

PATIENCE.

BY RACHEL E. CHALLICE.

(Continued.)

The trusty bailiff, seeing that his master was becoming more and more absent-minded, sent for Harold from London.

It was a sad home-coming for the young student. The Squire moody in his despair, and the house desolate from the absence of the brother, whose name was never mentioned. So, not liking to leave the old man alone, Harold bravely determined to renounce his painting career, and remain as companion to his father in the farming. The Squire was not naturally selfish, but understanding nothing about art, it never occurred to him what a sacrifice his son was making in giving it up. In fact, if any one had asked him, he would have said that no doubt the lad preferred the fresh air and hillsides of the sweet country, to the fog and streets of smoky London. Often when Harold was dense and stupid in some farm matters, a sigh would escape the old man, as he thought of the bright ways and ready help of the absent son. But he never breathed a word of regret, for Davison having left the village at the same time as Charles, the Squire had no doubt but that both the young men were spending the spoils of the cash-box together.

From this slight summary of earlier events, we can understand the drift of the thoughts of Harold, as he sat in his attic studio, after the interview with his father that morning. If it were only possible that this chance of painting a picture might prove a success! How bright and different would his lonely life become if he dared to pursue his art and win his love!

Here the meditations of the young man were interrupted by the Squire calling him to other occupations and interests.

Harold was touched to see how pleased his father seemed at the compact made that morning. Never thinking for an instant that his son's effort in painting might prove a success, the Squire was delighted at that part of the agreement which related to his promise to learn farming.

The old man was nervously anxious that his son should see the best side of everything, so as not to be disappointed with his decision. The young fellow found it difficult to attend to the manifold merits of the soils and pastures, as he pondered in his mind the effects he longed to obtain in the picture of his imagination. However, he successfully strove to put his painting ideas out of his head as they approached Bloxom, the oldest and most trustworthy bailiff on the estate.

The young man was pleased to see something of the old smile light upon his father's face, as he said. "My son is going to learn farming from you, my man, so mind you look after him well. He has been merely dabbling in it till now."

"Ay ay, sir," returned the bailiff "we want a young head about the place."

"But I am afraid you will find mine a very thick one," said Harold with one of his bright, genial smiles, "for I hardly know a potato from a carrot top."

"All right, young gentleman," replied Bloxom, "it will all come in time, only Patience, that's all, only Patience." Harold started, and glanced eagerly at his father, as the word so precious to him was sounded in his ears.

But the old gentleman had certainly not associated the vicar's daughter with the little homily of the bailiff, for he said in his quiet measured tones: "Yes, Bloxom, that is what I always say. Farming like our's cannot be learnt in the go-a-head fashion of the present day. It is a real putting the hand to the plough that does it, and no looking back."

"Ay ay, sir, that be it," was the honest man's hearty reply, as he cast an affectionate look at a rick which was being thatched.

CHAPTER II.

From that day, Harold's time was more than fully occupied. The rising sun found him giving his whole mind to learning farming. True to his compact with his father, he devoted the morning to mastering the value of wool, the time of the sowing of seed, and the proper price to give for cattle. But each day the business became more uncongenial to him. With what a sigh of relief did he turn to his painting, when mid-day had passed. Hardly waiting to take the luncheon which old Bridget prepared for him, he started off with a step firm and swift, and a face bright and hopeful, as his thoughts fled to the prosecution of his picture. The work was made still more attractive by the fact of the beautiful girl consenting to be the model for it. The young man had taken the vicar's wife into his confidence, and explained how he hoped to get his father's consent to a painting career, by producing a successful picture. The old lady, interested in the young man's ardour and enthusiasm, could not refuse his earnest request that her daughter Patience should sit for him. The plan was a solemn secret between Harold, the young girl, and the mother. Not even the vicar was to know, least perchance he might reveal it in his chats to the old Squire.

Very sweet and pleasant to Harold were the afternoons spent in the oak-panelled parlour of the rose-covered vicarage. The old lady knitted quietly, as she listened to the young man's accounts of his London life. Patience found the time passing quickly as she felt increasing pleasure in the bright descriptive conversation of the artist, which was only interrupted by his having to coax his dog Pat to keep his paw placed on her white dress. Then when the rays of the setting sun falling on his model's head warned Harold that time was up; he sometimes turned the picture to Patience with a despairing sigh at feeling so unable to make it beautiful enough. But the blood mounting to her cheeks, as the speaking loveliness of the face made

her think she had been flattered, she turned away without giving a word of encouragement to the artist.

Thus the glorious autumn days passed away, and with many hopes and last wistful glances, the picture was sent off to London for admission at the forthcoming Exhibition of the Society of British Artists.

The following weeks were fraught with suspense and anxiety to Harold and his sympathising friends.

With the increasing dreariness of the country, farming became more and more distasteful to the young man.

One morning, at the end of November, he found a letter, already opened lying by his plate on the breakfast table.

Harold, forgetting that the similarity of initials might well excuse his father for making the mistake of opening it, felt very angry and annoyed more especially when he found it was a polite refusal of his picture.

Mortification and disappointment having destroyed any appetite the poor fellow might have had for breakfast, he hastily swallowed a cup of tea, and went out to his work of seeing to the ploughing of some fields.

At dinner that evening, Harold was unusually moody and silent, and his father having looked at him once or twice with curiosity, filled his wineglass with some '34 port, and opened the conversation by saying:—

"So I see you have been sending some balderdash to a London Exhibition which does not seem to see the value of it. Well, I'm not sorry for it, for from what I know about such things, it seems it takes money without bringing it. Why you know we can trace our family right back to the time of the Conqueror, but never an artist in the pedigree. We are what is called a true yeoman folk, and now you're all I've left, we mustn't desert our old farming, so stick to it, my boy, stick to it, and I'll make it worth your while."

Poor Harold, who by assiduous attention to the paring of an apple, was trying to curb his irritation, now looked across the shining mahogany table, to where the old Squire sat, and said in a dull bitter tone, "Yes sir, I think you are about right, nothing either beautiful or artistic will have anything to do with this family. I ought to have known better and just settled down to grind, grind."

"Tut, tut," said the old gentleman, "you are getting on very well. Those lambs, they say, have as good a chance for the next cattle show as ever any had. Just patience, my boy, patience."

"Don't speak to me of Patience," said the young man, moving from the table to the fireplace and angrily kicking, with the heel of his boot, a log of wood which lay mouldering in the grate. "I can't stand that, if you want to make me angry, just keep saying that word."

"Hoity toity!" repeated the old man raising his eyes in astonishment at his son's vehemence. Then, recollecting a previous similar outbreak of Harold's when the word Patience had been mentioned, he said kindly but firmly, "you heard my reason, this is just a fancy of your's, which comes from knowing so little of the world. You must see that neither Patience Dacre's father nor I could think of such a thing as a marriage between you. With no money on her side, and you just at the commencement of farming, it would be simple madness. No, look to your lambs, and put all that nonsense out of your head." Harold stood silently, as if absorbed in counting the sparks flying upwards from the burning wood. Then pulling himself together with an effort, he said: "All right dad, that Patience I was thinking of was all a dream. I will just try and get some of the other sort you are so anxious about." Then adding with a little bitter laugh, "I shall not want any afternoons any more now, governor," the young man left the room to fight out his disappointment in the solitude of his "studio."

With the return of the packing case containing his picture, a dull dreary winter commenced.

In his disappointed state of mind, the young man mistook the sympathy of Patience and her mother about the rejection of his picture, as mere pity and partial scorn for his want of success. So as he knew in his own heart that he had staked and lost on this effort all his chances of winning the girl, he kept away from the vicarage and nursed in solitude his wounded pride and feelings.

The Hall during the winter seemed duller than ever, as since the disappearance of the elder son, the Squire declined having any visitors to the house.

These dreary months were very empty to Patience. With the absence of her artist friend, she began to realize how much of her life he had filled. His conversation had led her to read books of which previously she had barely known the names, the sight of his painting had induced her to cultivate her taste for drawing, which before had been hidden. She still read, and she still drew, but books lose half their interest, if you cannot talk them over with the one who recommended them, and drawing becomes dreary if you have no one to show you where you have failed in obtaining the requisite effect.

The Vicar's wife also discovered the sad expression on the hitherto happy face of Patience. When sometimes the sound of distant horse's hoofs was heard, the tender lady looked pitifully at the bright eager expression which would overspread the young girl's countenance, as she thought it might announce the coming of the hoped-for visitor. And when the retreating steps told the disappointment of her daughter's expectation, the mother could scarcely repress a sigh, as she saw the girl's face bend over her work again with that expression of pathetic patience which often comes with hope deferred.

All these early winter days Harold was unremitting in his attention to the lambs, which he intended should take their place at the large London cattle show.

The more mortified he felt at the non-success of his painting, the more he tried, with the dogged determination peculiar to the family, to prove that he was not quite so ignorant of farming as his father thought.