

of the women gathered in the big dining-room of the Grange. The windows were shut now, for the chill of the early frost was on the prairie, and the great lamps burned steadily above the long tables. Cut glass, dainty china and silver gleamed beneath them amidst the ears of wheat that stood in clusters for sole and appropriate ornamentation. They merited the place of honour, for wheat had brought prosperity to every man at Silverdale who had had the faith to sow that year.

On either hand were rows of smiling faces: the men's burned and bronzed, the women's kissed into faintly warmer colour by the sun, and white shoulders shone amidst the sombrely covered ones, while here and there a diamond gleamed on a snowy neck. Barrington sat at the head of the longest table, with his niece and sister, Dane, and his oldest followers about him, and Witham at its foot, dressed very simply after the usual fashion of the prairie farmers. There were few in the company who had not noticed this, though they did not as yet understand its purport.

Nothing happened during dinner, but Maud Barrington noticed that although some of his younger neighbours rallied him, Witham was grimly quiet. When it was over, Barrington rose, and the men who knew the care he had borne that year never paid him more willing homage than they did when he stood smiling down on them. As usual, he was immaculate in dress, erect, and quietly commanding; but, in spite of its smile, his face seemed worn, and there were thickening wrinkles, which told of anxiety, about his eyes.

"Another year has gone, and we have met again to celebrate with gratefulness the fulfilment of the promise made when the world was young," he said. "We do well to be thankful, but I think humility becomes us, too. While we doubted, the sun and the rain have been with us for a sign that, though men grow faint-hearted and spare their toil, seed time and harvest shall not fail."

It was the first time Colonel Barrington had spoken in quite that strain, and when he paused a moment there was a curious stillness, for those who heard him noticed an unusual tremor in his voice. There was also a gravity that was not far removed from sadness in his face when he went on again, but the intentness of his retainers would have been greater had they known that two separate detachments of police troopers were then riding toward Silverdale.

"The year has brought its changes and set its mark deeply on some of us," he said. "We cannot recall it, or retrieve our blunders, but we can hope they will be forgiven us, and endeavour to avoid them again. This is not the fashion in which I had meant to speak to you tonight, but after the bounty showered upon us I feel my responsibility. The law is unchangeable. The man who would have bread to eat or sell must toil for it, and I, in disregard of it, bade you hold your hand. Well, we have had our lesson, and we will be wiser another time; but I have felt that my usefulness as your leader is slipping away from me. This year has shown me that I am getting an old man."

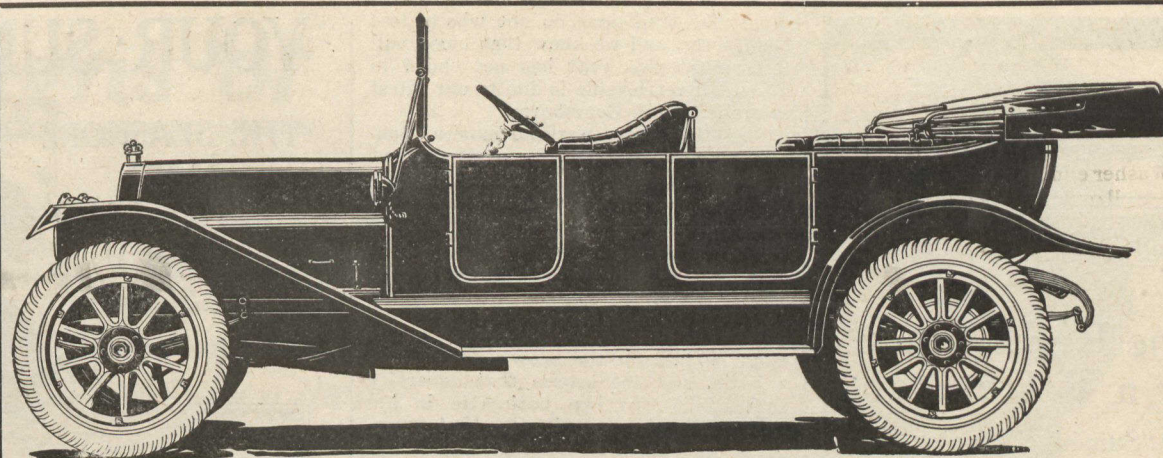
Dane kicked the foot of a lad beside him, and glanced at the piano as he stood up.

"Sir," he said simply, "although we have differed about trifles and may do again, we don't want a better one—and if we did, we couldn't find him."

A chord from the piano rang through the approving murmurs, and the company rose to their feet before the lad had beaten out the first bar of the jingling rhythm. Then the voices took it up, and the great hall shook to the rafters with the last "Nobody can deny."

Trite as it was, Barrington saw the darker flush in the bronzed faces, and there was a shade of warmer colour in his own as he went on again.

"The things one feels the most are those one can least express, and I will not try to tell you how I value your confidence," he said. "Still, the fact remains that sooner or later I must let the reins fall into younger hands, and there is a man here who will, I fancy, lead you farther than you would ever go with me. Times change, and he can teach you how those who would do the most for the Dominion need live to-day. He is also, and I am glad of it, one



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