

[Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.]

THE HOUSE-KEEPER

—AT—

LORME HALL.

By Ellen Vavasour Noel.

ON the rose-clad stoop of a large comfortable farm-house near Cornwall an old woman was sitting. She has been knitting, but her work has dropped from her hand and she is leaning thoughtfully back in her low rocking-chair.

"Aunt, what are you thinking of?" On being thus addressed she turned towards the speaker, a bright-looking young girl who has just come out of the house, and said:

"Would you like to hear a story, Nora?" "A story! that I would, Aunt," Nora eagerly replied, as she seated herself beside her. "Is it about something which happened long ago when you were young?"

"Yes, child; it happened many years ago in the family that I lived with, when I first went to service. I was about your age, Nora, when I went to live at Lorme Hall, some miles from Montreal. My mistress was a widow and very wealthy; she had two children, to whom I was engaged as nurse. I had been living with Mrs. Lorme some months, when she decided upon going to Chicago to visit a relative. I, to my great delight, was to go with her to take care of the children; and we were busily engaged getting ready for our journey when I was unfortunately taken seriously ill; so my mistress had to leave me behind and take one of the housemaids in my place as nurse. Mrs. Lorme left orders that I was to be well taken care of and remain at the Hall until her return. She was a kind mistress, Nora, and a fair sweet-looking lady too. Poor thing, it would have been better for her if she had never paid that visit; but we poor mortals can't see ahead; if we could what a world of trouble we might save ourselves sometimes. 'Tis all right, I suppose, yet it is pretty hard to see things happen as they do often, and still to believe that it is best so for us. When I had recovered a little and was able to go about again, I missed the dear pretty children very much. The great house seemed very lonely and silent as I wandered drearily from one grand room to another, listening in vain for the pattering feet and merry voices of the absent little ones.

"Some weeks went by; I was quite strong again, and Mrs. Barton, the house-keeper, finding that I was handy with my needle, kept me busy, for which I was not sorry, as I did not like being idle. And now, Nora, I must tell you about Mrs. Barton. She had lived for a long time in Mrs. Lorme's family, and when her young lady, to whom she was much attached, got married, she went with her to Lorme Hall, where she became house-keeper. She was a little pale, peck-marked woman; her hair was perfectly white, but not from age, for she was not more than forty. It had become so, she said, when she lost her husband years before, when she was a young girl. I can fancy, Nora, that I see her before me now. Her trim little figure, clothed in grey or brown, for she always wore those colours, and her white hair put smoothly back beneath a black lace cap. She was, as I have said, devotedly attached to her mistress, and Mrs. Lorme returned that affection, placing the greatest confidence in her, treating her like an old friend rather than a servant, and Mrs. Barton was worthy of her esteem; there was not one among the numerous domestics of which she had the charge that did not regard her with respect and kindly feelings. Time passed, the day fixed for Mrs. Lorme's return went by, and yet in her letters to Mrs. Barton she did not speak of coming home. Mrs. Barton, I could see, wondered at her mistress' long absence. It was so unusual for her to remain long away from Lorme Hall. It was now the middle of summer; they had been gone three months when a letter arrived, telling Mrs. Barton that she was going to be married the following week to a gentleman she had met in Chicago, and that in a short time afterwards they would return to the Hall, accompanied by a party of friends. The news, as you may suppose, Nora, created no little excitement. With many wishes for her beloved mistress' future happiness Mrs. Barton set us to work to prepare for the reception of the bridal party. Two weeks later they arrived. The children were wild with delight to get home again. My mistress looked extremely well and happy; her husband, Mr. Crossham, the new master of Lorme Hall, was a fine-looking man, about, I should think, forty-five. We were all favourably impressed with his appearance and pleasing manners. Mrs. Barton was suffering from a violent attack of neuralgia, and did not see him until two or three days after his arrival at the Hall. It was one morning as I was following her up the front staircase to attend to some directions she had just given me, when as we reached the top of the stairs Mr. Crossham passed us going down. I looked at Mrs. Barton to tell her who it was, but the words froze on my lips. She was bending over the balustrade watching his retreating form; her face,

Nora, was as white as your collar, and wore a wild startled expression. She turned to me, and grasping my arm in her agitation so tightly that it pained me, in a hollow tone she whispered:

"Who is that, Kate, who is it?" "I told her it was Mr. Crossham. Dropping her hand from my arm the words 'Oh, my God,' burst from her lips, as, turning from me, she disappeared down one of the passages leading to her room. Her strange emotion puzzled me exceedingly; but as she did not, when she saw me again, allude to what had occurred, and I did not dare ask an explanation, I was obliged to smother my curiosity as best I could.

"For some time the Hall was a scene of continual gaiety, and then when autumn came and the guests began to depart Mr. and Mrs. Crossham went with some of the gay party to New York. The children were left behind, very much I saw against my mistress' wishes, but Mr. Crossham thought it best, she told Mrs. Barton. Poor little dears, it was their first separation from their mamma. Miss Ellie, the youngest, was a fair delicate child about five years old, she fretted and pined sadly for her mamma. Do what I could to comfort and cheer her, it was of no use; the call still was for her dear mamma to come back to Ellie. She could not understand why they had been left at home, although I overheard Master Frank, who was two years older, trying to enlighten her on the subject. He had heard some of the servants' gossip and told his sister that it was their new papa's fault that they were left alone, that their mamma wanted to take them, but he did not care about them and would not let their mamma take them with her. 'I don't care one bit for him, Ellie,' he added, clenching his little fist in his anger and indignation. 'I don't care one bit for him, he is not nice, and I'll tell mamma when she comes back that we don't want him to live with us any longer.' And this dislike increased during his mother's absence. He used to say that Mr. Crossham would not let her come back to them, and on their return home, after fondly embracing his mamma, he turned contemptuously away from his step-father's proffered kiss, saying:

"I don't want to kiss you, for you took mamma away from us."

"Mr. Crossham's face flushed either with surprise or anger. He gave a low whistle, and walked into the drawing-room. My mistress did not see this; she had passed down the hall to meet Ellie, but Mrs. Barton did and to my astonishment never reproved the boy.

"A month or two went by, Christmas came. Christmas! ah, Nora, what magic there is in that word to the young. It is a season longed for by them and welcomed with smiles and gladness; but as the years go by and they find, alas, too often, the bright dreams of youth unrealized, and see the vacant places of absent dear ones and miss familiar voices that are hushed for ever on earth, that once joyous time becomes a day of sad regrets, silent heart-aches and yearnings perhaps for that Christmas when all earthly things shall be forgotten. I have seen many Christmases since that one, Nora, and happy ones too, but it was, I think, the happiest in all my life. On that day your uncle George arrived unexpectedly from Ireland. Two years before, when I left the old country with my parents, I had promised to be his wife, though I might have to wait for years before he would be able to claim me. His elder brother had died suddenly, and the farm becoming his, he sold it and came out to America. He is old and gray-haired now, Nora, but taller, finer looking young man could not be seen than he then was. You may imagine my feelings when I went down to the house-keeper's sitting-room where I was told some one wanted to see me and found that it was George. When I went with him that morning to the little church near Lorme Hall, so prettily decorated with evergreens, berries and flowers, and kneeling by his side thanked God for His goodness to us, there was not, Nora, a happier girl in the world than I was that bright Christmas morning.

"Soon after Mrs. Crossham announced her intention of spending the rest of the winter in Montreal. Mr. Crossham found the Hall so dull. He had always resided in a city, and disliked the country. As they intended to board, she would take, she said, only one servant with her, and asked me to go. I did so, although I was not very willing, as you may suppose, Nora, to leave the Hall, for George had been appointed gardener there, and I was so happy; still, after my mistress' kindness to us, I could not refuse; besides I was fond of the children, who had become much attached to me.

"The night before we left, Mrs. Barton came into the nursery, where I was sitting by the fire, finishing a piece of work. Since my mistress' marriage she had become greatly changed. Her health seemed to be failing, the pleasant cheerfulness of her manner had given place to a gloomy reserve. As she seated herself near me and I looked on her haggard, troubled face, I again wondered, as I had often done before, what had caused the alteration. She spoke of our departure on the

morning. I felt sorry for her, for I knew how lonely she would be during our absence. I told her so and wished she could go with us.

"Would to Heaven that I were going with you," she exclaimed, "then I could see what he—she stopped—and getting up from her seat came to my side. 'Kate,' she said in an earnest tone, as she looked eagerly into my face, 'Kate, you are a good faithful girl. I can trust you. Promise me if anything should happen when you are away to make you think my dear mistress is not happy you will at once let me know.' This appeal startled me. What was it she feared. I knew she disliked Mr. Crossham, for I had noticed her shrink from going into a room where she knew he was or turn out of her way to avoid meeting him, and she kept a prying curiosity, very unusual in her with regard to other things—over every action and word of his. I had also seen her, when she thought no one was observing her, intently regarding him with an expression on her pale face I could never fathom.

"On our arrival in Montreal Mr. Crossham procured apartments at the St. Lawrence Hall, and a dreary enough time myself and the children passed for the rest of the winter in that gay crowded house. My mistress, too, seemed to become weary of the continual round of gaiety Mr. Crossham persuaded her to enter upon, and to long for the quiet comforts of her own elegant home. Spring came at last, but Mr. Crossham put off from week to week our return to Lorme Hall, although my mistress was most anxious to return again to the country. I began to dislike Mr. Crossham, as I became convinced of the utter selfishness of his character. His temper, also, was very violent, and that he had begun to treat his gentle wife with indifference and neglect, was but too apparent. She was often left alone, and I saw sometimes the traces of tears on her fair face. I did not forget my promise to Mrs. Barton, but expecting to see her almost from day to day I did not write; besides, what could Mrs. Barton do, I thought. If my mistress was unhappy she could not help it.

"Little Ellie, always a delicate child, became this spring seriously unwell. The Doctor ordered change of air; her mother becoming much alarmed about her determined to return home immediately. Mr. Crossham did not accompany us; he had two or three engagements which must be attended to, he gave as an excuse, but if the child got worse to let him know. So my mistress, with her sick darling, returned alone to Lorme Hall. Mrs. Barton gnashed her teeth as to what had occurred during our absence. 'Did my mistress still seem happy?' 'Was Mr. Crossham kind to her and the children?' I could not satisfactorily answer these questions, and Mrs. Barton seemed much distressed and troubled at my replies. On her removal to the country little Ellie began to recover, though slowly, and then Mrs. Barton, who had not left Lorme Hall for about eight years, went for a few days to Montreal; but when she went she did not tell anyone, not even my mistress.

"Mr. Crossham had not been long at Lorme Hall after his return from Montreal, before his harsh tyrannical temper and heartless conduct towards his wife and her children were noticed and talked about among the servants who sincerely pitied their gentle mistress. How bitterly she must have repented that second hasty marriage, in which she had wrecked her happiness and destroyed the peace of her happy home.

"Towards the close of the summer an infant daughter was laid in my mistress's arms, but it was a delicate babe, and lived only a few days. I was regretting its loss—for my mistress grieved sadly after it—to Mrs. Barton one day. Her answer rather astonished me. I did not know what to think of her when she replied:

"Kate, I have prayed for that child's death, and now on my knees I thank God for granting that prayer. Don't regret it!"

"Mr. Crossham spent most of his time in the city, spending his wife's money, for he had none of his own. It was now too evident it was for that the mean wretch had married my poor mistress.

"One morning after being absent some days in Montreal, Mr. Crossham returned home, accompanied by a Captain Carter, who had been his constant companion the winter before. He seemed to be greatly excited and in a terrible hurry to get back to Montreal, for he ordered the horses to be at the door again immediately after dinner. He then proceeded to his wife's boudoir where Mrs. Woodford, our clergyman's wife, an old and dear friend of my mistress, was sitting with her, for she was spending the day at the Hall. I happened also to be just then in the room, placing fresh flowers in a vase, but my mistress at that moment was in the adjoining apartment. Mr. Crossham, bowing to Mrs. Woodford, enquired where Mrs. Crossham was, and being told he followed her into the next room, closing the door carefully after him.

"We heard him talking to my mistress, his voice becoming louder, the tone more angry as the conversation continued.

(To be continued.)

A great Public Want fully met by Dr. Colby's Anti-Costive and Tonic Pills.

Art and Literature.

A new ladies' newspaper, *De Huisrouw*, has appeared at the Hague.

A statue to Sir Humphrey Davy was unveiled at Penzance on Tuesday.

The Emperor of Germany, recently paid £40 for an autograph letter of Washington.

L. Kranach's birth was celebrated at Weimar on the 31st ult., that day being the four hundredth anniversary of the event.

M. Ambroise Thomas is working on a new opera, *Françoise de Rimini*. The subject is taken from a poem by MM. Michel Carré and Jules Barbier.

An opera is being written on Sardou's famous drama *Pa'rie*, by Signor Lamo Rossi, director of the Naples Conservatoire. It will be called *La Contessa di Mons*.

Richard Wagner, the German composer, says, in a recent card, that the "Marseillaise" is an old Italian air, and that it was played at the court of Lorenzo de Medici.

Johann Strauss, the celebrated *chef d'orchestre*, will give twelve grand concerts in Madrid this winter. The Spanish aristocracy made him an offer, which he has accepted.

Among donations of great value which have recently enriched the Imperial Library of St. Petersburg, is a Koran written by the hand of Osman. This manuscript is more than twelve hundred years old, and is one of the most ancient and precious treasures of Mussulman literature.

A splendidly illuminated address has been presented by Mlle. Titien to the priests of the Roman Catholic Cathedral, Dublin, in recognition of kind services rendered for many years past. The address contains a drawing of her birthplace, Ischl, and is the work of pupils of the Sisters of Charity.

We have heard of "songs without words," but the manager of the Prague Theatre has given an opera without songs. It appears that the ladies of the chorus, who were about to take their benefit, took umbrage at the ungallant conduct of the manager, who announced the event "for the benefit of the female portion of the chorus." A deputation was despatched to request that the words sung might be altered to "ladies," but their demand was refused, and the "ladies" accordingly struck. Not in the least disheartened, the manager ordered the opera to be performed, minus the vocal music.

THE FATE OF MUSIC.—It is said of Rubinstein, the generalissimo of pianists, that he predicts the downfall of all that is worthy of being called music in seventy-five years hence, and this conclusion he draws from his observance of an increasing rage for petty clatter-compositions and those which are more calculated to astonish and create sensation than to give true pleasure to the hearer, or in any wise bear the stamp of what may be termed genuine artistic music. Cheap and inefficient musical tuition he also considers to be a great promoter of the decay of what among virtuosos is considered true music.

It may not be known to all our readers that "Mario" is merely the stage name of the famous tenor singer who bears it. His real name is Giuseppe, Marquis of Candia. He was born in Turin in 1810. The vicissitudes of his life having led him to Paris in early manhood, his exquisite voice soon attracted great attention. He first appeared under the name of "Mario" at the Grand Opera-house in Paris, in 1838. In 1854 he made an operatic tour through the principal cities of the United States, charming all who heard him by his unrivalled voice and his perfect method. His voice is no longer what it once was, and many have been disappointed when hearing him sing during this last visit to this country; many more have regarded it as a desired souvenir to hear even a faint echo of the voice which has so long been celebrated.

Madame Lucca has been the recipient of many valuable gifts from the nobility of Europe as testimonials of her personal and artistic worth. On leaving Ischl, a celebrated Bavarian watering-place, where she had given a concert for the benefit of the poor, a packet was placed in Madame Lucca's hands, which contained a magnificent bouquet of diamonds, a gift from the Princess Trubetzkoi, who had been present at the concert for the poor, and who had previously witnessed many of Lucca's triumphs at St. Petersburg and elsewhere. Similar *cadeaux* came from the Imperial house of Hapsburg in recognition of the charitable act of Madame Lucca and of her artistic worth. The present of the kaiser was a diadem in brilliant, elaborately set in pure gold; that of the empress was a pair of pearl earrings of great value, also set in gold—the smaller pearls being in the shape of an apple, the larger pearls (the pendants) in the shape of pears. On leaving Berlin, on the way for the United States, shortly afterwards, the Emperor of Germany presented Madame Lucca with a pair of earrings formed of gigantic pearls, oyster-shaped, and studded with brilliant of the purest water. The empress gave her a splendid pearl necklace, all the pearls being Oriental.