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Genius at Milwood.

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MILWOOD did not know whether to be pleased or otherwise when it discovered that a famous man had taken Shattermere Cottage, the wonderfully picturesque little place by the side of beautiful Shattermere. Shattermere was the delight of artists who were always coming to paint it. The artists put up at the Bell and were taken no notice of by Milwood people, to whom artists, authors, musicians and all their kind were Bedlam folk.

Ralph Thornton might be a very great man to the outside world. He would have been one of the Bedlam folk, something to be looked at askance as belonging to a disreputable class if it were not for Lady Darien, the Lady of the Manor, whose will in Milwood was law.

Lady Darien's first interest in the Thorntons—there was a Mrs. Thornton as well—was on the score of the insanitariness of Shattermere Cottage.

"My dear," she said to her niece, Celia; "I must really call on the poor things, if only to point out to them the impossibility of the Cottage in winter. It is all very well in this beautiful summer, when they can be out of doors all day and needn't light fires. Wait till the winter comes and the Mere is covered with white mist; when the doors and windows won't close properly and the chimneys won't draw. I think it is perfectly shocking of Lord de Sales to let such a place for habitation at all."

"Oh, but someone must live in it to keep it aired, Aunt Mary," Celia protested. "The dear old place! You wouldn't have it drop to pieces from the damp? What would the artists do?"

Lady Darien looked at Celia with a hint of severity in a very tender gaze. She had been a little annoyed with Celia the previous autumn when, through an indiscretion of someone or other, her niece had made the acquaintance of one of the artists who lodged at the Bell—a tall gipsy-looking fellow, who seemed to Lady Darien when she encountered him carrying his easel across her park, and sitting down by the Mere to paint it in one of its ever-changing aspects, quite unnecessarily strange and Bohemian-looking. The acquaintance had not gone very far. Lady Darien had acted with great promptitude, carrying Celia off to the Highlands as soon as she discovered her acquaintance with the artist.

Celia was destined in the masterful little lady's mind to marry her distant cousin, Lord Chilton. That the young people had shown no leaning that way did not matter at all. Of course Celia would be ready to marry Chilton when he asked her.

Lady Darien had everything but money. Shatterdale Manor House was falling to pieces for want of a little money to repair it. By and bye all there was would go to Lord Chilton. The old lady had saved what she could to dower her penniless niece, but that was not much.

She had to keep up a certain state at the Manor House; and she had not starved its hospitality. But what, after all, did it matter, when presently Celia would be Lady Chilton? Lord Chilton was a pleasant and kindly young man. It was not likely any girl should object to marrying him.

"I believe Chilton spoke of this Mr. Thornton," she went on, her eye softening as it always did if it rested long enough on Celia's charming face. "Chilton seemed to admire him very much. I don't quite fall in with the modern fashion of receiving everyone who paints or plays or writes as equals. Still—Chilton was certainly very enthusiastic."

"Do go and see them, Aunt Mary," urged Celia. "Poor things! the rheumatism will have them in its grip before they know where they are. It is really your duty to warn them."

"There is Nutgrove empty," Lady Darien said considerably. "If they give me an opening. . . . Not that I particularly want anyone of that kind in Nutgrove.

Someone like dear old General Baines would please me better."

Lady Darien called in the Thorntons and came back with the verdict that they were really pretty much what she expected. He was a little brown-bearded man with very absent, soft, brown eyes, who had sat caressing his beard abstractedly for the greater part of Lady Darien's visit. Mrs. Thornton had apparently made up for her husband's silence.

"She chatters like a starling, my dear," said the old lady. "Not a very discreet person and not quite a lady. I don't consider her up to her husband's level at all; but no doubt she is a very good wife. She seemed quite alarmed when I told her about the state the cottage was in in the winter; and she showed a proper deference to my opin-

Mrs. Poingdestre and Miss Hammersley called together on the Thorntons with a sense of supporting each other and were surprised to find Celia Humphreys there before them; and so much at home that she positively poured out tea for Mrs. Thornton, who was short-sighted and either half-filled the cups or overflowed them. They had a comfortable feeling of their own condescension and even expressed an interest in Mr. Thornton's work, of which they had never read a line.

"I hope he'll consent to see you," Mrs. Thornton said, beaming at them through her glasses. "But if he does you will be lucky. Of course he's never disturbed at his work. I guard him from all intrusion. It isn't likely, ladies, you'll see him, so you may as well prepare yourselves for disappointment."

While Mrs. Poingdestre and Miss Hammersley stared with amazement at this incomprehensible point of view, the great man made his appearance. He was wearing a shabby velvet coat and down-at-heel slippers; and he came in carrying a pipe with a very large bowl between his fingers. He smelt shockingly of tobacco, but he seemed to be quite unaware of the fact as he bowed absently to the two ladies and asked for tea.

"If you could spare my wife for a few minutes," he said. "I want her assistance with my work. I won't keep her long. As a matter-of-fact," he add-

ed the aristocracy—unless she had been a governess or a companion to the aristocracy!

"More likely a lady's maid," Flora Hammersley said, narrowing her already thin lips.

Mrs. Poingdestre looked at her with sudden illumination.

"I believe you are right, my dear," she said; "she was certainly a lady's maid."

Celia Humphreys was present when someone repeated the story of Mrs. Thornton's having been a lady's maid in one of the Shatterdale drawing-rooms. She contradicted the story flatly.

"It isn't a bit true," she said. "As a matter-of-fact she was a waitress at a tea-shop in Birmingham when Mr. Thornton saw her and fell in love with her. He adores her. The whole of the Monna Delicia was written to her."

The drawing-room gasped. It didn't know anything about the Monna Delicia and didn't care. What it did care about was that it should have received in its midst, admitted to its house, called upon, an ex-waitress in a Birmingham tea-shop.

After the first pause the ladies began chattering hard and fast. Someone or other had the intrepidity to say that they were quite sure Lady Darien would know how to put Mrs. Thornton back into the place she occupied by right, and the discussion became slightly acrimonious when Celia Humphreys replied



THEN SHE WOULD HAVE UNDERSTOOD.

Aunt Mary: Really, Clara, I don't see what you find to rave over in that football hero you're engaged to. Last night he seemed to me to be a perfectly ordinary, average young man.

Clara: Oh, but if you only could see him on the football field, where I saw him first! (Becomes incoherent with rapture).

ion. I have not yet come to the point of letting them have Nutgrove. I don't care to begin admitting these outsiders to our society. You never know where it will end. Still. . . . When the neighbourhood heard that Lady Darien had called on the Thorntons, the neighbourhood called unanimously.

People took a rather virtuous standpoint about it, saying, that if writers and such folk would take houses in the place it would be, of course, quite wrong to leave them lonely, with only Mr. Fullerton, the vicar, who was stone-deaf, and Dr. Maggs, who drank for society. "Besides, where dear Lady Darien showed the way," said Mrs. Poingdestre to Flora Hammersley, the elder of the two Hammersley girls, who would never see fifty again, "Where dear Lady Darien showed the way they must all follow."

ed amiably. "I've got into difficulties with my characters. I depend upon my wife's knowledge of the ways of the aristocracy. Naturally I don't know anything about them. My father was a Welsh miner, you see."

"Oh, please go with him, Mrs. Thornton," Miss Humphreys said, with an easy intimacy that quite shocked the good ladies; "we shan't mind, Mrs. Poingdestre, shall we? Everything must give way when it is a question of Mr. Thornton's work. I shall just take Mr. Thornton's tea into the library. . . ."

Mrs. Poingdestre and Miss Hammersley talked a good deal about the visit. They, too, had discovered that Mrs. Thornton was not a lady. Ralph Thornton's simplicity in accepting her as a guide to the ways of the aristocracy seemed to them merely ridiculous. How on earth could Mrs. Thornton know anything about the ways of

that it was an immense honour for anyone of them to know the Thorntons. Celia reported these happenings to Lady Darien, and, as might have been expected, the old lady took the view that for anybody to object to people she had called upon was an unheard-of presumption.

She and Celia were sitting at lunch when this story was told and Celia happened to be facing a large mirror at the other end of the room. In it she saw the reflection of Griggs, the staid parlour-maid, who was waiting in the temporary absence of the footman. Griggs had the impassive face of the well-trained servant, a drab respectable face. Now it was animated by the most extraordinary interest. There was life and colour in it as though the woman had suddenly come alive. Her eyes turned towards Lady Darien with an expression of . . . was it grat-