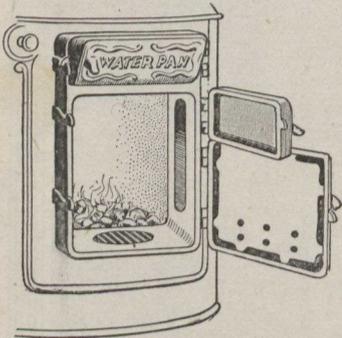


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at Silverdale was apparently there, as were most of the women; and Witham stood still a moment, very erect, with shoulders square, because the posture enabled him to conceal the tremor that ran through him when he saw the smiling faces turned upon him. Then he moved slowly down the room towards Maud Barrington, and felt her hand rest for a second between his fingers, which, he feared were too responsive. After that, everybody seemed to speak to him, and he was glad when he found himself sitting next to Miss Barrington at the head of the long table, with her niece opposite him.

He could not remember what he or the others talked about during the meal, but he had a vague notion that there was now and then a silence of attention when he answered a question, and that the little lady's face grew momentarily grave when, as the voice sank a trifle, he turned to her.

"I would have paid my respects to Colonel Barrington, but Dane did not consider it advisable," he said.

"No," said Miss Barrington. "He has talked a good deal about you during the last two days, but he is sleeping now, and we did not care to disturb him. I am afraid you will find a great change in him when you see him."

Witham asked no more questions on that topic until later in the evening, when he found a place apart from the rest by Miss Barrington's side. He, fancied this would not have happened without her connivance and she seemed graver than usual when he stood by her chair.

"I don't wish to pain you, but I surmise that Colonel Barrington is scarcely well enough to be consulted about anything of importance just now," he said.

Miss Barrington made a little gesture of assent. "We usually pay him the compliment, but I am almost afraid he will never make a decision of moment again."

"Then," said Witham slowly, "you stand in his place, and I fancy you know why I have come back to Silverdale. Will you listen for a very few minutes while I tell you about my parents and what my upbringing has been? I must return to Winnipeg, for a time, at least, to-morrow."

Miss Barrington signed her willingness, and the man spoke rapidly with a faint trace of hoarseness. Then he looked down on her.

"Madam," he said, "I have told you everything, partly from respect for those who only by a grim sacrifice did what they could for me, and that you may realize the difference between myself and the rest at Silverdale. I want to be honest now at least, and I discovered, not without bitterness at the time, that the barriers between our castes are strong in the old country."

Miss Barrington smiled a little. "Have I ever made you feel it here?"

"No," said Witham gravely. "Still, I am going to put your forbearance to a strenuous test. I want your approval. I have a question to ask your niece to-night."

"If I withheld it?"

"It would hurt me," said Witham. "Still, I would not be astonished, and I could not blame you."

"But it would make no difference?"

"Yes," said Witham gravely. "It would, but it would not cause me to desist. Nothing would do that, if Miss Barrington can overlook the past."

The little white-haired lady smiled at him. "Then," she said, "if it is any comfort to you, you have my good wishes. I do not know what Maud's decision will be, but that is the spirit which would have induced me to listen in times long gone by!"

She rose and left him, and it may have been by her arranging that shortly afterwards Witham found Maud Barrington passing through the dimly-lighted hall. He opened the door she moved towards a trifle, and then stood facing her, with it in his hand.

"Will you wait a moment, and then you may pass if you wish," he said. "I had one great inducement for coming here to-night. I wonder if you know what it is?"

The girl stood still and met his gaze, though, dim as the light was, the man could see the crimson in her cheeks.

"Yes," she said, very quietly.

"Then," said Witham with a little

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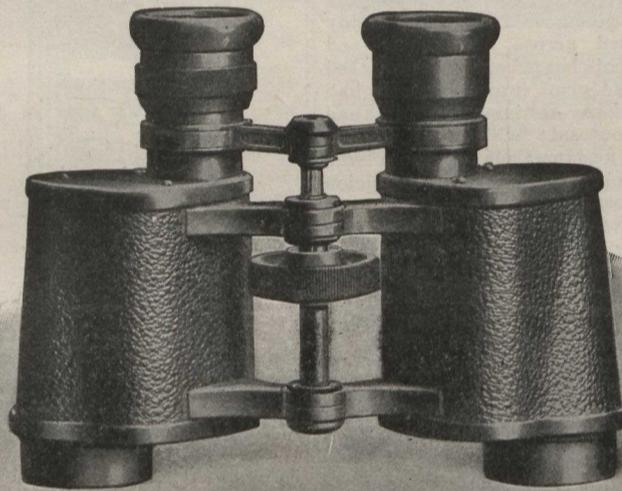
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