

The Origin of "O Canada"

(By Dumtries Brant.)

Brigadier General Lawrence Buchan, C.V.O., C.M.B., the writer of the version of "O Canada" which the Kiwanis Club of Vancouver has decided to adopt as the Canadian National Anthem, wrote the verse in Vancouver city, when staying with his brother, the late Ewing Buchan, in Barclay street, after he had crossed the Dominion, from the Atlantic to the Pacific for the first time—during the Fall of 1909.

It had taken centuries to gather the sentiments so briefly and loyally expressed in the few lines, for, from away back in the days of Bruce and Wallace of Scotland, Lawrence Buchan's forebears were patriots to the core, and down through the ages they fought for their country with tongue, with pen and with sword; and, quite as early in history on the Welsh side of the house, whence his Mother came, love-of-country was inbred for generations, and expressed in verse and song in the loved ballads of Wales. Born in Brant county, Ontario, of devotedly patriotic Scottish and Welsh parentage, Lawrence, the eleventh child in a large family, inherited the love-of-country strongly from both sides of the house, and cemented it in a real passion for his own land. family, inherited the love-of-country strongly from both sides of the house, and cemented it in a real passion for his own land.

Schooled at Upper Canada College, where the love of the Empire was impregnated in studies, sports and pastimes, young Buchan showed his fighting spirit (the first way in which his patriotism expressed itself) very early, and just as soon as he was of age to wear a uniform, he began his drilling. The Fenian Raid saw him a youth ready for the fray, and, for years after he was an officer of the Queen's Own Rifles in Toronto. In the year 1885, when he was in Manitoba, the Riel Rebellion broke out, and Lawrence Buchan leaped into it with heart and soul and real joy. He never gave up the soldiering afterwards, but joined the 90th battalion, Fort Osborne, Winnipeg, after Reil's capture, and took course after course in "the work of war," aiming towards the higher places. He was in London, Ontario (Colonel) when war with South Africa was declared, and, on his way home, while in England, he lunched and dined at Buckingham palace, with other Canadian officers, where, for the first time he met and spoke with Queen Victoria face to face. "Such a little, frail woman," he said afterwards, "to bear the weight of a country-at-war upon her shoulders," and he felt an intense admiration for and deep sympathy with the Head of the Empire, which seemed intensified when the news of her death reached him not very long after his return to Canada.

He loved the Royal family. He was twice on the Duke of Connaught's staff when at Aldershot, he chummed with the Duke of Teck on his way from Africa, and when the Duke of York and Princess May were in Montreal during the Fall of 1901 and General Buchan's name was announced, the Princess exclaimed: "I've heard my brother speak of you so often: you must sing for us." It was a love for the family which was at the head of the Empire he worshipped.

It was not until the year 1909 that General Buchan saw the whole breadth of Canada, and, when he had traversed it, the blood of the Welsh bards surged through him, and, with ready pen he wrote

"O Canada! our heritage, our love,"
and, with his mind, fast racing through the different parts of the Empire, the words came

"Thy worth we praise all other lands above."

The immensity of his home land enthralled him. In view of the mighty mountains and of the great Pacific, seen from

Vancouver's heights came the words

"From sea to sea, throughout thy length,
"From pole to borderland—"

Then, with the remembrance of the greatness of the Empire, the picture of the brave, tired Queen—flashed

"At Britain's side, whate'er betide, unflinchingly we'll stand"

And the world must know it—

"With heart we sing,"

while the feeling of devotion to all who were of the Royal House, the remembrance of King Edward's brother, and of his son George, found expression in the always loved words—

"God save the King"

while his heart throbbed back to the early upbringing of devout parents, and, attuned to the Very Highest, he ended with the prayer words for his Canada, as well as for his King—

"Guide Thou the Empire wide do we implore,
And prosper Canada from shore to shore." Amen.
Such was Lawrence Buchan's nunc dimittus.

Returning to Montreal he lived, en route, on the train's observation platform so that no possible part of Canada that could be seen would escape his vision. A heavy cold, which developed into pneumonia, was the result. One week from the day he left Vancouver and three days from the time of his arrival in Montreal, Brigadier General Lawrence Buchan passed quietly into his Next Life.

His brother, Ewing Buchan, who was then Manager of the Bank of Hamilton in Vancouver, sent the verse to Mr. Albert Ham—and thus we have the Kiwanis-accepted version of "O Canada!" for Canada's National Anthem.

Lawrence Buchan—Born January 29, 1846, at "Braeside," the family home, in Brant County, Ontario, between the towns of Paris and Galt. Died October 6, 1909, at Montreal, P.Q., Canada.

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