

**DOWN THE
ORINOCO
IN A CANOE**

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Down the Orinoco in a canoe by S. Pérez Triana & R. B. Cunninghame Graham

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S. PÉREZ TRIANA & R. B. CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM

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By
S. Pérez Triana

With an Introduction by
R. B. Cunninghame Graham

' Que ejeura que ejtá la Noche !
La Noche ! que ejeura ejtá !
Asi de ejeura ej la ausencia . . .
Bogá, Negrito, bogá,
Bogá !

CANDELARIO OBESO

New York
Thomas Y. Crowell & Co.
Publishers

1902

337-19-51

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PREFACE

'Climas pasé, mudé constelaciones, golfos inavegables, navegando.'—*ERCILLA : La Araucana.*

To read a book to which a friend has asked you to write a preface is an unusual—nay, even a pedantic—thing to do. It is customary for a preface-monger to look contemptuously at the unopened bundle of his friend's proofs, and then to sit down and overflow you his opinions upon things created, and those which the creator has left in chaos. I plead guilty at once to eccentricity, which is worse than the sin of witchcraft, for witchcraft at one time may have exposed one to the chance of the stake ; but eccentricity at all times has placed one outside the pale of all right-thinking men. To wear a different hat, waistcoat, or collar, from those affected by the

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Apollos who perambulate our streets, to cut your hair too short, to wear it by the twentieth fraction of an inch too long, is *scandalum magnatum*, and not to be endured. So in confessing that I have read 'Down the Orinoco in a Canoe,' not only in the original Spanish in which it first appeared, but in its English dress, is to condemn myself out of my own mouth, to be set down a pedant, perhaps a palterer with the truth, and at the best a man so wedded to old customs that I might almost be a Socialist.

It is undoubtedly a far cry to Bogotá. Personally, more by good fortune than by any effort of my own, I know with some degree of certainty where the place is, and that it is not built upon the sea. My grandfather was called upon to mediate between Bolivar and General Paez, and I believe acquitted himself to the complete dissatisfaction of them both. Such is the mediator's meed.

The general public, of whom (or which) I wish to speak with all respect, is generally, I take it, in the position of the American

Secretary of State to whom an office-seeker came with a request to be appointed the United States Vice-Consul for the town of Bogotá. The request was duly granted, and as the future Consul left the room the Secretary turned to the author of this book, and said: 'Triany, where in thunder is Bogoter, any way?' Still, Bogotá to-day is, without doubt, the greatest literary centre south of Panama. Putting aside the floods of titubating verse which, like a mental dysentery, afflict all members of the Spanish-speaking race, in Bogotá more serious literary work is done during a month than in the rest of the republics in a year. The President himself, Don José Manuel Marroquin, during the intervals of peace—which in the past have now and then prevailed in the republic over which he rules—has found the time to write a book, 'El Moro,' in which he draws the adventures of a horse. The book is written not without literary skill, contains much lore of horsemanship, and is a veritable mine of local customs; and for the moral of it

—and surely Presidents, though not anointed, as are Kings, must have a moral in all they write, they do and say—it is enough to make a man incontinently go out and pawn his spurs.

Thus, Bogotá, set in its plateau in Columbian wilds, is in a way a kind of Chibcha Athens. There all men write, and poets rave and madden through the land, and only wholesome necessary revolutions keep their number down. Still, in the crowd of versifiers one or two, such as Obeso, the negro poet, who, being denied all access to the lady of his love—the colour line being strictly drawn in Bogotá, as well befits a democratic government—brought out a paper once a week, entitled *Lectura para ti*, have written verse above the average of Spanish rhyme. Others, again, as Gregorio Gutierrez Gonzalez and Samuel Uribe Velazquez have written well on local matters, and Juan de Dios Carasquilla has produced a novel called 'Frutos de mi Tierra,' far better than the average 'epoch-making' work of circulating library and press.