

ELECTIVE AFFINITIES.

A Novel.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF GOTTHE.

PART I.

CHAPTER XII. (Continued.)

He found himself the first person awake on his domain. The laborers seemed to be staying away too long; they came; he thought they were too few, and the work set out for the day too slight for his desires. He inquired for more workmen; they were promised, and in the course of the day they came. But these, too, were not enough for him to carry his plans out as rapidly as he wished. To do the work gave him no pleasure any longer; it should all be done. And for whom? The paths should be gravelled that Otilie might walk pleasantly upon them; seats should be made at every spot and corner that Otilie might rest on them. The new park house was hurried forward. It should be finished for Otilie's birthday. In all he thought of all he did, there was no more moderation. The sense of loving and of being loved, urged him out into the unlimited. How changed was now to him the look of all the rooms, their furniture, and their decorations. He did not feel as if he was in his own house any more. Otilie's presence absorbed everything. He was utterly lost in her; no other thoughts ever rose before him; no conscience disturbed him; every restraint which had been laid upon his nature burst loose. His whole being centered upon Otilie. This impetuosity of passion did not escape the Captain, who longed, if he could, to prevent its evil consequences. All those plans which were now being hurried on with this immoderate speed, had been drawn out and calculated for a long, quiet, easy execution. The sale of the farm had been completed; the first instalment had been paid. Charlotte, according to the arrangement, had taken possession of it. But the very first week after, she found it more than usually necessary to exercise patience and resolution, and to keep her eyes on what was being done. In the present hasty style of proceeding, the money which had been set apart for the purpose would not go far.

Much had been begun, and much yet remained to be done. How could the Captain leave Charlotte in such a situation? They consulted together, and agreed that it would be better that they themselves should hurry on the works, and for this purpose employ money which could be made good again at the period fixed for the discharge of the second instalment of what was to be paid for the farm. It could be done almost without loss. They would have a freer hand. Everything would progress simultaneously. There were laborers enough at hand, and they could get more accomplished at once, and arrive swiftly and surely at their aim. Edward gladly gave his consent to a plan which so entirely coincided with his own views.

During this time Charlotte persisted with all her heart in what she had determined for herself, and her friend stood by her with a like purpose, manfully. This very circumstance, however, produced a great intimacy between them. They spoke openly to one another of Edward's passion, and consulted what had better be done. Charlotte kept Otilie more to herself, watching her narrowly; and the more she understood her own heart, the deeper she was able to penetrate into the heart of the poor girl. She saw no help for it, except in sending her away.

It now appeared a happy thing to her that Luciana had gained such high honors at the school; for her great aunt, as soon as she heard of it, desired to take her with her, and bring her out into the world. Otilie could, therefore, return thither. The Captain would leave them well provided for, and everything would be as it had been a few months before; indeed, in many respects better. Her own position in Edward's affection, Charlotte thought she could soon recover; and she settled it all, and laid it all out before herself so sensibly that she only strengthened herself more completely in her delusion, as if it were possible for them to return to their old limits—as if a bond which had been violently broken could again be joined together as before.

In the meantime Edward felt very deeply the hindrances which were thrown in his way. He soon observed that they were keeping him and Otilie separate; that they made it difficult for him to speak with her alone, or even to approach her, except in the presence of others. And while he was angry about this, he was angry at many things besides. If he caught an opportunity for a few hasty words with Otilie, it was not only to assure her of his love, but to complain of his wife and the Captain. He never felt that with his own irrational haste he was on the way to exhaust the cash-box. He found bitter fault with them because in the execution of the work they were not keeping to the first agreement, and yet he had been himself a consenting party to the second; indeed, it was he who had occasioned it and made it necessary.

Hatred is a partisan, but love is even more so. Otilie also estranged herself from Charlotte and the Captain. As Edward was complaining one day to Otilie of the latter, saying that he was treating him like a friend, or, under the circumstances, acting quite uprightly, she answered unthinkingly,

"I have once or twice had a painful feeling that he was not quite honest with you. I heard him once say to Charlotte, 'If Edward would but spare us that eternal flute of his! He can make nothing of it, and it is too disagreeable to listen to him.' You may imagine how it hurt me, when I like accompanying you so much."

She had scarcely uttered the words when her conscience whispered to her that she had much better have been silent. However, the thing was said. Edward's features worked violently. Never had anything stung him more. He was touched on his tenderest point. It was his amusement; he followed it like a child. He never made the slightest pretensions; what gave him pleasure should be treated with forbearance by his friends. He never thought how intolerable it is for a third person to have his ears lacerated by an unsuccessful talent. He was not indignant; he was hurt in a way which he could not forgive. He felt himself discharged from all obligations.

The necessity of being with Otilie, of seeing her, whispering to her, exchanging his confidence with her, increased with every day. He determined to write to her, and ask her to carry on a secret correspondence with him. The strip of paper on which he had, ironically enough, made his request, lay on his writing-table, and was swept off by a draught of wind as his valet entered to dress his hair. The latter was in the habit of trying the heat of the iron by picking up any scraps of paper which might be lying about. This time his hand fell on the billet; he twisted it up hastily, and it was burnt. Edward observing the mistake, snatched it out of his hands. After the man was gone, he sat himself down to write it over again. The second time it would not run so readily off his pen. It gave him a little uneasiness; he hesitated, but he got over it. He squeezed the paper into Otilie's hand the first moment he was able to approach her. Otilie answered him immediately. He put the note unread in his waistcoat pocket, which, being made short in the fashion of the time, was shallow, and did not hold it as it ought. It worked out, and fell without his observing it on the ground. Charlotte saw it, picked it up, and after giving a hasty glance at it, reach it to him.

"Here is something in your handwriting," she said, "which you may sorry to lose."

He was confounded. Is she dissembling? he thought to himself. Does she know what is in the note, or is she deceived in the resemblance of the hand. He hoped, he believed the latter. He was warned—doubly warned; but those strange accidents, through which a higher intelligence seems to be speaking to us, his passion was not able to interpret. Rather, as he went further and further on, he felt the restraint under which his friend and his wife seem to be holding him the more intolerable. His pleasure in their society was gone. His heart was closed against them, and though he was obliged to endure their society, he could not succeed in re-discovering or re-animating within his heart anything of his old affection for them. The silent reproaches which he was forced to make to himself about it, were disagreeable to him. He tried to help himself with a kind of humor, which, however, being without love, was also without its usual grace.

Over all such trials, Charlotte found assistance to rise in her own inward feelings. She knew her own determination. Her own own affection, fair and noble as it was she would utterly renounce.

And sorely she longed to go to the assistance of the other two. Separation, she knew well, would not alone suffice to heal so deep a wound. She resolved that she would speak openly about it to Otilie herself. But she could not do it. The recollection of her own weakness stood in the way. She thought she could talk generally to her about the sort of thing. But general expressions about "the sort of thing" fitted her own case equally well, and she could not bare to touch it. Every hint which she would give Otilie, recoiled back on her own heart. She would warn, and she was obliged to feel that she might herself still be in need of warning.

She contented herself, therefore, with silently keeping the lovers more apart, and by this gained nothing. The slight hints which frequently escaped her had no effect upon Otilie; for Otilie had been assured by Edward that Charlotte was devoted to the Captain, that Charlotte herself wished for a separation, and he was at this moment considering the readiest means by which it could be brought about.

Otilie, led by the sense of her own innocence along the road to the happiness for which she longed, only lived for Edward. Strengthened by her love for him in all good, more light and happy in her work for his sake, and more frank and open towards others, she found herself in a heaven upon earth.

So all together, each in his or her own fashion, reflecting, or unreflecting, they continued on the routine of their lives. All seemed to go its ordinary way, as, in monstrous cases, when everything is at stake, men will still live on, as if it were all nothing.

CHAPTER XIV.

In the meantime a letter came from the Count to the Captain—two, indeed—one

which he might produce, holding out fair, excellent prospects in the distance; the other containing a direct offer of an immediate situation, a place of high importance and responsibility at the Court, his rank as Major, a very respectable salary, and other advantages. A number of circumstances, however, made it desirable that for the moment he should not speak of it, and consequently he only informed his friends of his distant expectations, and concealed what was so nearly impending.

He went warmly on, at the same time, with his present occupation; and quietly made arrangements to secure the works being all continued without interruption after his departure. He was now himself desirous that as much as possible should be finished at once, and was ready to hasten things forward to prepare for Otilie's birthday. And so, though without having come to any express understanding, the two friends worked side by side together. Edward was now well pleased that the cash-box was filled by their having taken up money. The whole affair went forward at fullest speed.

The Captain had done his best to oppose the plan of throwing the three ponds together into a single sheet of water. The lower embankment would have to be made much stronger, the two intermediate embankments to be taken away, and altogether, in more than one sense, it seemed a very questionable proceeding. However, both these schemes had been already undertaken; the soil which was removed above, being carried at once down to where it was wanted. And here there came opportunely on the scene a young artist, an old pupil of the Captain, who partly by introducing workmen who understood work of this nature, and partly by himself, whenever it was possible, contracting for the work itself, advanced things not a little, while at the same time they could feel more confidence in their being securely and lastingly executed. In secret this was a great pleasure to the Captain. He could now be confident that his absence would not be so severely felt. It was one of the points on which he was most resolute with himself, never to leave anything which he had taken in hand uncompleted, unless he could see his place satisfactorily supplied. And he could not but hold in small respect persons who introduced confusion around themselves only to make their absence felt, and are ready to disturb in wanton selfishness what they will not be at hand to restore.

So they labored on, straining every nerve to make Otilie's birthday splendid, without any open acknowledgment that this was what they were aiming at, or, without their directly acknowledging it to themselves. Charlotte wholly free from jealousy as she was, could not think it right to keep it a real festival. Otilie's youth, the circumstances of her fortune, and her relationship to their family, were not at all such as made it fit that she should appear as the queen of the day; and Edward would not have it talked about, because everything was to spring out, as it were, of itself, with a natural and delightful surprise.

They, therefore, came of all of them to a sort of tacit understanding that on this day, without further circumstance, the new house in the park was to be opened, and they might take the occasion to invite the neighborhood and give a holiday to their own people. Edward's passion, however, knew no bounds. Longing as he did to give himself to Otilie, his presents and his promises must be infinite. The birthday gifts which on the great occasion he was to offer to her seemed, as Charlotte had arranged them, far too insignificant. He spoke to his valet, who had the care of his wardrobe, and who consequently had extensive acquaintance among the tailors and mercers and fashionable milliners; and he, who not only understood himself what valuable presents were, but also the most graceful way in which they should be offered, immediately ordered an elegant box, covered with red morocco, and studded with steel nails, to be filled with presents worthy of such a shell. Another thing, too, he suggested to Edward. Among the stores at the castle was a small show of fireworks which had never been let off. It would be easy to get some more, and have something really fine. Edward caught the idea, and his servant promised to see to its being executed. This matter was to remain a secret.

While this was going on, the Captain, as the day drew near, had been making arrangements for a body of police to be present—precaution which he always thought desirable when large numbers of men are to be brought together. And, indeed, against beggars, and against all other inconveniences by which the pleasure of a festival can be disturbed, he had made effectual provision.

Edward and his confidant, on the contrary, were mainly occupied with their fireworks. They were to be let off on the side of the middle water in front of the great ash-tree. The party were to be collected on the opposite side, under the planes, that at a sufficient distance from the scene, in case and safety, they might seem to the best effect, with the reflections on the water, the water-rockets, and floating-lights, and all the other designs.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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