



To the Iona Community:
a sign of
justice-seeking churchmanship:
in gratitude

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Scottish Labour Party,
1893.

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Preface

A dead writer is not inert-mere dead mutton waiting to be carved into graduated slices for judicious academic palates. In the mystery of his being, he remains as elusive as any living personality. R B Cunninghame Graham was more elusive than most.

It is of considerable help when the subject of a book promises that the examination of his work will afford a reliable guide to his convictions, even when his statements are indirect to the subject. This encouragement is mine. In a Preface to "His People" Cunninghame Graham says of the writer: ".....in writing he sets down (perhaps unwittingly) the story of his life, and as he does so, makes it worth reading only by chronicling all his impressions of the world quite honestly, as if he were alone upon a desert island (as in fact he is), and he were writing on the sand". In another Preface, that to his book "Progress", he enlarges upon this theme: ".....he who writes a preface to his book describes his own interior life, or, without wishing, lets it peep out from the depth of his own being....."; ".....such revelations of a man, made incidentally and, as it were, upon the way, are worth a thousand storehouses of facts. Mere facts are in the reach of any fool to prose about....."; ".....the spoken word can be manipulated, so as to conceal the speaker's personality, but when a writer takes his pen in his hand, in spite of all he can do, it is straight manifest". He believes authors have an instinct to keep intact from other eyes a "secret garden in their souls" which is nobody's business; otherwise they stand revealed to the careful reader. Frank Harris has well described him as "an amateur writer of genius". It is to my advantage that, not only in prefaces, where he felt specially free, but all through his work, he stepped aside to make remarks on all sorts of subjects lightly connected with his theme, letting us peep into his soul through windows of half-unconscious self-revelation, where a professional would have been more ordered, and more careful of the reception of his comments.

These pregnant asides, taken with more substantial contributions, make it clear that, although his thought is not deductive or logical in form, it is coherent. He emerges from examination as a social thinker of power and stature. His religious outlook does not appear so well knit, for which reasons will be adduced.

That I have had the means to come to the subject through the examination of rare documents not previously given full scrutiny, I owed very largely to Admiral Sir Angus Cunninghame Graham, KBE, CB, whose kindness gave a substance to this thesis, which must otherwise have been lacking.

The other main acknowledgement I should make is to Professor West, Cunninghame Graham's first biographer, who, with imagination and shrewd judgement, collected in Dartmouth College Library, Hanover, Newhampshire, USA, what was then the best collection of his works. He, too, allowed me to use rare material and gave me his personal encouragement. As we talked together in the Library sharing our enthusiasm for this man who had brought us together-he a citizen of the Dollar Republic which Cunninghame Graham castigated as the inheritor of the worst of Puritanism, myself one of the myopic, deluded, deluding

clergy whom he counted irrelevant to life-we could but wonder what the Laird himself would think, if he were looking down on us.

Or up. We must not anticipate the conclusions of the second part of this book.

I.M.F.

Please note:

- 1) Two decades ago the researches of Lady Polwarth had established beyond doubt that RBCG's wife was Caroline Horsfall, the daughter of a Yorkshire surgeon. In her mid-teens she walked out on the family (who wrote her off in turn) looking for a career on the stage. Gabrielle was her stage name. In the text which follows I have retained the impression of her (somewhat romanticised?) which I culled from her husband's papers, without changing it. She was clearly a remarkable person in her own right. I have also, when giving quotations, kept intact RBCG's original wording e.g. not altering his 'Mohammedanism' to 'Islam' or 'man' to 'humanity'.
- 2) Where reference is made in the text to 'Bloody Sunday' that indicates the march on Trafalgar Square to protect it for free speech in 1889. Information is given in Appendix 1.
- 3) The National Library in Edinburgh used the bibliography attached to secure the most comprehensive collection of our subject's works up to 1960 (my cut-off point for references) – a distinction previously held by Dartmouth College library, Hanover, New Hampshire USA.
- 4) I've been indebted to the generosity of village friends who gave their time and skills to process the material for publication.