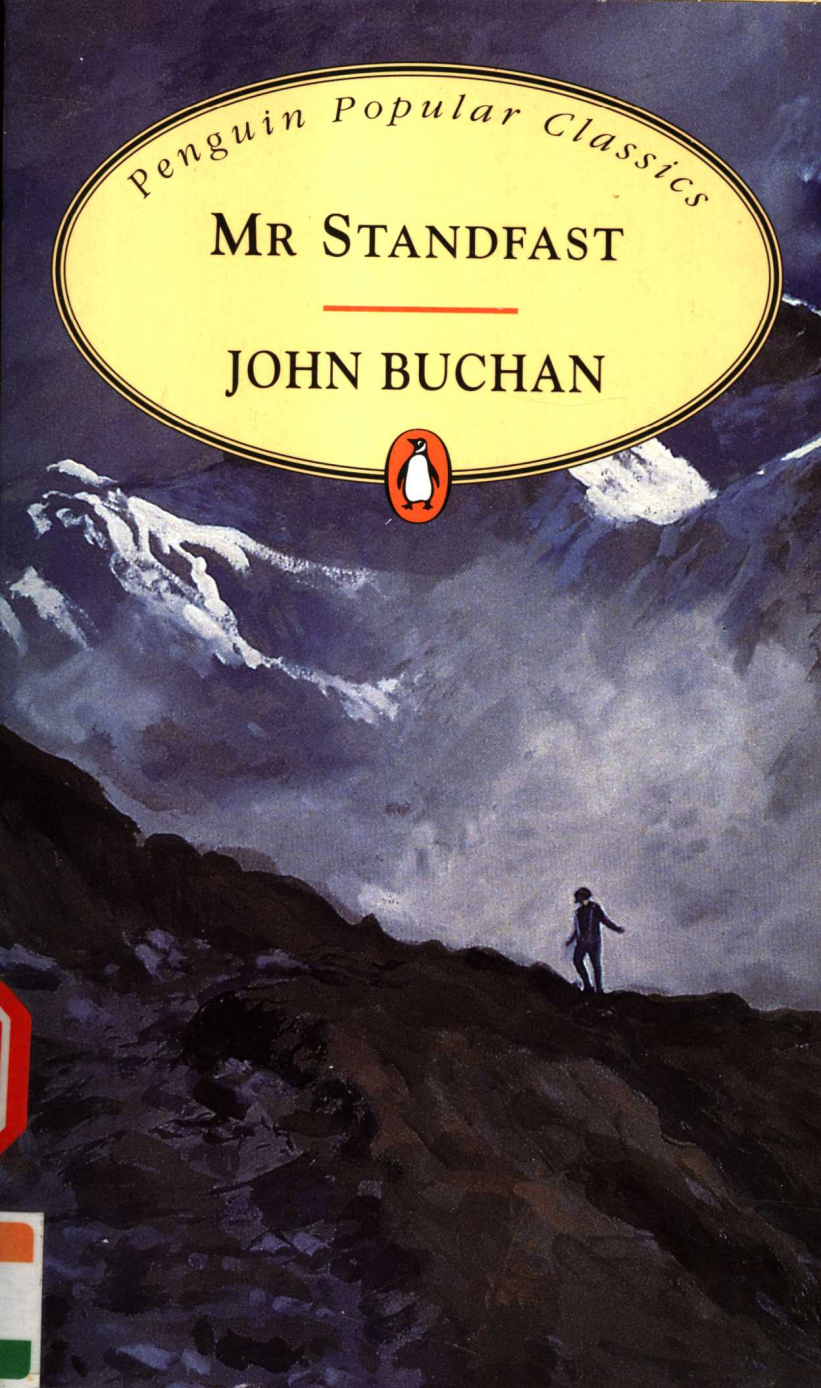
Penguin Popular Classics
MR STANDFAST
JOHN BUCHAN

Penguin Popular Classics

MR STANDFAST

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

'I had a vision of what I had been fighting for, what we all were fighting for. It was peace, deep and holy and ancient, peace older than the oldest wars ... '

Ardent patriot Richard Hannay is given his most trying task yet: passing himself off as a pacifist in order to infiltrate the anti-war league. His aim is to discover an unimpeachable German spy, 'a man whose brain never sleeps', thus saving Britain from its enemy in the crucial early days of the First World War.

He begins his undercover work in the Cotswolds, posing as Cornelius Brand, but his search takes him on to the Highlands of Scotland and the bloody battlefields of France where, in his own identity, he sees his efforts and sacrifices – and those of his comrades – come to fruition.

The cover shows a detail from *Jungfrau* by John Cooke
(photo: Private Collection/Bridgeman Art Library)

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MR STANDFAST

BY JOHN BUCHAN

JOHN BUCHAN (1875–1940). Imperial statesman, Member of Parliament, barrister, publisher, soldier and creator of the dashing Richard Hannay, John Buchan is best remembered for his adventure stories.

John Buchan was born in Perth, Scotland, in 1875. His father was a minister of the Free Church of Scotland, and a year after John Buchan was born his family moved to Fife. They later moved to the Gorbals in Glasgow and it is here that John received his education, attending Hutcheson's Grammar School and the University of Glasgow. By the time he went to Brasenose College, Oxford, Buchan had already written articles for various periodicals, and while there he published his first novel, *Sir Quixote of the Moors* (1895). He won several prizes for his studies, including the Newdigate Prize for poetry in 1898, and was made President of the Union. He graduated with a First, but did not receive a Fellowship. Called to the bar in 1901, Buchan's first job was as private secretary to Lord Milner, the high commissioner for South Africa. His time out there was spent on the reconstruction of the country's administration following the Boer War and confirmed Buchan's belief in imperialism. Returning to London in 1903, he became a director of Nelson's the publishers, in addition to his career as a barrister, which gave him a chance to concentrate once again on his literary interests. In 1907 he married Susan Grosvenor, a union which proved to be an extremely happy one, blessed with four children. During the First World War, Buchan was a newspaper correspondent in France, an intelligence officer and then Director of Information. He later wrote *Nelson's History of the War* and became President of the Scottish History Society. A keen historian, his biographies of *The Marquis of Montrose* and *Walter Scott* helped to establish his reputation in this field. In 1927 Buchan was elected Conservative MP for the Scottish Universities and in 1935, on being made the fifteenth Governor General of Canada, he was created first Baron Tweedsmuir. An extremely

well-liked and respected man, Buchan's death in 1940 evoked a great deal of sorrow.

John Buchan's first real success as an author came in 1910 with *Prester John*, a fast-moving adventure story set in South Africa. This was followed by a series of popular stories with recurring heroes like Richard Hannay, Dickson McCunn, Edward Leithen and Sandy Arbuthnot. Buchan referred to his stories as 'shockers' and books such as *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, *Mr Standfast*, *The Three Hostages*, *Huntingtower* and *John Macnab*, with their romantic characters, authentically rendered backgrounds and world-wide conspiracies, proved immensely popular.

Set in the early days of the First World War, *Mr Standfast* was first published in 1919. In this, the third volume of Richard Hannay's adventures, he poses as a pacifist to ensnare a seemingly irreproachable German spy.

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JOHN BUCHAN

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To that most gallant company

THE OFFICERS AND MEN

OF THE

SOUTH AFRICAN INFANTRY BRIGADE

on the Western Front

CONTENTS

PART I

PART II

NOTE

The earlier adventures of Richard Hannay, to which occasional reference is made in this narrative, are recounted in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and *Greenmantle*.

J.B.

PART I

CHAPTER ONE

THE WICKET-GATE

I SPENT one-third of my journey looking out of the window of a first-class carriage, the next in a local motor-car following the course of a trout stream in a shallow valley, and the last tramping over a ridge of down and through great beech-woods to my quarters for the night. In the first part I was in an infamous temper; in the second I was worried and mystified; but the cool twilight of the third stage calmed and heartened me, and I reached the gates of Fosse Manor with a mighty appetite and a quiet mind.

As we slipped up the Thames valley on the smooth Great Western line I had reflected ruefully on the thorns in the path of duty. For more than a year I had never been out of khaki, except the months I spent in hospital. They gave me my battalion before the Somme, and I came out of that weary battle after the first big September fighting with a crack in my head and a D.S.O. I had received a C.B. for the Erzerum business, so what with these and my Matabele and South African medals and the Legion of Honour, I had a chest like the High Priest's breastplate. I rejoined in January, and got a brigade on the eve of Arras. There we had a star turn, and took about as many prisoners as we put infantry over the top. After that we were hauled out for a month, and subsequently planted in a bad bit on the Scarpe with a hint that we would soon be used for a big push. Then suddenly I was ordered home to report to the War Office, and passed on by them to Bullivant and his merry men. So here I was sitting in a railway carriage in a grey tweed suit, with a neat new suitcase on the rack labelled C.B. The initials stood for Cornelius Brand, for that was my name now. And an old boy in the corner was asking me questions

and wondering audibly why I wasn't fighting, while a young blood of a second lieutenant with a wound stripe was eyeing me with scorn.

The old chap was one of the cross-examining type, and after he had borrowed my matches he set to work to find out all about me. He was a tremendous fire-eater, and a bit of a pessimist about our slow progress in the west. I told him I came from South Africa and was a mining engineer.

'Been fighting with Botha?' he asked.

'No,' I said. 'I'm not the fighting kind.'

The second lieutenant screwed up his nose.

'Is there no conscription in South Africa?'

'Thank God there isn't,' I said, and the old fellow begged permission to tell me a lot of unpalatable things. I knew his kind and didn't give much for it. He was the sort who, if he had been under fifty, would have crawled on his belly to his tribunal to get exempted, but being over age was able to pose as a patriot. But I didn't like the second lieutenant's grin, for he seemed a good class of lad. I looked steadily out of the window for the rest of the way, and wasn't sorry when I got to my station.

I had had the queerest interview with Bullivant and Macgillivray. They asked me first if I was willing to serve again in the old game, and I said I was. I felt as bitter as sin, for I had got fixed in the military groove, and had made good there. Here was I – a brigadier and still under forty, and with another year of the war there was no saying where I might end. I had started out without any ambition, only a great wish to see the business finished. But now I had acquired a professional interest in the thing, I had a nailing good brigade, and I had got the hang of our new kind of war as well as any fellow from Sandhurst and Camberley. They were asking me to scrap all I had learned and start again in a new job. I had to agree, for discipline's discipline, but I could have knocked their heads together in my vexation.

What was worse they wouldn't, or couldn't, tell me anything about what they wanted me for. It was the old game of running me in blinkers. They asked me to take it on trust and

put myself unreservedly in their hands. I would get my instructions later, they said.

I asked if it was important.

Bullivant narrowed his eyes. 'If it weren't, do you suppose we could have wrung an active brigadier out of the War Office? As it was, it was like drawing teeth.'

'Is it risky?' was my next question.

'In the long run – damnably,' was the answer.

'And you can't tell me anything more?'

'Nothing as yet. You'll get your instructions soon enough. You know both of us, Hannay, and you know we wouldn't waste the time of a good man on folly. We are going to ask you for something which will make a big call on your patriotism. It will be a difficult and arduous task, and it may be a very grim one before you get to the end of it, but we believe you can do it, and that no one else can. ... You know us pretty well. Will you let us judge for you?'

I looked at Bullivant's shrewd, kind old face and Macgillivray's steady eyes. These men were my friends and wouldn't play with me.

'All right,' I said. 'I'm willing. What's the first step?'

'Get out of uniform and forget you ever were a soldier. Change your name. Your old one, Cornelius Brandt, will do, but you'd better spell it "Brand" this time. Remember that you are an engineer just back from South Africa, and that you don't care a rush about the war. You can't understand what all the fools are fighting about, and you think we might have peace at once by a little friendly business talk. You needn't be pro-German – if you like you can be rather severe on the Hun. But you must be in deadly earnest about a speedy peace.'

I expect the corners of my mouth fell, for Bullivant burst out laughing.

'Hang it all, man, it's not so difficult. I feel sometimes inclined to argue that way myself, when my dinner doesn't agree with me. It's not so hard as to wander round the Fatherland abusing Britain, which was your last job.'

'I'm ready,' I said. 'But I want to do one errand on my own

first. I must see a fellow in my brigade who is in a shell-shock hospital in the Cotswolds. Isham's the name of the place.'

The two men exchanged glances. 'This looks like fate,' said Bullivant. 'By all means go to Isham. The place where your work begins is only a couple of miles off. I want you to spend next Thursday night as the guest of two maiden ladies called Wymondham at Fosse Manor. You will go down there as a lone South African visiting a sick friend. They are hospitable souls and entertain many angels unawares.'

'And I get my orders there?'

'You get your orders, and you are under bond to obey them ...' And Bullivant and Macgillivray smiled at each other.

I was thinking hard about that odd conversation as the small Ford car, which I had wired for to the inn, carried me away from the suburbs of the county town into a land of rolling hills and green water-meadows. It was a gorgeous afternoon and the blossom of early June was on every tree. But I had no eyes for landscape and the summer, being engaged in reprobating Bullivant and cursing my fantastic fate. I detested my new part and looked forward to naked shame. It was bad enough for anyone to have to pose as a pacificist, but for me, as strong as a bull and as sunburnt as a gipsy and not looking my forty years, it was a black disgrace. To go into Germany as an anti-British Afrikander was a stoutish adventure, but to lounge about at home talking rot was a very different-sized job. My stomach rose at the thought of it, and I had pretty well decided to wire to Bullivant and cry off. There are some things that no one has a right to ask of any white man.

When I got to Isham and found poor old Blaikie I didn't feel happier. He had been a friend of mine in Rhodesia, and after the German South-West affair was over had come home to a Fusilier battalion, which was in my brigade at Arras. He had been buried by a big crump just before we got our second objective, and was dug out without a scratch on him, but as daft as a hatter. I had heard he was mending, and had promised his family to look him up the first chance I got. I found him sitting on a garden seat, staring steadily before him like

a lookout at sea. He knew me all right and cheered up for a second, but very soon he was back at his staring, and every word he uttered was like the careful speech of a drunken man. A bird flew out of a bush, and I could see him holding himself tight to keep from screaming. The best I could do was to put a hand on his shoulder and stroke him as one strokes a frightened horse. The sight of the price my old friend had paid didn't put me in love with pacificism.

We talked of brother officers and South Africa, for I wanted to keep his thoughts off the war, but he kept edging round to it. 'How long will the damned thing last?' he asked.

'Oh, it's practically over,' I lied cheerfully. 'No more fighting for you and precious little for me. The Boche is done in all right. ... What you've got to do, my lad, is to sleep fourteen hours in the twenty-four and spend half the rest catching trout. We'll have a shot at the grouse-bird together this autumn and we'll get some of the old gang to join us.'

Someone put a tea-tray on the table beside us, and I looked up to see the very prettiest girl I ever set eyes on. She seemed little more than a child, and before the war would probably have still ranked as a flapper. She wore the neat blue dress and apron of a V.A.D. and her white cap was set on hair like spun gold. She smiled demurely as she arranged the tea-things, and I thought I had never seen eyes at once so merry and so grave. 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.

'Who on earth's that?' I asked Blaikie.

'That? Oh, one of the sisters,' he said listlessly. 'There are squads of them. I can't tell one from another.'

Nothing gave me such an impression of my friend's sickness as the fact that he should have no interest in something so fresh and jolly as that girl. Presently my time was up and I had to go, and as I looked back I saw him sunk in his chair again, his eyes fixed on vacancy, and his hands gripping his knees.

The thought of him depressed me horribly. Here was I condemned to some rotten buffoonery in inglorious safety, while the salt of the earth like Blaikie was paying the ghastliest price.