

## PARK

### I

MUNGO PARK walked on in the belief, absurd as he knew it to be, that he had died. There are catastrophes (so he assured himself) where the victim need not add to his perplexity the pain of suspending his judgment. And this hypothesis was some relief to him here and now—if, as in his anguish he thought, it is here and now. He dismissed as impertinent his own critical question: when did it happen and where and how?

One thing at a time, he answered himself. For he wanted no more than a mind sufficiently at ease to draw inferences from the evidence of his bewildered senses. He did not deny that he felt well. All his reactions were perfect; he had no physical pain; his breathing was right; there was not the least irritation on any part of his skin; no blister, fly-bite, soreness; his clothes, hat, boots seemed ideally part of himself. His stick hung on his wrist; he could hear his watch ticking; he verified, by touching the places, that his many pockets held their expected contents.

But he felt alone in a vast world. He could hear no sounds other than those produced by himself and his belongings; his footsteps and the faint noise of his salivation, the rustling of his clothes. It was such silence as, when on a still frosty morning a man is sitting on a hillside, will make him say two audible words only to hear his own voice, and be sure that he has not become suddenly deaf.

He was on the Oxford road, going eastward; and he had just come up from Burford by the slanting way. He had lunched there and looked about; in fact, when he was startled, he was repeating to himself with

amusement a quotation upon the Carey monument: 'And plenteousness in their palaces.' It had suddenly struck him that the road was just faintly different. The part surfaced for wheel traffic was narrower; the rest, great breadths, was grassy gallops. And the telegraph posts were absent. He shuddered with misery.

Dream? Nonsensical question. No one asks it in a dream. One hundred times nonsensical.

He moved to the grass: and, looking at the flowering plants, named them: betony, lady's bedstraw, fennel. He took a few steps towards the hedge: and then he heard a note, sweet and prolonged, as of a flute. He stood still and it stopped. He took another step or two and the instrument spoke again, at an harmonic interval. He stopped and went on; and always with the same result. Someone he could not see was observing his movements minutely. With all his attention absorbed by the experience, but not in any way unpleasantly, he walked on; until at an instant there were in his legs innumerable points of pain. He tottered and fell. He had been well peppered. His last controlled thought was that the metaphor was good. The sweat stood all over him; he just waited, smarting dreadfully.

A slight, powerful man came towards him. This was delirium: but he had no power to deal with the question. The young man was a negro; and dressed as unexpectedly. The costume was right and logical enough; but of design, colour and materials such as he had never seen in combination.

The man spoke an unheard tongue. It was evidently short, sympathetic questions; and the voice was attractive. Mungo Park stared at him without a word and closed his eyes. With this action he relaxed all his muscles and lay like a rag. The nozzle of a flask came against his lips and he took a draught of its contents.

Deo gratias, said he, automatically.

## *Blackfriars*

Potui te gravius vulnerare, said the voice. Mungo Park sprang to a sitting posture with astonishment, relief, dignity, indignation.

Tu me vulnerasti?

Et non alius.

Eccur?

Nonne audisti sibillam?

Sibilla? Quæ est ista?

The young man pulled round an instrument which he had slung to him, the very form of which was a sufficient explanation. It was a cluster of shepherd's pipes attached to a wind-bag, a home-made-looking thing, with a charm of age or handle or both about it. Bent on demonstration, he blew up the bag; and then, with delicate orange-tipped fingers, produced the harmonic sounds, but this time as a merry tune.

Mungo Park felt wretched again.

Nil timendum, said the man with a slight accent of reproof; Veni.

Non possum ambulare.

Age. Veni. He held out his hands and tugged Mungo Park to his feet: then he strode off as though he were alone, and his prisoner struggled after him.

There was no door to the doorway of his cabin, a heavily constructed building, the wooden elements by far too strong, and prodigally spacious as the residence of one man. It smelt inside of fields and woods. There was a couch, heavily built too, with a dark leather mattress and a neck rest.

The man pulled off his cap, which he threw on a shelf, displaying thick black hair, straight and glossy. He spread a textile rug on the mattress and smoothed it swiftly. The broad stripes of dark blue and red were to become familiar. Mungo Park willingly obeyed the invitation to stretch himself upon it.

The young man moved about, looked out, came back, sat on a stool, stood up, muttered, looked out again.

Then he addressed to Park a rattle of remarks in his own tongue.

Dic latine.

Dixi mysterium ; et iterum dico.

Unde noscis Latinam ?

Est lingua sacra.

Park relapsed into wild thoughts, and groaned.

Nil timendum, the black repeated ; and passed into a room beyond, where he began a one-sided conversation, at first hesitating, then voluble, interminable.

When he came back he said :

Accersitus.

As the negro turned his back, Park walked firmly into the apartment where he had heard him go to speak, and advanced with the courage of a racked man going to be beheaded ; his legs were painful. The appearance of the little room was a distraction in its strangeness. It was a small octagonal. The walls were of different hues, and rippled each at a different angle. It was finished atop by eight convergent triangles ; it was like being inside a big crystal. A solid stool was structured with the floor, all one wood ; and a furniture settle, or table, had on it a quantity of untidy blank paper and a metal style.

A soft note recalled his attention and there came staccato words : Ra tete ra. He returned no answer. The signal and words were repeated.

Adsum, said he, stupidly.

Bene ; faveas. He sat down. Followed unintelligible words.

Intellexisti ?

Minime.

Tu quis es ?

Kentigernus Park Scoticus.

Faveas voces custodem. He clapped his hands in answer to this request, and the negro came in and took the seat.

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Take a handful of those sheets, said he in Latin, and write down your own replies. Then he spoke in Bapama, but at a chosen pitch, facing squarely to one of the panels; and a long dialogue followed as at first. Now then, he said to Park, be clear and brief. What is your name? And so, perhaps for twenty minutes, he performed the tedious office of interpreter. His fatigue and anxiety were shown in the increasing obsequiousness with which he transmitted the replies, often evidently considered most unsatisfactory, and the increasing sharpness with which he elicited them.

He smiled when the ordeal was over, and his eyes shone boyishly.

A whole set of relations and implications came in an instant to Park's mind: that integrity of many elements which at any moment of this recent period he had no hope of recovering.

I am convalescent, was his first reflection. The signal went, and the black did all that he expected him to do. He was absent a long time; and Park now cared as little as he knew what he was answering about.

Let him, said he; I'll give that lad something to think about, and make him wiser.

The black returned without any remark or legible expression on his features. Park fixed him and asked (in English):

What's your name?

The black hesitated and answered:

Cuan.

It's like a dog, thought Park.

Dic mihi, Joannes . . . .

Non licet.

Dic tamen . . . . he commanded angrily.

Cuan spoke volubly in Bapama, and would not be stopped by word or gesture. Park looked at him with patient hostility and presently said:

Nihil metuendum. Cuan became at once and remained, villainously silent. He was called and came back.

Vocatus. Park hobbled with great difficulty to the speaking room and sat down.

Ades?

Adsum.

Mox locuturus est Reverendissimus Dominus Thomas a Villa Gracili S. T. D. a secreto Amplitudinis suæ vicarii generalis diœceseos Kottatilis. Esne paratus? Intellexisti?

Ita.

It is a dream, thought Park, abandoning all his hypotheses, as he heard the exceeding sweetness of the voice which paraphrased the message just received and went on :

Salve, Domne hospes, prospera sint tibi omnia, et æternaliter.

Fluently, courteously, with the slowness of a cultured man, the speaker elicited a really rational account of Park's person, antecedents, present conditions and—perplexities.

I have a certain theory about you, but you must volunteer the information.

It is correct, said Park.

But say it.

I am a priest.

Face the blue plate and stare at it. Park did so. Shapes quivered upon it and presently settled to a picture. It showed an interior like a room in a London club, as to human figures acting independently. The foreground figure was a big bust of a man in monastic dress. He was black. He put his hood off his head with a natural gesture and smiled, and the plate became blue again. Park faced the speaking plate and the voice went on :

## *Blackfriars*

I was going to say goodnight; but I will make a few remarks to you which will not be recorded. You will receive your formal instructions later. First, be quite at rest in your mind. We shall certainly take charge of you. Stay where you are contentedly. You are a prisoner, but only of your own undertakings. The less you move and speak the more convenient. Do not let the fact distress you: but it is as well for you to know that you are the cause of hideous excitement throughout the world. It is through no fault of yours; but the trouble is very great. So caute, cautissime. Treat the gamekeeper as what he is. When you see him say to him, 'Ta'at ng'on'; it means 'Faith of a slave'; and give him your blessing. I will do the rest, if indeed anything else is required. Then send him to me. Excuse me further; for we shall be busy all night about you. Be well. The man will do all he can. Make him teach you some useful phrases of the common tongue; he is well educated. Memento memoris. Vale.

Park had no time to linger on what he had heard. But he restrained his hurry and went back.

Cuan showed signs of misgiving.

Ta'at ng'on. The poor fellow threw himself flat on his face. *Benedictio Dei omnipotentis, Patris et Filii et Spiritus sancti, descendat super te et maneat semper*, said the priest; and he knelt erect.

Amen.

### *Accersitus.*

The gamekeeper sprang to his feet, blessed himself, clasped his hands at the height of his face so hard that they shook, and dashed into the speaking room. When he went his skin was slate-colour and his eyes seemed plates of flat dull copper: but he came back looking as usual and morally, if not quite, restored. He had his hand before his mouth as though by force to keep his words inside it, and the thought expressed

by his upturned eyes was laughably transparent : Thank God I have not spoken a word. Park had to restrain himself not to feel like a sultan.

Cuan helped this unconsciously by the swift silence with which he passed and repassed, innumerable busy. He noticed his guest's fagged look : and brought officiously just the portfolio stand the Parks have seen in all ages. But the portfolio which he placed upon it !

The plates were metal, perhaps zinc, polished in different degrees according to the design, large enough for life-size heads, which was in fact their subject. The drawing was incised in thick, masterly lines ; and laid in the spaces were coloured surfaces, well within the drawing ; these were enamel, inlaid metal and pieces of shell, put there by pressure, fusion or setting as the substance might require. Hair in the portraits was treated as in good Gothic sculpture, and such accidents as moles, rather frequent, and scars, more rare, were evidently much valued by the designers.

All the portraits were of men ; and all the horses (for horses there were) were stallions. Park had never mastered the horse ; but he could see well enough that the creatures represented had been marvellously trained ; or, what was the same thing, were so admitted to friendship with their masters that they knew of themselves how to stand for portraiture ; and could speak if they chose. They might indeed by some miracle have become fully domesticated like the sheep-dog.

Dogs ; what brutes these were ; they were horrible ; mastiffs, bloodhounds, bull-dogs were regimental emblems in comparison. Park thought he would come back to them later and turned all the dog plates.

At the next he almost gave a cry ; pure David Jones. It was a scene of hunt animals at all planes and angles ; no bother about scale ; little wild horses and big ibexes, cheetahs and gazelles with their natural characteristics superbly emphasised.



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Cuan showed his face. He saw that he was not called ; but he came on, persuasively. He had changed his clothes and had nothing but a cotton tunic, breech-cloth and white sandals.

As though he were a nurse he lifted Park as he was and carried him to a bath. There he stripped him and togged him up in a sheet of the red and blue stripe ; but not before he had looked with compassion at the miserable state of his legs, so swollen and discoloured where the saltpetre, or whatever it was, had damaged them. He touched the skin delicately, and sighed.

He went away and presently was hard at it in the speaking room. He came back with compressed lips ; he laid Park on a table, made him easy with towels ; and then, with a lye he had prepared, did him all over and mopped him half dry. He oiled him until he smelt like a herbarium, artistically sponging off the drops where they formed ; then in a jolly wooden bowl as big as a wastepaper basket he made another lye, which, applied, turned the ointment to soap.

With grimaces and gestures he expressed : You must try to walk down into the water ; for you are so slippery that I should let you fall.

He went down first to arrange the sunk furniture ; on this he made his bather comfortable with his face just above the surface of the water.

Lying without sensation in the tepid bath he watched Cuan, who, besides, was taking trouble that all his movements should be closely inspected, separating and assembling all the things which had been on his body and would never be there again. He could see that it was a sort of mausoleum rite which was being performed ; that somewhere in the then world there must be a museum vault waiting for its prey. He saw in his own suit and other clothes, in his purse, watch, map, tobacco, handkerchief, rosary, pencil, knife, scapular medal, keys, the pathos of stiffened clouts

and trays of venerable rubbish often seen behind glass. He noted the absence of his hat and stick; and had the strange illusion that they were at x leagues and y years of distance, irretrievable.

Cuan built all to a rectangular shape which satisfied him; and then fetched a copper box with a flange lid. He examined the inside and invited Park to do the same. He laid all the belongings in it, adding only a bullet of what was nothing but camphor.

So there's trade with the Philippine Islands, thought Park.

He came out of the water; was dried and wrapped in the striped sheet.

Cuan looked most foolishly like a woman handling clothes and household fittings wisely; he had the queer gestures of testing the transparency of a towel; impatient hurtling of a cloth round and round as though to discover its cardinal points; firm choice of one rather than the other of two indistinguishable objects.

He wiped and dried the shampooing table and draped it with a cloth. He placed the pile of clothing, looking shop-new, and stood attentive. Park watched and Cuan waited. At length almost inaudibly :

Benedicite. And Park blessed the clothes.

With reverence and tenderness, and yet with servile authority, for the ritual was a mixture of vesting a bishop and dressing a baby, he touched Park with each garment, and deftly wound it, or hung it and disposed it, as its use demanded.

Park thought of the priests of the old law as he made mental notes for dressing himself in the future.

The dress felt togalike, and as if the last miracle would be that it stayed on. It was not however quite complete. Cuan bandaged his feet with a dark green scarf. prepared like a puttee. It left the toes free,

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turned the heel dexterously, and stopped with a tuck. Shoes over this.

Then Cuan was crestfallen. He saw that the buskins could not be worn. Park had the vanity to be sorry, for they were of white-enamelled leather, decorated with a green line.

Then came a broad woven belt passed through the fold of a half-pendant of this toga behind to the front. It had five tails at each end to make a fastening. The general effect of what the servant did with these ten tails was to plait them; but this is a gross description. Speaking generally of his residence in Ia, and the resemblances and differences which struck Park in making the comparisons forced upon him by his experiences, while certain objects, like baskets, barrels, cheeses, showed a stability which nothing could upset, there were principles which seemed unfathomable; among them, fastenings. Park, after long observation and practice, after frequent and humiliating tuition, learnt a few for use; but, wherever he went, his imbecility in this particular weighed upon him; exposing him to the witticisms of Dlar, and the respectful staring of many.

Last a collar was laid round his neck. It passed under a pocket of the garment left by skilful draping, which Cuan drew over his head in a hood.

Attached to the collar was a superb medal which, from its appearance, and especially the fine workmanship, Park took to be gold. It must have been four inches across. It represented the Deipara. Owing to the intricate folds of her draperies, there must have been a thousand different surfaces, all of which were treated separately with enamel. Round about was an inscription in Roman characters—and strangely Park thought this the most astonishing novelty.

He made it out at a glance: *INVENTA SUM ERGO DEIPARA IMMACULATA.*

Recognizing the most entrancing of anagrams, I am mad all right, he reflected; but he smiled with resignation.

Park's custom, from the seminary at least, had been to take the food set before him; and as to liquor, though he liked it, he was satisfied if there was what he considered harmony between the beaker and its contents; and asked no more :

What—if the wine impart a golden tinge  
To thought—what skills the colour of the wine?<sup>1</sup>

When his meal was finished, taken at the couch where he had first reclined, Cuan stood before him as though waiting for a signal; Park wondered how he knew the time so accurately. There was a tremour in everything and then a hush as though the earth had stopped breathing.

Hora precum, said the man, though all things said the same.

Park, thinking he heard him say 'Jube, Domine, benedicere,' went on with Sunday compline, in which Cuan joined.

Preparation for the night consisted chiefly of making Park comfortable where he lay. Cuan asked him if he wished to see the stars; and drew away the ceiling, showing a blue parallelogram of sky, which flooded his consciousness with an ocean of longing and regret, and at the same time soothed it unutterably.

I do not speculate, Park with emphasis resolved, upon this world, its age or its human government. Certain things show signs of security, but I deduce nothing. But if to-morrow . . .

He found himself already beginning to form wishes and velleities, and cut the process short.

<sup>1</sup> 'Pash zezel tiffem,' says the Wapama proverb: the darkest wine illuminates.

## *Blackfriars*

To-morrow! It has either gone or will never be; detestable point of imaginary time.

At an age when nights are often broken, and if a man has had the wisdom to make the best of that condition, he may feel in the morning benefit as though each of his forty sleeps had been effective sleep; and should he relish his dreams, queer or evil, he has, before the magical night has faded into the day of real pains and dangerous responsibilities, a few minutes' sense of enrichment. Park stared at the stars from his couch. He knew, so feeble was his astronomy, that it would have to be Cassiopeia or Ursa major, or some part of those constellations for him to have any pleasure of recognition. No. He wished obstinately that a particular star should be the pole-star.

In which case . . . . he started ratiocinating . . . .

He slept a minute; for the stars had moved only a diameter, or 'twenty four hours and a minute,' said he; and slept again.

The stars appear to have a circular motion; and the pole-star . . . . and he slept again. No, he was wide and wild awake, and fetched a horrible curve in stellar space. He became loosened from his couch which took a curve of its own.

I shall never be back in time, he groaned. I shall never be back in time. Every thought has two meanings. If not back in time, in what shall I be back. Shall I ever be back? 'Ever' is a property of time, and I shall never be back in time. Every thought has multiple meanings. I shall never be back in time. So he shut his eyes, and when he opened them he was back.

Yes, but am I back in time? What was that about the two kinds of time? I know. Cuan; the stars.

He could hear the voice of Cuan in the speaking room; but whether impatient or obsequious he could not make out.

Then he heard the man's voice near him ; speaking in a piteous whisper :

Dormis, Domne? ignosce mihi. Tristitia affectus, somno fractus, nescio quid amplius. Da mihi mandatum ut dormiam . . . .

Habes mandatum. And he himself went to sleep; sleep, as it were, and no more nonsense. The vision he had had, as pleasing and reassuring as it was surprising, upon the eggshell blue plate in the speaking room furnished the nucleus of his fancies. He thought that he was lying on his face in grass, and that it was Thursday, and that on Thursday people were black. He woke and smiled. It wasn't Thursday; it was the Assumption and a Wednesday; therefore people are as usual.

His clothes and coverings were strange.

Oh, aye, said he; better asleep; and he slept.

*(To be continued.)*

JOHN GRAY.