

Chapter XXI - The Night-School And The Schoolmaster

Bartle Massey's was one of a few scattered houses on the edge of a common, which was divided by the road to Treddleston. Adam reached it in a quarter of an hour after leaving the Hall Farm; and when he had his hand on the door-latch, he could see, through the curtainless window, that there were eight or nine heads bending over the desks, lighted by thin dips.

When he entered, a reading lesson was going forward and Bartle Massey merely nodded, leaving him to take his place where he pleased. He had not come for the sake of a lesson to-night, and his mind was too full of personal matters, too full of the last two hours he had passed in Hetty's presence, for him to amuse himself with a book till school was over; so he sat down in a corner and looked on with an absent mind. It was a sort of scene which Adam had beheld almost weekly for years; he knew by heart every arabesque flourish in the framed specimen of Bartle Massey's handwriting which hung over the schoolmaster's head, by way of keeping a lofty ideal before the minds of his pupils; he knew the backs of all the books on the shelf running along the whitewashed wall above the pegs for the slates; he knew exactly how many grains were gone out of the ear of Indian corn that hung from one of the rafters; he had long ago exhausted the resources of his imagination in trying to think how the bunch of leathery seaweed had looked and grown in its native element; and from the place where he sat, he could make nothing of the old map of England that hung against the opposite wall, for age had turned it of a fine yellow brown, something like that of a well-seasoned meerschaum. The drama that was going on was almost as familiar as the scene, nevertheless habit had not made him indifferent to it, and even in his present self-absorbed mood, Adam felt a momentary stirring of the old fellow-feeling, as he looked at the rough men painfully holding pen or pencil with their cramped hands, or humbly labouring through their reading lesson.

The reading class now seated on the form in front of the schoolmaster's desk consisted of the three most backward pupils. Adam would have known it only by seeing Bartle Massey's face as he looked over his spectacles, which he had shifted to the ridge of his nose, not requiring them for present purposes. The face wore its mildest expression: the grizzled bushy eyebrows had taken their more acute angle of compassionate kindness, and the mouth, habitually compressed with a pout of the lower lip, was relaxed so as to be ready to speak a helpful word or syllable in a moment. This gentle expression was the more interesting because the schoolmaster's nose, an irregular aquiline twisted a little on one side, had rather a formidable character; and his brow, moreover, had that peculiar tension which always impresses one as a sign of a keen impatient

temperament: the blue veins stood out like cords under the transparent yellow skin, and this intimidating brow was softened by no tendency to baldness, for the grey bristly hair, cut down to about an inch in length, stood round it in as close ranks as ever.

'Nay, Bill, nay,' Bartle was saying in a kind tone, as he nodded to Adam, 'begin that again, and then perhaps, it'll come to you what d-r-y spells. It's the same lesson you read last week, you know.'

'Bill' was a sturdy fellow, aged four-and-twenty, an excellent stone-sawyer, who could get as good wages as any man in the trade of his years; but he found a reading lesson in words of one syllable a harder matter to deal with than the hardest stone he had ever had to saw. The letters, he complained, were so 'uncommon alike, there was no tellin' 'em one from another,' the sawyer's business not being concerned with minute differences such as exist between a letter with its tail turned up and a letter with its tail turned down. But Bill had a firm determination that he would learn to read, founded chiefly on two reasons: first, that Tom Hazelow, his cousin, could read anything 'right off,' whether it was print or writing, and Tom had sent him a letter from twenty miles off, saying how he was prospering in the world and had got an overlooker's place; secondly, that Sam Phillips, who sawed with him, had learned to read when he was turned twenty, and what could be done by a little fellow like Sam Phillips, Bill considered, could be done by himself, seeing that he could pound Sam into wet clay if circumstances required it. So here he was, pointing his big finger towards three words at once, and turning his head on one side that he might keep better hold with his eye of the one word which was to be discriminated out of the group. The amount of knowledge Bartle Massey must possess was something so dim and vast that Bill's imagination recoiled before it: he would hardly have ventured to deny that the schoolmaster might have something to do in bringing about the regular return of daylight and the changes in the weather.

The man seated next to Bill was of a very different type: he was a Methodist brickmaker who, after spending thirty years of his life in perfect satisfaction with his ignorance, had lately 'got religion,' and along with it the desire to read the Bible. But with him, too, learning was a heavy business, and on his way out to-night he had offered as usual a special prayer for help, seeing that he had undertaken this hard task with a single eye to the nourishment of his soul - that he might have a greater abundance of texts and hymns wherewith to banish evil memories and the temptations of old habit - or, in brief language, the devil. For the brickmaker had been a notorious poacher, and was suspected, though there was no good evidence against him, of being the man who had shot a neighbouring gamekeeper in the leg. However that might be, it is certain that shortly after the accident referred to, which was coincident with the arrival of an awakening

Methodist preacher at Treddleston, a great change had been observed in the brickmaker; and though he was still known in the neighbourhood by his old sobriquet of 'Brimstone,' there was nothing he held in so much horror as any further transactions with that evil-smelling element. He was a broad-chested fellow with a fervid temperament, which helped him better in imbibing religious ideas than in the dry process of acquiring the mere human knowledge of the alphabet. Indeed, he had been already a little shaken in his resolution by a brother Methodist, who assured him that the letter was a mere obstruction to the Spirit, and expressed a fear that Brimstone was too eager for the knowledge that puffeth up.

The third beginner was a much more promising pupil. He was a tall but thin and wiry man, nearly as old as Brimstone, with a very pale face and hands stained a deep blue. He was a dyer, who in the course of dipping homespun wool and old women's petticoats had got fired with the ambition to learn a great deal more about the strange secrets of colour. He had already a high reputation in the district for his dyes, and he was bent on discovering some method by which he could reduce the expense of crimsons and scarlets. The druggist at Treddleston had given him a notion that he might save himself a great deal of labour and expense if he could learn to read, and so he had begun to give his spare hours to the night-school, resolving that his 'little chap' should lose no time in coming to Mr Massey's day-school as soon as he was old enough.

It was touching to see these three big men, with the marks of their hard labour about them, anxiously bending over the worn books and painfully making out, 'The grass is green,' 'The sticks are dry,' 'The corn is ripe' - a very hard lesson to pass to after columns of single words all alike except in the first letter. It was almost as if three rough animals were making humble efforts to learn how they might become human. And it touched the tenderest fibre in Bartle Massey's nature, for such full-grown children as these were the only pupils for whom he had no severe epithets and no impatient tones. He was not gifted with an imperturbable temper, and on music-nights it was apparent that patience could never be an easy virtue to him; but this evening, as he glances over his spectacles at Bill Downes, the sawyer, who is turning his head on one side with a desperate sense of blankness before the letters d-r-y, his eyes shed their mildest and most encouraging light.

After the reading class, two youths between sixteen and nineteen came up with the imaginary bills of parcels, which they had been writing out on their slates and were now required to calculate 'off-hand' - a test which they stood with such imperfect success that Bartle Massey, whose eyes had been glaring at them ominously through his spectacles for some minutes, at length burst out in a

bitter, high-pitched tone, pausing between every sentence to rap the floor with a knobbed stick which rested between his legs.

'Now, you see, you don't do this thing a bit better than you did a fortnight ago, and I'll tell you what's the reason. You want to learn accounts - that's well and good. But you think all you need do to learn accounts is to come to me and do sums for an hour or so, two or three times a-week; and no sooner do you get your caps on and turn out of doors again than you sweep the whole thing clean out of your mind. You go whistling about, and take no more care what you're thinking of than if your heads were gutters for any rubbish to swill through that happened to be in the way; and if you get a good notion in 'em, it's pretty soon washed out again. You think knowledge is to be got cheap - you'll come and pay Bartle Massey sixpence a-week, and he'll make you clever at figures without your taking any trouble. But knowledge isn't to be got with paying sixpence, let me tell you. If you're to know figures, you must turn 'em over in your heads and keep your thoughts fixed on 'em. There's nothing you can't turn into a sum, for there's nothing but what's got number in it - even a fool. You may say to yourselves, 'I'm one fool, and Jack's another; if my fool's head weighed four pound, and Jack's three pound three ounces and three quarters, how many pennyweights heavier would my head be than Jack's?' A man that had got his heart in learning figures would make sums for himself and work 'em in his head. When he sat at his shoemaking, he'd count his stitches by fives, and then put a price on his stitches, say half a farthing, and then see how much money he could get in an hour; and then ask himself how much money he'd get in a day at that rate; and then how much ten workmen would get working three, or twenty, or a hundred years at that rate - and all the while his needle would be going just as fast as if he left his head empty for the devil to dance in. But the long and the short of it is - I'll have nobody in my night-school that doesn't strive to learn what he comes to learn, as hard as if he was striving to get out of a dark hole into broad daylight. I'll send no man away because he's stupid: if Billy Taft, the idiot, wanted to learn anything, I'd not refuse to teach him. But I'll not throw away good knowledge on people who think they can get it by the sixpenn'orth, and carry it away with 'em as they would an ounce of snuff. So never come to me again, if you can't show that you've been working with your own heads, instead of thinking that you can pay for mine to work for you. That's the last word I've got to say to you.'

With this final sentence, Bartle Massey gave a sharper rap than ever with his knobbed stick, and the discomfited lads got up to go with a sulky look. The other pupils had happily only their writing-books to show, in various stages of progress from pot-hooks to round text; and mere pen-strokes, however perverse, were less exasperating to Bartle than false arithmetic. He was a little more severe than usual on Jacob Storey's Z's, of which poor Jacob had written a pageful, all with their

tops turned the wrong way, with a puzzled sense that they were not right 'somehow.' But he observed in apology, that it was a letter you never wanted hardly, and he thought it had only been there 'to finish off th' alphabet, like, though ampusand (&) would ha' done as well, for what he could see.'

At last the pupils had all taken their hats and said their 'Good-nights,' and Adam, knowing his old master's habits, rose and said, 'Shall I put the candles out, Mr Massey?'

'Yes, my boy, yes, all but this, which I'll carry into the house; and just lock the outer door, now you're near it,' said Bartle, getting his stick in the fitting angle to help him in descending from his stool. He was no sooner on the ground than it became obvious why the stick was necessary - the left leg was much shorter than the right. But the school-master was so active with his lameness that it was hardly thought of as a misfortune; and if you had seen him make his way along the schoolroom floor, and up the step into his kitchen, you would perhaps have understood why the naughty boys sometimes felt that his pace might be indefinitely quickened and that he and his stick might overtake them even in their swiftest run.

The moment he appeared at the kitchen door with the candle in his hand, a faint whimpering began in the chimney-corner, and a brown-and-tan-coloured bitch, of that wise-looking breed with short legs and long body, known to an unmechanical generation as turnspits, came creeping along the floor, wagging her tail, and hesitating at every other step, as if her affections were painfully divided between the hamper in the chimney-corner and the master, whom she could not leave without a greeting.

'Well, Vixen, well then, how are the babbies?' said the schoolmaster, making haste towards the chimney-corner and holding the candle over the low hamper, where two extremely blind puppies lifted up their heads towards the light from a nest of flannel and wool. Vixen could not even see her master look at them without painful excitement: she got into the hamper and got out again the next moment, and behaved with true feminine folly, though looking all the while as wise as a dwarf with a large old-fashioned head and body on the most abbreviated legs.

'Why, you've got a family, I see, Mr Massey?' said Adam, smiling, as he came into the kitchen. 'How's that? I thought it was against the law here.'

'Law? What's the use o' law when a man's once such a fool as to let a woman into his house?' said Bartle, turning away from the hamper with some bitterness. He always called Vixen a woman, and seemed to

have lost all consciousness that he was using a figure of speech. 'If I'd known Vixen was a woman, I'd never have held the boys from drowning her; but when I'd got her into my hand, I was forced to take to her. And now you see what she's brought me to - the sly, hypocritical wench' - Bartle spoke these last words in a rasping tone of reproach, and looked at Vixen, who poked down her head and turned up her eyes towards him with a keen sense of opprobrium - 'and contrived to be brought to bed on a Sunday at church-time. I've wished again and again I'd been a bloody minded man, that I could have strangled the mother and the brats with one cord.'

'I'm glad it was no worse a cause kept you from church,' said Adam. 'I was afraid you must be ill for the first time i' your life. And I was particularly sorry not to have you at church yesterday.'

'Ah, my boy, I know why, I know why,' said Bartle kindly, going up to Adam and raising his hand up to the shoulder that was almost on a level with his own head. 'You've had a rough bit o' road to get over since I saw you - a rough bit o' road. But I'm in hopes there are better times coming for you. I've got some news to tell you. But I must get my supper first, for I'm hungry, I'm hungry. Sit down, sit down.'

Bartel went into his little pantry, and brought out an excellent home-baked loaf; for it was his one extravagance in these dear times to eat bread once a-day instead of oat-cake; and he justified it by observing, that what a schoolmaster wanted was brains, and oat-cake ran too much to bone instead of brains. Then came a piece of cheese and a quart jug with a crown of foam upon it. He placed them all on the round deal table which stood against his large arm-chair in the chimney-corner, with Vixen's hamper on one side of it and a window-shelf with a few books piled up in it on the other. The table was as clean as if Vixen had been an excellent housewife in a checkered apron; so was the quarry floor; and the old carved oaken press, table, and chairs, which in these days would be bought at a high price in aristocratic houses, though, in that period of spider-legs and inlaid cupids, Bartle had got them for an old song, where as free from dust as things could be at the end of a summer's day.

'Now, then, my boy, draw up, draw up. We'll not talk about business till we've had our supper. No man can be wise on an empty stomach. But,' said Bartle, rising from his chair again, 'I must give Vixen her supper too, confound her! Though she'll do nothing with it but nourish those unnecessary babbies. That's the way with these women - they've got no head-pieces to nourish, and so their food all runs either to fat or to brats.'

He brought out of the pantry a dish of scraps, which Vixen at once fixed her eyes on, and jumped out of her hamper to lick up with the utmost dispatch.

'I've had my supper, Mr Massey,' said Adam, 'so I'll look on while you eat yours. I've been at the Hall Farm, and they always have their supper betimes, you know: they don't keep your late hours.'

'I know little about their hours,' said Bartle dryly, cutting his bread and not shrinking from the crust. 'It's a house I seldom go into, though I'm fond of the boys, and Martin Poyser's a good fellow. There's too many women in the house for me: I hate the sound of women's voices; they're always either a-buzz or a-squeak - always either a-buzz or a-squeak. Mrs. Poyser keeps at the top o' the talk like a fife; and as for the young lasses, I'd as soon look at water-grubs. I know what they'll turn to - stinging gnats, stinging gnats. Here, take some ale, my boy: it's been drawn for you - it's been drawn for you.'

'Nay, Mr Massey,' said Adam, who took his old friend's whim more seriously than usual to-night, 'don't be so hard on the creaturs God has made to be companions for us. A working-man 'ud be badly off without a wife to see to th' house and the victual, and make things clean and comfortable.'

'Nonsense! It's the silliest lie a sensible man like you ever believed, to say a woman makes a house comfortable. It's a story got up because the women are there and something must be found for 'em to do. I tell you there isn't a thing under the sun that needs to be done at all, but what a man can do better than a woman, unless it's bearing children, and they do that in a poor make-shift way; it had better ha' been left to the men - it had better ha' been left to the men. I tell you, a woman 'ull bake you a pie every week of her life and never come to see that the hotter th' oven the shorter the time. I tell you, a woman 'ull make your porridge every day for twenty years and never think of measuring the proportion between the meal and the milk - a little more or less, she'll think, doesn't signify. The porridge WILL be awk'ard now and then: if it's wrong, it's summat in the meal, or it's summat in the milk, or it's summat in the water. Look at me! I make my own bread, and there's no difference between one batch and another from year's end to year's end; but if I'd got any other woman besides Vixen in the house, I must pray to the Lord every baking to give me patience if the bread turned out heavy. And as for cleanliness, my house is cleaner than any other house on the Common, though the half of 'em swarm with women. Will Baker's lad comes to help me in a morning, and we get as much cleaning done in one hour, without any fuss, as a woman 'ud get done in three, and all the while be sending buckets o' water after your ankles, and let the fender and the fire-irons stand in the middle o' the floor half the day for you to break your shins against

'em. Don't tell me about God having made such creatures to be companions for us! I don't say but He might make Eve to be a companion to Adam in Paradise - there was no cooking to be spoilt there, and no other woman to cackle with and make mischief, though you see what mischief she did as soon as she'd an opportunity. But it's an impious, unscriptural opinion to say a woman's a blessing to a man now; you might as well say adders and wasps, and foxes and wild beasts are a blessing, when they're only the evils that belong to this state o' probation, which it's lawful for a man to keep as clear of as he can in this life, hoping to get quit of 'em for ever in another - hoping to get quit of 'em for ever in another.'

Bartle had become so excited and angry in the course of his invective that he had forgotten his supper, and only used the knife for the purpose of rapping the table with the haft. But towards the close, the raps became so sharp and frequent, and his voice so quarrelsome, that Vixen felt it incumbent on her to jump out of the hamper and bark vaguely.

'Quiet, Vixen!' snarled Bartle, turning round upon her. 'You're like the rest o' the women - always putting in your word before you know why.'

Vixen returned to her hamper again in humiliation, and her master continued his supper in a silence which Adam did not choose to interrupt; he knew the old man would be in a better humour when he had had his supper and lighted his pipe. Adam was used to hear him talk in this way, but had never learned so much of Bartle's past life as to know whether his view of married comfort was founded on experience. On that point Bartle was mute, and it was even a secret where he had lived previous to the twenty years in which happily for the peasants and artisans of this neighbourhood he had been settled among them as their only schoolmaster. If anything like a question was ventured on this subject, Bartle always replied, 'Oh, I've seen many places - I've been a deal in the south,' and the Loamshire men would as soon have thought of asking for a particular town or village in Africa as in 'the south.'

'Now then, my boy,' said Bartle, at last, when he had poured out his second mug of ale and lighted his pipe, 'now then, we'll have a little talk. But tell me first, have you heard any particular news to-day?'

'No,' said Adam, 'not as I remember.'

'Ah, they'll keep it close, they'll keep it close, I daresay. But I found it out by chance; and it's news that may concern you, Adam, else I'm a man that don't know a superficial square foot from a solid.'

Here Bartle gave a series of fierce and rapid puffs, looking earnestly the while at Adam. Your impatient loquacious man has never any notion of keeping his pipe alight by gentle measured puffs; he is always letting it go nearly out, and then punishing it for that negligence. At last he said, 'Satchell's got a paralytic stroke. I found it out from the lad they sent to Treddleston for the doctor, before seven o'clock this morning. He's a good way beyond sixty, you know; it's much if he gets over it.'

'Well,' said Adam, 'I daresay there'd be more rejoicing than sorrow in the parish at his being laid up. He's been a selfish, tale-bearing, mischievous fellow; but, after all, there's nobody he's done so much harm to as to th' old squire. Though it's the squire himself as is to blame - making a stupid fellow like that a sort o' man-of-all-work, just to save th' expense of having a proper steward to look after th' estate. And he's lost more by ill management o' the woods, I'll be bound, than 'ud pay for two stewards. If he's laid on the shelf, it's to be hoped he'll make way for a better man, but I don't see how it's like to make any difference to me.'

'But I see it, but I see it,' said Bartle, 'and others besides me. The captain's coming of age now - you know that as well as I do - and it's to be expected he'll have a little more voice in things. And I know, and you know too, what 'ud be the captain's wish about the woods, if there was a fair opportunity for making a change. He's said in plenty of people's hearing that he'd make you manager of the woods to-morrow, if he'd the power. Why, Carroll, Mr Irwine's butler, heard him say so to the parson not many days ago. Carroll looked in when we were smoking our pipes o' Saturday night at Casson's, and he told us about it; and whenever anybody says a good word for you, the parson's ready to back it, that I'll answer for. It was pretty well talked over, I can tell you, at Casson's, and one and another had their fling at you; for if donkeys set to work to sing, you're pretty sure what the tune'll be.'

'Why, did they talk it over before Mr Burge?' said Adam; 'or wasn't he there o' Saturday?'

'Oh, he went away before Carroll came; and Casson - he's always for setting other folks right, you know - would have it Burge was the man to have the management of the woods. 'A substantial man,' says he, 'with pretty near sixty years' experience o' timber: it 'ud be all very well for Adam Bede to act under him, but it isn't to be supposed the squire 'ud appoint a young fellow like Adam, when there's his elders and betters at hand!' But I said, 'That's a pretty notion o' yours, Casson. Why, Burge is the man to buy timber; would you put the woods into his hands and let him make his own bargains? I think you don't leave your customers to score their own drink, do you? And as

for age, what that's worth depends on the quality o' the liquor. It's pretty well known who's the backbone of Jonathan Burge's business.'

'I thank you for your good word, Mr Massey,' said Adam. 'But, for all that, Casson was partly i' the right for once. There's not much likelihood that th' old squire 'ud ever consent t' employ me. I offended him about two years ago, and he's never forgiven me.'

'Why, how was that? You never told me about it,' said Bartle.

'Oh, it was a bit o' nonsense. I'd made a frame for a screen for Miss Lyddy - she's allays making something with her worsted-work, you know - and she'd given me particular orders about this screen, and there was as much talking and measuring as if we'd been planning a house. However, it was a nice bit o' work, and I liked doing it for her. But, you know, those little friggling things take a deal o' time. I only worked at it in overhours - often late at night - and I had to go to Treddleston over an' over again about little bits o' brass nails and such gear; and I turned the little knobs and the legs, and carved th' open work, after a pattern, as nice as could be. And I was uncommon pleased with it when it was done. And when I took it home, Miss Lyddy sent for me to bring it into her drawing-room, so as she might give me directions about fastening on the work - very fine needlework, Jacob and Rachel a-kissing one another among the sheep, like a picture - and th' old squire was sitting there, for he mostly sits with her. Well, she was mighty pleased with the screen, and then she wanted to know what pay she was to give me. I didn't speak at random - you know it's not my way; I'd calculated pretty close, though I hadn't made out a bill, and I said, 'One pound thirty.' That was paying for the mater'als and paying me, but none too much, for my work. Th' old squire looked up at this, and peered in his way at the screen, and said, 'One pound thirteen for a gimcrack like that! Lydia, my dear, if you must spend money on these things, why don't you get them at Rosseter, instead of paying double price for clumsy work here? Such things are not work for a carpenter like Adam. Give him a guinea, and no more.' Well, Miss Lyddy, I reckon, believed what he told her, and she's not overfond o' parting with the money herself - she's not a bad woman at bottom, but she's been brought up under his thumb; so she began fidgeting with her purse, and turned as red as her ribbon. But I made a bow, and said, 'No, thank you, madam; I'll make you a present o' the screen, if you please. I've charged the regular price for my work, and I know it's done well; and I know, begging His Honour's pardon, that you couldn't get such a screen at Rosseter under two guineas. I'm willing to give you my work - it's been done in my own time, and nobody's got anything to do with it but me; but if I'm paid, I can't take a smaller price than I asked, because that 'ud be like saying I'd asked more than was just. With your leave, madam, I'll bid you good-morning.' I made my bow and went out

before she'd time to say any more, for she stood with the purse in her hand, looking almost foolish. I didn't mean to be disrespectful, and I spoke as polite as I could; but I can give in to no man, if he wants to make it out as I'm trying to overreach him. And in the evening the footman brought me the one pound thirteen wrapped in paper. But since then I've seen pretty clear as th' old squire can't abide me.'

'That's likely enough, that's likely enough,' said Bartle meditatively. 'The only way to bring him round would be to show him what was for his own interest, and that the captain may do - that the captain may do.'

'Nay, I don't know,' said Adam; 'the squire's 'cute enough but it takes something else besides 'cuteness to make folks see what'll be their interest in the long run. It takes some conscience and belief in right and wrong, I see that pretty clear. You'd hardly ever bring round th' old squire to believe he'd gain as much in a straightfor'ard way as by tricks and turns. And, besides, I've not much mind to work under him: I don't want to quarrel with any gentleman, more particular an old gentleman turned eighty, and I know we couldn't agree long. If the captain was master o' th' estate, it 'ud be different: he's got a conscience and a will to do right, and I'd sooner work for him nor for any man living.'

'Well, well, my boy, if good luck knocks at your door, don't you put your head out at window and tell it to be gone about its business, that's all. You must learn to deal with odd and even in life, as well as in figures. I tell you now, as I told you ten years ago, when you pommelled young Mike Holdsworth for wanting to pass a bad shilling before you knew whether he was in jest or earnest - you're overhasty and proud, and apt to set your teeth against folks that don't square to your notions. It's no harm for me to be a bit fiery and stiff-backed - I'm an old schoolmaster, and shall never want to get on to a higher perch. But where's the use of all the time I've spent in teaching you writing and mapping and mensuration, if you're not to get for'ard in the world and show folks there's some advantage in having a head on your shoulders, instead of a turnip? Do you mean to go on turning up your nose at every opportunity because it's got a bit of a smell about it that nobody finds out but yourself? It's as foolish as that notion o' yours that a wife is to make a working-man comfortable. Stuff and nonsense! Stuff and nonsense! Leave that to fools that never got beyond a sum in simple addition. Simple addition enough! Add one fool to another fool, and in six years' time six fools more - they're all of the same denomination, big and little's nothing to do with the sum!'

During this rather heated exhortation to coolness and discretion the pipe had gone out, and Bartle gave the climax to his speech by

striking a light furiously, after which he puffed with fierce resolution, fixing his eye still on Adam, who was trying not to laugh.

'There's a good deal o' sense in what you say, Mr Massey,' Adam began, as soon as he felt quite serious, 'as there always is. But you'll give in that it's no business o' mine to be building on chances that may never happen. What I've got to do is to work as well as I can with the tools and mater'als I've got in my hands. If a good chance comes to me, I'll think o' what you've been saying; but till then, I've got nothing to do but to trust to my own hands and my own head-piece. I'm turning over a little plan for Seth and me to go into the cabinet-making a bit by ourselves, and win a extra pound or two in that way. But it's getting late now - it'll be pretty near eleven before I'm at home, and Mother may happen to lie awake; she's more fidgety nor usual now. So I'll bid you good-night.'

'Well, well, we'll go to the gate with you - it's a fine night,' said Bartle, taking up his stick. Vixen was at once on her legs, and without further words the three walked out into the starlight, by the side of Bartle's potato-beds, to the little gate.

'Come to the music o' Friday night, if you can, my boy,' said the old man, as he closed the gate after Adam and leaned against it.

'Aye, aye,' said Adam, striding along towards the streak of pale road. He was the only object moving on the wide common. The two grey donkeys, just visible in front of the gorse bushes, stood as still as limestone images - as still as the grey-thatched roof of the mud cottage a little farther on. Bartle kept his eye on the moving figure till it passed into the darkness, while Vixen, in a state of divided affection, had twice run back to the house to bestow a parentetic lick on her puppies.

'Aye, aye,' muttered the schoolmaster, as Adam disappeared, 'there you go, stalking along - stalking along; but you wouldn't have been what you are if you hadn't had a bit of old lame Bartle inside you. The strongest calf must have something to suck at. There's plenty of these big, lumbering fellows 'ud never have known their A B C if it hadn't been for Bartle Massey. Well, well, Vixen, you foolish wench, what is it, what is it? I must go in, must I? Aye, aye, I'm never to have a will o' my own any more. And those pups - what do you think I'm to do with 'em, when they're twice as big as you? For I'm pretty sure the father was that hulking bull-terrier of Will Baker's - wasn't he now, eh, you sly hussy?'

(Here Vixen tucked her tail between her legs and ran forward into the house. Subjects are sometimes broached which a well-bred female will ignore.)

'But where's the use of talking to a woman with babbies?' continued Bartle. 'She's got no conscience - no conscience; it's all run to milk.'