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she had seen the stubborn patience in this man's face as well as a stamp that was not borne by any other man at Silverdale. Some of the crofter settlers, who periodically came near starvation in their sod hovels, and the men from Ontario who staked their little handful of dollars on the first wheat crop to be wrested from the prairie, bore it, however. From what Miss Barrington had told her, it was clear that Court-horne's first year in Canada could not have been spent in this fashion, but there was no doubt in the girl's mind as she listened. Her faith was equal to a more strenuous test.

"There is a difference in the present, but who taught you bridge-building? It takes years to learn the use of the axe," she said.

Witham laughed. "I think it took me four, but the man who has not a dollar to spare usually finds out how to do a good many things for himself, and I had working drawings of the bridge made in Winnipeg. Besides, your friends have helped me with their hands as well as their good-will. Except at the beginning, they have all been kind to me, and one could not well have expected very much from them then."

Maud Barrington coloured a trifle as she remembered her own attitude towards him. "Cannot you forget it?" she said, with a curious little ring in her voice. "They would do anything you asked them now."

"One generally finds it useful to have a good memory, and I remember most clearly that, although they had very little reason for it, most of them afterwards trusted me. That made, and still makes, a great difference to me."

The girl appeared thoughtful. "Does it?" she said. "Still, do you know, I fancy that if they had tried to drive you out, you'd have stayed in spite of them."

"Yes," said Witham dryly, "I believe I would, but the face that in a very little while they held out a friendly hand to a stranger steeped in suspicion, and gave him the chance to prove himself their equal, carries a big responsibility. That, and your aunt's goodness, puts so many things one might have done out of the question."

THE obvious inference was the prodigal was reclaimed by the simple means of putting him on his honour, but that did not for a moment suggest itself to the girl. She had often regretted her own disbelief, and once more felt the need for reparation.

"Lance," she said, very quietly, "my aunt was wiser than I was, but she was mistaken. What she gave you out of her wide charity was already yours by right."

That was complete and final, for Maud Barrington did nothing by half, and Witham recognized that she held him blameless in the past, which she could not know, as well as in the present, which was visible to her. Her confidence stung him as a whip, and when in place of answering he looked away, the girl fancied that a smothered groan escaped him. She waited, curiously expectant, but he did not speak, and just then the fall of hoofs rose from behind the birches in the bluff. Then a man's voice came through it singing a little French song, and Maud Barrington glanced at her companion.

"Lance," she said, "how long is it since you sang that song?"

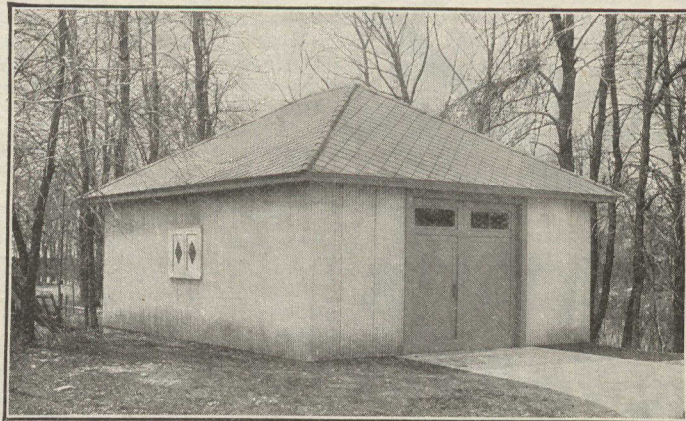
"Well," said Witham, doggedly conscious of what he was doing, "I do not know a word of it, and never heard it in my life."

Maud Barrington stared at him. "Think," she said. "It seems ever so long ago, but you cannot have forgotten. Surely you remember Madame Aubert, who taught me to prattle in French, and the day you slipped into the music-room and picked up the song, while she tried in vain to teach it me. Can't you recollect how I cried, when you sang it in the billiard-room, and Uncle Geoffrey gave you the half-sovereign which had been promised to me?"

"No," said Witham a trifle hoarsely, and with his head turned from her watched the trail.

A man in embroidered deerskin jacket was riding into the moonlight, and though the little song had ceased, and the wide hat hid his face, there was an almost insolent gracefulness in his carriage that seemed familiar to Wit-

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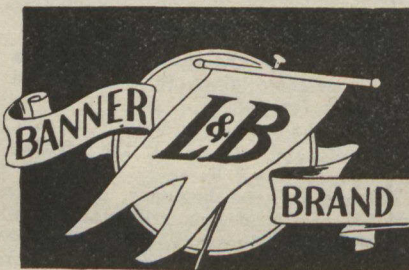
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