VENETIAN LIFE

BY DELIA AUSTRIAN



A STRANGE MARKET ON AN ISLAND



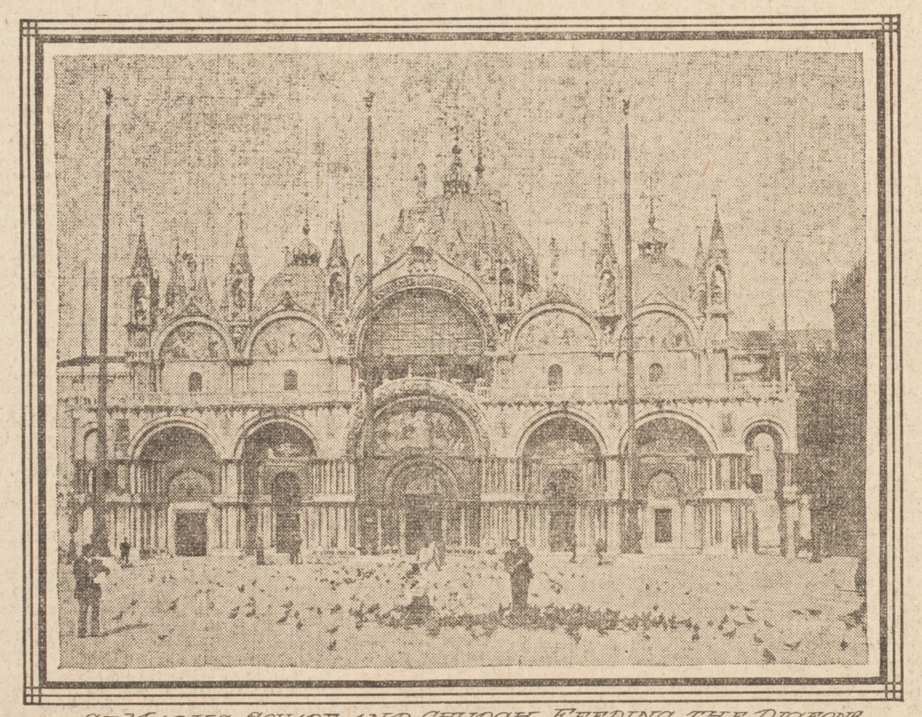
A BEAUTIFUL VENETIAN PALACE ON THE GRAND CANAL



GONDOLIERS IN HOLIDAY ATTIRE



AT WORK STRINGING BEADS



ST. MARK'S SQUARE AND CHURCH-FEEDING THE PIGEONS

The traveller stands in awe of Rome, looks with admiration on Florence and gives his heart to Venice. He is filled with mystery from the very start aroused by the thought that he is to see a city built on islands with water everywhere. With this strangeness comes a feeling of fear as he hands his luggage to a gondolier and steps into the gondola wondering how his gondolier will steer the light flimsy craft through the many small canals, for he has no light and the night is dark.

The gondolier gives his back to the oar and they are off. The moon rays play upon the waters giving them an iridescent blue. The rocking of the gondola from side to side soon awakens a feeling of calm and rest. The traveller is so easily entranced by the mystery of color, sound and movement he wonders if anything could disturb it when the cry "Ah Stali" strikes sharp upon his ear. The canal is narrow it seems impossible for two gondolas to ride abreast but the prow is turned aside and another boat darts forth like a seagull playing on the waters and passes safely.

When asked if it is not hard to manage one of the crafts the gondolier answers: "it is all in getting used to it. You see we begin when we are little boys; we start by rowing freight boats, we live on the canals so much it is hard to keep on land. We can almost feel when a boat is coming before we hear the cry "Ah! Stali.' "

The boat with many twists and sudden turns, is carried through a long net-work of canals. They pass a long row of gondolas lined up before a large hotel waiting to disembark. They turn a corner and are now on the great canal, whose broad waters shimmer like many precious gems with the light of the town and the moon playing on the waters. Looking across on one bank he sees the snowy dome of a large church, on the other many old palaces, once occupied by grandees and princes, now remodeled to meet the needs of English and American tourists.

Just before the traveller alights the gondolier whispers to him, "Sir, don't forget a pour-boire for the gondolier." Supper is eaten in haste, for the traveller is anxious to go out on the stone balcony and enjoy the quiet beauty of that Venice of which he has read and dreamed but is just getting to know. One by one the stars have come out, they have spangled the sky and changed the waters to a greenish hue. The Canal throbs with sounds, there are many boats going up and down carrying enthusiastic Americans and lively English, who give vent to their feelings in such phrases "Isn't this just splendid," "I like Venice better than any other city." "Charles after you make your fortune let us come and live here, and spend our old age riding about in gondolas."

Their enthusiasm tempts him and he hastens to get a gondola. He instructs the gondolier to take him to St. Marks square. Nearing the shore the gondolier points out a large marble building saying that it is the Great Palace of the Doges, on the other side is the splendid National Library Towering above these buildings are the golden Domes of St. Marks Church and the great column with the splendid clock. The doves have gone to rest and the square is given over to pleasure seekers; some are promenading up and down, others are sipping coffee and listening to the soft strains of a mandolin orchestra.

HISTORY

Venice and Genoa are the two Italian cities that from earliest times disputed the rights of the sea. A desire to be independent caused Venice to develop by leaps and bounds, the people were so proud of their own attainments they had small desire to marry, even to associate with Italians of other cities. As early as the tenth century Venice held her own with other cities of Italy, many of the islands had been spanned with stone bridges and 60 churches reared their proud heads. Every island had its own church, its own ecclesiastical director, and Tribune. These Tribunes were exceedingly jealous of their power, they elected the Doge with care and when he tried to rule with a high hand threw him in prison. The Lion became the symbol of this city's power. One adorned the ducal palace and into its jaws were thrown the charges brought against her citizens.

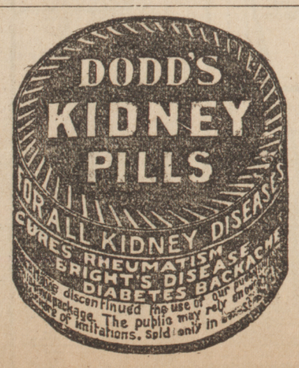
This strength and desire to rule the sea was expressed by a strange ceremony called the wedding of the sea.

It was the Doge Peter Orsolo II. who on the ship called the Bucentaure threw the first gold on the waves and thus presided at the marriage of Venice with the Adriatic. At this time Dalmatia was brought under her rule and by the twelfth century the Adriatic became her domain.

It was not until a century later that Venice became a real oligarch under Doge Peter Gradenigo. A law was passed that only those should be considered citizens who had fathers and grandfathers in the government all others to be excluded. This law caused great discontent among the people, but their words of opposition remained unheeded.

Possessors of vast fortunes, the patricians and rich merchants rivaled in wildest extravagance, their money flowed from the coffers as easily as wines from their bottles, and this desire for splendid display resulted in making Venice the most attractive city in the world. The mosts plendid palaces were reared along the banks of the canals, their facades were adorned with the richest arabesque carvings. Handsome gondolas and liveried gondoliers stood before the doors day and night. Haughty princes and handsome ladies richly attired in silks and splendid jewels spent their days riding in their gondolas, paying calls, night was turned into day with dancing and merry-making at splendid balls.

It was in the fifteenth century that Venice attained the summit of her power; she boasted as having 200,000 inhabitants, she had 3,000 vessels and 35,000 marines, more than 45 gallies mounted by 11,000 men protected her commercial interests on the high seas. When Constantinople was taken by the Turks Venice carried off some of her richest treasures and brought over Byzantine artists to adorn St. Mark's and her other churches.



ANCIENT GLASS MAKING.

Though Venice contributed little that was new to the art of glass-making nowhere else, not even among the Peersians and the Arabs, did it attain so great a stage of perfection. Glass-blowing was one of the earliest arts; many of the largest museums of America have specimens showing that the Egyptians and the Romans had great skill in blowing glass. It is difficult to say when glass-making was first begun in Italy; some Italian authorities say with the founding of the city in the fifth century. The oldest mosaics that adorn the Cathedral of St. Marks are those found at the entrance, those representing the Christ, the Madonna and St. Mark. They belong to the 10th century but many say that this is the work of glass makers from the Orient.

The government was anxious to develop the industry and therefore granted these corporations so many privileges that they soon developed into monopolies. But these factories burned so often that they threatened the entire city and laws had to be passed ordering the destroying of all furnaces on the Rialto and later limiting the industry to the Island of Murano.

Marco Polo, the son of an old patrician family, did more than al others to make glass-making a fine art. He went to Constantinople, where his brother Andrea had a large trading house. He trafficked in the Black Sea, in the region of the Caucasus and the Volga. Among the Persians, in India and Cochin China he saw beautiful examples of glass-making and he broughth many fine samples and ideas on glass-blowing back with him. He was called the best citizen in Venice and his services were rewarded by his being made a member of the Great Council. He urged the glass-makers to experiment with the enamels known to the Orient and not to limit themselves to the making of fantasies. The successful glass manufacturers were exceedingly proud of their calling; they were men of great wealth, and were ranked as patricians They often spent large fortunes working out a new process. They held a firm position in society and were allowed to marry their daughters to noblemen.

Their skill soon became known in every part of Europe and the Orient and glass manufacturers of other countries offered them large wages to tempt them away from home. The council of ten passed the following laws to put an end to these allurements. They said that if a glass-blower took any of the secrets of his craft to any foreign country he was to be imprisoned and if he persisted in spite of his imprisonment he was to be killed. In spite of this law some were tempted to Persia, China, Brussels, France and England.

Though the Venetians succeeded in discovering few new colors, they became wonderfully successful in fashioning fantastic shapes and enhancing their glass with beautiful decorations. Some of the designs etched into the glass and plates are as fine and as exquisitely done as though they were paintings. They etched on glass the most delicate and graceful designs; this was done with a diamond. As early as the 16th century they began to make glass for mirrors, this became such an important industry that special laws were passed governing their manufacture. In 1806 all the corporations were abolished and thirty years later they were limited to a dozen.

MODERN GLASS.

Today the traveller finds plenty of shops in historic palaces on the grand canal and around St. Marks squares. The workers at Murano are trying to revive the industry of which their ancestors were rightly proud. Though only the most skilled have succeeded in blowing glass that will stand muster with the work done some centuries ago, much of their work is really creditable.

It takes from nine to ten years to make skilled workmen. Many begin to learn when they are nine, they study designing in the school of Murano and assist the workmen. The men are usually paid by the piece and skilled workmen earn from four to five dollars a day. This work appears simple to one who has small knowledge of the craft, but it requires a tremendous amount of dexterity for one wrong twist will spoil a vase nearly finished. The simple pieces can be made by one man, but the more elaborate designs require an assistant. The worker gives the shape required by means of his blow-pipe and as the vase takes on the right shape the assistant hands him lumps of glass on the end of an iron rod. With these lumps the glass-blower makes dragons, sea-monsters, flowers, and leaves used as ornaments and handles. Before the vase is cool be can add gold foil.

LACE MAKING.

Their love for finery led to the revival of the lace-industry—especially the Burano lace which was once known to every fisher-woman on the island.

The galleys of Venice as early as the 15th century took rich laces to all parts of Europe. Though many kinds of laces were manufactured the real Venetian point was considered the handsomest and was the most popular. Some of the foremost lace-makers in Italy amassed great fortunes. Venetian laces was popular in every court in Europe. The manufacturers of Italian laces received a great blow when Colbert, seeing what this industry would do for the exchequer of France, brought over workers from Italy and established lace industries in his own country. From this time the Italian industries began to decline. By the middle of the 19th century the making of Venetian lace was confined to the Island of Burano, but even this soon fel into decay. The last twenty years have seen a great revival in the making of Venetian lace. In 1872 some of the lace manufacturers began to revive the industry by copying old designs. A school was started with twenty young women and it was not long before others joined the class.

A few years ago a great storm swept across the Island of Burano which threatened the simple fisher-folk with starvation. When the Queen of Italy and some of her friends heard this sad news they suggested that the women should be set to doing needle-work known to their great grandmothers. There was only one old woman who still knew how to do the Burano lace and she was too old to teach. A woman was sent to her and watched the old lady while she made the lace and in turn taught it to her pupils. It is difficult now to find a woman on the Island who can not make this lace and many of the most beautiful designs that were completely forgotten are now being revived.

The Italian Renaissance did more than perfect the arts of glass-blowing and lace making. It was the Venetian press that printed the first books written in Italian and Greek. One Alde Manuse, under the patronage of Isabel d'Este established a press in Venice where were printed the works of Plato, Aristotle and Sophocles. In 1904 the brothers de Gregoriis printed a very beautiful copy of Herodotus. Printing would have developed rapidly but the Popes were anxious to be the sole possessors of rare books and did their best to put down the art of printing. Though the books printed were few they were done with care and handsomely bound.

PRINTING AND LEATHER WORK.

Leather-work and illuminating became important crafts. The leather-work was used for book covers and in the making of furniture. Some of the leather was painted with dyes of different colors but the greater part was tooled. The designs were wonderfully graceful and worked with the greatest nicety. Many of the books that could not be printed were illuminated on parchment. These illuminators showed great dexterity in the handling of their brushes though their work was not as fine as that done by the Florentine and Roman Monks. The art of tooling leather and binding books has had a great revival in Venice during the last few years. Some of the finest hand-bound books are the work of the Venetian bookbinders. Their leather tooling also commands great admiration from artists in all parts of Europe.

ARCHITECTURE AND PAINTING.

But patrician pride and love of pomp developed two other arts for Venice, architecture and painting. The gallery of Venice is one of the finest in Europe and has splendid works showing what Titian, Palma Vechio and Bellini did for the art in Venice. Titian's one painting alone, the Assumption of the Virgin, would entitle Venice to a prominent place in Italian Art

While her painters were busy creating splendid pictures for altars her architects were busy drawing plans of beautiful palaces and great churches. On either side of the Gran Canal are to be seen many beautiful palaces, it was here most of the old patrician families built their homes. As the traveller goes along the left bank in his gondola he sees the Punto della Salute and Dogana di Mare the principal custom house in Venice. Beyond is the attractive church called the Santa Maria della Salute. There is the Palace Dario in the style of the Lombard, and the Palace Vemir that consists only of the ground floor, though the building is planned on a scale of great magnificence. On the same bank is the beautiful Palace Rezzonico which was built by a rich patrician in the 17th century. This is the house in which Browning died. On the opposite bank is the Palace Treves, largely known because it contains Canova's last work Hector and Ajax. The Palace Grimani is the handsomest of the Renaissance type and is adorned with splendid carvings.

ST. MARK'S.

But it is the St. Mark's square with the gilded domes, broad place and high clock tower that tell the traveller about the really great splendor of Venetian architecture. The history of this square is long and glorious. If historical accounts are accurate the remains of St. Mark were brought from Alexander to Venice in 828 and the Venetians built a small basilica to contain them but this was soon afterwards destroyed. It was in the 11th Century that the Venetians raised a more splendid monument to their patron saint. Many historians believe that architects were brought from Constantinople to plan this noble church of Cigognara and others believe that though Saint Sophie served them as a model it was wholly the work of Venetian architects. It is likely they learned from the Byzantines how to make their gilded domes and their rich mosaic figures. It is quite certain that two of the columns which adorn the church were brought from Constantinople, there was another column but at the time it was transported it fell into the water. The one is adorned with the statue of St. Theodore, the patron of the city, the other has the winged lion and is the emblem of St. Mark. These with the splendid bronze horses were afterwards brought to Paris by Napoleon but were later restored to their rightful place. With these great bronzes are the rich mosaics which adorn the church without and within. The two mosaics represent the embarkment of the body of St. Marks at Alexander and the disembrakment in Venice. The oldest on the facade is of the 13th Century and represents the bringing of the Saint's relics to the church. All the arches and cupolas of the church are adorned with rich mosaics. The oldest date fom the 12th Century and represent scenes from the Old Testament. The altar is decorated with pillars of alabaster, four of these pillars were taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. Here is also found a mosaic portrait of St. Mark set with many kinds of precious gems.

PALACE OF THE DOGES.

It was in the Palace of the Doges that the laws were passed which made for the strength, the intrigue and crime of the city. This splendid palace was partly burned twice. It is built upon a large open court and floor after floor is supported by great rows of pillars beautifully carved. The exterior of the palace is elegant and sombre, the outside expresses strength and the interior great splendor. Every room is heavily decorated with paintings that cover the wall and the ceilings. Paintings that glorify the city and the government. The walls are covered by Christian saints and pagan divinities; here Neptune, Mars and Venus stand guard. The apartments are reached by a long flight of steps called the stairs of the Grants were one of the early doges was decapitated. One passes two colossal Statues of Neptune and Mars and enters the Hall of the Scala d'Oro, decorated with rich statues and paintings.

The room is adorned with lovely frescoes and splendid statues of Atlas, Hercules, Charity and Abundance.

Another spacious room is the Hall of the College where the Signoria, composed of sixteen wise men, six counselors and three chiefs met to decide criminal cases. The room is adorned with a throne and benches raised on several steps. The wall is decorated with many splendid allegorical paintings. The ceiling here as in the other rooms is decorated with elaborate frescoes.

The most important room is the Hall of the College, it is wonderfully large and decorated with many splendid allegorical figures. The most attractive of these represents the Doge Pasqual Cigogma before Christ with Saint Mark, protected by faith and justice. The ceiling is decorated with richly carved wood and a painting by Tintoretto showing Venice reigning over the sea receiving maritime honors. The largest and most splendid room is the hall where were assembled the Major Consul, and all the nobles whose names were inscribed in the Book of Gold. The ceiling is decorated with Tintoretto's Paradise, the largest painting in the world, and illustrates the whole story of Creation. The frieze about the hall is decorated with thirteen medalions painted by Tintoretto and his pupils representing the doges since the ninth century. Only one place is left vacant, it is inscribed with these words: Here is the place of Marini Falethri who was executed for crimes. The ceiling designed by Christoforo Sorte is the richest in the palace and the chef-d'eouvre of Veronese; Venice is crowned with Glory and surrounded by Fame, Peace, Abundance and the Graces.

The most interesting part of this palace is the bridge of Sighs over which criminals passed when condemned to die chances Doges. But it is nearly sun-set [illegible] traveller calls to his gondolier to take him up to the Rialto, one of the most famous bridges in history. A broad flight of steps ascends to the slanting bridge, which at this hour of the day is almost forsaken except for a few beggars and vendors with cheap wares—But the bridge would tell a different story. It becomes crowded with handsome stalls where are seen rich silks, rare stones and beautiful glass. They are doing a lively trade, women with [illegible] handsome gowns and proudest patricians press forward anxious to see and to buy these rich wares. Off in one lonely corner sits a lonely man with a beautiful girl—as the crowds pass by they enquire who they are only to be told. It is Shylock the Jew and his fair daughter Jessica.—The day dream might last forever when an old man begs for a few sous and the Venice of the past is forgotten in the Venice of the present.



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