

Chapter III - Mr Riley Gives His Advice Concerning A School For Tom

The gentleman in the ample white cravat and shirt-frill, taking his brandy-and-water so pleasantly with his good friend Tulliver, is Mr Riley, a gentleman with a waxen complexion and fat hands, rather highly educated for an auctioneer and appraiser, but large-hearted enough to show a great deal of *bonhomie* toward simple country acquaintances of hospitable habits. Mr Riley spoke of such acquaintances kindly as 'people of the old school.'

The conversation had come to a pause. Mr Tulliver, not without a particular reason, had abstained from a seventh recital of the cool retort by which Riley had shown himself too many for Dix, and how Wakem had had his comb cut for once in his life, now the business of the dam had been settled by arbitration, and how there never would have been any dispute at all about the height of water if everybody was what they should be, and Old Harry hadn't made the lawyers.

Mr Tulliver was, on the whole, a man of safe traditional opinions; but on one or two points he had trusted to his unassisted intellect, and had arrived at several questionable conclusions; amongst the rest, that rats, weevils, and lawyers were created by Old Harry. Unhappily he had no one to tell him that this was rampant Manichaeism, else he might have seen his error. But to-day it was clear that the good principle was triumphant: this affair of the water-power had been a tangled business somehow, for all it seemed - look at it one way - as plain as water's water; but, big a puzzle as it was, it hadn't got the better of Riley. Mr Tulliver took his brandy-and-water a little stronger than usual, and, for a man who might be supposed to have a few hundreds lying idle at his banker's, was rather incautiously open in expressing his high estimate of his friend's business talents.

But the dam was a subject of conversation that would keep; it could always be taken up again at the same point, and exactly in the same condition; and there was another subject, as you know, on which Mr Tulliver was in pressing want of Mr Riley's advice. This was his particular reason for remaining silent for a short space after his last draught, and rubbing his knees in a meditative manner. He was not a man to make an abrupt transition. This was a puzzling world, as he often said, and if you drive your wagon in a hurry, you may light on an awkward corner. Mr Riley, meanwhile, was not impatient. Why should he be? Even Hotspur, one would think, must have been patient in his slippers on a warm hearth, taking copious snuff, and sipping gratuitous brandy-and-water.

'There's a thing I've got i' my head,' said Mr Tulliver at last, in rather a lower tone than usual, as he turned his head and looked steadfastly at his companion.

'Ah!' said Mr Riley, in a tone of mild interest. He was a man with heavy waxen eyelids and high-arched eyebrows, looking exactly the same under all circumstances. This immovability of face, and the habit of taking a pinch of snuff before he gave an answer, made him trebly oracular to Mr Tulliver.

'It's a very particular thing,' he went on; 'it's about my boy Tom.'

At the sound of this name, Maggie, who was seated on a low stool close by the fire, with a large book open on her lap, shook her heavy hair back and looked up eagerly. There were few sounds that roused Maggie when she was dreaming over her book, but Tom's name served as well as the shrillest whistle; in an instant she was on the watch, with gleaming eyes, like a Skye terrier suspecting mischief, or at all events determined to fly at any one who threatened it toward Tom.

'You see, I want to put him to a new school at Midsummer,' said Mr Tulliver; 'he's comin' away from the 'cademy at Lady-day, an' I shall let him run loose for a quarter; but after that I want to send him to a downright good school, where they'll make a scholard of him.'

'Well,' said Mr Riley, 'there's no greater advantage you can give him than a good education. Not,' he added, with polite significance, - 'not that a man can't be an excellent miller and farmer, and a shrewd, sensible fellow into the bargain, without much help from the schoolmaster.'

'I believe you,' said Mr Tulliver, winking, and turning his head on one side; 'but that's where it is. I don't *mean* Tom to be a miller and farmer. I see no fun i' that. Why, if I made him a miller an' farmer, he'd be expectin' to take to the mill an' the land, an' a-hinting at me as it was time for me to lay by an' think o' my latter end. Nay, nay, I've seen enough o' that wi' sons. I'll never pull my coat off before I go to bed. I shall give Tom an eddication an' put him to a business, as he may make a nest for himself, an' not want to push me out o' mine. Pretty well if he gets it when I'm dead an' gone. I sha'n't be put off wi' spoon-meat afore I've lost my teeth.'

This was evidently a point on which Mr Tulliver felt strongly; and the impetus which had given unusual rapidity and emphasis to his speech showed itself still unexhausted for some minutes afterward in a defiant motion of the head from side to side, and an occasional 'Nay, nay,' like a subsiding growl.

These angry symptoms were keenly observed by Maggie, and cut her to the quick. Tom, it appeared, was supposed capable of turning his father out of doors, and of making the future in some way tragic by his wickedness. This was not to be borne; and Maggie jumped up from her stool, forgetting all about her heavy book, which fell with a bang within the fender, and going up between her father's knees, said, in a half-crying, half-indignant voice, -

'Father, Tom wouldn't be naughty to you ever; I know he wouldn't.'

Mrs Tulliver was out of the room superintending a choice supper-dish, and Mr Tulliver's heart was touched; so Maggie was not scolded about the book. Mr Riley quietly picked it up and looked at it, while the father laughed, with a certain tenderness in his hard-lined face, and patted his little girl on the back, and then held her hands and kept her between his knees.

'What! they mustn't say any harm o' Tom, eh?' said Mr Tulliver, looking at Maggie with a twinkling eye. Then, in a lower voice, turning to Mr Riley, as though Maggie couldn't hear, 'She understands what one's talking about so as never was. And you should hear her read, - straight off, as if she knowed it all beforehand. And allays at her book! But it's bad - it's bad,' Mr Tulliver added sadly, checking this blamable exultation. 'A woman's no business wi' being so clever; it'll turn to trouble, I doubt. But bless you!' - here the exultation was clearly recovering the mastery, - 'she'll read the books and understand 'em better nor half the folks as are growed up.'

Maggie's cheeks began to flush with triumphant excitement. She thought Mr Riley would have a respect for her now; it had been evident that he thought nothing of her before.

Mr Riley was turning over the leaves of the book, and she could make nothing of his face, with its high-arched eyebrows; but he presently looked at her, and said, -

'Come, come and tell me something about this book; here are some pictures, - I want to know what they mean.'

Maggie, with deepening color, went without hesitation to Mr Riley's elbow and looked over the book, eagerly seizing one corner, and tossing back her mane, while she said, -

'Oh, I'll tell you what that means. It's a dreadful picture, isn't it? But I can't help looking at it. That old woman in the water's a witch, - they've put her in to find out whether she's a witch or no; and if she swims she's a witch, and if she's drowned - and killed, you know - she's innocent, and not a witch, but only a poor silly old woman. But

what good would it do her then, you know, when she was drowned? Only, I suppose, she'd go to heaven, and God would make it up to her. And this dreadful blacksmith with his arms akimbo, laughing, - oh, isn't he ugly? - I'll tell you what he is. He's the Devil *really*' (here Maggie's voice became louder and more emphatic), 'and not a right blacksmith; for the Devil takes the shape of wicked men, and walks about and sets people doing wicked things, and he's oftener in the shape of a bad man than any other, because, you know, if people saw he was the Devil, and he roared at 'em, they'd run away, and he couldn't make 'em do what he pleased.'

Mr Tulliver had listened to this exposition of Maggie's with petrifying wonder.

'Why, what book is it the wench has got hold on?' he burst out at last.

'The 'History of the Devil,' by Daniel Defoe, - not quite the right book for a little girl,' said Mr Riley. 'How came it among your books, Mr Tulliver?'

Maggie looked hurt and discouraged, while her father said, -

'Why, it's one o' the books I bought at Partridge's sale. They was all bound alike, - it's a good binding, you see, - and I thought they'd be all good books. There's Jeremy Taylor's 'Holy Living and Dying' among 'em. I read in it often of a Sunday' (Mr Tulliver felt somehow a familiarity with that great writer, because his name was Jeremy); 'and there's a lot more of 'em, - sermons mostly, I think, - but they've all got the same covers, and I thought they were all o' one sample, as you may say. But it seems one mustn't judge by th' outside. This is a puzzlin' world.'

'Well,' said Mr Riley, in an admonitory, patronizing tone as he patted Maggie on the head, 'I advise you to put by the 'History of the Devil,' and read some prettier book. Have you no prettier books?'

'Oh, yes,' said Maggie, reviving a little in the desire to vindicate the variety of her reading. 'I know the reading in this book isn't pretty; but I like the pictures, and I make stories to the pictures out of my own head, you know. But I've got 'Aesop's Fables,' and a book about Kangaroos and things, and the 'Pilgrim's Progress.'

'Ah, a beautiful book,' said Mr Riley; 'you can't read a better.'

'Well, but there's a great deal about the Devil in that,' said Maggie, triumphantly, 'and I'll show you the picture of him in his true shape, as he fought with Christian.'

Maggie ran in an instant to the corner of the room, jumped on a chair, and reached down from the small bookcase a shabby old copy of Bunyan, which opened at once, without the least trouble of search, at the picture she wanted.

'Here he is,' she said, running back to Mr Riley, 'and Tom colored him for me with his paints when he was at home last holidays, - the body all black, you know, and the eyes red, like fire, because he's all fire inside, and it shines out at his eyes.'

'Go, go!' said Mr Tulliver, peremptorily, beginning to feel rather uncomfortable at these free remarks on the personal appearance of a being powerful enough to create lawyers; 'shut up the book, and let's hear no more o' such talk. It is as I thought - the child 'ull learn more mischief nor good wi' the books. Go, go and see after your mother.'

Maggie shut up the book at once, with a sense of disgrace, but not being inclined to see after her mother, she compromised the matter by going into a dark corner behind her father's chair, and nursing her doll, toward which she had an occasional fit of fondness in Tom's absence, neglecting its toilet, but lavishing so many warm kisses on it that the waxen cheeks had a wasted, unhealthy appearance.

'Did you ever hear the like on't?' said Mr Tulliver, as Maggie retired. 'It's a pity but what she'd been the lad, - she'd ha' been a match for the lawyers, *she* would. It's the wonderful'st thing' - here he lowered his voice - 'as I picked the mother because she wasn't o'er 'cute - bein' a good-looking woman too, an' come of a rare family for managing; but I picked her from her sisters o' purpose, 'cause she was a bit weak like; for I wasn't agoin' to be told the rights o' things by my own fireside. But you see when a man's got brains himself, there's no knowing where they'll run to; an' a pleasant sort o' soft woman may go on breeding you stupid lads and 'cute wenches, till it's like as if the world was turned topsy-turvy. It's an uncommon puzzlin' thing.'

Mr Riley's gravity gave way, and he shook a little under the application of his pinch of snuff before he said, -

'But your lad's not stupid, is he? I saw him, when I was here last, busy making fishing-tackle; he seemed quite up to it.'

'Well, he isn't not to say stupid, - he's got a notion o' things out o' door, an' a sort o' common sense, as he'd lay hold o' things by the right handle. But he's slow with his tongue, you see, and he reads but poorly, and can't abide the books, and spells all wrong, they tell me, an' as shy as can be wi' strangers, an' you never hear him say 'cute things like the little wench. Now, what I want is to send him to a school where they'll make him a bit nimble with his tongue and his

pen, and make a smart chap of him. I want my son to be even wi' these fellows as have got the start o' me with having better schooling. Not but what, if the world had been left as God made it, I could ha' seen my way, and held my own wi' the best of 'em; but things have got so twisted round and wrapped up i' unreasonable words, as aren't a bit like 'em, as I'm clean at fault, often an' often. Everything winds about so - the more straightforrad you are, the more you're puzzled.'

Mr Tulliver took a draught, swallowed it slowly, and shook his head in a melancholy manner, conscious of exemplifying the truth that a perfectly sane intellect is hardly at home in this insane world.

'You're quite in the right of it, Tulliver,' observed Mr Riley. 'Better spend an extra hundred or two on your son's education, than leave it him in your will. I know I should have tried to do so by a son of mine, if I'd had one, though, God knows, I haven't your ready money to play with, Tulliver; and I have a houseful of daughters into the bargain.'

'I dare say, now, you know of a school as 'ud be just the thing for Tom,' said Mr Tulliver, not diverted from his purpose by any sympathy with Mr Riley's deficiency of ready cash.

Mr Riley took a pinch of snuff, and kept Mr Tulliver in suspense by a silence that seemed deliberative, before he said, -

'I know of a very fine chance for any one that's got the necessary money and that's what you have, Tulliver. The fact is, I wouldn't recommend any friend of mine to send a boy to a regular school, if he could afford to do better. But if any one wanted his boy to get superior instruction and training, where he would be the companion of his master, and that master a first rate fellow, I know his man. I wouldn't mention the chance to everybody, because I don't think everybody would succeed in getting it, if he were to try; but I mention it to you, Tulliver, between ourselves.'

The fixed inquiring glance with which Mr Tulliver had been watching his friend's oracular face became quite eager.

'Ay, now, let's hear,' he said, adjusting himself in his chair with the complacency of a person who is thought worthy of important communications.

'He's an Oxford man,' said Mr Riley, sententiously, shutting his mouth close, and looking at Mr Tulliver to observe the effect of this stimulating information.

'What! a parson?' said Mr Tulliver, rather doubtfully.

'Yes, and an M.A. The bishop, I understand, thinks very highly of him: why, it was the bishop who got him his present curacy.'

'Ah?' said Mr Tulliver, to whom one thing was as wonderful as another concerning these unfamiliar phenomena. 'But what can he want wi' Tom, then?'

'Why, the fact is, he's fond of teaching, and wishes to keep up his studies, and a clergyman has but little opportunity for that in his parochial duties. He's willing to take one or two boys as pupils to fill up his time profitably. The boys would be quite of the family, - the finest thing in the world for them; under Stelling's eye continually.'

'But do you think they'd give the poor lad twice o' pudding?' said Mrs Tulliver, who was now in her place again. 'He's such a boy for pudding as never was; an' a growing boy like that, - it's dreadful to think o' their stintin' him.'

'And what money 'ud he want?' said Mr Tulliver, whose instinct told him that the services of this admirable M.A. would bear a high price.

'Why, I know of a clergyman who asks a hundred and fifty with his youngest pupils, and he's not to be mentioned with Stelling, the man I speak of. I know, on good authority, that one of the chief people at Oxford said, Stelling might get the highest honors if he chose. But he didn't care about university honors; he's a quiet man - not noisy.'

'Ah, a deal better - a deal better,' said Mr Tulliver; 'but a hundred and fifty's an uncommon price. I never thought o' paying so much as that.'

'A good education, let me tell you, Tulliver, - a good education is cheap at the money. But Stelling is moderate in his terms; he's not a grasping man. I've no doubt he'd take your boy at a hundred, and that's what you wouldn't get many other clergymen to do. I'll write to him about it, if you like.'

Mr Tulliver rubbed his knees, and looked at the carpet in a meditative manner.

'But belike he's a bachelor,' observed Mrs Tulliver, in the interval; 'an' I've no opinion o' housekeepers. There was my brother, as is dead an' gone, had a housekeeper once, an' she took half the feathers out o' the best bed, an' packed 'em up an' sent 'em away. An' it's unknown the linen she made away with - Stott her name was. It 'ud break my heart to send Tom where there's a housekeeper, an' I hope you won't think of it, Mr Tulliver.'

'You may set your mind at rest on that score, Mrs Tulliver,' said Mr Riley, 'for Stelling is married to as nice a little woman as any man need wish for a wife. There isn't a kinder little soul in the world; I know her family well. She has very much your complexion, - light curly hair. She comes of a good Mudport family, and it's not every offer that would have been acceptable in that quarter. But Stelling's not an every-day man; rather a particular fellow as to the people he chooses to be connected with. But I *think* he would have no objection to take your son; I *think* he would not, on my representation.'

'I don't know what he could have *against* the lad,' said Mrs Tulliver, with a slight touch of motherly indignation; 'a nice fresh-skinned lad as anybody need wish to see.'

'But there's one thing I'm thinking on,' said Mr Tulliver, turning his head on one side and looking at Mr Riley, after a long perusal of the carpet. 'Wouldn't a parson be almost too high-learn't to bring up a lad to be a man o' business? My notion o' the parsons was as they'd got a sort o' learning as lay mostly out o' sight. And that isn't what I want for Tom. I want him to know figures, and write like print, and see into things quick, and know what folks mean, and how to wrap things up in words as aren't actionable. It's an uncommon fine thing, that is,' concluded Mr Tulliver, shaking his head, 'when you can let a man know what you think of him without paying for it.'

'Oh, my dear Tulliver,' said Mr Riley, 'you're quite under a mistake about the clergy; all the best schoolmasters are of the clergy. The schoolmasters who are not clergymen are a very low set of men generally.'

'Ay, that Jacobs is, at the 'cademy,' interposed Mr Tulliver.

'To be sure, - men who have failed in other trades, most likely. Now, a clergyman is a gentleman by profession and education; and besides that, he has the knowledge that will ground a boy, and prepare him for entering on any career with credit. There may be some clergymen who are mere bookmen; but you may depend upon it, Stelling is not one of them, - a man that's wide awake, let me tell you. Drop him a hint, and that's enough. You talk of figures, now; you have only to say to Stelling, 'I want my son to be a thorough arithmetician,' and you may leave the rest to him.'

Mr Riley paused a moment, while Mr Tulliver, some-what reassured as to clerical tutorship, was inwardly rehearsing to an imaginary Mr Stelling the statement, 'I want my son to know 'rethmetic.'

'You see, my dear Tulliver,' Mr Riley continued, 'when you get a thoroughly educated man, like Stelling, he's at no loss to take up any

branch of instruction. When a workman knows the use of his tools, he can make a door as well as a window.'

'Ay, that's true,' said Mr Tulliver, almost convinced now that the clergy must be the best of schoolmasters.

'Well, I'll tell you what I'll do for you,' said Mr Riley, 'and I wouldn't do it for everybody. I'll see Stelling's father-in-law, or drop him a line when I get back to Mudport, to say that you wish to place your boy with his son-in-law, and I dare say Stelling will write to you, and send you his terms.'

'But there's no hurry, is there?' said Mrs Tulliver; 'for I hope, Mr Tulliver, you won't let Tom begin at his new school before Midsummer. He began at the 'cademy at the Lady-day quarter, and you see what good's come of it.'

'Ay, ay, Bessy, never brew wi' bad malt upo' Michael-masday, else you'll have a poor tap,' said Mr Tulliver, winking and smiling at Mr Riley, with the natural pride of a man who has a buxom wife conspicuously his inferior in intellect. 'But it's true there's no hurry; you've hit it there, Bessy.'

'It might be as well not to defer the arrangement too long,' said Mr Riley, quietly, 'for Stelling may have propositions from other parties, and I know he would not take more than two or three boarders, if so many. If I were you, I think I would enter on the subject with Stelling at once: there's no necessity for sending the boy before Midsummer, but I would be on the safe side, and make sure that nobody forestalls you.'

'Ay, there's summat in that,' said Mr Tulliver.

'Father,' broke in Maggie, who had stolen unperceived to her father's elbow again, listening with parted lips, while she held her doll topsyturvy, and crushed its nose against the wood of the chair, - 'father, is it a long way off where Tom is to go? Sha'n't we ever go to see him?'

'I don't know, my wench,' said the father, tenderly. 'Ask Mr Riley; he knows.'

Maggie came round promptly in front of Mr Riley, and said, 'How far is it, please, sir?'

'Oh, a long, long way off,' that gentleman answered, being of opinion that children, when they are not naughty, should always be spoken to jocosely. 'You must borrow the seven-leagued boots to get to him.'

'That's nonsense!' said Maggie, tossing her head haughtily, and turning away, with the tears springing in her eyes. She began to dislike Mr Riley; it was evident he thought her silly and of no consequence.

'Hush, Maggie! for shame of you, asking questions and chattering,' said her mother. 'Come and sit down on your little stool, and hold your tongue, do. But,' added Mrs Tulliver, who had her own alarm awakened, 'is it so far off as I couldn't wash him and mend him?'

'About fifteen miles; that's all,' said Mr Riley. 'You can drive there and back in a day quite comfortably. Or - Stelling is a hospitable, pleasant man - he'd be glad to have you stay.'

'But it's too far off for the linen, I doubt,' said Mrs Tulliver, sadly.

The entrance of supper opportunely adjourned this difficulty, and relieved Mr Riley from the labor of suggesting some solution or compromise, - a labor which he would otherwise doubtless have undertaken; for, as you perceive, he was a man of very obliging manners. And he had really given himself the trouble of recommending Mr Stelling to his friend Tulliver without any positive expectation of a solid, definite advantage resulting to himself, notwithstanding the subtle indications to the contrary which might have misled a too-sagacious observer. For there is nothing more widely misleading than sagacity if it happens to get on a wrong scent; and sagacity, persuaded that men usually act and speak from distinct motives, with a consciously proposed end in view, is certain to waste its energies on imaginary game.

Plotting covetousness and deliberate contrivance, in order to compass a selfish end, are nowhere abundant but in the world of the dramatist: they demand too intense a mental action for many of our fellow-parishioners to be guilty of them. It is easy enough to spoil the lives of our neighbors without taking so much trouble; we can do it by lazy acquiescence and lazy omission, by trivial falsities for which we hardly know a reason, by small frauds neutralized by small extravagances, by maladroit flatteries, and clumsily improvised insinuations. We live from hand to mouth, most of us, with a small family of immediate desires; we do little else than snatch a morsel to satisfy the hungry brood, rarely thinking of seed-corn or the next year's crop.

Mr Riley was a man of business, and not cold toward his own interest, yet even he was more under the influence of small promptings than of far-sighted designs. He had no private understanding with the Rev. Walter Stelling; on the contrary, he knew very little of that M.A. and his acquirements, - not quite enough, perhaps, to warrant so strong a recommendation of him as he had given to his friend Tulliver. But he

believed Mr Stelling to be an excellent classic, for Gadsby had said so, and Gadsby's first cousin was an Oxford tutor; which was better ground for the belief even than his own immediate observation would have been, for though Mr Riley had received a tincture of the classics at the great Mudport Free School, and had a sense of understanding Latin generally, his comprehension of any particular Latin was not ready. Doubtless there remained a subtle aroma from his juvenile contact with the 'De Senectute' and the fourth book of the 'Æneid,' but it had ceased to be distinctly recognizable as classical, and was only perceived in the higher finish and force of his auctioneering style. Then, Stelling was an Oxford man, and the Oxford men were always - no, no, it was the Cambridge men who were always good mathematicians. But a man who had had a university education could teach anything he liked; especially a man like Stelling, who had made a speech at a Mudport dinner on a political occasion, and had acquitted himself so well that it was generally remarked, this son-in-law of Timpson's was a sharp fellow. It was to be expected of a Mudport man, from the parish of St. Ursula, that he would not omit to do a good turn to a son-in-law of Timpson's, for Timpson was one of the most useful and influential men in the parish, and had a good deal of business, which he knew how to put into the right hands. Mr Riley liked such men, quite apart from any money which might be diverted, through their good judgment, from less worthy pockets into his own; and it would be a satisfaction to him to say to Timpson on his return home, 'I've secured a good pupil for your son-in-law.' Timpson had a large family of daughters; Mr Riley felt for him; besides, Louisa Timpson's face, with its light curls, had been a familiar object to him over the pew wainscot on a Sunday for nearly fifteen years; it was natural her husband should be a commendable tutor. Moreover, Mr Riley knew of no other schoolmaster whom he had any ground for recommending in preference; why, then, should he not recommend Stelling? His friend Tulliver had asked him for an opinion; it is always chilling, in friendly intercourse, to say you have no opinion to give. And if you deliver an opinion at all, it is mere stupidity not to do it with an air of conviction and well-founded knowledge. You make it your own in uttering it, and naturally get fond of it. Thus Mr Riley, knowing no harm of Stelling to begin with, and wishing him well, so far as he had any wishes at all concerning him, had no sooner recommended him than he began to think with admiration of a man recommended on such high authority, and would soon have gathered so warm an interest on the subject, that if Mr Tulliver had in the end declined to send Tom to Stelling, Mr Riley would have thought his 'friend of the old school' a thoroughly pig-headed fellow.

If you blame Mr Riley very severely for giving a recommendation on such slight grounds, I must say you are rather hard upon him. Why should an auctioneer and appraiser thirty years ago, who had as good as forgotten his free-school Latin, be expected to manifest a delicate

scrupulosity which is not always exhibited by gentlemen of the learned professions, even in our present advanced stage of morality?

Besides, a man with the milk of human kindness in him can scarcely abstain from doing a good-natured action, and one cannot be good-natured all round. Nature herself occasionally quarters an inconvenient parasite on an animal toward whom she has otherwise no ill will. What then? We admire her care for the parasite. If Mr Riley had shrunk from giving a recommendation that was not based on valid evidence, he would not have helped Mr Stelling to a paying pupil, and that would not have been so well for the reverend gentleman. Consider, too, that all the pleasant little dim ideas and complacencies - of standing well with Timpson, of dispensing advice when he was asked for it, of impressing his friend Tulliver with additional respect, of saying something, and saying it emphatically, with other inappreciably minute ingredients that went along with the warm hearth and the brandy-and-water to make up Mr Riley's consciousness on this occasion - would have been a mere blank.