

THE CENTURY MAGAZINE.

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NO. I.

VENICE.

It is a great pleasure to write the word; but I am not sure there is not a certain impudence in pretending to add anything to it. Venice has been painted and described many thousands of times, and of all the cities of the world it is the easiest to visit without going there. Open the first book and you will find a rhapsody about it; step into the first picture-dealer's and you will find three or four high-colored "views" of it. There is nothing more to be said about it. Every one has been there, and every one has brought back a collection of photographs. There is as little mystery about the Grand Canal as about our local thoroughfare; and the name of St. Mark is as familiar as the postman's ring. It is not forbidden, however, to speak of familiar things, and I believe that, for the true Venice-lover, Venice is always in order. There is nothing new to be said about it certainly, but the old is better than any novelty. It would be a sad day, indeed, when there should be anything new to say. I write these lines with the full consciousness of having no information whatever to offer. I do not pretend to enlighten the reader; I pretend only to give a fillip to his memory; and I hold any writer sufficiently justified who is himself in love with his topic.

I.

MR. RUSKIN has given it up, that is very true; but it is only after extracting half a life-time of pleasure and an immeasurable quantity of fame from it. We all may do the same, after it has served our turn, which it probably will not cease to do for many a year to come. Meantime, it is Mr. Ruskin who, beyond any one, helps us to enjoy. He has, indeed, lately produced several aids to depres-

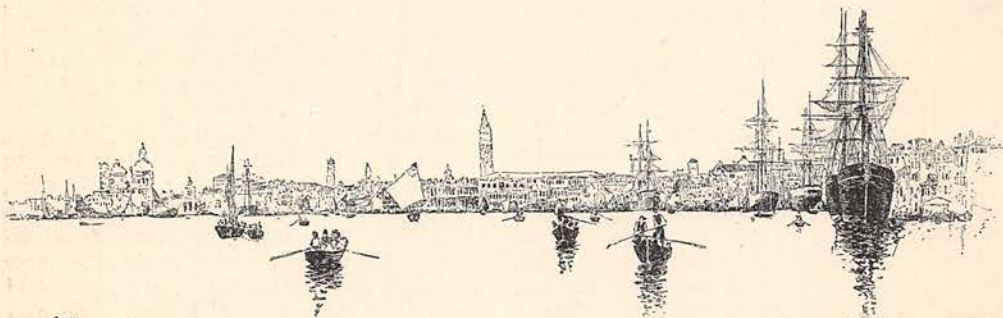
sion in the shape of certain little humorous—ill-humorous—pamphlets (the series of "St. Mark's Rest"), which embody his latest reflections on the subject of Venice and describe the latest atrocities that have been perpetrated there. These latter are numerous and deeply regrettable; but to admit that they have spoiled Venice would be to admit that Venice is easily spoiled,—an admission pregnant, as it seems to us, with disloyalty. Fortunately, one reacts against the Ruskinian contagion, and one hour of the lagoon is worth a hundred pages of demoralized prose. This queer, late-coming prose of Mr. Ruskin (including the revised and condensed issue of the "Stones of Venice," only one little volume of which has appeared, or, perhaps, will ever appear) is all to be read, though much of it seems to be addressed to children of tender age. It is pitched in the nursery-key, and might be supposed to emanate from an angry governess. It is, however, all suggestive, and much of it is delightfully just. There is an inconceivable want of form in it, though the author has spent his life in laying down the principles of form, and scolding people for departing from them; but it throbs and flashes with the love of his subject,—a love disconcerted and abjured, but which has still some of the force of inspiration. Among the many strange things that have befallen Venice, she has had the good fortune to become the object of a passion to a man of splendid genius, who has made her his own, and, in doing so, has made her the world's. There is no better reading at Venice, therefore, as I say, than Ruskin, for every true Venice-lover can separate the wheat from the chaff. The narrow theological spirit, the moralism *à tout propos*, the queer provincialities and pruderies, are mere wild weeds in a mountain of flowers. One may

doubtless be very happy in Venice without reading at all,—without criticising or analyzing, or thinking a strenuous thought. It is a city in which, I suspect, there is very little strenuous thinking, and yet it is a city in which there must be almost as much happiness as misery. The misery of Venice stands there for all the world to see; it is part of the spectacle,—a thorough-going devotee of local color might consistently say it is part of the pleasure. The Venetian people have little to call their own,—little more than the bare privilege of leading their lives in the most beautiful of towns. Their habitations are decayed; their taxes heavy; their pockets light; their opportunities few. One receives an impression, however, that life presents itself to them with attractions not accounted for in this meager train of advantages, and that they are on better terms with it than many people who have made a better bargain. They lie in the sunshine; they dabble in the sea; they wear bright rags; they fall into attitudes and harmonies; they assist at an eternal *conversazione*. It is not easy to say that one would have them other than they are, and it certainly would make an immense difference should they be better fed. The number of persons in Venice who evidently never have enough to eat is painfully large; but it would be more painful if we did not equally perceive that the rich Venetian temperament may bloom upon a meager diet. Nature has been kind to it, and sunshine and leisure and conversation and beautiful views form the greater part of its sustenance. It takes a great deal to make a successful American; but to make a happy Venetian takes only a handful of quick sensibility. The Italian people have, at once, the good and evil fortune to be conscious of few wants; so that if the civilization of a society is measured by the number of its needs, as seems to be the common opinion to-day, it is to be feared that the children of the lagoon would make but a poor figure in a set of comparative tables. Not their

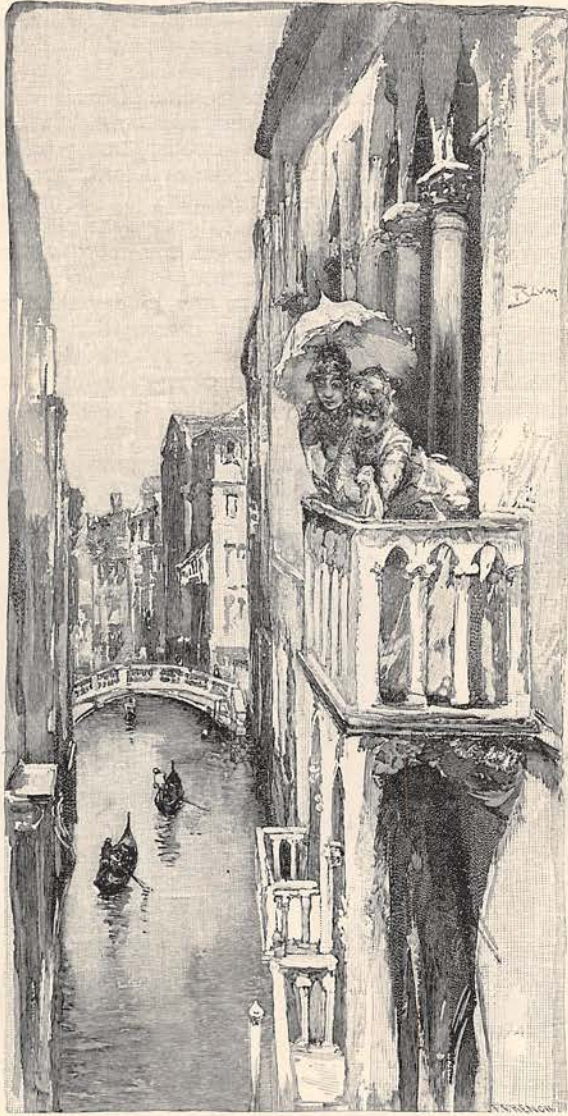
misery, doubtless, but the way they elude their misery, is what pleases the sentimental tourist, who is gratified by the sight of a beautiful race that lives by the aid of its imagination. The way to enjoy Venice is to follow the example of these people, and make the most of simple pleasures. Almost all the pleasures of the place are simple; this may be maintained even under the imputation of ingenious paradox. There is no simpler pleasure than looking at a fine Titian,—unless it be looking at a fine Tintoretto, or strolling into St. Mark's,—it is abominable, the way one falls into the habit,—and resting one's light-wearied eyes upon the windowless gloom; or than floating in a gondola, or hanging over a balcony, or taking one's coffee at Florian's. It is of these superficial pastimes that a Venetian day is composed, and the pleasure of the matter is in the emotions to which they minister. These, fortunately, are of the finest; otherwise, Venice would be insufferably dull. Reading Ruskin is good; reading the old records is, perhaps, better; but the best thing of all is simply staying on. The only way to care for Venice, as she deserves it, is to give her a chance to touch you often,—to linger and remain and return.

II.

THE danger is that you will not linger enough,—a danger of which the author of these lines had known something. It is possible to dislike Venice, and to entertain the sentiment in a responsible and intelligent manner. There are travelers who think the place odious, and those who are not of this opinion often find themselves wishing that the others were only more numerous. The sentimental tourist's only quarrel with his Venice is that he has too many competitors there. He likes to be alone; to be original; to have (to himself, at least) the air of making discoveries. The Venice of



VENICE. (FROM THE PAINTING BY D. MARTIN RICO. BY PERMISSION OF A. J. DREXEL.)



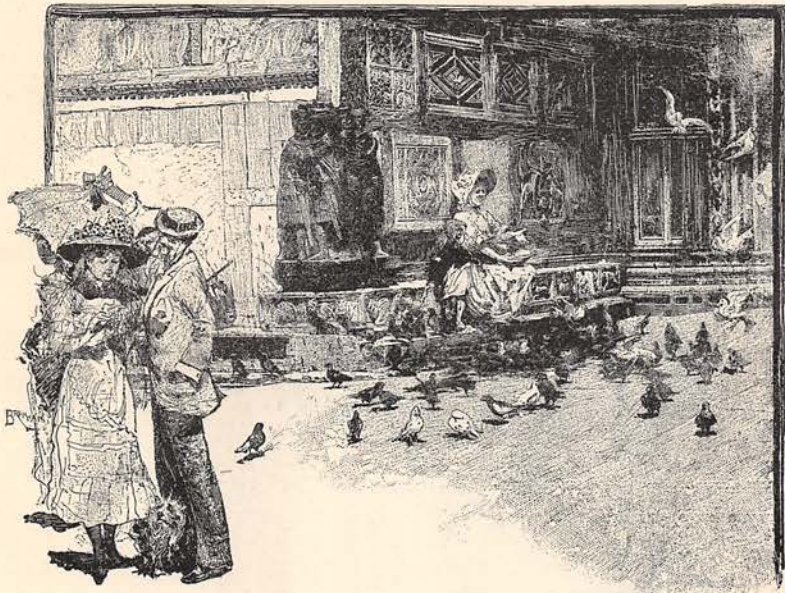
A VENETIAN BALCONY.

to-day is a vast museum where the little wicket that admits you is perpetually turning and creaking, and you march through the institution with a herd of fellow-gazers. There is nothing left to discover or describe, and originality of attitude is completely impossible. This is often very annoying; you can only turn your back on your impertinent playfellow and curse his want of delicacy. But this is not the fault of Venice: it is the fault of the rest of the world. The fault of Venice is that, though it is easy to admire it, it is not so easy to live in it. After you have been there a week, and the bloom of novelty has rubbed off, you wonder whether

you can accommodate yourself to the peculiar conditions. Your old habits become impracticable, and you find yourself obliged to form new ones of an undesirable and unprofitable character. You are tired of your gondola (or you think you are), and you have seen all the principal pictures and heard the names of the palaces announced a dozen times by your gondolier, who brings them out almost as impressively as if he were an English butler bawling titles into a drawing-room. You have walked several hundred times around the Piazza, and bought several bushels of photographs. You have visited the anti-quity-mongers, whose horrible sign-boards dis-

honor some of the grandest vistas in the Grand Canal; you have tried the opera and found it very bad; you have bathed at the Lido and found the water flat. You have begun to have a shipboard-feeling,—to regard the Piazza as an enormous saloon and the Riva degli Schiavoni as a promenade-deck. You are obstructed and engaged; your desire for space is unsatisfied; you miss your usual exercise. You try to take a walk, and you fail, and meantime, as I say, you have come to regard your gondola as a sort of magnified baby's cradle. You have no desire to be rocked to sleep, though you are sufficiently kept awake by the irritation produced, as you gaze across the shallow lagoon, by the attitude of the perpetual gondolier, with his

ness. The loss is your own, moreover; it is not,—with all deference to your personal attractions,—that of your companions who remain behind; for though there are some disagreeable things in Venice, there is nothing so disagreeable as the visitors. The conditions are peculiar, but your intolerance of them evaporates before it has had time to become a prejudice. When you have called for the bill to go, pay it and remain, and you will find on the morrow that you are deeply attached to Venice. It is by living there from day to day that you feel the fullness of its charm; that you invite its exquisite influence to sink into your spirit. The place is as changeable as a nervous woman, and you know it only when you know all the



FEEDING THE PIGEONS IN ST. MARK'S SQUARE.

turned-out toes, his protruded chin, his absurdly unscientific stroke. The canals have a horrible smell, and the everlasting Piazza, where you have looked repeatedly at every article in every shop-window and found them all rubbish, where the young Venetians who sell bead-bracelets and "panoramas" are perpetually thrusting their wares at you, where the same tightly buttoned officers are forever sucking the same black weeds, at the same empty tables, in front of the same *caffès*,—the Piazza, as I say, has resolved itself into a sort of magnificent tread-mill. This is the state of mind of those shallow inquirers who find Venice all very well for a week; and if in such a state of mind you take your departure, you act with fatal rash-

aspects of its beauty. It has high spirits or low, it is pale or red, gray or pink, cold or warm, fresh or wan, according to the weather or the hour. It is always interesting and almost always sad; but it has a thousand occasional graces, and is always liable to happy accidents. You become extraordinarily fond of these things; you count upon them; they make part of your life. Tenderly fond you become; there is something indefinable in those depths of personal acquaintance that gradually establish themselves. The place seems to personify itself, to become human and sentient, and conscious of your affection. You desire to embrace it, to caress it, to possess it; and, finally, a soft sense of possession grows up, and your visit becomes a per-



THE BRIDGE OF SIGHS.

petual love-affair. It is very true that if you go there, like the author of these lines, about the middle of March, a certain amount of disappointment is possible. He had not been there for several years, and in the interval the beautiful and helpless city had suffered an increase of injury. The barbarians are in full possession, and you tremble for what they may do. You are reminded, from the moment of your arrival, that Venice scarcely exists any more as a city at all; that it exists only as a battered peep-show and bazaar. There

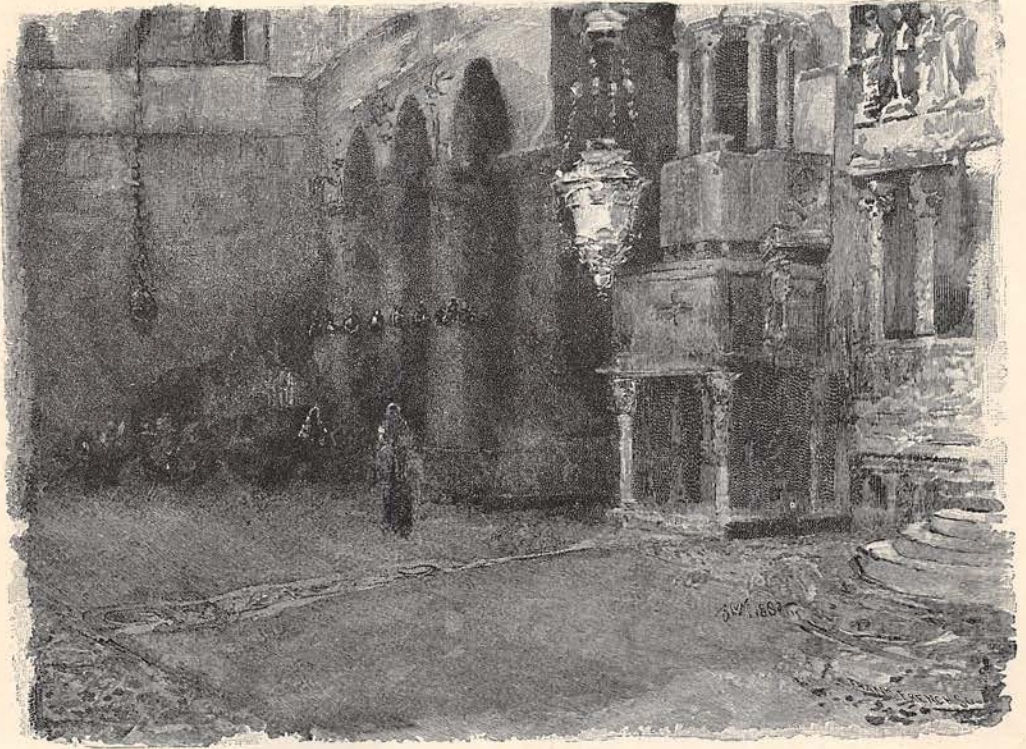
was a horde of savage Germans encamped in the Piazza, and they filled the Ducal Palace and the Academy with their uproar. The English and Americans came a little later. They came in good time, with a great many French, who were discreet enough to make very long repasts at the Caffè Quadri, during which they were out of the way. The months of April and May, of the year 1881, were not, as a general thing, a favorable season for visiting the Ducal Palace and the Academy. The valet-de-place had marked them for his own and held triumphant possession of them. He celebrates his triumphs in a terrible brassy voice, which re-sounds all over the place, and has, whatever



ST. MARK'S AND THE CAMPANILE.

language he be speaking, the accent of some other idiom. During all the spring months in Venice these gentry abound in the great resorts, and they lead their helpless captives through churches and galleries in dense, ir-

little warrant for regarding it as a religious affair. The restoration of the outer walls, which has lately been so much attacked and defended, is certainly a great shock. Of the necessity of the work only an expert is, I sup-



IN ST. MARK'S.

responsible groups. They infest the Piazza; they pursue you along the Riva; they hang about the bridges and the doors of the *caffes*. In saying just now that I was disappointed at first, I had chiefly in mind the impression that assails me to-day in the whole precinct of St. Mark's. The condition of this ancient sanctuary is surely a great scandal. The peddlers and commissioners ply their trade—often a very unclean one—at the very door of the temple; they follow you across the threshold, into the sacred dusk, and pull your sleeve, and hiss into your ear, scuffling with each other for customers. There is a great deal of dishonor about St. Mark's altogether, and if Venice, as I say, has become a great bazaar, this exquisite edifice is now the biggest booth.

III.

It is treated as a booth in all ways, and if it had not, somehow, a great spirit of solemnity within it, the traveler would soon have

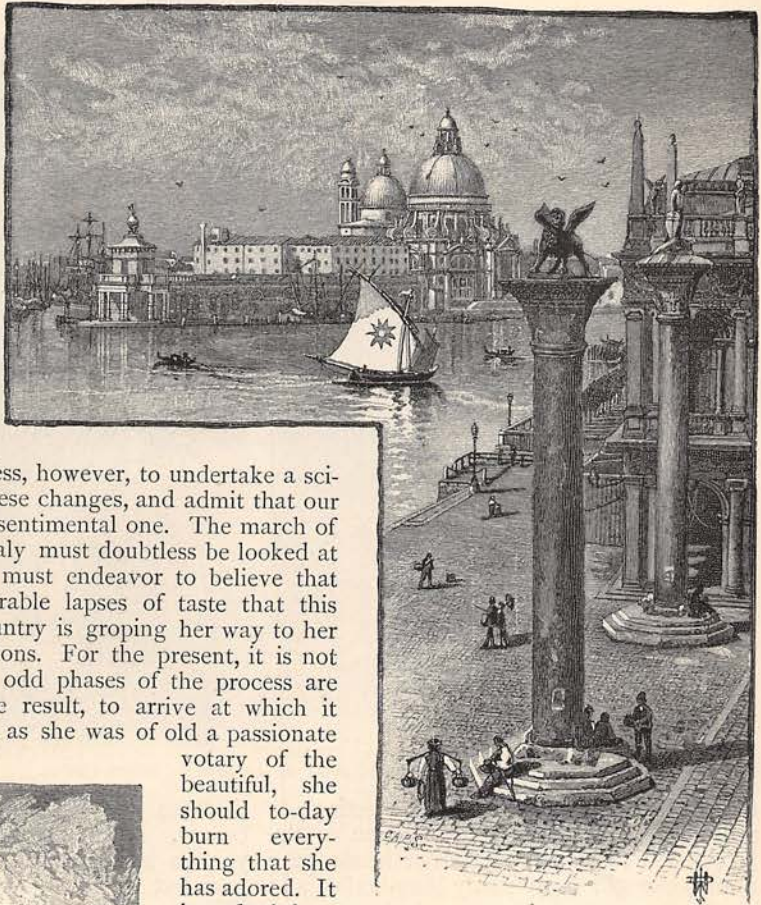
pose, in a position to judge; but there is no doubt that, if a necessity it be, it is a deeply regrettable one. To no more distressing necessity have people of taste lately had to resign themselves. Wherever the hand of the restorer has been laid, all semblance of beauty has vanished, which is a sad fact, considering that the external loveliness of St. Mark's has been for ages less impressive only than that of the still comparatively uninjured interior. I know not what is the measure of necessity in such a case, and it appears indeed to be a very delicate question. To-day, at any rate, that admirable harmony of faded mosaic and marble, which, to the eye of the traveler emerging from the narrow streets that lead to the Piazza, filled all the farther end of it with a sort of dazzling, silvery presence,—to-day this lovely vision is in a way to be completely reformed, and, indeed, well-nigh abolished. The old softness and mellowness of color,—the work of the quiet centuries and of the breath of the salt sea,—is giving way to large, crude patches of new material, which

have the effect of a monstrous malady rather than of a restoration to health. They look like blotches of red and white paint and dishonorable smears of chalk on the cheeks of a noble matron. The face toward the Piazzetta is in especial the newest-looking thing conceivable,—as new as a new pair of boots, or as the morning's pa-

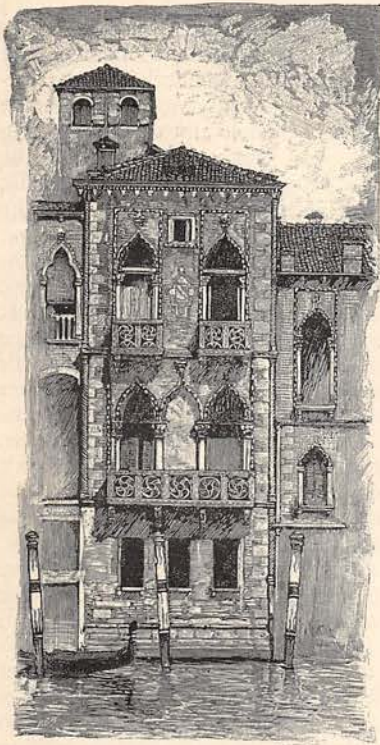
per. We do not profess, however, to undertake a scientific quarrel with these changes, and admit that our complaint is a purely sentimental one. The march of industry in united Italy must doubtless be looked at as a whole, and one must endeavor to believe that it is through innumerable lapses of taste that this deeply interesting country is groping her way to her place among the nations. For the present, it is not to be denied, certain odd phases of the process are more visible than the result, to arrive at which it seems necessary that, as she was of old a passionate

votary of the beautiful, she should to-day burn everything that she has adored. It is, doubtless, too soon to

judge her, and there are moments when one is willing to forgive her even the restoration of St. Mark's. Inside, as well, there has been a considerable attempt to make the place more tidy; but the general effect, as yet, has not seriously suffered. What I chiefly remember is the straightening out of that dark and rugged old pavement,—those deep undulations of primitive mosaic, in which the wandering tourist was thought to perceive an intended resemblance to the waves of the ocean. Whether intended or not, the analogy was an image the more in a treasure-house of images; but from a considerable portion of the church it has now disappeared. Throughout the greater part, indeed, the pavement remains as recent generations have known it,—dark, rich, cracked, uneven, spotted with porphyry and time-blacked malachite, and polished by the knees of innumerable worshippers; but in other large sections the idea imitated by the restorers is that of the ocean in a dead calm, and the model they have taken, the floor of a London club-house or of a New York hotel. I think no Venetian and scarcely any Italian cares much for such differences; and when, a year ago, people in England were writing to the "Times" about



THE PIAZZETTA.



DESDEMONA'S HOUSE.



RIALTO BRIDGE, BUILT BY ANTONIO DA PONTE, 1588-91.

the whole business, and holding meetings to protest against it, the dear children of the lagoon (so far as they heard, or heeded, the rumor) thought them partly busy-bodies and partly asses. Busy-bodies they doubtless were, but they took a good deal of disinterested trouble. It never occurs to the Venetian mind of to-day that such trouble may be worth taking; the Venetian mind vainly endeavors to conceive a state of existence in which personal questions are so insipid that people have to look for grievances in the wrongs of brick and marble. I must not, however, speak of St. Mark's as if I had the pretension of giving a description of it, or as if the reader desired one. The reader has been too well served already. It is surely the best-described building in the world. Open the "Stones of Venice," open Théophile Gautier's "Italia," and you will see. These writers take it very seriously, and it is only because there is another way of taking it that I venture to speak of it: the way that offers itself after you have been in Venice a couple of months, and the light is not in the great Square, and you pass in under the pictured porticoes, with a feeling of habit and friendliness, and a desire for something cool and dark. There are moments, after all, when the church is comparatively quiet and empty, when you may

sit there with an easy consciousness of its beauty. From the moment, of course, that you go into an Italian church for any purpose but to say your prayers, or look at the ladies, you rank yourself among the trooping barbarians I just spoke of; you treat the place like an orifice in the peep-show. Still, it is almost a spiritual function,—or, at the worst, an amorous one,—to feed one's eyes on the mighty color that drops from the hollow vaults and thickens the air with its richness. It is all so quiet and sad and faded; and yet it is all so brilliant and living. The strange figures in the mosaic pictures, bending with the curve of niche and vault, stare down through the glowing dimness; and the burnished gold that stands behind them catches the light on its little, uneven cubes. St. Mark's owes nothing of its character to the beauty of proportion or perspective; there is nothing grandly balanced or far-arching; there are no long lines nor triumphs of the perpendicular. The church arches indeed; but it arches like a dusky cavern. Beauty of surface, of tone, of detail, of things near enough to touch and kneel upon and lean against,—it is from this the effect proceeds. In this sort of beauty the place is incredibly rich, and you may go there every day and find afresh some lurking pictorial nook. It is a treasury of bits, as

the painters say; and there are usually three or four painters, with their easels set up in uncertain equilibrium, on the undulating floor. It is not easy to catch the real complexion of St. Mark's, and these laudable attempts at portraiture are apt to look either lurid or livid. But, if you cannot paint the old loose-looking marble slabs, the great panels of basalt and jasper, the crucifixes, of which the lonely anguish looks deeper in the vertical light, the tabernacles whose open doors disclose a dark Byzantine image, spotted with dull, crooked gems,—if you cannot paint these things, you can at least grow fond of them. You grow fond even of the old benches of red marble, partly worn away by the breeches of many generations, and attached to the base of those wide pilasters, of which the precious plating, delightful in its faded brownness, with a faint gray bloom upon it, bulges and yawns a little with honorable age.

IV.

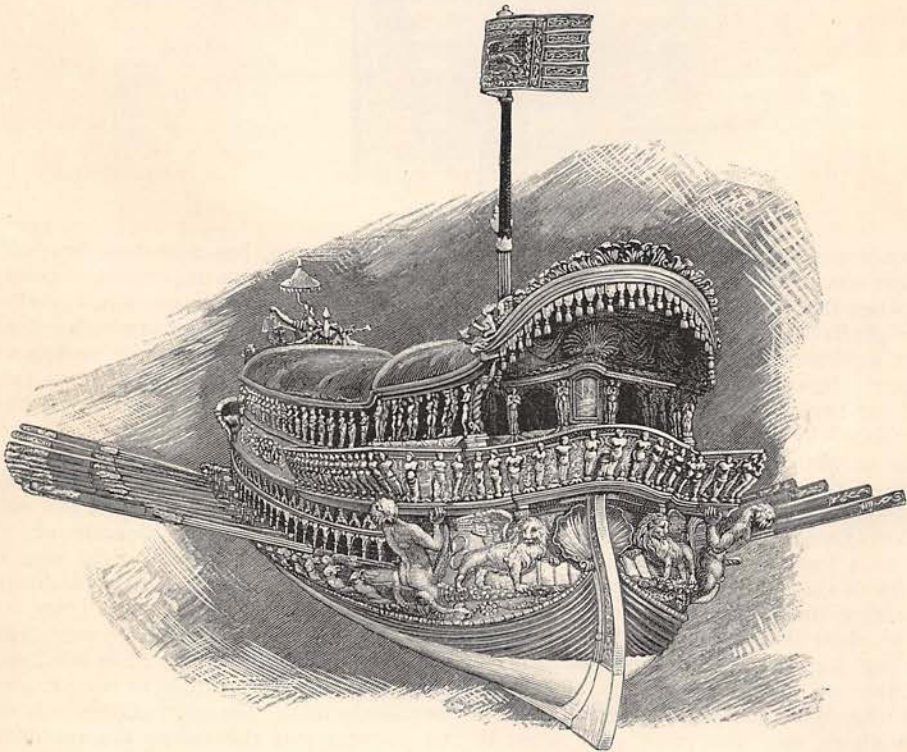
EVEN at first, when the vexatious sense of the city of the Doges having been reduced to earning its living as a curiosity-shop was in its keenness, there was a great deal of entertainment to be got from lodging on the Riva degli Schiavoni and looking out at the far-

shimmering lagoon. There was entertainment indeed in simply getting into the place and observing the queer incidents of a Venetian *aménagement*. A great many persons contribute, indirectly, to this undertaking, and it

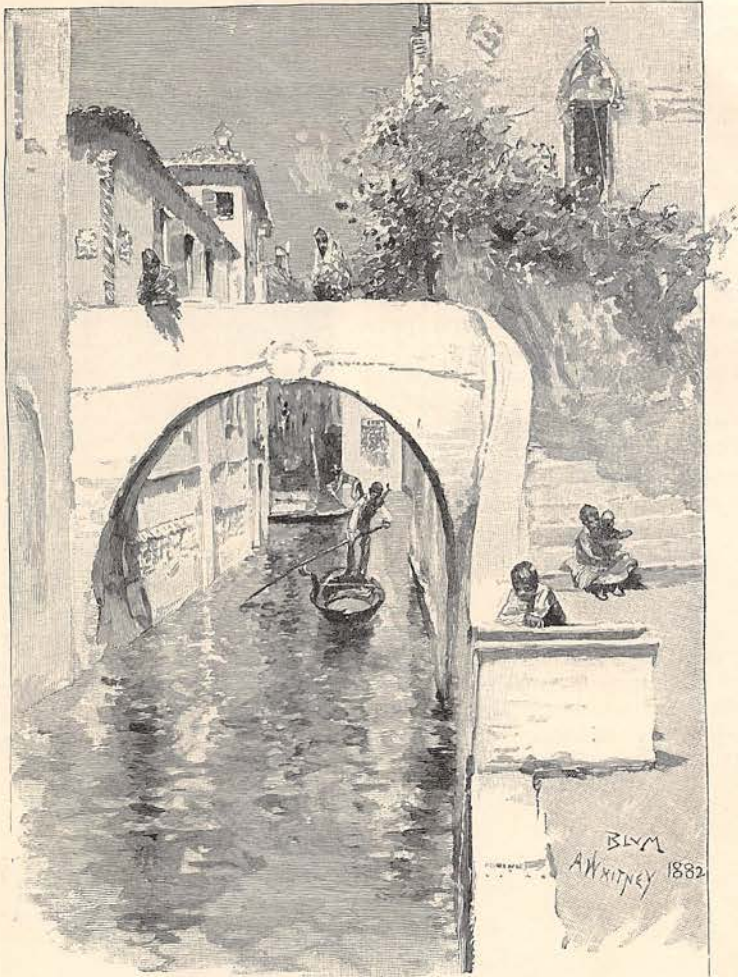


SAN GIORGIO MAGGIORE.

is surprising how they spring out at you during your novitiate, to remind you that they are bound up in some mysterious manner with the constitution of your little establishment. It was an interesting problem, for instance, to trace the subtle connection existing between the niece of the landlady and the occupancy of the fourth floor. Superficially,



BUCENTAUR, THE STATE BARGE OF VENICE.



A NARROW CANAL.

it was not easily visible, as the young lady in question was a dancer at the Fenice theater—or when that was closed, at the Rossini—and might have been supposed to be absorbed by her professional duties. It proved to be necessary, however, that she should hover about the premises in a velvet jacket and a pair of black kid gloves, with one little, white button; as, also, that she should apply a thick coating of powder to her face, which had a charming, oval, and a sweet, weak expression, like that of most of the Venetian young girls, who, as a general thing (it was not a peculiarity of the landlady's niece), are fond of besmearing themselves with flour. It soon became plain that it is not only the wavy-twinkling lagoon that you behold from a habitation on the Riva; you see a little of everything Venetian. Straight across, before my windows, rose the great pink mass of

Palladian church, has a success beyond all reason. It is a success of position, of color, of the immense detached Campanile, tipped with a tall, gold angel. I know not whether it is because San Giorgio is so grandly conspicuous, and because it has a great deal of worn, faded-looking brick-work; but for many persons the whole place has a kind of suffusion of rosiness. If we were asked what is the leading color at Venice we should say pink, and yet after all we cannot remember that this elegant tint occurs very often. It is a faint, shimmering, airy, watery pink; the bright sea-light seems to flash with it, and the pale whitish-green of lagoon and canal to drink it in. There is, indeed, in Venice a great deal of very evident brick-work, which is never fresh nor loud in color, but always burnt out, as it were, always exquisitely mild. There are certain little mental pictures that rise before the sentimental tourist at the simple mention, written or

spoken, of the places he has loved. When I hear, when I see, the magical name I have written above these pages, it is not of the great Square that I think, with its strange basilica and its high arcades, nor of the wide mouth of the Grand Canal, with the stately steps and the well-poised dome of the Salute; it is not of the low lagoon, nor the sweet Piazzetta, nor the dark chambers of St. Mark's. I simply see a narrow canal in the heart of the city,—a patch of green water and a surface of pink wall. The gondola moves slowly; it gives a great, smooth swerve, passes under a bridge, and the gondolier's cry, carried over the quiet water, makes a kind of splash in the stillness. A girl is passing over the little bridge, which has an arch like a camel's back,

looking at it from his window, when he is not floating about with that delightful sense of being for the moment a part of it, which any gentleman in a gondola is free to entertain. Venetian windows and balconies are a dreadful lure, and while you rest your elbows on these cushioned ledges the precious hours fly away. But, in truth, Venice is not, in fair weather, a place for concentration of mind. The effort required for sitting down to a writing-table is heroic, and the brightest page of MS. looks dull beside the brilliancy of your *milieu*. All nature beckons you forth, and murmurs to you sophistically that such hours should be devoted to collecting impressions. Afterward, in ugly places, at unprivileged times, you can convert your



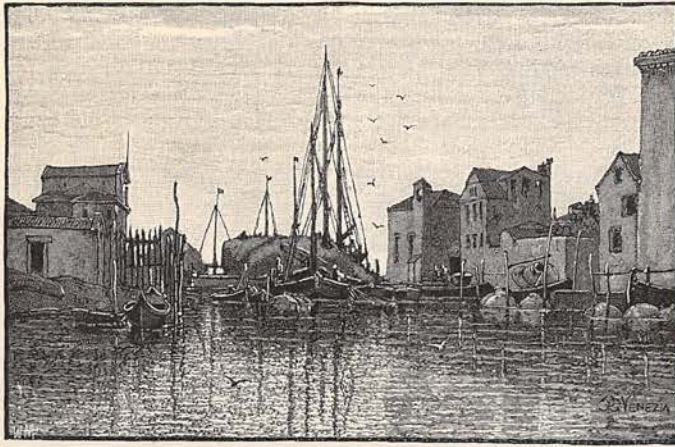
MONKS GOING TO THE CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA DELLA SALUTE, ON THE FÊTE OF SANTO ANTONIO.
(FROM PHOTOGRAPH OF PAINTING BY MISS CLARA MONTALBA.)

with an old shawl on her head, which makes her look charming; you see her against the sky as you float beneath. The pink of the old wall seems to fill the whole place; it sinks even into the opaque water. Over the wall is a garden, out of which the long arm of a white June rose—the roses of Venice are splendid—has flung itself by way of spontaneous ornament. On the other side of this small water-way is a great, shabby façade of gothic windows and balconies,—balconies on which dirty clothes are hung, and under which a cavernous-looking doorway opens from a low flight of slimy water-steps. It is very hot and still, the canal has a queer smell, and the whole place is enchanting. It is poor work, however, talking about the colors of things in Venice. The sentimental tourist is perpetually

impressions into prose. Fortunately for the present prosier, the weather was not always fine; the first month was wet and windy, and it was better to look at the lagoon from an open casement than to respond to the advances of persuasive gondoliers. Even then, however, there was a constant entertainment in the view. It was all cold color, and the steel-gray floor of the lagoon was streaked the wrong way by the wind. Then there were charming, cool intervals, when the churches, the houses, the anchored fishing-boats, the whole gently curving line of the Riva, seemed to be washed with a pearly white. Later, it all turned warm,—warm to the eye as well as to other senses. After the middle of May the whole place was in a glow. The sea took on a thousand shades, but they were

only infinite variations of blue, and those rosy walls I just spoke of began to flush in the thick sunshine. Every patch of color, every yard of weather-stained stucco, every glimpse of nestling garden or daub of sky above a *calle*, began to shine and sparkle,—began, as the painters say, to “compose.” The lagoon was streaked with odd currents, which played across it like huge, smooth finger-marks. The gondolas multiplied and

as you see this movement in profile, in a gondola that passes you,—see, as you recline on your own low cushions, the arching body of the gondolier lifted up against the sky,—it has a kind of nobleness which suggests an image on a Greek frieze. The gondolier at Venice is your very good friend,—if you choose him happily,—and on the quality of the personage depends a good deal that of your impressions. He is a part of your daily life,



HAY-BOATS—SMALL CANAL OFF “CANALE DELLA GIUDECCA.”

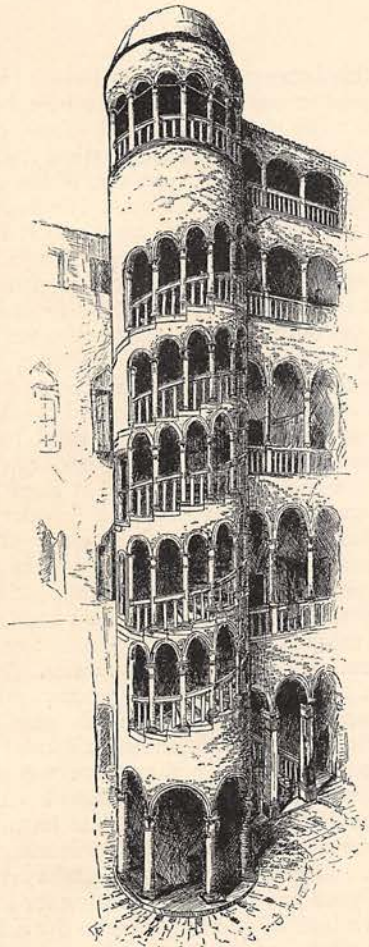
spotted it all over; every gondola and every gondolier looking, at a distance, precisely like every other. There is something strange and fascinating in this mysterious impersonality of the gondola. It has an identity when you are in it, but, thanks to their all being of the same size, shape, and color, and of the same deportment and gait, it has none, or as little as possible, as you see it pass before you. From my windows on the Riva there was always the same silhouette,—the long, black, slender skiff lifting its head and throwing it back a little, moving, yet seeming not to move, with the grotesquely graceful figure on the poop. This figure inclines, as may be, more to the graceful or to the grotesque,—standing in the “second position” of the dancing-master, but indulging, from the waist upward, in a freedom of movement which that functionary would deprecate. One may say, as a general thing, that there is something rather awkward in the movement of even the most graceful gondolier, and something graceful in the movement of the most awkward. In the graceful men of course the grace predominates, and nothing can be finer than the large, firm way in which, from their point of vantage, they throw themselves over their tremendous oar. It has the boldness of a plunging bird, and the regularity of a pendulum. Sometimes,

your double, your shadow, your complement. Most people, I think, either like their gondolier or hate him; and if they like him, like him very much. In this case they take an interest in him after his departure; wish him to be sure of employment, speak of him as the gem of gondoliers, and tell their friends to be certain to “secure” him. There is usually no difficulty in securing him; there is nothing elusive or reluctant about a gondolier. They are, for the most part, excellent fellows, and the sentimental tourist must always have a kindness for them. More than the rest of the population, of course, they are the children of Venice; they are associated with its idiosyncrasy, with its safest charm, with its silence, with its melancholy. When I say they are associated with its silence, I should immediately add that they are associated, also, with its sound. Among themselves they are an extraordinary talkative company. They chatter at the *traghetto*, where they always have some sharp point under discussion; they bawl across the canals; they bespeak your commands as you approach; they defy each other from afar. If you happen to have a *traghetto* under your window, you are well aware that they are a vocal race. I should go even further than I went just now, and say that the voice of the gondolier is, in fact,

the sound of Venice. There is scarcely any other, and that, indeed, is part of the interest of the place. There is no noise there save distinctly human noise; no rumbling, no vague uproar, nor rattle of wheels and hoofs. It is all articulate, personal sound. One may say, indeed, that Venice is, emphatically, the city of conversation; people talk all over the place, because there is nothing to interfere with their being heard. Among the populace it is a kind of family party. The still water carries the voice, and good Venetians exchange confidences at a distance of half a mile. It saves a world of trouble, and they don't like trouble. Their delightful garrulous language helps them to make Venetian life a long *conversazione*. This language, with its soft elisions, its odd transpositions, its kindly contempt for consonants and other disagreeables, has in it something peculiarly human and accommodating. If your gondolier had no other merit, he would have the merit that he speaks Venetian. This may rank as a merit, even—some people perhaps would say especially—when you don't understand what he says. But he adds to it other graces which make him an agreeable feature in your life. The price he sets on his services is touchingly small, and he has a happy art of being obsequious, without being, or, at least, without seeming abject. For occasional liberalities he evinces an almost lyrical gratitude. In short, he has delightfully good manners, a merit which he shares, for the most part, with Venetians at large. One grows very fond of these people, and the reason of one's fondness is the frankness and sweetness of their address. That of the Italian people, in general, has much to recommend it; but in the Venetian manner there is something peculiarly ingratiating. One feels that the race is old, that it has a long and rich civilization in its blood, and that if it has not been blessed by fortune, and that if it has not been polished by time. It has not a genius for morality, and, indeed, makes few pretensions in that direction. It scruples not to represent the false as the true, and is liable to confusion in the assignation of property. It is peculiarly susceptible to the tender sentiment, which it cultivates with a graceful disregard of the more rigid formalities. I am not sure that it is very brave, and was not struck with its being very industrious. But it has an unflinching sense of the amenities of life; the poorest Venetian is a natural man of the world. He is better company than persons of his class are apt to be among the nations of industry and virtue—where people are also, sometimes, perceived to lie and steal. He has a great desire to please and to be pleased.

v.

IN this latter point the cold-blooded stranger begins at last to imitate him; he begins to lead a life that is, before all things, good-humored: unless, indeed, he allow himself, like Mr. Ruskin, to be put out of his good-humor by Titian and Tiepolo. The hours he spends among the pictures are his best hours in Venice, and I am ashamed of myself to have written so much of common things when I might have been making festoons of the names of the masters. But, when we have covered our page with such festoons, what more is left to say? When one has said Carpaccio and Bellini, Tintoretto and the Veronese, one has struck a note that must be left to resound at will. Everything has been said about the mighty painters, and it is of little importance to record that one traveler the more has found them to his taste. "Went this morning to the Academy; was very much pleased with Titian's 'Assumption.'" That honest phrase has doubtless been written in many a traveler's diary, and was not indiscreet on the part of its author. But it appeals little to the general reader, and we must, moreover, not expose our deepest feelings. Since I have mentioned Titian's "Assumption," I must say that there are some people who have been less pleased with it than the gentleman we have just imagined. It is one of the possible disappointments of Venice, and you may, if you like, take advantage of your privilege of not caring for it. It imparts a look of great richness to the side of the beautiful room of the Academy on which it hangs; but the same room contains two or three works less known to fame which are equally capable of inspiring a passion. "The 'Annunciation' struck me as coarse and superficial": that was once written in a simple-minded traveler's note-book. At Venice, strange to say, Titian is altogether a disappointment; the city of his adoption is far from containing the best of him. Madrid, Paris, London, Florence, Dresden, Munich,—these are the homes of his greatness. There are other painters who have but a single home, and the greatest of these is Tintoretto. Close beside him sit Carpaccio and Bellini, who make with him the dazzling Venetian trio. Paul Veronese may be seen and measured in other places; he is most splendid in Venice, but he shines in Paris and in Dresden. You may walk out of the noon-day dusk of Trafalgar Square in November, and in one of the chambers of the National Gallery see the family of Darius rustling and pleading and weeping at the feet of Alexander. Alexander is a beautiful young Venetian in crimson



SCALA ANTICA IN THE COURT OF GOLDONI'S HOUSE.

pantaloons, and the picture sends a glow into the cold London twilight. You may sit before it for an hour, and dream you are floating to the water-gate of the Ducal Palace, where a certain old beggar, with one of the handsomest heads in the world—he has sat to a hundred painters for Doges, and for personages more sacred—has a prescriptive right to pretend to pull your gondola to the steps and to hold out a greasy, immemorial cap. But you must go to Venice, in fact, to see the other masters, who form part of your life while you are there, and illuminate your view of the universe. It is difficult to express one's relation to them; for the whole Venetian art-world is so near, so familiar, so much an extension and adjunct of the actual world, that it seems almost invidious to say one owes more to one of them than to another. Nowhere (not even in Holland, where the correspondence between the real aspects and the little polished canvases is so constant and so exquisite) do art and life seem so inter-

fused and, as it were, so consanguineous. All the splendor of light and color, all the Venetian air and the Venetian history, are on the walls and ceilings of the palaces; and all the genius of the masters, all the images and visions they have left upon canvas, seem to tremble in the sunbeams and dance upon the waves. That is the perpetual interest of the place,—that you live in a certain sort of knowledge, as in a rosy cloud. You don't go into the churches and galleries by way of a change from the streets; you go into them because they offer you an exquisite reproduction of the things that surround you. All Venice was both model and painter, and life was so pictorial that art could not help becoming so. With all diminutions, life is pictorial still, and this fact gives an extraordinary freshness to one's perception of the great Venetian works. You judge of them not as a connoisseur, but as a man of the world, and you enjoy them because they are so social and so actual. Perhaps, of all works of art that are equally great, they demand least reflection on the part of the spectator,—they make least of a mystery of being enjoyed. Reflection only confirms your admiration, but it is almost ashamed to show its head. These things speak so frankly and benignantly to the sense that we feel there is reason as well in such an address. But it is hard, as I say, to express all this, and it is painful as well to attempt it—painful, because in the memory of vanished hours, so filled with beauty, the sense of present loss is overwhelming. Exquisite hours, enveloped in light and silence, to have known them once is to have always a terrible standard of enjoyment. Certain lovely mornings of May and June come back with an ineffaceable fairness. Venice is not smothered in flowers at this season, in the manner of Florence and Rome; but the sea and sky themselves seem to blossom and rustle. The gondola waits at the wave-washed steps, and if you are wise you will take your place beside a discriminating companion. Such a companion, in Venice, should, of course, be of the sex that discriminates most finely. An intelligent woman who knows her Venice seems doubly intelligent, and it makes no woman's perceptions less keen to be aware that she cannot help looking graceful as she glides over the waves. The handsome Pasquale, with uplifted oar, awaits your command, knowing, in a general way, from observation of your habits, that your intention is to go to see a picture or two. It perhaps does not immensely matter what picture you choose: the whole affair is so charming. It is charming to wander through the light and shade of intricate canals, with perpetual



STATUE OF COLLEONI, BY VERROCCHIO. (IN THE CAMPO DI S. ZANIPOLLO.)

architecture above you and perpetual fluidity beneath. It is charming to disembark at the polished steps of a little empty *campo*—a sunny, shabby square, with an old well in the middle, an old church on one side, and tall Venetian windows looking down. Sometimes the windows are tenantless; sometimes a lady

Baptism of Christ, by Cima, which, I believe has been more or less repainted. You can make the thing out in spots; you can see that it has a fullness of perfection. But you turn away from it with a stiff neck, and promise yourself consolation in the Academy and at the Madonna dell' Orto, where two



VIEW FROM THE GARDEN ON THE ISLAND OF SAN LAZZARO.

in a faded dressing-gown is leaning vaguely on the sill. There is always an old man holding out his hat for coppers; there are always three or four small boys dodging possible umbrella-pokes while they precede you, in the manner of custodians, to the door of the church.

VI.

THE churches of Venice are rich in pictures, and many a masterpiece lurks in the unaccommodating gloom of side-chapels and sacristies. Many a noble work is perched behind the dusty candles and muslin roses of a scantily visited altar; some of them, indeed, are hidden behind the altar, in a darkness that can never be explored. The facilities offered you for approaching the picture, in such cases, are a kind of mockery of your irritated desire. You stand on tip-toe on a three-legged stool, you climb a rickety ladder, you almost mount upon the shoulders of the *custode*. You do everything but see the picture. You see just enough to perceive that it is beautiful. You catch a glimpse of a divine head, of a fig-tree against a mellow sky; but the rest is impenetrable mystery. You renounce all hope, for instance, of approaching the magnificent Cima le Conegliano in San Giovanni in Bragora; and bethinking yourself of the immaculate purity that dwells in the works of this master, you renounce it with chagrin and pain. Behind the high altar, in that church, there hangs a

noble picture, by the same hand,—pictures as clear as a summer twilight,—present themselves in better circumstances. It may be said, as a general thing, that you never see Tintoretto. You admire him, you adore him, you think him the greatest of painters, but, in the great majority of cases, you don't see him. This is partly his own fault: so many of his works have turned to blackness, and are positively rotting in their frames. At the Scuola di San Rocco, where there are acres of Tintoretto's, there is scarcely anything at all adequately visible, save the immense "Crucifixion" in the upper story. It is true that in looking at this huge composition you look at many pictures; it has not only a multitude of figures, but a wealth of episodes; and you pass from one of these to the other, as if you were "doing" a gallery. Surely, no single picture in the world contains more of human life; there is everything in it, including the most exquisite beauty. It is one of the greatest things of art; it is always interesting. There are pictures by Tintoretto which contain touches more exquisite, revelations of beauty more radiant, but there is no other such vision of an intense reality and a splendid execution. The interest, the impressiveness, of that whole corner of Venice, however melancholy the charm of these gorgeous and ill-lighted chambers, gives a strange importance to a visit to the Scuola. Nothing that all travelers go to see appears to suffer less from the incursions

of travelers. It is one of the loveliest booths of the bazaar, and the author of these lines has always had the good fortune, which he wishes to every other traveler, of having it to himself. I think most visitors find the place rather alarming and wicked-looking. They walk about a while among the fitful figures that gleam here and there out of the great tapestry (as it were) with which Tintoretto has hung all the walls, and then, depressed and bewildered by the portentous solemnity of these objects, by strange glimpses of unnatural scenes, by the echo of their lonely footsteps on the vast stone floors, they take a hasty departure, and find themselves again, with a sense of release from danger, and of the *genius loci* having been a sort of mad white-washer who worked with a bad mixture, in the bright light of the *campo*, among the beggars, the orange-venders, and the passing gondolas. Solemn, indeed, is the place, solemn and strangely suggestive, for the simple reason that we shall scarcely find four walls elsewhere that inclose within a like area an equal quantity of genius. The air is thick with it, and dense and difficult to breathe; for it was genius that was not happy, inasmuch as it lacked the art to fix itself for ever. It is not immortality that we breathe at the Scuola di San Rocco, but conscious, reluctant mortality. Fortunately, however, we have the Ducal Palace, where everything is so brilliant and splendid that poor, dusky Tintoretto is lifted in spite of himself into the concert. This deeply original building is, of course, the loveliest thing in Venice, and a morning's stroll there is a wonderful illumination. Cunningly select your hour—half the enjoyment of Venice is a question of dodging—and go at about one o'clock, when the tourists have gone to lunch and the echoes of the charming chambers have gone to sleep among the sunbeams; there is no brighter place in Venice, by which I mean that, on the whole, there is none half so bright. The reflected sunshine plays up through the great windows from the glittering lagoon, and shimmers and twinkles over gilded walls and ceilings. All the history of Venice, all its splendid, stately past, glows around you in a strong sea-light. Every one here is magnificent, but the great Veronese is the most magnificent of all. He swims before you in a silver cloud; he thrives in an eternal morning. The deep blue sky burns behind him, streaked across with milky bars; the white colonnades sustain the richest canopies, under which the first gentlemen and ladies in the world both render homage and receive it. Their glorious garments rustle in the air of the sea, and their sun-lighted faces are the very complexion of Venice. The mixture of

pride and piety, of politics and religion, of art and patriotism, gives a magnificent dignity to every scene. Never was a painter more nobly joyous, never did an artist take a greater delight in life, seeing it all as a kind of breezy festival and feeling it through the medium of perpetual success. He revels in the gold-framed ovals of the ceilings, with the fluttering movement of an embroidered banner that tosses itself into the blue. He was the happiest of painters, and he produced the happiest picture in the world. The "Rape of Europa" hardly deserves this title; it is impossible to look at it without aching with envy. Nowhere else in art is such a temperament revealed; never did inclination and opportunity combine to express such enjoyment. The mixture of flowers and gems and brocade, of blooming flesh and shining sea and waving groves, of youth, health, movement, desire,—all this is the brightest vision that ever descended upon the soul of a painter. Happy the artist who could entertain such a vision; happy the artist who could paint it as the "Rape of Europa" is painted. Tintoretto's visions were not so bright as that; but he had several that were radiant enough. In the room that contains the "Rape of Europa" are several smaller canvases by the greatly more complex genius of the Scuola di San Rocco, which are almost simple in their loveliness, almost happy in their simplicity. They have kept their brightness through the centuries, and they shine with their neighbors in those golden rooms. There is a piece of painting in one of them which is one of the sweetest things in Venice, and which reminds one afresh of those wild flowers of execution that bloom so profusely and so unheeded in the dark corners of all of Tintoretto's work. "Pallas chasing away Mars" is, I believe, the name that is given to the picture; and it represents in fact a young woman of noble appearance, administering a gentle push, to a fine young man in armor, as if to tell him to keep his distance. It is of the gentleness of this push that I speak, the charming way in which she puts out her arm, with a single bracelet on it, and rests her young hand, with its rosy fingers parted, upon his dark breast-plate. She bends her enchanting head with the effort,—a head which has all the strange fairness that Tintoretto always sees in women,—and the soft, living, flesh-like glow of all those members, over which the brush has scarcely paused in its course, is as pretty an example of genius as all Venice can show. But why speak of Tintoretto when I can say nothing of the great "Paradise," which unfolds its somewhat smoky splendor, and the won-



THE DUCAL PALACE.

der of its multitudinous circles, in one of the other chambers? If it were not one of the first pictures in the world, it would be about the biggest, and it must be confessed that at first the spectator gets from it chiefly an impression of quantity. Then he sees that this quantity is really wealth; that the dim confusion of faces is a magnificent composition, and that some of the details of this composition are supremely beautiful. It is impossible, however, in a retrospect of Venice, to specify one's happiest hours, though, as one looks backward, certain ineffaceable moments start here and there into vividness. How is it possible to forget one's visits to the sacristy of the Frari, however frequent they may have been, and the great work of John Bellini which forms the treasure of that apartment?

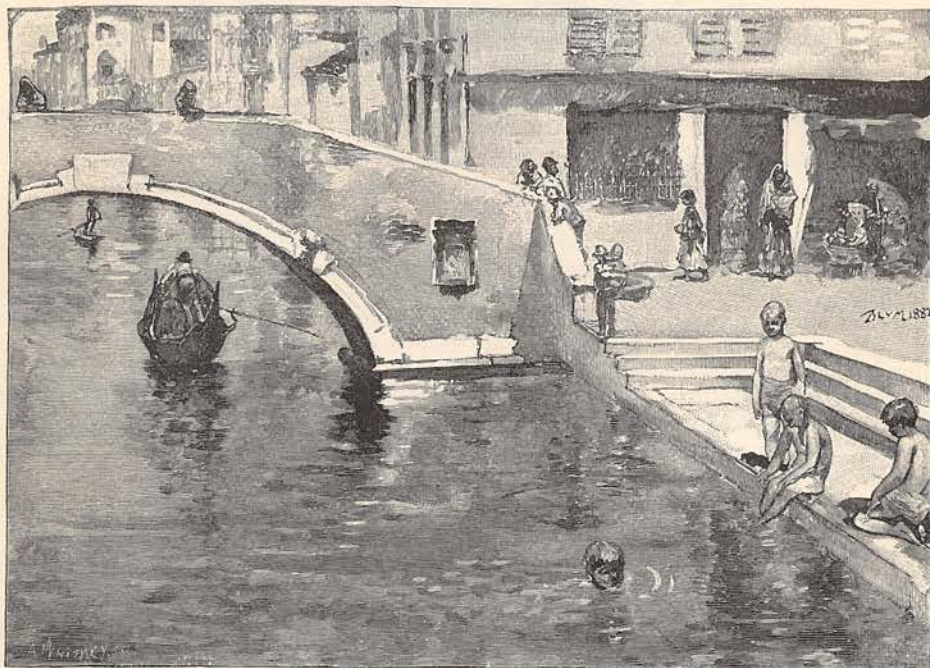
VII.

NOTHING in Venice is more perfect than this, and we know of no work of art more complete. The picture is in three compartments: the Virgin sits in the central division with her child; two venerable saints, standing close together, occupy each of the others. It is impossible to imagine anything more finished or more ripe. It is one of those things that sums up the genius of a painter, the experience of a life, the teaching of a school. It seems painted with molten gems, which have only been clarified by time, and it is as solemn as it is gorgeous, and as simple

as it is deep. John Bellini is, more or less, everywhere in Venice, and wherever he is, he is almost certain to be first—first, I mean, in his own line; he paints little else than the Madonna and the saints; he has not Carpaccio's care for human life at large, nor Tintoretto's, nor that of the Veronese. Some of his greater pictures, however, where several figures are clustered together, have a richness of sanctity that is almost profane. There is one of them on the dark side of the room at the Academy, containing Titian's "Assumption," which, if we could only see it,—its position is an inconceivable scandal,—would evidently be one of the mightiest of so-called sacred pictures. So, too, is the Madonna of San Zaccaria, hung in a cold, dim, dreary place, ever so much too high, but so mild and serene, and so grandly disposed and accompanied, that the proper attitude for even the most critical amateur, as he looks at it, seems to be the bended knee. There is another noble John Bellini, one of the very few in which there is no Virgin, at San Giovanni Crisostomo,—a St. Jerome, in a red dress, sitting aloft upon the rocks, with a landscape of extraordinary purity behind him. The absence of the peculiarly erect Madonna makes it an interesting surprise among the works of the painter, and gives it a somewhat less strenuous air. But it has brilliant beauty, and the St. Jerome is a delightful old personage. The same church contains another great picture, for which he must find a shrine apart in his

memory; one of the most interesting things he will have seen, if not the most brilliant. Nothing appeals more to him than three figures of Venetian ladies which occupy the foreground of a smallish canvas of Sebastian del Piombo, placed above the high altar of San Giovanni Crisostomo. Sebastian was a Venetian by birth, but few of his productions are to be seen in his native place; few, indeed, are to

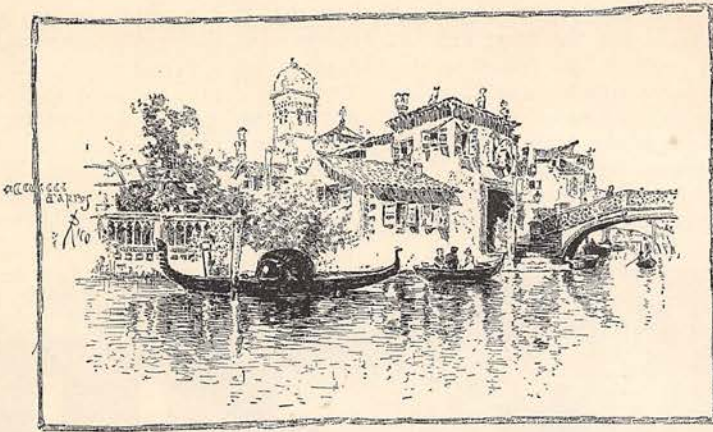
cure that she is gentle, and so quiet that, in comparison, all minor assumptions of calmness suggest only a vulgar alarm. But, for all this, there are depths of possible disorder in her light-colored eye. I had meant, however, to say nothing about her, for it is not right to speak of Sebastian when one has not found room for Carpaccio. These visions come to one, and one can neither hold them nor brush



A MEMORY OF VENICE.

be seen anywhere. The picture represents the patron saint of the church, accompanied by other saints, and by the worldly votaries I have mentioned. These ladies stand together on the left, holding in their hands little white caskets; two of them are in profile, but the foremost turns her face to the spectator. This face and figure are almost unique among the beautiful things of Venice, and they leave the susceptible observer with the impression of having made, or rather having missed, a strange, a dangerous, but a most valuable, acquaintance. The lady, who is superbly handsome, is the typical Venetian of the sixteenth century, and she remains in the mind as the perfect flower of that society. Never was there a greater air of breeding, a deeper expression of tranquil superiority. She walks like a goddess—as if she trod, without sinking, the waves of the Adriatic. It is impossible to conceive a more perfect expression of the aristocratic spirit, either in its pride or in its benignity. This magnificent creature is so strong and se-

them aside. Memories of Carpaccio, the magnificent, the delightful—it is not for want of such visitations, but only for want of space, that I have not said of him what I would. There is little enough need of it for Carpaccio's sake, his fame being brighter to-day—thanks to the generous lamp Mr. Ruskin has held up to it—than it has ever been. Yet there is something ridiculous in talking of Venice without making him, almost, the refrain. He and Tintoretto are the two great realists, and it is hard to say which is the more human, the more various. Tintoretto had the mightier temperament, but Carpaccio, who had the advantage of more newness and more responsibility, sailed nearer to perfection. Here and there he quite touches it, as in the enchanting picture, at the Academy, of St. Ursula asleep in her little white bed, in her high, clean room, where the angel visits her at dawn; or in the noble St. Jerome in his study, at S. Giorgio degli Schiavoni. This latter work is a pearl of sentiment, and I may add, without being



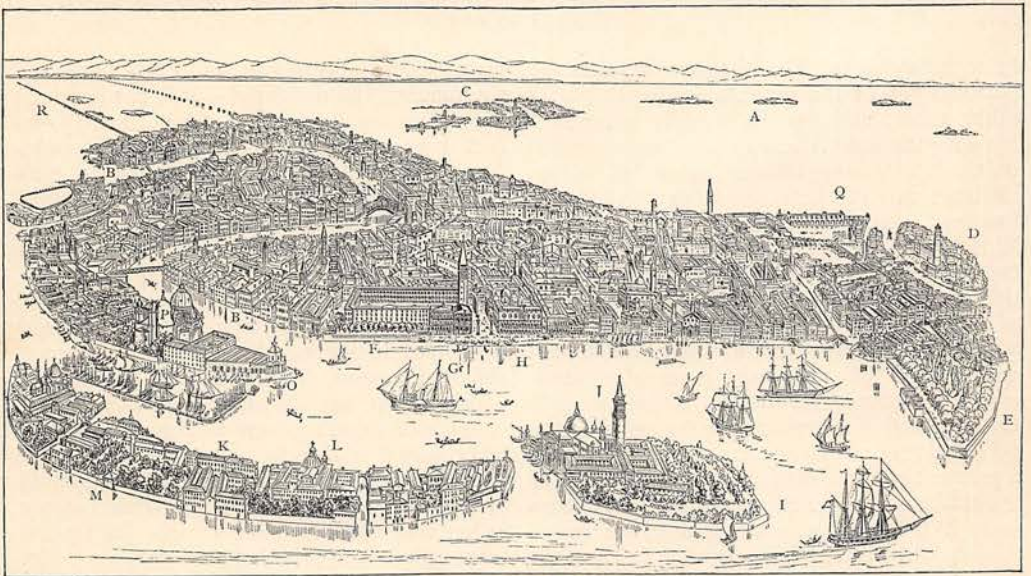
A CANAL IN VENICE. (FROM THE PAINTING BY D. MARTIN RICO. BY PERMISSION OF GEO. BARRIE, ESQ.)

fantastic, a ruby of color. It unites the most masterly finish with a kind of universal largeness of feeling, and he who has it well in his memory will never hear the name of Carpaccio without a throb of almost personal affection. This, indeed, is the feeling that descends upon you in that wonderful little chapel of St. George of the Slaves, where this most personal and sociable of artists has expressed all the sweetness of his imagination. The place is small and incommodious, the pictures are out of sight and ill-lighted, the custodian is rapacious, the visitors are mutually intolerable, but the shabby little chapel is a palace of art. Mr. Ruskin has written a pamphlet about it which is a real

aid to enjoyment, though I cannot but think the generous artist, with his keen senses and his just feeling, would have suffered at hearing his eulogist declare that one of his other productions—in the Museo Civico in Palazzo Correr, a delightful portrait of two Venetian ladies, with pet animals—is the “finest picture in the world.” It has no need of that to be thought admirable; and what more can a painter desire?

VIII.

MAY in Venice is better than April, but June is best of all. Then the days are hot, but not too hot, and the nights are more



BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF VENICE.

A, Lagoon—B, Grand Canal—C, Murano—D, Island of S. Pietro—E, Public Gardens—F, Place of St. Mark—G, Campanile—H, Ducal Palace and St. Mark's—i, Island of S. Giorgio Maggiore—K, Canal of the Guidecca—L, SS. Redentore—M, Island of the Guidecca—N, Bridge of the Rialto—O, Custom-house—P, S. Maria della Saluta—Q, Arsenal—R, Railroad.

beautiful than the days. Then Venice is rosier than ever in the morning, and more golden than ever as the day descends. It seems to expand and evaporate, to multiply all its reflections and iridescences. Then the life of its people and the strangeness of its constitution becomes a perpetual comedy, or, at least, a perpetual drama. Then the gondola becomes your habitation, and you spend days between sea and sky. You go to the Lido, though the Lido has been spoiled. When I was first in Venice, in 1869, it was a very natural place, and there was only a rough lane across the little island, from the landing-place to the beach. There was a bathing-place in those days, and a restaurant, which was very bad, but where, in the warm evenings, your dinner did not much matter as you sat letting it cool upon the wooden terrace that stretched out into the sea. To-day the Lido is a part of United Italy, and has been made the victim of villainous improvements. A little cockney village has sprung up in its rural bosom, and a third-rate Boulevard leads from Santa Elisabetta to the Adriatic. There are bitumen walls and gas-lamps, lodging-houses, shops, and a day theater. The bathing establishment is bigger than before, and the restaurant as well; but it is a compensation, perhaps, that the cuisine is no better. Such as it is, however, you will not scorn occasionally to partake of it on the breezy platform under which bathers dart and splash, and which looks out to where the fishing-boats, with sails of orange and crimson, wander along the darkening horizon. The beach at the Lido is still lovely and beautiful, and you can easily walk away from the cockney village. The return to Venice in the sunset is classical and indispensable, and those who, at that glowing hour, have floated toward the towers that rise out of the lagoon, will not easily part with the impression. But you indulge in larger excursions—you go to Burano and Torcello, to Malamocco and Chioggia. Torcello, like the Lido, has been improved; the deeply interesting little cathedral of the eighth century, which stood there on the edge of the sea, as touching in its ruin, with its grassy threshold and its primitive mosaics, as the bleached bones of a human skeleton washed ashore by the tide, has now been restored and made cheerful, and the charm of the place, its strange and suggestive desolation, has well-nigh departed. It will still serve you as a pretext, however, for a day on the lagoon, especially as you will disembark at Burano and admire the wonderful fisher-folk, whose

good looks—and bad manners, I am sorry to say—can scarcely be exaggerated. Burano is celebrated for the beauty of its women and the rapacity of its children, and it is a fact that though some of the ladies are rather bold about it, every one of them shows you a handsome face. The children assail you for coppers, and, in their desire to be satisfied, pursue your gondola into the sea. Chioggia is a larger Burano, and you carry away from either place a half-sad, half-cynical, but altogether pictorial impression; the impression of bright-colored hovels, of bathing in stagnant canals, of young girls with faces of a delicate shape and a susceptible expression, with splendid heads of hair, and complexions smeared with powder, faded yellow shawls that hang like old Greek draperies, and little wooden shoes that click as they go up and down the steps of the convex bridges; of brown-cheeked matrons with lustrous tresses and high tempers, massive throats encased with gold beads, and eyes that meet your own with a certain traditional defiance. The men throughout the islands of Venice are almost as handsome as the women; I have never seen so many good-looking fellows. At Burano and Chioggia they sit mending their nets, or lounge at the street-corners, where conversation is always high-pitched, or clamor to you to take a boat; and everywhere they decorate the scene with their splendid color—cheeks and throats as richly brown as the sails of their fishing-smacks—their sea-faded tatters, which are always a “costume”—their soft Venetian jargon, and the gallantry with which they wear their hats—an article that nowhere sits so well as on a mass of dense Venetian curls. If you are happy, you will find yourself, after a June day in Venice (about ten o'clock), on a balcony that overhangs the Grand Canal, with your elbows on the broad ledge, a cigarette in your teeth, and a little good company beside you. The gondolas pass beneath, the watery surface gleams here and there from their lamps, some of which are colored lanterns that move mysteriously in the darkness. There are some evenings in June when there are too many gondolas, too many lanterns, too many serenades in front of the hotels. The serenading (in particular) is overdone; but on such a balcony as I speak of you needn't suffer from it, for in the apartment behind you,—an accessible refuge,—there is more good company, there are more cigarettes. If you are wise you will step back there presently.

Henry James, Jr.