



CHAPTER VIII. DIGRESSUS SOMEWHAT.

In London meanwhile Mr. Reginald Hessegrave, to use his own expressive phrase, was "going it." And few young men with Mr. Reginald's income knew how to "go it!" at the same impetuous pace as Mr. Reginald Hessegrave.

That very same evening indeed, as he walked down the Strand arm in arm with his chum, Charlie Owen, who had just been fellow in the office who fulfilled to the letter Mr. Reginald's exalted ideal of "what a gentleman ought to be," he stopped for a moment to look out of the window at the list of winners in the first race of the season.

Mr. Reginald, as is the wont of his kind, had backed the favorite. He drew a long breath of disappointment as he scanned the telegram of results. "The Witch wins in a canter," he murmured, with marked disgust to his sympathizing companion.

"Pipped again! For a tinner!" with many a resignation, he was maintained under this misfortune indeed by the consoling reflection that the "tinner" he had risked on Yorkshire Lass would come in the end out of Kathleen's pocket. "It's a thing to have a sister who is obliged to dabble in paint for a livelihood, but from the practical point of view it has its advantages."

And Reggie found it a distinct advantage during the racing season that he was able to draw upon Kathleen's savings for unlimited loans, which were never repaid, it is true, but which were described as such in order to save undue wear and tear to Mr. Reginald's delicate feelings. It doesn't "look well" to ask your sister point blank for a present of a £10 note, but a loan of that amount from Kathleen is a far more palatable arrangement.

"That's a nuisance," Charlie Owen responded, with a sympathetic, "Why, for I suppose you're a philosopher."

Now this was exactly what Mr. Reginald had done, after the fashion of the city clerk who fancies himself as a judge of domestic life, but he wasn't going to acknowledge it.

ours that philanthropy like this can only be made to pay on the somewhat exorbitant terms of 60 per cent. deducted paper-hand. But Mr. Reginald, as it happened, was far too small game for either Miss Florrie or her papa to fly at. His friendship for the young lady was distinctly platonic one. She and her mamma used him merely as an amiable young fool who could fill in the odd evenings between more serious engagements, when papa's pocket was empty and mamma's nerves were on edge.

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the straw. "It's all square, I assure you. I've never been coming."

"Where from?" Charlie continued, not wishing to be hard, but still anxious for the collateral," as Florrie's papa would have put it.

"Oh, I telegraphed today to my people at Venice," Reggie replied readily. "But 'my people' of course was a euphemism for 'my sister.'"

And he did not seem to mean, but business in business, and he looked to know on what expectations precisely he was risking his money.

"Yes, here it is," Reggie replied, drawing it out somewhat sheepishly from the recesses of his pocket. He didn't like to show it of course, but he saw too well that on no other terms could he be spared the sterner disgrace of having to refuse Florrie's cheque for a second bottle of Veve Cliquot, should she choose to demand it.

Charlie ran his eye over the telegram. It was general, but not satisfactory. Entirely disagreeable. And finding the money. This is the last time. Remember. KATHLEEN.

"She always says that," Mr. Reginald interposed, with a slightly apologetic undertone. "Oh, dear, yes, I know it's a way they have," Charlie responded, with a tolerant smile, as one who was well acquainted with the strange fads of one's people did not wish to say anything but the plainest truth.

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the treacherous sea was sleeping calmly like a child and no breath of wind from the Dalmanian hills disturbed the tranquil rest of its glossy bosom.

They crossed over partly in Mortimer's own private gondola, partly in a hired barca—a henocap, as Arnold Willoughby irreverently called it—from the steps of the Molo. As they passed out of the harbor...

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Mortimer gazed at her with a comic little look of quizzical surprise, but when she lay alone with her after no small struggle, and he meant to make the best of this solitary opportunity.

"I've heard that," Canon Valentine and his wife are commiserating and his wife are commiserating in his voice. "Now, do you think, Miss Hessegrave, I planned this picnic to the Lido today and got off with you alone...

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stently, seriously. He was one of those rare men who rise far above jealousy. Kathleen was touched by his attitude—what woman would not have been? For a moment she half regretted she could not answer him "yes." He was so genuinely in love, so deeply and honestly grieved at her inability to love him.

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"I shall always like you very much, Mr. Mortimer."

never told yet to anybody—hardly even to myself. Mr. Willoughby is nothing more than a friend and a companion to me."

But the American read her meaning through her words for all that. "Willoughby was a friend and a companion to me," she said, "but you are doing right. I can't help admiring it. That penniless man against American millions! But you have left my heart poor—oh, so poor, so poor! There was one thing in life upon which I had fixed it, and you have given that to Willoughby, and Miss Hessegrave, I can't even quarrel with you for giving it!"

Kathleen looked forward toward him anxiously. "Oh, for heaven's sake," she cried, clasping her hands, "don't betray me, Mr. Mortimer. I have never betrayed a single word of this to him, nor to me. It was a woman's secret, keep it—keep it sacred, for my sake, I beg of you!"

Mortimer looked at her with the intensest affection in his eyes. He spoke the plain truth. That woman was the one object in life on which he had set his heart, and without her his wealth was as worthless as a man's. "Why, Miss Hessegrave," he answered, "what do you think I am made of? Do you think I could not keep it more sacred than anything else on earth? You must have formed indeed a very low opinion of me. I can see this knowledge, but for heaven's sake, don't do what I can toward making Willoughby's path in life a little smoother and easier for him. I wish to do so for his own sake before I shall wish it a thousand times more for your sake in distance."

Canon Valentine stared at him in the midst of the Piazza with a stony British stare of complete disapprobation. He rejected it in toto. "So this is modern Venice!" he exclaimed, with the air of a man who revisits some painful scene he has known in his better days. "This is what emancipated Italy has made of it! Dear me, Mrs. Hessegrave, how altered it is, to be sure, since the good old times of the Austrian occupation!"

Canon Valentine interposed, not entering into his humor, "The doggy seat great changes, canon. You haven't been here since united Italy. How much lovelier it must look to you, how much more really and truly beautiful!"

The canon gazed at her full face, in the blankest astonishment. "Quite the contrary," he answered curtly. "I see very great changes, but they're all for the worse. These pigeons, for example, they were always a nuisance, flying about under one's feet and getting in one's way at every twist and turn, but there are ten times as many of them now as there ever used to be."

"Why, I love the pigeons," Kathleen cried, all amazed. "They're so tame and familiar. In England the boys would throw stones at them and frighten them, but here they're so tame and friendly. I'm sure to feel as if they belonged to the place and as if man was a friend of theirs. Besides, they're so characteristic, and they're historically interesting, too, don't you know. They're said to be the descendants of the identical birds that friends on shore, which enabled him to capture Crete and so lay the foundations of the Venetian empire. I just love the pigeons."