

ELECTIVE AFFINITIES.

A Novel.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF GOETHE.

PART I.

CHAPTER IX. (Continued.)

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

"Just about as long as you have been in the world," replied Edward.

"Dear child, I planted them when you were still lying in your cradle."

The party now betook themselves to the castle. After dinner was over they were invited to walk through the village to take a glance at what had been done there as well.

A little party, held together by such feelings as had grown up among our friends, is always unpleasantly interrupted by a large concourse of people.

"It is as we supposed," Edward cried to Charlotte.

"Then the Baroness, too, is not far off," answered Charlotte.

"Doubtless not," said Edward. "She is coming, too, to-morrow, from another place."

"We must prepare for them in time, Otilie," said Charlotte.

"What arrangement shall I desire to be made?" Otilie asked.

Charlotte gave a general direction, and Otilie left the room.

The Captain inquired into the relation in which these two persons stood towards one another, and with which he was only very generally acquainted.

They were both slightly older than Edward and Charlotte, and had been intimate with them from early times at court.

The connection had never been absolutely broken off, although it was impossible to approve of their proceedings.

"It would have been more convenient if they had not come till a couple of days later," Edward was saying, as Otilie re-entered.

"The Captain offered his services, and so did Charlotte, but there was something or other to object to both of them."

"Give it to me, cried Otilie, a little hastily.

"You will never be able to finish it," said Charlotte.

"And really I must have it early the day after to-morrow, and it is long," Edward added.

"It shall be ready," Otilie cried; and the paper was already in her hands.

The next morning, as they were looking out from their highest windows for their visitors, whom they intended to go some way and meet, Edward said:

"Who is that yonder riding slowly along the road?"

The Captain described accurately the figure of the horseman.

"Then it is he," said Edward; "the particulars, which you can better see than I, agree very well with the general figure, which I can see too."

The figure came nearer, and Mittler it veritably was. They received him with warm greetings as he came slowly up the steps.

"Why did not come yesterday?" Edward cried, as he approached.

"I do not like your grand festivities," answered he; "but I am come to-day to keep my friend's birthday with you quietly."

"How are you able to find time enough?" asked Edward, with a laugh.

"My visit, if you can value it, you owe to an observation which I made yesterday. I was spending a right happy afternoon in a house where I had established peace, and then I heard that a birthday was being kept here. Now this is what I call selfish, after all, said I to myself: you

will only enjoy yourself with those whose broken peace you have mended. Why cannot you for once go and be happy with friends who keep the peace for themselves? No sooner said than done.

"Here I am," I determined with myself that I should be.

"Yesterday you would have had a large party here; to-day you will have but a small one," said Charlotte; "you will meet the Count and the Baroness, with whom you have had enough to do already, I believe."

Out of the middle of the party, who had all four come down to welcome him, the strange man dashed in the keenest disgust, seizing at the same time his hat and whip.

"Some unlucky star is always over me," he cried, "directly I try to rest and enjoy myself. What business have I going out of my proper character? I ought never to have come, and now I am persecuted away. Under one roof with those two I will not remain, and you take care of yourselves. They bring nothing but mischief; their nature is like heaven, and propagates its own contagion."

They tried to pacify him, but it was in vain.

"Whoever strikes at marriage," he cried, "whoever, either by word or act, undermines this, the foundation of all moral society, that man has to settle with me, and if I cannot become his master, I take care to settle myself out of his way. Marriage is the beginning and the end of all culture. It makes the savage mild, and the most cultivated has no better opportunity for displaying his gentleness. Indissoluble it must be, because it brings so much happiness that what small exceptional unhappiness it may bring counts for nothing in the balance."

And when we know the world we see clearly that it is only the positive eternal duration of marriage in a world where everything is in motion, which has anything unbecoming about it.

"It is annuances marriage may often have; I can believe that, and it is as it should be. We are all married to our consciences, and there are times when we should be glad to be divorced from them; mine gives me more annoyance than ever a man or a woman can give."

All this he poured out with the greatest vehemence; he would very likely have gone on speaking longer, had not the sound of the postillions' horns given notice of the arrival of the visitors, who, as if on a concerted arrangement, drove into the castle-court from opposite sides at the same moment.

CHAPTER X.

The visitors were welcomed and brought in. They were delighted to find themselves again in the same house and in the same rooms where in early times they had passed many happy days, but which they had not seen for a long time. Their friends, too, were very glad to see them. The Count and the Baroness had both those tall fine figures which please in middle life almost better than in youth.

The effect made itself felt immediately on the entrance of the new comers. They were fresh from the fashionable world, as was to be seen at once, in their dress, in their equipment, and in everything about them; and they formed a contrast not a little striking with our friends, their country style, and the vehement feelings were at work underneath among them.

This, soon, however, very soon disappeared in the stream of past recollection and present interests, and a rapid, lively conversation soon united them all. After a short time they again separated. The ladies withdrew to their own apartments, and there found amusement enough in the many things which they had to tell each other, and in setting to work at the same time to examine the new fashions, the spring dresses, bonnets, and such like; while the gentlemen were employing themselves looking at the new traveling carriages, trotting out the horses, and beginning at once to bargain and exchange.

They did not meet again till dinner; in the meantime they had changed their dress. And here, too, the newly-arrived pair showed to all advantage. Everything they wore was new, and in a style which their friends at the castle had never seen, and yet, being accustomed to it themselves, it appeared perfectly natural and graceful.

The conversation was brilliant and well sustained, as, indeed, in the company of such persons everything and nothing appears to interest. They spoke in French that the attendants might not understand what they said, and swept in happiest humor over all that was passing in the

great or the middle world. On one particular subject they remained, however, longer than was desirable. It was occasioned by Charlotte asking after one of her early friends, of whom she had to learn that she was a widow, and that she was on the point of being separated from her husband.

"It is a melancholy thing," Charlotte said, "when we fancy our absent friends are finally settled, when we believe persons very dear to us to be provided for for life, suddenly to hear that their fortunes are cast loose once more, that they have to strike into a fresh path of life, and very likely a most insecure one."

"Indeed, my dear friend," the Count answered, "it is our own fault if we allow ourselves to be surprised at such things. We please ourselves with imagining matters of this earth, and particularly matrimonial connections, as very enduring; and as concerns this last point, the plays which we see over and over again help to mislead us; being, as they are, so untrue to the course of the world. In comedy, we see a marriage as the last aim of a desire which is hindered and crossed through a number of acts, and at the instant when it is reached the curtain falls, and the momentary satisfaction continues to ring on in our ears. But in the world it is very different. The play goes on still behind the scenes, and when the curtain rises again we may see and hear, perhaps, little nough of the marriage."

"It cannot be so very bad, however," said Charlotte, smiling. "We see people who have gone off the boards of the theatre, ready enough to take a part upon them again."

"There is nothing to say against that," said the Count. "In a new character a man may really venture on a second trial; and when we know the world we see clearly that it is only the positive eternal duration of marriage in a world where everything is in motion, which has anything unbecoming about it. A certain friend of mine whose humor displays itself principally in suggestions for new laws, maintained that every marriage should be concluded only for five years. Five, he said, was a sacred number—pretty and uneven. Such a period would be long enough for people to learn one another's character, bring a child or two in to the world, quarrel, separate, and what was best, get reconciled again. He would often exclaim, 'How happy the first part of the time would pass away! On one side or the other there would not fail to be a wish to have the relation continue longer, and the amiability would increase the nearer they got to the parting time. The indifferent, even the dissatisfied party, would be softened and gained over by such behavior; they would forget, as in pleasant company the hours pass always unobserved, how the time went by, and they would be delightfully surprised when, after the term had run they first observed that they had unknowingly prolonged it.'

"Charming and pleasant as all this sounded (Charlotte felt it to her soul) as was the moral significance which lay below it, expressions of this kind, on Otilie's account, were most distasteful to her. She knew very well that nothing was more dangerous than the cautious conversation which treats culpable or semi-culpable actions as if they were common, ordinary, and even laudable, and of such undesirable kind assuredly were all which touched on the sacred of marriage. She endeavored, therefore, in her skilful way, to give the conversation another turn, and when she found that she could not, it vexed her that Otilie had managed everything so well that there was no occasion for her to leave the table. In her quiet observant way a nod or a look was enough for her to signify to the head servant whatever was to be done, and everything went off perfectly, although there were a couple of strange men in livery in the way, who were rather a trouble than a convenience. And so the Count, without feeling Charlotte's hints, went on giving his opinions on the same subject. Generally, he was little enough apt to be tedious in conversation; but this was a thing which weighed so heavily on his heart, and the difficulties which he found in getting separated from his wife were so great that it had made him bitter against everything which concerned the marriage bond—that very bond which, notwithstanding, he was so anxiously desiring between himself and the Baroness.

"The same friend," he went on, "has another law which he proposes. A marriage shall only be held indissoluble when either both parties, or at least one of the other, enter into it for the third time. Such persons must be supposed to acknowledge beyond a doubt that they find marriage indispensable for themselves; they have had opportunities of thoroughly knowing themselves; of knowing how they conducted themselves in their earlier unions; whether they have any peculiarities of temper, which are a more frequent cause of separation than had dispositions. People would then observe one another more closely; they would pay as much attention to the married as the unmarried, no one being able to tell how things may turn out."

"That would add no little to the interest of society," said Edward. "As things are now, when a man is married, nobody cares any more either for his virtues or for his vices."

TO BE CONTINUED.

The Oregon papers denounce the massacre of the Modoc prisoners in unpestered terms.

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