



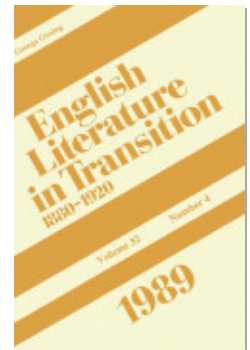
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Buchan's *Richard Hannay*

J. Randolph Cox

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Henry James and a blind leper on Molokai (they both sent letters of condolence to Fanny Stevenson), Borges, Owen, the neighbor girl Adelaide Boodle (she asked young English officers to bury Stevenson's toy soldiers in the trenches of the Great War), and, not the least eloquent or perceptive in this line, Nicholas Rankin.

Jefferson Hunter
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BUCHAN'S *RICHARD HANNAY*

John Buchan. *The Four Adventures of Richard Hannay*. Introduction by Robin W. Winks. Boston: David R. Godine, 1988. \$19.95

IT WAS SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO that John Buchan sent Richard Hannay across Scotland in search of the meaning of the phrase "the thirty-nine steps" and rescued spy fiction from the less able hands of William Le Queux and E. Phillips Oppenheim. Since then much ink has been spilled by critics in an attempt to explain the secret of Buchan's success.

The publisher David R. Godine has collected the first four Hannay novels (omitting only *The Man from the Norlands*) into a handsome volume that commemorates the anniversary of the publication of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*—in fact, if not in stated intent. Essentially, this is the first U. S. edition of the omnibus first published by Hodder and Stoughton of London in 1930. While the text has been reset (the original edition had 1204 pages to 672 in this volume) the scheme of re-numbering the chapters to give a sequential and cohesive appearance to the book follows that of the earlier edition. Thus, the chapters run from number one, "The Man Who Died" in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, to chapter seventy-five, "How I Stalked Wilder Game Than Deer" in *The Three Hostages*.

Robin Winks's scholarly introduction ("Stalking the Wilder Game") sets Buchan's accomplishment in the context and perspective of the rest of his life and work, discusses his style, and presents a reasoned and reasonable argument that should put to rest the old accusations that Buchan was anti-semitic.

I first read Buchan in 1950 in the old Pocket Books edition (1941) of *Greenmantle* in which the typesetter confused the location of the battle where Hannay was wounded with another phrase and called chapter four "Adventures of Two Dutchmen on the Loos." I have returned to the novel and its companions many times since in different printings but always with much of the excitement of that

first encounter which I associate with the coming of spring. Re-reading the canon now reinforces some of the reasons in my mind for Buchan's longevity in the popular imagination as it raises unanswered and unanswerable questions about how he got there. It was refreshing to a thirteen-year-old to find an author who spoke directly to him and not down to him. Buchan told you things you felt were important to hear, but he never belabored the point. The Scots do these things so well.

That first adventure (*The Thirty-Nine Steps*) is a simple and direct tale. It suggests a kinship with the fairy tale or folktale in that most of the characters are identified by profession or attribute not by personal name. Close the book and try to recall any names beyond that of the hero. Hannay is easy, of course, and we remember Scudder because of the dramatic aspects of the scenes in which he appears, but who are the other people encountered on the long road to the cliff where thirty-nine steps lead to the sea at high tide? A dry-fly fisherman, a literary innkeeper, a milkman, a spectacled roadman, a radical candidate, a bald archaeologist. None of the villains has a name, only qualities of the sinister. Even the Black Stone is not defined clearly. And here is the genius of the author on display, for is it not that which we do not see clearly that is all the more terrifying? Like the shadowy figure in the moonlight coming through the bedroom window, were we to turn on the light we would recognize it for a lamp or a pile of discarded blankets.

The later adventures are longer and more complex and all of the characters are defined as required and Hannay's companions increase in number. Buchan obviously became more interested in them (his "puppets" he calls them in *Pilgrim's Way*, but they are more than that) and returned to the writing of them with as much pleasure as we return to hear of their deeds all over again. (There seems to be something of the epic stature to the stories so we naturally slip into using words like "deeds" which suggest a chronicle of knights in armor.)

Buchan did not return to his heroes so often that they ever wore out their welcome: five novels about Richard Hannay (over a period of twenty years), a handful about Edward Leithen, written concurrently, with several threads of narrative and character that bind them together into a cycle.

Always good at putting his heroes in jeopardy and making the reader feel their terror, Buchan is equally adept at describing the quiet moments of relaxation at the end of the day's adventure, and this is why we are able to identify so closely with these figures. Much has been made of his philosophy of needing to justify his heroes their

successes and possessions. What is often overlooked is the sense these characters have of the need to prove they are worthy. The Buchan hero is never allowed to rest on his or her laurels for there is always another hill to climb.

There are subtle issues to consider when assessing Buchan, among them his sympathetic portrayal of the conscientious objector in *Mr. Standfast* written when patriotic fervor in England must have been at its height. These add to the texture of his tales. But it is the adventure that draws us back.

The stories begin quietly, but they build to a heroic crescendo. So Hannay goes off to the Middle East through the backroads of wartime Germany to seek the meaning of the phrases on the scrap of paper left by Harry Bullivant. The ending is like something out of classic high adventure when Sandy Arbuthnot, so suggestive of Lawrence of Arabia, scatters the enemy before him as he rides to fulfill the prophecy of the figure of the title, *Greenmantle*. *Mr. Standfast* closes with the death of Peter Pienaar who had tried to emulate some of the philosophy of *Pilgrim's Progress* and succeeded in ways he had never hoped of doing, while the conclusion of *The Three Hostages* is the classic stalking of the most dangerous game in the hills near Hannay's country home of Fosse.

It is good to have the stories available in the United States again. This is an edition of the classic tales to be valued and Robin Winks's able introduction goes far to explain just how the Buchan formula works without ridding it of its essential magic.

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TAUCHNITZ: MORE THAN 40 MILLION VOLUMES

William B. Todd and Ann Bowden. *Tauchnitz International Editions in English 1841-1955: A Bibliographical History*. New York: Bibliographical Society of America, 1988. \$75.00

MANY OF THE AUTHORS OF THE ELT PERIOD gained countless additional readers through publication of some of their works in the "Collection of British Authors" printed in English and issued by Bernard Tauchnitz in Leipzig, Germany. Although intended for "Continental Circulation only" the ubiquitous wrapped volumes of the Tauchnitz edition were found seemingly everywhere.

A total of 5,372 volumes representing the works of 783 authors were printed in the series, and while only a small proportion of the