



A Vanished Arcadia Being Some Account of the Jesuits in Paraguay 1607 to 1767

R. B. Cunninghame Graham

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Historicus nascitur, non fit.' I am painfully aware that neither my calling nor election in this matter are the least sure. Certain it is that in youth, when alone the historian or the horseman may be formed, I did little to fit myself for writing history. Wandering about the countries of which now I treat, I had almost as little object in my travels as a Gaucho of the outsidècamps'. I never took a note on any subject under heaven, nor kept a diary, by means of which, my youth departed and the countries I once knew so well transmogrified, I could, sitting beside the fire, read and enjoy the sadness of revisiting, in my mind's eye, scenes that I now remember indistinctly as in a dream. I take it that he who keeps a journal of his doings, setting down day by day all that he does, with dates and names of places, their longitude and latitude duly recorded, makes for himself a meal of bitter-sweet; and that your truest dulcamara is to read with glasses the faded notes jotted down hurriedly in rain, in sun, in wind, in camps, by flooded rivers, and in the long and listless hours of heat -in fact, to see again your life, as it were, acted for you in some camera obscura, with the chief actor changed. But diaries, unless they be mere records of bare facts, must of necessity, as in their nature they are autobiographical, be false guides; so that, perhaps, I in my carelessness was not quite so unwise as I have often thought myself. Although I made no notes of anything, caring most chiefly for the condition of my horse, yet when I think on them, pampa and cordillera, virgin forest, thèpasses' of the rivers, approached by sandy paths, bordered by flowering and sweet-smelling trees, and most of all the deserted Jesuit Missions, half buried by the vigorous vegetation, and peopled but by a few white-clad Indians, rise up so clearly that, without the smallest faculty for dealing with that which I have undertaken, I am forced to write. Flowers, scents, the herds of horses, the ostriches, and the whole charm of that New World which those who saw it even a quarter of a century ago saw little altered from the remotest times, have remained clear and sharp, and will remain so with me to the end. So to the readers (if I chance to have them) of this short attempt to give some faint idea of the great Christian Commonwealth of the Jesuit Missions between the Parana and Uruguay, I now address myself. He who attacks a subject quite fallen out of date, and still not old enough to give a man authority to speak upon it without the fear of contradiction, runs grave risk. Gentle, indulgent reader, if so be that you exist in these the days of universal knowledge and self-sufficient criticism, I do not ask for your indulgence for the many errors which no doubt have slipped into this work. These, if you care to take the trouble, you can verify, and hold me up to shame. What I do crave is that you will approach the subject with an open mind. Your Jesuit is, as we know, the most tremendous wild-fowl that the world has known

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