



VINTAGE

# THE THIRTY-NINE STEPS

JOHN BUCHAN

VINTAGE CLASSICS

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## About the Book

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May 1914. Britain is on the eve of war with Germany. Richard Hannay is living a quiet life in London, but after a chance encounter with a mysterious stranger he stumbles into a hair-raising adventure - a desperate hunt across the country and against the clock, pursued by the police and a cunning, ruthless enemy. Hannay's life and the security of Britain are in grave peril, and everything rests on the solution to a baffling enigma: what are the thirty-nine steps?

## About the Author

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JOHN BUCHAN (1875-1940) was born in Perth, Scotland, and educated at the universities of Glasgow and Oxford. He had always loved reading and started writing – poems and a novel – while still at school. His first book, *Sir Quixote of the Moors*, was published in 1895. He went on to write over one hundred others – novels, short stories, biographies and political commentaries. Yet writing was only one of his many talents. He became a lawyer and then spent two years in South Africa as Private Secretary to Lord Milner, the High Commissioner. In 1907 he joined the publishing firm of Thomas Nelson, but when World War I started he became one of only five journalists attached to the British army to report on the war. In 1918 he was made Director of Intelligence at the new Department of Information. He had always maintained ‘Publishing is my business, writing my amusement and politics my duty’ and in 1927 he was elected to the House of Commons as a Conservative MP. In 1935 he was appointed Governor-General of Canada and made Lord Tweedsmuir of Elsfeld – a title which combined his Scottish origins and the village outside Oxford where he and his family had settled in 1919. But his health was never perfect and he died in Montreal in 1940.

*The Thirty-nine Steps* remains the book for which he is best remembered. His six-year-old daughter, Alice, needed sea air after an operation, so in 1914 the family were staying in Broadstairs, Kent. Nearby, relatives had been lent a house with steps down to a private beach. There the famous novel was finished. Serialized first in *Blackwood’s Magazine* under a pseudonym ‘H de V’, it was published under Buchan’s name in October 1915 and sold over 25,000 copies within three months. It has been in print ever since.

## About the Illustrator

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EDWARD ARDIZZONE (1900–1979) was born in Haiphong, French Indo-China (now Vietnam), where his father worked for the Eastern Telegraph Company. When he was five, his English mother brought him back to Britain and, after a miserable time at public school in Dorset, he began work as a clerk in the London office of the firm that had employed his father. In the evenings he attended classes given by Bernard Meninsky at the Westminster School of Art. After 1927 he started to make his living from book illustration and painting, and ultimately became renowned for his children's books which were at their most popular in the 1950s and '60s and are now enjoying a revival. During World War II he worked as an official War Artist in France, North Africa and Italy, and afterwards he taught at the Camberwell School of Art and the Royal College.

His first picture book, *Little Tim and the Brave Sea Captain*, was published in 1936 and was followed over the next four decades by eleven more stories about the same character. Tim, though very much a loner, is a boy of great self-reliance, courage and perseverance – not unlike the hero of *The Thirty-nine Steps*, Richard Hannay. When, in 1964, Dent included the book in their series of Illustrated Children's Classics, Ardizzone was a happy choice of artist. He was in much demand as an illustrator and worked with such authors as Eleanor Farjeon, Graham Greene, James Reeves and his cousin Christianna Brand.

In appearance 'Ted' Ardizzone was like one of his own creations – large, jovial, bespectacled and usually taking snuff. He was much loved in his lifetime and received many awards, including the Kate Greenaway Medal for *Tim All Alone* (1956) and a C. B. E. in 1971.

To  
Thomas Arthur Nelson,  
Lothian and Border Horse

*My Dear Tommy,*

*You and I have long cherished an affection for that elementary type of tale which Americans call the 'dime novel', and which we know as the 'shocker' - the romance where the incidents defy the probabilities, and march just inside the borders of the possible. During an illness last winter I exhausted my store of those aids to cheerfulness, and was driven to write one for myself. This little volume is the result, and I should like to put your name on it in memory of our long friendship, in these days when the wildest fictions are so much less improbable than the facts.*

J. B.

*John Buchan*



*The Thirty-nine  
Steps*

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*Illustrated by Edward Ardizzone*

VINTAGE BOOKS  
London



## I

### The Man Who Died

I RETURNED from the City about three o'clock on that May afternoon pretty well disgusted with life. I had been three months in the Old Country, and was fed up with it. If anyone had told me a year ago that I would have been feeling like that I should have laughed at him; but there was the fact. The weather made me liverish, the talk of the ordinary Englishman made me sick, I couldn't get enough exercise, and the amusements of London seemed as flat as soda-water that has been standing in the sun. 'Richard Hannay,' I kept telling myself, 'you have got into the wrong ditch, my friend, and you had better climb out.'

It made me bite my lips to think of the plans I had been building up those last years in Bulawayo. I had got my pile - not one of the big ones, but good enough for me; and I had figured out all kinds of ways of enjoying myself. My father had brought me out from Scotland at the age of six, and I had never been home since; so England was a sort of Arabian Nights to me, and I counted on stopping there for the rest of my days.



But from the first I was disappointed with it. In about a week I was tired of seeing sights, and in less than a month I had had enough of restaurants and theatres and race-meetings. I had no real pal to go about with, which probably explains things. Plenty of people invited me to their houses, but they didn't seem much interested in me. They would fling me a question or two about South Africa, and then get on to their own affairs. A lot of Imperialist ladies asked me to tea to meet schoolmasters from New Zealand and editors from Vancouver, and that was the dismalest business of all. Here was I, thirty-seven years old, sound in wind and limb, with enough money to have a good time, yawning my head off all day. I had just about settled to clear out and get back to the veld, for I was the best bored man in the United Kingdom.

That afternoon I had been worrying my brokers about investments to give my mind something to work on, and on my way home I turned into my club - rather a pot-house, which took in colonial members. I had a long drink, and read the evening papers. They were full of the row in the Near East, and there was an article about Karolides, the Greek Premier. I rather fancied the chap. From all accounts he seemed the one big man in the show; and he played a straight game too, which was more than could be said for most of them. I gathered that they hated him pretty blackly in Berlin and Vienna, but that we were going to stick by him, and one paper said that he was the only barrier between Europe and Armageddon. I remember wondering if I could get a job in those parts. It struck me that Albania was the sort of place that might keep a man from yawning.

About six o'clock I went home, dressed, dined at the Café Royal, and turned into a music-hall. It was a silly show, all capering women and monkey-faced men, and I did not stay long. The night was fine and clear as I walked back to the flat I had hired near Portland Place. The crowd

surged past me on the pavements, busy and chattering, and I envied the people for having something to do. These shop-girls and clerks and dandies and policemen had some interest in life that kept them going. I gave half a crown to a beggar because I saw him yawn; he was a fellow sufferer. At Oxford Circus I looked up into the spring sky and I made a vow. I would give the Old Country another day to fit me into something; if nothing happened, I would take the next boat for the Cape.

My flat was the first floor in a new block behind Langham Place. There was a common staircase, with a porter and a liftman at the entrance, but there was no restaurant or anything of that sort, and each flat was quite shut off from the others. I hate servants on the premises, so I had a fellow to look after me who came in by the day. He arrived before eight o'clock every morning and used to depart at seven, for I never dined at home.

I was just fitting my key into the door when I noticed a man at my elbow. I had not seen him approach, and the sudden appearance made me start. He was a slim man, with a short brown beard and small, gimlety blue eyes. I recognized him as the occupant of a flat on the top floor, with whom I had passed the time of day on the stairs.

'Can I speak to you?' he said. 'May I come in for a minute?' He was steadying his voice with an effort, and his hand was pawing my arm.

I got my door open and motioned him in. No sooner was he over the threshold than he made a dash for my back room, where I used to smoke and write my letters. Then he bolted back.

'Is the door locked?' he asked feverishly, and he fastened the chain with his own hand.

'I'm very sorry,' he said humbly. 'It's a mighty liberty, but you looked the kind of man who would understand. I've had

you in my mind all this week when things got troublesome. Say, will you do me a good turn?’

‘I’ll listen to you,’ I said. ‘That’s all I’ll promise.’ I was getting worried by the antics of this nervous little chap.

There was a tray of drinks on a table beside him, from which he filled himself a stiff whisky and soda. He drank it off in three gulps, and cracked the glass as he set it down.

‘Pardon,’ he said, ‘I’m a bit rattled tonight. You see, I happen at this moment to be dead.’

I sat down in an armchair and lit my pipe.

‘What does it feel like?’ I asked. I was pretty certain that I had to deal with a madman.

A smile flickered over his drawn face. ‘I’m not mad – yet. Say, sir, I’ve been watching you, and I reckon you’re a cool customer. I reckon, too, you’re an honest man, and not afraid of playing a bold hand. I’m going to confide in you. I need help worse than any man ever needed it, and I want to know if I can count you in.’

‘Get on with your yarn,’ I said, ‘and I’ll tell you.’

He seemed to brace himself for a great effort, and then started on the queerest rigmarole. I didn’t get hold of it at first, and I had to stop and ask him questions. But here is the gist of it:

He was an American, from Kentucky, and after college, being pretty well off, he had started out to see the world. He wrote a bit, and acted as war correspondent for a Chicago paper, and spent a year or two in south-eastern Europe. I gathered that he was a fine linguist, and had got to know pretty well the society in those parts. He spoke familiarly of many names that I remembered to have seen in the newspapers.

He had played about with politics, he told me, at first for the interest of them, and then because he couldn’t help

himself. I read him as a sharp, restless fellow, who always wanted to get down to the roots of things. He got a little farther down than he wanted.

I am giving you what he told me as well as I could make it out. Away behind all the governments and the armies there was a big subterranean movement going on, engineered by very dangerous people. He had come on it by accident; it fascinated him; he went further, and then he got caught. I gathered that most of the people in it were the sort of educated anarchists that make revolutions, but that beside them there were financiers who were playing for money. A clever man can make big profits on a falling market, and it suited the book of both classes to set Europe by the ears.

He told me some queer things that explained a lot that had puzzled me - things that happened in the Balkan War, how one state suddenly came out on top, why alliances were made and broken, why certain men disappeared, and where the sinews of war came from. The aim of the whole conspiracy was to get Russia and Germany at loggerheads.

When I asked why, he said that the anarchist lot thought it would give them their chance. Everything would be in the melting-pot, and they looked to see a new world emerge. The capitalists would rake in the shekels, and make fortunes by buying up wreckage. Capital, he said, had no conscience and no fatherland. Besides, the Jew was behind it, and the Jew hated Russia worse than hell.

'Do you wonder?' he cried. 'For three hundred years they have been persecuted, and this is the return match for the *pogroms*. The Jew is everywhere, but you have to go far down the backstairs to find him. Take any big Teutonic business concern. If you have dealings with it the first man you meet is Prince *von und zu* something, an elegant young man who talks Eton-and-Harrow English. But he cuts no ice. If your business is big, you get behind him and find a

prognathous Westphalian with a retreating brow and the manners of a hog. He is the German business man that gives your English papers the shakes. But if you're on the biggest kind of job and are bound to get to the real boss, ten to one you are brought up against a little white-faced Jew in a bath-chair with an eye like a rattlesnake. Yes, sir, he is the man who is ruling the world just now, and he has his knife in the Empire of the Tsar, because his aunt was outraged and his father flogged in some one-horse location on the Volga.'

I could not help saying that his Jew anarchists seemed to have got left behind a little.

'Yes and no,' he said. 'They won up to a point, but they struck a bigger thing than money, a thing that couldn't be bought, the old elemental fighting instinct of man. If you're going to be killed you invent some kind of flag and country to fight for, and if you survive you get to love the thing. Those foolish devils of soldiers have found something they care for, and that has upset the pretty plan laid in Berlin and Vienna. But my friends haven't played their last card by a long sight. They've gotten the ace up their sleeves, and unless I can keep alive for a month they are going to play it and win.'

'But I thought you were dead,' I put in.

'*Mors janua vitae*,' he smiled. (I recognized the quotation: it was about all the Latin I knew.) 'I'm coming to that, but I've got to put you wise about a lot of things first. If you read your newspaper, I guess you know the name of Constantine Karolides?'

I sat up at that, for I had been reading about him that very afternoon.

'He is the man that has wrecked all their games. He is the one big brain in the whole show, and he happens also to be an honest man. Therefore he has been marked down