

ISAAC BUCHANAN, ESQUIRE, M.P.P.  
OF HAMILTON, CANADA WEST.

The portrait on the first page introduces this memoir, and the memoir unfolds to the people of Canada the life history of one of the most remarkable men in the Province; Isaac Buchanan senior partner in the firm of Peter Buchanan & Co., of Glasgow, in Scotland; of Isaac Buchanan & Co., New York; of I. Buchanan, Harris & Co., Montreal; of Buchanan, Harris & Co., Hamilton; and of Adam Hope & Co., London, Canada West. But when we say one of the most remarkable men in the Province, eminence in commerce is not meant as his only title to that distinction. With the physical and mental qualifications which make the sagacious, indomitable, successful merchant, Mr. Buchanan combines the philosophical discernment which penetrates the most complex politico-economic problems and reduces their complexity to simplest principles. And yet more and greater, with the public well-being ever in view, he is the greatest friend of Provincial Labor and a patriot as unsullied in manner and in motive of action, as he is fearless and independent.

Isaac Buchanan was born at Glasgow, Scotland, on the 21st of July 1810, and is fourth son of the late Peter Buchanan, Esquire, of Auchmar, an ancient seat of the Buchanans. Auchmar is situated on the banks of Loch Lomond, Stirlingshire, on the confines of Dumbartonshire, a spot historically interesting, being the very gateway between the Highlands and Lowlands at the pass of Ballmaha, through which the Rob Roy of romance, the robber McGregor of bare truth, drove such cattle as he harried in the Lowlands and which were not protected by black-mail. Auchmar House, near the city of Hamilton, Canada West, the residence of Mr. Isaac Buchanan, is affectionately named in remembrance of his father's property on Loch Lomond. It is situated in Clairmont Park on the elevated table land, whose abrupt and rugged front bounds the city on the south and forms what is locally termed the 'mountain.' From the brow of that mountain the view of Hamilton city is charming. You see it lying four or five hundred feet below, chequered on a floor diversified with green, sloping gently a mile and a-half to the clear waters of Burlington Bay; Ontario lake, mirror of the morning sunrise, bounding the horizon on the east; the wooded uplands ascending from the north shore—green where near, blue where lofty and more distant; farm fields interspersed; the rural habitations of the Flamborough townships scattered among the undulating woods; the seven or eight hundred houses of Dundas, nestling within the bosom of the valley westward; and the white feathery streaks of steam on the face of the distant hills, or down by the bay, indicating where the Great Western railway trains are sweeping along, evenly to Niagara on this side, circuitously to Toronto beyond the bay, and laboriously rising mile after mile upward, aslant the face of the distant Flamborough mountain.

Mr. Buchanan's father was a merchant of high standing in Glasgow. His estate of Auchmar, comprising an area of fourteen hundred acres, and including the hill immediately south of Ben Lomond, the last of the Grampian range, was sold to the Duke of Montrose in 1830, by Peter Buchanan, Esq. the younger, recently deceased, who afterwards joined his brother, Isaac, and put the money got for Auchmar into his extensive Canadian business. That beautiful property had been long coveted by the noble house that now possesses it, not only on account of its romantic situation and fine shooting, but for its contiguity to Buchanan House, the ducal seat, and because Auchmar was the only spot in the parish of Buchanan, the parish comprising the entire eastern side of Loch Lomond, not then included in the duke's magnificent domain.

Isaac Buchanan was carefully educated, passing from the Glasgow Grammar School to a preparatory training for the Glasgow College, under the celebrated scholar and antiquary, the Reverend Doctor Graham, of Aberfoyle, who assured the pupil's father that his son would take the highest honors at the University. Mr. Buchanan, however, was not destined to undergo the University ordeal. When on the way one day, about the beginning of October, 1825, to purchase his college gown, an incident occurred which presented to his view a very different career.

Meeting in the street, a friend of his father, John Leadbetter, Esq., he was informed by that gentleman that he could secure for him a rare opening in the house of William Guild & Co., West India and Honduras merchants, and was then on his way to mention the thing to his father. The boy immediately caught at the proposition,

having formerly observed how many sons of the first families in Glasgow had failed to obtain desirable openings when prepared to fill them. Though his father was absent at Auchmar and would not return for a month, he resolved at once, on his own responsibility, to accept the proffered appointment for a short period, urging upon Mr. Leadbetter, who showed some hesitation, that if his father disapproved he could still go to College.

He had been a month with Guild & Co. before his father knew that change in his son's destiny, who, though feeling much disappointment of the hopes he had formed of his boy's literary success, yielded to his inclinations and Isaac became permanently fixed in business at the early age of fifteen. Within three years, through a concurrence of unusual circumstances, his position became one of great responsibility, leading to a rapidity of advancement seldom equalled. He became a partner in the firm before attaining his twentieth year, and in 1833, the Canadian branch of the business was wholly transferred to him.

In boyhood Mr. Buchanan was surrounded by the happiest influences; his father being an elder in the Church of Scotland, and his mother one of those loveliest spirits who in life and death experience and illustrate 'the peace that passeth all understanding;' and he has carried the fruits of his early impressions with him into the world, for in one of his election addresses during the contest of 1861, we find that he uttered the following manly declaration: 'My more immediate friends can understand how, with such favorable views of the Prime minister (the Hon. John A. Macdonald,) I could be the independent member I have been. I hope this arises from my being possessed of enough of the Scottish character to have the fear of God, and to have no other fear—to be able to realize myself as being perpetually in a higher presence than that of statesmen or kings.' 'And,' says one of his friends, 'They who best know the man, can testify how fearless is his conduct in the presence of the mere face of clay.'

So intense were his physical and mental labors in the early career of his manhood, and while laying the foundation of his since eminent house, that his health became endangered, nor was the relaxation he sought such as youth generally flies to, the only 'diversion' of mind he allowed himself, being an attendance on the medical and philosophical classes of the Glasgow College.—In commercial book-keeping he then became a reformer, superseding much of the intricacy and old nonsense, by clearness and simplicity in the forms of statements and the like, which are still in use throughout the extensive ramifications of his former and present business connexions. At no period of his life has he been idle in heart or brain; a sound constitution enabling him to perform an amount of work almost incredible.

*Mr. Buchanan became the Pioneer of the Wholesale Trade of Upper Canada.*

Canada West is indebted to Mr. Buchanan for the early development of the immense wholesale trade now carried on in the upper Province. In the fall of 1831 he established a branch of his business in Toronto; his brother merchants in Montreal laughing at his presumption. 'Had that course been a prudent and profitable one,' said they, 'was it to be supposed the old fathers of the trade would not have adopted it?' In vain they laughed. In vain they warned the adventurer and foretold Mr. Buchanan's speedy discomfiture and return from the 'far west' with his unbroken shipments of goods unsold. But the supposed folly of to-day proved the wisdom of to-morrow. The house of Buchanan & Co. flourished in the wilderness. His timid competitors found that one in advance had gained on them a march, and one after another followed as soon as they saw how well the ice bore.

He differed also from the Montreal merchants in favoring the establishment of the Commercial and later Banks. These raised up a local opposition in wheat buying and gave the farmer a considerably larger price; while the opposition in selling goods, commenced by Mr. Buchanan, brought down prices of goods. This double advantage was doubtless the main cause of the rapid rise of late years of Upper Canada. She in fact got over 25 per cent. additional for her grain, half a dollar per bushel for wheat having previously to this been the general price, and she got her supplies, in consequence of the establishment of a comparatively cash system and increased competition, at a similar reduction in price, thus getting an immensely increased amount of commodities in exchange for each bushel of wheat.

The pioneer, however, kept the lead. A branch of his business was subsequently pushed on to Hamilton, and from thence to London, where a magnificent building has been erected by his firm there, Adam Hope & Co., forming at once an ornament to that rapidly improving young city, and a monument of the enterprise and success of the house of the Buchanans and their business associates.

To be the pioneer of a great trade in a new, and extensive country, necessarily involves his being a party to the originating of all those institutions which mark the difference between civilization and barbarism—churches, educational systems, hospitals, asylums, news-rooms, commercial exchanges, boards of trade, national and emigration societies, insurance offices, banks, trust and loan companies, steam navigation, telegraphing, with many things else incidental to these, and lastly and most largely important of all, the introduction and spread of railroads.

The successful efforts of Mr. Buchanan, and of Buchanan, Harris & Co., both in Canada and in Britain, for the Great Western Railway are universally known and appreciated as having been quite essential to its construction. He moved the first resolution at the public meeting at Hamilton, when the project of the Great Western was resuscitated in 1845, and with his brother and Mr. Atcheson, organized the subsequent meeting in Manchester, England, which secured the construction of the Great Western line.

*Political Questions of thirty years ago. Clergy Reserves. Mr. Poulett Thomson, Governor General.*

We can only give some of the questions of the past a passing glance. Soon after coming to this country Mr. Buchanan discerned that two matters vitally affecting the peace and prosperity of the country were wrong. Lower and Upper Canada were both ruled by oligarchies, which, even if they might be the best monopolies possible, from the individuals being the best men of the province, must pass away before there could be political quiet in the country. In Lower Canada it was a mercantile oligarchy, each Governor being expected to see all things under him with the eyes of the Quebec and Montreal merchants. In Upper Canada it was a Church of England oligarchy, one of whose fatal blunders was their insisting that the Scottish church establishment was in Canada a dissenting church. It was the Scotch being left in that degraded position that made the conspirators in 1837, see any chance for rebellion.

The first proposition for the settlement of the Clergy Reserves in Upper Canada, without secularizing them, was made by Mr. Buchanan. In 1835, he published in an extra of the Toronto Albion, which was widely circulated, a plan for the settlement of 'the vexed and difficult question.' There was then no common school system. He proposed that one should be established by a compulsory tax or assessment, having a column for each christian sect in the schedule, and having thus ascertained the field for usefulness of each religious body, to give them for religion the same sum as they are respectively assessed for education, or a sum in exact proportion to that out of the Clergy Reserve fund.

Mr. Poulett Thomson, who came out from England as Governor General of the two Canadas in 1839, had been the junior member in a firm of Russia merchants. He entered Parliament in 1826 for Dover, and on Manchester becoming a parliamentary borough for the first time, by the Reform Act of 1832, he was chosen one of its two members. In Earl Grey's Reform government, which took office in 1830, he was Treasurer of the Navy and Vice-President of the Board of Trade; and filled the office of President from 1834 till 1839, during which he carried out reductions and amendments in the customs laws and tariff of duties. The changes were not much discussed and attracted comparatively little notice, but those afterwards effected by Sir Robert Peel with more ostentation, were only the sequences of Mr. Thomson's reduction of duties, as his were a continuation of the alterations in the tariff begun by Mr. Huskisson in 1824 and 1825.

When, in 1839, Mr. Thomson was appointed Governor General of Canada, Mr. Buchanan was in Scotland, and drew a petition which was sent from the city of Glasgow to the Queen (nominally, but in reality to Lord Melbourne, and Lord John Russell, who were then respectively Prime Minister and Colonial Secretary,) stating that the appointment of a man, chiefly known as connected with Russia and the interests of the Baltic, and 'an enemy of the colonies,' as Mr. Thomson was assumed to be, would paralyze

every British interest abroad. The petition prayed her Majesty 'to reconsider the appointment, and to select for this important dependency a governor NOT KNOWN TO BE ENIMICAL to the great interests which he is sent to protect and promote!' The London Times, in two different articles on the subject said, if remonstrances as strong had gone from other places, Lord John Russell must have kept Mr. Thomson at home.

Mr. Thomson, on arriving at Toronto in 1839, as Governor General, sent for Mr. Buchanan, through his Secretary, Mr. Murdoch. Mr. Buchanan required the Secretary to disclose to his Excellency before the interview, that he had in that manner objected to his being sent out to govern Canada, so that in the interview they might frankly understand each other. It was about the Clergy Reserve question that the Governor General desired to see Mr. Buchanan; and his Excellency afterward, when visiting Hamilton in the following summer indicated to him that his plain declaration that the Scotch could not be expected to be loyal to 'a government that made them dissenters by Act of Parliament,' had greatly affected Lord John Russell and the home ministry. The following year the term 'A Protestant Clergy' was declared by statute to include the Scottish establishment, and thus one of the dangers was so far extinguished.

But Upper Canada was more dissatisfied with its two established churches than it had been with one. For the next thirteen years the two favored churches and their Clergy Reserves were the foundation of all political agitation. The question was at last brought to the hustings in 1854. Having proposed an anti-Clergy Reserve League which should not cease till equal justice was done to all sects, Mr. Buchanan, at the elections of 1854, allowed his name to be used against Sir Allan McNab in Hamilton, to enable parties by their votes to record their opinion that the peace of the Province, required an immediate settlement of the Clergy Reserve question. To gain his election Sir Allan at last promised his friends that he and his political allies would no longer stop the way.

Fifteen years previously Mr. Buchanan had given evidence before the Commission of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and during a much longer period had corresponded on the subject with Principal McParlane, Dr. Welch, and other leaders of the church, as well as with the Marquis of Bute, her Majesty's Commissioner to the Church, whose friendship Mr. Buchanan enjoyed. The intimacy, especially with Dr. Welch, which he had preserved (his family having been members of Dr. Welch's congregation when in Glasgow,) was of material public benefit as increasing the Doctor's interest in the Canadian church question, and in giving the latter greater confidence in making the celebrated report as convener of the colonial committee, which may be said to have settled the question. Dr. Welch was one of the finest minds of the day; and whose friendship, we are informed, was a great honour as well as privilege. He was moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, when the disruption occurred in 1843, and having seceded, he was the first moderator of the Free Church. Mr. Buchanan was one of twenty whom Dr. Welch asked to endow the Free Church College in Edinburgh by giving a thousand pounds each. Mr. Buchanan replied that he would give the amount, but that he felt that it would be more natural that his subscription should be applied to assist the Free Church college and churches in Canada, and so the money was applied. It was at his suggestion and out of deference to his services that Kingston University of the Established Church of Scotland was called Queen's College, and that Knox College and the Knox Churches in Upper Canada were so named by the Free Church of Scotland, called the Canada Presbyterian Church.

*Commercial Panic of 1837; Suspension of Specie payments.*

Mr. Buchanan visited the British markets nearly every year, for the first ten years of his residence in Canada. He arrived out at New York in the Spring of 1837 to witness a dreadful financial crisis. The evening he landed he was in company with eleven of the first merchants of New York, nine of whom had suspended all payments, and on the apparently solvent two being twitted as 'unfortunates still in the body' one of them whispered to Mr. Buchanan, 'only till Monday.' The streets were full of an enraged populace threatening the banks, and his fellow passengers lost not a moment in getting on board the north river steamer leaving New York. Mr. Buchanan, however, remained in New York for many days, and mingling with all sorts of people, satisfied himself that the patent facts corroborated