

ELECTIVE AFFINITIES.

A Novel.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF GOETHE.

PART I.

CHAPTER II (Continued.)

So saying, he sprang on his horse, without waiting the arrival of the coffee. "Here you see," said Charlotte, "the small service a third person can be, when things are off their balance between two persons closely connected; we are left, if possible, more confused and more uncertain than we were." They would both, probably, have continued hesitating some time longer, had not a letter arrived from the Captain, in reply to Edward's last. He had made up his mind to accept one of the situations which had been offered him, although it was not in the least up to his mark. He was to share the annuity of certain wealthy persons of rank, who depended on his ability to dissipate it. Edward's keen glance saw into the whole thing, and he pictured it out in just, sharp lines. "Can we endure to think of our friend in such a position?" he cried; "you cannot be so cruel, Charlotte." "That strange Mittler is right after all," replied Charlotte; "all such undertakings are ventures; what will come of them it is impossible to foresee. New elements introduced among us may be fruitful in fortune or in misfortune, without our having to take credit to ourselves for one or the other. I do not feel myself firm enough to oppose you further. Let us make the experiment; only one thing I will entreat of you—that it be only for a short time. You must allow me to exert myself more than ever, to use all my influence among all my connections, to find him some position which will satisfy him in his own way." Edward poured out the warmest expressions of gratitude. He hastened, with a light, happy heart, to write off his proposals to his friend. Charlotte, in a postscript, was to signify her approbation with her own hand, and unite her entreaties with his. She wrote, with a rapid pen, pleasantly and affectionately, but yet with a sort of haste which was not usual with her; and, most unlike herself, she disfigured the paper with a blot of ink, which put her out of temper, and which she only made worse by attempting to wipe it away. Edward laughed at her about it, and, as there was still room, added a second postscript, that his friend was to see from this symptom the impatience with which he was expected, and measure the speed at which he came to them by the haste in which the letter was written. The messenger was gone; and Edward thought he could not give a more convincing evidence of his gratitude, than by insisting again and again that Charlotte should at once send for Outtie from the school. She said she would think about it; and, for that evening, induced Edward to join with her in the enjoyment of a little music. Charlotte played exceedingly well on the piano, Edward not quite so well on the flute. He had taken a great deal of pains with it at times; but he was without the patience, without the perseverance, which are requisite for the completely successful cultivation of such a talent; consequently, his part was done unequally, some pieces well, only perhaps too quickly—while with others he hesitated, not being quite familiar with them; so that, for any one else, it would have been difficult to have gone through a duet with him. But Charlotte knew how to manage it. She held in, or let herself be run away with, and fulfilled in this way the double part of a skilled conductor and a prudent housewife, who are able always to keep right on the whole, although particular passages will now and then fall out of order.

CHAPTER III.

The Captain came, having previously written a most sensible letter, which had entirely quieted Charlotte's apprehensions. So much clearness about himself, so just an understanding of his own position and the position of his friends, promised everything which was best and happiest. The conversation of the first few hours, as is generally the case with friends who have not met for a long time was eager, lively, almost exhausting. Towards evening, Charlotte proposed a walk to the new grounds. The Captain was delighted with the spot, and observed every beauty which had first been brought into sight and made enjoyable by the new walks. He had a practised eye, and at the same time one easily satisfied; and although he knew very well what was really valuable, he never, as so many persons do, made people who were showing him things of their own unaccountable by requiring more than the circumstances admitted of, or by mentioning anything more perfect, which he remembered having seen elsewhere. When they arrived at the summer house, they dressed out for a holiday, only, indeed, with artificial flowers and evergreens, but with some pretty bunches of natural corn ears among them, and other field and garden fruit, so as to do credit to the taste which had arranged them. "Although my husband does not like in general to have his birthday or christening day kept," Charlotte said, "he will not object to lay to these few ornaments being expended on a treble festival." "Treble?" cried Edward.

"Yes, indeed," she replied. "Our friend's arrival here we are bound to keep as a festival; and have you never thought, either of you, that this is the day on which you were both christened? Are you not both named Otto?" The two friends shook hands across the little table. "You bring back to my mind," Edward said, "this little link of our boyish affection. As children, we were both called so; but when we came to be at school together, it was the cause of much confusion, and I readily made over to him all my right to the pretty laconic name." "Wherein you were not altogether so very high-minded," said the Captain; "for I well remember that the name of Edward had then begun to please you better, from its attractive sound, when spoken by certain pretty lips." They were now sitting all three round the same little table where Charlotte had spoken so vehemently against their guest's coming them. Edward, happy as he was, did not wish to remind his wife of that time; but he could not help saying: "There is good room here for one person more." At this moment the notes of a bugle were heard across from the castle. Full of happy thoughts and feelings as the friends all were together, the sound fell in among them with a strong force of answering harmony. They listened silently, each for the moment withdrawing into himself, and feeling doubly happy in the fair circle of which he formed a part. The pause was first broken by Edward, who started up and walked out in front of the summer-house. "Our friend must not think," he said to Charlotte, "that this narrow little valley forms the whole of our domain and possessions. Let us take him up to the top of the hill, where he can see farther and breathe more freely." "For this once, then," answered Charlotte, "we must climb up the old footpath, which is not easy. By the next time I hope walks and steps will have been carried right up." And so, among rocks, and shrubs, and bushes, they made their way to the summit, where they found themselves, not on a level flat, but on a sloping grassy terrace, running along the ridge of the hill. The village with the castle behind it, was out of sight. At the bottom of the valley, sheets of water were seen spreading out right and left, with wooded hills rising immediately from their opposite margin and at the end of the upper water, a wall of sharp, precipitous rocks overhanging it, their huge forms reflected in its level surface. In the hollow of the ravine, where a considerable brook ran into the lake, lay a mill, half hidden among the trees, a sweetly retired spot, most beautifully surrounded; and through the entire semicircle over which the view extended, ran an endless variety of hills and valleys, copse and forest, the early green of which promised the near approach of a luxuriant clothing of foliage. In many places particular groups of trees caught the eye; and especially a cluster of and poplars directly at the spectator's feet, close to the edge of the centre of the lake. They were at their full growth, and they stood there, spreading out their boughs all around them, in fresh and luxuriant growth. To these Edward called his friend's attention. "I myself planted them," he cried, "when I was a boy. They were small trees which I rescued when my father was laying out the new part of the great castle garden, and in the middle of the summer had rooted them out. This year you will no doubt see them show their gratitude in a fresh set of shoots." They returned to the castle in high spirits, and mutually pleased with each other. To the guest was allotted an agreeable and roomy set of apartments in the right wing of the castle; and here he rapidly got his books and papers and instruments in order, to go on with his usual occupation. But Edward, for the first few days, gave him no rest. He took him about everywhere, now on foot, now on horseback, making him acquainted with the country and the estate; and he embraced the opportunity of imparting to him the wishes which he had been long entertaining, of getting some better acquaintance with it, and learning to manage it more profitably. "The first thing we have to do," said the Captain, "is to make a magnetic survey of the property. That is, a pleasant and easy matter; and if does not admit of entire exactness, it will be always useful, and will do, at any rate, for an agreeable beginning. It can be made, too, without any great staff of assistants, and one can be sure of getting it completed. If by-and-by you come to require anything more exact, it will be easy then to find some plan to have it made." The Captain was exceedingly skillful at work of this kind. He had brought with him whatever instruments he required, and commenced immediately. Edward provided him with a number of foresters and peasants, who, with his instruction, were able to render him all necessary assistance. The weather was favorable. The evenings and the early mornings were devoted to the designing and drawing, and in a short time it was all filled in and colored. Edward saw his possessions grow out like a new creation upon the paper; and it seemed as if now for the first time he knew what they were, as if they now first were properly his own.

Thus there came occasion to speak of the park and of the ways of laying it out; a far better disposition of things being made possible after a survey of this kind, than could be arrived at by experimenting on nature, on partial and accidental impressions. "We must make my wife understand this," said Edward. "We must do nothing of the kind," replied the Captain, who did not like bringing his own notions in collision with those of others. He had learned by experience that the motives and purposes by which men are influenced, are far too various to be made to coalesce upon a single point, even on the most solid representations. "We must not do it," he cried, "she will only be confused. With her, as with all people who employ themselves on such matters merely as amateurs, the important thing is, rather that we shall do something, than that something shall be done. Such persons feel their way with nature. They have fancies for this plan or that; they do not venture on removing obstacles. They are not bold enough to make a sacrifice. They do not know before hand in what their work is to result. They try an experiment—it succeeds—it fails; they alter it; they alter, perhaps, what they ought to leave alone, and leave what they ought to alter; and so, at last, there always remains but a patch work, which pleases and amuses, but never satisfies." "Acknowledge candidly," said Edward, "that you do not like this new work of hers." "The idea is excellent," he replied; "if the execution were equal to it, there would be no fault to find. But she has tormented herself to find her way up that rock; and she now tortments everyone, if you must have it, that she takes up after her. You cannot walk together—you cannot walk behind one another with any freedom. Every moment your step is interrupted one way or another. There is no end to the mistakes which she has made." "Would it have been easy to have done it otherwise?" asked Edward. "Perfectly," replied the Captain. "She had only to break away a corner of the rock, which is now but an unsightly object, made up as it is of little pieces, and she would at once have a sweep for her walk and stone in abundance for the rough masonry work, to widen it in the bad places, and make it smooth. But this I tell you in strictest confidence. What is done must remain as it is. If any more money and labor is to be spent there, there is abundance to do above the summer-house on the hill, which we can settle our own way." If the two friends found in their occupation abundance of present employment, there was no lack either of entertaining reminiscences of early times, in which Charlotte took her part as well. They determined, moreover, that as soon as their immediate labors were finished, they would go to work on the journal; and in this way, too, reproduce the past.

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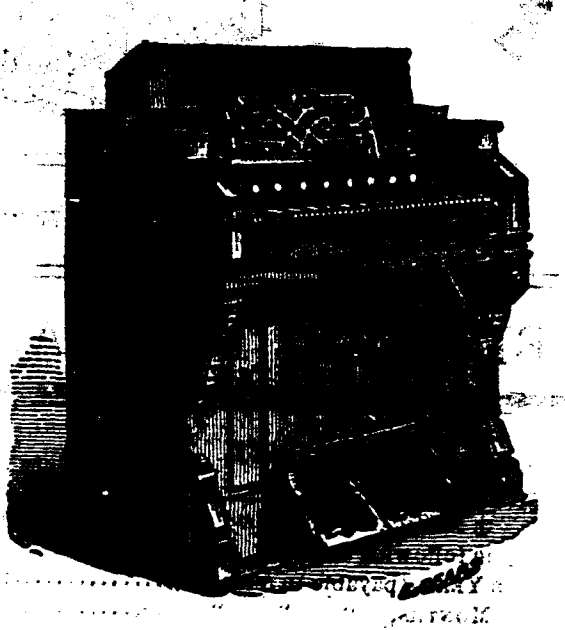
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