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Cedric Watts and Laurence Davies

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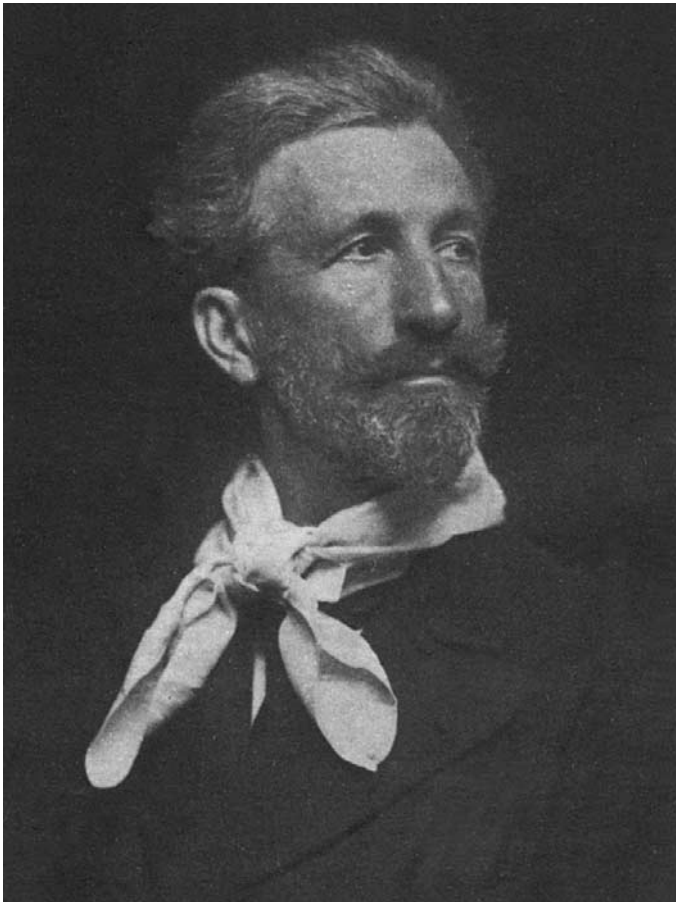
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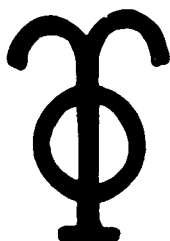
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CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM

A CRITICAL BIOGRAPHY



by CEDRIC WATTS

(Lecturer in English, University of Sussex)

and LAURENCE DAVIES

(Assistant Professor of English, Dartmouth College, New Hampshire)

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Cedric Watts is author of *Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness': A
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ABBREVIATIONS AND EDITORIAL NOTES

In the ensuing chapters we frequently refer to our subject as Graham. This, like CG in the notes, is to be understood as an abbreviation of (and not a discourtesy to) R. B. Cunninghame Graham. Other abbreviations are these:

- Add. MSS. Additional Manuscripts, Manuscript Department of the British Library.
- AFT* A. F. Tschiffely: *Don Roberto* (Heinemann, London, 1937).
- ASA The manuscript collection of Admiral Sir Angus Cunninghame Graham.
- BL The British Library.
- CS Court of Session Records, West Register House, Edinburgh.
- CTW* C. T. Watts, ed.: *Joseph Conrad's Letters to R. B. Cunninghame Graham* (Cambridge University Press, London, 1969).
- DC H. F. West Collection, Baker Library, Dartmouth College, New Hampshire.
- GD22 Cunninghame Graham Muniments, General Register House, Edinburgh.
- Harden Graham family papers held by Lady Polwarth at Harden, Hawick, Roxburghshire, Scotland.
- HFW* Herbert Faulkner West: *A Modern Conquistador: Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham: His Life and Works* (Cranley and Day, London, 1932).
- I.L.P. Independent Labour Party.
- L.R.C. Labour Representation Committee.
- NLS The National Library of Scotland.
- NYPL Berg Collection, New York Public Library.
- S.D.F. Social-Democratic Federation.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- SR *The Saturday Review* (London).
UT The Academic Center Library, University of Texas at Austin.

When, in the notes and bibliography, a book's place of publication is omitted, that place is London. Dates are abbreviated in British and not American style: thus 3.5.1900 means 3 May 1900 and not 5 March 1900.

In quotations, a row of three dots (...) represents an ellipsis which was already present in the text that we are quoting, whereas a row of five dots represents an omission that the present writers have made.

Our general editorial policy has been to preserve without correction any errors or idiosyncrasies in the letters, documents and texts that we quote; but occasional emendations (enclosed in square brackets) have been made for clarity's sake. In Cunninghame Graham's letters the punctuation is frequently erratic; and of his published work he once remarked, late in life:

But still I might have finished all those sentences; not broken off to moralize right in the middle of the tale; split less infinitives, and remembered those rules of grammar that I have disregarded, as freely as a democratic leader tramps on the rights of the poor taxables who put him into power. (*Rodeo*, 1936, p. xvi.)

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PREFACE

A few years ago, the two writers of this book were shown the monument to R. B. Cunninghame Graham which stands on the outskirts of Dumbarton. It had been erected in 1937, a year after his death, and must then have been a quietly impressive and imaginative memorial, standing in grassy open ground once belonging to his family, fashioned of Scottish stone but incorporating blocks from Uruguay and Argentina, and with a sculptured bas-relief of his bold profile surmounting an inscription proclaiming 'A Master of Life – A King Among Men'. The monument that we saw, however, was in a public ground whose turf had here and there been trodden to dust; raucous children from the nearby council flats kicked a tin can round it; some of the stones had been wrenched away; green spray-paint liberally illuminated the profile of a Master of Life; and in place of the inscription was an empty socket.

Thus it had become a monument to time and oblivion: ironically appropriate, it seemed to us then, to Cunninghame Graham's reputation since his death; and truly appropriate to one whose writings were so often preoccupied by the implications of crumbling memorials and by the irony of forgotten merit, time's erosion and men's neglect.

I checked my horse, and began moralizing on all kinds of things; upon tenacity of purpose, the futility of life, and the inexorable fate which mocks mankind, making all effort useless, whilst still urging us to strive.

'Whilst still urging us to strive': Cunninghame Graham's striving took extraordinarily varied forms. To summarise his career is to strain syntax, imagination and credulity. With relish, therefore, the traditional summary proceeds.

R. B. Cunninghame Graham, 1852–1936. Alias Don Roberto, because of his Spanish blood. Alias the Uncrowned King of Scot-

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PREFACE

land – for he was a Scottish aristocrat descended from King Robert II and the Earls of Menteith. Educated at Harrow and Brussels, he became a traveller and fortune-seeker in South and Central America, working as a cattle-rancher and horse-dealer among gauchos and llaneros. After returning to Britain he became one of the most mercurial, eloquent and radical political figures of the late nineteenth century. Elected to Parliament as a Liberal in 1886, during his stormy parliamentary career he became, in practice, the first socialist M.P., advocating free secular education, the eight-hour working day, and the nationalisation of industry and commerce; and he was jailed for six weeks at Pentonville for his part in the Bloody Sunday demonstration of 1887. He made his name as a courageous and uncompromising defender of the workers, of the poor and of the under-privileged; became a crucial figure in the emergence of the British Labour Party, after tireless campaigning with William Morris, Keir Hardie and others, yet became one of the most severe critics of the Labour Party as it grew in strength, numbers and respectability. In later years he was President of the National Party of Scotland, and of its successor, the Scottish National Party. Thus his political career alone is amply spectacular; and his literary career has its own distinctive richness.

He came late to writing, like Joseph Conrad, after the many years of travel; but soon acquired the reputation of a distinctively gifted ‘writer’s writer’, an idiosyncratically ironic essayist and story-teller. His works ranged from brief sketches and polemical articles to translations, biographies and histories, and earned the enthusiastic praise of Edward Garnett, Conrad, Ford Madox Ford and Bernard Shaw. He helped Conrad with *Nostromo*, and furnished Shaw with material for *Captain Brassbound’s Conversion* and *Arms and the Man*; and his literary correspondents included Henry James, Thomas Hardy, Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons, Axel Munthe, W. H. Hudson and W. B. Yeats. In fact, one of the most concise ways of indicating the peculiar richness of his personality and the diversity of his interests is to extend that list of his correspondents, for it includes the artists William Rothenstein, John Lavery and Jacob Epstein; the Scottish Nationalists Compton Mackenzie and Hugh MacDiarmid; political campaigners such as Kropotkin, Roger Casement, Ben Tillett, Tom Mann; aesthetes, adventurers, scholars; Ramsay MacDonald and Lawrence of Arabia, Arab guides and the Ranees of Sarawak.

‘What don’t you know!’, cried Conrad. ‘From the outside of a sail

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to the inside of a prison!’ Cunninghame Graham moved confidently and knowledgeably among gauchos, diplomats, fencers; among Spaniards and Moors, painters and equestrians. He was a proud, elegant figure, yet tough and wiry; a dandy who prided himself on his ability as a horse-rider and his skill with the lasso and the pistol; a public orator who could bring an audience of working-men to its feet, roaring approval; an introspective, often elegiac writer, as familiar with the mists and drizzle of Scotland as with the blaze of the Moroccan sun; a mixture of Hamlet and Don Quixote, a sceptic and an idealist; a plenitude of paradoxes. ‘Cunninghame Graham’, said Chesterton, ‘achieved the adventure of being Cunninghame Graham.’

In the ensuing chapters we hope to describe that adventure. We follow the main trajectory of Cunninghame Graham’s life, pausing to analyse the most important phases in his political and literary careers. Without fanfares, we offer various discoveries and reappraisals, the consequences of fresh research on published and unpublished sources. We attempt to show a courageous consistency within Cunninghame Graham’s diversity, and, for all the necessary documentation and dissection of his theories and principles, we try to keep before our imagination his living figure; for his masterpiece, as John Lavery pointed out, was himself.

When the Master of Life and King among Men walked down the street, the children scampered behind him, mimicking his swagger. We will scamper with them, seeking to keep that swagger in sight.