

LITERATURE, &c.

The British Magazines.

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THE WISHING BRIDGE.

BY JOHN J. NEWTON.

The old bridge from the city grey
Lies little further than a mile;
O'er many a sequestered style,
And many a daisied meadow way.

And thence into a lane, that seems
So cool and quiet—not too wide,
With hedgerows upon either side—
A place you sometimes see in dreams.

And 'neath the bridge a streamlet flows,
With mingling sounds of song and sigh;
And listless breezes wander by,
Laden with dreamy long-agoes.

The trees around hide heaven from sight,
Save one small speck of summer sky,
That gazes like a calm blue eye
Entranced with a strange delight.

Those leafy trees, that gurgling rill,
'Tis years since I beheld them last;
But arching o'er the shapeless past
The wishing bridge is with me still.

A place becomes almost a part
Of us, when linked unto the place
Is some dear old familiar face
Or some strong feeling of the heart.

In childhood, what a glad belief
We give to each wild legend's truth!
Alas, that joys of early youth
Should be the seeds of after grief!

For oft before the sleepless eye
Each dead wish, rising from the dead,
At night-time with funeral tread
In mournful mockery shall pass by;

Each, shrouded well in time's dark pall,
Shall pass a troop of sable woes—
When'er the flickering night-lamp throws
Its ghastly shadows on the wall.

Yet what tried spirit hath not seen,
And seeing, chide his heart's wild fret—
That it were idle to regret
He is not what he would have been?

For God hath measured unto all
Their nature rather than their fate,
And some of us he maketh great,
And some of us he maketh small;

And grants to none so close a span,
And gives to none so dark a doom,
That hath not in the wide earth room
To work and prove himself a man.

Go there, dear friend, in trust—for you
Have that strong trust that nothing shakes;
You have the fervent faith that makes
A truth of that it would have true;

Go when the sun, that soon must set,
Lingers in love about the place,
And earth is as an angel's face
O'ershadowed by a vague regret;

And when the dizzy insect hum
Is hushed in reverence to the power
And solemn beauty of the hour
That makes the glens and valleys dumb;

Then baptized with the setting sun
In liquid hues of dying day,
Look up to the great heaven, and pray
Your only wish—'Thy will be done!'

From Chambers's Edinburgh Journal.

CONFESSIONS OF A SHY MAN.

Among the minor miseries of life, there is none greater than the misery of shyness. I speak feelingly, for I have all my life been under the dominion of that evil spirit, which I have in vain attempted to exorcise. And here, before proceeding further with the narrative of my sufferings, I would rectify a mistaken supposition entertained by many persons, that it requires greater confidence to unbosom one's self to the public than to an individual. Quite the contrary I know to be the case. In confiding one's woes to the public, there is no accompanying dread of a cold word or a cold glance—no fear of one's communications being received with that manifestation of indifference, or air of abstraction, which is agony to the shy man, because it makes him feel as if he had been guilty of folly or presumption—thus establishing more firmly than ever the thrall of his tyrant fiend. In addressing the public the man is sheltered behind the author. He is not as in the society of his fellow men, so hurried and nervous that, knowing not what he says or does, he is guilty of absurdities foreign to his real character. In the quiet of his own study, with only his pen for his companion, he preserves his presence of mind, and can be himself, which, with others, the shy man never is, or can be. True, when his productions are fairly launched on the cold, merciless waves of public opinion, he may feel many misgivings; he may seek more than ever to abstract himself personally from the notice of the world; but he buoy himself up with the belief that some will understand his sorrows, and, in spirit at least, yield him their sympathy; he indulges the hope that to the hearts of those who share the same unfortunate constitution, his words, foolishness as they be to others,

will carry the consolation they suffer not alone or unpitied. But to return to myself.

Many would call me one of the fortunate of the earth, and in outward circumstances I have reason to esteem myself such. But philosophers have agreed that the seed of happiness is in the mind: one would say, therefore, that when the mind is in a constant state of uneasiness, there can be little real enjoyment. I am one of two brothers, the children of parents in easy circumstances, belonging to the great middle class of society. In disposition my brother was remarkably the reverse of myself. He possessed that easy grace, that winning confidence of manner equally remote from forwardness on the one hand, and from shyness such as mine on the other. I was early sensible that he was with everybody a much greater favorite than I was—even with our father and mother; not that they intended this to appear—for they were good and just parents, and wished in every respect to do rightly by their children, and in all substantial marks of their regard ever made them equal; but they replied to my brother's affectionate demonstrations by caresses which were never lavished upon me. All this was perfectly natural. Perhaps they thought I did not care for such manifestations of love, as I did not court them; but it wounded me to the quick, and I frequently withdrew to my own little room to weep alone and unpitied—my grief aggravated by the consciousness that while over-sensitiveness was the fault of my nature, I was regarded as an indifferent, apathetic child. And yet I would have died rather than my tears should have been seen or their cause guessed. At these times I frequently felt jealous of my brother; but this frame of mind seldom continued long, for I admired him greatly, was peculiarly sensible of the fascination of his disposition, and even passionately desirous of being valued by him. With these sentiments towards him, I served him in every way I could devise, screened him when he got into scrapes, and wrote his Latin version or Greek verb for him when he was idle or puzzled, for I was not only more painstaking than he was but my intellectual powers were greater. No one, however gave me credit for the last kind of superiority; I was generally considered a 'plodding boy.' In common minds there is always a sort of showy effectiveness associated with idea of talent; and most persons erroneously regard industry as the virtue of dulness, or at best of mediocrity, instead of, as it ordinarily is the concomitant of superior abilities. My brother meanwhile rewarded my good offices now and then by informing me that I was 'a very good fellow after all, though it was a pity I had so little pluck!'

As I drew towards manhood, the agony I endured from being obliged to go into society was indescribable. The company of women in particular was formidable to me. I was plain and insignificant in appearance, and awkward in manners, and I fancied that they despised my attentions, and even sometimes made merry at my expense. A party was for me but a succession of mortifications. One lady in particular, an intimate friend of my mother's, was a constant source of terror to me. I would willingly have walked ten miles any day to avoid her. She was not, however, generally considered a disagreeable person; on the contrary, she was a favorite with most people. She was a lively sharp-witted woman, fond of saying smart things, and thoughtless of the pain they might give. Her heart I believe was good and true, and she would not have intentionally done an injury to any one; but her sympathies were all with wit, brilliancy, grace and fashion. My brother was a prodigious favorite with her. She invited him to all her entertainments and he was her right hand man upon every occasion. Me she was constantly twitting with my sheepishness, stupidity and want of gallantry. She was merciless witty at the expense of my awkwardness and blunders, and denied that diffidence had anything to do with them. On the contrary, she declared that I frequently said and did ruder and more forward things than any body she knew. And making allowance for her exaggerated style of speaking, there was truth in her accusation; but she little dreamt of the desperation, the mortification, goaded for the moment to recklessness by her jibbing, satirical remarks which prompted my unmannerly conduct. Such a disposition as mine was quite inconceivable to her—totally foreign to her own nature. Had she comprehended my character, her conduct, I believe, would have been different, for as I have said before, she was far from being a bad-hearted woman, and had been my mother's tried and constant friend from childhood. But in my behaviour she only saw obstinacy and disagreeableness.

My mother had died while I was a school-boy, and I was still little more than a youth when my father followed her to the grave. He had realised a considerable fortune, which he left to be equally divided between my brother and myself. My brother embarked his share in the concerns of a mercantile house, in which he was a partner; I succeeded to the profession of my father—that of solicitor in a large town.—I am now approaching what I may term the romance of my life; for even my life, pale, colourless, and negative as its general tenor has been, has had its era of romance, or at least of romantic feeling.

After my father's death I rarely went into company, but confined myself to the society of clerks and musty parchments during the day, while in the evening I held converse with the mighty minds of humanity through the medium of books. I had become a sort of city hermit. I was now resigned to my fate. In the complete seclusion in which I

lived, I was no longer daily subjected to my former mortifications. I enjoyed a sort of negative contentment, if not a positive felicity. But the calm of my life was broken at last. One day I received an invitation to an entertainment, to be given at the suburban villa of an old and intimate friend of my father's, and the senior partner in the firm to which my brother belonged. The invitation was an unwonted one, as, from my evident disinclination for society, everybody had given up asking me. This was to be quite a gay affair: there was to be dancing within doors, and the grounds were to be lighted with coloured lamps. The evening arrived. How well I remember it! A warm August night, with a soft, starlit sky, and no moon. I had not thought much about the party, and had not at all made up my mind whether I should go or not. Now, however, I decided on going. I thought I should like to take a peep at the world once more, as a mere spectator, and by way of adding to my materials for philosophising. I went and to my amazement was received by my host and hostess almost with distinction. By them I was immediately introduced to their daughter, the heroine of the night, for the ball was given in honor of her birthday. I had not seen her since she was quite a child, as she had been absent at school for several years. And now, how shall I describe her, so as to do justice to her grace and beauty, and to the goodness and intelligence which spoke in every feature of her lovely face! Mary—for such was her name—seemed about eighteen or nineteen, of a tall graceful, and yet girlish figure. Her complexion was very dark, but uncommonly smooth and clear. A rich roseate glow, changing with every emotion of her sensitive heart, mantled on her cheek, and added brilliancy to her soft dark eyes, while the expression of her exquisite mouth bespoke the sweetness of her temper. Long luxuriant curls of the richest and darkest hair fell around the fresh, blooming, joyous, young face.

An overwhelming fit of shyness seized me the moment this lovely vision met my eyes. I made a more than usually awkward bow, for my muscles seemed suddenly to contract and stiffen. I stammered, and said nothing, feeling as if suddenly bereft of ideas. A glance in a pier-glass completed my discomfiture. There, beside my radiant companion my defects were more striking. My shabby ungainly figure, my pale, harsh features, my awkward attitude and disconcerted aspect, formed a strange contrast with her brilliant figure and graceful deportment. I felt that I looked like a fool, and yet I knew I was not a fool. But my fate (so it seemed to me) had condemned me ever to appear like one. I would have shrunk into an obscure corner, had not Mary, in a frank and lively tone, began to talk to me. By degrees I became more at ease. There was a fascination in her voice, and under its influence, for a few brief minutes, I forgot myself and my shyness in the pleasure of listening to her. She asked me if I had danced. I replied in the negative. How I wished I had. In the excitement of the moment I believe I might have asked her to join a quadrille.

We were standing near a window which opened upon the lawn. I ventured to admire the picturesque effect of the ladies white dresses seen through the trees, and the lamps glittering among the dark foliage.

'Have you been out?' she enquired.
'No,' I replied.
'Should you like to go?'

'If you will accompany me,' I said hesitatingly, and in amazement at my own courage.
'Willingly,' she answered; and the next minute I found myself sauntering down a shady alley, partially illumined by the green-like lights of the coloured lamps, the stars shining through the rents in the leafy roof, the sound of music borne on the perfumed and tepid air, and the most charming woman I had ever seen learning on my arm. It was like enchantment; and now when I look back upon it through the long vista of years, it resembles a dream of fairy land. The brief moment of intoxication was soon over. I was not again that night near Mary; but from a remote corner I watched every movement of her light, bright figure—every turn of her sweet, gleeful countenance.

From that day forward I thought and dreamed only of Mary. I never had another conversation with her: she never leant on my arm again; but when I met her, she bestowed on me a sweet sunny smile, and a kind 'How do you do, Mr Charles?' and these were the golden moments of my life. I lived upon the remembrance of them for days and weeks. I would have given the world to have been able to accost her; but I never could, and I believe she thought I preferred to be unnoticed. I would have walked ten miles any day to have caught a glimpse of her; and the very sight of a light in the window I imagined to be hers would make my heart beat violently: little did she dream of the fond idolatry with which I regarded her.

Half a year had elapsed from the time of the memorable ball, when one day my brother looked into my private writing room, and with his handsome face lighted up with more than usual satisfaction, informed me that he came to tell me some news: he was going to be married, and bade me guess to whom. I could not.

'What do you think of Mary—?' he replied.

Thanks to the long confirmed habit of suppressing all outward demonstrations of my emotions, which my shyness had rendered almost instinctive, though unable to make any reply, I contrived to maintain a calm demean-

nour. My brother was too much occupied with his own satisfaction to observe my silence. After expatiating some time on his felicitous prospects, he left me to call upon Mary, his countenance beaming with delight.

As soon as he was gone, I gave orders that I should not be disturbed on any pretext whatever, locking the door of my apartment, that I might indulge my feelings unmolested. I felt stunned, wretched and overwhelmed with a bitter sense of loneliness. It seemed to me as if, by an irrevocable doom, I had been thrust beyond the pale of human sympathy. In Mary's eyes I was probably but an odd, insignificant, *outré* sort of being, whom her gentle heart led her to compassionate—and my brother was the object of her love! My heart was torn with jealousy, and even with envy. I cursed the hour of my birth, my many disadvantages, and the crowning evil of my shyness, which prevented me from making use even of those I might possess. How that wretched afternoon passed I cannot tell. But 'time and the hour runs through the roughest day,' and pass it did. By degrees I became resigned to my fate, and after long struggles, I almost brought myself to rejoice in the prospect of my brother's happiness. I could not, however, so far conquer my feelings as to be able to call on my sister-in-law elect, and I excuse myself from appearing at the marriage on the plea of illness. And in truth I was ill—in one of the worst stages of life's 'fitful fever.'

When the honeymoon was over, and the young couple settled in their new home, I overcame myself so far as to visit them there. The kindness, nay, affectionateness of Mary's manner towards me almost maddened me. With playful grace she rallied me on my eremitish propensities, and invited me to come to them any evening that I felt tired of my own company, or every evening if I pleased. Sometimes, but rarely, I availed myself of this invitation; for though I always received a kind welcome, I fancied somehow or other, that my presence was a drawback to their ease and enjoyment. As the years rolled on, however, the adoration I had once felt for my brother's lovely wife, settled down into a devoted but calm friendship: the happiest hours of my existence were spent in her company, and I was no longer so mad as to regret the tie which had given me a claim to her society, and a title to address her as my dear sister Mary.

Mary and my brother had been married for more than twelve years; when the latter was killed by a fall from his horse. Poor Mary had hardly recovered from the first poignant anguish caused by this sudden calamity, when intelligence was received that a vessel in which nearly all her fortune and that of her children was embarked, had been lost at sea. Her father being involved in the same misfortune, could do nothing to help her, and she was thus left almost penniless. The intelligence of this last sad blow was communicated to me by herself in a note full of good sense and good feeling. She at once asked me to afford her some assistance to get her boys educated. Her little girl, she said, she should teach herself, while she could easily maintain both by giving instruction in music, in which she was allowed to be a proficient. As soon as I had read this note, the contents of which had caused me truly the deepest concern, although there was mingled with it a strange and selfish feeling of satisfaction, which I in vain endeavoured to hide from myself, I hastened in the direction of Mary's house, which was situated in a different quarter of the town. I found her alone writing, and surrounded by letters and papers. My brother's widow was dressed in the deepest mourning; her magnificent dark curls were all now drawn beneath her close muslin cap; the bright bloom of youth had forsaken her cheeks; she was sad and pale; but in her noble, patient sorrow, she was still a beautiful woman.

'This is another heavy affliction, dear Charles,' she said, as she affectionately pressed my hand; 'but it would seem nothing after the last!' (here her lip trembled, and her eyes filled with tears) 'if it were not for my children. The poor boys, Charles!' And Mary looked the petition she had preferred in her note.

Now, being asked a favour, always added tenfold to my shyness. I stammered, turned away my head, shuffled my limbs, and returned no answer. Then, as I stole a glance at Mary, I saw that her countenance fell, and she began hastily to say, 'Oh, never mind; perhaps you cannot. I shall be able, perhaps, to get one of them into Christ's Hospital, and'

But I hastily interrupted her. 'I am a fool, Mary; but you must forgive me. See, here is my will. Read it.'

It was a will by which I bequeathed to her the bulk of my property, and in succession to her daughter. Her face as she read assumed an expression of extreme astonishment.

'You see, Mary,' I said, 'it is all intended for you. I need but little at any time; so take it now; educate your boys, and keep what remains for yourself and little Mary.'

'No, no, Charles—dear, generous brother! But this will, I see, was made long ago. I thought you had not cared for me?'

'Oh, Mary! I have always thought more highly of you than of any other in the world; and I wished you to know, at least after I was dead, how I had valued your goodness, and felt all your benevolence towards me.'

'My dear Charles, I am more and more amazed! I fancied you disapproved of me, you came so seldom to see us. Sometimes I