MUNGO PARK

BY : T : BANKS MACLACHLAN

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MUNGO
PARK

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FAMOUS
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PUBLISHED BY
OLIPHANT ANDERSON
& FERRIER·EDINBVRGH
AND LONDON

The designs and ornaments of this volume are by Mr Joseph Brown, and the printing from the press of Messrs Turnbull & Spears, Edinburgh.

PREFACE

This volume was at first intended to be merely a sketch of the career of one of our noblest Scotsmen. But recent momentous events in West Africa have made necessary an enlargement of the original intention. The story of the exploration of the Niger, which begins in earnest with the moving adventures of Mungo Park, has been carried down through many phases to the present day; and an attempt is made in these pages to set down within small compass a clear account of the complicated process which has issued in the Niger Question as we now know it. In itself, the story of the Niger is one of intense and romantic interest. Many travellers —most of them Scotsmen—have contributed to the tale. But incomparably the greatest of them all was Mungo Park; and a knowledge of his achievements is essential to the proper understanding of West African affairs as they now stand.

T. B. M.

Edinburgh, *March* 1898.

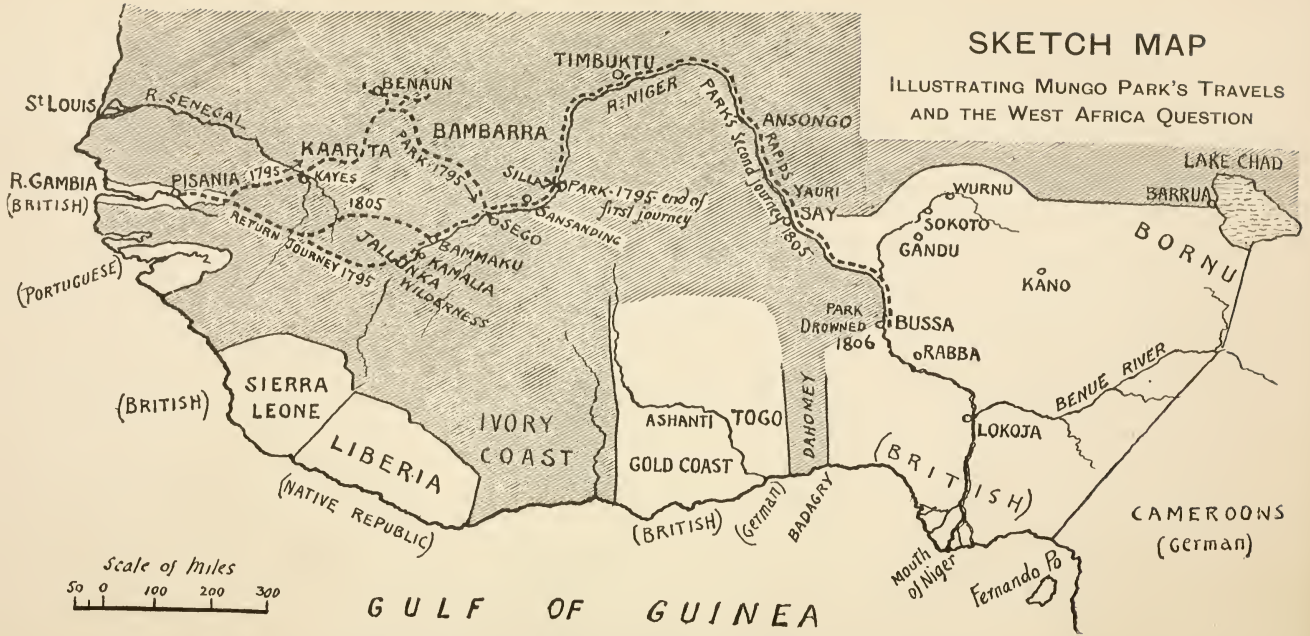
To

JOHN GEDDIE.

March 1898.

T. B. M.

CONTENTS



The dotted lines show Mungo Park's Routes in 1795 and 1805.
The shaded portions indicate the territories now claimed by the French.

MUNGO PARK

CHAPTER I

MUNGO PARK'S EARLY LIFE

On the road that runs by Yarrow side there is a hamlet, some four or five miles west of Selkirk, called Foulshiels. One of the two or three cottages standing by the wayside is a picturesque ruin ; four low, thick walls overgrown with ivy of a very delicate and beautiful variety. Yarrow runs murmuring through the leafy glen below, and on the bank beyond, a couple of bowshots from the cottage door, old Newark Castle stands on guard, like some grim, grey sentinel. It is a spot of exceeding beauty, one of the loveliest and most romantic in all Borderland.

In this rude little cottage there lived, during the second half of last century, a small farmer named Mungo Park, one of those hard-working, plain-living, strong-brained men who have made the Scottish peasantry respected all the world over. Thirteen children were born to him, and eight of them were reared to maturity in a dwelling no larger than the cot of a hill-shepherd of the present day. Mungo Park, the African traveller, was the seventh child of the family, and he was born on the 10th of September 1771. In common with the Scottish yeoman farmers of his time, Mungo Park the elder had an almost reverential

appreciation of the value of education. Money, as we may suppose, was not too plentiful at Foulshiels; yet, not content with himself superintending the instruction of his numerous family, he engaged a private teacher to reside in the house and look to the education of the boys and girls.

In due time Mungo was sent to the Grammar School at Selkirk, and for a number of years he daily trudged the four or five miles that lay between the hamlet and the little county town. He was a reading boy, thoughtful, and inclined to silence and solitude. And though we have none of those anecdotes portentous of coming greatness, which biographers delight to cherish, his childhood was not altogether devoid of indications of that love of adventure which was the passion of later years.

The time has not long passed when it was the ambition of almost every worthy Scottish parent to give at least one of his sons a University education and make a minister of him. Mungo, the serious and studious member of the family, was selected for that honour. But the desires of the young man himself were towards medicine, and not without reluctance, we imagine, the father was induced to allow him to follow his own bent. Accordingly Mungo, who had now reached the age of fifteen, was bound apprentice to Dr Thomas Anderson, a surgeon in Selkirk. For three years he resided with his master, pursuing his professional and classical studies, and, we doubt not, learning somewhat of the good qualities of his master's eldest daughter, a young lady who twelve years later became the explorer's wife.

When he was eighteen Mungo Park removed to Edinburgh, and passed three diligent but uneventful years at

the University, completing his medical studies. He had a reputation as an earnest and assiduous worker, especially in his favourite study of botany, but further than that there is nothing notable to record of his college days. But his first move, after completing his medical course, showed that ambition had already begun to stir within him. He wasted no time in Edinburgh, where openings were scant and prospects narrow, but started at once for London in search of employment. There was one important circumstance—important in the light of subsequent events—that prompted him to court fortune in the Metropolis. Mr James Dickson, his brother-in-law, was there, and enjoyed a position of considerable influence, which might, and did, prove helpful to his young relation. Dickson had had a remarkable career. The son of a Scottish peasant, early in life he left Scotland for London, where he was employed for some time in a Hammersmith nursery. There his superior intelligence and skill drew upon him the attention of Sir Joseph Banks, who, discovering the passion of the young gardener for botany, gave him the run of his library, and encouraged him in his scientific studies. Step by step Dickson advanced. He established himself in London as a seedsman, and giving his leisure hours to the study of science, in course of time became a botanist of European reputation.

It was to this man that Mungo Park owed his first start in his profession. When the young man went to London Dickson introduced him to Sir Joseph Banks, and, on the recommendation of Sir Joseph, Park was appointed assistant surgeon on one of the East India Company's vessels.

Mungo Park was now twenty-one, strong, hopeful, and ambitious, ready to do anything or to go anywhere. 'I have now got upon the first step of the stair of ambition,' he wrote to Dr Anderson of Selkirk, his former master. But his ambition had nothing of the taint of personal vanity about it. It was a healthful longing for the work that satisfies—to achieve something that would make the world the better for his having lived in it. But the bounding spirit of youth was tempered by a gravity and thoughtfulness that seldom comes to men while they are still on the threshold. In the same letter he gave a glimpse of a side of his character which he unveiled only on very rare occasions :—'The melancholy, who complain of the shortness of human life, and the voluptuous, who think the present only their own, strive to fill up every moment with sensual enjoyment; but the man whose soul has been enlightened by his Creator, and enabled, though dimly, to discern the wonders of salvation, will look upon the joys and afflictions of this life as equally the tokens of Divine love. He will walk through the world as one travelling to a better country, looking forward with wonder to the author and finisher of his faith.'

On the eve of setting sail for the East he wrote thus again to his trusted master and friend :—'I have now reached the heights that I can behold the tumults of nations with indifference, confident that the reins of events are in our Father's hands. May you and I (not like the stubborn mule, but like the weaning child) obey His hand, that, after all the troubles of this dark world in which we are truly strangers, we may, through the wonders of atonement, reach a far greater and exceeding weight of

glory. I wish you may be able to look upon the day of your departure with the same resignation that I do on mine. My hope is now approaching to a certainty. If I be deceived, may God alone put me right, for I would rather die in the delusion than wake to all the joys of earth. May the Holy Spirit dwell for ever in your heart, my dear friend, and if I never see my native land again, may I rather see the green sod on your grave than see you anything but a Christian.'

Strange words those for a man so young. They seem to be unnaturally serious in the mouth of a healthy, buoyant-minded youth who had just put his foot on the first rung of the ladder, and was standing with his face upturned towards fame. They are the utterance, however, of a conviction which remained with Park all his life, and more than once preserved him from despair when every other hope and solace had deserted him.

The voyage to Sumatra, which occupied a year, was in no way noteworthy, save for the opportunity it gave to the young surgeon of increasing his scientific knowledge. He made many observations, collected specimens in botany and natural history, and upon his return he read a paper before the Linnæan Society on eight new fishes he had discovered during his stay on the coasts of Sumatra.

But during his absence in the East, forces had been at work that were destined to completely alter the course of his career, even at its very outset, and to send him forth to accomplish the precise kind of work for which Nature had fitted him. Mungo Park was happy in this, at least, that he did not spend his best years groping for his life's

work. He found satisfaction at an age when most young men are still looking wistfully around them, and wondering if there is any one thing they have been sent into the world to do. Park was not quite twenty-four when Africa first cast her spell upon him.

CHAPTER II

THE MYSTERY OF THE NIGER

Long before the Christian era dawned upon the world, men's minds were vexed by the mystery of the Niger. Even in the time of Herodotus, nearly 2500 years ago, the mystery was an old one. In those distant days it was known that beyond the great and terrible African desert that barred the conquests of the restless nations of the Mediterranean shores, lay a vast and fertile land, teeming with human beings, and watered by a mighty river. There is credible evidence of travellers having crossed the Sahara and penetrated as far south as the Upper Niger. But those were the exploits of fearless explorers only, and did not result in the establishment of any permanent communication between the peoples on the northern and southern fringes of the desert.

Centuries rolled on, without adding one jot to the world's knowledge of Negroland. Carthage, and after it, Rome, held sway in the north of Africa. But the desert set bounds to the spread of Empire, and the Sahara and the unknown land beyond remained as they had been—fit subjects for the speculation of the fanciful geographer.

What neither Carthage nor Rome could do was re-

served for the Arab to accomplish. Impelled by the new and irresistible faith of Islam, the Arabs swept like a devouring fire across the north of Africa, from east to west, destroying alike Christianity and Paganism in their course; then turning south, they pressed onward through the desert to the land of the Negroes. It was in the fierce ardour of religious warfare that the Arabs first penetrated to the Niger; and what the spiritual impulse began, the commercial instinct maintained and developed. Timbuktu sprang into existence on the banks of the Niger, and, in course of time, grew to be one of the greatest of the trading cities of the north of Africa, a mart of international importance, sharing the wealth and commercial glory of Egypt, Tripoli, and Morocco.

Meanwhile, Europe had begun to throw off the lethargy of the Middle Ages and to feel the stirrings of new and strange impulses. The spirit of inquiry and adventure had come to life again; men were once more beginning to speculate and to dare. Amongst the nations of Europe the Portuguese were the first to be roused to enterprise, and naturally, owing to their geographical position, it was to the sea that they turned their eyes. They began to creep round the coast of Africa, feeling their way bit by bit to the Cape. Then, making a bold dash, they crossed the ocean to India. It was they who first made known to Europe the existence of the great rivers, the Senegal and the Gambia.

Close upon the heels of the Portuguese came the English sea-dogs of the days of Queen Elizabeth, mariners unsurpassed in any age or country for skill and daring. A curious medley of virtues and vices were those Eliza-

bethan seamen. Fierce, cruel, and crafty, yet brave and generous; hard-headed when their own interests were concerned, yet almost quixotically patriotic, they would sail a ship in the face of the devil for the glory of England or the lust of gold. It was gain rather than glory that drew them to the coast of Africa. The Senegal and the Gambia were then believed to be the mouths of the mighty river upon which stood the golden city of Timbuktu, the city of their stories and their dreams; and to the man who could break through the deadly fever-belt of the western coast and thread his way far into the interior, the reward of 'wealth beyond the dreams of avarice' was promised.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century several well-organised and determined attempts were made to ascend the Gambia. But they all ended in disaster. The hostility of the Portuguese, fever, and mutiny brought them to naught. Then came a pause of nearly a hundred years, followed by another attempt to reach the interior by way of the Gambia. Like those that preceded it, this expedition failed of its purpose. But at least one all-important fact was finally established—that the Gambia and the Niger were separate and distinct rivers, and that, if the great inland river and the golden cities upon its banks were ever to be reached, it must be by some other way than sailing up the Senegal or the Gambia.

This was about 1720. Many years again elapsed before a fresh attempt was made to solve the mystery of the Niger. But towards the close of the century a change began to come over the spirit of African exploration. The love of science had begun to quicken the motions of men's minds, to direct their energies into new channels,

and to inspire them with motives hitherto undreamt of. In former times the problem of the Niger had been looked at only from a commercial or a territorial standpoint. Now the scientific impulse, which cannot long be stayed by considerations of profit or loss, was bearing in upon the problem. The African Association was formed for the purpose of promoting discovery in the Dark Continent. Under the direction of this band of eminent and learned men, research was made into the history and condition of the north of Africa, and much valuable information was collected. Then they turned their attention to the Niger.

One after another explorers were sent out by the Association with instructions to penetrate into the interior. Ledyard, in 1788, made the first attempt, selecting Egypt as a starting point. But he died at Cairo at the very outset. The next volunteer was Lucas, who essayed to cross the desert from Tripoli. After he had gone five days' journey southward an outbreak of hostilities among the Arabs of the district made further progress impossible, and he returned to Tripoli. Next year Horneman succeeded in crossing the Great Desert, but was never heard of again, save in vague rumours of violent death.

Three times foiled in their endeavours to reach the Niger by way of the Sahara, the African Association bethought themselves of approaching it by the Gambia on the west, the old route of the pioneers of African exploration. Major Houghton, a man in every respect qualified for such an enterprise, was selected for this new venture. At first all went well. Without serious difficulty or mishap he traversed the basins of the Gambia and Senegal, and

continued his march eastwards, in high spirits at the prospect of success. Before entering the country of the Moors the intrepid traveller sent this cheerful message to the British settlement on the Gambia :—'Major Houghton's compliments to Dr Laidley; is in good health, on his way to Timbuktu; robbed of all his goods by Fenda Bukar's son.' Then came a long silence, till months of anxious, fruitless waiting brought the conviction that another noble life had been sacrificed in the cause of African exploration. Four years passed before the fate of Major Houghton was definitely known. Then it was discovered that he had been foully done to death by the Moors.

At this period in the history of the elucidation of the Niger mystery, several theories of the river were entertained by geographers. As we have said, the long popular notion that the Senegal and the Gambia were the mouths of the Niger had been already exploded. Some geographers believed that the Niger flowed eastward to the heart of the Continent, and fell into a great inland lake or chain of lakes whose waters were evaporated by the sun, or lost in the sand. Another, and a still more startling theory, was that the Niger and the Nile were one and the same; one immense river taking its rise on the west coast of Africa, and traversing the whole breadth of the Continent. A third division of theorists held to the opinion that the river flowed from east to west, and emptied its waters into the Atlantic, but where, no man could tell. And a fourth school just as firmly maintained that there was no such river as the Niger, and that the story of its existence was a fable of ancient times.

Such was the sum of our uncertain knowledge concerning the Niger, when Mungo Park declared himself ready to risk another attempt to solve the riddle. It was to his ever-ready friend, Sir Joseph Banks, a leading member of the Association, that Park was indebted for the rare opportunity that was now unfolded before him. Sir Joseph had had a watchful eye upon the young Scotsman's career; he had taken the measure of his capacity, and decided that he was a man to whom the Society could entrust the difficult mission. Eagerly Park offered himself, and just as eagerly was he accepted; for repeated disasters had almost made the Association despair of finding a suitable man, willing to undertake the perilous adventure.

There is no evidence that previous to this time Park had thought of African exploration as a possible career. He had no special or even very definite theories regarding the Niger; the study which preceded his departure for Africa inclined him to the belief that it rose somewhere far in the interior, and flowed westwards. It was his innate love of travel and the promptings of an honourable ambition that determined his choice.

Here then we have a stripling of four and twenty, setting out to solve a mystery that for more than two centuries had baffled the ingenuity and daring of his countrymen, and for ten times two centuries had at once fascinated and defied the speculative geographers of Europe. In reading the exploits of Mungo Park, it is not easy to continuously bear in mind that they were the achievements of a very young man. The resourcefulness, the self-control, the patient endurance and

resolute adherence to one fixed purpose, suggest the traveller of mature years and long experience, rather than an untried youth, of an age when those qualities are in most men only just beginning to influence the actions.

The young explorer was tall and broad-chested, muscular, firmly knit, and of excessively hardy constitution. His face marked him out from among ordinary men. It was a powerful face, with an expansive brow, a prominent, clear-cut nose, and a strong chin; but the frank and mild expression of the eyes redeemed it from severity. In manner and speech he was simple and unaffected.

CHAPTER III

PARK'S FIRST JOURNEY

MUNGO PARK sailed from Portsmouth on the 22nd of May 1795. A month later the ship entered the Gambia, and continued the voyage up the river as far as Jonkakonda, whence Park travelled on horseback to Pisania, a small village on the banks of the Gambia where a British trading factory had long been established. There he was hospitably entertained by Dr John Laidley, the agent in charge, till the rainy season had passed and it was possible to continue his journey. During this time of waiting Park studied with diligence the Mandingo tongue, the language in common use in that part of Africa, and gathered what information he could of the countries through which he was to pass on his way to the Niger. On the latter subject he got very little satisfaction. The black traders from the interior whom he met at the factory, whether from jealousy, suspicion, or the African's natural love of lying, did their best to lead him astray and to dissuade him from making the attempt to reach the Niger. But instead of being discouraged, Park only became the more determined to carry out his mission.

In this way passed the gloomy months of the wet season, when the rain falls in torrents upon the sodden

woods and the tornado roars. Twice he was prostrated by fever and confined to the house for weeks. But as the waters began to subside and the atmosphere to grow dry, he rapidly regained strength; and the return of the dry season found him in high spirits and ready to take his departure for the interior. It had been Park's intention to travel with a native caravan, but as the merchants took no pains to conceal their dislike to his mission, he decided to proceed alone. On the 2nd of December he bade farewell to his friends at Pisania and turned his face eastwards. He had only two companions, a negro servant named Johnson, who spoke both English and Mandingo, and a sprightly negro boy named Demba, who was also skilled in the languages of the peoples of the Niger. Park rode a small but hardy horse, his attendants bestrode asses, and among them they carried the modest baggage of the expedition. This consisted of provisions for two days; some beads, amber and tobacco with which to purchase fresh supplies as they were required; a few changes of linen, an umbrella, a pocket sextant, a compass, and a thermometer. Two fowling pieces and two pairs of pistols were their only weapons. It happened that a Mohammedan, two slave merchants, and a native blacksmith were going for some distance in the same direction as Park, and agreed to travel with him for mutual protection.

Thus slenderly equipped the little cavalcade set out on a journey of many hundreds of miles, through a country utterly unknown to Europeans, and inhabited by people of whom rumour had nothing to tell but deeds of craft, treachery, and cruelty. Dr Laidley and two other white

traders accompanied Park the two first days, and when they had shaken hands with him and stood watching as he disappeared into the forest, they believed that they would never see his face again. Nor was the mind of the young traveller free from uneasy forebodings. 'I had now before me,' he wrote in his journal, 'a boundless forest, and a country the inhabitants of which were strangers to civilised life, and to most of whom a white man was the object of curiosity or plunder. I reflected that I had parted from the last European I might probably behold, and perhaps quitted for ever the comforts of Christian society.'

Park, however, was not long to have leisure to nurse those gloomy thoughts. He had scarcely ridden three miles when a mob of natives rushed out upon him, stopped the caravan, and demanded payment of customs. As argument was useless and force out of the question, Park allowed himself to be victimised, and went on his way. This was only the first of countless experiences of the same kind. The African is a shameless and irrepressible beggar. The more he gets the more he asks; he will even beg the clothes from your back and the food from your mouth; and what he cannot get by asking he will steal if he can do so with any degree of safety.

Without hindrance or notable incident Park passed into the dominions of the King of Wuli, a venerable and courteous old man, who not only gave Park permission to traverse his territory to Bondou, but promised to offer up prayers for his safety. At the same time he entreated him to desist from his purpose, reminding him of the fate of Major Houghton, and reiterating his belief that the

same miserable fate awaited him. But Park would not be moved. He told the king that he had well considered the matter, and was determined to proceed in the face of any danger.

Provided by the king with a guide, Park resumed his journey, striking off from the Gambia towards the north-east and the basin of the Senegal. And here he had a foretaste of the toils and perils that lay before him. Forced marches had to be made through regions where water was scarce or entirely absent. Water-carriers had to be hired; the dread of robbers made cowards of his servants; and the begging and pilfering propensities of the natives put a severe strain upon Park's good nature. At one village on the way it seemed as if the entire female population had turned out to harass him. 'They were rude and troublesome in the highest degree,' said Park. 'They surrounded me in numbers, begging for amber, beads, etc., and were so vehement in their solicitations that I found it impossible to resist them. They tore my cloak, cut the buttons from my boy's clothes, and were proceeding to other outrages, when I mounted my horse and rode off, followed for half a mile by a body of these harpies.'

At a village further on he again heard of the death of Major Houghton, and was warned of the fate that would inevitably overtake him if he ventured into the land of the Moors. The shade of the murdered traveller seemed ever to flit before him, pointing the way to death. But though Park, in his struggle to the Niger, was in this manner many times reminded of the danger that hung over him, and was frequently depressed and disheartened in conse-

quence, he never for a moment harboured the idea of retracing his steps.

About the end of December the wayfarers entered Fatticonda, the capital of Bondou. Park had reason for the uneasiness with which he sought the presence of Almami the king, for that monarch had an evil reputation, and was commonly reported to have treated Major Houghton with severity, and caused him to be plundered. To protect himself in some measure against the rapacity of the king, Park hid some of his valuables in the roof of the hut in which he lodged, and donned his best blue coat, thinking that the regal dignity would not bend to beg the very clothes from his back. But he had yet something to learn of African greed.

'We found the monarch sitting upon a mat, and two attendants with him. I repeated what I had before told him concerning the object of my journey, and my reasons for passing through his country. He seemed, however, but half satisfied. The notion of travelling for curiosity was quite new to him. He thought it impossible, he said, that any man in his senses would undertake so dangerous a journey merely to look at the country and its inhabitants. However, when I offered to show him the contents of my portmanteau, and everything belonging to me, he was convinced, and it was evident that his suspicion had arisen from a belief that every white man must of necessity be a trader. When I had delivered my presents, he seemed well pleased, and was particularly delighted with the umbrella, which he repeatedly furled and unfurled, to the great admiration of himself and his two attendants, who could not

for some time comprehend the use of this wonderful machine.

'After this I was about to take my leave, when the king, desiring me to stop awhile, began a long preamble in favour of the whites, extolling their immense wealth and good dispositions. He next proceeded to an eulogium on my new blue coat, of which the yellow buttons seemed particularly to catch his fancy; and he concluded by entreating me to present him with it, assuring me, for my consolation under the loss of it, that he would wear it on all public occasions, and inform everyone who saw it of my great liberality towards him. The request of an African prince, in his own dominions, particularly when made to a stranger, comes little short of a command. It is only a way of obtaining by gentle means what he can, if he pleases, take by force; and as it was against my interest to offend him by a refusal, I very quietly took off my coat, the only good one in my possession, and laid it at his feet.'

Park's tact had its reward. Not only did he escape being plundered; he was presented with a small quantity of gold and allowed to go without molestation. And so he passed into Kajaaga, a land of pleasant hills and valleys in the basin of the Senegal.

When he reached the frontier town of Joag it was evening. He lay down to sleep on the 'bentang,' a stage or platform erected in every West African town, generally under a large tree, and used as a place of public resort. Early in the morning he was aroused by the arrival of a band of horsemen, who dismounted and formed a circle round him, and with muskets in hand sat watching him

till daybreak. Then the leader of the party broke into a long harangue, declaring that as the stranger had entered the king's town without having first paid the duties or sent a present to the king, his servants, horses, baggage, and all his property were forfeited; and they had come to carry him, by force if necessary, before their master the king.

Resistance, of course, was out of the question, and Park, remembering that he was in the land where 'backsheesh' was all-powerful, took refuge in diplomacy. He said he had entered the king's dominions without knowing that it was necessary to pay the duties beforehand, but he was ready to do so now. He thereupon handed over to them the gold which the King of Bondou had given him, hoping that it would appease them and that he would escape without having his baggage examined. But in this he was disappointed. They insisted on opening his bundles and helping themselves. All day they wrangled and chaffered with the unfortunate traveller, and when they left him at sunset they carried with them one half of his goods.

A deep gloom now fell upon Park and his companions. They spent the night by the side of a feeble fire, downcast and sleepless. When morning came they were afraid to buy provisions, lest the display of their beads and amber might tempt the people to further robberies. All day they struggled against the desire for food, and at nightfall came the first of several very remarkable deliverances which Park experienced at the hands of women during his wanderings in Africa.

'Towards evening,' said Park, 'as I was sitting upon

the bentang, chewing straws, an old female slave, passing by with a basket upon her head, asked me if I had got my dinner. As I thought she only laughed at me, I gave her no answer; but my boy, who was sitting close by, answered for me, and told her that the king's people had robbed me of all my money. On hearing this, the good old woman, with a look of unaffected benevolence, immediately took the basket from her head, and shewing me that it contained ground nuts, asked me if I could eat them. Being answered in the affirmative, she presented me with a few handfuls and walked away before I had time to thank her for this seasonable supply. This trifling circumstance gave me peculiar satisfaction. I reflected with pleasure on the conduct of this poor untutored slave, who, without examining into my character or circumstances, listened implicitly to the dictates of her own heart. Experience had taught her that hunger was painful, and her own distresses made her commiserate those of others.'

One stroke of good fortune was closely followed by another. It happened that Demba Sego, a nephew of the King of Kasson, whose dominions lay in the line of Park's march, was passing that day through Joag on his return home from an embassy. He took the travellers under his protection, and together they crossed the Senegal and entered upon Kasson territory. No sooner was Park thus completely in his power than Demba Sego turned upon him and demanded a reward suitable to his rank and the services rendered. Demba was aware of the traveller's impoverished condition. But he was implacable; remonstrance was fruitless; and with a heavy heart Park handed over another portion of his now scanty bag-

gage. This trouble, however, was a small one compared with what followed. At the town of Tisi, Park was lodged in the house of Tiggity Sego, the father of Demba, and the latter, borrowing Park's horse, set off on a diplomatic mission, saying he would return in three days. Day after day passed, precious time that the explorer could ill afford to lose, and yet Demba did not return. After nine days had been wasted in waiting Demba returned, and Park prepared for departure. Then came the usual demand for a gift. Park selected an offering, but it was contemptuously rejected as unworthy the acceptance of a man of Tiggity's consequence; and in the end the barbarians, falling upon the bundles, helped themselves to whatever pleased them. When they were satisfied there remained barely half of what had been spared by the thieves of Joag.

The quiet acquiescence in the decrees of fate with which Park met every calamity bore him through this fresh misfortune; and he quitted Tisi thankful that he had still some baggage left for him to carry. Then came a pleasant interlude in this record of wrong and robbery. The blacksmith from the Gambia, who had been faithful to Park through all his trials, at last arrived at his native village, and the inhabitants, who had been warned of his coming, welcomed him with great rejoicings. 'The meeting between him and his relations was very tender,' Park wrote in his journal, 'for these rude children of nature, free from restraint, display their emotions in the strongest and most expressive manner. Amidst these transports the blacksmith's aged mother was led forth, leaning upon a staff. Everyone made way

for her, and she stretched out her hand to bid her son welcome. Being totally blind, she stroked his hands, arms, and face with great care, and seemed highly delighted that her latter days were blessed by his return, and that her ears once more heard the music of his voice. From this interview I was fully convinced that, whatever difference there is between Negro and European in the conformation of the nose and the colour of the skin, there is none in the genuine sympathies and characteristic feelings of our common nature.'

Park, introduced by the blacksmith to the simple villagers as a friend and protector, was feasted and entertained for the greater part of two days, and when he resumed his journey he was accompanied by the blacksmith, who insisted on seeing him safely out of the district.

On his arrival at the residence of the King of Kasson at Kuniakary, he was ushered into the royal presence, and was agreeably surprised to find that greed was not always an attribute of rank. Demba Sego Jalla received him courteously, and accepted the traveller's gift without grumbling at its small value. However, when, a few days later, Park obtained payment from a local trader of a debt for which Dr Laidley had given him an order, the king showed himself a true African by pouncing upon him and extorting a liberal amount as his own share.

This part of the Continent Park described as enchanting. The number of towns and villages, and the extensive cultivation around them, surpassed anything he had yet seen in Africa. Indeed, ever since leaving the dank and gloomy forests that stretch from the coasts for many a

mile inland, he had traversed a country of pleasing aspect and teeming population, and had suffered more from acts of individual rapacity than from the animosity of the people as a whole.

So far fate had dealt leniently with Park. But now the outlook was becoming darker; new and graver dangers began to threaten. It had been his intention to hold on in an easterly direction, through the kingdoms of Kaarta and Bambarra, till he reached the Niger. When he entered Kaarta, however, he found that war had broken out between these two States, and that it would be extremely dangerous to travel through a country overrun by marauders, by whom he would infallibly be plundered or murdered as a spy. He was advised by the King of Kaarta to return to Kasson till the war was over. But Park was anxious to push on; he dreaded being overtaken by the rainy season in the heart of Africa; and still more he disliked the thought of returning to the coast without having attained the object of his mission.

There was one perilous alternative. He might make a detour to the north, through the Moorish kingdom of Ludamar, and so descend upon Bambarra and the Niger without passing through the war-disturbed region. It was an alternative that only a brave man, determined to do his duty at any cost, would have thought of choosing. Not only did it add considerably to the length of the journey, but it led him into a land inhabited by one of the most treacherous, cruel and fanatical peoples in the world. It was by these Moors of Ludamar that Major Houghton had been done to death—lured into the desert, stripped of everything he possessed, and left to die of

hunger and thirst. Park knew the place and the manner of Houghton's death. Yet he had no thought of turning back. He bent his steps northward, to face dangers and hardships rarely surpassed in the records of travel.

CHAPTER IV

A CAPTIVE AMONG THE MOORS

As Mungo Park held on his way to Ludamar he was daily confronted with abundant evidence of the evil character of the people in whose power he was about to place himself. Murder, theft, and cruelty in every form seemed to be the sole employment of those wandering tribes, and with this savagery was blended a subtlety and treachery that made their wickedness doubly dangerous. Park's terrified attendants entreated their master to return, declaring that they would rather relinquish all claim to reward than go another step towards the country of the Moors.

In those circumstances—for the risk of his servants being seized and sold into slavery was indeed very great—Park took the precaution of applying to Ali, the chief of Ludamar, for a safe conduct through his domains to Bambarra. After a delay of fourteen days the petition was granted, and one of Ali's slaves arrived to convoy Park as far as Gumba, the nearest town in Bambarra. The faithful boy Demba, when he saw that his master was determined to proceed at all hazards, resolved to accompany him, and a negro was hired to take the place of the deserter Johnson.

On the third day of the journey, at a large town called Dina, Park had his first personal experience of Moorish insolence and rapacity. The fanatics surrounded the hut in which he lodged, and hissed, shouted, and abused him, and even spit in his face. But finding that all their efforts to irritate the stranger to retaliate were unavailing, they seized his baggage without any pretext, except that he was a Christian, and despoiled him of everything that took their fancy. Seeing their master thus contemptuously treated, and knowing that he was powerless to protect them, Demba and the negro refused to accompany him further. Expostulation was in vain; they could not be induced to face the risk of death or slavery. Fearing that the fanaticism of the Moors would lead them to greater outrage, Park decided to lose no time in quitting Dina. Alone and by night he stole out of the city. Seven days' perilous march lay between him and the comparative safety of Bambarra. But on he must go; there was no turning back now.

He had not gone far when Demba came running after him. Love for his master had overcome his fears. And not only did the boy himself return to his allegiance; he succeeded in persuading the negro to follow his example. For five days the three travellers pressed onward without suffering molestation from the Moors, yet hourly haunted by the dread of them. But, as day after day passed, and still they got through unscathed, their terror diminished and gave place to hope. In a gaiety of spirits to which they had long been strangers, Park and his companions one evening entered a village within two days' journey of Gumba. The simple negroes,

delighted with the honour of entertaining a white man, spread a feast and held high revel. Grateful for their hearty kindness, Park consented to remain another day with the villagers. The day was spent in rest and harmless merriment. Park was elated. In fancy he pictured himself on the banks of the Niger, his long foot journey over, the first stage of his great undertaking accomplished.

He was sitting in his hut in the evening, surrounded by his friends, indulging those pleasing fancies, when suddenly a band of Moors entered, and announced that they had come to carry him to the camp of Ali at Benaun. Park was struck dumb with surprise and fear. Seeing his perturbation, the Moors endeavoured to assure him that he was required at Benaun only for the purpose of satisfying the curiosity of Fatima, Ali's wife, who was very anxious to see the Christian, and that he would thereafter be allowed to proceed on his journey. But he knew too much of Moorish dishonesty and treachery to place any reliance on their word, and with many forebodings of coming trouble he prepared to return with Ali's messengers.

For five days Park and his boy Demba—the negro had made his escape on seeing the Moors—were hurried northward over a hot, sandy country, tormented by thirst and weak from lack of food. At Dina, Park went to pay his respects to one of Ali's sons. The Moor demanded some knives and scissors, and upon Demba explaining that his master had none of these articles, he snatched up a musket, and, presenting it to the boy's ear, would have blown out his brains had not the young man's companions wrested the gun from him and hurried the

captives out of the hut. During the night the boy attempted to escape, but was prevented by the Moors, who took the precaution of going to sleep stretched out in front of the door of the hut.

On the evening of March 12th, they reached the camp at Benaun, a great array of dirty tents scattered in disorder over the plain, over which wandered large herds of camels, cattle, and goats. When the company of horsemen and their prisoners appeared in sight the whole company turned out to meet them. A mob of men, women, and children swarmed round the unfortunate white man, pulling him hither and thither, plucking at his clothes, insulting and threatening him, and demanding that he should repeat the shibboleth of Islam, 'There is but one God, and Mahomet is His prophet.' In this fashion Park was dragged to the tent of Ali, an old man with a long white beard and of a sullen and evil countenance. Ali looked at him long and in ominous silence, but nothing could restrain the curiosity of the women. They pressed round the stranger, plying him with countless questions. They examined his clothes, searched his pockets, made him open his waistcoat to show the whiteness of his skin, and even counted his toes and fingers to satisfy themselves that he was human. Then a wild hog was brought in, and Park was directed to kill and eat it. Though very hungry he wisely restrained himself; it would not have been prudent to have partaken openly of the flesh of an animal which the Moors detested. At length a little boiled corn and water was given to him, and he passed the night on a mat spread on the sand. Worn out though he was with fatigue and excitement, sleep was

denied him, for all night long he was surrounded by an inquisitive, chattering mob.

Next day Park was lodged in a hut, inside of which the wild hog was tethered in derision of the Christian. Not only was the animal itself a very disagreeable inmate; it attracted to the spot a number of boys, who employed themselves in irritating the hog almost to madness. 'I was no sooner seated in this my new habitation,' said Park, 'than the Moors assembled in crowds to behold me; but I found it rather a troublesome levee, for I was obliged to take off one of my stockings and show them my foot, and even to take off my jacket and waistcoat to show them how my clothes were put on and off: they were much delighted with the curious contrivance of buttons. All this was to be repeated to every succeeding visitor; for such as had already seen these wonders insisted on their friends seeing the same; and in this manner I was employed dressing and undressing, buttoning and unbuttoning, from noon to night. About eight o'clock Ali sent me for supper some kouskous and salt and water, which was very acceptable, being the only victuals I had tasted since morning.'

During the night the Moors kept strict watch over their prisoner. At intervals they looked into the hut to make sure that he was there, and in the hours of darkness lighted wisps of grass when they made their visits. 'With the returning day commenced the same round of insult and irritation, the boys assembled to beat the hog, and the men and women to plague the Christian. It is impossible for me to describe the behaviour of a people who study mischief as a science, and exult in the miseries

and misfortunes of their fellow creatures. It is sufficient to observe that the rudeness, ferocity, and fanaticism which distinguish the Moors from the rest of mankind found here a proper subject whereon to exercise their propensities. I was a stranger, I was unprotected, and I was a Christian; each of these circumstances is sufficient to drive every spark of humanity from the heart of a Moor; but when all of them, as in my case, were combined in the same person, and a suspicion prevailed withal that I had come as a spy into the country, the reader will easily imagine that, in such a situation, I had everything to fear. Anxious, however, to conciliate favour, and, if possible, to afford the Moors no pretence of ill-treating me, I readily complied with every command, and patiently bore every insult; but never did any period of my life pass so heavily; from sunrise to sunset was I obliged to suffer, with an unruffled countenance, the insults of the rudest savages on earth.'

The captives were not allowed to remain in idleness. Demba was employed to gather grass in the woods, and Park, after various occupations had been suggested, was installed in the office of barber to the royal family. But his first essay on the head of one of the young princes exposing his unfitness for the post, he was ignominiously dismissed. At this Park was in no wise disconcerted, for it was part of his design to be as useless and insignificant as possible, so that the Moors might have the less reason for denying him his liberty. His clothes, except those he wore, and all his effects were removed to Ali's tent, so that he was unable to have the comfort of a change of linen, which the intolerable heat and dust made the more

necessary. But he counted himself fortunate in having hid his compass in the sand before his jailors searched him.

About a week after Park's arrival at the camp a council of the chief men was held to decide on the fate of the captive. Of the result of the consultation he could get no satisfactory account. Some said that he was to be put to death; some that his right hand was to be hacked off; others that his eyes were to be put out. He had the melancholy certainty, however, that nothing would be done to him till Fatima the queen had seen him, and she was still in the north. Mental distress and bodily privation soon brought on a sharp attack of fever. The wretched captive, now in the lowest depths of depression, wrapped himself in his cloak and lay down in the hope of inducing perspiration. He had just fallen asleep, when a party of Moors entered the tent and pulled the cloak from him. The sick man implored them to leave him in peace. But they began to mock and jeer, and to harass him with their devilish sportiveness.

Driven to despair by the torture, and fearful lest passion might force him to some desperate act of resentment, which would mean certain death to him, Park staggered from the hut, and lay down under the shade of a clump of trees a short distance from the camp. He had barely time to compose himself when a company of Moors galloped to the spot, and commanded him to rise and return to the camp. He begged hard to be allowed to rest there for a little, but one of the ruffians, losing patience, pulled out a pistol and twice snapped it at Park's head. For a third time he cocked it, and was about to strike the

flint with steel, when Park prayed him to hold his hand, and returned with the horsemen to the camp. There he was taken before Ali, who told him, with ferocious menaces, that if ever again he went outside the skirts of the camp he would be shot by the first person who observed him.

A few days after this incident, Park received orders to mount his horse and ride out with Ali, who desired to show the white man to some of his lady friends. When Park came forth from his hut, a sudden scruple seized the Chief. The stranger's nankeen breeches struck him as not only inelegant, but indecent; he would not be guilty of the impropriety of introducing a man so attired into the presence of ladies. Therefore Park, at the command of the cut-throat, enveloped his person in the ample folds of his cloak. Ali made a round of the tents in which his friends resided, and the unhappy captive had to submit to being handled and examined as if he were a strange sort of animal. The ladies, being persons of distinction, were enormously corpulent: with the Moors bulk and beauty are synonymous terms. Park said that a woman of even moderate pretensions to good looks must be one who could not walk without a slave under each arm to support her, and a perfect beauty was a load for a camel. Stoutness was carefully cultivated by the Moorish women, and the higher the social position the greater were the pains taken to acquire the requisite degree of plumpness.

The hot season had now set in, and the heat was terrific. The sand, unsheltered by foliage of any kind, was frequently heated to such a degree that the naked foot could not be placed upon it; and so fiery were the winds from the desert that they scorched the hand if held in a

current of air. Water became very scarce, and in the general distress the wants of the prisoner were entirely ignored. Moreover, as it was the time of the Mahomedan Lent, the Christian was put upon the same famine rations as the Faithful. A little kouskous, with salt and water, once in the twenty-four hours, was his allowance. 'Time, however,' Park philosophically observed, 'somewhat reconciled me to my situation. I found that I could bear hunger and thirst better than I expected, and at length I endeavoured to beguile the tedious hours by learning to write Arabic. The people who came to see me soon made me acquainted with the characters, and I discovered that, by engaging their attention in this way, they were not so troublesome as otherwise they would have been. Indeed, when I observed any person whose countenance I thought bore malice towards me, I made it a rule to ask him either to write in the sand himself, or to decipher what I had already written; and the pride of showing his superior attainments generally induced him to comply with my request.'

All this time Park had never once allowed himself to forget his first resolve—to endure all, to learn all, and to neglect no circumstance, however trifling, that might ultimately aid him to escape. He had been content to wait till an opportunity presented itself. But now there arose a new cause of alarm. The long-continued deprivation of the necessaries of life began to tell upon his health. A dimness of sight, sleeplessness, and a tendency to faint when he attempted to sit up, were the principal symptoms. His two attendants—Johnson, the runaway servant, had been captured and brought to Benaun—were in a hope-

less plight. They lay in a stupor on the sand, and he had difficulty in rousing them even when their scanty rations arrived.

This dreary, killing monotony was suddenly disturbed one day at the end of April by the news that the Bambarra army was approaching the frontiers of Ludamar. Instantly orders were given to strike the tents and collect the cattle, and next morning the whole camp were on the move northward. On the fourth day the great caravan reached Bubaker, another encampment of Ali's, and there settled down in a thick wood, surrounded by a vast, unbroken expanse of sand. At last Park had the honour of being presented to Queen Fatima. Like the ladies of her court, she was ponderously corpulent, and at first looked upon the Christian with aversion. Gradually, however, she regarded him with more favour, and Park began to hope that he had found a friend.

The heat increased, and as water was even scarcer than at Benaun, Park's sufferings grew wellnigh beyond endurance. His meagre allowance being insufficient to assuage his thirst, he sent the boy Demba to the wells to fill the water-bottle. But the Moors drove him away with blows and curses, indignant that the slave of a Christian should dare to draw water from wells dug by followers of the Prophet. In his agony Park begged water from the slaves as they moved about the camp, but with little success, and frequently he passed nights of intense suffering, dreaming of water.

'No sooner had I shut my eyes, than fancy would convey me to the streams and rivers of my native land. There, as I wandered along the verdant brink, I surveyed

the clear stream with transport, and hastened to swallow the delightful draught. But alas! disappointment awakened me; and I found myself a lonely captive, perishing of thirst amidst the wilds of Africa!

'One night, having solicited in vain for water at the camp, and being quite feverish, I resolved to try my fortune at the wells, which were about half a mile distant from the camp. Accordingly, I set out about midnight, and being guided by the lowing of the cattle, soon arrived at the place, where I found the Moors very busy drawing water. I requested permission to drink, but was driven away with outrageous abuse. Passing, however, from one well to another, I came at last to one where there was only an old man and two boys. I made the same request to this man, and he immediately drew me up a bucket of water. But as I was about to take hold of it he recollected that I was a Christian, and fearing that his bucket might be polluted by my lips, he dashed the water into the trough and told me to drink from thence. Though this trough was none of the largest, and three cows were already drinking in it, I resolved to come in for my share; and kneeling down, thrust my head between two of the cows, and drank with great pleasure, until the water was nearly exhausted, and the cows began to contend with each other for the last mouthful.'

CHAPTER V

ESCAPE FROM CAPTIVITY

In such wretched state the weary weeks dragged on, till at length signs of the approaching rainy season warned the captive that the crisis of his life was near. If he was ever to regain his freedom, no time was to be lost, for soon the Moors would break up their camp and move northward to the skirts of the Great Desert, whence escape would be impossible. Just at the right moment circumstances came about which favoured the design Park had been long meditating. Ali found it expedient to go south to Jarra to settle various matters affected by the war in Kaarta. Now the further south Park could get, the further he would be away from the desert and its difficulties, the less within the sphere of Moorish influence, and the nearer to a place of safety from pursuit. Determined not to let slip the opportunity, Park begged the Queen for permission to accompany Ali. Fatima took compassion upon the captive; she used her influence with her husband, and to Park's great joy he was told to prepare for the journey. His clothes were brought from Ali's tent and some of them restored to him, after he had once more satisfied the curiosity of the Queen by showing how they were put on and taken off again.

On the morning of the 26th May, Park, with his two attendants, Demba and Johnson, joined the cavalcade of Moors and started for Jarra. His joy at departure, however, was soon turned to consternation. On the morning of the third day, as the travellers were getting ready for the saddle, the King's chief slave, taking Demba by the shoulder, told him that Ali was to be his master in future; then turning to Park, he said, 'The business is settled at last; the boy and everything but your horse goes back to Bubaker; but you may take the old fool (Johnson) with you to Jarra.'

This was an act of tyranny that Park could not brook in silence. He hastened to the tent of Ali, and in an outburst of passionate words, gave vent to his indignation. The Moor said not a word while Park vehemently reproached him with cruelty, treachery, and injustice, but listened with a contemptuous and malignant smile on his lips. Then turning to the interpreter, he haughtily commanded him to tell the white man that if he did not immediately mount his horse, he would be served in the same manner as Demba. 'There is something in the frown of a tyrant,' wrote Park, 'which rouses the most secret emotions of the heart. I could not suppress my feelings; and for once entertained an indignant wish to rid the world of such a monster. . . . It was in vain to expect anything favourable to humanity from people who are strangers to its dictates. So having shaken hands with this unfortunate boy, and blended my tears with his, assuring him, however, that I would do my utmost to redeem him, I saw him led off by three of Ali's slaves, towards the camp at Bubaker.' Park was

true to his promise. As long as he was in Africa, and as long as hope remained, he never lost an opportunity of causing search or inquiry to be made; but he never saw his faithful boy again.

Ali had not been many days in Jarra, when he found it necessary to return to Bubaker again; but as it was only on a flying visit, he decided to let his prisoner remain at Jarra. Park could hardly contain himself for joy, when he learned that the Chief and his attendants had actually departed. The difficulty of escape was now greatly reduced, and immediately he began to lay his plans and watch for a chance to put them into execution. The uproar and confusion raised in the town by rumours of the approach of an invading army were also conducive to the success of his designs. He was still waiting and on the alert, when with that suddenness which marked all the movements of his captors, Ali's chief slave and four Moors arrived to carry him back to camp. Thereupon Park resolved not to wait another day, but to make a dash for liberty.

That very night he gathered his meagre wardrobe together. About daybreak Johnson, who, though he had flatly refused to go further with him, but had been aiding him by playing the spy on the Moors, came to him and whispered that they were asleep. Lifting his bundle, Park stole cautiously from the hut, and stepping over the negroes who were sleeping in the open air, made his way to where his horse was tethered. A cold sweat stood on his brow; he trembled at the thought of discovery; for this was his last chance of escape from hopeless captivity. When he had mounted his horse, he gave his papers to

Johnson to take to the Gambia, and bidding him farewell, stealthily quitted the town. For about a mile he rode on with great caution and with as much speed as his worn-out horse could carry him. Every bush he approached he examined with anxiety, fearful lest his enemies should rush out upon him. A number of shepherds whom he encountered followed him for some distance, hooting and throwing stones. But Park endured the maltreatment patiently, too fervently thankful that they did not carry their obstruction further. At last his tormentors left him; hope began to revive within him; his backward glances became less frequent; and he was steadily jogging his horse forward, when he was startled by a loud halloo, and looking back saw three Moors galloping after him at full speed, whooping and brandishing their guns. As it was useless to attempt to evade them, mounted as he was upon a horse weakened by months of starvation and neglect, he turned back to meet them. When the Moors came up with him two of them seized his bridle, and the third, presenting his musket, told him he must go back to Ali.

This was the final blow. It seemed to numb the faculties of the unhappy traveller. Misfortune had now done its worst; he would no longer strive against fate; no longer hope to elude his doom. In the silence of utter despair he rode back with the Moors. But they had not gone far, when they halted under cover of some thick bushes and commanded him to untie his bundles and show them his belongings. After all, they were not emissaries of the King, but thieving vagabonds who had followed Park to plunder him. It argued extreme

poverty to have nothing that a Moor would steal. Yet so it was. They found nothing worth taking except his cloak; and one of the robbers, dragging it from Park's shoulders, wrapped it around his own. Park begged hard to have it returned, for it was invaluable to him—his only protection against the rains and the mosquitoes. The Moors, however, gave no heed to his entreaties, and when he attempted to follow them, one of the thieves struck his horse over the head, and threatened to shoot him if he did not desist. So Park, once more turning his horse's head toward the east, rode off into the woods, where he might the more easily baffle pursuit; and rejoicing that he had at last made good his escape from the clutches of Ali the Moor. 'It is impossible,' he said, 'to describe the joy that arose in my mind when I looked around and concluded that I was out of danger. I felt like one recovered from sickness; I breathed freer; I found unusual lightness in my limbs; even the Desert looked pleasant.'

He had been a captive for nearly four months.

CHAPTER VI

STRUGGLING ONWARD TO THE NIGER

Once more Mungo Park was free to pursue his mission. But in every other respect his condition was desperate. His health had been impaired by months of hardship. He was utterly destitute; without food or money to buy it. He had neither guide nor interpreter. His horse had become so weak that it was scarcely able to carry him. And finally, and worst of all, the rain season was about to begin. If ever explorer had good reasons for relinquishing his task and taking the nearest way home, Park was that one. But notwithstanding all these impediments to further advance, and the certainty that they would further increase as he went on, his zeal for the mission he had undertaken never slackened. He was determined to hold on his course till human endurance could go no further. What most he dreaded was the possibility of having to return home with the aim of his journey unaccomplished.

Casting from him all thought of retreat, he pulled himself together and struck off in a south-easterly direction towards Bambarra and the Niger. All day he toiled through an arid waste of sand and stunted shrubs, where there was neither water nor shade from

the sun. In the afternoon, when faint from hunger and thirst, he came upon a herd of goats tended by two Moorish boys. It was a herd of his old enemy, Ali, and he did not dare to linger in the hope of obtaining relief. On again he urged his trembling horse, in the desperate hope of reaching water during the night. His thirst was intolerable; his mouth was parched and inflamed; and at times his eyes grew dim, and he feared he would fall from his horse in a faint.

'A little before sunset, having reached the top of a gentle rising, I climbed a high tree, from the topmost branches of which I cast a melancholy look over the barren wilderness, but without discovering the most distant trace of a human dwelling. The same dismal uniformity of shrubs and sand everywhere presented itself, and the horizon was as level and uninterrupted as that of the sea.

'Descending from the tree, I found my horse devouring the stubble and brushwood with great avidity; and as I was now too faint to attempt walking, and my horse too much fatigued to carry me, I thought it but an act of humanity, and perhaps the last I should ever have it in my power to perform, to take off his bridle and let him shift for himself; in doing which I was suddenly affected with sickness and giddiness; and falling upon the sand, felt as if the hour of death was fast approaching.

'Here then,' thought I, 'after a short but ineffectual struggle, terminate all my hopes of being useful in my day and generation; here must the short span of my life come to an end? I cast, as I believed, a last look on the

surrounding scene, and whilst I reflected on the awful change that was about to take place, this world with its enjoyments seemed to vanish from my recollection.'

He had fallen into a swoon. With his returning senses came a renewed desire to live. He resolved to make a last attempt. Staggering to his feet and driving his horse before him, he set out anew on the search for water. When darkness came on lightning began to play, premonitory of a storm. Soon, to his great joy, the wind began to whistle through the scrub. He opened his cracking lips; but instead of rain-drops got a mouthful of hot sand. A sandstorm had burst upon him. So thickly flew the sand, he was obliged to mount his horse and shelter behind a bush to escape suffocation. Toward midnight the sandstorm ceased, rain fell, and spreading out his clean clothes, he quenched his thirst by wringing and sucking them.

It was necessary, however, if he was not to perish of hunger, to find some human habitation where he would be supplied with food. Therefore all that night Park wandered about in darkness so dense that he had sometimes to grope his way through the bush with his hands. Once he saw a light, and discovered that it came from a watering-place frequented by Moorish herdsmen. But so great was his terror of again falling into the hands of those barbarians, that he plunged anew into the wilderness, willing rather to risk death from hunger and thirst.

Once more it was to a poor woman that the wanderer owed the preservation of his life. In the morning he reached a Negro village, and though afraid to venture in,

hunger compelled him to face the danger. The head man turned his back upon him; he would give the stranger neither food nor shelter. As Park rode in deep dejection out of the village he came upon a hut, at the door of which an old motherly-looking woman was sitting spinning cotton. He made signs to her that he was hungry, and the woman, inviting him into her hut, gave him food for himself and a little corn for his horse. And Park made the good old woman happy by presenting her with one of his handkerchiefs.

While he was resting and pleasantly ruminating on his timely deliverance, the people of the village gathered around. Their whispering and ominous looks alarmed him. He listened, and though he knew little of their language, he could make out that they were discussing the expediency of taking him prisoner and carrying him to Ali. So, without exhibiting any signs of fear or showing undue haste, he got clear of the village as quickly as possible, and again struck into the woods.

For three weeks Park held steadily on in the direction in which he believed the Niger to be. Now that he had left the country of the Moors far in the rear, he had little to suffer from the enmity or insolence of the inhabitants; for the Negroes of this region were prone to regard him with more of wonder than resentment. Yet had he many a day of fasting. Sometimes a handful of corn or meal and a little water had to suffice for an entire day and night. On at least one occasion he had to be content with the water without the corn or meal. To obtain this meagre living, he had to part with everything he could possibly do without—portions of his wardrobe, some of

his coat buttons, even a lock or two of his hair. In some parts of the country white men's hair was highly prized as a charm. This valuable information was vouchsafed to Park one morning as he was leaving the house of a Chief where he had been well entertained.

'In the morning, when I was about to depart, my landlord, with a great deal of diffidence, begged me to give him a lock of my hair. He had been told, he said, that white men's hair made a saphie that would give to the possessor all the knowledge of white men. I had never before heard of so simple a mode of education, but instantly complied with the request; and my landlord's thirst for learning was such, that, with cutting and pulling, he cropped one side of my head pretty closely; and would have done the same with the other, had I not signified my disapprobation by putting on my hat, and assuring him that I wished to reserve some of this precious merchandise for a future occasion.'

Park had the good fortune to fall in with a small party of natives journeying to Bambarra, and attached himself to their caravan. But the weakness of his horse made it impossible to keep up with them without great effort. It became so exhausted at times that he thought he would be compelled to leave it to its fate, and he had to travel most of the journey on foot, driving the animal before him. To overtake his companions, who had ridden ahead of him during the day, he had sometimes to travel far into the night, and arrive at the encampment hungry, footsore, and weary, long after they had supped and settled to rest. So ragged and dirty had he become, that the villagers laughed and jeered at him as he passed,

driving his gaunt, bony steed in front of him. 'He has been at Mecca; you may see that by his clothes,' cried one. Others mockingly offered to purchase his horse; and so beggarly a look had the poor white man that the very slaves, he believed, were ashamed to be seen in his company.

At last, on the twentieth of July, Park was told that he would see the Niger early the next day. Excitement kept him awake all night, and before daybreak he was up and had saddled his horse, eager to be off on the last stage of his eventful journey. It was evident that he was in the neighbourhood of a populous and busy town. The roads were crowded with people carrying goods to the market-place of Sego. Large and thriving villages lay along the route. By eight o'clock in the morning they saw the smoke of Sego curling to the sky; and the traveller's heart beat strong within him as he reflected that a few miles ahead rolled the mighty river upon whose waters the eyes of a European had never yet looked, and to reach which he had toiled and suffered so long.

'We rode together through some marshy ground, where as I was anxiously looking around for the river, one of them called out 'Geo affilli!' (See the water!); and, looking forwards, I saw with infinite pleasure the great object of my mission; the long sought for, majestic Niger, glittering to the morning sun, as broad as the Thames at Westminster, and flowing slowly *to the eastward*. I hastened to the brink, and, having drank of the water, lifted up my fervent thanks in prayer to the Great Ruler of all things, for having thus far crowned my endeavours with success.'

CHAPTER VII

ON THE NIGER

PARK was astonished at the signs of civilisation and wealth he saw around him. Sego, the capital of Bambarra, at which he had now arrived, he found to be an extensive city, substantially built, though of clay, and with a population, he calculated, of thirty thousand persons. The river swarmed with trading canoes, and the surrounding country was highly cultivated. It was a scene he had not expected to discover in the heart of Africa.

If Park was surprised, the natives were much more so at the sudden appearance of the stranger amongst them. They looked with silent wonder at the gaunt, rag-clad, famine-worn man, with the long, unkempt hair and beard, sitting on the river bank. The people stared at him as they passed to and from the ferry, but no one spoke to him. His heart sank within him as he saw many Moors among the throng. For more than two hours he sat disconsolate by the river. Then, the news of his coming having been carried to Mansong, the king, a chief was sent to him to say that the king refused to see him, and that he must not presume to cross the river until he had declared his purpose in coming to that country. A village was pointed out to him where he might pass the night.

Thither he went, but found he was regarded with so much fear and suspicion that no one would give him food or shelter, or indeed have anything whatever to do with him. All day he sat, hungry and dejected, under a tree. At nightfall the wind began to rise and the rain-clouds to gather, and he looked with concern to the prospect of passing a tempestuous night in the open air and exposed to attack from wild animals, which were very numerous in the neighbourhood. But here again Park experienced another of those beautiful instances of the goodness of woman, which he records so tenderly and gratefully.

'About sunset, a woman, returning from the labours of the field, stopped to observe me, and perceiving that I was weary and dejected, inquired into my situation, which I briefly explained to her; whereupon, with looks of great compassion, she took up my saddle and bridle, and told me to follow her. Having conducted me into her hut, she lighted up a lamp, spread a mat on the floor, and told me I might remain there for the night. Finding that I was very hungry, she said she would procure me something to eat. She accordingly went out, and returned in a short time with a very fine fish, which, having caused to be half-broiled upon some embers, she gave me for supper.

'The rites of hospitality being thus performed towards a stranger in distress, my worthy benefactress (pointing to the mat, and telling me I might sleep there without apprehension) called to the female part of her family, who had stood gazing on me all the while in fixed astonishment, to resume their task of spinning cotton; in which they continued to employ themselves great part of the night. They

lightened their labour by songs, one of which was composed extempore, for I was myself the subject of it. It was sung by one of the young women, the rest joining in a sort of chorus. The air was sweet and plaintive, and the words, literally translated, were these :—

'"The winds roared, and the rains fell.
The poor white man, faint and weary, came and sat under our tree.
He has no mother to bring him milk ; no wife to grind his corn.
(*Chorus*)
Let us pity the white man ; no mother has he."

'Trifling as this recital may appear to the reader, to a person in my situation the circumstance was affecting in the highest degree. I was oppressed by such unexpected kindness, and sleep fled from my eyes. In the morning I presented my compassionate landlady with two of the four brass buttons which remained on my waistcoat, the only recompense I could make her.'

For three days Park remained at the village, waiting to be granted an audience of the King. But each day brought its tale of sinister rumours. The King and his chief men, it was said, were very suspicious of the motives of his journey, and were confirmed in their suspicions by the evil stories of the Moors. Were there no rivers in the white man's own country, they asked, that he had come so far to see the Niger? But, notwithstanding the malice of his enemies, Park fared better than he had dared to expect. On the third day a messenger came from the King and presented him with a bag containing five thousand cowries—little shells which pass current as money in many parts of Africa—and commanded him to leave the country forthwith. Mansong did him the further courtesy of pro-

viding him with a guide who was to conduct him to Sansanding, a neighbouring town lower down the Niger. On his journey thither Park learned from the guide that Mansong was not unfavourably disposed towards him, but that he feared he might not be able to protect him from the Moors. Therefore he considered it prudent not to receive him at court.

At the village where Park put up for the night he was again confronted with dismal discouragement. It was as much as his life was worth, his host assured him, to go further east; for the further he went the further would he penetrate the sphere of Moorish influence. And as for Timbuktu, the great object of his search, it was entirely in possession of those merciless fanatics, and death would be the certain doom of any Christian who might have the hardihood to enter the city. But Park was not to be deterred by rumours, however alarming; and anew he formed the resolution to push on till further progress was absolutely barred.

The country through which he passed was thickly populated, fruitful, and pleasant to look upon. The scenery reminded him of some of the most beautiful counties of England. He entered Sansanding as privily as possible, and was relieved to find that the Negroes took him for a Moor. But one of the Moors discovered the error, and raising a great outcry, Park was quickly surrounded by a crowd of his old enemies. They jostled and blustered and threatened, vowing that they would force him to repeat the Mahomedan prayers; and had it not been for the interference of his host, they would inevitably have done him violence. They ordered him

to mount a high seat by the door of a mosque, where the multitude might see him; and there he sat till sunset, surrounded by a swaying, excited, gesticulating mob. Even when he retired to his hut for the night they would not leave him in peace, but clambered over the walls of the courtyard to see him eat and perform his devotions. About midnight, when the Moors had at last taken themselves off, his host came to him and begged him to write a 'saphie,' or charm. So with a reed for a pen and charcoal and gum-water for ink Park wrote out the best charm he could think of—a copy of the 'Lord's Prayer.'

In fear of the Moors, Park rose very early next morning and left the city before anyone was stirring. For five days he followed the course of the Niger, riding part of the way, and at other times driving his horse before him. The state of his own health was fast becoming alarming, but the condition of his horse was already hopeless. On the morning of the fifth day the emaciated animal fell while crossing some rough clayey ground, and could not be raised upon its legs again. In mournful mood Park sat for a while beside his panting, way-worn companion; but finding that its condition did not mend, he removed the saddle and bridle, placed a quantity of grass within reach, and sorrowfully left the horse to its fate. 'I could not suppress the sad apprehension,' he said, 'that I should myself, in a short time, lie down and perish, in the same manner, of fatigue and hunger.'

At the next village the chief man peremptorily turned the wanderer from the door, and Park, weary and downhearted, was looking about for some place to rest a while, when a fisherman consented to carry him in his canoe to

the town of Silla. There again he experienced the inhospitality to which custom had rendered him almost callous. Sick, hungry, and exhausted to the uttermost he sat down under a tree until night came on. Hundreds of people crowded round to stare at him, but no one offered him food or shelter. After much entreaty he was allowed to lie for the night in a damp, tumble-down hut. The result of the exposure was an attack of fever, and as he lay tossing wearily and longing for the return of daylight, the hopelessness of his enterprise began to force itself upon him.

'Worn down by sickness, exhausted with hunger and fatigue; half-naked, and without any article of value by which I might procure provisions, clothes, or lodging, I began to reflect seriously on my situation. I was now convinced by painful experience that the obstacles to my further progress were insurmountable. The tropical rains were already set in with all their violence; the rice grounds and swamps were everywhere overflowed, and in a few days more travelling of every kind, unless by water, would be completely obstructed. The cowries which remained of the King of Bambarra's present were not sufficient to enable me to hire a canoe for any great distance; and I had but little hopes of subsisting by charity in a country where the Moors have such influence.

'But above all, I perceived that I was advancing more and more within the power of those merciless fanatics, and from my reception both at Sego and Sansanding, I was apprehensive that, in attempting to reach even Jenne (unless under the protection of some man of consequence

amongst them, which I had no means of obtaining), I should sacrifice my life to no purpose, for my discoveries would perish with me. The prospect either way was gloomy. In returning to the Gambia, a journey on foot of many hundred miles presented itself to my contemplation, through regions and countries unknown. Nevertheless, this seemed to be the only alternative; for I saw inevitable destruction in attempting to proceed to the eastward.

'With this conviction on my mind, I hope my readers will acknowledge that I did right in going no farther. I had made every effort to execute my mission in its fullest extent which prudence could justify. Had there been the most distant prospect of a successful termination, neither the unavoidable hardships of the journey, nor the dangers of a second captivity, should have forced me to desist.'

If ever explorer was justified in relinquishing the task that had been imposed upon him, it was Mungo Park at this stage of his journey. He had already accomplished more than any of his predecessors: he had reached the Niger and solved the first part of the mystery—that it flowed from west to east. And with our present knowledge of the Niger and the regions through which it takes its course, we know now that nothing short of a miracle could have saved Park from destruction if he had persisted in going forward. All his labour would have been lost to the world, and his name added to the long list of devoted travellers who have disappeared into the interior of Africa and never been heard of again. His instructions had been to penetrate to the Niger, to ascertain the course of the

river, and if possible its rise and termination; and to visit the principal towns or cities in its neighbourhood, particularly Timbuktu and those of the Haussa country. But those were general orders, delivered without entire appreciation of the stupendous difficulties involved, and were utterly beyond accomplishment by any one man or any one mission. As a matter of fact, expedition after expedition had to be sent out, many a noble man's life had to be sacrificed, and more than thirty years of untiring endeavour had to pass before those aims were fully achieved. It was not till 1828 that a European entered Timbuktu and got out of it alive; and it was not till the year 1830 that the mouth of the Niger was discovered—after numberless disasters had taught men the secrets of success in African travel.

With that promptness and thoroughness which marked all his actions, Park had decided before dawn to return to the Gambia that very day. But first he set about collecting information concerning the Niger and its course from Moorish and Negro traders who had either sailed down the river for long distances or conversed with merchants from remote regions. By this means he ascertained its general course as far as Haussa; but of its direction beyond that his informants knew nothing; they believed the Niger ran 'to the world's end.'

CHAPTER VIII

THE RETURN JOURNEY

On the morning of the 30th of July 1796, eight months from the day on which he had started from the Gambia, Mungo Park set out on his return thither. Though there was a certain satisfaction in having his face toward home, the prospect before him was sufficient to appal the bravest. A journey of nearly two thousand miles, through an unknown country, had to be performed on foot. He was sick, clothed in rags, destitute. The tropical winter, with its terrible wind and rain, had now set in. The rivers were overflowing their banks and inundating the land, swamps were rising into inland seas, and the paths were deep in mire and in many places totally impassable. But there was no alternative. He had either to fight his way back to the Gambia, or perish miserably among strangers and enemies.

He began his journey by canoe. At the cost of a handful of his scanty store of cowries he voyaged all day up the Niger, and at night, for a like expenditure, was allowed to share a hut with a slave, who compassionately lent him a large cloth to cover him while he slept. It was almost invariably from the poor and needy that the lonely white man received spontaneous kindness.

When he reached the place where he had left his horse, as he had thought, to die, he found that the animal had been tended by the chief man and was somewhat improved in condition. It was still, however, too weak to carry him, and he had to resort to his former plan of driving it before him. For the next three days the rain fell in torrents, so heavily that walking was out of the question. When he resumed his journey the country looked like a vast sea. For miles he waded knee-deep, and in crossing swamps was frequently up to the breast in water.

The difficulties of travel had now become so serious that he determined to procure a guide; but though he offered two hundred cowries, no man could be induced to face the perils of the road. As he neared Sansanding, he discovered that calumny had been at work during his absence. A rumour had gone abroad that he had come into Bambarra as a spy, and he learned that the king had sent men to Jenne to apprehend him. In those circumstances the people were naturally unwilling or afraid to assist him, or to give him food and shelter. He was shunned by everybody, and was even threatened with violence when he grew more urgent in his entreaties for assistance. The further he went the greater the animosity he encountered, until he realised that if he was to escape a second captivity he must lose no time in getting out of Bambarra. Indeed, the king's men were out in search of him, to carry him off to Sego. Making a detour to avoid the capital, he continued his journey westward along the Niger, resolved to ascertain, on his way home, how far the river was navigable in that direction. Whatever danger or difficulty he might be placed in,

Park never forgot the object of his mission, or allowed considerations of personal safety to turn him aside from duty. As the rainy season advanced, provisions became scarcer, until neither money nor entreaties could procure a supply. For three successive days he could get nothing to eat but a little raw corn.

Arriving at nightfall at a village called Song, he was met on every hand with surly looks, and was curtly refused food or shelter. The inhabitants would not even allow him to so much as enter the gates of the village. This was not only an uncomfortable but a very dangerous predicament; for the vicinity was infested with lions, and death would have been the almost inevitable penalty of lying unprotected overnight in the open. But his arguments and prayers were alike unheeded, and in despair the outcast, having collected some grass for his horse, lay down on the wet ground under a tree by the village gate, with no covering but his scanty rags. He had not lain long when the roar of a lion broke upon the stillness of the night. Park sprang to the gate, and with desperate energy attempted to force it open. But he could not, and the people within told him that they dared not open the gate unless they had the chief's permission. Park begged them to let the chief know of his critical position; but no attention was paid to him, and for two hours he waited in terrible anxiety, listening to the roaring of the lion, and expecting every moment to be pounced upon. At one time the animal came so near him as it prowled around, that he heard it rustling among the grass; and making a dash for the tree, he climbed into it and remained there till the lion

had gone off again. At last the chief and some of his men came to the gate, and invited the stranger to enter. 'They were convinced, they said, that I was not a Moor; for no Moor ever waited any time at the gate of a village without cursing the inhabitants.'

Next day Park nearly lost his horse. When crossing a swamp, where the water rose to the saddle girths, the horse slipped into a hole and was all but drowned, before it struggled out again. The state of the horse and its ragged rider when they emerged from the swamp was deplorable. The villagers laughed at them as they passed, and compared them to two dirty elephants. Frequently the traveller found his path obstructed by large streams flowing into the Niger, and those had to be crossed despite the alligators and the swiftness of the current. His usual mode was to secure his precious papers in the crown of his hat, then lead his horse to the brink of the stream, push it headlong into the water, and seizing the bridle in his teeth, swim to the other side, taking his chance of being pulled under by an alligator. By a traveller endowed with less cheerfulness and patience than Park those impediments would have been counted as disagreeable as they were dangerous. But he seemed to find compensations in every distress; and of those adventures he naïvely says:—'The rain and heavy dew kept my clothes continually wet; and the roads being very deep and full of mud, such a washing was sometimes pleasant, and oftentimes necessary.'

One of those tributaries of the Niger was so deep and rapid that Park hesitated before attempting to swim across. After examination, however, he determined to face the

risk. 'With this view I fastened my clothes upon the saddle, and was standing up to the neck in water, pulling my horse by the bridle to make him follow me, when a man came accidentally to the place, and seeing me in the water, called to me with great vehemence to come out. The alligators, he said, would devour both me and my horse if we attempted to swim over. When I got out, the stranger, who had never before seen a European, seemed wonderfully surprised. He twice put his hand to his mouth, exclaiming in a low tone of voice, "God preserve me! who is this?" But when he heard me speak the Bambarra tongue, and found that I was going the same way as himself, he promised to assist me in crossing the river.' The outcome of this timely meeting was the unwonted luxury of a canoe and a supper, which, though meagre, was better than he had enjoyed for many a night. But no one offered him shelter, and while all other men were asleep in their huts, Park had to sit out all night under a tree, exposed to the rain and wind of a tornado.

In the town at which he halted on the following night he had the rare good fortune to procure a full meal and a sound sleep under a roof, in return for writing charms for the superstitious natives. Further on, in an obscure little village hidden away in the recesses of a romantic valley, he was treated with liberal hospitality. But on the morning of the day on which he parted with the innocent Negroes a disaster overtook him which reduced his fortunes to the very lowest ebb. He had left the Niger at Bammaku, where the river takes a more southerly trend, and was pushing eastward towards Sibidulu, over a wild and rocky tract, when he fell in with a band of men

armed with muskets, who said they had been sent to bring him to the King of the Fulahs. As resistance would have been useless, Park turned and went with them. They had not ridden more than a quarter of a mile, when, passing through a dark place in the wood, the fellows suddenly attacked him. One snatched off his hat, another with a knife cut off the only button that remained on his waistcoat; then falling upon him in a body, they stripped him stark naked and examined every article of clothing. Even his boots, though so dilapidated that the sole of one of them was tied to his foot with a broken bridle-rein, were examined with a view to appropriation. Park begged them to return at least his pocket-compass, without which he could not hope to find his way through the wilderness; but one of the robbers, cocking his musket, vowed he would kill him instantly if he laid a finger on it. The thieves stood for a little considering whether or not they would return their victim some of his rags. Then flinging him a shirt, his trousers and his hat, they went off into the wood, taking his horse with them.

'After they were gone,' said Park, 'I sat for some time looking around me with amazement and terror. Whichever way I turned, nothing appeared but danger and difficulty. I saw myself in the midst of a vast wilderness, in the depth of the rainy season; naked and alone; surrounded by savage animals and men still more savage. I was five hundred miles from the nearest European settlement. All these circumstances crowded at once on my recollection, and I confess that my spirits began to fail me. I considered my fate as certain, and that I had no alternative but to lie down and perish. The influence of

religion, however, aided and supported me. I reflected that no human prudence or foresight could possibly have averted my present sufferings. I was indeed a stranger in a strange land, yet I was still under the protecting eye of that Providence who has condescended to call himself the stranger's friend.

'At this moment, painful as my reflections were, the extraordinary beauty of a small moss in fructification irresistibly caught my eye. I mention this to shew from what trifling circumstances the mind will sometimes derive consolation; for though the whole plant was not larger than the top of one of my fingers, I could not contemplate the delicate conformation of its roots, leaves, and capsula without admiration. Can that Being (thought I), who planted, watered, and brought to perfection in this obscure part of the world a thing which appears of so small importance, look with unconcern upon the situation and sufferings of creatures formed after his own image? Surely not! Reflections like these would not allow me to despair. I started up, and disregarding both hunger and fatigue, travelled forwards, assured that relief was at hand.'

Fired with this spirit he struggled on to Sibidulu, the frontier town of the kingdom of Manding, and there he had an experience of kindness and prompt justice surpassing anything he had ever met with in Africa.

When he was admitted to the presence of the chief man, Park told the story of the robbery. The chief heard him out in silence, then, with an indignant wave of his hand, he exclaimed, 'Sit down; you shall have everything restored to you; I have sworn it.' Then,

turning to an attendant, 'Give the white man a draught of water, and with the first light of the morning go over the hills and inform the Chief of Bammaku that a poor white man, the King of Bambarra's stranger, has been robbed by the King of Fulahdu's people.' For two days Park waited for the return of his property, but, ever anxious to push forward, he then went on his way, hoping to have his horse and clothes sent after him. At a place called Wonda he was sitting naked in the shade waiting till his rag of a shirt, which he had washed, should dry, when the fever from which he had suffered at intervals for many days suddenly returned in a severe paroxysm. For nine days he remained at Wonda prostrate with fever. Food was scarce in the land, even to the point of famine, and Park was deeply oppressed by the thought of being dependent for subsistence upon people who were themselves reduced to such dreadful straits that they had actually to sell their own children to obtain the price of a little corn. So anxious was he to conceal his sickly condition from his host that he used to spend whole days lying hidden from sight in the wet cornfields, a very unselfish and thoughtful action, but one that greatly aggravated the fever that was rapidly sapping his strength.

At last the stolen horse and clothes were restored to him, but he was very much concerned to find that the precious compass had been smashed and rendered useless. The horse was reduced to a mere skeleton, and so weak as to be quite unfit for travel. Park therefore presented him to his host as a parting gift, and on the morning of September 8 resumed his journey on foot westward

to the Gambia, carrying in his hand a spear and over his shoulder a leather bag containing his scanty wardrobe, two presents from his poor but kindly landlord.

He was a strange figure, this tattered, long-haired man, with the spear and wallet, and his boots cut down into sandals. Never was traveller in a more melancholy plight. Rain fell incessantly in torrents that only the tropics know. The roads lay deep under mud and water, and the lonely wanderer dragged his slow steps along, toiling through the sodden land from sunrise to sunset, and, when night came, thankful for even a handful of corn to eat and a corner of some damp, draughty hut to lie down in.

Day after day Park moved painfully westward, with the growing conviction that the end of the struggle was not far distant. Escape from death seemed impossible. Even if he were able to bear up for a time against sickness, hunger and fatigue, and the awful depression that the African fever brings in its train, the vast Jallonka wilderness still lay ahead, as if gaping to swallow him up. It took caravans five days of rapid travelling to cross this waste; five days, during which neither house nor human being, nor any trace of habitation, could be seen. Even to the hardy natives, who knew every mile of the way, and went well prepared for the hardships of the march, this wilderness was a place of terror, to be rushed over at headlong speed. And how could he, scarce able to do more than crawl, without a day's rations, ignorant of the route, and without a compass to direct his steps, hope to pass the barrier that lay between him and the Gambia? It was impossible, and Park had almost resigned himself

to the thought that the depths of the Jallonka wilderness would see the end of his toil and suffering.

But just when hope was at its last flicker came the most notable of the many deliverances that were vouchsafed to Park at critical junctures of his career. It might be called the 'crowning mercy' of his first African expedition. It happened in this wise.

When Park arrived at the little town of Kamalia, he was conducted to the house of one Karfa Taura, a negro slave merchant, whom he found sitting in the company of several other traders. So yellow was the traveller's skin from the effects of fever, so wretched and poverty-stricken his appearance, that the traders would not believe he was a white man, but suspected he was an Arab in disguise. Asked if he understood Arabic, Park answered in the affirmative. Then Karfa caused a curious little book to be brought, and Park's eyes glistened with delight and emotion as they rested on the familiar English type of *The Book of Common Prayer*. It was like the sight of a familiar friendly face in a strange land. He read the book, and Karfa, satisfied that his guest was a white man, promised to assist him. He said it was impossible for Park to proceed at that time, for the Jallonka wilderness could not be traversed until the rainy season was over. As soon as the rivers were fordable, he intended to go to the Gambia with a slave caravan, and he advised Park to remain at Kamalia till then. When Park replied that he was totally without means of supporting himself, Karfa looked at him thoughtfully for a space. He had never before seen a white man, and was not sure if he could subsist on the food that the country supplied. However,

he was easily satisfied on that point, and a bargain was concluded that for the price of one prime slave Park should be fed and lodged till the end of the rainy season, and then conducted in safety to the Gambia. So the way-worn and fever-wasted traveller settled down to recruit and wait for the return of the dry season.

For the time being Park's difficulties were at an end, but the effects of the privations through which he had passed were not so easily shaken off. For five weeks he was tormented with fever, and when at last the rains began to subside, and with them the rigours of his illness, he was so weak that he could scarcely stand erect. Another cause of grievous annoyance was the malice of some of the traders. They invented and circulated all manner of evil stories concerning him, and the arrival of a merchant from Sego with a fresh budget of tales about the mysterious stranger increased the suspicion and animosity with which he was regarded. But through it all Karfa Taura faithfully stood his friend, and from first to last his kindness and attention did not abate one jot.

During this time of waiting Park was by no means idle. He was diligent in collecting information about the country, its people, productions, climate, conditions, and prospects, and the results of those researches he subsequently set forth in a singularly clear and interesting fashion.

CHAPTER IX

HOME WITH A SLAVE CARAVAN

When the time drew near for the caravan to leave for the coast, slaves were brought in from various parts of the country round about and quartered at Kamalia. Those poor wretches, who knew nothing more than that they were to be dragged to the Gambia, sold to the white man, and taken away across the sea, looked upon Park with horror. They had a rooted conviction that the whites either ate their slaves or sold them to others to be eaten, and so great was their terror at the prospect of the journey to the coast that they had to be ironed and closely guarded to prevent escape. During the day they were fettered two by two, and every four slaves were tied together by means of a strong leathern thong passed round their necks. At night, for additional security, chains were put upon their wrists, and sometimes round their necks. The feet of the more refractory were made fast to a heavy billet of wood.

Park went freely among those unhappy beings, and made friends with those who would be friendly. He tried to cheer them by saying that their fate would not be the terrible one they feared; that on the other side of the ocean they would be employed in cultivating the soil,

and would not be hardly dealt with. But they would not believe him. 'Have you really got such ground as this to set your feet upon?' asked one simple fellow earnestly, laying his hand on the earth as he spoke.

During this period of waiting at Kamalia the slaves were not harshly treated. It was to the trader's profit to have his human merchandise in good condition for the toilsome march to the coast. Therefore they were encouraged to gaiety. Every morning they were led out in their chains to the shade of the trees, and prompted to sing and play; but, while some of the captives could assume an appearance of light-heartedness, most of them sat dumb and sullen, gazing at the ground all day.

Park had been buoyed up with the hope that the first days of the year would see him well advanced in the journey to the coast. Week after week, however, passed away, and still the expedition was delayed on some trifling pretext or other. The African gives no heed to the passage of time; he meanders through life as leisurely as if the span of existence were still meted out on the liberal scale of patriarchal times. To Park delay was not only vexatious, it was dangerous. He had new and bitter enemies in a company of Moorish merchants who were stationed for the time at Kamalia. They never ceased to conspire against him, and to endeavour to turn Karfa's friendship to hostility. If they had succeeded, Park's life would not have been worth a day's purchase, for Karfa was the only man who stood between the white man and his enemies.

At last the day of departure was fixed for April 19th, and when the day came round there was no further

postponement. The slaves were gathered together, their irons were knocked off, and burdens apportioned to each. The caravan consisted of seventy-three persons, of whom thirty-five were slaves. The slaves were fastened together by a rope passed round the neck, four of them to a rope, and a man with a spear walked between each four. The order of march having been formed, some superstitious rites were performed, and off the caravan started at a rapid pace. As some of the slaves had been in irons for years, and were unaccustomed to free or rapid movement, they had not gone far when the sudden exertion induced painful contraction of the muscles of the legs. But this was only the beginning of their miseries.

When the borders of the dreaded Jallonka wilderness were reached, preparations were made for a series of forced marches. Then the order was given to press forward at the greatest possible speed. Everyone had to look to himself; there was no mercy shown to either sex or age or condition. If a slave, faint with hunger and fatigue, lagged behind, or dropped to the ground under the weight of his burden, the whip was plied till agony compelled him to make another effort. Early in the day two slaves, a woman and a girl, were so much exhausted that even the lash could not stimulate them to further exertion. They were dragged along with the caravan for some hours, till they fell deadly sick, and then it was discovered that they had eaten clay, probably with the deliberate intention of putting an end to their sufferings by destroying themselves. It was useless to attempt to go on with them, and their infuriated master had to

confess himself baffled, and returned home, to wait for another opportunity to convey his living merchandise to the coast.

Next day the wilderness was entered. The members of the caravan were ordered to keep close together, and the rate of march was still further accelerated. The heat was intense, and Park suffered much from the inflamed and blistered condition of his neck and arms. At times he was alarmed lest he should not be able to keep up with the caravan, but his apprehensions were lessened when he observed that his fellow-travellers were as much exhausted as himself. One woman in particular, a slave named Neali, aroused his commiseration. In the morning she had been sulky and had refused the pittance of meal and water served out as sustenance for the entire day. The morning had not far advanced when she began to complain of dreadful pains in her legs. Before noon a remarkable accident happened. As the travellers were resting by a rivulet, a hive of bees was discovered in a hollow tree. Some of the people were about to plunder it when an immense swarm of bees flew out, and attacking the caravan, scattered it in all directions. When the stampede was over and the fugitives returned, and had picked out the stings from their bodies, Neali was missed. After a search she was found lying by the stream, stung all over the body, and writhing in agony. The stings were extracted, her body was washed and rubbed with bruised leaves, and she was commanded to rise and continue the journey. But this the wretched woman obstinately refused to do. Misery had made her reckless of consequences. Coaxing and threats being alike unavail-

ing, the whip was again brought out, and after enduring a few strokes in dogged silence, she jumped up and struggled on for four or five hours. Then she made a sudden bolt for the woods, but was so weak that she stumbled and fell. As she lay among the grass, unable to move, she was once more savagely flogged. But the slave-drivers expended their fury in vain; their utmost brutality could not goad exhausted nature to another effort, and she was placed on a litter and carried upon the heads of two slaves. Night at last brought an end to a day of horror.

The long march over a difficult country, and under a burning sun, without anything to eat for twenty-four hours but a handful of meal, had reduced many of the slaves to the last extremity of exhaustion. Some of them, too weary and miserable to care what came over them, snapped their fingers, 'which, among the negroes, is a sure sign of desperation.' Immediately those were all put in irons, and some of the most dangerous-looking were set apart and had their hands tied. The night's rest, however, slackened their sufferings, and in the morning they were ready to obey their masters.

But the dawn brought no relief for poor Neali. Stiff and sore from the bruises and exertion of the previous day, she could not so much as stand. She was accordingly tied to the back of an ass, her hands secured under the animal's neck and her feet under its belly; and in this painful position she lay as inert as a corpse. No sooner had the caravan started than the ass began to plunge and kick, and as Neali could make no effort to save herself, she was quickly thrown and injured severely. Time after time she was flung upon the ass's back; but it

was useless ; the animal could not be induced to go quietly. Then the slavers lost patience. 'Cut her throat! cut her throat!' rose the cry. Sick at the thought of the impending butchery Park hurried on with the van-guard. In a short time he was overtaken by one of Karfa's slaves carrying Neali's garments on the end of his bow. From him he learned that Neali had not been murdered, but had been left to a more terrible fate—to be torn to pieces by wild animals or to die a lingering death from hunger and thirst under the fierce heat of an African sun.

The awful fate of Neali cast a deep gloom over the minds of the travellers, and for the rest of the day every one strained his strength to the utmost, fearful lest he should be the next to share her doom. Park, distressed by the intense heat and the rapidity of the march, shared the general fear. In his anxiety to keep up with the caravan he threw away his spear and everything that might impede his progress. When sunset came they halted exhausted near a thicket where there was a convenient camping ground. But water could not be found, and they had to drag themselves other four miles before they discovered a stream. Next morning there were loud complaints of pains in the legs and blistered and inflamed feet. But there could be no resting. On went the caravan, toiling in the blazing sun over steep and rocky ground, which cruelly lacerated the feet. The marks of many horsemen in the sand made them fear an attack from robbers, and the slaves were spurred onward with relentless severity, through high grass and bushes, up steep hill sides, and down rocky gorges, till at nightfall they sank prostrate by the watering-place.

For five days those forced marches were continued. On the afternoon of the fifth day the travellers sighted the first human habitation that they had seen since entering the wilderness, and once more enjoyed the luxury of sleeping with a roof over their heads. But their return to inhabited regions was attended with risks of another kind. As they passed through the villages on their way they learned that two hundred Jallonkas were lying in wait, bent on plundering the caravan. To escape the marauders the travellers changed their course and marched swiftly by night, without stopping for food or rest. The rumours of impending attack from the Jallonkas thickening as they advanced, a halt was called, and men were hired to protect them. Then the caravan set off again, pushing on with the utmost speed to get clear of the dangerous country. From early morning till sunset they struggled on without tasting one morsel of food. Before many hours had passed it became apparent that they could go no further. Accordingly at the village where they camped for the night, a stay of three days was made to recruit and to prepare the toil-worn wretches for the final stage of their journey to the sea.

When on the march again they were joined by another gang of slaves likewise bound for the coast, and the two parties continued the journey together. The heat was still intense, and the path through the woods difficult and exhausting. But the order was that on no account should the pace be slackened.

About noon, one of the slaves, being faint with fatigue, dropped the load from his head. For this he was soundly flogged, and the burden was again

placed upon his head. For another hour he struggled on, panting with the exertion and quivering in every limb. But not even the fear of the lash could stimulate where exhaustion was so complete. Again he let slip the burden from his trembling hands, and again the woods echoed to the curses of the slaver and the crack of the whip. Once more the poor fellow staggered to his feet, and almost frantic with pain and fear, did his best to keep up with the caravan. Soon after, when a halt was made at a pool of water, the slave was in such desperate straits that he dropped upon the ground and lay as if dead. The rope was removed from his neck, and it being now obvious that no amount of torture could rouse him, he was left behind with one of the traders who undertook to bring him on in the cool of the evening. But at night when the trader rejoined his companions, he came alone. The unfortunate slave had either been released from his misery by a knife thrust or left to perish by the wayside as the woman Neali had been.

A few days later Park witnessed another equally pitiful incident of the infamous trade. 'At Jallacotta,' said Park, 'one of the slaves, who had travelled with great difficulty for the last three days, was found unable to proceed any further. His master proposed, therefore, to exchange him for a young girl belonging to one of the townspeople. The poor girl was ignorant of her fate until the bundles were all tied up in the morning and the coffle ready to depart. When coming with some other young women to see the coffle set out, her master took her by the hand and delivered her to the stranger. Never was a face of serenity more suddenly changed into one of the

deepest distress; the terror she manifested on having the load put upon her head, and the rope fastened round her neck, and the sorrow with which she bade adieu to her companions were truly affecting.'

To his great joy, Park now found himself once more upon the banks of the Gambia, and passing through towns and villages he had visited while on his eastward journey eighteen months before. At Jindeh, where Park had said good-bye to Dr Laidley, the slaves were left behind till a favourable opportunity for selling them should arrive, and Park, and his faithful host and friend Karfa, set out for Pisania. Deliverance from toil and danger was now at hand; another day would see him safe among his own countrymen. But yet, even with this delightful certainty before him, Park was oppressed with thoughts of his unhappy companions.

'I could not part for the last time with my unfortunate fellow-travellers, doomed, as I knew most of them to be, to a life of captivity and slavery in a foreign land, without great emotion. During a wearisome peregrination of more than five hundred British miles, exposed to the burning rays of a tropical sun, these poor slaves, amidst their own infinitely greater sufferings, would commiserate mine, and frequently, of their own accord, bring water to quench my thirst, and at night collect branches and leaves to prepare me a bed in the wilderness. We parted with reciprocal expressions of regret and benediction. My good wishes and prayers were all I could bestow upon them, and it afforded me some consolation to be told that they were sensible I had no more to give.'

On the 10th of June Park reached Pisania, the head-

quarters of the British settlement. He was hailed as one risen from the dead. All hope of his return had long been relinquished, it having been reported that he had been murdered by the Moors in Ludamar in an early stage of his travels. Neither of his attendants, Johnson and Demba, had returned, nor ever been heard of. With an eagerness and satisfaction that none could feel but he who had long been exiled from civilisation, Park arrayed himself in European garb, and made the first comfortable toilet he had enjoyed for more than a year and a half. His beard, which had grown to a prodigious length, was ruthlessly shorn, much to the regret of Karfa, who vowed that the operation had transformed Park from a man into a boy. Karfa was made happy with the price of two prime slaves, double the amount of guerdon promised by Park. But the signs of the white man's greatness, which he saw on every hand, filled the soul of the Negro with a pensive melancholy. The trading schooner that lay anchored in the river was to him an inexhaustible wonder. Many an hour he stood looking at it in deep meditation; then he would sigh gently, and say, 'Black men are nothing.' And it puzzled him more and more to understand why Park, who belonged to such a mighty and wonder-working people, should care to explore a country so poor and backward as Africa.

Mungo Park had now reached the Gambia safely, but the delays and dangers of his enterprise were by no means ended. In all his adventures misfortune seemed to hang on to his heels to the very last step.

For many months the river had not been visited by a European vessel, and as the rainy season was now setting

in once more, there was little probability of a ship arriving till near the end of the year. Accordingly, Park settled down, with what patience he might muster, to wait the day of his final deliverance. By a fortunate chance, however, before two or three days had passed, an American slave-ship came up the river, and though a passage by the vessel entailed a double voyage across the Atlantic—first to America, and then back to England—Park was too eager to return home to let the opportunity slip. He embarked on June 17th.

On the way down the river, where the sun sucked malaria from the mud, and the fever mists hung like a pall on the fringes of the forest, crew and slaves were stricken with sickness. Before the river mouth was reached, the surgeon, four of the seamen, and three of the slaves had died, and six or eight more slaves succumbed before the deadly coast had been left behind. With more than a hundred slaves huddled under hatches, the ship set sail for North Carolina. The sickness continued, and eleven more slaves were dragged lifeless from the noisome hold, and thrown into the sea. Then the vessel sprang a leak. The crew worked at the pumps till they could hold out no longer, and still the water gained on them. In this extremity those of the Negroes whom fever, sea-sickness, and the horrors of the fœtid den in which they were confined had not entirely prostrated, were taken out of their irons and put to the pumps, at which they were forced to labour till they could scarce raise their arms for weakness. When sickness and weariness and misery had reduced everybody almost to despair, the sailors compelled the captain to run for the West

Indies as the only chance of saving their lives. Even at the very entrance to the harbour of St John's their ill-luck did not desert them. They narrowly escaped being cast away on the rocks, and got into port with extreme difficulty.

From St John's Park took passage in a British mail boat, and, after a tempestuous voyage, arrived at Falmouth on December 22, 1797. He had been absent from England two years and seven months.

CHAPTER X

LIFE AS A COUNTRY DOCTOR

NOTHING could have been more characteristic of Mungo Park than the manner of his return to London. When he landed at Falmouth he revealed himself to no one. He sent no messenger before him to startle men with the tidings that the traveller who had long since been given up as dead was alive and on his way to the Metropolis, and to prepare an ovation for the first white man who had ever trod the banks of the Niger.

Travelling with all haste, he arrived in London before daybreak on Christmas morning. As he did not care to disturb the household of Mr Dickson, his brother-in-law, at so early an hour, he passed the time by walking about the streets in the neighbourhood of the house. By and bye, seeing one of the gates of the British Museum Gardens open, he went in and strolled about the grounds. It chanced that morning that Mr Dickson, who had charge of the gardens, went there earlier than was his habit to look to some small matter of business. As he entered he saw, in the grey light of the dawn, the figure of a man, and drawing nearer, was thunderstruck to recognise the lineaments of his brother-in-law. For a moment he hesitated between fear and joy: he doubted whether

what he looked upon was a spirit or a living man. But a second glance set his doubts at rest, and he rushed to the embrace of his long-lost friend.

The return of Park spread a sensation throughout the country. His long absence, his sudden reappearance after he had been given up as lost, and rumours of the strangeness of his adventures, combined to raise the interest of the public to an intense pitch. To gratify this curiosity an abstract of the travels was prepared by Mr Bryan Edwards, the secretary of the African Association, and printed; and then Park set himself to write a complete narrative of his journey. An offer by the Government to employ Park to make a survey of New South Wales was made, and rejected; subsequently it was again made, and again rejected. After having settled his business affairs in London, he escaped from the Metropolis and its hero-worshippers, and went home to Foulshiels to see his mother and to write his book in the peaceful solitudes of his native valley. The material he composed from was the precious notes, written on many separate pieces of paper, under so many strange and difficult circumstances, and preserved with so much care during his wanderings. The details he filled in from memory. His habit was to write in the early part of the day, and in the evening to take a solitary stroll on the banks of the Yarrow, when he mentally shaped the course of his work and mused on the mystery of the Niger. At times, in a fit of restlessness, he would cast his papers aside, and wandering far from home, bury himself in the wild recesses of the Borderland. We can discover also that there were frequent traversings of the

road to Selkirk, where his old master, Dr Anderson, still resided; and the wooing of his first love, and last, made triumphant progress.

In the untried and uncongenial labour of bookmaking Park was assisted by Mr Bryan Edwards, to whom, doubtless, the *Travels* owe something of their literary grace. Park was a man of action; he was not skilled with the pen; and he frankly admitted that, 'not being in the habit of literary composition, he was obliged to employ some one to put his manuscript into a form fit for the public eye; but that every sheet of the publication had undergone his strict revision, and that not only every fact but every sentiment was his own.' Of this collaboration much has been made by a few of those near-sighted people who are addicted to prying into the nooks and crannies of a great man's character, but are incapable of forming an estimate of the worth of the whole man, or of arriving at a clear conception of his real personality. Those critics have exhausted themselves, without injury to Park; and the severe things they said have long been forgotten. In all his career we have not found one instance in which Park placed personal aggrandisement before the public benefit or the strict discharge of his duty. In this case he had carried through the mission entrusted to him with unflinching devotion; and having valuable information to give to the world, he made sure that it was presented in a form that did justice to the subject.

Towards the close of the year Park returned to London, taking with him the manuscript upon which he had spent the labour of the summer and autumn months. But there was still much revising to be done, and the

spring of 1799 was well advanced before the book was published. At once it leapt into popular favour. The subject had the fascination of the mysterious; for Africa in those days was in truth the 'Dark Continent,' and Park was one of the first to raise the veil that enshrouded it. The story of his adventures was one of the most romantic in the history of travel; it was told with candour and modesty, entirely without embellishment or pretension; and it was evident to every reader, that however marvellous might be the tale, it was absolutely free from the taint of exaggeration.

The proceeds of the sale of the book and the liberal remuneration given by the African Association amounted to a considerable but not a large sum. It was large enough, however, to put a man of Park's simple tastes in easy circumstances for a time, and to justify the next step that he took. He hastened home to Scotland and was united in marriage with the lady who had held his fancy in youth and manhood. 'Of the personality of this lady,' said Joseph Thomson, the African traveller, 'we know little beyond the simple facts that she was tall and handsome, amiable in disposition, with no special mental endowments, and if anything, somewhat frivolous and pleasure-loving—characteristics very unlike what we should have expected in the wife of such a man as Park.' But great men, like ordinary men, marry, not for 'mental endowments,' but for love's sake. 'The proof o' the puddin' is the preein' o't,' and there is no criterion of the success or failure of marriage but the happiness or misery that issues therefrom. Viewed from this standpoint, Park's marriage was all that we could have desired for

him. It began in love, and in love continued to the end. Mrs Park may have been a very commonplace woman, but she truly loved her husband; she had the sense to admire him and believe in him, which all great men's wives do not have; and, as events proved, she was ready to sacrifice everything for his sake when the call of duty came.

Of the depth of Park's own feelings we have ample evidence. When in London on business two years after his marriage—time enough for disillusionment—he writes to his 'lovely Ailie,' his 'sweet wife,' and vows that she is everything he could desire; and wherever they go, she may be sure of one thing, that he will always love her. 'My lovely Ailie, you are constantly in my thoughts. I am tired of this place, but cannot lose the present opportunity of doing something for our advantage. When that is accomplished I shall not lose one moment. My darling, when we meet I shall be the happiest man on earth. Write soon, for I count the days till I hear from you, my lovely Ailie.' And all through their married life to the end his letters breathe the same deep affection. 'Kiss all my dear children for me, and let them know that their father loves them,' he wrote from the banks of the Gambia several years later; and in every message that he sent to his wife when beset by perils and difficulties, he revealed that gentle considerateness which means more than a multitude of sentimental words.

It is pleasant, therefore, to reflect that Mungo Park was not one of our unhappily mated geniuses, and that the toils and perplexities of the latter part of his life were not intensified by domestic infelicity.

After Park married he continued to reside at Foulshiels, where the farm was still carried on by his mother and one of his brothers. We have no means of ascertaining precisely what was his plan of life for the future. It has been suggested, and justly, that he had no conscious intention of returning to Africa, but hoped that his past services and the influence of powerful friends would procure him some congenial employment. But he waited in vain. Time passed on, until the responsibilities of fatherhood pressed him towards a decision. At one time there seemed to be a probability of his going out to New South Wales to fill a Government post; but the negotiations came to nothing. Then he had some thoughts of taking to farming; and finally he reluctantly resolved to resume the practice of his profession, for which he had never had any strong liking.

This was not a very happy period of Park's life; nor, indeed, did he find much satisfaction in any part of the six years that elapsed before he made his second expedition to the Niger. For a long time after his return home from Africa, his health caused him uneasiness. The hardships that would inevitably have killed any man of ordinary physique, had left their mark upon his constitution. Dyspepsia, and its attendant imp, despondency, held him fast, making day miserable with gloomy forebodings, and night hideous with dreams of the horrors of captivity among the Moors. His unsettled worldly condition, the lack of employment, and indifferent health, combined to make him restless and unsatisfied.

But there was something that lay deeper than all those. The truth is, the spell of Africa was upon him—that name-

less charm of which no man can thoroughly purge his blood once he has been inoculated. Almost before he was aware of the sensation, Park was longing to be back in the wilderness. Less than a year after his marriage, upon the capture of Goree from the French, we find him writing to Sir Joseph Banks expatiating on the increased facilities thereby afforded for communicating with the interior of Africa.

'If such are the views of Government,' he writes, 'I hope that my exertions in some station or other may be of use to my country. I have not as yet found any situation in which I could practise to advantage as a surgeon; and unless some of my friends interest themselves in my behalf, I must wait patiently until the cloud which hangs over my future prospects is dispelled.'

But patient waiting and the influence of friends alike availed him nothing. The time had not yet come, and Park had to bend to the inevitable. All hope of indulging his passion for travel had to be abandoned, and Park forced himself into the narrow sphere of a country doctor. He selected the little town of Peebles, and there established himself in October 1801. He was then thirty years of age.

Even in the present day, with the locomotive thundering past its doors, with its profusion of summer villas, and its streams of tourists, Peebles has not had the reproach of dulness lifted from its name. 'As silent as the grave —or Peebles' is a saying out of which the truth has not yet altogether departed; and if true of these days, how intensely applicable to the Peebles of a hundred years ago!

'In the earlier years of the century,' says William Chambers in his *History of Peeblesshire*, 'domestic accommodation was still on a very imperfect scale. The apartments were small and few in number; many houses being of a good kind, but consisting only of a kitchen, parlour, and bed-closet. In perhaps not more than two dozen dwellings were there any carpets; horn spoons were giving way to pewter; and silver forks were of course unheard of. There was no reading-room, and the two or three newspapers which arrived daily or semi-weekly were handed about in clubs. The transit of goods from Edinburgh was conducted by a few carriers' carts, which were sometimes obstructed for days by heavy snowstorms in winter. On one occasion of this kind there was a dearth of salt in the town for a fortnight.' Some idea of the poverty of Peebles may be formed from the fact that about the beginning of the century there were only fifteen clocks and nineteen silver and two gold watches in all the town.

The house in which Mungo Park lived still stands. It is situated in the Northgate, at the head of the Briggate, and is distinguished from other buildings by two substantial pillars at the door. In Park's time the dwelling must have been one of the best in the town. When his practice increased—and it did so rapidly—he opened a surgery in the High Street, on a spot now occupied by a temperance hotel. A photograph of the house, taken immediately before demolition, shows the surgery to have been a mean little building, rudely put together; a mere box. 'In this miserable den,' says Chambers, 'did Park experience some of the difficulties incidental to the life of

a country surgeon, and pine for that kind of employment as a traveller which he felt to be his destiny. Who, in looking at the place now, can wonder at his resolution to prosecute his career in a more fitting field of enterprise?'

There was one bright aspect in Mungo Park's life in Peebles—his friendship with Sir Walter Scott, who then resided at Ashesteil, and the venerable Dr Adam Ferguson, at Hallyards. Cold and restrained in manner to the casual stranger, and absolutely impervious to the inquisitiveness of the lion-hunter, Park was ever frank and communicative with men of kindred mind. The anecdotes of Park that Scott has sent down to us are luminous with character.

'On one occasion,' he says, 'the traveller communicated some very remarkable adventures which had befallen him in Africa, but which he had not recorded in his book. On Scott asking the cause of this silence Park answered, "That in all cases where he had information to communicate which he thought of importance to the public, he had stated the facts boldly, leaving it to his readers to give such credit to his statements as they might appear justly to deserve; but that he would not shock their faith, or render his travels more marvellous, by introducing circumstances, which, however true, were of little or no moment, as they related solely to his own personal adventures and escapes."'

It is to Scott also that we are indebted for the record of an incident which plainly shows in what direction Park's thoughts and desires had now begun to flow. Scott came upon him one day standing by the banks of the Yarrow, throwing stones into the stream, and watching the bubbles

as they rose to the surface. 'This,' said Scott, 'appears but an idle amusement for one who has seen so much stirring adventure.' 'Not so idle, perhaps, as you suppose,' answered Park. 'This was the manner in which I used to ascertain the depth of a river in Africa before I ventured to cross it—judging whether the attempt would be safe by the time the bubbles of air took to ascend.'

Scott instantly concluded that Park was meditating a second expedition to Africa. And he was right.

In justice to Park, and in answer to the very hard things that have been said of his dissatisfaction with his lot, it must be noted that even if he had had the inclination, he never had the chance of settling down to the practice of his profession. On the very month he established himself in Peebles, his intentions were disturbed by a letter from Sir Joseph Banks, stating that, peace with France having been concluded, the African Association would certainly revive their project of sending a mission to the Niger, and that Park would be recommended as the proper person to command the expedition. The immediate effect of this announcement was to intensify Park's longing to return once more to Africa, and to increase the irksomeness of his daily duties. In one of his confidential talks with Sir Walter Scott, he told him that 'whenever he awoke suddenly in the night, owing to a nervous disorder with which he was troubled, he fancied himself still a prisoner in the tent of Ali; but when the poet expressed some surprise that he should design again to revisit those scenes, he answered that he would rather brave Africa and all its horrors, than wear out his life in long and toilsome rides

over the hills of Scotland, for which the remuneration was hardly enough to keep soul and body together.'

Two years wore on in this state of 'divine discontent.' He worked hard, his practice grew, and he performed the hard duties of a country doctor with unwearying fidelity. But still he dreamed of Africa and what might yet be done there. Suddenly, in the autumn of 1803, came a message from the Colonial Secretary, desiring his presence in London. Park was ready. He left all and hurried to the Metropolis. The Secretary told him of the Government's intention to send an expedition to the Niger, and offered him the command. Park, though burning with eagerness to be off to Africa, prudently asked time for deliberation and consultation with friends. He returned to Scotland for this purpose. But it was little more than a formality. His mind was already made up. This was the opportunity for which he had been waiting for years, and there was no thought of drawing back, now that the dream had become a reality.

In a few days he accepted the offer of the Colonial Secretary, and before the end of the year he was back again in London, expecting to set sail in a short time for the coast of Africa. But delay followed delay, and finally in February, when everything was ready for the departure from Portsmouth, and some of the troops were actually on board the ship, a governmental change occurred, the expedition was countermanded, and the question whether it would be sent or not was left for the decision of the new Secretary.

Park returned to Scotland in deep disappointment.

He had been kept so long in suspense, and so often had had his hopes beaten down, that he began to fear he would never attain his desire. However, acting on a recommendation by the Colonial Office, that he should meantime practise astronomical observation, and extend his knowledge of eastern languages, he took with him to Peebles a Moor named Sidi Ambak Bubi, whom he had engaged as a teacher of Arabic. The advent of the Moor in the quiet town of Peebles, where a man of colour was a prodigious novelty, threw the community into an excitement that had scarcely subsided, when, at the end of about three months, Park and his family quitted Peebles for Foulshiels.

For other three months he remained at his mother's farm at Foulshiels, with his wife and four little ones, anxiously waiting for the summons to London, yet, for their sakes, dreading the day of its coming. So much did he shrink from the pain of leave-taking, that he had thoughts of going to Edinburgh, as if on business for a day or two, and sending his farewell to his wife and family from there. 'Ailie, say the word, and I'll stay,' he exclaimed in the agony of parting. Even on the threshold of achievement, he was willing to sacrifice the dearest ambition of his life for love of her.

One of the last friends to whom Park paid a farewell visit was Sir Walter Scott. He rode over to Ashesteil, and spent the night there. Next morning Scott mounted his horse, and accompanied his friend part of the way to Foulshiels. It was a day to inspire gloomy forebodings. The air was still, and a mist enshrouded hill and dale. As the two horsemen rode side by side over the wild

region that lies between Tweed and Yarrow, Scott spoke of the dangers and uncertainties of the journey to Africa, and endeavoured to persuade his companion from again tempting fate. When they had surmounted the last hill, and from Williamhope Ridge saw the heavy mist rolling slowly down the valley of the Yarrow, Scott, in his romantic, imaginative way, looked upon the scene as 'a striking emblem of the troubled and uncertain prospect which his undertaking afforded.'

But Park was not to be moved. They cantered down the slope to the place of parting. By the ditch which separates the moor from the road they halted and bade each other farewell. Then Park turned his horse to the highway. In crossing the ditch the animal stumbled and nearly fell. 'I am afraid, Mungo,' said Sir Walter, 'that is a bad omen.' 'Freits * follow those who look to them,' answered Park, and putting spurs to his horse he plunged into the mist. Scott never saw him again.

Park arrived in London at the end of September, and promptly submitted to the Colonial Secretary a written statement of his plans. Therein he gave expression to a very interesting theory he had formed regarding the termination of the Niger—namely, that the Niger and the Congo were one and the same river. To this conviction he had been led by his own experience, and the reasonings of an African trader named George Maxwell, a Scotsman—the Niger seems to have been the particular preserve of Scotsmen—who had intimate knowledge of the Congo region of West Africa. By this theory the course of the river was stretched out to an almost incon-

* Omens.

ceivable length; but, as we have said, in those days Africa was a land of wonders, and men naturally expected remarkable phenomena. This was Park's belief; he knew the tremendous difficulties of the overland journey to the Niger; he could imagine the perils to be encountered in a canoe voyage of thousands of miles upon an unknown river through an unknown country; he found few people who thought that success was possible. Yet he never flinched. He had resolved to clear up the mystery of the Niger or die in the attempt.

Park had gone to London with the expectation that no time would be lost in sending off the expedition. In this he was bitterly disappointed. There were weeks of waiting, of departmental parleying and procrastination. Officials trifled with his orders, or calmly set them aside till a more convenient season. Friends worried him with well-intentioned warnings of disaster. In a fever of anxiety, Park was constant in his endeavours to push forward the preparations, for further delay meant that the travellers would be caught in the dreaded rainy season long before they had reached the Niger. But plead and pester as he might, he could not hasten the pace of officialdom, and four months elapsed before he set sail for the coast of Africa.

The expedition left Portsmouth on the 30th January 1805.

CHAPTER XI

THE SECOND EXPEDITION—A DISASTROUS MARCH

THE young leader—Park was now thirty-four—was accompanied by two old school-fellows, Alexander Anderson, his brother-in-law, a surgeon of several years' experience, and George Scott, an artist, who was to act as draughtsman. To give Park the necessary authority over the soldiers, a captain's commission was bestowed upon him, and Anderson was made a lieutenant. Park took out with him four carpenters, to build a boat when the Niger was reached. The soldiers were to be drawn from the garrison at Goree, near the mouth of the Gambia, and Park had been empowered to offer such bounties, or other encouragement, as would induce them to cheerfully join the expedition.

When the expedition set sail from Portsmouth it was already several months behind the time originally fixed upon by its leader. More precious time was lost through storms and contrary winds and the manœuvres of French privateers. When he arrived at Goree and declared his purpose, offering double pay and a discharge on return, almost every soldier in the place was eager to go with him. Doubtless they were tired of the dulness and inactivity of garrison life on an unhealthy coast, and were

ready for any adventure to break the monotony. Thirty-five soldiers were selected and put under the command of Lieutenant Martyn, who had agreed to accompany the explorers. Two seamen were also added to the number. Not a single negro, however, could be induced to enlist.

In high spirits and with loud huzzas, the soldiers bade farewell to their comrades who remained behind, and sailed for the Gambia, hoping to be back again before the year was out. Poor fellows, little they knew what was before them.

The middle of April saw the expedition on the banks of the Gambia, and on the 27th the march was begun. It was a large, well-armed and thoroughly equipped cavalcade that filed out of Kayi under the salute of the vessels lying at anchor in the river. It consisted of Park and his two friends, Anderson and Scott, thirty-five soldiers under the command of Lieutenant Martyn, two seamen, and four carpenters—in all, forty-five Europeans. There were about two score of donkeys to bear the baggage, and Isaacs, a Mandingo priest and merchant, who was accompanied by several servants, acted as guide and interpreter. Park was cheerful and confident. 'I have great hopes to bring this expedition to a happy conclusion,' he wrote on the eve of the march. 'If all things go well, this day six weeks I expect to drink all your healths in the water of the Niger. The soldiers are in good health and spirits. They are the most dashing men I ever saw, and if they preserve their health, we may keep ourselves perfectly secure from any hostile attempt on the part of the natives. I have little doubt but that I shall be able, with presents and fair words, to

pass through the country to the Niger; and if once we are fairly afloat, *the day is won!*'

With this fair promise before them, the band of adventurers passed into the wilderness.

Trouble came upon them at the very outset. The day was remarkably hot, with that moist, enervating heat that comes before the setting in of the rainy season; and the vagaries of the donkeys at once began to strain the patience of the soldiers. Three of the animals stuck fast in the mud, and while the drivers were struggling to free them, they were left behind without a guide. Others of the soldiers dropped far into the rear, a new guide had to be procured, the heat increased; and when, late in the afternoon, the stragglers came together again at their first halting place, they were all thoroughly worn out with the exertions and vexations of the day. Day after day brought wearisome repetitions of those irritating and depressing difficulties. Some of the asses, being overloaded, persisted in lying down on the road. Others kicked off their burdens, and, with their plunging and capering, threw the caravan into disorder, and made almost intolerable the already exacting duties of their drivers.

In less than a fortnight from the start disease began to show itself: two of the soldiers were stricken with dysentery. A few days later another soldier, at the end of the day's march, fell down in an epileptic fit and expired. Days of exhausting labour were frequently followed by nights of watchfulness and anxiety, for the natives had begun to show hostility to the travellers, and to cast envious eyes upon the rich merchandise they carried.

At night double sentries were posted, and each man slept with a loaded musket beside him.

At this juncture Park experienced for the second time a mishap which is not uncommon in Africa, and which, though it has an element of the ludicrous in it, was on this occasion followed by serious consequences. The camp had been pitched for the night, and the evening meal was being prepared, when an immense swarm of bees, disturbed by the foragers, swooped down upon men and beasts, and scattered them in all directions. In the wild stampede no one gave thought to the fire which had just been kindled. The flames spread to the underwood and bamboos, and in a few minutes, when the fugitives, having escaped from their tormentors, began cautiously to return, they saw that the camp was in a blaze. Every man rushed to the rescue. The destruction of the baggage meant irretrievable ruin to the expedition, and for half an hour this new and terrible danger threatened them. But after a fatiguing battle with the flames the men triumphed. When the asses were gathered together again they were found to have suffered severely from the onslaught of the bees. Three asses and one horse were never seen again, and three other asses were so much stung that two died before morning, and the third had to be abandoned. Many of the soldiers also were seriously injured on the face and hands.

Meanwhile, the enemy that Park dreaded more than all others combined had been drawing nearer and nearer. The rainy season was closing in upon them. Already distant thunder had been heard, and ominous puffs of wind from the south-east bespoke the coming tornado.

At the first rain squall one of the carpenters, who suffered from dysentery, became greatly worse. In a day or two he was unable to sit upright on his ass. Two soldiers were appointed to hold him on, and for a while the dying man was carried along, begging, in his misery, to be left behind to die, and frequently casting himself from the ass and resisting all attempts to reseat him. Before long death came to his relief; for a second time a grave was dug in the wilderness; and the band moved on again, their hearts heavy with anticipations of evil.

Up till this time never a doubting word had Park set down in his journal. Whatever may have been his thoughts, he never permitted himself to give expression to his uneasiness. Danger, difficulty, privation, and labour were quietly accepted as inevitable. But when his men began to drop around him, the steady cheerfulness which no excess of personal hardship could abate, became overclouded. It was on June 10th—by which time he had hoped to drink the health of his friends in the water of the Niger—that he began to record his misgivings. On that day he wrote:—

'The front of the coffle reached Shrondo at sunset; but being in the rear I had to mount one of the sick men on my horse, and assist in driving the fatigued asses, so that I did not reach the halting place till eight o'clock, and was forced to leave four asses in the woods. Shrondo is but a small town. We halted as usual under a tree at a little distance, and before we could pitch one of the tents, we were overtaken by a very heavy tornado, which wet us all completely. In attempting to fasten up one of the tents to a branch of the tree, I had my hat blown away

and lost. The ground all round was covered with water about three inches deep. We had another tornado about two o'clock in the morning.

'The tornado which took place on our arrival had an instant effect on the health of the soldiers, and proved to us to be the *beginning of sorrow*. I had proudly flattered myself that we should reach the Niger with a very moderate loss. We had had two men sick of the dysentery. One of them recovered completely on the march, and the other would doubtless have recovered had he not been wet by the rain at Baniserile. But now the rain had set in, and I trembled to think that we were only half way through our journey. The rain had not commenced three minutes before many of the soldiers were affected with vomiting; others fell asleep, and seemed as if half intoxicated. I felt a strong inclination to sleep during the storm, and as soon as it was over I feel asleep on the wet ground, although I used every exertion to keep myself awake. The soldiers likewise fell asleep on the wet bundles.'

When day dawned it was found that twelve of the soldiers were sick, and everybody was wet and sore and wretched. But even in those depressing circumstances the dauntless leader did not overlook the minutest portion of the work he had pledged himself to perform. Hearing that there were rich gold mines in the vicinity, he visited them, and made careful note of the method of production, which he embodied with explanatory sketches in his diary. Every day, and frequently throughout the greater part of the night, Park did the work of any ten men. Did a worn-out beast of burden sink down on the sodden, slip-

pery path, it was invariably Park who was left behind to struggle with the obstinate brute, and to bring it up to the rest of the cavalcade. Did a sick soldier, reckless in his misery, lie down by the wayside, Park was there to encourage him and to help him on, many a time dismounting, placing him upon his own horse, and holding him there, while he threaded his way through the darkening forest. Then there were interminable palavers with the chiefs to be held, food supplies to be procured, observations to be made, thieves to be watched or tracked, stolen goods to be recovered; and amidst it all Park had his own share of sickness and fever.

Before many days of the rainy season were over half the men were either sick or unable to exert themselves to much effect. They were barely able to walk or to drive the asses, and the natives, who were for ever hovering around, harassed and plundered without ceasing. Scarcely a day passed now but a sick soldier gave up the struggle in despair. Those were left behind in friendly villages, and the natives were liberally paid to attend to the sufferers till the return of the expedition. The sick men died, and the expedition never returned. Many of the men lay down by the wayside and refused to go further, choosing rather to take their chance with the natives and the wild beasts than to drag themselves even for another day through mud and marsh and dripping forest.

The inhabitants of one village, hearing of the helpless condition of the travellers and of the riches they carried, turned out in battle array to annihilate them. But at sight of a danger with which they knew how to cope, the soldiers roused themselves. Something of their old spirit came

back to them, and they made such a brave show in the presence of their enemies, that the latter discreetly slackened in their warlike menacings. Park, adroitly seizing the opportunity, by a great deal of apparent confidence and a little diplomacy so impressed the Negroes, that they not only allowed him to pass unmolested, but even accepted his proffered friendship.

The leaders of the expedition were now in as grievous a state as the rank and file. Anderson and Scott, then Martyn, and finally Park, were prostrated by fever. For a time Park was so weak that he could not stand erect without feeling a tendency to faint. But he was merciless to himself. Others might fall out and remain behind to rest, but for him there could be no respite. From morning till night he toiled, watching and helping the caravan from van to rear-guard. Everything depended upon him. While others sank under the burden of despair and physical suffering, he was sustained, not by superior bodily strength, but by his indomitable spirit and the enthusiasm of the explorer. To the others the labour of the expedition was nothing but a daily round of suffering and heart-sickness, with a miserable death for an ending. To Park it was a means of fulfilling a glorious mission, and of bringing to fruition an idea that had for years absorbed all his energies and desires. This is the secret why leaders of great enterprises outlive all hardships while their followers fall thick around them, and we have no better example of the saving power of a great idea than the achievements of Mungo Park.

From the middle of June till the end of the rainy season the journal is little else but a record of trouble and

disaster. In course of time all the asses that had been brought from the coast had either died or had been lost or abandoned on the march. Fresh ones were procured when possible; but frequently the number of animals was not sufficient to carry the sick and the baggage. Negroes had to be hired to carry the burdens, and even to help the soldiers to load and unload, to such a state of weakness had they been reduced. Day by day the rains became heavier, the tornadoes more terrible, the country more difficult to traverse, and the thieving of the natives more persistent and outrageous. So bold did they become, that one fellow snatched the musket from Park's hand and made off with it. Thereupon Park gave orders to shoot the first man caught stealing. Several rascally negroes had narrow escapes from death; but nothing could deter them, and hardly a day passed but there was a chase after a thief, or a wearisome and generally fruitless search for stolen goods.

In all his dealings with offending natives, even when provoked almost beyond the limits of human endurance, Park never forgot to be merciful. It was only when driven by absolute necessity, when the very existence of the expeditionary force was endangered, that he permitted his men to resort to violence. Diplomacy and forbearance were stretched to cracking point before he would suffer a shot to be fired, and even then he endeavoured only to disable, not to kill. This consideration for the barbarians among whom he travelled was one of the most admirable traits of Park's character, and gives him an honourable distinction among African explorers. Too often has the advance of the

pioneer into the Dark Continent been traced in blood and fire.

On July 27th there came one ray of comfort and encouragement to the way-worn leader. As he was staggering on, very sick and faint, and driving a horse and an ass before him, the neglected charges of other men, he came to an eminence from which he had a view of mountains far away in the east. 'The certainty that the Niger washes the southern base of these mountains,' he wrote, 'made me forget my fever; and I thought of nothing all the way but how to climb over their blue summits.' Three days later there is an entry of infinite pathos. One of the men, named William Allen, became so ill that he could not be carried further. Park left him in the care of the chief of a village, and in his diary he wrote:—'I regretted much leaving this man. He had naturally a cheerful disposition, and he used often to beguile the watches of the night with the songs of our dear native land.'

It had now become plain that Anderson's constitution could not much longer withstand the strain that was being put upon it. On August 10, Park, while encouraging and assisting stragglers in the rear, came upon his friend lying under a bush by a stream apparently dying, and scattered around were many of the soldiers, themselves too ill to render any aid. The heat was intense, the stream was deep, and Park was extremely fatigued; but by a supreme effort he not only succeeded in carrying Anderson over on his back, but likewise transported the load of his own ass, and dragged across the horse that Anderson had been riding. Sixteen times did he cross

the stream, and only utter exhaustion prevented him from assisting some of the soldiers.

From that day Park kept an unceasing watch over his friend. Mounting a sick soldier on his own horse, he went on foot, driving before him a loaded ass and the horse upon which Anderson was seated. But before a couple of days had passed it seemed as if his tender care would go for naught.

'Rained all the morning. About eleven o'clock, the sky being clear, loaded the asses. None of the Europeans being able to lift a load, Isaaco made the negroes load the whole. Saddled Mr Anderson's horse, and having put a sick soldier on mine, took Mr Anderson's horse by the bridle, that he might have no trouble but sitting upright on the saddle. We had not gone far before I found one of the asses with a load of gunpowder, the driver being unable to proceed (I never heard of him afterwards), and shortly after the sick man dismounted from my horse and laid down by a small pool of water, refusing to rise. Drove the ass and horse on before me. Passed a number of sick. At half-past twelve o'clock Mr Anderson declared he could ride no farther. Took him down and laid him in the shade of a bush, and sat down beside him. At half-past two he made another attempt to proceed, but had not rode above an hundred yards before I had to take him down from the saddle and lay him again in the shade. I now gave up all thoughts of being able to carry him forwards till the cool of the evening; and having turned the horses and ass to feed, I sat down to watch the pulsations of my dying friend.'

When evening came, and with it a refreshing breeze,

Anderson made another attempt to ride. But they lost their way in the dark, and had to pass the night unsheltered on the summit of a rugged hill, exposed to attack from lions, which abounded there. When day dawned they came upon Scott and three more of the sick, who had spent the night in the same wretched plight. A hammock having been improvised out of a cloak slung on a pole, Anderson was placed therein and carried by two men. On the same day Scott was again stricken with fever. He was placed on Anderson's horse, but at night, when the camp was formed, he was nowhere to be seen. Men were sent back to search for him, but returned without any tidings of the missing draughtsman. Next day the search was renewed, again without success; and Park, concluding that Scott had remained behind at a certain village to recruit, made ample arrangements for his guidance in following up the caravan, and continued the march.

On entering the town of Dumbila Park was overjoyed to meet his old friend Karfa Taura, who had rescued him from destruction on his former travels. Karfa had heard of Park's arrival, and had travelled several days' journey to meet him and assist him to the Niger. 'He instantly recognised me,' said Park, 'and you may judge of the pleasure I felt on seeing my old benefactor.'

Park was now only two or three days' march from the Niger. And it was well that the journey was short, for the roads were very bad; rain still fell in torrents, and only one of the few remaining soldiers was able to drive an ass. On the 19th August, nearly four months after the departure from the Gambia, this handful of ragged,

emaciated men began slowly to ascend the ridge which separates the upper tributaries of the Senegal from the river of their quest. Park, in his eagerness, pushed on in advance of the caravan, and, coming to the brow of the hill, 'once more saw the Niger rolling its immense stream along the plain!'

CHAPTER XII

ONCE MORE ON THE NIGER

THE first stage of the journey had now been accomplished. But at what tremendous cost! Park was fast breaking down under the ravages of dysentery. Anderson was dying; Scott had been lost; and of the band of hardy fellows who had left the Gambia in gleeful hope of stirring adventure and a speedy return, only seven, and some of those worn to the very point of death, had lived to see the Niger. This miserable remnant of the once splendid expedition was now nearly a thousand miles—taking the deviations of the path into account—from a European settlement, and surrounded by treacherous and suspicious barbarians, who on the slightest pretext might overwhelm it at any moment. Even Park admitted that the prospect was gloomy.

Yet he cheered himself with the reflection that he had proved the object of the expedition to be practicable—namely, that merchandise could be carried safely to the banks of the Niger, and that if the journey was accomplished in the dry season, the trader might calculate on a very small loss of life. The cause of the appalling loss that the expedition had suffered was, of course, the hardships of

the rainy season, which would not have been incurred but for the delay of officials in London. It is somewhat remarkable, however, that Park never alludes to the most terrible mistake of all—that of taking so many Europeans with him.

Joseph Thomson, the African traveller, commenting on this omission, says :—'We would naturally have expected him to add as a third conclusion, that under no circumstances should Europeans be employed in such a caravan except as conductors, or it might be as guards. That conclusion, however, he apparently did not reach — indeed, we look in vain throughout his journal for any indication that he was at all aware of the frightful nature of his blunder in starting only with Europeans. And yet before him was the tangible fact, that of thirty-five soldiers and four carpenters who left the Gambia with him, only seven entered Bammaku, while Isaaco and his attendants were all alive and hearty, though much of the white men's work had fallen upon them in addition to their own.'

It is easy to lay the finger on the mistakes of pioneers after ninety years of experience has reduced African travel to almost an exact science. In Mungo Park's time it was the belief of geographers that it was impossible to penetrate into the interior of Africa without strong military escort. And, in truth, they had good reason for their belief. The sufferings of Horneman, Houghton, and Park were of themselves sufficient to justify the conviction. Though Park did not in his journal specifically allude to this mistake, the events recorded there speak for themselves; and we find their effects in the geo-

graphical works published soon after the receipt of Park's journal in London. It is therein suggested that in the next expedition to the Niger the black troops of Sierra Leone should be employed.

Park and his men had reached the Niger at Bammaku in Bambarra. After a short halt to enjoy a sorely-needed rest, a canoe was obtained to carry the baggage down to Sego, where Mansong, the king, resided. As the canoe was not large enough to carry all the party, the soldiers were sent down by land, and Park and Anderson sailed in the canoe to watch the baggage. They found the Niger at this point to be an immense river, more than a mile broad, and sweeping majestically along at the rate of six or seven miles an hour.

The heat had now become terrific, and the health of the travellers did not benefit much by the escape from the toils of the march. The dysentery was reducing Park so seriously that he determined to be rid of it at all costs. He dosed himself so thoroughly with mercury that for six days he could neither speak nor sleep. But this heroic treatment put an end to the dysentery. In a few days another of the men succumbed to the extreme heat. To add to their anxiety, reports reached them that Isaaco, who had been sent forward to Sego with presents for the king, had been slain, and that the king had vowed he would kill every white man who showed face in his dominions. Nevertheless, Park held resolutely on his way, and in a day or two was gladdened by the arrival of an emissary from the king with canoes to convey him and his companions to Sego.

The journey down the river was resumed, and in more

encouraging circumstances. But still the climate played sad havoc with the men. The heat grew more and more intense, till, on September 26, it reached a climax. 'The canoes were not covered with mats,' wrote Park in his journal, 'and there being no wind, the sun became insufferably hot. I felt myself affected with a violent headache, which increased to such a degree as to make me almost delirious. I never felt so hot a day; there was sensible heat sufficient to have roasted a sirloin, but the thermometer was in a bundle in the other canoe, so that I could not ascertain the actual heat.' Soon another halt had to be called to bury the dead; and when the voyagers pushed out into mid-stream again, they had laid to rest two more of their number on the banks of the Niger.

But the depression that followed this fresh disaster was relieved by the arrival of messengers from the king, assuring Park of his protection, and giving him liberty to go to any part of his dominions. He seemed, however, to have some superstitious fear of the strangers, and did not invite them to visit Sego. Accordingly, Park fixed upon Sansanding as a suitable place to build the boat that was to carry him, he hoped, to the Atlantic Ocean. When the travellers landed at Sansanding, the people came in such crowds to gaze at them that the baggage could not be brought ashore until the sight-seers had been beaten back with sticks. Two large huts were set apart for the use of the white men—one for the baggage, and the other, opening into it, for living quarters; and having stored his goods and made his men as comfortable as possible, Park began to lay his plans for the next stage of the great adventure.

But death, which never left them for long, returned within a week of their landing and dealt them another blow. Yet another couple of men died of dysentery and fever, and during the night hyenas entered the hut and carried off one of the bodies. This rapid dwindling of his force filled Park with alarm. It seemed as if the expedition would be annihilated long before the voyage to the ocean could be begun. Mansong the king had promised to send canoes to Park to be converted into a boat, and their arrival was waited for with daily increasing impatience and anxiety. But nothing avails with African dilatoriness and procrastination, and Park at last bethought himself of opening a shop so as to obtain money with which to purchase canoes. He therefore 'opened shop in great style, and exhibited a choice assortment of European articles to be sold in wholesale or retail.' The venture was a great success. Sansanding being a populous and busy town, to which people flocked in large numbers from the surrounding country, he did an extensive business. Indeed, so great was his prosperity that it drew upon him the envy of the native merchants, who conspired to procure his expulsion or death. But the king resisted the popular clamour, and day after day Park found his shop more and more crowded with customers. 'Such was my run of business,' he said, 'that I was sometimes forced to employ three tellers at once to count my cash. I turned one market day twenty-five thousand seven hundred and fifty-six pieces of money (cowries).'

During all this time there had been no tidings of Scott. Park had never let slip an opportunity to make inquiries concerning his friend; he had halted several times in the

hope that Scott would overtake his companions; and in the end he had sent a messenger back the route they had travelled to bring up the missing man or discover what had happened to him. This messenger now returned with the melancholy news that Scott was dead. More than this bare fact Park could not ascertain.

The promise of the gift of canoes, which had been again renewed, but as yet remained unfulfilled, was at last made good. A canoe was brought down stream and moored at Sansanding. On hearing the welcome news Park hurried down to the river, but to his intense chagrin he found a worthless old craft, one half of which was rotten. Another half canoe was brought, but it would not fit the half of the one already sent. In despair, Park sent Isaaco to the king, fortified with another substantial present, to beg him either to send a proper canoe or permit him to purchase one. The king accepted the gifts; there was the usual irritating delay; and in the end another canoe was sent down to Sansanding, as rotten and patched a vessel as the other two. As nothing better could be made of the matter, Park and one of the soldiers set about joining the least decayed portions of the two canoes. All the rotten pieces were cut out; the holes were filled up, and the whole structure repaired and strengthened; and after eighteen days of hard labour the old Bambarra canoes were fashioned into an odd-looking, but withal serviceable, vessel, forty feet long, six feet broad, and flat-bottomed, and was christened 'His Majesty's schooner *Joliba*.' Joliba is the native name for the Niger.

This great difficulty overcome, Park's spirits began to

rise at the prospect of a speedy departure on the final stage of the journey. But while he had been labouring, and sustained by the hopefulness that ever issues from activity, the life of his one remaining friend and companion had been slowly ebbing away. The bitterest sorrow of all fell on the 28th October, when Anderson's four months' illness was closed by death. 'No event which took place during the journey,' Park wrote, 'ever threw the smallest gloom over my mind till I laid Mr Anderson in the grave. I then felt myself as if left a second time lonely and friendless amidst the wilds of Africa.' Park was indeed little better than alone. Of his men only three remained, all feeble and emaciated, and one of them deranged in his mind. Lieutenant Martyn, who should have been a valuable assistant to Park, seems to have been a careless, dissipated fellow, in no wise fitted to fill the difficult and responsible position in which he had been placed. He was not a man who could give counsel on the higher interests of the mission.

By the middle of November all was ready. A guide and interpreter named Amadi Fatuma was engaged. Isaaco was paid off and started for the Gambia, carrying with him Park's journal and letters for transmission to London and Foulshiels. To his wife Park wrote with that tender reserve and cheerfulness which he had ever shown to her when in the direst straits, and always in the highest degree when the danger was greatest:—

'I am afraid that, impressed with a woman's fears and the anxieties of a wife, you may be led to consider my situation as a great deal worse than it really is. It is true my dear friends, Mr Anderson and George Scott,

have both bid adieu to the things of this world, and the greater part of the soldiers have died on the march during the rainy season, but you may believe me, I am in good health. The rains are completely over, and the healthy season has commenced, so that there is no danger of sickness; and I have still a sufficient force to protect me from any insult in sailing down the river to the sea. . . .

'I think it not unlikely but I shall be in England before you receive this. You may be sure that I feel happy at turning my face towards home. We this morning have done with all intercourse with the natives; and the sails are now hoisting for our departure for the coast.'

To the Colonial Secretary Park sent his journal and a message, which, for pathetic simplicity and strength and quiet bravery, will find few equals in the annals of travel. Once and for all, before vanishing for ever from human ken, Park stamped deep and indelible the impress of his own character. This noble letter is an epitome of all the good qualities of the man.

'On board of H.M. Schooner *Joliba*,
'at anchor off Sansanding,
'*November* 17, 1805.

'My Lord,—I have herewith sent you an account of each day's proceedings since we left Kayee. Many of the incidents related are in themselves extremely trifling, but are intended to recall to my recollection (if it pleases God to restore me again to my dear native land) other particulars illustrative of the manners and customs of the natives, which would have swelled this bulky communication to a most unreasonable size.

'Your Lordship will recollect that I always spoke of the rainy season with horror, as being extremely fatal to Europeans; and our journey from the Gambia to the Niger will furnish a melancholy proof of it.

'We had no contest whatever with the natives, nor was any one of us killed by wild animals or any other accidents; and yet I am sorry to say that of forty-four Europeans who left the Gambia in perfect health, five only are at present alive—viz., three soldiers (one deranged in his mind), Lieutenant Martyn, and myself.

'From this account I am afraid that your Lordship will be apt to consider matters as in a very hopeless state; but I assure you I am far from desponding. With the assistance of one of the soldiers I have changed a large canoe into a tolerably good schooner, on board of which I this day hoisted the British flag, and shall set sail to the east with the fixed resolution to discover the termination of the Niger or perish in the attempt. I have heard nothing that I can depend on respecting the remote course of this mighty stream, but I am more and more inclined to think that it can end nowhere but in the sea.

'My dear friend Mr Anderson, and likewise Mr Scott, are both dead; but though all the Europeans who are with me should die, and though I were myself half dead, I would still persevere; and if I could not succeed in the object of my journey, I would at last die on the Niger.'

Never was noble vow more faithfully redeemed.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FATE OF MUNGO PARK

On the 19th of November 1805, Park and his little band launched out into the current of the great river. Though Park, in his cheerful, reassuring way, had written to his wife that once they were afloat they would consider themselves embarked for England, the adventure was, at its best, a desperate one. They were but five men, travel-worn, fever-wasted, adrift in a crazy canoe on a stream that abounded with rocks and rapids, on a voyage of unknown length through an undiscovered country, peopled, for all they knew, by barbarians of the most ferocious type. If the river issued in the Congo, as Park believed, then the voyage would be one of many months. If it ended, as there was also reason for supposing, in some fiery desert in the heart of the continent, then their doom was sealed. Return by water would be impossible, and an attempt by land, in their condition, quite as hopeless. It must have been, then, with a dread sense of the irrevocable that the voyagers let slip their moorings, and committed themselves to the current of the Niger.

In due time Isaaco reached the Gambia, and Park's papers were transmitted to England.

Then came a long silence. Spring returned, when it

was hoped that news might come of the successful navigation of the Niger; but still the silence remained unbroken. Months went by; misgivings grew into fears; then sinister rumours of the fate of the expedition began to reach the British settlements on the coast, brought down by traders from remote regions in the interior. But four years passed before the Government resolved to make themselves master of the facts. In January 1810, Isaaco, who had accompanied the expedition as guide in 1805, left the Senegal with instructions from the British Government to return to the Niger and ascertain the truth. Isaaco carried out his mission in a thorough and satisfactory manner; and on his return to the coast, eight months later, he handed over to the authorities a minute record of his journey, and of the information he had gathered. It is wholly upon this, corroborated by subsequent investigation, that we depend for the story of the close of Park's adventurous career.

When he reached the Niger, Isaaco had the good fortune to fall in with Amadi Fatuma, the guide who had sailed with Park down the river. Upon seeing Isaaco, Amadi burst into tears, and cried, 'They are all dead!' Then he told the story of the disaster.

The expedition, when it set sail on the Niger, consisted of nine men—Park and Martyn, three soldiers, three slaves, and Amadi, as guide and interpreter. They pushed out into mid-stream, to avoid the danger of attack from the banks, and as a very large stock of provisions had been taken on board, it was unnecessary to make frequent stoppages. But they had scarcely got two days on their way when the danger of the enterprise became apparent.

During the long delay at Sansanding, the news of the coming of the white men, of their intended passage down the river, and of the great wealth they carried, had spread far and near, and aroused the cupidity of the tribes inhabiting the banks of the Niger. And now bands of natives were lying in wait along the stream, ready to sally forth and plunder the strangers.

The first attack was made by three canoes loaded with men who were armed with pikes, lances, and bows and arrows. Park tried persuasion, but failing, he opened fire, and repulsed them without difficulty. Further down the river three separate attempts to intercept the little schooner were met in the same fashion. About this time the death of another of the soldiers reduced the number of white men to four, and the total number of the voyagers to eight; but as they had each fifteen muskets always lying ready for action, they were still a formidable party to attack. It seemed, indeed, as if they were more than a match in fair fight for the strongest force their enemies might bring against them, for when assailed by a great fleet of sixty canoes, they beat them back with heavy loss.

Lieutenant Martyn, who had never been of much service to the expedition when thoughtfulness or self-sacrifice or hard work was needed, now found congenial occupation. He took to fighting as to a bloody sport. When the blacks had been thoroughly beaten, and further firing became wanton cruelty, Amadi, moved at the sight of so much bloodshed, seized Martyn's hand, and begged him to cease firing. In a frenzy of rage, Martyn turned upon the guide, and would have killed him on the spot had not Park interposed.

Undismayed by repeated defeats, the natives swarmed to the banks in greater numbers than before. At one point the travellers encountered a great army posted on the river side; but they avoided a conflict by crossing to the other bank, and slipping swiftly by. At another place, where the stream divided into three dangerous passages, a hostile band took up a position on the rocks which commanded the water-way, and so seriously threatened the safety of the vessel, that it was thought prudent to return up stream and descend by another channel.

At length the voyagers reached the Haussa country, where Amadi's engagement as guide terminated. The anchor was dropped, and two days were spent in making preparations for continuing the journey. Park, as he would thenceforth have to depend upon his own knowledge of the native tongues, wrote down from his interpreter's dictation the names of the necessaries of life in the languages of the countries through which he was about to pass. The day before setting sail again, Amadi was sent ashore at Yauri to buy provisions and to convey gifts to the king and the chief of the neighbouring village. The chief, in taking delivery of the present for the king, asked Amadi if his master would ever return to the land of the Haussas; and Park, on being informed of the question, sent back the reply that he would return no more.

As the sequel shows, Park, when he uttered those simple words, pronounced doom upon himself and his companions.

Next day, after he had bidden farewell to the wanderers, and the *Joliba* was again on her way down the Niger,

Amadi went to pay his respects to the King of Yauri. In the presence of the king he was confronted by two men sent by the chief, who swore that the white man, notwithstanding his great wealth, had gone away without sending any gifts either to the king or the chief—an unpardonable offence in the eyes of an African potentate. 'And this Amadi Fatuma, now before you,' they added, 'is a bad man, and has likewise made a fool of you both.' Amadi's protests were of no avail. He was seized and thrust into irons, and the incensed king dispatched his warriors in hot haste down the river to a town called Bussa, to rouse the people and intercept the white men.

Now it happened that in all the course of the Niger there was no part of it better suited for an attack from the land than Bussa. A short distance above the town the river leaves the broad, low valley behind it, and rushes swiftly through a deep narrow gorge which is strewn with islands and dangerous rocks. Almost opposite the town a great wall of rock, pierced by narrow channels, lies across the stream, and through those openings the water rushes with irresistible force. 'The subtending sandstone hills,' says Joseph Thomson, in describing this fateful spot on the Niger, 'pass into abrupt and precipitous masses of hard metamorphic rock, and break up the channel of the river by dangerous rocks and islands occupied by villages. Thus narrowed and divided, the waters of the river sweep onward in three branches—one of them easy to navigate, the others difficult at flood time, and almost impossible when the river is low.' Upon those rocks and along the precipitous banks the dusky enemy clambered, and awaited the coming of the strangers.

When Park and his men came within sight of the hostile array it was too late to turn back. They were in the grip of the current; it seized them and dragged them into the thick of their enemies, who received them with furious volleys of lances, pikes, arrows, and stones. The white men replied with a vigorous discharge of musketry, and then the battle became general. The slaves at the paddles strained till their sinews cracked to move the canoe up against the current, or, at least, to keep out of reach of the weapons of the howling, frantic mob that blackened the river side and swarmed wherever there was foothold. The boat moved slowly down the stream, Park and his three companions firing as they went. Then two of the slaves at the paddles were killed, and the boat began to drift more swiftly to destruction. Everything on board was thrown into the water to lighten the vessel. Still the rapids dragged it downwards, and with yells of delight the savages bent themselves with renewed energy to the assault.

There could be but one end to it all. A few minutes more, and the gallant little band would be speared, or prisoners in the hands of their infuriated enemies. Park and his men fought to the last moment, till they were exhausted with paddling, and the hopelessness of the conflict became plain. Then came the climax, dramatic and tragical. The four white men tossed their muskets into the water. Park took hold of one soldier, Martyn seized the other, and together they jumped into the rushing waters. They disappeared in an instant, and no man saw them rise again, neither was any trace of their bodies ever found. The last remnant of this un-

happy expedition disappeared as completely as if it had vanished into space.

Whether Park and his companions jumped overboard in the hope of escaping to land lower down the stream, or with the deliberate intention of ending their lives rather than fall into the hands of their enemies, we shall never know. But the probabilities are strongly in favour of the first supposition. Park was a man who never gave in; his resource and hopefulness were boundless; and we may be almost certain that in his last act there was some daring plan of escape. Without further knowledge, it were unreasonable and unjust to suppose that the faith and courage which had sustained him through perils and sufferings so manifold, in the end forsook him utterly.

The slave who remained alive in the boat was taken prisoner. Amadi, the guide, was kept in irons for three months. When he was released he sought out the surviving slave, and from him got the story of the manner of Mungo Park's death. It will thus be seen that for the circumstances of Park's death we depend upon the word of an unknown slave. His narrative, however, is plain and credible; and all subsequent investigations have strengthened the belief that the slave had told the truth. When 'His Majesty's schooner *Joliba*' was seized by the natives, nothing was found in it but a sword-belt. With infinite pains, Isaaco succeeded in obtaining possession of the belt, and brought it back with him to the coast—the only relic of the great expedition of nearly a hundred men and beasts, that had left the Gambia loaded with arms and merchandise.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MYSTERY OF THE NIGER SOLVED

THE death of Mungo Park left the mystery of the Niger still unsolved, and five and twenty years of conjecture and adventurous and disastrous search were to pass before the complete solution was found. The theory bequeathed by the dead explorer—that the Niger and the Congo were one and the same river—became the general opinion; and it was on this basis that the explorations immediately following were planned.

But meanwhile, even when the fate of Park was still an uncertainty, a German arm-chair geographer named Reichard, by study and research, discovered the great secret which actual exploration could not unfold. By a careful examination of maps and an exhaustive study of the whole problem, he concluded that the river, after making a great bend to the south and south-west, and being joined by other large streams, discharged itself by many different channels into the Gulf of Guinea. In other words, Reichard's guess was perfectly correct. But, after all, it was only one theory among many, and contemporary opinion dismissed it as 'hazardous and uncertain,' and the painful quest went on.

In 1816, four years after the news of the final disaster

to Park's expedition had been brought home, the Government fitted out another force for West Africa. It was divided into two sections—one to penetrate to the Niger from the Gambia as Park had done, and to descend the river; the other to ascend the Congo from its mouth. It was hoped that either one section or the other would gain its end; and in the event of both succeeding, they would meet and coalesce upon the stream in the interior of the continent.

The plan was doomed to miserable failure. The overland company, consisting of a hundred men commanded by Major Peddie, in crossing the malarial belt between the coast and the uplands, were decimated by disease. It was the old story over again. First the commander was laid low, then the best of his officers, and the men dropped by the wayside as they dragged themselves along. Plundered and harassed by the natives, all their transport donkeys dead or stolen, and threatened by starvation, the survivors gave up the struggle in despair, and returned to the place whence they had started without having accomplished anything. Captain Gray, one of the survivors, made a gallant attempt to retrieve the disaster. Starting out afresh, he followed Mungo Park's track as far as Bondou. But there he found the suspicions of the people an impenetrable barrier. For nearly a year he was detained, virtually a prisoner, till an opportunity to return presented itself, and he made his way back to the coast.

The other section of the expedition, led by Captain Tuckey, was equally unfortunate. It reached the coast of Africa in safety and sailed up the Congo to the first

cataract without mishap. Unable to go further by water, the men hewed their way through the forest till they reached the broad navigable water above the falls. Then the inevitable fevers and dysentery seized them. Their state became hopeless; advance meant certain death. They retraced their steps, dropping one by one as they went, and Captain Tuckey himself reached the ship only to die.

Failure in this attempt was complete. But failures were regarded merely as stepping-stones to ultimate triumph, and it was not long before new explorers came forward as full as ever of faith and eagerness.

But before the despatch of another expedition, a second theoretical geographer had correctly solved the problem of the Niger. This was James M'Queen, a very remarkable man, also a Scotsman. When the story of Park's first adventures in Africa was given to the world, a copy of the book found its way into the hands of M'Queen, who was then in the Island of Grenada, West Indies, with many negroes under his charge. The mystery of the Niger took a strong hold upon his imagination, and having among the number of his slaves several negroes who in the days of their freedom had lived on the banks of the Niger, he naturally began to question them on the subject. The information that he gathered encouraged him to pursue the inquiry further. For years—for more than twenty years—he went on collecting facts and opinions from every possible source. In the course of his studies he published a pamphlet setting forth his views, but it was passed by almost unheeded. In nowise discouraged, M'Queen persisted in his theories and his inquiries. In 1821 he brought out a book con-

taining the results of twenty-five years of labour. Viewed in the light of subsequent discoveries, and developments of even recent years, it was a truly marvellous book. Not only was the author right in his contention that only in the Bight of Benin should they look for the termination of the Niger; he was, in general, correct in laying down the details of the course of the river, and in his description of the salient features of the countries through which it passed. He was a man of extraordinary insight. He made statements and prophecies about the future of West Africa and the advance of the French from the Senegal, which have been fulfilled to the letter. But of those matters something will be said in the next chapter.

There is no reason for believing that M'Queen's book attracted much more attention than his earlier pamphlet. Men preferred to hug their fanciful theories, and to ascribe strange powers to the rivers of the Dark Continent. As M'Queen himself at that time said:—'The rivers of interior Africa were believed to be like no other rivers. By one they were stated to run, first increasing and then diminishing, till the current disappeared altogether. By another, after flowing in opposite directions, they at last met and stood still; and by a third, that one of the great rivers in the world, with all its tributary streams, was swallowed up in a lake or absorbed by sands.'

Defeated so often and so disastrously in their attempts to explore the Niger from the west coast, men turned their eyes again to the northern route, from Tripoli through the Great Desert. Thrice, thirty years before, had the explorers of the African Association essayed the northern road, and thrice had they signally failed. But as the

difficulties of the Gambia seemed to be almost insuperable, it was decided to attempt the desert once more. For this purpose the British Government selected three men—Captain Clapperton of the Royal Navy, Dr Oudney, and Major Denham. Hugh Clapperton had many things in common with Mungo Park. He too was a Scottish Borderer—Annan, in Dumfriesshire, being his native place. He was tall, stalwart and athletic; patient, cheerful, and prudent. He had the heart of a lion and the simplicity of a child; and travel was his master passion. But unlike his great forerunner, he was a man of slender education. He had gone to sea when he was a boy of thirteen, and twenty years of adventure in many climes had fitted him to take the lead in any enterprise where daring and endurance were indispensable.

In November 1821—the year in which M'Queen published his wonderful book—the expedition landed at Tripoli. After many vexing delays, such as only Oriental ingenuity is capable of effecting, a caravan was organised. It consisted of four Europeans and ten servants, an Arab escort of 210 men, and merchants and freed slaves brought up the total to about 300 persons. On November 29th the caravan struck out into the desert. In a few days they had left every sign of living thing behind them. Then the oases and watering-places became fewer, until they almost altogether disappeared. From sky-line to sky-line stretched a trackless waste of rock and sand, shelterless from the burning sun, where the fiery breezes were as the breath of a furnace. Hundreds of sun-bleached human skeletons strewed the way; to the travellers reminders of their own probable fate. One evening, when they dragged

themselves parched and panting to the brink of a desert well, they found the ground around it white with the bones of full five score skeletons. On another day, in the course of a single march, they counted more than a hundred skeletons by the wayside, victims of heat, thirst, and fatigue. In some of the long and rapid forced marches across utterly waterless regions as many as twenty camels would sink down under the terrible ordeal in one day.

After two months of unceasing toil and hardship, the wayfarers began to notice that they were drawing near to the confines of this Land of Death. There were some indications of fertility in the soil. The sight of occasional patches of scanty grass and an occasional tree gladdened their hearts and put new vigour into their wearied limbs. Day by day the aspect of the country improved, till at last the travellers found themselves in a land of trees and flowers and pleasant valleys, on the borders of the great Lake Chad, away in the very heart of Africa.

More than a year was spent in diligent and adventurous exploration of the Chad region, then Clapperton and his companions pressed westward to Kano and Sokoto, two populous and busy cities. Dr Oudney died on the way ; but, undeterred by misfortune and increasing difficulties, Clapperton turned his face southward toward Yauri, borne up with the hope of reaching the Niger and solving the great mystery. On all hands he was warned of the dangers that lay before him. But he would not be intimidated, and was about to continue the march when the Sultan of Sokoto, either suspicious of the white man's intentions, or really alarmed for his safety, withdrew his

promise of protection. For weeks Clapperton remained at Sokoto, hoping that the prohibition would be removed. His expectation, however, was not fulfilled, and, sorely disappointed, he retraced his steps to Lake Chad, and thence struck out northwards on his homeward journey. Before five months were over the Sahara had been re-crossed, and the wanderers were once more in Tripoli, after an absence of nearly three years.

This expedition proved conclusively that the Niger did not flow far to the east, or fall into an inland lake or swamp, as theorists had so long maintained, but that its outlet must be looked for in the south. In fact, men now began to look with certainty to the Gulf of Benin for the mouth of the great river.

The mission was accounted so satisfactory that the Government decided to send out Clapperton again to search for the mouth of the Niger. Accordingly, before the end of the same year, Captain Clapperton, with Captain Pearce and Surgeon Morrison as companions, landed at Badagry, near Lagos, on the Slave Coast. His design was to march up country in a north-easterly direction till he reached the Niger, and, after pushing on to Sokoto and establishing trade relations there, to sail down the river till he came out at its mouth. But first the deadly fever zone had to be traversed. Scarcely had the travellers started when disease came upon them. Morrison was the first to succumb. When he felt himself sinking under the fever, he turned coastwards, but died before he reached Badagry. Pearce struggled on till he could not drag one leg after another, then he lay down and died by the wayside.

Clapperton was now left alone with his servant, Richard Lander, a Cornishman; but in this one companion, as the story will show, he had a man after his own heart and a friend whom he could trust to the uttermost. After many weeks of hard travel they came out upon the Niger at Bussa, the very spot where, twenty years before, the career of Mungo Park had been brought to a tragic close. One object of Clapperton's mission being to elucidate the mystery of Park's disappearance, he searched in every likely quarter for information of the lost explorer. Though unsatisfying in some details, the general result of his inquiries confirmed the account given by Amadi Fatuma, Park's guide and interpreter. When questioned, the natives hesitated and equivocated, and all were anxious to prove that they had had no hand in the tragedy. But evasion and lying were what the travellers expected. 'Almost every African,' said Lander in after years, speaking out of the fulness of a bitter knowledge, 'is guilty of gross exaggeration in his statements, and too many are confirmed liars.'

From Bussa Clapperton crossed to Kano, and thence journeyed to Sokoto, where he hoped to find the Sultan as favourably disposed towards him as on his former visit. But the country was in the turmoil of civil war, and the Sultan was in no mood for entertaining strangers, especially strangers of whose motives he was suspicious. Clapperton was subjected to the numberless vexations and disheartening obstructions which an African potentate knows so well how to inflict. Already reduced in strength by dysentery and fever, he sank under the strain. For thirty-six days he lay in grievous illness

nursed by the faithful Lander, and died on 13th April 1827. In a village near Sokoto the remains of the intrepid traveller were laid to rest by his sorrowing and now solitary attendant.

Then came the test of Richard Lander's mettle. He was alone and unprotected among a half-savage and unfriendly people. He was beset with all manner of dangers. He was entirely destitute of the scientific knowledge that smooths the path of the explorer. Above all, he was not in duty bound to concern himself with the course of the Niger. Most men, in those circumstances, would have at once taken the nearest way home. But Richard Lander was one of Nature's travellers. What he lacked in knowledge and training was more than made up for by extraordinary shrewdness, daring, and power of endurance. His master had imbued him with the exploring spirit, and, fired with the enthusiasm which is the first and the last requisite for success, he set himself to finish the work that Clapperton had so well begun.

Lander returned to Kano, and then struck to the south, believing the great river which was reported to run through that region to be the Niger. As a matter of fact it was the Benue, a tributary of the Niger, for which he was making. But when he had covered little more than half the distance he was stopped by order of the Sultan. There was nothing for it but to go back the way he had come. He returned to Kano, and realising the futility of further effort, he set out to find his way to the coast. After months of travel through one of the most dangerous regions in all Africa he arrived at Badagry in November 1827, two years from the time of starting with Clapperton,

Pearce and Morrison. Four months later he reached England, bringing with him Clapperton's papers and a record of his own wanderings.

If any further evidence of the death of Mungo Park had been needed, it was supplied by the investigations of Captain Clapperton at Bussa. The public were now perfectly satisfied that the great traveller had lost his life in the manner described. But there were two persons who during all those years had clung to the belief that Park was still alive, a captive somewhere in the interior of Africa. Those persons were Park's wife and his second son, Thomas. From his boyhood young Park had nursed the idea that his father was alive, until it had overshadowed all others; and the one ambition of his life was to clear up the mystery that overhung his parent's fate. The years went by, but they brought no opportunity of realising his dream. Yet still he waited and watched and planned.

At last, in 1827, at the very time when Richard Lander was wearily dragging himself homeward with proof of his father's death, young Park plunged into the desperate enterprise. Without letting his mother know of his intention lest she should forbid the project, he embarked on a ship bound for the South Seas. He left the ship on the voyage and contrived to reach the Gold Coast. From Accra he wrote a letter to his mother disclosing his plan. It was full of the confidence of ingenuous youth. 'Depend upon it, my dearest mother, I shall return safe. . . . It was my duty—my filial duty—to go, and I shall yet raise the name of Park. You ought rather to rejoice that I took it into my head. . . . I shall be back in three

years at the most—perhaps in one. God bless you, my dearest mother.'

This was his first and last message. He disappeared into that dark and mysterious region, which holds the secret of many an unrecorded tragedy, and no white man ever saw him again.

When, in the spring of 1828, Richard Lander arrived in England from West Africa, the desire to return to the Niger was strong within him. He offered himself to the Government for another expedition without stipulating for fee or reward. The offer was accepted, though not without hesitation, for repeated disasters made it appear as if the Niger problem would never be solved. In March 1830, Richard Lander and his brother John, whom he had persuaded to join him, landed once more at Badagry. In three months they reached Bussa. There they made fresh investigation into the circumstances of the death of Mungo Park, and the meagre details they gathered again all went to confirm the narrative of Amadi Fatuma. Two books and some loose papers of no value that had belonged to Park and Anderson were recovered. Fruitless also were Lander's questionings of the natives regarding the course and termination of the great river whose banks they inhabited. The people neither knew nor cared to know whither the river went after it flowed past their doors. 'Theories respecting the Niger,' said Lander, 'are even more various and contrary in this country than the hypotheses of the learned of Europe on the subject. Scarcely two people are to be found that agree in the same opinion.'

After the usual difficulties and delays two canoes were

procured, and about the end of September the Landers, having solemnly commended themselves to the protection of the Almighty, set sail down the Niger. For many days they were carried along by the current through scenes of infinite variety. At first the river wound swiftly out and in through a picturesque hilly region, where the voyagers were in constant danger from sunken rocks. Then it would slacken speed as it overflowed into an extensive valley, or spread its waters out into an immense inland lake. Gradually the mountain region was left behind. The river flowed majestically through a boundless plain, where vegetable life became more and more profuse, till it expanded into a vast and gloomy primeval forest. Hitherto the travellers had had little to fear from the natives; everywhere they had found them mild-mannered and not unfriendly. But the denizens of the forest region were Pagans and cannibals, fierce and treacherous; and more than once it seemed as if the expedition were doomed to a bloody close.

But the Landers were cheered in their danger and depression by unmistakable signs that the sea was not far distant. They fell in with black traders who spoke of the ocean, and with others who had sailed up stream from it. Soon the river broke up into countless branches, on whose sombre shores the deadly fever vapours hung like a shroud over the mud and the mangroves. In some places the channel was so narrow and the mangroves so thick and close, that they formed a complete arch above them, through which the light of day could not penetrate. And in those dark and dismal passages, where never a breath of sweetening outer air could come, a strong and

loathsome odour arose from the ooze and mud and filth that clung to the roots and branches of the mangroves.

Now they began to pass little specks of foam on the water, which they thought might have been carried up from the mouth of the river by flood tides. On November 14th they noticed, with intense satisfaction, that the current was being influenced by the tides, and next day they were overjoyed to see the face of a white man among a crowd of savages gathered on the shore. He was the master of a Spanish schooner lying in the river waiting for a cargo of slaves. On the 23rd they felt the first whiff of salt air mingling with the noisome exhalations of the swamps. With rapture and gratitude they drew in the cool, bracing breezes, and strained their longing eyes for the first glimpse of the ocean.

At nine o'clock in the evening of November 23rd, 1830, the glorious vision burst upon them. 'We could perceive in the distance,' said Lander, 'the long-wished-for Atlantic, with the moonbeams reposing in peaceful beauty upon its surface, and also hear the sea breaking and roaring over the sandy bar which stretches across the mouth of the river. The solemn voice of ocean never sounded more melodiously in my ear than it did at that moment: O! it was enchanting as the harp of David.'

Their task was accomplished. Their labour was ended. The Mystery of the Niger was solved at last!

CHAPTER XV

THE NIGER OF TO-DAY—A NEGLECTED HERITAGE

WHILE the Niger mouth was still undiscovered, another famous Scottish traveller had been making diligent search for its source. This was Major Laing, a native of Edinburgh, a man whose character and achievements entitle him to a place of honour among African explorers. Laing's first discovery was that the fountain of the Niger lay only 150 miles from the west coast, on the frontier of Sierra Leone. In a second expedition, taking the northern route, he crossed the Sahara, and in August 1826 entered Timbuktu, earning the distinction of being the first European to set foot in that enchanted city. But he never returned to tell the story of his adventures. The people of Timbuktu became suspicious of the inquisitive, note-taking white man who had suddenly appeared in the city. It was bruited about that he was a spy. A plot was laid against his life by the notable men of the town, and he was murdered in the desert by his guides on the third day after leaving Timbuktu.

The year 1828 is a memorable date in the history of West African exploration. It was in that year that a Frenchman first trod the banks of the Niger. This

was Réné Caillé, a young man of lowly birth and meagre education, but of boundless daring and perseverance. Disguised as a Moorish merchant, he set out from the coast in the neighbourhood of Sierra Leone and reached Timbuktu in April 1828. There he remained undetected for fourteen days, then joining a caravan bound for Morocco, he crossed the desert in safety, and finally arrived in Europe. He was the first European to return alive from the city of Timbuktu. His was an expedition of evil omen for British ascendancy in the Western Soudan.

Of the French, however, enough will be said before this narrative is ended. In the meantime it is necessary to return to the lower reaches of the Niger and follow the new development which Lander's discovery had made possible.

Years before, that sagacious and far-seeing man, James M'Queen, had urged his countrymen to plant the British flag at Bussa, and from there command the entire basin of the Niger. 'A city built there,' he said, 'under the protecting wings of Great Britain, and extended, enriched, and embellished by the industry, skill, and spirit of her sons, would ere long become the capital of Africa. Fifty millions of people, yea, even a greater number, would be dependent on it.'

It was with some such splendid vision as this before their eyes that the pioneers of civilisation and commerce in the Lower Niger entered upon their great enterprise. And here, again, a Scotsman took the lead. Macgregor Laird was born in Greenock; but he had settled in Liverpool, and then, as now, the name was associated with all that is admirable in business life. Two steamers were

made ready, specially adapted for river navigation, and in August 1832 Laird and Lander led an expedition up the Niger. Scarcely had they entered the network of fœtid creeks and rotting mangroves, when disease laid hold upon them. Eighteen men were lost before the region of fevers was left behind and the open and healthy country reached, and the total results of the mission fell far short of expectations.

Next season two attempts were made. The explorers got as far north as Rabba, but on the way back Lander was mortally wounded in a treacherous attack by the natives, and died on the island of Fernando Po, off the mouth of the river. In those three expeditions forty Europeans died of fever. Disheartened by disaster and the meagreness of the reward of his labour and sacrifices, Macgregor Laird gave up the attempt to turn the Niger to account. But he was still convinced that a great commercial future lay before West Africa.

In 1841 the British Government took up the task that private enterprise had failed to accomplish. Their scheme was an elaborate one; it was partly philanthropic, partly commercial. Three steamers were to sail up the Niger and establish a settlement on the river at the point where it is joined by its mighty tributary the Benué. Treaties were to be made with the chiefs for the suppression of the slave traffic and the conduct of trade, a model farm was to be planted, and the natives were to be instructed in agriculture. In fine, an experiment in empire building was to be made in Nigeria. The expedition was thoroughly well planned, and probably would have succeeded but for the old implacable enemy, West African fever. In two

months forty-eight men were swept off by that terrible scourge, and the survivors returned home in dismay, with the conviction that the Niger would for ever be to the white man a river of death.

Eight years passed. The remembrance of former disasters grew dim, and then our countrymen again returned to the assault. Once more the Government determined to obtain a footing upon the Niger. As at other times when baffled in attempts to reach the interior from west or south, the explorers made a descent from Tripoli, across the Great Desert to Lake Chad. James Richardson, a Lincolnshire man, whose ambition it was to suppress the African slave trade, was in command. Richardson had endeavoured to make the expedition an international one. He had tried France and failed. Eventually he obtained the co-operation of two Germans, Dr Barth and Dr Overweg; but the British Government assumed all responsibility for the cost of the expedition. The caravan made the journey across the desert without accident, but the real work of the expedition had scarcely been begun when Richardson and Overweg died. Though left to continue his travels alone, Barth determined to carry out the project to its utmost limit. Travelling far to the south, he reached the Benué river more than four hundred miles from where it joins the Niger. Even there it was a great, majestic waterway, half a mile in breadth. Then turning to the north-west, Barth traversed the valley of the Niger, and arrived in Timbuktu in August 1853. He remained in the city for a month, and in the capacity of British Ambassador made overtures for opening up trade with Great Britain by way of the Niger. His life

was in extreme danger from the fanaticism of the people, but he succeeded in extricating himself, and returned to Europe after having accomplished one of the most extensive and fruitful missions in the history of West African travel.

The news of Barth's success instantly aroused the slumbering spirit of enterprise. An expedition was fitted out by the Government, and Macgregor Laird, who had never lost faith in the future of Niger Land, eagerly entered into the new venture. This time fortune was kind. The expedition, sailing up the Niger, entered the Benué, and explored its course for more than 300 miles, returning home again without having suffered those disastrous losses which had wrecked the hopes of former discoverers.

But at this point, just at the time when it appeared as if the struggles and sacrifices of sixty years were about to be rewarded, the interest of the British Government in West Africa began to wane. There is evidence — if official letters said to have been discovered by the French in the archives of Timbuktu may be accepted as genuine —that as late as 1859 the Government still cherished intentions of bringing the trade of the Upper Niger within the sweep of British activity. But nothing decisive was done; the matter was allowed to gradually drift into the background, until at length the Western Soudan was to all intents and purposes abandoned to whomsoever might think it worth their while to pick it up. The sordid doctrine that colonies were burdensome poor relations, to be discouraged and snubbed and got rid of as quickly as possible, had become fashionable in politics; and, as was

to be expected in the circumstances, West Africa was treated with the contumely which was the proper portion of one whose prospects were hopelessly bad.

Happily, however, the British merchant could not easily be turned aside. In West Africa, as in many other parts of the world where British rule has taken root, we owe our ascendancy, not to governmental wisdom, but to the courage, vigour, and tenacity of our traders. If Macgregor Laird and the men associated with him more than forty years ago had not taken up the work when Government relinquished it, in all human probability the British possessions in West Africa would now have been a mere fraction of what they are, and the largest and richest of them all would never have been ours. As has been said, Laird, in common with almost every intelligent man who had practical knowledge of Nigeria, had a steady faith in the future of the country. In earlier years, when British statesmen were inspired by the same conviction, his plans for development had been on a colossal scale. He had hoped to see trading and military posts dotted along the entire course of the Niger and thence to the Gambia, and the whole of West Africa and its hundred million inhabitants thus enclosed in the sphere of British influence. The withdrawal of Government support rendered impossible a scheme of such magnitude; but Laird was none the less determined to go as far towards its realisation as unassisted private endeavour could carry him. Trading stations in the form of floating hulks were established at various points on the Niger, and European agents and educated natives from the coast were placed in charge.

The venture soon began to realise good returns; it

became evident that the right vein had been struck at last. The success of the pioneers attracted other traders to the river; stations were multiplied; with competition came unscrupulousness; till it seemed as if the new enterprise, that had promised so fairly, was to be a curse to the natives and ruin to the traders. It was the genius of Sir George Taubman Goldie that saved Nigeria. Under his guidance the competing firms were in 1879 amalgamated under the name of the United African Company, and what had previously been a danger became a source of strength. The company prospered. Its power and vitality were enormously increased when the company was soon afterwards opened to the public, and with a capital increased to one million sterling, it was raised to a position unassailable by foreign competitors. Finally, in 1886, a Royal Charter was granted, and the company assumed its present title of the Royal Niger Company.

Joseph Thomson, who himself played an important part in bringing about this happy consummation, lived long enough to see the first fruits of the new order of things. 'Already,' he wrote in 1890, 'good results are flowing from the new administration. The gin traffic has been taken in hand, suppressed where possible, and restricted elsewhere by enormous duties. Arms and gunpowder are also no longer sold wholesale to the savage natives. The resources of the country are being tested and developed as they never were before, and with the most gratifying results.'

But those operations of the Niger Company were almost wholly confined to the east bank of the river, from its mouth to the Benué—an immense tract of land, yet still

a mere corner of the great basin of the Niger. Of the other parts of the vast region which the courage and perseverance of British explorers had thrown open to their countrymen, there is another and a very different tale to tell.

When Mungo Park first landed in West Africa the French possessions in that part of the world were comparatively insignificant. The French had a settlement on the Senegal, and seemed perfectly content to confine themselves to that locality. But there was one man even in the days of Mungo Park who foresaw the rivalry of the distant future. That man was James M'Queen. It is now nearly eighty years since he warned the British Government of the danger of a French advance from the Senegal to the Niger. 'France,' he said, 'is already established on the Senegal, and commands that river, and if the supineness and carelessness of Great Britain allow that powerful, enterprising, and ambitious rival to step before us and fix herself securely on the Niger, then it is evident that with such a settlement in addition to her command of the Senegal, France will command all Northern Africa.' Doubtless a wise appreciation of this danger had its share in inducing successive Governments to send expeditions to the Niger.

For nearly seventy years after Mungo Park's first journey, in fact, so long as British explorative activity held out, the French confined themselves to the Senegal. But coincidently with our withdrawal from the Upper Niger, the French began to give rein to imperial ambitions. Their first care was to extend and strengthen their hold upon the Senegal, their base of operations. Then they

made deliberate plans for the next move—to the Upper Niger, hitherto considered a British preserve. There had been ample time and opportunity for the British Government to prevent the threatened invasion, for seventeen years elapsed between the first prospecting by French explorers and the actual advance to the Niger, and the traders on the coast had never ceased to warn the home authorities of the danger ahead. But the Government steadily ignored the warning. 'More than that,' says Thomson, 'the coast authorities were told to let the French go where they liked, and not to throw any obstacles in their way.'

With the Western Soudan thus thrown invitingly open to them, the French crossed the watershed, and in 1880 planted the tricolour on the Niger at Bammaku, where, seventy-five years before, Mungo Park had unfurled the Union Jack. Treaties were made with the Niger potentates, a railway to connect the Senegal and the Niger was forthwith commenced, and a gunboat was launched on the newly-acquired waterway. Now firmly established on the Upper Niger, and finding the British Government still blandly acquiescent, the new comers cast their eyes over the vast region encircled by the river, and dreamed of conquest on the same easy terms. Just at this time, however, the peoples of Europe suddenly woke up and became alive to the possibilities of Africa. From neglect they rushed to the opposite extreme. The despised Continent became the desire of the nations; 'the scramble for Africa' began.

Quickened by this new-born spirit of acquisitiveness, Great Britain at last opened her ears to the prayers of

the National African Company, and proclaimed a protectorate over the territory lying between the mouth of the Niger and the Benué, where the Company carried on their trading operations. North of the Benué, to Timbuktu, though theoretically under British administration, was in reality a No-man's land. Upon this the Germans fixed their attention. They had already taken possession of the Cameroons—another neglected British patrimony—and now they thought to round the head waters of the Benué and overrun the country beyond the British sphere. The African Company met this new danger promptly and boldly. Time was not wasted in parleying with the Government. They decided what must be done, and did it secretly and swiftly.

Joseph Thomson, who had recently returned from Masai-land, and was seeking health on the Mediterranean shores, was chosen for the difficult mission. On March 16, 1885, he set sail up the Niger. Steaming up the river as far as Rabba, he disembarked, made a dash up country to Gandu and Sokoto, and by the end of May was on his way home again carrying with him treaties sealed by the two Sultans, 'practically placing their two empires under a British Protectorate, and giving all commercial privileges to the National African Company.' On his way down the Niger Thomson had the grim satisfaction of seeing the German expedition toiling up stream, 'all unconscious of the fact that not a yard of ground from Timbuktu to Akassa, or from Bornu to Yoruba, had been left on which to plant the flag of the Fatherland.'

Thomson died in the belief that he had secured for

his countrymen to all time coming the Niger basin from Timbuktu to its mouth—1500 miles of a noble river, draining a rich and populous region capable of incalculable development. But even he had not correctly gauged the measure of British apathy or French aggressiveness. The exploitation by France of territories that were British by virtue of treaties and priority of exploration went on more openly than before. Pushing their way gradually down the Niger, in January 1895 they occupied Timbuktu. The 'Queen of the Soudan,' 'Timbuktu the Mysterious,' the inaccessible goal of centuries of adventure, was in the end captured by a band of only nineteen men—seven French marines and a dozen Senegalese negroes. Its ancient splendour had long ago vanished. It was deserted and tumble-down, a mere wreck of a city. Many a year of strife within and without, and the wild misrule of nomadic chiefs, had destroyed its trade and drained it of its people.

Still holding east, the French prospectors turned the great bend of the Niger and made their way southwards, planting military posts and making treaties in the very regions that Thomson had but recently brought within the sphere of British influence. And while this wholesale land-filching was being carried on upon the Niger, other equally energetic and undiscriminating parties of Frenchmen were 'touring with the tricolour' in the great territories lying between the river and the ocean. From Senegambia, from the Ivory Coast, from Dahomey, this process of expansion went rapidly on, till in less than ten years the French have mapped out as their own the whole of the Western Soudan, except the old British and

Portuguese settlements, a narrow strip belonging to Germany, and the native Republic of Liberia. They have established themselves on the west bank of the Niger as far south as Bussa, leaving only 500 miles of the 2000 miles course of the river under British control. The British Colony of Gambia has been whittled down to a mere slip of land, hemmed in by French territory and completely debarred from expansion or development. Sierra Leone has also suffered compression, though not so seriously. The French have helped themselves to a huge slice of what was lately considered to be the natural hinterland of the colony. By shutting off Gambia and Sierra Leone in this manner from free communication with the interior, and at the same time widening their own seaboard, our rivals may at their leisure tap the wealth of the Western Soudan, and leave the British colonies to a slow process of starvation. And if statistics may be trusted, we may take it that this process is now in rapid operation.

Happily for the Gold Coast and Lagos, and the territories of the Royal Niger Company, the advance of the French has at last been challenged in earnest. It is felt that the time for a final settlement has come. This matter of the hinterland of Lagos and the Gold Coast is no new dispute. The Anglo-French Commission at present debating the question in Paris met for the first time in 1892. It met again in 1894 and yet again in 1896, and at every successive session the French pretensions were found to have swelled prodigiously since the previous meeting.

However, Great Britain was inclined to be indulgent;

the people were indifferent; they did not object to letting France have what was supposed to be of no particular value. Thus the French have gradually wormed their way southward and eastward, till now, if their claims be again admitted, the Gold Coast and Lagos will be served as Gambia and Sierra Leone have been—hemmed in, isolated, shut off from trade with the interior, and gradually starved out of existence.

The French would also gain another very important point upon which they have apparently been determined for some years, that is, to secure a port on the river below Bussa. The Niger is navigable by steamers from the mouth to Bussa, about 500 miles. From Bussa to near the Great Bend, 500 or 700 miles more, the river is broken by rapids and is not navigable by large vessels. Thence to Bammaku there is a clear waterway for craft of considerable size. From Bammaku to Kayes on the Senegal a railway is being constructed—it may even now be complete—and from Kayes steamers ply to St Louis at the mouth of the Senegal. It will thus be seen that the French have at present a direct steamer and railway route to the very heart of the Western Soudan, which will drain off the trade of the country towards the Senegal. If, in addition to this, they obtain a footing on the Lower Niger, below Bussa, they will become formidable competitors with our countrymen on British territory. And this rivalry will be under conditions that will press grievously upon the British merchant; for while British Free Trade throws open every portal to the merchandise of the Frenchman, Protection jealously shuts out British goods from all the vast territories in West Africa over which France now holds sway.

To avoid confusion in following future developments of the West African question, it should be remembered that there are six distinct British colonies or possessions in that region. Those are the colonies of Gambia, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, Lagos, the territories of the Royal Niger Company, and the Niger Coast Protectorate. Of the first two, Gambia and Sierra Leone, there is nothing more to be said. They have been completely shut in by the French, the boundaries have long been formally settled, and the future can hold little for them. The Niger Company's territories east of the river, we may now reasonably regard as safe against violation. Though the northern boundary, from Say on the Niger to Barrua on Lake Chad, had been mutually agreed on by Great Britain and France, there was no reason for supposing that it was any more secure against the irresponsible French prospector than the frontiers of our other colonies in West Africa. But about a month ago—in February 1898—a fortunate accident drew from the French Government an acknowledgment of great value and importance. A rumour from West Africa that a French expedition had crossed the Niger south of the Say-Barrua line and was on its way to Sokoto, raised such a commotion in this country that the French Government denied the truth of the report and solemnly disavowed any desire or intention of entering the dominions of the Sultan of Sokoto. It is almost impossible now to conceive that, after this pledge, the French will be permitted to come south of the Say-Barrua line under any pretext whatsoever.

It is therefore mainly with the delimitation of the frontiers of the Gold Coast and Lagos that the West

Africa Commission is occupied. Whatever form the decision may take, the hinterlands of those two colonies will be much smaller than they might have been. We cannot choose but pay for the neglect of the past forty years; we have paid for it dearly already. But the era of indifference is now at an end. The British Government have now been thoroughly aroused, and, what is very much more important, the British people, for many years uninformed and uninterested in the matter, are forming an opinion that will have to be reckoned with. In fact, the 'game of grab' in West Africa is at an end. We shall no longer depend only upon any agreement that the Commission may arrive at. Treaties have been made before this, and then cynically ignored by the French land-snatchers. For example: In 1890, an Anglo-French Agreement was concluded by which the sphere of action of the Royal Niger Company was declared to be bounded on the north by a line drawn from Say on the Niger to Barrua on Lake Chad, and to include the kingdom of Sokoto. Instantly a Frenchman was sent out to explore this frontier line, and when he arrived at Sokoto he actually made, or attempted to make, a treaty with the Sultan affecting the very territory which his Government had declared to be within the British Protectorate.

The occupation of Bussa Town by the French is another illustration of this mode of empire-making. Long before the French showed face in the extensive territory known as Bussa, Sir George Goldie had established two British military posts there. Twice the Royal Niger Company had concluded treaties with the King, and an official intimation of the British Protectorate had been

sent to Paris by Her Majesty's Government, and received without protest. In January and February 1897 the Niger Company, having become involved in a serious struggle with the natives of Nupé and Ilorin, found it necessary to concentrate their forces upon that issue. Previously to entering upon the campaign, Sir George Goldie had pledged himself to the British Government not to carry warlike operations further north than Jebba, that negotiations between Britain and France might not be prejudiced. Taking a mean advantage of this pledge, the French seized upon Bussa Town. And there they remain. Even at the last moment Sir George Goldie might have prevented the outrage had he chosen to break his word to the British Government, for he had ample forces at his command, and was within easy reach of Bussa Town.

As it is now apparent that the French will keep advancing till they are stopped by British bayonets, something is being done more potent than treaty-making. What James M'Queen urged eighty years ago is at last being done. He recommended that Bussa should be the headquarters of British dominion on the Niger. Bussa—for the present, at all events—is not ours to occupy. Lokoja has been chosen as the head-centre of Nigeria. It is a town of at least a hundred thousand inhabitants, situated on the west bank of the Niger, opposite the mouth of the Benué River. A permanent Imperial Camp has been erected, military officers have been sent out, strong native regiments have been formed, and British authority is now a force that will soon make itself felt even to the utmost borders of the half million of square miles which constitute Nigeria. The frontiers of Lagos and the Gold

Coast will be guarded by a native force raised specially for that purpose. A survey has been made for a railway to the gold fields of Ashanti. Another railway is now being laid down from Lagos to Abeokuta. Some day this line will be carried across the Niger and far to the north-east to tap the abundant trade of Nigeria. And Nigeria is no plague-stricken wilderness inhabited by wild and naked Fetishists, as has been too commonly supposed. Fetishism is practically confined to the Western Soudan. Nigeria—the Central Soudan—is peopled for the most part by Mohammedans, who are comparatively in a high state of civilisation. It has a fertile soil, great and populous cities, and an immense trade.

This rich and wide inheritance from the explorers of the first half of the century the Royal Niger Company have preserved and handed down to the British people. It is the only part of the British sphere in West Africa that has escaped severe curtailment at the hands of the foreigner. When we look over the map of the Western Soudan we see tens of thousands of square miles that might have been ours for the asking, now under French domination—lost beyond recall. The river Niger, for which Great Britain sacrificed so much, flows for fifteen hundred miles through French territory. The tricolour now floats over the land where Mungo Park toiled and triumphed and died; over boundless tracts that are strewn with the bones of British explorers. Houghton and Park, Clapperton, Lander and Laing have laboured for the profit of the stranger. But the names of those men are still remembered with honour on the banks of the Niger. The French, generally grudging in their praise of our

West African travellers, have been just to the memory of Mungo Park.

Félix Dubois, the last Frenchman to visit the Upper Niger and publish a record of his journey, speaks in generous admiration of the great Scotsman. He tells us that the passage of 'the man with the great beard,' as Park was called by the natives, has become a legend on the shores of the Eastern Niger, and that the people of Sansanding of those days had a sincere liking and respect for the white stranger. In November 1888, a French gunboat having dropped anchor at Samba-Marcalla, a picturesque little town near Sego, the natives pointed out to the officers the grave of one of the men in the ill-fated expedition of 1805. Thereupon the gunners forged an iron cross and placed it over the grave of the unknown. Upon it were inscribed these words :—"To the Memory of one of the companions of Mungo Park, who was buried here. *The Niger Fleet, November* 1888."

The ivy-covered ruin of the little cottage on the banks of the murmuring Yarrow at Foulshiels has been enclosed and preserved as a memorial of Mungo Park. In Peebles the houses where he lived and worked have been marked so that the passer-by may note them. At Selkirk a statue has been raised in his honour. But the most precious tribute of all to the name of the great traveller is the one raised by strange hands in a land of strangers—the little iron cross that casts its shadow on the sands of the majestic Niger.

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