

ELECTIVE AFFINITIES.

A Novel.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF GOETHE.

PART I.

CHAPTER VIII. (continued.)

They ordinarily sat in the evening in the same places round a small table—Charlotte on the sofa, Ottilie on a chair opposite to her, and the gentlemen on each side. Ottilie's place was on Edward's right, the side where he put the candle when he was reading—at such times she would draw her chair a little nearer to look over him, for Ottilie treated her own eyes better than another person's lips, and Edward would then always make a move towards her, that it might be as easy as possible for her, indeed he would frequently make longer stops, than necessary, that he might not turn over before she had got to the bottom of the page.

Charlotte and the Captain observed this, and exchanged many a quiet smile, but they were both taken by surprise at another symptom, in which Ottilie's latent feeling accidentally displayed itself.

One evening, which had been partly spoiled for them by a tedious visit, Edward proposed that they should not separate so early—he felt inclined for music—he would take his flute, which he had not done for many days past. Charlotte looked at the sonatas which they generally played together, and they were not to be found. Ottilie, with some hesitation, said that they were in her room—she had taken them there to copy them.

"And you can, you will, accompany me on the piano?" cried Edward, his eyes sparkling with pleasure.

"I think perhaps I can," answered Ottilie.

She brought the music and sat down to the instrument. The others listened, and were surprised to hear how perfectly Ottilie had taught herself the piece—but far more surprised were they at the way in which she contrived to adapt herself to Edward's style of playing. Adapt herself, is not the right expression—Charlotte's skill and power enabled her, in order to please her husband, to keep up with him when he went too fast, and hold in for him if he hesitated; but Ottilie, who had several times heard them play the sonata together, seemed to have learnt it according to the idea in which they accompanied each other—she had so completely made his defects her own, that a kind of living whole resulted, from it, which did not move indeed according to exact rule, but the effect of which was in the highest degree pleasant and delightful. The composer himself would not have been surprised to hear his work disguised in a manner so charming.

Charlotte and the Captain watched this strange unexpected occurrence in silence, with the kind of feeling with which we often observe the actions of children—unable exactly to approve of them, from the serious consequences which may follow, and yet, without being able to find fault, perhaps with a kind of envy. For, indeed, the regard of these two for one another was growing also, as well as that of the others—and it was perhaps only the more perilous because they were both stronger, more certain of themselves, and better able to restrain themselves.

The Captain had already begun to feel that a habit which he could not resist was threatening to bind him to Charlotte. He forced himself to stay away at the hour when she commonly used to be at the works; by getting up very early in the morning he contrived to finish there whatever he had to do, and went back to the castle to his work in his own room. The first day or two Charlotte thought it was an accident—she looked for him in every place where she thought he could possibly be. Then she thought she understood him—and admired him all the more.

Avoiding, as the Captain now did, being alone with Charlotte, the more industriously did he labor to hurry forward the preparations for keeping her rapidly-approaching birth day with all splendor. While he was bringing up the new road from behind the village, he made the men, under pretence that he wanted stones, begin working at the top as well, and work down, to meet the others; and he had calculated his arrangements so that the two should meet on the eve of the day. The excavations for the new house were already done; the rock was blown away with gunpowder; and a fair foundation-stone had been hewn, with a hollow chamber, and a flat slab adjusted to cover it.

This outward activity, these little mysterious purposes of friendship, prompted by feeling with more or less they were obliged to repress, rather prevented the little party when together from being as lively as usual. Edward, who felt that there was a sort of void, one evening called upon the Captain to fetch his violin—Charlotte should play the piano, and he should accompany her. The Captain was unable to refuse the general request, and they executed together one of the most difficult pieces of music with an ease, and freedom, and feeling, which could not but afford themselves, and the two who were listening to them, the greatest delight. They promised themselves a frequent repetition of it, as well as further practice together.

"They do it better than we, Ottilie," said Edward; "we will admire them—but we can enjoy ourselves together too."

CHAPTER IX.

The birthday was come, and every thing was ready. The wall was all complete, which projected the raised village road against the water, and so was the wall passing the church; for a short time it followed the path which had been laid out by Charlotte, and then winding upwards among the rocks, inclined first under the summer-house to the right and then, after a wide sweep, passed back above it to the right again, and so by degrees out to the open plain. A large party had assembled for the occasion. They went first to church, where they found the whole congregation collected together in their holiday dresses. After service, they filed out in order: first the boys, then the young men, then the old; after them came the party from the castle, with their visitors and retinue; and the village maidens, young girls, and women, brought up the rear.

At the turn of the walk, a raised stone seat had been contrived, where the Captain made Charlotte and the visitors stop and rest. From here they could see over the whole distance from the beginning to the end—the troops of men who had gone up before them, the file of women following, and now drawing up to where they were. It was lovely weather, and the whole effect was singularly beautiful. Charlotte was taken by surprise, she was touched, and she pressed the Captain's hand warmly.

They followed the crowd who had slowly ascended, and were now forming a circle round the spot where the future house was to stand. The lord of the castle, his family, and the principal strangers were now invited to descend into the vault, where the fountain stone, supported on one side, lay ready to be let down. A well-dressed mason, a trowel in one hand and a hammer in the other, came forward, and with grace spoke an address in verse, of which in prose we can give but an imperfect rendering.

"Three things," he began, "are to be looked to in a building—that it stand on the right spot; that it be securely founded; that it be successfully executed. The first is the business of the master of the house—his and his only. As in the city the prince and the council alone determine a building shall be, so in the country it is the right of the lord of the soil that he shall say, 'Here my dwelling shall stand; here, and nowhere else.'" Edward and Ottilie were standing opposite one another, as these words were spoken; but they did not venture to look up and exchange glances.

To the third, the execution, there is neither art nor handicraft which must not in some way contribute. But the second, the founding, is the province of the mason; and, boldly to speak it out, it is the head and front of all the undertaking—a solemn thing it is—and our bidding you descend hither is full of meaning. You are celebrating your festival in the deep of the earth. Here within this hollow spot, you show us the honor of appearing as witnesses of our mystic craft. Presently we shall lower down this carefully-hewn stone into its place; and soon these earth-walls, now ornamented with fair and worthy persons, will be no more accessible—but will be closed forever!

The foundation stone, which with its angles typifies the just angles of the building, with the sharpness of its moulding, the regularity of it, and with the truth of its lines to the horizontal and perpendicular, the uprightness and equal height of all the walls, we might now without more ado let down—it would rest in its place with its own weight. But even here they shall not fail of lime and means to bind it. For as human beings who may be well inclined to each other by nature, yet hold more firmly together when the law cements them, so are stones also, whose forms may already fit together, united far better by these binding forces. It is not seemly to be idle among the working, and here you will not refuse to be our fellow laborer,—with these words he reached the trowel to Charlotte, who threw mortar with it under the stone—several of the others were then desired to do the same, and then it was at once let fall. Upon which the hammer was placed next in Charlotte's, and then in the others' hands, to strike six times with it, and conclude, in this expression, the wedlock of the stone with the earth.

"The work of the mason," went on the speaker, "now under the free sky as we are, if it be not done in concealment, yet must pass into concealment—the soil will be laid smoothly in, and thrown over this stone, and with the walls which we rear into the daylight we in the end are seldom remembered. The works of the stone cutter and the carver remain under the eyes; but for us it is not to complain when the plasterer blots out the last trace of our hands, and appropriates our work to himself; when he overlays it, and smooths it, and colors it.

Not from regard for the opinion of others, but from respect for himself, the mason will be faithful in his calling. There is none who has more need to feel in himself the consciousness of what he is. When the house is finished, when the soil is smoothed, and the surface plastered over, and the outside all overwrought with ornament, he can even see in yet through all disguises, and still recognize those exact and careful adjustments, to which the whole is indebted for its being and for its persistence.

But as the man who commits some evil deed has to fear, that notwithstanding all precautions, it will one day come to light—so too must he expect who has

done some good thing in secret, that it also, in spite of himself, will appear in the light; and therefore we make this foundation stone at the same time a stone of memorial. Here, in these various hollows which have been hewn into it, many things are now to be buried, as a witness to some far-off world—the metal cases, hermetically sealed contain documents in writing; matters of various note engraved on these plates; in these fair glass bottles we bury the best old wine, with a note of the year of its vintage. We have coins, too, of many kinds, from the mint of the current year. All this we have received through the liberality of him for whom we build. There is space yet remaining, if you will, to offer anything to the after-world.

After a slight pause the speaker looked around; but, as is commonly the case on such occasions, no one was prepared; they were all taken by surprise. At last, a merry-looking young officer set the example, and said: "If I am to contribute anything which as yet is not to be found in this treasure-chamber, it shall be, pair of buttons from my uniform—I don't see why they do not deserve to go down to posterity!"

No sooner said than done, and then a number of persons found something of the same sort which they could do; the young ladies did not hesitate to throw in some of their side hair combs—smelling bottles and other trinkets were not spared. Only Ottilie hung back; till a kind word from Edward roused her from the abstraction in which she was watching the various things being heaped in. Then she undressed from her neck the gold chain on which her father's picture had hung, and with a slight gentle hand laid it down in the other jewels. Edward rather disarranged the proceedings; by at once, in some haste, having the cover let fall, and fastened down.

The young mason who had been most active through all this, again took his place as orator; and went on: "We lay down this stone forever; for the establishing the present and the future possessors of this house. But in that we bury this treasure together with it, we do it in the remembrance—in this most enduring of works—of the perishableness of a human thing. We remember that a time may come when this cover so fast sealed shall again be lifted; and that can only be when all shall again be destroyed which as yet we have not brought into being.

"But hold—now that it at once may begin to be, back with our thoughts out of the future—back into the present. At once, after the feast which we have this day kept together, let us on with our labor; let no one of all those trades which are to work on our foundation, through us keep us unwilling holiday. Let the building rise swiftly to its height, and out of the windows, which as yet have no existence, may the master of the house, with his family and with his guests, look forth, with a glad heart over his broad lands. To him and to all here present herewith be health and happiness."

With these words he drained a richly-cut tumbler at a draught, and flung it into the air, thereby to signify the excess of pleasure by destroying the vessel which had served for such a solemn occasion. This time, however, it fell out otherwise. The glass did not fall back to the earth and indeed without a miracle.

In order to get forward with the buildings, they had already thrown out the whole of the soil at the opposite corner; indeed, they had begun to raise the wall, and for this purpose had reared a scaffold as high as was absolutely necessary. On the occasion of the festival, boards had been laid along the top of this, and a number of spectators were allowed to stand there. It had been meant principally for the advantage of the workmen themselves. The glass had flown up there, and had been caught by one of them, who took it as a sign of good luck for himself. He waved it round without letting it out of his hand, and the letters E and O were to be seen very richly cut upon it, running one into the other. It was one of the glasses which had been executed for Edward when he was a boy.

The scaffoldings were again deserted, and the most active among the party climbed up to look round them, and could not speak enough in praise of the beauty of the prospect on all sides. How many new discoveries does not a person make when on some high point he ascends but a single story higher. Inland many fresh villages came in sight. The line of the river could be traced like a thread of silver; indeed, one of the party that he distinguished the spires of the capital. On the other side, behind the wooded hill, the blue peaks of the far-off mountains were seen rising, and the country immediately about them was spread out like a map.

"If the three ponds," cried some one, "were but thrown together to make a single sheet of water, there would be every thing here which is noblest and most excellent."

"That might be easily effected," the Captain said. "In early times they must have formed all one lake among the hills here."

"Only I must beseech you to spare my clump of planes and poplars that stand so prettily by the centre pond," said Edward. "See,"—he turned to Ottilie, bringing her a few steps forward, and pointing down—"those trees I planted myself."

"How long have they been standing there?" asked Ottilie.

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