

wiser. But you have found yourself. A great career lies before you."

"You may be right," said Jim, "or you may not be right, but either way it doesn't matter."

Cheriton inspected the young fellow with the greatest coolness and impartiality. There was no mistaking that the words were tragic. Cheriton's penetration declared them to be so. He took some little time for reflection, and then he slowly drew a cheque out of his pocket-book with an air that was really unfathomable.

"There must be no misunderstanding, Lascelles," said he, with an air that was brisk and businesslike. "There is every reason to believe that the picture of Miss Perry will prove a valuable property. But at the same time, I hold your promise that I may purchase it on my own terms. Is not that the case?"

"It is, Lord Cheriton," said Jim, with indifference.

"I hope the bargain I drove with you may not prove too hard," said Cheriton, with an enigmatic smile that Jim Lascelles took not the least pains to fathom. "But if I may say so, your conduct in allowing me to drive such a bargain was curiously injudicious. For everybody tells me that your picture is magnificent."

"I don't think it matters," said Jim, who was looking tired. "Although one is glad you like it, of course."

"It must always be pleasant to the artist to have his work admired. My own comment upon your work is this. I hope, my dear fellow, you will be able to forgive its extravagance."

As he spoke he gave the cheque to Jim Lascelles. The painter, however, paid no heed to it at first. His instinct was to crush it in his hands and fling it away,