

LIFE PURSUITS OF REUBEN BUTCHART AS WRITTEN BY HIM IN
PREPARATION FOR HIS 100TH BIRTHDAY (APRIL 22, 1963)

Reuben Butchart was born in Eramosa Township—a small township in Wellington County, Ontario—on April 22, 1863. His father was David Butchart, of Scotch descent. His mother was Catherine Royce, of the same locality, who had an English-born father in Robert Royce of Eramosa.

Mr. Butchart's education was obtained in the Public and High Schools of Georgetown, Fergus and Milton in the County of Halton. He had a year of High School in Fergus, but he affirmed that he got the most instruction from a Scotchman named Peter McLean, who was head of the Bruce Street School in Milton. This school, he believed, was a hold-over from the various Grammar Schools and "Academies" of an earlier period.

After quitting school to earn a living, he found such commercial pursuits as were possible in Milton were no bid for him, and that his enlarging talents needed an occupation with words, rather than commodities. Pitman Shorthand was then attracting students to Toronto, but while working, he studied at home, and had a thrill in life by being able to record a Methodist sermon, which was his aid to getting up speed. He got a higher thrill still, in becoming official Court reporter of Halton County Courts, under Judge Miller. Severe illness here struck him, and he had the luck to escape impending consumption (then very prevalent) by taking a leisurely visit in the sun at an uncle's farm in Huron County, which secured a health-balance after several years. Before this, while in a brief residence in Toronto, he had been offered and accepted a position on the staff of Hansard at Ottawa, which was one of his ambitions, but the illness just mentioned prevented his going. He accepted this as a Providential move in his career.

In 1885 he began a twenty-one year career as assistant to Edmund E. Sheppard, who was then at the head of The Daily News of Toronto. Here Mr. Butchart was successively secretary, accountant and business manager. He was for two years a member of the Toronto Press Gallery, in the Legislative Assembly, of which Sir Oliver Mowat was the Liberal Premier. At this point his experience with the daily Press was ended, but his experience in the art of publishing was developed. Mr. Sheppard lost control of the Daily News by reason of an unfortunate libel suit—the fault of a night editor. Mr. Sheppard, anticipating this, had for two years been preparing a new weekly paper for Toronto. On an evening in mid-October he had sat down with his solicitor and his secretary, and drafted plans for a journal to be called Toronto Saturday Night. Its first issue was the first Saturday in December—December 3, 1887. It contained some new ideas for such a paper—particularly the "Town Talk" by the editor under the name of "Don". A brilliant success followed. The paper expanded to a wider field and made a lot of money. A six story building was erected at 26-28 Adelaide Street, West. After some years, owing to ill health, the editor sold out his interest to another publisher who had a staff of his own. The sale was in April, 1906.

In early years, Mr. Butchart had associated himself with the fortunes of the Church of Christ (Disciples) and in the year 1897 had begun for the Disciples, a national paper—The Christian Messenger. Mr. Charles T. Paul, an accomplished linguist, was first editor, but the formation of the monthly paper was due to the experience which Mr. Butchart had received in his earlier work of nineteen years of helping Edmund E. Sheppard develop Saturday Night.

In the year 1907, Mr. Butchart was called to the work of accountant and business manager of the Christian Board of Publication, situated in St. Louis, Missouri. Here he found a favorable job which enlarged his abilities and he said he had a thousand friends. But at the end of his first year he resigned his position and returned with his family to Toronto. There was a deep conviction in him that he had a higher destiny to serve in his native Canada. On August 31, 1908, he entered the employment of Mr. W. H. Moore, M. P. Here he was accountant, executive manager and editorial contributor to the Canadian Courier, a weekly journal of public opinion that was somewhat in advance of its time. After 20 years it finished with a circulation of over 50,000, and a reputation as a national journal.

Now begins Mr. Butchart's career for the Disciples of Christ in Canada. In the year 1922 the churches in Ontario and the Maritime Provinces formed a national movement called All-Canada. At this time he was again the editor of the Christian Messenger. But the All-Canada movement gave him the position of Editor-of-Publications, and a national paper was formed called The Canadian Disciple, which took over the established Maritime weekly—the Christian. This larger field, he greatly enjoyed, and he continued the Canadian Disciple successfully as editor, and made a financial success of the business. He was retired from the editorship in October 1929.

In retirement, he began to cultivate acquaintances with all the early publications which the Disciples had formed, beginning with a monthly journal of 1845. Friendship and friendly inheritance brought him such unexampled quantities of historical beginnings that he turned to the writing of a Church History, and formed in succession several preparatory statements. They were not books but pamphlets, and they were called: "A Flame of the Lord's Kindling—1933"; "Old Everton—1941"; "A Primer of Disciple History—1942".

In 1941, the Ontario Co-Operation sponsored his offer to write a national history and in eight years he produced a volume of over 700 pages, of which 30 were illustrations, and of which the title was "The Disciples of Christ in Canada Since 1830". This book had been written in faith that a publisher might be found, and Mr. C. L. Burton of Toronto undertook its production. The volume had a fine reception, and gained for the writer on this continent, his reputation as the first historian of the Disciples, and the foundation of all their future works. Mr. Butchart computes his life service from leaving school to retirement as fifty-one years. He served a long experience with the Disciples as editor and secretary of denominational activities, and in 1948 was awarded the title of Elder Emeritus of Hillcrest Church at 2 Vaughan Road, Toronto.

He also wrote verse for fifty years and published "The Lyric Flute" in 1928, and "Second Testament of Collected Verse" in 1936. He retired with the satisfaction of knowing his historical writing and his verse were cherished in colleges and universities, and in many families in both Canada and the United States of America.

Mr. Butchart, in the year 1889 was united with Anna M. Black, of a well known Eramosa family. In February 1915 she pre-deceased him. Of six children granted them, two grew to adulthood—Charles C. Butchart of Buffalo and Jean I. MacKinnon of Guelph. In September 1927 he married Leonora Whitehead Muir, who died in November 1943.

ADDED NOTE BY HIS GRANDSON (MALCOLM MacKINNON)

Despite the threat of consumption that clouded his youth, Reuben Butchart was blessed by excellent health over his long life and reached the age of 100 in full possession of his mental and physical faculties. More than a hundred guests came to a reception at the home of his daughter to congratulate him on his 100th birthday. A few weeks after his birthday, he contracted pneumonia and died on July 2nd, 1963. He is buried in the Necropolis Cemetery in Toronto. He was survived by his son and daughter, 4 grandchildren, and 18 great grandchildren.

He was an avid collector of books and a careful reader who noted his thoughts in the margins. He was a frequent contributor to newspapers and magazines, a prolific correspondent, a genealogical scholar, a loving and dedicated family man and a constant source of inspiration to those who knew him.