

# THE GENTLEMANLY NIGGER.

BY  
FRANCIS GRIBBLE.

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It was generally admitted that the nigger who performed that summer, on the beach at Frinton, was "no ordinary nigger."

His costume, of striped cotton, was as neat as if he had put it on for a fancy-dress ball; his wide flapping collar was spotless; his straw hat was never weather-beaten; and he did not wear a made-up tie.

"The gentlemanly nigger" was the girls' name for him. They deserted all the other seaside entertainments—they even neglected their novelettes—in order to sit in a circle round him; and speculation as to his identity was rife in the Sea View Boarding House.

"It is vain for him to call himself 'Mr. Bimbo,'" said Mrs. Haycroft, the proprietress. "Nothing will ever persuade me that Bimbo is his real name."

"I should think not, indeed," said Mrs. Browne, the wife of the great Brixton draper. "You can tell that by his grand air when he turns the banjo upside down to collect the coppers."

"Just as if he was calling for the King's taxes," said Mrs. Haycroft.

"Or as if he was a great nobleman at a charity bazaar," said Mrs. Browne.

"And who shall say that he isn't a nobleman in disguise?" said Mrs. Haycroft. "I've heard of noblemen doing such things before now, when they are down on their luck."

"I shouldn't wonder if it was," said Mrs. Browne, "for there's no denying that he's dis-tangay, and when he takes to singing one of his sentimental ballads—"

"It's just as if he was serenading the maid in her attic—I mean to say her lattice—height."

That was how the elder ladies discussed Mr. Bimbo; and the younger ladies were equally enthusiastic, so that it was like a bomb-shell bursting in their midst, when Master Tommy Haycroft, aged nine, burst into the conversation with the question:

"Who kissed Mr. Bimbo last night over the garden wall?"

All the elder ladies then looked at all the younger ladies; and all the younger ladies looked at each other; while Mrs. Haycroft tried to cover their confusion by threatening to smack Tommy afterwards if he told.

But Tommy was as bold as brass.

"I'm not going to tell," he said, "not now, and I'll promise not to tell at all if she gives me sixpence."

So the subject dropped; but, on the following morning, Master Tommy Haycroft decided to Master Johnnie Browne that—

"Six of them gave me sixpence each for promising to say it wasn't them, and one of them gave me a shilling."

"Then that's the one, you bet," said Johnnie; and though Johnnie was cynical, he was right.

The "one" in question, indeed, was no other than Johnnie's own sister, Miss Brilliantina Browne, known to her family as Brillie; and the conversation above reported seems to show that, if she had done wrong, her mother was hardly less to blame than herself for her lapse from proper courses.

Nor did that conversation stand alone. On the contrary; the theme came up nightly; and pleasantries, and even personalities, were exchanged about it.

"There's a far-away expression in his eyes, but I daresay his thoughts aren't quite as far away as his looks," said Mrs. Haycroft.

"That's just what I think when I see him looking round at the girls," rejoined Mrs. Browne. "Now it's one he looks at, and now it's another, so that it's hard to say which he looks at most; but if I wasn't afraid of turning my Brillie's head—"

"Oh, ma!" Miss Brilliantina interrupted. "Look at her blushing," laughed her mother and Mrs. Haycroft said:

"Well, if he should turn out to be a nobleman in disguise—and stranger things have happened to my certain knowledge—in that case, Mrs. Browne, it wouldn't be a conquest to sneeze at after all."

So the talk ran; and it was seed that fell upon a fertile soil.

Miss Brilliantina Browne was pretty, in a fluffy sort of way, and knew it; and she had cherished "ideas beyond her station" ever since last summer's seaside flirtation with an Oxford undergraduate who had been introduced to her (by the Master of the Ceremonies).

That flirtation, indeed, had come to nothing, as seaside flirtations generally do; but it had left Brilliantina with a yearning for higher social things. She blamed the young Brixton tradesmen for not adopting the "Oxford manner."

It would have taken but little to make her censure her own father for the same short-comings.

Moreover, there were the novelettes. She regularly read two a day, and we all know in what light life is pictured in these romantic tracts. What wonder, then, that Brilliantina began to see the gentlemanly nigger as the King of a Castle in the Air? What wonder that an understanding began to grow up between them when he collected contributions in his banjo?

"I suppose Mr. Bimbo isn't your real name?" she ventured as she dropped into the instrument a piece of silver originally intended for the collection plate on Sunday.

"I expect you're doing it for a charity, aren't you?" she asked on the next opportunity; and Mr. Bimbo smiled his most enigmatic smile.

"I knew it because any one can see you have the Oxford manner," she said on her third opportunity; and Mr. Bimbo rewarded her with a confidential nod.

Such were the passages which led Mrs. Browne to the conclusion that her Brillie had made a conquest; and, if the subsequent passages were not observed by Mrs. Browne—well, we all know that there are some secrets which the young like to keep to themselves.

Mrs. Browne was not to know, for instance, that Mr. Bimbo had serenaded Brilliantina under her bedroom window at midnight, and she was still less likely to be informed of the passage which had put a shilling into Master Tommy Haycroft's pocket. Such incidents are associated in sentimental minds with thoughts too deep for the idle chaff of boarding-houses; and there is a point at which even mothers who laugh at their daughter's flirtations, remember their responsibilities.

"I shouldn't mind so much if it was only ma, but she might get writing to pa," was the way Brilliantina put it to herself.

For her father did not read novelettes, and was ignorant of the romantic possibilities of life. A nigger for him was just a nigger. It would be useless to try to convince him that Mr. Bimbo was black as night only for wantonness. He would only telegraph to summon Brilliantina home.

"And then I should miss that drive," thought Brilliantina, for things, still unobserved by Mrs. Browne, had even got as far as that.

Sunday was to be the day, and Clacton was to be the meeting-place. A visit to an old school-friend, alleged to be staying at Clacton; was to be the pretext. Mr. Bimbo was to be waiting with the carriage at the Clacton station.

He was; and he had washed his face, as a first step, as it were, towards the disclosure of his identity. He was dressed as elegantly as any other gentleman who takes a lady for a drive, and as for his manner—

"If that isn't the Oxford manner," thought Brilliantina, "then I don't know the Oxford manner when I see it."

Perhaps she did not know it; but Mr. Bimbo's manner, at any rate, was widely different from that of the ordinary nigger on the beach, and he ended a delightful afternoon by quoting Tennyson's "Lord of Burleigh":

"He was but a landscape-painter,  
And a village maiden she."

It was one of the few pieces of poetry that Brilliantina knew; and having to learn it by heart at school, she had voted it "as good as a novelette," except that the end was "so sad" and "so unnatural."

"For what I can't understand," she said, "is the girl's pining away. She can't have been a girl of any spirit."

"She can't," Mr. Bimbo agreed; and then there was an interval of silence until Mr. Bimbo spoke again:

"If I knew a girl of spirit," he said "a girl who would trust me absolutely—a girl who would adorn any station, even the highest—"

And, of course, he did know such a girl—and of course, Brilliantina knew one, too—and so, of course—

It was in the office above the shop, and Brilliantina had to face an angry father.

He was an indulgent father as a general rule, but he did not read novelettes, and secret marriages do take some explaining—when the wife is not in a position to give a definite account of her husband. Brilliantina felt it so. She feared that Mr. Bimbo had overdone the part of the Lord of Burleigh. She wished that he had given her more precise information as to the whereabouts of his estates. Sentiment had prevented her from thinking of all that before; but now that she was under cross-examination it troubled her.

For Mr. Browne had bounded from his chair, and was pacing the room, and using very violent language.

"A secret marriage! Oh, Brillie! Brillie! A nigger on the bench, and your mother there to look after you! Oh, Brillie! Brillie!"

"But ma said he was such a gentlemanly—"

"Gentlemanly nigger, indeed! Your mother said that, did she? What's the world coming to next? And what's your gentlemanly nigger's name, miss? What does he call himself? Uncle Bones? Sambo? Jumbo?"

"Bimbo," said Brilliantina.

"Bimbo! Bimbo!" Mr. Browne repeated. The name seemed to suggest something to him—he did not seem to know exactly what. Perhaps it was a music hall memory. Perhaps—

"Bimbo isn't his real name, of course," Brilliantina corrected. "It couldn't be. His real name is Poppewick"; and once more Mr. Browne repeated the name after her.

"Bimbo! Bimbo! Poppewick! Poppewick!" Evidently he was searching for some link between the two appellations; but Brilliantina interrupted him.

"You'll change your mind about him, pa, when I show you his photo, and you see how distinguished he looks," she went on, adding, as she removed the tissue paper. "There are Poppewicks in the Peerage, I expect, pa."

But Mr. Browne retorted with a withering scorn.

"Expect! Is that what your novelettes teach you to expect? Why don't you expect him to be the Prince of Wales and all the Royal Family while you're about it? What I expect is—"

But then he stopped; for he had looked at the photograph, and found the missing link. When he resumed, the tone of his voice was modified. He spoke with sarcasm, yet as one relieved to know that things are not so bad as he has feared.

"Well, Miss Brillie," he said. "So that's your gentlemanly nigger, is it?"

"What! You know him, pa?" gasped Brilliantina.

"Know him? Know Mr. Poppewick, who blacked his face and called himself Mr. Bimbo at the smoking concerts? Seeing that he was one of my assistants until two months ago—"

Brilliantina gasped again. It was difficult for her to know what to say, so she said nothing, nor did it seem that her father expected her to say anything. He had been an angry father, for five minutes, but now, he was about to become an indulgent father once more.

"I've nothing against him, my dear," he said. "He only left because I was giving up the New Cross branch. I thought he'd gone to Jones' Brothers, but as he preferred to try his luck as Mr. Bimbo—"

He paused, and then, "I don't know that it's altogether a proper way of going courting, Brillie, but still—well he is a very gentlemanly young fellow, as you say—and you're fond of him, Brillie, aren't you?"

"Oh, pa!" said Brilliantina once again. He had become quite the indulgent father now. His manner was no longer even that of a man making the best of a bad job.

"You looked higher, Brillie. You couldn't help it, with your boarding-school education and your novelettes. But I daresay you've got just as high as it's good for you to go, so I'll tell you what I'll do for you. I'll open that New Cross branch of the business again, and I'll put you and Mr. Bimbo in to manage it, so just you run away and tell Mr. Bimbo to come and see me."

[The End.]

## SENTIMENT AND STRATEGY.

The great soprano was singing at Pangaroo. Her desire was to finish up the concert in time to take train back to Melbourne, and, at the last moment, here was the audience whooping for a second encore. The great soprano, in her dressing room, ramped. Then she darted out, assumed a cardboard smile of great gratification, and retreated again. But the audience still whooped. "Here," she snapped, "I'll fix them." She came on, began "Home, Sweet Home," and sang half-way into the verse with profound feeling. Then her voice broke, and she gave way to a flood of passionate tears, and staggered from the platform. "Now," she said, "drive like blazes for that train!"

## AN ADVENTURE WITH ROBBERS.

A traveller in Mexico, whose name was Taylor, started one morning at sunrise from the cold comfortless inn where he had slept the night before. A few hours' riding brought him to a small town, where he was glad to rest himself, and breakfast. When mounting his horse again, he was asked whether he would not have a guard, as the road he was going was much frequented by robbers; but he refused, either because he was too brave to care for one, or because he thought it was a mere pretence to make him pay for an escort. He rode off, the inn-keeper telling him he would certainly be stopped on the road.

He travelled on for some time; not a creature was to be seen on the road, which lay between two steep hills. So lonely was it that he thought it would be well to load his pistol. Before he could do this, however, he heard a slight movement in the bushwork by his side. Turning to see what caused it, a double-barrelled musket met his view, pointed at him, so close and so well-aimed that he could almost look down the barrels. Holding the musket was a fierce-looking man in a pink shirt and white trousers. In a moment, a second was visible on the other side, then a third in front. The attack was so sudden, that he could only throw down his arms as they bade him. The next command was that he should get off his horse; this, too, he did, for, with one unloaded pistol, how could he fight the robbers? They made him lead his horse out of the road, for fear of any passers-by. One of them went back to keep guard. The others, pointing their muskets at their victim, ordered him to lie down on his face. They then took off his coat and waistcoat, and turned his pockets inside out. His purse had very little money in it, at which they were angry. He had been so prudent as only to take enough for his journey, but he had a cheque on a bank in Mexico. The robbers gave him back his papers, and this cheque among them.

They next tied his hands behind him; then spreading out a blanket he carried, emptied his bags into it, that they might choose what to take. They took all but letters, books and papers. They also picked his pockets of some oranges and cigars, but gave him back one of each, saying: "Perhaps you may get hungry before night." They tied all they took up in a blanket, and carried it off, leaving him his horse, fortunately. They then departed, bidding him good-day, and saying how pleased they were to have met him. He, poor fellow, with his hands tied behind him, felt it anything but pleasant. The first thing was to get rid of the rope; and, after twisting and turning a long time, he contrived to turn his hands round so that he could reach the knots with his teeth—in half an hour he was free once more. His horse had remained near him. He caught him, mounted, and rode off, seeing, as he did so, the three robbers in the distance. He galloped on as hard as he could, and reached a town where a good old priest directed him to an honest inn. As he jumped off his poor tired horse, he told the people in the inn he had no money. But they kindly bade him not to mind it; he might stay as long as he liked. They told him, too, that he ought to be thankful the robbers had not taken his life as well as his money and goods.

## THE IRISH REPUBLIC.

Postage stamps prepared by the short-lived Irish Republic have been found, ready for issue. They are printed in the Republican colours—green, white, and orange, with inset pictures of the three Manchester martyrs (Larkin, O'Brien, and Allen) on a shamrock leaf. Beneath is a harp and the words, "God Save Ireland."

## WORTH HER WEIGHT IN GOLD.

### A CAT THAT SWIMS AND DIVES.

The pet of the stock stores labourers who work day and night at the Enfield Munition Factory is a black cat with white chest and paws. This cat is quite ordinary so far as looks go, but it is worth its weight in gold all the same.

Before the advent of "puss" the water-rats, which abound in the River Lea, made short work of the sandwiches and other eatables which the men brought along with them. Often a man would put his dinner into what he thought was a safe hiding-place, only to find on going to look for it that it had disappeared.

Now the reign of the rats is over, and puss reigns supreme. She will chase a venturesome rodent round and round the workshops, and even if it plunges into the river she will dive in and swim after it until she catches her prey. Then she will land triumphantly and place her capture in a prominent position for all to see.

Recently she caught a rat nearly as big as herself, swam along with it in her mouth, and landed it quite neatly.

She makes a good living hunting rats, and eats every particle excepting the tail. A legend goes about among the men who labour day and night at Enfield Lock that a rat's tail would poison their favourite.

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