

ELECTIVE AFFINITIES.

A Novel.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF GOETHE.

PART II.

CHAPTER I. (Continued.)

"You have contrived," said Charlotte, "without perhaps knowing it or wishing it, to lead the conversation altogether in my favor. The likeness of a man is quite independent; everywhere that it stands, it stands for itself, and we do not require it to mark the site of a particular grave. But I must acknowledge to you to having a strange feeling; even to likenesses I have a kind of disinclination. Whenever I see them they seem to be silently reproaching me. They point to something far away from us—gone from us; and they remind me how difficult it is to pay right honor to the present. If we think how many people we have seen and known, and consider how little we have been to them and how little they have been to us, it is no very pleasant reflection. We have met a man of genius without having enjoyed much with him—a learned man without having learnt from him—a traveler without having been instructed—a man to love without having shown him any kindness.

"And, unhappily, this is not the case only with accidental meetings. Societies and families behave in the same way towards their dearest members, some towards their worthiest citizens, people towards their most admirable princes, nations towards their most distinguished men.

"I have heard it asked why we heard nothing but good spoken of the dead, while of the living it is never with some exception. It should be answered, because from the former we have nothing more to fear. So unreal is our anxiety to preserve the memory of others—generally no more than a mere selfish amusement; and the real, holy, earnest feeling would be what should prompt us to be more diligent and assiduous in our intentions toward those who are still left to us."

CHAPTER II.

Under the stimulus of this accident, and of the conversations which arose out of it, they went the following day to look over the burying-place, for the ornamenting of which and relieving it in some degree of its sombre look, the architect made many a happy proposal. His interest, too, had to extend itself to the church as well; a building which had caught his attention from the moment of his arrival.

It had been standing for many centuries, built in the German style, the proportions good, the decorating elaborate and excellent; and one might easily gather that the architect of the neighboring monastery had left the stamp of his art and his love on this smaller building also; it worked on the beholder with a solemnity and a sweetness, although the change in its external arrangements for the Protestant service, had taken from it something of its repose and majesty.

The Architect found no great difficulty in prevailing on Charlotte to give him a considerable sum of money to restore it externally and internally, in the original spirit, and thus, as he thought, to bring it into harmony with the resurrection-field which lay in front of it. He had himself much practiced skill, and a few laborers who were still busy at the lodge, might easily be kept together, until this pious work was should be completed.

The building itself, therefore, with all its environs, and whatever was attached to it, was now carefully and thoroughly examined; and then showed itself, to the greatest surprise and delight of the architect, a little side chapel, which nobody had thought of, beautifully and delicately proportioned, and displaying still greater care and pains in its decoration. It contained at the same time many remnants, carved and painted, of the implements used in the old services, when the different festivals were distinguished by a variety of pictures and ceremonies, and each was celebrated in its own peculiar style.

It was impossible for him not at once to take this chapel into his plan; and he determined to bestow special pains on the restoring of this little spot, as a memorial of old times, and of their taste. He saw exactly how he would like to have the vacant surfaces of the walls ornamented, and delighted himself with the prospect of exercising his talent for painting upon them; but of this, at first, he made a secret to the rest of the party.

Before doing anything else, he fulfilled his promise of showing the ladies the various imitations of, and designs from, old monuments, vases, and other such things which he had made; and when they came to speak of the simple barrow sepulchres of the northern nations, he brought a collection of weapons and implements which had been found in them. He had got them exceedingly nicely and conveniently arranged in drawers and compartments laid on boards cut to fit them, and covered over with cloth; so that these solemn old things, in the way he treated them, had a smart, dresy appearance, and it was like looking into the box of a trinket merchant.

Having once begun to show his curiosities, and finding them prove serviceable to entertain our friends in their loneliness; every evening he would produce one or other of his treasures. They were

most of them of German origin—pieces of metal, old coins, seals, and such like. All these things directed the imagination back upon old times; and when at last they came to amuse themselves with the first specimens of printing, woodcuts, and the earliest copper-plate engraving, and when the church, in the same spirit, was growing out, every day, more and more in form and color like the past, they had almost to ask themselves whether they really were living in a modern time, whether it were not a dream, that manners, customs, modes of life, and convictions were all really so changed.

After such preparation, a great portfolio, which at last he produced, had the best possible effect. It contained indeed, principally only outlines and figures, but as these had been traced upon original pictures, they retained perfectly their ancient character, and most captivating indeed this character was to the spectators. All the figures breathed only the purest feeling; every one, if not noble, at any rate was good; cheerful composure, ready recognition of One above us, to whom all reverence is due; silent devotion, in love and tranquil explanation, was expressed on every face, on every gesture. The old bearded man, the curly-pated boy, the light-hearted youth, the earnest man, the earnest man, the glorified saint, the angel hovering in the air, all seemed happy in an innocent, satisfied, pious expectation. The commonest object had a trait of celestial life; and every nature seemed adapted to the service of God, and to be, in some way or other, employed up-in it.

Towards such a religion most of them gazed as towards a vanished golden age, or on some lost paradise; only perhaps Otilie had a chance of finding herself among being of her own nature. Who offer any opposition when the Architect asked to be allowed to paint the space between the arches and walls of the chapel in the style of these old pictures; and thereby leave his own distinct memorial at a place where life had gone so pleasantly with him?

He spoke of it with some sadness, for he could see, in the state in which things were, that his sojourn in such delightful society could not last forever: indeed, that perhaps it would now soon be ended.

For the rest, these days were not rich in incidents; yet full of occasion for serious entertainment. We therefore take the opportunity of communicating something of the remarks which Otilie noted down among her manuscripts, to which we cannot find a fitter transition than through a simile which suggested itself to us on contemplating her exquisite pages.

This is, we are told, a curious contrivance in the service of the English marine. The ropes in use in the royal navy, from the largest to the smallest, are so twisted that a red thread runs through them from end to end, which cannot be extracted without undoing the whole; and by which the smallest pieces may be recognized as belonging to the crown.

Just so there is drawn through Otilie's diary, a thread of attachment and affection which connects it all together, and characterizes the whole. And thus these remarks, these observations, these extracted sentences, and whatever else it may contain, were, to the writer, of peculiar meaning. Even the few separate pieces which we select and transcribe will sufficiently explain our meaning.

FROM OTILIE'S DIARY.

"To rest hereafter at the side of those whom we love is the most delightful thought which man can have when once he looks out beyond the boundary of life. What a sweet expression is that—'He was gathered to his fathers!'"

"Of the various memorials and tokens which bring to us the distant and the separated—none is so satisfactory as a picture. To sit and talk to a beloved picture, even though it be unlike, has a charm in it, like the charm which there sometimes is in quarreling with a friend. We feel, in a strange, sweet way, that we are divided and yet cannot separate.

"We entertain ourselves often with a present person as with a picture. He need not speak to us, we need not look at us, or take any notice of us; we look at him, we feel the relation in which we stand to him; such relation can even grow without his doing anything towards it, without his having any feeling of it; he to us exactly as a picture."

"One is never satisfied with the portrait of a person that one knows. I have always felt for the portrait-painter on this account. One so seldom requires of people what is impossible; and of them we do really require what is impossible; they must gather up into their picture the relation of everybody to its subject, all their likings and all dislikings; they must not only paint a man as they see him, but as everyone else sees him. It does not surprise me if such artists become by degrees stunted, but indifferent, and all of one idea; and indeed it would not matter what came of it, if it were not that in consequence we have to go without the pictures of so many persons near and dear to us."

"It is not true, the Architect's collection of weapons and old implements, which were found with the bodies of their owners, covered with great hills of earth and rock, proves to us how useless is man's so great anxiety to preserve his personality after he is dead; and so inconsistent people are! The Architect confesses to have himself opened these barrows of his fore-

fathers, and yet goes on occupying himself with memorials of posterity."

"But after all why should we take it so much to heart? Is all that we do, done for eternity? Do we not put on our dress in the morning, to throw it off again at night? Do we not go abroad to return home again? And why should we not wish to rest by the side of our friends, though it were but for a century."

"When we see the many grave-stones which have fallen in, which have been defaced by the footsteps of the congregation, which lie buried under the ruins of the churches, that have themselves crumbled together over them, we may fancy the life after death to be as a second life, into which a man enters in the figure, or the picture, or the inscription, and lives longer than when he was really alive. But this figure also, this second existence, dies out too, sooner or later. Time will not allow himself to be cheated of his rights with the monuments of men or with themselves.

CHAPTER III.

It causes us so agreeable a sensation to occupy ourselves with what we can only half do, that no person ought to find fault with the dilettante, when he is spending his time over an art which he can never learn; nor blame the artist if he chooses to pass out over the border of his own art, and amuse himself in some neighboring field. With such complacency of feeling we regard the preparation of the Architect for the painting of the chapel. The colors were got ready, the measurements taken; the cartoons designed. He made no attempt at originality, but kept close to his outlines; his only care was to make a proper distribution of the sitting and floating figures, so as to tastefully ornament his space with them. The scaffolding were erected. The work went forward; and as soon as anything had been done on which the eye could rest, he could have no objection to Charlotte and Otilie coming to see how he was getting on.

The life like faces of the angels, their robes waving against the blue sky-ground, delighted the eye, while their still and holy air calmed and composed the spirit, and produced the most delicate effect. The ladies ascended the scaffolding to him, and Otilie had scarcely observed how easily and regularly the work was being done, than the power which had been fostered in her by her early education at once appeared to develop. She took a brush, with a few words of direction, painted a richly folding robe, with as much delicacy as skill.

Charlotte, who was always glad when Otilie would occupy or amuse herself with anything, left them both in the chapel, and went to follow the train of her own thoughts, and work her way for herself through her cares and anxieties which she was unable to communicate to a creature.

When ordinary men allow themselves to be worked up by common every-day difficulties into fever fits of passion, we can give them nothing but a compassionate smile. But we look with a kind of awe on the spirit in which the seed of a great destiny has been sown, which must abide the unfolding of the germ, and neither dare nor can do anything to precipitate either the good or the ill, either the happiness or the misery, which is to arise out of it.

Edward had sent an answer by Charlotte's messenger, who had come to him in his solitude. It was written with kindness and interest, but it was rather composed and serious than warm and affectionate. He had vanished almost immediately after, and Charlotte could learn no news about him; till at last she accidentally found his name in the newspaper, where he was mentioned with honor among those who had most distinguished themselves in a late important engagement. She now understood the method which he had taken; she perceived that he had escaped from great danger; only she was convinced at the same time that he would seek out greater; and it was all too clear to her that in every sense he would hardly be withheld from any extremity.

She had to bear about this perpetual anxiety in her thoughts, and turn which way she would, there was no light in which she could look at it that would give her comfort. Otilie, never dreaming of anything of this, had taken to the work in the chapel with the greatest interest, and had easily obtained Charlotte's permission to go on with it regularly. So now all went swiftly forward, and the azure heaven was soon peopled with worthy inhabitants. By continual practice both Otilie and the architect had gained more freedom with the last figures; they became perceptibly better. The faces, too, which had been all left to the architect to paint, showed by degrees a very singular peculiarity. They began all of them to resemble Otilie. The neighborhood of the beautiful girl had made so strong an impression on the soul of the young man, who had no variety of faces preconceived in his mind, that by degrees, on the way from the eye to the hand, nothing was lost, and both worked in exact harmony together. Enough; one of the last faces succeeded perfectly; so that it seemed as if Otilie herself was looking down out of spaces of the sky.

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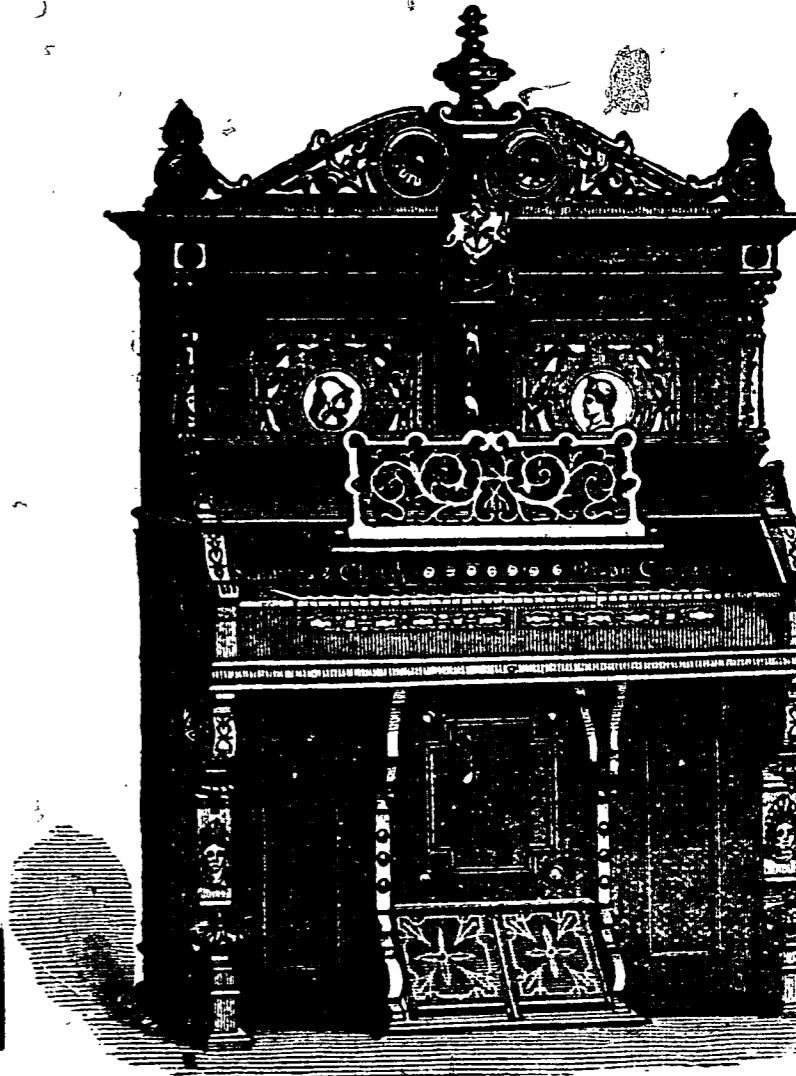
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