# Their knavish tricks

by MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE

**THE DOUBLE-CROSS SYSTEM IN THE WAR OF 1939 TO 1945 by J. C. Masterman (Yale University Press £2.95)**
**THE GAME OF THE FOXES by Ladislas Farago (Hodder and Stoughton £3.95)**

SIR John Masterman's account of double-cross intelligence operations in the 1939-45 war must be unique in this species of literature as being accurate and under- rather than over-stated. It was, in fact, prepared in the summer of 1945, to be an official record and to provide a textbook for the future. Thank heavens Sir John, in releasing it for general perusal, made no attempt to jazz it up or popularise it, but just left it as it was. It stands as far and away the most valuable document of the kind available in the public domain; lucid, cogent and authentic.

Double-cross operations consist, in simple terms, of capturing an enemy agent and then turning him round, so that he goes on functioning under control. He is given material to transmit (chicken-feed), and is built up into a mythical character in accordance with the specifications of his captors. In time he becomes their creation, their man, and they love him. If his performance under their tutelage is so highly regarded by the enemy that he gets a decoration—the Iron Cross, say—they are as delighted as if they had won it themselves. When they have to blow him—i.e., allow him to give himself away—under the exigencies of some deception project, they grieve as much as Dickens did when he killed off Little Nell. Sir John draws attention to the extraordinary credulity of the *Abwehr* in holding on to agents manifestly under our control; in this respect, we were all a little like doting old husbands, who, however flagrant the adulteries of their young spouses, continue to believe in their fidelity.

Of course, on the British side we had the enormous advantage of being able to read the *Abwehr's* radio traffic owing to the remarkable success of our cypher-crackers. It was an awesome sight, down at Bletchley, to see them playing rounders, as they did each afternoon, to refresh themselves for their arduous labours, which resulted, at one level, in Monty receiving Rommel's operational orders almost as soon as he did, and at another, in our knowing just what Admiral Canaris, the head of the *Abwehr*, was up to with his men, and the information he was getting from them. Imagine one's joy and delight at appearing in this intercepted traffic! A thrill comparable with being referred to in a *Pravda* editorial, or in one of the Overseas Service of the BBC's news roundups. As rounders players, the cypher-crackers were, perhaps, not in the highest class, and in appearance and style scarcely conformed to the popular idea of a warrior bold, but in performance they were worth, any one of them, a whole clutch of major-generals.

As Sir John points out, one of the great advantages of working with double-agents is that the operation is self-financing, and can even, in certain circumstances, be made to yield a profit. Spy-masters expect their agents to make exorbitant demands for money, and the controllers of double-agents are not backward in falling in with this propensity. The French particularly, I found in Algiers, were liable to refer any requirements they might have in the way of motor tyres or other equipment in short supply to Berlin on behalf of a highly regarded double-agent who could today, if he cared to, legitimately wear an Iron Cross in one lapel and a *Croix de Guerre* in the other. An airdrop invariably resulted. I once made the suggestion that our man might send a message that his sexual appetites were troubling him and that he feared to avail himself of local facilities for fear of giving himself away. In my mind I had a picture of Rhinemaidens floating down from the sky. My French colleagues were more sceptical; the most that could be expected, they insisted, would be a supply of bromide.

What with the Bletchley material—which amounted to being able to look up the answer in the back of the book—and the great skill of Sir John and his MI5 associates, from quite early on in the war the German intelligence set-up in this country was under our control. In order to keep it so, with a view, among other things, to its subsequent use for deception purposes, the agents concerned had to be given sufficient accurate material for transmission to sustain their reputation at home. Getting just the right blend was a fascinating literary exercise. By and large, this was so well done that MI5, I suspect, provided the *Abwehr* with a better service than their own men could have achieved on their own. As described by Sir John, one of its chief architects, the double-cross system in the last war was a classic in its *genre* though unlikely ever to be repeated. What with pilotless reconnaissance planes and computerised cypher-cracking, future prospects for double-agents would seem to be bleak.

Ladislas Farago's massive volume covering German espionage in Western Europe and America leading up to and during the 1939-45 war, is as different from Sir John's as a pizza from cheese straws. Lush, ebullient, the narrative breathless, the canvas, as we say, crowded, it is not surprising to read in a publicity handout that the film rights have already been sold, and that it tops the best-seller list in America. It would also, I should suppose, make a very good television serial on the lines of 'The Man from UNCLE.' Mr Farago has, indeed, assembled a great mass of information, derived for the most part from the *Abwehr* records which were captured by the Americans and sent to Washington. As he goes along, he mentions a large number of names, some of persons known to me in my MI6 days. I find them difficult to recognise in this setting; rather as though one searched for old familiar faces in a group photograph of the College of Cardinals.

The reason, perhaps, lies in the very nature of Mr Farago's material. Intelligence agents, in my experience, tend to be even bigger liars than journalists, and in their reports are given to exaggerating their achievements, as well as the importance of their opposite numbers, in order to magnify the feat of getting the better of them. In the case of German agents particularly, snobbishness often plays a part. Hence the portentous accounts, quoted by Mr Farago, of alleged contacts with the late Duke of Kent and the Duke of Windsor when he was Prince of Wales and during his short reign. I came across similar cases of *Abwehr* officers having a high old time in aristocratic circles in Paris which they dished up to their awed masters at home as building up valuable sources of information.

Mr Farago's treatment of episodes of which I had some experience or knowledge seemed to me to suffer from his reliance on *Abwehr* records. The point may be illustrated by a reference he makes to my time as MI6's man in Mozambique. After referring, inaccurately, to Graham Greene and myself as 'Philby's chief assistants in the coverage of Portugal' (Greene was posted to Freetown in Sierra Leone, then a British colony, and I to Lourenço Marques), he says that I was so unnerved by 'the relatively large *Abwehr* contingent' in Mozambique that I tried to drown myself in the Indian Ocean. This was how, for obvious reasons, the local *Abwehr* man saw and reported the incident, but speaking for myself, I find it difficult to imagine a more derisory reason for departing this life than the extent of his operations in Mozambique, such as they were.

Such slip-ups apart, Mr Farago and Sir John have, in their different ways, provided a fine store of pabulum for Bondsmen yet unborn. Neither, I expect, would agree with me when I add that the manifold stratagems and knavish tricks they recount, in my opinion, played little, if any, part in the war's final outcome, which would have been pretty much the same if there had been no *Abwehr*, no MI5 or MI6, and no OSS.

# Holland's hour

by JOHN KENYON

**THE DUTCH IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY by K. H. D. Haley (Thames and Hudson £2.25 cloth: £1.25 paper)**

THE seventeenth-century Dutch were a remarkable race. One of the smallest nations in Europe, they won their independence from Spain after a war lasting more than 70 years, then they took on France, at the height of its power under Louis XIV, and emerged successful from that encounter, too. In the intervals they fought three successive naval wars against England from which they emerged with credit; and all this with a constitution so cumbersome and divisive that it was the despair of their military commanders and civil rulers.

But more than this: her seamen and merchants made Holland the mistress of the Baltic and North European trade, she wrenched the monopoly of the Spice Islands of the East from the Portuguese, and also planted colonies in Brazil, the Caribbean and North America. This far-ranging enterprise was aided by a banking and credit system acknowledged to be the most sophisticated and advanced in the world, and a model for all other nations. She was in the van in printing and map-making, and her artists, though perhaps not fashionable to the same degree outside their own country, except in the field of marine painting, are now acknowledged as some of the most brilliant in the history of European art. (Only in the field of literature did she lag behind.) Finally, she was noted as the first state in Europe to practise something like religious toleration for all, and the looseness of her system of federal government, making extradition almost impossible, made her a refuge for the persecuted from all Europe.

Holland aroused the envy and irritation of the English, as she did of the French. It always seemed feasible that a small nation like this should be made to surrender its disproportionate spoils under threat of military pressure. But to some Englishmen, especially financiers, thinkers and diplomats, Holland was a model to be imitated. To Sir William Temple, for instance, she was an earthly paradise;

> They argue without interest or anger; they differ without enmity or scorn; and they agree without confederacy. Men live together, like critizens of the word associated by the common ties of humanity, and by the bonds of peace, under the impartial protection of indifferent laws, with equal encouragement of all arts and industry, and equal freedom of speculation and enquiry.

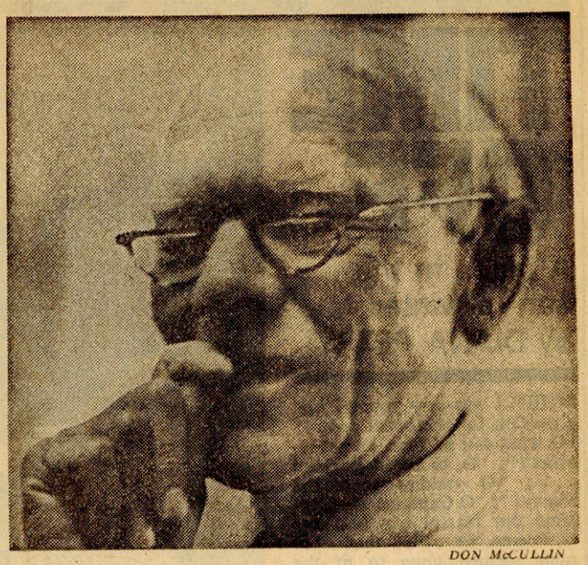
A study of this utopia must have a place in any 'Library of European Civilisation,' the more so since the standard history of the Netherlands in the seventeenth century, by Pieter Geyl, makes very heavy and ponderous reading. Professor Haley's volume is light and easy in tone, but it conceals a considerable depth of reading and scholarship, in Dutch as well as English, and brings together the findings of recent scholarship on all aspects of Dutch culture, though he purposely refrains from more than a passing consideration of the Dutch overseas empire, which would call for another volume in itself. As an introduction to the subject it could scarcely be bettered, and like all the volumes in this series, it is excellently illustrated.

THE BEST BOOKSHOPS

# The way of all flesh

by BERNARD LEVIN

**CHRONICLES OF WASTED TIME, Vol 1: The Green Stick by Malcolm Muggeridge (Collins £3)**



DON McCULLIN

**Malcolm Muggeridge : 'The book of a tormented soul.'**

WHAT A PIECE of work is Mr Muggeridge! Who knows him, loves him; who meets him is bathed in the glow he radiates; who talks to him, reveres. But what of those—and they are, after all, most people—who do none of these things? What should they make of him? With this first volume of his autobiography at hand, one can speculate to some purpose. Sternly detaching myself, therefore, from my profound and unshakable affection for him, suppressing my memory of the number of times I have approached him with a rebuke on my lips only to find it fade in the beam of loving-kindness he has instantly turned on me, steeling myself even against the seductive power of his writing, I weigh the book and its author and start with the two paradoxes of his mind and life.

The first, minor, paradox is of little importance. The spectacle of Mr Muggeridge condemning affluence as he travels by taxi or limousine to and from the television studios he denounces as haunts of the devil, is irresistibly comic, like a Trappist shouting his head off from morning to night or a St Simeon Stylites in a deep leather armchair on the ground. In one important respect, of course, this improbable John the Baptist does indeed practise what he preaches: some years ago, having contracted, as many men do as they grow old, an uncontrollable revulsion for the human sexual functions in general and his own in particular, he suited his conduct to his feelings, and now spends much, if not most, of his time denouncing those who have not yet seen fit to follow his example.

That matters little, especially since he recognises his impossible position ('I have wasted too much of my life in the death-camp of carnality'). What matters much more is the second paradox, reflected in the appalling river of rancour and uncharitableness that flows through this book. There are times when he reminds me of Baron Corvo, who also gave the impression of hating everybody he met, and plotting vengeance on those who had done him a good turn. If this judgment seems harsh, I cannot help it; but if it seems unfair, I must call Mr Muggeridge in my defence. Thus:—

(On D. H. Lawrence): 'all he had to offer . . . were the sick phallic fantasies and perversities of quasi-impotence.' (On the Labour Party): 'the unlikely emergence of figures like Hugh Gaitskell . . . may well have been fostered by their sycophantic skills.' (On W. T. Stead, who, after all, went to prison in an endeavour to end a peculiarly vile Victorian scandal): 'made straight the way for many another moralistic campaigner fulminating against wickedness, and thereby advertising it.' (On Gandhi): 'looked crafty and calculating.' (On Nehru): 'hollowness . . a man of echoes and mimicry. . . .' (On Keynes): 'pursuing at one and the same time a passion for Duncan Grant and for inflationary economics.' (On Joseph Chamberlain): 'a preposterous engraving of a man.' (On T. S. Eliot): 'somehow blighted, dead, extinct.' (On Churchill): 'flabby and puffy . . . vaguely obscene . . . inebriated old sea-lion . . ludicrous and embarrassing performance . . . malign and disagreeable.' (On C. P. Scott): 'false and phoney.' (On W. P. Crozier): 'Infinitely boring . . . fishy hostile eyes seeking an opportunity to cause unease and embarrassment.'

But Mr Muggeridge takes his diabolism further still; he includes whole categories of people in his roster of the damned, and chief among them are, all too often, those who spend their time trying to improve the lot of their less fortunate fellows *in this world*. St Mugg seems to be firmly of the opinion that it is very wrong to try to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, or (ultimate sin) distribute the knowledge of contraception to people whose children are starving because they are already too many for their parents to feed. It is not just that dreadful breed of pseudo-liberals who have spent most of this century opening the gates to the enemy—the ones who have looked on the sins of the Left with one eye while regarding those of the Right with both; Mr Muggeridge is rightly, and savagely, scornful of those, but he goes further and condemns implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, many who are very far from that category. Thus, writing of Gandhi, he says:—

> By this time he had become one of the *gurus* of the age, along with figures like Albert Schweitzer and Bertrand Russell (later to be joined by Che Guevara, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X) for all of whose plastic busts there was a ready sale.

I find it difficult to convey the strength of my feeling that a man who can include Schweitzer and King, in a comprehensive sneer, with a crazed ranter like Malcolm X and a ruthless totalitarian like Guevara, ought to be ashamed of himself. Indeed, if it were any man other than Mr Muggeridge doing the sneering, I would dismiss him as a poseur and leave him at that.

Ah, but it *is* Mr Muggeridge. And I know that he is not a poseur, but a man who lives directed by love for humanity and pity for its suffering. And there is no doubt that his love is genuine, and in this book, as he begins his survey of a life that he considers wasted, it becomes clear that his pilgrim's progress has always been moving him towards a predestined goal, the state of ecstasy in which he now lives, and from which this world looks very small and very unimportant by comparison with the robe of God into which he now waits to be woven as a tiny thread.

It has been a strange life, though a full one. Born the son of a Labour MP (it is touching to see how hard Mr Muggeridge strives to exclude his father, quite illogically, from the category of hated humanists and millenarians), he has moved from place to place, and from job to job, almost invariably at whim (either his own or somebody else's). Teaching English in India, conscious all the time of the grotesque absurdity of what he was doing; writing for the *Manchester Guardian*, insisting all the time on the grotesque absurdity of what everybody around him was doing; Moscow correspondent in the days of Stalin, a period which leads to his unanswerable indictment of

> Wise old Shaw, high minded old Barbusse, the venerable Webbs, Gide the pure in heart and Picasso the impure, down to poor little teachers, crazed clergymen and millionaires, drivelling dons and very special correspondents like Duranty, all resolved, come what might, to believe anything, however preposterous, to overlook anything, however villainous, to approve anything, however obscurantist and brutally authoritarian, in order to be able to preserve intact the confident expectation that one of the most thorough-going, ruthless and bloody tyrannies ever to exist on earth could be relied on to champion human freedom, the brotherhood of man, and all the other good liberal causes to which they had dedicated their lives.

At first, the book seems artless and rambling; only when one reads on into it does one realise how cunningly it is shaped, how purposeful are the digressions, how carefully weighed is every anecdote, every parenthesis. It is very roughly chronological, taking him from his childhood up to his final severance from the *Guardian*, and on this framework are hung all his observations of and reflections on life—his gradual conviction that this life is transitory ('sleepwalking to the end of the night'), his estimates of himself and of those he has known, his comparison of the world he has lived through with the world he now lives in.

For all the wry amusement, for all the certainty about the universe, for all the unhesitating judgments admitting of no appeal, this is clearly the book of a tormented soul—or at any rate a soul which *has been* tormented, even if it has now come safe to harbour. It would have been easy for St Mugg to disguise this fact, to give the wheel of detachment one more twist, to screw up the flippancy one more notch. The temptation is resisted; and the final realisation is that this is the self-portrait of an honest man.

But what a strange honest man he is. His indifference to success in this world and his impatience to be done with this muddy vesture of decay altogether are fine and moving, like his love for his wife, which he expresses beautifully; his picture of the vanished suburban world in which he grew up, and the even more remote world of Anglo-India, are brilliantly composed and lit; he writes with apparently effortless grace. How can this be the same man as the harsh Savonarola of the elly, calling others to righteousness the name of the man, or god, o insisted that only those with- sin could cast the stones? In paradox lies the heart of St g's mystery. Perhaps it will xplained in the succeeding es of this superb book.

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