

PATIENCE.

BY RACHEL E. CHALLICE.

(Continued.)

Feeling bound to keep his promise of taking the picture with him, he put it carefully in the trap, but he vowed it should remain there unless he saw reasons to alter his opinion of the critic friend.

Arrived at the house, Harold felt a glow of pleasure as he entered the panelled drawing room, warm and ruddy with a bright log fire and pink shaded wax candles—he felt somewhat ashamed of his fit of jealousy against the guest of his hostess, when Mrs. Dacres presented him an elderly white-headed man, who took him warmly by the hand, and expressed his pleasure at meeting a fellow artist.

That was a very happy little dinner for Harold. Seated by the side of Patience, who looked beautiful in a soft cream-colored cashmere dress, his kind friends at either end of the table, the sympathetic genial face of the artist shining opposite, the time passed swiftly enough.

Later in the evening, when the vicar had gone to see a sick parishoner, the hostess was eager in her enquiries for the picture.

Harold, feeling ashamed to say that he had not brought it into the house, went off to the stable and fetched it from the trap where he had left it.

The old gentleman gave the painting a long and careful inspection before offering his opinion. Then removing his gold glasses from his eyes, turned to the young man who was waiting the verdict with eager and nervous impatience, and gave him some well-earned words of encouragement, for the careful and clever work shown in the painting. Then he pointed out one or two faults in the picture, which well might account for its refusal at an Exhibition.

Touched at seeing the deeply earnest way in which Harold listened to every word of advice, the artist added: "And I will say, Mr. Newton, to prove to you that I am not flattering you, that if you rectify those little mistakes, I don't at all see why you should not send it to the Royal Academy. And what's more, I should not be at all surprised if the picture were accepted, for there is a freshness of idea and painting in it which is always attractive."

That was a very happy moonlight drive home for Harold after his evening at the vicarage. Once more hope seemed to shine in his horizon. Once again there was a chance for his painting. Once again there was a chance of winning Patience.

CHAPTER IV.

A few bright afternoons at the vicarage, and the faults in the picture were removed, and even the old artist could give nothing but commendation. It was touching to see the mother remove her spectacles, rub them and put them on again to gaze with eagerness at the portrait of Patience. Then she looked up at Harold with her kind sympathetic expression, and said:—"Well, my dear friend, whether the picture meet the approbation of the academy or not, you may rest assured that my praise of it is most unqualified."

Then looking at the smiling blushing face of the girl at her side the lady added proudly: "And yet I can say that you have not flattered our little one."

The beginning of April saw the departure of Harold's picture with the old artist, who promised to see that it was sent to the Royal Academy on the appointed day for the reception of works.

The fortnight which followed was a very happy one for Harold; his horse was constantly seen with its rider wending its way to the vicarage, where pleasant hours were passed by the two young people; Harold teaching Patience to sketch, reading poetry to her, or taking her for delightful walks in the country, which was daily becoming more beautiful in its fresh green spring foliage.

Sometimes the poor fellow became moody and depressed, as he thought of his impunctuality, and his father's objection to his marrying. But then, hoping his picture might be successful, he determined that he at least would enjoy the short interval. If the refusal of his painting showed it was useless to pursue his art, then he would be destined to years of farming, without money, and no hope of marriage.

At last came the week when the varnishing tickets are sent to the successful exhibitors at the Royal Academy. Day after day went by and no news came of the picture. Poor Harold, with the despair which came so easily to him, made up his mind that the painting had been rejected.

Feeling robbed of all hope, he stopped his visits to the vicarage, and with dull dogged determination, plodded about the land which brought no pleasure to him.

One morning at the beginning of May, the Squire told Harold at breakfast, that business required him to go to London that day.

The young man wondered what could possibly be of such importance as to make his father abandon his usual routine of work to make a sudden journey. But the old man was quiet and uncommunicative.

The fact was, he had that morning received a letter from an old friend, a chaplain in the army, saying that in his military duties at Halifax, Nova Scotia, he had come across some important intelligence respecting the Squire's son Charles.

Fearing some disgrace to his name, the brave old father, keeping all anxiety to himself, went off to London alone.

Almost dazed by the traffic and noise of the streets, so strange and unfamiliar to him, the Squire made his way to an old fashioned hotel in Convent Garden.

There he found Mr. Thorn, his soldier clerical friend, as straightforward and kind-hearted as in those days so long ago when they used to hunt and shoot together.

At any other time this meeting, after so many years, would have been full of interest and pleasure to Mr. Newton, but every thought and feeling seemed now concentrated on the one idea of news of Charles—news of his absent, erring, but beloved son, was it bad? or was it good? He could hardly bear the suspense any longer.

Mr. Thorn, easily discovering his friend's anxiety, lost no time in putting into his hands the statement he had written of a confession made to him by a soldier named Davison on his death bed at Halifax.

This man was no other than the "ne'er do well" of the village of Hersdon who had disappeared at the same time as Charles left his home. It ran thus:

"I, Robert Davison, feeling myself to be dying, think it as well to relieve my mind, by confessing a robbery which I committed at Squire Newton's, of my native village of Hersdon. I was sick of the place, and I wanted a change. The governor had plenty of cash, and I didn't see why I shouldn't have some of it, but as I lie here, I sometimes think it may have gone hard with Master Charles, and he was always very good to me. However, the ill-gotten gains did not last long; and after one dishonest act, I easily drifted into others, until at last, to escape being 'run in,' I enlisted in the regiment first sailing for Nova Scotia. And now they will just have the expense of burying me."

Mr. Newton read the paper eagerly to the end, and then his hand dropping helplessly, at his side, he stared before him with a vacant, dazed expression.

A great joy had swept over his heart at this written statement of his son's innocence, but then came the paralyzing feeling of his own injustice. Was it then his, Henry Newton's fault, that Charles had gone forth homeless and suspected of robbery? How would he ever come back to a father who had so misjudged him? In what part of the world was he wandering now?

The chaplain, seeing how upset the Squire was, and knowing that nothing could be done just then for the recovery of the missing son, suggested a walk in the Strand. There amongst the busy throng of people, they met the vicar of Hersdon, who had come up to town to see the Academy on the day of its opening. Delighted at meeting Mr. Newton, the clergyman insisted upon taking him to the Academy. The Squire had never before visited any London exhibition of pictures, so one can imagine his surprise, when on passing round the square court yard crowded with carriages, and mounting the broad carpet staircase, he found himself in the picture-lined rooms, filled with a throng of fashionable people.

CHAPTER V.

Mr. Thorn soon meeting friends, by whom he was taken to another part of the Exhibition to see some special work of art, the vicar of Hersdon and the Squire were left alone.

"Now you know," said Mr. Newton, "that all this is not in my line at all. Why if you had taken me to some cattle show, I could have told you fast enough what was bad and what was good, but all these pictures convey no ideas to me. Why if the people come down to the country, and saw real meadows and woods, whilst enjoying the fresh air and sunshine, it would be more sensible than crowding in this atmosphere to see what these pictures make of it all."

"But this is art!" said the vicar.

"Well I hope Harold will never come to this place," said the old man, as it would make him more mad than ever about painting. I must be careful and not tell him where I have been. What would he say, I wonder, to see his old father surrounded by all this? Why I think he would fancy I am already in my dotage!"

"But," taking the vicar by the arm, and leading him to one of the leather-covered seats in the centre of the room, "I think the boy is getting over that rubbish." At this moment a tall handsome bearded man issued from the crowd round the pictures and wearily took a vacant place on the other side of the settee, thus having his back to the two old gentlemen. Idly and listlessly looking about, the expression on his face became suddenly one of deep interest, for, without daring to turn his head for fear of interrupting the conversation, he heard what sounded like his father's voice say:

"But even if Harold does give up his painting, it is not as it would have been with Charles. He was a regular chip of the old block. With him it would never have been a case of drive, drive. Now, with Harold I see it goes very much against the grain, and that his heart is hankering after this sort of thing."

Then the old man went on to tell the vicar of the news of Davison's confession, and he could not hide his dreadful remorse at his treatment of his son.

An onlooker would have been astonished to see the emotion and excitement which appeared on the bronzed face of the stranger at what would have seemed an ordinary conversation between two old gentlemen.

But this young man, brought by chance, if there be such a thing, within ear shot of the talk, was no other than Charles Newton. Almost ruined by a fire, which broke out on his sheep-range in Australia, and broken down from a fever in the bush, the poor fellow, with his little savings, had returned to England.

Within easy reach of his home, pride kept him from returning thither. If his father had had a spark of affection for him he would have answered that letter sent through Davison—unfortunate letter, unknown to him by the 'dead letter office'—How many lives blighted and hopes destroyed, do those little white packets represent as they lie helplessly there!

The young man, never doubting of the safe destination of his mission,