Such care was amply rewarded, for the novel quickly reached four editions, and remained the most popular he ever wrote. Curiously, Buchanan was not encouraged by this success to publish other fiction right away, even though he had been working on A Child of Nature since his sojourn in the Highlands in 1870; and there followed a five-year interval before that novel appeared in 1881. After that year, however, ten novels were published before the close of 1885; when the first phase of his career as a novelist was brought to an end by his success as a playwright.

Why there should have been so large an interval between his first and second novel followed by such activity is not easy to determine. Clearly the very success of The Shadow of the Sword relieved Buchanan of the need

to publish another one immediately. Luckily for him, Richard Bentley, his publisher, did not acquire the novel's copyright, and paid him generous royalties. When, in 1881, Buchanan turned to Andrew Chatto to publish both his verse and fiction, he could then sell him the copyright for another fifty or one hundred pounds. Within a year of The Shadow of the Sword's publication Buchanan returned to England to live, and doubtless part of the money accruing from its success enabled him to begin publishing his own journal of politics and literature, Light, in April 1878. Even its failure six months later did not appear to embarrass Buchanan to the point of making him write fiction to extricate himself from debt. A more likely reason for the complete hiatus in his literary production¹ was his wife's illness, which had partly caused his return from Ireland, and did involve him in costly journeys to physicians in every part of the country. As her cancer deteriorated the extent of his debt forced him to take decisive action. He sold the copyright of The Martyrdom of Madeline for £300 to Andrew Chatto, and that of God and the Man for £250, and in December 1881 he sold him that of his verse for £300.² At this stage in his career these were still large sums and attest to Buchanan's value to a shrewd publisher. Unfortunately for Chatto, Buchanan never again

1. No plays of his were performed between his dramatisation of Harriett Jay's novel The Queen of Connaught in January 1877 and his next play The Nine Days' Queen in December 1880.

2. Letter dated April 23 [1881] and agreement dated December 3, 1881 in the Chatto Papers at the British Library.

attempted a novel along the lines of The Shadow of the Sword, a curious amalgamation of the adventure of historical romance and the message of a "novel with a purpose", which had been just the formula to achieve popular, and critical, acclaim. Rather he turned to writing novels with a purpose which Chatto did not dislike, and to those of ideas of which he did not approve. Chatto's insistence on acquiring the copyright of the fiction he published was Buchanan's best safeguard, besides his amour propre, against writing second-rate fiction; having no direct pecuniary interest in the sales of his novels, once Chatto had bought them, helped to ensure that he followed his own interests more than he might have done. When, in order to raise money quickly, Buchanan did write sensational novels or romances he often sold them to other publishers, as he did with his worst, Stormy Waters, in 1885.

Buchanan's success on the stage did not come as rapidly as that of his verse or fiction, but when it came, with the immensely popular melodrama Alone in London in 1885 his interest in writing novels waned. Writing, and subsequently, producing, plays held out the promise of far greater riches to him than any other literary activity, and for the nine years ending in his bankruptcy in 1894 most of his energy was devoted to the theatre. During those years he produced only six novels, of which two were ~~prose~~^{adapted} versions of his plays, two were little more than long short stories of dubious worth, and only one, The Heir of Linne (1888), a moderately ambitious work. In the six years left to him after the bankruptcy, when

he realised that he was not likely to repeat his earlier stage successes and that his reputation as a man of letters was much tarnished, he took the writing of novels more seriously once again and produced eight, all of which are still quite readable, and of which two or three are remarkably good.

Buchanan was rightly defensive about his career as a novelist and dramatist. He knew that with his more pinchbeck productions in both genres, he, the scourge of Rossetti and many others, was leaving himself open to just those charges of insincerity or slovenliness or even of being a commonplace workman that in the past he had brought with so much indignation to work superior to much of his own. On occasion he was deeply wounded by being reminded of his "backslidings in literature". He recounts one such episode involving Robert Browning only to retaliate by stressing Browning's reliance upon Buchanan's favourable reviews when he had not achieved his later prominence. At the Royal Academy dinner in early 1888, on hearing W.E.H. Lecky, the historian, praising Buchanan's recently published City of Dream, Browning had asked his neighbour "'Of whom is he speaking? Of Buchanan the writer of plays?'" which last "was construed by those who heard it as an expression of ironical contempt" and was duly reported to Buchanan (Jay, pp. 114-5). He was much disturbed by this apparent slur by Browning, who well knew Buchanan's financial straits;¹ three years later he went out of his

1. Buchanan had earlier borrowed money from Browning from time to time. Maisie Ward, Robert Browning and His World: Two Robert Brownings?, p. 101.

way to defend his pot-boiling activities, denying that he had sold his poetic birthright for a mess of pottage and had only gained his "bread by hodman's labour" when it was a case either of that or of "sitting empty-stomached on Parnassus."¹

Altogether, in his efforts to make a living by his pen, Buchanan published at least twenty-eight novels (the term here is taken to include romances and long short stories or tales, as he called them). The exact total cannot be ascertained because two (Alone in London, 1885, and The Wedding Ring, 1891) of that number were published only in America and no copy of them can be found in this country, and because Buchanan may well have published some novels serially without ever issuing them in book form. The problem is further complicated by the fact that he did not write at least two of the novels published in his name, Rachel Dene (1894) and Lady Kilpatrick (1895);² although the latter does contain large amounts of dialogue taken direct from one of his plays,³ when it was originally

1. "Letter Dedicatory". The Outcast, p. 193.

2. The present writer would fain believe that a third, Stormy Waters, written at the same time as the other two, 1884-1885, is also not by him.

3. "I may as well inform you at once that scarcely a line of [the novel] is really from my pen, tho' it is based on a play of mine" Letter to Andrew Chatto, February 8, 1895. Chatto Papers. There is some doubt as to which play Buchanan is here referring, though the present writer is reasonably certain that it is one that was never performed in London, and which was written in collaboration with Aubrey Boucicault, The Squireen: An Irish Drama in Four Acts, of which a typescript copy is in the New York Public Library. It is almost certain that this play was written during Buchanan's visit to America in 1884-5.

published in serial form he did not write it. The mere fact that Buchanan could allow his name to appear as the author of works not his own gives all too sufficient an idea of his attitude to the writing of fiction; and when it is realised that Rachel Dene originally appeared in a provincial newspaper as early as 1884, it can be seen that once he began writing for money in earnest, in 1882 or 1883, he was prepared to hazard his growing reputation as a novelist for a sum of which his share was probably less than £100. Unfortunately for Buchanan, after its initial appearance in the provinces, Lady Kilpatrick was republished in 1893 in The English Illustrated Magazine, the only one of "his" later novels to appear in a journal so accessible to those in the literary world who would have had more than a passing interest in Buchanan, though they might not have bought his novels. Nothing could have been more damaging to his reputation as a man of letters. Lady Kilpatrick (as it then appeared) was the barest skeleton of what a novel should be, consisting of a rather theatrical and totally improbable plot and some very wooden stock characters. For the disinterested observer of Buchanan's work, of which there were still many and some influential, the novel provided a very sorry contrast to the earlier fiction from his pen. It is quite possible that many of those who damned the ignoble pot-boiling of Buchanan's later career as a novelist based their judgment on this one more easily accessible work, which, ironically, Buchanan did not even write.

It is clear from that unpleasant business that

Buchanan, under the pressure of circumstance and possibly only for a short period, could not have taken either his reputation or the writing of novels as seriously as he should have done. Undoubtedly he shared his contemporaries' views that the novel as an art form was much inferior to verse;¹ and during 1884 or early 1885 he must have been under great strain, emotional and financial, possibly because of his mother's illness.² Buchanan was so incensed at Chatto's determination to publish the novels, despite his entreaties to suppress them, that he resolved to set himself up as publisher (see Appendix), declaring in his manifesto that he would publish only his work for which he was seriously asking a hearing.³ It is significant that though he wrote three of his better novels when a publisher he did not issue one of them himself. Undoubtedly Buchanan saw himself as a poet, to which role he attached great significance and responsibility. He wrote verse because he had something to say and the gift to say it better, he felt, than anyone else; he wrote novels solely because he could

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1. It was only in 1880, when Buchanan was just beginning his career as a novelist in earnest, that "Henry Holbeach" (W.B. Rands) writing in the Contemporary Review "could express his amazement at the novel's rapid rise to respectability over the previous twenty years." Kenneth Graham, English Criticism of the Novel, 1865-1900, p. 6.
 2. At some time in the 1880s her death seemed imminent, and what she meant to him is clear in his biography (Jay, pp. 286-289). His visit to America was cut short by his own ill health in early 1885 (Jay, p. 227).
 3. Is Barabbass a Necessity?, p. 23.

not live by his verse, and not because he considered himself a novelist. Perhaps in his sacred function as poet he often did not lavish the care on his verse that he should have done, but compared with the effort he expended on too much of his fiction he was a very careful craftsman indeed. For him novels were a much inferior genre, and he could dash off one of the worst of his shorter ones in a week and sell it for £100. He may well have prostituted his gifts when writing fiction, but he claimed never to have sold out as a poet. In 1896, twenty years after his first success in the genre, and admittedly when trying to minimise the enormity of allowing his name to be used to sell others' work, he wrote (several years after Henry James's similar pronouncement upon the subject),

... it should be borne in mind that the Novel, so called, that is to say, the modern Prose Story, is, of its very nature, formless and inchoate, and hardly belongs to real Art at all.¹

Buchanan never seems to have thought deeply about the novel as an art form; but he was well-read in the best fiction of his time, whether English, American (he admired Hawthorne's style and considered Melville a genius), French or Russian. His own better work, with occasional echoes of Hugo, Dickens or Reade, seems original enough, while his worst, however perfunctory, was always written with a force and vigour which would have carried many readers on to the invariably happy ending. As a novelist, he was quite good at drawing character, especially that of women;

1. Ibid.

his dialogue (as befits a dramatist) was lifelike and economical and he had a deft touch with dialect, of which he was proud; like his friend and master, Reade, he researched keenly in his quest for accuracy; not particularly inventive, in plot complexities he relied heavily on stock situations sometimes enlivened with melodramatic tricks; coincidence, particularly in his inferior work, often figured much too prominently; and even his best work is faulted by carelessness which careful revision should have removed. He rarely experimented in technique, and did not draw on his own experience as often as he might have done for the basis of his novels; it was, however, his preoccupation with relations between the sexes that, in a prurient age, gave his work its wide appeal, throughout the 1880s at least.

Even the most cursory glance at Buchanan's (too often infelicitous) titles for his novels shows his interest in the opposite sex; and when they are read, it transpires that A Child of Nature (1881), Annan Water (1883), Love me for ever (1883), Matt (1885), That Winter Night (1886) and Come live with me and be my love (1891) have women protagonists besides the eight novels whose titles would indicate that to be the case. Buchanan's knowledge of women seems better than that of his own sex; certainly his friends, in the last years of his life, attested to the fact that his knowledge of the world of men was not at all extensive, and that he was trusting and unworldly where many would be suspicious and cynical. Having no brothers, and being the centre of the worlds of his mother, his wife,

and his adopted daughter, Buchanan came to know women better than most men ever do, and this knowledge (until late in his career as a novelist, however, severely restricted by the conventions of the genre) he put to good use.

Buchanan, widely praised long since for his perceptive delineation of female character in his London Poems and North Coast, managed with the first novel he wrote, A Child of Nature, to produce a new kind of heroine, who was much admired by many critics when the novel was finally published in 1881. Mina Macdonald is but one of many children of nature in the novel, and the prototype of several in the rest of Buchanan's fiction. An orphan, as are many of his heroines, brought up by a Gaelic-speaking Highland fisherman and her uncle, a minister, she is a fearless tomboy yet, on occasion, a lady of delicate natural refinement. At one with the elements and the environment, so that in rough weather she can pilot a yacht (in the opening chapter) between the reefs guarding the entrance of Loch Uribol, and sufficiently attuned to the wild life of the Highlands to have a seal come to her call, Mina represents to Buchanan something very close to his ideal woman; natural, unaffected, direct, inherently tactful and wise, intellectual enough to appreciate her uncle's studies of Ossian, and capable of the most profound affection, she is the prototype of the sixteen year old Matt in the novel of that name (1885), who, though lacking Mina's cultural advantages (until the end of the novel) is also a far cry from the Victorian heroine. Mabel in the short Love me for Ever (1883) is closely related to her, as is the heroine of Andromeda (1908) who, like Matt,

has her natural gifts and beauty obscured by her humble circumstances, though she is ready, like all Buchanan's heroines, to sacrifice herself completely in her love for a worthy man. It is the nature of these novels that such qualities are never abused, though, of course, they are threatened (both in Matt and Andromeda by marriage with the girls' guardians). Mina's happiness in the earliest (and best of the three) is only threatened by her social inferiority to the man she loves, and by the fact that he is affianced to his cool and worldly cousin.

This cousin, who atypically for Buchanan, undergoes a transformation in the novel partly marked by her discovery of, and appreciation for, Mina's character, represents the other main feminine type, on which Buchanan plays his variations, to a much lesser extent, throughout his work. Haughty, cold, often a coquette and a flirt amusing herself dangerously at the rugged hero's emotional expense, likely to marry for advantage but never for love (for which she has little capacity), she does not appear so frequently as Mina, probably because Buchanan, a champion of women, did not wish to undermine their cause. A not unsympathetic version of her appears in Diana's Hunting (1895), and in Effie Hetherington (1896) she represents the type of woman who can drift into prostitution, partly because she has no inborn aversion to the life, and partly because its material benefits far outweigh any sense of guilt she may feel.

Elsewhere Buchanan can depict girls who come near to the Victorian heroine. In character, if not in

circumstances, Priscilla Sefton in God and the Man is the most conventional of his heroines, being sweet and feminine, a little bloodless perhaps, but blessed with a sharp wit. Madeline in The Martyrdom of Madeline (1882) has many of Mina's qualities, but she is headstrong and impetuous where Mina's natural modesty and grace would never have let her become prey to a philanderer. On the whole, his heroines are never unreal, and the action resulting from their characters seems unforced and natural; they are invariably one of Buchanan's strengths as a novelist.

A frequent feature of the plot is the seduction by the unprincipled Steerforth figure of a little Em'ly. Buchanan uses his soiled innocent to unveil the villain's true nature, after her misguided loyalty has provided the necessary mystification of the principals, and to demonstrate the hero's magnanimous concern, amid universal condemnation of the "fallen woman", for her welfare. These creatures have Buchanan's sympathy undoubtedly, but only with a few minor ones, and Madeline and Marjorie Annan (of Annan Water) does he bend all his efforts to make them flesh and blood; in many novels their minor role leaves them lifeless cyphers.

The dichotomy between the quick and the dead is more sharply drawn in the male half of his novels' population. Often embattled, cursed by his own instinct for making enemies and for saying things better left (however true) unsaid, Buchanan identified very strongly with the outcasts of his fiction. They too find their prototype in

A Child of Nature, in Mina's brother Graham Macdonald. Dour, strong, inarticulate, deeply emotional, not as sympathetically drawn as his sister but a real individual nevertheless, he can be traced through Charlotte Bronte's Rochester, Emily Bronte's Heathcliff,^{and} the Byronic hero, back to Rousseau. In Buchanan's work Macdonald is clearly the forerunner of Christian Christianson in God and the Man (1881), an uncultured, moody, savage giant of a man, not petty, mean or vindictive, but nonetheless dominated by his desire for revenge. He is Sutherland, muted but a pillar of strength, a Sir Galahad, in The Martyrdom of Madeline, and re-appears three years later in The Master of the Mine; though there, cultured and self-educated, he is a pale shadow of his former self. He is last seen, impressive in middle age, still uncommunicative, ill-mannered, uncouth yet good at heart as Richard Douglas, alive as ever, in Effie Hetherington. It is no coincidence that the novels in which the type appears count among Buchanan's best; clearly he identified deeply with the man, and could allow free expression to his own frustrated emotions.

The cool, selfish, conventional man, often in the early novels the representative of civilisation set as a foil against those representing nature, is not usually one of Buchanan's successes. Perhaps Lord Arranmore in A Child of Nature, who battles between duty and love, and has to conquer his innate feelings of superiority to win Mina, is as close to a living entity as Buchanan gets. But his successors' hold on life is even more tenuous. Richard

Orchardson of God and the Man is a poor combatant for Christianson, and all the aristocratic villains scheming to seduce the village maidens in The Master of the Mine, Stormy Waters, The Heir of Linne (1888) and Woman and the Man (1891) owe much to Buchanan's radical prejudices, which do not allow so much as a hint of empathy to enliven them, and much to creatures like Steerforth. One shining exception to the list is the Reverend Charles Santley of Foxglove Manor (1884) upon whom Buchanan lavishes much care, and who could well be his answer to any critics who denied his ability to create a credible philanderer. Buchanan probably went too far (for R.H. Hutton for one) in his making him a vicar of the Church of England. A handsome man, preaching almost mystical sermons in a most musical voice (thus ensuring the presence of many female worshippers in church of a Sunday), who is complex enough to exude faith despite his doubts, and because of them to hold rigidly to orthodoxy and drive himself mercilessly in his execution of parish duties, he personifies for Buchanan his own dilemma (and that of so many Victorians) between heart and head, his wish to accept the Christian faith which is undercut by his knowledge that the New Testament can no longer be taken as the literal truth concerning its founder.

Buchanan's dialogue, never weak, improved throughout his career. There is a marked contrast between the somewhat stilted and repetitive exchanges in The Shadow of the Sword and God and the Man and those between Horsham and Short in Diana's Hunting, or between the Bohemian artists in Andromeda. Buchanan's experience as a dramatist obviously

taught him how to be expressive in as few words as necessary; and not a little of the later novels' improvement can be attributed to this effective economy.

Buchanan was wise, too, in his sparing use of dialect. Having a gift for languages (besides Danish and Norwegian, he knew German and French, and made comparisons between Irish and Scottish Gaelic), it was only natural that he should use dialect, especially as one of his strengths was his depiction of the lower classes, but as a rule it is not obtrusive; and just once, in his only use of Cockney in Stormy Waters, does it grate, and thereby reinforce the impression that that novel is his worst.¹ Elsewhere he seems to have realised that the most effective method for using dialect is, perhaps, to substitute regional words for commonplace ones, and to restrict phonetic transcription to a minimum. The flavour of a different mode of speech he aimed to catch, and at this he was usually adept.

Fortunately for him, Buchanan began writing novels for a living in the 1880s when a marked reaction had set in against the complex plots of Wilkie Collins,² and when critics looked to the novel more for delineation of character than subtleties in the story, which Buchanan would not have been able to provide. His better novels, either do not use conventional plot devices, or, if they do, hold

1. If indeed, it is by him. It seems to have been based on Buchanan's melodrama "A Sailor and his Lass" which was written in collaboration with Augustus Harris; perhaps its faults can be laid to Harris?

2. Graham, p. 99.

sufficient interest by other means for the reader to accept the creakings of the lumbering machinery which are occasionally audible. One device to which he turns again and again in his need for the necessary reversal to his hero's (or heroine's) fortunes is the false report of someone's death. Invariably does the hero or heroine plan to remarry, only for the dead spouse to appear at a particularly unfortunate moment (though never during the wedding ceremony). In The Heir of Linne the old laird in his will unexpectedly anticipates his creator's penchant for this trick, thereby allowing his Canadian son (whom he had believed drowned at sea for twenty years, and had had no hints during that time that he might not have been) to inherit his property and thus baulk his unprincipled and avaricious nephew. In a review of Woman and the Man (1893), Buchanan was sarcastically praised for his courage at producing another work containing "the inopportune appearance of the wicked husband when the virtuous wife is about to re-marry."¹ It is likely that he was apt to forget that conventions for stage melodrama were more conservative than those of the novel; that situations accepted there were no longer appreciated in purportedly serious fiction (Woman and the Man was a ~~prose~~ ^{fiction} version of his play of the same name). Yet seven years later in Andromeda, the heroine's guardian, whose wife in name she has been for the four years of his absence, returns from his "death" in the Alaska goldfields just in time to prevent her marriage to her artist lover; at this

1. Daily Chronicle, November 25, 1893, p. 3.

point it is difficult to see how Buchanan can extricate himself from these toils and have a happy ending, for Matt Watson, though a rough sailor, is not a bad man. In this predicament Buchanan turns to another of his favourite devices, a natural catastrophe: a ship is wrecked in a storm in the Thames estuary, and Watson dies a hero in helping to save her crew. Other resorts of the popular novelist, rich uncles dying and leaving all their money to their impoverished nephews and nieces, or missing wills miraculously discovered are used where necessary. Buchanan was concerned that Matt, his first essay into such melodramatic fiction, should not be promoted as a serious work; in a letter to his publisher he asked,

How did "Matt" do with you? I have always thought it a mistake not to have issued it in the first place at a low price for the book-stalls. It is so suited for that purpose.¹

A sure sign of his inferior work is the pervasive use of coincidence to be found there. The plot of The Master of the Mine, a novel written in his first phase, hinges upon the fact that the hero, as near to a conventional one as Buchanan ever got, persuades the crew of the lifeboat, of which he is boatswain, of a Cornish village to put to sea in a terrible storm after witnessing the drowning of most of the passengers and crew of a wrecked ship. Whom should he save but his childhood sweetheart now a rich woman returning for the first time in many years to England from Brazil. Not only that but she is also the cousin of the local squire's son and affianced

1. Chatto Papers, June 22 [1885].

to him. If such occurrences, which are frequent in his novels, were part of his view of fate, as those less fortunate ones in Hardy's work demonstrate his belief that it was a perverse and blind force blighting human happiness, even then they would be scarcely creditable. Fiction should not be stranger than truth. Buchanan took such pains to get so much in his work accurate, it is a pity that he did not resolve his plot problems in a more realistic way. It would be whimsical to elevate these fortuitous events into a philosophy of the benevolence of fate, rather than see them as the shifts of a man writing sensation novels to a deadline. Perhaps in this case he felt that the skill deployed in his description of the violent storm provided the power to suspend his reader's disbelief at the less than natural circumstances at the centre of it. Indeed Buchanan did have, as Mrs. Lynn Linton later remarked, "splendid literary force" which was used, according to her, to write "sentimental bunkum"¹ about women; doubtless she would have agreed that he used it to blind the reader to other blemishes in his work when the occasion arose.

His most obvious deficiencies as a novelist stem mainly from his basic attitude to the genre. Even as a poet he did not blot as many lines as he should have done; as a novelist, often writing at breakneck speed to meet the deadlines of serial publication, and sometimes not believing in the value of the work he was doing, he could write stuff which long since has found the oblivion of its deserving. After the first three or four novels, he rarely

1. Daily Telegraph, March 27, 1889, p. 5.

rewrote on a large scale. His method was to write large amounts at a time, trusting the impetus of his creative mood to carry him through to the end; and frequently it carries the reader with it. Unfortunately for him he was not a great enough writer to give absolutely coherent form to his world at the first attempt, nor was he the unrelenting seeker after perfection who reshapes his material until he is satisfied with it. His early novels were carefully constructed with a well-thought-out plot, and with characters devised to contrast each other and to articulate Buchanan's own view of the issues the novel raised. If such forethought had been accompanied by careful revision his name as a novelist would now be remembered; but often in the work of his worst period neither forethought (to any appreciable extent) nor revision were employed, and his early renown as a novelist withered. Buchanan's prolixity and lack of form were little inhibited by the convention of the three volume novel; no one needed less encouragement to spread himself. "Formless and inchoate" the novel in his hands could often become; but his best work does have a shape and unity that give the lie to his statement.

His few successes in the genre provide the measure to his many failures. In only three of his novels, for example, does he, a student and admirer of Browning and a writer of good verse dramatic monologues himself, ever diverge from the conventional omniscient third-person method of narration. As might be expected such divergence produces happy results. During his stay at Oban in the late 1860s he wrote a short story, or "study"

as he called it, "Eiradh of Canna", which he described, quite accurately, in a letter to William Canton in December 1874 as a "masterpiece" (Jay, pp. 186-7). He had published it, by then, in The Land of Lorne (1871), and was to republish it in A Poet's Sketch-Book (1883). It is the history, told with pathos, but not, for once, with one whit of sentimentality, of a Hebridean fisherman's daughter. A sombre tale of economic hardship, of an unfortunate marriage to an itinerant tailor with the gift of words, and of Eiradh's return to Canna to die where she was born, it amply demonstrates Buchanan's gifts as a story-teller, as a perceptive observer of the life of humble fisherman, and as a student of female character. Here Buchanan's lifelong interest in the vulnerability that the feminine capacity for love can bring is first expressed in an artistic way. What gives this firmly realist story its particular effect (the subject and treatment are not unlike those of Synge), is Buchanan's use of a Gaelic-speaking narrator. Thus Buchanan's own propensity for sentimentality is neatly stifled, and his knowledge of Gaelic can make the story read as a direct translation. The story has a simplicity and yet a Celtic colour to it that greatly enhance its effect, and is beyond question one of the best things Buchanan ever wrote. Buchanan turned to a narrator once again with Christianson's account of his crucial sojourn on the Arctic island (in God and the Man), a necessary means to a realistic understanding of his mental processes when undergoing his great change of heart. Only in Father Anthony (1898) did he use it for an entire novel, when he

can depict Irish countryside and customs as they come fresh to the eyes of an English physician, and much effect and truth to life is gained thereby.

Truth to life was, at first, at least, one of Buchanan's main concerns. The anonymous reviewer of God and the Man in The Spectator was particularly impressed by Buchanan's description of the Arctic wilderness in which Christianson and Orchardson are marooned. He found it hard to believe that Buchanan had not had "personal experience of life and scenes in the remote North."¹ Of course Buchanan had not; but he had read accounts of such life and scenes and had enough imagination to put them to very good use. In his correspondence with Andrew Chatto there are several requests for works of reference; one, for two treatises on Cornish dialect, saw fruit in The Master of the Mine. Buchanan was hardly so assiduous in his research as Charles Reade, but he did take some pains to get his facts right, as the novels and his letters testify. The interesting aspect of this quest for accuracy is that Buchanan did not draw as liberally on his own experience as he might have done. Invariably the settings of most of his novels, especially the Highlands of A Child of Nature or the Ireland of Father Anthony, are drawn from actuality, but their action and often their minor characters (the major ones, of course, did come from himself) are more literary than real. Indeed Buchanan always tended to the melodramatic, but when melodrama was

1. 54, December 10, 1881, p. 1574.

set aside and his own experience drawn upon, Buchanan wrote good work. It can be accounted to his credit that it was in his last novels that he began to extend his range, and to drop his naive and stereotyped attitudes in a determined attempt to repeat the deserved successes of his early novels. Of course one aspect of his experience, about which nothing is known, enlivened even his most humble work, and, proves a useful introduction to his less ephemeral fiction.

As David Skilton writes in a recent study of the conventions governing the fiction of Buchanan's time,

The Victorian novelist had to tread a tight-rope of moral and social acceptability. On the one hand he risked offending against very strict but often imprecisely formulated canons of behaviour; on the other hand he might be over cautious, and fall into dullness and consequent popular failure.¹

Buchanan's forceful style could usually protect him from dullness; but his abiding interest in the relations between the sexes, always a highly charged matter which few novelists could ignore (yet fraught with obvious perils), assured him popularity from the beginning. And whereas Rhoda Broughton's depiction of feminine passion was considered "coarse and unmaidenly" and Ouida's downright "wicked", Buchanan was widely praised for the skill and discretion with which he handled the love scenes in The Shadow of the Sword and A Child of Nature. With his third novel, God and the Man, he explored more controversial ground, yet went no further than Dickens had in David

1. Trollope and his Contemporaries, p. 79.

Copperfield; and Orchardson seducing and impregnating Christianson's sister was artistically justified by the consequent heightening of the antagonism between the two men. In his next novel, emboldened by his remarkable success, and conscious of the hypocrisy surrounding the figure of the "fallen woman", he wrote a polemic against the double standard for sexual behaviour. He concludes that this is responsible for that great social evil, prostitution. Men may come to marriage impure, but a defiled woman has practically only one path open to her, that leading downward. Perhaps The Martyrdom of Madeline was a little too naive even for his respectable contemporaries, and to correct its major weaknesses Buchanan wrote three other novels in quick succession. Having failed, he felt, to give central credibility to Madeline's predicament, probably in his wish to avoid giving offence, by not describing the events leading up to her elopement with Gavrolles, in his next novel, Annan Water (1883) he gives a most detailed description of the development of Marjorie Annan's affection for her unscrupulous French fortune-hunter. But the shallow stereotyped character of the villain still flawed his treatment of the topic. In a more ambitious novel, Foxglove Manor (1884), Buchanan not only attempted a deeper study of the philanderer, but went to the lengths of making him a Church of England clergyman. In his next, The New Abelard (1884), again an obvious recasting of a subject which fascinated him, a rector of a country church resigns his living because of his heretical views, and though discovering his first wife

to be unexpectedly alive, bigamously marries the heiress he loves. This was Buchanan's first essay at a fictional treatment of theological issues, but whatever validity that such treatment may have had for his readers must have been undercut by the somewhat tawdry and unreal plot which was its vehicle. Already the carefully planned and deeply felt enquiries into interesting questions of human conduct were being relegated to a secondary position by the more titillating and melodramatic variations on a basic situation. After The New Abelard, Buchanan frankly dropped the writing of serious novels, and, for the next ten years, wrote sentimental melodramas with homely morals but scarcely a provocative idea.

After more than fifteen years of working in close proximity with them on the stage and six years after being told that he wrote "sentimental bunkum" about them, Buchanan finally could, in his last phase, write about women as predators. In Diana's Hunting (1895) the heroine is a beautiful actress who tries to lure the writer of her first success away from his dull but devoted wife, and all but succeeds. Diana Meredith is clearly a New Woman, eccentric and intellectual; rather flighty, but sincere, very attractive, vivacious and in love with the playwright. Apart from one particular feature of the novel which will be discussed later, what makes it one of the best he wrote (even if the ending is not hard to foresee) is the quality of the felt experience that makes up Buchanan's portrayal of the man's dilemma.

In Effie Hetherington there is again a female predator. Effie is not as attractive a character as Diana, and is certainly shallower and more frivolous than she is. Here Buchanan returns with Effie's flirtation with Richard Douglas to a repetition of Ethel Sedley's trifling with Graham Macdonald's affections during a boring (for her) sojourn in the Highlands in A Child of Nature. Both these novels make refreshing reading after the rather conventional attitudes of earlier work, and in the second Buchanan becomes quite daring. Effie, despite her encouragement of Douglas's passion, has been trying to win her best friend's fiancé, not openly like Diana, but by becoming pregnant by him in a vain attempt at emotional blackmail (and thereby producing yet another female foundling). As if to balance such an insight into feminine wiles, Buchanan becomes curiously reticent in his description of them. On the night of Effie's daughter's birth (she turns to Douglas in her crisis, who because of his love for her, takes her in) there is very little overt statement to anticipate such an event; and it is only by close reading that the full extent of Effie's designs on Arthur Lamont becomes apparent. Doubtless even in the later 1890s such reticence was necessary; but it does not spoil the novel, which is one of the best Buchanan ever wrote, marred only by the moral ending, when Effie, seventeen years after her daughter's birth, is discovered as a leader of the Parisian demi-monde, richly be-jewelled and notorious. This is the fate which awaits the coquette who falls; and fearful that

it should be too attractive to his readers, Buchanan has her, guilt-wracked, throw herself in the Seine, on seeing her daughter as she once was, an innocent and lovely girl. This novel, and it gives a measure of Buchanan's growth in his last years, both in his knowledge of the world and his skill in portraying it, asks the question, What sort of woman becomes a prostitute? And is truer to life than almost any of his previous works.

This, the last novel Buchanan wrote in which he does attempt a realistic discussion of sexual matters (his remaining three, though having a love interest have other purposes) contains a curious piece of comfort to the shy Victorian male (it is a description of the man Effie has tried to trap):

Essentially conceited and shallow, he knew little of women. Had he known more, perhaps his adventures with them would have been less fortunate. It is the man of power and insight who, penetrating the sources of female caprice, and reading the female heart like a book, stands aghast at his discoveries, and lets slip each golden chance (p. 56).

Clearly the last half of that statement refers to Buchanan himself; it is unfortunate that he never again examined the "sources of female caprice," and the hint of opportunities and failures in his own love life to be found in the last words is deliciously tantalising.

At least twenty of his novels, albeit trite, melodramatic and sentimental, have lost their contemporary virtue of being lively or forceful. For when he descended into "railway novels" or "shilling shockers" (of which his early paper-bound collection of stories, Storm-beaten, had

been one), he was not animated by a relish for the mode, merely by his idea, misguided almost certainly, of what would sell. So far as can be discovered, it was Buchanan's most ambitious work that succeeded, his least that failed. His cynicism about popular taste was not only misplaced, but it helped to bring about a critical re-assessment of his work which may have discarded some novels worthy of retention. The Spectator opened its review of the really poor "sensation novel", Stormy Waters (Which is bad enough to raise the question of Buchanan's authorship), by writing

We are compelled to say - and we say it with real regret - that as a writer of prose fiction, Mr. Buchanan is not fulfilling the great expectations raised by those singularly powerful and beautiful works, The Shadow of the Sword and God and the Man, or even by such less strong but very charming writing as was to be found in A Child of Nature.

Later in the review Buchanan's novel was declared to be "unworthy of the merest literary hack" and to be so indifference of his reputation "as not to care whether he reaches even the low average of pot-boiling work."¹

It is one of the features of Buchanan's career that he had the early support of several influential men of letters (G.H. Lewes, Hepworth Dixon and R.H. Hutton, not to mention Browning and other men who might never have expressed their appreciation of his work in print, yet privately offered much support). This review

1. 58, May 30 1885, p. 733. The present writer does believe that the Spectator reviews of Buchanan, if not written by Hutton as Robert H. Tener's check-list of identifications indicates (Victorian Periodicals Newsletter, No. 17), represented Hutton's views on his work.

by The Spectator marks the parting of the ways between Buchanan and his last and most influential of those admirers.¹ Seldom, after 1885, did his work receive close attention on a full page or more of the Spectator's valuable space. His eager rush to earn money after his measured efforts to write "first-class work" had thrown into jeopardy his entire career. Hutton's admiration for the three novels mentioned was not misplaced, and no student of Buchanan should overlook their qualities, and those of a few others.

The Shadow of the Sword, planned as early as 1874 (Jay, pp. 183-196), written throughout 1875, and, in the end, often hurriedly produced to meet serial deadlines for publication in The Gentleman's Magazine during 1876, remains one of the best, and the most popular, of any of Buchanan's longer works of fiction. As may be expected it has several flaws, the most obvious being persistent authorial intrusion. This is clearly the fault of the beginner in the genre, especially since Buchanan was writing a polemic against the evils of war and could scarcely, given his dogmatic and forceful personality, be expected to avoid the pitfalls that await one conscious of a captive audience (for the strengths of the novel assured him that). Indeed his intrusion is unnecessary; he had already created his spokesman in the somewhat flawed character of Master Arfoll, an itinerant schoolmaster and preacher considered to be mad and therefore allowed to utter seditious remarks that otherwise might have brought him trouble. By

1. He and Lewes had fallen out over the *Fleshly Controversy*, Jay, pp. 109-110.

making the hero, Rohan Gwenfern, a failed candidate for the priesthood, he too could be engaged in argument with the local priest on the Christian attitude to the wholesale murder war involves. A further shrewd idea was to set the novel in the France of 1813-1816, and to have Gwenfern, absolutely opposed to bloodshed, as an outcast evading the insatiable demands of the conscription required to maintain Napoleon's armies. Thus the average English reader could side with the peasant against the Emperor, thereby allowing Buchanan's potentially dangerous idea of the necessity to resist any evil demands of civil authority a more sympathetic reading than if, say, he had chosen British involvement in the Crimean War as the basis for his message.

This is one of Buchanan's most carefully constructed novels, hence its remarkable success (it was still being reissued fifty years after publication), but there are several other blemishes, besides the constant reminders of the presence of the author, which might explain why it has failed to find readers one hundred years after its conception.

It should be made clear that it is not the authorial intrusions as such that grate upon a modern reader so much as the highflown, often rhetorical, language in which they appear. When Gwenfern, for example, bent on murder looks upon the sleeping figure of the Emperor he turns from his task to be thus addressed by his creator,

Look again at the closed Imperial eyes! See the cold light sleeping deep and pitiless on that face that ruled a world! To those dead eyes, cold as a statue's stony orbs, thou, poor wretch, hast been offered up by a world grown mad like thee. (p. 458).

These intrusions do appear, however, only at crucial points in the plot, much of the day to day narrative is done quite naturally and is thus unspoilt.

There are other signs of the apprentice hand in the work; Buchanan's extensive knowledge of Brittany and its people, which gives his world much vividness and reality, also betrays him into the introduction of elements not necessary for the development of plot or theme, and Gwenfern's falling in with the wreckers on the cliff-top is one example of this. Other than the flooding of the village, which at least, had long been foreshadowed by Buchanan, the only other major fault involves Gwenfern's presence in the same room as the sleeping Napoleon, who, caught in a rainstorm on the eve of Waterloo, happens to shelter in the same farmhouse that Gwenfern has appropriated in his rather crude efforts to assassinate the avatar. This episode is at the end of a long novel, and takes it from romance into melodrama, but it is comparatively minor; and the pacifist Gwenfern even knowing what good would result from his act is, of course, incapable of killing one man.

The novel has several links with his other works and provide it with some of its manifest power. In choosing Celtic Brittany for his setting Buchanan can cast a weird mystical light over much of the action. His people hold superstitions similar to those in the wilds of Scotland and Ireland; prophetic dreams anticipate the action; and the landscape, dotted with many relics of pre-Christian faiths, is evoked with all of the skill that Buchanan had

hitherto deployed only in his verse. Indeed the opening chapters describing the towering Breton coastline, honey-combed with the caves in which Gwenfern manages to stay hidden for so long, are written in marvelously cadenced prose, and are the best in the book.

Another major strength lies in the characters Buchanan has created. With the exception of the second villain (the first, casting a shadow over the entire action, though not, of course, directly involved in the life of the village, being Napoleon), who is rather stereotyped, and who tries hard, by fair means or foul, to win the heroine; all the other main characters are realistically drawn. Even Arfoll, who loathes the tyrant and all that his ambition has done to France and Europe and who has given Gwenfern the idea of resisting him, cannot withstand the personal magnetism of Napoleon when seeing him make his farewells to the Imperial Guard at Fontainebleau in 1814, before leaving for Elba. Another happy touch is to make the retired sergeant who leads the gendarmes in their hunt for Gwenfern a friend of his quarry's father, dutiful to the state, but human, not a fanatical worshipper of Napoleon (this lot falls to the uncle of the hero, a veteran of the Grand Army, thereby complicating family attitudes to Gwenfern a great deal). In fact when defending himself from arrest and execution, Gwenfern inadvertently kills the sergeant by throwing a rock at his attackers, and begins to lose his reason as a result. Buchanan may resort to tricks to prove Gwenfer's manhood but he has the intellectual honesty to show that in such

a conflict no one is unsullied, and no one emerges unscathed. Gwenfern himself, a strapping and handsome young giant in 1813 (not without doubts about the wisdom of his action, and by no means a conventional romantic hero) becomes through the cruel privations suffered in his long persecution a prematurely grey, stooping man, aged far beyond his years, whose wits, only three years later, have not yet returned to him.

According to Buchanan,¹ he wrote A Child of Nature in 1870, yet Harriett Jay's chapter on his "First Ideas of Novel Writing" (pp. 183-196) clearly indicates that in its early drafts the novel was a melodramatic farrago involving bigamy and a perilous survival for the new heir to the earldom of Uribol, of which the first five chapters only had been written² (p. 184). Indeed a comparison between Buchanan's plot outline written in 1874 and his novel of 1881 demonstrates the superiority that mature consideration, careful planning ("fundamental brainwork" said Rossetti in a differing context), and a proper subjugation of his melodramatic vein could effect (and makes his later escapades into that vein understandable). Certainly A Child of Nature is not even a good novel, certainly several of Buchanan's essential weaknesses (not least that for a happy ending for everyone who deserves it, however far probability must be stretched) are here displayed, but, with those reservations made, it remains an interesting

1. Prefatory note to God and the Man, p. iv.

2. The final version had thirty-seven chapters.

and readable piece of work. It is subtitled "A Romance", thus disarming those critics who would look in it for strict probability and truth to life. In a period when such fiction was not common, and which was to have its resurgence in the work of R.L. Stevenson and Rider Haggard, Buchanan was warmly welcomed for his attempt at it. The novel's plot is not strong, but most of the characters are real and express the basic dichotomy of Buchanan's own existence. The uncivilised Highlanders, and the cultured Mina and her uncle are contrasted quite vividly with the cool, worldly and selfish representatives of London society. When describing the natives of Uribol Buchanan's imagination creates living human beings all sharing a capacity for passion, loyalty, strength and self-sacrifice, whereas the landlords and sportsmen visiting the area are cool, conventional, and self-seeking and not (as frequently happens with those with whom Buchanan is incapable of even temporary identification) quite credible. The Highland setting naturally gave him the opportunity to indulge (but not to over-indulge like his friend William Black) in word-painting; thus allowing graphic expression of his own love of the wilderness to heighten the effects of the narrative.

In later years Buchanan cited God and the Man as one of the five or six works upon which he would stake his reputation. Certainly his opinion was shared by many, and it soon became the second most popular novel he ever published. A "romance" like its predecessor, it, too, has too much of an air of contrivance about the basic situation

Buchanan strives to set up. Avowedly descending "to what some critics call the heresy of instruction"¹ it must have been written to answer the question, Under what circumstances could a man be persuaded to forget his hatred for another and even, possibly, come to love him? To this end, after giving Christian Christianson ample reason (including the seduced sister) for hating Richard Orchardson, the two are marooned (not in altogether improbable circumstances) on an island in the Arctic (with the barest means for survival). Soon the spiteful, mean and cowardly Orchardson is at his foe's mercy, but Buchanan's alter ego realises the vanity of revenge, how hollow a victory his killing of Orchardson would represent, and the latter can die reconciled to him. Christianson's change of heart is not sudden, but begins with a mystical sense of God's presence on his first seeing the aurora borealis, and is brought home to him by his instinctive saving of Orchardson's life when attacked by a hungry polar bear. Christianson, a gaunt skeleton of a man almost dead from his privations is rescued in the spring and returns to England, there to marry the Methodist missionary both men had loved.

Again, the work contains admirable descriptions of its English and Arctic setting, Christianson's description of the northern lights being particularly fine:

Then suddenly, as I gazed northward, there appeared spanning the heavens a great broad bow of phosphorescent light; out of this bow began to fall sparkling streams of clearest blood-red fire; and in an instant, shooting up from the horizon, rose flames of all the rainbow's hues, but infinitely brighter, darting up with quivering tongues to meet the flames of the bow - till all the heavens seemed afire (p. 265).

1. Prefatory note, p. iv.

Setting aside the clumsiness of the structure, which Buchanan goes to some lengths to disguise, there should be pointed out the typical carelessness with which the novel was written. In the first chapter, for example, the hero is described as having "lived much of his life in foreign lands", and, it is darkly hinted, even having engaged in trafficking of slaves; but in the Epilogue, by which time it is apparent that the extent of Christianson's foreign travel is the one abortive voyage to North America, Buchanan briefly attributes his prosperity as being due to diligent work in his old neighbourhood in East Anglia! Such carelessness as this is all too prevalent in Buchanan's fiction, and this novel has one or two other scarcely less obvious examples of it.

What makes the story so powerful is the character of Christian Christianson, with which Buchanan does seem to identify particularly strongly. A headstrong, reckless, rebellious individual, not as cerebral as Rohan Gwenfern, surlily nursing his family's resentment at the Orchardsons, yet basically generous and warm-hearted, he does, like those others of this type, seem to be a direct projection of his creator. Not an outcast, like Gwenfern, he is a lonely, taciturn man, and is redeemed, only through his meeting and loving Priscilla Sefton, from life as a boorish countryman. The heroine too, though not like her predecessors, is a believable individual, sweet and gentle, one of the few perfect Christians in Buchanan's work (despite the presence of many clergymen), who is shrewd enough not to be beguiled by Orchardson's advances into a proposed

marriage and who can instinctively bring out the best of Christianson's superficially not very attractive personality.

Quite apart from its polemical purpose of destroying the double standard,¹ which purpose was not appreciated by Buchanan's contemporaries, The Martyrdom of Madeline is interesting because it contains Buchanan's first attempt at drawing the literary London of his own experience. Not subtitled a romance, the novel pillories the new gossip journalism of Edmund Yates and his World and Henry Labouchere and Truth. Buchanan's recent forays into the London theatre enliven a description of Madeline's career as an actress, once she has escaped Gavrolles's clutches, and before she marries her guardian's benefactor; and he can even lampoon the cult of aestheticism through the gushing acceptance by sycophantic critics of Gavrolles's meaningless but beautifully vicious verse on the villain's visit to London. The impetus given by Buchanan's indignation at the sexual hypocrisy of the time helps to make the novel better than his subsequent less worthy treatment of a similar seduction (in Annan Water); and, perhaps, what he later evidently considered to be a flaw in the novel, the inadequate preparation for Madeline's elopement with Gavrolles, is sufficiently explained by the development of her character before she leaves London for the fatal finishing school in Rouen, and by his later extensive study of the Frenchman's duplicity and cunning. There is, as in A Child of Nature, a distinct contrast drawn between all of Madeline's friends, the Dickensian

1. The novel "has for its theme the social conspiracy against Womankind." God and the Man, p. iv.

rustics in Madeline's adoptive family, her Bohemian guardian, her brave champion (Sutherland) and her benevolent City husband, who all have a romantic aura to them, and none of whom, apparently, are as capable of clear thinking as is Gavrolles, whose calculations eventually lead to his doom. Thus what purports to be a serious discussion of the attitudes partly causative of prostitution has a distinct, which by now is characteristic of its author, melodramatic quality (the good emotional or intuitive people being beset by the bad intellectual ones). This too shows a basic fault in the structure of the novel. Although she is the butt of the innuendoes planted by Gavrolles for purposes of blackmail in the gossip journals, Madeline is not so much a martyr to social attitudes (her disapproving sister-in-law dislikes her origins and the taint of her being an actress), as she should have been to exemplify the theme with fidelity, but rather the victim of her extremely sensitive nature's sense of guilt and shame. She runs away from her kind and understanding husband when the slanders are published when, by a discussion with him of her liaison with Gavrolles which her husband already knew in outline, her troubles could have been easily resolved. But Buchanan, bent on portraying his heroine's suffering in the London streets, could not allow so simple a solution, and the drama plays itself out all the way to the happy recognition scene at the institution for reforming prostitutes.

Foxglove Manor (1884) denotes the point in Buchanan's career as a novelist where he began to lose his way; and was the first of his books to be regarded

as offensive, probably because it had no one character which the reader could look to as representing the moral norm, all of the four major ones being flawed to a greater or lesser extent. In his effort to create a credible philanderer Buchanan did succeed. The Reverend Charles Santley is a sensual man whose love of High Church ritual is attributable to his belief that its sights, sounds and smells might enable the soul to be saved through the senses (ever heresy in Buchanan's book), and his emotional attachment to the Anglican faith runs counter to the intellectual convictions gained by a close study of Lyell, Strauss and "the higher rationalism." This lack of intellectual underpinnings for his faith makes him vulnerable, and the novel opens with his unexpected discovery that a former pupil of his, with whom he was deeply in love, has now returned to his new parish as wife of an eminent biologist. The anticipated intellectual clashes between doubting clergyman and agnostic scientist, to the novel's detriment, do not take place. Though the heroine is torn between her love for, and duty towards, her husband on the one hand, and her girlhood passion (sedulously revived by Santley) for the clergyman and her belief in the faith he represents, on the other; and, though Santley is well conceived, the novel, for all Buchanan's efforts, does not quite convince; and he cannot withstand the temptation to have the jealous husband, intending to teach his wife's lover a sharp lesson and give him the fright of his life (which succeeds to the extent of temporarily deranging his mind), elaborately stage her false death through the use of a new anaesthetic,

thereby giving one of his creator's favourite plot devices a new twist. There are some good things in the novel. The development of Santley's passion for Mrs. Haldane is well done indeed; and her predicament, with her marriage to a cool, saturnine man of science is well contrasted with the ardours of Santley's religiosity. But the intellectual possibilities of his character are not, after early promise, very carefully developed, and his affair with his organist culminating in her pregnancy during his courtship of Mrs. Haldane pushes his blackguardly qualities too far, and was considered to be in the worst taste.

Written when Buchanan was composing the first drafts of The City of Dream, that allegory of a latter-day Christian's search for the holy city, The New Abelard (1884), shares something of the poem's form. By the beginning of the novel, Buchanan's most ambitious since God and the Man, Ambrose Bradley has thought through the implications of the scientists and the higher critics, and has come to the conclusion that the miracles of the New Testament never took place, that Christ was not the Son of God made flesh and is to be understood only as the ideal human type, and that the Church of England, like the ruined Mossleigh Abbey of the opening chapter is a relic of the age of faith, as riddled with superstition as the abbey is with creepers, and well out of the way of the progress of modern thought. He has none of Santley's smooth hypocrisy, though much of his unconscious self-deception; and he does have the love of a rich, intelligent, beautiful, trusting and passionate woman. The novel

begins well with Bradley forced to resign his living because of his heretical views, and eventually he is persuaded by his fiancée to let her build a temple near Regent's Park for him to preach to London's intelligentsia. With his consciousness of success and power, his ideas become woolly and confused. Where at first he was aiming to steer between the old dogmas and the new materialism towards a purified and exalted Christian ideal (probably Buchanan's own aspirations), he loses himself in the religion of man, of Positivism. His church, like that of "A City without God" in The City of Dream, is decorated by artists of the aesthetic school (as with, Santley, religious aestheticism becomes central to his creed), with portraits of Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Shelley taking the place of more traditional, and more Christian, figures. Losing his commitment, in his pride at his public eminence, even to his idea of what is the core of Christianity, and becoming aware of how far and how quickly he has gone (at the deathbed of one of his lover's intellectual friends, who, despite her professed agnosticism, has more real faith than he does), he impulsively proposes a bigamous marriage to his lover (though she, of course, does not know of his first one) and they soon marry secretly. The diminution of his faith has produced a corresponding diminution of his moral responsibility. At the outset a man of his values could not have conceived such an act; here, for the first time since his rather cruder treatment of Christianson's change of heart in the Arctic wastes, Buchanan does try to show a gradual alteration in a person's character, though the deterioration is shown to

come (most conventionally) from that person's gradual rejection of Christianity. Having suffered ^grief and bereavement often in his life, Buchanan always thought the test of religion was the measure of its consolation in grief, hence Santley's exposure in the previous novel. Bradley loses his second wife (after the bigamy is exposed) and finding no support in the remnant of his faith turns (having once denounced the "superstition" of belief in Christ's miracles) to spiritualism for solace, but being duped he becomes distraught with despair, and wandering throughout Europe, happens upon Ober-Ammergau at the time of the Passion Play, and half-demented, accepts the play as absolute evidence of the Christian truths it enacts, and dies a happy man. As with nearly all of Buchanan's work there is an air of contrivance about the novel, a feeling that the characters, lifelike though they are, are walking predestined paths. A little too didactic, in its attempts to show the dangers of trimming one's beliefs, the novel lacks the fire of Buchanan's convictions, and its ending, for him, is curiously ambiguous. Was Bradley sane or insane when he saw and accepted the Passion Play? Is Buchanan sincerely suggesting this as a viable means back to Christianity for a man of intelligence or is it merely the final derangement of a dying man that allows Bradley this last comfort? By this time in his life Buchanan was no longer a Christian, and perhaps the conclusion to the novel reflects his own doubts, at any rate it is scarcely satisfying; as, doubtless, it was intended to be.

When, in 1895, Buchanan returned to the novel,

it was after the humiliation of the bankruptcy court and of having cheap pot-boilers fathered on him by his unscrupulous publisher. In the eleven years since The New Abelard had appeared his frantic efforts to stave off disaster had seen the publishing of ten novels ranging from poor to very bad in quality and the performance of thirty-four plays. Diana's Hunting, of that year, provides a welcome demonstration of Buchanan's maturity in his development of feminine character and a portrait, though not an accurate one, of one of the most notable literary men of his day.

The theme of Diana's Hunting is similar to that expressed in verse in "Fides Amantis" at the end of The Outcast in 1891 (CPW, II, 205-206); supreme happiness comes from love, and in aspiring to that goal one must not wilfully bring misery to anyone. Frank Horsham in his involvement with Diana Meredith is inclined to forget the claims of a wife and daughter, and the rewards offered to Horsham should he follow Diana, starring in his play, to America, are depicted with an allure that suggests that Buchanan was alive to such temptations. It appears to be a return to Buchanan's old conflict between heart and head, and part of the novel's suspense derives from the fact that, surely, Horsham will follow his heart and Diana. His response to the actress, which forms the centre of the novel, anticipates D.H. Lawrence in the imagery of sleep applied to man's sexual existence:

Had Diana Meredith not crossed his path, he would doubtless have remained the kindest of husbands and the best of fathers. But like another Endymion, he had been asleep for years, in a sort of waking dream, when suddenly there burst upon him, in full argent loveliness and all the nudity of passion, the young goddess of the Theatre, adored by all who beheld her, yet with eyes only for him. For a time he had lain entranced, hardly conscious of the spell, and looking up in slumbrous fascination; then mastered by her beauty, awakened to life by her musical voice, aware of nothing but her presence, he had felt his dead youth stir again within him, and had reached up his arms to embrace the shining goddess. Even then he might have returned again to the dead calm of ordinary sleep-in-life, while she, like her prototype the imperial votaress, had passed on - "in maiden meditation, fancy free." But wonder of wonders - the goddess had remained! Instead of freezing him with the pride of her virginity, she had answered him with looks and words of burning, passionate love (pp. 208-209).

Horsham does not, of course, succumb to the passion, though throughout the novel there is a very strong emotional undertow, which, in so romantic a writer, would naturally lead the reader to think that the elopement is possible. But no, the novel is really not between heart and head as it proclaims to be throughout its length, but rather a more moral conflict between sexual passion and spiritual love. Love for Buchanan is an effort of will, a refusal to give in to the near-overpowering gusts of passion that anyone may succumb to when encouraged by such a person as Diana Meredith. Not only is she a New Woman, eccentric, bold and free to do what she likes, but she appreciates Horsham's art, which his wife fails to do for all her love of him, and is bewitchingly beautiful. Buchanan certainly risks much in making her so compatible and desirable when compared with the homely unintellectual wife.

As his one aid to Horsham's moral recovery Buchanan

employs the fourth main character in the novel, the art critic Marcus Aurelius Short, who is, as Buchanan's correspondence to him indicates, none other than his conception of George Bernard Shaw. In June 1895 Buchanan wrote,

Dear Mr. Shaw,

In a story about to be published ..., I have made a sort of fancy sketch of a person called G.B. Shaw. When I tell you that I am rather in love with the character, you'll infer that 'tis no unkind caricature; but 'tis down like a child's drawing 'out of my own head', since I have no personal knowledge of you and have only built up the creature as I conceive him Only in one thing does he differ from my conception of you - there is never the least mistake about what he says and means.¹

By September the novel had not yet appeared, and already Buchanan was apprehensive that Shaw would not quite like the portrait, so he sent an advance copy of the novel preceded by a slightly defensive letter:

You will smile perhaps at my saying that "M.A. Short" resembles yourself, but what I meant was that it was a sort of fancy sketch of what G.B.S. might be. The physical attributes you will overlook, for I've no idea of your personality and have only been 'manufacturing' a character. True or false, it touches me very much and I am pleased with you for inspiring it, however remotely.²

By November Shaw had read the novel and had, in his own words, disclaimed resemblance to Short.³ One can see some resemblance in character between the two:

Short was a cynic by temperament, and a journalist by profession. He belonged to what has been called the advanced school; in other words, he was a radical, a realist, and a progressionist of the most

1. Letter dated June 8, 1895. Shaw Papers. British Library.

2. Dated September 8, 1895.

3. On the envelope containing Buchanan's reply (dated November 23, 1895) to Shaw's reaction to the novel Shaw wrote "On my disclaiming resemblance to his Marcus Aurelius Short".

fearless order. His watchword was "thorough," and in the opinion of most people he was thoroughly offensive and thoroughly impossible. He dressed like a bandit, and he talked like one. His criticisms on Art and Literature, published in a morning paper, were the despair of the publishers, the Royal Academy and all right-thinking people; his political speeches, delivered informally and always in favour of the forlornest causes, were the very quintessence of bitterness, sarcasm, and scorn for Society. He had one bugbear, "Respectability"; one detestation, the Ideal; and one contemptuous term, "Formulas," to express his scorn of everything the rest of the world considered sacred. He was, in a word, a literary bandit - and a thoroughly good fellow (pp. 21-22).

As an example of Short's dramatic criticism, Buchanan even prints the entire review of ~~Mr~~ Horsham's play. Already Short though witty, as he often is throughout the novel, is gradually becoming the mouthpiece for Buchanan's own opinions, here on contemporary drama. By the end when Short has attended the death-bed of his utterly dissipated wife, and thereby given Horsham a real insight into the nature of love, he has become a curious amalgamation of Shaw and Buchanan. Shaw's dislike for social formulae like Duty is combined with Buchanan's reverence for Woman: Short saw in Goethe's "Das Ewig-Weibliche the promise and potency of our future social life" (p. 57). At the climax of the novel with Horsham planning to go to America (to go west?), Short preaches Buchanan's never-failing doctrine that Love is the only fact of human existence and tells Horsham that when his wife died he "'was more to her when the end came than even God!'" He continues

"'It's good to be loved like that! It's good to be the rock and stay of someone. But to be useful to no one in the world, and to starve some poor soul that is hungering for one's love, is the real and only Hell!'" (p. 238).

It was this doctrine of love that Shaw disliked so much, and to have it put into the mouth of someone purported to be based on him was too much to bear. Such sentimentality, he declared in his letter to Buchanan, "usually produced by whiskey, more or less," was worthy of Hall Caine, or R.C. Carton, or "poor old" Thackeray, but for the sort of work Shaw had set himself to do a harder heart was necessary.¹

Father Anthony (1898), his last popular success, which had reached eighteen editions within six years of publication, uses an idea Buchanan had first considered in A Marriage by Capture (1896, another brief novel best forgotten), that of the dilemma of the priest who has heard the confession of a man guilty of a criminal act, and who has to stand idly by while another man is arraigned for it. In the later novel the dilemma is greatly deepened by the fact that the priest is brother of a man unjustly arraigned for murder. For the first time in many years, Buchanan uses a narrator for his story, so that the people and country of Ireland can be described by an English physician who comes fresh to them, and who, because of his medical skills, can become deeply involved in the mystery of the murder. At one stage it looks possible that the narrator will fall in love with the fiancée of the imprisoned man, but that direction is never quite taken, and the doctor returns to Wimpole Street refreshed but still single. The novel modestly succeeds where his more ambitious works fail; it

1. Is Barabbas a Necessity?, pp. 24-25. Also in G.B. Shaw, The Collected Letters, 1874-1897, edited by Dan H. Laurence, pp. 584-5.

is all of one piece, with no jarring plot machinery or poor characterisation to mar it. Indeed the rustic Irish doctor, understandably upset at the actions of the English interloper, and a bibulous priest, Father John, are creations worthy of men of higher reputation than himself and Buchanan could, albeit at this level (roughly comparable, and even based on, Conan Doyle's achievement with Mr Holmes), still produce creditable work, which did manage to be popular.

His last ambitious work is The Rev. Annabel Lee (1898), where he takes his reader into the twenty-first century and suggests that with the general prosperity then attained, and with the concomitant natural decay of all religion (whose source, after all, lies in the fear of death and in the sorrows and hardships of this life), only materialism and the worship of man will survive.

Buchanan had read Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward, or 2000-1887, and used his forecast of such technological developments as universal television (or the "phonoscope"), music relayed from ubiquitous loudspeakers, and rapid transit by personal helicopter to give plausibility to his thesis. A happy touch is to have drinking water taken direct from the Thames. Medicine has all but conquered disease, and, except for natural disasters, traffic and other accidents and a few obscure hereditary diseases, death comes only with old age. But it was not with such improvements, technological or scientific that Buchanan was concerned; though they were what reviewers chose to deride.¹

1. Sunday Special, March 27, 1898, p. 2.

Part of his purpose is to warn that such a society can only work through the tyranny of the majority. To keep mankind pure, euthanasia is compulsory for sickly children; and any who grow up mis-shapen are forbidden marriage. Deviants of whatever kind, were if considered threatening to the state, to be eliminated. By Annabel Lee's maturity public trials of such cases never occurred, for the great majority were happy with their "heaven on earth", and for the few not so fortunate the weight of public opinion was sufficient to silence the potential revolutionary. Besides with everyone enjoying prosperity, only very exceptionally was there ever anyone dissatisfied with his condition; poverty, famine, social inequality, and disease had, after all, been ^{eradicated} ~~minimized~~. As Buchanan says only the wretched have ever demanded eternal life, to the strong and happy this world is sufficient, and with wretchedness vastly diminished so too has interest in the after life.

But by a fluke exposure to death (of her ten-year-old brother from meningitis) when a little girl, questions concerning the after life are raised in Annabel Lee's mind, questions that can only be answered for her by a return to a discredited Christianity (she has gained access to old Christian tracts in her local library). As a brilliant undergraduate, she ministers to the suffering and the weak (accident victims and the aged), and discovers among them a hidden yearning for immortality, and for her preaching of the Christian promise of it. At this stage, and still tolerated by the state, she has a discussion with one of the wisest and gentlest of the elders of her community, Auberon

Shelley Espinosa, who justifies his materialist philosophy thus, in the terms of Pater or Wilde,¹

"My dear Miss Lee, to the strong and good existence itself is ample; they do not quarrel with the happiness of the day because they go to sleep at night! The ephemeron of an hour is blest equally, so long as it enjoys life, with the animal or human centenarian, since in reality we only live by moments, and the distinction is merely one of calculation. The present instant is what concerns us, for in it, and it only, we really are" (pp. 110-111).

Achieving more and more success with her preaching, and human enough to appreciate the power and slight notoriety it brings her, Annabel is called before a court to justify her behaviour. She is let go since most present (whose every face is "intellectual and beneficent") feel that she is really only going through a phase long left behind in human progress; though one of her accusers says what she preaches is "sedition of the madhouse, to be suppressed, beneficently yet firmly, like other corruptions and disease" (p. 156). After further evangelising, and a landslide that causes the death of many with riots resulting, she is again called before the elders; and in that confrontation, the underlying principles upon which the state has prospered, essentially the doctrine of Elimination, are laid bare for the apolitical majority; and Annabel is last seen leading a Christian uprising in the heart of London.

A sermon on the text "not by bread alone", The Rev. Annabel Lee, shows Buchanan the political thinker and would-be Christian to be really quite a remarkable man. Although a socialist and from birth firmly wedded to the ideal of the material improvement for the mass of population,

1. "Life is a mauvais quart d'heure made up of exquisite moments." A Woman of No Importance.

Buchanan knew from his own experience whither Godless materialism could lead. His sympathy was ever with the weak and downtrodden, and suffering persecution (as he saw it) in his own life, he was only too aware that universal affluence and man's dislike of the unusual would foster the majority's intolerance of those freaks of accident and human nature that have produced the world's greatest artists and most profound thinkers. He was ever scornful of what man had made of the Christian doctrines, and for what devilry they had been a justification, but, deeply religious, he fervently believed that the essence of Christianity was caritas, and that an "intellectual and beneficent" society without a spiritual core worthier than man's worship of himself could not survive.

Annabel Lee remains an interesting novel because it contains the happy fusion of two essentials of Buchanan's talent: his passionate belief in the validity of what he is saying and the use of his powerful imagination (albeit in this case working on Bellamy's raw material) to create a vivid world populated by credible human beings. It demonstrates the fact that had his energies been channelled more carefully and not dissipated in the myriad distractions associated with working in the theatre he could well have written enduring fiction; as it was he too often indolently slipped into the conventions of popular melodrama which effectively strangled the life out of his less ambitious work in the genre. Ironically enough he did not have the conspicuous success with this pabulum, cynically served up, that he had with his stage melodrama. His best work is that in which he did not pander to base popular tastes,

but expressed his own convictions, and it was with his more ambitious work that he had the greatest sales. Unfortunately for him, he did not draw the obvious conclusion until late in his career, and for too long a time, from 1885 to 1895, he dashed off cheap novels to settle short-term debts, when more effort might have maintained an untarnished reputation and promoted his long-term welfare.

Another aspect of Buchanan's career as a novelist needs brief mention here, though fuller discussion of it will be left to the concluding chapter of this thesis, because it applies to his other literary activities besides the writing of fiction. It is probably true that Buchanan's tendency to sentimental melodrama, even in his best work, betrayed the presence of a commonplace side to his nature that was not so easily discernible in his verse. His almost mystical trust in the holiness of womankind could become the banal platitudes of much Victorian fiction about the little woman; his own hard-won and hard-kept optimism could become cheapened into trite happy endings; and his deep beliefs concerning the sacredness of human love could become coarsened into ordinary commercial love stories. In his best work the ideals are still pristine, but with the carelessness, the cynicism, and the crude sentimentality of his worst even the least perceptive reader could see the weary shifts of a man who had lost touch with the sources of his inspiration. In his prodigious outpouring of plays and novels lies the sad story of the eclipse of a solid reputation and of his failure, painfully apparent in his last poverty-stricken years, when, too late, he struggled manfully to restore his name.

CHAPTER FOUR

CRITICISM

There are two facts to be borne in mind when considering Robert Buchanan as a literary critic. The first is that, in general, he followed a well-articulated aesthetic approach to literature from his earliest forays into criticism to his last. The second fact is that he often seemed incapable of preventing his personal feelings about the author from colouring his remarks upon the works under review.

The second fact should be disposed of before consideration is given to Buchanan's aesthetic theory. The most obvious case of personal animus distorting his criticism is that concerning Swinburne and Rossetti, where animus aplenty is to be found on both sides of the Fleshly Controversy. But there are several other major figures, George Eliot being one, where Buchanan's knowledge of, and distaste for, their personality, seems to have clouded his critical judgment. With Tennyson, however, his warm appreciation of the qualities of the man forced him, though not always, into silence concerning what he considered to be his failures as a poet. And Buchanan's strong admiration for Browning's verse seems to have been somewhat abated as he got to know the poet better, and could not have been encouraged by Browning's disparaging remark in 1888 (see above, p. 79) about Buchanan the writer of Adelphi melodramas. It should be noted that Buchanan's literary acquaintance

was not wide, thus many works could be discussed quite dispassionately; also, his prejudice did not blind him to the merits of William Morris and William Allingham, even when he knew they were friends of D.G. Rossetti; and, for that matter, Buchanan never made his admiration of Swinburne's prosodic gifts a secret. But knowing much of his own criticism was often as greatly concerned with the man as with his work, Buchanan, in his own journal Light, could blandly state that "most criticism is a farce hastily got up either by friends or enemies,"¹ it being almost impossible to find honest criticism (though he considered Ruskin and Mill honest) without some sort of bias. Doubtless this is the cynicism of the disillusioned idealist; but Buchanan, by 1878, had been continuously attacked by Rossetti's supporters and sympathizers for six years, and there can be little doubt that his publications were abused because they were by him (hence, in part, the publication of Saint Abe and White Rose and Red anonymously).²

1. April 27, 1878, p. 108. Twenty years later Buchanan was saying the same thing in an open letter to Marie Corelli in the Sunday Special for May 15, 1898: "I unhesitatingly affirm that four-fifths of all that is publicly printed concerning Books and Men is dictated either by coterie-friendship or coterie-animosity." p.2.

2. Buchanan did have good cause for his cynicism. Quite apart from Rossetti "working the oracle" for his Poems in 1870, there was the case of G.H. Lewes doing the same thing on the publication of George Eliot's The Spanish Gypsy. Lord Houghton confessed to Buchanan that he had written the eulogistic notice of the verse in the Edinburgh Review, while holding the strongest reservations about its poetic merit; all because he had promised Lewes that he would do so. "The Rolling of the Log," Sunday Special, November 26, 1899, p.2.

From his earliest collection of essays to one of his last serious articles, Buchanan's aesthetic theory changed very little indeed. Though seen by many, especially students of Rossetti, to be a typical Victorian hypocrite attacking Rossetti's verse for just those vices that privately he condoned or even encouraged, which regrettably is no great distortion of the truth, Buchanan was no mere Philistine, but a poet and a mystic too; and undoubtedly his later avowals of Rossetti's poetic merit (seen at the time by Rossetti's friends as a miserable concession of defeat forced by the hope of more charitable reviews of his own work in future) were based on a genuine appreciation of Rossetti's aspiration and achievement. It is easy to say of a critic, who, following Shelley and Carlyle, fervently believed that a poet is "a prophet and a propagandist or nothing"¹ and that of "literature alone can it be said that its very breath and being, its essential fons et origo, is ethical; that without ethics ... literature would be non-existent,"² that he represents just those dogmatic assertions of morality usually attributed to Mrs. Grundy. Throughout his life he fought a running battle with the Art for Art's Sake champions of the time, whether Swinburne and (mistakenly) Rossetti in the 1860s and 1870s, or George Moore and George Saintsbury in the 1880s. But Buchanan's approach to literature should not be over-simplified, and he scorned overt

1. The Outcast, p. 191.

2. "The Ethics of Criticism," Contemporary Review, p. 224.

moralizing and didacticism almost as much as any aesthete did.

The opening essay of David Gray, and Other Essays (1868) is called "The Poet or Seer," and, fifteen years later, Buchanan thought sufficiently highly of it still, to use it again, slightly shortened, as the first in ^A~~The~~ Poet's Sketch-Book. This is Buchanan's clearest statement of his critical principles, which he summed up briefly as "The poet sees life newly, assimilates it emotionally, and contrives to utter it musically."¹ Essential to the poet first of all is what Buchanan here, and frequently elsewhere, calls the "Glamour" or the gift of sight deep into the heart of things, "Some side of truth as no others"² have seen it and through it "saying a mystic thing that we have never heard before".³ Without this ability to see, a man is no poet, merely a versifier aping the methods and matter of his betters; though, clearly the poet should know what has been done before him and assimilate it, before mapping out his own vision. By his new insight into the materials of life the poet "spiritualizes" them, gives them a new

1. David Gray, p. 3. "Contrives" seems an unfortunate word to use in this context, since it was Rossetti's straining after poetic effect that Buchanan disliked so much; in his explanation of the poet's music, with his insistence on the genuine and the sincere utterance of the poet's emotions, he virtually declares that the emotions of the poet dictate the music in which they are uttered - 'contrivance' does not enter into it.

2. Ibid., p. 10.

3. Ibid., p. 12.

significance and meaning to which the reader had hitherto been blind. Insight is a gift not, of course, limited to poets; Dickens is one of the first contemporary writers to display it on a large scale. It is the reader's appreciation of the artist's insights on the profoundest level, soul speaking to soul, that brings with it the pleasure that all literature should bring. Pleasure for the sake of pleasure, art for the sake of art, is not literature but entertainment - a much less worthy and commoner achievement. Not overt sermonizing or didacticism is the poet's way, but the revelation of some new patterns in the universe, whether a Shakespeare seeing divinity in the diversity of human character or a Wordsworth seeing it in the mountains and the rivers of the English landscape. The poet is a sacer vates, a "prophet and a seer," communicating his vision to the less gifted sitting at his feet.

The seer only becomes a poet, however, if his emotion is sufficiently strong to coerce his intellect into expressing his vision. Too many writers reverse the process and their intellect tries to coerce emotion - the result is prose not poetry. The easiest emotion to assess is that of the lyric poet whose cry is "so sharp, so rapid, so genuine" that it can never fail to find an echo in our hearts.¹ This echo became the crucial part of Buchanan's criticism of Rossetti and

1. Ibid., p. 22.

Swinburne. After Wordsworth, Leigh Hunt, Mill, Carlyle, Ruskin, Lewes and Arnold (the essential condition for "supreme poetic success" being "the high seriousness which comes from absolute sincerity"¹) had each made their conception of sincerity central to their literary criticism, Buchanan used his to damn Rossetti's sonnets, which struck no echo in his heart at all. The trouble with making sincerity so important in one's aesthetics is that with so impressionistic a guide one can easily be led astray. Writing of the poetical treatment of a subject beyond the critic's experience, which by Buchanan's definition should occur frequently when reading a poet's rather than a poetaster's work, the critic can only say "This rings true" or the opposite. For Buchanan, Rossetti's poetry rang very false indeed. Real emotion, whether lyrical or the "emotional meditation" of Wordsworth, underlay all poetry, and it was the critic's role to respond to it, and communicate his response to his readers; spurious emotionalism was to be exposed for the sham it was.

Poetry, Buchanan never tired of saying, is the "soul's perfect speech"; when the poet's vision has been true, his emotional response to what he has seen is genuine, then the resulting utterance however expressed is poetry. False harmony, to begin at the other end, betrayed a falseness of vision or falseness of heart: "a cold or forced expression" indicating insincerity. Ornate poetry,

1. "The Study of Poetry" Essays in Criticism, Second Series, p. 36.

and this was to be Buchanan's main charge against Rossetti, sacrifices emotion and meaning to expression and betrays "a dangerous intellectual self-consciousness" which raises a barrier to the production of true poetry. "A thing cannot be uttered too briefly and simply if it is to reach the soul." Sweet and melodious sound, concealing instead of expressing thought, is not poetry - just as the sweet sounds in nature are not poetry unless they are used as "symbols of definite form and meaning."¹ This brief exposition of Buchanan's aesthetic creed leaves little wonder that he could attack Swinburne and Rossetti as sharply as he did; Poems and Ballads and Poems contain very little that would impress Buchanan with its simplicity or its sincerity.

This artistic theory was as much a guide for Buchanan the aspiring poet as it was for Buchanan the scourge of the poetasters. Also, as might be expected from Buchanan, in practice it was much modified. In effect his insistence on truthful vision meant that the poet should concern himself with contemporary issues, the widespread loss of faith being a prime one, rather than look back longingly to times when sure faith was unshaken.

And, as has already been said, Buchanan's distrust of technical virtuosity meant the denial of his own skill as a poet, and a failure to develop lyric gifts that his early work (especially Undertones, his earliest)

1. Ibid., p. 47.

showed in such profusion.

The Fleshly Controversy

Robert Buchanan took his first tilt at Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites in his novelette "Lady Letitia's Lilliput Hand," which was serialized in Temple Bar in the first four months of 1862. Since there is no record of Rossetti's reaction, it may be assumed that Buchanan's mild satire of a Pre-Raphaelite painter went unnoticed; and the portrait bears more resemblance to Millais than it does to Rossetti:

Unfortunately for his devotion to art, he had too much pocket money, and could do as he pleased. His friends were rich people, and he had money: indeed he had first studied art simply as an amateur, and it was only after a hard fight that he was allowed to become a professional artist, a "trade" which his friends considered extremely low.¹

Rossetti was mourning the death of his wife Elizabeth (February 1862) and would have paid little attention to what was, after all, one of the many petty gibes that he and his friends had had to endure. It is general, fashionable, and incidental, not being at all central to the fiction in which it is found.

The first reference to Buchanan by any of the Rossetti circle is that by Swinburne in a letter to W.M. Rossetti dated January 4, 1866. In it Swinburne tells of his own work in preparing his edition of Byron for

1. David Gray, Buchanan's close friend, had died in December 1861, so for Buchanan if for no one else, this description of the leisured rich would have had very bitter overtones. Temple Bar, March 1862, p. 555.

the Moxon Miniature Poets series, and continues:

An illustrious Scotch person by the name of Buchanan has done, it seems, a like office for Keats, and received £10 in return. This sum the publisher is willing to lose, and to cancel the poor devil's work, if I will do Keats instead on those terms: and won't I? and wouldn't I gratis? This forthcoming Scotch edition of Keats, who hated the Scotch as much as I do ... has long been a thorn in my side: and apart from the delight of trampling on a Scotch Poetaster, I shall greatly enjoy bringing out a perfect edition of Keats¹

Swinburne's edition of Keats never appeared, nor did Buchanan's; but Swinburne did go to some lengths to ensure that Buchanan would not think that the publisher's decision to cancel his work had been engineered by Swinburne.² It is fitting that the strongest feeling shown throughout the controversy should invariably have been Swinburne's, for he it was who waged the most warfare, clearly enjoying the prospect of "trampling on a Scotch Poetaster." His delight in invective answered Buchanan's penchant for moral polemic; had there been no Swinburne, there would have been little response from the Rossetti brothers to goad Buchanan into fury. Swinburne's description of Buchanan suggests that he had been acquainted with his name and work for some time,³ but implies that W.M. Rossetti might not have heard of him. This was not the

1. The Swinburne Letters, Cecil Y. Lang, ed., letter No. 95.

2. Ibid., No. 96.

3. Swinburne and the Rossettis frequently went to Dr. Westland Marston's Saturday evening dinners, and so did Buchanan. But there is no evidence that Swinburne and Buchanan ever met, though both were friendly with Richard Monckton Milnes, later Lord Houghton, whom Buchanan blamed for Swinburne's love of the erotic, as displayed in Poems and Ballads (Houghton's library of erotica was considered the best in Europe). W.M. Rossetti much later denied ever having seen Buchanan, let alone meeting him. Some Reminiscences, II, p. 525.

case. It is a curious irony that it should be a Rossetti, and more ironic that it should not be the much more volatile Dante Gabriel, but the staid, respectable, unemotional William Michael, who replied:

I confess a peculiar abhorrence of Buchanan, and satisfaction that his Caledonian faeces are not to bedaub the corpse of Keats.¹

It is interesting, too, that it should also be W.M. Rossetti who here established the scatological nature of the exchanges that were to take place between the Rossettis, Swinburne and ~~their~~ intimates over the next ten years. D.G. Rossetti's comment to Swinburne is more restrained than his brother's, but the opinion of Buchanan's critical abilities is the same:

... the puddling of Keats with Buchanan is a fearful thought. In fact it is very seriously to be regretted as a good selection of Keats was needed.²

That these feelings were mutual was to be only too amply demonstrated in the next few years; and if T. Earle Welby is to be believed, Buchanan "was looking for opportunities for reprisal" as a result of the cancelling of his edition of Keats.³

With its sensuality, paganism, and blasphemy,

1. Georges Lafourcade, Swinburne's Hyperion and other Poems, fn. pp. 30-1.

2. Oswald Doughty and J.R. Wahl eds., Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, letter No. 663.

3. Back Numbers, p. 153. What Welby overlooks is the fact that Buchanan might never have known of these private opinions concerning himself, or of Swinburne's possibly replacing him as editor of Keats.

Swinburne's Poems and Ballads burst upon the placid Victorian literary scene in the late summer of 1866. The notoriety of such poems as "Anactoria", "Dolores", or "Faustine" was heightened by the knowledge that Swinburne had been compelled to withdraw his work from Moxon's (and, quite possibly, thereby leave the projected Keats) and have it republished by the disreputable John Camden Hotten. John Morley's sincere outrage at Poems and Ballads, recorded in the Saturday Review (August 4, 1866), was matched by Buchanan's own slightly less sincere diatribe in the Athenaeum (August 4, 1866). Buchanan, four years Swinburne's junior, adopted a patronizing tone calculated to reflect very faithfully the sense of moral shock that many must have felt on first reading Poems and Ballads. Attributing Swinburne's excesses to the faults of youth, and, it must be noted, possible "evil advisers", Buchanan chastises him for being "deliberately and impertinently insincere as an artist," ever the cardinal sin in the Scot's aesthetics. The poems "are unclean, with little power; and mere uncleanness repulses. Here in fact we have Gito, seated in the tub of Diogenes, conscious of the filth and whining at the stars " (p.137). Swinburne's letters record his "quasi-venereal enjoyment" of such abuse, with its implications concerning Swinburne's supposed homosexual proclivities; and its display, always a hallmark of Buchanan's invective of this period, of a good knowledge of the more salacious parts of western literature.

Not content with this onslaught on Swinburne,

which is certainly directed at the man as much as at his work, Buchanan betrayed for those who penetrated the identity of "Caliban" further animosity towards the poet in "The Session of the Poets" published over that pseudonym in the *Spectator* six weeks later. Having hinted in the *Athenaeum* at one of Swinburne's reputed weaknesses here he lampooned his weakness for drink, using the poet's favourite anapests (see above pp.5-6, where the appropriate stanzas are given).

Buchanan described himself in the poem as "looking moony, conceited, and narrow"; his vanity could never exclude him from a list of the major contemporary poets, and his prudence might have seen this as a useful disguise. Caliban's identity was soon established,¹ as was that of the reviewer in the *Athenaeum*.²

Having been attacked by men of some stature, and always relishing controversy, Swinburne published Notes on Poems and Reviews in early November, 1866. Calling his times "an age of hypocrites," claiming his poetry to be genuine and sincere, he peppered his reply to his critics with many incidental gibes, the best being his gratuitous, and funny, description of "Faustine" as being the "reverie of a man gazing on the bitter and vicious loveliness of a face as common and as cheap as

1. C.K. Hyder, Swinburne's Literary Career and Fame, p. 95.

2. Swinburne referring to Buchanan's review of Notes on Poems and Reviews mentioned seeing "R.B. the second in the *Asinaeum*" in a letter to W.M. Rossetti, dated November 12, 1866, Lang, 163.

the morality of reviewers"¹ He also referred to the "hoarser choir" of idyl-writing imitators of Tennyson (to which Buchanan replied later):

We have idyls good and bad, ugly and pretty; idyls of the farm and mill; idyls of the dining-room and the deanery; idyls of the gutter and the gibbet. If the Muse of the moment will not feast with "gigmen" and their wives, she must mourn with costermongers and their trulls.²

Buchanan replied, relatively serenely, in a review of Swinburne's defence, and ended by hoping to see Swinburne winning

that public testimony of universal esteem which is always ready to be awarded as the crown of the pure, the sincere and the inspired poet.³

On this positive note, the running battle might well have ended, were it not that William Rossetti published his defence of Swinburne's Poems and Ballads: A Criticism, which began:

The advent of a new poet is sure to cause a commotion of one kind or another; and it would be hard were this otherwise in times like ours, when the advent of even so poor and pretentious a poetaster as a Robert Buchanan stirs storms in teapots.⁴

Rossetti later justified this unfortunate remark as being written in answer to ~~this~~ ^{the} "Session of the Poets", which

1. Notes on Poems and Reviews, p. 15.

2. Ibid., p. 22.

3. Athenaeum, November 3, 1866, p. 565.

4. p. 7. The allusion, as is that in Swinburne's reference to "costermongers and their trulls" becoming the subject of idyls, is to the success of Buchanan's London Poems, published that year.

"rumour ... ascribed to Mr. Buchanan." When discussing the controversy thirty years later, Buchanan declared that from the instant he read that remark he considered himself free to "strike at the whole coterie."² At this time too, Buchanan heard that he was the butt of the gossip of the Rossetti-Swinburne circle.³

The next blow in the bitter feud now developing seems to have been struck by Swinburne (though it is quite possible that Buchanan also struck some in unsigned newspaper articles or reviews) in his review of "Mr. Arnold's New Poems" a year later; and it hit Buchanan particularly hard. Referring to Wordsworth's doctrines that poetic inspiration was more important to a poet than the mastery of poetic technique, Swinburne, the poetic technician par excellence, wrote

There is no such thing as a dumb poet or a handless painter. The essence of an artist is that he should be articulate. It is mere impudence of weakness to arrogate the name of poet or painter with no other claim than a susceptible and impressionable sense of outward or inward beauty, producing an impotent desire to paint or sing. The poets that are made by nature are not many; and whatever "vision" an aspirant may possess, he has not the "divine faculty" if he cannot use his vision to any poetic purpose. There is no cant more pernicious to such as these; more wearisome to all

¹ *Some Reminiscences*, p. 523

² "The Rolling of the Log," Sunday Special, November 26, 1899, p. 2. Note that his justification for attacking the coterie, even thirty years later, is because they had formed a circle of mutual admiration. Even then Buchanan did not know that it was fear of his attack alone that had caused Rossetti to "work the oracle" in the first place.

³ Jay, p. 159. Swinburne's and Rossetti's letters are full of excretory and execratory references to Buchanan.

other men, than that which asserts the reverse
 Such talk as this of Wordsworth's is the
 poison of poor souls like David Gray.¹

Unnecessarily unkind remarks like this, must have caused Buchanan to think that his enemies were going well out of their way to taunt him, and few men have been more easily baited than the irascible Buchanan. A fitting, and sufficient, riposte appeared four years later in Buchanan's footnote to a review of another Scottish poet struck down in his youth:

Mr. Algernon Charles Swinburne, author of "Atalanta in Calydon", went some years ago far out of his way to call David Gray a "dumb poet" - meaning by that a person of great poetical feeling, but no adequate powers of expression. So many excellent critics have resented both his impertience and the unfeeling language in which it was expressed, that Mr. Swinburne is doubtless ashamed enough of his words by this time When Mr. Swinburne and the school he follows are consigned to the limbo of affettuosos, David Gray's dying sonnets will be part of the literature of humanity.²

A year later, in a very revealing letter to Robert Browning, which gives Buchanan's justification for his attack on Rossetti, but which shows just how deeply vengeful he was, he wrote

In the whole morale of the affair I will only plead guilty to one instinct of recrimination. When these men, not content with outraging literature, violated the memory of the poor boy who went home from me twelve years ago to die, I made a religious vow to have no mercy;

1. Fortnightly Review, October 1, 1867, p. 428. When Swinburne republished this essay in Essays and Studies (1875) the reference to David Gray was amplified by a footnote, which, in 1899, Buchanan erroneously designated as the first cause of his personal animosity towards Swinburne.

2. "George Heath, the Moorland Poet", Good Words, March 1871, p. 175.

and I have had none. Thus far I have been revengeful. The main cause is nevertheless righteous and good.¹

Buchanan was just the man to fight another's cause even more fiercely than he might fight his own; he was also quite capable of elaborating a rationale for behaviour and attitudes which were quite irrational. The deep wound to his ego caused by W.M. Rossetti's calling him a poetaster was forgotten in his fervour to protect David Gray's name from Swinburne's slander.

In February 1868, Buchanan published David Gray, and Other Essays, and in the "First Word" he wrote of the Gray's "exquisite music ... too low and tender to attract crowds, or to entice coteries delighted with the scream of the whipper-snapper",² a reasonably clear allusion to Swinburne and the Rossettis. Later Buchanan refers to Swinburne's remarks in Notes on Poems and Reviews, where he (probably rightly) assumes that he was the target of the phrases he quotes:

A gifted young contemporary, who seems fond of throwing stones in my direction, fiercely upbraids me for writing "Idyls of the gallows and the gutter," and singing songs of "coster-mongers and their trulls."³

Since Buchanan is here attempting to establish his point that any subject could be suitable for poetic treatment, and since it suited him to distort Swinburne's comments

1. T.J. Wise, A Swinburne Library, p. 69.

2. David Gray, p. vi.

3. Ibid., p. 291.

on the imitators of Tennyson's manner to read as a criticism of his choice of matter, his remarks are here necessarily curtailed. However they do establish beyond doubt, the fact that Buchanan at least, and almost certainly Swinburne too, felt that a running battle was well engaged. There seems to have been a lull, however,¹ for two years before Buchanan struck.

W.M. Rossetti's Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley appeared in January 1870, and received at the hands of the anonymous reviewer in the Athenaeum a particularly severe appraisal. Buchanan, of course, it was, bent on making Shelley's editor look as complete a fool as possible, who declared that Rossetti lacked the necessary "impartiality and discrimination" to be a good biographer, and the necessary "taste both in conception and phraseology" and the necessary critical acumen to be a good editor. He deplores the textual corrections made, which, for lack of authentic manuscripts "must be purely conjectural;" having declared that Rossetti had mistaken his vocation, he ended a long review by saying that the edition would only be of value to future editors of Shelley and for "readers fond of textual criticism".² To all appearance it is not an unjust review, if unnecessarily personal in tone. However, Rossetti, a week later,

1. Only broken in January, 1869 when Swinburne wrote a very polite letter to Buchanan deploring his inability to attend a poetry reading by the Scot on the following day. Lang, 286A.

2. Atheneum, January 29, 1870, p. 156.

complained to the editor that readers of the review might have received the impression that wholesale textual emendations had been made; such was not the case.¹ Given the opportunity to reply to Rossetti's objections, Buchanan was not the man to miss the chance to restate them, and in doing so he more clearly showed the animus behind them. Using language reminiscent of Rossetti's "so poor and pretentious a poetaster" of three years before, and thus revealing the root cause of his malignity, Buchanan wrote that it was Rossetti's "pretension as a critical commentator" that had been considered, and

We thought we had distinctly expressed our opinion that a conjectural revision of Shelley's poems must be untrustworthy for want of MSS. and of a sufficient criterion; that the corrections introduced into Mr. Rossetti's text are not always convincing; and that many of those which he suggests but does not incorporate in the text are such as to raise grave doubts of his capabilities as a critic of poetry.²

It is probably that it was this rough handling that prompted Rossetti to urge his brother to ignore Buchanan's criticisms of his poetry eighteen months later. It is also quite probable that it was this exchange that terminated Buchanan's long association with the Athenaeum, with the editor unwilling to let his prestigious journal become the battleground for such petty and regrettable literary squabbles. A more important effect of Buchanan's virulent reply was to alarm Dante Gabriel Rossetti, then just about to publish his own poetry in book form for the first time

1. Athenaeum, February 5, 1870, p. 198.

2. Ibid., p. 198.

(at the age of forty-two). It is small wonder that he should be apprehensive about what Buchanan would do to him. The unfortunate part of it all is that he had no doubt whatsoever that Buchanan would attack him:

By the bye, I expect the B - B - Buchanan to be down upon me in the Athenaeum /he wrote to Swinburne a week later/, and am anxious to time my appearance when it seems likely that friends can speak up almost at once and so catch the obscene organ of his speech at the very moment when it is hitched up for an utterance, and perhaps compel the brain of which it is also the seat, to reconsider its views and chances.¹

In a letter to his publisher, F.S. Ellis, written the same day (February 14, 1870), Rossetti repeated himself practically word for word hoping "to keep spite at bay ... if a few good men were in the field at the outset."²

Thus Rossetti's famous "working of the oracle" in the spring of 1870 was due solely to fear of Buchanan, and not, as is sometimes said, to the natural timidity of the poet who had taken this long to find the courage to publish (or of the painter who never did allow the public exhibition of his works). Ironically this gave Buchanan another stick with which to beat Rossetti. How Rossetti knew that the harsh review of his brother's Shelley was not the end to the feud is not to be guessed, but certainly Buchanan's desire to stifle the source of the new school of poetry was no secret, and such an ambition had

1. Doughty Wahl, 923.

2. Doughty Wahl, 924.

reached the ears of Rossetti.¹ It is also quite possible that Rossetti's overwrought imagination saw potential enemies under every bush, and at this time Buchanan had no intention of reviewing Poems. The fact that he did review it, very harshly, some time after its publication (when Rossetti might have imagined himself to have achieved unthought of success relatively unscathed) must have added considerably to Rossetti's paranoid conviction, not that it was correct, that he was the victim of a ruthless and stealthy enemy who had waited eighteen months before beginning his harrassment.

It was, then, the desire to drown out Buchanan's anticipated spite that prompted the "chorus of eulogy" (Buchanan's phrase) which began, a little precipitately as Rossetti feared it would, with Sidney Colvin's review in the Pall Mall Gazette of April 21, 1870, four days before Poems was published by Ellis. Colvin reviewed the work again, twice, in the Westminster Review; and ranged ready were Swinburne in the Fortnightly Review; Morris (somewhat reluctant) in the Academy, John Skelton in Fraser's Magazine; Joseph Knight in the Globe, the

1. There is Rossetti's letter to Tennyson on the publication of Poems and Ballads, where he denies that he was the source "of the qualities" in Swinburne's poetry which displeased Tennyson, and goes on to assert "that no one has more strenuously combated" "the wayward exercise" of Swinburne's genius than himself. Doughty Wahl, 693.

In his biography of Richard Monckton Milnes, James Pope-Hennessy quotes a letter of Buchanan's to Milnes, dated April 1871, where the Scot deplores "the 'vile set' which Swinburne had 'got among': 'slaves who flatter and pollute him,' wrote Buchanan of the P.R.B., 'mean crawlers on the skirts of literature.'" Monckton Milnes: The Flight of Youth, fn., p. 153.

Sunday Times, and the Graphic; Dr. Gordon Hake in the New Monthly; and H.B. Forman in Tinsley's Magazine. William Bell Scott failed to secure the North British Review, but G.A. Simcox was reported to be sympathetic. The Athenaeum, Buchanan's pitch, caused some concern until it was discovered that Westland Marston would review Poems. In North America, even, E.C. Stedman was enlisted in Putman's. There were such obvious loopholes as the Spectator, the Quarterly, Blackwoods, the Saturday Review and the Contemporary Review, but Rossetti wanted to ensure a predominantly favourable reception for his work, and in this he succeeded.

Of course, even by his friends Rossetti's difficulties as a poet were often not minimised, but the Spectator anticipated Buchanan, very mildly, by asking "whether or not there be not too much art in proportion to the intensity of feeling" in Rossetti's work.¹ Indeed Rossetti's affectation, his otherworldliness, his "clean indecency . . . , a sort of deliberately hovering between nudity and nakedness"² not to say sensuousness, his lack of thought or imagination all were castigated before Buchanan repeated the charges.

Evelyn Waugh rather ambiguously states that it was Rossetti's "prolonged connection" with the "coarse and soulless" Fanny Cornforth that "gave colour to the attacks levelled against him by Robert Buchanan in 1871."³

1. Spectator, June 11, 1870, p. 131.

2. The Nation, July 14, 1870, p. 29.

3. "Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Centenary Criticism," Fortnightly Review, May 1928, p. 602.

Buchanan may have envied Rossetti's rumoured sexual successes,¹ though in the Fleshly School of Poetry (hereafter referred to as the pamphlet) he denied all personal knowledge of Rossetti and could "quite believe that in private life he is a most exemplary person,"² which last remark does seem ironic, and must have appeared so to Rossetti. Whatever other ulterior motive Buchanan may have had, he certainly considered Rossetti as the leader of a new and unhealthy school of English poetry, and he certainly aimed at making his poetic advent just as tempestuous as William Rossetti had said Buchanan's was with London Poems. To this end he attacked Rossetti's artificiality and insincerity on five different occasions; and, it is believed, also wrote "Coterie Glory", "Fleshing the Fleshly," and even, "Mr. Buchanan and the Fleshly Poets." Also, and Buchanan's was not a simple character, his biographer says that part of his motive for the attack was his yielding "to the temptation to be smart and funny at the expense of a clique whose antics were, to his thinking at least, highly absurd".³ Just before the pamphlet appeared in April 1872, and using a pseudonym known to his assailants, he wrote that "sensualists and spooneys

1. The liaison with Janey Morris was quite open. In fact Buchanan's notice in the October 1871 Contemporary Review appeared within days of Rossetti's return from his idyllic summer spent at Kelmscott with Mrs. Morris, possibly the last really happy period of his life.

2. The Fleshly School of Poetry, and Other Phenomena of the Day, p. 67.

3. Jay, p. 159.

are not so common as some critics persist in telling us."¹ Here is Buchanan minimizing Rossetti's influence assuredly, but also mocking his own criticism, possibly because, with the pamphlet through the press, he was beginning to regret, as well he might, his role in the affair.

Playful or not, misunderstood or not, Buchanan's malicious intent cannot be denied. Once it is affirmed, however, the whole criticism is thrown into question. When so tenuous and impressionist a principle as "sincerity of vision" is made the touchstone of one's aesthetics, it is only too easy to find a deficiency of this essential in the poetry of those one dislikes. After allowance is made for Buchanan's animus (which was not envy, whatever else it was), and it invests every accusation of falsity, hypocrisy, and insincerity with which these attacks abound, it remains to his credit that they were not invalidated by spite. For many Rossetti remains a fraud,² and the question of Rossetti's sensuality is one with which all of his students have to come to terms.

It is entirely likely, as has been noted, that Rossetti had heard rumours that Buchanan considered him to be the source of a dangerous new development in English poetry (in the pamphlet he refers to Rossetti as the "formally recognized ... head of the school"³) and that any

1. "Walter Hutcheson." "Criticism as one of the Fine Arts", Saint Paul's Magazine, April 1872, p. 389.

2. The most recent, and outspoken, being Geoffrey Grigson in his review of Professor Doughty's Life of Rossetti in Encounter, XVII, November 1961, 68 - 72.

3. p. 31.

attacks on Swinburne and W.M. Rossetti were but minor skirmishes before a full-blooded assault on the enemy's too vulnerable centre. An early testing might have been the anonymous review of Poems, which is ascribed to Buchanan,¹ that appeared in the Contemporary for June 1870. Here are the first references to the "school to which Rossetti belongs;" to the "circumstances of culture and personal influence which conspired to produce a book like Poems;" to "the sensuous vividness" (albeit "fused into white light by spiritual suggestion") which "runs through all the poems" and shows the "fusion of 'flesh' and 'spirit' which belongs to the school;" and to a "quality in the style which it would be wrong to call affectation, or reticence or literary cynicism; but yet there is something in it which suggests all these names."² If Buchanan did not write this (and in the pamphlet he says that he read the poetry for the first time in the summer of 1871),³ he would have endorsed every word of it.

Nine months later, and this is the first known attack on Rossetti by the Scot, there appeared over Buchanan's name an article on an obscure Scottish poet. Referring to Keats, Robert Nicholl and David Gray, Buchanan wrote,

1. ^{Tentatively} By the Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, I, p 227.

2. Contemporary Review, June 1870, pp. 480 - 1.

3. p. 56.

Genius, music, disease, death - the old, weary, monotonous tune, have we not heard enough of it? Not yet. It will be repeated again and again and again, till the whole world has got it by heart, and its full beauty and significance are apprehended by every woman that bears a son. At the present moment it comes peculiarly in season: for England happens to be infested at present by a school of poetic thought which threatens frightfully to corrupt, demoralise, and render effeminate the rising generation; a plague from Italy and France; a school aesthetic without vitality, and beautiful without health; a school of falsettoes innumerable - false love, false picture, false patriotism, false religion, false life, false death, all lurking palpable or disguised in the poisoned chalice of a false style. Just when the latter Della Cruscan school is blooming out in the full hectic flush of mutual admiration which is the due preliminary to sudden death, just when verse-writers who never lived are bitterly regretting that it is necessary to die, and thinking the best preparation is to grimace at God and violate the dead [a reference to Swinburne's slur on David Gray, as Buchanan's footnote, quoted above p. 141, makes clear], it may do us good to read the old story over again¹

There is no record of Rossetti ever having seen this, and Swinburne's letters do not show that he did then, though he did quote from it in Under the Microscope. (p. 68).

Here, in parvo, is Buchanan's whole case against Rossetti. Six months later it was to be expanded into the notorious article in the Contemporary; which was itself, six months later, incorporated into the more notorious pamphlet, with whole chapters devoted to the corruption and demoralization of Victorian England.

"The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D.G. Rossetti" appeared in the Contemporary Review for October 1871 over the name of Thomas Maitland. Though later Buchanan said

1. "George Heath, The Moorland Poet," pp. 170 - 1.

that to gauge a book's effect on its readers was a fruitless exercise and not worth performing, and it is noteworthy that he never believed in repressing works because of their immoral tendencies, here it is the mature Rossetti's proselytizing in the service of evil that Buchanan castigates most strongly. Again and again, too, is Rossetti's insincerity deplored, with his delight in archaic form and diction for their own sake denying the honest expression of "truths of the soul;" and the tortured laboriousness of the verse giving none of even Swinburne's "genuine spontaneity". Never before had an indictment of Rossetti's Poems been so comprehensive; nor had such charges been expressed so forcefully.

What reduced the review's potential for destroying Rossetti's reputation as a poet, and what makes it, for the cynical, even more representative of Victorian prudery than it is of Victorian righteousness is its tone. Buchanan's overstatement, his straining rhetoric and his over-insistence of Rossetti's insincerity seem to be devices of someone who protests too much; and, worse, behind these was to be seen evidence of an unpleasant side to Buchanan's character. The pamphlet was much more self-revelatory, as will be seen, but in the article, the repetition, within five lines, of a catalogue of Rossetti's females' behaviour - they "bite, scratch, scream, bubble, munch, sweat, writhe, twist, wriggle, foam, slaver ..." (p. 343) - betrays a certain relish and imaginative power, which, for the acute observer at least, were to become one of the marked characteristics of

its author.

Rossetti and his friends were much exercised to discover who it was who was lurking behind the pseudonym Maitland, and the first printed reactions centred on this unfortunate issue. Sidney Colvin, a new member of the Rossetti circle, once the identity of Maitland had been established, was reported in the Athenaeum¹ to be preparing to reply to the article "by Thomas Maitland, a nom de plume assumed by Mr. Robert Buchanan."² A week later, in language calculated to goad Buchanan into revealing himself, Colvin denied any intention of so doing. On December 16, Buchanan publicly admitted authorship of the article, but denied that he had used the pseudonym (which he swore on oath, four and a half years later, that he had not affixed to the article), and added that Alexander Strahan, the publisher of the Contemporary, "is best aware of the inadvertence which led to the suppression" of his name. Unfortunately, Strahan, in a letter printed immediately above Buchanan's, lamely denied that the Scot was the author: "You might with equal propriety, associate the article with the name of Mr. Robert Browning, or of Mr. Robert Lytton or any other Robert." The editor of the Athenaeum drily noted that "Mr. Buchanan's letter is an edifying commentary on Messrs. Strahans'"; and, deploring both parties' complacent attitude to the use of the pseudonym (later, it said, "Aliases so taken up and dropped again are really only

1. December 2, 1871.

proper to one class of the community"), continued, "we prefer, if we are reading an article by Mr. Buchanan, that it should be signed by him, especially when he praises his own poems; and that little *'inadvertencies'* of this kind should not be left uncorrected till the public find them out" (p. 794). Here is the beginning of one of the two myths concerning Buchanan's attack on Rossetti: that he praised his own verse in a pseudonymous article assailing another's. Buchanan did refer to himself, in his opening figure concerning the relative stature of contemporary poets (he saw Tennyson and Browning alternating as the prince in a production of Hamlet, with Matthew Arnold in the role of Horatio, himself in the very minor part of Cornelius, and the Fleshly School merely such "walking gentlemen" as Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and Osric), but he did not refer to his poetry. Yet twenty years later biographers of Rossetti could still, never having read the original article, parrot the Athenaeum's objection. The other myth is closely allied and just as false: that the attack was inspired by envy at Poems' success (which surprised even Rossetti, who was very gratified to learn that there was money in poetry, and had spent that summer of 1871 in the production of several of his best known works for his next volume). At this time Buchanan was quite a successful poet, in his own right; and had he been a man of modest tastes, which he was not (one of the 'inadvertences' that led to Strahan's use of the pseudonym was the fact that Buchanan was cruising in his yacht off "the shores of the Western Hebrides"), he could well have lived

off the income derived from his verse. Doubtless the inventors of this canard looked at the Buchanan of the later 1870s and 1880s, a poet manqué indeed, who might well have envied anyone's poetic successes, but in 1871 there was no hint of his later poetic failures.

Meanwhile battle was joined furiously on both sides of the controversy. In December 1871, Temple Bar came out strongly for Buchanan; but in the same month, R. H. Horne, in the ninth edition of his Orion, vigorously upheld Rossetti, who, now was spurred into producing one of the few prose statements he ever made about his poetry: "The Stealthy School of Criticism". He made much of Buchanan's malice, as well he might, and of his opinion that one poet was incapable of judging another's work impartially, but gave tacit admission to the validity and force of Buchanan's main charge by replying to it. Grandly vague he defended the sonnet "Nuptial Sleep" (of which Buchanan had said "Here is a full-grown man, presumably intelligent and cultivated, putting on record ... the most secret mysteries of sexual connection"¹) as being a "sonnet-stanza" in a greater poem, "embodying, for its small constituent share, a beauty of natural universal function, only to be reprobated in art if dwelt on ... to the exclusion of those other highest things of which it is the harmonious concomitant". In the most important statement in his defence. Rossetti claimed to "take a wider view than some poets or critics, of how much in

1. "The Fleshly School of Poetry", p. 338.

the material conditions absolutely given to man to deal with as distinct from his spiritual aspirations, is admissible within the limits of Art"¹ This statement, and his poetry of course, placed Rossetti for the time being, firmly in the van of the l'art pour l'art movement, soon to sweep the country. H. Buxton Forman, in "The 'Fleshly School' Scandal", also answered Buchanan's criticisms point by point, and accurately forecast that his name had now gained "an unenviable notoriety that is likely to stick to him for the rest of his career."² "Coterie Glory," in the Saturday Review, repeated Buchanan's attacks, (it has been attributed to him) and tried to demolish Forman's defence because it came from "'that worst of enemies, your worshipper.'"³

Before the Fleshly pamphlet appeared, though probably after he had written it, Buchanan made his third and fourth known attacks on Rossetti. In "Tennyson's Charm" he elaborated upon his objections to Rossetti's diction; after accusing him of being (with George Sand and Baudelaire) "didactic in the service of Passion and

1. "The Stealthy School of Criticism", Athenaeum, December 16, 1871, p. 793.

2. Tinsley's Magazine, February 1872, p. 90. Forman of course, was absolutely correct, but, one can assume, partly because the Formans, Colvins, Gosses, Knights and others persisted in blacking Buchanan any time his name appeared in public. It is a mean, ugly business, conducted by some mean, ugly men; Forman being one of the last to uphold virtue with a clear conscience.

3. February 24, 1872, p. 240.

Vice",¹ he goes on to write of Tennyson's "recent imitators ... eagerly gathering up and wearing the meretricious finery he threw away, with writers like Mr. Dante Rossetti ... Latinising our mother-tongue in drawl after drawl of laboured affectation." At this point he gives a long footnote listing several examples of Rossetti's latinate diction, and making the point much better than he did in the pamphlet:

Death is a seizure of 'malign vicissitude', a kiss 'a consonant interlude' of lips; a moan 'the sighing wind's auxiliary'; the sky 'soft-complexioned'" Here is Euphues come again with a vengeance, in the shape of an amatory foreigner ill-acquainted with English, and seemingly modelling his style on the 'conversation' of Dr. Samuel Johnson.²

The fourth attack, that over the signature of Walter Hutcheson, also in Saint Paul's Magazine came in April 1872. It minimized the influence of the "Mutual Admiration School of Poetry" outside London, and included an impassioned appeal for an end to all unsigned criticism. It would seem that by this time Buchanan was heartily sick of the whole business, having seen the pamphlet through the press, and was probably beginning to regret his rashness. Had he known what was in store for him only a month or two later, he might have regretted it all even more.³

1. Saint Paul's Magazine, March 1872, p. 295. At this time Buchanan practically wrote this magazine single-handed. Its editor was Anthony Trollope, who seemed to exercise little authority over Buchanan.

2. Ibid., p. 298.

3. In an unpublished letter from Sidney Colvin to D.G. Rossetti, dated April 27, 1872, Colvin, preparing the reception for the pamphlet, declared that he has "set rods in pickle for the Fortnightly Review, Athenaeum, Saturday, Daily News, and Pall Mall; and there shall not be a whole bone left in the Buchanan-Maitland-Hutcheson skin" Angeli Papers, University of British Columbia Library, Vancouver, Canada.

The exact publication date of the Fleshly School of Poetry is not known. It was advertized for immediate publication before the end of April, and Rossetti had read it by May 15 when W.M. Rossetti noted in his diary that "This little book of Buchanan's seems likely to create a good deal of hubbub." D.G. Rossetti's own inner turmoil when he read the statement on the first page of the Preface indicating that the attacks made on Buchanan since the Contemporary article of the previous October were "the inventions of cowards, too spoilt with flattery to bear criticism". This accusation of cowardice¹ was one of the major reasons for Rossetti's collapse and attempted suicide three weeks later; Buchanan then proceeded to make veiled hints about Rossetti's private life, giving a rich description of contemporary Bohemia, implying that it was inhabited by Rossettis, Swinburnes, and even Arnolds ("their religion is called culture, their narrow-mindedness is called insight," p. 6). He repeated statements made in the Contemporary about "the self-control and easy audacity of actual experience" of a man chronicling "his amorous sensations," with heavy

1. Which was repeated in "Fleshing the Fleshly" in The Echo, May 18 1872, "In order to bear tamely the charges and insults hurled pell-mell at the heads and hearts of Mr. Swinburne and Mr. Rossetti, they would really need to be the veriest aestheticised simulacra of humanity, Mr. Buchanan seems to think them ... " (p. 1). The author of this, who, Joseph Knight assured the Rossettis, was Buchanan himself, need not have worried. Under the Microscope, one of the most crushing pieces of literary invective since Swift, was to be published within a few weeks.

stress, again, on Rossetti's "maturity": he is "far too self-possessed to indulge in the riotous follies of the author of 'Chastelard', and infinitely too self-conscious to busy himself with the dainty tale-telling of the author of the 'Earthly Paradise'" ... (p. 31).

On the question of the fleshliness of Rossetti's poetry; Buchanan quotes from Rossetti's defence of the sonnet "Love-Sweetness" in "The Stealthy School of Criticism" -

For here all the passionate and just delights of the body are declared - somewhat figuratively, it is true, but unmistakably - to be as naught if not ennobled by the concurrence of the soul at all times (Buchanan's italics).

- in order to land hard on the one unfortunate word in Rossetti's statement with a footnote saying, "My complaint precisely is, that Mr. Rossetti's "soul" concurs a vast deal too easily" (p. 58). Later Buchanan raises the question of what Rossetti "means by the soul;" and fears

from the sonnet he quotes, that he regards the feeling for a young woman's person, face, heart, and mind, as in itself quite a spiritual sentiment. In the poem entitled "Love-Lily" he expressly observes that Love cannot tell Lily's "body from her soul" - they are so inextricably blended. It is precisely this confusion of the two which, filling Mr. Rossetti as it eternally does with what he calls "riotous longing", becomes so intolerable to readers with a less mystic sense of animal function (p. 69).

One wonders how Buchanan would have explained, what he must have heard once, the passage in the Marriage Service where the groom promises to worship the bride with his body. At any rate, such criticism to the hyper-sensitive

Rossetti, must have been most unpleasant, for all its apparent lack of real understanding of the poet or his work.

The first chapter of the pamphlet is devoted to a survey of poetry written in England under the influence of Amour Courtois, a "fever cloud generated first in Italy ... finally, after sucking up all that was most unwholesome from the soil of France, to fix itself in England, and breed in its direful shadow a race of monsters whose long line has not ceased ...:" "poor old" Donne, Davies, Carew, William Drummond, the two Fletchers, Habington Crashaw,¹ Suckling, and Browne, all were tainted by the epidemic that culminated in Cowley (pp. 10-13). The antidote of eighteenth century neo-classicism practically cured the disease but "a fresh importation of the obnoxious matter from France" (p. 15), the writings of Charles Baudelaire, caused it to break out again. There follows a chapter delineating the Frenchman's influence on Swinburne with which few of Buchanan's older readers would have disagreed: "All that is worst in Mr. Swinburne belongs to Baudelaire. The offensive choice of subject, the obtrusion of unnatural passion, the blasphemy, the wretched animalism, are all taken intact out of 'Fleurs de [sic] Mal'" (p. 22). Buchanan even quotes from Baudelaire's first poem ("Au Lecteur"), "Hypocrite lecteur, - mon semblable, - mon frere!" (p. 23) without realizing that it was

1. The accompanying remark describing Crashaw as "a Rossetti of the period, with twice the genius and half the advantages" gives some idea of Buchanan's ignorance of both Crashaw's and Rossetti's lives, p. 12.

precisely to the Buchanans of this world (or the Buchanan in us) that it was directed.

After expressing his belief that Swinburne was "obviously capable of rising out of the fleshly stage altogether" (p. 31), Buchanan then turns to the head of the school, and repeats his original criticism of the Contemporary almost verbatim and then deals with Rossetti's "Stealthy School of Criticism", using it as an excuse for a fresh culling of examples of fleshliness from "The House of Life". Flat assertion follows flat assertion:

Sonnet VII, "Love's Lovers," is meaningless, but in the best manner of Carew and Dr. Donne; and the same may be said of Sonnet VIII, "Passion and Worship." Sonnet IX, "The Portrait," is a good sonnet and good poetry, despite the epithets of "mouth's mould" and "long lithe throat." Sonnet X, the "Love Letter", is fleshly and affected, but stops short of nastiness. Sonnet XI is also innocuous. Sonnets XII to XX are one profuse sweat of animalism, ... (p.60).

In "Pearls from the Amatory Poets" Buchanan gives his principal criterion for judging poetry once again:

The morality of any book is determinable by its value as literature - immoral writing proceeding primarily from insincerity of vision, and therefore being betokened by all those signs which enable us to ascertain the value of art as art. In the present case the matter is ludicrously simple; for we perceive that the silliness and insincerity come, not by nature, but at second hand; Mr. Rossetti and Mr. Swinburne being the merest echoes - strikingly original in this - that they merely echo what is vile, while other imitators reproduce what is admirable (p.70).

The remainder of the chapter is devoted to showing some close, some obscure and many non-existent parallels between the earlier English poets and the Fleshly School. It is little more than a compilation of English erotic

verse; having drawn the reader's attention to Carew's "The Rapture" in his discussion of the "House of Life," Buchanan recommends Donne's eighteenth elegy to the reader fascinated by Swinburne (p.76). He then turns to the "slovenly and laboriously limp" diction characteristic of Rossetti's verse, and gives copious examples of it, using it to prove his thesis "that insincerity in one respect argues insincerity in all" (p.81).

The last chapter, "Prospects of the Final Degradation of Verse," returns to the snake of sensualism of London, 1872, and contradicts what Buchanan said a month earlier in "Tennyson's Charm," if not the entire pamphlet, by saying:

Now God forbid that I should charge any living English poet with desiring to encourage debauchery and to demoralise the public. I believe that both Mr. Swinburne and Mr. Rossetti are honest men, pure according to their lights, loving what is beautiful, conscientiously following what inspiration lies within them (p.83).

No longer cold-bloodedly trying to promote passion and vice, the two poets are now merely misguided men who know not what they do. As an afterthought, and strengthening the impression that the chapter was written hastily, Buchanan brings one last charge against Rossetti and Swinburne saying that they "use Verse as the vehicle of whatever thoughts are too thin or too fantastic ... to stand without the aid of rhythmical props" (p.88), a not invalid remark.

But what detracted from such validity as was to be found in the pamphlet, and what made its publication a most disastrous mistake from Buchanan's viewpoint, was its

undeniably fleshly tone. It must be remembered that Miss Jay did say that Buchanan was trying to be "smart and funny", and it is hoped that the humour of his description of the situation in Rossetti's Sonnet XXI, "Parted Love", was intentional (as undoubtedly it was), which sonnet shows the lover "despairingly waiting" for his lady who "has retired to get breath and arrange her clothes"! (p. 61). On the next page, in his gleeful hunt for the fleshly, Buchanan regrets that "we get nothing very spicy till we come to Sonnet XXXIX" (p. 62) and "Eden Bower" is found to be concerned with "the general arts of fornication" (p. 68). Buchanan seems to be deliberately pandering to the tastes of the pimply clerks whose moral welfare he said he was concerned about. Whether deliberately humorous or not, and the humour of this distasteful episode has never been acknowledged, presumably because of the dire effects it had on Rossetti, undoubtedly there lurked behind Buchanan's description of the "leg disease" afflicting London, behind his "Pearls from the Amatory Poets," behind the whole Fleshly Controversy the diseased imagination of a sick man. No "man can be better aware", admitted Buchanan, of the insidious allure "of the charm of writers like Baudelaire" (p. 20), and his really wide knowledge of erotic European literature attests to the fact. Noting the rampant sensuality of his time, the extent of prostitution in London being a national scandal, he wrote, "Look which way I will, the horrid thing threatens and paralyzes me" (p. 2). Or again, describing "the models of the female Leg" everywhere displayed (in draper's shop windows

presumably), he sees "the whole definite and elegant article as far as the thigh, with a fringe of paper cut in imitation of the female drawers and embroidered in the female fashion!" (p.3)¹ And again, "The Leg, as a disease, is subtle, secret, diabolical. It relies not merely on its own intrinsic attractions, but on its atrocious suggestions. It becomes a spectre, a portent, a mania" (p.4). While he may have been trying to be funny at times in the pamphlet, here surely, is a sick man fighting something he finds frightening in himself, putting on record evidence of his own unnatural attitudes to sex. "To the pure, all things are pure" is an adage often repeated in this controversy; and it was Buchanan's own impurity that detected the impurities in Rossetti's poetry; and his contemporaries were not slow to point this out. Claiming to articulate a healthy attitude to sensualism, Buchanan was not mentioning the unmentionable so much as he was advertising it in a particularly meretricious and self-revelatory way. It was as much this distasteful side to his character as it was the effects of his attack on Rossetti that contributed to the decline of his reputation after 1872.

The pamphlet did indeed "create quite a hubbub" when it appeared, with the Athenaeum in particular denouncing Buchanan's dishonest salaciousness and "intolerable grossness" in the "discreditable treatment of what might have been a perfectly just and interesting question of

1. Of course, it was not long since that a glimpse "of the female ankle," was considered most improper.

criticism";¹ and several other journals reluctantly taking sides with Buchanan, while denouncing his methods. Buchanan received encouragement and help, according to his biographer, from Leicester Warren (who helped him design the cover of the pamphlet) a minor poet of some note, and Cardinal Manning, as well as being sent "messages of sympathy and congratulation" ... "by a large number of less famous people" (Jay p. 163). Tennyson, according to Buchanan, told him that "Nuptial Sleep" was the "filthiest thing he had ever read",² and Browning wrote that he hated "the effeminacy of Rossetti's school,"³ indicating his belief that Rossetti's was the prime influence among the coterie, and that however offensively he had done it, Buchanan was only publicly expressing the opinions of men whose literary judgment he must have respected.

Probably Rossetti's awareness that Buchanan's assault was widely supported increased his paranoid

1. Athenaeum, May 25 1872, p. 651.

2. Buchanan quoted this remark in his brief history of the controversy, "The Rolling of the Log", cited above, p. 140, and thereby created a new storm - but the only recorded opinion of the Laureate concerning the poem states that it "impressed him deeply". F.T. Palgrave, "Personal Recollections" in Hallam Tennyson's Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir, p. 846.

3. From Browning's letter to Isabella Blagdon, written in June 1870, which anticipates Buchanan's objections to Rossetti so closely as to use the same accentuation on "lily" as did Buchanan as an example of his "soft" "archaic accentuations ... and other like Belialisims." Letters of Robert Browning, ed. Thurman L. Hood, pp. 137-8.

feeling of being persecuted by a conspiracy of evil men.¹ Possibly the guilt at being publicly branded an immoral man (and this after the summer at Kelmscott with Janey Morris, when her husband was away in Iceland), which even his conscience could not have denied,² was too strong in a man as concerned with public opinion and opprobrium as he was. Certainly he was by this time a confirmed addict to chloral hydrate (whose unfortunate effects were greatly exacerbated by his excessive intake of whisky) an insomniac, subject to prolonged fits of melancholy and a confirmed recluse. A robust man might have shrugged off Buchanan's attack (Swinburne gloried in it), but the much weakened Rossetti resisted feebly under it then collapsed. After taking an overdose of laudanum, and being nursed back to health, he never recovered even the shaky infirmity of 1871, and lingered on a semi-invalid for another 10 years.

For the remainder of 1872 the controversy swirled on past the now indifferent Rossetti, with Swinburne

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1. In W.M. Rossetti's Diary (now at the Library of the University of British Columbia) for May 26, 1872, Ford Madox Brown is reported as saying that "a dead set at all artists and men of our connection" was behind Buchanan's attack.
 2. There is Evelyn Waugh's comment, in part quoted above, p.147, concerning the man whose poetry showed him to be a platonist with ethereal views of women while whose life, associated as he was with the "apparently soulless" Fanny Cornforth, showed him to be an "unromantic sensualist." Ford Madox Ford does seem to round out the picture by saying, "He lived his life as it came; satisfied his desires as they came and let the natural effects ensue from natural causes." Rossetti: A Critical Essay on his Art, pp. 153-4.

taking up arms again with the publication of Under the Microscope in July. Rossetti, in May, had thought it "talented, but its tone somewhat exceptionable, as showing too intimate acquaintance with the minutiae of the hostile writings"¹, but he did "seem to agree", three weeks later, that it would give reviewers something other than Buchanan's pamphlet to talk about, but "enjoined Swinburne to say little or nothing about himself" in it.² Under the Microscope did not sell very well (except in Germany where it was thought to be a scientific treatise), and created much less stir than had Buchanan's greatly inferior production of two months earlier. Possibly the literary world had tired of the controversy; perhaps it felt that Buchanan's attack did not merit such attention; or, more likely, that it felt that Swinburne's reply was far too savage for its purpose. A fine piece of sustained invective, Under the Microscope attacks Alfred Austin's recent comparison of Tennyson with Byron in his Poetry of the Period, which includes Swinburne's delineation (only after his careful statement that it is his admiration for the poet that prompts such remarks, and not, as he will later charge Buchanan, his envy) of Tennyson's major failure in *Morte d'Albert*, as he delighted in calling the Idylls of the King. Swinburne's discussion of Walt Whitman's poetic merits gives ample indication of his later celebrated reversal of opinion on the American, and he,

1. W.M. Rossetti's Diary, May 3, 1872.

2. Ibid., May 18, 1872.

typically, goes out of his way to deride J.R. Lowell's recent "Thanksgiving Ode". But, as might be expected, it is Buchanan who is the main target. Interspersed throughout his preliminary tour de l'horizon Swinburne directs gibes at him of biting wit.¹ When Swinburne's whole attention is focussed on the Scot, savage irony results. Peppered with damaging references to Buchanan's lately published Drama of Kings, the Fleshly School of Poetry, his letters to the Athenaeum, his verse, and his essays, Swinburne's diatribe scourges the "polyponymous moralist" for his own insincerity and malevolence, envy, ignorance, vanity and the pernicious habit of praising his own work.² Buchanan's conduct is likened to that of Laberius Crispinus in Johnson's Poetaster, "whose life is spent in the struggle to make his way among his betters by a happy alternation and admixture of calumny with servility" (p. 65); and Buchanan is left in the last

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1. In a footnote obviously referring to Buchanan's statements on the Fleshly School's prosody and deploring another critic's ineptitude on the same topic concerning Walt Whitman, Swinburne says he could wish this discussion "away, and consigned to the more congenial page of some tenth-rate poeticule worn out with failure after failure, and now squat in his hole like the tailless fox he is, curled up to snarl and whimper beneath the inaccessible vine of song" (p. 50).
 2. "It is really to be regretted that the new fashion of self-criticism should never have been set till now All students of poetry must lament that it did not occur to Milton for example to express in public his admiration of "Paradise Lost". It might have helped support the reputation of that poem against the severe sentence passed by Mr. Buchanan on its frequently flat and prosaic quality" (p. 66).

paragraph stripped of all human dignity, an innocuous, "though very ugly," serpent, doomed "to go upon its belly and eat dust all the days of its life" (p. 88); a forecast Swinburne and his friends did their best to fulfil.

After such a drubbing Buchanan tried to give as good as he got, but "The Monkey and the Microscope"¹ is about as ineffective as its title might suggest. Forty lines of doggerel name-calling, it may show Buchanan's dogged indestructibility, but when Swinburne's production has been generally ignored, such dismal notice was surely not worth the effort.

The feud continued with Buchanan being forced to publish his verse anonymously to escape the vehement scorn of reviewers incensed at the effect that Buchanan's criticism was known to have had on Rossetti. Just who these reviewers were is uncertain. Edmund Gosse, Sidney Colvin, H.B. Forman, John Skelton and Joseph Knight probably subscribed to the continuation of the ugly business; and Swinburne's letters frequently make derisive and scurrilous comment on Buchanan.² The derision found its way into print three years later, with Swinburne making at least three separate assaults on Buchanan in

1. Saint Paul's Magazine, August 1872, p. 240.

2. In an important letter to Theodore Watts (as he then was), dated December 12, 1872, Swinburne gives his reason for writing Under the Microscope as being "the examination of certain critical questions of the day regarding Byron, Tennyson, and Whitman; his attention to Buchanan being motivated by "affection for a friend rather than ... personal irritation." Swinburne "could not but recognize the deplorable truth that the vilest of living scribblers had power to inflict grave annoyance and serious suffering on one of the noblest and to me dearest among men and poets" (Lang, 449).

1875, beginning with the publication of The Works of George Chapman. In his Introduction, Swinburne describes the hero of one of Chapman's plays as being one "who assumes the mask of as many pseudonyms to perpetrate his crimes as ever were assumed ... by a prudent member of the libellous order of rascally rhymesters to vent his villanies in shameful society" (p. xxiii). Later there is mention of a "scribbling Scot of the excremental school of letters" (p. xxvii), and of the dirty tactics of a "verminous pseudonymuncle, who ... may prefer for one rascally moment the chance of infamy as a slanderer to the certitude of obscurity as a scribbler" (p. xxxiii). Buchanan later testified in court that he had seen these remarks.

In 1875, also, Swinburne republished his critique of Arnold's poetry (see above, pp. 140-1) in Essays and Studies. As an obvious attempt to goad the Scot, he added a footnote to his previous slighting reference to David Gray in which he accused the dead poet of plagiarising from "such obscure authors as Wordsworth and Shakespeare," and, because of "the grievous harm done by false teaching and groundless encouragement," not being strong enough to know his own poetic weakness (p. 153). It was this amplification of his original gibe at Gray that Buchanan wrongly remembered (some twenty-four years later in "The Rolling of the Log") to be the original impetus for his assault on Rossetti.

In the summer of 1875 an anonymous poem entitled Jonas Fisher: A Poem in Brown and White was published. Repeating in a verse of a quality and style not unlike Buchanan's (at its worst), most of the Scot's reservations

about the state of contemporary England, and particularly about the effeminate immorality of contemporary English poets, this long poem could easily be taken for Buchanan's work. It was, however, that of James Carnegie, Earl of Southesk. Swinburne assumed Buchanan to be the author, and celebrated his latest opportunity to revile him with this:

He whose heart and soul and tongue
Once above-ground stunk and stung,
Now less noisome than before
Stinks here still but stings no more.¹

A week later Swinburne, in an anonymous review, ascribed Jonas Fisher to either Buchanan or the devil, but concluded that the former must be its author. This Buchanan denied in a letter to the Athenaeum two weeks later. On December 11, in the Examiner there appeared a long letter entitled "The Devil's Due"² and signed "Thomas Maitland", in which Buchanan was again named as the author of Jonas Fisher and was castigated as the "multi-faced idyllist of the gutter," the letter ending with a parody of Buchanan's and Strahan's letters to the Athenaeum in December 1871, in which they had tried to justify the original use of the pseudonym. Knowing that the author of this was Swinburne, who was not wealthy, and hoping to damage him seriously by showing him to be a man of straw, the furious Buchanan sued the owner of the Examiner, Mr. Peter Taylor, M.P., for the large sum of five thousand pounds, the case coming to court in June, 1876. After three days of charge and counter-

1. The Examiner, November 20, 1875, p. 1304.

2. This was subsequently published by Forman and Wise, and is one of their notorious forgeries.

charge, in which much of the history of the whole sorry affair was traced, in which Buchanan's own verse was read in court and pronounced fleshly, in which the judge condemned the fleshly tone of Buchanan's attacks on the school but also stated that much of the school's poetic production should never have been written ("if all of it was consigned to the fire tomorrow the world would be very much better"), the jury found for Buchanan, but awarded him a paltry £150 damages. Rossetti lay low at Bognor Regis for the duration of the case, fearful that he might be subpoenaed and brought back into the centre of the sordid business. With it, overt hostilities ceased; Swinburne, so far as can be ascertained, never referring to Buchanan in print again. Buchanan, again, was the loser, forfeiting much sympathy by going to court, and thereby becoming a confirmed rebel never to enjoy the friendship of influential men of letters again. It was at this time that he struck up a close friendship with Charles Reade, another litigious man outside the literary establishment of his day, but the glowing future so widely predicted for Buchanan only ten years before had been sacrificed in a foolish vendetta.

Five years later, after becoming aware of the fact that it was probably his own action that had accelerated Rossetti's physical decline, and being reminded by his wife's recent death of the need to make amends before it was too late, Buchanan dedicated his novel God and the Man (a roman à these concerning the mutual hatred of two men and how natural forces eventually ended it)

To An Old Enemy.

I would have snatch'd a bay leaf from thy brow,
 Wronging the chaplet on an honoured head;
 In peace and charity I bring thee now
 A lily-flower instead.

Pure as thy purpose, blameless as thy song,
 Sweet as thy spirit, may this offering be:
 Forget the bitter blame that did thee wrong,
 And take the gift from me!

In his Diary for January 6, 1882, W.M. Rossetti calls these lines "a handsome retraction for past invidious attacks"; and notes the ironical fact that "G thinks the verses may really be intended for Swinburne," but Hall Caine and Watts-Dunton convinced him to the contrary.¹ After Rossetti's death in April, Buchanan affixed two further stanzas to the dedication in the second edition of the novel (August, 1882) addressed to Rossetti. In his preface, Buchanan, who since "The Monkey and the Microscope" had engaged in no further literary action against the Fleshly School, made one more retraction in which he praised Rossetti's "exquisite work." He admitted too, for the first time, his lack of objectivity with a remark concerning the "incompetency of all criticism, however honest, which is conceived adversely, hastily and from an unsympathetic point of view;" he ended by regretting that he should ever have ranked himself with the Philistines (Tennyson and Browning among others!), encouraging "them to resist an ennobling and refining literary influence," and he took "melancholy pleasure"

1. Thomas Hall Caine, Recollections of Rossetti, p. 226.

from the fact that Rossetti had understood and accepted the spirit of the dedication, as he had been informed by Hall Caine.

Having thus fully and handsomely admitted his error, Buchanan became once again (and has remained ever since) the victim of continuing obloquy as the hastily written lives of Rossetti were published. In one of them, however, Hall Caine's original version of Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti¹, he was given the opportunity to defend and justify his attack on the poet, which he did at some length; and it was here that he said that when the Contemporary article appeared "the newspapers were full of panegyric; mine was a mere drop of gall in an ocean of eau sucrée." Buchanan gives the reception to that article as the motivation for publishing the pamphlet. Of Swinburne's three attacks in 1875 as well as Under the Microscope he says "If you compare what I have written of Rossetti with what his admirers have written of myself, I think you will admit that there has been some cause for me to complain, to shun society, to feel bitter against the world; but, happily, I have a thick epidermis, and the courage of an approving conscience." Later, he makes "full admission," once more, "of Rossetti's claims to the purest kind of literary renown, and if I were to criticize his poems now, I should write very differently. But nothing will shake my conviction that the cruelty, the unfairness, the

1. Fn. pp. 71-2.

pusillanimity, has been on the other side, not on mine."

With every biography of Rossetti came ~~on~~ a discussion of the Controversy, and in every discussion envy, malice, and baser motives were attributed to Buchanan. The process began with Joseph Knight in 1887, when he wrote of this "curiously unprovoked and unjustifiable attack" and categorically stated, which does seem to be true, that Rossetti's early demise was caused by it.¹ Since Buchanan's death in 1901, no one has been harsher with him than Professor Doughty, Rossetti's definitive biographer. "Jealousy, journalistic motives of self-advertisement and monetary gain" are ascribed to Buchanan, who is a "vulgar hypocrite ... low in mind, low in taste, low in breeding, and as an apostle of morality, evidently insincere ..."² Severe as this is, and not completely unjust, it does overlook the fact that Rossetti expected Buchanan's attack. Was this because he knew that it was deserved? Or was this certainty the beginnings of his paranoia? Was Buchanan's attack tongue-in-cheek and was he outmanoeuvred when his enemy took it seriously, even when he knew that Buchanan was being less than sincere? Beyond the written records and letters of that time, there would have been hundreds of conversations whose content is forever lost. Buchanan's biographer does give as his motive for being "smart and funny" at the Fleshly School's

1. Life of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, p. 140.

2. O. Doughty, A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, p. 499.

expense the fact that he had been the butt of insults, and the excerpts quoted from the Rossettis' and Swinburne's letters show this to be no less than true. Whatever the rights or wrongs of this disgraceful affair, it is certain that Buchanan was rarely read by his contemporaries with an open mind, and it is a testament to the strength of the passions engendered by the Fleshly Controversy that only now, one hundred years later, is it possible to give an objective account of it.

Buchanan's Views on Other Contemporaries

Ironically, at a time when Walt Whitman's reputation was not high in his native country, in Great Britain it was a small band of men, the Rossettis, Swinburne, J.A. Symonds and Buchanan who did all they could to promote his cause.¹ Willy-nilly, Whitman's name was dragged into the controversy, but for a time at least he was considered neutral ground. It was Buchanan,² however, aware of the inconsistency of championing Whitman while attacking Rossetti, who appended a lengthy note to The Fleshly School pamphlet explaining the difference between the "imitative and shallow" fleshly poets and the "outrageously original and creative," spiritually pure and healthy, American (p. 96). Buchanan

1. A Whitman scholar forty years ago said "Literary history will count it one of Buchanan's highest honours that he recognized Whitman's genius early and fought lustily for Whitman's recognition." Harold Blodgett Walt Whitman in England, p. 76.

2. W.M. Rossetti carefully avoided Buchanan's irritation by noting his essay on Whitman when listing the scant attention and admiration paid to the American in this country in his preface to Poems by Walt Whitman of 1868.

goes on to deplore the "fifty lines of a thoroughly indecent kind" in Whitman's verse, but such "sheer excess of aggressive life" is to be found in Shakespeare, Aristophanes, Rabelais and Victor Hugo among others and continues

It is in a thousand ways unfortunate for Walt Whitman that he has been introduced to the English public by Mr. William Rossetti, and been loudly praised by Mr. Swinburne. Doubtless these gentlemen admire the American poet for all that is best in him; but the British public, having heard that Whitman is immoral, and having already a dim guess that Messrs. Swinburne and Rossetti are not over-refined, has come to the conclusion that his nastiness alone has been his recommendation (p. 97).

It is entirely possible that Swinburne's later change of opinion concerning Whitman can be attributed, in part, to these remarks.

Both W.M. Rossetti and Buchanan maintained contact with Whitman in the next few years, and worked independent of each other to promote Whitman's cause. Seeing a notice in the Athenaeum (March 11, 1876) which reprinted the principal points of an article in the West Jersey Press outlining Whitman's rejection by the American literary world and the poet's subsequent penury, Buchanan leapt to his defence in typical manner. On March 13, he expressed his "English indignation," in a letter to the Daily News (p. 2), at the "Determined, denial, disgust and scorn" of the American publishers, editors, and writers for Whitman. He continued in typical provocative manner:

As Christ had His crown of thorns (I make the comparison in all reverence), and as Socrates had his hemlock cup, so Walt Whitman has his final glory and doom though it comes miserably in the shape of literary outlawry and official persecution.

Buchanan ended by urging the establishment of a committee to collect subscriptions for at least 500 copies of Whitman's complete works. He also sent £25 to Whitman immediately. The letter stirred up a storm on both sides of the Atlantic. W.M. Rossetti, ever ready to help Whitman no matter in whose company, corroborated Buchanan's statements in a letter to the News the following day.¹ M.D. Conway wrote in the New York Tribune (April 26) that he was "compelled to deny Mr. Buchanan's gross exaggerations." Whitman himself wrote to W.M. Rossetti (May 5): "I do not approve Conway's letter ... , an insult to Mr. Buchanan through me ... every point in B's March 11th letter to the News, is well taken, and true without exception particularly all about the American critics, publishers, editors, 'poets', and even what he says about my "impoverishment" is much, much nearer the truth, than Mr. Conway's and Lord Houghton's rose-coloured illusion varnish"² At the end of several letters from Whitman to Rossetti, he politely asks him, if it is convenient, to show them to Buchanan; and apparently some of them were. Whitman did write a short note of gratitude to Buchanan direct.³ For a while the Scot ran an independent subscription

1. Swinburne's characteristic comment to Rossetti on this matter cannot be ignored: "Du reste, you must allow me to observe that it gives us a pleasing foretaste of the millennial period to see the lion (yourself) lying down (not with the lamb but) with the skunk." After referring to the "American 'eagle' and the Hebridean polecat," he calls a recent treatise by Whitman on poetry, "the most blatant tray of impotent and impudent ignorance I ever heard except from the throat of Bavius Buchanan or Maevius Maitland" (Lang, 729).

2. Walt Whitman: The Correspondence 1842-1885, Edwin H. Miller, ed., 3 Vols., III, p. 44.

3. Ibid., pp. 36-7.

service for the American, but eventually, because of the hostility engendered by Buchanan versus Taylor, was forced to give it up. On January 8, 1877 he wrote to Whitman that because "the tone adopted by certain of your friends here became so unpleasant ... I requested all subscriptions etc. to be paid over to Rossetti, and received no more myself."¹ There can be little doubt that Buchanan had materially assisted Whitman, and had also given him much support and encouragement when few others had done. But it was probably best for Whitman that W.M. Rossetti remained his chief lieutenant in England, since Buchanan's gift for making enemies would sooner or later have handicapped the cause. Buchanan's last gesture for Whitman was his letter (written soon after his pilgrimage to New Jersey to meet him for the first time) to President Cleveland of June 13, 1885 asking, in vain, for a government pension for the aged poet.²

It is small wonder that Buchanan should have admired Whitman, who was in behaviour and effect exactly what Buchanan meant by the sacer vates. It was Whitman's message, his being a prophet of a democracy based on brotherhood and love, a "prophet with faith in man and the divinity of man's destiny" (Jay, p. 301) that Buchanan admired. His appreciation of Whitman as a poet was less wholehearted, considering him careless about

1. Ibid., fn. p. 64.

2. Letters of William Michael Rossetti concerning Whitman, Blake and Shelley, Clarence Gohdes and Paul F. Baum, eds., fn. p. 105.

beautifying his message and calling him "loud and coarse" when "'sounding his barbaric yawp'" (as he quoted approvingly).¹ But to Whitman Buchanan did bring his tripartite aesthetics and declared that "When lilacs last in the dooryard bloomed" to contain "the three essentials of poetic art - perfect sight, supreme emotion, and true music. This, however, is unusual in Walt Whitman."²

Ironically, Buchanan shared his appreciation of Browning with the Rossettis, and ironically, too, it was Browning's Christianity that Buchanan first admired (much later Buchanan recorded his asking Browning whether or not he was a Christian, and Browning had thundered "No!" This had led Mrs. Sutherland Orr to deny the truth of Buchanan's anecdote in her biography). Buchanan reviewed Dramatis Personae in Saint James's Magazine in July 1864, long before he had formulated his aesthetic theory. In Browning, as in Whitman, he most valued his strong sympathy for humanity, his ability to find "glimpses of the divine" even under the sophistry of Bishop Blougram, and good points even in such an unmitigated humbug as Sludge the Medium. As an ardent democrat, Buchanan might well compare Browning's psychological insight with Shakespeare's and as an ardent Christian he might well see this wide human sympathy as testimony to Browning's belief that all men were God's children however evil they might appear.

Of Browning's style, Buchanan only made the

1. "Walt Whitman," David Gray, p. 220.

2. Ibid., p. 217.

necessary explanation that it was the "fine conscientious expression of clearly defined thought," and if full of mannerisms only because Browning was too much in earnest to add false colour to his portraits (p. 482). Four years later Buchanan reviewed The Ring and the Book in the Athenaeum. Well might Browning retort on being told that Buchanan had no appreciation of his contemporaries that he was the kindest critic he had ever had.¹ In this review there is little which is not the most generous praise of Browning's masterwork, not only was it "beyond all parallel the supremest poetical achievement of the age," but "the most precious and profound spiritual treasure since the days of Shakespeare."² In the first part of his review, Buchanan wondered to what degree the "inspiration and workmanship of The Ring and the Book were poetic as distinguished from intellectual,"³ which later became his main objection to Browning's work; and he considered that the characters' manner of thinking was too similar, even if their thoughts were widely different. But Buchanan did appreciate Browning's purpose and achievement, and marvelled at his subtlety and insight. Pompilia he

1. Robert Buchanan, "Some Memories of Robert Browning," Sunday Special, November 5, 1899, p. 2.

2. Athenaeum, March 20, 1869, p. 399.

3. Athenaeum, December 26, 1868, p. 875. By a bitter piece of irony (in the light of subsequent events) this part of the review ended (after again stressing the intellectual rather than emotional power of the poem): "But if Mr. Browning impresses still more strongly on the world's heart the danger of overbearing judgment, he will be like a messenger from heaven, sent to teach the highest of all lessons to rashly-judging men" (p. 876).

considered to be an immortal, with the heavenly glamour and purity of Imogen, Cordelia and Juliet, and haunting the poem "with a look of ever-deepening light." Buchanan rightly takes "Giuseppe Caponsacchi", "Pompilia", and "The Pope" as the best monologues of the poem. Finding further evidence of Browning's capacity for discovering the divine in the basest of men, he cites Guido Franceschini's despairing last cry

Abate, - Cardinal, - Christ, - Maria, - God ...
Pompilia, will you let them murder me?

as investing Pompilia with "God-like power and pity", and making the reader feel that even Guido has been purified by his association with her.

Later Buchanan came to the reluctant conclusion that Browning was more an intellectual juggler, playing off one character's conception of the truth with that of another, and not giving, himself, any firm spiritual guidance in any direction (hence his question concerning Browning's beliefs). Quite probably Buchanan's disillusionment with Browning was based on his knowledge of the poet's mind, which he considered to be worldly, to be too concerned with trivia, and to be essentially commonplace. What shocked Buchanan, with his own sense of impending oblivion, was that until the events described in "La Saisiaz" (and despite the death of Elizabeth Barrett Browning) Browning had so little sense of man's vulnerability, and when Browning wrote "La Saisiaz" he could not offer anything more than the hope of immortality, supported by "Intellectual cunning" rather than by "full

spiritual conviction."¹ It is an aesthetic rather than a philosophic judgment; for Buchanan deplores the lack of emotion in the poem; but it probably comes, in part, from Buchanan's growing realisation that Browning's bluff optimism had no spiritual basis that he could discover or at least partake of, and so in his own search for a resolution to life's questions the works of Robert Browning lost their attraction.

But at least they had communicated some spiritual insights, whereas Tennyson, for Buchanan, had never even attained that rank. Buchanan was never the intimate of Tennyson that he was of Browning, but he did admire the man, and felt few of the reservations about his mind and character that he had concerning Browning's.

Although published as early as 1864, and although containing opinions about individual works which he later modified or reversed (here he called "Maud", for example, a "gigantic blunder", whereas later he called it "highly readable"), Buchanan's anonymous review of Enoch Arden expresses his reservations about the laureate's work, which he never, in the essentials, changed. He admired Tennyson's lyric gifts enormously, here and elsewhere, declaring him to be "the most perfect artist living", who has done much to refine the tone and purify the language of English verse. Indeed his encomium of Tennyson the artist contains his complaint about Tennyson the poet, unlike Whitman or Browning, he is too respectable, too refined, too much the English gentleman who has never offended "the British

1. Light, May 18, 1878, p. 214.

matron". Buchanan's review is larded with such adjectives as "pleasant", "exquisite", "charming", "delightful", "pretty", but "the grand living human element" is lacking in Tennyson's verse.¹ While praising the "exquisite skill" of the handling of some of the episodes in "Enoch Arden", Buchanan cannot refrain from declaring that

The chief inconsistencies lie in the character-painting, than which nothing could be more pretty and sketchy. Annie, with whom we are asked to sympathize, is a vapid, lifeless nonentity; and Philip, for a miller, is lamentably lacking in bone and tissue. Enoch, the 'strong, heroic soul,' quits home for no definite reason, returns home to find his wife has married another, talks pastoral - Tennysonian, and Tennysonian - tragical-turgical, and finally, being determined to make everybody happy, renders Philip's children illegitimate. Philip - grateful, possibly, for the blessing - favours Enoch with 'a costly funeral', for only at the miller's expense could the ceremony have been made so stylish. We are left in doubt as to how Annie felt on the subject. Possibly, in her usual mild way, she turned her face to the wall and wept, and then smiled sweetly, and was happy ever afterwards. In simple truth, the poem has no sinew, no strength, no purpose in it; it is a neat rivulet of plot meandering through a wide meadow of dulness. How differently would such a subject have been treated by the master of psychology - Robert Browning! 2

Buchanan commends several poems unreservedly, praising "The Grandmother" highly, and "Tithonus" and "The Voyage". But he spends at least a third of his review in discussing "The Flower," saying that it is precisely Tennyson's weakness that he can be so easily imitated; why does he not soar into the region of inimitables like

1. "Tentatives by the Laureate," Saint James's Magazine, September 1864, p. 227.

2. Ibid., 233.

Milton or Coleridge? Had his thought been "invariably deep and original, or piercing and individual",¹ there would be no flock of Tennyson imitators churning out idyls scarcely to be distinguished from the genuine article. Buchanan wrote at least one essay devoted to "Tennyson's Charm", where he stressed the laureate's gifts as a singer and omitted his doubts about him as a thinker, and in his journal Light, fourteen years after the first review, he again commends "his beautiful music, which will never die" and his representation of the best part of English middle-class life of his time, but again declares that there "is nothing in him of that tremendousness which moves large masses of people."² On Tennyson's death Buchanan was approached by the editor of the Contemporary Review to write a memorial article, but he refused thinking that his honest convictions would not be welcome. "What a satire on literature it is," he wrote at the time, "to find the whole world flocking to worship the poets of Good Taste, while a singer like James Thomson dies neglected!"³

Buchanan was not the mean-spirited, spiteful and envious man Swinburne and others tried to make him appear. His literary tastes were catholic, and unlike some of the more prominent critics of the day (Edmund Gosse and

1. Ibid., 227.

2. Light, May 18, 1878, p. 213.

3. Jay, p. 145.

William Archer championing Stephen Phillips, for example) his judgment has been ratified by later generations. With Matthew Arnold of course, he is on safe ground, but what he said of him in 1878¹ needs little qualification nearly one hundred years later. He admired Arnold for his consistently superb poetic expression ("Others probably have gone higher at the highest, but how often lower, and the majority have seldom, if ever, been vouchsafed an equal flight"), and though he admired the Marguerite poems, particularly the best known, and considered "The Forsaken Merman" to be the high-water mark of Arnold's achievement ("the infinite sorrow and pathos ... give this poem a grip upon the heart, even more than on the mind - a hold that is all the stronger in that it is ... undefinable"), it was Arnold's religious poetry, "Empedocles," "Obermann Once More" ("Compared with these lives how weak and lifeless and unreal seem all the dreary utterances of orthodox Christianity") and "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" that Buchanan liked best. Several other contemporary poets, too, he enjoyed. He made no secret of his admiration for William Morris's narrative gifts, which he thought the best of his time and he commended William Allingham's lyrical verse. After slating George Eliot's "A College Breakfast Party" as undigested Browningese,² he could praise Swinburne's

1. Light, August 31, 1878, pp. 649-650.

2. Light, July 6, 1878, p. 426. Later, in his review of Kipling's Stalky and Co., he did commend George Eliot's sonnet-sequence "Brother and Sister" as being the one real poem she had written.

Poems and Ballads, Second Series, for its poetry and music and for being a "beautiful and wholesome" work.

As might be expected of the author of The Fleshly School of Poetry there were other poets he did not admire. Many of them have found oblivion, and need not be mentioned here, but of those whose reputation is still high he singled out one for a particularly harsh attack. Buchanan first assailed Rudyard Kipling in the Sunday Special for April 17, 1898, the best part of which is his parody "The Ballad of Kiplingson". Kipling, having choked to death on a puff from the Times, assures Saint Peter of his qualifications:

'But I was a real Phenomenon,' continued
Kiplingson,
'The only genius ever born who was Tory
at twenty-one!'

'Alas, and alas,' the good saint said, a tear
in his eye serene,
'A Tory at twenty-one! Good God! At
fifty what would you have been?

'There's not a spirit now here in Heaven
who wouldn't at twenty-one,
Have tried to upset the very Throne, and
reform both Sire and Son!' (CPW, II, 324)

When Stalky and Co, was published a year and a half later Buchanan attacked it and its author very severely in "The Voice of the Hooligan" in the Contemporary Review. Roger Lancelyn Green includes this essay in Kipling: The Critical Heritage for being the "first major attack on Kipling for brutality, warmongering, and illiberalism". Buchanan saw Kipling as part of the great drift away from the gospel of humanity preached by Wordsworth, Shelley and Dickens, and as adumbrating the worship of physical force and commercial success which had led to the South African War.

Plain Tales from the Hills and the Jungle Books Buchanan exempted from his general indictment, and he could not deny Kipling's faculty for verse-making, but the necessary spiritual and intellectual qualities of the poet, Kipling did not have (Buchanan makes no mention of "Recessional"). His Barrack-room Ballads describe whatever is "basest and most brutal in the British mercenary," and Buchanan wondered that no influential spokesman for the Army had denied their truth. If accurate, Buchanan could only take them as support for his own anti-Imperialism. He liked the melody and pathos of "Mandalay", and considered "Song of the English" to be "distinct and absolute poetry", though still permeated by the brutality and baseness which found their most blatant expression in "Belts". But it was Stalky and Co., so very different from Wordsworth's boyhood or that of Dickens as seen in David Copperfield, that Buchanan detested. Here there is none of Kipling's great predecessors' "solace for the yearning hearts of man", nothing but vulgarity, brutality and savagery on every page, nothing but a base pandering to the animal instincts of a populace already swayed in the direction of Jingoism by the mindless propaganda of the newspapers.

If Whitman was, for Buchanan, the supreme poet of his time, Charles Dickens was undoubtedly the first novelist. He never reviewed Dickens, but in February 1872 the appearance of Forster's biography did prompt Buchanan to publish "The 'Good Genie' of Fiction" in Saint Paul's Magazine. Written at the height of the Fleshly Controversy, the essay's warmth, sanity and sense contrast

markedly with the tenor of Buchanan's other criticism of that period. Not pure adulation (that came later), Buchanan's essay does explain the reason for Dickens's excessive sentimentality, and does concede that his characters are not real people but the denizens of a Fairyland (ogres, monsters, elves, fairies, and demons). His work has the limitations of a story told by a child, for, according to Buchanan, Dickens is at his "greatest when most personal and lyrical, and ... he is most lyrical when he puts himself in a child's place, and sees with a child's eyes." This is the secret to a true appreciation of Dickens's art. "In any case," Buchanan continues, "in any of his best passages, whether humorous or pathetic, emotion precedes reflection, as it does in the case of a child or of a great lyric poet." Like Browning, Dickens, through his humour which dissolves hatred, manages to persuade us to tolerate the failings of the Uriah Heeps and other monsters of this world. Dickens is the prophet of the brotherhood of man. For Buchanan "one book of the Master, David Copperfield is dearer to me than all the Bibles of the world, for it keeps sacred for me the whole Fairy Tale of Life"¹ Buchanan found in Dickens the sources for his own beliefs in the perfectibility of man, which the new realism denied. A naive sentimental optimism he considered more worthwhile and just as tenable as the dark, cynical, pessimism of Zola or Ibsen.

1. "The Gospel of Plum Pudding," The Sunday Special, November 6, 1898, p. 2.

There was one other writer living, however, who did appeal to him in much the same way that Dickens did. In one of his letters to Andrew Chatto, Buchanan asked him to send all of Mark Twain's works that he did not already possess, since he was considering an article which would express Buchanan's "lofty admiration" of Twain's achievement from a "much higher standpoint" than any yet taken (January 15, 1895). It is to be regretted that this article never appeared; but in a survey of the American scene, Buchanan did call Twain the "soul-fellow" of Lincoln and Whitman, and stated that Twain's power, wisdom and insight culminated in the character of Jim the Negro in Huckleberry Finn, a radical departure from most current Twain criticism which had scarcely got beyond considering him a humorous writer for boys. Buchanan thought, too, that A Yankee at the Court of King Arthur a work of "true puissant and shaping imagination" compared to which The Idylls of the King "is the embodiment of all that is trivial, false, conventional, flabby in the feudal conception"¹

In March 1889, the long-cooling embers of the Fleshly Controversy were stirred into flame for a few weeks when Buchanan wrote a brief notice of George Moore's Confessions of a Young Man in a review of "The Modern Young Man as Critic".² To Buchanan, Moore was "the new prophet of animalism", "a Cockney Bohemian of

1. "The Wise Man of America", Sunday Special, April 16, 1899, p. 2.

2. Universal Review, March 1889, pp. 353-372.

the Latin Quarter" (!) whose frankness was his one redeeming quality. The only living English writer whom Moore appreciated was W.H. Pater, whose "jejune essays" he seemed to have read with rapture. Moore swiftly and savagely retaliated in Henry Labouchere's Truth, calling Buchanan a "failure", and someone "whom the successors of Swinburne and Rossetti" rejected with unutterable contempt. Frank Harris considered Moore's retort to be worthy of Swift, and undoubtedly Buchanan had stumbled on a new source of virulent abuse which was to annoy him for several years to come.

One contemporary novelist for whom Buchanan had high regard was Thomas Hardy. He had published "The Impulsive Lady of Croome Castle" in his journal Light, and in his last years considered Hardy to be the greatest contemporary writer of fiction. But the note of sadness detectable in even Hardy's earliest novels, deepening into the cry of pain in Tess and the "unutterable desolation" of Jude the Obscure was more than Buchanan's tenuous optimism could bear. Literature was the corroboration of the beauty and joy of life not their repudiation. Hardy with his Calvinistic belief in man's corruption had no comfort for a man whose experience of life could not deny Hardy's philosophy but whose instincts cried out for something more positive.

Buchanan wrote much general dramatic criticism, and some touching reminiscences of the theatre of the 1860s when J.L. Toole was jester to the court of Charles Dickens. Much of that criticism deals with the ephemeral work of

minor men, but his opinions of two of the giants of his day are of interest. Buchanan had read and commended Peer Gynt, even its poetry, as early as 1873. But later, Ibsen's name was linked ad nauseam with those of Zola, de Goncourt and Hardy as a proponent of the joyless literature of the nineties. Of Gegangere (Ghosts) he says a poet might have stirred us with its subject, or a dramatist "have made it live and move," but Ibsen is neither; "this arid writer" deals with heredity, sociology, morality and religion by "placing a smudgy finger on the black marks which disfigure the map of life, but seldom or ever assisting us with any flash of poetic vision."¹ As for being a realist, "Ibsen's people seem to be rural Phantoms, - hypochondriacs of the Ideal, searching their own secretions ... for signs and portents. The result ... is universal ugliness The very writing is devoid of both grace and charm."²

Shaw seems to have brought out the very best, in the sense of literary expression at least, from Buchanan. When writing to him or of him, his prose takes on a sparkle and a wit that Buchanan had never before deployed. Shaw was the one man of stature on the literary scene of his declining years that Buchanan could look to with some kind of approval. Their correspondence opened with Buchanan's commending The Quintessence of Ibsenism as the finest piece of polemical writing he had read for many a day (Oct. 26, 1891).

1. "The Modern Young Man as Critic," p. 366.

2. Letter to George Bernard Shaw, dated October 27, 1891 in the Shaw Papers at the British Library.

The tone of Buchanan's side of the correspondence (Shaw's replies are lost, with all the rest of Buchanan's papers) is best suggested by part of his response to the one letter (through being published, without Shaw's permission, in Is Barabbas a Necessity?), which has survived (in part), where Shaw stated that the deaths of his father and sister disturbed him less than a misprint in an article;

You deal so largely in generalities, in nebulous statements, that you, like the average man, are difficult to catch and hold. Here, at last, you are explicit. Love and death trouble you far less than 'a misprint in an article' - sentiment is the result of whiskey etc. - Goethe, that intellectual Onanist, was a wise creature. Why, you Saturnine Reviewer, you eternal Carper and Faultfinder, your articles are chockful of misprints, your sobriety has all the characteristics of intoxication, and your wisdom is the merest self-worship. If Bernard Shaw is the outcome of water-drinking and vegeterianism, I mean to go in for the Buchanan Blend and avoid green stuff altogether (March 6, 1896).

In his series of articles in the Sunday Special, Buchanan twice addressed an open letter to Shaw. The first, entitled "The Jester as Moral Pioneer," described Shaw as the "only English-speaking Realist of any intellectual importance", who at least believed in meliorism, as Buchanan did, though at the expense of all social conventions, which Buchanan could not accept. But he did appreciate the presence of one man of letters who believed something, and was prepared to fight for his beliefs in a way in which the petty litterateurs of the day were incapable.¹ Three weeks later, however, Buchanan had to revise his opinions. He had just read Plays: Pleasant and Unpleasant. Shaw was no realist, he was an idealist, his

1. Sunday Special, April 3, 1898, pp. 4 - 5.

plays were simply "Romantic Impertinences, peopled by notions, not human beings; not by persons but comic Tomfooleries" worthy of Lewis Carroll. A bundle of preposterous libels on human nature, the plays demonstrated Shaw's incapacity for handling with delicacy deep thoughts or emotions. Approached in the right spirit, however, that is as a species of Punch and Judy show, and forgetting "the explanatory criticisms", "the genuine high spirits, gay human feeling and real dramatic faculty" of the plays make them invariably delightful. The whole review keeps reverting to the volte face Buchanan considers Shaw to have performed:

Your Chocolate Soldier, your Heavenly Twins and comic Waiter in You Never Can Tell, your Mrs. Warren and her cold-blooded daughter, your airy fairy Dentist and his impossible clientele, are just as fantastic and just as impossible as Bunthorne himself I gladly welcome them, having hugely enjoyed their absurdities. But the REAL and the ACTUAL, what on earth do they have to do with that? They are no more like Life than their prototypes [of W.S. Gilbert], and when, from time to time they deviate into doctrine, they merely reveal the least charming side of your cynicism and the ugly side of their gnomish monstrosity.¹

Later Buchanan gives him advice about what subjects and themes are the best dramatic material for purveyors of "far^ccial romantic idealism". But he bursts out again in the next paragraph:

Yet all this, we are assured by you,² Mr. Arthur Roberts Chadband Codlin Bottom Shaw is "Terewth," the "Terewth" by which Art is to be redeemed, the Theatre to be saved, while men believe and live! O, Sir, how can you! O, Bottom! Bottom! how marvellously thou art transformed! You went to

1. Sunday Special, April 24, 1898, p. 4.

2. Arthur Roberts was a popular low comedian of the day; Thomas Codlin, apparently, a Punch and Judy man.

sleep (no wonder) in the Independent Theatre,
and here we find you awake in Nonsenseland,
while Shakespeare's Titania fondles your hairy
head, and Peaseblossom and Mustardseed are
invoked to scratch your ears!

Such exuberance and wit provide a good place to leave Robert Buchanan the critic. Impressionistic he undoubtedly was; always, too, on the watch for the ethical drift of any work; but, on the whole, his main concern as a critic was to sift the solid gold of poetry (he never tired of repeating Novalis's dictum that poetry is the only absolute reality) from the dross of even his greatest contemporaries' work. He may have been wrong in particulars; his failure to appreciate Walt Whitman's rhythmic subtleties springs to mind. And his continuing fight against Kipling, Ibsen¹ and Zola for ethical reasons, might suggest some of his limitations as a critic. But his instincts, his emotions were good and true. Not particularly profound, Buchanan was usually right in his estimations. Only once was he 'wrong' (over Rossetti), but he repented that; and besides there are still those who agree with his original judgment. To Buchanan's credit must be placed his unswerving loyalty to two of the greatest poets of his time. For both Whitman and Browning, Buchanan worked diligently and courageously, and it is no exaggeration to say that with both men he was largely responsible for their late recognition. This has long been accepted as far as Whitman is concerned, but for Browning, too, Buchanan helped to find the audience that the great poet had, until 1864 (or even several years

1. He disliked Ibsen's social dramas, not Peer Gynt. He also disliked Henry James's "super-refined subtleties", too; but he long admired Herman Melville, when his reputation had fallen low.

later), failed to reach. When those two names are placed on one side of the scales, the unfortunate Rossetti affair finds its true worth. Unfortunately for Buchanan, Iago was right: the evil Buchanan did lived (and lives) after him, the good lies interred with his bones.

CHAPTER FIVE

POLEMICS

No man as forthright or as dogmatic as Robert Buchanan could remain silent for long on what he considered the great issues of his time. It was as a polemist that he reached his widest audience, and could give the ideas often implicit in his verse, fiction or criticism their clearest and most cogent expression. On the question of the freedom and rights of the individual, he took his lead from Herbert Spencer, an acquaintance (and, quite possibly, a friend) of long standing, whose work he admired deeply. He saw with J.S. Mill, that the socialism many, himself included, were striving for, could well lead to the tyranny of a "collective mediocrity". Early signs for Buchanan of the development of such a tyranny were to be found in the journals purveying society gossip to the "new order of the vulgar-genteel" ("The Newest Thing in Journalism," Contemporary Review, XXX, September, 1877, p. 700). Another manifestation of this power could be seen in the censorship of literature, whether that discreetly exercised by libraries like Mudie's or that instigated in courts of law by Vigilance Committees. Later more ugly proof of the power of public opinion as moulded by the popular press was to be found in the persecution of greatly gifted, if erring, individuals like Charles Parnell and Oscar Wilde. Buchanan attacked these and other signs of insensitive majority rule wherever he saw them.

One phenomenon which he long felt was responsible for much of the ugliness of life around him was the

growth of scientific materialism. He had first encountered it in discussion with G.H. Lewes and George Eliot when he was strongly armoured with his new-found Christianity. But as he grew older and his faith diminished, he was all too aware of the insidious charm of the hedonism of Omar Khayyam which now had the philosophic support of the best brains of his time. In 1890 he became engaged with one of them, T.H. Huxley, in the question "Is Man born Free and Equal?"

Three years later he participated in a controversy, precipitated by his Wandering Jew, on the question "Is Christianity played out?", with Richard Le Gallienne, and later, Israel Zangwill. He published a pamphlet attacking publishing practices of his day; and in a final vigorous flourish (containing more words than all of the rest of his polemical utterances) he pontificated upon any subject of his choosing in a respectable Sunday paper from 1898 to the first weeks of 1900.

Buchanan's first foray into new battlegrounds was due, ironically, to an aftermath of the Fleshly Controversy. For him that had raised moral as much as literary questions, and his next targets, too, were symptoms (to a much greater extent than Swinburne and Rossetti were, and involving a much larger segment of the public than they had) of the degeneration Buchanan saw around him. It was a report in the World of his legal assault on Swinburne, Buchanan versus Taylor, saying (as did G.A. Sala in the Illustrated London News) that it would have been better if the case had never been brought to

trial, and that it "can only be regarded as a scandal to literature" (World, July 5, 1876, p. 9) that marks the beginning of Buchanan's new holy war. While it would be unfair to say that his survey of trends in journalism a year later can be seen as a reply to such an observation, doubtless it did make him aware of the recent proliferation of journals whose sole purpose was to retail gossip about anyone in the public eye, and to comment on news items, such as his action against Swinburne, which the newspapers would merely report.

Though winning his case against the proprietor of The Examiner, Buchanan had not appeared to good advantage when cross-examined in court; and Swinburne's, Rossetti's and his own verse had been castigated by the judge as fleshly. Like Whistler's encounter with Ruskin only a year later, it had been one of those unfortunate episodes for nineteenth century art, which culminated in Wilde's trials in 1895, and in which not notably cultured men pronounced solemnly upon literature and paintings of which they had little understanding or appreciation. Buchanan had, in his own words five years later, ranked himself with the Philistines;¹ and his behaviour throughout the controversy was certainly not to literature's credit.

A year later he began a series of anonymous²

1. God and the Man, p. vi.

2. In a letter in the November issue of the Contemporary replying to Yates's strong retort, Buchanan, with the editor's assistance, appeared to deny his authorship (XXXI, p. 1054) of the series; but Yates was not likely to be misinformed, and much later Buchanan acknowledged it (Jay, p. 102).

articles called "Signs of the Times" in the Contemporary Review. Characteristically only two appeared, which makes it all the more likely that the first article, "The Newest Thing in Journalism", may have been prompted by his, by this time, well-known "instinct of recrimination". It was a scathing survey of the new journals purveying society gossip, of which two, Mayfair and Henry Labouchere's Truth, had been begun by former contributors to Edmund Yates's World. Quoting copiously enough to convince posterity of the justice of his onslaught,¹ Buchanan attributed their success to the fact that "men without honour and women without delicacy [were] hourly on the increase" (XXXI, p.700), and that a new and lower class of readers was beginning to make its depraved demands heard. In the next essay, "Fashionable Farces" (Contemporary Review, November, 1877, pp. 1041-1054) Buchanan attacked the similar pandering to the same audience indulged in by the adaptors of French plays. He called upon English dramatists to forswear such work and write "good English plays" instead. Little did he know how soon he himself would be engaged in such activities; though farce, apparently, he never attempted.

These attacks on the frivolities of the times were in character, and were sincere. Buchanan's earliest and latest acquaintances noted his earnestness; and he

1. He cites at length one of the problems of social conduct posed as "Hard Cases" in Vanity Fair, which readers were invited to solve. In it a lady whose husband is absent is inveigled under the mistletoe and kissed. What should she do? After printing thirty answers, the editor pronounces one the winner. Buchanan called this sort of thing "sheer imbecility", but it certainly seems to have been effective journalism, giving Vanity Fair's readers a little vicarious experience of life in society.

always yearned for the highly serious discussions that he had had in his youth in Glasgow, and which, in literary London, he rarely found. Buchanan, his close friend Henry Murray once wrote, "hated triviality, cackle and small talk and scandal, and anything which could come under Matthew Arnold's sweeping definition of 'intellectual levity'";¹ small wonder that he fell foul of the society journalism of his day which subsisted on little else. As late as 1898 when invited by the editor of the Sunday Special to survey contemporary journalism once again, he pleaded for more discussion in the popular press of the "great problems of Life and Death" (Sunday Special, December 4, 1898, p. 2), whose existence, apparently, he could not forget for a moment, though he well knew that in an increasingly materialist society more and more people were becoming apathetic to them.

Yates was not slow to reply to Buchanan, and there now began a running battle between the two that persisted for over ten years. Yates's response, "A Scrofulous Scotch Poet", contains interesting biographical information, not portraying him in a very attractive light, about Buchanan's earliest days in London, when he had come to the offices of Temple Bar hoping to have his verse and essays accepted by G.A. Sala's editorial assistant. Yates had then lent money to Buchanan (who acknowledged his help publicly in his dedication to Storm-beaten in January 1862), had published his contributions, and had found him other work. Buchanan had unwittingly stumbled on another hornet's

1. Robert Buchanan and Other Essays, p. 10.

nest, however; Yates was as quick and as virulent in his response to criticism as had been Swinburne:

For ten years at least I have seen nothing of Mr. Buchanan. I knew in common with the rest of the world, that he had failed as a poet, as a novelist, as a playwright; I knew that shielded by the mask and cloak of pseudonymity, he had stabbed some great reputations in the back, and had had his moral ulcers laid bare by the scalpel of judicial examination. Further than this I know nothing. I have had no dispute with Mr. Buchanan; no word of anger has passed between us. When last I saw him I was his friend; when last he addressed me I was his benefactor. But now without word or deed on my part,¹ all is changed. I ... am a 'retailer of gossip, with whom no society of respectable men, not to say gentlemen, would associate for ten minutes;' while Mr. Robert Williams Buchanan, who stings the hand that succoured him, and anonymously stabs those who saved his tainted life, is a Contemporary Reviewer, the soi-disant guide, philosopher, and friend of 'all cleanly people who respect honest literature and live earnest lives' (World, September 26, 1877, p. 14).

Besides Yates, Buchanan had attacked Henry Labouchere, who in Truth, missed no subsequent opportunity to score off him. Being at a disadvantage in that he could not expect the journals to print his replies to their onslaughts, unless they saw fresh opportunities for castigating him (they always had, after all, the last word); and since, for various reasons, other journals would not wish to become embroiled in the feud, Buchanan, who never lacked courage, lampooned Yates and Labouchere in his novel The Martyrdom of Madeline (1881). Because Madeline's past had been scandalous, Buchanan could have his villain Gavrolles give both Edgar Yahoo of the "Whirligig" and Hubert Lagadere of the "Plain Speaker" sufficient information of

1. Not true, of course.

her mesalliance for them to let fall in their columns the typical prurient and tantalising hints of such behaviour that the real journalists habitually employed. They become part of the novel's purpose by showing the pain this yellow journalism can bring to the innocent as well as the guilty; and by showing that in a hypocritical age when such obvious social evils as prostitution are not openly discussed, surreptitious innuendo can all too easily be employed for purposes of blackmail.

Yates and Labouchere gave as good as they received; and, much later, when Buchanan, still on the same question of the evils and causes of prostitution, began a lengthy correspondence in the Daily Telegraph in March 1889 asking the question "Is Chivalry still Possible?" (on which the most notable contribution is Mrs. Lynn Linton's letter, already quoted, of March 27), he came in for another attack in Truth. Under the heading, the best thing in the article, "Is Buchanan still Possible?" (April 4, 1889, pp. 624-6), his pretensions to a leading place in English literature, based on his undoubted gifts as a scholar, and "a man of imagination, having a command of rich and varied vocabulary," are fatally negated by his absolute lack of sincerity (p. 624); which is once again demonstrated in his "The Modern Young Man as Critic",¹ where his strictures on William Archer had been a retaliation against Archer's criticism of his plays in About the Theatre, and those on George Moore for his comments on

1. Published in the Universal Review, III, March 15, 1889, pp. 353-372.

Buchanan in The Confessions of a Young Man. Having once gained, in the Fleshly Controversy, a reputation for vindictiveness, Buchanan spent the rest of his life fending off gibes such as these.

This particular feud he sought to end with the following lines which failed to be included, as Buchanan intended they should, in The Outcast (1891):

So Edmund, Henry, pax vobiscum,
 Arcades ambo, here's adieu!
 All strife, all hate, at last to this come -
 The silent grave, the sunless yew.¹

In his persistent denunciation of the infringements by the collective mediocrity upon the rights of the individual, Buchanan was early pronouncing against literary censorship. In fact it was the refusal by Mudie's Library to supply him with a copy of Swinburne's Poems and Ballads, second series, published only two years after Buchanan versus Taylor, that first prompted him to raise the issue in his own journal:

Now, we are not likely to be accused of being too considerate for Mr. Swinburne, or of having his welfare too wildly at heart, but we take leave to protest, in the name of common sense, against the suppression, or threatened suppression, of an interesting book. We do not subscribe to Mudie's in order to have the advantage of a philosophic librarian, who will tell us what to read and what to avoid; we subscribe simply for purposes of convenience, and we pay Mr. Mudie to supply us with what books we want, not what books he considers moral. In point of fact, there is nothing in these Poems and Ballads at which any sensible creature could take offence, and there is in them so much that is noteworthy and beautiful, that to suppress them is a public affront. But be a book what it may, we protest

1. Henry Murray, p. 8.

against suppression altogether. The public is not an infant, and is quite old enough to choose its own literature. If it chooses ill, so much the worse; but it is no affair of Mr. Mudie's.¹

George Moore, who was unlikely to be on the same side of any issues as Buchanan, also attacked the circulating libraries, with more justification than Buchanan had, when Mudie's had withdrawn A Modern Lover because of the objections of two ladies. He then published A Mummer's Wife in a single volume edition at six shillings (as opposed to the prohibitive ten shillings and six pence per volume of the standard three volume issue), and emboldened at its success, could condemn the libraries' crippling pressure on new work unacceptable to them in his pamphlet Literature at Nurse, or Circulating Morals (1885). In it he cited risqué passages from novels currently popular with Mudie's readers, including Buchanan's Foxglove Manor with its "libidinous clergyman", which were much worse than anything in his. And he blamed the circulating libraries for largely contributing to the "deplorable dearth of talent among novelists", by their "staying the current of fresh ideas, and quickly opposing the development of fresh thought" (p. 19). Moore ran into more serious opposition, however, when he assisted the aged Henry Vizetelly in his publication of Zola's novels; and when Vizetelly was eventually imprisoned (despite his assurances that he would not continue to publish Zola, he discovered that the state of his business compelled it), Frank Harris found

1. Light, July 6, 1878, p. 427. It is altogether likely Light had been begun by Buchanan as his practical answer to The World and Truth. Light soon failed, however.

Moore's defence of Vizetelly impossible to print in the Saturday Review.

Buchanan took it upon himself to come to Vizetelly's aid with one of the better pieces of polemics of his career (described by Henry Murray as being worthy "to take its place by Milton's "Areopagitica" and John Mill's "Essay on Liberty" as an irrefutable argument on the side of freedom of thought and expression"¹), On Descending into Hell: A Letter addressed to the Right Hon. Henry Matthews, Q.C., Home Secretary, Concerning the Proposed Suppression of Literature (1889). Not a closely argued attack on censorship (and therefore not to be mentioned in the same breath as Milton or Mill), the pamphlet is more a series of thrusts, some brilliant, some very wide of the mark, at the assumptions behind the move to ban Zola. The arguments range from an ad hominem appeal to a Tory Home Secretary to act as Benjamin Disraeli would have done, defending "the freedom of letters against a whole army of canting busybodies," and prurient "Vigilance Committee-Men" (p. 17), to more profound discussions of the cause of the human depravity and vice that Zola depicts. Since Matthews was a Catholic, Buchanan could state his case in theological terms: man has eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and has lost his innocence, it would be stupid to deny him any new means of knowledge, and "we cannot save ourselves now by ignorance" (p. 28). Zola is of the Devil's party and gives us glimpses of the

1. Robert Buchanan, p. 15.

Hell that all percipient men know is part of human existence, and a knowledge of which is necessary to all who have to fight their way through the world. Zola and artists like him can satisfy those moments "when even the best of us crave more" than Tennyson's Poems or Patmore's Angel in the House can give, "the bitterness of knowledge, the sight of the charnel house, the glimmer of the deep, dim lights of Hell" (p. 32). The Catholic Church, unlike puritan England has always held that "no carnal sin or carnal knowledge can really wreck the soul", and since Zola's work is only a threat to the body, then Mr. Matthews as a Catholic should, with the superior wisdom of his Church, act to put an end to Vizetelly's imprisonment.

Buchanan sees puritanism obviously enough as one of the causes of this movement to suppress literature, but sees the other, curiously, as pragmatic Science, with its ideal of regulating human life so that eventually man after several generations will "arrive at the perfectly balanced mind in the perfectly balanced body, - a Teutonic condition to be found even now in the Fatherland" (p. 25. And a condition he examined in The City of Dream and The Rev. Annabel Lee).

That England's literature for most of the nineteenth century has been expurgated he credits to the "priesthoods of Episcopacy, of Dissent, of Good Society, of Art and Letters (or Dilletanteism), of cheap Science, and, most potent, yet least responsible of all, the priesthood of the Stump, or Politics." These, though mutually antagonistic, have combined

to ensure that "there must be no descending into Hell, that literature especially must be kept clean and wholesome, fit for family perusal" (p. 31). Elsewhere he credits Mudie's library with giving "a protective wing" to literature while "the moribund drama gasps and struggles Desdemona-like under the smothering pillow of the blindly jealous Lord Chamberlain" (p. 27).

Buchanan made the predictable points that much of Shakespeare, Dryden, Fielding, Smollett, Burns, and Byron would need to be excised if scrutinised by the enforcers of the Obscene Publications Act (1857) used to convict Vizetelly;¹ and he wisely warned that the record of every generation is "filled with the names of books labelled vicious by the contemporary majority" only to be pronounced sane and "soul-helping" by posterity (p. 35). The only suppression worth the name was that of wiser argument, deeper insight, or greater knowledge. And, besides, immoral literature, he repeats, is the sign of a corrupt society, and it is the cause not the effect that should be attended to.

Perhaps the pamphlet is not as effective as a man of Buchanan's undoubted literary power could have made it; it certainly did not produce the desired result. But it was one of the few voices raised in protest at Vizetelly's imprisonment, and is a by no means unworthy performance.

1. In the previous year Moore and Vizetelly had produced an anthology "designed to show that, on the grounds alleged against Zola's work, the Bible, Shakespeare, and most of the English classics should be suppressed." Joseph Hone, The Life of George Moore, p. 151.

By 1891 those other manifestations of demos,¹ Yates and Labouchere, were no longer mindless purveyors of social gossip; compared to the next generation of journalists, exemplified by W.T. Stead, they were positively beneficent (Yates had persistently criticised the Times for its irresponsibility); if a clash of personalities had been behind his feud with Yates and Labouchere, there was something much more profound to animate his later attacks on the newspaper press.

Buchanan often approvingly quoted John Morley's description of the press as a "mighty engine for keeping popular conscience and intelligence at a low level." In his last years he fought against it, even from within, as effectively, no doubt, as Don Quixote fought similar engines. For he realised that the manipulation of public opinion by the new penny press was a far more dangerous phenomenon than the idle chatter of society journals. In his last years he vigorously denounced the growing tide of militarism; the smug, insular English superiority; the worship of material wealth and the rise of men like Cecil Rhodes who could harness such forces (did not Rhodes once try to buy his own London paper?) and deploy them in the massive support for the punitive action in the Transvaal, and other gross manifestations of majority power that Buchanan and a few others fought vainly to restrain.

His political thinking, and doubtless that of

1. "I have ^e ceased to believe in Progress and Social development", wrote Buchanan to G.B. Shaw in July, 1895, "and I don't care a damn for Demos, now."

many other people besides, had been greatly clarified by a correspondence which he had initiated, once again, in the columns of the Daily Telegraph, during January and February, 1890.¹ It had begun with Buchanan's response to T.H. Huxley's essay "On the Natural Inequality of Man" in Nineteenth Century (XXVII, January 1890, pp. 1-23), in which Buchanan denied that Rousseau had said that all men were equally endowed, physically and intellectually. Huxley,² while welcoming a new entrant to "the theatre of political speculation" was not at first to be drawn. And when, in response to an editorial calling upon him to define what sort of individual freedom he was seeking, Buchanan, after a lengthy diatribe against the failure of nominally Christian nations and their citizens to live by truly Christian ethics,³ specified equal freedom for all to share the necessities of life, equal freedom of opportunity, and equal freedom of thought and action within the necessary limitations of political organization (pp. 61-2). Huxley, in his next letter, accepted these as his own aims, saying that the "necessary limitations of political organization"

1. Reprinted under the title "Are Men born Free and Equal?" in The Coming Terror and Other Essays and Letters (1891), pp. 43-97.
2. Who had said in a footnote to his essay that he had "no energy to waste on replies to irresponsible criticism" (p. 5).
3. "'Love one another' was [Christ's] highest and holiest admonition - one which we, in this Christian country, carry out by allowing wealth to accumulate and men to decay; by permitting, as in the area of the deer forests of Scotland, the accidental wealth of one or two men to mean the destruction and expatriation of thousands; by suffering, as in Ireland, a landlordism without even the excuse of capital, to drive a whole nation into despair and crime" (p. 54).

should be decided by "the results of experience" and neither by "the celestial courts of Poesy nor by the tribunals of speculative cloudland" (p. 72). Herbert Spencer was the object of the last remark; and this was another expression of their long dispute concerning pragmatic science and speculative philosophy. In his next letter the controversy took a new turn when Huxley asked Buchanan whether Spencer, the champion of individualism, could indeed be, as Buchanan claimed, a socialist (p. 75).

Buchanan was now forced to equate Spencer's political philosophy, which Huxley asserted was "diametrically opposed" to it, with his own socialism. The result was ingenious and certainly was not publicly denied by Spencer in his only contribution, and the last, to the correspondence. He began by giving a brief history of the various harmless forms of individualism that he had seen in his youth among the followers of Robert Owen, whose own belief

was that man, though born free and equal in the sphere of moral rights, 'was entirely the creature of circumstances,' and the main mission of his life was the mission of Socialism generally - to modify those circumstances so as to produce, practically, a new Moral World (p. 84).

Buchanan then gave his version of the ideal socialist state as having only the political and civic government necessary for such things as drainage and lighting (and, doubtless, law enforcement and justice; Spencer himself would never have dispensed with them), and to ensure equal work and equal opportunity for all, with no class supported by the exertions of another. To this, he declared, Spencer would

have no objection; and nor did he.

The most interesting part of the discussion centred on the attitude of the three disputants (for Spencer was following its course closely) to social welfare. None was entirely predictable. Huxley, Darwin's champion, might have been expected to allow natural processes to eliminate poverty; instead, he believed that the poor should be helped by some such state welfare system as is now part of every Western economy. This, Buchanan, somewhat surprisingly, saw as "an interference with the conduct of life;" such "over legislation would restore slavery to mankind," would destroy individualism "and the last hope of the higher socialism" (p. 88). What he means is not absolutely clear, and he subsequently wrote an essay on the subject. To ensure that his position was easily understood, Spencer, quoting from his Social Statics, "As no cruel thing can be done without character being thrust a degree back towards barbarism, so no kind thing can be done without character being moved a degree towards perfection," counselled private acts of charity as a sure means to the improvement of the race. Quoting from The Man versus the State, where he had returned to the question, he warned that a welfare system giving social aid indiscriminately would "enable the inferior to multiply" thus entailing "mischief" (p. 96). Thus the scientist counselled social welfare, and the sociologist seemed to fear the growth of a biologically inferior species as a result of such a programme; and Buchanan, for all his socialism, seemed to fear the growth of mob rule and the

disappearance of individual rights.

In 1891 he published "Is Man Born Free and Equal?" as part of a collection of his polemical utterances in The Coming Terror and Other Essays and Letters. What he feared was none other than totalitarianism, and the title essay articulated those fears. The political tyranny of majorities would by means of welfare state legislation destroy the incentives for personal betterment. He foresaw espionage in all aspects of public and private life, the despotism of Trades Unions, widespread suppression of freedom of individual action, ignorant and repressive journalism, jurisprudence "confounding the empirical laws of expedience with the laws of ethics" (this a last attack on Huxley's empiricism), and a new priesthood of science regulating the growth and freedom of mankind according to the "arbitrary laws of empirical and materialist discovery" (pp. 35-6).

Here is Spencer's philosophy of individualism allied to Mill's anticipation, now widely shared by many opponents of socialism, of the tyranny of the "collective mediocrity". Buchanan's particular contribution is his fear of the growth of the new priesthood of science with its sinister control over mankind's development. Materialism, which he saw as the besetting evil of his age and which manifests itself in so many different ways, he always combated as resolutely as sympathetic editors and publishers would allow. For him the Higher Socialism, as compared to the socialism of the Fabians whose avowed purpose was the amelioration of the material conditions of society which Buchanan opposed, has as its object "less to organize political agencies

[such as Trades Unions] than to widen the area of personal freedom as far as possible, so that in proportion to the liberty of action granted to individuals would be the comfort and security of the community" (p. 15). Buchanan's political thought is provocative and by no means invalidated by the events of the twentieth century. Clearly his argument against Fabianism was one concerned with the means to bring about the socialist millenium. Communism Buchanan abhorred; in fact it was really the worst aspects of it that he seems to have envisioned. His ideas are still undeveloped and grandly vague at times. Nowhere, for example, does he specifically tackle the question of the ownership of land; on the one hand he deplores it being in the hands of a few wealthy people, but on the other he clearly would not accept state ownership.

Ignorant and repressive journalism Buchanan had witnessed in 1890. When it became politically expedient to publicise Charles Parnell's adultery with Mrs. O'Shea, which had long been common knowledge in political circles and had long been accepted by her husband, the massive righteousness of Victorian respectability was called into play by those anxious to see Parnell leave public life. So far as Buchanan was concerned if O'Shea was not affected by his wife's liaison with Parnell it was no business of anyone else; and he scorned the cynical manipulation of public feeling and "the constitutional bigotry which [had] led even so honest a man as Mr. Gladstone to join in the cry against him."¹ It was an unparalleled

1. "The Journalist in Absolution", The Coming Terror, p. 353.

example in English politics of the powerlessness of the individual against carefully orchestrated outbursts of outraged morality. In an article published just after the divorce action when Parnell's political future was still not clear, Buchanan wrote

... to all men who value the security of their homes and the right of private judgement, the New Journalism, with its aggression, its tyrannical bias, and its shameless indecency, is the old Priest in Absolution forcing a way into every household (pp. 352-3).

The only published comment by Buchanan on Parnell's subsequent downfall and sudden death that can be discovered was partly reprinted in St. John Erskine's biography of the Irishman:

And now? The things which fear'd his face
Fight for the Lion's skin!

What one of these shall put it on?
Thou, weakest of the weak,
Who, when thy Lord lay woe-begone,
First kiss'd, then smote, his cheek?
Or thou, who mock'd him in his fall
With foul and impious jest?
Or thou, the basest of them all,
Who gnaw'd the bleeding breast?

Jackals and cowards, mourn elsewhere!
Not near the mighty Dead!
Your breath pollutes the holy air
Around a Martyr's bed.
Go! fatten with the Scribes and Priests
Who led your foul array,
Or crouch with all the timorous beasts
Who follow'd him for prey!¹

(CPW, II, 419)

When Buchanan's emotion was aroused to this pitch, the resulting verse was not unworthy of its theme.

1. Parnell, p. 326. One of the scribes would have been W.T. Stead, and along with the Irish clergy glad to be rid of Parnell was the Methodist, Hugh Price Hughes.

He had long been a sympathiser with Irish political objectives, particularly Home Rule, and probably realized better than most that with Parnell's death such ambitions were dashed.

Four years later he was exercised on behalf of another embattled and friendless Irishman, Oscar Wilde. One of the few men of letters to raise his voice in opposition to Wilde's persecution in the popular press (Henry Labouchere, whose amendment to the legislation used to convict Wilde ensured his two years' sojourn in Reading gaol, persistently vilified him in Truth), Buchanan wrote several letters to the Star in April 1895. It is altogether likely that he wrote to all the major newspapers, but such was the climate of opinion that the only letter published was that in the evening paper. It began, as such letters of his invariably began, by appealing in a so-called Christian country for some Christian charity, and declaring that Wilde's writings, which were ostracised with their author, were harmless. As a general indictment of the hypocrisy that had been so much in evidence in Parnell's case, and not as he later explained as a particular charge against the man prosecuting Wilde, he concluded,

Let us ask ourselves, moreover, who are casting these stones, and whether they are those "without sin amongst us" or those who are themselves notoriously corrupt (Star, April 16, 1895, p.4).¹

Not unreasonably, the Marquess of Queensberry assumed himself

1. Labouchere's private life was by no means pure, ^{which} ~~was~~ was common knowledge.

to be the target of Buchanan's invective, and very mildly conceded that while not notoriously corrupt he could not claim to be without sin. Could Buchanan? (Star, April 19, 1895, p. 3). Next day, Buchanan hastened to assert that it was the "Christian publicists who were pronouncing sentence on Mr. Wilde before he was even committed for trial" (p. 3) that he was attacking. He then expressed his disapproval at the discomforts and indignities suffered by Wilde as he languished in prison awaiting trial. The following day someone signing himself "Common-Sense" objected to Buchanan using the Wilde case as the basis for arguing for better pre-trial treatment of prisoners, when for someone like Bill ⁱSykes the present system was entirely satisfactory. On April 23 Buchanan took the opportunity, once again, to champion the rights of a richly gifted individual against the harsh indiscrimination of the penal system:

Just in so far as a man has been respected by us, has amused us, has afforded us harmless pleasure, should he receive delicate consideration. Treatment which would not in the least trouble Mr. Sikes may break the heart of a gentleman and scholar like Mr. Oscar Wilde; and if we who follow his calling do not speak on his behalf, who is to do so? Whatever he is, whatever he may be assumed to be, he is a man of letters, a brother artist, and no criminal prosecution whatever will be able to erase his name from the records of English literature.

Later letters asserted that Wilde's "paradoxes and absurdities" far from being a calculated attack on public morality were purely ironical and that most of his works are "as innocent as a naked baby," Dorian Gray being one

"of the highest morality" (Star April 24, p. 2). He also deplored that, unlike in romantic fiction (specifically Hugo's Les Miserables), no Christian clergyman had lifted his voice, in the midst of the outcry against Wilde, preaching tolerance and forgiveness.

It is possible that Buchanan's appeals did have some effect on Wilde's predicament. His solicitor appealed for the delay of the trial on the grounds that public feeling might prevent it from being fair and unprejudiced. This Mr. Justice Charles declined. When, at the end of the first trial Wilde was to be released on bail, a clergyman, quite unknown to him, the Rev. Stewart Headlam, did stand surety for him as an act of charity (he felt "that the public mind had been prejudiced before the case began", and he was "anxious to give Mr. Wilde any help ... to enable him to stand trial in good health and spirits". Star, May 7, p.3).

One inescapable comment about Buchanan, "the complete letter-writer" as Israel Zangwill once called him, is his love of self-advertisement. He had a sufficiently high reputation that most editors would print most of his letters. Hitherto the newspaper controversies here discussed had never promoted the sale of his wares. But in January 1893 he had become embroiled in just such a potentially lucrative controversy when he had published The Wandering Jew and it had been reviewed in the Morning Chronicle (anonymously by Richard le Gallienne). As his verse and novels testify, Buchanan was always eager to discuss questions of religion, and his reply to the review

once again involved him in a lengthy newspaper controversy, which helped to exhaust the first edition of the book within two weeks of its appearance. Le Gallienne had been quite generous with his praise of Buchanan's reverential attitude to Christ in the poem though calling his craftsmanship "slapdash" and "crude" (Morning Chronicle, January 11, 1893, p.3). Buchanan's reply, unfailing as ever, and printed the following day, contained his claim to have depicted a nineteenth century Christ, "patient, long-suffering, ever-misunderstood, eternally-condemned," that none of his readers would ever forget. As to the literary qualities of the work, he continued, he was "indifferent", having "no respect whatever for mere art or mere literature." It is easy to imagine what anathema this ill-considered expression of his old prejudices against the aesthetes would have been to many of his readers. Buchanan all too often seemed to forget that though beauty should not, for him, be the end of art, it should at least be an attribute of it. His letter certainly produced a strong response from Le Gallienne, then a young man of twenty-seven anxious to make his way in the literary world, who was to benefit from the controversy even more than Buchanan.¹ He, predictably, declared that it was just Buchanan's cavalier attitude to "mere art" and "mere literature" that could allow him to publish "verse so nerveless and effects so cheap," and then went on to defend a religion not his own by saying that Christ was

1. Richard Whittington-Egan and Geoffrey Smerdon, The Quest of the Golden Boy, pp. 206-223.

not the weak and spectral alien of Buchanan's portrait but a vital and strong influence, and ended by asking Buchanan whether Christianity really was played out (Chronicle, January 13, 1893, p. 3). The editor was thus given a title for the correspondence, and received over two thousand letters on the topic before the month ended. On at least two Sundays the issue was discussed in pulpits up and down the land; and even the Marquess of Queensberry was moved to express his own gratification that such a question could be so freely discussed in the columns of a daily paper, when only seventeen years earlier his public defection from the ranks of Christians had been followed by social ostracism and the loss of political rights (January 30, 1893, p. 8)

In a later letter, Buchanan said there must be "something essentially deficient in a creed which, like Christianity, has so black a record, and has done so little for the general happiness of man" (Chronicle, January 16, 1893, p. 3). Towards the end of the correspondence he considered that deficiency, which had caused Christianity to be the "deadly enemy of human progress," to lie in "the transcendental empiricism of its Founder" (Chronicle, February 7, 1893, p. 3). Hitherto Buchanan had always separated the historical record of what had been done by men in the name of Christianity from the teachings of Christ Himself, which he had considered to be inspired; and much of them he took as the basis for his own socialism. Now he was prepared to come into the open, as he was not in The Wandering Jew and condemn the diverting of man's eyes

from this world with all its splendours and joys, for the empty promise of another, thus encouraging evil men to prosper and establish themselves throughout the ages at the expense and suffering of believers and their heirs.

Buchanan's own views clearly became more radical in the course of this controversy; or, at least, he became less inhibited in expressing his deepest convictions. But it is doubtful that many changed their opinions as a result of it. Certainly clergymen were much perturbed by such a direct attack in such a public place upon their religion; and, to some extent, their complacency must have been shaken by the extent and bitterness of many of the anti-Christian sentiments expressed by people of all classes. Le Gallienne published his own response in November of the same year, The Religion of a Literary Man, which really was the most nebulous expression of Le Gallienne's "essential Christianity." Israel Zangwill reviewed the book in the Star (November 25, 1893, p. 1), and in his article surreptitiously inserted this couplet describing Buchanan, "stiff in opinion, always in a rage, he is everything by turns and nothing sage".¹ He

1. Which he later expanded to the following, whose original publication has not been found:

'Are there many Buchanans whom we have all been ignorantly confounding? There is a poet Buchanan, Byronic and brilliant, who is only nominally the same as Buchanan the mystic (not to be confounded with Buchanan the materialist). There is also Buchanan the complete letter-writer, who is unrelated to Buchanan the author of "Christian Romances," who in his turn, suffers from being identified with the Buchanan who writes novels for the other person, and it need hardly be said that none of these gentlemen is Buchanan the essayist, or Buchanan the business man They were all born in different years, and some of them are dead. Several are men of genius, and one or two are Philistines whom the others dislike.'

considered Le Gallienne to be as good a Jew as a Christian, and accused Buchanan of being no more specific in the expressing of his beliefs. Buchanan immediately replied stating categorically his belief in the Fatherhood of God ("as revealed daily and momentarily in the human conscience or Ego"), and in the immortality of the individual (Star, November 27, 1893, p. 1). To this Zangwill wittily and perceptively replied, but the editor of this four-page evening paper quickly put an end to a new controversy on the old topic, only allowing Buchanan space to print his verse reply to Le Gallienne (in the measure of "The Vicar of Bray", since, so far as Buchanan was concerned Le Gallienne was a follower of Omar Khayyam, a materialist, not a Christian at all) of which this is the first stanza:

If I desire to end my days at peace with all theologies
 To win the penny-a-liner's praise, the Editors' apologies,
 Don't think I mean to cast aside the Christian's pure beatitude,
 Or ~~case~~ ^{platitude.} my vagrant steps to guide with Christian prayer and
 No, I'm a Christian out and out, and claim the kind appellative
 Because, however much I doubt, my doubts are simply Relative;
 For this is law, and this I teach, tho' some may think it vanity,
 That whatsoever creed men preach, 'tis Essential Christianity!

(CPW, II, 410)

An issue related to this one blew up after Robert Browning's death. In 1891 his "Letter Dedicatory" at the end of The Outcast, Buchanan reported an early conversation with him in which he told Browning that in his verse he was "an advocate of Christian theology, ... an essentially Christian teacher and preacher," which was, indeed, the burden of his review of Dramatis Personae. Browning regarded this as an "impeachment and a slight," so Buchanan "put the question categorically, 'Are you not, then, a

Christian?' He immediately thundered, 'No!'" (p.198) In her biography, Mrs. Sutherland Orr refuted this, saying that Buchanan must have misunderstood Browning, who though not accepting Christian dogmas en bloc was still a Christian. In "Some Memories of Robert Browning" (Sunday Special, November 5, 1899, p. 2) Buchanan returned to the question very briefly, in an otherwise delightful essay describing his relations with the older poet, by saying "A careful study of his writings will convince any dispassionate student ... that he was a very queer sort of Christian indeed, if he was one at all." He quoted from "Gold Hair: A Study of Pornic" (from Dramatis Personae), but only to say that it reflected a mood of Browning's "favourite argumentative character of Mr. Facing-both-ways." Browning shared Buchanan's belief, "a nebulous hope ... rather than a reasoned-out conviction," in the survival of the personality after death, and that so far as Buchanan was concerned was the extent of his religion. Apparently Mrs. Orr once again denied that this was true, and several others of his biographers and students seem to have been much disturbed at Buchanan's assertion, which the most gentlemanly refute¹ unconvincingly.

Another polemical foray was occasioned by his decision to become a publisher. After his trouble with Andrew Chatto over the publication of Rachel Dene in 1894, which was greatly exacerbated by its repetition over Lady Kilpatrick a year later, Buchanan decided, in much the same

1. W. Hall Griffin and H.C. Minchin The Life of Robert Browning.

way that he became a theatrical producer, to publish his own work. With his first book thus issued, The Devil's Case (1896), appeared Is Barabbas a Necessity? (given free to all purchasers of his wares, one shilling otherwise, and now very scarce and not in the British Library). "A Discourse on Publishers and Publishing", it castigates others besides Chatto and Windus. John Lane's withdrawal of Oscar Wilde's works during the trials a year before is denounced as a "brutal impertinence," especially since Wilde owned their copyright and Lane, therefore, was little more than a wholesale bookseller. Buchanan draws attention to the fact that several publishers were closely associated with Mudie's Library, which could well see one work being promoted while another (his own?) was suppressed. Of Chatto and Windus, and the whole question of authors letting their copyrights go, he asserts that on several occasions he had tried to buy back the copyright of his novels at three times their purchase price (the Chatto correspondence only contains Buchanan's offer to return Chatto what he paid, plus interest and his expenses; but Buchanan's offer could have been made orally) and deplores the fact that too often the impecunious author is driven by circumstances to sell his rights thereby depriving him for ever of any interest in his own products (pp. 9-10).

Much of the first half of the pamphlet is spent in denouncing the mystique of publishing with its concern with "the Trade" and its connections with "the Press". Buchanan gives some interesting figures on the cost of producing a novel, and the sort of profit a publisher can

make out of a successful one. The first half ends by Buchanan showing Tolstoy's generosity in taking no money from his writings, as merely making a free gift of them to the grasping publishers who can now charge as high a price for them as the market will bear.¹

In the second half of the pamphlet, under the heading "Buchanana", he rides several of his hobby-horses after first giving a short description of The Devil's Case. He briefly notes the devil's bibliography, pausing long enough to call Paradise Lost a tedious bore and "intellectually and morally a dead thing", and to assert that Byron and Goethe among others have missed "the true inwardness of the Spirit of Revolt" and that "supreme Pity and Sympathy, supreme Love and Tenderness, supreme dissatisfaction with a system which is disfigured by so much Evil, form the true note of the true Devil," as his own poem shows (p. 18). Having finally rejected Christ as a saviour of this world, be it said, it was only logical that Buchanan should turn to the Devil. Several pages are devoted to the curse of anonymous criticism, which can allow the indolent to review books they have not read; and Buchanan allows himself one more swing at Le Gallienne whose "essential Christianity" was

1. In his correspondence with Shaw he replied to Shaw's objection to this remark:

You told me in a former letter that rather than scamp your work you allow your old mother to suffer daily inconvenience, and now you tell me you refused so much money from a prowling entrepreneur Now, no one gains by the free performance of your play but the said entrepreneur, ... while by accepting what is your moral right you could doubtless give some additional comfort to one whom ... you love dearly. (Letter dated March 6, 1896).

"essential Nebulosity, that ... didn't imply either God or Immortal Life, that we eat and drink and to-morrow we die, but that it didn't particularly matter, that in fact nothing mattered very much, so long as we had the Star, the Log-rollers, Jesus, Omar Khayoum [sic], the Yellow Book, and Mr. George Meredith!" Eventually Buchanan moves on to the casus belli of his new venture into publishing. He describes the publishing history of Lady Kilpatrick, "written some years ago during a period of nightmare, and sold for a trifle" (p. 21) and he prints a letter which he wrote to Chatto and Windus on February 14, 1895 making ad miseriam appeals to them to suppress it (the original of this letter is with the Chatto correspondence):

This story and several others were produced at a time when I was driven to despair by pecuniary troubles, which culminated in my bankruptcy. To avoid ruin, if possible, I wrote (for miserable sums) work in which I had to have assistance. The whole of that period is a nightmare to me, and closely upon it has come the greatest grief and sorrow of my life [his mother's death]. It is doubly hard and cruel that any person should endeavour, at such a time, to ruin me with the novel-reading public ... (p.22).

Then, and not for the first time, Buchanan describes the hodman's work that he has had to do for publishers. The only reason, he says, for telling the public of his sordid affairs is that they should know which of his works he values, which he does not so that they realise, as he puts it, that he was "not fatuous enough to mistake" any of his "geese for swans" (p. 23). At least, he concludes, the worst that can be said of Rachel Dene and Lady Kilpatrick is that they are "harmless tale-tellings" and are not as are other men's work half-hearted

compromises between a desire for popular success and Art. Nor has he like some nameless contemporaries, he must have been thinking of Thomas Hardy, "mistaken the puddle of Pessimism for the crystalline well of Art." Forceful language, illuminating metaphor, once Buchanan's ire is up, these never left him, but Barabbas, is not much more than a collection of sallies at publishers, novelists, critics, the entire literary world. The last sally of all was directed at a colossus of that world, George Bernard Shaw. Buchanan had the temerity (for which he afterwards apologised profusely) to quote a lengthy extract from a letter from Shaw to him in which Shaw characteristically made little of human affections (see above, p. 121); of the sentimental appreciation "usually produced by whiskey, more or less," of a "'good heart'"; and prided himself on his self-sufficiency, which made him more concerned at a mis-print in an article than the deaths of his father or sister ("with whom he was on excellent terms") (p. 24). These sentiments prompt Buchanan to state, once again, his faith, in memorable prose

... that the only justification of Art and Humanity is personal Love, and that the deeper we feel the bond which unites us to those nearest to us, the more conscious we are of the supreme piteousness of Love and Death, the more likely are we to add a verse or a chapter to the great Human Gospel. There is nothing divine, nothing eternal, in Man, except his affections. They are the foundation of all hope, all belief, and they are the soul of all Art which is worthy of the name (p. 25).

Buchanan then restates his basic aesthetic that "the special study of the poet," as distinguished from the prosaist, is Man in relation to the eternal problems of Life and Death. The Poet, in short, "is a Prophet, a

Propagandist, or nothing". Too many of our so-called poets have put spiritual speculation to one side, there have been "too many troops of polite and energetic singers", Tennyson he would consider one, "taking every existing idea on trust, and filling their little buckets at the fountains of English undefiled left by their predecessors" (p. 26).

At the end of the pamphlet are several "notes" on various aspects of publishing in which Buchanan hits wildly at Edmund Gosse, who had recently said that some authors were getting too greedy, and commends Sir Walter Besant¹ and his Society of Authors, who were clearly trying to improve the lot of the struggling author, and deplores the advent of the Literary Agent, yet another plunderer on the skills of that author. He fires a last salvo on behalf of M. E. Braddon in her struggle to preserve the three-volume novel from the boycott of Mudie's Library, and ends with a tirade against typical publisher's advertising.

Is Barabbas a Necessity? is too full of bitterness and special pleading to be considered one of Buchanan's more memorable pieces of invective. That he was still considered a polemist of power is implicit in the offer made by the editor of the newly-founded Sunday Special in early

1. Here Buchanan commends the virility and purity of Besant's fiction. Three years later he accused him of writing for the market, and accepting the status quo, offering no new thoughts, "nothing to tell the world of its own secrets, or of the struggles of your own temperament", and worse yet, encouraging young people to regard writing as rewarding trade for those prepared to work, when in fact Besant should know very well that no thinker, or seeker after a truth has the slightest chance of being successful in his lifetime. Sunday Special, September 24, 1899, p. 2.

1898 to discuss topical issues as freely as the law of libel allowed every Sunday for as long as he liked. For a year, with occasional interruptions, Buchanan fulminated on his pet topics, from capital punishment to vivisection, from militarism to scientific materialism, from Positivism to Christianity; it was his last chance to inveigh against all the ills discernible in the last years of Queen Victoria's reign. The editor was inundated with letters when Buchanan called the hero of Omdurman "a rat-catcher killing Dervishes", and when he published his memoirs of those early benefactors of his Robert Browning, George Eliot and G.H. Lewes it was indignantly asked of him, who would not let such considerations encourage reticence in such matters, whether he knew the meaning of gratitude. Much of what he wrote was merely the repetition of opinions stated often enough before; much is of interest now only to the social historian; but some is worthy of the literary historian's notice; and Buchanan's honest reflections on literature and its leading figures of his day are well worth preserving.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Robert Buchanan, prolific and energetic writer that he was, can be best described as a Victorian romantic. An artist with several basic deficiencies, which all suggest no less serious deficiencies as a man, he has become notorious for one major blunder in an otherwise relatively blameless career. Undoubtedly the personality he exhibited so openly in his later work was not one to appeal to those with a more exalted view of what a poet should be, and his exhibitionism, along with the animosity of several influential contemporary critics, the early repudiation by such later critics as Lytton Strachey of the major, let alone minor, Victorian writers, and the vogue for the concise spare verse of the Imagists, all combined to bury Buchanan's reputation as a minor poet of distinction not very long after his death in 1901. Since that time no whole-hearted attempts have been made to resuscitate that reputation.

He was a Victorian in many ways, especially in the pejorative sense of that word. His prurient and hypocritical attitude to matters of sex, his insistence on testing the ethical quality of any new literary work, his arrogant dogmatism (as often as not hiding inner insecurities, which he later came to recognise), his insular complacency, and his self-righteousness all appear as typical of his contemporaries. No less a judge than Matthew Arnold arraigned him in public and in private for his Philistinism. The public censure is

in Culture and Anarchy, the private in a letter to his mother¹ where he called Buchanan, "a clever, but raw and intemperate, Scotch youth;" and there can be no doubt that Arnold was right.

Intensely energetic, unafraid of experimenting with forms of expression or in ways of earning money, he was undoubtedly a romantic, and, as he grew older, his romanticism deepened. The early relatively objective verse in Undertones and succeeding volumes including North Coast, where his personality though present was never objectionably obtrusive, was later replaced by the subjective and too ambitious efforts to versify the philosophical and religious thought of the ages in The Earthquake and The City of Dream, and became the outright Byronism of The Outcast, where all reticence was dropped and Buchanan expressed himself as freely in his verse as he had long been doing in his prose. His aesthetic creed from first to last exalted the poet to a supreme role, but unlike several of his great contemporaries, who felt too constrained by the popular insistence on vatic verse, Buchanan, egotist that he was, clearly revelled in it. But it remains only clever verse, rarely did he reach the pitch of inspiration to be found in his earlier work, and he often wrote when the poetic mood was not on him. He shared with his great contemporaries their deeply romantic attitude to love,² that it was the only sure way to bring meaning to life,

1. Dated February 22, 1868, The Letters, edited by G.W.E. Russell, I, p. 389.

2. Did not Arnold in "Dover Beach" suggest that being true to one another was the only hope for certainty in a world of deeply unsettling change?

which was hardly a very satisfactory replacement for the religious certainties that had been destroyed by science and the higher criticism. Buchanan's profound belief in man's individuality never left him; and the concomitant sense of isolation, exacerbated by his own behaviour, while never expressed as eloquently as Arnold had expressed it, nevertheless invested much of his polemic, whether prose and verse, with real force. Most romantic was he in his trust in intuition rather than reason, in emotion rather than intellect; and like so many of his contemporaries, though possibly with better cause and with more awareness of the pitfalls awaiting the gullible, he believed in second sight and the validity of mystical visions, which he, at least, valued more than the discoveries of pragmatic science. Man's spiritual needs, in an increasingly materialist age, were his main concern, and he did what he could to minister to them throughout his life.

Undoubtedly Buchanan's romantic other-worldliness, like that of many others, was a part of a reaction to the ugliness, the viciousness, the stress, and the oppressiveness of much of contemporary life, particularly that of the growing cities. Having been brought up in one of the ugliest, Glasgow, during a period of maximum growth, he discovered, through the agency of Wordsworth's verse, the divinity in nature, and became one of the leading nature poets of his generation. Much of his work contains the recurring contrast between the corruption of city life and the purity of a country life regulated by nature, frequently associated with the epithet of Babylon for the first and the

image of Eden for the second (clichés though both were even in his time). While his discovery and acceptance of Christianity, after his free-thought upbringing, was unconventional, his gradual surrender of Christian dogma was as painful for him as it had been for others of his time. Well-informed about scientific discoveries and the ideological and spiritual ferment they caused, he was forced to give up bastion after bastion of his new-found faith. Certainty became belief, belief became hope, and, long before his death, Buchanan came to deny Christ's godhead, and to blame Him for much of the misery wrought on earth.

The voicing of such an indictment not long after Charles Bradlaugh had been finally admitted to Parliament was too much for Buchanan's more conventional readers. The literary outcast had become a rebellious heretic. Like Shelley and Byron before him, and like no contemporary man of letters of similar standing, Buchanan self-consciously rebelled at the very strong conformist pressures of his time. The forthrightness and the originality of opinions, expressed by one who was never notably self-effacing, on every subject of interest to a well-read man, may well have exposed more of Buchanan's inner life than his readers either wanted or liked. Reticence would have retained him admirers that such exhibitionism, never very popular with the English, undoubtedly lost him. Indeed the "garish Bohemianism" of his later days suggests that Buchanan, the staunch upholder of righteousness and purity, in many ways the quintessential Victorian was less than sincere (probably both in his moral early days and in his Bohemian phase), and was assuming a role for which he was not quite suited. It appears that in

middle age, like so many since (but how many then?), he began to live the life that his stern Calvinist outlook had denied him in his youth.¹

Buchanan had three major deficiencies as an artist: he was far too careless; his message was often too controversial for the greater proportion of his readers, when, indeed it was clearly expressed, and was too nebulous when it was not; and the medium for that message was just not sufficiently unobtrusive. His carelessness can be attributed to his early training in Grub Street and the surprising rapidity of his success as a poet. The journalism of those early years in London habituated him to the easy production of facile and readable work, a faculty which he could employ with amazing ease for the rest of his life, but which is hardly conducive to the production of enduring art; while his success confirmed him in his own immodest assessment of his achievement, and, no longer inhibited by the fear of failure, he ceased to lavish the care on his verse that had won him that success. His aesthetic creed, too, that content was much more important than form, forced him into a running battle with the aesthetes, from Swinburne to le Gallienne, and allowed him a contempt for form which was perilous, if not fatal, to the writing of poetry. One last reason for the prolixity and shapelessness of too much of his work was that he did not take heed of Charles Reade's advice, couched in homely metaphor, to be sure to fill the teapot before pouring out again (Jay, p. 234); when Buchanan wrote under the pressure of inspiration good work resulted, but too often, though not with his verse (which

1. For him, perhaps, with his wife's death in that year, life really did begin at forty.

occasionally had raw emotion as its genesis, if little more) the pressure was that of circumstances and the resulting work, commonplace or worse.

A poet who believes that poetic thought is superior to poetic expression can become incapacitated by his own aesthetic when he runs out of things to say, or when his central theme ceases in his hands to have sufficient subtlety or originality. For a large part of his career Buchanan was a poet with a Christian message, but as his beliefs eroded away so too did much of his poetic worth. Buchanan was too forthright a man to be able to create poetry from religious doubt, and as his doubts grew so did the fissure between what he wanted to believe, or, rather, what he wanted to express as his beliefs, and what he could believe. To one who set sincerity as high as he did, and to one who needed the high pressure of true inspiration to produce poetry, such doubts greatly debilitated his later verse. Since he believed that it was a writer's duty to be as positive as possible, he could not bring himself to be satiric, or iconoclastic, or pessimistic. Thus it is his earliest work, when his ideas and values were clearest and simplest, which has the best chance of enduring; while his later work, always interesting and not infrequently rising to the eloquence of poetry, though never for very long, becomes insubstantial and windy. His return to London in 1878 represents the end of his career as a distinctive poet; long before, had he said best what he had to say of life in the city, and his was just not the temperament for ambitious discussions of philosophy or theology.

Buchanan's deficiencies as an artist merge with those as a man when his style is examined. He liked large words and capital letters, and could use imprecise emotive expressions when specific, carefully worded ones would have carried his argument further. Never a searcher for the mot juste, he could slip into cliché¹ and other loose expression rather than attain the precision, the economy, and the beauty of a stylist. In his polemical verse and prose he could be extravagant and melodramatic, and could soon lose all sense of proportion. The naturally forceful mode of a man of strong, not to say violent, emotions could easily deteriorate into bombast and vulgar rant. Dogmatic and self-assertive, he loved an audience, and even his best fictional work, as in The Shadow of the Sword, is marred by the incursion of florid and theatrical rhetoric, when a better writer would trust to his skill and the reader's sensitivity to draw the proper conclusions. His unsubtle, emotional writing too often betrays a lack of those qualities which all good writers should possess (though great ones might dispense with them): sanity, balance, and intelligence. "Raw and intemperate," said Arnold, and prominent signs of Buchanan's defective sensibility dogged him throughout his life.

In an age which appreciated sentiment and which could tolerate much sentimentality, a man of Buchanan's warm enthusiasms and generous sympathies was bound to be

1. As when he referred to Oscar Wilde as "a gentleman and a scholar", in what otherwise might have been an eloquent defence of his fellow artist, see above, p.217.

popular. Here, possibly, is his main weakness, as a serious writer. Unable to be satiric or pessimistic because of his congenital determination to put the best face on the ugliness and suffering around him, he could easily slip into the wish-fulfilling efforts of the sentimental writer of fiction and melodrama to block such unpleasantness out. The popular acclaim of much of his work in this kind, which he well knew to be unworthy of him, encouraged a failing which should have been strenuously resisted. A touch of sentimentality spoils even some of his earliest work, and in his latest it becomes positively embarrassing. Yet he had a true gift for pathos, as his memoir of David Gray shows; that such a gift should have coarsened into the shallow emotionalism of some of his subsequent work, suggests Buchanan's distrust of his own gifts possibly, and certainly his contempt for his readers.

Excessive sympathy for the plight of his fictional characters' dilemmas was matched by an at times overwhelming pity for his own. Strong men are often sentimental, but they are often silent, too. That this fiercely combative man should indulge so publicly in self-pity at the wounds which, much more often than not, came in response to his own crippling thrusts, is not perhaps to be marvelled at. In fact, it suggests, as does much of his work, that behind the sturdy exterior there was a weak, vain, and little man, and all those copious references to himself in verse, essays, and even fiction, which were derided so severely by Swinburne in Under the Microscope (See Appendix, p. 254, for a choice example of this invective), are conscious or unconscious efforts of a very insecure man to give himself stature and

self-confidence.

The man revealed in his art was very much the same as that revealed throughout his life by his acts. Buchanan was the reverse of the typical Victorian in this at least; his public figure showed all his failings while his private one, little to be suspected by his readers, showed all his virtues. G.R. Sims, in the memoir of his friend and collaborator in Harriett Jay's biography, writes

In his work the dominant note was nearly always that of "I am Sir Oracle," but when the pen was thrown aside and he found himself among his fellow-workers, with a cigarette between his lips and John Jameson at his elbow, there was no more modest or less self-assertive man than Robert Buchanan (p.251).

But in public he was intensely pugnacious, litigious, intolerant and ~~very~~ bumptious after his early success confirmed his own appreciation of his gifts. Arnold called Buchanan, when he was in his twenty-seventh year a "youth", and he never lost a certain brash callowness, a failure to appreciate that for all one's ideals some things are better left unsaid. Letters were sent to editors, when a few moments of reflection would have convinced him of the un-wisdom of his act. But then with the frenetic activity of his last twenty years, itself an escape from thought (see above, p. 11), a few moments of reflection were almost the last thing he wanted. Balance, moderation, common-sense these all must be fostered to survive in the world; for Buchanan calculation of the effects of his acts was almost a Satanic way of going about things. He rushed in, tilted at windmills, was unduly harsh and crude in his dealings with those with whom he disagreed, and gradually lost credence as a serious and sensitive man of letters as a result.

Buchanan always felt that the reasons for his failure as a poet were that he had made too many enemies, whose vitriol envenomed every hostile review, and that much of what he had to say was unpalatable; for no one (he would cite Wordsworth as a typical case) who resolutely expressed the truth ever was successful in his lifetime. No doubt Buchanan was blind to his literary failings; and there is an element of truth in both his assertions; but certainly it is true that much of his work is of uneven quality, and only a small proportion worthy of the attention Buchanan claimed for all of it. Perhaps the most sure reason for his eclipse during his lifetime is that much of his work and what people read in the newspapers of his other activities, culminating in the report of his bankruptcy, showed Buchanan to be an unpleasant man. Avowedly a believer in the ethical values of literature, he represented in his own personality just the sort of person who stood in most need of its beneficent influence, yet clearly had gained little from his lifelong associations with it. Besides those epithets applied to him by Arnold, there would have been many others by men no less shrewd; and few of his critics, because of his egotism, could long dissociate the man from his work.

There can be no question that the virulence and persistence of Buchanan's attack on Rossetti did offend most of the major critics of his day. G.H. Lewes never forgave him for it (Jay, pp. 109-110), and other influential men such as Theodore Watts-Dunton, Edmund Gosse, Sidney Colvin, H.B. Forman, George Moore and even, possibly,

Arthur Quiller-Couch, may all be included in the list of those whose loyalty to Rossetti coloured their attitude to Buchanan. R.H. Hutton his main champion thereafter, who was well aware of the widespread animosity to Buchanan,¹ gradually altered his opinion of Buchanan as the Christian, "soul-helping", content of his work diminished, and the shoddiness of its craftsmanship and the heresy of its themes correspondingly increased. At his death only two minor men, Henry Murray and Archibald Stodart Walker came forward to express their admiration for Buchanan, but both in trying to counteract the swing of the critical pendulum, made excessive claims on behalf of their friend, which did more harm than good (especially since Stodart Walker's book is not invested by any critical acumen whatsoever), when harsh reviews by men like Arthur Symonds² restated in more vigorous terms the widespread critical aversion to

1. The Spectator (LVIII, May 30, 1885, p. 734) when castigating Buchanan for the terrible novel Stormy Waters went out of its way to assert its disinterestedness:

Mr. Buchanan, like other men who have engaged in literary controversy, has made enemies in certain literary circles; and criticism of his books has, we cannot doubt, often been embittered by personal dislike and antagonism; but he knows that in these columns his work has never been treated otherwise than respectfully, and has often received a deserved tribute of ungrudging admiration.

2. The original comments on Stodart Walker's Robert Buchanan: The Poet of Modern Revolt, is to be found in the Saturday Reviews obituary for Buchanan, XCI, June 15, 1901, p. 764, which was reprinted in Studies in Prose and Verse, pp. 121-123.

Buchanan's work. Only one critic, Hugh Walker, writing in 1909, supports the early high appreciation of Buchanan's worth, calling him a "Celt of the most varied gifts, and of genius which ought to be unquestionable."¹

It should be borne in mind, too, that the great swing away from reverence for things of the previous century that was signalled by Lytton Strachey's Eminent Victorians, swept greater names than his towards oblivion. Subsequent criticism has rehabilitated the major writers of the nineteenth century; and Tennyson, Dickens, George Eliot, Browning (possibly to a lesser extent), and even Trollope enjoy higher reputations now than at any time since their death. Despite a few passing recommendations for a full-length critical biography of one of the most interesting and versatile men of letters of his day, virtually nothing has been done to attempt to restore Buchanan's position, which few of his most partisan contemporaries would have denied him, of that of a good minor poet.

Undoubtedly his eclipse was due to factors other than those already suggested. Besides the blanket rejection of Victorian writers, one or two others, not unlike Buchanan, came in for particular censure. Shelley's reputation was at its nadir in the early twentieth century. Declamatory, self-revealing, intensely subjective and apparently formless expressions of radical ideas were out of fashion, and Buchanan's own tendency to such verse found

1. Literature of the Victorian Era, p. 574.

him in select company. Not even his most avid champion would exalt him to Shelley's rank (though Henry Murray, possessed of some shrewd critical insight, placed him alongside Tennyson and Browning¹), but when one compares Buchanan's sometimes florid, expansive, repetitious, loosely-worded, high-flown rhetoric with what was considered the epitome of the poetic art at the beginning of this century, one can see why Buchanan's verse failed to appeal to subsequent generations. Imagism, in itself a reaction from just such verse, with its hard, clear precise images and its spare, impersonal style, represented a revolution in taste away from the fuzziness and facile emotionalism of much of Buchanan's later work. Nor could that work compete with the growing intellectual complexity of the verse associated with the names of Eliot, Pound or Yeats, and the concomitant decline of the popularity of poetry.

Perhaps, too, his verse was never presented to the public in an appealing form. No one stood, or stands, more in need of a judicious selection of his works than Robert Buchanan. Doubtless the vast conglomerate lump of the two volumes of his Collected Poetical Works, where no effort was expended in making the verse visually appealing, had to be issued; but one slender and attractive edition of his best verse might have done his reputation much more good. As it is the gold takes too much finding: the dross has obscured it to all but a few eyes. One should not leave Buchanan on this sombre note, however, but rather recall his achievements in literature.

Byron had long since said "We are all on a wrong

1. Robert Buchanan, p. 31.

tack (Lakers and all). Our successors will have to go back to the riding school ... and learn to ride the great horse." Buchanan had actually attended the academy run by Peacock, and had doubtless learnt much from him in poetic technique and a sense of form; yet he, possibly, more than anyone of his age, reverted to Byronic excesses in his verse, rather than aspire to the carefully wrought work of most of his greater contemporaries. He aimed for over-all effect, the large canvas using the broad strokes was generally his mode, and he aimed for edification not for aesthetic satisfaction. He was versatile and fecund, he was also prone to unconscious (and conscious) imitation of the major poetic influences of his generation (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, Browning, Rossetti and Swinburne), which while acceptable and understandable in a young man's work, argues a certain failure in that of the mature poet. A distinctive voice Buchanan did not quite achieve; he never made any real advance on the reputation his early poetry gained him; he wrote much clever verse throughout his life; and his ballads, especially those translated from the Scandinavian (though these translations were marred a little by Buchanan's softening of their impact), show him to have a genuine feeling for that mode. But his early simplest verse championing the moral virtue of the underprivileged in remarkably modern terms represents the high-water of his poetic achievement.

His achievement in fiction, criticism, and polemics is of a lower order than that of his verse (while that of his drama is of a lower still). None of his novels,

whether polemic or popular, is free of faults; most of them are invested with a power, however, which may have frightened his more timid readers, but which still impresses. He managed to create several memorable heroines, and one derivative but distinctive hero-type; and his explorations of the relations between the sexes at first a little unadventurous, and always inclined to be cliché-ridden and melodramatic, were occasionally daring and quite arresting. When he extended his novels' range to match his own experience, his work took on a life and interest that found him readers long after his death.

His criticism is impressionistic; and, perhaps, too concerned for his subject's ethical drift to throw as much light on it ^{that} ~~as~~ a more wide-ranging approach might have done. Yet he wrote perceptively of Dickens; and, though losing his youthful enthusiasm and inclined to see all such work as vanity later in his life,¹ he admired Walt Whitman's efforts on behalf of democracy; thereby helping the American to that material betterment which his growing recognition afforded him. On Robert Browning's behalf, when he too was only admired by a few, Buchanan laboured mightily, if slightly muddle-headedly as he later thought, and was certainly in the van when his late success burgeoned into Browning Societies up and down the country.

1. Writing, on December 31, 1899, on Herbert Spencer's "moral teaching ... that the Race is continually advancing through the gradual adaptation of human nature to the conditions of social life," Buchanan could not bring himself to agree or disagree with the "profoundest thinker" of his time, and could only think "that it is in its very essence a beautiful Dream, like Dickens's Dream of human Fairyland, like Whitman's Dream of a triumphant Democracy" (Jay, pp. 302-3).

His polemics are a curious mixture of airy rant and shrewd ideas. His concern for the direction that the later Victorian society was taking produced some very interesting verse (in The City of Dream) and fiction (The Rev. Annabel Lee); and a newspaper controversy involving Herbert Spencer and T.H. Huxley shows his radicalism to have been much modified by his experience of the force of public opinion. No longer a typical socialist, and eschewing Fabianism, he was persecuted (as he considered it) for his role in the Fleshly Controversy, and this greatly heightened his sense of his individuality, as well as his already exalted valuation of the worth of human love.¹ Much of his really solid work in all fields was undermined by the passions aroused by this one really unfortunate episode in Buchanan's career, from which not a few of his subsequent troubles derived. Obloquy has sullied his name, not undeservedly, for one hundred years, which attests to the skill and determination of Rossetti's champions to ensure that such would be the case, but this obloquy should now be tempered, surely, by some more comprehensive assessment of the man and his work.

1. W. Robertson Nicoll in A Bookman's Letters considered Buchanan to be very fortunate in his retention of "the warm affection of three such women as his mother, his wife, and his sister-in-law," throughout his stormy career (p. 324).

APPENDIX

Robert Buchanan's correspondence with Andrew Chatto
and his Publishing History.

As might be supposed, Buchanan's relations with his publishers form an interesting part of his literary career, and the story of his sallying forth shillelagh in hand bent on the murder of J.R. Maxwell makes a fitting prologue for a study of this part of his life. That episode apart, however, his early dealings with publishers were not unhappy, partly because he was successful and they frequently came to him with work, but mainly because he was lucky enough to discover Alexander Strahan, who published his work from 1865 to as late as 1879, and with whom he remained on cordial terms for the rest of his life.

Buchanan's "first serious effort in literature",¹ Undertones, was published by Moxon in 1863. What reason he had for going to the publisher of Tennyson is not clear; it may even have been Peacock himself who arranged this. Two years later, however, he was quite happy to be sent to George Smith of Smith, Elder by G.H. Lewes and be offered "a good round sum"² for Idyls and Legends of Inverburn; but at the last moment he discovered Strahan and the book was placed in his hands. A year later, George Routledge published his translations from the Scandinavian, Ballad Stories of the Affections with some success; and in 1867 the Dalziel brothers offered him £400 for verse to be used in the lavishly illustrated North Coast and Other Poems. This work failed to sell, and it is doubtful if

1. "'Undertones' and 'Idyls and Legends of Inverburn'", My First Book, ed. Jerome K. Jerome, p. 283.

2. Ibid., p. 291.

Buchanan ever received again such generous rewards for his verse. Other publishers now came to him with work; Sampson Low asked him to edit the journals of J.J. Audubon, which was a critical and popular success and was ultimately published in an Everyman edition in 1913. John Payne commissioned an edition of Keats for the Moxon Miniature Poets series and paid Buchanan £10 for his work in 1866, only for it to be rejected and offered to Swinburne, thereby, possibly, exacerbating an already explosive situation.¹ But Moxon's did accept Buchanan's edition of Longfellow's work and published it in 1868. After the failure of North Coast, Buchanan stayed with Strahan for the publication of his verse, and worked very hard on his three journals: The Contemporary Review, Saint Paul's (then edited by Anthony Trollope, though Buchanan, according to W. Robertson Nicoll,² sometimes wrote entire issues almost single-handed), and Good Words. Buchanan's last popular verse successes, albeit anonymous, were Saint Abe and his Seven Wives (1872) which ran into five editions, and Red Rose and White (1873) which ran into four. When Strahan stopped publishing books (he continued, however, with his periodicals), Buchanan went to Henry S. King, who published his Poetical Works, in three volumes, in 1874. Over the next six years 750 sets were sold, but Buchanan's days as a popular poet were almost over, and when Balder the Beautiful appeared, published by William Mullan in 1877, it was a complete failure. At this

1. See above, p. 135.

2. A Bookman's Letters, p. 325.

time Buchanan turned to fiction as a means of supporting himself and his household (his wife, mother and adopted daughter), and as with his early poetry, he immediately found a large market for his wares. The Shadow of the Sword, published by Richard Bentley in 1876 was a critical and popular success (and was heading Buchanan's works in the Chatto and Windus catalogue as late as 1912), and this was followed by God and the Man which marked the beginning of his association with Andrew Chatto in the spring of 1881. Soon realizing how much money he could make with fiction, Buchanan wrote a short novel (or tale as he called it) based on the Flying Dutchman legend, Love me for Ever, in a week and sold its magazine rights for £100. For The Martyrdom of Madeline, in 1881, also he received £300 from Chatto for the serial and book rights; and, by 1885, Chatto and Windus had published eight more of his novels. After his return from America and his success as a playwright, he published fewer novels; he became dissatisfied with Chatto and Windus and published verse, fiction, essays and plays ^{using} ~~after~~ Walter Scott, J. and R. Maxwell (surprisingly), William Heinemann, T. Fisher Unwin, John Long, C.A. Pearson, J.N. Arrowsmith (of Bristol), Ward and Downey, George Redway, and himself. Chatto and Windus remained, because of his financial obligations to them, his main publishers, however, and their issue of the Complete Poetical Works (in two volumes) in the year of Buchanan's death, set the seal on their relationship. But it was, after initial cordiality, a very uneasy one, culminating, after some very bitter exchanges in 1893 and 1894, in Buchanan turning publisher himself in 1896, and maintaining

his little shop at 36, Garrard Street, Soho until 1899.

The only large collection of letters (over 110) written by Buchanan known to exist are those to Andrew Chatto (or to the Chatto and Windus company) now in the British Library (Additional M.S. 52480). These letters are invaluable for the light they throw on Buchanan's attitudes to his verse and fiction, on some of his day-to-day activities and on some aspects of his family life (hitherto virtually unknown), on his perennial financial problems, on the character of his publisher, and most of all on his own character and the events which led up to his venture into publishing.

By 1881, when he first opened negotiations with Andrew Chatto, Buchanan could not account for his verse not reaching "the great general public," to which it especially appealed; and he could only conclude that its price must have been too high (Letter to Andrew Chatto, dated 29.XI.81). Hitherto six shillings was the price his verse had sold for, which must have put it out of reach of those for whom much of it was written (when he went into business for himself, some of his titles were offered for two shillings and sixpence). Though it may appear a rather naive explanation, there may be some truth in it; but one is inclined to see the backlash of the Fleshly Controversy as a more obvious cause of his unpopularity. Richard Gowing, editor of the Gentleman's Magazine, in 1875 could say in his introduction to the serialisation of The Shadow of the Sword that "The Wedding of Shon Maclean" and "Phil Blood's Leap" were both so popular, that they had

become standard party pieces. If Gowing was right, and Buchanan was reaching a large audience with the journals, then it was merely a question of how to persuade that audience to buy the verse when it appeared between hard covers. Those two pieces, in particular, appeared in Ballads of Life, Love and Humour (1882) some six years after their original publication, and Chatto and Windus did not report high sales of the book.

Very early in this correspondence, Buchanan is fighting a rearguard action over his poetry. Ballads of Life, Love and Humour was published early enough in 1882, for Hall Caine to read "The Lights of Leith" to Rossetti at Birchington, and Selected Poems too, was published in that year. As part of their arrangement, Chatto republished White Rose and Red, The Book of Orm, Idyls and Legends of Inverburn, Undertones, London Poems all at six shillings, and St. Abe at five shillings. Their impact must have been so slight, that Buchanan had to plead with Chatto to publish his City of Dream. On April 23, 1882 he wrote

As to the City of Dream, I don't like to blow my own trumpet, but I only wish I could impress you, as I am myself impressed, with the importance of that work. Of this I am convinced - that no work of equal magnitude and daring has been attempted in this generation. I am perfectly certain that it will mark an epoch in my literary career and quadruple my popularity. But, I hear you say, "it is poetry." So it is, but poetry on a theme which interests every modern man who thinks and feels.

Chatto must have been amused at Buchanan's naivety, for his business lay with the unthinking masses who wanted entertainment. Ironically enough, however, the City of Dream

when it finally was published six years later did cause some excitement, and Chatto had to print a second edition. But generally his objections to poetry whether Buchanan's or that of anyone else, were based on sound business judgment and were probably right.

As early as 1882, it can be assumed, the nature of the arrangement between Buchanan and Chatto was becoming apparent to the former. Actually Chatto wanted Buchanan's potentially lucrative fiction, which at first was well-received by both critics and public; whereas Buchanan had turned to the progressive new publishers with the hope that they could find some way to promote the sale of his verse. Unfortunately Buchanan's lack of money sense played into Chatto's hands, and very soon the writer was being paid for novels not yet written or even planned, and he began the wearisome task of turning out pot-boilers. He may even have cynically written poor novels as some kind of retaliation at Chatto's failure, as he seems to have seen it, to sell the verse. Certainly the 1884 edition of Buchanan's Poetical Works indicates some radical split between poet and publisher. This book, which, virtually unaltered, became the first volume of the two volume Complete Poetical Works of 1901, abounds in misprints (never to be corrected), and is unsightly with its small type in double columns. What is worse, is that Buchanan never bothered to incorporate into the 1884 edition certain marked improvements that he had made in several of his best poems when republishing them two years before in the Selected Poems. Thus his appeal to posterity, often repeated in the last years of

his life, to give his work the justice he felt it had never received from the most influential of his contemporaries (Saintsbury, Gosse, Colvin, Watts-Dunton, Buxton Forman, and Quiller-Couch), is based on an imperfect "definitive" edition. In 1898, he advertized a "definite Library Edition" of his works, but it never appeared, so the 1884 version has remained the most accessible form of his best verse. The letters partly explain why this appalling carelessness occurred. In early 1884 he was seeing the novel The New Abelard through the press; and from February to July he was involved with the careful supervision of an abortive City of Dream (which was advertized in October 1884, when the Poetical Works appeared, as being "in the Press"), indeed the letter, dated July 22, which contains the only reference to the Poetical Works in the correspondence also states that all proofs of the City of Dream are also returned, and that "to-morrow you shall have complete revise of Foxglove Manor." Burdened with all this work, in part precipitated by his departure for New York in the early autumn, and almost certainly incurred with a view to paying for the trip, it is little wonder that Buchanan did not involve himself too deeply with the minutiae of careful revision. And when it is discovered that there was some domestic crisis in June 1884 which clearly incapacitated Buchanan for some time, it seems remarkable that he could get through the large amount of proof-reading and re-writing (of Foxglove Manor) that he did.

Robert Buchanan does present an interesting problem to his would-be biographer. On the one side he

liberally vouchsafed all kinds of biographical information in his early journalism, to which idiosyncrasy Swinburne could draw deadly attention in Under the Microscope:

With the kindest forethought, the most judicious care to anticipate the anxious researches of a late posterity, Mr. Buchanan has once and again poured out his personal confidences into the sympathetic bosom of the nursing journals Time may have hidden from the eye of biography the facts of Shakespeare's life, ... but none need fear that the next age will have to lament the absence of materials for a life of Buchanan (p. 66).

There is scarcely a book of criticism or verse that does not have a dedication to Buchanan's wife, mother, father, or sister-in-law, most of them mawkishly sentimental, though Shaw, apparently, found that "Ad Matrem" in The Devil's Case (1895) most moving.¹ Indeed an intellectual and spiritual biography of Buchanan can be easily made from his work, and even his emotional attachments can be assessed with some accuracy from the effusions to Mary and Harriett scattered throughout the verse. But on the other side there is scarcely any factual information about his day-to-day life to be found. Harriett Jay, in the only biography, relies on Buchanan's published reminiscences (in the Sunday Special, T.P. O'Connor's M.A.P., and such sources) for her record of his early life, but she gives very little in the way of hard fact about the time and place of the events occurring in the thirty years she was a member of his household. Some deficiencies can be partially filled

1. Shaw's letter expressing admiration for "Ad Matrem" reminded Buchanan too closely of Oscar Wilde's attitudes to life and art: "Poor Oscar talked to me once in almost the same way, - said he didn't feel moved by real love and sorrow but was deeply moved by them in Art - which is Bosh and Twaddle, my dear fellow, and in your heart you know it." Buchanan to Shaw, November 23, 1895.

by reference to Buchanan's verse or fiction; his dedication to D.G. Rossetti in God and the Man, for example, is headed "London, August 18, 1882."

The Chatto correspondence does give much valuable information on Buchanan's addresses and movements between London, Southend, France and Scotland between 1881 and 1900. Three days before signing that dedication to Rossetti, for example, he was in Paris; two days afterwards, he was in Southend. But in a correspondence dealing mainly with money and deadlines, there is little additional information to be gleaned. On Buchanan's trip to America it is only known that it extended to a year and was curtailed by Buchanan's ill-health; in the correspondence there is only one letter from New York, dated February 3, 1885, but that deals solely with a proposal to syndicate well-known English authors in newspapers associated with Thorndyke Rice of The North American Review. An interesting domestic episode comes to light concerning one Robert Haddow, whom Buchanan employed as a secretary but who apparently drank Buchanan's liquor and then stole money from him. On being dismissed, Haddow apparently wrote to Chatto accusing Buchanan of stealing his ideas in the writing of a certain scene in The New Abelard, which accusation Chatto seems to have believed, and his enquiry to Buchanan produced a fiery rejoinder (December 27, 1883) which seems to have ended Haddow's larcenous ambitions, but which can scarcely have improved Buchanan's regard for his publisher. Probably because he did not like Chatto, and he had little gift for intimacy with anyone, Buchanan's

letters to him are never chatty or communicative; many of them are apologetic for failure to return proofs promptly, or for failure to meet deadlines. Such self-abasement by a very proud man, and on occasion he was prepared to abase himself lower if an advance on his next novel were forthcoming, must have made this particular relationship a very irksome one for Buchanan. Chatto, he must have felt, saw a side to his character that no one else even suspected.

The only letter on a positively buoyant note in the entire collection is that to Chatto dated March 11, 1883, when Buchanan sends him two seats for the first night of Stormbeaten, the dramatisation of God and the Man:

Dear Mr. Chatto,

Two stalls for Wednesday, with my kindest regards. The performance would indeed be incomplete without you, who first took my bantling under your protective wing - Everybody seems to expect a big success, and putting the construction and effects out of the question as my own work, I think you will find the scenic effects superb - Will you come round to Box 2 and shake hands?

Ever yours,

Robert Buchanan.

For once his optimism was well-founded, and the play was one of the biggest successes he ever had.¹

There are few hints of his private life in the correspondence. In fact little of it is known. How he met his future wife, their courtship, whether they had

1. But not a financial one for him. In one of his letters, in the present writer's possession, Buchanan bemoans the fact that he "lost fearfully by Stormbeaten, owing to the dreadful expenses." It being rather hard, as everyone had profited by it but himself.

any children, and what the nature of his relationship with his Sister-in-law, Harriett, really was, are not now known.

While Robert Buchanan never was an easy man with whom to deal, defaulting on deadlines, proving not so popular as Chatto had once hoped he would be, and being quite irresponsible where money was concerned, the shadowy figure of Andrew Chatto that emerges from the correspondence does not have much appeal either. Doubtless if Buchanan had been an industrious and prolific novelist (which, in a way, he was), an Anthony Trollope in fact, his relations with his publisher would have been as cordial as could be wished; as cordial, for example, as those between Chatto and Grant Allen, one of his stable of novelists, who could publicly attest to his publisher's kindness, sympathy and generosity.¹ Buchanan's only public opinions of Andrew Chatto were the exact opposite. It was Chatto's misfortune to have a prolific and industrious writer whose main literary ambitions lay in poetry, and whose day-to-day interests lay in the theatre. Buchanan only turned to Chatto when he needed money.

A publisher who could have coaxed the best out of Buchanan, instead of one who was quite content with the worst he could dash off, would have been the ideal. As it was, Chatto was usually prepared (especially in the beginning) to go half-way to meet Buchanan's often peremptory demands for money; and he did criticize Buchanan's work as containing too much "philosophizing and theorizing" (an

1. My First Book, p. 48.

obvious bar to its popularity, and not the sort of criticism Buchanan needed). But on occasion Chatto went far out of his way to procure some of the worst stuff that ever appeared over Buchanan's name (though, not regrettably, actually written by him), so he must have thought that Buchanan's was a reputation, even so late as 1894-5, out of which good money could be made. Chatto was a businessman, who quite happily exploited Buchanan's need for money, possibly even relished it. Undoubtedly, over twenty years Buchanan's behaviour would have deserved some harshness, but the vindictiveness and baseness of some of Chatto's actions seem unwarranted by anything Buchanan did. It was Buchanan's permanent misfortune to bring out the worst in many of the people with whom he associated.

It was in 1881 that Andrew Chatto offered Buchanan £300 for The Martyrdom of Madeline and £250 for God and the Man, and thereby showed himself to be a shrewd judge of the value of work submitted to him. For these are two of Buchanan's best four or five novels, and never again did Chatto pay so high a price for Buchanan's work. On December 3, 1881 Buchanan signed over all the copyrights of his verse to Chatto for £300, and the following year he asked for, and presumably received, £250 for the rights to Foxglove Manor (another 'good' novel) and the as yet unwritten New Abelard for serial publication in the Gentleman's Magazine.

Altogether in the years 1881-5, Chatto and Windus produced seven books of Buchanan's verse, two of his essays, and nine of his novels. The verse was not successful, and by 1888 Buchanan had opened negotiations to buy back the

copyrights, which he duly did in December 1889, paying £50 more than the price he received for them. At the same time he bought back the book publication rights to the novel Rachel Dene, paying an extra £28 for the costs incurred in its printing. Later Buchanan returned the rights to Rachel Dene as security for a loan of £120.

In August 1894, Buchanan was declared a bankrupt. In that month he sold the rights to The Charlatan (another novel based on the play of the same name) written in collaboration with Henry Murray to Chatto for £120, and as a rider to the agreement allowed him to publish Rachel Dene. At the time this agreement was signed, according to Buchanan's letters to Chatto, dated August 9 and 11, 1894, Chatto promised to suppress the proposed publication if Buchanan could raise £120 within a month. Six days after the agreement, however, Chatto and Windus were advertising Rachel Dene for publication in September, and it did appear before the end of the year. Doubtless the additional worry of the bankruptcy and the impending death of his mother, to whom he was devoted, prevented Buchanan from fighting that battle as full-bloodedly as he might have done. Rachel Dene is a really bad novel, and it is some comfort to know that it was not written by Buchanan. Unfortunately for him another novel, Lady Kilpatrick, was soon acquired by Chatto from Tillotson's, an agency for publishing novels in the newspapers. On February 8, 1895 (on a sheet heavily edged in black) Buchanan wrote the following to his publishers, with, for one so fiery, remarkable restraint:

Dear Sirs,

I see in the Daily Chronicle an announcement that you have in your possession a story called Lady Kilpatrick. By what kind of fatality you always get hold of my belated work I cannot guess, but I have been trying for some time to ascertain who possessed the book rights of the story in question. I may as well inform you at once that scarcely a line of it is really from my pen, tho' it is founded on a play of mine and contains large quantities of dialogue. It was finished at a time of great anxiety, some years ago.

Of course your position in the matter is an awkward one, as you are out of pocket by the transaction; and I presumably am to blame in the matter. My only desire now is to prevent more inferior work being given to the world over my signature. What has taken place in the past will never take place again, however. Under the circumstances, perhaps, you will give way to entertain one of two propositions:

either,

(1) To return me the whole book/rights of the story, for the sum you have paid for them, plus interest; or

(2) To take in exchange for the story another of the same length, on which I am now engaged, and which is at any rate mature and good work.

I presume in any case that you do not propose putting anything more of mine on the market for a little time to come? In that case, there can be no difficulty in the way, as it is to both your interest and mine that you should have the best work I can do, and the publication of inferior stories can result in no ultimate gain to any person concerned.

I shall be glad to hear from you on the subject at your convenience.

Yours truly

Robert Buchanan.

There can be no doubt that it was highly irresponsible of Buchanan to allow other people's work to be sold to provincial newspapers as his own. He might have realised that

sooner or later such pigeons would be sure to come home to roost (in the second half of the second sentence of that letter that realization is hinted at). Doubtless he deserved the treatment he got from Chatto and Windus, yet the fact remains that the publishers replied the same day to the effect that the book was in type and that the work was too far along for either of his propositions to be considered. At this Buchanan was justly incensed, and threatened to dispute their right to produce a book giving the author no opportunity to make excisions. After many exchanges of letters between Buchanan and Tillotson's and Chatto and Windus, Buchanan was granted a three-month reprieve and the book eventually appeared in September, 1895. One cannot help thinking that since Buchanan had long ago bought back his poetry copyright, thereby relieving Chatto and Windus of any appreciable loss in that area, and since they were making a fair profit from the ten or so of his novels, of which they produced new editions periodically (a practice they followed until 1920 or later), they might have been a little more considerate to one of their better men. As it was the energy expended in delaying Lady Kilpatrick's publication, the depression caused by his mother's state and the recurrent attacks of fever that sapped his strength throughout the year, left him little energy with which to complete the proposed revision, which involved less than 2,000 words.

This is the background against which his foray into publishing must be set. Buchanan had warned Chatto that if he persisted in publishing Rachel Dene he would publicly

denounce him, and this he did. On the publication of Lady Kilpatrick he must have resolved to have no more to do with any publishers, and must have been grateful that he had bought back the copyrights of his poetry several years earlier.

For all his bluff assertions to the contrary, Buchanan despised himself for "Stooping to hodman's labour" as he put it.¹ He well realized that the public could not help but see Buchanan the popular novelist, Buchanan the writer of Adelphi melodramas, and Buchanan the serious poet, as one man, however much he might try to set his verse apart from the hurly-burly of his other activities. Whenever he detected criticism of his pot-boiling activities (William Archer, for example, is quoted by Arthur Waugh as saying that Buchanan was "'guilty of the most unpardonable sin a craftsman can commit - that of not doing his best'"²) he was quick to defend himself. On relating the incident concerning Robert Browning's innuendoes about "'Buchanan the writer of plays'" at the Royal Academy dinner in 1888 (see above, p. 79), he continues

Naturally enough Browning may have fancied that in writing plays for the market I was selling my birthright for a mess of pottage, but he knew better than most men that I had no option - it was either that or practical starvation.³

1. In the "Letter Dedicatory" at the end of The Outcast, p. 193.

2. Reticence in Literature, p. 155.

3. Jay, p. 114.

The one element of truth in this, however, is the fact that Browning did help Buchanan to be granted a Civil List pension of £100 by Gladstone in 1870, which he drew for the rest of his life. That alone should have guaranteed Buchanan from the "practical starvation" that he feared, and when it is remembered that he received on average £150 for each of his twenty-five novels, it can be seen that without the stage he could have lived in reasonable comfort. What gives the lie to Buchanan's statement, and thereby makes many of his statements suspect, is the fact that it was just such an Adelphi melodrama that Browning was apparently sneering at, that Buchanan sold in 1889 or 1890 for the sum of £2500 (Jay, pp. 242-3); and this was but one of his several very successful plays. Buchanan lost more than he made ⁱⁿ ~~to~~ the theatre, several times mounting extravagant plays which did not succeed. Nevertheless a lot of money passed through his hands during the 1890s, and it was his lack of the Scottish virtue of thrift that drove him to the lengths of selling Rachel Dene and Lady Kilpatrick to, he hoped, obscure provincial newspapers.

Buchanan must have resolved to go into publishing at the time he was rewriting Lady Kilpatrick, for in a letter to G.B. Shaw dated September 8 he declared "This publishing for myself is a step I am taking with good reason, and it involves a challenge to the normal publishing Jonathan Wilds of Paternoster Row". As a publisher he issued The Devil's Case, Is Barabbas a Necessity?, The Ballad of Mary the Mother, and re-issued The City of Dream,

The Poetical Works, Selected Poems, The Earthquake, The Outcast and Saint Abe (of which only the last of the re-issues is in the British Library). It is to be noted that outside of the tract on publishing, he published only verse. His novels went to Heinemann, John Long, T. Fisher Unwin, and C.A. Pearson. He soon wearied of the experiment, for which he was temperamentally unsuited, but continued to advertise his verse as late as 1899.

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- "The Ethics of Criticism." Contemporary Review, LXXVII,
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- "The Monkey and the Microscope." Saint Paul's, XI, August
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- "Notes on Poems and Reviews, by Algernon Charles Swinburne."
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- "Poems and Ballads, by Algernon Charles Swinburne." Athenaeum,
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- "The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley." Athenaeum,
January 29, 1870, pp. 154-156.
- "The Ring and the Book, by Robert Browning." Athenaeum,
December 26, 1868, pp. 875-6; March 20, 1869, pp. 399-400.

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C. Plays (A chronological list of first performances, and some notable revivals).

The Rathboys (Strand, May 17, 1862).

The Witch Finder (Sadler's Wells, October 8, 1864).

A Madcap Prince (Haymarket, August 3, 1874).

Corinne (Lyric, June 26, 1876),

The Queen of Connaught (Olympic, January 15, 1877)

The Nine Days' Queen (Gaiety, December 22, 1880).

The Exiles of Erin; or, St. Abe and his Seven Wives (Olympic, May, 7, 1881).

The Shadow of the Sword (Brighton, May 9, 1881; Olympic April 8, 1882).

Lucy Brandon (Imperial, April 8, 1882).

Storm-Beaten (Adelphi, March 14, 1883).

Lady Clare (Globe, April 11, 1883).

A Sailor and His Lass; or, Love and Treason (Drury Lane, October 15, 1883). Written with Sir August Harris.

Bachelors (Haymarket, September 1, 1884, revived in September 1886). Written with Hermann Vezin.

Constance (New York, Wallack's, November 11, 1884).

Agnes (Comedy, March 21, 1885).

Alone in London (Philadelphia, Chestnut Street, March 30, 1885; Olympic, November 2, 1885; revived frequently after an initial long run, and toured Canada and U.S.A. for two years). Written with Harriett Jay.

Sophia (Vaudeville, April 12, 1886).

A Dark Night's Bridal (Vaudeville, April 9, 1887).

The Blue Bells of Scotland (Novelty, September 12, 1887).

Fascination (New York, Wallack's, May 30, 1887; Novelty, October 6, 1887). Written with Harriett Jay.

Partners (Haymarket, January 5, 1888).

Joseph's Sweetheart (Vaudeville, March 8, 1888).

Roger-la-Honte; or, Jean the Disgraced (Elephant and Castle, November 29, 1888); as A Man's Shadow (Haymarket, September 12, 1889; revived several times, notably at the Haymarket, November 27, 1897).

That Doctor Cupid (Vaudeville, January 14, 1889).

The Old Home (Vaudeville, June 19, 1889).

Theodora (Brighton, November 18, 1889; Princess, May 5, 1890).

The Man and the Woman (Criterion, December 19, 1889).

Miss Tomboy (Vaudeville, March 20, 1890).

The Bride of Love (Adelphi, May 21, 1890).

Clarissa (Vaudeville, June 2, 1890).

Sweet Nancy (Lyric, July 12, 1890; revived Court, February 8, 1897).

An English Rose (Adelphi, August 2, 1890). Written with G.R. Sims.

The Struggle for Life (Avenue, September 25, 1890). Written with F. Horner.

The Sixth Commandment (Shaftesbury, October 8, 1890).

Fra Giacomo (New York, Harlem Opera House, March 2, 1891).

Marmion (Glasgow, April 8, 1891).

The Gifted Lady (Avenue, June 2, 1891).

The Trumpet Call (Adelphi, August 1, 1891). Written with G.R. Sims.

The White Rose (Adelphi, April 23, 1892). Written with G.R. Sims.

The Lights of Home (Adelphi, July 30, 1892). Written with G.R. Sims.

The Black Domino (Adelphi, April 1, 1893). Written with G.R. Sims.

The Piper of Hamelin (Comedy, December 20, 1893). Music by F.W. Allwood. Published as: The Piper of Hamelin; A Fantastic Opera in Two Acts. London: W. Heinemann, 1893.

The Charlatan (Haymarket, January 18, 1894).

Dick Sheridan (Comedy, February 3, 1894).

Lady Gladys (Opera Comique, May 7, 1894).

A Social Butterfly (Opera Comique, May 10, 1894). Written with H. Murray.

The Strange Adventures of Miss Brown (Vaudeville, June 26, 1895). Written with Harriett Jay.

The New Don Quixote (Royal, February 19, 1896). Written with Harriett Jay.

The Romance of a Shopwalker (Colchester, February 24, 1896; Vaudeville, February 26, 1896). Written with Harriett Jay.

The Wanderer from Venus (Grand, Croydon, June 8, 1896). Written with Harriett Jay.

The Mariners of England (Grand, Nottingham, March 1, 1897; Olympic, March 9, 1897). Written with Harriett Jay.

Two Little Maids from School (Metro, Camberwell, November 21, 1898). Written with Harriett Jay.

There is a typescript copy of The Squireen; An Irish Drama in Four Acts, By Robert Buchanan and Aubrey Boucicault, in the New York Public Library. There is no evidence that it was ever performed.

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