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New Books In Review

An Account of Spying Through the Ages

ANATOMY OF SPYING: By
Ronald Seth. Dutton. \$5.95.

SINCE 1945 there has been such a tide of books about espionage that this once hidden subject threatens to become an open secret. A basic constituent, the individual spy's memoir or autobiography, contains nevertheless a built-in booby-trap. How can you judge whether, and to what degree, he (or she) is lying? Because the *corpus delicti* usually lies in some far-off region, you can't.

This reviewer has been assured by a retired American diplomat of ministerial rank that the earliest well-publicized reminiscence by a British agent in World War II is 90 per cent prevarication. From the period of the first World War a predecessor of Mr. Seth's, Hamii Grant, said flatly: "Great spies have all written their memoirs, but in no case can these works be regarded as trustworthy records of the actual parts played by their writers. . . . It is always necessary to go to independent chroniclers in order to arrive at the truth." Now, in this field independent chroniclers are uniquely hard to come by, for the reason that those in the know are forbidden by their governments to discuss what they know.

So the would-be historian of espionage is, at the outset, faced with frustration amid what should be primary sources. This is not an atmosphere to attract professional scholars, whose aim is to circumscribe a segment of fact and, by evaluating it exhaustively, arrive at truth. But since this vast area touches on diplomacy, psychology, military history, and several other realms, it remains one of the most challenging of fields for the student.

And could there be a field more inherently glamorous? Long before the Sphinx was carved, people have been consumed with curiosity, about whatever they should not know. Spies, who attempt to satisfy just such curiosity, regularly face danger, conflict, and suspense—the stuff of drama. Hence the attractiveness of their calling to journalistic job-holders intent on lassoing the skittish buck. That is a legitimate intent. But in the process of spinning a yarn a marvelous sphere of social activity is apt to become sullied.

Mr. Seth's latest title is a textbook example of this sort of thing.

In style it is adequate. In arrangement, which is topical rather than chronological, there is ample opportunity to "anatomize" such subjects as sabotage, postal censorship, communications, etc. Mr. Seth does so, for these and a dozen other topics. The trouble is, they have all been done before, often as well, usually more fully, and always more authoritatively. Yet there are no bibliographical references in this book, with two exceptions. It would then seem that the least the author could do would be to render what he himself has written more usable. But his book has almost no illustrations (two charts) and a grossly insufficient index.

The narrative itself, after a nod to the pre-Christian era, concentrates on the period from the American Civil War up to the U-2 episode. In his "anatomy" of international espionage across two hemispheres during that teeming time Mr. Seth perpetrates the standard quota of highly questionable generalizations and careless errors. Is it accurate, for example, that the Japanese in their 1904 war with Russia "were the first ever to use groups of saboteurs behind the enemy lines on an organized scale"? Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Harry Dexter White was not "an assist-

ant to the Secretary." The United States Army's Counter-Intelligence Corps is not the "Central Intelligence Corps." In discussing the Central Intelligence Agency the author allots ten pages to Allen Dulles which appears to be based solely, and without attribution, on an avowedly anti-Dulles pamphlet by a British Member of Parliament.

One phase of Mr. Seth's opus has value. These are the pages describing his combat training as

an agent in the British S.O.E. during World War II. Therein his analysis of the psychology and regimen controlling the course of instruction is both readable and useful. Elsewhere are interesting, if often trite, passages on the qualities mandatory in a "spymaster" and a contrasting of different governments' Intelligence Service traditions.

Spy buffs may take to this book. There seem to be a good many of them around.

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