

Books

The King's Agent

by J. Kent Clark

Charles Scribner's Sons, N.Y. . . . \$5.95

Reviewed by John A. Hawgood

By writing a "Restoration Novel" (the action opens at the battle of Sedgemoor in 1685) J. Kent Clark, associate professor of English at Caltech, inevitably challenges comparison with two classics of that genre—Thackeray's *Henry Esmond* and Kathleen Winsor's *Forever Amber*.

It may be said at once, and without reproach, that Dr. Clark's offering is likely to achieve neither the lasting fame of the former nor the immediate notoriety of the latter, but it is nevertheless going to be read and enjoyed by a great many people. It was already scheduled, before publication, as the October selection of the Dollar Book Club—and it is far superior, both in literary craftsmanship and in its treatment of history, to the run-of-the-mill historical romance.

The King's Agent is based upon careful research, much of it pursued in the Huntington Library, which is particularly strong in material on seventeenth-century British history, the preserve of the late well-beloved Godfrey Davies, who would surely have enjoyed reading this book immensely.

But Dr. Clark wears his learning lightly, and disguises its fount successfully. The tale is crisply told in a modern but not too slangy idiom.

A noted writer, a Pulitzer Prize-winner with at least three of his stories made into movies, and with best sellers among the paperbacks, recently gave the formula for a successful historical novel to a neophyte at the game as: "An attempted seduction before page 100; an encounter with a scarlet woman before page 200; a completed seduction before page 300. Then—Bingo!"

Dr. Clark waits until page 274 (with preliminary fumbblings to keep things moving on pages 167 and 235). He thus measures up adequately to this yardstick, yet holds his fire quite prettily. But to make up for the belated and somewhat inverted

seduction (the heroine, tired of waiting, had to come and get him!) our hero has his "required" encounter with a scarlet woman (the King's mistress, Catherine Sedley, Duchess of Dorchester) as early as page 83:

"Please stop gaping and sit down, Mr. Barnard . . . Have you never seen a woman before?"

His second is on page 215:

"Ralph rose. 'You won't take it personally if I kiss you goodbye?'"

"Not at all."

(After which we almost expect Catherine—out of character as well as of period—to gush, "And next time you must come to tea, and meet Mother.")

He meets Catherine for the third and last time on page 323:

"I would hate to believe you are more concerned with your head than with my body."

"A habit, Kit," he said. "Only a disgusting habit."

"Break it, by all means," she said."

But he didn't. It was too ingrained. So they parted forever, Sir Ralph Barnard's virtue (in this direction at least) still intact.

Nevertheless, these three conversations with the notorious Catherine Sedley are retailed with great skill and are perhaps the most entertaining parts of the book.

If the hero, Ralph Barnard, emerges as a somewhat stuffy character (if not indeed, in places, a downright prig) this, at least, as with his heroine, is what the plot demands, and it rings the changes most refreshingly on the usual swashbuckling, epigram-dropping, garter-snapping Restoration gallant of fiction.

Sir Ralph may be a trifle slow in the boudoir but he can undress a French diplomatic courier (male) in double-quick time, after first stunning him by one well-directed blow with a blunt instrument, and can discover his secret despatches, hidden in his wig, in the twinkling of an eye.

Though the narrative neither rollicks nor roisters, the plot is a good and fast one, subtly and at times elegantly woven.

Hollywood should take notice of this novel. It has a fine, upstanding

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hero (who is nevertheless a lawyer by profession and a secret agent by avocation), a lovely, eloquent but deceitful heroine, a noble prostitute, an ignoble monarch, a lost cause, a court scene, a hunting scene, several battlefields, cloaks, daggers and plenty of sword and boudoir play.

Hollywood casting

Letting my imagination range over the freeways I already begin to cast *The King's Agent* for its ultimate but surely inevitable embalment in celluloid. With a little bit of cooperation between the major studios, Sir Ralph Barnard (James Stewart) serves King James II (Sir Ralph Richardson, barely needing to overact) chats and flirts with the king's mistress, Catherine Sedley (Marilyn Monroe), loves the cruel, double-crossing Esther Hemphill (Katharine Hepburn) marries the delectable Henriette (Taina Elg), and fights the villainous Randall (Basil Rathbone) in a back street of Paris.

There are also bit parts for Sir Laurence Olivier (Colonel Jack Churchill, afterwards Duke of Marlborough), Charles Laughton (Judge Jeffries), Bing Crosby (the Papal Nuncio) and Frank Sinatra (William of Orange—why not? He should try everything at least once), but not alas for either Alan Ladd or Brigitte Bardot, for all the characters talk a lot and with animation, while *nearly* all the time they are all more than adequately clothed.

John A. Hawgood, professor of modern history and chairman of the School of History at the University of Birmingham in England, holds doctor's degrees from London and Heidelberg and received part of his training at Yale and Wisconsin Universities. He has spent four out of the last five summers in California, doing research at the Huntington Library.

No More War!

by Linus Pauling

Dodd, Mead, N.Y. \$3.50

Reviewed by Wolfgang K. H. Panofsky

This is an important book in two respects: it explains such things as the difference between atomic and nuclear explosions, the nature of ionizing radiation, and similar technical material, in an unusually lucid and

popular language; and it documents the author's views on the current controversy over nuclear testing.

Dr. Pauling, professor of chemistry at Caltech, makes it quite clear that there exists no substantial disagreement among the scientists whose views are on record concerning the basic scientific data on background radiation, exposure of the average citizen to medical x-rays, and the contribution to radiation exposure from fallout; and that general agreement exists on the influence of radiation exposure on genetic changes, life-span shortening, and the more specific hazards to health (with the exception of disagreement on the effects of extremely small doses on the incidence rates of leukemia and bone cancer). Pauling documents the hazards of atomic war, including the radiation effects associated with atomic bombing, and it is unlikely that anyone will disagree with him that these hazards far outweigh all other dangers ever faced by man; his conclusion, as expressed in the title of the book, is that war is no longer a "morally defensible" means of settling the differences among men and governments.

Dangers of testing

I will now comment on Pauling's discussion of the danger of atomic testing. In his exposition on the exposure of the population to nuclear radiation, he documents the commonly accepted rates: the average American receives in his life span about equal dosages from natural sources and medical diagnostic x-rays, and well under a tenth of either of these amounts from fallout if testing continues. Nevertheless, he singles out the fallout problem as dominant by discussing the additional rather than the relative health damage that could be caused. In so doing, he computes numbers of potentially damaged people which, although they appear large, are extremely difficult to document in a statistically meaningful way.

From the discussion of the fallout problem caused by atomic weapons testing as a health problem—which in my opinion is not a dominant danger *per se* of these times—Pauling develops his appeal for the stopping of testing as being synonymous with an

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appeal for abolition of nuclear war. It is this identification which involves questions of the political effect of stopping these tests; arguments concerning these questions are given in the book to only a very minor extent. One of the arguments given—that a test ban would make it less likely for powers other than the United States, the U.S.S.R. and Great Britain to acquire bombs—is clearly fallacious; atomic weapons of not too radical design could be developed by other nations without the need for tests; it should be recalled that the number of weapons which failed to function in the tests has been exceedingly small.

My comments on Pauling's position on continued testing should not be taken to imply that I believe that the opposite arguments—that testing must be continued under any circumstances—are compelling. Rather, I conclude that neither the medical nor the political arguments concerning nuclear weapons testing are sufficiently compelling to allow consideration of this problem apart from the generally pressing need for a halt in the weapons race. Pauling's conclusion that the present superweapons should preclude another world war will be disputed by few; his views in singling out nuclear tests as a logical first step to peace are much less convincing.

Wolfgang K. H. Panofsky is the director of the High Energy Physics Laboratory at Stanford University. He received his PhD at Caltech in 1942.

Guide to Technical Reports

by Henry Dan Piper & Frank E. Davie
Rinehart & Company, Inc., N.Y. \$1.00

Reviewed by George R. MacMinn

This exceptionally well-printed, attractive pamphlet of 83 pages says everything essential about its subject with a clearness, conciseness, and readableness for which any writer of technical reports should be grateful. The guide is intended not only for students but also for professional engineers and scientists, and for industrial personnel in any category that may be concerned with technical writing.

Direct, practical value is assured by the collaborative authorship of the pamphlet. Henry Dan Piper, associate professor of English at the Insti-

tute, has been conducting the course in technical writing here for several years with notable success; in addition he enjoys the advantage of having formerly been employed in the laboratories of E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Co., Inc. Frank E. Davie is a mechanical engineer of many years' experience with the Shell Oil Company. Besides, these authors have had the benefit of suggestions from Dr. Peter Kyropoulos, now of the General Motors Styling Center, Detroit, and from the engineering staff of Technical Communications, Inc., Los Angeles. An earlier version of the guide was thoroughly tested in a division of the Shell Oil Company, and the present text is based on a study of current practices in "well-known and diversified industrial and governmental laboratories and engineering organizations."

One particularly interesting and effective feature of the guide is the presentation of the section on procedure for the formal report in the form of such a report, thus immediately illustrating the principles described.

More than half the space of the pamphlet is given to an appendix of five examples, the first a formal report submitted by a student at Caltech, the four others informal reports of various kinds. "Exhibits" D and E are made especially useful by being presented, each of them, in three parts: (1) the original report; (2) a recommended revision of this first form; (3) a critical analysis of the two forms.

It is gratifying to find that the authors emphasize the importance of the report-writer's studiously projecting himself into the point of view of the intended or expected reader, with as much knowledge, imagination, and psychological acumen as such a not only preliminary but also continuous part of the process may require. Very commendable is the counsel, too, regarding tact, courtesy, and discretion. The student or, indeed, the occupant of high office, may be learning his most valuable lesson when he understands that he is, first and last, a man writing for the benefit of other men as well as serving his own interests.

George MacMinn, professor of English, emeritus, taught the course in technical writing at Caltech for 12 years.

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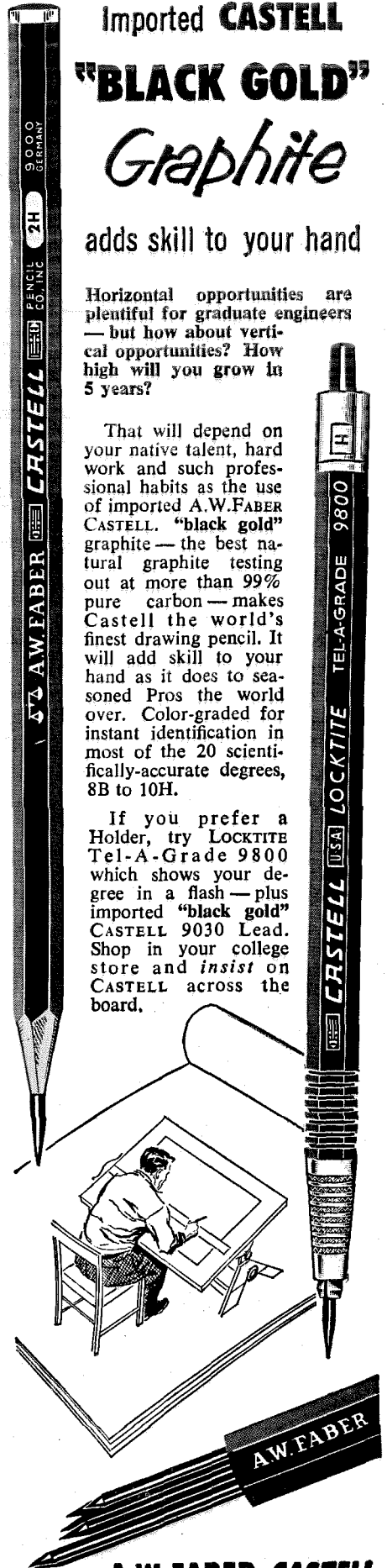
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