

competent to give advice in regard to what ought to be done?"

"I am afraid I don't, Lord Cheriton," said Jim rather feebly.

"That is disappointing, for in the past you have shown such a surprising fertility of ideas and resources. The problem is so serious. Can one conceive a world in which cream buns have no savour, circuses no glamour, and in which the Joseph Wrights of Derby are allowed to ruffle it unquestioned among the betters? Frankly, the feat is beyond me, Lascell. And then, too, my dear fellow, the news that Muffin has a new mauve from London to wear in the spring has excited hardly any enthusiasm."

"Indeed?" said Jim.

"That is so, I assure you. And to my mind, that is not the least sinister symptom. I have conferred with the wise woman of Hill Street, and during my sojourn in the west country also with the presiding genius of Slocum Magna. And after some discussion of the pros and cons of the situation, for *mon père* and *ma tante* do not appear to see eye to eye in all things, we are at last in agreement that something ought to be done to restore the savour to the best confectionery and also to ensure that no upstart shall occupy without question the same kind of *fauteuil* as Rembrandt and Velasquez. The result of our deliberations is, my dear fellow, that we have come to the conclusion that you are the man to help us."

"I!" said Jim, impotently.

"Have you any objection to undertaking such a scheme of philanthropy?"

"If I could do anything to add to Miss Perry's happiness," said Jim, "I should be just about the proudest chap in the world."