

Literature, &c.

The British Magazines
FOR JUNE.From Chambers's Edinburgh Journal.
CONSTANCY.

'THERE is a tale of old St. Manon's harp, and when the pilgrim minstrel was no more, it uttered but one sound whoever touched it; however gay, however glad or lightsome, was the tune that any other finger tried to play, a long, long sigh was all the sound that came.'

'What an exquisite idea! How beautiful—how full of poetical feeling!' exclaimed Elizabeth Monro, as, closing her book with a responsive sigh, she leant back in her easy chair, and surrendered herself to the fancies awakened by these words. Her mother, who had been silently working at the other end of the fireplace while Elizabeth read, now looked up, smiling at the mournful cadence with which the little sentence had been uttered; but her face faded into seriousness as she met the abstracted look of her young daughter, and recognised the workings of a too vivid and romantic imagination in her varying cheek and dreamy eyes. Happily she was aware those symptoms resulted from imagination alone; and though the anxious expression lingered on her countenance, it lent no gravity to her tone as she answered, 'I should say most fanciful, most poetical, or even beautiful, if you will; but, dearest Elizabeth, in what consists its mournful truth, or where are we to find its parallel?'

With half indignant eagerness Elizabeth raised herself from her indolent position, and impetuously exclaimed, 'Oh mamma! how can you ask? surely its echo is found in every loving, constant heart?'

Mrs Monro's smile returned as she asked, 'the echo of what, Elizabeth?—of the long, long sigh? Alas for the loving, constant heart were that to be its only occupation and reward!'

But it was with a still more earnest look Elizabeth replied to her mother's half bantering tone and words. 'Mamma, I do think there is something mournful in the idea of constancy: does not its very existence imply somewhat of delay and disappointment, and hope deferred—a strain upon the heart till hope is over, and then a grief incurable, irremediable, till life itself is past?'

The tears that shaded Ellen's soft eyes bespoke her full conviction of the truth of this description, and checked the smile that still was lingering on her mother's lip. For a moment Mrs Monro paused, and then with gentle seriousness she answered—'Not so, my child; but such is the meaning that I would attach to constancy. Oh how differently the word strikes upon my ear, upon my heart! You look upon it as a sentiment; you confine it to one passion; you make it the handmaid of weak hearts, paralysing even their puny strength, while I regard it as a principle existing in noble minds, prompting to noble deeds; inspiring fortitude, endurance, perseverance, instead of passively supporting a morbid state of feeling, or encouraging an obstinate resistance to circumstances—an opposition to the judgment of wiser and more experienced heads.'

As Mrs Monro spoke, her eyes involuntarily rested on an old portrait which hung upon the opposite wall, and following the look, with an arch smile Elizabeth exclaimed, 'If here be truth in tradition, we have at least no example of constancy there!'

Her mother turned on her a look of painful inquiry as she asked, 'Elizabeth, where did you learn that? I was just going to select the original of that portrait as affording beyond all, or any I had ever known, the best exemplification of my opinion; the best proof that even in the quiet circle of domestic life, the constant heart may become a refuge of strength not only for its own support, but for the happiness of all within its sphere. Look attentively for a moment at that countenance, and tell me—even had you never been acquainted with her it represents, never heard or known aught of her life or character—what would be the impression these features would convey?'

With a depreciating gesture, as if the study were indeed superfluous, Elizabeth rose in obedience to her mother's wish, and perused more closely those lineaments, so well known and well beloved. It was the portrait of a lady, matronly, but not advanced in life; an air of serene thoughtfulness seemed to add more years than time had reckoned, and gave intelligence and decision to features cast in nature's gentlest and most feminine mould. Elizabeth looked long and thoughtfully at that sweet face; and even after she had returned to her seat, still fascinated, bent her gaze upon it, until a question from her mother reminded her that she had not given the desired opinion yet. Starting, she hurriedly exclaimed, 'Oh! mamma, who could read aught but truth and honor on that clear, expressive brow; or detect one fickle wavering line in the whole of that earnest face? And yet—' She paused, apparently unwilling to qualify her testimony, but gave her mother an appealing look, as if she too must be aware that something in the experience of history of that individual contradicted the fair promise pictured there.

Mrs Monro took up the unfinished sentence. 'And yet—you have possibly heard, that, fickle and untrue to her earliest attachment, she wedded another for the sake of house and lands, while he that loved her first was far away, winning in other lands the gold which

was to have made her his. I knew that, long ago, some such story had been spoken, but hardly thought it could have survived its little day, outlived her blameless, admirable life, to find at last a resting place in the bosom of one of her descendants.' She paused abruptly, while Elizabeth, surprised and grieved at this unusual reproof, hastened, with words full of gentleness and affection, to apologise for her involuntary fault.

Conquering her momentary emotion, Mrs Monro more calmly continued.—'You remember that dear parent, Elizabeth, and with a memory full of reverence and love; of that I am convinced, even though you thus lightly spoke. But had you known her as I did—had you been honoured with her confidence—had you been of an age to appreciate her rare and noble heart before that heart was stilled—you would not wonder that it was with a feeling akin to some bodily pain I saw her memory wronged by a child of mine—of hers. And now, to remove that impression for ever, listen to me. I need not, perhaps, tell you of her earliest years, how she lost her mother before she knew her, and was brought up entirely beneath her father's eye. I do believe he must have been such a father as those harsher times rarely exhibited, for he sacrificed ambition, and every former predilection, to devote himself to his little helpless child. Descended from an ancient family, and the last of his line, and hitherto most desirous of an heir, he resisted every temptation to a second marriage, fearing to place a stepmother over his darling, and reconciled himself to the disappointment of not having a son, by feeling that there was no child in Christendom for whom he would exchange his daughter. Thus he loved her, while she, unacquainted with any other experience, accepted his deep affection, as the usual expression of paternal love, and imagined that every child in the world was as fortunate as herself. Thus in happy ignorance she passed through her nursery, her school-room days; their period abridged by her lonely father's anxiety to have her seated beside him in his library, while he directed even her childish studies himself.

One day he was unusually grave, and answered her remarks and questions absently, while now and then he would lay down his book, and re-peruse a letter which lay beside him on the table, each time apparently less satisfied with its contents. At last he said abruptly, 'Cicely, I expect a visitor to-day. Your cousin Georgy Hume, is very ill, and is coming here for change of air.'

Cicely's heart bounded with joy at the thought of that unknown luxury—a young companion; but the next moment checked its gladness with the recollection of his being ill; and, full of sympathy, she inquired the circumstances from her father. Drawing her towards him, in grave and half-reluctant tones he proceeded to inform her that Georgy was not only ill, but very unhappy too, and that it was as much for his mind's health as for that of his body, that he was sent to those who would take care of him and love him well.

Cicely's glistening eyes had promised for her, but she quickly inquired, 'what makes Georgy unhappy?' And looking up in her father's face, she added very softly, 'has he lost his own papa?'

'The eyes she was gazing at became clouded with emotion, and even a tear fell upon her cheek with the kiss that was imprinted there at once; but the answer was very different from the one she apprehended, 'Oh no my child, but he has got a new mamma!'

'A new mamma,' interrupted the little girl. 'Oh, papa, is not that a happy thing? Why did you never get me a new mamma?'

'It was now the father's turn to speak impetuously; and, surprised out of his self-possession, he replied, 'because I love you too dearly, my own heart's treasure. Nothing was ever to supply your place to me, or mine to you. Georgy's new mamma has been unkind, and his heart they say, is breaking; and if he was not sent away, he would soon be in his grave.'

'This little scene has been described to me by her who never afterwards forgot it. It was her first introduction to the evils and sorrows of actual life; but if it opened a view down to that gloomy vista, it also lighted up the past with a glow such as she had never felt before. With somewhat of awe, and a mysterious chill, she awaited the arrival of this young stranger, so early initiated into grief, and as she soothed, and comforted, and wound herself into the recesses of his heart, she learned from the artless detail of all he had suffered, to appreciate her own more favoured lot, and all the self-denying affection her own dear parent had shown. With years and acquaintance with the world, this knowledge deepened, while closer and closer she was drawn to that earliest love that had smoothed her life-long path; and it became the constant purpose of her heart to return it devotedly, and to consider no sacrifice too great, could it insure the happiness of him who had only thought of hers.

'The trial came, deeper and sooner than she had expected, but, true to her resolve she endured it with steadfast heart. Georgy had outlived his childish griefs, or found, whenever they turned, that loving friends and a happy home still remained in the haven that had sheltered him at first. No wonder that each succeeding year increased the attraction of these friends, and that at last he became conscious there was no happiness where they were not. Alas for poor Georgy! his lot was differently cast. A relative in India had written to his father offering honourable occupa-

on and emolument to his son if he came out; and, engrossed by the interests and advancement of his second family—influenced perhaps also by his wife, who retained all her early unkindness—Georgy's father insisted that the offer should be accepted. Family ties were easily broken; but there was one sad, sad parting, though for a time young sanguine hearts had hope that there need have been no parting at all; but when older ones were consulted, arrangements were found incompatible; and sorrowfully but determinedly Cicely relinquished that for the first time brought a furrow on her father's loving brow.

'I hasten over all those scenes—indeed to me they never were enlarged on, but looking at that countenance, so gentle, yet so steadfast, we well may imagine how her constancy was tried when she thus un murmuringly sacrificed an attachment that had grown with her growth, and had woven itself from childhood into a heart such as hers. But more was yet to come. Years passed away—long, sweet, tranquil years, cheered by filial love, and perhaps by some lingering distant hope—when, in one of those commercial revolutions which from time to time have occurred in this country, involving many who seemed to have no direct connection with such events, it was discovered that Cicely's father had long become security for a mercantile friend, a circumstance almost forgotten until his ruin brought each past transaction to light.

'Slowly it dawned upon him and on her. In fortune and prospects both were irretrievably ruined. The memories, the hopes of years, in one hour were obliterated as things that had never been: that old demesne, those trees, those walls; each revered, each familiar object all to pass away, to become the property of a stranger, and the place that had borne their name to know them no more. So much for the past; but the future,—oh, how to meet that, how even contemplate the obscurity that had suddenly settled on their lives! Their sun had gone down at noon, and in the midst of life's enjoyments they were surrounded by a darkness that could be felt.

'And now shone out the constant heart. At a meeting of pitying friends, who thought at first that something might be saved, one inconsiderately remarked, 'Ah, if this girl had been a son, they couldn't touch a foot of your property! What a pity you never thought of marrying again!' He to whom the speech was addressed had not time to check its thoughtless utterance, but he opened his arms to the drooping flower that sought shelter in his bosom, as again he reiterated the declaration of his earlier life—'No son could be so precious as this daughter is to me—dearer than houses or lands, or even a time-honoured name; while she is spared, I heed them not, nor feel the blow but for her sake.'

'The drooping head was raised, the bright eyes glistened, no longer tearful and sorrowing, but full of holy confidence and joy. She was all in all to her father; she filled the place of every hope, every regret; she sufficed his entire heart, and life could have no dearer reward. Then with cheerful spirit she turned again to the future, and examined her own power, to discover in what manner she best could alleviate the privations which must be expected, without forfeiting the independence of character so precious to them both.

'They left their home, and took possession of a humble dwelling. We may well believe that wounded pride found no place there; and if Cicely was sometimes pained when, the forgetfulness of advancing years, her father would ask for some once essential comfort, she almost found a balm in the placid tone of resignation with which, remembering himself, he would say, 'Ah, that was in our old home!'

'I said that she examined her own powers; that was not the age of accomplishments; but the fewer that possessed them, the more valuable they became, and Cicely was endowed with a talent for drawing, which even now may be enjoyed by only a gifted few. She had often for amusement, or prompted by affection, taken likenesses of her friends; they had been greatly admired and prized by those who had been thus favoured; and she determined now to test the sincerity of those encomiums, and, by increased diligence and cultivated, to deserve still higher approval. She consulted and placed herself under the tuition of a distinguished artist, who had already made a name and a fortune; and he, with the generosity and noble feeling of true genius, entered warmly into her plans, afforded her his instructions, promoted and enjoyed her success, and would receive, as his only fee and reward, the privilege of transmitting her features to his canvass, as you see them represented there. For many a year he regarded that portrait as the brightest ornament of his collection; and when, in an honoured old age, he still lived to survive her, he sent this valued relic to her children, as the most precious memorial they could receive.

'It is said that ill news flies fast; and even in those days of cumbrous travelling, the tidings of their ill fortune had reached the absent Georgy in a time that seemed incredibly short, at least to those that heard from him so quickly in return. But it was to Cicely he chiefly wrote, a letter glowing with affection and generous hope, asking her at once to come and share with him the fortune he was making. Years must pass away before he could leave his employment to return; but return he yet would, and restore her to her father; or i—and this was written less confidently—her father would encounter a change of climate for the sake of witnessing their mutual happi-

ness, what could he say, but that he would welcome him as a son and the old man should find that he had two children with one heart.

'None can tell how Cicely felt on reading that letter: that it opened a door for happiness and short-lived hope, we well may believe. I know that she consulted the physician who had always attended her father as to the consequences of his removal to that climate; but his answer was unhesitatingly given, 'It would shorten his days.' Again the constant heart faltered not; but in a letter full of beauty and alm affection, she transmitted her decision to her cousin, and extinguished his long-cherished hope for ever. A few more months brought the tidings of his having made another choice; and thus ended that mutual dream.'

An involuntary exclamation from Elizabeth for a moment interrupted Mrs Monro; and then it was in a more hurried tone she resumed—'I was the child of that union, and when it became necessary to remove me to a European climate, the love and the home that had fostered my father's earlier years again welcomed and sheltered me. But I am anticipating by many, many years. It was with a soft and tranquil smile Cicely acquainted her father with this marriage; he seemed to think it quite a natural circumstance, and no more was ever said. Already she had attained distinction in her favourite pursuit, and with her moderate wishes, the profits it realised left her almost without a pecuniary care: thus diligent, successful, useful, and beloved, could she, even amidst these reverses, have been otherwise than happy? Oh yes, that speaking countenance always reassures me; and whenever I gaze upon it, I delight in reminding myself that at this very period of her life it was drawn.

'But another change awaited her: in time her father's health and spirits began to fail—those treasures for which she had lived and sacrificed so much; his native air and scenery were prescribed for him; and though almost wondering how under such altered circumstances, those scenes could do him good, she submitted the proposal to his decision and he pronounced in favour of it at once. She had commissioned a friend to seek out a quiet cottage in their old neighbourhood, when she was one day surprised by a letter from the individual who had become the proprietor of their former home. He was a very distant relation, who had purchased it partly for the name, and though they knew him not, he now addressed them in language full of delicacy and respect, saying that he was going to travel for some time, and hearing they were seeking a temporary residence in the neighbourhood, ventured to ask them, would they honour him by occupying his house while he was away?'

'Cicely looked at her father: again she wondered how he would decide; but he thought his days were numbered; and though he spoke it not to her, his heart swelled with pleasure at the prospect of ending them within those old familiar walls. The offer was accepted, frankly, cordially, even as it had been made. What more need I say? Mr Monro did not travel, at least for a while; when he did, it was only to take a little tour, with Cicely as his bride, and then return with her to cheer her father through many a happy year in his old ancestral home.

'And now, like Elizabeth, will you allow that constancy and happiness are not incompatible, and that it is a virtue not to be monopolised by one exclusive sentiment?'

'Oh yes, mamma: thank you for your little story. Much as I loved dear grandmamma, I never loved her half so well as now: forgive me, sweet picture, for my heedless words. But, mamma, though I admit you have given an example of constancy under trial—constancy to a principle of mingled duty and affection—do you think that if dear grandmamma had really loved her Georgy—you know, mamma, he was your own papa—had she truly loved him as you seemed to imply, even though she might have acted as in sacrificing her own wishes, could she ever have been as content and happy as she was—as full of life and animation as even I remember her—as full of serenity and peace as she there looks down upon us now? Oh, mamma! give up that point: she loved him no longer; she was inconstant to Georgy: she had learned to forget him, and he troubled not her joy.'

There was a long pause of silence, during which Elizabeth somewhat repented of her remark, for she saw that her mother's downcast eyes had filled with tears; and when she raised them to answer her again, sad, and low, and broken was the tone in which she spoke. 'Long years had passed away, and blooming children were clustering about her, when I, a pale, puny, motherless little girl, was received amidst the group. Their noisy play was hushed, and we stood a charmed circle round her, when she recalling old memories, told of the far-off day when a similar scene was acted in that very room; and then treated each young, loving heart to welcome me, even as she had done that lonely stranger then.

'Other years swept on, and that stranger once more returned, enfeebled by climate, and bowed with illness to die where he had been once restored to life. Kind and true as ever was the welcome he received, gentle the eyes that watched beside his closing day; but before that solemn hour came, he had the joy, which I can well believe was unspeakable, of seeing his child united to the son of her truly loved.

'And she—her life prolonged to see her children's children; the true wife; the warm friend; the tender mother, guided and gladdening all, with a co tenance so bright in age, none could think a youthful sorrow ever