

## PARK

### II

HE was in Westminster Cathedral and it was also a railway station of intolerable vastness and silence. A church has chairs, vaulting; these provided abominations on the floor and overhead. A station has taxicabs, advertisements, kiosks, angles. What a wilderness of these features. There was a covered lorry with a stupid bill pasted on its hood: 'G. S. R. Man is omnivorous.' The lorry became multiplied to infinity in dreary perspective, the alignment perfect like an army-train or a boy's drawing. Park went down the line in his vestments looking for the sacristy and a third-class smoking compartment. He had lost his server and his railway porter. I shall recognize him, for he is black. An unending train went through, pouring out passengers without stopping; all were negroes. Park halted and addressed himself prophetically:

Go through the swinging glass doors; no one will notice you, as you are black. With a wrench and a struggle he came to himself.

That is a strange thing, he thought; to dream a fact I did not know awake. I am black.

It was light; he was chilly, for he had perspired copiously; his chin and neck were soaked. There were horses outside; he could hear the clink through the open ceiling.

In some way he divined that the horses were for himself, and he experienced one of those miserable minutes all must have known. He remembered with dread the lively expressions of the horses he had looked at in the portfolio of engravings; and at the same time that the state of his legs would prevent his

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attempting to ride. With rage he sprang from the couch, and his legs were well. He had common thoughts of bathing and shaving.

Cuan came in carrying a great cloak and a helmet. He spoke some fossil sentence, some 'good morning' or other; and Park repeated a syllable or two as he heard them. Evidently a start was intended.

He made to put on his shoes. Cuan did it for him, and laced them. He walked towards one of the panels of the room; the man slid it open and he passed out of doors. He could not see the horses, but there was Cotswold, earth and sky; the familiar golden soil and cool green, the coloured pattern of fields, crop, stubble, grazing, early ploughing; hedges of quick, draped with clematis and tangled with black bryony. The eastern sky was a dense formation of thin, horizontal clouds. Cuan pulled and straightened his clothes, and laid the great cloak on his shoulders, clasping it at the neck. He handed him the helmet, dull black papier-mache with a badge painted on the front. There were pendant chains as straps. Cuan just tied them, a 'single knot'; the chain held. Then he took up all the back folds of the wide cloak, dropped it half and half over his two shoulders and led the way. The cloak which Cuan wore was draped in the same way, with the odd effect; and held so by a loop at the tail fastened to a button at the neck. The horses turned their heads to stare at the two men.

Cuan held the stirrup and Park mounted. When he saw what Cuan did, he threw the folds of his cloak off his shoulders, so that it enveloped himself and part of the horse. He required in fact no riding freedom: the mount was practically a pack-horse, and responsive to the least wish of the rider.

They rode in a southerly direction, so that Park expected to go near Eastleach, but checked himself remembering his resolve.

They took the fields straight on, for the hedges were filled with gaps. He saw horses grazing, but neither sheep nor cattle. He distinguished houses from farms. Dwelling houses were highly characterized, long, low, vast, with very broad eaves and a fancy shown for balconies and circular windows. He found later that the lighting was principally top-lighting, and in public buildings concealed lighting. But the farms, with modifications easily imagined, and what seemed to Park a note of splendour, were typical farms: with barns, sheds, pens; paddocks and orchards, abundant evidence of the invisible farmer's wife in the rabble of poultry; and flower gardens barricaded like a king's park.

They came to a road and took the right.

Hot, hot, said the groom, and the horses came abreast and trotted. Park felt exhilarated.

Quomodo vocatur equus?

Tsup.

Equi?

Bini vocantur Zup; plurimi Ssup.

Equitare?

Tsuba, zuba, ssuppa, juxta placitum.

They rode a stream; the horses galloped, seeing their destination ahead.

IT WAS A BUILDING in its way arrestingly sumptuous: a two-stage rotunda with a flattened dome, all of stonework, laboriously dressed and masoned, designed with consummate art. At a handsome distance from its base was a circuit of low wall with many gate openings. The whole stood in a splendid area of well-kept grass, and there were no paths visible. Round the upper and smaller stage of the building ran an inscription course. From the portion exposed to his view Park reconstructed the words of the psalm: Laudate pueri Dominum, laudate nomen Domini. There were

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a few men sitting on the coping, dressed in what could only have been liveries. They rose to their feet in silence as the horsemen rode into the enclosed space. The groom led the horses away, and Park followed Cuan through one of the circular doorways into a foyer. A servant took their cloaks, helmets and whips, and glanced to see if they had spurs or weapons.

By different doorways in the inner wall Park and his man entered the rotunda.

It was a relief to Park to recognize that he was in a sacred building. He felt his reason was being saved. Kneeling men moved sufficiently for his accommodation. He knelt, blessed himself, and spoke to God as a man does.

His desire was to be as little distracted as possible, but he soon detected that men in choir, certainly below somewhere, and probably at a prodigious depth, were singing none.

It was approaching the prayer. He heard the great clang of a bell, and the sound of a subterranean sea, as somewhere a multitude rustled together. A choir pealed, whence he could not determine : *Ecce sacerdos magnus*.

He rose to his feet : and could then see over the rather broad parapet where his arms had rested. He was one of many occupying a hung gallery at the spring of a cupola ; it was just as it were a circular pew, for one row of men, with its seat and kneeler. The cupola leaped from the summit of another much greater and far down in the earth ; and that again was supported by piers. A part of the ultimate floor at a still greater depth was brightly illuminated. This was the sanctuary ; for the procession of the mass moved towards it. It was cut by the unbroken ascending line of some great element of the building and in another direction by a traverse as austere. He could see the bishop at the faldstool however ; his ministers moving in ample

space, and with utmost solemnity and precision, as they vested him.

This was all, at the distance, which could edify or gratify him, until two deacons passed the chasuble over the bishop's head, and Park was certain, beyond any contradiction, that it was close-sewn with diamonds.

The mass proceeded exactly as anyone can verify anywhere, raised however to the scale to which the reader of this relation has grown accustomed. It ended with the publication of an indulgence in the sacred language (as the Wapami call Latin) and the vulgar tongue; and this afforded Park's first opportunity of hearing Bapami spoken with some deliberation. It made no impression upon him; he tried without success to catch the equivalent expression of a hundred days. One feature had struck his imagination: all had knelt for the credo, and tens of thousands, at any rate, had united in singing it.

Park had made a curious observation at the mass. He was sure the bishop was white: for the prelate had distinctly raised his face as he sat at the faldistorium; and, though he would not admit it to himself, he believed that it was in his own direction.

As the three rode away, he could not keep the subject out of his mind, and he addressed to Cuan many remarks tinged by this curiosity.

At last the man said, frowning slightly, and low, as if scandalized:

My lord observed that the bishop is a pale man?

Yes.

God is no respecter of persons. It is not an uncommon thing (changing the subject as quickly and thoroughly as he could) on a great feast to breakfast at a club.

You are my guide.

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My lord would agree not to make friends or even to speak.

Yes.

And to leave the club at the first signal from me : ng'on n'tha (I am only a servant).

Yes. What is the dedication of that church?

The martyrs of Uganda.

Benedictus Deus.

Amen. Yonder is the club.

Park looked in the direction of Cuan's whip; and laughed with pleasure and amusement as they drew near, at the extraordinary mass of horses and gorgeously dressed men.

His pleasure however was soon clouded; for his appearance created a stir, which the utmost politeness of the gamekeepers and stableboys (for such they all were) could not disguise. Many moved to surround Cuan, but he shook them off.

He made for a fat black and spoke to him aggrievedly. The giant smiled and patted Cuan on the shoulder; but he led the way, and in quick time Park was reclining on a prepared couch and left to his thoughts. These would have been dismal had not the nimblest smiling black he could have imagined bustled up with a tray which he thrust into Park's hands without ceremony.

Instantly he splayed the feet of a folding tripod he had under his arm, snatched the tray, planted it on the stand and stood grinning. It was evident from his expression that he was supposed to be amusingly got up. Park smiled and the boy went away pleased.

He, at any rate, hasn't heard of the man-in-the-moon, he thought gloomily. But the breakfast was good. It was a delicate fry of some sort of liver, on a big thin barley biscuit, a bowl of salted water, and an orange. He had hardly finished his meal when Cuan appeared ready for riding and spoke a sentence in Bapama in

which Park was proud to recognize the word *ssup*. What a relief to be gone. Oh, the glory of the unchangeable sky, the gladness of the grass, the restorative view of hawk-weed, scabious, calamint; the row of elms; and an addition, in Park's eye not at all unacceptable, of grey poplar, the fancy of a local proprietor, perhaps, for the disposition indicated planting; the ash, too, appeared abundant.

The line they took was as straight as they chose, for there was no standing crop in the way; and there were passages innumerable in the hedges.

There was at home a parcel for Park; a copper box, namely; and lying on it, his first mail: a meticulously folded note. It was from Monsignor Villa Gracil; and the writing was microscopic, artistically disposed on the sheet. Beside the compliments d'usage, its purport was—for it was easy and fraternal: I send some odds and ends. Have patience; I have so little. Speak to me p.m. I am called in familiar conversation *Svilig*. Park made an experiment in trying to think *Wapama*. He means to express, he surmised, that he is frightfully busy and is impatient to see me; and also that I am to hold on until 'they' have made up their minds about me.

In the order of spiritual and intellectual value the contents of the box was: a breviary for the week (from which it appeared that today was Saturday); a crucifix of mature design in which (so naturally) the divine Victim was of negro type; a grammar of *Bapama*, in the *Bapami* language and character; a *Bapamu-Latin* (and vice-versa) dictionary; a book of views in a kind of lithography; a map of Great Britain; abundance of handmade paper, a block of Chinese ink, a few brushes and four red pens.

*(To be continued.)*

JOHN GRAY.