

THIRTEEN STORIES

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Thirteen Stories by R. B. Cunninghame Graham

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R. B. CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM

**THIRTEEN
STORIES**

Thirteen Stories

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By

R. B. Cunninghame Graham

Author of

"Mogreb-El-Acksa," etc.



London

William Heinemann

1900

To

George Morton Mansel

I Dedicate these sketches, stories, studies, or what do you call them. We have galloped together over many leagues of Pampa, by day and night, and therefore I hope he will find the tales (or what do you call them) as near square by the lifts and braces, as is to be expected from a mere landman.



PREFACE

TO-DAY in warfare all the niceties of old-world tactics are fallen into contempt. No word of outworks, ravelins, of mamelons, of counter-scarps, of glacis, fascines ; none of the terms by means of which Vauban obscured his art, are even mentioned. Armies fall to and blow such brains as they may have out of each other's heads without so much as a salute. And so of literature, your "few first words," your "avant-propos," your nice approaches to the reader, giving him beforehand some taste of what is to follow, have also fallen into disuse. The man of genius (and in no age has self-dubbed genius called out so loud in every street, and been accepted at its own appraisalment) stuffs you his epoch-making book full of the technicalities of some obscure or half-forgotten trade, and rattles on at once, sans introduction, twenty knots an hour, like a torpedo boat. No preface, dedication, not even

PREFACE

an apology *pro existentia ejus* intervening betwixt the bewildered public and the full power of his wit. A graceless way of doing things, and not comparable to the slow approach by "prefatory words," "censura," "dedication," by means of which the writers of the past had half disarmed the critic ere he had read a line. I like to fancy to myself the progress of a fight in days gone by, with marching, countermarching, manœuvring, so to speak, for the weather-gauge, and then the general engagement all by the book of arithmetic, and squadrons going down like men upon a chess-board after nice calculation, and like gentlemen.

Who, hidden in a wood, watching a nymph about to bathe, would care to see her strip off her "duds" like an umbrella-case, and bounce into the river like a water-rat?—a lawn upon the grass, a scarf hung on a bush, a petticoat rocked by the wind upon the sward, then the shy trying of the water with the naked feet, and lastly something flashing in the sun which you could hardly swear you had seen, so rapidly it passed into the stream, would most enchant the gaze of the rapt watcher hidden behind his tree. And so of literature, wheedle me by degrees, your reader to your book, as did the giants of the past in grace-

PREFACE

ful preface, dedication, or what do you call it, that got the readers, so to speak, into the book before they were aware. It seems to me, a world all void of grace must needs be cruel, for cruelty and grace go not together, and perhaps the hearts of the pig-tailed, pipe-clayed generals of the past were not more hard than are the hearts of their tweed-clad descendants who now-a-days blow you a thousand savages to paradise, and then sit down to lunch.

Let there be no mistake ; the writer and the reader are sworn foes. The writer labouring for bread, or hopes of fame, from idleness, from too much energy, or from that uncontrollable dance of St. Vitus in the muscles of the wrist which prompts so many men to write (the Lord knows why), works, blots, corrects, rewrites, revises, and improves ; then publishes, and for the most part is incontinently damned. Then comes the reader cavalierly, as the train shunts at Didcot, or puffs and snorts into Carlisle, and gingerly examining the book says it is rubbish, and that he wonders how people who should have something else to do, find time to spend their lives in writing trash.

I take it that there is a modesty of mind as deep implanted in the soul of man as is the