

"Mr. Lascelles," said a dealer, "I should like you to give me an option on all the work you produce during the next five years. I feel sure I could sell it."

"We have a new Gainsborough here," said a third person, who spoke in an unofficial capacity, "and that is all there is to be said about it."

About the end of the month Cheriton himself appeared, duly armed with expert opinion, to see for himself. He was accompanied by Miss Burden and his *fiancée*, who was looking thin and unhappy. It was a beautiful day for the time of year; and in regard to his appearance, the happy wooer was as fastidious as usual. Never had he seemed more faultless in his attire or more scrupulously paternal in his demeanour. He looked long at the masterpiece, and he looked particularly.

"Lascelles, my good fellow," said he, "I am forced to arrive at one conclusion. If you were to paint a thousand pictures, this is something you will never surpass."

"Why do you think so?" said Jim.

"Because, my dear fellow, there is growth in it. You began it a callow stripling; you have finished it, shall I say, a strong man in the plenitude of his power. I have watched you and the picture grow together from month to month. It is given to no man to do that sort of thing twice."

Jim Lascelles, however, was a robust young fellow—at least, it was his ideal to be so. He was apt to be on his guard against high-flown sentiment, yet he knew that Cheriton had spoken the truth.

"You are right," he said simply. "That canvas has got all I have or all I ever shall have. I am older now than when I began it, and I hope I'm wiser."

"Not wiser really, my dear fellow; we never get