

Jim was not proof against the assault.

"I'm not sure that it does," he said miserably.

"I wouldn't be too sure about that if I were you."

Jim began to look decidedly fierce. In spite of the cheque for ten thousand pounds, which he viewed as somewhat in the nature of a mockery, he showed no disposition to be baited.

"Perhaps it would be wise, Lord Cheriton, not to pursue the subject."

Cheriton laughed outright at the solemnity of the young fellow's manner.

"On the contrary," said he, "one feels that the subject of the Red House at Widdiford should be discussed at length. Miss Perry and I have been over to look at the old place before completing the purchase."

"Ah! that is interesting," said Jim, who was more bewildered than ever.

"It seems that, in addition to its other lures, the Red House at Widdiford has peaches in season."

"Of course it has," said Jim, who was beginning to feel that Cheriton was making a rather long excursion in the realms of bad taste.

"Well, my dear fellow, I put it to you—what is the use of having peaches in season if one has not the appetite to eat them?"

"What, indeed!" said Jim.

"And again, my dear fellow—what, pray, is the use of giving Buszard a contract for the large size when cream buns lose their savour?"

Jim made no reply, but merely looked miserable.

"Let me tell you in confidence, Lascelles," said his patron, in a becomingly low tone, "that even the circus has begun to pall. And as for Joseph Wright of Derby, the question of his permanent merit is beginning to appear almost a matter of indifference. Do you feel