

Grant Allen

A photograph of a library or bookstore with wooden shelves filled with books. The image has a halftone dot pattern overlay.

*Ivan Greet's
Masterpiece*

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Ivan Greet's Masterpiece



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PREFACE.

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I have collected in this volume such of my more recent short stories as seemed to me to possess the best claim to literary treatment. They are mostly those which have been written more or less to please myself, and not to please the editor of this or that periodical. Others, however, are cast as a sop to Cerberus.

The first on the list, "Ivan Greet's Masterpiece," was originally published in the *Graphic*. I sent it, I confess, in fear and trembling, and was agreeably surprised when I found the editor had the boldness to print it unaltered. Two of the other stories here given to the world, however, met with less good fortune: "The Sixth Commandment" and "The Missing Link." This is their first public appearance on any stage. They were sent round to every magazine in which they possessed the ghost of a chance; but, as usually happens when one writes anything in which one feels more than ordinary personal interest, they were unanimously declined by the whole press of London. Hitherto, I have been in the habit of cremating in one annual holocaust all such stillborn children of my imagination; henceforth I shall keep their poor little corpses by my side, and embalm them from time to time in an experimental volume of Rejected Efforts.

Of the other pieces here submitted to the reader, "Karen" first appeared in the *Graphic*; "Pallinghurst Barrow," in the *Illustrated London News*; "The Abbé's Repentance," in the *Contemporary Review*; "Claude Tyack's Ordeal," "The Pot-boiler," and "Melissa's Tour," in *Longmans' Magazine*;

“Tom’s Wife,” in the *Novel Review*; “The Great Ruby Robbery” and “The Conscientious Burglar,” in the *Strand Magazine*; “A Social Difficulty,” in the *Cornhill*; “The Chinese Play at the Haymarket” and “My Circular Tour,” in *Belgravia*; and “The Minor Poet,” in the *Speaker*. My thanks are due to the editors and proprietors of those periodicals for kind permission to reprint them here.

Many of these stories I like myself. I hope “The Pot-boiler” and “The Minor Poet” may soften the hard heart of the man who reviews me for the *National Observer*.

G. A.

Hotel du Cap, Antibes.
March, 1893.

IVAN GREET'S MASTERPIECE.

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I.

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'Twas at supper at Charlie Powell's; every one there admitted Charlie was in splendid form. His audacity broke the record. He romanced away with even more than his usual brilliant recklessness. Truth and fiction blended well in his animated account of his day's adventures. He had lunched that morning with the newly-appointed editor of a high-class journal for the home circle—circulation exceeding half a million—and had returned all agog with the glorious prospect of untold wealth opening fresh before him. So he discounted his success by inviting a dozen friends to champagne and lobster-salad at his rooms in St. James's, and held forth to them, after his wont, in a rambling monologue.

“When I got to the house,” he said airily, poising a champagne-glass halfway up in his hand, “with the modest expectation of a chop and a pint of porter in the domestic ring—imagine my surprise at finding myself forthwith standing before the gates of an Oriental palace—small, undeniably small, a bijou in its way, but still, without doubt, a veritable palace. I touched the electric bell. Hi, presto! at my touch the door flew open as if by magic, and disclosed—a Circassian slave, in a becoming costume *à la* Liberty in Regent Street, and smiling like the advertisement of a patent dentifrice! I gasped out——”

“But how did ye know she was a Circassian?” Paddy O'Connor inquired, interrupting him brusquely. (His name

was really Francis Xavier O'Connor, but they called him "Paddy" for short, just to mark his Celtic origin.)

Charlie Powell smiled a contemptuously condescending smile. He was then on the boom, as chief literary lion. "How do I know ye're an Oirishman, Paddy?" he answered, hardly heeding the interruption. "By her accent, my dear boy; her pure, unadulterated Circassian accent! 'Is Mr. Morrison at home?' I gasped out to the Vision of Beauty. The Vision of Beauty smiled and nodded—her English being chiefly confined to smiles, with a Circassian flavour; and led me on by degrees into the great man's presence. I mounted a stair, with a stained-glass window all yellows and browns, very fine and Burne-Jonesey; I passed through a drawing-room in the Stamboul style—couches, rugs, and draperies; and after various corridors—Byzantine, Persian, Moorish—I reached at last a sort of arcaded alcove at the further end, where two men lay reclining on an Eastern divan—one, a fez on his head, pulling hard at a chibouque; the other, bare-headed, burbling smoke through a hookah. The bare-headed one rose: 'Mr. Powell,' says he, waving his hand to present me, 'My friend, Macpherson Psaha!' I bowed, and looked unconcerned. I wanted them to think I'd lived all my life hob-nobbing with Pashas. Well, we talked for a while about the weather and the crops, and the murder at Mile End, and the state of Islam; when, presently, of a sudden, Morrison claps his hands—so—and another Circassian slave, still more beautiful, enters.

"'Lunch, houri,' says Morrison.

"'The effendi is served,' says the Circassian.

“And down we went to the dining-room. Bombay black-wood, every inch of it, inlaid with ivory. Venetian glass on the table; solid silver on the sideboard. Only us three, if you please, to lunch; but everything as spick and span as if the Prince was of the company. The three Circassian slaves, in Liberty caps, stood behind our chairs—one goddess apiece—and looked after us royally. Chops and porter, indeed! It was a banquet for a poet; Ivan Greet should have been there; he’d have mugged up an ode about it. Clear turtle and Chablis—the very best brand; then smelts and sweetbreads; next lamb and mint sauce; ortolans on toast; ice-pudding; fresh strawberries. A guinea each, strawberries, I give you my word, just now at Covent Garden. Oh, mamma! what a lunch, boys! The Hebes poured champagne from a golden flagon; that is to say, at any rate”—for Paddy’s eye was upon him—“the neck of the bottle was wrapped in gilt tinfoil. And all the time Morrison talked—great guns, how he talked! I never heard anything in my life to equal it. The man’s been everywhere, from Peru to Siberia. The man’s been everything, from a cowboy to a communard. My hair stood on end with half the things he said to me; and I haven’t got hair so easily raised as some people’s. Was I prepared to sell my soul for Saxon gold at the magnificent rate of five guineas a column? Was I prepared to jump out of my skin! I choked with delight. Hadn’t I sold it all along to the enemies of Wales for a miserable pittance of thirty shillings? What did he want me to do? Why, contribute third leaders—you know the kind of thing—tootles on the penny-trumpet about irrelevant items of non-political news—the wit and humour of the fair, best

domestic style, informed throughout with wide general culture. An allusion to Aristophanes; a passing hint at Rabelais; what Lucian would have said to his friends on this theme; how the row at the School Board would have affected Sam Johnson.

“‘But you must remember, Mr. Powell,’ says Morrison, with an unctuous smile, ‘the greater part of our readers are—well, not to put it too fine—country squires and conservative Dissenters. Your articles mustn’t hurt their feelings or prejudices. Go warily, warily! You must stick to the general policy of the paper, and be tenderly respectful to John Wesley’s memory.’”

“‘Sir,’ said I, smacking his hand, ‘for five guineas a column I’d be tenderly respectful to King Ahab himself, if you cared to insist upon it. You may count on my writing whatever rubbish you desire for the nursery mind.’ And I passed from his dining-room into the enchanted alcove.

“‘But before I left, my dear Ivan, I’d heard such things as I never heard before, and been promised such pay as seemed to me this morning beyond the dreams of avarice. And oh, what a character! ‘When I was a slave at Khartoum,’ the man said; or ‘When I was a schoolmaster in Texas;’ ‘When I lived as a student up five floors at Heidelberg;’ or ‘When I ran away with Félix Pyat from the Versaillais;’ till I began to think ‘twas the Wandering Jew himself come to life again in Knightsbridge. At last, after coffee and cigarettes on a Cairo tray—with reminiscences of Paraguay—I emerged on the street, and saw erect before my eyes a great round Colosseum. I seemed somehow to recognize it. ‘This is *not* Bagdad, then,’ I said to myself, rubbing my eyes very hard—

for I thought I must have been wafted some centuries off, on an enchanted carpet. Then I looked once more. Yes, sure enough, it *was* the Albert Hall. And *there* was the Memorial with its golden image. I rubbed my eyes a second time, and hailed a hansom—for there were hansom about, and policemen, and babies. ‘Thank Heaven!’ I cried aloud; after all, this *is* London!”

II.

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“It’s a most regrettable incident!” Ivan Greet said solemnly.

The rest turned and looked. Ivan Greet was their poet. He was tall and thin, with strange, wistful eyes, somewhat furtive in tone, and a keen, sharp face, and lank, long hair that fell loose on his shoulders. It was a point with this hair to be always abnormally damp and moist, with a sort of unnatural and impalpable moisture. The little coterie of authors and artists to which Ivan belonged regarded him indeed with no small respect, as a great man *manqué*. Nature, they knew, had designed him for an immortal bard; circumstances had turned him into an occasional journalist. But to them, he represented Art for Art’s sake. So when Ivan said solemnly, “It’s a most regrettable incident,” every eye in the room turned and stared at him in concert.

“Why so, me dear fellow?” Paddy O’Connor asked, open-eyed. “I call it magnificent!”

But Ivan Greet answered warmly, “Because it’ll take him still further away than ever from his work in life, which you and I know is science and philosophy.”

“And yer own grand epic?” Paddy suggested, with a smart smile, pouncing down like a hawk upon him.

Ivan Greet coloured—positively coloured—“blushed visibly to the naked eye,” as Paddy observed afterwards, in recounting the incident to his familiar friend at the United Bohemians. But he stood his ground like a man and a poet for all that. “My own epic isn’t written yet—probably never

will be written,” he answered, after a pause, with quiet firmness. “I give up to the *Daily Telephone* what was meant for mankind: I acknowledge it freely. Still, I’m sorry when I see any other good man—and most of all Charlie Powell—compelled to lose his own soul the same way I myself have done.” He paused and looked round. “Boys,” he said, addressing the table, “in these days, if any man has anything out of the common to say, he must be rich and his own master, or he won’t be allowed to say it. If he’s poor, he has first to earn his living; and to earn his living he’s compelled to do work he doesn’t want to do—work that stifles the things which burn and struggle for utterance within him. The editor is the man who rules the situation; and what the editor asks is good paying matter. Good paying matter Charlie can give him, of course: Charlie can give him, thank Heaven, whatever he asks for. But this hack-work will draw him further and further afield from the work in life for which God made him—the philosophical reconstitution of the world and the universe for the twentieth century. And that’s why I say—and I say it again—a most regrettable incident!”

Charlie Powell set down his glass of champagne untasted. Ivan Greet was regarded by his narrow little circle of journalistic associates as something of a prophet; and his words, solemnly uttered, sobered Charlie for a while—recalled him with a bound to his better personality. “Ivan’s right,” he said slowly, nodding his head once or twice. “He’s right, *as usual*. We’re all of us wasting on weekly middles the talents God gave us for a higher purpose. We know it, every man Jack of us. But Heaven help us, I say, Ivan: for

how can we help ourselves? We live by bread. We must eat bread first, or how can we write epics or philosophies afterwards? This age demands of us the sacrifice of our individualities. It will be better some day, perhaps, when Bellamy and William Morris have remodelled the world: life will be simpler, and bare living easier. For the present I resign myself to inevitable fate. I'll write middles for Morrison, and eat and drink; and I'll wait for my philosophy till I'm rich and bald, and have leisure to write it in my own hired house in Fitzjohn's Avenue."

Ivan Greet gazed across at him with a serious look in those furtive eyes. "That's all very well for *you!*" he cried half angrily, in a sudden flaring forth of long-suppressed emotion. "Philosophy can wait till a man's rich and bald; it gains by waiting; it's the better for maturity. But poetry!—ah, there, I hate to talk about it! Who can begin to set about his divine work when he's turned sixty and worn out by forty years of uncongenial leaders? The thing's preposterous. A poet must write when he's young and passionate, or not at all. He may go on writing in age, of course, as his blood grows cool, if he's kept up the habit, like Wordsworth and Tennyson: he may even let it lie by or rust for a time, like Milton or Goethe, and resume it later, if he throws himself meanwhile, heart and soul, into some other occupation that carries him away with it resistlessly for the moment; but spend half his life in degrading his style and debasing his genius by working for hire at the beck and call of an editor—lose his birthright like that, and then turn at last with the bald head you speak about to pour forth at sixty his frigid lyrics—I tell you, Charlie, the thing's impossible! The poet

must work, the poet must acquire his habits of thought and style and expression in the volcanic period; if he waits till he's crusted over and encysted with age, he may hammer out rhetoric, he may string fresh rhymes, but he'll never, never give us one line of real poetry."



III.

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He spoke with fiery zeal. It was seldom Ivan Greet had an outbreak like this. For the most part he acquiesced, like all the rest of us, in the supreme dictatorship of Supply and Demand—those economic gods of the modern book-market. But now and again rebellious fits came over him, and he kicked against the pricks with all the angry impetuosity of a born poet. For the rest of that night he sat moody and silent. Black bile consumed him. Paddy O'Connor rose and sang with his usual verve the last new Irish comic song from the music-halls; Fred Mowbray, from Jamaica, told good stories in negro dialect with his wonted exuberance; Charley Powell bubbled over with spirits and epigrams. But Ivan Greet sat a little apart, with scarcely a smile on his wistful face; he sat and ruminated. He was angry at heart; the poetic temperament is a temperament of moods; and each mood, once roused, takes possession for the time of a man's whole nature. So Ivan remained angry, with a remorseful anger; he was ashamed of his own life, ashamed of falling short of his own cherished ideals. Yet how could he help himself? Man, as he truly said, must live by bread, though not by bread alone; a sufficiency of food is still a condition-precendent of artistic creation. You can't earn your livelihood nowadays by stringing together rhymes, string you never so deftly; and Ivan had nothing but his pen to earn it with. He had prostituted that pen to write harmless little essays on social subjects in the monthly magazines; his better nature

recoiled with horror to-night from the thought of that hateful, that wicked profanation.

'Twas a noisy party. They broke up late. Fred Mowbray walked home along Piccadilly with Ivan. It was one of those dull, wet nights in the streets of London when everything glistens with a dreary reflection from the pallid gas-lamps. Pah! what weather! To Fred, West-Indian born, it was utterly hideous. He talked as they went along of the warmth, the sunshine, the breadth of space, the ease of living, in his native islands. What a contrast between those sloppy pavements, thick with yellow mud, and the sun-smitten hillsides, clad in changeless green, where the happy nigger lay basking and sprawling all day long on his back in the midst of his plaintain patches, while the bountiful sun did the hard work of life for him by ripening his coconuts and mellowing his bananas, unasked and untended!

Ivan Greet drank it in. As Fred spoke, an idea rose up vague and formless in the poet's soul. There were countries, then, where earth was still kindly, and human wants still few; where Nature, as in the Georgics, supplied even now the primary needs of man's life unbidden! Surely, in such a land as that a poet yet might live; tilling his own small plot and eating the fruits of his own slight toil, he might find leisure to mould without let or hindrance the thought that was in him into exquisite melody. The bare fancy fired him. A year or two spent in those delicious climates might enable a man to turn out what was truest and best in him. He might drink of the spring and be fed from the plaintain-patch, like those wiser negroes, but he would carry with him still all the

inherited wealth of European culture, and speak like a Greek god under the tropic shade of Jamaican cotton-trees.

To the average ratepayer such a scheme would appear the veriest midsummer madness. But Ivan Greet was a poet. Now, a poet is a man who acts on impulse. And to Ivan the impulse itself was absolutely sacred. He paused on the slippery pavement, and faced his companion suddenly. "How much land does it take there for a man to live upon?" he asked, with hurried energy.

Fred Mowbray reflected. "Well, two acres at most, I should say, down in plantain and yam," he answered, "would support a family."

"And you can buy it?" Ivan went on, with surprising eagerness. "I mean, there's lots to be had—it's always in the market?"

"Lots to be had? Why, yes! No difficulty there! Half Jamaica's for sale, on the mountains especially. The island's under-peopled; our pop's half a million; it'd hold quite three. Land goes for a mere song; you can buy where you will, quite easily."

Ivan Greet's lip trembled with intense excitement. A vision of freedom floated dimly before him. Palms, tree-ferns, bamboos, waving clumps of tropic foliage; a hillside hut; dusky faces, red handkerchiefs; and leisure, leisure, leisure to do the work he liked in! Oh, soul, what a dream! You shall say what you will there! To Ivan that was religion—all the religion he had perhaps; for his was, above all things, an artistic nature.

"How much would it cost, do you think?" he inquired, all tremulous.

And Fred answered airily, "Well, I fancy not more than a pound or two an acre."

A pound or two an acre! Just a column in the *Globe*. The gates of Paradise stood open before him!

They walked on a hundred yards or so again in silence. Ivan Greet was turning over in his seething soul a strange scheme to free himself from Egyptian bondage. At last he asked once more, "How much would it cost me to go out by the steerage, if there is such a thing on the steamers to Jamaica?"

Fred Mowbray paused a moment. "Well, I should think," he said at last, pursing his lips to look wise, "you ought to do it for about a tenner."

Ivan's mind was made up. Those words decided him. While his mother lived he had felt bound to support her; and the necessity for doing so had "kept him straight," his friends said—or, as he himself would have phrased it, had tied him firmly down to unwilling servitude. But now he had nobody on earth save himself to consult, for Ethel had married well, and Stephen, dull lad, was comfortably ensconced in a City office. He went home all on fire with his new idea. That night he hardly slept; coconuts waved their long leaves in the breeze before him; dusky hands beckoned him with strange signs and enticements to come over to a land of sunlight and freedom. But he was practical too; he worked it all out in his head arithmetically. So much coming in from this or that magazine; so much cash in hand; so much *per contra* for petty debts at home; so much for outfit, passage money, purchase. With two acres of his own he could live like a lord on his yams and plantains. What sort of

food-stuff, indeed, your yam might be he hadn't, to say the truth, the very faintest conception. But who cares for such detail? It was freedom he wanted, not the flesh-pots of Egypt. And freedom he would have to work out his own nature.



IV.

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There was commotion on the hillside at St. Thomas-in-the-Vale one brilliant blazing noontide a few weeks later. Clemmy burst upon the group that sat lounging on the ground outside the hut-door with most unwonted tidings. "You hear dem sell dat piece o' land nex' bit to Tammass?" she cried, all agog with excitement; "you hear dem sell it?"

Old Rachel looked up, yawning. "What de gal a-talking about?" she answered testily, for old Rachel was toothless. "Folk all know dat—him hear tell long ago. Sell dem two acre las' week, Peter say, to 'tranger down a' Kingston."

"Yes, an' de 'tranger come up," Clemmy burst out, hardly able to contain herself at so astounding an incident, "an' what you tink him is?" Him doan't nagur at all! Him reel buckra gentleman!"

A shrill whistle of surprise and subdued unbelief ran sharply round the little cluster of squatting negroes. "Him buckra?" Peter Foddergill repeated to himself, half incredulous. Peter was Clemmy's stepfather; for Clemmy was a brown girl, and old Rachel, her mother, was a full-blooded negress. Her paternity was lost in the dim past of the island.

"Yes, him buckra," Clemmy repeated in a very firm voice. "Him reel white buckra. Him come up to take de land, an' him gwine to lib dere."

"It doan't can true!" old Rachel cried, rousing herself. "It doan't can possible. Buckra gentleman doan't can come an' lib on two-acre plot alongside o' black nagur. Him gwine to

sell it agin; dat what it is; or else him gwine to gib it to some nagur leeady. White buckra doan't can lib all alone in St. Tammass."

But Clemmy was positive. "No, no," she cried, unmoved, shaking her comely brown head, with its crimson bandanna—for she was a pretty girl of her sort was Clemmy. "Him gwine to lib dere. Him tell me so himself. Him gwine to build hut on it, an' plant it down in plantain. Him berry pretty gentleman, wit' long hair on him shoulder; him hab eyes quick and sharp all same like weasel; and when him smile, him look kinder nor anyting. But him say him come out from England for good becos him lub better to lib in Jamaica; an' him gwine to build him hut here, and lib same like nagur."

In a moment the little cluster of negro hovels was all a-buzz with conjecture, and hubbub, and wonderment. Only the small black babies were left sprawling in the dust, with the small black pigs, beside their mothers' doors, so that you could hardly tell at a glance which was which, as they basked there; all the rest of the population, men, women, and children, with that trifling exception, made a general stampede with one accord for the plot next to Tammass's. A buckra come to live on the hillside in their midst! A buckra going to build a little hut like their own! A buckra going to cultivate a two-acre plot with yam and plantain! They were aghast with surprise. It was wonderful, wonderful! For Jamaica negroes don't keep abreast of the Movement, and they didn't yet know the ways of our latter-day prophets.

As for Ivan Greet himself, he was fairly surprised in turn, as he stood there in his shirt-sleeves surveying his estate, at this sudden eruption of good-humoured barbarians. How

they grinned and chattered! What teeth! what animation! He had bought his two acres with the eye of faith at Kingston from their lawful proprietor, knowing nothing but their place on the plan set before him. That morning he had come over by train to Spanish Town, and tramped through the wondrous defile of the Bog Walk to Linstead, and asked his way thence by devious bridle-paths to his own new property on the hillside at St. Thomas. Conveyancing in Jamaica is but an artless art; having acquired his plot by cash payment on the nail, Ivan was left to his own devices to identify and demarcate it. But Tammas's acre was marked on the map in conspicuous blue, and defined in real life by a most warlike boundary fence of prickly aloes; while a dozen friendly negroes, all amazement at the sight, were ready to assist him at once in finding and measuring off the adjacent piece duly outlined in red on the duplicate plan he had got with his title-deed.

It was a very nice plot, with a very fine view, in a very sweet site, on a very green hillside. But Ivan Greet, though young and strong with the wiry strength of the tall thin Cornishman, was weary and hot after a long morning's tramp under a tropical sun, and somewhat taken aback (as well he might be, indeed) at the strangeness and squalor of his new surroundings. He had pulled off his coat and laid it down upon the ground; and now he sat on it in his shirt-sleeves for airiness and coolness. His heart sank for a moment as he gazed in dismay at the thick and spiky jungle of tropical scrub he would have to stub up before he could begin to plant his first yam or banana. That was a point, to say the truth, which had hardly entered into his calculations

beforehand in England, he had figured to himself the pineapples and plantains as a going concern; the coconuts dropping down their ready-made crops; the breadfruits eternally ripe at all times and seasons. It was a shock to him to find mother-earth so encumbered with an alien growth; he must tickle her with a hoe ere she smiled with a harvest. Tickle her with a hoe indeed! It was a cutlass he would need to hack down that matted mass of bristling underbrush.

And how was he to live meanwhile? That was now the question. His money was all spent save a couple of pounds, for his estimates had erred, as is the way of estimates, rather on the side of deficiency than of excess; and he was now left half-stranded. But his doubts on this subject were quickly dispelled by the unexpected good-nature of his negro neighbours. As soon as those simple folk began to realize, by dint of question and answer, that the buckra meant actually to settle down in their midst, and live his life as they did, their kindness and their offers of help knew no stint or moderation. The novelty of the idea fairly took them by storm. They chuckled and guffawed at it. A buckra from England—a gentleman in dress and accent and manner (for negroes know what's what, and can judge these things as well as you or I can) come of his own free-will to build a hut like their own, and live on the tilth of two acres of plantain! It was splendid! it was wonderful! They entered into the spirit of the thing with true negro zest. "Hey, massy, dat good now!" They would have done anything for Ivan—anything, that is to say, that involved no more than the average amount of negro exertion.

As for the buckra himself, thus finding himself suddenly in the midst of new friends, all eager to hear of his plans and intentions, he came out in his best colours under stress of their welcome, and showed himself for what he was—a great-hearted gentleman. Sympathy always begets sympathy. Ivan accepted their proffered services with a kindly smile of recognition and gratitude, which to those good-natured folk seemed most condescending and generous in a real live white man. The news spread like wild-fire. A buckra had come who loved the nagur. Before three hours were over every man in the hamlet had formed a high opinion of Mistah Greet's moral qualities. "Doan't nebber see buckra like a' dis one afore," old Peter murmured musingly to his cronies on the hillside. "Him doan't got no pride, 'cep de pride ob a gentleman. Him talk to you and me same as if he tink us buckra like him. Hey, massy, massa, him good man fe' true! Wonder what make him want to come lib at St. Tamma?"

V.

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That very first day, before the green and gold of tropical sunset had faded into the solemn grey of twilight, Ivan Greet had decided on the site of his new hut, and begun to lay the foundations of a rude wooden shanty with the willing aid of his new black associates. Half the men of the community buckled to at the work, and all the women: for the women felt at once a novel glow of sympathy and unspoken compassion towards the unknown white man with the wistful eyes, who had come across the great sea to cast in his lot with theirs under the waving palm-trees. Now, your average negress can do as much hard labour as an English navy; and as the men found the timber and the posts for the corners without money or price, it came to pass that by evening that day a fair framework for a wattled hut of true African pattern stood already four-square to all the airts of heaven in the middle frontage of Ivan Greet's two acres. But it was roofless, of course, and its walls were still unbuilt: nothing existed so far but the bare square outline. It had yet to receive its wattled sides, and to be covered in on top with a picturesque waterproof thatch of fan-palm. Still, it was a noble hut as huts went on the hillside. Ivan and his fellow-workers stood and gazed at it that evening as they struck work for the day with profound admiration for their own cunning handicraft.

And now came the question where Ivan was to sleep, and what to do for his supper. He had doubts in his own mind how all this could be managed. But Clemmy had none;

Clemmy was the only brown girl in the little community, and as such, of course, she claimed and received an acknowledged precedence. "I shall have to sleep *somewhere*," Ivan murmured, somewhat ruefully, gazing round him at the little cluster of half-barbarous cottages. "But how—Heaven help me!"

And Clemmy, nodding her head with a wise little smile, made answer naturally—

"You gwine sleep at mo fader, sah; we got berry nice room. You doan't can go an' sleep wit' all dem common nagur dah."

"I'm not very rich, you know," Ivan interposed hastily, with something very like a half-conscious blush—though, to be sure, he was red enough already with his unwanted exertion in that sweltering atmosphere. "I'm not very rich, but I've a little still left, and I can afford to pay—well, whatever you think would be proper—for bed and board till I can get my own house up."

Clemmy waved him aside, morally speaking, with true negro dignity.

"We *invite* you, sah," she said proudly, like a lady in the land (which she was at St. Thomas). "When we ax gentleman to stop, we doan't want nuffin paid for him board and lodgin'. We offer you de hospitality of our house an' home till your own house finish. Christen people doan't can do no less dan dat, I hope, for de homeless 'tranger."

She spoke with such grave politeness, such unconsciousness of the underlying humour of the situation, that Ivan, with his quickly sympathetic poet's heart, raised

his hat in return, as he answered with equal gravity, in the tone he might have used to a great lady in England—

“It’s awfully kind of you. I appreciate your goodness. I shall accept with pleasure the hospitality you offer me.”

Old Peter grinned delight from ear to ear. It was a feather in his cap thus to entertain in his hut the nobility and gentry. Though, to be sure, ’twas his right, as the acknowledged stepfather of the only undeniable brown girl in the whole community. For a brown girl, mark you, serves, to a certain extent, as a patent of gentility in the household she adorns; she is a living proof of the fact that the family to which she belongs has been in the habit of mixing with white society.

“You come along in, sah!” old Peter cried cheerily. “You tired wit’ dat work. You doan’t accustom’ to it. White gentleman from England find de sun berry hot out heah in Jamaica. You take drop o’ rum, sah, or you like coconut water?”

Ivan modestly preferred the less spirituous liquor to the wine of the country; so Clemmy, much flattered, and not a little fluttered, brought out a fresh green coconut, and sliced its top off before his eyes with one slash of the knife, and poured the limpid juice (which came forth clear as crystal, not thick and milky) into a bowl-shaped calabash, which she offered with a graceful bow for their visitor’s acceptance. Ivan seated himself on the ground just outside the hut as he saw the negroes do (for the air inside was hot, and close, and stifling), and took with real pleasure his first long pull at that delicious beverage. “Why, it’s glorious!” he exclaimed, with unfeigned enthusiasm (for he was hot and thirsty), turning the empty calabash upside down before his