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justice, and justice only, could take out the sting.

Ralph and Malcolm were driving into the yard. Edith went over to them. "Boys, I want to have a talk with you," she said, resolutely.

The Christmas dinner at the old home-stand was a merry one. Mrs. James spread a feast that was fit for the gods on high Olympus. Laughter, jest and repartee flew from lip to lip. Nobody appeared to notice that Robert ate little, said nothing, and sat in his shabby "best" suit with his grey head bent even lower than usual, as if desirous of avoiding all observation. When the others spoke to him he answered deprecatingly and shrank still further into himself.

Finally all had eaten all they could and the plum pudding was carried out. Robert gave a low sigh of relief. It was over; he would soon be able to escape and hide himself and his shame away from the mirthful eyes of those men and women who had earned the right to laugh at the world in which their success gave them standing and influence. He... he only... was a failure.

He wondered why Mrs. James did not rise. Mrs. James only leaned comfortably back in her chair and looked at Malcolm. Malcolm rose in his place. Silence fell on the company; everybody looked alert and expectant except Robert. He still sat with bowed head, wrapped in his own bitterness.

"I have been told that I must lead off," said Malcolm, "because I'm supposed to possess the gift of the gab. But if I do I am not going to use it for any rhetorical effect to-day. Simple, earnest words must express the deepest feelings of the heart in doing justice to its own. Brothers and sisters, we meet to-day in our old home, surrounded by the benedictions of the past years. Some measure of success has fallen to us all; but only one of us has been supremely successful in the only things that count—sympathy and unselfishness.

"I shall tell you my story for the benefit of those who have not heard it. When I was a lad of sixteen I started to work out my own education. Some of you will remember that old Mr. Benson at the Bridge offered me a place in his store for the summer at wages which would go far towards paying my expenses at the country academy the next winter. I went to work, eager and hopeful. All summer I tried to do my faithful best for my employer. In September the blow fell. A sum of money was missing from Mr. Benson's till. I was suspected and discharged in disgrace. All my neighbors believed me guilty; even some of my own family looked upon me with suspicion... nor could I blame them, for the circumstantial evidence was strongly against me."

Ralph and James looked ashamed, and Edith and Margaret, who had not been born at the time referred to, lifted their faces innocently. Robert did not move or glance up. He hardly seemed to be listening.

"I was crushed in an agony of shame and despair," continued Malcolm. "I believed my career was ruined. I was bent on casting all my ambitions behind me and going west to some place where nobody knew me or my disgrace. But there was one person who believed in my innocence... who said to me: 'You shall not give up... you shall not behave as if you were guilty. You are innocent, and in time your innocence will be proved. Meanwhile show yourself a man. You have nearly enough money to pay your way next winter at the academy. I have a little I can give you to help you out. Don't give in... never give in when you have done no wrong.'

"I listened and took his advice. I went to the academy. My story was there as soon as I was, and I found myself shunned and sneered at. Many a time I would have given up in despair had it not been for the encouragement of my counsellor. He furnished the backbone for me... I was determined that his belief in me should be justified. I studied hard and came out at the head of my class. Then there seemed no chance of my earning any more money that summer. But a farmer at the Bridge, who cared nothing for the character of his help if he could 'get the work out of them,' offered to hire me. The prospect was distasteful, but, urged by my friend, I took the place, and endured the hardships. Another winter of hard and lonely work passed at the academy. I won the Farrell Scholarship, which meant an arts course for me. And then,

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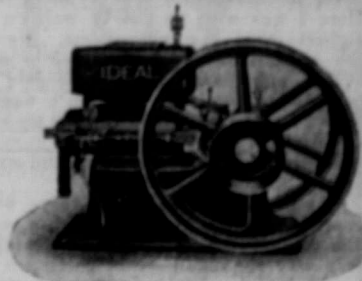
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