The Runagates Club

By Kate Macdonald

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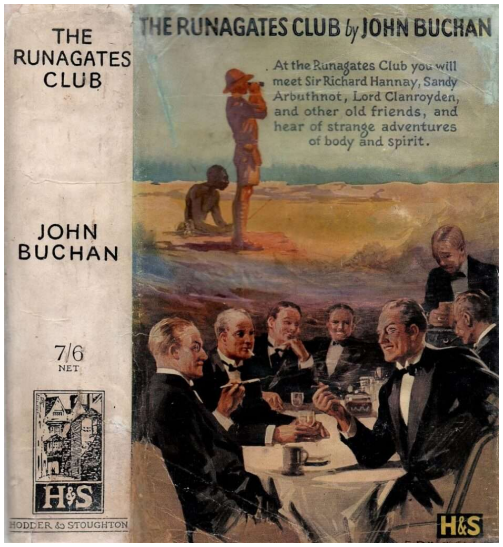

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‘Fullcircle’ from 1920 is a celebration of English country living and traditional social values, the story of three visits to a small country house in Oxfordshire and of the changes observed by the narrator over a number of years. It is a beautifully crafted account of the insidious but benign possession of the owners by the seventeenth-century spirit of the house. The story is also a satire on the do-goodery of the Fabian Society and the earnestness of the Modernist urbanite transplanted into traditional English countryside.

The house of the story – inspired by Weald Manor at Bampton, Oxfordshire – is a ‘wicked little house’ that forces religious as well as social change on its owners. Although the Giffens begin as earnest humanists, over a brief number of years they are taken on a journey through the Church of England, to Anglo-Catholicism, and finally to Roman Catholicism, the religion of the house’s original owner. The changes in how the Giffens use the chapel signpost their progress. First used as a committee room and then a library, in its final incarnation as a place of religious worship the narrator realises that it is now ‘a more pagan place than when it had been workroom or smoking-room’.

* * *

Buchan does not signal his literary conceits in his short stories; he merely plants them and allows them to grow. By the time the reader reaches the end of *The Runagates Club*, the range of fears that the stories explore, and the underlying opposition between the security of the society depicted, and the insecurity experienced by the characters when things go awry, have grown to encompass much of human experience.

The *Runagates* stories also have a connection to Buchan’s most often-used trope, that of the thin line between civilisation and the destructive and terrifying forces of anarchy. He began writing about this at the turn of the century, and it remained his principal theme, with an obvious connection to fear in *The Runagates Club*.

Why did Buchan focus for so long on this idea? His imaginative engagement with social, political, cultural and technological changes throughout his lifetime would

have fuelled his awareness of how change affects people, and societies. In *The Runagates Club*, his last collection of short fictions, Buchan foregrounds the urbanity of his assured, secure social settings to allow the characters to go forth and explore the uncertainties of the worlds beyond. They find wonders and achieve marvels, but they are close to being terrified out of their wits.

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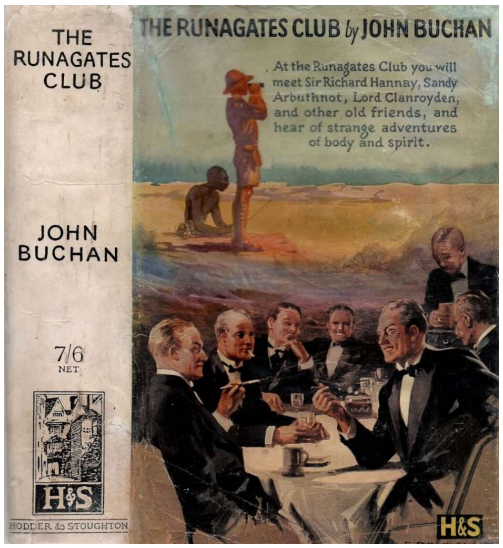

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‘Fullcircle’

‘Fullcircle’ from 1920 is a celebration of English country living and traditional social values, the story of three visits to a small country house in Oxfordshire and of the changes observed by the narrator over a number of years. It is a beautifully crafted account of the insidious but benign possession of the owners by the seventeenth-century spirit of the house. The story is also a satire on the do-goodery of the Fabian Society and the earnestness of the Modernist urbanite transplanted into traditional English countryside.

The house of the story – inspired by Weald Manor at Bampton, Oxfordshire – is a ‘wicked little house’ that forces religious as well as social change on its owners. Although the Giffens begin as earnest humanists, over a brief number of years they are taken on a journey through the Church of England, to Anglo-Catholicism, and finally to Roman Catholicism, the religion of the house’s original owner. The changes in how the Giffens use the chapel signpost their progress. First used as a committee room and then a library, in its final incarnation as a place of religious worship the narrator realises that it is now ‘a more pagan place than when it had been workroom or smoking-room’.

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Buchan does not signal his literary conceits in his short stories; he merely plants them and allows them to grow. By the time the reader reaches the end of *The Runagates Club*, the range of fears that the stories explore, and the underlying opposition between the security of the society depicted, and the insecurity experienced by the characters when things go awry, have grown to encompass much of human experience.

The *Runagates* stories also have a connection to Buchan’s most often-used trope, that of the thin line between civilisation and the destructive and terrifying forces of anarchy. He began writing about this at the turn of the century, and it remained his principal theme, with an obvious connection to fear in *The Runagates Club*.

Why did Buchan focus for so long on this idea? His imaginative engagement with social, political, cultural and technological changes throughout his lifetime would

have fuelled his awareness of how change affects people, and societies. In *The Runagates Club*, his last collection of short fictions, Buchan foregrounds the urbanity of his assured, secure social settings to allow the characters to go forth and explore the uncertainties of the worlds beyond. They find wonders and achieve marvels, but they are close to being terrified out of their wits.

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