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VENICE, QUEEN OF THE SEA

The incoming traveler alighting from the train at the railroad station in the unique city of Venice is surprised to find neither bus nor cab, street cars nor even streets at his service. Should his hotel rise from the edge of the Grand Canal or be in the vicinity of the Piazza of St. Mark's, the city square, as it doubtless is, he can take passage on the little steamer or ferry, plying back and forth on the canal, but otherwise he bargains as best he can with a gondolier who propels the strange funeral-looking craft dexterously through the intricate network of small canals. That old lady must have been an American of the West, who, when asked for her impressions of Venice, replied that at the time of her visit there the spring freshet had flooded the streets and had compelled the citizens to use boats to get about town in the attendance upon business and social duties.

This picturesque city of the sea is built upon one hundred and seventeen small islands, that are connected by three hundred and seventy-eight bridges, mostly stone, spanning the hundred and fifty or more canals With its island location Venice recalls at the present time our own Galveston, but, unlike the Texan city, Venice is protected from the sirocco winds of the Adriatic by a long sand bar. What a delightful city Venice must be for residence for those people whose over sensitive nerves are distressed by the continuous rumbling of heavy drays and loaded carts along rough cobble stones or by the sharp click of horses' shoes striking the concrete pavement in other cities! Not a horse nor a cow can be seen in Venice; even the agile goats of Naples, the stair-climbing goats, which mount to the fourth and fifth floors twice daily to give up their supply of milk, are absent from this city. Life is confined to the groups of idle loafers, bare-headed women, dirty street urchins, and the flocks of cooing pigeons hovering about the cathedral and eating from the generous hand of the girl tourist. With but one or two exceptions no trees are growing and the foreigners need not learn the Italian for "keep off the grass." At one side of the city there is a public garden of twenty acres, the location of church buildings until destroyed by Napoleon, the stern iconoclast, when he overthrew the ancient republic and on their site laid out the garden.

The gondola is a queer craft with bottom nearly flat, and of uneven balance. The canals are too narrow to admit the use of ordinary oars; while the gondolier's station on the projecting stern and the construction of the gondola, with its uneven sides, admit of rounding sharp corners. There is a similarity to Charon's boat on the River Styx as he guided his bark from the stern with a paddle which makes a funeral cortege of gondolas in the canals of Venice a most weird procession. It is not to be inferred that one must always have recourse to a gondola when stepping out of doors; while in many places the water in the canals laps the walls of the old palaces and dwelling houses, a narrow walk at other places separates the two and a labyrinth of paved and narrow lanes winds in and out among the buildings that otherwise are built together. Surrounded on all sides by water, republican Venice early did what England has more recently been doing. She acquired territorial power through her ships and her commerce. The republic of Venice flourished mightily and waxed strong, subduing cities and people until she had planted her emblem, the lion of St. Mark, in Greece and then Constantinople. Her arsenal, whose workmen today are making torpedoes and other war machinery for Italy, at one time gave employment to sixteen thousand men, and could send forth a completed war vessel daily from the shops. It was Venice which largely furnished the means of transportation to the crusaders, filling her treasury with the riches of the Orient and laying new territory tributary to her municipality. It was Venice which frequently single-handed engaged the murderous Turk, and although repelled by the Crescent, ultimately succeeded in checking the ambitious designs of the Porte. It was in one of these wars with the Turks, in 1687, that the Parthenon, then used as a storehouse for the infidel's powder, was exploded and demolished. Commerce made Venice a flourishing and powerful republic, bringing property to the city in its ships. When Genoa later diverted trade by her shorter route to India in rounding Cape Good Hope, and the Turk had become a menace to trade interests in the East, the power of Venice began to decline.

One of the industries developed and fostered by trade was the manufacture of Venetian glass. A visit to the glass factories today, while proving intensely interesting, is a disappointment to the tourist, because but few men are employed; only ten or twelve in a factory. The furnace at the Columbian Exposition was a very accurate representation of the process of glass-blowing. The most curious sight, perhaps, is the spinning of glass; a small rod of glass is heated and drawn out into a silvery thread upon a large spinning wheel, from which it is woven into unbreakable girdles and mats of brilliant hues. It may be that this process will ultimately suggest a method for the successful manufacture of flexible glass. A million dollars' worth of goods are still annually manufactured at Venice. The Venetian glass workers were so influential in the Middle Ages that they coined their own money and the patrician youths of Venice were allowed to marry their daughters without losing social or political prestige. The importance of the glass industry led to the drawing up of codes of trade regulations in the thirteenth century, and this organization, together with the guild of the gondoliers of the ferries, may be considered the first trades-union of history; the union of the ferrymen was partially established as benefit societies.

As the student reads how Venice, whenever the republic made a treaty, always reserved for itself the exclusive control and monopoly of all salt mines, he sees an historical justification for the national monopoly of salt in modern Italy. Salt now bears such a heavy government tax that the poorest Italians are forced to dispense with that staple article as a food and it is affirmed that numerous examples can be cited of poor people who have become inmates of asylums for want of proper seasoning in their vegetable food, which fact goes to support the scientists who are now contending that salt is a vital food and essential part of the human anatomy.

After the commercial activities had reached their height the arts advanced rapidly, especially painting. The Venetian school of art lacks neither in number of works nor in grades of conception and execution. Among the artists of the world, Titian is excelled by few, while his works are unsurpassed in coloring and surface. Being an untiring worker, who enjoyed a long life of activity, his numerous productions are to be found distributed among all the important galleries of Europe. But the Academy of Venice contains some of his best: "The Assumption of the Madonna," by some critics considered the seventh world-picture in order of importance, is well worthy a place with the works of Raphael and Michael Angelo; while his "Presentation of Mary in the Temple" will also hold the attention of the visitor. It is but recently reported that a million dollars has been offered for his painting at Rome, sometimes called "Sacred and Profane Love." It seems an exorbitant sum for a sermon on canvas until we recall that the manager of a corporation is to receive a like amount for his services per year, and Titian must have spent many months on this enduring work of his art. To study the works of Tintoretto, one must go to Venice, where he adorned numerous churches and decorated several rooms in the ducal palace. In the palace is his "Paradise," the largest oil painting in the world, measuring thirty by seventy-four feet. These two artists were followed by Paul Veronese, the great pictorial artist. The finished works of these men found their way into many countries, going out into the intellectual and artistic life of the various peoples as formerly the Venetian argosies penetrated the seas to far-off countries with material benefit to civilization and to commerce.

In this connection the architecture of Venice should not be omitted. In Germany the city centers about the Rathhaus, or city hall, which usually faces an open square used as a market place. In Italy the Rathhaus is replaced by the cathedral. At Venice St. Mark's cathedral terminates one end of the paved square of St. Mark's, while the other end and sides are lined with cafes and with shops filled with art objects, whose proprietors stand without, endeavoring to entice the tourist within by using his own language. The persistency of these dealers suggests our own Midway or Earle's Court Exposition at London.

St. Mark is the tutelary saint of Venice, whose bones are said to have been brought from Alexandria in 829 and been deposited within the cathedral. The edifice, erected in the Byzantine style of architecture, with its oriental magnificence, shows the effect of the close connection Venice maintained with the East. The mosaics adorning the church profusely within and without are unsurpassed; so numerous and vast are these stone pictures that they cover an area of nearly fifty thousand square feet, representing Biblical and church scenes; some of these are the work of the twelfth century. So stately and magnificent is St. Mark's that the Italian government building at the Paris Exposition last summer was a model of the cathedral.

It seems to have been the custom, frequently practiced by the Italian church, to place the spoils of war in some part of the sacred edifice and there dedicate them to their God. The Pisans built into the interior of their cathedral sixty-eight ancient Roman and Greek marble columns which they had taken as plunder in their numerous campaigns. So over the portal of St. Mark's the Venetians set four bronze horses taken in 1280 at Constantinople. Although they are among the finest bronzes of antiquity they form a strange ornament for a church and probably in no other city would they be given so exalted a position.

The life of Venice is quaint; one of the most picturesque groups formed by its people is a band of serenaders, with voices exquisitely musical, gathered in front of the chief hotels on a moonlight night. Should a window rise, the leader, with profound obeisance, advances to catch the falling coins in his hat. This is the city where the Shakespearean Shylock loaned his money, taking for security a claim on a pound of human flesh; at this port Antonio anxiously awaited the return of his merchantmen. It was from Venice that Marco Polo began those interesting voyages which revealed to him, the first of his countrymen, the interior of China. Here extends the lofty covered Bridge of Sighs, famed in song and story, as it connects the criminal court in the ducal palace with the place of executions and the prisons.

In Venice and other ancient Italian cities which have been republics of world renown, one is impressed with the great influence and political power of those corporations; their history emphasizing the need of making the city life of our own metropoles healthful and invigorating to the state at large.—Baptist Outlook.

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