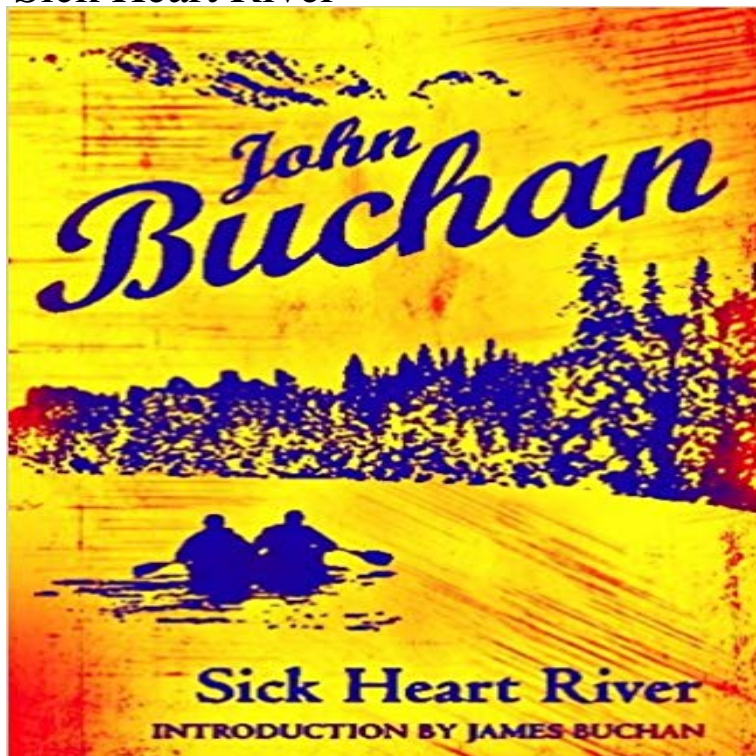


Sick Heart River



John Buchan tells in *Memory Hold-the-Door* how, as he lay ill during the early months of the World War, he invented a young South African called Richard Hannay, who had traits copied from many friends, and amused himself considering what he would do in various emergencies. He gave Hannay certain companions, and the escapes, the hurried journeys, the high adventures of these braves gradually spread to fill eleven romances in the Greenmantle series, three in the Huntingtower group, and the single book, *The Prince of the Captivity*, in which two or three of the characters of the earlier tales appear. To those who have come under the spell of these romances there is nothing to equal them. It is no explanation to say that they are well-written, exciting; that they range through wild places, country lanes, or the stunted streets of London or Constantinople, or the islands of the Aegean; characters in other books are as brave and resourceful, women as fair, deeds as desperate; but here is a company of adventurers whose lives seem to give you a promise that a chance will come for you, amidst the dullest prose of life, to make the same wild dedication of yourself to unpathed waters, undreamed shores. Did it not come three times to an ageing Glasgow grocer, as it did again and again to the Master of Clanroyden? There will be nothing silly and fantastic about it as Clanroyden says to Hannay there is about the Irish Sagas, but it will have the grave good sense which you find in the Norse Sagas and of course the Greek. There is a great story-telling gift at work in these books, but I doubt if it is that as much as the characters of the men themselves which give them fascination. There had plainly been a Golden Age at Oxford when Buchan went down and he has wonderfully remembered and woven together the selected qualities of the Elizabethan lads he knew there. No character, I should judge, is

based on one actual person. In *Memory Hold-the-Door* he does say that his character Sandy Arbuthnot, Lord Clanroyden, was suggested by Aubrey Herbert, but as one reads the chapter *This for Remembrance*, the chapter of laurel and rue for his friends killed in the War, one sees how many of these men were given a new immortality through all his tales. In the case of Clanroyden some of the qualities of Auberon Herbert are so evident that this writer at first thought Aubrey Herbert was a misprint. Plainly the characters, the lives, and the fates of these two men, his friends, Aubrey Herbert, the son of the Earl of Carnarvon, and Auberon Herbert, Lord Lucas, greatly influenced all the romances. It was natural that this should be so. The book most widely quoted through the tales, and their implicit creed, is *Pilgrims Progress*. I read it through again as I began this introduction and I was happy to come on a line Buchan had not quoted which seemed to me wonderfully to summarize the attitude of his characters. Christian says to By-Ends, If you will go with us, you must go against wind and tide. With all their advantages of birth and wealth, few men have gone so gallantly against wind and tide as the two Herberts. Aubrey Herbert, almost blind through his life, managed to be with the Guards at Mons, to be at Anzac, and at Kut el Amara. Auberon Herbert, one leg gone, still got into the Royal Air Force and was killed in France. Aubrey Herbert was born in 1880, Lord Clanroyden in 1882. Both were educated at Eton and Oxford. Herbert was an attache at Constantinople and travelled widely through the Turkish provinces and like Clanroyden was the blood brother of every Albanian bandit. It is his deep knowledge of the Middle East that we see in Clanroyden's part in *Greenmantle*. And we see also in Clanroyden what Desmond MacCarthy saw in Herbert the embodiment of this spirit which made mishaps, and even graver misfortunes, more tolerable in his company.

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