

A HATCHMENT

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A hatchment by R. B. Cunninghame Graham

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BY

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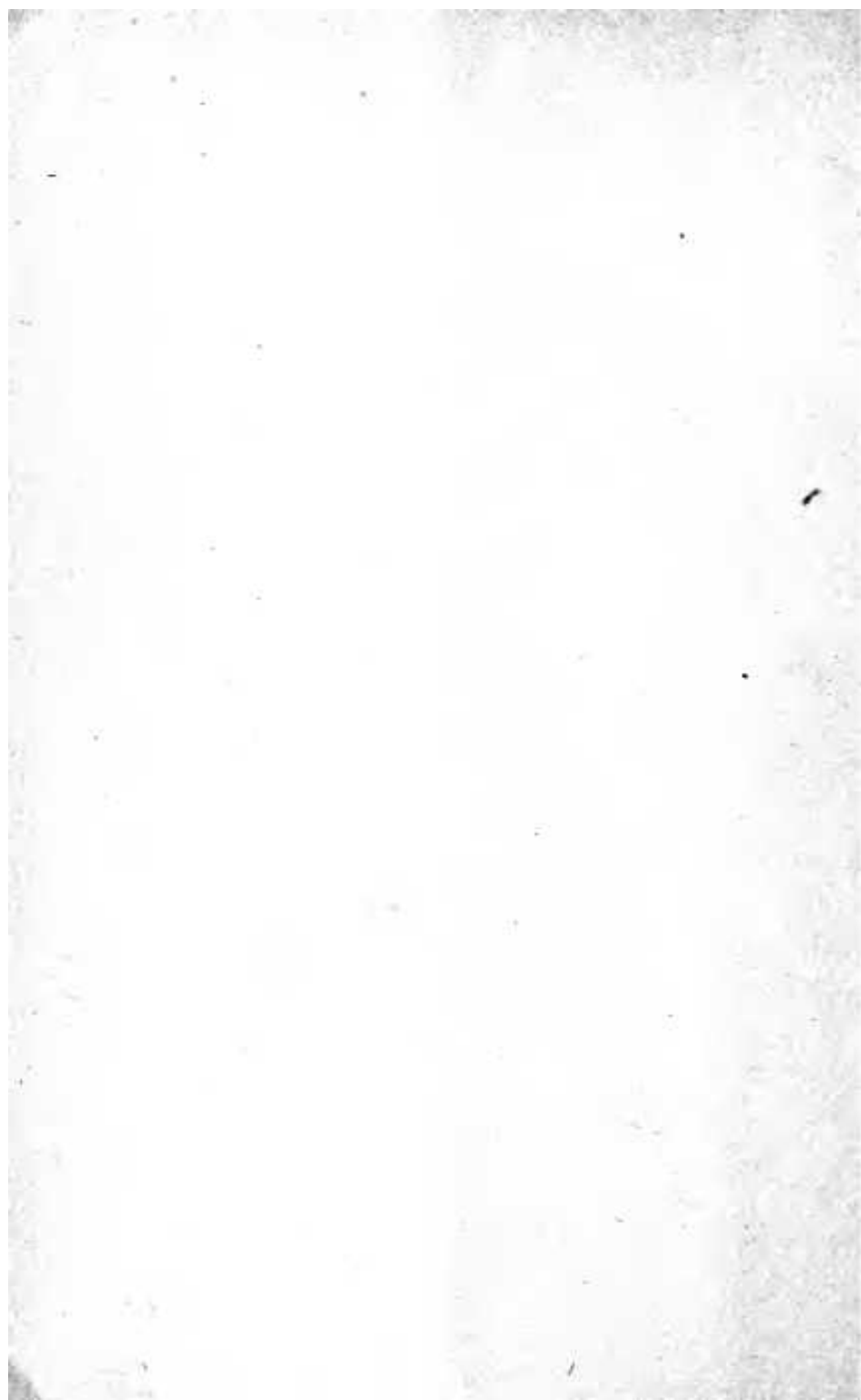
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TO
WALTER B. HARRIS
OF TANGIER
EXPLORER, WRITER AND FRIEND



PREFACE

THERE is a something almost indecent, as it were, in setting forth all a man thinks and feels, without an explanation or at the least a prelude of some sort. A fencing master goes through the salute, a jockey takes a preliminary canter, even divines resort to incantations of some kind or other before they fall a-preaching, and when a speaker starts with "Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen" and the farrago that goes to herald forth a speech, that is his preface.

Now, preludes, prefaces and explanations are of the nature of a stalking horse, by means of which writers may approach their readers on their blind side. If a man writes a treatise upon aviation, or astronomy, he naturally has no false shame, for no one writes upon such matters without full knowledge, and it is ten to one he knows a hundred times more of them than does the man who reads. If by mischance the writer on the subjects I have named makes

a mistake of detail, he is easily excused, and no one thinks himself aggrieved.

Upon the other hand, a man who writes from his own imagination should he chance to err in taste (a fault that even critics sometimes fall into) or fail in interesting, make but the slightest slip in grammar or in style, he is held as one accursed.

Only a poet gets worse treatment, for he, if he should happen to turn out a genius, is straightway worshipped, almost held a god; but if he fail, or if he only should attain mere excellence, all those who read him, although most likely they never wrote a line of verse in all their lives (or even decent prose), treat him as if he had insulted all their female relatives, was a stealer of the sacrament, and had sinned against the Holy Ghost. This possibly is just as it applies to poets, for when they are really great they make humanity feel small, and to a degree the same applies to every writer who comes before the public with something of his own, I mean something that no one else in the whole world could possibly have written, let it be good or bad.