

(CONTINUED.)
MR. ANONYMOUS
PAST.

The air of Harrow-on-the-Hill must be peculiarly bracing, if the proverbial sentiment about the bird of St. Michael, attributed to the boys educated there, be founded on anything like practical experience. The goose, they say, is an awkward dainty, being too much for one, and not enough for two.

If I had two sons who "asked for more" after finishing a goose at a sitting, I should write to the *Times*. It is true that there are geese and geese, and the specimen sent to the *Maple* was a fine one, but I had the fellow-lodger to help them, they left pickings; and if some Harrowian curls the lip of scorn, I cannot help it; truth is my hobby.

When they had their first glasses of sherry after the meal, Harry said: "We must drink the health of Mr. Anonymous, please."

"Mr. Anonymous," repeated Susan slipping.

"Mr. Anonymous," echoed Mr. Nicholson, who drank, and then added, "Some relative?"

"I don't know," replied Harry. "He is a dead, or rather a succession of dead, without a name. He sent us the goose, he sent us this sherry; he made us more valuable presents. Do you think I could receive benefits without knowing from whom they come?"

"Certainly," said the fellow-lodger. "I think you have told me that in one of his first letters this unknown professed himself a friend of your—your mother's. Am I correct?"

"Yes, there are several probable reasons for that; he may be ashamed of not doing more. You may have mistaken that claim upon him as a trustee of those funds which I think you said had been unwisely invested; or he may have a morbid dislike to being thanked."

"It is strange anyhow," said Harry. "That our mysterious benefactor should not have come forward to assist us when we most needed it."

"When you lost your mother?"

"Yes," said Susan, "he was not in England then, and knew nothing about what had happened."

"That is very likely," said Mr. Nicholson. "Especially as you were supposed to be well provided for. Have you not said so?"

"Yes," replied Harry; "our poor mother's little property was in a bank which broke; but, thank God, she did not know what happened. She died in the belief that her children were beyond the reach of sordid cares."

"It was about two years ago, I think you have said?"

"Yes, two years last August. I was at college when summoned away to her bedside, for her illness was sudden and short. And just as we were recovering a little from the shock, ruin came. If I had been alone in the world I think that I should have enlisted or emigrated, for I felt very desperate; but fortunately I had Susan to look after, and that steadied me. Well, we must not complain. I was fortunate to get my clerkship, and we managed to save that piano, and a few things which were sacred in our eyes, from the wreck."

"It was a sad blow, and the cares of life have fallen upon you early, my young friends," said Mr. Nicholson, "but pardon me for having led the conversation into such a melancholy channel," he added, seeing that Susan had much ado to restrain her tears. "I do not know how it happened."

"Oh, Harry and I often talk over old times," said Susan. "I like to think when we banish them from our memories."

"The old man bowed his head and sighed deeply. "Have you any likeness of her?" he asked after a pause.

"Oh, yes," replied Susan, and she rose and placed a miniature portrait in his hand.

He gazed at it in silence for some time, and then murmured, "It is—it is—our mother," he exclaimed.

"I mean how like your sister," said Mr. Nicholson, handing the miniature to him.

"Oh, yes, there is a strong family resemblance," said Harry. "But since you will not have any more sherry, suppose we go up to your room and smoke a pipe while Susan makes tea."

When the tea was over, and the young ones had settled down to the mutual absorption of nicotine, the latter referred again to the subject of his personal affairs.

"The only thing I regret," said he, "is the way in which my sister is shut up. It must be a dreadful thing for her, poor girl, to be alone all day; and it is bad for her to be entirely without any companion of her own sex."

"Have you no relatives nor friends?" asked Mr. Nicholson.

"One might say so of our many years ago on account of a family misfortune. But there were some friends, and who me my present appointment, and who would have been glad to see me. I have declined, because of that family affair for Susan thought, and I thought that it would perhaps be brought up against her, if she mixed in the society to which these friends would have introduced her. Of course we did not put our refusal upon that ground; Susan said that she would not mix in the society to which they think me very wrong and selfish. I am not quite confident that I am right myself, and yet the pride which shrinks from raking up an old shame can hardly be a false pride—can it?"

It is not an easy thing to decide in a moment the degree of pride which every man ought to allow himself to point where the line should be drawn, and the balance begins to beat the parish bounds between self-respect and vanity. No wonder that Mr. Nicholson puffed hard at his pipe in silence. It was evidently no lack of interest that held his tongue, however, for he turned away his head, and his hand shook as though it were pained. And probably Harry did not look for a reply, he was thinking aloud as much as talking to the other; and presently he perceived this, and said with a laugh, "A pleasant sort of company I must be, with my sentimental agonies! My excuse is the relief it affords me to speak out, and there is no one else upon whom I can inflict the ideas which sometimes plague me; for, of course, I want Susan to think me free from care as a lap-dog. And then I seem to have known you all my life; I forget that it is hardly six months since we left the house together one morning, and both walking city-wards, fell into conversation. But I know that you will pardon me."

"There is no need for pardon," said Mr. Nicholson. "You do me a favor by talking and ease your conscience. I am a lonely old fellow, who has spent the better part of his life away from his country."

To be continued.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE FIVE. (Continued.)

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