

JACK'S MATCHMAKING.

"Oh Jack, what on earth shall we do?"

"Well, what's the matter now, little woman? Is the house on fire, or have you upset my last drop of turpentine?" and Jack Melford turned to look at his young wife, who was disconsolately examining a letter she had just received from the postman.

"Read that, Jack, and you'll see for yourself"—handing the highly-scented epistle to her husband, who sniffed at it for a moment with comic disgust, and then read aloud—

"My dear Margaret—The letter announcing your return from Italy and your establishment at Hutton was very welcome, not only as giving us a hope of seeing a little more of you both, but from a selfish point of view"—"Not a doubt of that, ma'am!" interrupted Jack—"as I am going to ask you to help me out of a difficulty. Maude has been, as I told you in my last, growing more and more difficult to manage. Since Sir Ralph Alverton openly announced his intention of making her his heiress, she has become simply unbearable, and I am in daily terror that she will affront him in some way, and in consequence ruin her prospects. You must know the old gentleman has an intense and utter aversion to artists of all kinds and sorts—'long-haired, simpering puppies,' he politely calls them. Well, Maude, always romantic and mad after cleverness of all kinds, is doubly crazy just now. She is always complaining that, since the improvement in her prospects, she is beset by a lot of young men who look on her simply as an itinerate money-bag, to be caught and utilised by the first comer. Naturally young men like a girl with money, and I very much doubt if Maude's talented idols would not be of very much the same opinion as the poor fellows she insists on dubbing 'uncle Ralph's Philistines.' Where on earth she gets her romance from I'm sure I can't tell—not from me, that's certain!"

"Humph! No; I exonerate her fully from that charge," muttered Jack.

"But, to cut a long story short," the letter went on, "she was raving the other day about some Signor or other, when Sir Ralph turned on her and told her plainly that, if she married an artist of any kind, not one penny of his money would she ever see. Maude never said a word on the subject; but her thoughts were pretty evident. Lord James Bertie proposed to her the next day, and though he was in every way most suitable, and the match would have been most pleasing to Sir Ralph, the headstrong girl scarcely gave the poor young man time to finish his proposal ere she refused him. Naturally, her uncle, whose heart was set on the match, is annoyed; and between the two I feel very wretched. So I am writing to ask a great favor of you, namely, to receive Maude on a visit for a little while.

"I have told her of my intention to write to you on this subject, and she seems to catch at the idea of getting away from home;

in fact, romantic and foolish even as she is, she feels the difficulty of her position as regards her uncle. Her only message is—"Tell Margaret, if she will really have me, let it be as her cousin in name as well as in fact. For Heaven's sake, let me for a little while drop "Miss Alverton, the heiress," and enjoy myself as plain "Maude Thornleigh." Now, my dear Margaret, can and will you grant this request? I need not try to describe what a relief it will be to me, if you do. Please explain all this to your husband for me.

"I consider I am asking a greater favor, in begging you to receive Maude this way, than I should dare to hope for from any one but your father's daughter; but let me add that I consider this visit entirely my affair, and that I will not hear of your being put to any expense, which I know, with your limited means, you can ill afford. I am particularly anxious that Maude should see an entirely different phase of life from that to which she has lately been accustomed; and your dear husband's being an artist is an additional advantage."

"So that's it, is it?" laughed Jack. "The old lady wishes her impressionable daughter to have a nearer view of Bohemia, I see! Well, perhaps she's right"—with a half-sigh. "Our life is quite humdrum enough to knock on the head all brilliant idealisations of an artist's life. Never mind, little woman," he added quickly, noticing his wife's grieved look; "if we are not a pair of Croesuses, there's enough for bread and water, and even at times for cheese. Kisses are gratis; so there's not much to complain of in the life; and, even if you do darn socks, dear heart, instead of making the pure embroidery of old days, I confess I am not Bohemian enough to prefer worn hose to neatly-mended ones."

"But, you see, Jack, the point is, I do owe aunt Eleanor a great deal; she was very good to me when dear father died, and I should like to help her, for I know her step-daughter tries her a good bit."

"Bound to, if the girl's worth her salt!" muttered Jack.

"But I don't," continued Mrs. Melford, "like the notion of this absurd farce about her name, or of your being bored by a fashionable aesthetic young lady, such as Maude is described by every one to be."

"Well, the change of name won't bother me, and, as to the neighbors, there is no one will care two straws if she calls herself 'Miss Smith' or 'Miss Alverton.' I confess I shall grudge losing our *tele-a-teles* a little; but still, if it's a case of your being able to do a kindness to a person you feel grateful to, I'll offer myself up on the altar of your gratitude. Besides, I've always the studio as a refuge; so, on the whole, my share of the sacrifice is not alarming. I'm far more sorry for you, for I