



Mr. Standfast

John Buchan

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In this nail-biting adventure story, Hannay must outwit a foe far more intelligent than himself; muster the courage to propose to the lovely, clever Mary Lamington; and survive a brutal war. Although Mr. Standfast is a sequel to *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, it offers far more characterisation and philosophy than the earlier book. For its pace and suspense, its changes of scenery and thrilling descriptions of the last great battles against the Germans, Mr Standfast offers everything that has made its author so enduringly popular. This publication from Boomer Books is specially designed and typeset for comfortable reading.

Mr. Standfast Details

Date : Published July 30th 2008 by Boomer Books (first published 1919)

ISBN : 9781600969645

Author : John Buchan

Format : Paperback 390 pages

Genre : Fiction, Adventure, Classics, Mystery, Thriller, Spy Thriller, Espionage

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From Reader Review Mr. Standfast for online ebook

Joshua says

Read aloud. My favourite Buchan, well, at least, my favourite Hannay Buchan (Greenmantle is a close second).

"A man's courage is like a horse that refuses a fence; you have got to take him by the head and cram him at it again. If you don't, he will funk worse next time. I hadn't enough courage to be able to take chances with it, though I was afraid of many things, the thing I feared most mortally was being afraid."

Chesterton said that a good soldier fights not so much because he hates the enemy, but because he loves those behind him: Buchan does an excellent job illustrating that sentiment. He also manages to pull off at least two major plot climaxes and a bunch of helter-skelter escapades (Hannay is that word incarnate), not to mention the funny Scots characters that pepper Buchan's writings ('For the first wee bit,' Hamilton reported, 'we thocht he was gaun daft'). Lots of fun.

Tim says

Buchan is a bit of an acquired taste. The book is a bit slow at times, and the values that form its backbone are often foreign. But that is part of his charm.

I love old books that were once popular. They are the window into the soul of an age.

In this one, we have a wonderful view of the tensions between pacifism and patriotism, socialism and class expectations in WWI Britain. Much of this is quite illuminating, and by itself makes the book worth reading. (In order to worm his way into a spy ring, Hannay has to pose as a pacifist.)

And as in Buchan's other books, it is precisely what Buchan doesn't mean to show us that is particularly illuminating: the generous "condescension" of the upper class General Hannay in appreciating the salt of the earth British soldier, the notion that he as an officer has an orderly as a servant, the casual racism of references to Asians, Italians, and Africans, the demonization of "the Boche."

I was given this by a friend who was editing a new biography of Oliver Wendell Holmes; she noted that this was one of the fifty books that Holmes read in the summer of 1919, when the court was out of session. That alone is a reason to read the book - a reminder particularly appropriate to Goodreads, that sharing the act of reading with someone else enhances the reading itself. I relished that I was getting a view not only into the mind of the time, but also of the great jurist. (Though of course, I have no idea what he thought of the book.)

My friend gave it to me because it is organized around metaphors and characters from A Pilgrim's Progress, and I had recently given her husband a lovely old illustrated edition of the same. Not remembering my Pilgrim's Progress as well as I might, or as the good christians of Buchan's day might have, a lot of the connections went over my head, as did some of the taken-for-granted background about WWI. The war front really only comes alive at the end of the book, in the concluding battles.

By the way, I don't understand the other reviews that suggest that Buchan is completely negative about

pacifists. While he builds a portrait of the narrowness of the sentiment of those opposed to the war (as opposed to the solid citizens who shoulder the burden uncomplainingly), it is almost Trollopian in its sympathy for those so portrayed, and in the end, it is a conscientious objector who is described as "the best of us" at the front.

P.S. I read *The Thirty-Nine Steps* long ago, but don't remember it well, and never read *Greenmantle*, the second book in his Richard Hannay series, so that may have contributed to my review. If I'd read the books in sequence, the characters and the thrust of the narrative would have been more familiar, and I might have found the book more engaging. I'd recommend starting with *The Thirty-Nine Steps*.

Alayne says

Despite its age, (published in 1919, almost one hundred years ago), this was a gripping book which I found hard to put down. The battles of the First World War were mentioned a lot and the names all meant something to me - third battle of Ypres, Polygon Wood, the Somme, Amiens, etc. And the German spy that the Intelligence Service was trying to catch was very slippery. Richard Hannay got himself into and out of a number of difficulties. Highly recommended.

Jack says

After reading *Mr. Standfast*, it's clear I should read ***Pilgrim's Progress***, as it plays an important part in the story. *Mr. Standfast* is a character in ***Pilgrim's Progress***, one to whom a character in *Mr. Standfast* the book aspires. Confusing until you've read a mile in their shoes. Or something.

Mr. Standfast appears to be the third book in a series set before and during World War I. The previous two books are *THE THIRTY-NINE STEPS* and *Greenmantle*, and subsequent ones are *The Three Hostages* and *The Island of Sheep*. Of course, being a doofus, I couldn't start at the beginning (except I've seen two versions of the film adaptations).

Richard Hannay, the main character, is a British general temporarily reassigned to intelligence to infiltrate a group of people who seem to be not for the (un)United Kingdom. There is evidence of espionage, and it is based upon this evidence that Hannay is redeployed. Adventures ensue. This covers the first third of the book, and I can't really relate the rest of the story without spoilers.

This book is much longer than the books I have been reading, 681 pages! There were times the book seemed to drag, and perchance when reading upon my phone, I paid more attention to how quickly I could read and flip to the next screen to lower the estimated time to completion of the chapter than to the story itself. Yet, when I thought about it, the ebb and flow accurately portrayed Hannay's view of his mission. At times it moved quickly, at other times it moved nowhere, and sometimes it moved in quicksand.

Hannay is generally well characterized in the book, for we see most everything through his eyes and ears. Other characters we learn different amounts about, the more important to Hannay, the greater the information related. While the reality of the characters might not be known to us, the reality of them as known by Hannay is sufficient.

And as near as I can tell, Hannay has respect for all the people around, even the enemy. Oh, he vehemently disagrees with them, but as an army fellow, he respects the discipline and the strategy of the German military, which seems rather surprising for the time of the book.

While an adventure of one particular man and his cohorts, Mr. Standfast serves as a celebration of the common British man and woman. Not necessarily for the war, each serves in his or her own way in support of the country, to defend it and their way of life not just for themselves, but for their descendants and those who cannot or will not do it themselves.

When I finished reading this at breakfast this morning, I had to compose myself so as to not burst into tears in the middle of Whataburger. This was such a bittersweet ending to the book. This is war, though, and this is life. There is death that comes and death that is put off, but in the end we are all touched by it one way or another. And may what can be said of us after we're gone perhaps touch on how we died, but more importantly how we lived. And loved.

I recommend Mr. Standfast highly not with reservation but with slight trepidation. Do not enter lightly, but perseverance will be rewarded (hence, five stars).

Stephen says

Very suspenseful. This book's strong point is the suspense, although I like the character of Richard Hannay. Overall, very worth reading, and probably you'll have to read it all at once, but it's not as good as the first book, the 39 Steps, partly because the ending was slightly drawn out and then suddenly cut off. I guess it was permissible, but I didn't prefer it.

Leslie says

I found this 3rd installment of the Richard Hannay story gripping! Although it could probably be read as a stand-alone, it does refer to the first two books of the series: The Thirty-nine Steps and Greenmantle, and I would strongly recommend starting with the first book.

Bill says

Mr Standfast is the third book in the John Hannay thriller/ spy series written by John Buchan. The first two, The 39 Steps and Greenmantle, were both excellent and this third story follows easily with another excellent, well-paced, thriller. In this story, John Hannay, now a General in the British Army is called back from the front (WWI) to help find an old adversary. The Germans are infiltrating pacifist factions and using these people to help their ends, as a conduit for passing information, and other activities. Hannay follows a trail to northern Scotland and back to the front in this wartime adventure. There are excellent characters in this story, Buchan writes thoughtfully and the story, especially the ending is all excellent. An excellent follow-up to the first two books. Next in this series will be The Three Hostages.

Laura says

From BBC Radio 4:

Agent Richard Hannay hunts his nemesis, the head of a First World War German spy ring. Stars David Robb and Clive Merrison.

Jayaprakash Satyamurthy says

This novel concludes what I think of as the original Hannay trilogy, which sees our hero through the course of the first world war, or the Great War as they used to call it.

There's an interesting change in tone over these three books. 'The Thirty Nine Steps' is stark and intense with Hannay a man pushed to the limit, fighting a battle he barely understands with few allies until the last third of the novel. 'Greenmantle' is an altogether more rollicking and gregarious work with various allies and companions along the way as well as the window-dressing of exotic settings, although it isn't bereft of moments of singular intensity.

'Mr. Standfast' is by far the darkest of the three novels, as Hannay alternates between the frontlines and backrooms of some of the most climactic moments of the war. There is a vivid sense of the horror of war, both in blitz-torn London and in the battlefields of Europe. Even though Hannay has his share of comrades, and even a love interest (described as 'childlike' or 'like a slim boy' rather a lot of times - was Buchan a closeted Uranian?) this novel plunges deep into the ideological currents that surround the war and its dissenters, taking us far from the realms of amiable jingoism at times. It also features a villain who is somehow far more diabolical than when we first met him in '39' and far more purely villainous than the villains in 'Greenmantle'.

The ending is bittersweet, with some noble companions lost. Along the way, I also realised that Hannay works as a character because Buchan is able to show us his limitations to just the right degree as to make his superhuman abilities palatable. Hannay describes a couple of lines of Goethe used as passwords by German spies as 'pretty dismal poetry' and confesses to having no ear for any instrumental music other than marching tunes. These foibles remind us that, for all his achievements, Hannay has led a life that has had little of culture or art in it, and Buchan does not present this as a flaw or an advantage, simply as a part of the character, allowing us to draw our own conclusions. This a far cry from the first Bulldog Drummond novel where 'Sapper' is clearly in love with his headstrong buffoon of a hero, even though he doesn't come across as especially notable even through 'Sapper's narrative.

Buchan was a subtle author; there are many fine things woven into the fabric of this novel. You don't have to agree with his politics or his religion to admire how he has deeply interwoven them with an exciting adventure story in a manner that gives added depth to the plot rather than making it into a shallow polemic. Matthew Reilly can brag until he's bleat in the face about pure entertainment, but a writer who is aware of his world-view and intelligently works it into his novels is preferable to any amount of allegedly subtext-less hi-jinks.

Kay says

What is it with series? I just don't like them, that's what. This third Richard Hannay book was a bit of a letdown, but I couldn't bring myself to rate it two stars. Really, I'd say 2-1/2.

There were some exciting passages in this book, but overall I found that the faults exhibited in the two earlier Hannay tales, namely a tendency to pontificate on character, fate, and philosophy plus a heavy reliance on coincidence to advance the plot were more pronounced here. Buchan also makes frequent references to events from the previous two books, so this is far from a stand-alone tale.

I also found the love interest subplot fairly cringeworthy. The girl is half Hannay's age, for starters, and so wonderfully clean, wholesome, bright, and fearless that I wanted to strangle her.

The central plot of the book sets Hannay up against his Moriarty, an evil arch-enemy he's crossed swords with in the past. Hannay is sent "undercover" among pacifists and conscientious objectors, which gives Buchan endless opportunity to natter on and on about the National Character. When Hannay waxes philosophical, I just skim. That sort of earnest sermonizing seems to have been as *de rigueur* as fatuous irony is today.

What is even more predictable are the countless references to "the Bosch" as the evil spies and perpetrators behind all that's wrong with the war effort. After a spell among the pacifists, one of Buchan's trademark chase scenes moves things along at a gratifying pace (though there are, alas, so many fortuitous encounters that the plot is marred considerably). The last part of the book, which takes place in Switzerland and then on the front in France can be a little hard to follow without brushing up on WW1 tactics and battles. At the time this was written (1919), of course, all these events would have been common knowledge.

I have to say, however, that I actually enjoyed the opportunity to immerse myself in 1918. These books are very much *of their time*, and there are many baffling references, some minor and some major, which invariably set me googling. In this novel, for example, I learned that an "Aquascutum" is a type of coat (Hannay mentions the word repeatedly), that there were travel restrictions in place for parts of Scotland during the war (a fact which is central in an extended "chase" scene), that there were about 50 air raids in Britain during the war, and that "Mr. Standfast" is a character in *Pilgrim's Progress*. And that's just the tip of the iceberg. (It helped that I was reading this e-text on my iPad and could quickly switch over to a browser to consult Google)

Speaking of e-books, a word of warning: I first started reading this from a free e-book I'd downloaded from Barnes and Noble. The text was so badly scanned that virtually every sentence had misspelled words and mangled passages. After about ten pages, I gave up and downloaded a free edition which was almost error-free from Amazon.

Lobstergirl says

More than a bit convoluted and ridiculous, but what are you gonna do? It's John Buchan and an engaging

story.

In the third of the five Richard Hannay novels, Dick, now a Brigadier General, is recalled from leading his troops on the Western front in the Great War in order to take part in a top secret spy mission. There's a German posing as a Brit in the British countryside, and Hannay adopts the pose of a pacifist in order to smell him out.

Before much smelling happens, the nearly-forty Dick Hannay falls head over heels for a girl (I think she's nineteen) who happens to be his spymaster. Dick seems to be particularly drawn to her boyishness: "I remember the way she laughed and flung back her head like a gallant boy."

The first time he sees her "I stared after her as she walked across the lawn, and I remember noticing that she moved with the free grace of an athletic boy."

"I had been picturing her in my recollection as very young and glimmering, a dancing, exquisite child. But now I revised that picture. The crystal freshness of morning was still there, but I saw how deep the waters were. It was the clean fineness and strength of her that entranced me. I didn't even think of her as pretty, any more than a man thinks of the good looks of the friend he worships."

"I loved to watch her, when the servants had gone, with her elbows on the table like a schoolboy..."

None of this is terribly convincing; the love Hannay feels for his war-crippled friend Peter Pienaar, the titular Mr. Standfast (a character from *Pilgrim's Progress*), is rather more so.

The Germans have a pretty easy time recruiting the British to work for them, someone tells Hannay. "The ordinary Briton doesn't run to treason, but he's not very bright. A clever man in that kind of game can make better use of a fool than of a rogue." Naturally this got me thinking of the Russians and people like Jared Kushner and Carter Page.

Buchan's heroes are always hale, hearty, and bookish. Manliness means being a very upper-crusty, very well educated warrior. A real man can barely stand sitting still. He wants to be in the center of the action; if that's a world war, all the better. There's no ugly war here. It's all beautiful. These are men who join in wars because they want "fresh air and exercise." (Think about that for a minute. This is a book published in 1919.) "I'm envying you some, for there's a place waiting for you in the fighting line," someone says to someone else in this veritable comic-book.

S Dizzy says

Not a terrible spy thriller

Carol Fenlon says

This is the kind of book I would never normally read but I was led to it because I read in another book that parts of it were set in the early days of Letchworth Garden City and I have a historical interest in that. I believe the protagonist Richard Hannay features in other of Buchan's books and he is certainly well drawn.

The book I suppose is best described as an action thriller, a tale of espionage and battle in World War 1. There are lots of twists and turns and predictably a romance along the way and a sacrifice at the end which allows the heroes (the British of course) to win out. Even though it now seems a bit dated and certainly it was predictable, I found it a satisfying read. It is very well written as one would expect from such a famed writer and jumps rapidly from action scene to action scene set in a bewildering variety of locations, with the characters in a number of innovative disguises, rather reminding me of the Milk Tray man Hannay appears as a sort of pre-James Bond figure, suave and upper class Brit but definitely full of British fairness and courage and there were many plot twists, sometimes seeming rather too convenient. I don't know whether this one was ever made into a film, but it certainly has the right scenic qualities for a movie. Overall, I enjoyed it even though it wasn't really my type of book and I was a bit disappointed that the part set in Letchworth only comprised a chapter or two at the beginning. Although I knew in advance roughly what would happen, I still wanted it to end the way that it did so I felt quite satisfied when I got to the end. If you like spy thrillers and history you will like this book.

Cathy says

For links to other posts relating to my Buchan of the Month reading project, visit my blog:
<https://whatcathyreadnext.wordpress.com/>

Mr. Standfast is the third book in my Buchan of the Month reading project.

Before I say anymore, I'll confess that Mr. Standfast is a book I've read many times before and it happens to be one of my favorite Buchan books (alongside Sick Heart River, which I shall be reading later this year). For me, it has everything: a mystery, some thrilling set pieces, great characters, numerous locations, a touch of romance and some chilling scenes on the battlefields of World War One France. I always get a bit tearful at the end. As well as being a very entertaining book, Mr. Standfast explores some serious themes – courage, fortitude, sacrifice.

As the title suggests, Mr. Standfast has a number of allusions and references to John Bunyan's work *The Pilgrim's Progress*. That book was an important text for Buchan and I believe it informs many of the themes in Mr. Standfast I have just mentioned. Full disclosure: my dissertation for my MA in English from The Open University was on the subject of the influence of *The Pilgrim's Progress* on John Buchan's books but don't worry, I'm not going to test your patience by quoting from it extensively. However, just a few thoughts on the connections between the two texts...

In his autobiography *Memory-Hold-The-Door*, Buchan attributes his regard for *The Pilgrim's Progress* to 'its picture of life as a pilgrimage over hill and dale, where surprising adventures lurked by the wayside, a hard road with now and then long views to cheer the traveller and a great brightness at the end of it'. The reference to the journey being 'over hills and dales' acknowledges that life brings moments of difficulty and challenge as well as ease, involving either physical or mental effort. The journey features 'surprising adventures' – the use of the word 'adventures' rather than 'experiences' suggesting that these will be exciting episodes - but these 'lurk' by the wayside. There is a sense of the unexpected, of danger in the choice of the word 'lurk'. All of these elements I feel are apparent in Mr. Standfast.

As well as having a thematic influence, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, as a physical object, plays a role in Mr. Standfast. It acts variously as a prize, a code-book and a source of moral and comfort.

For example, *The Pilgrim's Progress* is one of Peter Pienaar's few cherished possessions; with the Bible, it acts as a source of comfort during his captivity in a German prisoner-of-war camp. Pienaar is described as 'puzzling over it', using it as one of his 'chief aids in reflection' and for 'self-examination'. Peter searches *The Pilgrim's Progress* to find examples that he can apply to his present predicament. Charmingly Peter takes everything in *The Pilgrim's Progress* 'quite literally' and talks about the character Mr Standfast 'as if he were a friend'. Arguably, Peter's identification with the characters in *The Pilgrim's Progress* partly inspires his actions at the end of the book.

For Hannay, *The Pilgrim's Progress* has a more practical and utilitarian function; he describes it as one of his 'working tools'. For example, it alerts Hannay to the fact that someone has searched his belongings as he observes 'a receipted bill which I had stuck in the *Pilgrim's Progress* to mark my place had been moved'. Later, it provides a method of authenticating the character Hannay has adopted. Producing his copy of *The Pilgrim's Progress* to the old postmistress of a Highland village, it creates a shared cultural connection between them as she comments, 'I got it for a prize in the Sabbath School when I was a lassie'.

One of the most notable roles for *The Pilgrim's Progress* in Mr Standfast is as a shared means of communication between Hannay and his comrades. This operates at two levels: as a common language to express feelings, anxieties and hopes and, at a practical level, as a code for secret communications between the characters. In particular, *The Pilgrim's Progress* becomes a key part of the burgeoning relationship between Mary Lamington and Hannay. At one point, Hannay sends a message of reassurance for Mary: 'If you see Miss Lamington you can tell her I'm past the Hill Difficulty. I'm coming back as soon as God will let me'.

There is a lot more I could say on the links between the two texts but I'll just close by saying that Mr. Standfast is a great story even if you have no knowledge of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. I think it is the best of Buchan's Richard Hannay adventures and one of the finest books he wrote.

Marts (Thinker) says

Another thrilling, fast-paced, WWI novel by Buchan featuring the adventures of Richard Hannay and his associates Pieter Pienaar, John Blenkiron and Mary Lamington. This time Hannay tracks down German spies and his main opponent is a master of disguise called Ivery who pursues him through Europe... With, as a bit of an unusual backdrop, 'The Pilgrim's Progress'...

Though a bit overly descriptive at times, this classic war adventure novel is loaded with action, adventure and excitement on every page...

Helen says

This story was published in 1919 and appears to have been written either during or just at the end of the First War. It cries out with details and emotion that was still hot at the time of writing. It reads to me as a report on the battles by someone who was there and the report given while it was all fresh in his mind. The anti-German rhetoric is what you would expect but is tempered occasionally with remarks praising German organisation, determination, and hard work.

The villain, whom we know from the previous books, and proven to be a German aristocrat, is the ideal evil

doer; brilliant, highly motivated, and with an army of agents at his command. With only four; John Blenkiron, the American mining engineer; Richard Hannay; Peter Pienaar, the South African hunter; Mary Lamington, the teen age spy; if they should win it would be a great achievement. Nothing like having terrible odds to stir up all one's abilities.

There are patriotic rants such as you find in writing of the period so you have to be careful not to be drawn in too much or you'll find yourself crying "Up the British!"

Johnny Waco says

The third of the Richard Hannay novels beginning with *The 39 Steps*, *Mr. Standfast* may be the weakest of the series. Like the second book, *Greenmantle*, it is set during WWI, and once again Hannay is pulled off the front lines with orders to infiltrate a German espionage ring. Although *Mr. Standfast* has some exciting set pieces, like Hannay's tramp over the Isle of Skye, off Scotland's coast, and his breakneck drive and later glacier climb through the Alps, the novel suffers from too many of these sorts of adventures--in short, the book sprawls in a way the more tightly focused Hannay novels don't. Buchan takes us from the English countryside to Glasgow to Skye to London to Switzerland to Italy and, finally, back to the trenches of northern France. All of this traipsing through Europe never succeeds in giving the reader a good grasp of how exactly Ivery's spy ring works, or even what his ultimate plan is--it all seems to be a bare-bones framework to hang the admittedly enthralling adventures on. Also troubling is the tone of the first fourth or third of the book; Buchan's books are always jingoistic and xenophobic, but *Mr. Standfast* strikes a meaner, uglier tone with Hannay's infiltration of a pacifist sect. I understand that England was in the middle of WWI when this novel was written, but Buchan rages against anybody who would object to war or even question if it was being fought intelligently or morally--the pacifists and conscientious objectors Hannay runs across are all ripped and described insultingly, with the implication they are all cowards, mentally unstable, or most likely traitors. Fortunately, Buchan mitigates these early insults with the character of Lancelot Wake, who maintains his pacifist principles but dies delivering messages through the most dangerous parts of the trenches.

One other note: as I read through the Hannay novels, I can't help but compare Hannay to James Bond, as Fleming was clearly influenced by Buchan's novels. Where Bond would have a cynical, pragmatic edge, Hannay, in the dawn of modern spycraft, feels that espionage is degrading, diverting soldiers from the front lines--an activity necessary only because the corrupt Germans started the whole game. Hannay also does not possess the hardness we see in Bond--when he lies, bluffs, or infiltrates, he carries a deep sense of shame at what he is doing, firmly believing it is less than manly.

John Frankham says

Tears galore for me at the finish of this splendid tale: also a wonderful examination of people under the pressure of strife and war.

"In this nail-biting adventure story, Hannay must outwit a foe far more intelligent than himself; muster the courage to propose to the lovely, clever Mary Lamington; and survive a brutal war. Although *Mr. Standfast* is a sequel to *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, it offers far more characterisation and philosophy than the earlier book. For its pace and suspense, its changes of scenery and thrilling descriptions of the last great battles against the Germans, *Mr Standfast* offers everything that has made its author so enduringly popular."

Dagny says

I enjoyed this book tremendously and it is my favorite Hannay adventure to date. (Or perhaps it is just that I am getting to know the characters better. We'll see with the next book.) The parts where Hannay was spying were exciting and fun reading. There was a bit too much military strategy and action near the end for my taste, but it was minor compared to the rest of the novel.

Dfordoom says

Mr Standfast, published in 1919, was the third of John Buchan's Richard Hannay espionage novels.

The success of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* had taken Buchan by surprise. Buchan was himself an interesting character who wrote some great weird fiction as well as works of serious history. He was created Baron Tweedsmuir in 1935 and ended up as Governor-General of Canada.

Richard Hannay is commanding an infantry brigade on the Western Front when he finds himself once again, somewhat against his will, assigned to counter-espionage duties. This time he must go undercover as a pacifist. Pacifist and anti-war activists in Britain are being used by the Germans to undermine the Allied war effort and Hannay must track down the master spy behind this plot.

Hannay finds that pacifists are not quite what he expected. Some he instinctively dislikes while for others he gradually learns to feel a grudging respect. He also has another even bigger surprise. The rather crusty 40-year-old brigadier finds himself falling madly in love with the 19-year-old Mary Lamington. Mary is ravishingly beautiful and exceptionally intelligent. She is also a formidable secret agent.

Hannay's hunt for the German spymaster takes him to Scotland and later to Switzerland, and it proves to be a most frustrating hunt indeed. Hannay's task is complicated by his determination to ensure that no harm comes to his new lady love, although in truth Mary is capable of looking after herself fairly well. There are many clever plot twists, exciting escapes from imminent death, and there's a great deal of entertainment to be had within the pages of this book.

Some reviewers will lead you to believe that Buchan's High Tory political beliefs and his enthusiasm for British imperialism combined with the common attitudes of the day on the subjects of women and foreigners make his books difficult for modern readers to appreciate. Personally I think this is nonsense. Buchan was a complex and intelligent man and his views are by no means simplistic or rigid.

He was also a masterful story teller and the Hannay novels are essential reading for anyone with a love for spy fiction.
