

The Schoolmaster.

HE stood with one hand resting on the table and he faced the long rows of empty benches. His mind wandered back through all the years he had spent in this very room—years spent in teaching boys who had since gone out to face the world—and he hoped that all of them were at least upright, honorable men, even if they had not all attained rank and fortune. His great purpose had been to teach these boys the grand principles of life, to show them the difference between right and wrong. Perhaps his teaching of the sciences had been a little lacking, but of one thing he was absolutely sure and that was that every boy who had ever come under his care had been taught that to be honorable among men should be the highest ambition in life.

He was the schoolmaster. He had seen the pupils come and go from year to year. For them his whole life had been spent within these four walls; his best energy had been expended. He was grey and worn and now he must give place to another. An open letter lay on the table before him. It had come that afternoon from the trustees and it stated in as polite and kind a manner as possible that as he was now getting rather too old to teach they thought it advisable for the welfare of the pupils that a younger man should be appointed in his stead. "Yes," he mused, "perhaps he was getting too old." Why that very morning he had tried to solve a problem and his hand had trembled so that the chalk had broken three or four times and twice it had fallen from his hand altogether. Then the figures would not come, he seemed to forget the simple rules, and try as he would he could not solve that simple problem. A titter ran round the room and some of the boys laughed outright. To lose the respect of his own pupils, that was the worst of all. He turned to them and with a shaking voice, spoke to them of honor and virtue, the respect due to age and the duties of man to men. He appealed to their manliness and he touched their hearts. When he had finished they were all deeply sorry for their thoughtless derision.

The school had been dismissed at noon. The town was having an "Old Boy's Reunion," and a half holiday had been proclaimed. After the pupils had gone he had remained, and as he stood leaning on the table facing the empty benches, he imagined himself addressing his favorite boys, the ones he loved the best. He walked slowly down an aisle and stopped at a bench. "Yes," he mused, "that was Masters' seat. If he were here he would not let them laugh at me." There were the initials, W. M., deeply cut on the top of the bench. The old man remembered having punished Masters for that but he was glad now that they were there. He had always thought of this as Masters' seat, although many others had occupied it since he had left the school for the sterner activities of life. He remembered the day he had left; how he had shaken hands with him and given him a few words of advice; and as he saw the manly figure move away he knew that Masters was well prepared to face the world. Masters, the pride of his heart, what was he now? He was the president of that large railroad. The old teacher