

‘I cannot boast,’ replied Ben, ‘of having read a great deal beyond that myself; but still, I should be sorry if I could not get a trunk full of books to read every six months.’

At this the governor, regarding him with a look of surprise said: ‘You must then, though so young, be a scholar, perhaps a teacher of the languages.’

‘No sir, I know no language but my own.’

‘What not Latin and Greek?’

‘No, sir, not a word of either.’

‘Why, don’t you think them necessary?’

‘I don’t set myself up as a judge, but I should not suppose them necessary?’

‘Aye! well, I should like to hear your reason.’

‘Why, sir, I am not competent to give reasons that may satisfy a gentleman of your learning, but the following are the reasons with which I satisfy myself. I look on languages, sir, merely as arbitrary sounds or characters, whereby men communicate their ideas to each other. Now, I already possess a language which is capable of conveying more ideas than I shall ever acquire: were it not wiser in me to improve my time in getting *sense* through that one language, than waste it in getting mere *sounds* through fifty languages, even if I could learn as many?’

Here the governor paused a moment, though not without a little red on his cheeks, for having only a minute before put Ben and the tenth chapter of Nehemiah so close together. However, catching a new idea he took another start:

‘Well, but my dear sir, you certainly differ from the learned world, which is you know decidedly in favour of the languages.’

‘I would not wish wantonly to differ from the learned world,’ said Ben, ‘especially when they maintain opinions that seem to be founded in truth. But when this is not the case, to differ from them I have ever thought my duty, and especially since I studied Locke.’

‘Locke!’ cried the governor with surprise, ‘*you studied Locke?*’

‘Yes, sir, I studied Locke on the *Understanding* three years ago, when I was thirteen.’

‘You amaze me, sir. You study Locke on the *Understanding* at thirteen?’

‘Yes, sir, I did.’

‘Well I pray at what college did you study Locke at thirteen; for at Cambridge college in Old England, where I got my education, they never allowed the senior class to look at Locke till eighteen.’

‘Why sir it was my misfortune never to be at college, nor even at a grammar school, excepting nine months when I was a child.’

Here the governor sprang from his seat, and staring at Ben, cried out:

‘And where, where, did you get your education?’

‘At home, sir, in a tallow chandler’s shop.’

‘In a tallow chandler’s shop?’ screamed the governor.

‘Yes sir, my father was a poor old tallow chandler, with sixteen children, and I the youngest of all. At eight he put me to school, but finding he could not spare the money from the rest of the children to keep me there, he took me home into the shop, where I